

## **THE MISTRESSES' PERSPECTIVE: A DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES IN EXTRAMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS OF FEMALE RELATIONSHIP TRANSGRESSORS**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

*These days, transgressions are rampant in disrupting the stability of relationships. Previous studies have proven that relational transgressions are one of the main reasons why romantic relationships end. For us to understand these events, the study delves into the experiences in extramarital relationships of female relationship transgressors. This present research helps to inductively ascertain the experiences of the female relationship transgressors, that there may be benefit in understanding, analyzing and comprehending the motives of the female relationship transgressors. Using purposive sampling technique, eight (8) female relationship transgressors participated in the study. Certain findings were drawn indicating that these female relationship transgressors have encountered perceived fulfilling experience with the married men. Hence, the fulfillment of the female relationship transgressors' need to feel important, fulfillment of their idealized image and the mutual affection beyond transgression correspondingly answer the objectives of the study that is to explore and understand the motives of the female relationship transgressors on why they commit into extramarital relationships. The present study extends previous researches in relational transgressions and it explores in detail how the female relationship transgressors are making sense of their personal and social world.*

**Keywords:** *Female relationship transgressor; Relational transgression*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the last decades in the global setting, numerous studies have investigated and explored adult romantic relationships. In the course of romantic relationship, almost all couples encounter relational threat such as transgression (Maier, 2005; Spitzberg and

Cupach, 2007). According to Spitzberg and Cupach (2007), focusing on the realm of transgressions as a malefactions provides the opportunity to explore the vast range of unexpected, inappropriate and disruptive behaviors in relationships. As dated, infidelity and deceit are two of the reasons why couples end their relationship. Another issue regarding relational transgressions is that scholars have analyzed these events often from the perspective of those whose expectations have been violated, often labeled victims. Less is known about how those who commit the transgressions, often labeled transgressors (Cionea, 2013). Metts (1994) described relational transgressions as "events, actions, and behaviors that violate implicit or explicit relationship norms or rules, such as sexual infidelity, involvement with a third party, deception, or betrayal of confidences". For instance, by simply lying to one's romantic partner violates the assumption of honesty that underlies most romantic relationships. Not only do transgressions disrupt the stability of a relationship, but they also trigger emotional responses such as hurt and anger. As the study focuses on those who commit transgressions specifically female relationship transgressors; we all know that numerous studies had been conducted about infidelity and the rebuilding of relationships after transgressions and this shows that the study is a poignant exemplification of how this summons transgression and how it can destroy and sway off the very foundation of a relationship.

The importance of this study is that, it provides and fills the gap in literature about relationship transgressors. Understanding the reasons for our limited knowledge about their experiences and perspectives are necessary in order to understand a certain event or situation as a whole. The authors would just like to explore it in a more in depth context wherein, the voices of the underrated and undervalued would be heard and explained. This research reveal useful data about individuals who have experienced a transgression and how they evaluate a perceived purposeful romantic relationship. In accordance to this, understanding one's perspective is important. All individuals have the capability to decide whether they want to view their struggles that inherently accompanies life as a task to be endured, or a kind of opportunity to learn from, grow and experience. Once they begin to accept that their perspectives can be only controlled by themselves, they can start to experience life through a lens of self-empowerment, where they are able to decide to what

degree whether to struggle with or accept the challenges of life. The present study also imparts knowledge to society such as family issues and discrimination. As commended by different studies in the Philippines, increment of broken families is one of the major issues faced by the Filipinos nowadays. One of the facts that logically justify some premise of broken family is can be attributed to relational transgressions. Considering relational transgression as an entity that produces an effect on families, these female relationship transgressors are being criticized and discriminated by society. This research contributes to lift up the views of the underlying thoughts and motives of the transgressors on why they commit into extramarital relationships and understand the experiences of female relationship transgressors in their relationship with married men. Hence, by knowing and understanding their experiences, this would give us a great depth of understanding in where these relationship transgressors are coming from, what they are going through and lastly their motivation for engaging in such relationships.

The purpose of the study is to inductively ascertain the experiences of female relationship transgressors in their relationship with married men. Specifically, to explore and understand the underlying thoughts and motives of the transgressors on why they commit into extramarital relationships.

## **Literature Review**

### *Relational Transgression*

Relational transgressions are significant events that affect romantic relationships. One's part or function in the transgression and one's sample type (i.e., dating undergraduates vs. older, married adults) were significant factors that differentiated how people manage relational transgressions (Cionea, 2013). In line with this Metts (1994) stated that "Relational transgressions are events, actions, and behaviors that violate implicit or explicit relationship norms or rules, such as sexual infidelity, involvement with a third party, deception, or betrayal of confidences". For instance, many people believe and consider that romantic partners should be sexually faithful and that all close relational partners should be emotionally faithful, loyal, and honest. Cupach and Metts (1994) characterized a relational transgression as a negative violation "of some rule of conduct or taken-for-granted

expectation about how the partners should act in their relationship” Also, partners may construe any instance in which a relational rule is profaned as a relational transgression. The rule violated may be explicit or implicit, regulative or constitutive. What matters is that at least one of the partners considers and believes a violation has occurred. An individual who commits the violation is the transgressor, and the other individual (toward whom the violation is directed) is the victim. Additionally, the scholars have indicated that, the victims of relational transgressions suffer negative consequences such as loss of face, a damaged self-concept and identity, and a variety of negative affective responses (Hui & Bond, 2009; Feeney, 2005; Metts, 1994 as cited in Vallade & Dillow, 2014). According to Metts (1994), prevaricating to one's romantic partner violates the assumption of honesty that underlies most romantic relationships. Not only do transgressions interrupt the stability of a relationship, but they also trigger emotional responses such as hurt and anger.

Various studies have examined relational transgressions and infidelity. The study of Cionea (2005) investigates the management of relational transgressions in romantic relationships. Findings suggest that partner's relational quality serves as a reference frame that affects the attributions partners make and the goals that they perceive as important to pursue when addressing the transgression. The role of the person affects these attributions and goals as well, with a different pattern emerging for victims and for transgressors. Also, victims tend to focus on the goals of negative feelings and dominance, whereas transgressors tend to focus on an array of goals, most of them positive: positive feelings, relationship-oriented goals, own negative face concerns, and other-oriented face concerns.

