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Editorial

One of the pressing questions that reverberates often in African Christianity is: What is an (African) Christian family? Family is very important to the traditional Africans. Raising a family is not just a social and cultural demand that has to be meant, but also a conditional for eschatological redemption or salvation. For the African Christian, the place of family cannot also be over-emphasised. Thus, prayers for the family in all its ramifications occupy the central stage in personal and intercession sessions. Although African Christians have for a long time contended with the notions of the Christian family in general, there is a progressive acceptance of its monogynous union based on heterosexuality. However, Western values and globalisation forces have continued to shape Christian family discourses and practices. Sex and sexuality issues have been escalated and mediated so much so that Christian 'theology' of family, sexuality, and sex has to contend with the throes of globalisation.

This volume, which is a product of the 2023 conference on the theme: Christian Family and Sexuality in Contemporary Society, critically reflects the tensions, challenges, and theological prospects of a Christian family. In the lead article, Professor Knoetze departs from the general conception of the Christian family based on Christ's salvation. Although he points out that family is a contested issue in Africa, he argues that a radical conception of the Christian family should centre around relationality, forging a missional relationship with the Trinitarian God. This is in contrast with the soteriological conception of family that has blurred the missional prospects that understanding family can birth for a long time.

Adu-Gyamfi's article also radically takes on the traditional conception of sex as a purely private issue, and attempts to strike a balance between it and the sexual revolution that theology of sexuality has to contend with. Coming from a heteronormative perspective, Adu-Gyamfi strongly maintains conservative theological stand on sexuality. He argues that the biblical

understanding of sexuality cannot be traded with the offering of the over-sexualised world.

On her own, Ayo-Oladayo explores the significance and nexus between language education and family development. She points out that effective communication in the family is a *sine qua non* for cohesion, unity, and progress. In addition to fostering cultural understanding, supporting cognitive growth, and fostering stronger family ties, it also improves communication abilities. Oladapo and Adererele examine the positive impacts of social change, particularly technological advancement, on the family. They opine that despite the advantages derived from modern communications devices, Christian theological understanding of the family should be countenanced and appropriated by Christian families.

Odesola and Odesola reflect on the significance of sex education in the church. Although sex education has not been a major interest in missional and catechetical teaching, they suggest that contemporary challenges make it imperative for the church to be interested in sex education. Otun's article introduces a philosophical dimension to sexuality discourse. Otun views the relegation of reason in choice- and decision-making processes as unacceptable and recommends a balanced deployment of both reason and faith in sexuality matters. Gombi re-examines the accounts of Genesis and contemporary sexual expressions. In the Genesis creation stories, an explanation of the nature of sexuality takes a central, climactic positioning and is given as a fundamental fact of creation. The excessive amount of material given to sexuality highlights its relevance in the Hebrew Bible within the cosmic context of the creation narratives. The foundation for the rest of the biblical narrative and discourse on human sexuality is provided by the profound depiction of God's original plan for human sexuality at the beginning of the canon, which also captures the core ideas of sexuality. Salifu enumerates the negative effects of street hawking, such as rape, unplanned pregnancies, and violence. He recommends that the state and social institutions should intervene to stem the corrosive tide of street hawking in Nigeria.

Biar explores the disagreement between 'pre-modernism' and postmodernism. He argues that the different positions these schools of thought hold have created serious tension in how to understand human sexuality. The recognition of feeling over reason and the relativistic contours that encircle the arguments of postmodernism, modernism, and premodernism all have impact on Christian notion of sexuality. He, however, maintains that the Bible still reserves the best model of sexual appreciation in contemporary society. For Kosoluware, the negative influences of postmodernism should be frontally addressed by contemporary African Christians. It is essential that the Church in Africa rise to the challenge through teaching, counseling and intentional preaching of the gospel. Atteh examines Christian moral victory, and points out the tensions that have characterised its different interpretations. He opines that the best approach to the theological issue is to insist that the victory believers have over the flesh nature is both positional and progressive, encompassing both the divine and the human responsibilities. Asaolu tackles the increasing cases of marital infidelity in society. Articulating the causes and effects of marital infidelity, Asaolu recommends that couples act in such a way that their actions could conform with Kantian categorical imperative. Finally, Ajao makes a case for sex education as a part of socialisation in the family. He notes that it is no longer possible to hold the view that sex talk is a taboo. Therefore, there should be a conscious approach to addressing sexuality issues.

