

**Exploring the Effectiveness of Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) for Couples who
Experience Infidelity**

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Abstract

Infidelity, defined as a relationship with a third party that violates the trust within the partnership which in turn breaks the exclusivity agreement made within the partnership, is an issue within relationships that many counsellors can struggle to work with. This capstone explores how emotion focused therapy (EFT) can help couples working through infidelity. EFT combines the principles of attachment theory by creating emotional awareness and breaking maladaptive emotional schemas. This capstone's literature review provides a deeper understanding of EFT, attachment theory, and interventions used in counselling. As well, this capstone provides ethical considerations of the principles and codes that counsellors adhere to when working with couples or individuals. This capstone highlights the implications for the counselling field, including the need for training, cultural competence, and best practices when working with couples.

Keywords: infidelity, emotion focused therapy, attachment, Gottman, couples therapy

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Exploring the Effectiveness of Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) for Couples who Experience Infidelity

Infidelity is defined as a relationship with a third person that violates trust within the partnership and involves emotional, sexual, or online activities that are not permitted under the exclusivity agreement between the couple (Irvine et al., 2024). Couples who experience infidelity may reach out to counsellors for support to navigate the broken trust and strained attachment within the relationship. Emotion focused therapy (EFT) is a modality that encapsulates attachment and emotional aspects of the couple, identifying the root of the problem (Goldman, 2019). This capstone will address the following research question: How can EFT help support couples who experience infidelity?

Developed in the 1980's by doctors Leslie Greenberg and Sue Johnson, EFT is a powerful method for resolving marital discord, specifically that which results from infidelity, because it is based on the idea that emotions are essential to human motivation and connection (Goldman, 2019). Integrated into EFT is attachment theory, which focuses on secure and insecure attachment dynamics critical to how couples relate to and react to one another when they experience infidelity (Allen, 2022b; Goldman, 2019). An in-depth exploration of the emotional and attachment-related discomfort that infidelity brings into a relationship can be gained by examining attachment theory within the framework of EFT. Research emphasizes how important it is to establish a safe counselling space where clients can work through their fears and difficulties in the hopes of forgiving and making up with their partner (Dargie, 2020; Irvine et al., 2024).

This capstone critically analyzes the literature on the topic of infidelity, EFT, attachment theory, and cultural use. This capstone highlights the need for a culturally sensitive and

customized approach when applying EFT across various relational contexts by acknowledging the diversity in responses to infidelity, influenced by factors like gender, cultural background, and attachment styles (Bozoyan & Schmiedeberg, 2023; Penn et al., 1997). This capstone provides suggestions on how counsellors can work with couples who wish to heal from infidelity while also exploring challenges that may arise in the counselling space. Therefore, this capstone critically analyzes the counselling modality, EFT, and how it can be used in couple's therapy. This capstone also highlights the need for professional training for counsellors when exploring couples' work and infidelity.

This capstone is organized to explicitly highlight the importance of the research question within each section. Definitions of terms help to identify common language in research. The self-positioning statements provide an understanding of the biases that may come out when researching this topic. Ethical considerations highlight the standards and principles counsellors are to adhere to. The literature review will provide an analysis of the concepts that the research question is exploring. This capstone will explore the implications in counselling, and how to apply the research to the counselling field. The applications to counselling will provide ways to apply the research and knowledge gained from this capstone towards the future of counselling, to enhance the understanding of infidelity and couples. The future research provides direction for growth in this field. The reflexive self-statement provides an understanding of the learning that was done throughout the process of writing this capstone, as well as providing a shift in the bias and viewpoint of the writer. The conclusion summarizes the capstone to create a well-rounded research project.

Purpose of Study and Research Question

This capstone addresses the following research question: How can EFT help support couples who experience infidelity? The purpose of this capstone is to critically analyze the literature on EFT and the application of this counselling modality within couple's therapy.

Definition of Terms

The following key term definitions are used throughout the capstone and help with understanding of the research question.

Infidelity

Emotional/romantic, physical/sexual, or technology-based relationship with a third party in which one partner has broken an exclusivity agreement or boundary that breaks trust and safety within the relationship (Irvine et al., 2024). Other terms that will be used interchangeably within this capstone include *cheating*, *unfaithful*, and *affair*.

Couple

Within the reviewed literature, a couple was defined as a male and female in a relationship. The Merriam-Webster (2024) dictionary defines couples as two persons who are married, engaged, or romantically involved. A more expansive definition would include same-gender couples, transgender couples, or nonbinary couples.

EFT

EFT is a therapeutic modality informed by the understanding of the role of emotions in psychotherapeutic change (Greenberg, 2017). EFT can be used for individuals or couples (Greenberg, 2017).

Self-Positioning Statement

For my whole life, I have found a special interest in relationships and how individuals operate within them. The uniqueness of each relationship and the unspoken rules of what is tolerable or intolerable have caught my attention for many years. I grew up in a nuclear family, with my mom and dad still together, and two older siblings. Growing up, I was surrounded by so much love from my immediate and extended family that I knew I wanted to be able to pour that into my own family one day.

I am writing this capstone from a White, heterosexual, female perspective. I have been with the same partner for the past 8 years and have only experienced this one relationship. My interest in infidelity and couples who choose to work through the challenges has flourished because of the debate it has brought among people I talk with. When someone has talked to me about cheating or if they have cheated, my first question is, “Why did you not just break up?” From my experience talking to others, people tend to say that when they cheat, they are already checked out of the relationship, so to them, they did not think about their partner during the act. I have not understood the reason why individuals stay in a relationship when they do not want to be, and I believe cheating is the easy way out because it usually ends up with their partner breaking up with them. I believe that people in happy relationships do not cheat; regardless of the circumstance, their partner will be at the forefront of their mind if one is truly happy. I am aware of these biases, and I will mitigate them by critically analyzing the literature on the topic of infidelity and couples. If I feel my biases coming out, I will refer back to the literature and what I have read, acknowledging the different perspectives that exist.

I acknowledge my privilege in not experiencing infidelity and not witnessing infidelity in my immediate family either. My bias lies in the belief that it is important to dissolve the

partnership when one partner has been unfaithful. I believe that if someone has cheated, then that relationship will have struggles for the rest of its entirety. I believe cheating is like a torch that will be held over the partner's head whenever something unfavourable comes up. I believe this will come up in the counselling space when clients are telling me about their reasons for working through the infidelity. Perhaps a small part of me might not believe the client if they say that they are able to trust their partner again. I plan on mitigating this bias by thoroughly listening to the client and both points of view. I want to open my ears to what both parties have to say and ask appropriate questions. I will try to put my bias behind me by understanding the perspective I am reading from and referring to research. Supervision is very important when it comes to mitigating bias and I can work through my difficulties with my supervisor so that I do not bring them into the counselling room. It may be hard to separate myself from the couples and their issues so being able to discuss a neutral plan of action with my supervisor is important.

I know that some couples do choose to look past the infidelity and stay together, which has led me to research the following question: How can EFT help support couples who experience infidelity? I believe that if couples choose to work through their experience of infidelity and stay together, they are not going to be able to do it alone. I believe therapy is essential for all couples because it allows for a nonbiased third party to help manage the communication between the couple. It is my bias that counsellors who take on couples do so through an informed perspective and value the relationship as the client and not each person within the relationship. A source of challenge for me in the future, based on my beliefs, will be not taking sides of one of the individuals in the relationship. I plan on mitigating this bias through self-reflection and the perspective I have and referring to the literature. This also can be

done through consultation with colleagues or supervisors so that I can focus on the important issue, and not my perspective or what my bias is towards the couple.

EFT stands out to me as a modality that focuses on attachment to one another and needing a secure base within the relationship. I believe that people are a product of their environment, and the bond they have with their parents secures that for them. I believe that attachment stems from the basis of all relationships, whether individuals see it or not. From doing my own research, I have a secure attachment and understanding what that looks like for me has helped me gain an insight into my own relationships. I have gained interest in this research question because of the way people can form relationships. I see myself navigating work with couples who are healing from infidelity, by introducing them to their attachment style and creating a conversation with their partner around what that means and what they need within the relationship. This will help create a stronger foundation that might have been broken.

