

Chapter 1

Introduction

Extramarital affairs are ‘something almost no one is neutral about, most are conflictual about, and everyone has an opinion about’ (Schnarch, 1991, p.148). With the increase in frequency of marital breakdowns, there has been regular discussion in the media on the role of infidelity in increasing divorce rates along with the possible reasons for infidelity. Although much has been written about infidelity (Brown, 2001; Dattlio, 2000; Glass, 2003; Glass & Wright, 1997; Lusterman, 1998; Pittman, 1989; Spring, 1996), there has been a lack of research on the Australian experience of infidelity. Most research has been carried out overseas, such as in the U.S.A., Britain and Europe. This research explores the experiences of Australians affected by infidelity. The stories of those couples who lived through infidelity and the strategies they employed to rebuild their relationships after infidelity are pursued.

This study is based on interviews with heterosexual informants who were in a married/de facto relationship and had stayed together for two years or more following the discovery of the affair. In this study, the term used for the person who engaged in the affair is the ‘non-exclusive partner’ and the primary partner is described as the ‘exclusive partner’. A wide variety of terms, for example, nonmonogamy and adultery, have been used in the research literature to refer to

infidelity. For this research the terms infidelity and extramarital affairs are used to refer to sex with someone other than one's partner without their permission (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004; Janowiak, Nell & Buckmaster, 2002; Mauldin & Hildreth, 1997; Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002).

1.1 Background and Significance

Although there is much written material available on infidelity the statistics on infidelity vary. Conservative estimates indicate that between 20-40 percent of all Americans will have sex with someone other than their spouse while married (Greeley, 1994; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) revealed that while they do register the percentage of marriages and divorces, they do not collect statistics on infidelity as divorce is granted on a no-blame basis. As a result, it is not clear what percentage of Australians have experienced extramarital sex.

Other social surveys (Hite, 1991; Gass & Nicols, 1988; Lawson, 1990; Weideman, 1997) indicate that 60 to 70 percent of married men and 50 to 60 percent of married women have an affair at some time during their marriage. Furthermore, 40 percent of divorced women and 44 percent of divorced men report more than one extramarital contact during the course of their marriage (Janus & Janus, 1993). Consequently, extramarital affairs constitute a significant problem for many couples (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004). The emotional and financial cost to those concerned is enormous, as ultimately the children and the couple may experience relocation and upheaval that affects

them emotionally, socially and financially (Glass & Wright, 1997). Therefore the relevance of this research lies in its addition to the available information on understanding the factors that may be related to and influence rebuilding relationships after infidelity.

This study covers many aspects of infidelity. It explores the reasons that lead to infidelity and what impact this has on the couple's relationship when discovered. By exploring the reasons for an affair and how couples process the experience, it is anticipated that some understanding will be gained for dealing with infidelity. Unlike other studies, this study will interview Australians who have actually experienced infidelity as this will provide an insight into their lived experience.

1.2 Organisation of Thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the study and the thesis. Chapter two reviews the literature concerned with infidelity. A brief history of infidelity is outlined as well as the contemporary views on infidelity. The contribution of factors such as age, gender, education, employment, opportunity and religiosity is also reviewed. Despite the abundance of clinical literature (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Brown, 1991; Gordon & Baucom, 1999; Humphrey, 1987; Kell, 1992; Lusterman, 1995; Pittman, 1989; Silverstein, 1998; Worthington & Diblasio, 1990) addressing the treatment of relationships after an affair, very few of these studies have been grounded in empirical research on factors that help rebuild relationships.

Chapter three describes the methodology used in the research. The purpose of the study is covered and the rationale for using a qualitative approach that incorporates a framework of narrative inquiry is provided. The recruitment of participants is outlined as well as how the interviews are conducted. Terminology used in the study is described. Strategies to maintain confidentiality and anonymity are explained. Also the strengths and limitations of this study are outlined.

In Chapter four the individual narratives of the informants are outlined. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality. In telling their stories, the informants describe their family portrait, whereby introducing their background and past history as the landscape of their lives. The narratives include informants sharing their experiences and making meaning of infidelity and the process of rebuilding their relationship.

In Chapter five the key themes emerging from the individual narratives are presented. Motivational factors such as the investment of time, children and property, and a desire to solve problems are evident in rebuilding the relationship after infidelity. Meaning making is instrumental to coming to terms with what happened. Forgiveness is also shown to be important in reconciliation. The role of counselling and its effect on individuals and their relationships is described. How relationships were modified during the rebuilding stage with a change in the power dynamic is also described.

Chapter six, the final chapter of the thesis, examines the findings from this study and compares them with information available from the extant literature. It discusses the significance of this Australian research that has explored the factors that helped to rebuild relationships after infidelity. The strengths and limitations are discussed as well as the implications for professional practice. Also some suggestions are outlined for further research into this topic.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter reviews existing research literature on infidelity. First an historical overview of infidelity as well as more contemporary views on infidelity are outlined. Then research on the reasons for infidelity and who is most likely to have an affair is reviewed. The impact of infidelity on relationships is also explored. In the final section, research specifically addressing the issues involved in the recovery of relationships after infidelity and the role of counsellors is presented.

The specific behaviours associated with infidelity are under-researched and those studies that have attempted to determine what actually occurs in infidelity in relationships have focussed primarily on sexual intercourse (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). In the literature infidelity is defined as sexual intercourse with someone else without a partner's permission (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004; Janowiak, Nell & Buckmaster, 2002; Mauldin & Hildreth, 1997; Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002).

According to Glass and Wright (1985), there are emotional-only, sexual-only and sexual and emotional combined types of infidelity on a continuum of sexual and emotional involvement. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Within each

general category there are different types. Sexual infidelity could consist of different types of sexual activities, or visits to sex workers or same-sex encounters (Blow & Hartnett, 2005).

A search of the literature on the subject of infidelity revealed that the terminology was varied. For example, infidelity was sometimes described as affairs, extramarital affairs, adultery, extradyadic sexual activities, liaison, cheating, betrayal, extramarital involvement and unfaithfulness. The terms used in describing those involved in infidelity included the 'hurt' or 'injured' partner and 'participating' or 'involved' partner. Pittman (1987) used the term 'infidel' for the partner having an affair and 'cuckold' to describe the partner not having an affair. Some of these terms reflect a value judgement; for example 'adultery' conjures up images of scarlet letters, and 'infidelity' can be defined as falseness or disloyalty. Although the term 'affair' is less loaded, the prime rationale for using the term 'infidelity' is that it is less obscure in meaning. While informants used the word 'affair' in their interviews, both 'affair' and 'infidelity' are used interchangeably in this thesis to refer to sex with someone other than one's partner without their permission (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004; Janowiak, Nell & Buckmaster, 2002; Mauldin & Hildreth, 1997; Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002). As sexual exclusiveness is an assumption for most couples in a relationship (Atkins, Baucom, Eldridge, & Christensen, 2005), the terms exclusive and non-exclusive partners have been used in this research.

2.2 Literature Search

The search for literature on infidelity was conducted through inter-library loans and search engines such as 'Expanded Academic Index' and 'Proquest'. Depending on the terminology used such as infidelity, betrayal, adultery or extramarital affairs, different journal articles were located. Some papers were accessed either through full-text databases and/or inter-library loans. Other papers were found by reading through the references and retrieving and reading relevant papers. Most of the literature reviewed in this chapter came from published journal articles and books from the United States of America. Some studies from Britain and Europe were also used. However, there was paucity of information from an Australian perspective as there is limited published research in this area.

The number of journal articles read were in excess of one hundred and eighty and the number of books referred to were in excess of fifty. The research findings included in this review were restricted to research on actual experiences of infidelity. Some of the research articles were considered unsuitable as they were investigations conducted using hypothetical situations of infidelity that university students might encounter in the future. The information was assembled into different categories such as historical and contemporary views on infidelity, reasons for infidelity, discovery and impact of infidelity, attitudes to infidelity, forgiveness, motivation and counselling. The last cut-off for search for literature was October 2006. Any research published since November 2006 is not part of the literature review presented in this chapter.

2.3 A brief history of infidelity

According to Jankowiak, Nell, & Buckmaster (2002), anthropologists have not systematically examined infidelity. Instead anthropologists have been more interested in prostitution than the mitigating factors of infidelity or whether a sanction was enforced by members of society. In 1951, Ford and Beach pioneered a cross-cultural study of human sexuality. They found that 54 out of 139 societies approved of some form of infidelity. Although not explored at any depth, the study determined that cultures overwhelmingly prefer to 'circumscribe (extramarital affairs) in one way or another'(Ford & Beach, 1951, p.114).

Historically, infidelity was strongly condemned in many societies and was punishable by death in some cultures. Religious teachings almost universally condemn infidelity (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Old Testament teaching as espoused in the 'Ten Commandments' was very specific regarding infidelity, 'you must not commit adultery' (sexual unfaithfulness to one's spouse) and if adultery was committed then the adulterers 'must be put to death' (Leviticus 20:10). New Testament teaching not only considered that 'adultery' was a sin, but it also added that 'adultery' is a sin that can be committed even with thoughts (Matthew 5: 28). Further, unconfessed 'adultery' leads to exclusion from the kingdom of God; yet God will pardon that sin as well as any others that are confessed (John 8: 4). According to Stephanson (2004, p.133), the older Christian perceptions of 'adultery as sinful requiring public policing' gradually changed to a secularised 'violation of codes of civilised social interaction rather than its offence to God or religion'. These views have influenced western thought in that the laws of the western world are based on the Judaeo-Christian principles. However, the

Christian teachings on infidelity have been softened with the secularisation of many Christian governments and the concomitant move away from regulating sexual behaviour. However, most cultures, races and religions still disapprove of infidelity, finding it troubling, and tactics such as self-help, shame and gossip are employed to humiliate and punish the partner who has had the affair (Janokowiak, et al., 2002).

Nevertheless, infidelity throughout history has been marked by differing reactions depending on rank and gender. Those who had power or rank were more able to have affairs and avoid punishment. Smuts (1992) argues that men have developed ways to control women such as arranged marriages, seclusion of women, chaperonage and obsession with virginity. Centuries of written history document the ways in which women and men have been treated differently in sexual matters, where women have been pressured to remain virgins until marriage and to abstain from sexual activities after divorce or the deaths of their spouses. This inequality is referred to as the sexual double standard (Haavio-Mannila & Konyula, 2003). In literature infidelity has been portrayed where 'women have been viewed in a more negative light and are punished more harshly' (Scheinkman 2005, p.234). Tolstoy's *Ana Karenina*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Hawthorne's *Hester Prynne* are all symbols of the punishment and humiliation that followed a woman's infidelity. The Koran and the Bible also reflect the negative approach to infidelity. Kipnis (2003) and Mithcell (2002) analysed the 'historical context of marriage in terms of patriarchy and the power inequality that has existed across the world and throughout the centuries' (Scheinkman, 2005, p.233)

The dictionary defines 'patriarchy as a social system in which men dominate and are regarded as the authority within the family and society. The Collins Dictionary (1975).defines patriarchy as men being the rulers over women whereby men are the beneficiaries of a set of social practices that validate men's perception of women as their sexual property. Usually men had the power and therefore had more opportunity for infidelity. Patriarchy has been linked to men believing they have a right to infidelity (Janowiak, et al., 2002) or polygamy, in which a rich man had more than one wife (Fan & Liu, 2004). In a society where polygamy is legal, a wife is generally more tolerant of her husband being involved in extramarital affairs (Fan & Liu, 2004). The patriarchal explanation is evidenced in the honour/shame social convention where a man's reputation (honour) is determined to a large extent by the behaviour of his daughters, sisters and spouse (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). A woman's uncontrolled sexuality brings shame on her husband (Janowiak, et al., 2002). This patriarchal explanation provides evidence of a powerful social force and 'often with the willing consent of the dominated' (Bourdieu, 2001, p.66).

Anthropologist, Suzanne Frayser (1985) studied sexuality in 62 cultures, present and past, and found that in 26 of 58 societies, the husband was allowed to have extramarital sex but not the wife. In cultures that permitted infidelity, none allowed it for women. Some cultures define 'adultery' differently for men and women. For example, in Jewish law a married woman is guilty of 'adultery' if she has sexual intercourse with any man other than her husband, while a married man is guilty only if he has sex with another man's wife. What he is guilty of is not disloyalty to his own wife, but of committing a property crime against another

man (Frayser, 1985). In Brazil until the late 1970s, men who were betrayed by their wives could kill their partners without legal consequences as their 'crimes of passion' were justified (Frayser, 1985).

Findings across many societies suggest that men use physical aggression more than women to punish a partner's infidelity (Janowiak, et al., 2002; Macoby & Jacklin, 1998). In some Middle Eastern and South Asian societies, male family members resort to honour killings to punish female family members for infidelity (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996; Janowiak et al., 2002). However, in some Arab cultures, men who wish to preserve their marriages prefer to ignore the evidence of a spouse's infidelity. As long as a wife's infidelity remains a secret, a husband can maintain the illusion of marital harmony (Wilkin, 1991). However, in other Arab cultures infidelity is dealt with harshly and may result in killing or harming both parties (Janowiak, et al., 2002).

Historically, in most cultures, there has been a clear separation between the domestic and erotic (Mitchell, 2002). People married, often by arrangement, with the goal of procreating and maintaining a family life. This marital status gave them legal marital 'rights'. Their erotic life was either repressed or sought elsewhere (Mitchell, 2002). Reibstein and Richards (1993) explored the inherent conflict of monogamy with infidelity, where sexual activity tends to decline over long-term relationships and sex is often more exciting and alluring with new partners. They argue that the very ideals of marriage may encourage infidelity whereas when couples embrace the model of an 'open marriage' where sex is not assumed to be exclusive and there is an expectation that partners will fulfil some

needs but not others. Where autonomy is highly valued and marriage and infidelity are seen as separate domains, then infidelity can be perceived as an enhancement to the primary relationship.

In summary, infidelity has historically been condemned in many societies. However, there have been differences in dealing with infidelity depending on rank and gender. Usually men have imposed sanctions on women where women have been pressured to remain virgins till marriage or to be celebrate after divorce or with widowhood. Sometimes instead of being exclusive to each other, couples choose to be non-exclusive and then infidelity can serve to enhance their relationship.

2.4 A contemporary view of infidelity

In contrast to the patriarchal view, the evolutionary model presents a biopsychological explanation for the male sense of ownership and male sexual jealousy (Betzig, 1989). It suggests that men and women have different reproductive interests, and thus different motives for entering into infidelity, as well as different responses to infidelity. In this analysis of 'mate-guarding' men and women are equally vigilant in monitoring their partner's extramarital inclinations and actions (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Choe, Lim, Hasegawa & Bennett, 1999; Hrdy, 1999). An extension of the 'mate-guarding' explanation is the 'pair-bond' hypothesis, which emphasises the centrality of the sexual union based on an exchange of the sexual division of labour that promotes 'responsibility, intimacy and a sense of mutual belonging' (Janowiak, 2002, p.87).

Even in contemporary societies, there is the view that 'every marriage or love relationship is organised around a presumption of sexual propriety' (Janowiak, et al., 2002, p.99). In effect, sexual ownership is a presumed right of both sexes and not a male monopoly. A cross-cultural survey of human sexuality found that infidelity ranked just below incest 'as the most strictly prohibited type of sexual relationships' (Frayser, 1985. p.20). Another study found that that no society, not even a permissive society condoned infidelity (Harrell, 1997, p.475),

This contradicts an earlier study by Ford and Beach (1951) that found that about one third of societies approved of some form of infidelity. The discrepancy between these two studies could be that Ford and Beach (1951) divided societies into 'restrictive' or 'permissive' Out of a sample of 185 societies for which evidence was available, the authors found that 156 allowed polygamy in favour of men. Therefore polygamy was not considered a violation and where infidelity occurred prohibitions were stronger against women. An understanding of monogamy as the norm continues to exist despite the evidence of statistics to the contrary. The puritan tradition is still promoted where 'monogamy is an ideal and infidelity is considered morally corrupt for both men and women' (Scheinkman, 2005, p.235). Kell (1992, pp.158) stated that monogamy 'is supported by society as a whole, making it more likely that extramarital affairs will continue to happen in secret'. Exclusive relationships constitute a societal norm in many countries, including Australia (de Vaus, 1997), the U.S. (Treas & Giesen, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1997), Spain (de Roda, Martinez-Inigo, de Paul & Yela, 1999) and Britain (Wellings, Field, Johnson & Wadsworth, 1994).

Furthermore, the exclusivity norm has been found to predominate in married, cohabiting and dating couples (McAlister, Pachana & Jackson, 2005; Treas & Giesen, 2000).

Increasing affluence, along with secularisation and urbanisation in industrialised Western countries in the 1960s, gave rise to a sexual revolution (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 2003). This revolution drew attention to the sexual activity and satisfaction of women, led to increased sexual knowledge and introduced modern sexual values, including the right of women to obtain pleasure from sex. In spite of this more permissive attitude to sexuality, Haavio-Mannila & Kontula (2003) found that infidelity was considered negatively by four fifths of the respondents in Finland, Estonia and St Petersburg. Even though in a survey involving adolescents, in which they mostly engaged in casual sex (Grello, Welsh & Harper, 2006), heterosexual college students reported that romantic relationships are typically characterised by mutual expectations for emotional and sexual fidelity (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999a).

2.5 How common is infidelity?

Many research studies have attempted to estimate how common infidelity is. According to Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson (2001); Snyder (1999); Gordon & Baucom & Snyder (2004), infidelity is a common phenomenon in marriages. Much has been written about infidelity with some empirical research exploring how couples have recovered from infidelity (Brown, 2001; Dattilio, 2000; Glass, 2003; Glass & Wright, 1997; Lusteran, 1998; Pittman, 1989, Spring, 1996). The results of studies that focus on sexual intercourse, deal with heterosexual

couples and draw from large representative samples appear to be more reliable (Blow & Hartnell, 2005).

Conservative estimates indicate that between 20-40 percent of all Americans will have sex with someone other than their spouse while married (Greeley, 1994; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994). As far back as 1948 Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin estimated from their sample that infidelity had taken place in 50 percent of all married males and 26 percent of married women by the age of forty (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948). More recent social surveys (Hite, 1990, 1991; Gass & Nicols, 1988; Lawson, 1990; Weiderman, 1997) indicate that 60 to 70 percent of married men and 50 to 60 percent of married women have an affair at some time during their marriage. No statistics on infidelity are collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (May, 2005). However, the divorce rate in Australia is approximately one out of every 2.6 marriages (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005). In the US, the divorce rate is half of all marriages (Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001). In the past infidelity was frequently cited by divorced persons as a prime reason for the dissolution of their marriages (Hein, 2000; South & Lloyd, 1995). Under the current 'no blame' divorce policy in Australia, such information is more difficult to obtain. Another difficulty in acquiring reliable statistics on infidelity has occurred because much of the research has suffered from serious methodological problems (Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001). The Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin (1948) study was a survey allowing anonymity for participants which may have been easier for them to discuss infidelity. Other studies were a combination of interviews and surveys. However, surveys differ greatly in

value according to how the respondents are sampled. For example, whether they are haphazard, purposive convenience or probability samples can differ greatly in value. The main problem with written questionnaires is response rate which can be less than fifty per cent which makes the survey not representative. Also questions may be open-ended or closed-ended. Each has advantages and disadvantages. With written questionnaires there is no possibility of clarifying questions that might be misunderstood.

Many investigators have failed to include samples in which infidelity has actually taken place, either using a vignette presented to college students (Kitzinger & Powell, 1995; Mongeau & Schulz, 1997; Parker, 1997; Sprecher, Regan & McKinney, 1998) or having participants rate their future likelihood of engaging in extramarital affairs (Buss, et al., 1999). Within the Australian context, there is paucity of research on infidelity. For example, most research in Australia on infidelity is incidental, such as a survey done in Western Australia in which individuals were asked to identify the major reasons for the breakdown of their relationship (Esmond, Dickinson & Moffat, 1998). The two main reasons for relationship breakdown given by the participants were a lack of communication (25 percent) and infidelity (23 percent).

2.6 Who is most likely to experience infidelity?

Freud's psychoanalytic theory of love written in 1905 provided the concept of the Oedipus Complex (Mitchell, 2000). According to Freud, a boy's close relation to his mother, as the primary love-object, leads to a desire for complete union with her. A girl, on the other hand, who is similarly attached to the mother, directs her

libido (love, sexual energy broadly construed) toward her father. This produces a triadic relationship regardless of one's sex, with the parent of the same sex cast in the role of a rival for the affections of the parent of the opposite sex (Mitchell, 2000). Following on from Freud, Horney and Thompson viewed infidelity as a harking back to the Oedipal triangle where the classical stance on husband-wife-and-lover reflects the early mother-father-and-child configuration. According to Person (1988), all love that intersects with a societal taboo is a reworking of the Oedipal taboo. Extramarital relationships require a different mechanism of splitting triangles, whereby a person splits his or her attention between two objects and the 'rivalrous triangle is characterised by Oedipal emotions of jealousy and anger' (Weil, 2003, p.53). In considering any societal taboo, such as infidelity, Freud declared, 'the basis of taboo is a forbidden action for which there exists a strong inclination in the unconscious' (Brill, 1938, p.832).