This volume is a coterie of discourses on sex, sexuality and family. The burning issues raised from multidisciplinary perspectives enrich the volume and provide a critical resource for further engagement. However, the ideas are solely the responsibility of the authors rather than the editorial board of the journal.

Benson Ohihon Igbion
Editor-in-Chief

ETHICAL APPROACH TO RESOLVING MORAL ISSUES EMANATING FROM CONTEMPORARY SEXUAL INFIDELITY

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Abstract

This study examines the ethical approach to resolving moral issues emanating from contemporary sexual infidelity. A marriage to be honoured and adorned without any blemish has now become something else that several people engaged themselves to be an exchange of love between men and women that are not legally joined together in holy matrimony. Apart from the above, sexual relations, as one of those things created as legitimate feelings of love within the boundary of marriage, is being abused. The task of this paper is to do in-depth descriptive research on the reasons the problem of sexual infidelity is rampant among married couples in this contemporary age and find a solution to it through an ethical approach to resolve the problem if not totally eliminate it. Immanuel Kant's ethical theory of categorical imperative will also be applied. The causes of this immoral act in this contemporary age could be traced to poverty, inability to meet sexual demand and marital dissatisfaction, among others. The effects are damage to self-esteem, loss of trust in cheating spouses and domestic violence. Thus, the writer recommends that spouses stay within their boundaries and show genuine love to each other.

Keywords: Ethical, Marriage, Sexual, Infidelity and Contemporary

Introduction

Sexual relations, as one of those things created as legitimate feelings of love within the boundary of marriage, is being abused. Though it is not a present issue, it has existed since the Biblical era. A marriage to be honoured and adorned without any blemish has now become something else that several people engaged themselves to be an exchange of love between men and women that are not legally joined together in holy matrimony. All because some husbands have neglected their duties at home to their wives and children. Likewise, many married women turn to something else when they see their husbands failing to be responsible at home. To the women, the holier-than-thou attitudes have sent many of their husbands out to look for a sugar mummy or girl who will serve as alternatives, which was not part of the marital vow.

However, there is a need for an Ethical approach to resolving moral issues emanating from contemporary sexual infidelity. Ethics is concerned with promoting the interest of others as a systematic attempt through the use of reason to make our individual and social moral experience in such a way as to determine the rules which ought to govern human conduct (Touo, 2022). It has to do with the process by which people clarify what is right and wrong and by which people act on what is taken to be correct. It involves the use of reason in determining a proper cause of action as well as making choices, making “thoughtful, reflective and self-conscious discussions” (Loving, 1999:16). Ethics, according to Scott (2002:12), “is important because moral questions are at the heart of life's most important issue. The task of this paper is to do in-depth descriptive research on the reasons why the problem of sexual infidelity is rampant among married couples in this present age and find a solution to it through an ethical approach to resolve the problem, if not eliminated. Immanuel Kant's ethical theory of categorical imperative will also be applied.

Consequently, the paper will look into the concept of sexual infidelity in marriage, biblical perspectives of marriage, and causes like inability to meet sexual demand and poverty. In addition, the paper will also look at the resultant effects like damage to self-esteem, premature death and loss of trust in the cheating spouse. Honesty, contentment and adjustment form part of the ethical approach. The paper recommends that couples should genuinely forgive each other.

Concept of Infidelity from the Christian Perspectives

Sexual infidelity in marriage is an abuse of a couple's assumed or stated contract as regards emotional sexual exclusivity. In marital relationships, exclusive expectations are usually assumed, although they are not always seen at the time. When they are not seen, research has shown that emotional damage can occur, including feelings of anger and betrayal, lowering of sexual and personal trust, and damage to self-esteem (Barta, 2005:2). Sexual infidelity is a behaviour or actions done contrary to the marriage vow or contract voluntarily entered into by a couple. It is usually seen as a betrayal of the sacred marriage agreement by a spouse. What constitutes an act of unfaithfulness varies between and within cultures and hinges on the relationship between people. Depending on the background, men and women can experience social penalties if their act of sexual infidelity is disclosed. The form and extent of these penalties are often dependent on the gender of the unfaithful person.

