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“I Can Have the Heart to Tolerate Insults Rather Than . . .”

Explorations of Forgivable and Unforgivable Transgressions in Ghanaian Marriages

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ABSTRACT—This qualitative study explores transgressions within the contexts of marriage in Ghana. We conducted interviews with forty married individuals aged twenty-eight to sixty-six years who had been married between one and thirty-five years. Using thematic analysis, we identified seven types of transgression with adultery being the commonest. Further, married individuals identified lying, disrespecting, insulting, and stealing as forgivable transgressions. However, some indicated that adultery and causing physical harm are unforgivable transgressions. Some of the transgressions identified were comparable to those found in previous Western studies, while others were different and culturally nuanced. Findings provide important insights into typical transgressions in Ghanaian marriages and may be important for pre-marital and couples counseling.

KEYWORDS—transgressions, close relationships, marital relationship, marital conflict

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Introduction

THE INTERDEPENDENT AS WELL AS THE SENSITIVE NATURE OF marital relationships make them susceptible to relational transgressions (Feeney, 2009; 2004). Transgressions are violations of some explicit or implicit norms or rules that govern the marital relationship (Feeney, 2009; Metts, 1994; Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005). Prior studies, mainly from Western cultural settings, indicate that transgressions occur frequently in marital relationships and can be very distressing (Feeney & Hill, 2006; Fincham, Jackson, & Beach, 2005). Targets of transgressions may feel devalued, wounded, or vulnerable (Goetz & Maria, 2018; Leary & Springer, 2001). Transgressions may weaken intimacy between marital couples and may be an indication of relational devaluation and in the extreme contribute to dissolving the marriage (Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009; Vangelisti, 2001). Cultural norms and expectations provide an important framework for exploring transgressions in marriage (Bell, Kamble, & Fincham, 2018; Rapske, Boon, Alibhai, & Kheong, 2010; Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001; Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2014). Most Ghanaian settings support collectivist ways of being and social harmony is emphasized in most relationships (Gyekye, 1995). Also in Ghana, there are prescribed roles for men and women in marriage and these differ from those in Western cultures (Darkwah & Ampofo, 2008). Typically, men assume headship roles in the family. They have the main responsibility of providing for the material needs of the family. Women, on the other hand, have the primary role of bearing and raising children. They also fulfill other auxiliary responsibilities such as taking care of the domestic chores (Boni, 2002; Gyekye, 2003). Cultural values of a collective society along with prescribed marital roles may influence marital partner's views of transgressions and whether or not they are forgivable. However, studies on transgressions in marriage within West African contexts are rare (For a review see Sooryamoorthy & Chetty, 2015). A few studies have examined severe transgressions such as mariticides (wife-to-husband-homicide), and spousal violence (Adinkrah, 2007; Adjei, 2015, 2016; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Osei-Tutu & Ampadu, 2017). Both minor and severe transgressions are a threat to marital relationships. When unaddressed, transgressions in close relationships can affect individual well-being and threaten the relationship (Theiss et al., 2009). Knowledge on relational transgressions is useful for

designing clinical and educational interventions. The current study extends prior research by examining transgressions in marital relationships in Ghana using qualitative inquiry to obtain nuanced perspectives from Ghanaians. The overall goal is to understand reactions to common as well as atypical transgressions in marriages and use the information to inform clinical interventions that are culturally tailored to the population.

Types of Transgressions in Close Relationships

Different categories of transgressions have been identified in close relationships. Feeney (2004) identified five types of hurts that may occur in close relationships: active disassociation (denying or retracting feelings of love and commitment); passive disassociation (ignoring or excluding partner from plans and activities); criticism; sexual infidelity; and deception (lying; breaking promises and confidences). This typology is similar to that found in earlier studies (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; Rye, Folck, Heim, Olszewski, & Traina, 2004; Vangelisti & Young, 2000). Rye et al. (2004), for instance, observed nine types of transgressions: broken commitment/unwanted relationship breakup; infidelity; verbal/emotional abuse; wrongdoing related to children; lying; physical/sexual abuse; gossip/wrongful accusation; unfair distribution of assets subsequent to divorce; and excessive use of drugs/alcohol (in the order of frequency).