Ethical Considerations

In Canada, counsellors are called to work in accordance with the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2017). The code serves as an umbrella document of ethics. This capstone will explore transference, countertransference, and the importance of documentation in couples counselling, through an ethical lens. This ethical section relates to the question *how can EFT help support couples who experience infidelity by discussing the biases around infidelity and the most efficient modality to use*. This is important to the counselling field as ethics guide the work of counsellors, even when the counsellor has experienced the same relationship breakdown. Additionally, couples therapy is unique counselling work whereby the relationship involves two people as clients, simultaneously requiring ethical guidance.

Ethical Code of Conduct Considerations

This section refers to the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* and why these principles are important to counselling and the counselling field. Discussed in detail below are key principles of this code of ethics that a therapist needs to follow that imply importance to this capstone's research question: How can EFT help support couples who are experiencing infidelity?

Respect for the dignity of persons and people, Principle I, section I.17, discusses informed consent, and the duty of the counsellor to receive informed consent before providing counselling (CPA, 2017). Informed consent allows the client to guide the session and decide what they talk about and if they want to talk about it. Section I.19 describes that informed consent is obtained from all members, even if a client is mandated into counselling, they too need to give their consent (CPA, 2017). This consent is gained during the intake and reviewed during each subsequent session. The importance of consent is demonstrated in the following hypothetical scenario. One partner may wish to embrace the counselling experience, and the other partner may be ambivalent. Therefore, it is important to obtain consent from all parties throughout the counselling experience. In alignment with consent, Principle I.29 discusses re-establishing consent, allowing the participant to take back their consent at any point during the duration of therapy (CPA, 2017). In session, counsellors can review informed consent at the beginning of each session to ensure the client is willing to participate in the counselling session. These principles are important in the counselling field because in individual or couples therapy, the counsellor does not have the right to proceed with therapy if the client does not agree with it (CPA, 2017).

Responsible caring, Principle II, discusses having competence and self-knowledge, specifically Principle II.6. As per responsible caring, counsellors are to work within their scope. Competency is a necessity within counselling, and counsellors must ensure that they continue to develop competency in couples counselling and relationship navigation when working with couples. Section II.9 speaks to being aware of bias and personal experiences when talking to a client (CPA, 2017) For example, it is important the counsellor is speaking from facts and literature rather than what they have experienced, because everyone's experience is different. Not being aware of one's own bias may lead to countertransference with the clients. Transference may have negative effects in the counselling space as they are subconscious thoughts of the therapist or client that one might be unaware of (Remmers, 2023).

Transference and Countertransference

Transference and countertransference relate to ethics because they are subconscious ideas of the therapist or counsellor (Remmers, 2023). Transference and countertransference are both counselling experiences that counsellors must learn to navigate once experienced because they can become patterns within the counsellor if not recognized early (Remmers, 2023).

Countertransference is the unconscious, conflict-based reaction to the client, typically reminding them of someone (Hayes et al., 2018). In contrast, transference is unconscious projections the client has from earlier experiences onto the therapist (Remmers, 2023). Sigmund Freud first coined these terms in 1909 and understood it to be one of the difficulties in forming a trusting relationship between client and therapist, as noted by Stefana (2015).

There can be both benefits and challenges for a counsellor when they experience countertransference. When working with couples healing from infidelity, there may be objective countertransference when the counsellor identifies with the client who received the infidelity

(Peluso & Spina, 2008). There is also subjective countertransference, and this is related to what the therapist feels from their own beliefs, as well as the personal, internal conflict that resides within (Peluso & Spina, 2008). Primary countertransference is experienced when the counsellor overidentifies with the unfaithful or betrayed client or blaming or defending one of the clients (Peluso & Spina, 2008).

With countertransference, challenges may occur when a counsellor projects their bias onto the couple. For example, if the counsellor is over-identifying with the client or feels like they have a specific bias about the client's situation, the counsellor might be pushing the client to act before they are ready. Despite these challenges, there are notable benefits of countertransference. Countertransference can also be a benefit to a therapist, if they embrace reflective practice and supervision, to discuss the specific elements of the countertransference that are occurring with the client (Prasko et al., 2022). Another benefit could be an increase in empathy and a better understanding of what the client is experiencing. This can be a benefit to the client because they may feel validated in their experience because the counsellor will be coming from a similar place of understanding. This relates to ethics because of the awareness counsellors build to their personal beliefs in accordance with section II.9 (CPA, 2017).

There are two types of transference: conscious and unconscious (Peluso & Spina, 2008). Conscious transference occurs when the counsellor is aware of what the client is feeling and can be productive to the relationship (Peluso & Spina, 2008). Unconscious transference can be destructive when the counsellor's sensitivities might be stimulated by the problems presented in therapy (Peluso & Spina, 2008). Transference with clients should be dealt with the same way one would deal with feelings towards others, which is to understand and accept those feelings the client is having (Prasko et al., 2022).

Similarly, to countertransference, transference can be both beneficial and detrimental to the therapeutic relationship. Transference may be beneficial because the client might look at the counsellor in a different perspective, being more willing to listen to what they have to say. The client's emotional reaction to the therapist can provide valuable information to the therapist, and topics can be explored in the counselling room, which also helps to establish a positive therapeutic relationship (Prasko et al., 2010). This relates to the research question because the therapeutic relationship can play a strong role when using EFT for clients going through infidelity. The detrimental aspects of transference could be a lack of boundaries for the client because they may become overly attached to their therapist. This falls in accordance with Principle III.31, which addresses clarifying boundaries, and limiting the duration of the relationship to therapy session, and obtaining supervision where necessary (CPA, 2017).

With the many intricacies of transference and countertransference, supervision is necessary. Section III.9 of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* instructs to obtain supervision to remain unbiased when talking with a client (CPA, 2017). Seeking and actively engaging in supervision can ensure that the therapeutic relationship is protected from countertransference. If the counsellor thinks their countertransference is starting to affect the therapeutic relationship, they should speak to their supervisor, which may lead to referring the client to a different counsellor. Supervision assists with clarifying the underlying feelings of the therapist towards their client (Prasko et al., 2022).

Importance of Documentation

Not only are counsellors responsible for adhering to the code of ethics, but in Alberta, they also need to abide by the College of Alberta Psychologists' (CAP, 2023) *Standards of Practice*. The code of conduct is different from the standards of practice because the code

includes ethical guidelines to follow to create a positive space, where the standards of practice are a minimal standard of professional conduct for psychologists and provisional psychologists in Alberta. They are similar because they both provide guidelines to follow to benefit the client and the counsellor. As stated in the *Standards of Practice* (CAP, 2023) in Alberta, psychologists are required to maintain records that include information about the clients, sessions, presenting problems, and arrangements for a period of 10 years. Section I.26 discusses the access to the records and aligns with consent given if it were to go to a third party (CPA, 2017). This relates back to consent as the clients have the right to take back their consent, and they need to consent to any information that is released about them. The records are also important to keep in case the couple wants to go to a new counsellor or if notes are subpoenaed by the courts.

Additionally in Section II.21, psychologists are to create and maintain the records for their clients that will assist in the continuity of care over time (CPA, 2017). In the *Standards of Practice* for Alberta, psychologists learn how to document, retain, and keep their records of client sessions (CAP, 2023). Section 7, maintenance and retention of records, discusses the responsibilities of counsellors providing their services (CAP, 2023). Safeguards that are in place around couples counselling and dual relationships include how the counsellor must gain consent from the client to share their notes (CPA, 2017). For instance, if the couple is in counselling, and one partner wants to read the notes from previous sessions, they have access to those notes, as this information pertains to the relationship. However, if a couple is also in individual counselling, they may be declined access to their partners notes from their session as that would be a breach of confidentiality (CPA, 2017).