One of the evolutionary researchers, Schmitt (2005: 247), submitted that men and women have inborn mechanisms that contribute to why they become sexually troubled, especially for certain types of sexual infidelity. It has been postulated that heterosexual men have advanced to an innate psychological mechanism that answers to the threat of sexual unfaithfulness more than emotional, sexual infidelity, and vice versa for heterosexual women. In his contribution, Haris (2002:7) believes that a potential adulterer is more damaging to the male, who could potentially invest in the children of another male. At the same time, for females, emotional adultery is more perturbing because they could lose the

parental venture to another woman's offspring, therefore affecting their chances of survival. However, more recent studies suggest that progressively, both men and women would find emotional sexual infidelity psychologically worse. Marital infidelity among couples is very rampant in this contemporary society and a critical factor in marriage collapse. It usually causes pain to the victims. Most married people regard a spouse's unfaithfulness as the most painful experience that can be easily overlooked in a marriage. The marriage infidelity literature, as argued by (Perterson, www.bible.org), reveals variants in the concept of infidelity. These include conflicted-romantic, physical sex, opportunistic, romantic, emotional and obligatory. Swenson explains that sexual infidelity occurs whenever a person engages in a relationship that violates the sanctity of marriage. This happens when the new relationship breaks trust, develops intimacy with another that does not belong in the marriage, or when experiences are shared with a new person other than with a spouse. Swenson further stated that infidelity indicates that there is no practical way to communicate disaffection within the marriage (Swenson: www.greswensonphd.com).

Infidelity is unfaithfulness in marriage between the married couples. This can trigger conflict in the family, especially when the infidelity is confessed openly and discussed together by the couple. The person in question in the couple may show a sense of remorse or guilt, but the innocent partner will feel betrayed, hurt or sometimes that he or she was unable to satisfy the infidel mate. In this regard, it becomes difficult to trust each other. This sometimes led to anger and threats and later resulted in conflict, which would either end in separation or divorce (Collins, 2007:612). Morality speaks of a method or behaviour regarding right and wrong behaviour. The word conveys the concepts of moral standards regarding conduct, moral responsibility, one's conscience, and a moral personality, or one who is proficient in wrong or right action. Common synonyms involve ethics, virtue, principles and goodness. Morality emotionally impacts one's behaviour, conscience, society and ultimate destiny

(<https://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/morality.htm>).

Morality impacts our day-to-day decisions; our conscience directs these selections. Again, we must choose for ourselves where the conscience initiates. Some people hold that the conscience is a matter of our hearts and that individuals program wrong, right and fairness theories. This is in keeping with the letters of Paul the Apostle, who point out that even those who lack believe in God recurrently obey God's instruction as given in the Ten Commandments: "for when Gentiles, who do not have the rule, by nature do the thing in the law, these, though, not having the rule, are a law to themselves, who display the work of the law written in their hearts, their principles also bearing eyewitness, and between themselves their opinions accusing or otherwise excusing them" (Rom. 2:14-15). Again, those who do not have faith in God are left with the only probable conclusion they can come to – that our conclusions are based exclusively on our need to survive. What we call our sense of right and wrong would be based on learned behaviour rather than part of a Divine design (<https://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/morality.htm>).

Christian marriage addresses the problem of infidelity with wedding vows and promises of unwavering lifelong faithfulness and devotion expressed in the strongest possible terms during marriage solemnization ("to hold and to have from this day forward... neglecting all others... until death do us part"). The couples make These vows publicly before an unchanging and holy God, and they construct a defensive barrier around the marriage vow for the good of their marital relationship. In this contemporary age, some couples do not even border to include such vows in their solemnization, dismissing them as outdated and overly harsh. The gospel of Matthew accounts Jesus speaking in no uncertain terms about the conclusiveness of the marriage covenant: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What God has joined together let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:6).

