

The Problem of Infidelity in the Society: A case Study of Ferdinand Oyono's "Une Vie de Boy".

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Abstract

This paper delves into the pervasive issue of infidelity within society, affecting numerous relationships and leaving a profound impact on those involved, as illustrated in Ferdinand Oyono's novel "Une vie de boy." Utilizing the book as a case study, the paper scrutinizes the root causes of infidelity, examining it as a prevalent concern in contemporary society. It seeks to identify the overarching factors contributing to these challenges, exploring the societal repercussions of infidelity. Furthermore, the paper offers recommendations to address issues related to infidelity and hypocrisy, considering their effects on society. This study is based on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which is relevant to our research. Grounded in sociocultural theory, the article posits that individuals' behavior reflects the broader societal context. The sociocultural theory is a psychological theory that explores the relationships between external and internal processes.

Introduction

Literature reflects the lives of people living in a given society. It helps in recording, preserving, and transmitting knowledge, playing different roles which include psychological, spiritual, and social. Additionally, literature is an imitation of life, showing that there is a strong relationship between real-life experiences and literature. Since literature mirrors the life history of a given people at a given period, there is French literature, Caribbean literature, and African literature. Such literary works tell the story of the lives of those people during a period.

Literature includes written works which may be either fiction or non-fiction. These works portray human experiences, emotions, and ideas. They serve as a means of conveying narratives, themes, cultural expression and different opinions. According to literary scholar Terry Eagleton (2008), literature is essentially "a body of written works which, in some way, call themselves 'literature'. In our contemporary society, the issue of infidelity presents a great problem eating deep into the very fabric of the society, especially the family unit. Infidelity has to do with the violation of the agreed-upon exclusivity in a relationship. Mark (2011) emphasizes that infidelity commonly involves the breach of trust in romantic or marital relationships, manifested through acts of betrayal such as engaging in romantic or sexual relationships outside the established partnership.

Summary of the Novel

The novel begins in Spanish Guinea, at the frontier with a Frenchman on vacation who encounters a man named Toundi, wounded and who was going to die. The Frenchman found Toundi's journal, popularly called *abook* by Toundi himself. The other part of the story consists of the journal (exercise book) that the Frenchman is supposed to read. Toundi didn't want to die in the hands of his enemies. Toundi, the protagonist of the novel lived with his family. He was always beaten by his father because of his defiance of his father. (P11/19) One day, he ran away and seeks refuge with Father Gilbert, a nearby priest. Though his father tried to bring him back, Toundi didn't want to go home. Toundi's greed made him to seek refuge with Father Gilbert, whom Toundi sees as his new father. Father Gilbert taught Toundi how to read and write. Father Gilbert equally taught him catholicism, got him baptized, christened him Joseph. (P13/21)

Toundi accompanied father Gilbert to Dangan, where he started working at the St Peters Catholic Mission. Toundi however observed the lives of both the natives and the Africans and the white that came to pray to God, and he eventually lost faith in God. He saw that not everyone who calls God believes him, because of how the white men associate with and dehumanize the black. Consequently,

he begins to criticize the principles of the so-called Europeans. After the death of Father Gilbert in a motorcycle accident a few months after meeting Toundi, Father Vandermayer takes Father Gilbert's place. (P18/22) Toundi had to stay with Father Vandermayer for a short period. During this time, he was maltreated and eventually he was sent to live with the commandant, who was in charge of the surrounding colony. He became the commandant's houseboy and later tends to Madame, the commandant's wife.

After six months of living with the commandant, Madame Suzy, the commandant's wife came back from Paris. The commandant takes her from Yaoundé. Everyone is amazed at her beauty and kindness, she is warm, caring, and beautiful, drawing the attention of almost every man in town. Sometime after her arrival, the commandant travels and left Toundi with her to take care of the house. (P50/63) Over time, Madame was maltreating him. As the commandant remains on tour, she was bored with her life. She started an affair with Monsieur Moreau, the prison director who was wicked towards Africans. The news of Madame and Monsieur Moreau's affair spreads throughout the town. Toundi was always sent by Madame to visit the prison director. He was however accused of spreading the rumors. (P96/144) The relationship between Toundi and Madame became worse after the rumors. Madame maltreats Toundi, and in turn, Toundi was more disrespectful towards her. One day, Sophie, a maid working for an agronomist, stole money from her employer's safe. Sophie is accused of stealing the workers' salaries with the help of Toundi. Toundi was arrested and taken to prison, where he was tortured and forced to confess to a crime he didn't commit. Sophie fled to Spanish Guinea. In Dangan, Toundi is arrested by the police, who believe he is Sophie's lover. He was punished severely and injured badly. Fortunately, his friend Mendim working at the police station, described as a very muscular man helped him. Monsieur Moreau instructed Mendim to beat Toundi, but Mendim poured beef blood on him to make it seem like he is injured. Toundi falls ill, and Mendim takes him to the hospital. They waited a long time to see a doctor as the black doctor was the only one around, and the other white doctor has been promoted to captain. The doctor found out that Toundi's ribs are broken and have punctured his bronchi. While he was still in the hospital, Monsieur Moreau came back with the white doctor, talking about punishing Toundi even more. The relationship between Toundi and the commandant has got so bad to the extent that the commandant allows marGullet, the police chief, to arrest and torture Toundi. It was at this point, after Monsieur Moreau leaves the hospital that Toundi escaped and headed towards Spanish Guinea, where he was first introduced at the beginning of the novel. (P156/170)