Forgivable and Unforgivable Transgressions

Forgiveness is often viewed as a bounded reality in marriages. This is because of the interdependent nature of most marital relationships. Some people who experience transgressions in their marriage often see forgiveness as a key strategy for responding to the offense. In a study by Rye et al. (2004), participants reported different forgiveness orientations towards their ex-spouse with the majority (92%) on the forgiveness continuum—thirty-seven percent had already forgiven; 46 per cent were trying to forgive; seven percent were not trying to forgive at the time but planned to do so in the future. A few participants (9%) were ambivalent as they did not know if they would forgive. Only one per cent of participants indicated that they had no intention of forgiving their ex-spouse.

While certain transgressions within marriage are forgivable, marital partners may find it difficult or may be unwilling to forgive other offenses.

es. Literature shows that certain transgressions are considered unforgivable in the context of close relationship (Cohen et al., 2006; Macaskill, 2005; Younger et al., 2004). In a study using a sample of undergraduate students on interpersonal betrayal, Younger et al. (2004) found that sixty percent of their study sample (n=196) reported that certain offenses such as murder, rape, and harming a child are unforgivable. A second part of Younger et al.'s study with a community adult sample found that forty-three percent (of the 86 participants) believed that murder, repeated offenses, child abuse, and hurting family members are unforgivable. Rapske et al. (2010) analyzed responses to open-ended questions in which one hundred eighty-five participants discussed interpersonal offenses they had not forgiven and found that the most common unforgiven offenses include: betrayal; violence/abuse; inappropriate communication; extra-relationship involvement; deception; and harm to other(s).

Reasons for extending forgiveness are varied and include: relational maintenance (Dindia, 1994; Emmers-Sommer, 2003; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Osei-Tutu, Dzokoto, Oti-Boadi, Belgrave, & Appiah-Danquah, 2019); religious reasons (Cohen, Malka, Rozin, & Chermas, 2006; Macaskill, 2005); as well as intrapersonal benefits (Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004). One of the primary reasons people in close relationships grant forgiveness is because they want to maintain relationships that are important to them (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Beyond relational benefits, some extend forgiveness because their religion enjoins them to do so. For example, some Christians believe that forgiveness is unconditional and limitless (Macaskill, 2005; Sandilya & Shahnawaz, 2014). Intra-personal reasons include the motivation to reduce the pain that the transgression may have caused the offended partner and the desire to restore personal happiness (Younger, et al., 2004).

The determination of whether an offense is forgivable may be based on interpersonal norms the couple hold, their religious or moral beliefs, as well as their cultural background (Osei-Tutu et al., 2019; Rapske, Boon, Alibhai, & Kheong, 2010; Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001; Rusbult et al., 2005). Some of the reasons participants cite for not extending forgiveness include religious explanations (Cohen, Malka, Rozin, & Chermas, 2006). Cohen et al. present that certain Jewish theology, for instance, such as the beliefs that certain offenses are too severe to be forgiven influenced Jewish adherents' motivations for unforgiveness. Other reasons for forgiveness are based on personal beliefs as well as a desire for self-protection. In the study by Rapske

et al. (2010), a small number of the study's participants explained that their inability or unwillingness to forgive was based on their view that either the offense or the offender was unforgivable. Further, a minority of the participants indicated that their inability or unwillingness to forgive was to protect themselves from potential future harm. Taken together, religion, personal, and interpersonal reasons may be used to justify forgiveness and unforgiveness when transgressions occur in close relationships.

The Current Study

The current study examines typical transgressions in Ghanaian marriages and whether these transgressions are deemed forgivable or unforgivable. The research questions that guided this study are: (1) what transgressions are perceived to be typical in marriage; (2) to what extent are typical transgressions considered forgivable or unforgivable?

The Ghanaian Context

Ghana is a country in West Africa. Four marriage unions are recognized in Ghana: customary, ordinance, Islamic marriage, and consensual unions. Customary marriage follows local customs and involves the payment of bride price. Ordinance marriage is contracted under Marriage Ordinance and may be conducted in church, court, or any approved location. Islamic marriage is conducted under the Marriage of Mohammedans Ordinance and is guided by Koranic Laws. Consensual unions (common law marriage) involve couples living together by mutual, rather than legal, consent (Awusabo-Asare, 1990; Heaton & Darkwah, 2011). Both customary and Islamic marriages permit polygamy; ordinance marriage permits only monogamous relations. People in consensual unions may either keep their relationship monogamous or permit polygamy.