If the couple has children, it is important to keep in mind their safety, as children are a vulnerable population. As stated in Section 17.1, there is a duty to report information that may be

harming another population, and a psychologist must follow all the standards (CAP, 2023). This would include if abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable populations becomes suspected. This is also in accordance with the protection of vulnerable populations, Section 2.30 of the *Standards of Practice*, outlining the psychologist's responsibility towards vulnerable groups or populations to take action to protect their well-being (CAP, 2023). The psychologist is trained to be vigilant about the safety of vulnerable peoples involved to minimize the harm to all parties involved. When issues of children arise, such scenarios further highlight the need for accurate and adequate documentation.

Summary of Ethical Considerations

This section discussed the importance of ethical considerations within the code of conduct and the standards of practice (CPA, 2017; CAP, 2023). The *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2017) places emphasis on consent, competence, and confidentiality. The *Standards of Practice* (CAP, 2023) places emphasis on documentation, record keeping, and the duty to report. Both codes help guide counsellors in their professional conduct. The benefits of transference and countertransference were discussed, as well as the challenges and how to mitigate these experiences the counsellor might have. This section also discussed the importance of documentation and how to navigate the relationship when children are involved and how to document. This next section will dive into the literature about EFT and infidelity within individual and couples therapy to further expand on the question: How can EFT help support couples who are experiencing infidelity?

Literature Review

This thorough literature review section highlights EFT and its challenges when working with couples struggling with infidelity. This literature review will also explore and critically

analyze research on infidelity and the intersectionality of EFT as related to the research question:
How can EFT help support couples who are experiencing infidelity?

EFT

In the 1980s, the founders of EFT were Dr. Leslie Greenberg and Dr. Sue Johnson (Goldman, 2019). EFT first started as process-experiential therapy due to the role of adaptive emotion within the individual and couples (Goldman, 2019). Process-experiential therapy describes how humans change and learn to access and use emotions to guide themselves toward appropriate ways to deal with their emotions and how to regulate them (Elliott et al., 2005; Timulak & Keogh, 2021). This later changed to EFT (Goldman, 2019). EFT focuses on emotions as they are the first things we experience in the world; emotions are the basic foundation of the human experience (Elliott et al., 2005; Goldman, 2019).

EFT has a significant focus on the therapeutic relationship and uses a person-centred approach (Geller, 2019; Rogers, 1957). EFT involves diving into the person's internal experiences and responding with empathy to help them connect with and understand their emotions (Geller, 2019). EFT is built on a valuing, affect-regulating, and empathetic relationship, where the therapist is mentally and emotionally present in the room and responds to the client's emotions and experiences (Geller, 2019; Timulak et al., 2019). EFT explains human functioning is due to emotions being the primary source of motivation and regulation, as seen in Rogers, Pearls, and Maslow's humanistic theories (Goldman, 2019). Greenberg stated that emotional responses promoted primary evaluations of goal attainment success rather than cognitions or beliefs (Goldman, 2019).

In EFT, dysfunction stems from past experiences that have created a lack of awareness of emotions and maladaptive emotion schemas (Timulak et al., 2019).

Individuals who have these rigid, problematic emotion schemas have a difficult time experiencing positive emotions but instead chronically experience maladaptive emotions such as shame or loneliness (Timulak et al., 2019). Working with these maladaptive emotions, therapeutic change is achieved in two ways: increasing emotional and conceptual processing, and restructuring maladaptive emotion schemas (Timulak et al., 2019). These changes can be done by raising emotional awareness, regulation, expression, and reflection, as well as generating adaptive emotional responses (Timulak et al., 2019).

The key to the development of emotion theory is the distinction between different types of emotions because not all emotions serve the same purpose (Goldman, 2019). As humans, and especially in relationships, there are two types of emotions that are experienced: primary adaptive emotions and secondary reactive emotions (Goldman, 2019; Timulak & Keogh, 2021). Primary adaptive emotions are direct reactions consistent with the situation to help an individual take appropriate action (Goldman, 2019; Timulak & Keogh, 2021). The contrast of adaptive emotions are primary maladaptive emotions, which are associated with negative learning experiences and no longer help the person but might hinder them (Goldman, 2019; Timulak & Keogh, 2021). Secondary reactive emotions are defensive emotions that obscure or transform the original emotion, and they lead to actions that are not always appropriate for the current situation (Goldman, 2019; Timulak & Keogh, 2021). This can be helpful when working with couples because each client, through psychoeducation, can become attuned to their emotions and negative patterns that were learned, which are affecting their relationships.

EFT was developed for couples as Greenberg was impressed with the importance of cycles and the power dynamics within relationships (Goldman, 2019). The heart of EFT for couples explored the primary feelings and circular interactions around closeness, portrayed as

attachment, and dominance, portrayed as influence (Goldman, 2019). Dailey et al. (2024) conducted an experimental case study to explore emotional and interactional changes in 11 sessions for a couple undergoing EFT. Out of 37 couples that participated in the York Emotional Injury Project, one was selected for this study because they had a successful outcome with their therapist Professor Les Greenberg. Because the couple was purposely selected for this research, it could have created a selection bias in the study. In the research, the couple was described as White, heterosexual, and not married but cohabitating. Due to these characteristics and the nature of a case study, it lacks generalizability to the population and other couples such as homosexual, or married couples. See the appendix for a summary of the articles reviewed.

After the 11 sessions, there were two common interactional cycles: the male partner's feelings of loneliness and inadequacy brought on by rejection and the female partner's dread and insecurity caused by her partner's infidelity (Dailey et al., 2024). Using EFT, negative cycles were transformed into healthier patterns characterized by compassion and assertive anger, with the help of expressing core emotional pain and unmet needs. However, even though partners showed improvements in forgiveness and relationship satisfaction, their scores reverted back to pre-therapy levels after the 3-month follow-up period. This study had a higher internal validity because of the genuine therapeutic approach. This study also showed reliability because the couple was chosen from a larger group sample based on their results. However, this study did not explore the consequences of infidelity, as expressed in the research question, but it did highlight the flexibility of EFT with its use in couples.

Although there are benefits of EFT, like emotional awareness and a strong therapeutic relationship, there are also challenges to this modality (Geller, 2019). EFT is a modality that focuses on emotions, and one of the guidelines that identify if it is working, is using client

“markers” (Timulak & Keogh, 2021). These markers include the use of relational therapy, which allows the clients to be vulnerable. This also allows the counsellor to offer experiential tasks that align with the client's therapeutic needs based on the counsellor's conceptualization of the client (Timulak & Keogh, 2021). Although a marker-driven therapy is useful, there are also limitations based on its objectivity. Misinterpretation of the markers may lead to incorrect therapeutic tasks, which could reduce the efficacy of the treatment. Another shortcoming to this modality is that clients must maintain a moderate level of emotional arousal for it to be effective (Timulak & Keogh, 2021). If a client is too aroused, they can become overwhelmed, and if they are under aroused, that can inhibit transformation and lead to dissociation. Another downside to EFT is that it relies on processing emotions; after looking through the literature, if an individual is neurodiverse and has trouble processing emotions, then this therapy is not effective for them.

EFT therapists utilize experiential techniques to facilitate this emotional transformation (Timulak et al., 2019). When applying EFT in therapy, one technique used is experiential work, such as two-chair work, which addresses internal conflict by enacting a dialogue between conflicting parts of the self (Sabey et al., 2022; Timulak et al., 2019). Sabey et al. (2022) used two-chair work in family therapy to resolve problematic parenting attitudes and behaviours rooted in unprocessed emotions that hinder effective caregiving. The two-chair technique can also be used with parents or a couple with children. This study recruited 16 parents with children, whereby the children were identified to have various mental health issues. This study aimed to examine the process and results of the two-chair technique when it was used on parents. This technique was used to help improve the parent's ability to support their loved ones and get past the barrier of problematic attitudes or behaviours that were from unprocessed emotions. There were four therapists trained in emotion focused family therapy (EFFT) who conducted

interviews, then the parents completed self-report measures afterwards. This technique was done using two chairs, with the parent on one chair talking to the empty chair as if it was their inner child, and then they would also speak from their child's perspective. One weakness found in this study is the sample demographic, as they came from the therapist's current caseload which could cause a bias in the study. As a result of the study, Sabey et al. found that parents experienced significant emotional resolution of their love-based fears, increased confidence in supporting their children, and a deeper understanding of their child's emotional experiences. Results of this study included that the two-chair technique had a positive effect on the parents in improving their unprocessed emotions and giving the parents confidence in their skills. The results also alluded to how deep the client is willing to go, which will determine how useful the intervention is going to be because there is an aspect of vulnerability needed to engage.