The study of Jeanfreau et al. (2014) focused on examining the process an individual goes through when making the decision to have an affair. Results showed how the participants became involved in marital infidelity, when the dissatisfaction they were feeling in their relationship was being replaced with positive attention from a friend or ex-flame. The affair partner was fulfilling needs that were not being met by the participant's partner. Although each of the participants did not intentionally seek to engage in an extramarital affair, the illusion of being “just friends” with the other person allowed the woman to experience positive attention, which, in turn, attracted and pulled them toward

an extramarital commitment and made it increasingly difficult to stay committed to the relationship. Studies have also shown and identified relational rules whose violations precede to transgressions in romantic relationships (Baxter, 1986; Feeney, 2005; Jones & Burdette, 1993; Metts, 1991; Metts, Morse, & Lamb, 2001; Metts, Pensinger, & Cupach, 2001; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988; as cited in Cionea, 2013). The study of Baxter (1986) showed that several rules were significant in romantic relationships: autonomy, similarity display, supportiveness, openness, loyalty, shared time, equity, and 'an inexplicable magic 'quality' the relationship ought to have.'

Relational transgressions, however, come up from other rule violations. For instance, breaking a promise to someone, being rude to the other person, making insensitive comments about the other person, deceiving the other person, and even changing plans made with the other person are all likely to violate a partner's expectations and constitute a more or less severe transgression in a relationship. These intrusions set off an ascription process in which people (especially victims) tend to look and search for the motivation of the transgressive behavior and must be addressed (Atwater, 1979; Roscoe et al., 1988). Maintaining relationships are often difficult for others while some couples find it much easy. Researchers stated that the capacity for rational thought of why some individuals attempt to maintain relationships with transgressors is unclear and not easily deciphered (Roloff, Soule & Carey, 2001).

## METHOD

This exploratory study used a qualitative approach as it attempted to broaden or deepen our understanding of how things came the way they are in the social world (Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge, 2009). The authors also used qualitative approach in order to capture the truth and describe this phenomenon in its deepest sense and basically, quantitative study cannot generate the underlying thoughts and feelings of the participants.

Moreover, the study used a Descriptive Phenomenological Research Design to inductively ascertain the experiences of female relationship transgressors in their relationship with the married men and also to explore and understand the underlying

thoughts and motives of the transgressors on why they are committing into extramarital relationships. The authors used this design due to the reason that the research question involves exploring what their views are and it also explores a new area wherein the issues are not yet understood or properly identified. Moreover, descriptive phenomenology was used when the researcher wants to describe the phenomenon under study and brackets their biases.

The information provided by the participants was gathered using interviews. As of today, according to Kvale (1983, 1994, & 2009 with Brinkmann) as cited in Englander (2012), interview has become the main data collection procedure that has been associated with qualitative studies. The authors specifically used semi-structured interviews with the selected participants provided with the letter of informed consent and the prepared interview questions of the authors. The authors decided to use semi-structured interviews in order to permit the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue whereby the initial questions are modified in the light of the participant's responses. The authors could also be able to probe or clarify significant and vague information that is provided by the participant. In semi-structured interviews, (1) There is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent. (2) The ordering of questions is less important. (3) The interviewer is freer to probe interesting areas that arise. (4) The interview can follow the respondent's interests or concerns. Thus, it was very appropriate to use this in study due to the reasons that; it facilitates rapport and empathy and allows a greater flexibility of coverage and tends to produce a richer data. Moreover, the participants were interviewed by the authors in their homes, in order to assure the confidentiality of information.

Through purposive sampling, eight (8) female relationship transgressors participated in the study. According to Giorgi (2009), phenomenological studies could use at least 3 participants in the study due to the reason that the subjects are too difficult for the researcher to handle in terms of their imagination. The author also points out that "Research based upon depth strategies should not be confused with research based upon sampling strategies". Hence, the authors decided to use eight participants for better appreciation of the variation of the phenomena. The authors limited the sample into a

fairly homogeneous sample through purposive sampling in order to find a more closely defined group for whom the research questions could be significant. The participants' inclusion in this study was based on the following criteria: (1) participants must be female ages 18-65 whereas in the psychosocial development of Erikson, in the stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation, intimacy and mutual sharing with another is the basic strength of this stage. It is believed that intimacy between two people as a couple was only possible when each had developed a strong sense of identity separately. While in stage of Generativity vs Stagnation, generativity refers to the adult's ability to care for another person. Although generativity is a dominant and major theme in the middle years (thirties, forties, and fifties), this kind of caring concern for future generations has its seeds in early adulthood – the childbearing years – and continues throughout the remainder of the lifespan. A sense of connectedness of one generation with another person is showed and implied in the concept, and generativity is, in the broadest sense, a symbolic link to immortality through acts and works that will survive the individual (Fleming, 2004). (2) a minimum 1 year relationship duration with their married partners which is based on the study of Wesson (2014) study of stages of healthy relationship. Stage 2 was chosen in this study because it refers to a relationship with initial but limited commitment just as to the relationship of the transgressors and the married men. The characteristic of stage 2 shows that the infatuation ends and is replaced with deeper understanding and appreciation of the partner. Lastly, (3) participants should consider themselves part of romantic relationship with their married partners.

In accordance with the demographics gathered by the researchers, constituting the extent of having 8 participants, it shows that the mean of the age of transgressors is 45. Additionally, one of the inclusion criteria of the participants is to have a minimum of 1 year relationship duration with their married partners and results showed that the mean of the length of the relationship of the female relationship transgressors with their married partners is 5 years. Half of the female transgressors that participated in the study were already married with their past romantic relationship partners while the other half is single. Half of the participants also reported that they have children with the married man.