Although this is changing somewhat, marriage in the Ghanaian context is often seen as an obligation, carrying with it recognition and social status (Gyekye, 2003; Tabi, Doster, & Cheney, 2010). Procreation or child-bearing is often considered as the natural outcome of a marital union. Traditionally, families (of orientation) played a significant role in the selection of partners and conduct of the marriage. Families inquired about the background of the prospective spouse prior to accepting a marriage union (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007). This was done to ensure that the prospective in-law was

worthy of their child and to ensure that a number of qualities are fulfilled for what is considered a successful marriage. Besides the background checks, prospective marriage partners receive counsel from elders and other mature married individuals often alerting them about the potential problems they will encounter in their marriage and how to resolve these issues when they arise (Assimeng, 1999).

Traditionally, conjugal roles in Ghanaian marriages were divided along gender lines. The husband was expected to be the primary breadwinner. The wife supported the husband by taking charge of the household chores such as cleaning and cooking. The wife also played a key role in raising the children in the marriage. However, in most contemporary Ghanaian marriages, there have been shifts in these patterns of relations. The education of women and their subsequent involvement in work outside the home have been cited as key factors contributing to contemporary marriage norms in Ghana (Assimeng, 1999; Gyimah, 2009). Further, changes in the financial statuses of women have contributed to changes in marriages in contemporary Ghana (Arku & Arku, 2009; Fallon, 1999). Whether these changing roles in marriage affect reactions to marital transgressions is unknown.

Method

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in Accra, Ghana's capital, and Aburi, a peri-urban area in the Eastern Region of Ghana. A total of forty interviews were conducted across the two locations. The sample was stratified based on gender so that equal numbers of men and women were interviewed. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. In order to have diversity in our sample, we purposively recruited participants of different ages, gender, and religious backgrounds who could communicate effectively in English (the official language of Ghana).

Participants comprised an equal number of males and females, aged between twenty-eight and sixty-six (Males: $M = 40.70$; $SD = 10.20$; Females: $M = 45.60$; $SD = 11.55$) and had been married between one and thirty-five years (Males: $M = 11.30$; $SD = 10.79$; Females: $M = 17.90$; $SD = 12.43$). Twenty-six (65%) participants had tertiary education (e.g., some college or trade school) and fourteen (35%) had completed secondary education. The sample is considered highly educated when compared with a national sam-

ple as only about two percent of Ghana's population has tertiary education (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The majority (n=31) of the participants described their socio-economic status as middle income; two had high socio-economic status; six said they were low; and one person did not provide any information. The participants also had varied occupational backgrounds including teachers (n=14); traders (n=9); bankers (n=4); secretaries (n=2); and students (n=2). There was one computer engineer, an immigration officer, a medical doctor, a security man, and one person was unemployed. Three participants were retired (nurse, seaman, and a teacher). There was no occupational data for one participant.

Further, the participants were religiously as well as ethnically diverse. Thirty-four participants self-identified as Christians and six as Muslims. The majority (n= 26) were Akan; six were Dagomba (of the Mole Dagbani ethnic group); three were Ewe; three were Ga; and two were Dagaati. According to the 2010 census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), Akans constitute 47.5% of Ghana's population. This is followed by the Mole Dagbani (16.6%), the Ewe (13.9%); Ga-Dangme (7.4%); and the Mande (1.1%).

Procedure

This study was part of a larger research project which explored forgiveness in Ghanaian marriage contexts. Interviews were conducted between November 2016 and March 2017. Ethical approval was given by the Ethics Committee of the Humanities, University of Ghana (ECH 127/15-16).

A female research assistant conducted interviews. The research assistant visited homes, retail shops, and offices to identify and recruit prospective participants. Participants were approached, asked if they were married, and if so if they would be willing to participate in an interview about forgiveness in marriage. The research assistant obtained permission to record the interviews digitally. Some of the interviews were conducted following initial contact while other interviews were scheduled for another time convenient to the participant. All interviews were conducted in a quiet and private location of the participants' preference. Interviews were conducted in English (the official language of Ghana). Recruitment of males and females were monitored to ensure that the sample had approximate numbers of each. Interviews lasted between twenty-five and fifty minutes.