Several authors suggest that those involved in an affair are unhappy or hurting (Brown, 2001; Gurian, 1995; Pittman, 1989). The affair indicates they want something else in their marriage and in their life. When two-person systems are under stress, a third person is sometimes brought in to stabilise the relationship (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Bowen, 1978). However, triangles are always dysfunctional in the sense that they offer stabilisation through diversion, rather than through resolution of the issues in the couple's relationship. An affair may calm the person who is experiencing the most anxiety or discontent and thus stabilise the marriage until the secret comes out. After the secret is revealed, relationship issues may still be obscured as they tend to focus on the

affair, instead of their part in the marital distance that predated the affair (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Kell, 1992).

A number of factors have been linked to infidelity (Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001). These include age, education, financial earnings, history of divorce, religiosity, length of relationship and opportunity (Atkins et al., 2001). Some research shows that infidelity is more likely to occur if participants married at a young age (Atkins et al., 2001). Assuming that people marry once and for life, there may be a connection to research that reports that frequency of marital sex declines with marital duration (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995). Some researchers attribute the declining frequency of marital sex to biological aging, attitudes about sex, the work status of a couple, presence of young children, race, gender and religion (Call et al., 1995). However, the most commonly cited explanation of the decline of marital sex is the loss of novelty (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1993; Call, et al., 1995).

Also, infidelity was more likely to occur for those with higher income and employment status, owing to the ability to hide costs and travel more easily (Atkins et al., 2001). The increased potential for infidelity is linked to the term 'opportunity' where there is access and attraction to other people (Atkins et al., 2001). This view of opportunity may explain the closing gender gap in rates of infidelity as greater numbers of women enter the workplace. The typical finding has been that in the past more men than women have engaged in infidelity (Greeley, 1994; Wiederman, 1997). However, this finding might be linked to the possibility that more men were surveyed or women did not want to disclose their

infidelity. Opportunity has been used to explain the gender differences in the incidence of infidelity, where men have historically been in the workforce in greater numbers than women (Atkins et al., 2001). However, recent research (Parker, 1997) suggests that differences between the sexes regarding infidelity may be decreasing in younger cohorts as more women are working and thus have greater opportunity for infidelity (Oliver & Hyde, 1993; Traeen & Stigum, 1998; Treas & Giesen, 2000).

Some writers, who base their conclusions on clinical opinion rather than research, believe that infidelity tends to run in families (Kaslow, 1993; Spring, 1996). They suggest that if one of the parents experienced infidelity, their children are more likely to have an extramarital affair or partner with someone who has an extramarital affair. Even though as children, they experienced difficulties when observing the effects of their parents' infidelity, they find they become part of a similar situation as an adult. To repeat the parent's pattern of infidelity is analogous to children from an abusive family deciding they will not be abusive but finding themselves repeating their parent's behaviour and becoming either abused or an abuser (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Kaslow, 1993). Spring (1996) contends that being faithful provides feelings of dependency and vulnerability; whereas being unfaithful produces a feeling of invincibility. What a partner may unknowingly do is seek out someone who treats them in a way that replicates their earlier experience of themselves. Sometimes there can be a strange resemblance between the circumstances of the partner's betrayal as a child and the circumstances of the betrayal as an adult (Kaslow, 1993; Pittman, 1991; Spring, 1996).

While some researchers (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1996) believe that low marital satisfaction will lead to infidelity, other studies failed to find a relationship between infidelity and marital satisfaction, sexual satisfaction or sexual frequency (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Spanier & Margolis, 1990). However, Atkins et al., (2001) found that marital satisfaction showed a strong association with infidelity. Participants who reported their relationships were 'pretty happy' and 'not too happy' were two and four times more likely, respectively, to have reported infidelity than those who reported that they were 'very happy' with their relationships.

Several therapists have developed typologies or reasons for affairs (Levine, 1998). For example, Emily Brown (2001) listed five types of affairs. Her clinical experience suggests that people have Conflict Avoidance Affairs, Intimacy Avoidance Affairs, Sexual Addiction Affairs, Empty Nest Affairs and Out-The-Door Affairs. In the first two descriptions, the non-exclusive partner avoids conflict and/or intimacy with the exclusive partner by having an affair. Sexual addiction or the desire for unlimited sex is similar to other addictive behaviours (Levine, 1998). When the children leave home, the resulting emptiness and loss can contribute to what is known as an empty nest affair (Spring, 2001). Sometimes a partner wants to leave the relationship but is not sure how to achieve this, so they have an affair that ultimately has the desired effect (Spring, 2001). In this way they destabilise the relationship so that the exclusive partner ends the relationship, saving them the difficulty of doing it.

Pittman and Wagers (1995) suggested that extramarital sex could be classified into four categories. These categories include accidental infidelity, philandering, romantic affairs, and marital arrangements. As implied, accidental infidelity has not been planned but occurs spontaneously, when an opportunity presents itself. Philandering is described as having fun through infidelity, whereas romantic affairs involve an emotional connection. Lastly, marital arrangements may include partners agreeing to infidelity because of issues like impotence, ill health or their interpretation of the marital bond. For example, some couples believe in open relationships that involve physical intimacy with other people but the marital bond is based on mutual affection and intellectual connection (Pittman & Wagers, 1995).

Research conducted in the United States with 517 married women by Masters, Johnson and Koldny (1994) found that there were several reasons for infidelity. Seventy two percent said they were emotionally dissatisfied with their husband, whereas forty six percent were sexually dissatisfied with husband. Thirty nine percent reported that they had been seduced by their lover and felt naturally polygamous. Thirty five percent had found out that their husband had had an affair and so they wanted to have revenge. Thirty percent of the woman said they did not know why they had an affair. When Masters et al. (1994) asked married men why they had an affair, seventy four percent said they wanted more sexual excitement and greater sexual frequency. Twenty eight percent said they wanted a more attractive or younger partner. Twelve percent had an affair to deal with a sexual dysfunction and two percent had an affair to either deal with a wife's physical incapacity or to have sex with another male.

Some of the reasons for becoming involved in infidelity as reported in the United States by Humphrey (1987) reflect similar themes. For example, marital sexual boredom and unhappiness in the marriage are listed, as well as reassurance against aging sexuality and sexual dysfunction. Humphrey (1987) found that sometimes infidelity with a person of a higher rank at work can mean gaining promotion at work.

Some authors (Glass & Wright, 1992; Spring, 1996) assert there are gender differences as to why infidelity occurs, and that stereotypically women tend to believe that infidelity is justified when it is for love; while men often believe the opposite (Glass & Wright, 1992). Thus, men are more likely to separate sex and love, while women believe that love and sex go together and that falling in love justifies sexual involvement. While extramarital sex is not considered acceptable for either gender, it seems to be more tolerated or expected of men (Collins & Coltrane, 1995). Jessica Benjamin (1998) contradicts this idea with her model of 'women's desire', whereby a woman is not the object of desire but the subject who desires. Louise DeSalvo (1999) contends that infidelity is about 'yearning and loss and about the freedom to enact one's own desire...it is about autonomy' (as cited in Weil, 2003, p. 53). Oliver and Hyde (1993) suggest that there are no differences in frequency and types of infidelity for men and women under the age of 40, with Wiederman (1997) supporting this notion.

Another explanation proposed as to why infidelity occurs involves the idea that some people like to live at the 'Edge of Chaos' (Crichton, 1995). This theory of self-organising behaviours argues that complex systems balance between a need

for order and an imperative to change. Hence, to flourish they need to be on the edge of chaos, not falling into dissolution or being too far from the edge, resulting in stagnation.

2.7 Discovery of Infidelity

Considerable emotional distress appears in the couple when infidelity is discovered (Levine, 1998). Infidelity may be terminated by a gradual withdrawal, or exposure of the infidelity by the non-exclusive partner, their lover or by accident, with subsequent cessation of all communication. The prevailing characteristic to the ending of infidelity is their lack of conclusion, without a shared process of grief (Kell, 1992). The end of a love-affair is very similar to bereavement, made all the more painful if it is experienced as a sudden loss, or with ambivalence or great dependency as well as a lack of emotional support (Kell, 1992).

The discovery of infidelity usually has a dramatic capacity to generate suffering in the partners, children, extended family and friends (Levine, 1998). One study suggested that the initial responses to a partner's disclosure of infidelity were often intensely emotionally charged, and involved confronting the non-exclusive partner, expressing anger and managing conflicting feelings (Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002).

Disclosure of the secret infidelity has been found to be correlated with reduced pre-occupation and decreased arousal in the non-exclusive partner as there seems to be a connection between thought suppression, level of arousal and extramarital

affairs (Layton-Tholl, 1999). Furthermore, extramarital affairs are characterised by sexual chemistry, emotional intimacy and elements of secrecy or deception (Mongenu, Hale & Alles, 1994). As a result, when the infidelity is exposed, the secrecy is lost and the attraction may subside.

2.8 Impact of Infidelity

The impact of infidelity on the exclusive partner is often unexpected and destructive, leaving them feeling defenceless, victimised and confused (Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Initially, they may have chaotic and intensely uncomfortable emotions, as they deal with the cognitive aspect of gathering information so that they can reconstruct their understanding of their relationships (Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Their reaction is similar to the emotions felt when people are confronted by any great loss or trauma (Horowitz, Stinson & Field, 1991). People experiencing trauma or loss manifest a pattern of symptoms marked by alternating periods of emotional numbing and reliving the shock of a trauma such as exposure to a life-threatening event, whereby they experience intense fear, helplessness or horror. Clearly, individuals involved in combat, automobile accidents or natural disasters, or who have experienced robbery have faced life-threatening situations. Victims of rape, child abuse and spousal battering experience similar circumstances' (Ortman, 2005, p.47). Ortman (2005, p.48) explains that the discovery of infidelity is often experienced as a betrayal of trust, resulting in a 'fatal psychic wound and a death blow to the relationship'. Victims of infidelity live in fear of another infidelity; they need constant reassurance and feel helpless to prevent it.

In a survey undertaken in Western Australia (Esmond, Dickinson & Moffat, 1998) individuals were asked to identify the major reasons for the breakdown of their marital relationship. The two main reasons for relationship breakdown given by the participants were a lack of communication (25 percent) and infidelity (23 percent). In a national survey conducted in the United States participants ranked infidelity second as the most damaging problem to relationships after physical abuse (Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997). From case studies on infidelity in the U.S., Hein (2000) reported that 65 percent of marriages do not recover from infidelity. Amato and Rogers (1997) found that infidelity was the biggest predictor of subsequent divorce. Their study found that among relationship problems, infidelity was more than twice as large as any other relationship issue, such as getting angry easily, being domineering, having irritating habits, spending money foolishly or abusing drugs or alcohol

Some researchers have found that gender differences were apparent in how the exclusive partner responded to infidelity (Glass & Wright, 1992; Sprecher, Reagan & McKinney, 1998; Wiederman, 1997). Atwood & Seifer (1997) discovered that the most common reaction of husbands to learning of their partner's infidelity was anger (38 percent), followed by shock (19 percent), whereas wives ranked shock first (45 percent) and anger second (35 percent). It was found that, generally, some try to preserve the relationship, whereas others tend to leave the relationship (Christian-Herman, O'Leary & Avery-Leaf, 2001).

Harris and Christenfield (1996) suggested the possibility that men and women may react differently to situations of infidelity as a result of their approach or

interpretation of the event. In addition to the relational loss or loss of the marital dream, they point out that the potential risk to men is the loss of paternity confidence, whereas women are concerned about being left to raise the children as single mothers (Harris & Christenfield, 1996). While women often assume responsibility for the success of their relationship, they did not feel responsible for their partner's infidelity (Nannini & Meyers, 2000).

However, a cross-cultural study involving 66 cultures (Jankowiak, Nell & Buckmaster, 2002) found that infidelity was troubling to both males and females in all the cultures studied as sexual propriety was a fundamental component of the relationship. However, this study found that there was a difference in the tactics employed by men and women in response to infidelity. They found that 88 percent of men resorted to physical violence, whereas 50 percent of women relied on forms of distancing themselves from the relationship. Women also used gossip to shame their partner and men were more likely to appeal to a higher authority (Jankowiak, et al., 2002).

According to studies (Luteijn, 1994; Roberts & Donahue, 1994; Wiggins & Lederer, 1984) marital satisfaction is positively related to self-esteem. Shackelford & Buss (1997) found that husbands' self-esteem is negatively correlated with wives' sexual infidelity and with wives' complaints of husbands' abuse and jealousy. Conversely, wives' self-esteem is negatively correlated with husbands' derogation of wives' physical attractiveness. Furthermore, men and

women with high self-esteem might presume infidelity will not irreparably damage the marriage (Wright, 1994).

Some of the common concerns that men and women struggle with after an affair are whether their reasons to rebuild the relationship are good enough (Spring, 1996; Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Couples question whether infidelity could happen again and whether they should stay together for the children. This is described by Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller (2002) as the 'roller-coaster' of emotions. Parents often agonise about the impact that their divorce and the splintering of their family will have on their children (Olson, et al, 2002). Most studies (Glass and Wright, 1997; Kelly & Fincham, 1999) confirm that children from divorced families fare worse than children from intact families, at least during the first two years after the separation, in areas of scholastic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-esteem and social competence. Children's well-being is improved, however, if they are in a divorced family with low levels of conflict (Glass & Wright, 1997; Kelly & Fincham, 1999).

Even though sexual infidelity occurs frequently (Pittman, 1989; Roche & Ramsbey, 1993; Roscoe, Cavanaugh & Kennedy, 1988; Thompson, 1991), it is generally perceived as a major rule violation (Pittman, 1987; Roscoe et al., 1988; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1996; Treas & Giesen, 2000). When discovered, sexual infidelities have a strong impact on perceptions and the future of the relationship, whether the infidelity was intentional or not (Spanier & Margolis, 1990). McGraw (1987) discovered from two studies he completed that higher

levels of guilt were reported following unintentional transgressions, as the non-exclusive partner did not have time to apply or plan strategies for alleviating guilt. Intentional transgressors, on the other hand, could use guilt-reduction strategies before the transgression occurred, such as justifying their behaviour. Initially if infidelity was perceived as unintentional then the exclusive partner finds it less disturbing than if the non-exclusive partner planned infidelity intentionally, as it appeared a spontaneous action. However, whether infidelity was intentional or unintentional, the long term impact on the relationship could still leave the exclusive partner feeling insecure

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) Theory of Reasoned Action, provides a conceptual framework to explore determinants of behavioural choices. The Stages of Change Model are defined as follows-

Precontemplation

No intention to change behaviour in foreseeable future

Contemplation

Awareness of a problem with serious thoughts about change

Preparation

Intending to take action in the next month

Action

Individual modifies own behaviour

Maintenance

Individual working to prevent relapse and consolidate gains

According to the model, the best predictor of whether or not someone performs a target behaviour (e.g., in this case, having an affair) is the intention to perform the behaviour. Barring unforeseen circumstances or the lack of opportunity to engage in a particular behaviour, intentions are typically good predictors of behaviour. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) identified two determinants of behaviour: attitudes toward performing the behaviour (based on a person's general evaluation) and subjective norms (based on a person's perception that important others desire the performance or nonperformance of a specific behaviour). Under some circumstances the normative component may be more important than the attitude; whereas for other persons, behaviours or contexts, that is, the attitudinal component may be more important than norms. Regarding infidelity, the attitudinal component of entitlement plays a large part in deciding to proceed with infidelity, whereas the subjective norm of the important partner's desire to avoid infidelity is ignored. The target population's readiness to change is an important factor in achieving change. Understanding Di Clemente and Prochaska's five stages in behavioural change may assist counsellors in facilitating a positive outcome for the couples that present after infidelity. For example, in the pre-contemplation stage the counsellor could validate the lack of readiness and encourage self-exploration, not action. In the contemplation stage the counsellor could encourage evaluation of pros and cons of behaviour change by identifying and promoting new positive outcome expectations. The preparation stage would involve the counsellor assisting in problem solving and taking small initial steps as well as helping the clients to identify social support and their underlying skills for behaviour change. In the action stage the counsellor could encourage restructuring cues as well as bolster self-efficacy

and reiterate long-term benefits. The maintenance stage is when the counsellor gives follow-up support by reinforcing internal rewards.

2.9 Recovery from Infidelity

It is not clear how many relationships recover from infidelity. The literature has not been able to clarify the recovery process but has looked at some of the factors that have contributed to the continuation of relationships after infidelity. Phases of emotional and relationship processes are summarised by Olson et al. (2002) as roller coaster, moratorium and trust building. While there may be many factors that influence the rebuilding of relationships after infidelity, the main factors as described in the literature are motivation, healing the hurt, forgiveness and counselling (Halford, Kelly & Young, 1997; McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997).

2.9.1 Motivation

When couples present for therapy, it is often the case that one partner is more 'motivated' than the other to address problems and the other may be ambivalent or indifferent (Halford et al., 1997). Kelly and Halford (1997) believe that motivation is ultimately an unobservable psychological construct that is manifested through such behaviours as responses on a questionnaire, attendance or compliance.

One model which sets out to describe the motivation to change is the Transtheoretical Model of Interventional Change or Stages of Change Model

(DiClemente & Prochaska, 1985). The counsellor needs to be aware that partners may or may not be at different stages of change such as precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action or maintenance (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1985). These stages affect their motivation and intentionality to seek change. In other words, the exclusive partner may have been at the *precontemplation* stage before the affair by not even considering any change, whereas the non-exclusive partner may have been at the *contemplation* stage thinking of how the relationship needs to change. In recovery, these stages may also apply when considering the change process. For example, one partner might be at the *preparation* stage of working out what needs to change, whereas the other partner may have reached the *action* stage of actually doing something about changing.

2.9.2 Healing the Hurt

Infidelity constitutes a significant problem for many couples and contributes to individual and relationship distress (Gordon et al, 2004). Clinicians have noted intense reactions such as rage toward the non-exclusive partner, feelings of shame, depression, overwhelming powerlessness, victimisation, abandonment as well as difficulties with concentration, persistent rumination about the event and disrupted daily functioning (Glass & Wright, 1997; Moultrup, 2003; Pittman, 1989; Reibstein & Richards, 1993; Spring, 1996).

In order to heal, there is a grieving process that takes place. At first, shock and denial usually occur, followed by anger, fear, guilt, regret and depression (McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997).

Researchers have noted a high incidence of clinical depression among partners experiencing a recent discovery or disclosure of an affair (Cano & O'Leary, 2000). The ending of infidelity is likely to contain a number of ingredients which make for painful partings and difficult recoveries (Kell, 1992). Moreover, the exclusive partner may often say that it was the deception, not the infidelity, that was harder to handle. Olson et al. (2002) reported that the initial responses to a partner's disclosure of infidelity were often intensely emotionally charged and sometimes violent, describing it as a roller-coaster ride.

After having passed through this first stage of grieving, there may be a period of obsessing about details, retreating both physically and emotionally, and recruiting the support of others in an effort to make meaning of the infidelity (Olson et al., 2002). This stage has been described as a moratorium where the communication was categorised as 'maintenance talk', meaning that the 'talk' did not help the couple to move forward productively in processing the relationship or determining a new direction (Olson et al., 2002).

2.9.3 Forgiveness

Forgiveness usually refers to a process of releasing resentment toward an offender (Hargrave, 1994) and the gradual restoring of relationships between people (Diblasio, 2000). Perhaps because forgiveness has generally been regarded as a theological concept, or perhaps due to the difficulty of confining the experience of forgiveness to empirical methodologies, forgiveness has not been given serious consideration by counsellors until the last two decades (McCullough &

Worthington, 1994). From early research exploring forgiveness (Cerney, 1989), benefits such as a reduction of guilt, anger, and anxiety have been claimed, as well as the prevention of the ill effects of grief and remorse.

Forgiveness, like love, is a concept as much as a feeling (Diblasio, 2000). However, if clients' assumptions about it are extreme or unrealistic, they may never forgive or may forgive too quickly. An assumption that may stop them from forgiving is the assumption that forgiveness happens completely, and all at once, making forgiveness seem out of reach (Stern & Bristow, 1996).

Many couples have discovered that when they forgive, their negative feelings toward their partner are not automatically replaced by positive feelings and that when they forgive, they do not forget the injury. In an intentional forgiveness model, 'forgive and forget' are replaced with 'forgive and remember' (Summer & Ferch, 1998). Couples have found that forgiveness is part of a slow, cumulative process that evolves as they have corrective experiences that rebuild trust and intimacy (Dibalsio, 2000). So many have learnt that in addition to forgiving their partner for wronging them, they need to consider forgiving themselves for the wrongs they have inflicted on their partner, their family and themselves (Jeffers, 1992; Summer & Ferch, 1998; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996).

Since the discovery or disclosure of infidelity represents a major relational betrayal, a three stage forgiveness model has been proposed (Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004). The three stages include dealing with

the impact, exploring context and finding meaning, and thirdly, moving on. This model integrates cognitive-behavioural and insight-orientated strategies (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Snyder, 1999). In this model cognitive components are developed such as attributions and reframes. It has been found helpful for people recovering from a trauma to put the event into context and make sense of it (Horowitz, 1985; Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This three stage forgiveness model was designed to help partners to explore themselves and their relationship to develop a better understanding of their relationship's vulnerability to an affair and to facilitate efforts to address those difficulties (Gordon et al., 2004).