In qualitative researches, it is highly important to give enough methodological details to enable the readers to understand the purpose of the study and in order for them to evaluate the quality and the usefulness of the study. According to Fade (2003) as cited in Fade (2004), qualitative research techniques are complex and full explanations are seemingly difficult to achieve within the constraints of the word limits set by journals. Thus, by using a recognized and reliable framework or data analysis technique would be very helpful as long as the readers understand what it subsumes. One recognized and reliable framework for qualitative studies is the Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis. DPA attempts to understand personal lived experience and how the participant makes sense of that experience which very appropriate to this study that mainly focuses on the relationship transgressors experience in their relationship with the married men. Moreover, DPA gives more emphasis on trying to understand on what it is like, from the point of view of the participants and the way by which it distinguishes itself from different approaches that are strictly interpretative.

The phenomenological psychological attitude was adopted and assumed while analyzing the data in order to make certain of the results reflect a careful description of precisely the features of the experienced phenomenon as they present themselves to the consciousness of the researcher (Giorgi, 2009). In this, the psychological acts of the female relationship transgressors are affirmed to be real while the objects at which those acts are directed and reduced to what shows as psychologically relevant to the particular experience being attended to. In this, the process of DPA involves: (1) Each description given by the female relationship transgressors is first read through in its totality in order to produce a better sense of the whole situation in which experiences occurred. (2) Then each description is accompanied to individually as the researcher goes through and marks off various units of meaning within the data in order to make such descriptions more capable of being managed or controlled. (3) After one description is broken down into separate units, each unit can then be transformed from the language through which it was given into psychological sensitive meaning units, which is gone through with the help of imaginative variation. This process is meant to purge out the horizons of the lived meaning more fully in order to widen the possibilities implicit in to the lived experiences of the female

relationship transgressors. (4) Lastly, after all the descriptions have undergone these steps, general psychological structures, in the sense described above, are sought-after. In relation to the analysis made by the researchers, the essential psychological structure mentioned earlier is referred to the lived experiences of the female relationship transgressors which may include different aspects of the description of which the transgressors were unaware. In other words, the psychological structure is clearly not a definition. Instead, psychological structure is meant show off how certain phenomena that get named are lived in which it considers the experiential and conscious moments that are seen and observed from a psychological perspective. This psychological perspective intends that the lived meanings are obviously based on an individual but get expressed ecumenical, meaning that they are general.

The final structure in the analysis is intended to function as an ideal representation the phenomenon of the female relationship transgressors that is being studied, based upon the actual instantiations of it within concrete lived experiences. It may also be the case that such structures become visible many times, or their relevance may be restricted to the cases studied in a specific study. Either way, they have the potency to bring out and expose a lived understanding of a certain phenomenon without first requiring a certain theoretical framework in order to comprehend it. In short order, Clarke and Gibbs (2010), discoursed that the learning outcomes of the descriptive phenomenological analysis must first learn the four key stages: (1) Reading, (2) Developing, (3) Translation/Transformation and (4) Structural description. Also, to become aware of some of the difficulties in applying this analytic approach, and understand how early analysis, even if abandoned, can make clarity of the issues to be addressed by further analysis. Prior to the process of descriptive phenomenological analysis, the data analysis was made first by reading the transcripts, second the significant statements were high-lighted. Third, grouping of the significant statements were made in order to form basic themes to categorical themes. Lastly, the basic and categorical themes were defined and the connections of each theme were conceptualized to form the model that represents the experiences, the underlying thoughts and motives of female relationship transgressors.

For the reflexivity of the study, different researchers approach a certain study from different perspectives or positions. These perspectives or positions could affect the research process that could possibly lead to research biases. According to Malterud (2001), he contends that: "Preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them". In order to avoid research biases, the authors declared their own perspectives about the female relationship transgressors.

The authors believed that these transgressors are the main reason why romantic relationships, and worse, happy families tend to fall apart. Some of these transgressors commit to extramarital relationships for the benefit of themselves, to be specific, for money. As what the society pictures them, the authors believed that most likely, all of us judged these people on our own perspective. These are the reasons why the authors decided to study these people; to be able to hear the voices of the underrated and undervalued. Wherein, by knowing and understanding their experiences would give us a great depth of understanding on where these relationship transgressors are coming from, what they are going through, and lastly their motivation of engaging in such relationships.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The present study explored the underlying thoughts and motives of the female relationship transgressors as to why they commit into extramarital relationships. Also, this study inductively ascertained the experiences of female relationship transgressors in their relationship with the married men.

### ***Fulfillment of the Need to Feel Important***

By virtue of the consistency of efforts manifested by the married men, the female relationship transgressors believed that their partners truly adore them and feel that their existence do matter as they also believe that they are valued. Therefore, these female relationship transgressors have a need to feel important and this need was fulfilled by the special treatment they experience from the married man—in connection to the positive

attributes of the married man as an “ideal partner”. This is one of the primary reasons why the emotions or moral sensitivity of the female relationship transgressors to their married partners are reinforced and subsequently remain in the relationship.

*“Because he is persistent that is why I fell for him. Sometimes I got surprised because he’s already in front of our sari-sari store and when I am sick, he brings medicine for me. My uncle does not visit me even if he is just near us. And I thought that this guy would really take good care of me when I grow old because he is very caring especially to children. To my children” - Rona, 38*

*“He is very sweet. He brings flowers every time we see each other up to the point that he confessed to me. Of course, once you see the effort of a person, and of course including the looks somehow haha, there, I am slowly falling in love with him because he is serious with me. I did not know then that he has already a wife during that time.” – Maria, 48*

*“I will never forget hmmm. A lot. For example, though it is just like that. He does things for me, when he will go out or go home, he kisses me. Also before sleeping. He is sweet, sweet.” - Pia, 42*

### ***Common Shared Experiences of the Female Transgressor and the Married Man***

During the outset of the conversations that the female relationship transgressors and married men have, these female relationship transgressors found a common ground with these married men. They feel connected with each other due to their similar experiences with their current and past romantic relationships. This connection that they feel makes them more interested in these married men and be more open to each other's stories. Two of these common shared experiences are their perceived negative attributes of the legal wife and the past romantic relationships of the female transgressors.