This study showed strengths in the methodology by measuring both before and after using the intervention (Sabey et al., 2022). This strength added to the study's validity because results can be linked to the effectiveness of the two-chair technique. However, this study could have used more participants to create a more generalizable study. Another strength seen within the study was the training of the EFFT therapists. This created reliability in that the therapists were aware of what they were doing and competent in using this intervention. Sabey et al.'s (2022) study helped the counselling field because it offered a more experiential way of doing therapy, especially if people were unable to focus on words the whole time, they were able to feel like they were living in the moment. The results from this study were important to the research questions because they allowed people to have conversations with others without them being there.

Looking into the reliability and validity of the two-chair technique, a study by Reidar Stiegler et al. (2023) was critically analyzed. Two-chair technique involves further exploration because it is an essential part of EFT, and a common intervention used. This study by Reidar Stiegler et al. explored the effects of EFT and the two-chair technique on self-compassion. Eighteen participants (12 women and six men) with low self-compassion, who were struggling with depression and/or anxiety were recruited from a Norwegian public treatment program. These participants underwent a two-phase therapy process which consisted of a baseline phase of five, seven, or nine sessions of solely EFT. The second phase was the active phase where they received five sessions of two-chair dialogue. The participants did a self-assessment using the Self-Compassion Scale which they were assessed before therapy, after baseline, and after the active phase.

Reidar Stiegler et al. (2023) found that self-compassion did not change among those in the baseline phase; however, when the two-chair technique was introduced, self-compassion increased. This decreased self-compassion was due to a reduction of negative subscales like isolation and over-identification rather than increasing the positive subscales like self-kindness. However, with these results, the study did not provide follow-up data to see if the two-chair technique was useful long term. These findings were compatible with those of Sabey et al. (2022). It is important to note that both Reidar Stiegler et al. and Sabey et al.'s research using the two-chair technique were completed using individual participants. It would be important that future research address the reliability and validity of the two-chair technique with couples as it appears successful when used on one participant, who stated the two-chair technique was a positive aspect in the counselling room to reduce negative feelings and attitudes towards themselves and others. The two-chair technique was used for individuals to help their confidence

(Reidar Stiegler et al., 2023) and on parents to help their relationship with their self and children (Sabey et al., 2022), but it has not been used on couples, so it cannot entirely be generalizable for every population.

In a qualitative meta-analysis, Marren et al. (2022) analyzed 11 qualitative studies to understand the perspective of clients receiving EFT. The studies were gathered through a systematic search of the literature, and primary findings were extracted and meta-analyzed. The common themes found throughout the analysis were clients feeling understood and validated, the structure of sessions, and the processing of emotions. After clients went through the EFT process, they shared that EFT was challenging, intense, and productive, with experiential work having high emotional demands but was helpful nonetheless. The therapeutic relationship was a crucial aspect in EFT. The clients valued the emotional support and connection as well as the validation provided by the therapist. In contrast, some clients found EFT to be emotionally overwhelming and the duration of therapy (10 sessions) to be too short to deal with all their emotions. This analysis relates to the research question because it demonstrates how important the therapeutic relationship is with clients, which can be very helpful for those working through infidelity.

After critically analyzing the research on EFT, the studies mentioned (Reidar Stiegler et al., 2023; Sabey et al., 2022; Timulak & Keogh, 2021) focused on the importance of emotions in the therapeutic process. Similarities in the studies appeared through the experiential nature of EFT emphasized through using the two-chair technique. They also discussed the importance of the therapeutic process and the presence and empathy of the therapist to the client's emotions. Differences included the relationship dynamics that were seen throughout the studies, from couples, individuals, and families. These results related back to the research question because the

studies emphasized emotional awareness, and experiential techniques in EFT, which could be helpful to couples because using EFT could allow couples to learn to be vulnerable with each other.

Studies With Couples

There has previously been research on couples therapy using other modalities, such as Gottman method couples therapy (GMCT). GMCT focuses more on attachment, where EFT focuses on emotions (Irvine et al., 2024). Both therapies have a focus on shifting maladaptive behaviours, whether in their emotional thinking or in their relationship (Goldman, 2019; Irvine et al., 2024). These therapies working in conjunction with one another could be helpful when working with couples with infidelity.

Irvine et al. (2024) aimed to compare GMCT with treatment-as-usual (TAU) approaches in helping couples recover from infidelity using a mixed method approach. GMCT is a clinical approach that addresses relationship functioning issues. Therapists trained in Gottman therapy provided a systematic approach to couples therapy to address underlying issues of infidelity, which included addressing feelings of hostility, betrayal, and rebuilding trust. TAU therapists who used a variety of theoretical orientations such as eclectic/integrative (6 therapists), EFT (4 therapists), psychodynamic therapy (3 therapists), systems-based therapy (1 therapist), and trauma-informed therapy (1 therapist).

Participants were chosen by a randomized controlled trial and out of 49 couples that were presenting for post-therapy infidelity, only 19 of them were used for this study after dropouts and disqualifications (Irvine et al., 2024). The demographics of the population were mainly from North America. This sample size is too small to be generalizable, and the location of the study was not stated, making it not generalizable to every population because of the unknown location.

The 17 Gottman therapists were recruited from the Gottman Institute and have been a certified Gottman therapists (CGT) for over 5 years. Within this recruitment, there existed a selection bias. The TAU couple therapists were invited to participate in the study if they had previous experience treating couples with infidelity. The couples were assessed with pre- and post-treatment assessments such as the Gottman Connect (GC) assessments and Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) analysis of conflict discussions. Using a Gottman assessment was a weakness because it could make for bias in the study considering one treatment is using Gottman work.

The SPAFF measures the emotional behaviours of a couple in real time through conversation (Irvine et al., 2024). This assessment focused on the couple's expressed affect, paying close attention to facial expressions, vocal tones, and speech content to characterize the emotions. Cultural influence was not considered throughout this study as they did not look into ways other cultures outwardly express themselves.

GMCT followed the trust revival method (TRM), an evidence-based approach, to promote healing and affair recovery in couples (Irvine et al., 2024). TRM has three phases: atonement, attunement, and attachment, while TAU therapists used their usual therapeutic approach. These phases of TRM help couples get answers to questions about the betrayal (atonement), deal with the preceding problems before the betrayal (attunement), and rebuild trust and re-attach in a positive way (attachment).

The results of this study indicated that GMCT was significantly more effective in improving relationship satisfaction, reducing separation-proneness, and enhancing trust and conflict management compared to TAU (Irvine et al., 2024). Both partners, whether involved or uninvolved, showed reductions in emotional sexual affair scores. The SPAFF analysis revealed

an increase in positive affect and there was a reduction in stonewalling behaviour compared to the TAU group. A strength of this study was the comparative analysis Irvine et al. (2024) conducted; this provided data on the effectiveness of TAU and GMCT. This study was highly reliable because it was a randomized control trial, and the protocols used throughout treatment were consistent for GMCT. However, there was a lack of diversity in the sample size, as it consisted of White, heterosexual, and married couples. They were missing the research on other populations. There may be bias because the tool used was developed by Gottman and could have aligned in favour of the GMCT framework. This study related to the research question because looking into attachment may help therapists identify the feelings towards infidelity within a couple. Attachment may lead the way in how the couple responds to difficult situations.

In another study focusing on attachment, Zuccarini et al. (2013) used the attachment injury resolution model (AIRM) for couples processing forgiveness and reconciliation. The relevance of this study, albeit a decade old, is an example of how couples process infidelity and focus on forgiveness. This study had three primary objectives: specifying the in-session engagement of partners, confirming the AIRM practically, and examining the execution of forgiveness tasks within therapy. This study found that steps five through eight of the AIRM were crucial in mitigating the harm, which led to more success in the outcome, which was seen in deeper emotional connection. This study also confirmed therapeutic interventions such as empathetic reflection and emotional processing. This study created a framework for EFT and ways to adapt it for couples' healing; however, because of the age of this study, it lacked diversity in couples' sexuality and culture. There was only one East Indian couple, and the rest were Caucasian. This study is still relevant today as it highlighted the importance of forgiveness, which is a timeless human experience and a fundamental aspect of human interaction. However,

they did not clearly define what a “couple” was for the purpose of this study, which could change what the modern definition of it is today.