2.9.4 Counselling

Even though there is widespread availability of counselling services, many married persons, as individuals or as a couple, do not pursue marriage counselling (Bowen & Richman, 1991). The majority of divorcing couples who do not seek counselling cited the primary reason as 'it was too late'. Bringle & Byers (1997) found that those with a positive attitude toward counselling and a previous history of marriage counselling were predisposed to counselling in the future. Gender differences were found in this research (Bringle & Byers, 1997), where females were more likely to seek counselling than males as they were more willing to perceive a problem and to seek help. However, Bowen and Richman (1991) found no significant gender differences in the willingness to seek couple counselling.

About 30 to 65 percent of couples who present for counselling have experienced infidelity (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Glass & Wright, 1997; Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997). It has been noted that infidelity is also one of the most difficult

problems to treat in therapy and one of the most damaging issues for a relationship (Scheinkman, 2005; Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997). Once infidelity is out in the open, the couple needs to decide whether to work on rebuilding the relationship or ending it. Initially, the feelings and thoughts may be distorted, chaotic and difficult to manage. Counselling can assist the ambivalence and confusion for the couple, so it is important to individually confront the doubts and fears about recommitting to the relationship (Stern & Bristow, 1996).

With the apparently high incidence of extramarital activity in contemporary societies, a few specific models exist in therapy to assist a couple in coping with the after-effects of infidelity. It has been found that couples who have not resolved the effects of infidelity can remain paralysed in the past 'refusing or unable to take risks on new behaviours and perspectives because of the distrust of their partners' (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004, p. 214). Therefore it is important to develop a treatment aimed at helping couples to address past injuries and to move forward in a healthy manner.

Some have suggested that recovery from infidelity is similar to recovery from an interpersonal trauma. The treatment model, therefore, can be informed by the existing trauma literature, particularly models involving violated assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Resick & Calhoun, 2000). When a code or standard (how one believes people should behave), has been violated, especially an interpersonal standard, then a person's sense of well-being is undermined. This may create in them a sense of confusion, unpredictability and lack of control. The intense negative interactions between the partners may be therapeutically addressed

through helping the couples to problem-solve and set boundaries on ‘lashing-out’ behaviours and interrogations (Gordon et al, 1998).

Research on reactions to traumatic events suggests that the assumptions people have about the world and other people may play a role in the severity of the response to a painful event (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). However, Moultrup (2003) has questioned the suggestion that infidelity is a trauma and in the same category as his example of an aeroplane crash. Instead, he sees infidelity as a symptom of unresolved and/or unhealthy emotional dynamics. The implications for treatment would be to examine past patterns of interacting and exploring ways to modify these dysfunctional patterns (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999).

Stressful life events at the time of the affair may have destabilised clients and contributed to their problems at home (Atwood & Seifer, 2001). Thus, tracing the timeline that identifies critical life events that contributed directly or indirectly to the affair, helps clients to realise that it is usually not one isolated event that led to the affair, but several happening concurrently. Partners can be encouraged to work together to identify these events and to discuss, in a non-accusatory way, how they made room for a third person (Gordon et al., 2004; Spring, 1996). Based on socially constructed meaning systems, marital scripts are formed. For example, for some individuals, infidelity becomes part of their dominant marital script (Atwood & Seifer, 2001).

Psychodynamic Theory explores the interaction with parents, siblings and other significant persons in childhood that leads to the development of certain dominant

ways of feeling, thinking and behaving. For example, if clients were abandoned, physically or emotionally by a parent, they may have learned to expect that the people they love will leave them. If they were abused, physically or emotionally, and they grew up feeling suspicious, intimidated and humiliated, their mistrust schema says 'People I love will hurt me' (Atwood & Seifer, 2001; Sharf, 1996; Winnicott, 1975). Couples usually take a long time to trust completely after an infidelity (Summer & Ferch, 1998). Their relationship is likely to feel fragile and tentative for several years after the affair is revealed, but during that time they may experience many reassuring, joyous moments as well. Many couples realise that trust is a delicate, elusive outcome that can be earned over time, through commitment and continued effort (Summer & Ferch, 1998). The non-exclusive partner needs to demonstrate to the exclusive partner through bold, concrete actions that they are committed to their partner (Spanier & Margolis, 1990; Spring, 1996). The exclusive partner needs to open up to the possibility of trusting again and reinforce the non-exclusive partner's efforts to win back confidence (Spanier & Margolis, 1990; Spring, 1996).

Helping couples and individuals rebuild their lives after infidelity is emotionally-charged work and can be described as a minefield for therapists (Pittman, 1987). The therapist's responsibility is for the process, while the clients make the decision about the outcome (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Traps for the counsellor come from both external and internal sources (Kaslow, 1993). Clients often attempt to influence the therapist to take their side, to ignore certain facts, or to assess fault. At times therapists, themselves, bring to the process their own issues, such as their own marital problems, an investment in 'success', or a particular

moral stance (Silverstein, 1998). The therapist's role is not to protect but to help both partners explore and understand how they arrived at this painful point (Halford, 1998; Atkins, Baucom, Eldridge & Christensen, 2005). Allowing the exclusive partner's desire to know too many details to continue unchecked is destructive to what remains of the relationship, and also may result in the therapist feeling out of control (Glass & Wright, 1997; McDonald, 1991).

Throughout the process of working with infidelity, questions about pacing and timing arise. Each partner needs sufficient time to sort through and express a wide range of feelings (Pittman, 1989). Anger and pain, in particular, need to be attended to before moving on. Researchers have noted a high incidence of clinical depression among partners experiencing a recent discovery or disclosure of an extramarital affair (Cano & O'Leary, 2000). There is so much grieving to be done and allowing sufficient time to deal with the difficult issues is essential. Other common traps for the therapist are pushing too hard to support one partner or promoting a particular solution, avoiding pain or other intense emotions, judging the morality of the situation, doing the client's work, or attempting to compensate for the client's pain (Kaslow, 1993; Schnarch, 1991).

The therapeutic alliance is considered to be an essential component of successful therapy (Nevels & Coche, 1993). It is not the therapeutic orientations that are as effective for client change, but rather the clients' personal interaction with their therapist. The humanistic traits of empathy, respect, and positive regard increase the connection between the client and the counsellor, but they may not be enough. Rather, research (Bergin & Lambert, 1978, as cited in Nevels & Coche, 1993)

suggests that greater therapist experience is associated with lower dropout rates. Further, the therapeutic alliance is a balance between an ability to stay involved with clients and yet remain separate enough to maintain a professional perspective. Furthermore, it has been found that the therapeutic alliance predicts increased motivation to change and increased couple relationship satisfaction (Johnson & Talitman, 1999).

In treating couples who have experienced infidelity, Gordon, Baucom and Snyder (2004) found in their multi-theoretical treatment that exclusive partners were assisted in coming to some understanding of the infidelity, with subsequent improvement in marital satisfaction. However, the non-exclusive partner's perceptions of the relationship and individual distress did not change during treatment. A later study (Atkins, Baucom, Eldridge & Christensen, 2005) found that couples experiencing infidelity were more distressed than couples who did not have such an experience at the beginning of therapy, but improved at a greater rate. Thus, at the end of treatment, the average outcome of couples who had an affair is indistinguishable from the outcome of distressed couples without affairs (Atkins et al., 2005). Therefore, Atkins et al. (2005) maintain that couples who were in therapy and dealing with infidelity changed at a faster rate than other distressed couples who were in therapy. This leaves room for optimism in rebuilding relationships after infidelity.

2.10 Conclusion

Even though much has been written about infidelity, questions remain as to how relationships survive infidelity and what factors help to rebuild relationships. As noted above, the literature has explored reasons for affairs as well as the processes of discovery and impact of infidelity. Some researchers have also investigated the factors that are helpful in rebuilding relationships. However, much of the research on infidelity has been conducted in countries like Europe and the U.S. There is paucity of information on the Australian experience of infidelity. As a result, there is a need to examine the effects of infidelity on couples in Australia and how they view the experience. The proposed research explores the impact of infidelity as well as the issues involved in the recovery of relationships after infidelity.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology used for this study. Firstly, the purpose of the study is identified and explained. Secondly, the rationale for using a qualitative approach is outlined incorporating a framework of narrative inquiry. Thirdly, the issues in the recruitment, terminology and non-identification of informants are clarified. Analysis techniques are described as they developed over the period of the study. The last section focuses on the ethical considerations as well as the strengths and limitations of this research.

3.1 Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the experience of couples affected by infidelity. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, most research has been done on the reasons for infidelity. However few qualitative studies have set out to explore how couples stay together after an extramarital affair and how these relationships have recovered. This study primarily seeks to give informants the opportunity to describe their experiences in relation to the factors that restore a relationship after infidelity.

3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Approach

To understand the experience of infidelity, a methodology is required that allows for the revelation of the complex breadth and depth of the informants' stories. In selecting a qualitative approach for this study, the researcher wished to understand the issues that couples experienced when affected by infidelity. Their stories of living and coping with infidelity needed to be recorded to portray their own experiences. Qualitative research is not merely quantitative research without numbers, but has its own distinctive role to play in the creation of a knowledge base for practice and policy (Bruner, 1990; Mcleod, 2001). Qualitative research is a process of careful, rigorous inquiry into aspects of the social world (Reissman, 1993).

Within the qualitative research paradigm, a narrative approach to interviewing and analysis has been adopted. The narrative approach seeks to investigate the storied experiences of people (McLeod, 2001). In this process people make sense of their experience and communicate their experience to others, in the form of stories. For most of us it is difficult to envisage the impact of infidelity on a couple's relationship. In this study, stories of how informants lived through the experience of infidelity are examined. As their lived experience was unique, their narratives needed to be honoured. Therefore a narrative approach is considered to be the most appropriate methodology to use.

Narrative inquiry provides an approach to understanding human experience that is consistent with the ways in which individuals make sense of their shared lived experience (Gergen 1994, 1999; Rice & Ezzy 1999). Attending to the stories

people tell, with their sequential nature and cohesive plots, provides a glimpse into the lived experience of the narrator. Traditional qualitative methodologies of interviewing and coding have the potential to fragment or de-contextualise the events that narrators weave together to make sense of elements in their lives (Reissman 1997). The term 'narrative inquiry' most clearly describes the purpose of inquiring narratively into each informant's experience of infidelity and using these stories as the units of data for analysis.

Narrative inquiry is a constructivist process that refers to what people do with events that happen in their lives; how they make sense of what happens to them. This approach proposes that meaning attributed to objects or events is not discovered, it is constructed. People, this approach argues, construct meaning through an ongoing process of interaction with their environment (Crotty, 1998). The story that is constructed is reflexive, as defined by Bruner (1990) and subject to constant editing and updating as their lives are lived and personal understanding and awareness changes.

Polkinghorne (1995) argues that the only way to truly understand human experience is to pay attention to the stories, or narratives, that people tell. It is these narratives that illustrate how people respond to and make sense of life events. These concepts and schemas are developed from socio-cultural and historical knowledge as well as from each individual's personal perspective. These schemas continually evolve to test and modify the newly constructed knowledge that people tell themselves and others (Schwandt, 2000). Research

informants may actively avoid following a guided interview format (Reissman 2003), thereby potentially affecting data and results. Furthermore, a narrative inquiry design is particularly useful in examining non-normative experiences such as infidelity (Harvey, Stein & Scott 1995; Reissman 1997; Reissman 2003; Stuhlmiller 2001).

Listening to and recording an individual's narrative presents a way of understanding human experience that is congruent with the manner in which people make meaning and understand events (Polkinghorne, 1995). This is due to our ability to 'reflect on ourselves and to alter the present in light of the past, or re-interpret the past in light of the present' (Kirkman, 2002, p.32). The narratives of the informants in this study described not just events, but their interpretation of these events. The informants told of their challenges and consequences and how they had arrived at the place they were in at the time of the interview. This process of ordering the events of their story, thoughts and understandings is narrative in form.

3.3 Sampling

As individuals' life experiences are being sought, a sampling procedure that allows for thorough exploration is required. The researcher needed to set the parameters of the population who possessed the desired information concerning the experience of such a unique event or situation as infidelity. Careful selection of potential informants was then necessary to identify where they would fit with the specific criteria under investigation (Silverman 2000). A purposive sampling

strategy, where informants were sought by their experience of infidelity, was employed in this study following the criteria set out below.

3.4 Recruiting informants

As the researcher wished to explore factors that influenced people's decision to stay together, there were two approaches. Firstly, a media release outlining the study was provided to media outlets in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast of Queensland, which requested that adults who had remained together after an affair, contact the researcher (Appendix A). Secondly, counselling colleagues were advised of the research so that they could inform suitable clients as possible participants in the study (Appendix B). Contact was made with the Inter-Agency (all agencies involved in health and wellness) monthly meetings held on the Gold Coast to notify them of the proposed research. To protect confidentiality counsellors were given a standard content letter to give to clients. The letter stated that the clients reserved the right to participate in the study. Declining participation would in no way influence the outcome of their current therapy. The letter instructed those who may be interested in being interviewed to contact the researcher directly (Appendix C).

Potential participants for the study were adults at the time of the study (over 18 years of age), who had experienced extramarital infidelity and had remained as a couple for at least two years following the discovery of infidelity. Either party could be interviewed. 'Snowballing' (Minchiello, Sullivan, Greenwood & Axford, 1999) in recruitment occurred with two of the informants who had heard from acquaintances about the study. The potential informants approached the researcher

via a phone call. Subsequently, a letter of invitation to participate was sent (Appendix C), as well as information (Appendix D) and consent sheets (Appendix E).

3.5 Data Collection

All interviews were recorded on audiotapes. Seven interviews were conducted, with four at an office, and three at the informants' homes. The location of the interview was selected according to each informant's choice of venue and availability for the interview. The interviews took place for approximately one and a half hours each, over a period of three months from mid-September 2003 to mid-December 2003. At the completion of the interviews, the informants were sent a card thanking them for their time and further informing them of the projected time-frame of the study and to maintain contact details for a final report to be sent at the conclusion of the project.

An information sheet (Appendix D) was prepared for each informant. Prior to the interview commencing, the consent form was signed by the informant and the researcher (Appendix E). The informant was also provided with a copy of the consent form. Consent for the tape-recording of the interview was also gained at this time.

The informant's right to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were respected via provision of an alias. As the informants each told their story about infidelity, it was important to allow them continued ownership over their story as much as

possible. While the ultimate end product is the researcher's interpretation of their narratives, the researcher wanted the informants to be able to identify their input and have ownership over this. Therefore informants were given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms for themselves.

The discussions began with the researcher providing an overview of the background to the study (including the formation of the project and researcher's interest in the area). Informants were told that the researcher was interested in eliciting a narrative of the informant's experience of infidelity. Not knowing how or what informants wanted to cover in telling their stories, the researcher did not want to limit the inquiry to a set form of questioning. As a result an in-depth open-ended method of questioning was used as this was deemed the most appropriate way of encouraging them to tell their stories. Therefore, after establishing rapport and thanking them for being part of the research, the researcher began with the question, 'What has been your experience of infidelity?' The researcher used encouraging nods and verbal responses such as 'tell me more' or 'mmm' to elicit further information.

The interviews were carried out using an open-ended format. The interviewer asked very few questions and found that the informants did not need much prompting. They said they felt safe and non-judged by the interview process. The one-to-one in-depth interviews took a narrative approach where the informants were encouraged to speak of their life history, including how they experienced the family system and the meaning they made of their lives within the context of their subjective experience of infidelity.

Making meaning of their experience was equally important to the content of the story and the truth of their experiences. In this manner, such a style of data collection did not set out to provide verifiable accounts of the participants' experiences. Rather, it involved the sharing of what she or he had subjectively experienced through infidelity with the emphasis on restoring the relationship after infidelity. This approach, according to Booth (1999, p.127), has 'the potential to harness the power of narrative in order to depict people's lives at the level of feeling as well as understanding'.

There was considerable difficulty in choosing the terminology that would capture the roles of the partners associated with the impact of infidelity. At times in the literature, the one having the affair has been described as the 'infidel' (Pittman, 1991), the 'involved partner' (Moultrup, 2003), the 'participating partner' (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004) or the 'offending partner' (Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002). Descriptions of the partner not having the affair have been the 'cuckold' (Pittman, 1991), 'hurt partner' (Spring, 1990), the 'injured partner' (Olson, et al, 2002; Gordon et al, 2004) or 'non-involved partner' (Moultrup, 2003).

Research conducted by Atkins, Baucom, Eldridge, & Christensen (2005) found that sexual exclusiveness is an assumption for most couples in a relationship. Therefore the terminology used in this research to designate the roles of partners is as follows: The term, 'non-exclusive partner', designates the individual having engaged in the extramarital affair. The term, 'exclusive partner', designates the

individual not having an affair. In the actual interviews, the informants would speak of either their wife or husband depending on their gender.

3.6 Data Analysis

Unlike some qualitative research processes, there are no strict rules governing narrative analysis technique. In fact, choosing such a design necessitates a departure from structured methodologies. A number of previous studies were examined to observe the multitude of ways in which narrative inquiry has been used (Booth, 1999; Harvey et al., 1995; Jones, 2002; Kirkman, 2002; Neimeyer, 2001; Ylijoki, 2001).

Having tertiary training in psychology and counselling, the researcher has counselled many couples over a period of ten years. Seeing an average of twenty people per week, the number of clients dealing with infidelity would be approximately thirty per cent. The researcher noticed that some relationships recovered from the effects of infidelity whereas others ended in divorce. As a result the researcher was curious about the factors that made the difference. In addressing the factors that rebuild relationships after infidelity, the researcher did not want to influence the outcome by adding counselling as a pre-requisite. Rather the intention was to discover the lived experience of these couples with their view of what was helpful in healing their relationship. Interestingly, counselling was one of the factors that came out of the study. Further research could explore informants with the pre-requisite of counselling in dealing with infidelity.

Notes were made after each interview that contained impressions, feelings about the interview, information that stood out about the informant or his/her story as a whole. As in open coding, I made a list of categories. This was first undertaken from the literature I had read. Throughout this process I was attempting to find meanings and relationships. A thematic analysis and a broader meta-narrative (or plot line) analysis were combined (Polkinghorne, 1995). The plot embedded within became a focus of analysis. This focus was determined by the content of the data.

The transcripts were typed leaving a column on the right side of the page in which I could write notes to identify themes. In the reading of the transcripts, key words, phrases, concepts and meanings were highlighted. The provisional list of themes or categories was in part influenced by the literature review, but new categories were added from the actual data (McLeod, 2001). The emphasis used by the informant highlighted some phrase or data as significant. An example of a key category that was not found in the literature, read prior to transcribing the data was the meaning of 'acts of kindness'. While this category was not common in all the informants' stories, it was in the majority of the stories. As the transcribing proceeded with all of the informants' tapes, the selection of important categories became more evident.

The narrative analytical methods I used involved studying the transcripts in detail and looking for dominant meanings. I was aware of my own subjective interpretation of the meanings within the texts but the validity of the meanings that were emerging from the data was sought looking for contradictions and

consistencies across all the informants' stories. The interview transcripts were de-identified and sent for review to the study supervisors. The supervisors reviewed both the content of the interview transcripts and categorisation of themes.

The reading and re-reading of the transcripts allowed for the identification of key words and themes that gave rise to coding and analysing so that meanings could be identified from the individual stories. For example, in all the interviews it became apparent that motivation was important to rebuild the relationships. Three key areas emerged from the core concept of motivation. These were the investment of children, property and time, the desire to solve problems and the fear of failure.

The informants' stories were collated using the informant's own words. This required a cut and paste technique, so that each story was redrafted within the same structure of themes. Headings and subheadings were used in this process which involved labelling, coding and categorising meanings. From the edited individual stories told under this structure of key themes, a consolidated results chapter was written using the most significant stories to relate the findings around each particular theme. Both the individual story lines and the group findings were reviewed by supervisors. Considerable discussion and exchange of views helped refine some of the coding and interpretation. This process continued throughout a long period of data analysis. The involvement of senior researchers who constantly reviewed the evolving analysis assisted in adding

rigour to the data analysis process. The issue of rigour and validity is discussed in section 3.9.

Had all of the informants' comments in relation to all the themes been included, the thesis would have been an immense document so a selection and editing process was necessary to illustrate the particular meaning that related to a similar experience among the other informants. This process required many drafts of the results chapters.

Individual narrative vignettes were selected from the full transcripts and included in the meta-narrative sections of the results in order that language, feelings and experiences could be expressed about a particular topic. This process allowed for comparison between experiences of the participants in relation to a particular topic. In such a way the individual segments of stories could be grafted into a larger story providing a 'whole picture' (McLeod, 2001).

3.7 Ethics approval

Ethics approval was granted through the University of New England Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. HE03/031) for the duration of the study. This involved providing all informants with a list of local services that they could contact (either by telephone or in person) should they become distressed by the interview process. Contact numbers for the project supervisors, the Human Ethics Committee, and the researcher were provided, should the informant wish to discuss their participation at any time. This was reiterated to

the informants prior to the interview commencing and a second copy of the information was given if necessary.

In the information package (Appendix D) and during the interview process, informants were advised that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time and all information gathered from them would be destroyed. No informants withdrew from the study. All informants were required to sign an informed consent letter prior to the interview beginning (Appendix E). At this time the informants were asked to consent to the tape-recording of the interview. All informants agreed to be tape-recorded. The informants were reminded that counselling was available for them, if necessary, owing to the revisiting of their story and the resurfacing of painful emotions.