Interview questions from the parent research protocol were framed around conceptions of forgiveness in marriage; forgivable and unforgiv-

able offenses in marriage; and taboos in marriage. Questions relevant to this study included (1) What offenses within marriage would you consider to be forgivable? and (2) What offenses in marriage do people consider as unforgivable? For each question, the interviewer used probes when necessary to obtain detailed response. In cases where participants stated that they would forgive all offenses, they were asked to give some examples.

Data Analysis and Validation

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a trained research assistant. The first author supervised the transcription to ensure their accuracy. For data analysis, we used participants' responses to the two main research questions related to this study: what offenses within marriage would you consider to be forgivable; what offenses are unforgivable? Next, two coders, one of which was the first author analyzed the data following Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. First, we went through the participants' responses to familiarize ourselves with the data. Second, for each of the research question we listed recurring offenses (e.g., beating, insult). We use the term "common" when an idea was mentioned by three or more participants. Third, we searched for emerging themes in the identified lists. For example, we used the theme *Neglect of duty* for transgressions that were related to a spouse's culturally prescribed role in the marriage union either as a wife or husband. Fourth, we reviewed the themes to make sure they fully represented the information in the transcribed data. For validation, the second author reviewed the transcripts as well as the generated codes to make sure they represented the information in the data.

Findings

Transgressions

We identified seven categories of transgressions in marital relationships, in their order of occurrence: (i) *Unfaithfulness*; (ii) *Verbal insult*; (iii) *Lying*; (iv) *Neglect of Duty*; (v) *Physical violence*; (iv) *Lateness*; and (vii) *Disrespect*. In the following paragraphs we define each of the seven categories, provide illustrative examples, and participants' decisions on whether they will forgive the transgressions or not. We observed four of the typologies of rela-

Table 1. Transgressions Using Feeney's Typology

Typology	Themes in Current Study	Example
Active disassociation	Refusal to eat wife's food	<i>[husband] not eating my food</i>
Passive disassociation	Using work to excuse oneself from engaging with partner	<i>[spouse] not coming home early from work when you[spouse] close early.</i>
Criticism	Verbal insult	<i>pouring insults on her[wife]</i>
Sexual infidelity	Cheating, unfaithfulness, adultery, extra-marital sexual involvement	<i>cheating on me with another woman</i>
Deception	Lying	<i>if you lie to me too I will forgive you</i>

tional transgressions (unfaithfulness, insult, lying, and lateness) identified by Feeney (2004) and an additional three unique to this sample. See Table 1.

Unfaithfulness. Unfaithfulness is a broad term that could include having an emotional or sexual relationship with someone other than one's spouse or partner (Allan & Harrison; Utley, 2011). In this study, unfaithfulness mainly referred to having extramarital intercourse and it was the most common transgression that participants (n=22) discussed. This finding is consistent with the view that fidelity is the bedrock of marriage. Some participants used the word 'unfaithfulness' others used "adultery," "fornication" and "cheating" (For a review on the changing nature of terms used for extra-marital relations see Allan & Harrison, 2006). Those who used the word unfaithfulness provided further information which showed that they were talking about sexual unfaithfulness. For example, one participant stated, *"unfaithfulness like catching my wife sleeping with another man."* Both adultery and fornication clearly suggest that an extramarital sexual relationship has occurred. "Cheating" was used also to indicate extramarital sex. A participant said, *"You see I have ever caught him cheating against me, he even has a child as a result of that."* Some participants stated that they will forgive unfaithfulness, others stated that it is a difficult transgression to forgive; and yet others said that they will not forgive such a transgression:

Being unfaithful that one too I can forgive (60-year-old woman; married for 35 years)

If your wife is cheating on you that one is difficult to forgive so you need to be talked to before you can forgive. (35-year-old man; married for 7 years)

If you cheat on me with another woman it will be difficult to forgive and maybe I will not even forgive. (50-year-old woman, married for 25 years)

I won't forgive her if she sleeps with another man. (33-year-old man, married for 2 years)