The similarities in themes between the studies (Irvine et al., 2024; Zuccarini et al., 2013) was the way couples and individuals react to difficult situations. They both investigated the processing of emotions and forgiveness. Differences included the type of model that was used to discuss the attachment. One study used the AIRM and the other used the TRM.

In summary, EFT is based on the idea that emotions are essential to human experience and are important for motivation and regulation. This method is especially helpful for couples recovering from infidelity because it enables people to identify and communicate their core feelings, such as hurt and fear, while also changing unhealthy emotional reactions into more positive and healthy feelings (Dailey et al., 2024). This relates back to the question of the use of emotions and intervention techniques being successful in reshaping emotions and maladaptive patterns, which could help couples learn new ways for dealing with infidelity.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory informs EFT and suggests that internal interpersonal realities create each other in circular feedback (Johnson et al., 1999; Johnson & Greenman, 2006).

Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in 1958 (Allen, 2022b; Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1982) conceptualized attachment as its own form of behaviour that was separate from feeding and sex, which were thought to be the only forms of attachment previously known. Looking into the seminal work of Bowlby (1982), it was thought that a child developed a close bond to their mother because she feeds them. Attachment theory aimed to explain why and how people, including children, developed strong bonds with certain individuals, as well as why those attachment behaviours may appear and disappear and

how they can last for a long time (Bowlby, 1982). Attachment theory's fundamental tenet describes how parents have biologically based impulses (i.e., a caring behavioural system) to shield, comfort, and care for their children to support their development and safety (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969, 1982; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). This theory intersects with relationships and couples by suggesting that these same caring patterns and behaviours, along with the need for security and support may extend into romantic partners. For instance, the way children seek comfort in their parents, adults seek comfort in their partner.

Attachment theory suggests that there are secure and insecure attachments which develop from the connection with one's mother as a child (Goldman, 2019). Goldman (2019) suggested the finding that a secure attachment in children allows them to explore the world and engage in their social environment when their mothers are around. These children would look for their mothers when they are scared, hungry, or upset. The insecure children do not have a secure base and often were distressed even if their mothers were around. These attachments from childhood form the attachments in adulthood. Attachment theory intersects with this research question because couples have experienced attachment with their primary caregiver, and this experience may have supported their adult attachments, which may be displayed in their adult relationships. These attachments could have been learned throughout their childhood or previous relationships, which could affect their current relationship. It is important to remain curious about how the couples interact and their attachment styles in relation to one another.

The focus of attachment theory on behaviour, such as turning to an attachment figure for support during trying times, is extremely pertinent to understanding and working with couples who are having relationship problems (Johnson, 2021). A couple's attachment can be understood

in terms of an insecure bond and separation distress (Johnson et al., 1999). An insecure bond refers to an emotional tie and set of attachment behaviours to manage the proximity to the attachment figure, which in this case is their partner (Johnson et al., 1999). There is typically a set of working schemas formed as well, which are working models and categories concerned about the worth and lovableness of self, along with the dependability of others (Johnson et al., 1999; Karantzas et al., 2022). Attachment theory may have an overemphasis on early attachments, particularly between infants and primary caregivers (Yip et al., 2018).

It may be beneficial to consider how attachment interacts with individuals outside of a romantic relationship, to highlight the importance of generalizability of attachment and the intersectionality of the research question. With purposeful consideration of workplace relationships, Yip et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive review to examine how attachment theory can be used in adult relationships in the workplace. They selected 97 peer-reviewed articles focusing on research conducted after 2010. The idea of the review was to pick out the key characteristics of attachment dynamics in organizations, and understand attachment dynamics within the workplace setting, while also looking into dyadic relationships and group dynamics. This review focused on the attachment behavioural system, which is one of the factors that drives people to seek support from others. They investigated secure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles and highlighted their impact on relationships, group dynamics, and organizational relationships. From this extensive review of the articles, Yip et al. found that secure attachments were linked to trust, effective leadership, and positive mentoring outcomes in mentor relationships. This could be insightful for couples therapy as the research on dyadic relationships may be relevant to a couple.

Insecure attachments lead to stress, burnout, and unproductive behaviours (Yip et al., 2018). Regarding a group dynamic, secure attachments promoted better performance and cohesion, and avoidant attachments hindered social functioning. Attachment styles can be a moderator of the relationship between the organization and employees. A challenge of the research highlighted how attachment does not take into account how people can change over time. For example, someone may have a very insecure attachment with their mother, but later in life, they have put in work on themselves and grown to have secure attachments with others, which would make their early attachment less relevant. There is also a criticism of categorizing people into only four types of attachment: secure, insecure, avoidant, and disorganized, because there may be cases where someone fits more than one style (Goldman, 2019; Yip et al., 2018). Categorizing a person may make them feel like they are that label, and it oversimplifies individual experiences and ways that people can fit into more than one category. Looking into attachment may affect a couple's ability to work through their romantic issues, such as if there was infidelity within the relationship.

Infidelity

Infidelity is defined as any emotional/romantic, physical/sexual, or technology-based relationship with a third party in which one partner has broken an exclusivity agreement or boundary that breaks trust and safety (Irvine et al., 2024). An exclusivity agreement is when both partners have agreed to be faithful to one another and will be monogamous. This causes relationship harm or distress to the romantic partner (Irvine et al., 2024). Infidelity is a significant source of distress for couples, which is a contributing factor to devastating relational consequences, such as divorce and separation (Irvine & Peluso, 2022; Vossler & Moller, 2014). Infidelity is also a common issue for couples and can be one of the most challenging problems to

work with in the counselling space (Gordon et al., 2005; Irvine et al., 2024; Irvine & Peluso, 2022; Vossler & Moller, 2014). Due to the complex and morally weighted nature of infidelity, therapists may come across additional challenges that negatively impact the treatment outcome (Irvine & Peluso, 2022). Some reactions to infidelity may include but are not limited to rage, abuse, lust, love, and jealousy (Peluso & Spina, 2008).

Not only is it difficult to treat couples with infidelity, but there is also a negative connotation around the words infidelity, affair, or cheating, and this can be a reason people may not want to admit or speak about their experience (Mark et al., 2011). The language synonyms used to describe infidelity relates to the research question because counsellors may want to learn to remain neutral, even in the language they use to avoid showing their bias and being considerate of judgmental terms.

When using language to describe acts of infidelity, Bozoyan and Schmiedeberg (2023) conducted a factorial survey experiment in Germany to understand the beginnings of infidelity and how the behaviours related to feelings towards infidelity. Out of these respondents, 53% were female. These respondents evaluated 26,633 vignettes on unfaithful behaviours to determine the attitudes and norms towards infidelity. Each respondent rated different hypothetical relationship scenarios in all the vignettes along dimensions of explicit behaviour, emotional involvement, infidelity duration, and erotic online contact. They found that sexual intercourse was the most significant factor in judging if something was considered infidelity, however, emotional involvement was more significant when combined with less explicit behaviours like kissing or hugging. They also found that women considered more scenarios as acts of infidelity, compared to men, as well as younger respondents had a larger array of what they judged as infidelity than the older respondents.

One strength of this study was the large and diverse sample size of 9,104 respondents who were born between 1971 and 2003 (Bozoyan & Schmiedeberg, 2023). A weakness in this study could be the bias that was present, as attitudes towards infidelity are not universal, but depend on the person responding. Another weakness of this study was that it did not consider the relationship background of the respondents and their biases. For example, if someone has been cheated on many times, they might have more judgements towards infidelity than someone who was the one committing infidelity. This study relates to the research question because it provides an overview of the way some individuals think regarding infidelity, and the biases that may be present towards it.

