

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?
THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTS AND ATTRIBUTIONS FOLLOWING MARITAL
INFIDELITY

A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri – Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
MICHELLE KLEINE

Dr. Jon A. Hess, Dissertation Supervisor

DECEMBER 2007

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
dissertation entitled,

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?
THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTS AND ATTRIBUTIONS FOLLOWING MARITAL
INFIDELITY

Presented by Michelle Kleine

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Dr. Jon A. Hess. He has epitomized throughout the process of writing this paper everything that I would want a mentor to be. As a scholar, he is brilliant. I knew that I was in capable hands. He was always there to help and no question I asked was ever considered too stupid. He offered encouragement when I needed it and every now and then even a gentle kick in the behind. I consider him not only my advisor, but my friend.

In addition to Dr. Hess, there were four other amazing scholars on my committee for whom I owe a debt of gratitude - Dr. Michael Kramer, Dr. Larry Ganong, Dr. Mary J. Smythe, and Dr. Marilyn Coleman. I appreciate so much their comments, advice, and words of encouragement. I feel it was a great honor to be able to learn from such a group as this. Thank you all.

I also want to thank my many participants. For my first study, 250 people took time out of their very busy lives to complete a survey for someone most of them didn't know from Adam. In my second study, 25 people, who most again did not know me, generously exposed a very sensitive, painful, part of their lives. Without your help, none of this would have been possible.

Finally, I want to thank my family - My husband, my boys, my mother, and my siblings. Thank you for always being there to help or to encourage me. In the end, you make it all worthwhile and I love you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
ABSTRACT.....	x

Chapter

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of this Study	
Importance of this Study	
2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Infidelity	
Definition and History	
Terminology Use	
Typologies	
General Demographics	
Predictors	
Social influence	
Individual difference influences	
Marital relationship influence	
Consequences	
Account Episodes	
Failure Event	
Deception	
Reproach	

Account	
Types of Accounts	
Excuses	
Justifications	
Concessions and refusals	
Evaluation	
Attribution Theory	
Heider's foundational work in attribution theory	
More recent developments of attributions theory	
Accounts and Attributions	
3. CHAPTER THREE: STUDY ONE.....	30
Commitment, Intention, Account Types, and Guilt	
Commitment Level	
Level of Intent	
Method	
Participants	
Procedure	
Instruments	
Motivation to maintain the marriage, level of intent, and revenge	
Accounts	
Level of Guilt	
Results	
Hypothesis One	
Hypothesis Two	

Hypothesis Three	
Research Question One	
Research Question Two	
Hypothesis Four	
Hypothesis Five	
Hypothesis Six	
Discussion	
Comparison with Mongeau's Study on Dating Couples	
Degree of Guilt	
Account Choice	
Theory Application and Future Directions	
Level of intent and account	
Motivation and account choice	
Causal Dimensions	
4. CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY TWO.....	52
Attribution Theory and Account Sequence	
Causal Dimensions	
Stability	
Locus	
Control	
Reproach, Accounts, and Subsequent Evaluation	
Account and Evaluation	
Method	
Thematizing	
Designing	

Interviewing	
Participants	
Sampling Criteria	
Locating Participants	
Setting	
Procedure	
Transcribing	
Data Analysis	
Verification	
Reporting	
Results	
Research Question One	
Research Question Two	
Research Question Three	
Motivation to terminate the marriage and account choice	
Motivation to maintain the marriage and account choice	
Research Question Four	
Initial Victim Reaction	
Account Significance	
Barriers	
Power Shift	
Relationship Talk and Remedial Work	
Discussion	
5. CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL DISCUSSION.....	118
Account Sequence	

Reproach	
Account	
Evaluation	
Intervening Variables	
Causal Dimensions	
Future Direction	
Summary of Findings	
Theoretical Contributions to Knowledge	
Value of Hypothetical Scenarios for Studying Marital Infidelity	
Infidelity in Marital Versus Dating Couples	
Practical Applications	
Applications for those who are contemplating marriage	
Applications for those whose marriage is affected by sexual infidelity	
Applications for marital counselors	
Conclusion	
REFERENCES.....	130
APPENDIX	
A. Study One script for potential participants.....	137
B. Study One questionnaire.....	138
C. Study Two demographic questions.....	143
D. Study Two interview schedule.....	144
E. Study Two interview script.....	145
VITA.....	147

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Account Sequence.....	15

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Account Response Examples.....	40
2. Demographic of Participants.....	62

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?
THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTS AND ATTRIBUTIONS FOLLOWING MARITAL
INFIDELITY

Michelle Kleine

Dr. Jon A. Hess, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This research focused on accounts and attributions following marital infidelity using a two-part investigation. In Study One, 250 married or previously married participants responded to a hypothetical scenario which asked that they assess their expected level of guilt and tell what account they would likely give to their spouse after an incident of extramarital sex was discovered. Motivation to remain in the marriage and the level of intent prompting the infidelity were manipulated in the scenarios. Results indicated that low motivation to maintain the marriage and high intent were related to the use of aggravating accounts (justifications and denials) while low intent was related to the use of mitigating accounts (concessions and excuses). Study Two utilized qualitative interviews of 25 individuals who had actually experienced infidelity in a marriage. Results indicated that motivation to remain married was a salient factor in the transgressor's choice of account. Additionally, a concession was the prominent account preferred by victims.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Most people begin their marriage with a vow of long-term commitment and faithfulness. Few people would likely say that they got married on a “trial basis.” In fact, almost every individual enters into the institution of marriage with expectations of a storybook, everlasting love (Vangelisti, 1994). Although marital conflict is inevitable, newlyweds truly believe their love will conquer all trials and tribulations throughout their years together and that their marriage will remain untarnished. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Estimates forecast that approximately one half of all new marriages will end in divorce (Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Norton & Moorman, 1987).

While research has found a vast number of causes of divorce, 25 to 50% of them cite infidelity as the leading culprit in the decision to dissolve the union (Betzig, 1989; Kelly & Conley, 1987). In fact, the famous Kinsey research reported that by the age of 40, approximately half of all married men and more than a quarter of all married women had had sexual intercourse during their marriage with someone other than their spouse (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Since then, reports have ranged widely from 26% to 55% for men and 21% to 45% of women (Allen et al., 2005; Levine, 1998). Recently, it has even been estimated that 70% or more of marriages experience infidelity (Brown, 1992; Buss, 1994). It seems safe to conclude that extramarital affairs can destroy marriages and that they are quite prevalent in today's society.

Even when divorce is not the ultimate outcome of an extramarital affair, clients of therapists have reported that infidelity has affected their lives with many other negative consequences: Breaking of religious teaching; betrayals of trust; loss of trust; guilt; shame; dishonesty; lies; panic; anger; humiliation; depression; loss of self-esteem and personal confidence; feelings of abandonment; attacks on one's sense of belonging; suicide; enraged feelings, homicide; marital conflict; a surge of justification to leave one's spouse; separation; anxiety; regret; lost respect and love; disruption of careers, marriages and families; loss of reputation; unwanted pregnancies; abortions; sexually transmitted diseases; loss of time and money; fears; jealousy; and sexual conflict and dysfunction (Charney & Parnass, 1995; Eldridge, 1983; Humphrey, 1987; Rhodes, 1984). It is clear from such findings that we may conclude that in addition to being correlated with a high rate of divorce, infidelity is at the very least associated with long-term marital dysfunction for many.

Purpose of this Study

Why do affairs have such devastating consequences for so many? There are many reasons. Prominent reasons noted in the literature are that affairs violate a mate's deep need for commitment, confirmation of specialness, and an unconditional sense of emotional security that are vital in the real core of the marital process (Charney & Parnass, 1995). While some affairs are considered recreational and allowed in "open marriages," the vast majority would be considered a violation of the marital bond of intimacy (Pittman, 1989).

The goal of this study is to explore some of the factors that might explain why some couples are able to repair their relationships after a transgression like infidelity,

whereas other couples fail to do so, and see their marriages end in divorce. In this study, I will look at one specific aspect of couple's interactions after infidelity: the accounts that are given, and the attributions couples make about those accounts. In this study I hope to learn more about how accounts and attributions impact couples' decision to divorce or rejuvenate their marriage following an extramarital affair by one of the partners.

According to Wilmot (1994) there is a need to explore the dynamics of relationship rejuvenation in different contexts. There is presently a lack of empirical evidence on the topic of infidelity due to methodological problems such as limited sample sizes and underreporting because of social stigma (Allen et al., 2005; Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Charny & Parnass, 1995; Levine, 1998). For example, samples are difficult to obtain in part because many researchers rely on university samples due to easy access of student respondents. Because the majority of college students are considered "traditional" students (i.e. 18-22 in age and single) they generally are not or have not been married and therefore are unlikely to have experienced infidelity in a marriage. Furthermore, samples are difficult to obtain in that marital infidelity is highly frowned upon in Western civilization and therefore finding married individuals who are married or divorced and who are willing to admit or discuss such a past major marital rule violation is difficult.

Given the prevalence of marital damage and divorce associated with infidelity, we need to study how individuals make the decision to rejuvenate or dissolve their relationship. Further, little is known about the impact of infidelity on accounts and attributions in the specific context of marriages as previous research has focused primarily on dating relationships (Mongeau & Schulz, 1997; Mongeau, Hale, Alles,

1994). There are many unanswered questions concerning relationship rejuvenation and how individuals make sense out of their and the other's attempts to rejuvenate the relationship (Wilmot, 1994). The primary focus of attribution theory is on the processes by which people form an understanding of personal or others' behavior (Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1992).

Importance of this Study

Empirical data of this kind can be beneficial to multiple audiences. First and foremost, it stems to offer fruitful theoretical contribution to the research on accounts and attributions and how these two phenomena impact one another. Research concerning accounts and attributions has generally treated the two as independent subjects, both in the way that the concepts are defined as well as the way that theory has approached them and they are subsequently researched (Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1992). However, because there is reason to believe that these topics are intrinsically linked (which will be reviewed in chapter two), research exploring the interplay of these two concepts can further our understanding of each independent subject as well as the relationship between the two.

Further, given the prevalence of clients who come to therapy because of infidelity in their marriage (Humphrey & Strong, 1976), practicing professionals may well be served with such information. Levine (1998) says that clinicians also need information from the social scientists on this subject because the survey researcher's view of the phenomenon of extramarital sex is not only different from the clinician's in scientific care and acceptability, but also what can be learned about the activity as the clinician's perspective is "a close-in one, filled with powerful emotion and meaning and plagued by

the lack of sociologic perspective” (p. 215). Finally, it could be argued that society as a whole can benefit from information gleaned from this study. Such knowledge at its most practical level could be beneficial to both individuals considering marriage as well as those already married. Traditionally, people feel that infidelity is immoral and contributes to the gradual decay of the family (Johnson, 1972). In fact, it is just such mentality, along with the prevalence we find of infidelity in society that has led the current policy makers and moralists to make this a national priority through their attention to discussion, funding and education. Thus, the present study will focus on the account sequence and associated attributions following the affair given that the subsequent communication process as well as the perceptions by each marital partner may have a profound effect on the chances of marital rejuvenation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the major theoretical constructs that underlie both studies in this dissertation. It begins by looking at the phenomenon of infidelity, from its definition and general demographics to predictors and relational consequences. Next, account episodes and attribution theory are reviewed in light of infidelity. Finally the relationship between account episodes and attributions is explored.

Infidelity

Definition and History

Terminology and definitions of extramarital behavior in the United States are socially constructed and filled with negative meaning (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Webster defines infidelity as the “lack of faith, trust, loyalty, and unfaithfulness of a husband or wife – as in adultery.” Infidelity is typically thought to refer to intimate relations with someone other than one’s spouse while sexual intercourse with another individual other than one’s marital partner is legally considered adultery and is a crime against the State, the religious institutions, and the partner (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). These and other references to extramarital relations are heavily influenced by religious teachings which traditionally condemn such behavior and are further reinforced by the legal system. Adultery is explicitly condemned in Judeo-Christian moral theology and has been since Biblical times. Further, about half of the states in America retain laws against adultery that, although seldom enforced, would prohibit those who commit such behavior the right to vote, practice law, serve alcohol, adopt children, or raise their own children (*Constitutional barriers*, 1992; Seigel, 1992). As a result, socialization around dating

patterns and marital scripts generally lead individuals to expect sexual fidelity from their spouse in marriage (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). In fact, more than 90% of the general American public believe that it “always” or “almost always” wrong for one to have sexual relations outside of the marriage (Smith, 1994). Adultery is furthermore condemned in the majority of societies worldwide (Murdock, 1949).

Such condemnation of adulterous relations can be traced far back into history and appears to have several possible explanations. One explanation concerns property protection (Salzman, 1972). In the second millennium B.C., Hammurabi codified legislation to maintain property. Women were considered to be a man’s property and thus a woman thought to have engaged in infidelity risked being disowned or killed. In the New England colonies in early American history women suspected of adultery were whipped, branded, physically disfigured or even put to death. In more contemporary times in the Greek society, killing one’s wife for suspected extramarital relations has been accepted and even encouraged (Johnson, 1972). This double-standard continues today and can be seen in the general attitude of permissiveness often associated with male infidelity.

Another explanation for the taboo surrounding infidelity throughout history is the economic and biological integrity of the family (Elbaum, 1981). Economic survival necessitated a close family unit and extramarital relations created strife and contributed to the spread of sexually transmitted disease. While the sexual revolution, women’s liberation movement, and today’s media have made a small impact, this can mainly be seen in the increase in women’s extramarital behavior in the last several decades versus societies overall attitudes of acceptance of such behavior.

Terminology use.

As previously reviewed, terminology and definitions concerning extramarital sexual behavior are fraught with negative meaning (e.g., “transgressor,” “victim”). It is difficult to find non-valuative references for such behavior. In fact, this paper uses terms throughout to refer to extramarital behavior and the individuals involved that may seem to have a negative connotation. These references were not meant to be value-laden but rather were used for clarity’s sake in most cases. Additionally, it might be added that the focus of this paper is on infidelity that is considered unwelcome in the marriage versus infidelity that is condoned or encouraged as may be the case in some marriage relationships (such as in an open marriage). Thus, it may be argued that such references in this paper are deemed appropriate, at least from the marital couple’s point of view.

Typologies

Not all infidelity is the same. There are a variety of different forms (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Specifically, infidelity can be purely sexual but involve no emotion such as interludes with prostitutes or one-night stands, it can involve both sex and emotional attachment which is what we typically think of as an affair, or it can be purely emotional with no sex such as in the case of Internet relationships. An ongoing affair where there is an emotional commitment (perhaps accompanied by a sexual relationship or not) to someone outside of the marriage is considered to be the most destructive to the marital relationship (Elbaum, 1981).

Infidelity can further be distinguished by its degree of acceptance within the marriage. Lawson (1988) categorizes affairs as parallel, traditional, or recreational in form. A parallel affair is infidelity where the behavior is known by the spouse but

implicitly condoned. A recreational affair is an affair found in what might be called an “open marriage,” where extramarital relationships are condoned and even welcomed and often are integrated into the marital bed.

Finally, Humphrey (1987) differentiates heterosexual infidelity from that of homosexual infidelity in that each has their own unique characteristics and dynamics. Because homosexual affairs may differ in important ways from heterosexual affairs, this project limits its focus to the latter.

General Demographics

Estimates of marital infidelity in the United States range from 21% to 70% for at least one incident of infidelity during a marriage by women and from 26% to 75% for at least one incident of infidelity during a marriage for men (Allen et al., 2005; Buss, 1994; Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953; Levine, 1998). Part of the reason for such discrepancy of numbers is the research difficulty found in data collection on this subject (Allen et al., 2005; Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Charny & Parnass, 1995; Levine, 1998). Because of its secretive nature and associated social condemnation, precise demographic data is difficult to obtain or questioned for its accuracy. Regardless of what number or range a researcher feels is most justified, it is clear that sexual infidelity is not an uncommon event, with even the lowest figures exceeding one out of every five individuals.

Typically, men have reported engaging in infidelity more often than women (Allen et al., 2005; Smith, 1991) although studies are finding that this gap appears to be closing (Allen et al., 2005; Lawson & Samson, 1988). Moreover, men often tend to have “sexual” affairs where the affair is just about the sex while women more often have

“emotional” affairs where intercourse with someone outside of the marriage is also associated with an emotional relationship (Glass, 1998; Hurlbert, 1992).

Finally, infidelity can have devastating effects on the marriage. Despite how common infidelity is, there is still a high association between the discovery of infidelity and negative consequences for a marriage. While research has found a vast number of causes of divorce, 25 to 50% of individuals cite infidelity as the leading culprit in the decision to dissolve their union (Betzig, 1989; Kelly & Conley, 1987).

Predictors

Research concerning infidelity in marriages has found an association between certain social, personal, and relationship dynamics that appear to impact one’s likelihood to engage in sexual intercourse outside of the marriage. Each of these is reviewed in turn.

Social influence. The attitudes and behaviors of others have a significant impact on a person’s likelihood of committing an act of infidelity. For example, a person is more willing to engage in extramarital sex when there is social pressure and approval from others who are important to that individual such as family or friends (Buunk & Bakker, 1995). Likewise, individuals have been found to be more inclined to engage in extramarital affairs when they report having friends who do the same or when they come from families where this type of behavior was common (Buunk & Bakker, 1995; White, Cleland, & Carael, 2000). Further, people who have occupations where infidelity is a common occurrence, are also more likely to have an extramarital affair (Glass, 1998).

Individual difference influences. Several individual factors have been documented as predictors of a person’s likelihood of engaging in extramarital sex. The first of these has to do with a person’s sexual history. The younger an individual is when he or she first

has sex as well as the greater number of premarital partners he or she has predict the propensity to engage in infidelity later in life (White et al., 2000).

Second, education level has been positively associated with permissive sexual values (Smith, 1991). These values, in turn influence likelihood to engage in extramarital sexual behavior.

Third, a variety of individual desires have been found to be connected with a person's propensity to engage in extramarital sexual activity. Some of the other more personal reasons listed for engaging in infidelity include desire for variety, enjoyment of sex, the thrill of novelty, emotional immaturity, and excitement of the conquest (Johnson, 1972).

Finally, individual attitudes have also been shown to be associated with prevalence of infidelity. Attitudes acquired from observing extramarital behavior in the family environment at a young age as alluded to in the previous section or strength of the biological sex drive may leave a lasting imprint on sexuality that in turn influences premarital and later post-marital behavior. In either case, a pattern may begin that continues after marriage. The best personal predictor of extramarital sex is said to be liberal attitudes where the more liberal one is the more likely they are to hold permissive attitudes toward infidelity and in turn be more inclined to engage in it (Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953; Smith, 1991; Smith, 1994).

Marital relationship influence. In addition to risk factors that an individual brings into a marriage, certain qualities of the relationship also influence the likelihood of extramarital sexual encounters. An unsatisfactory sex life or general dissatisfaction with the marriage itself is associated with infidelity (Brown, 1991; Johnson, 1972). In fact, in a

study of ten leading marriage manuals it was concluded that lack of sexual fulfillment in marriage is the main relationship contributing cause of infidelity (Johnson, 1972).

However, while marital dissatisfaction may often be to blame for an extramarital affair, this cause seemed to have a stronger impact on women than on men. According to research by Marano (Glass, 1998), 56% of men who had engaged in infidelity report that they love their marital partners and enjoy good sex at home. This was in contrast however to 34% of women from the same research who stated that their marriages were happy.

Consequences. Personal and marital relationship consequences of infidelity tend to be largely negative in impact. Commonly reported consequences of infidelity include: guilt; dishonesty; lies; anxiety; regret; fears; unwanted pregnancies; abortions; sexually transmitted diseases; anger; humiliation; loss of respect and love; jealousy; depression; suicide; marital conflict; sexual conflicts and dysfunction; disruption of careers, marriages, and families; loss of reputation; loss of time and money; separation; divorce; and even homicide (Humphrey, 1987). Additionally, men tend to feel more betrayed by their spouse having sex with another man while women typically feel more betrayed by their husbands being emotionally involved in an extramarital affair (Glass, 1998; Buss et al., 1992).

Account Episodes

All relationships experience periods of progression and regression (Wilmot, 1994). At times, however, regression can lead to a transgression by one of the partners such as would be the case with infidelity. Transgressions can either be social in form or relational (Metts, 1994). Social transgressions are a violation of an accepted social rule or norm. For example, not replying when someone asks a question would illustrate a

violation of a social norm. Relational transgressions, however, are violations of relational rules or expectations (Metts, 1994; Roloff & Cloven, 1994). Examples of such relational rules might include not discussing in-laws or designation of who will conduct certain household duties. Relational transgressions vary in their degree of severity, however. Infidelity is an example of a relational transgression that would be considered in most marriages to be a great relationship rule violation. Still, in order to cope with or make a relational transgression of any degree appear more acceptable, remedial work must be enacted by the violator (Goffman, 1971). These corrective measures may ultimately affect the likelihood of marital reconciliation.

Account sequences are one type of conversational strategy used to engage in remedial work (Schonbach, 1980). An account is a linguistic device exercised whenever a behavior is subjected to valiative inquiry (Scott & Lyman, 1968). “Valiative inquiry” is a request for an explanation of either an inappropriate or expected act (Canary & Cody, 1994). They are responses in social situations where behavior is called into question. Accounts can inhibit conflict escalation by verbally bridging the gap between action and expectation. When a partner’s expectation is violated, there is often an attempt made by the offender to transform the transgression into an acceptable act and restore the relationship. The interaction process by which an account is offered is called an account episode or sequence (Schonbach, 1980). An account episode has as its minimal ingredients an “actor” and an “opponent” who engage in an interaction across the following four phases (Schonbach, 1992):

1. *Failure event.* The actor is, rightly or wrongly, held at least partly responsible by the opponent for the violation of a normative expectation

held by the opponent. This can either be an acted offense or the omission of an obligation.

2. *Reproach phase.* Frequently the opponent reacts to the failure event with some kind of reproach, mild or severe, hence the name of this phase. However, the opponent may also respond with some neutral why question or an expression of sympathy or compassion, instead of, or in addition to, a reproach.
3. *Account phase.* The actor, called upon to respond to the opponent's challenge, may react with an account in the narrow sense – an excuse or a justification. Alternative or supplementary reactions of the actor during this phase may be concessions of responsibility or guilt, or else some explicit or covert refusal to offer an account or to admit one's involvement in the failure event.
4. *Evaluation phase.* Eventually – either right after the actor's account, concession, or refusal, or after some more interchanges between the two agents – the opponent will come to an evaluation of any or all of the following: the account or account substitute, the failure event in light of the account, and the actor's personality in the light of both the failure event and account (pp. 40-41, italics added to headings; See figure 1 also).