Verbal insult. The second most frequent transgression in this study was verbal insult. Verbal insults are hurtful or negative words and are often used as a tactic in conflict (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2003). In marriage, personal insult can have negative consequences (Gottman, 1994). In this study, participants (n=17) stated that they feel offended when their partner verbally “insults” them or their family. Some participants simply stated that “insult” was an offense in marriage and others stated that one of the transgressions in marriage is when a spouse “say[s] hurtful words” or “passes a comment that is supposed to get you angry.” Participants mainly mentioned verbal insult in the context of transgressions that are forgivable in a marriage. One participant indicated that verbal insult is a “petty” offense that can be forgiven. For some participants, the context (public vs. private) in which the insult occurs is important. Most Ghanaian contexts afford an embedded and close-knit sense of living. People are respected for their social identity and social status in their communities (Gyekye, 1995). It is therefore crucial that this social status be protected (at least in the public eye). Hence, the second and third quotes below, though not necessarily condoning insults, suggest that if an insult occurred it should be in private:

Insults and those petty petty misunderstanding that one you can forgive those ones (35-year-old man, married for 7years)

I don't like it when my husband insults me, insults me outside for everyone to see (40-year-old woman, married for 10 years)

... it would be out of place if in the mist of other people or your friends and your partner does something and then you either start ... pouring insults on her (38-year-old man, married for 7years)

Lying. Lying is an intentional false statement or misrepresentation of information (Roggensack & Sillars, 2014). People have multiple reasons for

using lies in their personal relationship such as a form of social and information control (Global Deception Research Team, 2006). Persons may lie because of a need for personal privacy, as well as for benevolent concerns for the partner (Roggensack & Sillars, 2014; Van Swol, Malhotra, & Braun, 2012). In this study, some participants (n=15) stated that lying is a transgression in marriage:

Offenses such as telling lies . . . I will forgive. (50-year-old woman; married for 25 years)

If you do what will not worry me a lot . . . like telling lies I can forgive you. (40-year-old man, married for 21 years)

Interviewer: can you list some of the offenses which you say you will forgive?

Respondent: oh yes, I will forgive . . . lies. (33-year-old man, married for 2 years)

Neglect of duty. The category includes offenses linked to culturally prescribed roles in the marriage. Mainly, men (n=11) related transgressions such as failure at domestic chores (*keeping home untidy, not cooking*); and lack of submission (wife “*disobeying my orders*”) as some of the transgression in a marriage. On the other hand, two women talked about specific gendered offenses such as husband refusing to eat wife’s food, failing to provide financially for the house and for children’s upkeep. The offenses in this category were discussed in the context of forgivable offenses in marriage:

. . . say she doesn’t cook, she doesn’t take care of the home by keeping it neat and clean, . . . offences like these I will forgive (42-old-man; married for 12years)

Maybe you expect your wife to either fetch water for you to bath or drink and then maybe she fails to do that, you can pardon her and maybe advise her. (38-year-old man; married for 7 years)

. . . not paying our children’s school fees, eating outside when I have cooked for him (42-year-old woman; married for 10 years)

Physical violence. Physical violence is a form of abuse. In this study, participants discussed different forms of physical (spousal) violence including *slapping, hitting, beating*, and unspecified violence. We found that majority

of the participants (n=9) who talked about physical violence in marriage were women. Only one man talked about spousal violence. Even so, he stated that a wife is not supposed to beat the husband. The majority of the women who talked about physical violence said the offense is forgivable. A few participants stated that physical violence which results in permanent harm is not forgivable:

I forgive everything, like . . . beating me (40-year-old wife of 14 years)

. . . if you beat me or you hit me with something that will result in injury or a scar . . . beating me with your belt, hitting me with a hot iron or sharp object, pouring acid or hot water on me . . . that one I won't forgive you (65-year-old wife of 35 years)

Culturally if you try to muscle or try to fight your husband physically it's enough grounds [for divorce]. (33-year-old man; married for 2 years)

Lateness. This category describes instances where a spouse does not come home early from work or simply *staying out late*. The participants (n=6) who talked about lateness stated that it is a forgivable offense in marriage. Four of the people who talked about lateness were women:

I will forgive . . . keeping late nights (33-year-old man; married for 2 years)

I forgive everything, like [spouse] not coming home early from work when you close early. (40-year-old woman; married for 14 years)

Interviewer: can you list some of these offences you would forgive?