Looking into experiences of infidelity, Moreno and Kahumoku-Fessler (2018) explored how individuals perceive infidelity behaviours based on their experiences with infidelity. Moreno and Kahumoku-Fessler had 83 private university students, primarily from the southwest United States, aged 18–25, mostly females, complete an anonymous survey. The participant profile was a weakness because it cannot be generalized to the entire population, and there was not enough male representation. This survey included demographic questions and items from the Perceptions of Dating Infidelity Scale (PDIS), which measured attitudes towards behaviours considered suggestive of infidelity. Along with the survey, they also included 20 interpersonal behaviours which the participants rated on a 6-point likert scale from “*never considered cheating*” to “*always considered cheating*.” The participants were either categorized by a self-report measure as either not involved or involved based on their history.

Unlike Bozoyan and Schmiedeberg’s (2023) study, this study considered the bias the participants may have towards cheating based on their past. However, there was still a commonality between the two studies such as women rating more domains of behaviours as

infidelity than the men did (Moreno & Kahumoku-Fessler, 2018). A unique part of this study was the finding that those uninvolved with infidelity, rated both sexual and emotional behaviours higher than behaviours without those experiences (Moreno & Kahumoku-Fessler, 2018). The strength of this study lies in the exploration of how prior experiences to infidelity shapes one's perceptions of infidelity. This study relates to the research question because infidelity generates emotions throughout people, and using EFT could be beneficial to process those emotions in a healthy way.

Regarding infidelity, there may be some struggles that come with counselling couples through this experience. In a mixed methods research design, Irvine and Peluso (2022) interviewed 351 couples to identify the challenges therapists face in treating infidelity. One noticeable strength of this study was the diversity of the therapists, as 41% of the sample indicated a marginalized group identity, however 96% of the respondents were from North America (Irvine & Peluso, 2022). Each therapist completed a Therapists' Experiences Treating Infidelity (TETI) survey that was anonymous. The TETI survey is a follow up to Softas-Nall et al.'s (2008) surveys. The current TETI survey was developed to broaden the understanding of therapists' comfort levels, with additional questions to assess the impact of the therapists' personal history with infidelity (Irvine & Peluso, 2022). The study revealed that issues such as countertransference, addressing trauma, limited experience, and balancing needs were obstacles (Irvine & Peluso, 2022). However, there was a lack of evidence-based practices and inadequate training in graduate programs for counsellors to deal with the issue of infidelity. This study relates to the research question because as the *Standards of Practice* discuss the need for supervision, it is helpful for counsellors who are experiencing transference or countertransference to receive supervision to increase competence in this area (CAP, 2023).

In summary, infidelity can be defined as breaches of emotional, romantic, physical, or technology-based exclusivity agreements that can lead to distress in a relationship (Irvine et al., 2024). Infidelity presents complex challenges in therapy because there can be intense emotions involved (Irvine & Peluso, 2022). Women generally viewed a broader range of behaviours as infidelity compared to men (Moreno & Kahumoku-Fessler, 2018). EFT's emphasis on emotional expression and empathy is beneficial to managing the multifaceted reactions to infidelity, by creating a space to understand each person's individual feelings towards the action. A common theme throughout the studies was the use of surveys, which can be heavily biased and subjective to the person answering. Survey results also differed depending on the time it was taken and the mood of the client, creating different answers.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

This literature review critically analyzed various research studies that explored the effectiveness of EFT, on individuals, couples, and families. EFT is used for individuals to become more in tune with their emotions so they can recognize maladaptive emotion schemas to achieve emotional processing (Timulak et al., 2019). Couple's EFT is beneficial to help with expressing emotions to one another (Dailey et al., 2024). EFT can also be used with families to help the primary caregiver overcome unprocessed emotions to be a good support system for their children (Sabey et al., 2022).

The literature review identified that EFT is rooted in the emotional experience and is central to humans as emotions play a role in the healing process within relationships (Goldman, 2019; Timulak et al., 2019). More specifically, EFT can help facilitate the identification and exploration of core emotions, which is essential for couples working through difficulties. Marren et al. (2022) and Sabey et al.'s (2022) studies particularly emphasized the importance of

emotional awareness, empathy, and the therapeutic relationship in achieving positive outcomes. Attachment theory was emphasized when using EFT because the attachments formed in childhood will determine an individual's response to infidelity within the relationship (Allen, 2022a; Johnson & Greenman, 2006).

The similarities across the studies include surveys and self-report measures which can be difficult to generalize these findings. However, it places a unique perspective of different individuals on the circumstance of infidelity, and opinions of EFT. Throughout the literature review, EFT was reinforced with the emphasis on emotion and attachment. Irvine and Peluso (2022) reinforced the struggle therapists face when dealing with couples going through infidelity. EFT appears to be a good fit for infidelity, as there can be many unprocessed emotions towards one partner, or the partners have not figured out a healthy way to express how they are feeling towards each other.

In the next section of this capstone, implications to counselling will be discussed, as well as further research and recommendations for future practice. This capstone concludes with a reflexive self-statement to discuss the personal learnings and growth that has been achieved throughout writing this capstone.

Implications for the Counselling Field

The final section of this capstone explores how EFT can help couples struggling with infidelity and explores implications for the counselling field. This section also recognizes the gaps in the literature and provides recommendations for future research.

Implications of EFT

EFT is a learned modality that focuses on emotions. Developing the skill of EFT is paramount to the counselling field because Principle 11.6 of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for*

Psychologists explains how counsellors must work within their scope and competencies (CPA, 2017). Along with learning about EFT, there are also courses for counsellors to take that help them learn how to use EFT with couples. When working with couples, counsellors should be aware of the best approach and modality to use and participate in continuous learning.

As Gordon et al. (2005), Irvine et al. (2024), Irvine and Peluso (2022), and Vossler and Moller (2014), pointed out, working with couples and infidelity is one of the most challenging problems. It is important to incorporate more training with counsellors and in graduate programs. Many counsellors may work with couples, but not all are proficient at handling infidelity issues. In accordance with Principle II. 6 (CPA, 2017), it is important for the counsellor to work within their scope and remain competent in their work with the couple. As indicated in the study by Irvine and Peluso (2022), they noticed a lack or inadequate training in infidelity programs.

Increasing the training for professionals in EFT would elevate the field and the modality as an evidence-based practice. Providing more counsellors with this skill set could allow more studies to take place, which would be able to add to the research and increase the evidence of the effectiveness of EFT.

Implications of Attachment

Goldman (2019) stated that attachment theory is fundamental to understanding how a couple looks at one another in the relationship, which will relay how the person responds to infidelity. Since everyone has their own attachment style, this is important when building the therapeutic alliance (Yip et al., 2018). Establishing a secure base and being transparent are important for a therapeutic alliance (Dargie, 2020). This ties into informed consent so that the client can trust their therapist and know exactly what they are stepping into (CPA, 2017). This

has implications for the counselling field because, as counsellors, there is an ethical responsibility to gain informed consent from the client (CPA, 2017).

When using attachment theory, the therapist is the “secure base,” and from there, the clients can safely explore and own their challenges and vulnerabilities (Allen, 2022a; Dargie, 2020). CGTs approach couples therapy with a systemic lens that is intended to address underlying issues of infidelity, such as managing hostile conflict, addressing feelings of betrayal and rebuilding trust (Irvine et al., 2024). EFT ties into Gottman’s attachment theory and how distressed couples cannot sustain emotional engagement (Johnson et al., 1999). Attachment theory informs EFT and suggests that intra and interpersonal realities create each other in a circular feedback fashion. The basic tenet of attachment theory relies on the safe emotional connection that drives humans as a fundamental survival need (Johnson & Greenman, 2006). Counsellors could work with couples using Gottman training or they could combine Gottman training with EFT. Therapists could focus on specializing in Gottman therapy to work within their scope, however, that could limit them to different types of couple’s work as they would have more of a focus on attachment. One place a counsellor could receive training in Gottman therapy is through The Gottman Institute (<https://www.gottman.com>).

