

RECOVERY FROM INFIDELITY: EXPLORING VARIABLES
RELATED TO THE HEALING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Clinicians and researchers report that growth and improvement is possible after infidelity takes place. However, research has not explored specific variables that should relate to improvement in the aftermath of infidelity. Results showed that differentiation of self was found to be related to forgiveness levels. High scores on the third stage of the three-stage Model of Forgiveness (Gordon & Baucom, 2003) predicted high scores on measures of personal growth and relational satisfaction. Posttraumatic growth and relationship satisfaction were also found to predict forgiveness. However, contrary to what was hypothesized, time since the infidelity took place and current levels of relational commitment were not found to be significant predictors of trauma.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation titled “Recovery from Infidelity: Exploring Variables Related to the Healing Process” presented by Ashley Heintzelman, candidate for the Doctor of Counseling Psychology degree, and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The topic of heterosexual infidelity has been extensively researched. The most comprehensive and recent statistics regarding the proportion of married individuals that have engaged in extramarital sex shows that in a national sample of over 3000 adults, 25% of men and 15% of women reported having sex with someone other than his or her spouse while married (Laumann, Gagnon, Michaels, & Michaels, 1994). Additionally, in a study of divorced men and women, 40% of men and 44% of women reported having more than one extramarital sexual contact during their marriages (Janus & Janus, 1993). The negative consequences of infidelity include loss of trust, damaged self-esteem, disruption to other relationships such as the relationships with children, friends or parents; financial consequences, suffering from emotional problems and divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Charny & Parnass, 1995; and Schneider, Irons & Corley, 1999). Furthermore, infidelity is reported to be among the most difficult relationship issues to treat in couples's therapy and infidelity is the most frequently cited cause of divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Atkins, Baucom & Jacobson, 2001; Charny & Parnass, 1995; Schneider, Irons & Corley, 1999; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997; Winek & Craven, 2003).

However, researchers and clinicians report that recovery from infidelity can occur; committed partnerships can survive the trauma of infidelity, and personal growth in the wake of infidelity is possible. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to empirically explore what theoretical factors contribute to the recovery from infidelity. Recovery from infidelity is

defined in this study as reported personal growth and increased relationship satisfaction. Based on literature in the following review, I specifically predicted that forgiveness, degree of trauma, and differentiation of self from the family of origin will be predictors of recovery from infidelity. Currently, little is known about how individuals can improve in the aftermath of infidelity, and these variables have not been empirically examined in relation to how they contribute to the process of recovery from infidelity.

For the purposes of this study, infidelity is defined as sexual intercourse during a committed relationship with someone other than the primary partner. This definition is adapted from Blow and Harnett's (2005a) definition of sexual infidelity. Many intervention models have been created to promote recovery from extramarital affairs, and each has implied pathways through which individuals improve in the aftermath of infidelity. These models will be discussed in detail shortly; however, these models of recovery have not received significant empirical examination. Therefore, the aim of this research is to test how the aforementioned variables help to explain the experience of growth and improvement following infidelity. This research will help us further understand the process of recovery from infidelity and shed light on what variables are important during specific stages of healing.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of our information on infidelity comes from books and articles written by clinicians regarding their observations after treating or interviewing clients who have dealt with infidelity. A smaller amount of information also comes from research studies conducted on individuals' experiences following infidelity. Clinicians who have worked extensively with couples that have experienced infidelity believe that it is possible for clients to create a relationship with his or her partner that has improved since the infidelity took place. For example, Spring (1996) wrote that after treating distressed couples for twenty-two years, she concluded that couples can survive infidelity if the individuals are willing to look honestly at themselves and acquire the skills necessary to recover from the crisis. Lusterman (1998) also reported that couples can survive infidelity by achieving new levels of trust, honesty, and communication. This information is encouraging regarding the positive outcomes that individuals may experience in the wake of infidelity, yet as previously mentioned, the majority of the research on the recovery process of infidelity has focused on the intervention models and treatment approaches for couples. Clinicians have written about what they believe couples should do in order to heal their relationship and many models have been developed as tools to help individuals' recovery from infidelity during therapy.

The most frequently cited and used intervention approaches include models created by DiBlasio (2000), Halford and Markman (1997), Lusterman (1998), Spring (1996), and the most commonly used intervention approach was developed by Gordon and Baucom (2004).

Lusterman (1998) created a “survival guide” for couples dealing with infidelity and developed a three-stage model to recovery based on restoring trust, reviewing the marriage, and creating a better marriage. Halford and Markman (1997) also developed an interpersonal trauma model for clinicians to use when working with couples who are trying to reconstruct their marriage after the discovery of an affair. The model involves creating safety and hope in therapy, clarifying their therapeutic contract for marital therapy (e.g., committing to a specified number of counseling sessions), normalizing traumatic reactions to the betrayal of infidelity, creating safety and hope in the marriage, reestablishing the marriage as the primary relationship, and promoting positivity and caring in the couple. Similarly, Spring (1996) constructed a three-stage process to help guide clinicians working with couples that are trying to recover from an affair. The steps include normalizing feelings, deciding whether to recommit or quit, and rebuilding the relationship.

Another treatment model that has been extensively written about in the clinical literature that was developed for treating couples that are dealing with an affair is Gordon, Baucom & Snyder’s (2004) integrative treatment design. Their model involves three stages including: (a) dealing with the impact of the affair, which involves absorbing and experiencing the impact of the interpersonal trauma; (b) a search for meaning for the traumatic event along with gaining awareness of the implications for the new understanding; and (c) moving forward with one’s life within the context of a new set of relationship beliefs. Other treatment approaches include Diblasio’s (2000) decision-based forgiveness treatment approach that consists of step-by-step strategies to help make forgiveness possible during the beginning of couples therapy. Likewise, Atwood and Seifer (1997), Brown (1991), Humphrey (1987), Kell (1992), Pittman (1993), and Sliverstein (1998) have all written books or articles regarding their

recommended approaches and guidelines for treating couples that are dealing with an affair. In general, the common factors among these treatment approaches include assessing the context of the affair, understanding the emotional impact of the affair, and clarifying the goals of therapy. For example, an important goal for couples dealing with infidelity is deciding if they want to continue the relationship (Lusterman, 1998; Spring, 1996). Despite the fact that these clinicians have created these models based on their clinical experiences through their work with couples, the efficacy of these interventions have only been explored using case-study designs. Aside from Gordon, Baucom and Snyder's (2004) treatment approach, where they integrated both the literature on traumatic response and interpersonal forgiveness in their conceptualization of treatment, these approaches do not appear to be well grounded in empirical research.

The sparse empirical literature that has focused on the healing process and positives outcomes includes work by Charny and Parnass (1995), Hansen (1987), and Olson et al. (2002). Charny and Parnass (1995) found that 15% of their couples reported that their relationships improved after the infidelity. Additionally, in a qualitative study of the process individuals go through following the disclosure of an affair, many couples described experiencing unintended positive relationship outcomes including developing a closer marital relationship, becoming more assertive, realizing the importance of good marital communication, placing higher value on the family, and taking better care of oneself (Olson et al., 2002). Olson et al.'s interviews with individuals who had experienced infidelity revealed a three-stage process following the disclosure of the infidelity. The process begins with an "emotional rollercoaster" and moves into a "moratorium" where individuals are trying to make meaning of the infidelity before they begin the final process of rebuilding trust. Furthermore,

Balswick & Balswick (1999) discovered that an affair can offer the couple an opportunity for growth through insight into the couple's relational dynamics. In a study examining cheating that took place outside committed heterosexual relationships, Hansen (1987) looked at the impact that the infidelity was reported to have on the committed relationship. Hansen asked a total sample of 215 participants about the impact of their own and their partner's extradyadic relationships on their current committed relationship. Hansen found that that for some of the participants, the infidelity improved the committed relationship. Specifically, 19.8 % of the participants reported that having an affair improved the quality of their committed relationship a "great deal" and 30.3% reported that the affair improved their committed relationship "somewhat." Participants in their study also reported that a partner's affair also helped to improve the quality of their relationship during which the affair occurred (5.5% for a "great deal" and 31.0% for "somewhat") (Hansen, 1987).