Having sex with only one partner who does not have any sexually transmitted infection (STI) is believed to be safe. Nevertheless, many healthcare professionals believe that there is no such thing as 'safe sex'. They believe the single way to be genuinely safe is not to have sex because "all forms of sexual contact entails some risk". Even when there is no actual physical risk, as in the case of sex in the midst of a faithful marriage involving two partners who have not betrothed in prior sexual activity, there are still sensitive risks to the intense vulnerability of sex. Kellers reminds us of the unbelievable blessing that sex can be to a truthful marriage. It signifies solidification and celebrates the beautiful and wholehearted obligations that marriage is meant to be. God designed marriage to symbolise the union we are expected to have with him. Kellers further stressed that the best marriages point to the deep, interminably fulfilling, and final union that all will have with Christ in love (Keller T and Keller K, 2011: 43).

More so, it is categorically prohibited in the Decalogue (seventh commandment, Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18): "Thou shall not commit adultery" In more precise language, we read: "And thou shall not be canal with thy neighbour's wife, to gorge thyself with her" (Leviticus 18:20). The consequence is death for both guilty party (Orr James, 1915:41). All marriages are witness by God. These are the overall teachings of the Old Testament regarding the issue of marriage. They form the context for the New Testament teachings. Throughout the Old Testament, there is a strong witness of the importance of marriage in the covenant and the dangers that follow marrying out of the covenants. Man is both a spiritual being and a physical one. Someone can say up till Genesis 2:20... "God and man could still give love and receive love through their spirit". However, because man had a physical body, he also needed someone to share human and physical love with. This fact is deduced from the fact that God is love, and man came from love and is made up of love, and love cannot dwell alone (Myles Munroe, 2001:60).

Biblical Perspectives on Marriage

In the Biblical account of creation, after creating the earth and the elements, God thereafter created man to inhabit and have dominion over it. The first man, Adam, lived alone in the Garden of Eden for quite some time before God said, "it is not good that the man should be alone; I will provide for him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18 KJV). Marriage is defined as joining two lives in a "one flesh" union characterized by fidelity. A "one flesh" union is both a mutual and exclusive sexual union and a sharing of the whole of life (Green, 2011: 508).

The above definition reflects the Christian perspective of marriage, simply as a union between a man and a woman endorsed by God's word. The people involved in a marital relationship are usually known as husband and wife. Through marriage, new rights, roles, and social relationships are formed between the spouses and their relatives. Some of the critical rights associated with marriage include sexual monopoly and those concerning the children born within the marriage. People get married for many reasons, this includes sex, child bearing, legal, spiritual or religious reasons. Marriage usually creates normative or legal obligations for the individual involved - one of the vital main problems that have affected marriage is infidelity.

Causes of Sexual Infidelity

Below are some of the causes of sexual infidelity which have made some marriages fail. Lack of genuine love: Some couples get into or stay in a marriage that is not based on love. This is one of the major reasons why people become unfaithful in marriage since relationships and marriages are founded on love.

1. Inability to create time for the family: This is the habit of spending insufficient time with one's spouse. This may be due to commitment at work or other social commitments. When a couple find it difficult to enjoy adequate time with each other, it may lead to loneliness, which, as a result, may give room for the temptation of marital unfaithfulness.

2. **Inability to meet the sexual desire of the spouse:** This is one of the leading causes of infidelity in marriage. When one person in a marriage cannot meet the sexual needs, expectations and desires of his/her spouse. This makes the partner seek satisfaction elsewhere.
3. **Unrealistic expectation:** Infidelity can also happen in cases where spouses in a marriage have unachieved expectations concerning marriage. In a case like this, the couple may get bored in the course of their marriage since marriage has its flaws, and anyone with unrealistic expectations will undoubtedly get disappointed in his/her spouse.
4. **Marital dissatisfaction:** This is another salient reason for infidelity for both sexes. When marriage becomes dissatisfying to any of the couples, it may lead to extra-marital affairs. This is very common among couples who have had a high number of past sexual relationships before marriage (Myles Munroe, 2001:60).
5. **Poverty:** This is a complex term that refers to numerous unfavourable conditions, including lack of food and productive resources, hunger and malnutrition, limited or no access to education and other essential services, unemployment and unsafe environment. Poverty has made many married women with economic challenges become victims of infidelity with the promise of giving them money to solve their problems. According to Onyeonuru (2003), in her writing, ninety-five percent of the people interviewed responded that the harsh economic situation contributed to the reasons why infidelity is rampant among women. The general impression was that the economic crisis led to abject poverty that triggered several modes of coping and survival strategies. Fronting this, Judi (2009, 209) affirms that the presence of sexual infidelity, especially when it leads to divorce, results in considerable economic and social

externalities resulting from family fragmentation. Infidelity is one major cause of financial impoverishment in the country today.