Respondent: everything you can think of . . . staying out late (45-year-old man, married for 11 years)

Disrespect. Respect is a foundation for a healthy relationship. There are different types of respect. Respect for a person encompasses respecting a person's characteristics, status, as well as respecting differences between people (DeLellis, 2000; Eckstein, Eckstein & Eckstein, 2014). Van der Geest (1997) observed that respect delineates social categories in Ghana. In the context of marriage, the social categorization between men and women dictates that women give respect and men receive it. In this study, a few participants (n=4) mainly referred to respecting male authority in the marriage. A male participant stated,

... being the head of the house, okay ... if I make some rules or set some standards at home I feel my wife being next in command should comply to that ...

References to disrespect were gendered such that both males and females stated that a man should not be disrespected. A female and one male participant made reference to spouses disrespecting each other. Disrespect of a spouse as well as in-laws was considered forgivable. In the quote below, which is also used as part of the title of this study, a male participant indicates his utmost dislike for being shown disrespect. He preferred to deal with an insult from the spouse than deal with disrespect. The second quote also highlights disrespect toward parents-in-law:

So disrespect is another aspect that as a man I wouldn't tolerate in marriage. We should all respect each other no matter how we are, that is why we are husband and wife ... I can have the heart to tolerate insults rather than being disrespect[ted]. (42-year-old man; married for 7 years)

... [Spouse] disrespecting yourself and your parents[-in-law] (33-year-old man; married for 2 years)

Discussion

This qualitative study investigated transgressions within the contexts of marriage in a Ghanaian sample and contributes to the limited research conducted on this topic in Ghana. We conducted interviews with forty married individuals aged twenty-eight to sixty-six years. Using thematic analysis, we observed seven types of transgression: unfaithfulness; verbal insult; lying; neglect of duty; physical violence; lateness; and disrespect. While some of the themes were consistent with those found in other typologies of relational transgression, themes unique to this Ghanaian sample emerged and suggest that our findings provide nuanced perspectives and differ from studies that have used a Western sample. For example, neglect of duty and disrespect were themes in the current study that have not been explicitly identified in other typologies (Feeney, 2004; Leary et. al., 1998; Rye et al., 2004; Vangelisti & Young, 2000).

Unfaithfulness was the most often cited transgression and this finding is

consistent with that of other studies that have identified unfaithfulness as a serious transgression (DeMaris, 2013). In this study unfaithfulness can be forgiven by some but not all spouses. Unfaithfulness overlaps with two of the other themes (e.g., deception, disrespect) as being unfaithful generally requires deception and the offended person may feel disrespected.

The insult transgression is not unique to this sample as several studies have identified insult as a transgression (Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper, & Stewart-Williams, 2006; Starratt, Goetz, Shackelford, McKibbin & Stewart-Williams, 2008; McKibbin, Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper, Starratt, & Stewart-Williams, 2007). However, the Ghanaian cultural norm regarding maintaining social harmony and keeping face publically may make this transgression qualitatively different in Ghana than in Western cultures. Based on interview responses, the primary concern does not appear to be with the content of the insult, but with the public performance thereof. In other words, the forgiveability of the offense is primarily linked to the social circumstances of its delivery, and not the specifics of the insult itself. Because Ghana is a communal society, how an individual is perceived and evaluated is a continual concern. Being insulted by another in public constitutes an attack and tarnish on a carefully managed social image in front of an audience, sometimes without an opportunity to defend oneself. The notion of a damaged image becomes a source of dismay (Agyekum, 2010; Sakyi-Baidoo, 2008). Public insult was the second most frequently mentioned transgression. In a sense this is a social hurt, one in which an individual's social evaluation is threatened, and not simply a matter of getting one's private feelings hurt.

According to Roggensack and Sillars (2014), even though lies are a common phenomenon in close relationships, romantic couples tend to idealize honesty. It is this idealization which makes lies unacceptable to some married individuals. In the current study, it appears that some participants minimized the effect of a spouse telling lies so far as it did not cause worry to non-offending partner. More so, all the participants who mentioned lying as an offense in marriage viewed it a forgivable transgression. This transgression is consistent with those found in most Western typologies and underscore that lying might be a universal transgression and also one that is likely to be forgiven.

The theme of "neglect of duty" has not been identified in other studies of transgressions and seems unique to this population. This finding can better be appreciated when examined from the cultural context of living in Ghana.