3.8 The Researcher's Role

In implementing this study on restoration of relationship after infidelity, there were three issues that were of interest. Firstly, the researcher was not sure how participants would respond to being interviewed. In fact, the researcher was not sure whether anyone would come forward to share their experiences on a subject that sometimes could be considered controversial. Secondly, the nature of the research question implied that the couples had repaired their relationships and yet the researcher had reservations about the permanence of such a recovery or how to measure the recovery. Thirdly, the researcher wondered if the Australian experience of infidelity would vary from research conducted overseas.

The informants agreed to be interviewed and were appreciative as they wanted their stories to be heard. However, before the interviews began, they did show some apprehension about being audio-taped. Once confidentiality was reassured, they were able to narrate their experience of infidelity, trying to make meaning of the event and the process of rebuilding the relationship.

In transcribing, the researcher was able to hear details that might have been missed in the first hearing of their stories. During the process of transcribing the audio-tapes, the researcher noted the informants' desire to tell their stories. It seemed that they wanted an opportunity to express themselves in a safe environment. It was like they had not only thought about their experiences long and hard, but they had also worked on 'knowing' their issues (McLeod, 2001). In order to rebuild their relationships they admitted to their understanding of what had happened and what their relationship had required for recovery from infidelity.

3.9 Limitations and strengths

As this was a qualitative study, there were only seven interviews conducted with informants who had experienced infidelity. This group of informants were motivated to speak about their experiences and self-selected upon notification of the project. The results therefore are influenced and limited by this, and are only representative of this group.

The complete range of experience dealing with infidelity cannot be presented here. This thesis narrates the experience of study participants. It is possible that other couples may have similar experiences or diverse ones. As with all narrative inquiry research, the data reported here is not meant to be representative, but can be generalised to say that informants who experience infidelity *may* have some of these experiences. Moreover, while “cybersex” is part of infidelity and one-third of divorce litigation is caused by online affairs (www.infidelitycheck.org, 2002), this study does not include this phenomenon. Nor will this study explore other types of affairs such as flirting, sms-ing, emotional sharing and oral sex, but will only focus on sexual affairs simply because the informants that presented had experienced extramarital physical sex with another partner.

In reference to *bias*, Hill, Knox, Thompson, Hess, Williams and Ladany (2005) define biases as ‘personal issues that make it difficult for researchers to respond objectively to the data’ (p.539). Bias was shown by the researcher in relation to whether anyone would come forward to share their experiences on a subject that may be considered controversial. *Expectations* are defined by Hill, et al. (2005, p. 538) as ‘beliefs that researchers have formed based on reading the literature and thinking about and developing research questions’. The researcher was obviously influenced by the limitation of literature, but the selection of narrative style of enquiry helped overcome this as informants were able to express their experience of infidelity. The researcher helped mitigate bias and expectations by reminding herself of her training to be neutral and open-minded. Also an

acknowledgement was made by the researcher that every person has the right to be heard in a non-judgemental way.

While qualitative research is characterised as relational, this is not true for quantitative methods (Haverkamp, 2005). As a result, Morrow (2005) points out that trustworthiness is a core criterion for quality or rigour. The term trustworthiness captures the recognition that informants can be 'vulnerable and that researchers carry a responsibility to promote their welfare and guard against harm' (Haverkamp, 2005, p.146). The researcher in this study was very conscious of showing trustworthiness by being non-judgemental and creating a safe place for informants to tell their stories. Confidentiality and respect were offered as well as providing the informants with information of where they could seek counselling if they found that feelings had been stirred up as a result of sharing their story.

The goal of using narrative inquiry is not to provide verifiable accounts of events. Rather, coming from a social constructionist background, the meaning attached to events is understood as changing over time. Personal narratives constitute the units of such discourse (Reissman 2003, p.341). Meaning is not static, rather it is fluid and evolves as other events are experienced, and the narrator reflects back on previous events. Thus, the goal of such a project is not to establish a traditional sense of validity and reliability. As stated previously, the relationship that builds between the researcher and the informant in a study such as this inherently means that what is said during this encounter may not be

replicated if someone else were to elicit the narrative. This situation rules out the possibility of another interviewer validating the findings.

Validity of the data is ensured *within* these informants' experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 2000). Reliability was enhanced in this project through the regular revisiting of the original audio taped interviews, to limit the possibility of the data being taken out of the context in which the informant intended it. Thus the apparently insignificant verbal and linguistic values (of pauses, for example) were included as part of the analysis in line with the chosen method. The themes that emerged were validated by the two supervisors involved in this research.

Narrative inquiry is able to deal with the uniqueness of such personal and distinctive data due to its focus on the individual plot embedded within each story (Reissman, 1997). Crucial meanings could be lost if the form of the telling is ignored and the text is fragmented and de-contextualised. Reciprocity exists between form and meaning. The strength of this study is that the nuances of speech and the organisation of the narrative were focussed on. Conversely, it must be acknowledged that the limitations of language may impede understanding (Reissman, 1993). This enabled the researcher to view both the micro and macro elements of the story and the interplay of these elements. This occurred both within an individual story and between the informant's accounts of the experience. For example, the macro elements of the story may relate to broader social and cultural contexts, such as the reported stigma associated with

infidelity, while micro issues communicate the internal world of the informant in responding to betrayal, guilt and shame.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the purpose of the study and the rationale for using a qualitative research design. It describes the process used to obtain and analyse informants' narratives of their experience of infidelity and rebuilding their relationship. The role of the researcher and the strengths and limitations of the study were outlined. The following chapter introduces the informants and provides an account of their narratives.

Chapter 4

Results: Individual Narratives

This chapter provides a portrait of each of the informants involved in this research together with their narratives. The informant's pseudonym appears at the top of each portrait. These portraits are structured so that the reader can develop a sense of the interview, the informant and their account of infidelity. The narratives outline their past history leading up to the infidelity and what happened at the time of discovery of infidelity as well as their relationship since their experience of infidelity. The informants' narratives are presented in chronological order according to when they were interviewed. In the text, italics are used to identify the informant's own words when they are used.

Demographic Table of Informants

Name	Age	Gender	No. of children	Age of children	Employment status	Years together
Anton	30	Male	2	4, 6	Technology	10
Bella	36	Female	4	12-20	Housewife	23
Cheryl	44	Female	3+ 4 step	8-24	Housewife	7
Darren	46	Male	5+ 2 step	8-24	Insurance	7
Errol	44	Male	2	9, 15	Psychologist	6
Felicity	32	Female	2	7, 9	Housewife	12
Gary	35	Male	3	4, 6 & 8	Tradesman	11

(Cheryl, Darren and Errol had been married before)

4.1 Portrait and Narrative of Anton

Anton was a 28 year old male at the time of his infidelity, married with two young children. He had acquired tertiary education with a double degree and had a well-paid but demanding job involving considerable stress.

4.1.1 Family Portrait

Anton was the third child, with an older sister and brother (deceased) and a younger sister. His mother had an affair when he was 13 years old which affected him, *my mother had an affair which was a shock to us all. I felt sorry for my dad and resented my mother for her infidelity. However, I could understand her frustration with my dad as he wasn't a good provider and relied on her a lot. She saw to most things so she was fairly stressed seeing to us kids, whereas dad was relaxed and fun to be with.*

His childhood was mostly enjoyable, his family shifted from place to place. Anton was encouraged to study hard, and ended up completing a double degree. His brother's death affected them all and created a lot of anxiety for him whenever his parents went out as he was afraid they might not come back. *The reality was that I knew that bad things, like death, could happen. I used humour, like a mask, to hide my fear and anxiety.*

Like his parents, he married young. He was 20 years old and his wife was 19 years old. They met at high school. *As an adult now, I can see that my mother was the responsible one and often felt unappreciated. That is ultimately how I felt in my own marriage responsible provider, unappreciated and isolated.*

4.1.2 Events preceding infidelity

Anton was working overseas, trying to keep his wife happy as she was complaining about living in a foreign country with language difficulties and young children. She felt he was away at work too long and she felt isolated, without her family nearby for support. Meanwhile he was trying to adapt to the new job with all its demands. *I was earning the most I had ever earned before, but the expectations were huge. When I would get home at night she would complain that I didn't care about her and that I should help her more with the children.* After a few months, there was a work colleague who seemed to appreciate him, and knew the stress they were both under at work. His wife insisted on returning to a country where English was spoken. He would commute to Europe for the week and return home on weekends. With work deadlines, he sometimes stayed in Europe for the weekend as well. *The opportunity was there for the affair to take place, lasting about seven months.*

4.1.3 Discovery of infidelity

Even though his wife did not know about the affair, Anton told her about it three months after he had ended it. His work contract had ended and they came back to Australia. Although Anton felt there was no reason to tell his wife about the affair, he wanted her to understand how unhappy he had been and how harsh she had been to him while they were living in Europe, and how much she had hurt him. *I wanted a change in the relationship and thought it would be better to be honest. I was ambivalent. I was both glad that I'd had the experience, but I felt bad too. I felt disconnected and yet sad. I wondered whether to move onto a new relationship, because it seemed like such hard work to stay with my wife.*

Anton felt there was ambivalence in his own family about the affair. He did not receive much support from his family. *I told my parents and siblings. One of my sisters was very critical of me which hurt a lot. My mother showed understanding as she had been unfaithful twelve years before, but my father found it difficult as it took him back to his own pain. Maybe, he identified with my wife more than me. However, he said he could understand how it happened, especially as my wife was not there for me.*

His wife told her parents, but not her siblings. They each told their best friends and asked them to keep it secret. They separated for three months, and had counselling. *I think it helped that our male counsellor had also had an affair. He seemed to understand what we were going through and he gave us hope that our relationship could recover. Also the fact that my parents had survived infidelity was helpful.*

4.1.4 The effects of infidelity

Initially his wife was both hurt and angry and insisted on separation. She found a place to rent, not knowing whether to end the relationship permanently or whether to repair the damage to the relationship. Gradually they began to talk, agreeing to be more honest with each other and to be more loving and not as critical of each other. *As a result of my being honest about my affair, my marriage improved gradually. It gave my wife a fright and put her on notice that I was not happy with the way things were. Having the affair was a dishonest way of dealing with my unhappiness in the marriage. Declaring my deceit was a risk I took which initially weakened the relationship, but later strengthened it.*

4.1.5 Factors that restored the relationship

An important factor was their commitment to their marriage vows and the old adage that ‘where there is a will, there is a way’. They made a conscious decision to mend the marriage. *My wife was able to forgive me, which humbled me and released me.* They were motivated to rebuild their relationship and they found that counselling helped as it offered a safe place to talk about unsafe issues. *I realised I did love my wife and that we had two children. I wanted to be able to have input in their lives which would be less if I divorced my wife.* They also decided to work on the flaws in their relationship instead of starting a new relationship with someone else. *Our relationship involved a big investment of time, memories and property, and we didn’t want to forfeit any of that.* For Anton, another important aspect was forgiveness. His wife was able to forgive him and give him a second chance. He cut back on his drinking and agreed to be accountable for his movements. *At first, she didn’t trust me very well so I would phone to let her know where I was and why I would be late. She would thank me for my consideration. A bigger test came when I had to work away for a week at a time and come home for weekends. At first she was fearful and insecure but after a while she was more trusting.*

To live with the past and move on as a couple, Anton and his wife found it helpful that having talked about their hurt and pain and having dealt with the reasons for the affair, they decided to stop ruminating about the affair to each other. Anton expressed it this way, *Not to keep talking about the past because we can’t change it, but having dealt with it we focus on today and our goals for the future.* Sometimes, there is a sense of a barrier there between them, so they either choose

to talk about what they are sensing or they ignore it. *It's a bit like sometimes overlooking a small thing a child may do that isn't really that important.*

At the time of the interview, it was nearly three years since the affair, and their relationship was much improved. Anton felt that his wife has changed into a softer and kinder person. As a result of the stability of their relationship, they decided to have two more children. *My wife is now four months pregnant and our relationship is really good.*

4.2 Portrait and Narrative of Bella

A 40 year old female at the time of her affair, married with four children and a stay-at-home mother. The death of her son and the ensuing grief had left her emotionally vulnerable.

4.2.1 Family Portrait

Bella was the youngest of three girls. Her father had wanted a son so she felt rejected by him. However, in her teens he made sexual advances to her. She had also been sexually molested as a child by an employee of her parents. *When I was 17, I became pregnant and married my boyfriend. We had four children. When I was 36 my son was killed. The grief affected me enormously. When I was 40, I had an affair.* Bella and her husband did not tell many people about what had happened as they thought *'the least said, the soonest mended'*. *My sister knew as did my mother-in-law and his brothers. Thankfully my parents were dead so they would not know. I felt judged by those who knew and 'unclean as a leper'.*

It took a long time for Bella's husband to trust her again and for him *to stop casting it up to me. My father had always been a womaniser, having had at least one affair that I knew of. I did not like what he did. My mother was wonderful and put up with a lot. As a child she would say to me, 'No man can cast anything against me!' I could never understand what that meant, but since having had the affair, I understand entirely.*

4.2.2 Events preceding infidelity

At the time, she was feeling neglected by her husband and angry with him for another failed business. They had been married 23 years. Two young men had been living with them as employees for this business and *as usual I was expected to cook and clean for them, as well as attend to my two younger children. My son had been killed four years before and one of these guys was a friend of his. I found that he really seemed to care about me, was thoughtful and attentive to me. After a few months, my husband passed a comment that he seemed to be in love with me. I was shocked, as this idea had not crossed my mind. However, I took more notice of him and wondered if it were true. He would say things like, "I could never find anyone as lovely as you". He was 20 years younger than me so I was flattered. Eventually we became lovers and the affair lasted three years. I loved him very much and missed him terribly after the affair.*

4.2.3 Discovery of infidelity

Her husband suspected something was going on, but she denied it. However, later on a friend told her husband the truth and this time she did not deny it. *Even though my husband was devastated, he brought me a bunch of roses to make*

amends. I was so ashamed of myself and so touched that he could be so forgiving by giving me flowers.

My feelings were of despair and guilt. I missed my lover but soon realised that I had to stop contact with him, if my marriage was to survive. There were enormous losses and grief. Deep down I had known the affair would not last, as my lover was so young and would have wanted children of his own later on. I grieved for my lost youth, my broken dreams and the cold reality of my situation. I dreaded what lay before me anguish, ongoing pain, clawing my way back to respectability, and overcoming the judgement and ostracism. I had no qualifications, having been married at 17 and I had been a stay-at-home mum for all these years. How bleak my future looked and how empty my life felt. Having lost a son a few years before, I had received a great deal of support and empathy from others, but now my grief was not comforted but strongly condemned.

4.2.4 Effects of Infidelity

For months I was very depressed, but I did not see a doctor. Maybe I needed anti-depressants? Somehow I had to make amends for my folly. I was too ashamed to tell anyone what I had done. Because Bella and her husband had not had counselling when their son was killed, they once again struggled on without counselling. With hindsight, I think counselling could have reduced the time it took to restore our relationship. In all the years we have been married we have faced many obstacles and somehow we would stick together and survive. I guess

we are a resilient couple, being able to endure, not give up, find a way through and start again. It was almost like rebuilding after a bomb had exploded.

The affair left her numb and isolated. She felt there was no empathy for the one being unfaithful; the other partner received all the attention and empathy, whereas the one who had the affair was judged and condemned. *It was equally painful for both my husband and myself and it has taken ten years to recuperate from such a massive wound to our marriage. The biggest consequence is that instead of us only having ever had sex with each other, I had spoiled that by doing it with someone else. That 'specialness' had gone forever. Living with the awfulness of what I had done still saddens me and I feel grateful that somehow we pulled through and we are still together. The wound has healed but the scar remains.*

4.2.5 Factors that restored relationship

I guess it was our commitment to each other. The children, the years we had spent together. If my husband had not loved me enough, it would have ended. He did not reject me but reached out to me and he forgave me. He showed me mercy, even though some days he would be hurt and angry. We both came to realise that the death of our son had hurt us both so much. My husband had thrown himself into work and in my vulnerability I had found refuge in someone else's arms. If our son had not died then I believe this situation would not have arisen.

Bella had to work hard at reassuring her husband that she could be trusted again and he in turn encouraged her for her openness. She made sure that she was truthful and kept her promises in terms of going where she said she would be

going. *At first there was awkwardness having sex and also if there was a TV programme depicting an affair. Even today I don't laugh at jokes about infidelity.* It took a long time for them to be truly relaxed in each other's company. Unfortunately he had wanted to know some of the details of the affair and then he found he couldn't handle knowing where and when they had carried on the affair. *I regretted telling him so much. I have felt on the outer edge with my grown-up children, knowing they felt deeply for their father, so that has been sad for me. The amazing thing is that when my third grandchild was born, she adored me right from the beginning. If I was holding her she wouldn't want to go back to her parents. It meant so much to me to be loved unconditionally by this baby and even today she loves me dearly and lights up when she sees me.*

I realise more than anything that my husband's love kept us together and I am so glad we survived the trauma of an affair. I have more compassion now for others and their challenges, knowing how sometimes we make decisions that seem alright at the time but later we regret them. I am still too ashamed to tell anyone what I did and make sure I don't divulge anything about my affair. My family never mentions it either.

To move on from the past was difficult. Even though they had no choice in their son's death, the grieving process was similar to the grief they experienced from living with the choice Bella had made to have an affair. In describing how she coped, Bella said, *In the same way we live with our son's death life goes on. There are days when his death or my affair, are fresh in my memory through little reminders such as music or the beauty of a loving moment. I feel a twinge of pain*

and feel the emotion of nostalgia, joy or sadness and then I let it go wistfully, knowing I can't go back there, but that it is part of my life forever. I focus on what I must do now, after acknowledging my feelings and reminding myself that I am human and not a robot. I have poured my energy into my marriage, children and grandchildren. I have a job I enjoy and I am content. My husband and I don't speak of the affair anymore and this has helped the healing.

At the time of the interview, it was 16 years since the affair had ended. The informants felt their relationship was restored, even though it had been a difficult struggle. To convey what their relationship is like now, Bella said, *It is comfortable, pleasing and rewarding. I am so glad we have each other and I admire him more than words can say. He is my hero; he loved me even though I betrayed him. He loves me still and I love him too. We have entered the best and most tender time of our marriage. It's like 'coming home' with feelings of acceptance, security and comfort, knowing you are loved, no matter what! Regrets, a few, but I am extremely grateful for the outcome.*

4.3 Portrait and Narrative of Cheryl

Cheryl was aged 44, with three children and four step-children, at the time of her husband's affair. Cheryl was at home raising the children, but had been employed before her second marriage. Cheryl's husband, Darren, was interviewed after Cheryl.

4.3.1 Family Portrait

Cheryl's father had been in the air force. Cheryl was born in Europe, even though her parents were British. Cheryl has a brother and a sister. *I went to 13 different primary schools in three different countries before I got to high school in Australia.* At first they lived in a city in New South Wales and then moved to the country within New South Wales where they lived for ten years.

Cheryl left home when she was 16 and completed a course at TAFE for a couple of years. Then she went to the Lands Department and married for the first time. Her husband was a land inspector and was about fourteen years older than her. He had a very dominant personality. They moved to the city, had two children but when the youngest was a baby and she was turning 30, she decided to leave him. *It was a turning point for me. He was quite an abusive, nasty person. I told him I wanted an amicable separation, but it did not work that way.* He cut off the credit card, took the money out the bank, sold her car and tried to isolate and keep her there. *So I had to go to great lengths to get out of there.*

I met my next husband shortly after this. He told me he had had several affairs and was a bit of a womaniser. He came from a family of eight children and went to a boarding school as did his brothers and sisters. After school he went jackarooing for a year and then he was conscripted. His first wife was an unusual woman and very hard. He married her soon after coming back from Vietnam and they had four children. He was in the life insurance industry when Cheryl met him. He was very successful and had very good people skills. He was very charming, very nice. *He seemed to have a self-destruct button in many areas of*

his life at that time. It wasn't just the affair...he made a lot of silly decisions. When I married him, and because his first wife had been so ruthless about the money, I wanted to reassure him and so I just handed over everything, and let him run everything. I lost everything with the bankruptcy. I often look back and think he deliberately destroyed his own credibility as a father, as a businessman, as a brother, as a son.