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which is relevant to our research. The sociocultural theory is a psychological theory that explores the relationships between external and internal processes. Additionally, sociocultural theory is a theoretical framework that examines how social and cultural factors shape human development, learning, and cognition. It was first proposed by Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, in the early 20th century and has since become one of the most influential theories in the fields of psychology, education, and anthropology. Lev Vygotsky, a literary critic, educator, and Russian psychologist, is known as the founder of sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, is a psychological framework that emphasizes the role of social and cultural interactions in cognitive development. At its core, the theory posits that individuals learn and develop within the context of social relationships and cultural influences. Vygotsky's work, particularly outlined in his seminal book "Thought and Language" (1934), highlights the importance of social interactions in shaping cognitive processes. According to Vygotsky, cognitive development is a result of the interplay between individuals and their social environment. It helps create a framework that facilitates systematic investigation of cognition, keeping in mind the social context. Human development is considered a socially mediated process that varies from one culture to another. Furthermore, sociocultural theory is a theoretical framework that examines how social and cultural factors shape human development, learning, and cognition. It was first proposed by Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, in the early 20th century and has since become one of the most influential theories in the fields of psychology, education, and anthropology. Lev Vygotsky, a literary critic, educator, and Russian psychologist, is known as the founder of sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, is a psychological framework that emphasizes the role of social and cultural interactions in cognitive development. At its core, the theory posits that individuals learn and develop

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According to Vygotsky, "What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow". (Vygotsky 1978) This underscores the significance of social interaction in facilitating learning beyond an individual's current independent capabilities. Moreover, Vygotsky introduced the idea of cultural tools and mediation. Cultural tools include language, symbols, and other means by which information is transmitted within a culture. Mediation involves the use of these tools to enhance cognitive functions. Vygotsky argued that the use of cultural tools mediates and transforms individuals' thinking processes. Sociocultural theory has impacted positively on fields such as education and others. Infidelity is one of the behaviors influenced by sociocultural factors such as norms, values, beliefs, and expectations within a given society. Therefore, studying infidelity from a sociocultural perspective can help to understand the social and cultural factors shaping these behaviors. It can also contribute to a better understanding of these behaviors and the underlying social and cultural factors that contribute to them. This understanding can inform efforts to prevent and address these behaviors in various contexts. This theory emphasizes that infidelity is not solely an individual choice but is influenced by broader cultural and societal factors. According to this theory, cultural norms and values regarding relationships and sexuality can have a significant impact on the prevalence of infidelity.

Infidelity in the Novel.

Infidelity was noted in the novel at the instance Toundi disowned his father because he was beaten and punished. However, his father told him that he could not run away from him because he was his blood. "She told me I had done well to leave my father's house and that my father was did not love me as a father ought to love his son." (P13/22) Though his mother supported his leaving the house, telling him that his father was not a good father.

Infidelity is evident in the affair between Madame, the commandant's wife, and Monsieur Moreau, the prison overseer. It is a crucial aspect of the novel, shedding light on the moral and ethical decay of the French colonial system. The commandant is unaware of his wife's infidelity. Madame, the commandant's wife and Monsieur Moreau use Toundi, the protagonist, to facilitate their meetings. Their relationship is built on a power imbalance as they hold authoritative positions within the colonial system, exploiting their power to satisfy their desires. The affair serves to expose the corruption and immorality of the French colonial system, which claims to be superior and civilized but is, in reality, morally bankrupt. Toundi was made a scapegoat and punished for crimes he didn't commit. We could see the of the European colonialism portrayed in the novel. The romance significantly impacts Toundi, who initially idealized and idolized Madame as a symbol of French culture and civilization. Toundi becomes deeply involved in the romance, acting as a messenger and intermediary between Madame and Monsieur Moreau. However, his involvement exposes him to the reality of French colonial society and the hypocrisy of the French colonial system. He realizes that the French are not the benevolent and civilized people he believed them to be, and their exploitation of the African population extends beyond the affair between Madame and Monsieur Moreau. In conclusion, infidelity is a significant aspect of "Une vie de boy," exposing the moral decay and hypocrisy of the French colonial system. It also profoundly impacts Toundi, highlighting the destructive nature of French colonialism and its effects on the African population. (p 96/147)