From Trauma to Forgiveness

The most frequently cited treatment model is the trauma-based model of forgiveness (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2004). Gordon, Baucom & Snyder view forgiveness as a process that partners go through in order to increase understanding of themselves, their relationship, and each other so that they can relinquish negative feelings, behaviors, and thoughts following the occurrence of a interpersonal betrayal such as infidelity (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005). Their conceptualization does not imply that partners have to reconcile in order for forgiveness to take place; partners can choose to end the relationship and still satisfy the specifications of forgiveness. In addition, Gordon and Baucom conceptualized forgiveness as an ongoing process that takes time rather than a distinct event in time. Their definition that will also be used in this study, specifies that the end state of forgiveness is made of three elements:

(a) gaining a more a realistic and balanced view of the relationship, (b) letting go of negative affect toward the partner who cheated along with increased empathy, and (c) decreasing the desire to punish the partner that cheated.

During the last few years, researchers have begun to focus on therapeutic strategies that specifically emphasize forgiveness (Worthington, 2005). Gordon, Baucom, and Snyder (2005) define forgiveness as a process where partners seek to increase their understanding of themselves, each other, and their relationship so that they are able to free themselves from being dominated by negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviors after having lived through a major interpersonal betrayal. Examples of research that have used forgiveness interventions include research conducted by Freedman and Enright (1996) and Hebl and Enright (1993). They found that forgiveness-based interventions that help individuals cognitively reframe an interpersonal trauma and achieve a better understanding of the reasons for the betrayal are effective treatments to increase individuals' level forgiveness and improving their psychological functioning. They also found that using forgiveness type interventions are clinically useful in that they help to reduce hostility and anger, increase empathy, and increase positive feelings for individuals that are coping with an interpersonal conflict. Additionally, Gordon, Baucom and Snyder's (2004) forgiveness model has been examined through a replicated case study (Gordon et al. 2004; Snyder et al., 2004). Gordon, Baucom, and Snyder examined six couples that entered and completed treatment that was designed to aid couples in their recovery from an affair. After completing the treatment, the majority of the couples were found to be less distressed, reported fewer posttraumatic stress symptoms, less depression, less marital distress, and reported greater forgiveness regarding the affair. Therefore, based on these findings, the forgiveness process appears to be important in the recovery from affairs.

Another key component of their model of forgiveness is that forgiveness in relationships closely corresponds to the recovery from a traumatic event (Gordon et al., 2005). Baucom et al. (2006) pointed out that an extramarital affair is not merely a very negative event; rather it is an experience that shatters core beliefs essential to emotional security. Because the literature on traumatic responses shows that individuals are more likely to become traumatized when an event goes against basic assumptions about how the world and people function (Janoff-Bulman, 1989, 1992), an affair may violate many important assumptions that individuals have about intimate relationships such as the belief that romantic partners can be trusted, or that relationships are a safe place (Baucom, Gordon, Snyder, Atkins, & Christensen, 2006).

When basic assumptions are defied, the injured partner often feels out of control and as if he or she cannot predict future behaviors of his or her partner. The forgiveness process involves efforts to reconstruct these former cognitions and recover a sense of interpersonal power, control, and security in the relationship (Gordon et al., 2004). Therefore, the conceptualization of infidelity as an interpersonal trauma is based on the similarities between responses to the discovery of infidelity and responses to trauma in general (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005). For example, many therapists have suggested that infidelity may result in symptoms comparable to those found in posttraumatic stress disorder including intense anger, feelings of shame, intrusive painful memories, depression, powerlessness, abandonment, victimization, persistent increased arousal, or avoidance and emotional numbing (Glass & Wright, 1997; Gordon et al., 2004). Furthermore, many treatment approaches for infidelity conceptualize recovery from an affair as analogous to recovery from an interpersonal trauma (see Gordon & Baucom, 1999; Gordon et al., 2004; Gordon et al., 2005; Snyder et al., 2004).

According to Gordon and Baucom (1999), individuals recover from interpersonal trauma by cognitively processing the betrayal and learning how to rebuild their relationships and move past bitterness. They do this by developing compassion or empathy for each other and enacting behaviors that are intended to restore balance in their relationships.

More specifically, in Gordon and Baucom's (1998) model, the goal of the first stage involves addressing the impact of the affair by cognitively and behaviorally dealing with the issues that develop from the immediate impact of the event such as depression, emotional dysregulation, and the need to express feelings such as hurt or anger. The goal of the second stage is to understand the context or the meaning of what happened. Therefore, this stage is more cognitive and insight directed because the proximal and distal factors that played a role in the cheater's decision to have an affair are explored. Empathy in this stage is promoted in order to help reduce anger and enhance understanding of the cheater's decisions. In the last "moving on" stage, the goals of this stage include (a) addressing the issue of forgiveness, (b) consolidating what has been learned about both the cheater and injured partner, (c) reexamining the relationship, and (d) making the decision regarding whether the relationship will continue (Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Overall, this conceptualization raises an important issue which is *how* an individual can recover from infidelity and implies that forgiveness is what allows individual to move past the trauma.

Because forgiveness appears to be a necessary component of the recovery process, it is important to be able to assess where individuals are in their course to recovery. Accordingly, Gordon and Baucom (2003) developed a three-stage forgiveness model and a measure, the Forgiveness Inventory (FI), in order to evaluate injured partners' progress through the major stages of forgiveness. The stages also parallel the general stages that are thought to happen

during the recovery from a psychological trauma (Gordon et al., 2005). Their integrative forgiveness-based treatment model's three major stages include (a) dealing with the impact, (b) a search for meaning, and (c) recovery or moving forward. Progress toward forgiveness is reflected by decreases in Stage I (impact) and Stage II (search for meaning), and an increase in Stage III (recovery) scores of the FI. Therefore, individuals who fall in the Stage I group report the least amount of forgiveness and individuals in Stage III report the highest levels of forgiveness. Individuals that fall in Stage II rate their forgiveness as intermediate between Stages I and III. Assessing where individuals fall within these stages should be related to the individual and relational outcomes they are experiencing. Specifically, I proposed that high levels of forgiveness (high Stage III scores) would predict higher relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction levels on measures of satisfaction that assess these specific domains than will individuals reporting less forgiveness.

Variables that Promote Forgiveness

Gordon and Baucom (1999) discuss the specific parts of each stage of forgiveness and address challenges of each stage including traumatic flashbacks, defensiveness, and lack of affect. However, the variables and processes that promote forgiveness have received little empirical examination. For example, relationship models that exist prior to the affair are likely to affect the process of recovery. Family system theories have been used to understand how individuals develop and sustain satisfying intimate relationships. Recognized as among the most theoretically elegant of the family systems theories (Murdock, 2009), Bowen's family systems theory highlights the construct of differentiation of self as a key relationship variable that provides a framework for understanding interpersonal functioning. According to Bowen, differentiation plays an essential role in the long-term intimacy and mutuality in marriage and

should therefore be related to how individuals handle the challenges that have been linked to specific stages of forgiveness (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Differentiation of self, as defined by Bowen (1978), refers to the ability to experience both intimacy and autonomy within a relationship. Well-differentiated individuals are able to maintain a clearly defined sense of self and are able to hold to their own personal convictions even when pressured by others and at the same time allow others the space for their own positions. They also have flexible interpersonal boundaries that allow them to experience emotional intimacy without having the fear of merging (Bowen, 1978). Conversely, individuals with low levels of differentiation tend to fuse in their interpersonal relationships, reactively distance themselves, or emotionally cut off (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Furthermore, well-differentiated individuals have been found to be more resistant to the negative effects of stress compared to less differentiated individuals (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), tend to function better in stressful situations (Bowen, 1978), and are posited to have more satisfying marriages (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

According to Kerr (1992), in emotionally committed relationships, higher differentiation allows for the development of an autonomous self. On the other hand, less differentiated individuals engage in interpersonal distance regulation to manage anxiety, whereas higher differentiated individuals are more at ease with intimacy and do not use fusion or emotional cutoff to regulate feelings of anxiety. As a result, when there is real or perceived separation from significant others, individuals who have lower levels of differentiation experience anxiety, which leads them to either fuse with others and become overwhelmed or emotionally cut off (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Many studies have found a positive relationship between differentiation and quality of relationship functioning. For example, individuals who evidence low levels of emotional

reactivity and emotional cutoff reported significantly greater satisfaction with their partners compared to individuals who are lower in differentiation of self (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). In another study examining the relationship between differentiation and quality of marital relationships, Skowron (2000) found that marital satisfaction was positively associated with low levels of emotional reactivity, emotional cut off, and fusion, along with higher levels of ability to take I-positions in relationships. Conversely, couples with lower levels of differentiation reported greater marital distress. More specifically, Skowron's (2000) results demonstrated that emotional cutoff uniquely predicted marital discord. Therefore, it is assumed when couples in marriage, particularly the male partner, remain emotionally available to one another, it is more probable that both partners will experience the marriage as satisfactory. Similarly, husbands' emotional withdrawal has also been found to be damaging to marriages (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Skowron (2000) concluded that the couple's capability to be closely connected with one another while still maintaining their individuality is a vital part of good marriages.