Effects of Sexual Infidelity on Marriage

- I. **Damage to self-esteem:** Many victims of an affair respond to an issue by blaming themselves. The person who has been embittered will suffer a blow to his or her self-pride. They may have the usual belief of, "Was I not enough?" "If I hadn't let myself to, this would not have happened" Just as children tend to fault themselves for their parents' Long after the abuse has stopped; victims will continue to suffer low self-esteem, a sad and often crippling loss of self-worth (McDowell's & Hosterllers, 1996:351)
- ii. **Impacts on all areas of life:** Extra-marital affairs can cause a ripple in the life of the victim. The victim may find him/herself looking differently among his/her friends and at the workplace. This can be either positive or negative, but most victims of an affair say that it brought about changes in all other areas of their lives. The report shows that there are some cases in which both partners may contribute to the problem of infidelity, especially when the infidelity is confessed and discussed together. The offender may experience regret or guilt, while the innocent partner feels betrayed by self-condemning because he/she could not satisfy the wayward mate (Collins, 2007:612).
- iii. **Loss of trust in a cheating spouse:** The victim of an issue will find it difficult to trust his/her partner. The couples may doubt their judgment of others. Even if the relationship ends and another begins, the baggage of perfidy can follow. It is essential to deal with the issue of trust, even if

it means getting the help of a professional counsellor to do so. The victim and his/her spouse will be grateful in the long run if the issue of trust is settled with the harmful consequences of it (Myles Munroe, 2001:60).

- iv. Domestic violence: This is another resultant effect of infidelity in marriage and family life. According to the American Psychological Association, some 40-60 percent of men who mishandle women also abuse children (1996:8). Fronting this, (Kunhiyop, 2008: 244,246) affirms that domestic violence does not only occur between the spouses but can also perpetrated against the children of the family. Demonstration of power and control by men and denial of sex by women as a result of infidelity can lead to domestic violence. This is enormously destructive, apart from causing injuries or loss of life; the constant insecurity with which the family members live may even lead to problems in sleeping. When a woman flees a violent marriage, she may have to leave her children behind to be raised without the loving care of their mother.
- v. Sickness: Sexual infidelity in marriage can lead to serious sickness as a result of sexually transmitted diseases (STD). Oladapo submitted that sickness exposes family life to many problems. He stresses that apart from the fact that the sick person will not be able to enjoy him/herself, it will also deny the person many things that should have been done at that time. Some other sicknesses that the affected person may have apart from sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) include depression, high blood pressure, loneliness or serious injuries, which may lead to loss of life if the person involved is not given adequate treatment (Oladapo, 2016:55-56).

- vi. **Spiritual effects:** Sin produces both moral and psychological guilt. The guilt that results from moral decadence may not only produce deep and long-lasting feelings of regret and self-recrimination, but it will also harm the victim of an infidelity relationship with God until the sin is repented of and forgiveness is experienced.
- vii. **Shame:** Shame is a cousin to an emotion of guilt, but whereas guilt focuses on a person's acts, shame points to a person's self. Because sexual infidelity is an invasion of an individual's person, it is typically accompanied by an overwhelming sense of shame (McDowell & Hosteller, 1996:351).

Ethical Approach to Resolving Moral Issues Emanating from Sexual Infidelity

1. **Moral Education:** This has to do with inculcating those in disposition called virtues; this is partly due to the recognition of pastoral response, parents, and teachers in general that the root of moral conduct is character. Aristotle expresses the importance of moral education in the strongest terms: "Legislators make the citizen good by forming habits in them". Moral efforts response on the part of pastoral caregiver or mentor is required in actualizing the goal of curbing the moral decadence emanating from sexual infidelity (Thomas, 1955: 485,587).
2. **Honesty:** This is another ethical response to curbing sexual infidelity in marriage and family life. A famous adage says, "Honesty is the best policy". (Niyi Ojo, 2014: 150) Opined that honesty is the only way that couples will ever come to understand each other. Without this, adjustments crucial to compatibility in marriage cannot be made. (Adams, 2002: 29-

30) view honesty as a fundamental Christian concept which needs to be reinforced within the family. One of the ways in which honesty can be applied among couples is by fulfilling the promise made by both the husband and wife.