Figure 1

Account Sequence (Schonbach, 1980)

Actor:	Agent A	Agent B
(1)	Failure event	
(2)		Reproach
(3)	Account	
(4)		Evaluation

Account episodes are universal elements of social processes which exist at all levels of complexities, from the mildest of interpersonal infractions between friends, to the “intricacies of negotiations at disarmament conferences” (Harvey et al., 1992, p41). They derive from the fundamental desire to avoid or minimize social conflict. An account episode’s main social purpose is to resolve or diminish the conflict created by the failure event through the negotiations present in the subsequent account phases. In addition, individual participants may benefit if hurt feelings of loss of control and self-esteem are soothed in the process. The need for relationship talk and potential behavioral change in the form of the account sequence is eminently probable in relationships in which the individuals are highly interdependent, such as a marriage (Morris, 1985). In an effort for the reader to better understand each of the four phases of the account sequence, each will be discussed in turn next.

Failure Event

Recall that a failure event occurs when a partner holds the other responsible for the violation of a relational rule or understandings. Relational transgressions are what we call these violations of relational rules or expectations. Some of these rules or expectations are more trivial in nature, while others are considered more significant (Jones & Burdette, 1994). The more sacred ones are generally tied to one's core values or expectancies and form the foundation of the relationship. Most couples believe in sexual monogamy as a sacred relational rule, making infidelity a major rule violation (Pittman, 1989; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988). In fact, research is consistent in listing infidelity and unfaithfulness as the most frequently cited relational transgressions in close, romantic relationships (Metts, 1994). When a violation of this magnitude occurs, the relationship is vulnerable to immediate termination (Vaughn, 1987). Still, many relationships do survive and herein lies the focus of this study.

Deception

As if the relational transgression of infidelity was not enough, the act of the deception associated with infidelity is in itself a serious relational transgression or disruptive event (Aune, Metts, & Ebesu-Hubbard, 1998; Metts, 1991). The discovery of deception has been found to increase uncertainty (Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988) and stimulate strong negative affect in the receiver. This is particularly true when what is being lied about as well as the act of lying itself are considered significant (McCornack & Levine, 1990). Thus, not only must the transgressor account for the violation, but he or she must also account for the deception surrounding the transgression (Aune et al., 1998). Certainly the act of infidelity itself

would be considered significant as would the attempt to hide it. The transgressor, therefore, would have both violations to account for.

Reproach

Once the extramarital affair has been divulged or discovered, a reproach generally follows. A reproach is a question, assertion, rebuke, or nonverbal sign employed by the victim to elicit an explanation from the perpetrator (Cody, Kersten, Braaten, & Dickson, 1992).

Initial reactions after the revelation of an affair can range from acknowledgement of the betrayed partner's personal responsibility and desire to keep the relationship alive to an immediate termination of the relationship (Levine, 1998). Most reactions fall somewhere between these two poles.

Regardless of the range, the betrayed will have many questions, one of the central of which will be "why" (Gordan & Baucom, 1999; Levine, 1998). Knowing "why" is extremely important in the rejuvenation process. The inability to understand the reasons for someone's behavior appears to be a primary factor in producing relational conflict and anger (Baumeister & Stillwell, 1992). Thus, victims are usually motivated to ask the transgressor for an explanation as to what caused their extramarital sexual activity.

Account

Only after the infidelity has been discovered will the victim request an explanation from the transgressor (Mongeau & Schulz, 1997). In response to the reproach of one's spouse, the explanation given for the infidelity is prone to have a critical effect on the outcome of the marriage. Research indicates that victims become particularly

enraged when they believe that the transgressor has no comprehensible reason for acting the way he or she did.

In contrast, understanding the cause or causes behind the infidelity help the partners to develop more empathy and compassion for one another (Gordan & Baucom, 1999). Such understanding appears necessary as a beginning step in rejuvenating the relationship if possible. By better understanding the partner's perspective, spouses are encouraged to sympathize with the external causes or mitigating circumstances which caused the transgression (Baumeister & Stillwell, 1992). Understanding the cause behind the affair allows for the creation of realistic attributions (Gordan & Baucom, 1999). As this understanding increases, a cognitive framework of logical attributions develops along with direction for future relational changes. Thus, the account seems to be a critical element determining whether or not the partner will be open to marital rejuvenation.

Failure to provide an account to one's partner following a relational transgression can have serious implications upon the relationship (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994). There are a number of different types of accounts available to the transgressor. Sykes and Matza (1957) composed the first typology of accounts as a means of understanding juvenile delinquency. Drawing on the work of Sykes and Matza (1957), Scott and Lyman (1968) developed one of the most influential approaches to the study of accounts which distinguished between two general types of accounts, excuses and justifications. According to Scott and Lyman (1968), excuses are accounts where one admits that the act occurred and is bad, but he or she denies full responsibility for it. A justification on the other hand is when one takes responsibility for an act but denies the negative implication. However, Schonbach (1980) added to Scott and Lyman's (1968) original list,

arguing that it had several categories missing. These new categories included concessions and refusals. Concessions are defined as a full or partial admission of guilt along with statements of remorse and possible restitution. A refusal occurs when one denies an act occurred or denies responsibility for it.

While subsequent research has focused on developing detailed typologies of accounts with many subcategories, several or all of the four basic categories of excuse, justification, concession, and refusal appear to be at the foundation of each typology (Benoit, 1995; Schonbach, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Semin & Manstead, 1983). It is for this reason that the current work will focus on the four original general categories of excuse, justifications, concessions, and refusals with examples of subcategories from Scott and Lyman (1968) and Schonbach (1980) where applicable.

Types of Accounts

Excuses. The two most common types of accounts are excuses and justifications (Scott & Lyman, 1968). An excuse involves the accused admitting that the transgression took place, but that he or she was not fully to blame. Four common types of excuses include appeal to accidents, biological drives, appeal to defeasibility, and scapegoating. Three in particular have relevance in the case of infidelity. Biological drive, for instance, might lead to one using the excuse, “It’s in men’s nature to cheat.” In “appeals to defeasibility,” the transgressor maintains that he or she was not fully aware or free to choose in the situation. Similarly, the spouse may argue that his or her behavior was a result of the misrepresentation of facts or due to impairment of will or knowledge for whatever reason. An example of an appeal to defeasibility would be “I would never have cheated on you if I wasn’t drunk.” Finally, an excuse might take the form “scapegoating.”

In scapegoating, the transgressor alleges that his or her behavior was a response to the behavior or attitudes of another. An example of this might include, “I wouldn’t have cheated on you if you would have paid more attention to me.”

Justification. The second most common type of account is a justification (Scott & Lyman, 1968). A justification involves the accused admitting responsibility for the transgression, yet denying that the behavior was harmful or claims that there were positive results. Six common forms of justifications include denial of injury, denial of victim, appeal to loyalties, condemnation of condemners, self-fulfillment, and sad tale (Scott & Lyman, 1968). In a “denial of injury” a spouse alleges that his or her behavior was permissible because no one was injured. Obviously this has little relevance in the case of infidelity given the usual negative impact an affair tends to have on a marriage. In the “denial of victim,” the spouse maintains that the act was permissible because the victim deserved the injury due to injury of the transgressor. For example, “You cheated on me, so I cheated on you!” would be an example of a “denial of victim.” Using the justification of an “appeal to loyalty,” the transgressor asserts that his or her behavior is condonable because it served the interests of another to who he or she owes an allegiance or affection. This justification is illustrated in the example, “Yes, I cheated on you, but I am in love with him.” Using the justification of “condemnation of the condemners,” the transgressor asserts that his or her behavior is justified in that other individuals likewise engage in such behavior without condemnation or punishment and may even be praised for it. Such is the case in this example, “Other couples experiment with affairs in their relationship and it is no big deal.” Additionally, one may justify his or her behavior using the argument that the behavior was done out of “self-fulfillment.” For instance, a

transgressor might use the following as a self-fulfilling argument, “This affair has helped me find out who I am.” Finally, a justification may involve saying that one’s sorrowful past is responsible for present actions such as “After going through the experiences I did as a child, I guess I just found it hard to faithfully commit to someone.” Therefore overall, justifications function to make the offense appear less negative or even positive.

Concessions and refusals. In addition to excuses and justifications, Schonbach (1980) added the accounts of concessions and refusals. A concession is defined as one confessing or admitting to the blame of the transgression, as well as including any statements of remorse. The main objective of a concession is to accept the blame along with its consequences, while promising to make up for the violation and/or to never do it again (Cody et al., 1992).

On the other hand, the accused may not accept blame for a transgression. In this case, a refusal or denial is the likely response. A refusal involves the accused denying that the act in question transpired, denying responsibility for it, or suggesting that the accuser has no right to reproach. This may be done through logical argument, evidence, challenging the accuser’s authority to make such an accusation, or rejection of the definition of the violation, to name but a few (Schonbach, 1980). For instance, a partner is using this account when they explain “I couldn’t have been with that girl last night because I was with Marty. Just ask him.” Ultimately, the purpose of a refusal then is to profess or prove innocence (Cody et al., 1992).

Evaluation

Recall that despite the relational damage caused by the act of infidelity and associated deception, many couples appear to be able to repair their relationships before

they lead to divorce. Affairs are given as a reason for marital separation by 31% of men and 45% of women, with only 17% of the men and 10% of the women who report affairs eventually filing for divorce (Humphrey, 1985).

Given that direct, communicative behavior (such as that found in the account sequence) can have such a strong, positive impact on the repair of close relationships (e.g., Aune et al., 1998; Canary & Stafford, 1992; Samp & Solomon, 1998) we can conclude that some accounts are successful. However, research on relational repair strategies suggests that partners do not perceive all tactics equally and that some approaches are more effective than others in repairing the ill brought about by a relational transgression (Emmers-Sommers, 2003).

Aggravating vs. Mitigating Nature of Accounts

Why are some accounts more successful than others? While all accounts serve the general function of defending the accused, some are more conducive to relationship rejuvenation than others (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994). Specifically, excuses and concessions including apologies are more likely to lead to relationship repair than are justifications and refusals. This is because each of the four basic types of accounts differ in their degree of politeness, with a concession representing the most polite or "mitigating" form of response, followed by excuses and justifications, and refusals representing the least polite or "aggravating" form of argument (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990). Thus, when involved in a conflict, it is our perception of the other partner's message that explains the choices we make (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995). In other

words, an account perceived as more polite by the victim is more likely to lead to relational repair versus termination of the marriage.

Concessions and excuses fall at the mitigating end of the politeness continuum because the transgressor accepted responsibility for the transgression, thereby accepting the reproacher's interpretation of the behavior and the legitimacy of the reproach (Mongeau et al., 1994). In other words, a concession and an excuse accept all or a degree of responsibility for an accused behavior and in so doing sanction a reproacher's analysis of the act and their right to reproach. Thus, concessions and excuses are viewed as more polite, preferable, and more effective at repairing relationships than justifications and refusals (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994).

For example, in a study by Holtgraves (1989) participants were asked to read a scenario in which a man arrived late to pick up his friend to the concert. Respondents read one of several accounts the man could use for arriving late. Holtgraves (1989) found respondents rated apologies and excuses as more preferable and helpful than justifications (he did not study denials/refusals). Additionally, in a review by Cody and McLaughlin (1990) of a number of studies, apologies were found to help reduce both the punishments that the transgressor might receive as well as the anger experienced by the victim.

Further evidence that mitigating accounts might help lay the groundwork for relationship rejuvenation comes from the work of Aune and colleagues (Aune, Metts, & Hubbard, 1998). They examined the use of prosocial relational repair strategies. Prosocial relationship strategies are strategies that elicit positive emotional responses in targets and

include things like the use of truth, relational work, relational invocation, soothing, apology, and discussion. These behaviors are characteristic of the concession account. In their study they concluded that prosocial relational repair strategies are positively correlated with the victim's increase in trust for the transgressor, the victim's expression of affection for the transgressor, and relational intimacy – all of which are damaged by the transgression (Aune, Metts, & Hubbard, 1998).

Attribution Theory

The term attribution concerns the evaluation of the cause of our own or other's behavior. Attribution theory focuses on how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal inferences for events or action. Six different theoretical traditions form the foundation of attribution theory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). These traditions include the work of Heider, Jones and Davis, Kelley, Schachter, Bem, and Weiner.

Heider's foundational work in attribution theory. Attribution theory began with the work of Fritz Heider (1944, 1958). Heider (1958) that attribution is the process of drawing influences. He claimed that people act as “naïve scientists,” studying their own as well as others' action in order to determine the cause behind it. He claimed that what motivates this inference process is our need to predict and control our environment. Knowing what caused a behavior allows us to control the likelihood of that behavior happening again or at least predict its future occurrence. In order to do this, we examine the environment, the setting, and the behavior itself. Ultimately, the cause may be categorized as either dispositional or situational in form. Dispositional factors are causes that stem from the individual such as character and ability whereas situational factors are causes that are externally imposed upon the individual by the environment or the

situation. Heider called these “causal loci” or the sources of the observed behavior, and he asserted that identifying the locus of causality for behavior is fundamental to the question of why someone behaves in a particular way. The partner also attributes personal characteristics, intentions, and attitudes to others in this process.

In addition to causality, Heider was concerned with inferences of responsibility for behavior. Although learning the cause behind behavior is important in many situations, it is also important to identify one’s level of responsibility for the act in question (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Heider maintained that there are differing levels of responsibility that range in their degree of behavior accountability. These levels include association, causal responsibility, foreseeability, intentional, and justifiable. Association is responsibility where a person is held accountable for an act with which he or she is not causally involved. The next level, causal responsibility, is when an individual engages in the behavior, but did not foresee or intend it. Foreseeability is when a person performs and act that he or she could foresee or anticipate while intentional responsibility is behavior that one performed after setting out to do. Finally, justifiable behavior is behavior that one is held responsible for but that appears justified given the circumstances. Fiske and Taylor (1991) apply these levels of responsibility to an example of an individual who shoots his neighbor, noting the obvious parallels between Heider’s naïve judgments of responsibility and our courts legal categories for dispensation of justice, namely criminal negligence, involuntary manslaughter, and first-degree murder.

More recent developments of attribution theory. Heider’s initial definition of attribution terms and writing on causality and responsibility heavily influenced the work of later theorists such as Jones and Davis (1965). Their model, labeled correspondent

inference theory, focuses on how people assess the behavior of others. Specifically, the theory asserts that the goal of the causal inference process is to assess the behavior of another and the intent that produced the behavior in order to determine the underlying stable character or disposition of the individual. Knowing the disposition of another in turn allows us to predict their future behavior. Behaviors believed to reveal underlying dispositions of another person include: behavior thought to involve free choice, behavior that produces unique consequences, actions that are out of character or role of the individual, socially undesirable behavior, and behavior that violates prior expectations.

The work of Harold Kelley (1972) was also heavily influenced by Heider. Kelley's theoretical work is distinguished from that of Jones and Davis however in that it attempts to explain in detail the causal inference process one uses when assessing multiple similar events across time as well as single isolated actions. Kelley's covariation model explains how people make attributions when multiple observations are available. The model describes how people use a covariation principle to assess how the behavior under scrutiny varies across instances (labeled distinctiveness), how consistent the behavior is over time and in different situations (labeled consistency), and whether other people also experience the same behavior from this individual (labeled consensus). The covariation principle cannot be applied however when only a single observation is available for inference. In this case, Kelly argues, the discounting principle or causal schemas may be applied. Using the discounting principle, perceivers observing a single instance weigh possible causes against each other based on the perceiver's past experience and learning. The discounting principle asserts that any one possible cause is discounted to the extent that other potential causes seem plausible. Another means people

use when drawing inferences of single observations involves relying on causal schema. Causal schemas are cognitive structures a person develops based on his or her past experience that attempts to explain the cause-effect relations that exist of the world. When we observe a single event that is unclear or ambiguous to us, we then rely on these pre-developed causal schemas as a means of helping us explain the uncertain behavior.

The work of Stanley Schachter (1959) and Daryl Bem (1972) also had a substantial impact on the development of attribution theory through their application of attribution concepts to self-perception. Schachter's theory specifically focuses on attributions of emotional states. Schachter maintained that there are two necessary conditions for emotion: a state of psychological arousal and cognitions that label the arousal and decide what emotion is experienced. He asserted that a person's internal physiological cues are often ambiguous and therefore we may relate them to any of several emotions or sources of arousal leading to possible misattributions of arousal.

Bem's theory of self-perception extended the work of attribution to include causal inferences of the self. He asserted that people employ a cognitive process when inferring their own personal attitudes similar to the process they employ when making attributions of other people's behavior. Specifically, he maintains that it is through observing our own behavior and the circumstances surrounding it that we are able to infer our personal attitudes and emotions.

Finally, the work of Bernard Weiner (Weiner et al., 1972; Weiner, 1979; Weiner, 1986) extended attribution ideas of causality to create a taxonomy of causes which includes locus, stability, and controllability. Locus refers to whether a cause is internal or external to the actor. Stability concerns the temporal duration of a cause and whether the

cause is primarily constant over time or whether it changes from situation to situation. Controllability relates to the “possible volitional alteration” of a cause or whether the cause is under the person’s control or not (Weiner, 1986; p. 294). This classification scheme allows for the identification of the underlying properties of these causes and comparison of their similarities and differences (Weiner, 1986). Further, Weiner (1986) asserts that there is a relationship between these causal attributions and emotions, and emotions in turn become the catalyst for subsequent behavior.

A fundamental assumption underlying attribution research is that our attributions influence our subsequent behavior. In other words, by attributing causes to unexpected behavior, people are able to give order and make sense out of their world. These causal judgments in turn affect reactions to the behavior under scrutiny.

Accounts and Attribution

Research concerning accounts and attributions have generally treated the two as independent subjects, both in the way that the concepts are defined as well as the way that theory has approached them and they are subsequently researched (Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1992). Attribution theorists seldom research how the concepts of causality, responsibility, and blame are communicated to others, while account researchers rarely investigate the attributions and emotions underlying corrective messages (Mogean, Hale, & Alles, 1994).

However, a natural connection exists between accounts and attributions. Attribution theory concerns itself with the judgments we make of the causes of our own as well as other people’s behavior. Additionally, attributions influence the choice of account by the transgressor. An account will be chosen based on the attribution that is

made regarding the cause of the conflict. In other words, when we are asked to explain our behavior, we will do so based on our assessment of what caused us to behave in such a manner.

Similarly, the recipient of this account uses causal judgments to evaluate the account provided. An account inherently suggests a cause for questionable behavior. Recall that certain accounts are likely to be more effective in achieving relationship rejuvenation and controlling the emotions of the recipient than are others (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994). Specifically, concessions and excuses are more mitigating than justifications and refusals and therefore are more likely to invite positive attributions from the recipient. A recipient of an account will respond based on the attribution he or she makes of the cause of the conflict inherent in such account (Harvey et al., 1992).

It is at this intersection of accounts and attributions in the context of infidelity that the following research takes place. Specifically, in Chapter Three, Study One is a quantitative analysis that looks at the relationship that exists between the variables of commitment level, guilt, inherent intent of the infidelity, and choice of account through the use of participant responses to hypothetical scenarios. In Chapter Four, Study Two continues the exploration of these variables as they apply to real life situations of individuals who have experienced infidelity in their own marriages. Finally, in Chapter Five I discuss what we can learn from the combined results of both studies.

CHAPTER 3: STUDY ONE

This chapter begins by examining what research has to say of the role commitment level plays in subsequent account choice. Additionally, research concerning the different levels of intent inherent in the act of infidelity is reviewed and how such levels of intent relate to level of guilt and account choice. Finally, after exploring relevant literature on these subjects, the first study is reported.

Commitment, Intention, Account Type and Guilt

Commitment Level

Recall that each of the four basic types of accounts may be arranged on a “mitigating-aggravating” continuum of politeness, with a concession representing the most polite or “mitigating” form of response, followed by excuses and justifications, and refusals representing the least polite or “aggravating” form of argument (McLaughlin, Cody, & O’Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990). Desire to maintain the relationship might have an important impact on the choice of account after a transgression (Hupka, Jung, & Silverthorn, 1987). In cases where the account giver is not interested in maintaining cordial relations with the victim, a more aggravating account seems likely. Specifically, research examining sexual infidelity among college samples has found that if one is interested in terminating versus maintaining a relationship, the use of justifications and refusals are common, while if there is high motivation to maintain the relationship, concessions and excuses are used more often (Mongeau & Schulz, 1997). Bearing this in mind, the following hypotheses are generated:

H1: Participants with high motivation to maintain the marriage relationship perceive that they will be more likely to use concessions and excuses than to use justifications and refusals.

H2: Participants with low motivation to maintain the marriage relationship perceive that they will be more likely to use refusals and justifications than to use concessions and excuses.

Level of Intent

In addition to the transgressor's motivation to maintain the relationship, the transgressor's level of intent may have an impact on his or her subsequent account choice as well as attributions of personal guilt (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994). According to Pittman (1989), sexual infidelities differ in their level of intent. For instance, they may occur "accidentally" or in contrast with more forethought. So what distinguishes individuals in their level of intent? Existing literature concerning the reasons that people commonly give for engaging in infidelity can be divided into five categories: Sexuality, emotional satisfaction, social context, attitudes-norms, and revenge-hostility (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). Sexuality refers to a need for sexual variety or a feeling of sexual incompatibility with one's partner. Emotional satisfaction refers to obtaining new emotional satisfaction or ego boosting from the extramarital affair, or behavior due to low marital satisfaction. Social contextual factors refer to opportunity, proximity, and physical separation from one's spouse such as the case of having an affair with a coworker or having an affair while away on a business trip. Liberal personal attitudes as well as support of such behavior from one's social network through descriptive (what others do in one's social network) and injunctive norms (what others in one's social

network think you should do) also appear to support infidelity. Finally, the revelation of a partner's infidelity can lead one to retaliate by having an affair also.

Upon examination, these five categories appear to be easily distinguished from one another in their level of intent. For example, sexuality concerns, emotional satisfaction issues and revenge seem wrought with intent. However, being at the "wrong place at the wrong time" or being pressured by one's social network appears less premeditated.

Presuming accounts reflect transgressor attributions, intent should in turn influence the production of accounts (Mongeau et al., 1994). Specifically, McGraw (1987) claimed that intentional transgressions are likely to produce aggravating accounts because the transgressor is less likely to feel guilty about his or her behavior and is more likely to have some preplanned explanation at hand. Less intent, however, increases the transgressor's level of guilt (McGraw, 1987) and thus more mitigating accounts seem likely (Mongeau et al., 1994).

Research appears to support a link between level of intent and attributions of guilt. For example, using Heider's (1958) attribution of responsibility model, McGraw (1987) performed two experiments investigating the attributional mediators of post-transgression guilt. She claimed that guilt was higher for accidental as opposed to intentional transgressions. In a study of sexual infidelity among college students, Mongeau and his colleagues (1994) also found that as personal intent increased for the transgressor, his or her perceptions of guilt decreased.

Perceptions of guilt have also been linked to subsequent account choice. In a study by McLaughlin, Cody, and O'Hair (1983), concessions were the account of choice

for transgressors who felt guilty, while refusals were used more often when he or she felt little guilt. Similarly, Cody and McLaughlin (1985) found that expressed guilt was related to more frequent use of concessions and apologies. Further, Baumeister and Stillwell (1992) found that there was more behavior change when subjects felt guilty than when they did not. This would also imply a positive relationship between guilt and the use of more mitigating accounts in that the more mitigating account of concession usually includes a promise of behavioral change.