Because the theory assumes that more differentiated individuals are able to successfully move between intimacy and autonomy, I predicted that differentiation of self will moderate the relationship between affair trauma and forgiveness. Individuals that have been able to establish autonomy and emotional intimacy in their marriages without experiencing incapacitating fears of abandonment or feeling smothered should be able to better deal with their partners' transgressions compared to individuals with lower levels of differentiation. Individuals with higher differentiation should be more successful at dealing with the immediate issues and emotions that develop from the event without cutting off or reacting with unproductively high

levels of emotionality, and more willing to explore the context of the affair and the factors that played a role in the cheater's decision to cheat.

Forgiveness and Trauma

As noted earlier, forgiveness is thought to be an important part of the recovery process from affairs. However, other factors expected to influence this process have been mentioned by scholars but have not received empirical examination. For example, Gordon et al. (2005) liken the forgiveness process to the recovery from a traumatic event and discuss how specific affair patterns and different factors are likely to influence and complicate the recovery process (Baucom et al., 2006; Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Therefore, in the current study the level of trauma one experiences because of the affair will be explored in relation to how this may predict the trajectory of the recovery process. Based on variables that may help account for individual differences in responses to affairs (Gordon & Baucom, 1999), the following factors will also be examined in relation to how they may relate to the degree of trauma experienced: length of affair, length of time after the affair took place, and levels of commitment.

I predicted that higher levels of trauma will be related to decreased levels of forgiveness because the experience of extreme levels of trauma may impede an individual's ability to go through the recovery process. For instance, in situations where the injured partner experiences severe interpersonal trauma and is dealing with intense feelings of shame, anger, depression, guilt, or anxiety, she or he may not be prepared yet to start cognitively processing or reframing the betrayal in order to begin rebuilding relationship. For example, under extreme emotional duress it may not be possible to develop a new understanding of the traumatic event and reconstruct a new meaning for the affair, which are experiences that are needed to achieve high levels of stage three in the forgiveness model (Gordon & Baucom, 2003).

Variables that Predict Level of Trauma

Many factors are predicted to influence the level of trauma one experiences as a result of event like an affair. For example, Gordon and Baucom (1999) stated that differences in affair patterns are apt to affect the level of experienced trauma. For example, an individual's response to a one-night stand is going to differ from the same person's response to discovering that his or her partner was involved in a long-term extramarital affair. A one-night stand may be interpreted as a mistake, whereas a long-term affair would conceivably represent a greater threat to the relationship's stability and feelings of betrayal may be much more intense (Gordon & Baucom, 1999; Baucom et al., 2006). Therefore, I hypothesize that on-going affairs compared to a one night stand will lead to increased levels of trauma.

Forgiveness is conceptualized as a psychological transformation of the transgression wherein the injured party's prevailing impulse towards retaliation is tempered, thereby allowing the opportunity for forgiveness (Rusbult et al., 2004). Because this process is considered to be a social transformation in that the injured party takes broader considerations into account beyond the actual transgression (e.g., concern for the relationship), this process is not usually immediate and does not occur at a single point in time (Rusbult et al., 2004). Hence, time appears to be an important component of the recovery process. Rothbaum, Foa, Riggs, Murdock, and Walsh (1992), Orcutt, Erickson, and Wolfe (2004), Blanchard et al. (1996), Ehlers, Mayou, and Bryant (1998) and Shalev et al. (1998) also support this assumption in their findings that in regards to change over time, symptom rates of PTSD decrease after the initial exposure to the trauma. Therefore, I hypothesize that length of time since the affair took place should be related to levels of trauma. Specifically, individuals who

report longer amount of time since the infidelity took place will evidence lower levels of trauma compared to individuals who have experienced infidelity more recently.

The level of one's commitment to their relationship may influence the level of trauma experienced. Stress that occurs within relational roles that are particularly significant to an individual's sense of self is more likely to have a harmful impact on psychological health than stress that takes place in roles that the individual perceives as less vital (Marcussen, Ritter, & Safron, 2004). Furthermore, Thoits (1991) contended that individuals are particularly susceptible to stressors in relational roles that are very important or supply more meaning and purpose to an individual's sense of self. Events that upset salient identities or the events that disrupt those to which individuals are highly committed will have more destructive effects on psychological health compared to stressors that disrupt identities that are not as important or to which individuals are not as committed (Thoits, 1991, 1992). Thoits (1992) summarized this research by stating that stressors that are "identity relevant" are more foretelling of psychological well-being compared to stressors that are "identity-irrelevant." Therefore, the more the individual has invested in his or her relationship such as children, time, or money, the more committed he or she will be to the relationship. Disruption of the relationship by infidelity may therefore result in higher levels of trauma compared to individuals who are less committed to their relationships. Therefore, I predicted that higher levels of commitment would predict higher levels of trauma.

The Relationship between Trauma and Differentiation of Self

Differentiation of self is believed to affect a wide range of human emotions and experiences. Under highly stressful situations, individuals with high and low differentiation of self both experience symptoms of stress (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen believed

that individuals who are high in differentiation are better able to tolerate stress compared to individuals who are lower in differentiation. In summary, Bowen hypothesized that the relationship between stress and symptoms would be moderated by differentiation of self in that the higher the level of differentiation of self, the greater the amount of stress that is needed in order for symptoms to become apparent. Furthermore, Bowen (1978) and Kerr and Bowen (1988) posited that individuals lower in differentiation of self will become more stressed and remain stressed for more extended amounts of time compared to individuals with higher levels of differentiation of self.

Murdock and Gore (2004) and Murray, Daniels, and Murray (2006) found support for Bowen's predictions in that they discovered that differentiation of self works as a moderator between differentiation of self and stress symptoms. Murdock and Gore (2004) also found that coping styles and differentiation were related to differentiation of self in that higher levels of differentiation were related to the greater use of reflective coping strategies and reactive and suppressive techniques of dealing with stress were related to lower levels of differentiation. Murdock and Gore (2004) discussed that differences in coping strategies may help to explain how individuals at different levels of differentiation deal with stress.

Accordingly, in the current study I predicted that differentiation of self moderates the impact of trauma on the ability to forgive. In the current study, trauma is conceptualized to be analogous to stress. A major component of the forgiveness process entails being able to deal with the emotional impact of the affair and being able to find meaning out of the traumatic event. Therefore, if he or she is not able to utilize adaptive coping mechanism such as reflective coping which entails a thoughtful, approach-oriented style of coping, then it would be more difficult for him or her to effectively move through the stages of forgiveness. I

predicted that the ability to forgive will not be affected by traumatic conditions in individuals with higher levels of differentiation. Conversely, individuals that are low in differentiation of self will experience lower levels of forgiveness and greater levels of trauma.

Outcomes of the Recovery Process

Individuals who evidence high levels of forgiveness in Gordon and Baucom's (2003) three-stage model of recovery are predicted to experience higher levels of relational and life satisfaction compared to individuals reporting lower levels of forgiveness. Improved relational and life satisfaction post-infidelity are predicted because forgiveness has been found to be correlated with the occurrence of these positive effects. For example, Gordon and Baucom (2003) found that couples who report forgiveness after a serious transgression has taken place show more investment in their marriages, greater psychological closeness, more equal balance of power in their marriages, and high levels of marital adjustment compared to couples that have not yet achieved forgiveness. Ripely and Worthington (2002) also found that forgiveness was positively associated with marital satisfaction. Furthermore, reconciliation-relevant behaviors (e.g., partner forgiveness for cheating) are related to life satisfaction, particularly in the context of extremely committed relationship (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003). Likewise, Buchard, et al (2003) found that forgiveness is positively associated with life satisfaction.