In most Ghanaian settings, men and women occupy different social roles (Ampofo, 2001; Boni, 2002). Men assume the role of head of the household whereas women assume subordinate (submissive) roles. These social roles engender different cultural expectations for men and women in marriage. Traditionally, a wife is primarily responsible for the household chores, such as cooking, washing and cleaning, and taking care of children (Ampofo, 2001; Gyekye, 2003; Offei, 2007; Dzokoto, Schug, Adonu, & Nguyen, 2018). Although there are indications that these social and power dynamics may be changing (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007; Gyimah, 2009; Heaton & Darkwah, 2011), these gendered cultural expectations are still relevant to some extent in most contemporary Ghanaian marriages.

One way in which the neglect of duty transgression was expressed by participants was in cooking and eating (or not eating) food cooked. Cooking plays an important role in the everyday life of families in Ghana (Gookee & Logan, 2014). Daily practices around cooking and eating of food often exemplify some of the social distinctions between women and men (Logan & Cruz, 2014). Women typically take on a greater responsibility for cooking. For married women, cooking and feeding the husband is a major part of her wifely responsibility (Clark, 1989; Williams-Forson, 2010). Clark (1989) observed that among some ethnic groups in Ghana, cooking is linked to the marital life. Poor practices associated with cooking—such as not cooking at all or not cooking well, meal timing, or delegating to substitute cooks (like domestic assistants)—may be a precursor for marital conflicts. On the other hand, refusing to eat a wife's food is a symbolic gesture of displeasure and this displeasure may go beyond issues related to food. A husband may refuse to eat the food prepared by the wife when there are problems with other aspects of their marriage. The food refusal is a signal to the wife that he is not pleased with something in the marriage. Similarly, a wife may be seen to have abdicated her wifely role if she were to stop cooking or delegate to others without the express permission of the husband. The unique expression and reaction to this marital transgression should be considered within the cultural context of Ghana in future educational programs and research.

The findings on physical violence offer interesting information on the nature of spousal violence in Ghana. Prior studies show that cultural expectations in marriage shape discourses on spousal abuse in Ghana (Adjei, 2015; 2016). A recent discursive study in a sample of Ghanaians suggests that some men often rely on implicit moral rights to physically punish their

wives for disobedience and other infractions (Adjei, 2015). Adjei (2016) posits that spousal violence originates from dominant cultural notions of masculinity in Ghana. Some men hold the perceptions that being active, daring, tough, and dominant are symbols of manliness and it is the internalization of these notions of masculinity that contributes to spousal violence. In a recent study with a large (N=3052) sample of men in Ghana, Osei-Tutu and Ampadu (2017) found that many Ghanaian men had a favorable attitude towards wife beating. Men indicated that wife beating was justified if the wife gossips, steals, has another partner, refuses to give husband food, insults the husband, burns the food she prepares, refuses to have sex with the husband, argues with the husband, neglects the children, or goes out without telling the husband. Long after the passage of the domestic violence bill into law, spousal beating continues to be a serious problem in Ghana (for a review on the process leading to the passage of the domestic violence bill into law, see Ampofo, 2008). The link between traditional notions of masculinity and physical violence in intimate relationships is not unique to our Ghanaian sample. Intimate physical violence is a serious transgression in marriage and is often fueled by erroneous understanding of traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity (Newsome, Davis, & Dinac, 2015). Wherever they are found, these ideas about masculinity have been shown to contribute to negative relationships (Newsome, Davis, & Dinac, 2015).

Staying out late is often seen as a signal that the offending spouse is not as interested in the spouse or the family as other types of engagements. Using Feeney's categorization, staying out late can be seen as a passive dissociation from the spouse or the family. It can be an indication that the offending spouse has found a worthwhile self-pursuit outside the home. It can also be an indication of a spouse over working. This transgression was expressed by our Ghanaian participants similar to those in Western and other studies.

Disrespect emerged as a transgression (albeit low in numbers) in the current study and has not been seen as a component of transgression in Western samples. Notably the findings were in reference to men's demand for respect. This may be explained by the cultural context in Ghana in which social roles for men and women are prescribed such that men are seen as more powerful, thus demanding more respect. Disrespect for men may also be viewed as a transgression in Ghana given the stronger need to show family solidarity than may be the case in Western cultures.