Secondly, the case of infidelity was also noticed when the commandant, Toundi's boss wanted to arrest him without first hearing his part of the story how he was unjustly punished for an offense he never committed. (p 165/170) The commandant was angry when he learnt of his wife's infidelity. He however, poured his anger on Toundi. Toundi was seen as standing in judgement by both his boss, the commandant and his wife, even monsieur Moreau also hated him and he was beaten and left to die without being given the opportunity to excuse himself. (P176/178)

Causes of Infidelity

Infidelity, or being unfaithful to a romantic partner, can have various causes:

Emotional infidelity may be driven by unmet emotional needs within the primary relationship. Individuals may seek emotional connection outside the relationship to fulfill needs for understanding, validation, or companionship. In the novel, this was seen when madame engaged in an extramarital affair with Monsieur Moreau, after her husband travelled. She had some emotional needs which she needed to satisfy (p97/146).

Dissatisfaction in the relationship: When a partner feels dissatisfied in the relationship, they may seek validation or attention from someone else. **Lack of emotional intimacy:** Emotional intimacy is crucial in a healthy relationship, and its absence can make a person vulnerable to infidelity. **Sexual dissatisfaction:** Similar to emotional intimacy, sexual satisfaction is also important in a relationship. When a person feels sexually dissatisfied, they may seek fulfillment elsewhere. **Opportunity:** Sometimes, a person may cheat simply because the opportunity presents itself, even if they are satisfied with their current relationship. **Conflicts:** Unresolved conflicts and resentments can create a sense of distance and disconnection between partners, making them more vulnerable to cheating.

The Effects of Infidelity

Infidelity, or cheating in a romantic relationship, can have effects on individuals and society. The effects of infidelity can be complex and may vary depending on the context in which it occurs. The effects include:

Emotional infidelity can lead to a breakdown of trust, communication, and overall relationship satisfaction. Perel explained that the betrayed partner may experience feelings of betrayal, insecurity, and a diminished sense of connection. Perel, E. (2017) *Betrayal: Infidelity can cause significant emotional pain and a sense of betrayal for the partner betrayed. This usually leads to a loss of trust and a breakdown of the relationship.* **Emotional Trauma:** Infidelity can lead to emotional traumas like depression and anxiety. Infidelity can cause great emotional trauma and difficulty for both the betrayed partner and the person who engaged in infidelity. The betrayed partner may feel betrayal, anger, and a loss of trust, while the person who engaged in infidelity may feel guilt, shame, and a sense of self-betrayal. **Loss of trust:** Infidelity can impact the betrayed partner's ability to trust their partner and collaborate in raising their children. Infidelity can lead to financial consequences, such as divorce settlements and alimony payments. Infidelity can result in the spread of sexually transmitted infections, posing serious health risks for both partners. According to Mark (2011) its consequences may include a damaged sense of security, self-esteem, and intimacy within the relationship.

For Children:

One of the primary effects of infidelity on children is a sense of instability and insecurity within the family. Children may feel betrayed and confused by the discovery of infidelity, struggling to understand why their parents' relationship has been disrupted. This can lead to feelings of a loss of trust in their parents, depression, and anxiety. Additionally, children may find themselves caught in the middle of their parents' conflicts, feeling compelled to take sides or keep secrets. This can create a sense of guilt and shame for the child and may also harm their relationship with one or both parents. Another potential effect of infidelity on children is a disruption of their routines and daily activities. This can lead the children to run away from the house. In the novel, Toundi ran away from the house because of the brutal beatings he received from his father. Though it may seem as if he was the person who displayed this quality of infidelity, but the situation at home pushed him into doing that. (P13/22)

Recommendation for prevention of infidelity

To prevent cases of infidelity, people who are close to each other, especially couples, need to develop a strong emotional bond. Work on developing self-confidence. Be transparent to each other. Fix reasonable boundaries for outsiders. Be ready to forgive. According to Glass et al, couples therapy or counseling may assist in addressing underlying issues, improving communication, and fostering relationship healing. Glass & Wright (1992). Rebuilding trust and communication is crucial for couples navigating the aftermath of physical infidelity.

Corbin noted that the violence done that this novel by Fedinand Oyono shows the violence done by French colonization at the level of family relationships. (19)

Conclusion

Infidelity is a big problem that impacts negatively on society. It affects people that are innocent and equally the guilty ones. It can be prevented when everyone involved in any relationship stays faithful to his or her partner. Ferdinand Oyono's "Une vie de boy" is a reflection of what happens in society, how marriage mates are unfaithful to their partners and bring untold sufferings to others. It is therefore imperative that the concept of faithfulness and fidelity to one's partner should be embraced to achieve progress and development in the world. Infidelity can have adverse effects on everyone in the family.

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