4.3.2 Events preceding infidelity

They had been married seven years, and had one child. There was the blended family issue with six children living with them. *So I had a very busy life that had only been happening for the last eight to ten months, I guess, that they had all been living with us. I couldn't afford any sort of help at home so my life went down the toilet somewhere, between the kitchen and laundry and the supermarket, pushing one trolley and pulling another one, but I was very determined to make it work and to build a strong relationship between my step-children and myself, and the other children together.*

There was a lot of financial pressure. They were heading for bankruptcy. *I can remember one morning he left the house without giving me a goodbye kiss and I thought then that was just so unlike him and I told him I felt I was losing him but he did not say anything to me.*

4.3.3 Discovery of infidelity

It was a few months after that he had a conference in Sydney and he was going again but only staying one night. Cheryl had organised for the children to be

looked after and decided to surprise him by accompanying him to Sydney. *I jumped up in the morning and said 'I'm coming with you' and he said 'Oh, that's good, Okay' so we got there and we booked into the hotel that the company had organised for him and the lady behind the reception desk said, 'Oh this is Mr. H's account from last week'. The moment I took that envelope (normally he wouldn't get a bill because the company would pay for it), I had a feeling this was strange and when I checked the bill I saw dinner and breakfast for two. He denied it for a little while and eventually the other woman's husband rang Cheryl and said, 'I believe your husband is having an affair with my wife'. It went from there and for about ten months Cheryl struggled with her husband saying he was going to stop seeing the other woman. They had counselling and the counsellor told Cheryl that it was unlikely that he would stop his womanising. This statement helped Cheryl to make up her mind and leave him. *He kept lying to me all the time he was constantly seeing her saying he wasn't seeing her, the financial situation was getting worse. I extricated myself from the family company and then I decided I would leave him and I packed up the kids. The oldest two went to Sydney and I took the other four with me and moved up here.**

They separated for twelve months during which time Cheryl's husband declared himself bankrupt and followed Cheryl to Queensland. He moved to Brisbane with his sister and then the woman he was having the affair with, left her husband and followed him to Brisbane where they set up house for six months which *actually was one of the best things that could have happened, because the reality of sharing an everyday domestic life with her was a long way removed from anything else that they might have shared.*

In a very short time things began to change with Cheryl making a few strategic decisions like *I wasn't going to be the ex-wife from hell, I wasn't going to give them any ammunition and I wasn't going to hand him to her on a plate.* Cheryl wanted to try and maintain a functional relationship with him because all the way along he kept saying he did not want the marriage to break up even though he was doing all these other things that indicated that he did. *I was leaving my children with him every second weekend. I decided if she wants my husband, she can have the children to look after every second weekend. I am not going to fall into the trap of being horrible to them or to him and keeping the children from him, giving them ammunition to hate me and justify what he had done and also prevent the children from seeing him. No, I'll have a nice relationship with him and she'll have the children every second weekend, and I must say that when I would take the children to him we would meet half-way, he would always be upset, he would be melancholy and upset and I would get sick pleasure out of putting the shoe on the other foot.*

4.3.4 Effects of Infidelity

The affair had a devastating effect on Cheryl. *I was absolutely gutted, I was so gutted, I can't tell you. It was like a fire had wiped me out. I was flat out putting one foot in front of the other and it was killing me. I had to leave him because it was killing me, because he would lie to me all the time. So many times he would make promises and he'd say he wasn't having any contact with her at all. He crushed me like a piece of paper. I was emotionally shattered. At the time I thought I was handling it very well but I look back now and I realise I was an*

absolute basket case. I didn't even think to go to the doctor to get help, which would have been good for me at the time.

4.3.5 Factors that restored relationship

Cheryl decided to be nice to her husband but then she began to have loving feelings towards him. And then she went to a Louise Hay workshop (Louise Hay is an author of self-help books) and it was a forgiveness workshop. *I felt stuck in blaming him for having the affair. Then I gradually realised that I also played a part in what happened. It dawned on me that we were like a pair of shoes that go together and I found that strangely challenging but also liberating. That was really the turning point for me in terms of dropping the baggage and I told him I forgave him, and he of course was in tears and he took that to mean everything is ok, we can get back together. That surprised me a bit and I didn't say anything about it. So it evolved from there where we did talk about getting back together. I think I got to know him more after we separated that the previous seven years.*

Shortly afterwards Cheryl's husband had a heart attack. He was living with the other woman, but he told Cheryl that their relationship was not working but they had two months to go on their lease. He felt bad because the other woman had moved up there, she left her husband and he was feeling guilty about that situation and he was a bankruptee. So many things had happened and he was facing the reality of what had happened. He was a Vietnam Veteran and there are many issues that he had never really talked about with Cheryl. After he got out of hospital they reconciled although it was almost a year after they had separated.

Cheryl found that the example of her sister-in-law's behaviour helped her to live with the past and move on in her relationship with her husband. *I've seen a lot of bitter women I have a sister-in-law who has been through this and she can't let that bitterness go. She serves it up to him constantly. You have to make a conscious decision that you are going to move on past that. You don't bring it up. Initially it would come up sometimes but I tried very hard not to. In bringing it up, you have to remember you are bringing her back to his mind and his thoughts. Every time you raise her name you are bringing her back into his mind. To be honest after we reconciled there wasn't a day that went by for about four years that I didn't think about it.*

At the time of the interview it was seven years since the affair and the relationship had changed. *Well, we have a very close relationship and he doesn't spend much time without me anymore. We are in constant contact and he has actually become more like the needy one. It's almost like a role reversal in many aspects. When you reconcile after infidelity there is a real shift in power and you have to be really careful how you use that. He is a lot more vulnerable. If we have a fight, we had a disagreement the other night and the next morning he is the one crying and he's saying he hates it when we fight. We talk it through the next morning and reconcile things.*

The power shift changed the dynamic between them. *He is really the needy one now and I'm doing some study at uni. I'm trying to encourage him to go out and play golf and get some golfing buddies and do things other than things we do together because we do 'everything' together. I love his company and we share*

interests and we do lots of things together that we love but as he gets older he is more and more dependent on me emotionally. He lets me decide where to go for our holidays and outings but I do take his opinion into account.

4.4 Portrait and Narrative of Darren

Darren is Cheryl's husband. He had been married before. He had five children and two step-children. He was aged 46 at the time he had the affair. He had been a good provider but was under financial pressure, trying to pay maintenance for his children from the first marriage.

4.4.1 Family Portrait

My dad was a bit of an old bugger a very hard man. Mum was the matriarch. Her father was a full-blooded Chinese who was a big landowner. She was brought up to be a lady and she was raised in North Queensland. They owned many businesses and she would be stage-coached to Townsville and put on a boat to Sydney and then stage-coached to New England to a private girl's school. They were very well off. My mother died five years ago. She was a lot like my wife lovely, warm, kind, vivacious, the life of the party actually. Both of them have that quiet strength. My mother had wonderful social skills. Dad is 84 now. I have great respect for him. He put eight children through boarding school and he was a successful businessman.

Darren was second to eldest. His family was close to each other especially the five brothers as they went to the same school. *One of my sisters died when she*

was five with leukaemia. I was twelve at the time. When I went to the funeral and saw her put in the ground, I wept uncontrollably for a few hours.

His parents taught him independence. *I didn't really go home after I had finished boarding school, except for holidays.* Darren did National Service and he met a girl six weeks into National Service and then he went to Vietnam after six months. Before he went to Vietnam they became engaged. *Three weeks after I got back from Vietnam and having changed to an angry man, I got married. I was angry because I had seen awful things in Vietnam that were not fair or right. I felt outraged that life wasn't fair. I was a womanizer and had several affairs.* Two of his brothers also had affairs. From Darren's first marriage he had four children aged 28, 26, 25 and 23. He also has a 14 year old daughter from his second marriage.

4.4.2 Events preceding infidelity

Darren was under a great deal of strain and feeling stressed. He was overwhelmed with financial and relationship issues. *I was under a lot of financial pressure. I was having a lot of trouble with my ex-wife with maintenance issues. There had been a long, drawn-out attempt to have a relationship with my four children, two of whom had come back to me after nine years of me not seeing them. So it was that stuff plus I was working really very hard to try and keep ahead of the tidal wave that seemed to be surging behind me and I was trying to outrun this thing but it mowed me down in the end. That's how it was.*

Darren felt he was desperate for comfort, even though his wife gave him comfort. It was pride that kept him from sharing with his wife that he was not coping. *She has always been an amazing woman. This is the largest regret that I have, that I have hurt her. This other girl was at work and she was interested in me, got to me during a low time. She was privy to what I earned and I think that was part of her attraction to me. Not that I like to admit that, but being realistic about it. She was fourteen years younger than me, being 28 or 29 and I was about 44. She came up with all these wonderful ideas on how to make my business more professional like salary sacrificing and I sort of fell into it. At a conference she sat next to me one weekend, so close to me that I could feel the vibes and it was yummy. I didn't do anything, I resisted that. It would have been about six months later at another conference, I had a few beers under my belt and she made it clear that she was available and I ended up in her room. The affair lasted for two years.*

4.4.3 Discovery of infidelity

Darren was confronted by his wife about a previous hotel account for two when he was supposed to be on his own at a work conference. He could not explain it and admitted that there was another woman that he had met at work. *I had been in Sydney for a conference and I thought the bill had been paid for by the company, so when I went with my wife sometime later the room was booked in my name and the hotel presented her with the bill. She confronted me with it and on the one hand I was so relieved, because I was being such a prick, but then I found it very difficult to let the other girl go. I kept going back to her and she wanted to continue too. In the Bible it says 'a man with two minds is unstable in all his ways'. It was hell and yet exhilarating.*

Upon discovery of his secret life, Darren experienced a myriad of emotions. He was confused as to what to do. *I felt guilt, remorse, happiness, terrible sadness. Even today when I start thinking about it, it makes me smart to have caused so much hurt and pain. Initially I had support from my girlfriend and then one of my sisters and her husband supported me and let me stay at her place for three months. I made the fatal mistake of believing I could supply everything. Maybe it was pride because I was so good with earning a lot of money. I felt it was my duty not to let anyone know what was happening. Therefore I felt isolated. If my wife had been aware of the financial position, I don't believe the affair would have happened.*

4.4.4 Effects of infidelity

Darren found that his world was turned upside down. He loved both women and was ambivalent about ending the affair. His wife left him and moved away. He declared himself bankrupt and moved interstate, resulting in feelings of shame and guilt. His health suffered and he began to examine his life. *I will never do that again! I felt so disgusted with myself that I had hurt my wife so much. It has made me understand and appreciate my wife more. It has made us capable of talking to each other which was part of the problem before. Love and respect have grown by being honest and committed to each other. Trust has been established because we talk, really talk about not just the trivial things.*

4.4.5 Factors that restored relationship

I knew I still loved her and that she loved me too. I also wanted things to be right for our kids as well. Our daughter is the link between our respective

biological children. Both Darren and Cheryl were compatible people with similar family backgrounds. They were motivated to restore their relationship and he did not want to manipulate anymore. After having had one failed marriage, he did not want to fail again and be labelled a loser. He was determined to save his marriage and so he made the decision to win. They found that forgiveness was an important part of the reconciliation. His wife attended a workshop on forgiveness and was able to forgive him. My wife was calmer and didn't use my affair as a weapon against me. She made sure I saw my children, my previous wife did not, and what really touched me was when she left me, she left a meal prepared for me. She was not revengeful and I really appreciated that. My wife doesn't raise the issue of the affair otherwise we wouldn't be together. She has been able to let it go. It is her strength that makes me strong.

To move on and live with what happened in the past was aided by the way his wife handled the affair. *She makes it easier by not rubbing my nose in it. I realise that I had a tendency to womanise in the past and I don't want to go there again because it left me empty and ashamed so I'm really glad to move on. I'm grateful every day that we are back together and I remind myself not to stuff it up ever again.*

At the time of the interview, the affair had taken place five years earlier. Darren was happy and comfortable in his relationship with Cheryl. They set some ground rules such as she would control the money with the signing rights and do the books as a result of the bankruptcy. They now spend more time together as he

works from home and Cheryl is now studying at university and so they have times when they are apart but he makes sure that he lets her know his movements to reassure her. *Our relationship is fabulous now it's superb.*

Darren felt that Cheryl had come through a tumultuous storm of hurt and pain that took time to settle and quieten the insecurity and distrust. *We are so glad to have weathered the storm and to be experiencing calmness and peace like never before. It is much more relaxing and real for us both and we appreciate each other much more. Our children are pleased we are back together and we feel it has been helpful for them to see that relationships can be made better with perseverance.*

4.5 Portrait and Narrative of Errol

Errol is a male who has been twice divorced. He has two children, and was living as a de facto, aged 44, at the time that his partner had the affair. He is highly educated, and is in the process of obtaining his PhD.

4.5.1 Family Portrait

Errol is one of eight children. His parents have just celebrated 50 years of marriage. He is the second eldest. When he was growing up, his parents were very poor so they lived with his mother's parents which meant there were twelve of them in a small house. *It's a kind of bizarre anomaly. I regarded my family life like being in a submarine. It was very close quarters, not much room to move around in, no privacy, very poor, never had a car, parents never owned a home,*

but they were a very highly religious Catholic family. They sent us all to private schools which was the major achievement of their life.

Errol's father worked in a factory. His mother was never in paid employment. They relied heavily on people outside the family for assistance. All of their interests were outside the house with individual pursuits like sports, scouts, etc. *Inside the house we moved around as twelve individuals with very little connection to anyone else. There was no open affection shown. Everybody was a single unit unto themselves. We rarely played together as siblings. We rarely had any interests that connected to our siblings. It was kind of bizarre in that this group of people would never connect.*

There were never any arguments, never raised voices, never any fighting. It was all because we realised resources were sparse and we had to get on in this small enclosed submarine. We didn't impose on anyone because space was so limited. Privacy was non-existent. We have this outward façade, even now when we gather for events, of looking like a close family but we never established any bonds. We just talk about surface stuff like our jobs, hobbies and sport but we never have a personal in-depth discussion. None of us would know our more intimate details. We just wouldn't have a clue.

4.5.2 Events preceding infidelity

Errol had been divorced twice and he did not want to live with someone but rather to date regularly. He met a woman who was intellectually bright and physically attractive. She was happy to live independently and come together on weekends.

After about six years, she was transferred two hours away to another town. *We continued to meet on weekends for good fun, good sex and good companionship but sometimes I would have to be overseas in a work capacity and so we would not see each as often. At the time of her affair I was not spending as much time together, maybe once a fortnight.*

4.5.3 Discovery of infidelity

Errol was told about the affair without hesitation. She told him straight away. *Honesty was the basis of our relationship. I was surprised when she told me, and my first feelings were of inadequacy and rejection. The affair lasted about eight weeks. He moved in with her but then she realised she had very strong feelings for me and that he was not the person she wanted. She ended up evicting him.*

4.5.4 Effects of infidelity

Errol's feelings of inadequacy and rejection quickly dissipated when he rationalised that the one time when he was not there somebody else was. *She hadn't let me know how much she needed me at the time. I quickly got past those first feelings. I thought I should fade out of the picture as she seemed to need men so I should give her the opportunity to establish the kind of relationship that would be suitable for her.* He took it as a critical incident and was quite pragmatic about the fact that she wanted to have a more satisfying relationship. The arrangement they had made had fallen down and was obviously not satisfying her needs.

4.5.5 Factors that restored relationship

They kept in contact with each other for two months. He went to see her and talked about issues. They went on picnics, but they ceased having a sexual relationship. They maintained contact because they had always been friends and they wanted to continue as friends. *We had a fairly open arrangement and we understood that we had our separate lives. However she wanted more of a life with me than I did with her.*

They remained as friends for about six months because it was a critical time. They decided to maintain a relationship that they could sustain so they were platonic friends and their contact decreased to monthly visits and weekly phone calls. Eventually they renewed an intimate relationship. *We just looked at each other and thought well, gee...you know I wasn't having any sex, I wasn't having any fun. She made it quite clear that she would want to rekindle the flame of passion. There wasn't any awkwardness as we began a sexual relationship again. It was a mutual decision. Mentally the decision was made and then everything else followed. We realised during that six months that we were not interested in anyone else and therefore why deprive ourselves of being with each other. I think the trust has always been there because she is honest and I'm honest. I never distrusted her in any way.*

At the time of the interview it was two and a half years since the affair. Errol described their relationship as *stronger than ever and just as honest. It is a very satisfying relationship as we are able to maintain our own space and come together when it suits us. It seems to be the best of both worlds. It combines*

intimacy and friendship with independence and freedom. We did talk about the affair at first but now we don't go there.

For a man, and speaking for myself, 'there was a feeling of contamination in infidelity, both physically and emotionally'. You get close to a person and you have that understanding that they have been with someone else and it takes a while, like six months, to feel that other person no longer contaminates this relationship. Reassurance over time that the other person is out of the picture helps to overcome the contamination. Also it helped that she made a commitment to me again emotionally before it became sexual again.

Errol felt that the other man could not mentally give her the satisfaction that Errol gave her. *We could sit down and have philosophical debates about things for hours. We are both educated but he was not.* They found that forgiveness and acceptance were part of the healing. Errol accepted what had happened and was able to overlook it. *I saw it as a critical incident and treated it as such. We both learnt from the experience and made sure we didn't take each other for granted anymore.*

4.6 Portrait and Narrative of Felicity

Felicity was a mother of two, married, aged 32 at the time she had the affair. Felicity left home as a young girl to be married. She had no employment training or experience. After having her children, she felt unappreciated and unfulfilled.

4.6.1 Family Portrait

She grew up in a rigid household and was the eldest of three children. Her father was very strict and her mother lacked confidence. She felt unsupported by her mother and controlled by her father. When she met her boyfriend who gave her the attention she needed, she made her escape from home and married him. She subsequently had two children.

4.6.2 Events preceding infidelity

I was at first happy and busy raising my children. But after a while, I felt unappreciated and unnoticed by my husband. He worked long hours and seemed distracted and disinterested in me. I longed for attention. I was giving out so much time and love to my children, but when they got older and went to school, I felt lost and abandoned. I didn't know what to do so I joined a gym to get fit and I soon found I was noticed by a guy there. He seemed to be interested in what I had to say. I felt heard and valued. After a few months of a gradual friendship developing, we became lovers.

4.6.3 Discovery of infidelity

Even though her husband became suspicious of her whereabouts, he was still shocked when he discovered that his wife was having an affair. *My husband began to get suspicious of me as I was distant and unresponsive to him. We did not have sex anymore. Eventually, he followed her to the gym where he saw her talking to the other man and then he watched as they went to lunch. He confronted me in the restaurant. I was shocked and tried to deny his accusations. Later on at home, he demanded to know the truth. I then admitted that I was*

having an affair. The look on his face was unforgettable, like he had been stabbed in the chest.

4.6.4 Effects of infidelity

Felicity's husband told her to leave the family home immediately. I was relieved that he knew, but I also felt sick about the hurt and damage I had caused him and the children. I left and lived with my lover for a few weeks. I saw the children now and then, but it was so sad and I felt bad.

The children wanted her to come back home, but her husband was very angry. *He would yell at me and call me names. He even had a fist fight with my lover in the street. After that he became very quiet and withdrawn.* Later he went to the doctor who said he had depression. He took anti-depressants. *The guilt I felt was really getting to me. My lover was fed up with all the drama and wanted some space. I went away to stay with my sister a couple of hours away. I would go for walks to try and clear my head. My husband and my lover would phone me which added to my confusion.*

4.6.5 Factors that restored relationship

It took some time for the emotions to settle down. Gradually Felicity and her husband were able to talk to each other without yelling and blaming. They realised they were both part of the equation. Felicity described how they were able to restore their relationship. *After the anger subsided, he was kinder to me and showed mercy. We talked about the children and what the future held. I had seen others who were not happier or better off by ending the relationship. Many*

of my friends are miserable and lonely now and wish they had worked things out. Besides I really loved him and wanted him in my life. I regretted what I had done and wanted to repair the damage, and gradually he acknowledged that he had also contributed to the breakdown of our marriage. Coming from a broken home, where my father had an affair resulting in the family break up, I decided I did not want to walk away and leave my children devastated. I wanted to show them that losers walk away but winners never quit.

They decided to have counselling to sort out their issues. Through counselling they looked at their old patterns of relating and then made the decision to alter their interactions. *We learnt about using 'I' statements and stopped accusing each other. Slowly we realised that love was an act of the will and we could love each other again. My husband forgave me and said he was sorry for neglecting me. I said I was sorry for what I had done and that I wanted to be with him and the kids. He said I could move back to our family home when we had worked out what went wrong. I felt so relieved and I was glad that we could start over again.*

Gradually they began to feel more relaxed with each other and after seven months of being apart, Felicity moved back into the family home. The counsellor told her to be an open book, accountable for what she did each day. Her husband was told by the counsellor to stop bringing it up as it would drive her away. *Sometimes he would go on and on about me sleeping with someone else, which made it very uncomfortable for me. But gradually he stopped talking about it, and I promised him I would not do it again.*

They wanted to have a better marriage and so they looked for ways to show that they really cared. Their counsellor introduced them to Gary Chapman's concept of 'the five love languages' (1997) which they found useful in knowing what love language applied to them. *I discovered that 'words of affirmation' and 'physical touch' really worked for my husband and he made sure he did 'acts of service' for me as well as giving me 'quality time'. It was like learning new ways of reacting, almost like in parenting, when you realise the kids are growing up and old ways of dictating to them won't work.*

Their relationship changed because they changed. They felt they had come through a huge challenge and survived it which made them stronger. They decided to be creative in spending time together. *We make sure we go on a date once a month, taking turns to plan the date. This way we remember we are still an item and not just parents to our children. We see ourselves as a romantic couple and we try to be creative in showing our love to each other.*

4.7 Portrait and Narrative of Gary

Gary was a married male, with three children. He was aged 35 at the time of his affair. He was unhappy at work, feeling isolated. A new employee at work became his friend and then his lover.