The possibility for growth from the struggle with suffering and crisis is a theme that is present in ancient literature and philosophy (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). More recently, there has been an increase in attention to the beneficial components of dealing with a traumatic experience. Data indicate that for many individuals, the encounter with very negative events and trauma can produce positive psychological change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006) and many

studies have shown that after the experience of traumatic events most individuals report positive life changes (Linley & Joseph, 2004a, 2004b; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). In Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995, 2004a) model of psychological growth, they discussed that growth stems from a kind of perspective and thinking that pushes individuals to a higher level of functioning than was present before the trauma occurred (i.e., the acquisition of a stronger sense of self). Changes in assumptions about the world allow individuals to rebuild their life narratives to include new knowledge and understanding about life. Linley (2003) further emphasized this process stating that that positive growth represents a springboard that propels an individual to a higher level of functioning than that which was held before the traumatic event, rather than a return to a baseline of pre-trauma functioning. Currently, no research has examined whether individuals could grow beyond their previous levels of psychological functioning in response to relationship betrayal.

The phenomenon of posttraumatic growth (PTG) is defined as a transcendent result of intrapersonal struggle to find benefit and meaning in relationships and life after traumatic experience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004a). Measures of PTG examine how successful individuals have been in coping with the consequences of experiencing trauma by examining how individuals reconstruct or strengthen their perceptions of others, the self, and the meaning of events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Five factors of PTG have been identified, including personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation for life, and spiritual change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). For example, as a result of experiencing loss and tragedy, many individuals have reported feeling a greater connection to other people in general, mainly a greater sense of compassion for others who suffer (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). After dealing with traumatic events, individuals also describe feeling a greater sense of closeness, intimacy,

and freedom to be oneself. Furthermore, individuals experience changed life philosophies and give accounts of having a changed sense of what is most important such that what was previously viewed as a small thing in life has become much more important. Individuals describe a changed sense of the priorities and an increased appreciation for what one actually has (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006).

Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004b) research on PTG indicates that it is a positive outcome that comes from adapting to trauma. They conceptualize PTG as a byproduct of the struggle with trauma that leads to higher levels of functioning rather than a coping strategy to deal with severe stress. Data suggest that the presence of PTG is an indication that persons who experience it are living life in ways that, from their viewpoint, are fuller, richer, and perhaps more meaningful (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). Therefore, I hypothesize that the experience of PTG will be related to high levels of forgiveness in Gordon and Baucom's (2003) model of recovery; individuals that have experienced PTG following the trauma of an affair will have found how their crises have personally benefited them and hence be more open to the forgiveness process.

In summary, the goal of this study is to explore specific variable that are predicted to influence the trajectory of the recovery process from infidelity. Because little is known about what variables contribute to personal growth and relational improvement in the aftermath of infidelity, this study will test multiple hypotheses. Because Bowen theory predicts that more differentiated individuals are able to react to stressful situations without emotionally cutting off or react with high levels of emotionality, I predicted that trauma, differentiation of self, and the interaction of trauma and differentiation of self would predict levels of forgiveness. Based on the findings that individuals who report high levels forgiveness experience improved

psychological functioning and a better understanding of the reason for an interpersonal betrayal, I hypothesized that posttraumatic growth and relationship satisfaction will predict forgiveness. I also hypothesized that specific relationship variables should have impacts on levels of trauma. As mentioned previously, stress that occurs within relational roles that are very important to an individual's sense of self is more likely to have a harmful impact on psychological health than stress that takes place in roles that the individual perceives as less vital. Therefore, individuals that are more committed to the relationships in which the affair takes place should experience higher levels of trauma compared to individuals who have less invested in their relationship. Also, because a long-term affair may be a greater threat to the relationship's stability compared to a one night stand, feelings of betrayal may be much more intense. Therefore, I predicted that on-going affairs compared to a one night stands will lead to increased levels of trauma. Lastly, because forgiveness is conceptualized as a psychological transformation process that is usually not immediate and does not occur at a single point in time, I predicted that the length of time since the affair took place should be related to levels of trauma. Longer amounts of time since the infidelity took place is hypothesized to be related to lower levels of trauma compared to the level of trauma experienced by individuals who have encountered infidelity more recently.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants were recruited via 6 main websites with on-line support forums specifically designed for individuals recovering from infidelity. The solicitation script was posted to these on-line discussion forums once a week for 6 months. The questionnaire filled out by participants was anonymous and no identifying information was recorded. Included with the measures was a statement discussing the volunteer nature of the study, as well as potential risks and benefits for their participation. In the current study, relationship commitment was defined as a situation where the committed partner believes that the relationship is worth working on to ensure that the relationship endures indefinitely (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, in the solicitation e-mail for participation in the study, it stated that “you are only eligible to participate if you are currently in a committed relationship and your romantic partner has had sexual intercourse with someone other than you during the course of your relationship. You must still be in the relationship where the infidelity took place, and the incident must have taken place at least 6 months ago. You must also be 18 years of age or older”. This time frame was used based on Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (1995) assertion that growth takes time to emerge. In their meta-analysis on benefit finding and growth, Helgeson, Reynolds, and Tomich (2006) found that actual benefit finding is more likely to be related to better outcomes when some time had elapsed since the trauma. Also, to assess for relational improvement, the participants had to remain in their relationship where the infidelity took place.

Data collection ended once 946 individuals completed the survey. Four hundred and twenty-one respondents fully completed the measures and this sample was used for analyses. Case deletion rather than imputation was used based on the simplicity of this method and because case deletion is thought to lead to valid inferences when missing data are missing at random (Little & Rubin, 1987). It was assumed that the discarded cases were randomly distributed and did not systematically differ from the rest of the cases in this study because missing data appeared to be due to test fatigue; the majority of the missing data appeared to be in the last third of the questionnaire packet. There is a possibility that this method may affect the validity of the results if the case deletion was biased because this would mean that the complete cases are unrepresentative of the full population. However, chi-square tests were used to see if the cases with missing data could be distinguished from the complete cases and no differences were found between the individuals who completed the survey and those who did not ($p > .05$ for gender, sexual orientation, and race). T-tests were also run on the dependent variables to see if there were any differences between individuals who fully completed all measures and those who did not. No significant differences were found ($p > .05$ for trauma and forgiveness).

The sample of 421 consisted of 85.3 % women, and 13.5% men; average age was 45.12 (SD = 9.20). Race/ethnicity responses showed the following percentages: 86.7% Caucasian, 3.6% African American, 1.2% Asian, 3.3% Hispanic, .7% Native American, and 3.6% self classified as “other.” Of the 421 participants, 1.2 % identified as bisexual, 96% heterosexual, and 1.7% homosexual. The sample consisted of 93.6% married and 6.4% in a committed dating relationship when the affair took place. Current relationship status of the sample consisted of 93.8% married and 6.2% in a committed dating relationship.

Measures

The survey package included demographic items assessing the context of the affair (e.g., length of affair, relationship status when affair took place), a trauma measure, a relationship commitment measure, a measure of self-report posttraumatic growth, a measure of differentiation of self, a measure of current relationship satisfaction, and a measure assessing for stage of forgiveness.

Demographics

The demographic survey asked about the participant's age, racial/ethnic information, sexual orientation, gender, relationship status when the infidelity took place, current relationship status, and the amount of time since the infidelity took place. How long the affair lasted was accidentally left off of the demographic questionnaire so data was not collected on this particular question.

Stress Measure

Because trauma is conceptualized to be analogous to stress in the current study, the Impact of Event Scale (IES; Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979) was used to assess the impact of the infidelity. The IES assesses responses to potentially traumatic events and has been applied to both clinical and nonclinical samples (Briere & Elliott, 1998). Items for the IES were derived from statements most frequently used to describe episodes of distress by persons who had experienced recent life changes (Horowitz, et al., 1979). Two subscales have been identified in this 15-item instrument, intrusion and avoidance. Intrusion was characterized by unbidden thoughts and images, troubled dreams, strong pangs or waves of feelings, and repetitive behavior. Avoidance responses included ideational constriction, denial of the meanings and consequences of the event, blunted sensation, behavioral inhibition or counter-

phobic activity, and awareness of emotional numbness (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979). On the measure, participants indicate the frequency of the experience of each item (1 = not at all, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, and 4 = often; et al., 1979). In previous research, test-retest reliability was .87 and internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha, ranged from .78 to .82 (Horowitz, et al., 1979). In a study with nonclinical college students, Cronbach's alphas were found to be .89 for the Intrusion scale and .85 for the Avoidance scale (Thatcher and Krikorian, 2005). The instrument was also found to be internally consistent as a unidimensional scale, with a reliability coefficient of .91 (Thatcher and Krikorian, 2005). Because this measure has been normed on nonclinical and clinical individuals who have experienced a potentially life changing event, it was appropriate to use for the nonclinical participants of this study who have experienced the traumatic life changing event of being cheated. In the current study, the total scale was used and Cronbach's alpha was found to be adequate at .81.