Implications for Culture in Counselling

Culture is an important aspect to consider when understanding problems brought to the therapy room. Considering different cultural perspectives on infidelity creates an overall picture of what infidelity is and how it is viewed within different cultures worldwide. Cultural implications include obtaining the knowledge needed to work with clients from different cultures. This training can be done through courses and learning more about different cultures through research. Having the necessary information about what infidelity and relationships look

like cross culture is a way to be culturally competent in accordance with the code of ethics. This training could happen in the therapy room by being mindful of what the client's culture is and listening with a curious ear. This would also include taking what the client says about their culture and doing individual research to gain more information on it.

Due to the influence of cultural norms and values, various cultural and subcultural groups may display distinctive emotional processing patterns and encounter emotional obstacles (Kwaśniewska et al., 2014). For example, emotional expressiveness and understanding can range between cultures, even with illnesses. Refraining from shame and prioritizing respect for parents, along with honouring others, are common cultural norms that must be respected before encouraging expression, self-determination, and independence (Goldman & Greenberg, 2018).

In accordance with the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*, Section II.14 refers to being sensitive and knowledgeable about cultures and discerning what will benefit and harm each one (CPA, 2017). For example, being aware of the language used in different cultures to describe what is appropriate for their situation. It is also important for the client to recognize their own bias and cultural beliefs as they are speaking. Section III.9 discusses objectivity and lack of bias on the therapist's part (CPA, 2017). This includes the words that the therapist chooses, which can have a biased undertone, so the therapist needs to attempt to be as objective as possible. This is important when working with couples dealing with infidelity because the words used can be judgmental and biased, which may make the couple not feel safe or feel as if the therapist is taking sides. In summary, the importance of counsellors practicing within their code of ethics and standards of practice includes cultural sensitivity and knowledge, as well as the previously explored importance of informed consent and working within one's scope.

Application for Counselling Practice

EFT for couples involves a structured process with five specific steps: validation and alliance formation, negative cycle de-escalation, accessing underlying vulnerable feelings, restructuring the negative interaction and the self, and consolidation and integration (Meneses & Greenberg, 2019). These steps are specific to couples counselling, and it is paramount that a counsellor assess whether the topics that the couple wishes to explore in counselling can be addressed within these five specific steps. The counsellor can then have a conversation with the couple about whether EFT is a suitable match to explore their areas of exploration. For instance, if a couple wishes to explore emotional vulnerability, perhaps EFT may or may not be the therapeutic modality that is used, as explored in the following study.

Marren et al. (2022) found that people find EFT challenging because of the need to be emotionally vulnerable. This implies that it is important to work closely with the client and to the degree that they feel comfortable so they can achieve the most out of therapy that they need. Not every person who comes into the counselling room is able to explore their intense emotions, as it can be overwhelming and draining (Marren et al., 2022). This can be avoided by having open communication with the client and the couple to make sure that they are working at a comfortable pace.

Throughout the work done by Yip et al. (2018) to gather a comprehensive view on attachment theory, they found that attachment is what drives individuals to seek support. This means that depending on someone's attachment, that may suggest how eager they are to receive support, especially after infidelity. Completing a thorough assessment and using adequate intake measures of the couple's attachments, as well as understanding whose idea it was to come to counselling, can give the counsellor a better opportunity to help the couple. It is also important to

collect consent, as one partner may be more eager than the other to receive help. Consent is to be gained before the therapy session begins, as well as it is an ongoing process for all future sessions (CPA, 2017). Consent can be verbal and written, and it is the opportunity for the client to feel like they are in control of their counselling.

Therapeutic Alliance

As noted in the literature review, EFT emphasized the therapeutic alliance, and the approach utilizes empathy and values what each person has to say. For counsellors, it is necessary to develop a strong therapeutic alliance with the couple. If the couple does not have trust in their counsellor, or feel safe, they may not be willing to discuss their problem. This can also be done by fostering a collaborative and supportive environment (Dargie, 2020). When using EFT, the alliance is built as one dives deeper into their emotions, and the counsellor stays receptive to what the client is feeling and open to hearing what they have to say (Marren et al., 2022). Elements of EFT that are explored in the counselling space include discussing the primary feelings around the infidelity (Goldman, 2019). To navigate this conversation in the counselling space, the counsellor could bring up the topic slowly to open a safe space. A counsellor can review the interaction cycles and work on changing the way the couple reacts to each other when they speak (Woldarsky Meneses & McKinnon, 2019).

Another part of creating a strong therapeutic alliance is approaching the situation nonbiasedly (CPA, 2017). This would include keeping a neutral perspective and hearing both partners before jumping to conclusions. When offering counselling where the relationship is the main focus would sound like continuously asking each partner “How does it make you feel hearing your partner say that?” and going back and forth so each person feels heard in the conversation. A strong growth to the therapeutic alliance is through collaboration and

engagement (Jimenez, 2021). This can be done by expanding points made by the client and following the client as they speak (Jimenez, 2021). This could be done by active listening and asking clarifying questions so that the client feels heard. If clients are struggling individually as well, the therapist could discuss their options for individual therapy with another counsellor. Engaging with individual therapy for each member in the relationship, as well as couples therapy, provides a dual relationship and may disrupt the therapist's ability to be objective (CAP, 2022).

Cultural Application

EFT has been expanded to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds, recognizing that the experience of feeling emotions is universal (Goldman & Greenberg, 2018). Different cultures may have similar emotional experiences and challenges, but the rules or norms of being able to express those emotions vary (Goldman & Greenberg, 2018). With considerations for each culture, when core emotions are addressed, they appear in a similar pattern to the emerging experience (Goldman & Greenberg, 2018).

An EFT counsellor in practice would ask the couple about their culture by opening the discussion around culture generically, for example, stating, "Tell me about your culture," and this could include how they grew up, their belief system, values, and opening a larger conversation about their differences as well. This may be valuable to ask at the beginning of the session, and if the couple responds, the therapist could ask them how their cultures influence their relationship and the differences between the ways they communicate. Counsellors may develop their own language style the more they practice and find a suitable way for themselves to ask about culture.

Summary of Application for Counselling Practice

In summary, EFT requires careful consideration of their clients' comfort levels with emotional inquiry. This includes creating a space where clients can be open and vulnerable while feeling safe. The therapeutic alliance is a large part of a strong therapy session and can have an impact on the client's ability to be open. EFT has been adapted culturally, and it is the responsibility of the counsellor to be culturally competent with their clients so they can provide a counselling session tailored to the needs of the couple.

Fundamental Next Steps for Research

There has been an inadequate amount of efficient and effective research done on treating couples with infidelity in therapy. Therefore, it could be beneficial for more research to be done to explore if infidelity could be considered a relational trauma (Irvine et al., 2024). In the Dailey et al. (2024) study, they looked at the couple's results from 3 months post-therapy, where a longitudinal study would be beneficial to view the true effectiveness and long-term results of EFT. This would help research in this topic because it would give a better understanding of treating individuals and couples. An area in the literature that had a large gap was the lack of studies on diverse cultural groups (Irvine et al., 2024; Zuccarini et al., 2013). As there may be different attitudes towards infidelity based on the culture, it would also be beneficial to look into multiracial couples as their perspective could be different from same race couples. This would be beneficial research for couples in Canada because the diversity within the country is growing which is bringing in different cultural views as well. As counsellors it is important to be aware of the different views clients might have towards relationships.

In the Sabey et al. (2022) study, they emphasized the two-chair technique used in EFT. This study would benefit from a longitudinal study as it would look at the lasting effects of this

technique rather than the immediate results. Areas for more research would include delving into two-chair work with couples, both heterosexual and homosexual, and different age groups as well since there was limited research on those. This is important for the research on infidelity in Canada because of the growing LGBTQ2S+ population. This relates back to the research question because it highlights the need for diverse research to expand the effectiveness of EFT to the entire population, and not a specific group. With insufficient research on all types of people, it can be hard to recognize EFT as being culturally adaptive, especially when working with couples of all types.