4.7.1 Family Portrait

He has three sisters and he is the second child. His father died just before the affair began. His mother was not coping as a widow and relied heavily on him for support. His youngest sister was cutting herself on her arms and legs and he found

the situation overwhelming. The females in his life did not realise that he was also finding it difficult to cope with the death of his father. *They would talk to me and cry on my shoulder, but I had no one to confide in.*

4.7.2 Events preceding infidelity

There were many things happening in Gary's life prior to the affair. He was experiencing a great deal of stress and isolation and feeling vulnerable. Gary expressed his situation in the following way. *Not only did my dad die, but I was having problems at home and at work. My son was in trouble at school and my wife was trying to handle it as much as possible. But she unloaded on me and at the same time I wasn't happy at work. I didn't fit in with my work mates and felt alone most of the time. I suppose I had a lot on my mind. Anyway, I found that a new girl at work seemed to notice me and said hi now and then. One day we just started talking and I found that she listened to me and did not expect me to solve her problems. I began to look forward to seeing her smiling face at work. She was the only bright spark in my life. A few weeks later after the staff party, we became lovers. It was great but I did feel guilty sometimes.*

4.7.3 Discovery of infidelity

The discovery of the affair was dramatic. It began with his wife's suspicion and escalated to a direct confrontation. *My wife noticed that I got phone calls at odd hours. She would question me and I would say it was someone from work. Eventually she checked up on me and phoned the number that was on my phone. To my horror she found out about the affair and all hell broke loose. She would come to my work place and make scenes. He lost his job and then his wife told*

him to leave the family home. He moved in with one of his sisters who made it very unpleasant for him. *My sister heaped so much scorn on me but there was nowhere to go and no money either.*

4.7.4 Effects of infidelity

The affair resulted in an overwhelming grief process of shame and depression. The couple separated and Gary not only lost his job, but also his sense of manhood and identity. *I felt like I had been castrated and I couldn't face seeing my kids either. I got so depressed that I wanted to end my life. I didn't know what to do. I was lost and alone. My mother was disappointed in me because I wasn't there for her in her hour of need. I felt like a loser.*

After a few weeks when the rage in my wife was less than a hurricane, my sister who had been cutting herself, told me about a counsellor who had helped her. After talking to my wife about our relationship, she agreed to go with me to the counsellor.

4.7.5 Factors that restored the relationship

There were a number of factors that assisted the healing process. Motivation and counselling played an important part in rebuilding their relationship. They also found that managing memories and forgiveness were vital in repairing the damage. Gary explained, *without a doubt, the counselling helped us to talk without shouting at each other. The counsellor acted like a referee. She checked with us about how motivated we were to fix the relationship. We worked out that we both were very motivated as we had three kids, a house and lots of good*

memories. There was a lot of pain for us both, but we talked about what went wrong and how we could make it right. We realised how we had been so critical of each other and then how the other one would sulk or be defensive. It wasn't easy. In fact it was bloody hard.

I kept having flashbacks to the good sex I had with the girl at work but I couldn't say anything to anyone. I kept saying to myself, 'forget about her, she is not the mother of your children', and 'your mate lost his house and children and the respect of his family because of another woman', things like that. I made a promise to my wife that I would never contact the other woman again and she said she would stop talking about her. That's when things began to change. Little by little my wife forgave me and the look in her eyes softened. I felt relieved that the nightmare was fading and after about five months we made a truce.

To declare to each other and their family that they wanted to begin their relationship again, they decided to have a special ceremony to mark this decision. *We decided to renew our wedding vows as we wanted to show our family that all was forgiven and that we were starting a new chapter in our relationship. We also had another baby (our fourth boy), which confirmed our commitment to each other. It also meant that my wife was able to trust me again by having another baby and being vulnerable.*

Gary felt that their marriage improved as they found new ways to be thoughtful and loving. *She was merciful and stopped bringing up my fling with the other*

woman. I decided to spend as much time with her and the children as possible. I have started my own business which is very satisfying but a bit challenging.

They made a few decisions to relate differently. We promised each other that we would not raise our voices but keep them soft. We are very open with each other, sharing our deepest feelings. We are finding new and exciting ways to relate that I never thought was possible. Our boys sense our stability and we are all happier and less dysfunctional

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has allowed the informants' experience of infidelity to be expressed. The informants were able to give their family portrait and the events that led to infidelity. On being given the opportunity to reveal their lived experience of infidelity, these informants have not only provided insight into the reasons, discovery and impact of infidelity, but also the factors that helped to rebuild their relationships after infidelity.

Chapter 5

Results: Rebuilding Relationships after Infidelity

This chapter reports the themes and patterns that emerged from the individual narratives presented in the previous chapter. Even though each narrative about infidelity was unique, there were overall similarities that became evident. Key words and themes were identified from the informants' narratives. For example, in all the interviews it became evident that motivation was important in rebuilding the relationships. In this analysis, the terminology used for the informants is the 'non-exclusive partner' (the one who had the affair) and the 'exclusive partner' (the one who did not have the affair). All of the informants in this study were married except for one couple who were in a de facto relationship.

The informants explored and enunciated their perceived reasons for the affair. It was important for them to know why the affair had taken place. They found that there were many factors that contributed to them having an affair such as hurt, isolation and pain. In addition to their vulnerability the opportunity to have an affair was available. When the discovery of the affair occurred the informants found it overwhelming. They described their emotions and actions after finding out about the infidelity. Two of the non-exclusive informants voluntarily told their partner about the affair, while the remainder of the informants were found out through suspicion and evidence. All the couples, except for one couple, separated for a period of time when the affair was discovered.

The results of this research found that three motivational factors impacted on the decision as to whether or not to continue in the relationship. These motivational factors included the investment in children, property and their time together, the desire to solve problems, and the fear of failure. Added to the motivational factors, was the task of the need to make meaning from the affair. Informants not only needed to face the truth about their relationship but they needed to understand the reasons for the infidelity. They also had to be willing to break the cultural barriers. They found strategies to mend or reconcile such as forgiveness, counselling, managing memories and vicarious learning. Themes such as forgiveness and counselling were reported through the informants' experience of infidelity. Another aspect in the rebuilding of the relationship was the modification that occurred in the relationship. This meant the informants gained personal authority through the experience, having moved from a position of victim to one of being a survivor. The informants also created a power shift in the relationship through improved communication. This changed the dyad dynamic.

The factors listed above are broadly contained within four group themes which include motivation, meaning, reconciliation and modification. These four aspects will be covered more fully below.

5.1 Motivation

For the relationships to recover, the couples involved had to be highly motivated to 'fix' or repair the relationship. Even though they knew that the effort required to work on their relationship was enormous, they possessed several motivational factors that prompted them to proceed. First, they all felt strongly about their

investment. Motivation was especially paramount where it involved children, property and time spent in the relationship. The informants were able to clearly express this. For example, an exclusive female said,

Our relationship involved a big investment of time, memories and property, and we didn't want to forfeit any of that. We worked out that we both were very motivated as we had three kids, a house and lots of good memories.

A non-exclusive male felt,

I knew I still loved her and that she loved me too. I also wanted things to be right for our kids as well.

Another non-exclusive male said,

I wanted to be able to have input in their lives which would be less if I divorced my wife.

One of the non-exclusive women described it as follows,

I guess it was our commitment to each other. The children, the years we had spent together.

The informants were not willing to walk away from their relationships and wanted to solve their problems. There was a belief that working it out was better than giving up. They were able to consciously make the decision to mend their marriages.

One non-exclusive partner described this determination to solve problems in the following way,

Coming from a farming background, it was up to us to work things out for ourselves. It was up to us to solve our own problems just like getting rid of our own garbage. On a farm, no wheelie bin truck collects our garbage, we see to it ourselves.

In solving their problems, the couples found that talking about what went wrong was helpful. Even though it was difficult, they were able to listen and respond.

One exclusive female decided that she had a 'choice to be better not bitter'. The informants went through an experience of cognitive dissonance where a state of discomfort results from a discrepancy exists between a person's beliefs and their overt behaviour (Lefton, 1994). Hence they were willing to change either their beliefs or behaviour, but it required time and effort. It was not a linear process of healing and coping, but rather a spiral pattern. In other words, it involved a process of moving forward and upwards, with times of going backwards and feeling like they were back at 'square one'. However, the informants no longer felt this was the case as they gradually realised that progress was being consolidated in order for further grieving and healing to take place.

Even though fear of failure might suggest a negative connotation, it motivated the informants towards a positive outcome. Their fear of failure led to the informants' determination to find a way to succeed in saving their damaged relationship. Only one of the couples did not separate when the affair was discovered. Financially they could not sustain two households, but they did not want to admit failure. Instead of claiming financial assistance from the government, they struggled, not wanting to admit defeat. Fear of failing in the relationship was evident especially for those from a broken or divorced home and family. They did not want to be a single parent raising children on their own. There was a sense of being emotionally shattered and yet enduring in order to avoid being labelled a loser or failure.

A non-exclusive male described his experience as follows

After having had one failed marriage, I did not want to fail again and be labelled a loser. I was determined to save my marriage and so I made the decision to win.

Another non-exclusive female said,

Coming from a broken home, where my father had an affair resulting in the family break up, I decided I did not want to walk away and leave my children devastated. I wanted to show them that losers walk away but winners never quit.

5.2 Meaning

In telling their stories, the informants began to gradually make meaning of their experience, so that by the time of the interviews their stories had developed into their version of the 'truth'. If they were interviewed by someone else, their narratives may possibly acquire a different emphasis and at a later time may even be noticeably altered. In facing the truth of what had happened, the informants were moved to make meaning of their lived experience. They found that the truth was both confronting but also liberating. One exclusive female expressed her process like this,

I felt stuck in blaming him for having the affair. Then I gradually realised that I also played a part in what happened. It dawned on me that we were like a pair of shoes that go together and I found that strangely challenging but also liberating.

Two themes emerged from the informants' stories. Firstly, they came to understand the reasons for infidelity and secondly, they were willing to break the cultural barriers. After experiencing infidelity, they had to make sense of what had happened. They wanted to understand the reasons for the infidelity and hopefully acquire insight with regard to their relationship as well as prevent further such experiences in the future.

5.2.1 Understanding the reasons for infidelity

All of the informants prior to the affair had experienced hurt, isolation and pain. There had been issues such as a family death, financial pressures, isolation and performance issues, and distance from their partner with an attendant lack of attention and appreciation. Therefore, the affair might be seen as an escape from their situation. Each of the narratives explained that there were several reasons that led to infidelity. The five types of affairs as listed by Brown (2001) comprising Conflict Avoidance Affairs, Intimacy Avoidance Affairs, Sexual Addiction Affairs, Empty Nest affairs and Out-The-Door Affairs did not equate to the experience of the informants. However, of the four categories as outlined by Pittman and Wagers (1995), two were applicable in this study, namely 'accidental infidelity' and 'romantic affairs'. Another reason given by the informants in this study was that 'opportunity' certainly facilitated infidelity. Opportunity is cited as one of the reasons that affairs take place by Atkins et al. (2001), as well as age, education, financial earnings, history of divorce, religiosity and length of relationship. In this study two of the informants were highly educated and one was financially earning more than most workers. Three of the informants had a history of divorce and two regularly attended church. Two-thirds of the informants had experienced a family member who had had an affair when they were growing up.

Some of the several reasons for an affair were, for example, expressed by a non-exclusive male who said:

Not only did my dad die, but I was having problems at home and at work. My son was in trouble at school and my wife was trying to handle it as much as possible. But er she unloaded on me and at the

same time I wasn't happy at work. I didn't fit in with my work mates and felt alone most of the time. I suppose I had a lot on my mind. Anyway, I found that a new girl at work seemed to notice me and said hi now and then. One day we just started talking and I found that she listened to me and didn't expect me to solve her problems. I began to look forward to seeing her smiling face at work. She was the only bright spark in my life. A few weeks later after the staff party we became lovers. It was great but I did feel guilty sometimes.

Again it can be seen that there were many factors that influenced having an affair.

These were also described by another non-exclusive male,

I was under a lot of financial pressure. I was having a lot of trouble with my ex-wife with maintenance issues. There had been a long, drawn-out attempt to have a relationship with my four children, two of whom had come back to me after nine years of me not seeing them. So it was that stuff, plus I was working really very hard to try and keep ahead of the tidal wave that seemed to be surging behind me and I was trying to outrun this thing but it mowed me down in the end. That's how it was.

A non-exclusive informant said,

I was at first happy and busy raising my children. But after awhile, I felt unappreciated and unnoticed by my husband. He worked long hours and seemed distracted and disinterested in me. I longed for attention. I was giving out so much time and love to my children, but when they got older and went to school, I felt lost and abandoned.

In dealing with their issues, couples found it helpful not only to understand the reasons for the affair but also to give meaning to what had happened. Trying to make meaning has been described as an arduous process, often involving 'obsessing about details, retreating both physically and emotionally and recruiting the support of others in an effort to make meaning of the infidelity' (Olson, et al., 2002, p.427). Couples recognised there were several issues that led to the affair and that they had both contributed to it. They made an effort to learn

from the experience and not repeat the behaviour. This was exemplified by statements of two of the informants.

A non-exclusive male said, 'I will never do that again'.

Another non-exclusive male pointed out that,

The affair has made us capable of talking to each other which was part of the problem before. Trust has been established because we talk, really talk about not just the trivial things. There was a lot of pain for us both, but we talked about what went wrong and how we could make it right.

In making meaning of the infidelity in this study, gender did not play a significant role as suggested by Harris and Christenfield (1996), where the potential risk to men is the loss of paternity. However, both sexes were concerned about being left to raise the children as single parents

The present research found that while the two exclusive partners were consoled by family and friends for their partner's infidelity, they knew from listening to the media and members of society they would be cautioned against deciding to stay in the relationship and work things out. Cheryl was told by her counsellor that it was unlikely for her non-exclusive partner to change from being a womaniser. The non-exclusive partners found they were criticised for their infidelity and they did not receive support from their friends or family. Instead they found them sceptical that they would be able to change their behaviour.

5.2.2 Willingness to break cultural barriers

Contrary to society's traditional view on infidelity, the informants in this study realised that even though they had betrayed or been betrayed *nevertheless* they

would show 'mercy' and rebuild their relationship. The Oxford Dictionary defines mercy as 'refraining from infliction of suffering by one who has right or power to inflict it'. One of the non-exclusive males described an important factor in rebuilding their relationship as, 'she was merciful and stopped bringing up my fling with the other woman'. A non-exclusive female added, 'after the anger subsided, he was kinder to me and showed mercy'. Even though the non-exclusive partner knew he or she had offended the exclusive partner, they were taken aback by little gestures of kindness exhibited by the exclusive partner. For example, when one partner found out about the affair, instead of blaming the non-exclusive partner, he showed love and forgiveness by presenting her with a bouquet of flowers.

This touched me deeply, so much so, that I marvelled at him and knew he was the better man. This act was so sacrificial and noble, and in my heart I honoured him for it, but at the time I could not speak of it, but I treasured it.

Another act of kindness occurred when the exclusive partner left her home, taking her children and belongings. Instead of being revengeful, she left a meal prepared for the non-exclusive partner so that when he returned from his business trip, he would have something to eat. He was so moved by it that he began to doubt his love for the other woman. His wife continued to be 'nice not ice' which affected the relationship positively. She stated,

I decided to be nice to him. I'm not going to fall into the trap of being horrible to them or to him and keeping the children from him, giving them ammunition to hate me and justify what he had done and also prevent the children from seeing him.

The willingness to break cultural barriers reflected the informants' ability to be their own person or differentiate regardless of the opinion of others. Differentiation or 'holding on to themselves' where self-confrontation and self-soothing took place was evident as the couples worked through the process of healing. As Schnarch (2000, p.354) elaborated, relationships go through 'cycles of growth and disruption mixed with periods of comfort and stability'. In this study, it was obvious that these cycles were part of the informant's experience. Although at times partners were in different phases of differentiation, the couples found that improving their self-differentiation stabilised and enriched their relationship.

5.3 Reconciliation

Infidelity has been described as a trauma, an event that violates basic assumptions about how the world and people operate (Gordon & Baucom, 1999; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004; Resick & Calhoun, 2001). In the case of an affair, the violation has been directly caused by an intimate partner with 'feelings of interpersonal loss and hurt' (Gordon et al., 2004, p.155). After the trauma of the affair, there was shock, followed by grief that had to be lived through. As with any emotional trauma, it takes care and time for healing to take place. Infidelity involves a wounding that is difficult to heal or mend, but with certain requirements being met, couples reconcile. In order to mend or reconcile, all the informants in this study spoke of four main areas that helped. These include forgiveness, counselling, managing memories and vicarious learning.

Forgiveness involves commitment, accommodation and a willingness to sacrifice (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Not only does forgiveness assist the relationship but studies have also found that forgiving can have beneficial psychological outcomes for the forgiver (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996). George Herbert described the importance of forgiveness by saying, 'he who cannot forgive another breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself' (cited in Yancy, 1997, pp.24).

Each informant emphasised that forgiveness played a large part in 'getting back on track'. For example, one woman had attended a Louise Hay workshop on forgiveness that helped her to forgive her husband for his affair (Louise Hay is an author of books on self-help topics). Some saw forgiveness as a process of 'gradual forgiving bit by bit'. Others felt that 'forgiveness and acceptance were part of the healing. I accepted what had happened and was able to overlook it'.

Perhaps because forgiveness has generally been regarded as a theological concept, or perhaps due to the difficulty of confining the experience of forgiveness to empirical methodologies, forgiveness has not been given serious consideration by counsellors until the last two decades (McCullough & Worthington, 1994). From early research exploring forgiveness (Cerney, 1989), benefits such as a reduction of guilt, anger, anxiety have been claimed, as well as the prevention of the ill effects of grief and remorse. An exclusive woman spoke about forgiveness,

I went to a workshop on forgiveness. That was really the turning point for me in terms of dropping the baggage and I told him I forgave him.

A non-exclusive male said,

My wife was able to forgive me, which humbled me and released me. I was also able to forgive myself.

A non-exclusive woman found,

My husband forgave me and said he was sorry for neglecting me. I said I was sorry for what I had done and that I wanted to be with him and the kids. He said I could move back to our family home when we had worked out what went wrong. I felt so relieved and I was glad that we could start over again.

As mentioned before, forgiveness, like love, is a concept as much as a feeling (Diblasio, 2000). However, if assumptions about it are extreme or unrealistic, informants may never forgive or may forgive too quickly. An assumption that may prevent them from forgiving is that forgiveness happens completely, and all at once. This may make forgiveness seem out of reach (Stern & Bristow, 1996). A non-exclusive male, discovered that forgiveness can be gradual,

Bit by bit my wife forgave me and the look in her eyes softened. I felt relieved that the nightmare was fading and after about five months we made a truce.

A non-exclusive female, found that it took time for forgiveness to happen.

If my husband had not loved me enough, it would have ended. He did not reject me but reached out to me and he forgave me. He showed me mercy, even though some days he would be hurt and angry.

Many couples have discovered that when they forgive, their negative feelings toward their partner are not automatically replaced by positive feelings and that

when they forgive, they do not forget the injury. In intentional forgiveness 'forgive and forget' are replaced with 'forgive and remember' (Summer & Ferch, 1998). Couples have found that forgiveness is part of a slow, cumulative process that evolves as they have corrective experiences that rebuild trust and intimacy (Dibalsio, 2000). So many have learnt that in addition to forgiving their partner for wronging them, they need to consider forgiving themselves for the wrongs they have inflicted on their partner, their family and themselves (Jeffers, 1992; Summer & Ferch, 1998; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996).

Since the discovery or disclosure of an affair represents a major relational betrayal, the informants experienced three stages in their forgiveness (Gordon & Baucom, 1999; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004). The three stages included dealing with impact, exploring context and finding meaning, and thirdly, moving on (Epstein & Baucom, 2002; Snyder, 1999). The informants found that they gradually dealt with the impact of the affair. They explored the context of what had happened and slowly made meaning of the trauma. This in turn helped them to move on. At times making meaning of the trauma and moving on required coping with a feeling of contamination. Coping with a feeling of contamination because of infidelity was part of the healing process. However, it took time for the informants to come to terms with the contamination. One of the informants expressed it this way,

There was a feeling of contamination in infidelity, both physically and emotionally. You get close to a person and you have that understanding that they have been with someone else and it takes a while, like six months, to feel that other person no longer contaminates this relationship. Reassurance over time that the other person is out of the picture helps to overcome the contamination.

Another informant felt that the affair had spoiled or contaminated the unique relationship as before the affair the couple had only had sex with each other. This had been lost forever and to overcome the feeling of contamination, the old bed (on which the extramarital sex had occurred) was disposed of and a new bed was actually built.

In reconciliation, counselling offered some assistance to those who did have the experience of counselling. They felt that counselling was a safe place and having someone really listening and remaining neutral was important. One informant explained it this way, 'Without a doubt, the counselling helped us to talk without shouting at each other. The counsellor acted like a referee.' Through the counselling, new ways of communicating and relating were explored. For example, the informants learned about 'I' statements, patterns of relating (e.g. distancing and pursuing), the Five Love Languages (Chapman, 1997) and Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1978). From a Transactional Analysis perspective, it was found that most of the couples operated from a critical parent or adapted child ego state. For example, 'there was a lot of pain for us both, but we talked about what went wrong and how we could make it right. We realised how we had been so critical of each other and then how the other one would sulk. It wasn't easy. In fact it was bloody hard.' Through counselling, they realised they needed to learn to operate from a more adult state.