Differentiation of Self

The Differentiation of Self Inventory - Revised (DSI-R; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) was used to assess differentiation. The DSI-R is a 46-item self-report measure that focuses on adults, their significant relationships, and current relationships with their family of origin. The DSI-R uses a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 6 (very true of me). The scale is made up of four subscales to measure differentiation including emotional cutoff (EC), emotional reactivity (ER), fusion with others (FO), and I-position (IP). In the current study, internal consistency for the full-scale was found to strong with a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Skowron and Schmitt (2003) found that internal consistency was moderately strong, ranging from .81 to .89, and that full scale consistency was strong with a Cronbach's alpha of .92.

Construct validity is indicated by relationship found between DSI scores and less symptomatology as well as less chronic anxiety (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). In a study examining the relationship between differentiation of self and psychological adjustment, Skowron, Wester, and Azen (2004) also found that DSI-R correlated ($r = .61$) with psychological functioning, evidencing construct validity.

Commitment

Participants' level of commitment was measured using the Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). This scale is made up of 25 items that tap into the level of relational commitment perceived by the participant. The measure has four subscales including commitment level, as well as three bases of dependence–satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. Sample items of the measure include: “I want our relationship to last for a very long time” (i.e., commitment level), “Our relationship is close to ideal” (i.e., relationship satisfaction), “If I weren't dating/married to my partner, I would find someone else” (i.e., alternative quality), and “I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose” (i.e., investment size). Higher scores in the Investment Model Scale represent higher levels of commitment to the relationship. Responses range from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 8 (*agree completely*) for each item. In a study examining three different samples of college students, Rusbult et al., (1998) found that reliability analyses revealed good internal consistency among items designed to measure each construct. Cronbach's alphas ranged from .91 to .95 for Commitment level, .92 to .95 for Satisfaction Level, .82 to .88 for Quality of Alternatives, and .82 to .84 for Investment Size. Principal components analyses performed on the scale items revealed evidence of four factors, with items designed to measure each construct loading on independent factors. Specifically, all items loaded on a single factor with

coefficients exceeding .40, and no items exhibited cross-factor loadings exceeding an absolute value of .40 (Rusbult et al., 1998). Regarding convergent validity, the Investment Model variables were moderately associated with other measures reflecting superior couple functioning (e.g., dyadic adjustment, trust level, inclusion of other in the self), and were essentially unrelated to measures assessing personal dispositions (e.g., need for cognition, self-esteem; Rusbult et al., 1998). Because I am specifically interested in assessing commitment level, the current study only used the seven items that apply to commitment level to one's romantic relationship rather than assessing dependence constructs as well (i.e., quality of alternatives, satisfaction, and relational investment). Cronbach's alpha in the current study for the commitment subscale was found to be good at .86.

Relationship Satisfaction

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) is a 32-item measure designed to assess relational satisfaction. The 32 items of the DAS are summed to create a total score ranging from 0 to 151, with higher scores indicating more positive dyadic adjustment. The participants rate each item on a scale ranging from 5 to 0 with 5 being "Always Agree" and 0 representing "Always Disagree." Spanier (1976) also identified four subscales: Dyadic Consensus (13 items; the degree to which the couple agrees on matters of importance to the relationship), Dyadic Satisfaction (10 items; the degree to which the couple is satisfied with their relationship), Dyadic Cohesion (5 items; the degree of closeness and shared activities experienced by the couple), and Affective Expression (4 items; the degree of demonstrations of affection and sexual relationships). Previous factor analysis from a sample of married and divorced individuals of the 32 items revealed that all the items hypothesized as indicators of each factor were confirmed to have their highest loading (in all cases above .30) (Spanier,

1976), and subsequent confirmatory factor analysis on couples also supported the four factor structure (Spanier & Thompson, 1982). The DAS has good internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$) and good test-retest reliability ($r = .96$) after 11 weeks (Spanier, 1976). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha for the full-scale was found to be acceptable at .90. Research examining the validity of the DAS has shown that total DAS scores have been consistently shown to discriminate between distressed and nondistressed couples and have been shown to identify couples with a high likelihood of divorce (Crane, Busby, & Larson, 1991). A cut-score of 97.5 has been validated to identify relationship distress (Christensen et al., 2004). The validity of the subscales has been assessed by examining the correlations between the DAS subscales and measures of love, liking, and marital satisfaction across heterosexual married and gay and lesbian cohabiting couples (Kurdek, 1992). The correlations provided support for the DAS being a multidimensional measure.

Forgiveness

The Forgiveness Inventory (FI, Gordon & Baucom, 2003) is a 23-item questionnaire that is used to assess injured partner's progress through the three-stage forgiveness model. The FI contains three subscales that assess: (a) Stage-1 experiences; (b) Stage-2 experiences; and (c) Stage-3 experiences. Each individual is classified into a stage of forgiveness. In order to do this, each scale on the FI is considered separately and raw scores for that scale are converted to z-scores. Based on the directions set forth by Gordon and Baucom (2003), each individual's three subscale z-scores are compared and then he or she is assigned to the group based his or her highest of the three subscale z-scores. Decreases in Stage 1 and 2 and an increase in Stage 3 reflect progress towards forgiveness. Participants rate each item on a scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always). Participants were couples recruited from a university or

marital clinic and a confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the existence of the three subscales, with each containing cognitive, behavioral, and affective components (alphas = .85, .76, and .75) (Gordon & Baucom, 2003). Cronbach's alpha levels for the three stages were at acceptable levels of reliability. The final subscales were .85, .76, and .75 for Stages I, II, and III, respectively (Gordon & Baucom, 2003). Gordon and Baucom also examined the intercorrelations between the three factors. As hypothesized, the Stage I and Stage II factors were positively correlated, $r = .66$, the Stage III factor was negatively correlated with the Stage I factor, $r = -.20$, and the Stage III factor was positively correlated with the Stage II factor, $r = .23$. In the current study, Cronbach's alphas for the scales were at acceptable levels of reliability: .76, .73, and .78 for the Stage I, the Stage II, and the Stage III subscales, respectively. The intercorrelations among the three factors were examined, and followed the predicted pattern found by Gordon and Baucom (2003) (i.e., Stage III was negatively correlated with Stage I and positively correlated with Stage II; Stage I and II were positively correlated, $r = -.21, .18, .59$, respectively).

Post-Traumatic Growth

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) is a 21-item self-report-inventory that measures an individual's perception of positive change following a traumatic life event. Participants are asked to rate on a scale from 0 (I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis) to 5 (I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis), how much their views have changed as a result of the trauma they experienced. The scale includes five factors: New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, and Appreciation for Life. Principal components factor analysis confirmed

the five factors structure because each factor loaded greater than .5 on one of the five factors without loading .4 or greater on any other factor (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

The PTGI was developed and validated in a sample of college students. Cronbach's alphas for the subscales ranged from .67 to .85 and Cronbach's alpha for the normative sample was .90. In the current study, internal consistency was found to be acceptable at .88. Test-retest reliability for the 21-item PTGI was found to be a good value ($r = .71$). To assess the concurrent and discriminate validity of the PTGI, the relationship between the PTGI and other validated scales and individual difference variables was examined (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Results indicated that PTGI score was not significantly correlated with scores of measures of social desirability or neuroticism, indicating that reports of growth are not from the result of subjects trying to present socially desirable responses and are not due to the lack of chronic negative emotionality (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to conducting regression analyses, collinearity, histograms, and normal probability plot of the residuals were examined. Standardized residuals, Cook's distance, leverage, and Mahalanobis distances were also examined. The tested assumptions were met. Means, standard deviations for the scales and intercorrelations among the variables (trauma, commitment, differentiation of self, forgiveness, relationship satisfaction, and posttraumatic growth) can be found in Table A-1. Table A-1 indicates that differentiation of self scores positively correlated with forgiveness scores and posttraumatic growth scores. Forgiveness scores were positively correlated with posttraumatic growth scores. Trauma scores negatively correlated with satisfaction and differentiation of self score (Table A-1). The small correlations may indicate that variable(s) not examined in this study are moderating or suppressing the relationships that were inspected (see discussion section for a full list of potential variables).

Differentiation of Self, Trauma, and Forgiveness

Based on Gordon and Baucom's (2003) instructions, each scale of the Forgiveness Inventory (FI, Gordon & Baucom, 2003) was considered separately and raw scores for each subscale were converted to *z-scores* and then compared. Each participant was assigned to a group based on his or her highest *z-score* (Gordon & Baucom, 2003). In the current sample, 98.2% of the participants fell into Stage III (i.e., the highest forgiveness stage). Therefore, Stage III scores were used to run the multiple regression analysis.