One would expect therefore, that affairs enacted due to sexuality concerns, emotional satisfaction issues, or revenge would produce less guilt and subsequently invite the use of more aggravating accounts, while affairs executed through less intentional means such as social contextual factors or social pressures would subsequently invite more mitigating accounts as the transgressor would presumably experience more guilt. However, while the relationship between level of intent and attributions of guilt appears a bit more conclusive, the connection between level of intent and account choice is not as clear. In their study of accounts, attributions, and sexual infidelity among a college sample, Mongeau and his associates (1994) were not able to confirm their prediction of a relationship between intent and the production of accounts. Taken together, the following hypothesis and research questions emerge:

H3: Intentional infidelity will be associated with decreased perceptions of guilt.

RQ1: Will accounts presented following intentional infidelity in marriage be more aggravating than accounts presented following less intentional infidelity?

RQ2: Will accounts presented following less intentional infidelity be more mitigating than accounts following more intentional infidelity?

As previously mentioned, people often engage in infidelity out of revenge or hostility toward their partner (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999; Levine, 1998; Mongeau et al., 1994). According to Kim and Smith (1993), revenge is the attempt to inflict harm in return for harm and involves vengeful behavior. Vengeance can be perceived as a basic expression of the reciprocity norm of returning harm for harm (Gouldner, 1960; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick & Johnson, 2001). Additionally, vengeance may include the three subsidiary goals of “balancing the scales,” “moral instruction,” and “saving face” (McCullough et al., 2001). An individual who has an affair to “balance the scales” does so in an attempt to “get even.” With “moral instruction” as the goal, vengeful infidelity is used to teach the initial offender that his or her behavior will not be tolerated. Finally, some may seek to save face through their infidelity. Victims often attribute to their offenders a belief that the victim was not worthy of being treated better (Heider, 1958). By retaliating in this manner, victims are sending a message to their offender that the victim deserves respect and should be valued (McCullough et al., 2001).

Ultimately then, one can surmise and in fact research supports that infidelity acted out of revenge is associated with less guilt than when revenge is not the motivation (Mongeau et al., 1994). Further, revenge appears to impact one’s subsequent choice of account (Mongeau et al., 1994). Specifically, Mongeau and his colleagues found the majority of accounts (75%) used under revenge conditions to be more aggravating in nature (justifications and refusals) while under no-revenge conditions more mitigating choices (75%) were made (concessions and excuses). Given that Mongeau and his associates research focused on relational sexual infidelity in general versus marital

infidelity, the present study seeks to learn if the previous findings are applicable when applied to marriage. Thus:

H4: An infidelity enacted out of revenge will generate lower perceptions by the transgressor of guilt than an act of infidelity where no revenge was intended.

H5: Accounts following infidelity characterized by revenge are more likely to be refusals and justifications than concessions and excuses.

H6: Accounts following infidelity not characterized by revenge are more likely to be concessions and excuses than justifications and refusals.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 250 individuals who had been or were currently married, with 98 male (39.2%) and 152 (60.8%) female respondents. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 84, with a mean age of 43.8, a median of 46, and a standard deviation of 12.1. The majority of the respondents were white (88.8%), while 17 (6.8%) were black and 2 (.8%) were Hispanic. The remaining (3.6%) indicated “other” or no answer for race. At the time of the study, 144 (57.6%) of the respondents were married, 89 (35.6%) were divorced, 14 (5.6%) were remarried, and 2 (.8%) were widowed. There were 210 participants (84%) who reported having children and 40 (16%) who did not.

Participants were obtained via network sampling beginning with students from the University of Missouri-Columbia, who were asked to distribute questionnaires to married or divorced individuals who they knew. Each student was allowed to distribute up to two surveys with the following criteria: In order to assure an even mix of male and female participants and a balance of married as well as divorced respondents, each student was

instructed to give questionnaires to one man and to one woman who have never been married to each other and one of these individuals had to be currently married while the other individual had to be currently divorced (see Appendix A).

The study was limited to heterosexual individuals who were currently, or had previously been married. The decision to use only heterosexuals was made on the grounds that currently only heterosexual couples are able to be legally married in most states as well as to eliminate any isolated characteristics which might be unique to gay or lesbian relationships.

Procedure

To collect the data for this study, students distributed the questionnaires to the target respondents, after checking with the potential participants to see if they were willing to do the survey. Participants then completed the surveys at their convenience and returned them by mail in a stamped and pre-addressed envelope. In order to verify that the surveys were filled out by a married or divorced person (not the student), participants were asked to provide a first name and phone number. Ten percent were randomly called to verify. All those contacted confirmed that they had received the questionnaire from a student and filled it out themselves. Participants were thanked while the researcher was talking with them.

Instruments

These questionnaires were designed to collect data concerning the accounts and attributions of respondents in the case of infidelity (see Appendix B). Hypothetical scenarios were chosen as they were modeled after Mongeau et al.'s (1994) use of hypothetical scenarios as a means of assessing infidelity in dating relationships. By using

a similar design it facilitated a meaningful comparison between the two studies. Additionally, this design allowed me to reach a larger sample size and to avoid natural ethical issues that would be of concern if one were to ask individuals in the sample if they had experienced infidelity in their marriage.

The questionnaire included hypothetical scenarios similar to Mongeau et al., (1994) except that they were based on marital infidelity versus dating infidelity (see Appendix B). These scenarios all described an incident in which the participant was to imagine that his or her spouse was out of town and the participant engages in an extramarital sexual encounter. However, these scenarios varied in terms of motivation to maintain the marriage and level of intent to commit infidelity. Following the scenarios, participants were asked to write an explanation for their behavior to their spouse and respond to some Likert-type questions that measured their perceived level of responsibility, blame, and guilt. The following sections describe in more detail the measures that were on the surveys.

Motivation to maintain the marriage, level of intent, and revenge. Motivation to maintain the marriage refers to one's level of commitment to the marriage at the time of the revelation of the affair. Level of intent refers to the degree of intent involved in the decision to have an extramarital affair.

Level of intent was derived from the five-part typology offered by Drigotas et al., (1999) which includes sexuality, emotional satisfaction, social context, attitudes/norms, and revenge/hostility. Both the level of commitment and the level of intent were manipulated in the design of the scenarios using a 5x2 cell design (see Appendix B), with each of the five level of intent represented as well as high versus low commitment.

Revenge was an isolated variable assessed from scenarios labeled with revenge as their intent.

Accounts. After reading the account, respondents were asked the question “How would you explain your behavior? Please be as descriptive as possible with what you might say to him or her (spouse).” They were then given ½ a page to allow them to write whatever open-ended response they felt would be most accurate of what they would say to their spouse in this situation. These accounts were then coded according to the combined typology of Scott and Lyman (1968) and Schonbach (1980), described in the results section.

Level of guilt. Level of guilt concerns the degree of personal guilt the transgressor feels for engaging in the extramarital affair. In order to measure this variable, I used a variation of the scale used to assess level of guilt in the study of accounts and attributions following sexual infidelity by Mongeau et al., (1994). The study by Mongeau and his colleagues had participants read a hypothetical study about an individual who cheats on his/her partner by having sexual relations with another. After reading a hypothetical scenario, participants were asked to place themselves in the transgressor’s place and respond to a series of attribution measures. The attribution measures were accompanied by 5-point Likert-type scales with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These questions included “I would expect that J feels guilt for his/her actions,” “I would expect that J feels ashamed for his/her actions,” and “I would expect that J feels innocent.” Reliability in Mongeau et al.’s study was found to be acceptable ($\alpha=.69$).

Results

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis predicted that participants with high motivation to maintain the relationship would be more likely to use concessions and excuses than justifications and denials. In order to test this assertion, participants were asked to write an account to their spouse in response to a hypothetical scenario in which their spouse had just learned of their infidelity. In half of the scenarios the respondents were told they were to answer as if they were highly motivated to maintain the relationship, while in the other half of the scenarios the participants were asked to respond as if they had low motivation to maintain their marriage.

The responses to this open-ended question were coded into one of four categories of accounts. An account is a response of explanation from the transgressor to a reproach. Accounts were derived from the combined typology of Scott and Lyman (1968) and Schonbach (1980) and include concessions/apologies, excuses, justifications, and refusals/denials. This four-part typology is commonly accepted and used by experts in the area of accounts (Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Cody, Kersten, Braaten, & Dickson, 1992).

A concession is when one confesses or admits to the blame of the transgression and includes statements of remorse. An excuse involves the transgressor admitting that the act took place, but that he or she was not fully to blame. A justification occurs when the transgressor admits responsibility for the act in question, yet denies that the behavior was harmful. Finally, a denial or refusal occurs when the accused denies that the act took place or denies responsibility for it. The author read the description of each account and sorted them into the pre-established account categories. (see Table 1). At this time a

second independent coder was trained by the author. The author defined the four categories in detail and asked the second coder to place each survey response into one of these categories. The second coder then read each account response and sorted them into the same pre-established categories. Inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen's kappa and $\kappa = .84$ (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986).

Table 1

Account Response Examples

Account	Example
<p>Justifications</p> <p>$n = 108$ (43.2%)</p>	<p>"My high school friend had fulfilled a need that obviously he (spouse) couldn't or wouldn't in the past."</p> <p>"I would not feel necessary to defend my actions if my spouse had cheated on me in the past. I would explain my loneliness, but also explain my unhappiness in the relationship."</p>
<p>Excuses</p> <p>$n = 42$ (16.8%)</p>	<p>"I would say I was pressured by my friend, I had too much to drink and things just got out of hand."</p> <p>"It was just physical. I didn't pursue, she pursued me."</p>
<p>Concessions</p> <p>$n = 58$ (23.2%)</p>	<p>"The only way to broach this would be to be honest and ask for forgiveness"</p> <p>"I would just apologize until she forgave me, tell her that I love her and I just messed up."</p>
<p>Denials/refusals</p>	<p>"Nothing ever happened. Period."</p>

$n = 5$ (2%)

“Probably would not talk about it.”

No Answer

$n = 37$ (14.8%)

To see whether participants who were in the high motivation condition were more likely to use concessions and excuses than justifications and refusals, the relative frequency of each choice was compared using a Chi-square. The results indicated that even though people with high motivation to maintain the relationship did use more concessions and excuses ($n = 62$) than justifications and refusals ($n = 46$), the difference was not enough to reach statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, n = 108) = 2.37, p = .12$. Thus, even though the results trended in the direction predicted, the difference was not sufficient to support the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis asserted that respondents with low motivation to maintain the relationship would be more likely to use justifications and denials than to use concessions and excuses. For this prediction account responses were once again compared, this time using the low motivation condition. These participants were asked to write a description of what they would say if they were low in motivation to maintain the relationship.

To see whether respondents with low motivation were more likely to use justifications and denials than concessions and excuses, the relative frequency of each choice was also compared using a Chi-square. Those individuals in the low motivation

condition responded using justifications and denials ($n = 69$) more often than concessions and excuses ($n = 33$), $\chi^2 = (1, n = 102) = 12.71, p = .00$. These results support hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3

H₃ stated that intentional infidelity will be associated with decreased perception of guilt. The infidelity in each of the scenario was worded to imply one of the five levels of intentionality by the transgressor as categorized by Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999). These levels include sexual concerns, emotional satisfaction issues, revenge, social contextual factors and social pressures. Based on description, these levels were further subdivided into one of two categories based on degree of intent. Sexual concerns, emotional satisfaction issues, and revenge were categorized as having a high degree of intent while social contextual factors and social pressures were categorized as having a low degree of intent.

While responding to the scenario, participants were asked to indicate the degree of guilt they would feel after committing such an act, using a 5-point Likert scale with questions modeled after a study with similar subject matter by Mongeau and his associates (Mongeau et al., 1994). The hypothesis was then tested with an ANOVA using the level of intent as the independent variable and the degree of guilt as the dependent variable. The results showed that for those who were asked to think about infidelity done with greater intent the level of guilt was lower (mean = 4.84) than for those whose transgression was done with less conscious intent (mean = 5.06). This difference is not statistically significant, however, $F(1, 242) = .364, p = .55$. As with hypothesis one, the

data differed in the direction expected, but not to a great enough degree to establish statistical significance. Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Research Question 1

RQ₁ asked whether accounts presented following intentional infidelity in marriage would be more aggravating than accounts following unintentional infidelity. In accordance with the literature (McLaughlin et al., 1983a; McLaughlin et al., 1983b; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990), accounts listed by respondents previously coded as concessions and excuses were categorized as aggravating accounts and those previously coded as justifications and denials were labeled as mitigating in nature. Recall that each of the four types of accounts differ in their degree of politeness, with concessions and excuses falling at the mitigating end of the politeness continuum and justifications and denials falling at the aggravating end. The intentionality of the scenarios was once again subdivided into high versus low intent.

To see whether participants who were in the high intent condition were more likely to use aggravating accounts than mitigating accounts, the relative frequency of each choice was compared using a Chi-square. Participants in the condition with infidelity of high intent responded more often using aggravating accounts ($n = 79$) than mitigating ones ($n = 37$), $\chi^2(1, n = 116) = 15.21, p = .00$, thus indicating that individuals who engage in infidelity with greater intent are more likely to use an aggravating account than to use a mitigating one in response to their spouses reproach.

Research Question 2

RQ₂ asked if accounts presented following less intentional infidelity are more mitigating than accounts following more intentional infidelity. In order to assess this

question, the same data set and coding procedure was used that was used in RQ₁. To see if participants who were in the low intent condition were more likely to use mitigating accounts than aggravating ones, the relative frequency of each choice was compared using a Chi-square. Participants in the low intent condition responded more often using mitigating accounts ($n = 58$) than aggravating accounts ($n = 36$), $\chi^2(1, n = 94) = 5.15, p = .02$. Thus, the data suggest that when infidelity is less intentional, people are more inclined to use mitigating accounts.

Hypothesis 4

H₄ predicted that an infidelity acted out of revenge will generate lower perceptions of guilt than an infidelity where no revenge was intended. Using the five previously categorized levels of intent (Drigotas et al., 1999) which were randomly integrated into participant scenarios, the scenarios with infidelity enacted out of revenge were isolated for comparison to those scenarios where revenge was not present. Guilt was again assessed using responses to Likert scale questions modeled after Mongeau et al. (1994). The hypothesis was then tested with an ANOVA using revenge as the independent variable and the degree of guilt as the dependent variable. The results showed that for those who were asked to think about infidelity enacted out of revenge the guilt was higher (mean = 5.22) than for those whose transgression was not done with revenge in mind (mean = 4.87). This difference was not statistically significant, however, $F(1, 242) = .606, p = .44$. Thus, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5

H₅ asserted that accounts would more likely be refusals and justifications following infidelity characterized by revenge. Using the variable created for H₄, level of

intent in the scenarios was divided into either the category of intended revenge or no revenge intended. The variable created for the different categories of account choice was also used for analysis. To test whether accounts would more likely be refusals and justifications following infidelity characterized by revenge, the relative frequency of each choice was compared using a Chi-square. Those individuals in the revenge condition responded using justifications and denials ($n = 33$) more often than concessions and excuses ($n = 15$), $\chi^2(1, n = 48) = 6.75, p = .01$. Thus, hypothesis 5 was supported.

Hypothesis 6

H₆ predicted that accounts would more likely be concessions and excuses following infidelity where revenge was not the intent. Again, the level of intent in the scenarios was divided into either the category of intended revenge or no revenge intended. The accounts were previously coded into either justifications and denials or that of concessions and excuses. The hypothesis was then assessed by comparing the relative frequency of each choice using a Chi-square. Those individuals in the no revenge condition did not respond using more concessions and excuses ($n = 80$) than justifications and denials ($n = 82$), $\chi^2(1, n = 162) = .03, p = .88$. The results do not support hypothesis 6.

Discussion

Comparison With Mongeau's Study on Dating Couples

The present study was modeled largely after Mongeau et al.'s (1994) study in its use of hypothetical scenarios to assess infidelity and associated variables. Both studies investigated the relationship that existed between the transgressor's intent and subsequent level of guilt and account choice as well as the presence of revenge and subsequent level

of guilt and account choice. However, Mongeau's study (1994) focused on dating infidelity, whereas the present study assessed infidelity in the marital relationship. In the pages that follow, I will comment on several key topics in which the data from this study can help advance our understanding of this topic area from what Mongeau and his colleagues' original work provided.

Degree of guilt. Mongeau et al. found an inverse relationship between intent and level of guilt. For married couples, however, the data in this study did not quite reach statistical significance, but the results trended in same direction of Mongeau's work. Thus, these findings do offer a degree of support for past research concerning the relationship between intent and level of guilt.

In the case of the relationship between the presence of revenge and subsequent degree of guilt, this study gave the opposite findings occurred as Mongeau et al. Specifically, Mongeau et al. found a significant relationship between revenge and level of guilt, whereas the present study found no such relationship.

There are several possibilities that may exist for the differing results between the two studies in regard to intent and revenge and later degree of guilt. First, while Mongeau et al. focused on dating infidelity, the present study focused in marital infidelity. Given the greater degree of commitment that is expected in a marital relationship and what a socially stigmatized act marital infidelity is considered to be, it is possible that regardless of whether intent or revenge are present, guilt is higher in marriages than when intent or revenge are present in a dating relationship.

Another possible explanation might stem from the use of hypothetical scenarios. It is quite possible that the use of such scenarios for assessing intent and revenge in

relation to guilt rather than using information from real life infidelity situations masked the potential results. In other words, without actually engaging in infidelity in real life it may be difficult to discern one's level of succeeding guilt. Additionally, given the social stigma that surrounds infidelity behavior in marriage, those individuals who had never engaged in infidelity may have responded with greater guilt when completing this survey than they might have experience in real life had they actually committed such a marital transgression. In fact, several of the surveys were returned with comments on them stating that while they responded to the questions asking them to assume that they had cheated on their spouse, they felt uncomfortable doing so as they would never do such a thing in real life. A few respondents even refused to answer the questions altogether for this same reason.

Account choice. In this study I found a positive relationship between the presence of revenge and choice of aggravating accounts. However, I did not find a positive relationship between the absence of revenge and use of mitigating accounts. This could possibly be explained by the way that revenge (and absence there of) was operationalized in the present study. Specifically, revenge is defined as one of five levels of intent derived from the typology offered by Drigotas et al. (1999) which includes sexuality, emotional satisfaction, social context, attitudes/norms, and revenge/hostility. However, in this study I isolated revenge from the other levels of intent in order to stay consistent with Mongeau et al.'s approach. I then compared revenge with the respondents' choice of account. For those in the revenge condition, aggravating accounts were chosen more often.

However, the absence of revenge in the case of infidelity did not necessarily lead to the use of mitigating account choices by the transgressor. This may be in part because remaining levels such as marital sexual issues and emotional satisfaction by their nature may too invite more aggravating accounts. For example, if a person were to engage in an extramarital affair because he or she did not feel sexually fulfilled in the marriage, a justification might seem in order. Thus, when revenge was isolated and the remaining levels of intent were assessed for subsequent account selection, mitigating accounts were not the significant choice. However, in the present study when levels of intent were divided into high and low categories of intent and compared to account choice, a significant relationship did exist indicating that the previous evaluation is an accurate one.

Interestingly, Mongeau et al.'s investigation of intent and revenge in relation to account choice resulted in the opposite findings of those of the present study. Specifically, in their study the relationship between intent and account choice was non-significant, while the relationship between revenge and account choice was significant for both aggravating and mitigating choices. The results for intent were perplexing to Mongeau and his colleagues (1994) given the central role that intent plays in attributions. They concluded that perhaps the presence or absence of revenge may have been considered a more important factor than intent in determining attributions for infidelity.

I would argue that Mongeau et al.'s surprising and opposing findings are not only due to the greater role that revenge may have played but perhaps also to the way that they operationalized intent and revenge. Mongeau et al. manipulated and measured intent as "premeditation," whereas they operationalized revenge as the presence of a previous

infidelity by one's partner. They used 2 (intent: high, low) $\times 2$ (revenge: present, absent) $\times 2$ (sex of infidel: male, female) independent groups factorial design. While certainly revenge is a behavior and intent is a motivation, I would argue that the act of revenge is driven by intent or a degree of intent, and thus the two measures are highly confounded. Thus, this might help to explain Mongeau et al.'s confusing findings that revenge impacted account choice while intent did not. For this reason it seems like perhaps Mongeau et al.'s choice to separate revenge from intent was a bad choice.

Theory Application and Future Directions

Level of intent and accounts. The level of intent associated with the infidelity influenced the type of accounts that participants presented. The high degree of intent conditions resulted in more accounts that were aggravating while the low degree of intent conditions resulted in accounts that were more mitigating. Further, when revenge was isolated as a level of intent, aggravating accounts were more common than mitigating responses. These findings indicate that a person who has perceived to have engaged in extramarital sex with high intent is more likely to use an account that is aggravating in nature. Conversely, a person who has participated in infidelity with low intent is more inclined to choose a mitigating account. These findings are consistent with the McGraw's (1987) claims that intentional transgressions are likely to produce aggravating accounts while less intent will invite mitigating responses.

McGraw's (1987) assertions, however, were based on the influence of guilt. He maintained that intentional transgressions are likely to produce aggravating accounts because the transgressor is less likely to feel guilty while transgressions that are done with less intent increase the transgressor's level of guilt and thus more mitigating

accounts are probable. Mongeau and colleagues' (1994) findings support an association between level of intent and guilt. Mongeau et al. did not find a relationship between level of intent and account choice however. While a relationship existed in the present study between level of intent and account choice, the findings in regard to the relationship between intent and guilt were not significant, and thus the basis for McGraw's claims cannot be fully substantiated. Further research should be done to explore the relationship between level of intent and guilt as well as the impact of intent on subsequent account choice.

Motivation and account choice. Consistent with past research (Hupka et al., 1987; Mongeau et al., 1994; Mongeau & Schulz, 1997), motivation to remain married did play a role in account choice with regard to use of aggravating accounts. In other words, the low motivation condition resulted in the presentation of more justifications and denials than excuses and concessions. It would stand to reason that if someone wants out of the marriage, he or she will naturally be more inclined to use an aggravating account as that person will have nothing to lose and will want to distance himself or herself from their partner and to place blame to save personal face.

While the use of mitigating accounts was not significantly related to motivation to remain married, it still trended in the right direction. Perhaps there is still a need for the transgressor to save personal face, which thus results in less strong findings. It may be possible that the use of hypothetical scenarios masked the true impact of motivation with respect to mitigating accounts. Either way, there is a reasonable possibility that there might be some effect with regard to mitigation even though this study did not reach significance on this test. Another explanation is perhaps the nature of the reproach is

influencing the account choice in addition to relationship motivation. Past research has shown that harshly phrased reproaches are likely to generate more aggravating accounts given that these reproaches pose a threat to the freedom of the account giver (Schonbach & Kleibaumhuter, 1990). Given that infidelity may invite more harshly phrased reproaches for some victims, such reproaches may in turn prompt more aggravating accounts by transgressors. These issues are worth further examination.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY TWO

The previous study focuses on quantitative methodology for assessment purposes by means of the use of hypothetical scenario application. The present study, however, has utilized qualitative interviewing of individuals who had actually experienced infidelity in their marriage as a means of gaining rich understanding of the role that accounts and attributions play in a marriage impacted by infidelity. The use of both quantitative and qualitative measurements in this way provide different but potentially complimentary ways of understanding the same concepts (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). Methodological triangulation may enhance both the precision of the data gathered as well as an understanding of contextual influences on those data.