Only one of the couples who had counselling was still continuing the affair surreptitiously. Even so, the informant still gained from the counselling as she was able to leave him finally after asking the counsellor, 'If he has had affairs

before, will he stop or keep doing it?' The counsellor informed her that 'it was unusual for womanisers to stop'. So while he was on a business trip she packed up her children and household and left. By leaving him, she started a process whereby he was able to realise that he did want her back in his life and they began to reconcile gradually. It took one year for them to be together again.

Informants found it difficult to manage their memories as they would have flashbacks of moments that would overwhelm them. They found that by avoiding the phrases of 'if only' and 'what if' helped them in coping with infidelity. Informants were very clear that constantly bring up what had happened was very damaging to the rebuilding of their relationship. They soon learnt not to say out loud 'if only you hadn't' as it involved a circle of regret 'which goes nowhere'.

One exclusive female said,

Initially it would come up sometimes but I tried very hard not to. In bringing it up, you've got to remember you're bringing her back to his mind and his thoughts. Every time you raise her name you are bringing her back into his mind. To be honest after we reconciled there wasn't a day that went by for about four years that I didn't think about it.

Considerable research has shown that distressed couples assign far more negative causes to their partner's behaviour than do non-distressed couples (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996); in this context cognitive therapy can be used to examine these negative automatic thoughts (Bongar & Beutler, 1995). One of the informants, using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (O'Connor & McDermott, 1996), found he was able to work on his sub-modalities and alleviate his pain by 'collapsing anchors' and consequently to manage his memories of his wife's extramarital affair. NLP is based on an assumption that emotion, thought and

behaviour is influenced by the sensory-specific modalities such as visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory that give rise to consciousness. It involves asking specific questions to help clarify the intended message in communication. It seeks to recover what has been left out and to reframe faulty thinking when the communication is distorted or over-generalised. Anchoring is the process by which memory recall becomes associated with (anchored to) some stimulus. Anchors are capable of being formed by repeated stimuli, such as verbally or through touch to assist access to resourceful states

The exclusive partners' self-talk revolved around 'what if he or she does it again?' This lack of trust was like a circle of fear that had to be constantly worked on by both parties. It was a reciprocal exercise described by one of the informants as follows, 'but gradually he stopped talking about it, as I promised him I would not do it again'. One non-exclusive man put it this way, 'when the look in her eyes softened I felt relieved that the nightmare was fading'.

It would seem that the couples from this study were able to manage memories well enough in order not to be immobilised by them. Quinto Osano (cited in Thompson, 1991, p.63), summed up managing memories by stating, 'the tension between needing to remember so as to protect the future from another similar disaster, and needing to forget in order to get on with life.'

Another aspect of mending the relationship or reconciliation was vicarious learning. Vicarious learning is described as learning that is obtained from sympathetic experience of another's experiences (Sharf, 1996). The informants

expressed how helpful it was to learn from others in dealing with infidelity. Being able to observe how others had dealt with similar situations in the past provided helpful insights to repair the relationships. An example of vicarious learning is:

I wasn't going to be the ex-wife from hell. I wasn't going to hand him to her on a plate. I've seen a lot of bitter women. I have a sister-in-law who has been through this and she can't let that bitterness go. She serves it up to him constantly. You have to make a conscious decision that you are going to move on past that. You don't bring it up.

Other informants had reservations after watching what their friends went through,

I'd seen others who were not happier or better off by ending the relationship. Many of my friends are miserable and lonely now and wish they had worked things out.

The real life examples of others were pointed out,

I think it helped that our counsellor had also had an affair. He seemed to understand what we were going through and he gave us hope that our relationship could recover. Also the fact that my parents had survived infidelity was helpful.

5.4 Modification

Each informant came away from the experience of infidelity with an awareness of how far they had come or how much they had emotionally developed. Informants were aware that the destructive patterns of relating had been replaced by a more constructive and rewarding way of being in a relationship and understanding each other. They were empowered by learning techniques in improved communication that enhanced their ability to express themselves appropriately. The impact on the relationship was a gradual consolidation of trust and intimacy that ultimately

affected the dynamics of the relationship. A non-exclusive male explained how trust was re-established,

I had to be accountable for my movements. At first, she didn't trust me very well so I would phone to let her know where I was and why I would be late. She would thank me for my consideration. A bigger test came when I had to work away for a week at a time and come home for weekends. At first she was fearful and insecure but after awhile she was more trusting.

Having survived the effects of an extramarital affair, the informants felt they had a psychological rank or power as a result of having come through a difficult experience. In other words, 'they knew that they knew' and no one had to tell them what it was like. Knowledge is powerful, bringing with it a paradigm shift in old beliefs and patterns, and consequently it brings with it a certain type of authority (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). The informants felt that having experienced infidelity, they had moved from being victims to survivors, with a resulting sense of personal authority.

One of the informants pointed out that,

We are so glad to have weathered the storm and to be experiencing calmness and peace like never before. It is much more relaxing and real for us both and we appreciate each other much more. Our children are pleased we are back together and we feel it has been helpful for them to see that relationships can be made better with perseverance.

Another non-exclusive informant said,

Our relationship has changed because we have changed. We feel we have come through a huge challenge and survived it which makes us feel strong.

Coming through the healing or grieving process, there was a sense of satisfaction of being an 'overcomer' or of achieving success. It was like 'growing up' and being an adult at last. There was a sense of strength and empowerment that emerged in all the informants. A couple of informants expressed their new authority this way:

It wasn't theory anymore but reality knowing that I'm a survivor, not a victim.

I know what I've been through and no one can tell me I don't know how to be a winner.

With the rebuilding of the relationship, power structures shifted in various ways. To begin with, the exclusive partners had the power to forgive or not forgive. Also the exclusive partners were able to be more assertive with requests and decisions, while the non-exclusive partners had to be more accountable and communicative, placing a higher value on their partners. For example, one of the informants said of her husband,

He is really the needy one now. It's almost like a role reversal in many aspects. When you reconcile after infidelity there is a real shift in power and you have to be really careful how you use that.

Another non-exclusive male said,

We set some ground rules such as she would control the money with the signing rights and do the books. I couldn't just come and go as I pleased, but had to be accountable for my whereabouts.

Despite the role reversal or changing power dynamic, couples reported feeling more comfortable and relaxed with each other. Power and control shifted so that money, accountability, holidays, outings were now decided by the other partner. However, as trust was established, issues were negotiated in a more democratic

way. They were more honest with their needs, instead of being compliant or critical.

The couples managed to free themselves from the rescue triangle which consists of the persecutor, rescuer and victim where people move in and out of these roles sometimes within seconds. Both the persecutor and the rescuer come from an attitude of superiority whereas the victim has a 'poor me' attitude. The couples did this by being aware of their old behaviours and consciously choosing to behave differently. Some described it as learning new ways of communicating, which were more proactive than reactive,

almost like in parenting, when you realise the kids are growing up and old ways of dictating to them won't work.

Another informant realised that,

we don't take each other for granted instead we say thank you often.

For relationships to thrive, it was found through counselling, that the informants had to give clear expression of their wants and needs. They realised that their partner was not a 'mind-reader' and it was important to be open and honest in their communication. Using 'I' statements were helpful as they were less blaming and less damaging.

As relationship boundaries had been violated by the affair, many informants felt it was necessary to repair the 'broken-down walls' of safety. It required setting firm boundaries around the relationship, such as not contacting the other party of the triangle or being secretive about whereabouts and activities. In order for couples to recuperate and rebuild their relationship, they had to fully commit to each

other. One of the informants expressed it like this, 'It helped that she made a commitment to me again emotionally before it became sexual again.' Another informant used a ritual to show their new commitment, followed by an action,

We decided to renew our wedding vows as we wanted to show our family that all was forgiven and that we were starting a new chapter in our relationship. We also had another baby (our fourth boy), which confirmed our commitment to each other.

After an affair, the informants discovered that they had to be more open and real with their feelings. They had to be 'authentic' for their relationships not only to survive but also thrive. The couples who rebuilt their relationships found that authenticity was rewarding. They learnt that being genuine meant they did not have to hide their feelings. They could be more open with each other. One exclusive female said,

I think I got to know him more after the affair than that the previous seven years of our marriage. I got to be me which was really liberating.

The informants likened the experience of rebuilding their relationship after infidelity to 'coming home', with all the mixed emotions of remembering past times, good or bad, as well as facing both the stability of a common history and the uncertainty of changes that lay ahead. One of the informants explained that,

There seems to be a longing in the human heart to be able to come home where we are free to be who we really are, however sometimes we are confined or restricted by living with others. It is a constant balancing act.

Another informant described her experience as,

We have entered the best and most tender time of our marriage. It's like 'coming home' with feelings of acceptance, security and comfort knowing you are loved, no matter what!

5.5 Conclusion

In summary, this study found that several factors influenced the couples in rebuilding their relationships. These factors included motivation, healing the hurt, forgiveness, counselling and modification of behaviour. The theme of motivation encompassed the investment of children, property and time. It also included the couple's motivation to solve their problems and not admit failure. In order to heal the hurt, meaning had to be made from the experience. To make sense of what had happened, the informants had to understand the reasons for the affair and be willing to break the cultural barriers. Reconciliation was comprised of various factors, including forgiveness and counselling, which played an important part in mending the relationship after infidelity. Also managing memories and learning vicariously aided the process. Finally restoring the relationship after infidelity required a modification of behaviour. This modification involved understanding the role of effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Having survived infidelity, the informants experienced a power shift and developed a sense of personal authority and authenticity.

The results of this study have shown that infidelity occurs for a variety of reasons, and has an impact on the informants that consists of various emotional states as previously outlined. Furthermore, the process of rebuilding their relationships has been described by individuals who have actually been affected by infidelity and the lessons learned through the experience. The next chapter

discusses the key findings of this study with its strengths and limitations, as well as understanding the reasons for infidelity. The contribution to knowledge in professional practice and further research is also outlined.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

The present research aimed to address the gaps in knowledge about the experience of Australian couples affected by infidelity. In doing so, a narrative methodology was utilized to allow informants the freedom to talk of their experience in the manner with which they felt most comfortable. The research question guiding this study was: *What are the factors that rebuild relationships after infidelity?* Using in-depth interviews, seven informants' narratives were collected and analysed and the results are presented in Chapter 4. Four major narrative themes of living through the experience of infidelity and rebuilding relationships have been presented in Chapter 5. The present chapter discusses some of the key issues in relation to the literature and also outlines some of the implications for professional practice and future research.

The first theme from this study covered informants' motivation to repair their relationship. This included their investment of time, money and children in the relationship, with the belief that they needed to solve their problems and not walk away from them. Fear of failure added to their motivation.

The second theme featured how informants made meaning of infidelity in their relationship. In order for this to happen, they had to understand the reasons for the affair and to then break the cultural barriers. They found that the

conventions of society suggested that they be sceptical of their partner changing. However, the informants in the study decided to continue with their relationship and look at ways of rebuilding it.

The third theme that emerged was reconciliation where forgiveness played an important part. The informants found that it was a slow and painful process. Counselling was also helpful for reconciliation to occur. The informants were provided strategies by counsellors that helped rebuild their relationships. Added to the process of reconciliation were acts of kindness and vicarious learning.

The fourth theme related to the experience of infidelity was the modification of the relationship. The informants were willing and able to change their patterns of relating. They made an effort to rebuild their relationships by using effective communication and by being transparent so that trust could be re-established. The modification in relationship included a power shift or role reversal as well as establishing boundaries and authenticity.

One of the significant aspects of this research is that it is one of the few studies which interviewed Australians about their experience of infidelity. Those Australians that were interviewed were mostly Anglo-Australians, with a mix of European ancestry, such as German, Italian and Greek as well as Asian, namely Chinese. However, in this study no indigenous people were actively recruited or interviewed and none volunteered for inclusion in this research.

6.1 Key findings in relation to research on infidelity

This section discusses the findings from the present study in light of previous evidence available from existing literature and highlights the differences and similarities between the Australian findings and other western literature. Investigating and analysing the experiences of those most intimately involved and affected by infidelity, provides a new perspective on understanding the factors that rebuild relationships after infidelity. From this study, assumptions about infidelity may be challenged, giving greater awareness for couples, health professionals and the community.

6.1.1 Understanding Reasons for infidelity

In this study, the informants shared a compelling need to comprehend the reasons for infidelity. As mentioned in the literature review, many reasons have been given for infidelity by other writers. These include Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson (2001), Brown (2001), Gurian (1995) and Pittman (1989). Brown (2001, pp. 6) provided a typology of affairs comprising Conflict Avoidance Affairs, Intimacy Avoidance Affairs, Sexual Addiction Affairs, Empty Nest Affairs and Out-The-Door Affairs. This study found that all of the informants did not have an affair to avoid conflict or intimacy, nor was sexual addiction a factor. The informants were not experiencing the 'empty nest' syndrome nor were they wanting an 'out-the-door' affair.

Instead prior to the affair, the informants had experienced hurt, isolation and pain, which Gurian (1995) and Pittman (1989) suggested could precipitate infidelity. The informants had experienced issues such as a family death,

financial pressures, isolation and performance issues, and distance from their partner with a lack of attention and appreciation. Atkins et al. (2001) cited 'opportunity' as one of the reasons that affairs take place, as well as age, education, financial earnings, history of divorce, religiosity and length of relationship. In this study 'opportunity' certainly played a part in the informants' infidelity. As mentioned in Chapter 5, two of the informants in this study were highly educated and one was financially earning more than most workers. Three of the informants had a history of divorce and two regularly attended church. Based on the clinical opinion of Kaslow (1993) and Spring (1996) that infidelity tended to run in families, it was found in this study that two-thirds of the informants had experienced a family member who had had an affair when they were growing up.

Pittman and Wagers (1995) suggested that infidelity could be classified into four categories, comprising accidental infidelity, philandering, romantic affairs and marital arrangements. In this study, the informants experienced either accidental infidelity (where infidelity has not been planned but occurs spontaneously when an opportunity presents itself) or romantic affairs (when there is an emotional connection).

Even though some literature (Glass & Wright, 1992; Spring, 1996) suggests there are gender differences in why people have affairs, this present study did not find that gender was a key factor. Although Masters et al. (1994) found that seventy-four percent of married men had an affair because they wanted more excitement and greater sexual frequency, nevertheless in this present study both

male and female informants experienced both aspects. In other words, the male informants did not separate sex and love, but were emotionally involved as were the female informants.

6.1.2 Disclosure and reaction to infidelity

In this research the reaction to infidelity, was acutely felt by informants. Varied emotions were experienced as they grappled with the reality of what had happened. The non-exclusive partners found that there was a lack of empathy towards them for having an affair, whereas the exclusive partners found they received emotional support as long as they chose to separate from the non-exclusive partner. The informants discovered that the end of an affair is very similar to bereavement, made all the more painful if it is experienced as a sudden loss, or with ambivalence or great dependency as well as a lack of emotional support (Kell, 1992; Reed, 1998).

Grief is the living response to loss and while it is a universally human phenomenon, it is experienced in a highly individualized and multidimensional manner (Reed, 1998). Individual characteristics of the bereaved person also play a part in the way their grief is experienced. For example, these characteristics include personal vulnerability, personality traits, age, social behaviour and familial patterns in dealing with grief (Muller & Thompson, 2003). Grief is assumed to be a linear process, with stages that will be moved through, before reaching the final goal of resolution. However, Shuchter and Zisook (1993, p.23) challenge the notion of linear stages explaining grief as 'not a linear process with concrete boundaries but, rather, a composite of overlapping, fluid

phases that vary from person to person'. They suggest that the recommended stages should be used as guides only as to what a person may experience during the grieving process. The couples in this study reported going through shock and anger on the discovery of the affair, as well as guilt for having had the affair or for believing that they contributed to their partner having an affair. In their grief, blame and shame were also experienced.

Not only does the aftermath of an affair result in grief but it can be compounded by a feeling of stigma, similar to those affected by alcoholism where society often views the topic as taboo and discourages talking about it (Campbell, 1997). Usually there are no support groups for those who have experienced infidelity, whereas there are support groups such as 'Alcoholics Anonymous' for alcoholics. This study revealed the lack of family and social support for those couples who decided to stay together and work on rebuilding their relationship.

The review of literature shows that the discovery of the affair usually has a dramatic capacity to generate suffering in the partners, children, extended family and friends (Levine, 1998). One study suggested that the initial responses to a partner's disclosure of infidelity were often intensely emotionally charged, and likened to a 'roller-coaster' ride involving the confrontation of the non-exclusive partner, expressing anger and managing conflicting feelings (Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002). However, in the literature, the feelings of the non-exclusive partner are not given much consideration.

From this study the informants expressed a kaleidoscope of feelings which were constantly shifting and varied.

Irrespective of gender, both the exclusive and non-exclusive partners felt the intensity of their experience. Contrary to the literature review (Harris & Christenfield, 1996) where gender may contribute to their reaction to infidelity, this study found that paternity confidence was not an issue. However, there was some concern about being a single parent left to raise the children alone.

The impact of infidelity on the exclusive partner is often unexpected and destructive, leaving them feeling defenceless, victimised and confused (Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Initially, they may have chaotic and intensely uncomfortable emotions, as they deal with the cognitive aspect of gathering information so that they can reconstruct their understanding of their relationships (Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Their reaction is similar to the emotions felt when people are confronted by any great loss or trauma (Horowitz, Stinson & Field, 1991). Once again the literature tends to focus on the impact of infidelity on the exclusive partner. However, Spring (1996) does expand on the impact of disclosure of infidelity on both partners, by likening the exclusive partner's experience as an 'avalanche of losses' and the non-exclusive partner's as a 'labyrinth of choices'. The informants in this study found that both parties did experience a sense of loss but the non-exclusive partners felt they did not have as much choice as outlined in the literature, as they were dependent on their partner's willingness to take them back.

Regarding the research on infidelity, certain key issues became apparent. Olsen, et al. (2002) reported that there is a three-stage process following disclosure of an affair. The process starts with an 'emotional roller coaster' and moves through a 'moratorium' before 'trust building' takes place. However, Spring (1996) suggests there are three stages in the healing process after an affair has been revealed. Firstly, partners need to normalize their feelings; secondly, they must decide whether to recommit to the relationship; and thirdly, if they decide to recommit to the relationship, they must undertake the process of rebuilding it. Contrasted with this, the informants in this study described their process as first of all deciding if they were motivated enough to stay in the relationship. Secondly, they had to make meaning of what had happened. After this came reconciliation and fourthly, the relationship experienced modification.

6.1.3 Rebuilding relationships

From the narratives of this study, it was found that four major issues influenced the rebuilding of relationships after infidelity. These over-arching factors are described as motivation, meaning, reconciliation and modification. Firstly, motivation was affected by the investment of children, property and time, as well as the desire to solve problems and a fear of failure. Secondly, the couples had to make meaning of what had happened. They did this by trying to understand the reasons for the infidelity and they were willing to break the cultural barriers. They were also positively affected by little gestures of kindness. Thirdly, for mending or reconciliation to take place, there had to be forgiveness, counselling, trust-building and vicarious learning. Fourthly,

modification occurred in the relationship, resulting in a power shift and being more authentic.

The informants in this study did experience the three stage forgiveness model as proposed by Gordon, Baucom and Snyder (2004), whereby they had to deal with the impact of infidelity, explore and find meaning and then move on. In intentional forgiveness “forgive and forget” are replaced with “forgive and remember” (Summer & Ferch, 1998). The couples in this study found that forgiveness was part of a slow, cumulative process that evolved as they rebuilt trust and intimacy (Dibalsio, 2000).

In conjunction with forgiveness, building trust plays an important part in the restoration of violated trust. Summer and Ferch (1998) found that couples take a long time to trust completely after infidelity. The informants in this study found that trust had to be earned over time, through commitment of being like an open book with nothing to hide. In small incidents, the exclusive partner would begin to trust the non-exclusive partner. This meant that the non-exclusive partner had to be accountable, while the exclusive partner opened up to the possibility of trusting again.

As discussed above the informants did not return to their original form of relating but rather to a renovated version of the old relationship. When the researcher began this research, she had written her thesis question as ‘What are the factors that *restore* relationships after infidelity?’ However, after listening to

the narratives, the researcher discovered that they did not restore their relationships but actually *rebuilt* them or renovated them with some modifications. In many ways they demonstrated a remarkable power of recovery of being able to save what was worth keeping and delete what was holding them back. They changed some of their patterns of relating using authenticity and boundaries, 'I' statements, knowing their love languages and eventually balancing the power between them.

From this study, it would appear that Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) Theory of Reasoned Action, provides a conceptual framework to explore determinants of behavioural choices. According to the model, the best predictor of whether or not someone performs a target behaviour (e.g., in this case, having an affair) is the intention to perform the behaviour. Barring unforeseen circumstances or the lack of opportunity to engage in a behaviour, intentions are typically good predictors of behaviour. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) identified two determinants of behaviour, namely attitudes toward performing the behaviour (based on a person's general evaluation) and subjective norms (based on a person's perception that important others desire the performance or nonperformance of a specific behaviour). Under some circumstances the normative component may be more important than the attitude; whereas for other persons, behaviours or contexts, the attitudinal component may be more important than norms. Regarding the narratives of this study on infidelity, the attitudinal component of entitlement played a large part in deciding to proceed with an affair, whereas the subjective norm of the important partner's desire to avoid an affair was ignored.