In order to help prevent multicollinearity that is introduced by the creation of the interaction term, the variables were centered by subtracting the mean score for the variable from all scores. In a hierarchical regression analysis, the predictors (centered IES scores) and (centered DSI scores) were entered first, followed by the interaction term (centered IES x DSI) in the second step. An average composite score was used for all scales (i.e., the average score of the total DSI was used rather than using averages of any of the DSI subscales). Results indicated that the regression equation with IES and DSI scores significantly predicted forgiveness scores ($R^2 = .05; f(2, 415) = 4.50, p < .05$). Examination of the beta weights showed that differentiation of self was a significant predictor ($\beta = .22, p < .05$) but trauma was not ($\beta = -.02, p > .05$). The second step of the regression equation in which the interaction term was entered was also statistically significant, $R^2 = .06: F(3, 414) = 3.02, p < .05$, and the addition of the interaction term did produce a significant increase in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .01; f(1, 414) = 3.14, p > .05$; adjusted $R^2 = .03, p > .05$) (see Table A-2). R^2 is the proportion of variance in the criterion variable explained by the model and the effect size for this hypothesis is small (Cohen, 1988). Given the effect of .06, and sample size of 421, the observed power is .35. The observed power indicates that more participants may have been needed to detect a significant interaction between trauma and differentiation of self based on this power level. Additionally, there may be a possibility of a type II error because with low power, the probability of concluding that there is no effect when there is one is high (Cohen, 1988).

Posttraumatic Growth, Relationship Satisfaction and Forgiveness

To test the hypothesis that PTG and relationship satisfaction predict forgiveness, a multiple regression was conducted. PTG and relationship satisfaction were the predictor variables and forgiveness was the criterion variable. Results indicated that the hypothesis was

supported, $R^2 = .14$; $F(2, 417) = 13.03$, $p < .05$; adjusted $R^2 = .13$, $p < .05$ (see Table A-3). R^2 is the proportion of variance in the criterion variable explained by the model and the effect size of this hypothesis is small (Cohen, 1988). Examination of beta weights of PTG and relationship satisfaction indicated that PTG ($\beta = .38$, $p < .05$) and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$) were both significant predictors of forgiveness.

Commitment, Time since Affair, and Trauma

To test the hypothesis that high levels of commitment and longer amounts of time since the infidelity took place should be related to the level of trauma experienced, a multiple regression was also performed. The predictor variables included commitment and amount of time since the infidelity took place. Length of the affair was not included in the analysis because of error in data collection for this variable (see demographics section). The criterion variable was level of trauma. Results indicated that the overall model was not supported ($R^2 = .01$; $F(2, 410) = 1.41$, $p > .05$; adjusted $R^2 = .003$, $p < .05$). R^2 is the proportion of variance in the criterion variable explained by the model and the effect size for this hypothesis is small (Cohen, 1988). Given the effect size of .01, and a sample size of 421, the observed power is .43. Therefore, more than 421 participants may have been needed to detect a significant relationship between commitment, time since the infidelity, and trauma with this power level. Also, the possibility of a type II error due to low power cannot be excluded because when power is low, the chance of a type II error is increased (Cohen, 1988).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Because little is known about what variables contribute to personal growth and relational improvement in the aftermath of infidelity, the aim of this study was to explore specific variables that are thought to influence the trajectory of the recovery process from infidelity. The results help to shed light on variables that may be critical to the healing process and the ability to move forward after the experience of infidelity (i.e., forgiveness, differentiation of self, posttraumatic growth, and relationship satisfaction).

As hypothesized, differentiation of self predicted forgiveness. This pattern lends support to Bowen's prediction that more differentiated individuals are able to react to stressful situations (e.g., infidelity) in more adaptive ways compared to lower differentiated individuals. The results of the current study imply that higher differentiated individuals experience higher levels of forgiveness compared to individuals with lower differentiation. Highly differentiated individuals may experience more forgiveness because when dealing with the stressful situation of infidelity, highly differentiated people are able to manage their emotional attachment to their partners without distancing themselves emotionally. In order for individuals to try to forgive their partners' infidelity, it may be important for them to stay connected to their partners. Because the forgiveness process entails partners seeking a better understanding of themselves, each other, and their relationship (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005). If individuals are emotionally distant from their partners and their relationships, the emotional investment needed to begin the process of forgiveness may not be present. Accordingly, individuals who

are less emotionally reactive may deal better with the immediate issues and emotions that arise as a result of the infidelity because they are not emotionally cutting off, reacting with extreme defensiveness, or responding with overly high levels of emotionality. The hypothesized interaction between differentiation of self and trauma was not supported. In the current study, trauma is conceptualized as analogous to stress. Although Murdock and Gore (2004) found that differentiation of self moderated the relationship between stress and coping, it is possible that the experience of an affair does not fit this pattern because the distress caused by an affair may not be comparable to the distress caused by the stressful life events assessed in Murdock and Gore's (2004) study (e.g., being angered by something that happened outside of one's control).

The hypothesis that posttraumatic growth and relationship satisfaction predicted forgiveness was supported. These findings suggest that current relationship satisfaction and personal improvements after the affair took place (e.g., enhanced psychological functioning; clearer understanding of the reasons why the affair took place) are related to the experience of higher levels of forgiveness. Individuals who can focus on and identify positive changes as a result of the infidelity (i.e., those who experience posttraumatic growth) may experience higher levels of forgiveness in the wake of an affair compared to individuals who do not feel they have evolved positively. Additionally, the results may indicate that individuals who had higher relationship satisfaction after the affair took place are likely to experience more forgiveness compared to individuals with lower relationship satisfaction. This implies that the process of forgiveness is affected by how satisfied one is with his or her relationship. However, relationship satisfaction *prior to and at the time of* the affair was not assessed in this study. It is possible that moving through the forgiveness process helps to improve relationship satisfaction. Future research focusing on relationship satisfaction before, during, and after the

affair took place may help to provide a deeper understanding of how relationship satisfaction influences forgiveness and vice versa. An alternative explanation of the results could be that higher levels of forgiveness predict relationship satisfaction and personal improvements. Studies focusing on understanding the direction of the relationship between relationship satisfaction, personal growth, and forgiveness are recommended.

Lastly, I hypothesized that specific relationship variables would have an impact on levels of trauma. This hypothesis was not supported in that time since the infidelity took place and current levels of relational commitment were not found to be significant predictors of trauma. In this study, time since the infidelity took place and level of current relational commitment do not appear to be related to trauma. It is also possible that the amount of time that has lapsed since the infidelity took place may have interfered with the participants' recollection of how traumatic the event was because the average amount of time since the infidelity took place in this sample was over one year. Additionally, this study utilized a measure of *current* relational commitment. Commitment levels at the actual time of the affair may be more relevant to the experience of trauma because the affair may have altered commitment levels. Because the relationship between degree of trauma and differentiation of self does appear to be a variable influencing the forgiveness process, additional research should focus on what variables may influence the experience of trauma and how the above variables may be related to forgiveness. Lastly, as previously mentioned, the observed power indicates that the possibility of a type II error cannot be excluded for the hypotheses that were not supported (i.e., there may have actually been an effect that was not detected).

Implications

The results of this study indicate that differentiation of self, forgiveness, posttraumatic growth, and relationship satisfaction are related to the process of recovery from infidelity. Therefore, this study has many implications for counselors working with clients who are dealing with their partner's infidelity as well as for counselors in training who are learning how to treat infidelity in a therapeutic setting. Differentiation of self, posttraumatic growth, and relationship satisfaction were found to predict forgiveness. These findings may help to provide clinicians with a framework for dealing with clients who come to them while trying to cope in the aftermath of infidelity. For example, it may be helpful during initial sessions for counselors to informally and formally (i.e., through standardized assessments) assess relationship satisfaction and the experience of posttraumatic growth. Because these constructs are found to be related to forgiveness, the information gathered during the initial sessions could help to provide a guide for what future sessions should look like (e.g., promoting a deeper understanding of why the affair took place to help promote posttraumatic growth; focusing on areas of the relationship that may help to improve relational satisfaction). Additionally, after exploring the clients' understanding of why the affair took place, how they have personally been affected by the affair, and what their relationship satisfaction was like before and after the affair, the information gathered could then be used to help educate clients about how these factors may be influencing their course of recovery (e.g., if clients are not willing to explore why the affair took place, this may be contributing to their difficulties in beginning to forgive their partner's infidelity).