A failure event occurs when one violates a relational rule or understanding. When this rule is one that is tied to the foundation of the relationship, violation of such rule by one partner can put the relationship in jeopardy. Such is the case with infidelity because most couples believe in sexual monogamy as a sacred relational rule, making infidelity a major rule violation (Pittman, 1989; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988).

However, while termination of the marriage is indeed a possibility, as we have already reviewed it is not the only potential outcome. Many relationships do indeed survive such trauma to their marriages. In-depth exploration of how the account sequence and attribution process play out in real life marriages that have experienced infidelity may prove fruitful in our understanding of the difference between marriages that ultimately terminate and those that are able to survive. Thus, this chapter begins with a review of the interplay that exists between the reproach, the account choices, and the

attribution process as they relate to infidelity. After examining pertinent literature on these subjects, the methodology, results, and discussion for the second study are reviewed.

Attribution Theory and Account Sequence

The guiding principle of attribution theory is that people seek to understand why an event has occurred (Weiner, 1986). This causal search is only instigated in situations where behavior is unexpected, aversive, and/or has important outcomes. Given that infidelity is generally seen as a major role violation in marriage, it typically would be considered a behavior that is unexpected, aversive, and that has important consequences for the marriage. Both the transgressor and his or her spouse would seek to learn the reason for the infidelity. Functions achieved from this causal search include reduction of surprise and aid in subsequent goal attainment (Weiner, 1986). Specifically, infidelity is often a great shock to the victim and thus making sense of the behavior aids in reducing this surprise. Because infidelity is considered by most to be an aversive act within the context of marriage, transgressors too will seek to understand or explain their own behavior if not for their partner's benefit, for their own. Additionally, by learning the reason(s) behind the infidelity, it allows the couple to potentially take action to prevent such behavior in the future if this is desired.

Causal Dimensions

According to Weiner (Weiner, 1979, 1980, 1986), there are three underlying dimensions of causality, or properties of causes that exist. These include stability, locus, and controllability.

Stability. One influence on our attributions of another's behavior is the level of "consistency" or "stability" found in the behavior (Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1986, 1992). That is, some causes are thought to be relatively invariant over time (e.g., cognitive ability), while other causes are more variable (e.g., luck). If your spouse, for example, had consistently been a model partner in the past, you would be more apt to believe that his or her behavior was an exception. Ideally, the transgressor who hopes for reconciliation will want to prove that his or her behavior is not a reflection of who he or she is but rather, it is a mistake, or a deviation from the norm (Aune, Metts, & Hubbard, 1998). Conversely, if one's partner had exhibited "consistency" with regard to affair behavior, the victim may be more inclined to attribute his or her partner's behavior as a stable characteristic of his or her character.

For example, whether there is a history of repeated one-night stands or affairs may affect relationship rejuvenation. If the injured spouse has experienced this revelation many times in the past, any expressed remorse or promise of remedial work may seem hollow (Gordan & Baucom, 1999). Reaction of the injured spouse, therefore, is likely to be different if this is a first versus a repeated affair (Levine, 1998). It will be more difficult for the injured partner to take the emotional risk of rebuilding the relationship (Gordan & Baucom, 1999).

Locus. Locus refers to whether the cause is internal or external to the actor (Weiner, 1986, 1992). According to Heider (1958), the sources or cause of a behavior can either be attributed as internal to a person (e.g., a person's intelligence or mood), external to him or her (such as stemming from environmental influences), or both. For example, when a friend receives a job promotion at work, you may attribute his success to his hard

work (internal cause), his personal connections with upper management (external), or both.

In cases where behavior involves acts of deception, it is particularly important for relationship rejuvenation that the transgressor convince his or her partner the behavior is an isolated occurrence and not evidence of a negative personality trait of the transgressor (deTurck, 1988). If the cause of the transgression is perceived to be due to an internal personality characteristic than the possibility of change would seem limited and subsequent ill behavior would appear likely.

Thus, in the case of infidelity, attributions that explain the transgression as stemming from more external sources (e.g., being drunk) would presumably be more conducive to relational repair than attributions that are associated with more internal causes (e.g., partner has sex addiction). Likewise, a one-night stand would conceivably be easier to attribute to external forces than an intentional long-term affair as the latter would naturally involve greater deception and motive. In a long-term affair, one's secret life must be consciously and continually managed around one's married life. The affair is maintained with intent. Behavior thought to be done with intent is said to say more about the transgressor or be more meaningful than behavior that was out of one's control or done without premeditation. In fact, intentionality has been found to relate to a person's willingness to forgive their offender (Darby & Schlenker, 1982).

Control. Finally, attributions are made by assessing whether behavior is believed to be either controllable or uncontrollable (Weiner, 1986, 1992). If the cause of a transgression is considered to be something beyond a person's control, the implications for the relationship are likely to be much different than when a transgression is perceived

to be within a person's control. A one-night stand caused by drinking and the support of bad company may be interpreted as less controllable, for example, than a situation where an individual was thought to make a sober, independent decision. Therefore, a long-term affair may naturally be seen as more controllable and in turn less likely to be forgiven.

Overall, relationship repair is believed to be more difficult and termination is more likely for causes seen as stable, internal, and controllable (Cody, Kersten, Braaten, & Dickson, 1992). Thus, one might conclude that a marriage afflicted by an affair is more likely to dissolve when the infidelity is viewed by the victim as stable, internal to the transgressor, and controllable.

RQ1: What is the relationship between causal dimensions (i.e., stability of behavior, locus of causality, and controllability of behavior) and marital status after infidelity?

Reproach, Accounts, and Subsequent Evaluation

As a means of unearthing the cause behind the infidelity, the scorned spouse will generally seek from his or her partner a reason for the transgression using a reproach. A reproach is defined as a question, assertion, rebuke, or nonverbal sign employed to elicit an explanation (Cody, Kersten, Braaten, & Dickson, 1992). It is motivated by our desire to understand the reason for another person's behavior and thus is a means or tool used in information seeking in the attribution process.

The reproach is subsequently followed by an account. An account is a verbal explanation given by the transgressor in response to a reproach. Accounts inherently suggest a cause for questionable behavior. In turn, the recipient of the account uses causal judgments to evaluate the account provided. The type of account offered for the infidelity

by the transgressor and the causes implicit within that explanation may play a critical role in the outcome of the marriage after the revelation of infidelity (Mongeau & Schulz, 1997).

There are four common types of accounts that a transgressor may employ (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Schonbach, 1980). These include excuses, justifications, concessions, and denials. Excuses are accounts where one admits that the act occurred and is bad, but he or she denies full responsibility for it. A justification on the other hand is when one takes responsibility for an act but denies the negative implication. Concessions are defined as a full or partial admission of guilt along with statements of remorse and possible restitution. Lastly, a refusal occurs when one denies an act occurred or denies responsibility for it. Concessions and excuses are found to be more polite or mitigating while justifications and denials are considered to be less polite and subsequently more aggravating.

How the reproach is phrased may have a substantial impact on the nature of the account offered in return. In a study by Cody and McLaughlin (1985), rude or harshly phrased reproaches resulted in more aggravating or less polite forms of accounts in response. Cody and McLaughlin argued that rude or harsh reproaches restrict the account-giver's freedom to use any desirable form of account, and instead evoke defensive responses from the transgressor. In another study of the managing of accounting behavior in the context of failure events, polite reproaches led to polite accounts and less polite or aggravating reproaches led to aggravating accounts in response (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983). These results are of particular concern in the case of infidelity as the severe nature of such an offense is likely to prompt a harsh

reproach. With a harsh reproach inviting a more aggravating account, a destructive spiral may be initiated, ultimately leading to the termination of the relationship.

RQ2: What is the relationship between the infidelity and reproach messages?

RQ3: What is the relationship between reproach and account messages?

Account and Evaluation

Regardless of whether or not the manner of reproach impacts subsequent account choice, the nature of the account ultimately chosen has been found to relate to relationship repair. For example, although both a concession and an excuse are considered more mitigating than justifications and refusals, a concession is the most preferred form of an account for remedial work or relationship rejuvenation (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994). By admitting responsibility for an offense accompanied with an apology and often plans for restitution, a concession is seen as more polite, preferred, and more useful in the rejuvenation process.

An excuse is the second most likely response to lead to repair or rejuvenation because it exudes the image that the offense was not intentional (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994). We are all more likely to "forgive and forget" if we think our partner did not mean to hurt us or was not fully responsible for his or her actions.

Justifications and refusals are not well received by the victim of a violation and are less likely to lead to remedial work or relationship rejuvenation (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody &

McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994). Specifically, justifications are unlikely to lead to a relationship repair because few of us want to hear that our loved one has had good reason for hurting us.

However, the least likely account response to lead to relationship rejuvenation is a refusal as no partner wants to be challenged, proven wrong, or contradicted (Cody et al., 1992; McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Canary & Cody, 1994). For example, often in the case of infidelity, a spouse is met with assertions of having a "wild imagination" when they accuse their partner of having an affair (Atwood & Seifer, 1997). Such an account is attributed as extremely aggravating by the receiver in comparison with the other three (Mongeau et al., 1994). Individuals who use refusals or denials, claiming that they did no wrong and are being falsely accused, often find their conflicts escalate (Manusov, Cody, Donohue, & Zappa, 1994; Schonbach, 1990). This is because by denying responsibility or that an act occurred the accounter is insinuating that the reproacher's interpretation of the situation is wrong. Thus, the negative attribution derived from a refusal may make the rejuvenation process a more difficult, if not an impossible one in a marriage.

In the case of infidelity, however, are their situations where a denial is attributed as constructive versus destructive to the relationship? For example, the transgressor may believe and the victim later conclude that denial was a desperate act of love used as a means to not reveal a mistake that could potentially destroy the marriage. Taken together, the following research question is offered:

RQ4: What is the relationship between the account, the evaluation, and the ultimate outcome of the relationship?

Methods

Kvale (1996) contends that there are seven steps to qualitative interviewing which include thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. While he concurs that such a simplified linear presentation of the process of interview research downplays the often chaotic nature of interview studies, he states that it is nonetheless an attempt to give the practice structure. It is this structure that I in turn wish to utilize and will therefore discuss each of the seven steps in light of the present study.

Thematizing

According to Kvale (1996), thematizing refers to the clarification of the content and purpose of one's study. It involves a conceptual explanation and a theoretical understanding of the topic as well as an explanation of "why" the study is being conducted. In order to better understand accounts and attribution in regard to infidelity, a review of related literature and theoretical studies was initially conducted.

Designing

The designing phase of the interview process involves the overall planning and preparing the methodical procedures for obtaining the intended information (Kvale, 1996). In the present study, the individual interviews focused on the communication that takes place between a husband and wife after the revelation that one of them has had an affair. A semi-structured interview format was used in an effort to allow me to ask the primary questions of interest but allow for additional probing based on initial responses. According to Cannell and Kahn (1968), early questions should serve to engage the respondent's interest without threatening or taxing him or her, followed by more

demanding or threatening questions when respondent's commitment can be presumed to have peaked. Thus, I began the interview by asking a number of demographic questions (see Appendix C). These questions were followed by several more general, less sensitive questions about the relationship itself and then finally more topic specific questions were covered (see Appendix D). This format was used as a means of allowing the interviewee time to become more comfortable with the interview process and willing to engage in conversation.

Interviewing

Participants. All interviews were conducted individually and there were a total of 25 interviews completed. The average length of each interview was approximately 41 minutes, with interview length ranging from 27 minutes to 68 minutes. A total of nine males and 16 females were interviewed. The median age was 46 years. There were a wide variety of occupations represented such as several stay-at-home mothers, an iron worker, a social service provider, several hairdressers, a diesel mechanic, and several retirees. With exception of occupation which was separated for confidentiality purposes, a complete description of demographics is listed in the table below to make viewing easier for the reader (see Table 2). Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' real names.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

NAMES (pseudo)	Sex	Age	Race	Who Committed the Infidelity	Current Relational Status	# of Times Legally Married	# of Children
Stacy	F	33	B	Spouse	Divorced	1	0
Maggie	F	51	W	Spouse	Remarried	3	?
Lydia	F	43	W	Spouse	Divorced	1	1
Arnold	M	55	W	Self	Divorced	2	2
Arnold	M	55	W	Spouse	Divorced	2	2
Kindy	F	41	W	Spouse	Remarried	2	2
Mary	F	41	W	Spouse	Married	1	2
Josh	M	29	W	Spouse	Remarried	2	2
Jeff	M	49	W	Spouse	Engaged	1	1
JoAnn	F	41	W	Spouse	Divorced	1	3
Jayden	M	36	W	Spouse	Remarried	2	2
Kally	F	65	W	Spouse	Remarried	2	2
Ellen	F	44	W	Spouse	Remarried	2	1
Iris	F	76	W	Spouse	Divorced	1	3

Demographics of Participants (cont.)

NAMES (pseudo)	Sex	Age	Race	Who Committed the Infidelity	Current Relational Status	# of Times Legally Married	# of Children
Bart	M	53	W	Self	Married	1	2
Dean	M	34	W	Self	Married	1	3
Annie	F	38	W	Spouse	Engaged	1	3
Brad	M	32	W	Spouse	Married	1	2
Lucy	F	58	W	Spouse	Remarried	3	3
Lucy	F	58	W	Spouse	Remarried	3	3
Kevin	M	43	W	Self	Married	1	3
Marge	F	47	W	Spouse	Divorced	1	1
Nadine	F	52	W	Spouse	Divorced	1	3
Darcy	F	36	W	Spouse	Married	1	3
Josephine	F	34	W	Spouse	Married	2	3

Sampling Criteria. The study was limited to heterosexual individuals who were currently, or had previously been married and who have experienced sexual infidelity in that marriage. I also required that both partners were aware of the infidelity. The decision to use only heterosexuals is made on the grounds that currently only heterosexual couples

are able to be legally married in most states as well as to eliminate any isolated characteristics which might be unique to gay or lesbian relationships.

Three additional restrictions were made when initially choosing participants for the study:

1. The study was limited to infidelity which was heterosexual in nature. This is because the complexity and different dynamics that might be involved in a homosexual affair (vs. a heterosexual affair) could make some responses noncomparable (Humphrey, 1987).

2. The infidelity was defined as one involving extramarital sexual intercourse. While certainly “affairs of the heart or mind” may exist with an individual outside of one’s marriage without ever evolving into a sexual liaison, it is the sexual affair that appears to be most socially condemned. Specifically, an extramarital sexual encounter is considered a crime against the state, the religious institutions, and the partner (Atwood & Seifer, 1997).

3. My focus was on “traditional affairs,” not “parallel” or “recreational” affairs (typology from Lawson, 1988). Traditional affairs are affairs not known by the spouse and would be considered a violation of the marital agreement. Parallel affairs are known by the spouse but implicitly condoned. Recreational affairs are affairs which are generally found in “open” marriages. These often involve inviting individuals outside of the marriage to join in the couple’s sexual relations. Both spouses are in agreement and no implicit marital rule is being violated.

Locating Participants. Participants were obtained through network sampling. This process is one that is often used when addressing very sensitive or personal topics such as

the focus of the present study (Granovetter, 1976). Initial interviews were people I knew who fit the sampling criteria. Additionally, interviews were obtained through speaking to friends and family and asking if they were aware of individuals who fit the sampling criteria. If so, these people were asked to contact the person in question and inquire as to whether or not I might be able to get in touch with him or her. If the individual agreed, I then made contact by phone and set up and later conducted an interview. This process was repeated with each individual interviewed with the exception of two people.

Two interviews were obtained through the questionnaire that was distributed in Study 1 of this paper. At the end of the questionnaire the respondent was asked if he or she had experienced infidelity in his or her marriage and would be willing to speak to me in more detail to please list a first name and a phone number where I might call. Two individuals gave such contact information. After making initial contact by phone, it was clear that they fit the sampling criteria and an interview was scheduled and later conducted.

Setting. Once potential participants were found and they each expressed to the person of referral that it was all right for me to get in touch with them, I made initial contact via the phone and/or email. At this time the interview time and setting were scheduled and was determined by the interviewee's preferences. Ultimately, eleven of the interviews were done in person and the remaining fourteen were conducted over the telephone. The decision to opt for one means over the other had to do with several factors. Geographic location of some of the participants in conjunction with the location of the interviewer was a concern for some. Additionally, face-to-face interviews can decrease the privacy and anonymity of participants and for that reason some chose to be

interviewed over the telephone. Overall then, while many of the interviewees were happy to meet in person, the remaining individuals preferred to be interviewed over the phone at a time that was convenient for each person.

In the case of the eleven interviews conducted in person, these interviews were conducted at a time and place that was comfortable for the participant. Eight of these interviews were conducted in the participant's home, two were completed at the individual's place of employment during their break, and one was conducted at a restaurant.

Procedure. Before beginning the interview, participants were informed (a) who I was, (b) the purpose of the study, (b) the procedures involved, (c) that participation was voluntary, (d) of the level of risk involved, (e) of the importance of the study, (f) that their identity would be kept confidential, (g) that the interview would be audio-taped with permission, (h) and that they could choose to not answer a question or withdraw at any time (see Appendix E). Interviewees were told that the interview could last between ½ to 1 ½ hours, depending on how much they had to say. They were told that all names and any identifying information would be changed in order to protect confidentiality. They were given contact information should they have further questions after the interview was over. Finally, the individual was asked if he or she would be willing to participate in the interview.

Transcribing

All participants except two agreed to be audio-taped. In the case of these exceptions, field notes were taken during the interview and then reviewed and supplemented after the interview concluded. The data from the taped interviews was

transcribed verbatim. The name of each participant was changed to a pseudonym and any identifying information was left out as the data were transcribed to ensure confidentiality. Each line of each interview was numbered for purposes of analysis and this numbering was restarted for each interview. After the interviews were transcribed, the data were transcribed, verified, and reported as discussed in more detail below.

Data Analysis

I assessed the data by applying a thematic analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I began this process by categorizing and coding the data. Categorization is a process of “characterizing the meaning of a unit of data with respect to certain properties” (p. 214). This was accomplished in both a deductive and inductive fashion. Information from the literature and research concerning accounts and attributions was used to stimulate sensitivity to clues of meaning in the data, suggest questions to be asked of the data, and served as a source of supplementary validation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Inductively, categories were determined as I began to see similarity of particular instances of data. After categorization, coding was assigned to each of the categories as a means of labeling them and distinguishing them from one another. After the data were categorized and coded, meaning was assigned to key moments found in the exchanges.

Verification

Verification involves assessing the generalizability, reliability, and the validity, of the interview findings (Kvale, 1996). According to Creswell (2007) there are eight strategies in particular that are used by researchers to assess the accuracy of their studies. These include: Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field; triangulation (researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods,

investigators, and theories, to provide corroborating evidence); peer review or debriefing (provides an external check of the research process); negative case analysis (here the researcher refines working hypotheses as the theory advances in light of negative or disconfirming evidence); clarifying researcher bias (the researcher reflects on personal biases at the outset of the study so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any biases that may have impacted the study); member checking (the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations); rich, thick description (allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability); and external audits (this is where a consultant who has no connection to the study examines both the process and product of the review).

Creswell (2007) recommends that qualitative researchers employ at least two of these strategies when assessing the accuracy of their research findings. This study completed both member checks and engaged in thick, rich description.

For member checks, I initially asked before the interviews began if participants would be willing to be contacted a second time upon completion of my interviews as a means of verifying my findings. Everyone I interviewed was willing to participate in member checks. Once the interviews were finished, I contacted by phone three individuals whom I had originally interviewed. I began by reminding them what a member check was. I then reviewed with them the major themes that had emerged from the data and asked them to verify these themes with their perceptions. They all agreed that the themes I reviewed were in keeping with their experiences. Each member check lasted approximately 10 minutes.

The second strategy used to assess the accuracy of my findings was the use of thick rich description in my reporting. Through the use of detailed description of participants experiences by means of long quotes and narration, readers are able to transfer information to other settings and determine whether these experiences can be transferred due to shared characteristics (Creswell, 2007).

Reporting

The final “reporting” stage involves communicating the method and the findings of the study (Kvale, 1996). This step is addressed through the review of the study as a whole in this paper.

Results

Research Question One

Research question one asked what is the relationship between causal dimensions (i.e., stability of behavior, locus of causality, and controllability of behavior) and marital status after infidelity. Unfortunately, due to demographics, my sample did not offer a great deal of insight into this question. The question required that I consider responses from victims who had either played a role in the decision to divorce or who were ultimately able to salvage their marriage. Despite a strong effort on my part to obtain a more diverse sample, the majority of the individuals in my sample were victims who were divorced and this was primarily due to transgressor initiation. Thus, the results here should be taken in light of the small sample in this category.

Of those I interviewed, controllability did not seem to impact to a great degree the decision to repair or terminate the marriage. This was because most of these individuals, those who remain married as well as those who divorced, appeared to view the act of

infidelity as a behavior that their spouse had a great deal of control over. Unless we are dealing with a situation where someone has been taken advantage of such as in the case of rape, generally speaking sex requires mutual consent. Thus, infidelity was generally perceived as controllable by both those who repaired their marriage as well as those who terminated the union.

Because the infidelity was controllable, it was considered to be a choice. The fact that there was choice involved and that this choice was one that directly impacted the victim appeared to contribute to the emotional pain the victim experienced. Here Darcy explains how she saw her husband's behavior as a choice and how the fact that he made this decision was in part what hurt her and still bothers her today:

Darcy – I just couldn't believe that he would do that to me. Why would he want to hurt me like that? All I had ever been was faithful to him. These women didn't hold a candle to me so why would he want to be with them? I still wrestle with that.

Despite perceiving that her husband intentionally hurt her, Darcy's marriage was able to survive. What appears to distinguish her marriage from those marriages that ultimately terminated was the perceived locus and stability in the act. Here Kindy explains how in addition to believing that her husband's unfaithfulness was controllable, she also saw the act as reflective of an internal personality characteristic:

Researcher – Did you see his behavior as something that was within his control or was there something else that contributed?

Kindy – I'm not sure what I thought. If it was controllable, he didn't care to control it. He was a very selfish person....I mean it usually had to do with alcohol he had ingested but he was a jerk. He was a whore. A nympho.

Researcher – Did this impact your decision to leave the marriage?

Kindy – Yes. Because he was selfish too. If he would have died it would have been OK. That's how I knew it was time to go.