*“I feel annoyed with my husband, that I don’t feel that I am his wife. And then, I met him. Hmmm. He told me his problems in life, coincidentally, we both have the same problems with our spouses.” - Myrna, 55*

*"He already told me at the beginning, the problems he has with his wife, that is why I understand him because I had the same problems also with my ex-husband." - Beth, 43*

*"When we were texting, he shared his experiences with his wife's attitude like being disrespectful to his parents. So I also told him about my problems with my ex-husband." - Rona, 38*

### ***Perceived Negative Attributes of Past Romantic Relationships***

Female transgressors compare their past romantic relationships with what they had with their married partners. The negative attributes or experiences from their past romantic relationships are one of the reasons for preferring to commit in a relationship with a married man—thinking that the attributes of the married man are far better than their past romantic relationship partners. This theme is followed by the female relationship transgressor's idea that the married man is their "Ideal Husband".

*"My husband is still not changing. Whatever I do for him does not change him. I have never felt like I am his wife and I hate him for that. That is why I fell in love with my boyfriend, because he made me feel that he is my husband. There is such a big difference between them." - Myrna, 55*

*"We broke up because he is a womanizer and always drunk. I hate it when I go home seeing him drunk and unruly." - Beth, 43*

*"My ex-husband does not care about me. If I go out with my friends and drink with them, he missed to advise me. I remember a time when he slapped me, and from that time on, I never trusted him." - Pia, 42*

### ***Married Man as an "Ideal Husband"***

As the female transgressors compare their past romantic relationship partners to their married partner, they realized that their married partners are far better than their past romantic relationship partners, thinking that the married man is their ideal partner, who will

take good care of them and make them feel loved and appreciated. These positive attributes of the married men are ascertained and being admired by the female relationship transgressors whereas they have never felt and experienced these special situations before with their past romantic relationships.

*"I am so happy and we are very happy when we are together. The times that we meet are the times I can feel what a husband and wife should feel. They way he puts his arms on my shoulders, the way he holds my hand and how he assists me when crossing the street made me see everything in him that my husband never did to me, that is why I love him so much and I was never wrong."* - Myrna, 55

*"My first husband was nice but somehow he does not care for me enough. He does not mind me going with my friends to drink. He would just go there and fetch me and not say anything or reprimand me. I want someone who will tell me what I am doing is wrong. And that is what my boyfriend is, my ex-husband lacks giving advices."*

- Pia, 42

*"He is kind and hardworking. He also comes with me to meet my siblings and to get to know each other. And what is good with him is that we complement each other. What he does not like me to do, I will not do it. What I do not want him to do, he does not do. So, we do not fight."* - Beth, 43

As the authors analyzed the statements that have been provided by the participants, social media has played a vital role on how these transgressions occur. According to some of these transgressors, they met their married partners through Facebook, Yahoo messenger and through text messaging. Through their consistent communication with each other, the female transgressors and their married partners found a common ground due to their common experiences. Their "Common shared experiences" from the married man's legal wife and the past romantic relationship of the transgressors begets the other two basic themes which are the "Perceived negative attributes of the legal wife" and the "Perceived negative attributes of past romantic relationships" of the female transgressor.

The perceived negative attributes of the past romantic relationship of female relationship transgressors (FRTs) refers to their unpleasant experiences with their past romantic relationship partners. These unpleasant experiences include; maltreatment, lack of care and affectionate verbal and non-verbal communication. After all, many aspects of past romantic relationships may influence how an individual manages present situations with romantic partners (Furman & Wehner, 1994 as cited in Bouchey & Furman, 2008). Although it is plausible that past romantic relationship experience may influence the individual's subsequent ones, it is unlikely that they would be completely the same, due to the fact that, one's partner is different from his/her past romantic partner and the attributes of the present partner might also influence the course of the relationship as well. Hence, even the FRTs encounter unpleasant experiences with their past romantic partners; they were still able to manage their romantic domain due to the positive attributes of the married man. The perceived negative attributes of past romantic relationships has been associated with another basic theme which is the "Married man as an Ideal Husband" (MMIH). MMIH is the realization of the FRTs that the married man is far better than their past romantic relationship partners. From their perceived negative attributes of past romantic relationships, these transgressors were able to determine the qualities or attributes that they were looking for their ideal partner, which they have found in their married partners. According to Fletcher & Simpson (2000); Muray, Holmes, & Griffin (1996) as cited in Figueredo, Sefcek & Jones (2006), people have concepts of what an "Ideal partner" should be, and the consistency between the ideal standards and the current romantic relationship partner's characteristics or attributes may function in initiating and maintaining the relationship (Fletcher, Simpson & Thomas, 1999 as cited in Figueredo, Sefcek & Jones (2006). In connection to the present study, all these transgressors shared that their married partners are sweet, caring and loving. They also mentioned that their partners made them feel how special they are and how important they are to their partners.

In connection to the two basic themes (Perceived negative attributes of past romantic relationships and MMIH), comes the categorical theme which is the "Fulfillment of the Need to Feel Important" (FNFI). Every human being has a need to feel important.

In relation to this, Dreyfus (2010) said that the need to feel special is common to human beings. Individuals want to know that they matter to others; they want to be seen. People strive to achieve some special status in the view of others; it is said that how we are viewed by others matters to us. One way of knowing that the individual is special is when people treat them differently than they treat others. When people are treated differently, given special and exclusive privileges, receive special favors, they feel special. This concept is seen in the study when the married man gives special attention to the FRT particularly by his act of kindness, gentleness, and affectionate communication. Also, people want to feel important to other because they want to feel significant and special. Looking on its surface, it may show that the quality of needing attention, affection and reassurance is what drives people wanting to matter to others. Upon understanding the concept, the real reason why people tend to seek to be important to others is because they cannot help but loving who themselves are and the fact that people want to be important to someone gives them validity that they are important to themselves (Tolle, 2011). FNFI is one of the motives on why FRTs commit to extra-marital relationships. Their need to feel important was fulfilled through the perceived positive attributes that the married man has. This positive attribute was determined by the comparison of the FRTs past romantic partners and the married man. According to McAdams (1992) and Reis & Shaver, (1988) as cited in Laurenceau, Troy, Carver (2005) each individual has a level of intimacy that he or she desires that characterizes his or her ideal for a romantic relationship. In other words, FRTs perceive that the married man fulfills her desired level of intimacy that makes their relationship as something ideal.