There is also a lack of research on the effects of infidelity in same sex couples. In Serban et al (2022), although they used a sample size to include the LGBTQ2S+ community, they would have benefited from a larger population. The growing population of same sex couples would be an area where more research needs to be done as the research is not exploring the intricacies of all types of relationships, as well as there is a lack of research on polyamorous relationships as well. Future research would be beneficial to include polyamorous couples and what constitutes infidelity for them and the rules they create within their relationship.

As noted in Zuccarini et al.'s (2013) study, there was a lack of research into multicultural couples and same-sex couples. A fundamental next step for research would be to study various couples and infidelity amongst differing cultures, to help with understanding how EFT could be helpful to a larger group of people. In summary, there exists the potential for various future research studies to better inform this counselling topic in Canada.

Reflexive Self-Statement

Throughout this journey of writing my Master of Counselling capstone, I have been able to do a lot of thinking about my own experiences and what I have learned. This capstone has

opened my eyes to perspectives on infidelity I did not think about before, and how big of a role emotions and attachment can play into relationships.

The literature has shown me how common of a problem infidelity is, but how little counsellors know about how to treat it, making it one of the hardest problems to work with. This includes me, as I did not have knowledge on how to handle this issue in the counselling room. This literature enhanced my knowledge in working with emotions through EFT and how crucial getting a better understanding of individuals' attachment behaviours is to their relationship. The definition of infidelity is very broad, with each type having a different effect on others makes me believe that not all infidelity is in the same category. Each couple will have a unique experience, and their own way of solving the problem. As well as it is not a one size fits all approach to healing infidelity. The literature explored the different ways infidelity can be dealt with and how different cultures process the infidelity and view it.

From an EFT standpoint, gaining emotional intelligence about oneself and their partner is a fond skill to develop. This modality has taught me that humans are highly emotional and are the way they are because of how they grew up and their relationship with their parents. I have learned that as a therapist, being a trusting and safe space that the client can trust is a big starting point for them to discuss their feelings and emotions. This has instilled in me the drive to try even harder to make sure my clients feel safe and trusted in my environment. I want them to be able to explore their emotions, even if they are novel to it because they were not allowed to as a child.

At the start of this capstone, I believed that once someone committed infidelity in their relationship, there was no way to heal that enough for the relationship to continue. As I have been doing this capstone, my views have shifted. I now believe that one can heal from infidelity,

but it will take a lot of work. If the people involved in the relationship are both willing to put in the work and accept each other's flaws while moving forward, then the relationship can start over to what it was. It is important to have a therapist who is competent in dealing with this issue so that it gives the couple the best chance for their relationship. I have also changed my view of the stigma I have put on infidelity. I view each person as a human who can make mistakes, but that does not define their character or who they are wanting to be. I believe that people can come back from making mistakes and develop into a better person than who they were before.

I continue to acknowledge the privilege I have to have been in a committed relationship and not have experienced infidelity. I continue to put work into myself and my relationship every day, in the same way couples who are struggling may be doing as well. My interest in healing infidelity and couples' commitment to each other continues to grow and I hope one day I can be a therapist to help those individuals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this capstone was to answer the research question: How can EFT help support couples who experience infidelity? This capstone highlights the important aspects of EFT, including attachment theory, to critically analyze the effectiveness of this modality on treating infidelity in couples. This capstone also emphasized the difficulties that appear when dealing with infidelity in couples in the counselling room. This capstone acknowledges the need for a strong therapeutic relationship when providing EFT to couples. Due to the focus on emotional awareness and empathy in EFT, this makes it a strong tool for helping couples rebuild trust in their relationship and reconnect. This capstone emphasizes the different experiences individuals have with EFT and when dealing with infidelity, creating a unique experience from the various self-report measures used.

This capstone demonstrated how EFT can successfully promote recovery from infidelity by treating the emotional scars and helping couples recognize their own attachment types and emotional patterns. The research highlights the need for therapists to receive further training and culturally sensitive training strategies to properly manage the diversity of infidelity experiences. This capstone acknowledges the code of ethics as well as the necessity for counsellors to provide thorough and thoughtful ethical support.

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Appendix

Methodology

Authors	Year	Title	Sample size	Selection/ recruitment	Data collection process	Data analysis process	Qual/ quant/ mixed/ case study	Notes on findings
Dailey et al.	2024	Capturing the Change: A Case Study Investigation of Emotional and Interactional Transformation in Emotion Focused Therapy for Couples	1 couple	The couple was selected out of 37 couples in the York Emotional Injury Project due to their successful outcome with Les Greenberg.	The couple completed self-report measures 1 week before and 1 week after their 11 sessions. These measures tracked the changes of forgiveness, trust, unfinished business and general relationship adjustment. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), and Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) were used.	This analysis was done by reviewing the recordings of the sessions using a theoretically informed qualitative analysis. The sessions were analyzed in terms of interactional positions and their transformation between the couple.	Case study	This study found two common interactional patterns: the male partner's feelings of loneliness and inadequacy brought on by rejection and the female partner's dread and insecurity caused by her partner's infidelity. EFT helped to resolve those negative cycles within the couple.
Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder	2005	Treating Couples Recovering From Infidelity: An Integrative Approach	1 couple	Not specified; likely through clinical referral or seeking therapy.	Pre-treatment, post-treatment, and 6-month follow up data collection. Used Global Distress Scale (GDS) and Beck Depression Inventory. Weekly pre and post treatment narratives were provided by the couple, and additional information about	Analysis focused on changes in marital satisfaction, viewing the individual depression levels and stages of forgiveness. Qualitative analysis of	Mixed case study	The results of this 19-year-old study found the treatment was effective and increased marital satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms. The couple maintained to work on their relationship and reported the positive

Authors	Year	Title	Sample size	Selection/ recruitment	Data collection process	Data analysis process	Qual/ quant/ mixed/ case study	Notes on findings
					reactions in session and their relationship.	narratives was also done.		impact of the treatment.
Irvine et al.	2024	A Pilot Study Examining the Effectiveness of Gottman Method Couples Therapy Over Treatment-as-Usual Approaches for Treating Couples Dealing With Infidelity	19 couples	Infidelity had to be the presenting problem for treatment. Couples were excluded if there was an active addiction, language barrier, or intimate partner violence.	Multimodal assessment strategy was used, with observational and self-report. The couples got an average of 32 sessions of treatment – either treatment-as-usual (TAU) or Gottman method couples therapy (GMCT). Couples completed the Gottman Connect (GC) assessment tool. The subscales assessed couples' relationship distress pre-and post-treatment, along with a video recording that was analyzed.	Data was analysed using a MANOVA, parametric, and correlational analyses to compare the GC group and TAU group. The videos were coded using Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF).	Mixed	This study found that GMCT had more significant outcomes and improvement in relationship satisfaction for both partners, and showed a significant reduction in separation-proneness compared to the TAU group.
Sabey, Stillar, & Lafrance	2022	Processes and Outcomes of an Emotion Focused Family Therapy Two-Chair Intervention for Transforming Problematic Parenting Patterns	16 parents	Parents with children who were identified to have various mental health issues were recruited for this study.	The intervention was recorded during the session and self-report measures were used immediately following using the two-chair intervention.	A task analysis procedure was used, including coding the transcripts and analyzing the emotional processes experienced by the parents.	Qualitative	The study found that two-chair has a positive effect on parents in improving their unprocessed emotions. The study also found that parents experienced significant emotional resolution of their love-based

Authors	Year	Title	Sample size	Selection/ recruitment	Data collection process	Data analysis process	Qual/ quant/ mixed/ case study	Notes on findings
								fears, which increased their confidence in parenting.
Zuccarini, Johnson, Dalgeish, & Makinen	2013	Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples: The Client Change Process and Therapist Interventions	24 couples	Couples were moderately distressed and selected from an AIRM outcome study.	The Experiencing Scale (ES), Structural Analysis of Social Behaviour (SASB), and Levels of Client Perceptual Processing Classification System (LCPP).	Empirical validation of AIRM steps, examining the performance of forgiveness tasks.	Quantitative	The 11-year-old study found the therapeutic pattern for EFT treatment is provided by steps five to eight of AIRM, which are critical for softening and resolution of injuries in therapy. It also emphasizes the importance of emotional response accessibility for reconciliation and forgiveness.