While Kindy's marriage ended in divorce, Darcy's marriage was able to survive the infidelity. Although Darcy admitted struggling with how to explain her husband's behavior, she said that ultimately she believed that this was not something inherent to who he was as a person:

Darcy – I really felt like he was a Dr. Jeckle, Mr. Hyde situation. I believed it was this other person doing these terrible things, but the man I really loved was deep in there somewhere. I just had to get past the other, if I could just, eventually that man would show through.

While the interview was not recorded, Josephine also explained how she did not believe that her husband's behavior was reflective of who he was as a person. Rather, she blamed his behavior on problems that they were having in their marriage. She stated that she loved him and that this was in part due to so many of the qualities that he possessed. Her marriage too was able to survive.

Not only did locus appear to play a role for those in my sample in their decision to repair or terminate their marriage, but the stability of the infidelity seemed to impact participant's decision. There were many individuals who I interviewed who initially tried to repair the relationship but after repeated violations of infidelity by their partner the

victim made the decision to leave the marriage. For example, while other variables had an impact on their decision to leave the marriage, Stacy, Annie, Lucy, and Kindy all explained how they eventually left the marriage in part due to their spouse's repeated infidelity. Here, Kindy explains how her husband's repeated behavior contributed to her decision to seek a divorce:

Kindy – Did he do it over and over? Yes. Not picky.

Researcher – Did this impact your decision to leave the marriage?

Kindy – Yes. I knew he would do it again. And again. And again.

Stacy explained to me that in fact she believed that she and her husband were working on repairing their marriage. They were even attempting to have a child. Ultimately however, she came home early from a trip to surprise him and found him in bed with another woman. In this excerpt she states how this second affair was the final straw in the relationship:

Researcher – So, ultimately you said that he did have more affairs?

Stacy – Well, he had one more affair & it was the one that just did us in.

Overall, while the sample size is small, controllability appeared to lack impact in relation to relationship repair versus termination. Locus and stability on the other hand seemed to play a much more significant role.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked about the relationship between the infidelity and the reproach messages. In my sample, what seemed to be influencing the nature of the reproach most was not the act of infidelity itself as this was thought to be a major rule violation in all of the marriages involved in the study. Rather, the nature of the reproach

appeared to be influenced largely by the victim's personality and the previous communication patterns in the marriage. For example, individuals who were more passive and/or tended to handle things by avoiding the situation tended to do so when confronted with the information that their spouse had cheated. In contrast, individuals who were more outspoken and perhaps were more argumentative with their spouse on other occasions likewise seemed more inclined to yell and scream in this case.

In this first example, Iris spoke in the interview about the communication that transpired between her husband and her just after her husband approached her with the news that he was in love with another woman and wanted a divorce. Iris's manner of reproach appears to be directly influenced by her knowledge of her husband's previous decision making behavior and the communication patterns that existed between them.

Researcher – And so, so what did you say when he said that. I know you won't remember exactly, but what was your response in general to when he told you he....

Iris – Well, mostly I told him I was afraid he would regret it.

Researcher – And did you ask him to not go, I mean, was there anything like that said?

Iris – No, I knew he meant what he said.

Researcher – Was that because that is just how he kind of always was with everything else?

Iris – Yeah

Researcher – So you knew when he had made up his mind he had made up his mind?

Iris – Right.

Researcher – So was there any fighting or anything?

Iris – No. No, not really.

In another interview, Kally explains how she reacted after she received a call from an anonymous individual saying her husband was having an affair. Rather than approaching her husband in a hysterical manner, she explained that she calmly asked him to leave.

Kally - and I knew he was leaving. And so I said to him how long are you... oh, I did say, the night that that gal called, I said, do not do this to [daughter's name] and I. If you are going to run around and you are not satisfied just being with us, then leave and don't make us so embarrassed. Don't make us the talk of the town. Just leave and start a new life. Just do not put us through this humiliation.

Kally further substantiates the pattern of communication that existed between her husband and her when she relays a conversation that took place between her daughter and a later wife of Kally's now ex-husband.

Kally - you know, I can't believe that [ex-husband] said that your mother and he never fought. They never argued. And [daughter's name] said, I can't remember them arguing. And she said, well that was the trouble with their relationship. I just stand up to him and I just tell him the way things...

Kally goes on later in the interview to support the second wife's assessment when she states that she regrets her passive nature and the way that she handled the news of the infidelity.

Kally - I don't know, I think I was too civil in our parting because there was never any huge disagreements. I pretty much just accepted what he said and went with it.

Further evidence of personality influence on reproach choice may be seen in my interview with Nadine. She explained how her husband and she typically communicated with one another in a calm fashion and that it was not normal for her husband and her to argue and fight. This pattern of communication seemed to impact Nadine's approach to confronting her husband with suspicions of his unfaithfulness. When faced with concrete evidence that her husband was likely seeing another woman after coming across an email exchange, Nadine did not immediately go to her husband and confront him with the letter.

Nadine – And you know I was still trying to figure out whether or not, in some ways I wish I would have just confronted him with the evidence, but I didn't want to, to this day he doesn't know that I read that email. I never told him.

Rather than confronting him directly, Nadine waited for an opportunity to observe the other woman with her husband as a means to assess their behavior together and subsequently dismiss or solidify her doubts. Even after watching them together and feeling like their behavior confirmed her suspicions, Nadine did not confront her husband. Her husband ultimately confessed his affair only after being encouraged by a mutual friend to do so.

Here Nadine describes how her husband and she sat their children down to tell them that their parents were going to separate and what a surprise this was to their children:

Nadine – So the following weekend we sat our children down and told them and like I said, that was, I still consider that the most difficult day of my life. It was completely awful because it was like hitting them with a ton of bricks.

Researcher – And did you tell them, I mean not necessarily the whole story, but why?

Nadine – No, well, they you know, they were looking at us like, huh? And they had no clue, yeah.

Nadine explains in another part of the interview that her children were very surprised to learn of their parent's pending separation because they rarely saw their parents argue:

Nadine – It seemed like things were still the same [after the affair was exposed to Nadine]. We didn't ever fight. So from our kid's perspective, they had no clue why.

Researcher – They were surprised?

Nadine – We were happy. They were very surprised. We hugged and kissed in the kitchen. And except after I discovered what was going on, we no longer did that, but they didn't notice. We were really good friends and so we weren't like the argumentative couple, shout at each other, hit at each other. We had fun together. We played games together as a family. We did normal stuff.

In contrast to these more subdued examples of conversation that occurred after the revelation of an affair, many of the individuals I spoke with relayed a far different story. In this next example, Darcy describes how it was normal for her husband and her to argue and that this had occurred regularly in the relationship.

Darcy – We would fight a lot. But even still, I was completely taken off-guard [by the infidelity]. I had no idea.

Researcher – You weren't expecting it, despite the arguing?

Darcy – No. Not at all. I mean, sure we fought a lot. But it was normal. I can remember even when we were dating being out with other couples and just going at it [fighting] like crazy. This one couple, who we went out with once before, we asked them to go out many other times and they would just smile and say sure but never take us up on it. I don't think they wanted to be around us, to listen to it again.

This pattern of communication between Darcy and her husband appeared in turn to influence the manner in which Darcy reacted to the news that her husband had engaged in infidelity and her subsequent reproach:

Darcy - After I found out, when he showed up I just kicked and punched him. I remember trying to rack him. I was screaming and crying.

Researcher – Was he surprised by your reaction?

Darcy – No. I don't think so. He seemed to take it like he deserved it.

This more explosive type of reproach was exhibited by other people I interviewed as well. In my interview with Stacy, she describes how she reacted hysterically after learning of her husband's affair. This type of response, she asserts, is in keeping with her personality:

Stacy - His best friend who also worked in the same company cornered me in the kitchen and said, you've got some problems. And one of them is that your husband is having an affair and we need to think together on how to fix it.

Researcher – So did you confront your husband at this point?

Stacy – Yeah. I publicly confronted him because we were having a party when his best friend informed me, so I made a public confrontation despite his best friend asking that I not. Especially given the fact that the woman he was having an affair with, my assistant, was in my house. Because she was my assistant and it was an awesome party. So I made a public confrontation. I am a very tempestuous person and you know, I kicked her out, I kicked everybody out. It was this screaming tirade.

Overall, the participants I spoke with expressed being extremely upset upon learning of the news that their partners had engaged in infidelity. However, what seemed to impact the way that they approached their spouse with this knowledge had more to do with their individual personalities and their communication patterns as a couple than the act of the infidelity itself.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked about the relationship between the reproach and the account message. Just as the reproach choice seemed to have more to do with the individual who was constructing it then the dynamics behind the language itself, the specific reproach used by the victims in my study appeared to have very little impact on the subsequent account choice of the transgressors. By and large, the thing that seemed to influence the nature of the account most was not the phrasing of the reproach itself, but rather the motivation the transgressor had for wanting to maintain the marriage. Those who appeared to want to terminate the marriage chose aggravating accounts while those who wanted to save the marriage ultimately chose mitigating ones.

Motivation to terminate the marriage and account choice. For those individuals who wanted to end their marriage, aggravating accounts were chosen by the transgressor upon being reproached by their spouse. In this first example, Lydia describes how her husband initially denied having an affair. It was only after he appeared to get his finances in order that he then came to Lydia and admitted having an affair and requested a divorce.

Lydia – You know that is hard to remember. I think I started suspecting little [things], places he said he was going to be he wasn't, and I did that phone call thing where I redialed to see where he had been. And then I called her house.

Researcher – And then did you confront him after that happened? Is that what prompted you to confront him.

Lydia – Oh, yeah, at first he denied it and who was I going to believe, him or everybody else. Because, people would kind of imply, you know, things, when we would be places, that he would tease her and say what _____ cat got your tongue, and stuff like that. And he would say that they were just doing that to just get a rise out of me to get him in trouble with me. He would always turn it around. So he always would deny it, and it finally came to me and admitted to me that it was happening and that he wanted out of the marriage.

Researcher – When did he admit that?

Lydia – When he asked for the divorce.

Researcher – So up to that point he didn't...

Lydia – Oh yeah, he denied it totally because I think he tried to make sure his truck got paid for and some things settled with the farm because we owed money still. I was making the payments on the truck and...

Researcher – Right

Lydia - So he wanted to sell the cattle, and he had some reason why he wanted to do it but he really wanted, he took that money and said that he thought he would pay his truck off, and of course, I was thrilled because that would be one less payment, not realizing that it was really because he needed to get that paid off.

Researcher – He was trying to get everything in order before he came to you.

Lydia – Yeah

Researcher – So when he came to you, then, he completely opened up and said, yeah, I have been having an affair.

Lydia – Well, I said, is she really worth it? And then he said, yeah, that he loved her.

Researcher – So when...

Lydia - . _____ he wouldn't have anything to do with it.

Researcher – So it was when he came to you for the divorce that he admitted that he was having an affair?

Lydia – Yeah. He said that he loved her.

Later in the interview...

Researcher – And it was only after he came to you and said that he wanted out that he admitted it [having an affair].

Lydia – Yeah. Yeah [initially] he kept denying it.

In this next example, a denial is also used initially just prior to the transgressor's request for a divorce. Here Arnold explains how he found a note on his vehicle implicating his wife in an affair. He confronts her with what he has read only to have her refuse to respond to his reproach:

M – Did you go straight home and confront her?

Arnold – She was not home. I tried calling the house, she was not home, so I tried calling her cell phone. And she did not answer so I just left her a voice mail and I was so upset I cannot tell you what I said on the voice mail. Evidently it was not very nice. That's what I've been told.

Researcher – When you did see her then, was it that evening.

Arnold – No. Within 15 to 20 minutes of my leaving a voice message, she showed up to where my pickup was.

Researcher – Can you tell me what happened at that point? How the conversation went?

Arnold – Basically, she got out of the car, mad as hell, and started questioning me about the note and all this. [I asked her if the note was true. Was she having an affair?] She did not answer the question which of course made me even angrier, so I just told her there was no need for us to continue this conversation. That I would be moving out in order to you know get my head cleared up and get my emotions in check before I started saying things I did not mean or those kinds of things.

Researcher – So you took her lack of response as an admission of guilt?

Arnold – Yes

This aggravating response to Arnold's inquiries was followed by the initiation of divorce proceedings by his wife. Her only other explanation was the justification that she was unhappy in the marriage. A justification is an aggravating form of account. Here Arnold goes on to explain how his wife attempted to justify her desire to leave due to unhappiness yet he later learned it was also largely due to her intentions to leave him for the man she was having an affair with and take Arnold's retirement money:

Arnold - The only response that I ever got out of that was, it is not about the money, I'm just not happy. And this whole process has been nothing more than to posture herself over the money. I am retired. I worked thirty years for [place of employment]. I took a lump sum buy out and vested with an investment firm and it had grown pretty good and that is what the whole thing was about. This gentleman that she had met has never held a full time job, or at least not one for any length of time. Not a pot to pee in nor a window to throw it out of and it was just evidently ripe and ready to go that route. Evidently the bottom line is the money.

Researcher – So in the end she did want a portion of that?

Arnold – No, they wanted all of it. It has been a very nasty, bitter divorce. Once I got my head screwed on straight and went through some therapy and went to a therapist and a psychiatrist, I have been able to think a little more rationally and I can look back now and see that it was just totally about the money. She had an alcohol problem and of course the gentleman has an alcohol problem and I guess they decided over a beer that this was what needed to be done. There was a very good friend of mine, a female friend, that was also friends with my wife. She had

run into my wife's boyfriend in a bar in March and had asked him what he had been up to because they were acquaintances and he said that he had been dating a married lady whose husband had a real good retirement network or whatever you want to call it and if the man died before they got a divorce, they would get it all and he would never have to work another day in his life. And if she had to settle for a divorce, then they would get half, which would mean they would neither one would have to work another day the rest of their life. That information was a little disturbing.

Aggravating accounts in past research have not been found to be associated with relationship rejuvenation. Typically, this is due to the fact that the account implies a lack of responsibility and remorse by the transgressor. Interestingly, several of the individuals I spoke with described how their spouse who had cheated on them chose a justification to explain the indiscretion while also expressing feelings of remorse and promises of restitution. Such expressions of regret and pledges of remedial work are typically associated with the mitigating account of concession. What is interesting, however, is that the remedial work in these examples appeared to be short lived or even non-existent. Ultimately, the majority of these marriages divorced. Thus, it is possible that these initial justifications and/or lack of remedial work were evidence of the transgressor's lack of marital commitment leaving the relationship more vulnerable to ultimate termination.

In this first example, Stacy explains how her husband was very apologetic about his affair. Still he blamed Stacy in part for his indiscretion:

Researcher – The evening that you confronted him, what did he say to you in return? What was his response to your allegations and your questions?

Stacy – His response was that he felt that was what we could expect because we don't have sex any more. He was very apologetic, though. It was very different than the second one [second affair]. The second one was really quite different. This one he was more apologetic, but at the same time making pleas that we don't have sex any more. You are always so angry at me. I can't talk to you about anything. It was like she doesn't mean anything to me. It was just stupid I know. I know it was dumb. It won't ever happen again. I'll end it. Please don't end the marriage. La-la-la-la-la.

Researcher – So he was sorry, but at the same time he wasn't taking full responsibility.

Stacy – Correct.

Researcher – It was your fault as well, he was saying.

Stacy – Right

In this next example, Annie explains how her husband explained his initial affair once it was exposed using a justification as an account:

Annie – He was just so in to working out and so was she and you know I think that they had that commonality. I was in grad school and he thought I was too absorbed into that and I probably was, you know. I think he thought he lost the attention from me so I think that is kind of where he was going with that one.

While Annie's husband also attempted to initially engage in remedial work to save the marriage, this was always short lived it seemed and he was back to his extramarital behavior, ultimately having multiple affairs.

In the previous examples, each of these marriages ultimately ended in divorce. We can conclude from these examples that lack of commitment to the marriage appears to significantly influence the choice of account. Specifically, denials and justifications seem to be more prevalent in cases where the transgressor has gone on to request a divorce or has been ultimately unwilling to reinvest in the relationship long-term and repair the damage created by the infidelity.

Motivation to maintain the marriage and account choice. Interestingly, while an aggravating account generally precipitated the final de-escalation of the marriage, it was also initially used by transgressors whose indiscretion was not yet confirmed to their partner and who were motivated to save their marriage. Denial, typically an aggravating account, was used in these cases by transgressors who wanted to save their marriage. By denying the infidelity, they were preventing their partners from learning of their indiscretion and potentially opening their marriage up to the possibility of divorce. In this first example, Mary explains how when she would confront her husband with the rumors that he was having an affair he would deny the accusations.

Researcher – And so for the longest time things were ups, downs, regular marriage? How long into the marriage before you were aware that something was wrong?

Mary - Suspicious? Probably about three years. Three or four years.

Researcher – And did you confront him?

Mary – Yeah. Accusations and denial.

In the case of Mary's marriage, it was only after the other woman confronted her and told her of her husband's infidelity that her husband finally admitted his indiscretion. Even at that, his confession was several days later.

Researcher – So when was the first time that you had confirmation?

Mary – We were out one night at a bar and she confronted me and told me in front of him.

Researcher – In front of him?

Mary – Yeah. And she said that she...cause she was married too. And she asked me...or she said that she was having to deal with this in her marriage because they had split up and were working on getting back together and she said that she was having to face this in her marriage and it was time that he had to face it in his too. Which took a lot of guts on her part to do that. It was in front of him and he still denied it.

Researcher – Oh, he still denied it, to..in this situation...or even at home?

Mary – Even at home for a few days.

Similarly, when Darcy approached her husband with suspicions of his infidelity, he too initially denied any wrong-doing. It was only after she overheard him admitting his transgressions that he ultimately confessed to being unfaithful.

Researcher – So when did you begin to suspect that he had cheated on you?

Darcy – Hmmm. When I was gone through the week [due to work] I would call and there would be no answer. I mean like two, three, four o'clock in the morning. He wouldn't answer his cell phone either.

Researcher – Did he explain this when you did talk to him?

Darcy – Yeah. I would finally reach him at work because no matter what he did or how late he was out he always seemed to make it to work the next day so I would call him there. I would scream and cry and accuse him. What were you doing? Who were you with?

Researcher – What would he say? Did he have a good answer?

Darcy – I guess he would say that he was out with friends, you know guys, and that was all. They were just riding around after the game drinking. When I asked him if there were any girls he said no. A few months later I started hearing more and more. I heard a rumor that he and another guy were both with these two girls. I asked him about it he said that they were confusing him with his nephew. That he would never do that. He loved me and he didn't want to lose me. That he would never do something like that again to me [reference to subject mentioned that he had cheated on her prior to getting married].

Researcher - When did he admit cheating on you then?

Darcy – Only after I overheard him talking about it on the phone. I set up a phone call with him and this guy he supposedly was doing all of this with and then I listened in on them.

When I asked Darcy if she was upset that her husband had initially denied the accusations of infidelity, she said that she had asked him why he had not told her originally.

Darcy – I told him how humiliating it was to have to hear it that way [from other people] and that I always had to hear it from other people [reference to her husband's prior premarital infidelity]. He said that he just couldn't do it [tell her

himself]. That he was scared. That he thought he would lose me and that he didn't think that he would have ever told me.

In both of these marriages, the denial was initially used as a way to preserve the marriage. By denying the accusations, they were avoiding potential termination of their marriage. I had the advantage of also interviewing one of transgressors in these marriages. Here he explains how his initial denial was a means of preserving his marriage:

Researcher - Why didn't you tell your wife initially that you had cheated on her?

Kevin - Because I didn't want to lose her and I knew I had made a mistake. It was actually more than a mistake, it was a habitual thing. And if she found out it would be over and I didn't want it to be over and I thought that I could hide it and not do it again.

The transgressors in these cases used denial, however, which is typically an aggravating account, as a way to prevent the termination of their marriage. They later admitted to their indiscretions but only after there was no other recourse. It was only at the point when they could hide their past behavior no longer that they chose to use a mitigating account. Here Kevin goes on to explain what he said to his wife once she learned the truth about his infidelity:

Kevin – I said I was sorry. Don't leave me. I won't do it again. I love you.

Overall, the reproach did not seem to impact to a large degree the accounts chosen by the transgressor. However, motivation to terminate or salvage the relationship did appear to play a large role in account choice. Those who were less committed to their relationship or who wanted to get a divorce chose denials or justifications. However, of

the individuals I spoke with who were able to repair their relationship, a denial was used initially as a form of relationship preservation. Only once the infidelity was confirmed to their partner did those transgressors who were committed to relationship repair use a mitigating account and institute remedial work.

Research Question Four

Research question four asked about the relationship between the account, the evaluation, and the ultimate outcome of the relationship. The account appeared to be play a significant role due to the extreme relationship violation the infidelity was for the victims as evidenced by their initial reactions. The pain and suffering they experienced and the subsequent relational damage that was created caused the victims to seek understanding and concessions from their partners. The strength of the relationship was further supported by preexisting barriers that existed in the marriage prior to the infidelity as well as talk about the current situation and remedial work by the transgressor. Initial reactions, account significance, and the role that barriers, relationship talk, and remedial work played in the decision to remain in the marriage will be discussed in detail below.

Initial victim reaction. In the interviews that I conducted it was clear that the act of infidelity in the marriage was considered by the victim to be a major rule violation with damaging effects. This was evidenced by the initial shock felt by the victim's upon learning of the infidelity as well as the subsequent expressed pain and long term ramifications, which for many included divorce.

Most of the victims seemed to be quite taken by surprise that their spouse had engaged in infidelity. This was even the case when there had been obvious signs or when there partner had engaged in infidelity before. In this first example, Jeff expresses how it

was not until he was confronted in his own living room with divorce papers by his wife and her parents that he knew that his marriage was in trouble.

Jerry - He [wife's father] had papers from the lawyer in his hand.....That's when I first knew that my marriage had actually failed.

Researcher – You were completely blindsided with this?

Jerry – Yeah, I had no clue. We had our ups and downs. I was like I thought things were fine.

Researcher – She had not come to you at any point before this and hinted at a divorce or anything like that?

Jerry – No.

Similarly, Lydia conveys how she had complete trust in her husband. This was despite the fact that she had been suspicious earlier in the marriage of his behavior with another woman.

Lydia – He had kind of had that deal with [another woman] and you know [people told me] he had an affair with her [but she didn't believe it], but anyway, after all that he kind of went on the wagon. He quit drinking, and he came out of rehab and he seemed to be really good. And we went ahead and had [daughter], because we thought, or I thought, I'm thinking in my head he's finally got his life turned around and everything. So you know, I would say that I was totally clueless.

Researcher – So it kind of hit you out of left field.

Lydia – Yes. And I was slow in seeing it because I think I just totally trusted and never ever doubted anything. And he told me he was doing that and I believed

that that was what he was doing. I just didn't like to think. I mean, I might have had a little bit of doubt about some things, but for the most part we gave him the benefit that now he was doing what he was saying he was doing. I didn't think I had anything to question.

Clearly, these individuals expected monogamy from their partners. In this next example, Annie recalls how she too was surprised by the news that her husband was having an affair. This was despite knowing that her husband had had two affairs before, yet she did not suspect that he was having another with her children's babysitter.