### ***Fulfillment of the Idealized Image***

Female transgressors feel fulfilled when they are being perceived to be the ideal wife. It is fulfilling for them when the complex of all their attributes- behavioral, emotional and mental- characterized them as “ideal” not only by themselves but by their married partners, this happens when they tend to focus so exclusively on themselves that it leaves no space for other values, including the goods and rights of the legal wives. Thus, their idealized selves are their idealized versions of themselves created out of their apprehension about the negative attributes of the legal wives and the compliments that they received from the married men. Their perception is that married men have emotionally chosen them

over the legal wives because they are more ideal and it yields them to have an overwhelming feeling in which serves as the other reason why they firmly stand in committing into extramarital relationships.

*"I am happy that he introduced me to his siblings. They treated me well and prepared for me. His sister told me to take good care of him and she believes that I will really take good care of him because that is his problem in his life, his wife's personality was not good at all. And his wife is not good in household chores. And they often fight with each other."* - Myrna, 55

*"He treated me as his wife. Even though his children are mocking me, I just kept silent. But of course if feels good whenever he tells me that he considers me as his wife."* - Claudine, 39

*"He made me feel that he loves me. That he loves me more than his wife. At first, I pushed him away but he was consistent on making me feel that he loves me. And it feels good."* - Paula, 38

### ***Perceived Negative Attributes of the Legal Wife***

These female relationship transgressors think that they outshine the legal wife because of their negative attributes; these negative attributes include the perceived negative way or treatment of the legal wife to her husband or the married man. This theme is followed by the female relationship transgressor's idea of perceiving one's self as an "Ideal Wife".

*"For me, I do not think they can fix their relationship because of his wife's attitude who seem to kill somebody."* - Myrna, 55

*"Whenever he is arguing with his wife, he automatically comes to voice out his problems. And of course, the stupid me comforts him haha. According to him, he is not happy anymore, the wife would control him. Sometimes the wife would scold him in front of many people so his masculinity was degraded."* - Paula, 38

*"He said he does not like his wife because his wife is mean, a nagger and always saying bad words." - Rona, 38*

### ***Perceiving One's self as an "Ideal Wife"***

These female relationship transgressors feel satisfied and loved when the married man recognizes them as their "Ideal wife". These transgressors feel that they're comparably a better version than the legal wife—referring to the perceived negative attributes of the legal wife. In this context, aside from receiving compliments that they are being recognized as an ideal wife, they tend to value themselves more in which made them become more comfortable recognizing their strengths and therefore think that everything gets easier with practice, even resisting the urge to make comparisons. They usually put their best foot forward and think that they are "wife material" or a "keeper".

*"Do you know what I like most? When he told me that it is with me that he felt that he has a wife. Also, he told me that I am the one that he considers as his wife. He never felt this to his wife." - Paula, 38*

*"I am sweet, caring, good in household chores, I know how to fix clothes, I know how to sew clothes. I will do everything just to have money but not being a GRO. Haha." - Beth, 43*

*"He treats us well and his problems about his wife is that she gambles every day. Even after his work, his wife will never prepare food for him. When we meet he told me that he never experienced the service of being a wife. Just now, because I serve him. He treats me as his wife." - Claudine, 39*

### ***Perceiving Having Children Legitimizes Their Relationship***

As part of the women's biological instinct to have children, when the female relationship transgressors gave birth out of love or mutual affection with their married partners, these transgressors feel that having a child with their married partners gives legitimacy to their relationship. This what made them significantly distinct from other romantic relationships. It provided opportunities to serve their married partners in new and

creative ways. Their children legitimized the forbidden relationship they have with the married men. Therefore, having children was one of the rational motives of the female relationship transgressors in staying committed in an extramarital relationship since this was their justification of the mutual affection between the transgressors and married men.

*“The most significant experience that I had in my relationship with him was when my children were born. We’re so much happy that time especially that it is a boy. I think the most significant experience of all mothers was when they gave birth to their child, because it is when being a family begins.” - Maria, 48*

*“One thing that would symbolize my love for him is our child. Of course, it is the fruit of our love for each other.” - Pia, 42*

*“If I were to choose one thing that would symbolize my love for him is this... (holds their child) of course we love our child. This is the fruit of our love for each other. This is the most important thing that has ever happened in our relationship.” - Rona,*

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Moreover, the second part of their common shared experience is their “Perceived negative attributes of the Legal Wife”. This basic theme explains how the FRTs view the legal wife. It is their understanding based on the stories that were shared by the married man. Due to their perceived negative attributes of the legal wife, they realized that they are far better than the legal wife, thinking that they have the positive attributes that the legal wife lacks. This results to another theme which is “Perceiving one’s self as an “Ideal Wife”. The female relationship transgressors tend to justify their wrong doing or the act of transgression through their perception of the negative attributes of the legal wives. Aronson (2008) stated that people are motivated to justify their own actions, beliefs, and feelings. Also it is the removal of the idea by changing something oneself. Hence, when they do something they will try, if at all possible, to convince themselves and other people as well, in which it was a logical, reasonable thing to do. These transgressors think that they have the qualities that an ideal wife has, which the married man has agreed to them. These

perceived negative attributes of the legal wives further gives them justification for their own action which in this case, is their transgression. In relation to this, perceiving to be the ideal partner as easily affectionate and responsive on many levels: physically, emotionally and verbally. There are some circumstances that the married men literally said that these transgressors are better than their legal wife, they said that these transgressors performed better in doing household chores and in taking good care of them and their children. Romantic experiences play a role in the development of a sense of self or identity in a way that; it develops distinct perceptions in the romantic arena. Thus, individuals who have positive experiences may think of themselves as an “Ideal partner”, whereas those who have adverse romantic experiences may not feel the same way (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). In the case of these FRTs, they perceived that they are “Ideal” due to their positive experience with the married man.