6.2 Strengths and limitations of the study

Explaining events as a narrative played a significant role in managing the experience of infidelity. This narrative story-making process appeared to be helpful in coming to terms with the informants' heightened emotional state. What emerged from this study was that the voices of those involved in infidelity were heard as they spoke of their lives before and after the affair. Reasons were given for their infidelity as well as their experience of finding their way out of the difficulties that ensued. The process by which they were able to make meaning of what had happened led to reconciliation and finally modification to the relationship.

While the methodology of narrative was chosen for this study to allow freedom for the informants to express their experiences of infidelity, their narratives were bound by the context of time. Therefore over time narratives are re-created as events, circumstances and people interact in complex ways to reshape the meaning of their experiences and thus their stories.

6.2.1 Strengths of the study

One of the strengths of this study is that it has added understanding to infidelity and it is unique in many ways. The uniqueness of this study is that the stories of those affected by infidelity are heard as they reflect on their lived experiences and speak of their lives since infidelity. The informants speak of the disruption to their relationship and families, the events that led to infidelity, the discovery of the affair, the hurt and pain they felt, the process of dealing with infidelity and the factors that helped them to rebuild their relationship. Also the

informants nominated the support that had been helpful to them. Importantly, the narrative approach to qualitative research emphasizes the ‘narrative, or story-based, nature of human understanding’ (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, pp. 34). As this was not a large study, narrative analysis was suitable and gave attention to details of speech, context and organization of the informants’ stories (Riessman, 2003).

Another strength of this research is that informants were interviewed who had actually experienced an affair. Other researchers have used either vignettes presented to college students (e.g. Kitzinger & Powell, 1995; Mongeau & Schulz, 1997; Parker, 1997; Sprecher, Regan & McKinney, 1998) or have participants rate their future likelihood of engaging in extramarital affairs (e.g. Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Knox, Zusman & Kaluzny, 2000). Further, some researchers primarily interviewed the exclusive partners (e.g. Olson et al. 2002) which might indicate reluctance by the non-exclusive partner to reveal their infidelity. In this study, however, all but two of those interviewed were the non-exclusive partners and these exceptions were the wife of the non-exclusive partner interviewed which gave an insight in how they both perceived the experience and the other exception was the man whose defacto had an affair.

6.2.2 Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations of the present study that need to be acknowledged. Had saturation been reached? The saturated model is defined as ‘one that includes all possible effects’(Howell, 1992) In the present study saturation had not been reached because not all possible effects had been

reached. However with only seven interviews completed common themes appeared that gave insight into the factors that rebuild relationships after infidelity.. It could be beneficial for more narratives to be accumulated so that a greater understanding of different settings and contexts might be gained. For example, the age group of the informants interviewed for the present study was between thirty and fifty years, having been together as a couple from three to twenty-five years. Furthermore, the interviews took place with a post-affair time range of three to twelve years, which could alter the construction of informants' narratives and affect recall bias. In this study only one of the informants was in a de facto relationship and the rest were married. It is plausible that a different set of issues would have emerged with younger informants and/or limiting the sample to only those with a recent experience of infidelity. For example, one of the key factors in deciding to continue the relationship was 'investment' in children, property and shared memories. It is not possible to comment as to what extent individuals would be committed to safeguard this investment where the relationship was of a shorter duration and/or did not involve children.

The self-selection of informants for this research has limitations. Their motivation to be interviewed for this study remains unknown. Further research exploring a wider group, which includes individuals who decided not to continue their relationship, may help in better understanding the profile and motivation of those who rebuilt their relationship and their desire to be part of such research studies.

Finally, the bias and subjectivity arising from the interpretation by the researcher needs to be acknowledged. One of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research is in the role of the researcher. The researcher becomes an integral part of the research process and thus the researcher's values, personal history and 'position' on characteristics such as gender, culture, class and age are inescapable elements of the inquiry. Also informants may be involved at intense levels of emotion and disclosure. In qualitative research the role of the researcher is 'trustworthiness' as it is a relational role and allows for a wider scope for the researcher's interpretive skills (Haverkamp, 2005, p.147). Interpretation by the researcher involves 'bracketing', whereby choices are made by bracketing broadly or narrowly. Bracketing broadly is when a person assesses the consequences of all of the choices together or bracketing narrowly is by making each choice in isolation (Read, Loewenstein & Rabin, 1999). Understanding the role of bracketing, enabled the researcher to monitor her perceptions and interpretations of the narratives so that conflicts of interest and value judgements were scrutinized. The assumptions and biases of the researcher were reflected upon and questioned by examining the evidence of the informants, and adjustments were made to interpretation accordingly. This process occurred over several months and was aided by the study supervisors' ongoing discussion of her interpretations. This dual-dialogue, self with supervisors, helped to minimise the researcher's own assumptions and biases.

6.3 Key Issues in relation to professional practice and future research

As more information is gathered and researched, then more understanding can be applied to professional practice. In dealing with the effects of infidelity, practitioners need to be aware of the pitfalls of working with couples affected by infidelity and the professional tools that are helpful in rebuilding relationships. Transference and counter-transference are some of the pitfalls, as well as clients attempting to influence therapists to take their side, to ignore certain facts or to assess fault. Transference occurs when the client reacts to the therapist as if the latter represented some important figure out of childhood so that conflicts and problems that originated in childhood are reinstated in the therapy room. Conversely, counter-transference is when the therapist is challenged by a client that triggers some reinstatement of a significant figure from their past. Therapists, themselves, bring to the process their own issues, such as their own marital problems, an investment in 'success', or a particular moral stance.

Understanding that the experience of infidelity can be likened to a trauma with the repercussions of loss and grief, practitioners need to be vigilant for symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and deal with it accordingly (Ortman, 2005; Resick & Calhoun, 2001). Dennis Ortman (2005) describes the effect of an affair as 'post-infidelity stress disorder' for vulnerable individuals, exhibiting symptoms similar to PTSD. The criteria for PTSD include exposure to a life-threatening event, intense fear, helplessness or horror, re-experiencing the event, emotional numbing, heightened anxiety, irritability and rage. Allowing the exclusive partner's desire to know too many details to continue is

destructive to what remains of the relationship, and also makes for a therapist who feels out of control (Glass & Wright, 1997; McDonald, 1991). The informants in this study found that they had symptoms of PTSD in that they experienced intense fear, helplessness or horror. They had flashbacks where they re-experienced the event and avoided reminders of the event. They experienced heightened anxiety with irritability and rage. According the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders(4th ed., 2000) the criteria for PTSD included the above symptoms.

6.3.1 Implications for professional knowledge

As outlined in the literature review, the therapist's responsibility is for the process, while the clients make the decision about the outcome (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Therapists need to aware of the traps that come from both external and internal sources (Kaslow, 1993). Clients often attempt to influence the therapist to take their side, to ignore certain facts, or to assess fault. A desire to ease the exclusive partner's pain may reinforce their obsession to know all the details of the affair to the degree that the therapist may become exasperated and reverse direction, now protecting the non-exclusive partner from the exclusive partner. The therapist's role is not to protect but to help both partners explore and understand how they arrived at this painful point.

Professionals need to be aware of their own prejudices regarding infidelity. Even with some health professionals, the researcher found a judgmental attitude to infidelity, whenever the topic was raised in discussion regarding this study. There would be a variety of responses from "get rid of the

bastard' to 'why stop affairs'? Although there is a strong norm in society against infidelity (Treas & Glesen, 2000; Weiderman & Allgeier, 1996), sexual affairs are not an uncommon phenomenon in many marriages across many cultures. Infidelity is one of the key predictors of subsequent divorce and has a profound impact on relationships where the relationship may not end in divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Therefore, it is vitally important for health practitioners to act more professionally and put aside their prejudices. Instead they need to remain neutral and employ helpful strategies in assisting couples who present for counselling as the result of infidelity.

6.3.2 Implications for professional practice

About 30 to 65 percent of couples who present for counselling have experienced infidelity (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Glass & Wright, 1997, Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997). It has been noted that infidelity is also one of the most difficult problems to treat in therapy and one of the most damaging issues for a relationship (Whisman, Dixon & Johnson, 1997). Once the affair is out in the open, the couple needs to decide whether to work on rebuilding the relationship or ending it. Initially, the feelings and thoughts may be distorted, chaotic and difficult to manage. Counselling can assist the ambivalence and confusion for the couple, so it is important to individually confront the doubts and fears about recommitting to the relationship (Stern & Bristow, 1996).

Even though there is widespread availability of counselling services, many married persons, as individuals or as a couple, do not pursue relational counselling (Bowen & Richman, 1991). When asked why help was not sought by

the majority of divorcing couples, the primary reason cited was that 'it was too late'. Bringle & Byers (1997) found that those with a positive attitude toward counselling and a previous history of marriage counselling were predisposed to counselling in the future. Although Bowen and Richman (1991) found no significant gender differences in the willingness to seek couple counselling, gender differences were found in this present study. In line with the work of Bringle & Byers (1997), female informants in the present study were more likely to perceive a problem and more willing to seek counselling.

As the therapeutic alliance is important in rebuilding the relationship, counsellors need to be reminded that, "too often we map our clients' prison, but not their escape" (Waters & Lawrence, 1993, p.53, as cited in Kelly & Halford, 1993). Therefore, counsellors need to be well-equipped and experienced in assisting the many couples who come for 'after the affair' counselling, wanting to escape the pain of their situation and needing assistance to either rebuild their relationship or end it in a civil manner.

To date, research about infidelity has primarily focused on the reasons for infidelity and methods of overcoming the hurt of infidelity, such as forgiveness. However, there has been a limited approach to the rebuilding of relationships after infidelity. Furthermore, there are few studies that have explored these issues in an Australian context. From this study, two unique concepts were spoken of by the non-exclusive partners that may be enlightening for both couples and counsellors. Firstly, reference was made to gestures of kindness that helped to turn the tide in their recovery. The unexpected acts of thoughtfulness

and kindness from the exclusive partners had a profound effect on the non-exclusive partners. Instead of acts of retribution or revenge, the exclusive partners decided to show kindness, which eventually made a difference in the healing of their relationships. Secondly, there was an acknowledgement of vicarious learning in dealing with infidelity. Most of the informants were able to observe from others who had been through a similar experience what the end of the relationship would entail. The informants were able to remind themselves of how others had suffered through choosing not to rebuild their relationships.

6.3.3 Implication for future research

There are many important issues that need to be considered in relation to future research. First, terminology to describe the informants and the act of being sexual with someone else than the informant's partner was difficult to arrive at as the intention was to remain neutral and non-judgemental. As described in chapter 2, some writers have used words for infidelity such as affairs, extramarital affairs, adultery, extradyadic sexual activities, liaison, cheating, betrayal, extramarital involvement and unfaithfulness. The terms used in describing those involved in infidelity included the 'hurt' or 'injured' partner and 'participating' or 'involved' partner. Pittman (1991) used the term 'infidel' for the partner having an affair and 'cukold' to describe the partner not having the affair. Some of these terms reflect a value judgement; for example 'adultery' conjures up images of scarlet letters. Even 'infidelity' is defined as falseness or disloyalty. Since almost all the informants used the term 'affair', the thesis uses both terms *affairs* (as in the literature and by informants) and *infidelity* which is described as sex with someone other than one's partner without their permission (Atwood & Seifer,

1997; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004; Janowiak, Nell & Buckmaster, 2002; Mauldin & Hildreth, 1997; Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler & Miller, 2002). As sexual exclusiveness is an assumption for most couples in a relationship (Atkins, Baucom, Eldridge, & Christensen, 2004), the terms used to describe the partners in this research are the 'exclusive' and 'non-exclusive'.

There are many recommendations for future research emanating out of the limitations of the present study. In relation to demographic profile of informants, it is recommended that further research could examine how such problems are viewed and handled by younger informants. Also future research could consider the effect of infidelity on women. Australia's demographic profile is rapidly changing. Women are increasingly visible in managerial and other senior positions. A small but growing group of families include couples where women have high degree of autonomy and mobility. The present research does not include voices of such women. It would be important to explore how women react to and experience their own infidelity and/or that of their partners. In other words, would women stay in the marriage if they were financially independent? Another important area for research is whether modern couples with no children but an investment in professional careers (conjoint or independent of one another) would stay together after an experience of infidelity. Future research should include other modes of research such as quantitative and intervention studies to evaluate the efficacy of various counselling and other strategies'

As mentioned in the limitations of this study, future research could include other population sub-groups such as indigenous Australians and immigrants and their experience of infidelity. It might indicate differences in cultural perceptions and reactions to infidelity and whether rebuilding relationships would be contemplated. While this research is largely focused on individuals with Anglo-Saxon or European ancestry, there are no participants from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South America or Africa. Immigrants bring with them a whole set of cultural values which over time are adjusted to reflect the social mores of their host country. Yet they also retain a certain value system that may be the prevalent social norm in their country of birth (Axelson,1999). The present research study is unable to distinguish differences in cultural norms in relation to perception and experiences of infidelity and factors that help rebuild relationships. Another group whose voice is completely missing is that of indigenous Australians. To what extent would their experiences be similar to those described in the present study remain unknown. It is therefore recommended future studies include indigenous Australians and immigrants from non-Anglo-Saxon cultures to explore issues associated with experiences of infidelity and their impact on relationships.

Irrespective of individual ancestry, there is a need to explore the long-term effect of infidelity on the children, and what is their lived experience when they became adults. Kaslow (1993) and Spring (1996) suggest from a clinical opinion that infidelity tends to run in families. However, this hypothesis has not been researched. Even though some of the informants in this study had experienced one of their parents having an affair, it would be insightful to

interview more adults whose parents had an affair when they were children and to follow up the repercussions of that experience as they matured and entered relationships themselves with others.

6.4 Conclusion

The informants in this study told very different narratives of their wounding and their need to be healed from the effects of infidelity. They displayed an innate urge towards wholeness and the need for making meaning in how they constructed their reality. As cited in Atkins, Baucom, Eldridge & Christensen (2005, pp. 144), the ramifications of infidelity could be described as, “The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places”. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*.

In hearing the stories of those who had overcome infidelity, it became clear that informants rebuilt their relationships by re-experiencing fidelity. From the narratives told by the informants in this research, it became apparent that they were indeed stronger having survived infidelity even though initially they felt that their dreams had been shattered and their relationships broken. However, they were able to gradually repair what was broken and heal the brokenness. Nevertheless, despite this healing in each of their lives there remained the trace of a scar, where forgiveness did not mean forgetting what had happened but rather remembering, learning from it and moving on. There is a clear indication that the factors outlined in this study may assist the outcome of infidelity for others.

The experiences of this study are not representative nor reflect the voices of a large group. However, the information is powerful because it provides insight into the lives and experiences of those affected by infidelity. This study has significant relevance for practice and future research. It is one of the few Australian studies that explored issues in rebuilding relationships after experiencing infidelity. It highlights the importance of being able to move beyond trauma and grief and deal with relationship issues constructively. It outlines some professional considerations for counsellors and some important aspects to consider in relation to professional practice. In terms of research, it fills an important gap in Australian literature because it involved Australians. Not only was the researcher Australian, but the counsellors and the informants were also Australian. Further studies which are able to build this research further would be of value.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Advertisement for Media

Appendix B – Letter to Professionals

Appendix C – Letter to Participants

Appendix D – Information Sheet

Appendix E - Consent form

Appendix A

Advertisement for Media

A research project will be conducted on 'Examining the Factors that Restore Relationships after Infidelity'. This study is to gather information from participants who have experienced infidelity and who have remained together for two years since the infidelity. It is important to understand what helps in rebuilding the relationship after such an experience. The study will be conducted through the University of New England in Armidale. If you require further information or are interested in participating you can contact the researcher, Iona Abrahamson, on 07 55399922 or her mobile 0419785942. Iona will be happy to return STD calls to reduce the cost to the potential participants.

Researcher: Iona Abrahamson

Appendix B

School of Health
Armidale, NSW 2351,
Australia

Letter to Professionals

(Professional contact details)

(Postal address)

Date:

Re: Research Project: Factors that Restore Relationships after Infidelity.

Dear (Name)

Thank you for your interest in the research project 'Factors that Restore Relationships after Infidelity'. This project forms part of my masters research. This study is to gather information from adult participants (either party involved in the marriage) who have experienced infidelity.

My request to you is to ask you to send out a letter to up to three current or past clients who fit the inclusion criteria, letting them know about the research to be conducted. I have enclosed a sample cover letter for your use.

Participants who fit the inclusion criteria are those who:

- Either party who have experienced infidelity.
- Have remained together for 2 years since the infidelity.
- Are aged 18 years or over

I would appreciate if you would mail information about the project to potential participants and ask them to contact me directly about the project. My contact details appear on the information sheet. I am happy to return STD calls to reduce the cost to the

participants. If you, or any potential participant, wish to have any further information regarding the study I would encourage you to contact me on (07) 55 399922 or my mobile on 0419785942.

Thank you for your support of this project

Iona Abrahamson

Master of Honours Student.

Supervisor 1: Associate Professor Margot Schofield

Phone: (w) (03) 9639 1809 or 0417 402 954

Email: mschofi2@metz.une.edu.au

Secondary Supervisor : Dr Rafat Hussain

Phone: (w) (02) 6773 3678

Email: rhussain@metz.une.edu.au

Appendix C

School of Health
Armidale, NSW 2351,
Australia

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

(Participant's name)

(Postal address)

Date:

Re: Research Project: Factors that Restore Relationships after Infidelity.

Dear (Name)

Thank you for your interest in this research project. I am wishing to interview anyone who is 18 years of age and over; and who has stayed in a couple relationship for at least 2 years since the disclosure of infidelity (either party in the relationship is of interest, although I will only interview one person from each couple).

I have attached information regarding the research which forms part of my Master of Counselling (Honours) study at the University of New England. The enclosed 'Information for Participants' sheet details what would be involved if you decide to take part.

After reading the enclosed information, I would encourage you to contact me if you require any further information regarding the study on (07) 55399922 or my mobile on 0419785942.

Thank you again for your interest in this project

Iona Abrahamson

Hons Masters Student.

Email: iona4life@hotmail.com

Supervisor: Associate Professor Margot Schofield

Phone: (w) (03) 96391809 or 0417 412 954

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Appendix D

School of Health
Armidale, NSW 2351,
Australia

Information Sheet for participants involved in research project

Title of Project: Factors that Restore Relationships after Infidelity

This study seeks to understand experiences of infidelity. It is particularly important for counsellors to understand what helps in rebuilding the relationship after such an experience, so that they can better help couples facing this situation. My aim is to explore how you experienced infidelity, whether you or your partner had the affair. I am interested to find out what worked for you in restoring your relationship.

If you agree to take part in this study, you must be aged 18 years or over. I would like to interview you at a time and place convenient to us both. I will be interviewing only one person from each relationship, not the couple. The interviews will take place at a predetermined location of your choice (for example, your home, my office at Lifeline or at another office where your privacy can be assured). During the interviews I will ask you to talk about being the instigator or recipient of infidelity. You will be asked to tell how you handled this experience, if reasons were given for the infidelity and if you sought information and from whom to help you understand. You will be asked to describe what factors contributed to the healing of your relationship. You will have the freedom to introduce any information that you would wish to share or that you believe would assist the study. It is envisaged that one interview will take place for about 60 – 90 minutes. With your permission the interview will be tape-recorded on audio tape.

You are under no obligation to participate in this project.

All information (including audio tapes) will be confidential and therefore coded to ensure that only I and the supervisors know your identity. The audio tapes will be destroyed as soon as being transcribed and no identifying information will be kept with the transcripts. After a period of five (5) years this data will be destroyed, in keeping with the policies of the university.

Since I will be asking you to speak about very sensitive events in your life I will take every care to support you in telling your story. If subsequent to your participation in the study, you wish to access counselling, I have details of several counsellors available in your area. Should you wish to contact a telephone crisis counselling service the telephone number is 131114.

I would like to assure you that you may withdraw your consent to be a participant in this study at any time, for any reason, without penalty of any kind. If this happens, any information that has been collected from you will be destroyed if you so wish. I will be pleased to answer any questions or concerns that you may have.

Iona Abrahamson,
Master of Counselling (Hons) student,
School of Health, University of New England, Armidale,
telephone, (02) 67 733647, or (07) 55399922.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE03/031 Valid to 08/04/07)

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which the research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

*Research Services
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351
Telephone (02) 6773 3543*

Email: Ethics@metz.une.edu.au

RESEARCH TEAM CONTACT DETAILS

Honours Masters Researcher: Iona Abrahamson

Phone: (w) 07 55399922 (h) 07 55435168

Email: iona4life@hotmail.com

Supervisor: Associate Professor Margot Schofield,

Phone: (w) (03) 94158252 or 040417402954

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Secondary Supervisor: Dr. Rafat Hussain

Phone: (w) (02) 6773 3678

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Appendix E

School of Health
Armidale, NSW 2351,
Australia

Researcher: Iona Abrahamson

Consent form for participant's involved in the research project ***'Factors that restore relationships after infidelity'***

I,have read the information contained in the 'Information for Participants' sheet attached, and verify that I am over 18 years of age and have had any queries satisfactorily answered. By signing this consent form, I am agreeing to be interviewed by the researcher. I understand that all information provided by me will be coded so that I remain anonymous to all but the researcher and supervisors. I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without providing a reason. If I choose to do this, I understand that all information gathered about me will be destroyed and not used in any manner.

I AGREE / DO NOT AGREE to have the interviews tape-recorded (please circle).

.....
Signed by participant

Date

.....