Researcher – So there were no real signs initially?

Annie – No, no, no, not really. You know, [child's name] was about four and [child's name] was about two. [Child's name] was fourish. And that was when it kind of started. But then again, I still wasn't clued in. You would think I would learn.

Annie continues by telling a story of how the other woman attended her children's birthday party. Despite what seemed like suspicious behavior to Annie's extended family, she still did not believe her husband was having an affair with this woman.

Annie - But you know my sister and my parents really didn't care for her. They had bad feelings about her. There was a birthday party for the boys and she would be in these short-shorts in February, and I just thought she was, you know, small town trailer trash. I basically didn't have any clue that she was, you know, she treated my kids fine and I was fine with it, and we just always had invited babysitters and stuff to big birthday parties. You know, they were like, she really flaunts her stuff in front of [Annie's husband's name] and swings her hair and

giggles and roles her eyes and don't you see that, Annie, don't you see that, you know. And I kind of chalked it off as that was how she was with every guy.

Does that make sense? Because I have seen activity before with [Annie's husband's name], but I also had seen it with other people. So I really didn't ...

Researcher – It did not seem like a personal threat?

Annie – I guess I really thought that I could trust [Annie's husband's name], but I would have to keep an eye on her, if that makes any sense.

Darcy, too, was quite taken by surprise to learn that her husband had been unfaithful. This was despite the fact that her husband had regularly cheated on her before getting married and that he had recently been staying out until all hours of the morning and running with a questionable group of people:

Darcy – I just remember it hitting me like a ton of bricks. It was weird. Even though I had all kinds of suspicions, when I would call home and he wouldn't be there in the middle of the night, we weren't having sex, I found a long blond hair on the back of his truck seat. Still, it really got me. And I was suspicious because he had done this so many times before [when dating] and I was digging for it but still it's like I really didn't believe, or want to believe, that he would do it.

After the initial shock of learning of the infidelity, the victims I spoke to expressed how badly they were hurt by their partner's transgression. In this first example, Maggie explains what a shock it was to learn of her husband's transgression and how a wave of emotions came over her:

Maggie – You know, I am trying to remember the details. I remember the confession itself. As soon as he said the words I was overwhelmed by the conversation that we were having that I was finding it hard to focus on the words. She goes on to explain the feelings she was having at the moment she first learned of the transgression:

Maggie – I was devastated. You know. Overwrought. Not thinking.

These kind of feelings appeared to be common for the spouse who learned of his or her partner's unfaithfulness. In this next example, Darcy explains how she was to the point of being suicidal and homicidal thoughts over the news of her husband's unfaithfulness:

Darcy – I remember just wanting to die. I wanted the pain to go away. I couldn't imagine how life could go on. All of my hopes, my dreams of a future with this man were shattered in an instant. I daydreamed of killing myself. Of drowning in the pool. Symbolically I thought almost of how I felt. I imagined myself just letting go and going slowly under. I wanted to kill them too [the other women her husband had cheated on her with]. I walked through it in my mind. Over and over, the details, how I would do it. I wouldn't have, killed myself or them, but I wanted to. I knew that either was a sin and so I couldn't. So I felt just helpless. Like there was no way out of this pain. I remember wondering how long I would feel this way. My heart literally, physically hurt. I didn't want to get up in the morning because that is all I thought of.

While the individuals expressed being very upset upon learning of their spouse's indiscretion, it was clear these emotions were often present for a long time. Even if the

couple divorced and years had passed, long term negative effects were expressed. Here Lydia explains how even ten years after the revelation of her husband's affair and her divorce she is still unable to put the past behind her:

Lydia - And, I mean, I was really devastated, and I still have a lot of damage for it, and I probably need counseling myself again. I still think of things. I still think that if that girl [the other woman] would cross the street in front of me, I would run her down. I wish bad things on her all the time and the bad thing is that it is not hurting her. It is hurting me. But it is like I can't let go. I can't get past that. Even after all these years. I mean, that was 1997 and I am not able to move forward. And I want to. But it is like I can't let it go and move on.

Darcy, too, despite the fact that her marriage survived, said that the infidelity had lasting effects on her and her marriage that she wrestles with even today:

Researcher – Were things difficult between you for quite a while?

Darcy – Oh yeah. Years. I can remember fantasizing about getting him back, but I never did. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I felt trapped. I wanted out. But we had [son] and I didn't want him to grow up without his father. I did love him too, but a lot of that seemed to die for awhile after I found out. It was like I stayed with him because it was what I knew and I didn't have the strength to leave. You know. I remember feeling like I was weak for not leaving, too.

Researcher – So do you still feel that way now?

Darcy – No. I do love him. I guess I never stopped. But it took years for us to get here. He tried really hard too. I will have to say he put up with a lot of crap from

me for years. I was really mean. I didn't tell him I loved him for about five years.

I'm not kidding. Five years. Even now, I don't say it often.

Account significance. The news of their partner's infidelity and the subsequent pain it caused for the victims appeared to create a strong desire in the individuals I interviewed to understand why their spouse had engaged in the behavior. There appeared to be a great need for them to hear an account after learning of their spouse's unfaithfulness. And not just any kind of account would do. Accountability appeared to be important. The victim wanted their partner to take responsibility for his or her behavior and to acknowledge the pain and turmoil the behavior had caused. The victim wanted to know that his or her spouse was sorry for the behavior and was willing to work toward making things right again. A concession appeared necessary not only for the repair of the relationship but also as closure for the victim even in marriages that ultimately terminated.

In this first example, Marge reflects on why she was unable to get over the infidelity. She explains that her husband did not take responsibility and offer an apology for his behavior. Ultimately, the marriage ended in divorce and she attributes the demise of the marriage in large part to this lack of remorse.

Researcher – Why do you think that it was not possible for you to put it away completely [get over the affair]?

Marge – I think that it was partly because he never really fully did, he did not ever see it in the way that I saw it, that it was a betrayal. But if he had said that he had made a mistake, that I'm sorry, I should not have done this to you and that it was wrong, then I think there would have been, I think we still could have been

together. I think I could have forgiven him for that but it was, clearly in his own mind, I mean it became clear that he was not going to, he really did not want to stay married to me.

A mitigating account of concession appeared to be important to the transgressor's spouse even in cases where the couple ultimately terminated the marriage. In this next example, Ellen explains how she was literally in the proceeds of a divorce and was moving out of state as a means of getting away from her husband. Despite all of this, however, she expressed that regardless of whether they divorced or not how important it was for her to hear him take accountability and to say he was sorry. She stated that had her husband just acknowledged his mistake and said that he was sorry that she would have likely forgiven him:

Ellen – I had to sell the house and pack up everything, I put everything in storage, and he came back to an empty house and I think he was pretty pissed off. And had he said I'm sorry I've hurt you, you know I don't want to be married to you. I think I could have said, even if he had said I want to be in the relationship [the marriage], I think I've done x,y,z a million times over again, I think I could have forgiven him, but he's never admitted fault.

In general, a concession was important for the victim as a means for the transgressor to convey remorse and to take responsibility for his or her behavior. This was an important step in the rejuvenation process. However, even in cases where the relationship ended in divorce, those victim's who did not receive a concession from their spouse in response to the reproach of the infidelity longed to hear such an account.

Barriers. Regardless of the transgressor's commitment level or the account that was offered in response to the reproach, what appeared to further impact the victim's commitment to the marriage was the presence of barriers in the relationship. Barriers are defined as restraining forces whose presence in a relationship restrict its dissolution (Attridge, 1994). These barriers may include internal psychological barriers or external structural barriers. Internal psychological barriers include being attracted to the partner, degree of commitment or feeling obligated to the marital bond, religious beliefs, the degree to which the spouse is incorporated into one's self identity, children, and irretrievable personal investments such as the time invested in the marriage, the degree of self-disclosure that has been exposed to the spouse, activities spent together, or the frequency of positive emotions experienced in the relationship. Examples of external structural barriers include such things as legal, financial, or social (i.e. pressure from friends and family) barriers to the dissolution of the marriage.

Although many of the victims I spoke with considered divorcing their spouse initially upon learning of the infidelity, often internal psychological and external structural barriers played a strong role in their decision to stay in the relationship. In this first example, Stacy explains how she was financially limited due to her status at the time as a college student and that this impacted her staying initially in the marriage. Further, she states that she felt pressure from her African American heritage and from the expectation from her family to remain in a marriage despite infidelity as long as her husband was a good provider:

Stacy - I was a non-traditional student. I had to pay my own way, working hard to do it right this time. And I think that being married, I felt as if I had some kind of

legitimacy and adulthood from my mother. So there was this message in my head, you must stick this out. People don't end marriages over infidelity.

Later in the interview....

Researcher – How did you evaluate his explanation of this first initial affair? In other words, he said he was sorry, he said he wouldn't do it again, it was just sex. At the same time he was pointing the finger at you somewhat. How did all that play a role in your decision to stay initially?

Stacy – Well, I was outraged, angrier than hell. I felt like his response was just so cowardly. I saw everything about him at that time as cowardly. He looked weaker to me and I was starting to enjoy punishing him emotionally. And at the same time I had all this scripting in my head that in our family, we stay. There's a lot of anxiety in African Americans about families staying together, especially upper middle class families. It's like, you know, we are, you know the anomaly that society doesn't expect us to be. We are families, whole families, who stay together. It's not the script you see on television or the crap that you see all the time about wealthy homes amongst African American communities. We are different. I have aunts who told me stories about infidelity with my uncles and all this stuff, you know, and I think it was kind of like, uh, we stay, even with infidelity, because if you have a relatively good man who can provide for your home than that's what you stick with. And he had proven himself also to kind of become a kind of provider, in the economic sense of the word. He was a hard worker and a strong earner and it was kind of like, well, what's love anyway?

Researcher – And you felt, if I understand you correctly, a responsibility to the commitment and what your family expected.

Stacy – umhm.

Researcher – So would you say it was more of this responsibility you felt like you had that what kind of excuse that he came to you with?

Stacy – Yeah. I really do think that it was that. I think that it was more about the stuff that was going on inside my head than what he was saying to me. I didn't really process much of what he was saying as a justification for staying.

Stacy was among several I spoke with who discussed feeling restrained in their decision to remain married due to financial constraints. Here Maggie explains how finances played a primary role in her initial decision to stay in her marriage:

Maggie – I was just devastated. You know. Overwrought. Not thinking. Didn't have enough money to support myself at that time. Irrational kind of. If I would probably have had the money at the time I probably would have divorced him on the spot.

Researcher – So, financially that was a large barrier.

Maggie – Oh it was a huge barrier. And I was twenty four years old and was making minimum wage.

Researcher – Other than financially, were there any other reasons that you stayed. I mean, were there feelings enough for him that you did feel like you wanted to stay in the relationship or was it really only about finances?

Maggie – I think it was initially only about finances.

Marge also describes how barriers played a large role in her decision to stay in the marriage. Here she explains that despite issues of concern expressed by her counselor she chose to stay in the marriage initially due to finances as well as because of her child:

Marge – And despite, really, indications from the counselor I did see, saying you know these are all red flags, I wanted to make it work, for the sake of our son, and because I know, frankly looking back it was a financial situation too, I was not just free to say I can take care of myself and my son with or without, that was really not the case and I wanted to finish my thesis, which I was right in the middle of so there were a lot of factors involved in wishing to try again and probably the biggest one being our son and not wanting to tear the family apart. You know what it would do to him.

Marge goes on to explain in the interview that the marriage continued to erode after the affair. She began to realize that a divorce was imminent and something that she was now prepared to do in that she had developed a better financial standing for herself:

Marge – And at that point I realized that there was nothing more for me to try to do. I could not do this on my own [save the marriage without her husband trying too] and so that's when I decided and at that point I don't think he was in another relationship. I think he knew that if he did that that would in effect be saying, that would be his statement that I want a divorce. So at that point I was working full time. I was financially, I could be financially independent. So at that point it was clear to me it was time to get out.

Josh also chose to stay in his marriage initially due to his child. He explained to me that despite his wife's behavior he did not want to get a divorce for the sake of his daughter:

Josh – Well, it was more or less staying with her because of my daughter, trying to make things work.

Josh continues later in the interview to reiterate that his daughter was the primary reason he stayed in the marriage after learning of the affair.

Josh – At that point it got to where she kept lying and denying it and there was no way around it so I basically bit my tongue, didn't do anything, and just kept things at peace when it came to our little girl. Because, like I said, we was out of state. I mean, no family, nobody around or anything like that, so I didn't want anything to happen to her [daughter] til we had actually moved back home.

Researcher – So that was really the reason for your behavior – was your daughter?

Josh – Right.

Researcher – Would you have done things differently in how you reacted to this situation had you been around your family at the time?

Josh – Oh, yeah. That wouldn't have happened.

Researcher – You don't believe that you were staying with her for any other reason?

Josh – No it was more or less being a thousand miles from anybody and having a little girl.

Children were a significant barrier to the termination of the marriage for many participants I spoke to. Here Jeff describes how while his wife was adamant about getting

a divorce, he tried to reconcile the marriage after learning of her infidelity largely due out of concern for their son:

M – And so after she came to you and she said she wanted this divorce..., you were motivated to try and save the marriage?

L – Yes

M – So you were trying to talk to her, trying to get a hold of her to work this out?

L – Yes. Because after that first week, we started talking, we got back together, they put the divorce on hold... Then, so it was probably a month later as we're going through the process of the divorce through the courts and everything. And then finally decided that we could get back together and we could make it work. So I went back and tried and tried for the second time.....And I said, well I have to try to make it work for my son. No matter how hard it was and she did have an affair with the guy or whatever you want to call it.

Thus, while the account offered in response to the transgression played a significant role in the victim's decision to rejuvenate or terminate the marriage, barriers appeared to impact this decision as well. The presence of financial barriers, social pressures, and children often restrained victims from going through with a divorce upon learning of the infidelity of their spouse.

Power shift. In cases where the transgressor was committed to maintaining the marriage, individual power appears to shift in the relationship. When the transgressor is engaging in his or her extramarital behavior as well as in cases where the transgressor has no interest in salvaging the marriage, the power in the marriage rests with the transgressor. However, once a transgressor expresses his or her commitment to the

marriage and offers a concession, the power in the relationships shifts from the transgressor to the victim. It is now the victim who holds the majority of the cards where reconciliation is concerned. Here in this first example, Stacy eloquently identifies this power shift:

Stacy – You know, I think that, I mean like I said at the beginning of the interview that this relationship was one that was troubled to begin with but adding the layer of infidelity was sort of like throwing grease into the fire. Um, but I mean you know it seems to me that, that something happens in terms of power, or the negotiation of power in a relationship once the infidelity takes place that's unlike any other problem in the marriage. So we had lots of problems but there was something about that infidelity where there was a huge shift of power.

Researcher – How so? Can you elaborate?

Stacy – The power was in my hands.

Researcher – Sure. Once it was revealed?

Stacy – Right.

Researcher – So beforehand he felt like at least had the power and the control and then once it was revealed it was in your hands?

Stacy – Right.

Likewise, Darcy explains how after learning of her husband's infidelity she was suddenly in charge of the relationship:

Darcy – There was little I didn't get that I wanted. If I wanted to go here, we went here. If I wanted to eat someplace, that's where we ate. We even moved to a new

town and bought a house that I wanted and he wasn't, he didn't really like the house. But he hardly said a word. With the kids, I have the last word.

Relationship talk and remedial work. Because of this power shift, there appears to be a period of transition that can last months and even years where the couple is sorting out the aftermath of the transgression and the victim is contemplating whether to stay in the marriage. In some cases the marriage is saved and in other cases the marriage is terminated. Beyond the presence of a concession what appears to impact whether the relationship is salvaged or whether it is terminated is largely due to the presence of relationship talk and remedial work by the transgressor. In other words, the concession is important initially as a sign of regret and commitment to the marriage, but the transgressor must back up this account with long term communication and remedial work.

Of the individuals that I interviewed who have stayed together long term and are still married today, relationship talk and remedial work were expressed as crucial in the repair of their marriage in addition to the concession. Here Mary describes how after her husband finally admitted that he had had an affair, he apologized, and he began to do remedial work in an effort to repair the marriage:

Researcher - So he was apologetic.

Mary – Yeah. Yes very apologetic. And he spent a lot more time at home with us and of course with another new baby, basically, we had to. And you know, he just tried. You know, he did a lot more things with us.

Researcher – And when he said he was going to be someplace that's where he was and...

Mary – Yeah

Researcher – Did he start to build trust again?

Mary – Yeah

Mary's husband was able to build this trust through long-term behavior in addition to his concession and the couple remains married today. Darcy's husband also offered an apology and promise of restitution. This concession was also combined with long term repair work. Here Darcy explains how her husband worked very hard to prove that he meant his apology and that he was committed to the marriage. She explains here how they talked through the situation and that he spent time with her and was persistent in his commitment despite her coldness:

Researcher – What did he say to you when he realized you knew [that he had been unfaithful]?

Darcy – He cried. He said how sorry he was. That he didn't really know why he had done it but that he was just really sorry. He said that he would do anything he could to make it right. He knew that I didn't believe him but he said he'd spend the rest of our lives trying to prove it.

Researcher – Has he kept those promises?

Darcy – Yes. He really has.

Researcher – What kind of things has he done?

Darcy – In the beginning I was a mess and it was really hard. I screamed and cried. I was depressed. I wanted to talk about it constantly and he would most of the time. He used to play a lot of sports and be with the guys. He didn't do that anymore. He did everything with me. He would come home when he said he

would and let me know where he was. I was really cold for a long time. Years.
And he just stuck it out.

So, it appears that an account is just the first step in the repair process. After an initial expression of remorse and promises of remedial work through a concession, talking through the situation and long-term remedial work by the transgressor is very important to the ultimate strength of the relationship. Relationships where the transgressors were not as persistent with their rejuvenation behavior ultimately ended in divorce.

Here Maggie explains how her husband was very apologetic just after the affair was revealed. She explains how it was this coupled with his initial remedial work that in large part kept her initially in the marriage. However, this remedial work was short-lived and Maggie explains how she believes that this ultimately led to the termination of their marriage:

Researcher - What kind of things did he say to you that made you feel like you should hold on for a bit [versus get a divorce]?

Maggie - He was you know coming by every day. He was bringing flowers. He was apologetic. He acted and appeared sincere. He was willing to go to counseling. He was writing me letters. Opening up his feelings. Trying to discover some things about himself too. To help better himself. And I felt that those efforts that he was showing were sincere at the time.

Researcher – Did he rationalize or did he...what was his..

Maggie – His whole stance through that whole early on time period was I was so wrong, inexcusable, please forgive me.

Maggie goes on to describe how her husband did not continue to try to repair the relationship. By discontinuing his remedial work, Maggie explains that she was never fully able to get over the affair and that she believed this was the beginning of the end of their marriage:

Maggie - We had not been getting along. We were very non-communicative.

Just everything was an argument, no matter what we said or what we did. It was constant bickering. And he is the one who came to me and said I want a divorce.

There was no discussion of infidelity or anything. He was just unhappy with the marriage. I was unhappy. And we were in the middle of getting the divorce.

Researcher – Would you attribute some of that unhappiness to the initial affair.

The issues _____?

Maggie – Yes, I would.

Researcher – On both your parts or on your part at least?

Maggie - On both our parts.

Researcher – Just as far as you are concerned, did that have to do with trust, or because of unresolved issues? How would you define that?

Maggie – I would say unresolved issues, and then trust.

Researcher – And, by unresolved issues, him just perhaps never being able to pinpoint a reason, or just not ever feeling...what kind of things were coming out at that point, I guess?

Maggie – I guess the initial promises that were made as far as we are going to be closer, we are going to do this, we're going to find common things to share, we're going to do that. As time went on, not only did none of that really happen, or it

would happen very sporadically. It was his unwillingness to share a big huge part of his life with the rest of the family, and I turned that into then, he can't be trusted. Then that kind of started that cycle.

One can see from these examples that the account is indeed important in the evaluation of the situation and the longevity of the relationship. However, the account is only as good as the behavior that follows it, meaning that a concession must be coupled with a transgressor's long-term commitment to the relationship exhibited through a willingness to talk about the infidelity and behavioral change.

Discussion

The interviews that I conducted in this study offer a great deal of insight into the impact infidelity has on a marriage and the role that the account sequence and attribution process appear to play in this situation. I will begin by reviewing the account sequence and each of its stages in turn, followed by a discussion of the impact of intervening variables, and the role of causal dimensions. Finally, we will look at where we might go from here with research concerning infidelity in relation to accounts and attribution.

Account Sequence

Results from this study offer clear support for the existence of the account sequence. Specifically, after the infidelity is divulged to the victim, he or she makes a reproach to the transgressor who responds with an account. In light of this account, the victim then makes an evaluation. Next, these stages will be discussed along with implications of individual findings for each.

Reproach. The reproach was present in every interview I conducted and appeared to be largely a reflection of the victim's personality and the communication patterns of

the relationship prior to the revelation of the infidelity. Further, the victim does appear to need to hear a reason for his or her spouse's indiscretion. This is a major role violation that seems to bring with it a great deal of questions about the relationship and the self. Thus, the victim wants to know "why."

This finding supports past research which maintains that one of the primary questions that victims will have for their spouse after the revelation of an affair is "why did you do it?" (Gordan & Baucom, 1999; Levine, 1998). Understanding "why" is extremely important in the rejuvenation process. The inability to understand the reasons for someone's behavior appears to be a primary factor in producing relational conflict and anger (Baumeister & Stillwell, 1992). Thus, victims are usually motivated to ask their spouse for an explanation as to what caused their extramarital sexual activity. In addition to the functions that an explanation may have for the rejuvenation process, the explanation is also important for making some sense of the event. Numerous studies and theoretical perspectives have shown that people have a deep need to assign meaning to relational events (e.g., Duck 1994; Frankl 1959), and so the demand for an explanation may be motivated in part to satisfy this need, regardless of whether the relational outcomes are rejuvenation or divorce.

Account. While McLaughlin et al. (1983) found that the nature of the reproach was related to the production of accounts, later research (Mongeau et al., 1994; Mongeau et al., 1997; Hupka et al., 1987) indicates that it may actually be motivation to maintain the relationship that is the primary determinant of account choice. In this study, the account also appeared to be largely determined by the transgressor's motivation to remain

in the marriage. Specifically, those transgressors who were motivated to dissolve their marriage chose aggravating accounts.

Interestingly, those who wanted to save their marriage chose the aggravating account of denial initially. It was only after they were unable to hide the indiscretion any longer that they confessed and changed to the use of mitigating responses. Their motivation to remain in the marriage was actually cited as their reason for choosing the aggravating response initially as a means to avoid the possible dissolution of their marriage upon the revelation of the news of their unfaithfulness.

The findings from this study offer further support for the major role that motivation plays in account choice. At the same time, these findings bring into question the significance of the reproach with respect to the transgressor's choice of account, the degree of control that the victim has in prompting a desired response from his or her spouse, and the research assumption that denials are aggravating in nature. Thus, while it appears that both the reproach and relationship motivation can play a role in determining the account choice, motivation seems to be the primary influence and may invite either aggravating or mitigating accounts for relationship rejuvenation purposes.