Another basic theme is “Perceiving having children legitimizes their relationship” with the married man. According to Silver (2011), having a child can strengthen a relationship. The author said that it is essential that both partners make the decision to have a child. Also, having a child can help in maintaining a relationship. Hence, a baby can positively enhance the relationship and bring the partners closer together. This concept of having a child is connected to the perception of the female relationship transgressors that having a child legitimizes their relationship which further commits them into extramarital relationships. The authors believe that these transgressors have an unconscious desire to have children with their married partners thinking that it would somehow make their relationship with the married man legal. Female relationship transgressors qualify their thinking in a certain way – when they gave birth out of love or mutual affection with their married partners, these transgressors feel that having a child with their married partners gives legitimacy to their relationship. It provides them with the possibility of favorable circumstances to serve their married partners in their own ways. Their children legitimize the forbidden relationship with the married men. Therefore, having children is one of the rational motives of the female relationship transgressors in staying committed in an extramarital relationship since this is their justification of their mutual affection.

Due to these three basic themes, the “Fulfillment of the Idealized Image” of the FRT was able to achieve. Female transgressors feel fulfilled when they are perceived the ideal wife. Having children with the married man also contributes to the fulfillment of their idealized image in a way that, they think that when they have children with their married partner, their idealized image as romantic partner particularly a partner that can bear a child fulfills their entire idealized image. Moreover, based on the female relationship transgressors' statements, they are truly glad when they are acknowledged by their married partners by showing their approval or appreciation; they also feel fulfilled that they regard their children as a fruit of their love. Throughout the entire extent of the acknowledgement given, it is fulfilling for them when the complex of all their attributes- behavioral, emotional and mental- characterized them as “ideal”, this happens when they tend to focus exclusively on themselves that it leaves no space for other positive attributes and values of the legal wives. Thus, their idealized selves are their idealized versions of themselves created out of their apprehension about the negative attributes of the legal wives and the compliments that they receive from their partners. Their perception is that their partners have emotionally chosen them over the legal wives because they are more ideal and this overwhelming feeling serves as the other reason why they firmly commit into extramarital relationships. To sum up, the development of romantic relationships lies in an individual's perception, beliefs and motivation. Therefore, deciding to commit in a romantic relationship can be regarded as being driven by several motivations that encompasses the different needs of an individual. According to Brown (1999) as cited in Kindelberger et. al. (2014), the prime goal in committing to romantic relationships is based on self needs. With this, the authors discovered that these transgressors have a need to feel important and to fulfill their idealized image by being recognized as someone who is “ideal”.

### ***Mutual Affection Beyond Transgression***

From the satisfying feeling of being regarded as an “Ideal Wife” and having an “Ideal Partner” comes this feeling what the authors coined as “Mutual Affection”. Mutual affection refers to the female transgressor's and the married man's feeling of love and affection for each other regardless of being in an extra-marital relationship. It is how they express their love for each other. Particularly by serving and caring for each other.

For as much as the female relationship transgressors knew that they were also loved, they are well expressed and marked by joy. In this case of love inbound, this mutual affection gives female relationship transgressors strength in their relationship with their married partners. For them since they know that they are being loved, female relationship transgressors are able to handle tougher situations. This mutual affection develops from the female transgressor's satisfying feeling of being regarded as an "ideal wife" and finally meeting her "ideal man" which is the married man. This mutual affection goes beyond the act of transgression, in spite of their acceptance of inevitability of defeat and the seclusion that the FRTs are experiencing.

*"Before he came home in the Philippines, he said "I love you" and asked if we could meet. I did not say "I love you too". What I said was "Say that to me in person". So from there when we met he said "I love you" haha then I told him "There, that is my promise. Say it to me in person so I will now say "I love you too". That is the reason why we love each other so much." - Myrna, 55*

*"I will never forget it when he told me that he loves me. Because I really felt happy that time. I never thought he would say that he loves me. Because I never expected that I am not the only one who feels love to him but he does too.." - Paula, 38*

*"He told me that he only feel this way to me and me too to him. Even though we are already old, we still give tenderness to one another, I always annoy him by my persistence. Basically, that happens when you love, even if you are old, you still show tenderness." - Beth, 43*

### ***Acknowledgement of the Act of Transgression***

Behind the emotional needs, they still acknowledge the act of transgression. They know what they have gotten into, they know their place and they do not want to get into any trouble with the legal wife. They actually admit that what they are doing is morally and legally wrong and they also acknowledge the possible consequences of their act. This requires their adjusting their daily routines due to the limitations of their relationship that forces them to seclusion.

*"I pushed him away several times and asked him to leave me because I know it is wrong. It is really wrong. I told him to end our communication and never see each other but he refused." - Paula, 38*

*"I decided to continue it because I love him. We love each other but it is wrong, right?" - Beth, 43*

*"At first, I really do not like it because it is wrong. I know it is wrong. Because he already has a wife. I also had a husband though we separated, it is still wrong in the eyes of God." - Rona, 38*

*"Even though it is wrong, I am still happy. This was the first time that I felt this. It was from him that I felt this.." - Paula, 38*

### ***Secluded Life***

The experiences of female relationship transgressors in committing to extra-marital relationships was described as “secluded” due to the reason that they remain kept from view. Their lives are very private and hidden from other people especially the legal wife. According to these transgressors, their life has been very difficult, in a way that they felt that they are surrounded by a wall of limitations that should never be crossed. This kept them grounded with their boundaries as a “Mistress”. Nevertheless, although these female relationship transgressors know how difficult and tough the situation is, they still decided to keep in touch with their married partners.

*"Hmm. The worst problem that we faced is.. If his wife would follow us. Every time we go on a date and see each other, it is always secretive and every step we take, we always look back to make sure that no one is following us. That is what we are scared about." - Myrna, 55*

*"Of course we go on a date secretly. That is why we seldom see each other because it is very hard. When we are together I feel so bothered that maybe his wife or someone will see us. I do not want to get involved in any scandals. It is shameful." - Paula, 38*

*"We are not dating. We just stay here sometimes because, yes, I am just his mistress and it would be difficult if someone would see us and beside he has work also."*

- Rona, 38

### ***Acceptance of the Inevitability of Defeat***

The female relationship transgressor's acceptance of the inevitability of defeat arises from the reality that they acknowledge the act of transgression. Female relationship transgressors articulated that they are willing to let go of their married partners as long as it is initiated by the married man. Since these female relationship transgressors have admitted even though the mutual affection exists, they depend the flow and continuance of their relationship on their married partner due to the reason that they accept that what they are doing is wrong. This makes them open to changes in any decision of their married partner.