Knowing that differentiation of self influences the experience of forgiveness also helps to guide the process of counseling. It may be helpful to teach counselors in training to formally

and or informally assess level of differentiation of self. Assessing differentiation of self may help to provide the counselors with a rough idea of how clients emotionally responded to the infidelity. Furthermore, the results of these assessments could help counselors to gauge how far along the client is in the recovery process (e.g., being completely emotionally cutoff from their partner may indicate less progress) and provide the counselor with information about specific variables to focus on during counseling sessions (e.g., focusing on reducing extreme emotional responses to the infidelity). Additionally, because differentiation of self was found to be a significant predictor of forgiveness, it may be helpful for counselors to provide clients with psycho-education around the process of recovery from infidelity. For example, it may be helpful to share with clients that the experience of infidelity is often a traumatic experience to help them understand why the recovery process may feel so difficult; many clients may not understand how an affair has the ability to completely wreck their core beliefs about their partner (Baucom et al., 2006).

Lastly, because forgiveness has been found to be an important component of the healing process from infidelity, clinicians are encouraged to help foster forgiveness in their clients and educating counselors in training about forgiveness models is recommended (for two frequently cited and empirically supported models utilized to help promote forgiveness, see Worthington et al. 2000 and McCullough & Worthington, 1995). Counselors may also want to encourage clients to join group therapy sessions with other clients dealing with infidelity because psycho-educational group interventions have found to be effective in promoting forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1995). The use on-line support forums specifically designed for individuals dealing with infidelity may also be a useful suggestion for clients. Online support groups have been found to help people effectively cope with a variety of problems and foster

well-being by promoting personal empowerment, improving understanding and knowledge, and developing social relationships (Barak, Boniel-Nissim, & Suler, 2008).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted. One of the main limitations is that the study was non causal so the directionality of the results is not clear. For instance, based on the hypotheses made in this study, the interpretation of the findings is that relationship satisfaction and posttraumatic growth predict forgiveness. It is possible that forgiveness levels predict relationship satisfaction and influence the experience of posttraumatic growth. Additionally, as noted in the results section, the effect sizes found for each hypothesis were small (Cohen, 1988). Therefore, it is a possibility that the significant effects found in this study may be an artifact of the large sample or due to the fact that effect sizes for moderators terms are known for being small (McClelland & Judd, 1993). Another limitation of this study is the homogeneity of the sample which affects the ability to generalize the results of this study. The sample consisted of 85.3% women and 86.7% Caucasian participants. Therefore, variables that influence the recovery process for individuals of other races and ethnicities may be different from the variables in this study. Based on research done on internet users, Teo (2001) and Weiser (2000) found that women are more likely to utilize the internet for support, interpersonal communication, and educational assistance whereas men typically use the internet for entertainment, leisure, and purchasing activities. Teo and Weister's research is supported by the large majority of female participants in this study. Therefore, caution should be used when generalizing the results to males.

Additionally, because most of the participants in this study were married when the affair took place, the results found in this study are not representative of individuals' process of

recovery from an affair that took place within a non-marital committed relationship. For example, it is not known if there are differences in the experience of trauma due to infidelity in committed relationships versus marriage. In the current study there were no differences in trauma scores for participants in committed relationships compared to married participants. However, because 93.6 % of the participants in this study reported that they were married, the sample size of participants in committed relationships may have been too small to detect a significant difference. Because research has shown that dating couples are seen as having less commitment and higher rates of disagreement than married couples (Brown & Booth, 1996; Nock, 1995), it is plausible that cheating that takes place in marital relationships is more traumatic than cheating that takes place in dating relationships. Therefore, it is possible that relationship status moderates the interaction between differentiation of self, trauma and forgiveness.

The data collection method may have had an effect on results of this study. As previously discussed, on-line support groups have been found to be an effective tool for handling specific conditions of distress and fostering psychological well-being (Barak, Boniel-Nissim, & Suler, 2008). The vast majority of the participants in this study fell into the highest stage of forgiveness on the Forgiveness Inventory (FI, Gordon & Baucom, 2003) and all of the participants in this study were obtained from online support forums for infidelity. Hence, the forgiveness levels of the participants in this study may be different from individuals who have not utilized support forums for infidelity (i.e., the use of on-line support forums to cope with infidelity helped to promote forgiveness). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Worthington (1998) suggested that forgiveness is fostered by group work with others dealing with similar experiences. Worthington's findings (1998) suggest that group support (in addition to

differentiation of self and trauma) may be influencing the experience of forgiveness. Therefore, to tease out the relationship among these factors and how they relate to forgiveness, replication of this study with participants who are not part of on-line support groups is suggested.

Conclusions and Future Research

This study has helped to identify factors that may be important in the recovery process of infidelity. As discussed, this research may help to provide counselors with some empirically supported suggestions to use in their work with individuals recovering from infidelity. Important areas for future research include further exploration of variables that have been empirically linked to forgiveness and the recovery process of infidelity such as empathy, acceptance, religiosity, external support, presence of children, and how long the infidelity lasted (Blow & Harnett, 2005b; Rusbult et al., 2004; & Worthington, 1998; 2005). Additionally, the directionality of the relationships between the variables in this study, particularly in regards to posttraumatic growth, relationship satisfaction, and forgiveness is not fully understood in this study. Future research that helps to make the directionality of the relationships between the above variables more clear would provide helpful information about the trajectory of the recovery process. Also, improving the observed power in future studies by using subscales may also help to detect significant relationships that were not found between variables in the current study. The subscales may help increase the power by providing greater precision (i.e., reliability, and accuracy (i.e., validity). Lastly, to improve the ability to generalize the results of this study, replication is needed with participants who are more diverse in gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and relationship status. Longitudinal research designs that utilize forgiveness interventions in a group format may also be a particularly fruitful area of research on the recovery process from infidelity.

Appendix A

Table A-1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations among Variables Studied

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5
1. IES	2.94	.27	1.47	4.00	-				
2. DAS	2.94	.50	2.00	5.00	-.11**	-			
3. Full DSI-R	4.53	.53	1.00	6.00	-.13**	.06	-		
4. Stage 3 FI	3.49	.45	1.29	4.57	-.08	-.02	.24**	-	
5. IMS	5.81	1.15	1.14	7.86	-.07	.08	.08	.19	-
6. PTGI	3.57	.70	1.38	4.95	-.01	.02	.22**	.36**	.10

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

IES = Impact of event scale (measure of trauma); DAS = dyadic adjustment scale (measure of relationship satisfaction); DSI-R = Differentiation of self inventory (full scale); FI = Forgiveness Inventory (stage 3); IMS = Investment model scale (measure of relational commitment); PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

Table A-2

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis with Trauma and
Differentiation of self as Predictors of Forgiveness*

Variable	B	SE B	β	R ²		
				R ²	Adjusted	Δ R ²
Step 1				.05*	.03	.044
Differentiation of Self	.28	.06	.23*			
Trauma	.03	.08	-.02			
Step 2				.06*	.03	.01
Differentiation of Self	.02	.51	.05			.
Trauma	.34	.96	-.22			
Trauma x DSI	.07	.21	.24**			

*p < .05.

** = Not significant due to large standard error

Table A-3

Summary of Regression Analysis with Satisfaction and PTG

as Predictors of Forgiveness

Variable	B	SE B	β	R ²		
				R ²	Adjusted	Δ R ²
Step 1				.14*	.128	.139
Satisfaction	.18	.06	.09*			
Posttraumatic Growth	.23	.05	.38*			

*p < .05.

Table A-4

Regression Analysis Summary with Commitment and Time

since Infidelity as Predictors of Trauma

Variable	B	SE B	β	R ²		
				R ²	Adjusted	Δ R ²
Step 1				.012	.003	.01
Commitment	.018	.015	.08			
Time Since Infidelity	.001	.001	-.08			

*p < .05.

Appendix B

Demographics Questionnaire

Gender:

Male Female

Age: _____

Ethnicity

I identify myself as:

- African-American
- Asian or Asian American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino/Latina
- Native American
- Other

Sexual Orientation:

- Heterosexual
- Homosexual
- Bisexual

Time Since Partner Participated in the Infidelity: _____

Length of Time Together when the Infidelity Took Place: _____

Relationship Status When Infidelity Took Place:

- In a committed dating relationship
- Married

Current Relationship Status (check all that apply):

- Single
- In a committed dating relationship
- Married
- Still in relationship where infidelity took place

Appendix C

The Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998)

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement by circling a number.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do not				Agree				Agree
agree at all				somewhat				completely

- 1) I want our relationship to last for a very long time
- 2) I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
- 3) I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.
- 4) It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.
- 5) I feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner.
- 6) I want our relationship to last forever
- 7) I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

Appendix D

The Forgiveness Inventory (FI, Gordon & Baucom, 2003)

Rate how much they currently experience each item on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always).