3. Fidelity: This is loyalty to one's spouse, which calls for maintaining a healthy sexual relationship among couples. (Niyi Ojo, 2014:175) suggest that couples resist the temptation to look after the opposite sex. They must build boundaries around their heart by being content with each other without the emotional gaze over another person outside their marital home.
4. Forgiveness: This is the act of granting a free pardon or giving up a claim of retaliation for an offence. It has to do with personal relations between one who has been wronged and a wrongdoer. In the act of forgiving, the cost or penalty for a wrong, whether actual or perceived, is born by the forgiver and not by the one forgiven (Green, 2011:309-310)
5. Moral Teaching: This has to do with teachings from the biblical points of view called virtues; this is due in part to the recognition of ethical response. Couples should generally know that the root of moral conduct is character. Moral efforts response on the part of the family, church and society is required in actualizing the goal of curbing the problem of sexual infidelity.
6. Sex Education: There is a need to educate couples about the merits and demerits of sexual infidelity. The controversies over sex education in the family, public schools and the dispensing of contraceptives to both married and unmarried people by federally funded clinics have made contraception a matter of public policy debate. The sex educators will help to

enlighten the couples about their attitudes toward sex. Sex education, coupled with biblical and moral teachings, tends to reduce the level of immoral acts of sexual infidelity, especially among married couples (Clinebell, 1984: 32).

7. **Personal Discipline:** This is another ethical response to the moral problem of sexual infidelity. Self-control, discipline, and determination to be agents of progress should be watched-words for all. Bad influences should be avoided as individuals watch for the role models in their marital homes. Any act of sexual immorality that can result in violence should be avoided; perseverance, tolerance, love and hard work, which are good ethical values, should be promoted in family life (Awoniyi, 2011:32-32).

"Immanuel Kant's theory states that "the basis for a Theory of Good lies in the intention or the will. Those morally praiseworthy acts are done out of a sense of responsibility rather than for the expected consequences, predominantly the consequences to self. The only thing GOOD concerning the act is the WILL, the GOOD WILL. That will be to do our DUTY. What is our duty? We should act in such an approach that we would want everybody else to act similarly in similar circumstances toward all other people."

This is corroborated by the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:12, "Hence, all things whatsoever ye would that mankind would do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." The writer agrees with Immanuel Kant's theory that the husband should care, be contented and stay within the jurisdiction of his wife to avoid the menace called infidelity, especially in this contemporary age and vice versa to the wife.

Kant expressed these as categorical imperatives. "Act in line with the maxim that you would desire all other rational people to follow as if it were a global law". For Kant, the GOOD includes the Principle of Universality. Kant argues that four formulations of this principle can be known:

- a. The formula of the rule of nature: Act as if the maxim of your deed were to develop through your will a universal law.
- b. The formula of the finish itself: Act in such a way that you at all times treat humankind, either in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but continuously at the same time as an end.
- c. The formula of Autonomy: So perform that your will can regard itself at the same time as making worldwide law through its maxims.
- d. The Kingdom of Finishes formula shows that one should not treat a person as a means to an end. Persons are always ends in themselves.
- e. Nobody should use or exploit anyone for whatever purpose.

Conclusion

The menace called infidelity has made many couples lose their integrity in family life and society at large. This paper has examined moral issues emanating from contemporary sexual infidelity with an overview of the concept of marriage and infidelity. It was also established that factors like lack of contentment, inability to meet sexual desire, unrealistic expectations, lack of genuine love and marital dissatisfaction are promoting infidelity in the family life. It was also established in the paper that shame, damage to self-esteem, loss of trust in a cheating spouse, sickness and domestic violence are the resultant moral issues which affect family life. In addition to the above, the work also revealed that both the couples, family members and society at large can ethically approach and resolve the problem of infidelity through moral education, sex education, fidelity, honesty and personal discipline. Immanuel Kant's theory of categorical imperative was used as the theory which states people should do to others what they want them to do in return. Thus, the paper recommends that spouses maintain personal discipline, stay within their boundaries and genuinely love each other.

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