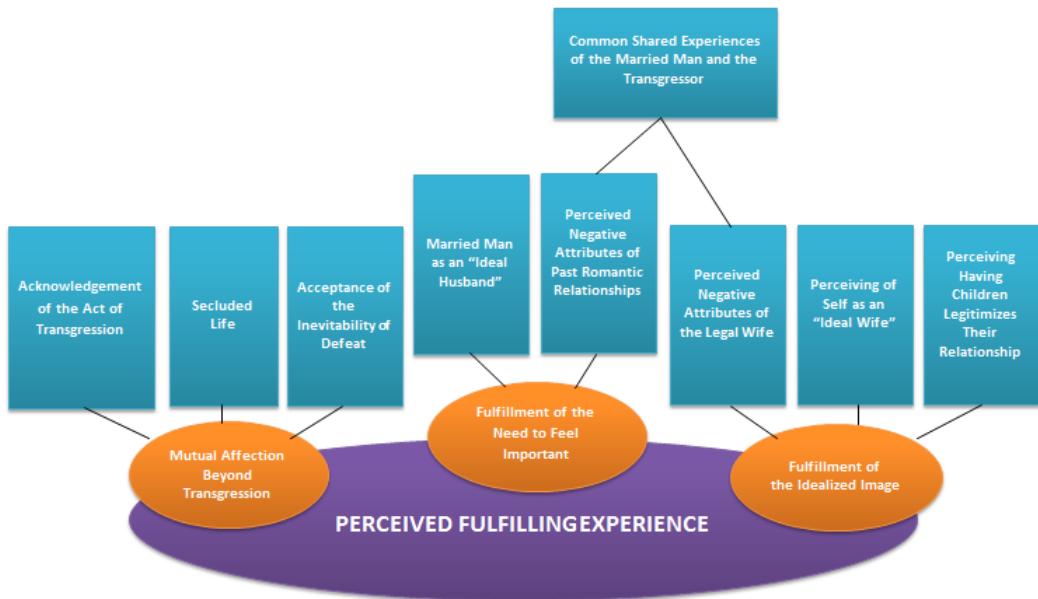
*"I do not want any trouble, if he will choose his wife over me, then so be it. I will not bother them." - Rose, 56*

*"If he will be the first one to leave me, then it is up to him. I will not stop him." - Pia, 42*

*"I am willing to let go. I will not fight for it. I told him that I do not want any trouble now. That is why until now, I sometimes tell him to go back to his wife and support the needs of his children, so there will be no trouble." - Rona, 38*

Furthermore, as stated by FRTs, their life was described as "Secluded", in a way that they have to keep hidden from other people especially the legal wife. They seldom go on dates with their partners because they do not want to get involved in any scandalous events with the legal wife. Living a secluded life means they understand that there are consequences. Seclusion was defined as the act of shutting out or keeping apart from society that can be a person, a couple, or a larger group for the reason of privacy (Mason & Alty, 1994). As admitted by the FRTs, they are all aware that what they have with their married partner is morally and legally wrong.

In connection to their secluded life, is their “Acknowledgement of the Act of Transgression”, As these transgressors acknowledge the act of transgression as legally and morally wrong, they become more dependent on their married partners in deciding to end the relationship or not. They already accepted that they should not fight for their relationship. This basic theme is called “Acceptance of the inevitability of defeat”. This theme is coined from the “defeatist attitude”. According to Khan (2001), one explanation most likely to make an individual to give up is an assumption that “No matter what you do, you cannot win.” In other words, an individual expects and accepts defeat and decides that there is nothing he or she can do to change things. According to Abedi (2016), Defeatism usually commences small and hardly noticed until it grows into immense proportions to the point that it can overwhelm an individual. For instance, the excitement that occurs at the beginning of the goal itself has worn off. It is here that many falls into the trap of a defeatist attitude and end up giving up entirely or failing. Female relationship transgressors claim that they are willing to let go of their married partners as long as it is initiated by the married men. Since these female relationship transgressors have admitted that they are wrong, even if mutual affection exists, transgressors depend the flow and continuance of their relationship on their partner and this makes them open to changes in any decision by their married partner. Despite of their acceptance of the inevitability of defeat this does not mean that they do not love their married partners. In a more general sense, even if they love their married partners, but their partner decided to leave them, they would just simply let go of their partner. According to Farmer (2011), one of our emotional needs is the need for affection. Mutual affection is considered as shared action words, feelings that are expressed both publicly and privately. It is said that it can be deliberated and articulated or it can be unconscious and automatic. Also, it is about constancy in which made the relationship last. The “Mutual affection Beyond Transgression” as a categorical theme does not become the reason for their decision to stay in the relationship, but somehow this theme became a big part of their motives in to stay committed. Below is the model that represents the experiences of the female relationship transgressors in an extra-marital relationship and the underlying thoughts and motives on why they engage in this type of relationship.



**Figure 1. Experiences, underlying thoughts and motives of Female Relationship Transgressors**

In the explanation of the model, the experiences of a transgressor is rooted from their common shared experiences with the married man. From these common experiences, the FRTs were able to determine and perceive the negative attributes of their past romantic relationships and as well as of the legal wife's. The FRTs realized that their need to feel important was not being satisfied by their past romantic partners and that their need to feel important was satisfied by the married men, thus recognizing them as their "Ideal Husband". On the other hand, upon recognizing the perceived negative attributes of the legal wives, these female relationship transgressors would compare their attributes to the legal wives in which they perceived themselves as the "Ideal Wife". When this perception was reinforced by the married men through compliments, the idealized image of the female relationship transgressors become fulfilled. Furthermore, what completes their fulfillment of their idealized image is their perception that having a child with the married man legitimizes their relationship. As the FRTs acknowledge the act of transgression they begin to accept the inevitability of defeat in a way that, they become dependent on the married man. As they acknowledge the act of transgression and accept the inevitability of defeat, they also embrace having a secluded life. Upon analyzing this concept, the authors deciphered the underlying thoughts of the female relationship transgressors in committing into extramarital relationships.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the study have given the researchers a great depth of understanding in where these relationship transgressors are coming from, what they are going through and lastly their motivation for engaging in such relationships. As we go beyond the FRTs underlying thoughts, it was discovered that the female relationship transgressors were trying to further develop their sense of self based on the themes that have been formulated. As noticed, these themes are all connected and are marked by correspondence expressing closely related meanings.

