UNDERSTANDING HOW COUPLES MAINTAIN MONOGAMY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORY OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS USING GROUNDED THEORY

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of this study was to expose a theory which explains how married persons maintain monogamy. Ten participants were interviewed twice, using a semi-structured interview format, which lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour and thirty minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis were used. Member-checking, bracketing, peer-review, analytic memos, and external auditing were used throughout the study for verification purposes.

Participation in the study was based on the inclusionary criteria of: (a) being legally married in the United States, (b) being 18 years or older, (c) having never cheated (i.e. emotionally or sexually) in their current marriage, (d) being able to read and speak English, and (e) being willing to be interviewed twice. The data supported the finding that monogamy is maintained by small, continual, and consistent efforts in each protective factor area. The protective factors include: (a) practicing congruence, (b) fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy, (c) building a secure attachment or emotional bond, (d) sex in a marriage, (e) behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries, and (f) coping individually and as a couple.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The counseling profession is distinct from other mental health professions due to the focus on wellness, prevention, and developmental aspects (Mellin, Hunt, Nichols, 2011). However, some have argued that as counselors and counselor educators and supervisors, we tend to conceptualize mental health and counseling as interventions to psychopathology rather than as a preventative approach (Furber, Segal, Leach, Turnbull, Procter, Diamond, Miller, & McGorry, 2015; Gale & Austin, 2003). Clients are often referred to counseling when they face clinically significant distress that negatively impacts many aspects in their lives. This is exemplified within The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) in the ways in which mental illnesses are characterized for diagnosis. Even though some scholars describe the need for public initiative to prevent mental illness and report that prevention counseling services have been shown to be effective (Furber et al., 2015; Whitson, Kaufman, & Bernard, 2009), clients are not often referred for counseling when everything is going well in their lives and they want to continue to prevent adverse events.

Despite the notion that the counseling profession focuses on wellness and prevention, services may be driven by interventions based on the medical model (Mellin et al., 2011) and may not focus on prevention. Within couples counseling, one of the
main reasons couples seek therapy is due to infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). In fact, approximately 11% to 25% of all married couples experience infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013). In these cases, couples have already experienced infidelity and are seeking interventions. There are few preventative approaches strictly dedicated to helping couples maintain monogamy. There are, however, some preventative services couples can seek such as pre-marital counseling. Pre-marital counseling may focus on helping couples prevent experiencing damage to a relationship and divorce and have been shown to help increase martial satisfaction and reduce divorce (Tambling & Glebova, 2013). Yet, few couples engage in pre-marital counseling services. Even in the pre-marital counseling services, maintaining fidelity is not a common focus.

Infidelity is an issue which many couples face worldwide privately and in counseling (Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013; Schade & Sandberg, 2012; Schmitt, 2004). Infidelity is commonly depicted as an abnormal behavior which violates an intimate bond and causes harm (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011; Moller & Vossler, 2015). The discrepancy between valuing fidelity and practicing infidelity sparked researchers to study infidelity within many disciplines (Gangstead & Thornhill, 1997; Lammers & Maner, 2016; Milne, 2011; Munsch, 2015; Schmitt, 2004). Such research has focused on reported prevalence rates (Russell et al., 2013), predicting and understanding why people cheat (Gangstead & Thornhill, 1997; Mark et al., 2011; Schmitt, 2004), how infidelity influences divorce (Campbell & Wright, 2010), and counseling services available after infidelity has occurred (Marin, Christensen, & Atkins,
2014; Scuka, 2015). Even though there is a plethora of information accessible regarding infidelity, there is very little research available that describes how couples maintain fidelity and/or how counselors can help couples prevent infidelity. In this dissertation chapter, you will read about the history of marriage and monogamy, types of infidelity, prevalence rates of infidelity, infidelity related to gender and sexual orientation, theories that attempt to explain why infidelity occurs, and some counseling treatments available to work with couples who have experienced infidelity.

**Purpose and Rationale**

Culturally, infidelity has been constructed as an inappropriate behavior that should be avoided (Milne, 2011). Yet, approximately one fourth of couples experience infidelity (Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013). As a result of infidelity, many couples divorce and/or seek couples counseling after the experience (Campbell & Wright, 2010).