Evaluation. This lack of control with respect to influencing their partner's account choice was very frustrating for many of the respondents in the study. Victim's desired mitigating responses even when they were not forthcoming. With the exception of when denials were used initially by transgressors to preserve the relationship, justifications and denials were viewed as extremely aggravating while concessions and excuses had a more mitigating impact on victims, consistent with what literature historically has said on the matter (McLaughlin et al., 1983a; McLaughlin et al., 1983b).

In fact, as might be expected, the use of aggravating accounts were not satisfying long term to the victims in this study. Even victims who are now divorced from their partner who received an aggravating account still long for “I’m sorry, I know I hurt you, I was wrong.” This may be explained in part because apologies and excuses are found to elicit more honoring of the recipient than are justifications and denials (Cupach & Metts, 1994). Due to the many doubts that infidelity creates about the self and the marriage, mitigating accounts seem necessary as a means to save face and validate the feelings of the victim. Honor and respect toward face is implied by mitigating responses (Cupach & Metts, 1994).

While victims longed for mitigating responses from their partners, there was an exception. Transgressors who wanted to remain married initially chose to use the typically aggravating account of denial as a means of hiding the discretion and preserving the marriage. When the transgression was later revealed and followed by a mitigating response and remedial work, the victim was inclined to positively respond to relationship rejuvenation. Past research has listed denial as an aggravating account. Aggravating behaviors are considered aggressive, challenging, and generally perceived as a threat to face (Cupach & Metts, 1994). However, in this study, denials used as a means of preserving the relationship were perceived by the victim as a means of relationship preservation. Cupach and Metts (1994) stress the theoretical nature of the aggravation-mitigation continuum because they state that almost any message can fall anywhere on the continuum, depending on the situation. Clearly, in the case of infidelity, a denial is not always viewed in hindsight as face-threatening communication.

The findings from this study offer evidence of the account choice having substantial and even long-term impact on its recipient. Although research to date has presented widespread support for the need for an account after a transgression and the subsequent initial impact of the account with respect to conflict negotiation and relationship rejuvenation, little is known about the long-term impact of account choice. Findings from this study indicate that there is a long-term impact of accounts, even in the case of relationship termination. These findings offer new insight into the importance of mitigating accounts that has not been noticed in previous investigations of the account sequence.

Intervening Variables

While many transgressors requested a divorce almost immediately after the revelation of the affair to their spouse, there were some who were committed to salvaging the marriage. However, given the huge violation of this act and its blow to the victim, relationship rejuvenation was not always certain. This was because many victims upon learning of the indiscretion initially wanted to terminate the union. Despite this desire, though, often they did not.

What appeared to impact whether the victim remained in the marriage after the infidelity was not only the presence of a mitigating account but also the presence of barriers. These victims stated that they stayed in the marriage due in part to various internal and external barriers. These barriers included such things as the investment of time or years married, religious beliefs, children, financial constraints, and family pressure. Levinger (1965) states that it is when a partner's attraction to the relationship is low that the barriers to exiting the relationship become important. It is at this time that the

cost associated with overcoming such barriers are considered and weighed against the desire to terminate the relationship (Attridge, 1994).

Barriers played a role in all of the individuals I spoke with who remain married or who stayed in their marriage at least initially. However, of those who remain married, remedial work by the transgressor and relationship talk was also prevalent. Remedial work included such things as the transgressor spending more time with the victim than had been spent in the past, being accountable for all activity so that there was no opportunity for the victim to have further suspicions, and even physically moving residential location as a means of removing the couple from the negative environment that had been created due to the infidelity. These findings support past research concerning choices of strategies used by individuals to repair marital relationships (Dindia & Baxter, 1987).

Talking about the relationship and what led to the transgression was also very important to the victims and the rejuvenation process. Past research has found that most of the strategies used in relationship rejuvenation across all types of relationships are behavioral changes, rituals, or other signals used to tell the partner of a desire to improve the relationship rather than overt communication about the status of the current relationship (Wilmot, 1994). However, overt relationship talk is used often by romantic partners to repair a relationship because the romantic bonds are more fragile than those bonds between friends or family. Having a “big relationship talk” and using third party involvement such as counseling, are often more necessary for this reason. The presence of those elements as essential to relationship rejuvenation was the case in the present study. While remedial work by the transgressor was necessary, communication about the

decline of the relationship was very important to the victim as well in order for the victim to make sense of the event and to put it to rest. This necessitated understanding what led to the event so that it could be prevented in the future.

Causal Dimensions

Causal dimensions in the attribution process include the victim's perception of the transgressor's level of consistency or stability in the behavior, whether the cause is perceived to be internal or external to the actor, and the victim's perception of the degree of control the actor has over the behavior. Past research has indicated that relationship rejuvenation is more likely in situations where the victim perceives the cause of the behavior to be external to the transgressor, inconsistent in form, and beyond the transgressor's control (Cody et al., 1992). In the present study, the majority of victims saw the act of infidelity as a controllable behavior for the transgressor. However, what appeared to impact the decision to rejuvenate versus terminate the relationship was whether the victim believed the act internal to the victim and the degree of consistency in the behavior. Specifically, for those marriages that were able to rejuvenate the victim appeared to interpret the behavior as external and inconsistent. Given the natural choice involved in the behavior, it was difficult for victims to perceive the behavior as uncontrollable. However, this did not appear to be as important as the internal or external nature of the offense or the degree of consistency. Perhaps the issue is still choice. If one can choose to engage in infidelity, he or she can also choose not to engage in infidelity. However, if this behavior is attributed to something that goes deeper and is believed to be reflective of a character or personality flaw, then rejuvenation appears hopeless for the

victim. This character issue appears to be further substantiated for the victims when transgressors engage in repeat offenses.

Future Directions

The findings in this study suggest several productive directions for research. Further examination from the transgressor's point of view as well as further exploration of the cognitive processes underlying the decision to end the marriage is needed. Even though this study had a good sample size for a qualitative inquiry, it would also help to follow up with a greater sample of couples who were able to rejuvenate their marriage. Additionally, account choice and its impact warrant further attention. These points are discussed below.

First, more investigation is needed of the transgressor's point of view. Due to sampling availability, the majority of the interviews were conducted with the victims of the affairs. Although this offers a unique and fruitful perspective, critics might argue that it is only half of the story and that the transgressor might have very different stories for the accounts and attributions experienced in the context of infidelity. Although that criticism is not necessarily a shortcoming of this particular study (after all, a researcher cannot do *everything* in one study), it is an accurate assessment of areas that this study was not able to cover. Future research would enhance our understanding in this area if it offered better depth here.

Similarly, more needs to be learned about the thought process behind the decision to terminate the marriage. Wilmot (1994) contends that this is a complex process and we do not fully understand the complexities and perplexities individuals face when deciding to let a relationship de-escalate or make a decision to rejuvenate it. Although this study

was able to provide information about why couples who stayed together decided to rejuvenate their relationship and how they went about doing so, it shed less insight on the decision making process behind the decision to divorce of individuals who ultimately terminated their marriage. This was because the majority of those interviewed who ultimately divorced after infidelity were not the ones in the marriage who wanted the divorce. In most of the cases, it was their partner who had engaged in the infidelity and ultimately initiated the divorce despite resistance by their spouse. Thus, in the majority of these cases I did not have the opportunity to learn about the thought process behind their decision to terminate the marriage as the majority of those in the sample were the victims and not the transgressors.

Even though the present study offered valuable insight about the dynamics involved for couples that were able to rejuvenate their marriage, the sample size for these individuals was very small. More investigation is needed of couples who are able to salvage their marriage after infidelity. While statistically it would seem that the pool of potential respondents should be plentiful for those who have experienced infidelity in their marriage yet not divorced, it was difficult to find people in this situation who were willing to speak to me about this past blemish in their relationship. It seems that once the couple is able to get past such a transgression they are hesitant to dredge it up again.

Finally, the nature and choice of account along with the long-term ramifications of its use warrant further attention. Accounts do not appear to be largely influenced by the nature of the reproach but rather, the transgressor's motivation to remain in the marriage appears to be the mediating variable. Additionally, those individuals who are not interested in dissolving the relationship do not automatically choose a mitigating

response. Ultimately, the account appears to have long-term influence on its recipient and the relationship which calls for further investigation.

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

The combined studies just reviewed offer a great deal of insight into the role that accounts and attributions play in the context of marital infidelity. Our understanding of these concepts has been further increased in part due to the methodological advantages that these studies employed. Finally, the findings from these studies offer a great deal of practical information for those married as well as practitioners. Each of these areas will be discussed in turn after an overview of the findings.

Summary of Findings

In Study One, the first hypothesis predicted that participants with high motivation to maintain the relationship would be more likely to use concessions and excuses than justifications and denials. Even though the results trended in the direction predicted, the difference was not sufficient to support the hypothesis. The second hypothesis, which asserted that respondents with low motivation to maintain the relationship would be more likely to use justifications and denials than to use concessions and excuses, was significant. Hypothesis three stated that intentional infidelity will be associated with decreased perception of guilt. As with hypothesis one, the data differed in the direction expected, but not to a great enough degree to establish statistical significance. Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Research question one of Study One asked whether accounts presented following intentional infidelity in marriage would be more aggravating than accounts following unintentional infidelity. Participants in the condition with infidelity of high intent responded more often using aggravating accounts than mitigating ones, thus indicating that individuals who engage in infidelity with greater intent are more likely to use an

aggravating account than to use a mitigating one in response to their spouses reproach. Research question two asked if accounts presented following less intentional infidelity are more mitigating than accounts following more intentional infidelity. Participants in the low intent condition responded more often using mitigating accounts than aggravating accounts. Thus, the data suggest that when infidelity is less intentional, people are more inclined to use mitigating accounts when the act is more intentional.

Hypothesis four of Study One which predicted that an infidelity acted out of revenge will generate lower perceptions of guilt than an infidelity where no revenge was intended was not supported. Hypothesis five asserted that accounts would more likely be refusals and justifications following infidelity characterized by revenge. Those individuals in the revenge condition responded using justifications and denials more often than concessions and excuses. Thus, hypothesis five was supported. Hypothesis six predicted that accounts would more likely be concessions and excuses following infidelity where revenge was not the intent. However, those individuals in the no revenge condition did not respond using more concessions and excuses than justifications and denials and therefore the results did not support hypothesis six.

In Study Two, the first research question asked about the relationship between causal dimensions (i.e., stability of behavior, locus of causality, and controllability of behavior) and marital status after infidelity. Controllability appeared to have little to do with relationship repair versus termination. Locus and stability on the other hand seemed to play a much more significant role.

Research question two of Study Two asked about the relationship between the infidelity and reproach messages. Overall, the participants I spoke with expressed being

extremely upset upon learning of the news that their partners had engaged in infidelity. However, what seemed to impact the way that they approached their spouse (reproach) with this knowledge had more to do with their individual personalities and their communication patterns as a couple than the act of the infidelity itself.

In Study Two research question three asked about the relationship between reproach and account messages. Overall, there did not appear to be a great relationship between the reproach and the account choice. However, motivation to terminate or salvage the relationship did appear to play a large role in account choice. Those who were less committed to their relationship or who wanted to get a divorce chose denials or justifications. However, of the individuals I spoke with who were able to repair their relationship, a denial was used initially as a form of relationship preservation. Only once the infidelity was confirmed to their partner did those transgressors who were committed to relationship repair use a mitigating account and institute remedial work.

Finally, Study Two asked about the relationship between the account, the evaluation, and the ultimate outcome of the relationship. Results indicated that the concession was extremely important in the evaluation of the situation and the longevity of the relationship. However, this account is only as good as the behavior that follows it, meaning that a concession must be coupled with a transgressor's long-term commitment to the relationship exhibited through a willingness to talk about the infidelity and behavioral change.

Theoretical Contributions to Knowledge

So, what have we learned from the combined results of these two studies? First, this research reaffirms that infidelity is a major rule violation with detrimental effects on

the marriage. A few people did not even want to answer the questions in the first study because the mere idea of role playing as a transgressor of infidelity was too much for them. Those participants in the second study who actually experienced an affair first-hand in their marriage were very clear concerning the damaging impact that the affair had on the relationship.

Additionally, the account sequence is a near universal response to the discovery of extramarital sexual activity. A transgression is typically followed by a reproach, an account, and then an evaluation. Where the findings of this project diverge from previous literature has to do with the reproach-account linkage. Previous writings depict the nature of the reproach as the major determinant of what account is given. The results from this research, however, show that the nature of the reproach does not always determine the subsequent account choice. In both studies motivation to maintain the relationship appeared to also play an important role in determining the nature of account given. Specifically, those who wanted to terminate the relationship chose aggravating accounts (e.g., denying that they were involved in an affair or blaming their spouse their own behavior).

Interestingly, however, motivation to save the marriage did not automatically lead to the use of mitigating accounts in either Study One or Study Two. In the first study, while results trended in the expected direction, a significant relationship was not found for those respondents who were asked to perceive themselves as having high motivation to maintain the marriage and the subsequent account choice they listed. This was perplexing given that mitigating accounts are associated with relationship rejuvenation.

Results from Study Two may help shed light on the peculiar results from Study One concerning motivation and use of mitigating accounts (or rather lack thereof). In Study Two, transgressors who wanted to save their marriage initially used a denial which is typically categorized as an aggravating account. Infidelity is generally thought to be a major relationship violation. These transgressors used the denial to conceal the infidelity from their spouse and subsequently opening the marriage up to possible termination. This may explain the heavier use of aggravating accounts in Study One as well.

Denial, however, was followed by a mitigating account from the transgressor once the infidelity was no longer able to be hidden from the victim. Thus, it appears that when the initial account fails, a follow-up account is offered to the recipient. That is to say, perpetrators seemed to have a two-stage strategy. If the initial stage was successful, the second stage was not needed, but if the initial stage failed then the perpetrator switched to the secondary strategy.

This finding offers fruitful insight into the account literature as the majority of the research to date focuses on the account response as a singular one. And, it also offers an important methodological implication. This research, shows that multiple accounts may be used until the desired result is achieved (in this case, preservation of the marriage). Thus, researchers who are trying to understand the account sequence in situations of marital infidelity (and perhaps other relational transgressions as well) may be unwise to simply ask participants about what strategies they used. Instead, a study design that allows for a more complex planning process may be needed. A singular survey question about which strategy was used would likely misinform the researcher about the exact

nature of how people attempted to deal with the problem of partner suspicion or discovery of the transgression.

Overall, further investigation in this area is warranted to see if motivation to maintain the relationship is indeed a primary mediator in choice of account as well as the role that the reproach plays in choice of account. Further, the possibility of multiple accounts being used in a given situation and the subsequent results of this warrants further exploration.

Research suggests that concessions and excuses are typically more mitigating while justifications and denials are more aggravating to the recipient. The present research found this to be true also. The one exception to this pattern, however, was when a denial was used by the transgressor and interpreted by the victim as a means of preservation for the marriage. In such cases, once the infidelity was confirmed for the victim, a mitigating response was then necessary followed by long-term remedial work and relationship talk in order for rejuvenation to be possible. Taken together, the choice of which account to use appears to have long-term impact on the relationship, even post-relationship, with aggravating accounts being far less settling for the victim. Victims longed to hear a concession from their partner, even if they later divorced.

This research has made important contributions to our understanding of the account sequence by identifying some intervening variables that impact the choice of rejuvenation for the victim beyond the choice of account offered by the transgressor. For those transgressors who want to salvage their marriage after an affair, barriers internal and external to the relationship play a major role in whether or not the victim decides to stay in the relationship as do remedial work and relationship talk. Many of the victims I

spoke with initially wanted out of the relationship upon learning of their spouse's infidelity but they felt trapped in the relationship due to children, financial issues, and other internal and external constraints on the relationship. Further, of those victims who considered staying in the relationship, the concessions offered by their spouses were very important but only as strong as the long term remedial work and relationship talk that supported them.

The present research makes several further significant contributions worth acknowledging. First, this research examined the interrelationship of accounts and attributions which is something that investigators say is lacking to date. Typically, accounts and attributions are investigated separately despite their overlap. The present research looked at both in the context of infidelity. The choice of account appeared to have a great deal of impact on the evaluation of the offense and the long-term satisfaction of the victim. Specifically, the victim perceives the concession as an important step in reconciliation of the relationship as well as necessary for personal satisfaction if the marriage terminates.

Additionally, this research used both quantitative and qualitative design in its methodology. Such a combination or triangulation in research design offers further validity for its results. Specifically, this approach allowed for the investigation of the transgressor's perspective (focused on in Study One) as well as the victim's point of view (which comprised the bulk of the data in Study Two). Additionally, the two studies led to similar findings concerning the role that motivation plays with regard to account choice, thus validating the use of hypothetical scenarios which I will explore further below.

Value of Hypothetical Scenarios for Studying Marital Infidelity

This research offered tremendous pragmatic and ethical challenges because of its topic of infidelity. For example, there were major concerns about how to handle the distribution and collection of the questionnaires in the quantitative study. It also was extremely difficult to obtain a sample for my qualitative interviews due to the sensitivity of the topic, particularly with individuals who had been able to save their marriage as this was not something that they wanted to revisit.

For these reasons researchers often use hypothetical scenarios, which is what I did in my quantitative design. There are questions, however, whether this method provides valid data given that it obligates the participant to role play rather than recount actual lived experiences. My research, by virtue of combining hypothetical scenarios with actual interviews offers a unique opportunity to evaluate the validity of using hypothetical scenarios, at least for this specific topic.

The first study in the present research used hypothetical scenarios to assess accounts and attributions from the vantage point of the transgressor. While the second study, due to sampling issues, focused primarily on the victims perspective, both studies had similar results with respect to motivation and account choice. Specifically, motivation to dissolve the marriage invited the transgressors use of aggravating accounts. However, in the first study, high motivation to maintain the marriage did not primarily lead to the use of concessions and excuses. Results from the second study had similar results in that those motivated to save their marriage chose denial initially as a way to conceal the transgression and prevent relationship termination. This, perhaps, explains the results of Study One as well in regard to motivation and use of accounts. Specifically,

given that infidelity is a major violation, denial may be the first choice of those interested in preserving their relationship. Although more research using hypothetical scenarios in conjunction with real-life examples appears necessary, the combined results from this research lend further validity to the use of hypothetical scenarios in the study of accounts following marital infidelity.

Infidelity in Marital Versus Dating Couples

A further contribution of this research is its assessment of actual married or previously married individuals versus college age, dating people. Given the difficulty of investigating infidelity, many researchers rely on individuals who are more easily accessible in the college age dating pool rather than researching infidelity in the context of marriage. This research, however, offers much about infidelity and communication in marriages that previously research has been unable to provide. Specifically, all individuals in the present research were or had been married. Additionally, those in the second study and many from the first study had actually experienced infidelity in their marriages and could offer rich descriptions of their experiences. Individuals in college are traditionally not married. While they may have experienced infidelity in the dating context, most have not experienced infidelity in a marriage. Therefore, the information obtained from this research therefore offers insight into the situation of infidelity in marriages that is impossible to obtain from a college age dating sample.

Practical Applications

Finally, the present research offers a great deal of fruitful information for individuals who are contemplating marriage or who have experienced infidelity in their

marriage as well as practitioners who are intervening in such cases. Infidelity is a major, some would say *the* major, relationship transgression.

Applications for those who are contemplating marriage. For people who are considering marriage, the threat of extramarital affairs is an important issue. Given that estimates forecast that about 70% all of marriages will experience at least one episode of infidelity, it is not surprising that many people are concerned about the possibility of extramarital affairs. For those engaged or just getting married, this study suggests some useful points.

In order for the marriage to be maintained it is important to maintain motivation to remain married, as this appeared to be a primary contributor in the rejuvenation of a marriage after an affair. Couples need to make a special effort to engage in activities and behaviors that keep them interested in the marriage and their partner in an effort to support this commitment.

The use of barriers as a means of maintaining marital relationships deserves comment. This project showed that couples who have significant barriers are less likely to divorce than those that have fewer or weaker barriers. However, the question is at what cost these barriers keep the relationship intact. If a barrier preserves a relationship that is detrimental to the well-being of at least one partner, then it may be better had the marriage ended in divorce. Couples may wish to establish some barriers to keep their marriage from being too easy to exit, but would be wise to avoid too punishing of circumstances if the marriage ends in divorce. It is better for marriages to stay together because both parties *want* to stay married to each other than because one or other felt constrained to a nonvoluntary relationship.

Applications for those whose marriage is affected by sexual infidelity. Although it is always best that infidelity can be prevented, the simple fact is that infidelity in marriages is a common occurrence. The question for those whose marriages have been affected by the discovery of infidelity is what they can do to minimize the negative consequences of the act. This minimization may involve repairing the relationship, or it may involve making the determination that the marriage cannot be saved and moving on in a way that is least detrimental to everyone involved (which includes at least the spouses, and perhaps other family members such as children).

First, in order for the relationship to survive, it is important for the transgressor to be motivated to save the marriage. He or she must in turn provide a concession. The importance of using a concession for the long-term psychological health of the individual and the stability of the relationship cannot be overstated. Additionally, the transgressor must be willing to discuss the infidelity and its impact on the marriage and be diligent in his or her efforts at remedial work in an effort to prove that the concession is legitimate.

For the victim, certainly he or she too must be committed to saving the marriage after learning of the infidelity in order for the relationship to reconcile. A concession from the transgressor and remedial work must be accepted as honest and sincere from the victim so that trust and love can once again be established solidly in the relationship.

Ultimately, a marriage where one or both partners are unmotivated to saving the relationship would indicate that the marriage cannot be saved. Likewise, a transgressor who is unwilling to take responsibility for his or her behavior and make every effort to make amends would indicate that the marriage is not capable of surviving long-term after the affair.

Applications for marital counselors. One of the best suggestions for couples who wish to repair and preserve their marriages is to seek the help of a professional counselor. The results of this study also suggest a few useful points that counselors can take away from the findings for their work with couples who are trying to repair their relationships after the discovery of sexual infidelity. First, commitment by both individuals to the marriage is crucial. The counselor would also be advised to stress the importance of the transgressor taking responsibility for his or her behavior and expressing remorse to the partner for hurting him or her. Additionally, both partners need to know that this is a long-term effort and remedial work and relationship talk should not be something that is expected to be short-lived or needed short-term.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined issues in how the account sequence is related to marital couples' likelihood of repairing a marriage after the discovery of extramarital sexual activity. The findings shed light on ways that the messages partners send impact not only chances of marital recovery, but also other outcomes (such as partners' assignment of meaning to the event). Given the high rate of divorce in our country and the detrimental impact that either divorce or unhappy marriages can have on married people and on their children, research on this topic has a lot to offer not only in advanced theoretical understanding but also in helping to solve some of our important social problems.