It is said that when one loses one's sense of self, he or she is most likely to seek their sense of self-worth from others. It suddenly becomes very relevant how others view us, as our sense of value, and self-worth, our confidence, depend on external factors such as physical attributes, success, status, money, and even fame. The study of James (1890) as cited in Crocker and Park (2003) argued that people are greatly selective about the domains on which they place their self-worth, concluding that "our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do". In other words, people differ in the eventuality they must satisfy to gain high self-esteem. A contingency of self-worth is a category of results on which a person places his or her self-esteem, so that person's view of his or her worth depends on perceived successes, failures, or adherence to self-standards in that domain. For some people, self-esteem may depend on being attractive, loved, or competent. For others, self esteem may depend on being virtuous, powerful, or self-reliant. The development of romantic relationships is a normative developmental task. It is also the part of identity construction that contributes to the ulterior social functioning of an individual and especially the formation of their self-concept (Sullivan, 1953; Zani, 1993 as cited in Kindelberger & Tsao, 2014). The reason why these FRT's depend on the married men is because their needs to develop their sense of self are being fulfilled by the married men. As a result, people tend to seek reassurance and compliments or praise from others in order for them to feel good about themselves, but in the state of being actual and real, emotional well-being depends on how we feel about ourselves. In support, several studies have agreed that romantic involvements are thought to influence both intimacy and identity

development which are two of the crucial psychosocial processes that an individual undergoes (Dyk & Adams 1987, 1990; Fitch & Adams, 1983; Furman & Shaffer, 2003 as cited in Bouchey & Furman, 2008). The interesting advantage for a psychological study is not simply just to imply that individuals have preferences for particular attributes in a romantic partner, but rather to impose that these preferences differ across individuals (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999 as cited in Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel & Hunt, 2014). In this sense, the transgressors look forward to the probable occurrence of having a new relationship with other men and unfortunately, these men are married. During the outset of the conversations that they had, unexpectedly, these transgressors and the married men have shared common problems regarding their romantic relationship partners including its negative attributes and resulted in complimenting and fulfilling the worth of the female relationship transgressors. The married men often praise the transgressors as their ideal partners making the transgressors feel fulfilled in hearing these compliments from them. These men helped the transgressors to feel and know their worth and have found reassurance in which their underlying thoughts have unconsciously made them decided to commit into extramarital relationships. The affectionate and special treatment that is being expressed by the married man was the reason for the FRT's to perceive their partners as the, "Ideal Husband". These positive attributes of the married man appeased the needs of the FRTs which also fulfills the self-worth of these transgressors.

The authors believe that the reason why these FRTs decided to commit in a relationship with a married man is that the married man fulfills their sense of self. They have seen their worth through the compliments and efforts given by their married partners. Therefore, their loss of sense of self was fulfilled. The events that were apprehended by the female relationship transgressors are being recognized as fulfilling experience. In the discourse analysis of the past romantic relationships of the transgressors, the experiences that they have run into were perceived as fulfilling for them. There is a sense of fulfillment for the female relationship transgressors because their mutual affection beyond transgression, need to feel important and idealized image were being fulfilled by their married partners. This is fulfilling for them because it made their experience different from others despite of accepting how other people view them since they have their own

perspective or they perceive their relationship with the married men differently. Therefore, this perceived fulfillment has been provided by the strong positive emotion of regard and affection for their married partners wherein these married men and female relationship transgressors have a mutual affection, they have an inclination to support and have an exchange of promises, and the psychological needs of the transgressors were being fulfilled.

The study focuses on the theoretical and professional preference of social psychology in a way that, it extends previous researches and fills the gap in the literature of relational transgressions. This study also explores in detail how the female relationship transgressors are making sense of their personal and social world.

The results of this study have shown the importance of examining romantic relationships in the context of relational transgressions. This research revealed useful data about individuals who have experienced a transgression and how they evaluate a perceived purposeful romantic relationship. In accordance to this, understanding one's perspective is important. These female relationship transgressors have the capability to decide whether they want to view their struggles that inherently accompanies life as a task to be endured, or a kind of opportunity to learn from, grow and experience. Once they begin to accept that their perspectives can only controlled by themselves, they can start to experience a self-empowered life, where they are able to decide to what degree they will struggle with or accept challenges. The study also imparts knowledge on family issues and discrimination. As commended by different studies in the Philippines, the increment of a broken family is one of the major issues faced by the Filipinos nowadays. One of the facts that logically justify some premise of broken family is ascribable to relational transgressions. Considering relational transgression as an entity that produces an effect on families, these female relationship transgressors are being criticized and discriminated on by society. Through this research, the underlying thoughts and motives of the transgressors on why they commit into extramarital relationships are revealed and understand the experiences of female relationship transgressors in their relationship with the married men.

The study extends to relational transgressions, particularly the female relationship transgressors. The study focuses on the relations and experiences of female relationship transgressors, specifically in exploring how the extramarital relationship started and what could be the possible factors that made them stay in the relationship. The authors gave importance in the ethical considerations of the study especially with regards to the information gathered from the participants. These female relationship transgressors are aware of the ethics behind on what they are doing. Consequently, their perspective on this showed that they have the acceptance of the inevitability of defeat albeit there is an acknowledgement of the transgression. The study is only limited in the perspective of Filipino female relationship transgressors.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The authors recommend that a further study using more specific terms of the inclusion criteria are made, and if possible, it will be more informative if future studies would integrate the perspectives of the legal wife, the male philanderer or the married man with the female relationship transgressors'. Furthermore, studies about the perspective and the experiences of a male relationship transgressor would also be recommended for this topic remains unexplored but is highly relevant in the field of social psychology. Future studies about relational transgressions particularly the individuals that are involved would help fill the gap in literature about this phenomenon.

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