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Sociology of Family

Literature Review: Cheating in Relationships

As the world continues to spin, cheating in relationships continues as well. With more technology and ways to connect with many different people, from one’s home town or across the globe, cheating in a relationship may become more and more tempting. Two different scholars presented the statistic of sixty-eight percent of women and seventy-five percent of men admitted to participating in some form of sexual cheating (Gunderson et al, Boon et al). This astounding fact presents why cheating in relationships is a topic to be more understood. Not only is sexual cheating prevalent but also emotional cheating is significant and readily available within texting and the use of phones (Gunderson et al, Durby et al). The act of cheating is defined in one article as, “An emotional involvement or sexual engagement with a third party that violates the norms of rational exclusivity” (Dillow et al). In the United States the expectation of those in a relationship is to have just one partner who one is involved with sexually and emotionally (Boon et al). When this doesn’t occur, the violation of the norm becomes significant because of the affect it can have on those who have been cheated on and those who have done the cheating (Miller). Subjects on this matter that have been looked into and studied include suspicion that leads to snooping, forgiveness in the event of being cheated on, tendencies in cheating in relation to gender, and the deeper affects and meaning of what it means to be cheated on.

The topic of forgiveness of a partner who has cheated is one that involves many different variables. Forgiveness is defined as, “A process of releasing the hostility and resentment” (Dillow et al). In the category of forgiveness there are two different kinds. First there is unconditional forgiveness. Unconditional forgiveness is the kind with no strings attached. The one who has been cheated on forgives the cheating partner without any stipulations or questions asked. Ways of communicating this kind of forgiveness would be shown through hugs, discussion, and apologies (Dillow et al, Gunderson et al). The other form of forgiveness is called conditional forgiveness. Conditional forgiveness is verbally granted forgiveness with the intention of making the partner pay and providing provisions with the forgiveness. When this form is present it normally does not continue to be a healthy relationship and relationship satisfaction plummets. In fact, conditional forgiveness is directly related to relationship dissatisfaction (Dillow et al). Scholars agree that a stronger more committed relationship will lead to unconditional forgiveness (Gunderson et al, Dillow et al). “Commitment has been found to be a relationship preserving motivation that prompts attempted to continue the relationship and forgive the transgressor” (Dillow et al). Rather this commitment is out of love or out of not wanting to give up, it is what provides second chances to those who cheat. Forgiveness is an important topic when it comes to cheating because it can determine the outcome of the relationship of the couple. Although forgiveness can save and preserve a relationship infidelity still has occurred, it may not continue to be a healthy relationship for times to come. There may be suspicion, jealousy, and a complete lack of trust (Boon et al).

The invasion of a partner’s personal property may be an action taken by someone who is suspicious of a partner’s infidelity in a committed relationship. In the past years as phone use becomes more and more prevalent, the act of snooping has become a temptation of those in relationships. In addition to phones, social media has made it more accessible to stay tuned with a partner’s life and interests (Stafford). To better define the term it is broken down to mean, “Snooping, also known as covert intrusive behavior, is defined as investigating (without a partner’s knowledge or permission) a romantic partner’s private communication (e.g. text messages, cell phone, and email)” (Derby et al). It was found that sixty-six percent of people in relationships have admitted to snooping (Derby et al, Stafford). Motivation behind snooping behavior may differ. Snooping with the partner’s knowledge is a form of control in a relationship setting boundaries of privacy and making those known to the partner (Stafford). Other reasons behind the act of snooping may include a seemingly innocent reason such as curiosity or on the other end of the spectrum, suspicion (Derby et al). Most snooping is completed without the partner’s knowledge and a higher percentage of snoopers find what they are suspicious of when snooping (Stafford). The act of snooping is not healthy for a relationship in most ways, “Snooping typically has negative consequences in that it is associated with increased conflict, decreased trust, and strained interaction” (Derby et al). If something is found while snooping confrontation is a normal reaction if something incriminating is found. Unfortunately, many snoopers find what they feared, which would be their partner cheating on them (Derby et al). Snooping is most prevalent in those couples who do not have high discloser in their relationship. This then causes a lack of trust in a relationship which then leads to a higher tendency of snooping being present (Derby et al). Snooping continues to be a bigger issue in relationships in regards to infidelity and the overall health of a relationship.

Since men and women take on different roles in a relationship, these pressures and stigmas follow through with how men and women react differently to infidelity in a relationship. In many different studies it is found over and over that men are more likely to cheat (Allen et al, Boon et al, Gunderson et al). Men are more influenced to cheat in a committed relationship when they are sexually dissatisfied compared to women who are more likely to cheat when they are dissatisfied with the overall relationship. Along the same lines, men are more likely to become jealous, after finding out about a partner cheating, about the sexual act. On the other hand, women worry more so about the emotional part such as, the man becoming emotionally attached to the other women (Allen et al, Gunderson et al). In addition, women are willing to reconcile with men after cheating more so than men are more likely to terminate the relationship (Gunderson et al). Because women are more likely to worry about their partner being emotionally involved, they are also more likely to behave intrusively without their partner knowing (Derby et al). Women are significantly more likely to partake in snooping without their partner’s knowledge of the situation. They may be concerned that their partner is cheating in some sort of way and often find out that their hunches are present for a reason (Derby et al, Stafford). Many studies even find it relevant to look at men and women separately when studying certain topics pertaining to infidelity in relationships (Allen et al, Derby et al, Gunderson et al).

How cheating comes about and the affects it has on an individual’s future and a couple’s future depends on many variables. One of the professionals expands on this topic by discussing the effects on someone who has been cheated on they may act out, slip into depression, or have trust issues in future relationships (Miller). The way one perceives cheating in general can prove to have an effect on thoughts about the topic. Leading up to being cheated on, it can be a sign that the relationship is unhappy. Communication could also not present in the relationship (Allen et al, Derby et al). Not sharing details in one’s life can lead up to creating an environment where cheating may occur. In regards to stigma and norms around cheating, they play a bigger part into cheating than one may think. If one hears stories about acquaintances cheating and thinks that it is a norm, they would be more likely to cheat as well (Boon et al). What goes into cheating and the outcomes can be predicted when analyzing certain topics (Allen et al, Boon et al, Miller).

Experts have looked into studying many different factors that play into infidelity in relationships. There have been many studies on snooping in a relationship. Also known as and studied as, intrusive behavior without a partner’s knowledge. Another area of cheating looked at is forgiveness. In this area, studies have looked at what would make it more likely a partner would forgive the one who cheated. Forgiveness was also a big topic because it often determined if a relationship was going to persist in the future or not. Within all of these articles many of the authors differentiated between the actions and reactions of men and women. They agreed on many of the topics with the way men and women react with cheating. Some other topics that could be expanded on would be looking more into cheating in same sex couples. One of the articles I found touched on how to predict if there was going to be cheating in a relationship, it would be worth it to conduct more of these studies in order to predict behavior. It would also be worth it to look into how much emotional cheating is done in comparison to sexual cheating, especially in this day and age where it is proven college aged kids today are worse at even holding a conversation. Cheating is an important topic to analyze and look into further because of the mental and emotional toll it can have on the one who cheated but even more so the one who has been cheated on. Relationships can be a main source of feeling loved and belonging. If one is cheated on this feeling can be shattered.

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