REFERENCES

- Atwood, J. D., Seifer, M. (1997). Extramarital affairs and constructed meanings: A social constructionist therapeutic approach. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 25 (1), 55-75.
- Allen, E., Atkins, D., Baucom, D., Snyder, D., Coup Gordan, K., & Glass, S. (2005). Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors in engaging in and responding to extramarital involvement. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 12 (2), 101-130.
- Attridge, M. (1994). Barriers to Dissolution of Romantic Relationships. *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 141-164). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Aune, R. K., Metts, S., & Ebesu Hubbard, A. S. (1998). Managing the outcomes of discovered deception. *The Journal of social Psychology*, 6, 677-689.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Stillwell, A. M. (1992). Autobiographical accounts, situation roles, and motivated biases: When stories don't match up. In J. H. Harvey, T. L. Orbuch, & A. L. Weber (Eds.), *Attributions, accounts, and close relationships* (pp. 52-70). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Betzig, L. (1989). Causes of conjugal dissolution: A cross cultural study. *Current Anthropology*, 30, 654-676.
- Bem, D. J. (1972) Self-perception theory. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, (Vol. 6. pp. 1-62), New York: Academic Press
- Benoit, W. (1995). *Accounts, excuses and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brown, E. (1992). *Patterns of infidelity and their treatment*. New York, Bruner/Mazel.
- Buss, D. M. (1994), *The evolution of desire: Strategies of human mating*. New York: Basic Books.
- Buunk, B. E, & Bakker, A. B. (1995). Extradyadic sex: The role of descriptive and injunctive norms. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 32, 313-318.
- Canary, D. J., & Stafford, L. (1992). Relational maintenance strategies and equity in marriage. *Communication Monographs*, 59, 243-267.
- Canary, D. J., & Cody, M. J. (1994). *Interpersonal communication*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc.

- Cannell, C. F., & Kahn, R. L. (1968). Interviewing. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology: Vol. II. Research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 526-595).
- Charney, I. W., & Parnass, S. (1995). The impact of extramarital relationships on the continuation of marriages. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 21, 100-115.
- Cody, M. J., & Kersten, L., Braaten, D. O., Dickson, R. (1992). Coping with relational dissolutions: Attributions, account credibility, and plans for resolving conflict. In J.H.
- Cody, M. J., & McLaughlin, M. L. (1985). Models for the sequential construction of accounting episodes: Situation and interactional constraints on message selection and evaluation. In R. L. Street & J. N. Cappella (Eds.) *Sequence and pattern in communicative behavior* (pp. 50-69). London: Edward Arnold.
- Cody, M. J., and McLaughlin, M. L. (1990). Interpersonal accounting. In H. Giles & P. Robinson (eds.), *Handbook of language and social psychology* (pp. 217-225). London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Constitutional barriers to civil and criminal restrictions on pre and extramarital sex. (1993). *Harvard Law Review*, 104, 1660-1680.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand oaks, CA: Sage.
- Darby, B. W., & Schlenker, B. R. (1982). Children's reactions to apologies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 742-753.
- Drigotas, S. M., Safstrom, C. A., & Gentilia, T. (1999). An investment model prediction of dating infidelity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 509-534.
- DeTurck, M. A., & Steele, M. E. (1988). Once a liar always a liar: Effects of individuating information on the utilization of base rates in deceptive attributions. *Communication Reports*, 1(2).
- Elbaum, P. L (1981). The dynamics, implications and treatment of extramarital sexual relationships for the family therapist.) *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 7, 489-495.
- Eldridge, W. D. (1983). Therapists' use of information and dynamics from extramarital relationships to stimulate growth in married couples. *Family Therapy*, 10, 1-11.

- Emmers-Sommer, T. M. (2003). When partners falter: Repair after a transgression. In D. Canary & M. Dainton (Eds.) *Maintaining relationships through communication: Relational, contextual, and cultural variations* (pp. 185-205). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Fiske, S. T. and Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Glass, S. (1998). Shattered vows. *Psychology Today*, 33 – 79.
- Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public: Microstudies of public order*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gordan, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1999). A multitheoretical intervention for promoting a recovery from extramarital affairs. *Clinical Psychology*, 6, 382-399.
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 161-178.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1976). Network sampling: Some first steps. *American Journal of Sociology*, 81, 1287-1303.
- Harvey, J. H., Orbuch, T. L., & Weber, A. L. (Eds.) (1992). *Attributions, accounts, and close relationships* (pp. 1-18). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hocker, J. L., & Wilmot, W. W. (1995). *Interpersonal conflict*. Dubuque, IA: W. C. Brown Communications, Inc.
- Holtgraves, T. (1989). The form and function of remedial moves: Reported use, psychological reality, and perceived effectiveness. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 8, 1-16.
- Humphrey, F. G. (1985, January). *Sexual dysfunction an/or enhancement interactions with extramarital affairs*. Paper presented at the Yale University Sex therapy Program, New Haven, CT.
- Humphrey, F. G. (1985, October). *Extramarital affairs and their treatment by AAMFT therapists*. Paper presented at the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, New York.
- Humphrey, F. G. (1987). Treating extramarital sexual relationships in sex and couple's therapy. In Weeks, G. R. & Gof, L. (Eds.), *Integrating sex and marital therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

- Humphrey, F. G., & Strong, F. (1976, May). *Treatment of extramarital sexual relationships as reported by clinical members of AAMFC*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Northeastern American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, Hartford, CT.
- Hupka, R. B., & Jung, J., & Silverhorn, K. (1987). Perceived acceptability of apologies, excuses, and justification in jealousy predicaments. *Journal of social Behavior and Personality*, 2, 303-313
- Hurlbert, D. F. (1992). Factors influencing a woman's decision to end an extramarital sexual relationship. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 18, 104-113.
- Johnson, R. E. (1972). Attitudes toward extramarital relationships. *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, 6, 168-191.
- Jones E. E., & Davis K. E. (1965). From acts to dispositions: The attribution process in person perception. In L Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Vol. II (pp. 219-266). New York: Academic Press.
- Jones, W. H., & Burdette, M. P. (1994). Betrayal in relationships. In A. L. Weber & J. H. Harvey (Eds.), *Perspectives on close relationships* (pp. 243-262). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Kelley, H. H. (1972). Attribution in social interaction. In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 1-26). Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Kelley, H. H. (1973). The process of causal attribution. *American Psychologist*, 28, 107-128.
- Kelly, E. L., & Conley, J. J. (1987). Personality and compatibility: A prospective analysis of marital stability and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 27-40.
- Kim, S. H., & Smith, R. H. (1993). Revenge and conflict escalation. *Negotiation Journal*, 9, 37-43.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., & Martin, C. E. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Oxford: Saunders.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., & Martin, C. E., & Gebhard, P. H. (1953). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.
- Kitson, G., & Morgan, L. (1990). The multiple consequences of divorce: A decade review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 913-924.

- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lawson, A. (1988). *Adultery: An analysis of love and betrayal*. New York: Basic Books.
- Levine, S. B. (1998). Extramarital sexual affairs. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 24, 207-216.
- Manusov, V., Cody, M. J., Donohue, W., & Zappa, J. (1994). Accounts in child custody mediation sessions. *Journal of Applied communication*, 22, 1-15.
- Martin, T., & Bumpass, L. (1989). Recent trends in marital disruption. *Demography*, 26, 37-51.
- McCornaack, S. A., & Levine, T. R. (1990). When lies are uncovered: Emotional and relational outcomes of discovered deception. *Communication Monographs*, 57, 119-138.
- McCullough, M. E., Bellah, C. G., Kilpatrick, S. D., & Johnson, J. I., (2001). Vengefulness: Relationships with forgiveness, rumination, well-being, and the big five. *Personality and social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 601-610.
- McGraw, K. M. (1987). Guilt following transgression: An attribution of responsibility approach. *Journal of Personality and social Psychology*, 53, 247-256.
- McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & O'Hair, H. D. (1983). The management of failure events: Some contextual determinant of accounting behavior. *Human communication Research*, 9, 208-224.
- McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & Rosenstein, N. E. (1983). Account sequences in conversations between strangers. *Communication Monographs*, 50, 102-125.
- Metts, S. (1994). Relational transgressions. In W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.). *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (pp. 217-239), Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Metts, S., & Mongeau, P. (1991). *Managing problematic situations in close relationships: Getting caught but getting on with it*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of Speech Communication Association, Atlanta, GA.
- Mongeau, P. A., Hale, J. L., & Alles, M. (1994). An experimental investigation of accounts and attributions following sexual infidelity. *Communication Monographs*, 61, 326-344.

- Mongeau, P. A., & Schulz, B. E. (1997). What he doesn't know won't hurt him (or me): Verbal responses and attributions following sexual infidelity. *Communication Reports, 10*, 143-152.
- Morris, G. H. (1985). The remedial episode as a negotiation of rules. In R. L. Street & J. N. Capella (Eds.), *Sequence and pattern in communicative behaviour* (pp. 70-84). London: Edward Arnold.
- Murdoch, G. P. (1949). *Social structure*. New York: Macmillan.
- Nortan, A., & Moorman, J. (1987). Current trends in American marriage and divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 49*, 3-14.
- Planalp, S., & Honeycutt, J. M. (1985). Events that increase uncertainty in personal relationships. *Human Communication Research, 11*, 593-604.
- Planalp, S., Rutherford, D. K. & Honeycutt, J. M. (1988). Events that increase uncertainty in personal relationship II: Replication and extension. *Human communication Research, 14*, 516-547.
- Pittman, F. (1989). *Private lies: Infidelity and the betrayal of intimacy*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Rhodes, S. (1984). Extramarital affairs: clinical issues in therapy. *Social Casework, 65*, 541-546.
- Roscoe, B., Cavanaugh, J. E., & Kennedy, D. R., (1988). Dating infidelity: Behaviors, reasons, and consequences. *Adolescence, 23*, 35-43.
- Samp, J. A., & Solomon, D. H. (1998). Communicative responses to problematic events in close relationships I: The variety and facets of goals. *Communication Research, 25*, 66-95.
- Salzman, L. (1972). Female infidelity. *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality, 6*(2):118-136.
- Schonbach, P. (1980). A category system for account phases. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 10*, 195-200.
- Schonbach, P. (1990). *Account episodes: The management of escalation of conflict*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. M. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review, 33*, 46-62.

- Segel, M. J. (1992). For better or worse: Adultery, crime and the Constitution. *Journal of Family Law*, 30, 45-95.
- Semin, G. R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (1983). *The accountability of conduct*. London: Academic Press.
- Smith, T. W. (1991). Adult sexual behavior in 1989: number of partners, frequency of intercourse, and risk of AIDS. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 23, 102-107.
- Smith, T. W. (1994). Attitudes towards sexual permissiveness: Trends, correlates and behavioral connections. In A.S. Rossi (Ed.), *Sexuality across the life course* (pp. 63-97)
- Sykes, G. M., & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: a theory of delinquency. *American Sociological Review*, 22, 664-70.
- Tedeschi, J. T., & Reiss, M. (1981). Verbal strategies in impression management. In C. Antaki (Ed.), *The psychology of ordinary explanations of social behavior* (pp. 271-309). London: Academic Press.
- Vaughn, D. (1987). *Uncoupling: How relationships come apart*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Vangelisti, A. L. (1994). Couples communication problems: The counselor's perspective. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 22, 106-126.
- Weiner, B. (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71, 3-25.
- Weiner, B. (1980). *Human motivation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
- Weiner, B. (1986). Attribution, emotion, and action. In R. M. Sorrentino & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation and cognition: Foundations of social behavior* (pp. 281-312). New York: Guilford Press.
- Weiner, B. (1992). Excuses in everyday interaction. In M. McLaughlin, M. Cody, S. Read (Eds.), *Explaining one's self to others: Reason-giving in a social context* (pp. 131-146). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- White, R., Cleland, J., & Carael, M. (2000). Links between premarital sexual behaviour and extramarital intercourse: A multi-site analysis. *AIDS*, 2000, 14, 2323-2331.
- Wilmot, W.W. (1994). Relationship rejuvenation. In D. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 255-274). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

APPENDIX A

Extra Credit Opportunity

You are invited to participate in a study on marital communication being conducted in the Department of Communication, University of Missouri-Columbia. This study examines the communication and perceptions about infidelity by individuals who are or have been married in the past. Participation involves finding **one male and one female**. They need to meet two conditions:

1. One must be married and one must be divorced at present.
2. They cannot have been married to each other at any point in time.

Because this questionnaire concerns the sensitive topic of infidelity, it is important that you let respondents know in advance the subject of the questionnaire. That way, they are not surprised when they start to fill out their responses.

The respondent's marriage does NOT have to have experienced an infidelity for the individual to be eligible to fill out the survey. It is important when you recruit participants that you do not ask them about their own personal marital history; just ask them if they are willing to fill out a questionnaire on the topic of marital infidelity.

You will receive extra credit for each person who returns the survey, up to two people. For methodological reasons, it is important that you follow the two criteris listed above.

The responses to this survey will be completely anonymous. These data are being collected as part of a study being conducted by Michelle Kleine, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

There are no risks incurred by participation in this study. The survey should take about ½ hour to complete. For finding people to participate you will receive extra credit, as determined by your instructor. If you would like to earn extra credit, but do not want to be involved in this study, there is an optional assignment. [see below].

If you are willing to participate, please take the number of surveys you can distribute. Because of the sensitive nature of this questionnaire, we do ask that you talk to the person about the topic of the study (communication about infidelity in marriage) before asking someone if he or she will complete the survey. Let them know that their marriage does not have to have experienced infidelity for them to participate. Finally, please assure them that their responses will only be seen by the researchers and that their names will not be associated with their surveys to ensure anonymity. Surveys need to be completed by (DATE) in order to be counted for extra credit.

Optional assignment

To earn extra credit other than participating in the study, you may find and select an article about public communication from an NCA or ICA research journal and write a 2-3 page critique of the article. This critique should summarize the major points in the article, then address these questions: (a) In what ways was the research done well or poorly?, and (b) What lessons does this research tell us about ethical, effective, and enjoyable public speaking? Please include a copy of the article (including its reference list) with your report.

APPENDIX B

Relationship Survey

Background information:

1. Sex: _____ male _____ female
2. Age: _____
3. Race: _____
4. Occupation: _____
5. Marital status: _____ married _____ divorced _____ remarried
6. If presently divorced, how long were you married before you divorced your last marital partner?
7. If married, how long have you been married to your current spouse? _____ years
_____ months
8. Have you had previous marriages? _____ yes _____ no If yes, how many? _____
9. Do you have children? _____ yes _____ no If yes, How many? _____

Please read the following scenario and answer the accompanying questions:

Note: The following is a 2 (high vs. low commitment) by 5 (level of intent: social context, attitudes/norms, sexuality, emotional satisfaction, and revenge) design. Here, the ten scenarios are all listed together. The labels were removed from the actual survey.

Social Context – Being in the wrong place at the wrong time:

Your spouse is out of town. Bored, you decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate and ultimately the two of you have consensual sex. This is not something that you planned to do or something that you believe is right. Later, your spouse learns of

your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that regardless of your behavior you are still **highly committed** to preserving the marriage.

Your spouse is out of town. Bored, you decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate and ultimately the two of you have consensual sex. This is not something that you planned to do or something that you believe is right. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that you have **very little commitment** to preserving this marriage.

Attitudes/Norms – I see little/nothing wrong with extramarital sex, and/or my friends or family support this kind of behavior

Your spouse is out of town. Bored, you and one of your friends whose spouse is also out of town decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you and your friend meet for the first time two other people of the opposite sex. You all sit together and have a few drinks. One of the people that you have just met mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the four of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You and your friend agree. Once there, your friend departs to the bedroom with one of the two new acquaintances and you are left in the living room with the other individual. Now, the conversation turns more intimate between the two of you and ultimately you have consensual sex. In retrospect, you feel that there is really little wrong with your behavior. However, later your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that regardless of your behavior you are still **highly committed** to preserving the marriage.

Your spouse is out of town. Bored, you and one of your friends whose spouse is also out of town decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you and your friend meet for the first time two other people of the opposite sex. You all sit together and have a few drinks. One of the people that you have just met mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the four of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You and your friend agree. Once there, your friend departs to the bedroom with one of the two new acquaintances and you are left in the living room with the other individual. Now, the conversation turns more intimate between the two of you and ultimately you have consensual sex. In retrospect, you feel that there is really little wrong with your behavior. However, later your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that you have **very little commitment** to preserving this marriage.

Sexuality - There were problems or issues with the sex in the marriage

Your spouse is out of town. Bored, you decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate. There have been problems or issues with the sex in your marriage and ultimately you and your friend have consensual sex. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that regardless of your behavior you are still **highly committed** to preserving the marriage.

Your spouse is out of town. Bored, you decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate. There have been problems or issues with the sex in your marriage and ultimately you and your friend have consensual sex. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that you have **very little commitment** to preserving this marriage.

Emotional satisfaction - Seeking emotional fulfillment not getting in marriage

Your spouse is out of town. Your spouse is regularly out of town, in fact, and you are very lonely. You miss intimate communication and have missed it for a very long time. You decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. You find the emotional connection enormously refreshing and fulfilling. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate and ultimately you and your friend have consensual sex. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that regardless of your behavior you are still **highly committed** to preserving the marriage.

Your spouse is out of town. Your spouse is regularly out of town, in fact, and you are very lonely. You miss intimate communication and have for a very long time. You decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. You find the emotional connection enormously refreshing and fulfilling. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could

go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate and ultimately you and your friend have consensual sex. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that you have **very little commitment** to preserving this marriage.

Revenge/hostility - Seeking to get back at spouse for something he or she did that was inappropriate

Your spouse is out of town. You are uneasy as you know that your partner has been unfaithful in the past and could do so again. To get your mind off of things, you decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You realize that this has potential to lead to inappropriate marital behavior, but you don't care. What is good for the goose is good for the gander so-to-speak and so you agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate and ultimately the two of you have consensual sex. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that regardless of your behavior you are still **highly committed** to preserving the marriage.

Your spouse is out of town. You are uneasy as you know that your partner has been unfaithful in the past and could do so again. To get your mind off of things, you decide to go to a local club for a drink. There you see a friend from high school of the opposite sex that you have not seen in years. You sit together and have a few drinks while talking over what has been going on in each of your lives since you last saw one another. Your friend mentions that it is difficult to talk over everyone else in the club and perhaps the two of you could go back to his/her apartment and continue your conversation. You realize that this has potential to lead to inappropriate marital behavior, but you don't care. What is good for the goose is good for the gander so-to-speak and so you agree. Once there, the conversation turns more intimate and ultimately the two of you have consensual sex. Later, your spouse learns of your unfaithfulness. When answering the following questions, suppose that you have **very little commitment** to preserving this marriage.

Accounts

1. How would you explain your behavior to your spouse? Please be as descriptive as possible with what you might say to him or her.

Level of responsibility, blame, and guilt (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994):

Please continue to answer questions 2-8 as if you were the person in the scenario who had the affair. Circle the number on the corresponding scale which best represents how you believe that you would feel.

In my interactions with this person, I did or felt this:

	Strongly <u>Agree</u>					Strongly <u>disagree</u>
2. I would feel responsible for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. I would feel accountable for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. I would condemn myself for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. I would blame myself for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. I would feel guilty for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	
7. I would feel ashamed for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	
8. I would feel innocent for my actions.	1	2	3	4	5	

Has your marriage experienced (present or past) experienced infidelity? ___yes ___no

If so, please answer the following questions:

1. Who had the affair, you or your spouse?
2. How was it discovered?
3. Once discovered, what was the explanation given by the guilty party for his or her infidelity?
4. How did the other spouse respond to this explanation?
5. What do you see as the primary reason the marriage either was repaired or ended in divorce?

APPENDIX C

Demographic Information

Age: _____

Sex: _____ male _____ female

Race: _____

Occupation: _____

Current relational status: _____ Married _____ divorced _____ remarried

How many times have you been legally married? _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

- Are you currently married? Tell me about your current/most recent marriage – Describe your spouse. How did you meet? How long have you been married? Do you have any children? What do you like most about your spouse?
- Describe the infidelity, and the events surrounding it? (Who committed the affair, nature of the affair (was it emotional/just sex/etc.; 1-night stand vs. ongoing; stranger vs. mutual acquaint., etc.; How was it discovered? When was the affair disclosed, etc.)
- Who do you think (self vs. other) was more responsible for this affair taking place?
- How satisfied were you with the marriage prior to finding out about the affair?
- When the affair was discovered, what was asked or said to the person who did it?
- What explanation did that person give for their behavior?
- Assess the degree of responsibility (the perpetrator) had for their actions -- how much responsibility do they bear for the events that took place?
- How much blame did the person who had the affair feel that they had?
- How guilty did the person who had the affair feel during the affair? When confronted?
- How was that explanation received -- what evaluation did (the victim) have of the explanation? Was this influenced by the nature of the account that was given? How motivated was (victim) prior to and then after the affair?
- What affect did the affair have on the marriage?
- If still married to this individual, how does the marriage compare with before the affair? What do you believe is the reason for that status?

APPENDIX E

Consent Information

Project Title:	Communicative Responses to Extramarital Affairs
Researchers:	Michelle Kleine, MA, is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of Missouri-Columbia and an assistant professor of communication at Truman State University.
Purpose:	I am conducting a study to look at communication about infidelity in marriage. You must be or have been married and over the age of 18 to participate. You need to have been in a marriage (either present or past) in which one or both of the partners engaged in an extramarital affair to participate in this study.
Time:	The study should take between ½ to 1½ hours, depending on how much you choose to participate and how much you have to say. Additionally, after data analysis, you will be given the opportunity to verify and comment on the investigator's findings that will take approximately 10 minutes to 30 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded.
Choice:	Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question and you may quit at any time.
Risk:	There is minimal risk involved with the study, except the possibility that the questions in this survey might cause some people to recall unpleasant memories. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions.
Benefits:	The results of this study should help shed light on factors that increase or decrease the chances of couples repairing their marriages after an act of infidelity. This research should be useful for couples who are trying to keep a marriage together after such a difficult incident.
Confidentiality:	<p>Your identity will <i>not</i> be revealed in the transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Consent forms will be separated from the data.2. Personal identifying information will be eliminated from the transcripts and any reporting of the data. Pseudonyms will be used to replace any names or locations.3. You can refuse to answer any question asked.4. Audio recordings will be kept on a secure computer.
Contact:	If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact Michelle Kleine at (660) 785-7821 or mkleine@truman.edu .
Questions:	If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Campus IRB (Institutional Review Board):

Office of Research
483 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-9585

Please keep this sheet for your records. Thank you for your valuable input in this study!

Michelle Kleine, MA
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Communication
University of Missouri-Columbia

Signing this consent indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above.

Signature

Date

VITA

Michelle Kleine was born in Kirksville Missouri. The majority of her childhood she was raised in Memphis, Missouri, where she currently resides with her husband Keith and their three sons. She received her BA from Truman State University (1996), her MA from Western Illinois University (1999), and her Ph.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia (2007). She currently is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Truman State University in Kirksville, MO.