In overview, participants in our study identified both similar and dissim-

ilar marital transgressions and whether these were forgivable or not. Differences have implications for considering Ghanaian cultural norms for future research and programs targeted at addressing marital transgressions.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are some limitations that should be noted. The sample was highly educated compared to the national population. A less educated sample may have different views of transgressions and what is and is not forgivable. While efforts were made to recruit a diverse sample in terms of religion, ethnicity, and other demographic variables, the geographical locations in which the study took place may have lent itself to having a sample that was more highly educated and of higher socio-educational status. Participants were recruited in an urban and a peri-urban area where opportunities for higher education and employment are more plentiful. Participants from more rural settings might have more traditional cultural values around marriage and the role of women and men in marriages and these values could affect differences in perceptions of transgressions. Future qualitative studies should include individuals from rural areas as well as individuals whose education and socio-economic status mirrors the population to obtain a more holistic perspective on transgressions.

Another potential limitation is that individuals were recruited rather than couples. Interviewing couples may have provided additional insight from the perspective of individuals who were married to each other. Similarly, future studies might want to include a large enough sample so that data can be coded and analysis conducted separately for men and women. While there were some gendered differences that emerged with respect to some of the transgressions identified, conducting analysis separately would have enabled us to determine convergence or divergence in identified transgressions and forgiveness.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, several details were not explored. For instance, we did not explore the nature of each of the identified category of transgression. For example, what is the content of the insults? Future studies could focus on each of the identified transgression. Feeney (2004) observed that transgressions in marriage are complex. Often, one hurtful episode may include more than one hurtful behavior of transgression. For example, the presence of infidelity may be accompanied by decep-

tion and verbal abuse. Future studies could investigate some of these complexities and multiple transgressions. We also need to know how common these transgressions are in marriage.

In the current study, we asked about what people consider as offenses in marriage. Their responses do not mean that they have actually experienced these transgressions themselves (although the comments from several indicated that they had experienced these transgressions personally). We also did not assess how frequent these transgressions are occurring in Ghanaian marriages; as well as their immediate impacts and long term effects. All these are important issues that future studies can investigate.

In spite of these limitations, the findings have important clinical implications. The information is useful for clinicians as well as lay counselors who work with couples where one or both partners have Ghanaian origin. Pre-marriage counseling can explore some of the issues we have identified as typical transgressions and allow the partners to discuss how they want to avoid and minimize these offenses in their relationships. Clinicians can help couples learn how to develop and practice adaptive problem solving strategies rather than using negative, passive, withdrawal behaviors (e.g. staying out late; refusing to eat wife's food) and active and deliberate hurtful acts (e.g. insults or physical violence) which can be harmful to the relationship. Clinicians may also need to help marital partners explore and reframe ideas about masculinity and gender roles in relationships given the contemporary context of Ghana (e.g., more women working). Psychoeducation that discusses, re-examines, and reframes views about physical violence and expectations in marriage will also be useful.

Conclusions

Our study makes an important contribution to understanding typical transgressions within Ghanaian marriages. Limited research has been conducted on this topic and there are several implications for education and counseling. Similar to prior studies, we observed some of the same types of transgressions with the most common being infidelity. The majority of the married individuals in this study indicated that they can forgive lying, verbal assault, unfaithfulness, neglect of duty, physical violence, lateness, and disrespect. However, some were unwilling to forgive unfaithfulness, and physical harm. The findings also indicate that responses to the identified transgressions were not simply forgive or not forgive, but complex. Some

offenses, such as physical harm, were responded to depending on the harm it causes. Further, responses to infidelity fell on a forgiveness continuum including, forgivable, difficult to forgive, and unforgivable.

We observed gender differences in the identified transgressions. Transgressions such as physical violence and neglect of duty were both gendered. Understanding what might be a transgression unique to women has implications for education and counseling.

Two of the transgressions seemed to be unique to Ghanaian culture. Neglect of duty and disrespect emerged as two themes that had not been observed explicitly in prior studies. A collective society with an emphasis on social harmony may make these transgressions more salient in Ghana than in Western cultures. Given this, it might be especially helpful to discuss these culturally nuanced transgressions in pre-marital and marital counseling. For example, the meaning of cooking and the eating of food could be explored so that each partner understands how these might affect one's feelings in the marriage.

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