- 1) I want to ask my partner for all the details about the event.
- 2) I find myself withdrawing from interaction with my partner.
- 3) I am examining my views about what I should realistically expect from my partner.
- 4) I want to find out why my partner did this.
- 5) I spend my time convincing myself that I am still a good person in spite of what happened.
- 6) I feel I am ready to put what happened behind me.
- 7) Our relationship feels out of balance as a result of what happened.
- 8) I am learning that many different factors caused this event.
- 9) I feel overwhelmed by confusing emotions about what happened.
- 10) I find myself collecting information about my partner's behavior.
- 11) I know how I feel about continuing our relationship.
- 12) I feel my emotions about the event are under my control.
- 13) Understanding what my partner did is more important to me than blaming him/her.
- 14) I find myself trying to be a better partner.
- 15) I can see both the positive and negative aspects of our relationship.
- 16) I am able to look at both good and bad qualities of my partner.
- 17) My emotions about what happened change from day to day.
- 18) I am able to let go of my anger about what happened
- 19) I feel like I want to punish my partner for what he/she did.
- 20) I keep trying to "even the score" between my partner and me
- 21) I am too numb to feel any emotion about what happened
- 22) My emotions about what happened are becoming clearer.
- 23) I want to make my partner "pay" for what he/she did.

Appendix E

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)

Each item is rated using values ranging from 0 (I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis) to 5 (I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis).

- 1) I changed my priorities about what is important in life.
- 2) I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.
- 3) I developed new interests.
- 4) I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.
- 5) I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.
- 6) I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.
- 7) I established a new path for my life.
- 8) I have a greater sense of closeness with others.
- 9) I am more willing to express my emotions.
- 10) I know better that I can handle difficulties.
- 11) I am able to do better things with my life.
- 12) I am better able to accept the way things work out.
- 13) I can better appreciate each day.
- 14) New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.
- 15) I have more compassion for others.
- 16) I put more effort into my relationships.
- 17) I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.
- 18) I have a stronger religious faith. .
- 19) I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.
- 20) I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.
- 21) I better accept needing others.

Appendix F

The Differentiation of Self Inventory - Revised (DSI-R; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003)

(Not at all True of Me and Very True of Me) 1-6

- 1) People have remarked that I'm overly emotional.
- 2) I have difficulty expressing my feelings to people I care for.
- 3) I often feel inhibited around my family.
- 4) I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress.
- 5) I usually need a lot of encouragement from others when starting a big job or task.
- 6) When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him/her for a time.
- 7) No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am.
- 8) I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me.
- 9) I want to live up to my parents' expectations of me.
- 10) I wish that I weren't so emotional.
- 11) I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person.
- 12) My spouse/partner could not tolerate it if I were to express to him/her my true feelings about some things.
- 13) When my spouse/partner criticizes me, it bothers me for days.
- 14) At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly.
- 15) When I am having an argument with someone, I can separate my thoughts about the issue from my feelings about the person.
- 16) I'm often uncomfortable when people get too close to me.
- 17) I feel a need for approval from virtually everyone in my life.
- 18) At times I feel as if I'm riding an emotional roller-coaster.
- 19) There's no point in getting upset about things I cannot change.
- 20) I'm concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships.
- 21) I'm overly sensitive to criticism.
- 22) I try to live up to my parents' expectations.
- 23) I'm fairly self-accepting.
- 24) I often feel that my spouse/partner wants too much from me.
- 25) I often agree with others just to appease them.
- 26) If I have had an argument with my spouse/partner, I tend to think about it all day.
- 27) I am able to say "no" to others even when I feel pressured by them.
- 28) When one of my relationships becomes very intense, I feel the urge to run away from it.
- 29) Arguments with my parent(s) or sibling(s) can still make me feel awful.
- 30) If someone is upset with me, I can't seem to let it go easily.
- 31) I'm less concerned that others approve of me than I am in doing what I think is right.
- 32) I would never consider turning to any of my family members for emotional support.
- 33) I often feel unsure when others are not around to help me make a decision.
- 34) I'm very sensitive to being hurt by others.
- 35) My self-esteem really depends on how others think of me.
- 36) When I'm with my spouse/partner, I often feel smothered.

- 37) When making decisions, I seldom worry about what others will think.
- 38) I often wonder about the kind of impression I create.
- 39) When things go wrong, talking about them usually makes it worse.
- 40) I feel things more intensely than others do.
- 41) I usually do what I believe is right regardless of what others say.
- 42) Our relationship might be better if my spouse/partner would give me the space I need.
- 43) I tend to feel pretty stable under stress.
- 44) Sometimes I feel sick after arguing with my spouse/partner.
- 45) I feel it's important to hear my parents' opinions before making decisions.
- 46) I worry about people close to me getting sick, hurt, or upset.

Appendix G

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976)

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships.

Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

5 = Always Agree, 4 = Almost Always, 3 = Occasionally Disagree, 2 = Frequently Disagree, 1 = Almost Always Disagree, 0 = Always Disagree

- 1) Handling family finances
- 2) Matters of recreation
- 3) Religious matters
- 4) Demonstrations of affection
- 5) Friends
- 6) Sex relations
- 7) Conventuality (correct or proper behavior)
- 8) Philosophy of life
- 9) Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws
- 10) Aims, goals, and things believed important
- 11) Amount of time spent together
- 12) Making major decisions
- 13) Household tasks
- 14) Leisure time interests and activities
- 15) Career decisions
- 16) How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?
- 17) How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?
- 18) In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?
- 19) Do you confide in your mate?
- 20) Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together)
- 21) How often do you and your partner quarrel?
- 22) How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
	4	3	2	1	0
- 23) Do you kiss your mate?

4	3	2	1	0
---	---	---	---	---
- 24) Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?

All of them	Most of Them	Some of Them	Very Few of Them	None of them
4	3	2	1	0
- 25) How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

Never;	Less than once a month;	Once/twice a month;	Once/twice a week;	Once a day;	More often
0	1	2	3	4	5
- 26) Have a stimulating exchange of ideas 0 1 2 3 4 5
- 27) Laugh together 0 1 2 3 4 5
- 28) Calmly discuss something 0 1 2 3 4 5
- 29) Work together on a project 0 1 2 3 4 5

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometime disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Check yes or no)

Yes = 0; No = 1

30) 0 1 Being too tired for sex.

31) 0 1 Not showing love.

32) The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely Unhappy Fairly Unhappy A Little Unhappy Happy Very Happy Extremely Happy Perfect
0 1 2 3 4 5 6

33) Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship? (rank 1-5 with 1 being the best statement that describes how you feel)

___ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

___ I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.

___ I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.

___ It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.

___ It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.

___ My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

Appendix H

Impact of Event Scale (IES; Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979)

Below is a list of comments made by people after stressful life events. Please check each item, indicating how frequently these comments were true for you after the affair took place. If they did not occur during that time, please mark the "not at all" column.

	FREQUENCY			
	Not At All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1. I thought about it when I didn't mean to.				
2. I avoided letting myself get upset when I thought about it or was reminded of it.				
3. I tried to remove it from memory.				
4. I had trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, because of pictures or thoughts about it that came into my mind.				
5. I had waves of strong feelings about it.				
6. I had dreams about it.				
7. I stayed away from reminders of it.				
8. I felt as if it hadn't happened or it wasn't real.				
9. I tried not to talk about it.				
10. Pictures about it popped into my mind.				
11. Other things kept making me think about it.				
12. I was aware that I still had a lot of feelings about it, but I didn't deal with them.				
13. I tried not to think about it.				
14. Any reminder brought back feelings about it.				
15. My feelings about it were kind of numb.				

Intrusion subset = 1, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 14; avoidance subset = 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15.

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VITA

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Ashley worked at University of Missouri-Kansas City as a Psychology Academic Advisor, and as an Assistant and Academic Advisor for the Counseling and Guidance M.A. Program. She also worked as an Empowerment Program Coordinator supporting refugee and immigrant women in with adjustment, mental health, and domestic violence issues in the Greater Kansas City area.

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