There are numerous counseling modalities and self-help books that focus on helping counseling heal and repair a marriage after an experience with infidelity. Overall, infidelity, marriage, and couples counseling for infidelity and affairs has been researched. However, the focus of this research has been to understand, predict, and treat after the fact. Meaning, the counseling field currently operates from a reactive approach despite the evidence of high prevalence rates, potential risk factors, and the damaging effects it can have on a couple (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Butler, Rodriguez, Roper, Feinauer, 2010; Schade & Sandberg, 2012).

A dearth of research has focused on couples and individuals who have successfully practiced fidelity. Understanding how couples successfully maintain fidelity
could generate new understandings regarding preventing infidelity. Therefore, if a theory could be generated to understand how couples successfully practice fidelity, perhaps counselors could assume a preventative approach with couples. Developing a preventative intervention for infidelity may ultimately help couples avoid the damaging and traumatic experience of infidelity.

**Construct Definitions**

*Infidelity* is defined as any sexual, emotional, and/or intimate romantic acts which violate a couple’s agreement to remain monogamous. There are various types of infidelity, ranging from sexual coitus and sexual touch to electronic infidelity (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011; Moller, 2015). Furthermore, couples themselves may define infidelity in varying ways based on established rules within the relationship (Moller, 2015). This study condensed these types of infidelity into two categories, which include sexual infidelity and intimate or emotional infidelity.

*Sexual infidelity* consists of extramarital sexual behavior, coitus, and sexual touch (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Mark et al., 2011; Moller, 2015). For example, sexual infidelity may include sexual behaviors such as coitus, touching, petting, oral sex, kissing, etc. with a person whom one is not in a committed relationship with (i.e. a third person).

*Intimate or emotional infidelity* is defined as developing an emotional bond or romantic feelings for someone other than a person’s spouse (Moller, 2015).

*Marriage* is an extremely old construct, predating the inception of politics, government, and even some religions such as Christianity (Milne, 2011). Yet, marriage
has been defined by the Congress of the United States of America (1996) as a union between a man and a woman. Since 1996, however, the Supreme Court ruled that states cannot designate same-sex marriages as illegal in June 2015. Therefore, this study defines marriage as the legal union between two persons.

*Fidelity/Monogamy* are used interchangeably for the purpose of this study.

Monogamy is defined as being married to and having a sexual relationship with only one partner (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Furthermore, fidelity or monogamy, within this study, consists of maintaining sexual and/or intimate romantic acts with a persons’ legal spouse (e.g. having no extra marital sexual behavior, coitus, sexual touch, or developed emotional bond and romantic feelings). For the purpose of this study, monogamy will be defined as a committed relationship between two persons who maintain the promise to be sexually and emotionally faithful to one another (Kampowski, 2015; Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013).

*Protective Factors* consist of internal and/or external factors which influence a person’s response to an adverse event (Rutter, 1985).

**Review of Literature**

Even though many people may understand what infidelity is, fewer may be well versed in the numerous constructs which influence infidelity. Therefore, in order to study the fidelity practices of couples there are several concepts related to infidelity which need to be discussed. Such concepts include marriage, monogamy, infidelity, types of infidelity, cultural aspects of infidelity, prevalence rates of infidelity, theoretical
explanations of infidelity, and infidelity in couples counseling are discussed in the literature review of chapter one. Furthermore, these constructs have been researched for the connection to infidelity specifically. Therefore, the reader may conceptualize the material presented in the literature review as epistemological connections to infidelity which begin broadly with marriage and conclude with a specific concept of treating infidelity in couples counseling. The point of this structure is to build knowledge and purpose for the proposed study.

**Marriage**

Marriage is considered to be a universal and ancient practice which may predate governing entities such as religion and politics (Milne, 2011; Outhwaite, 1981; Walker, Flinn, & Ellsworth, 2011). Some conceptualize marriage practices as primitive and driven by reproduction and economic factors (Walker et al., 2011; Westermarck, 1926). The exact origin of marriage is not known; however, it was documented in some of the earliest historical records that are over 2,000 years old (Murstein, 1974). For instance, Walker et al. (2011) described that marriage practices have an evolutionary component and can be found in historical hunter-gatherer type relationships. However, ancestral marriages, either arranged or courted, had economic aspects. For example, bride price, bride service, bride capture, dowry, love, and bride exchange were common marriage practices in which marital unions were formed in order to exchange goods or labor in many cultures such as the Greeks (Murstein, 1974; Walker et al., 2011; Westermarck, 1926). This example conveys that marriages may have had historical practical purposes
such as reproduction, survival, and economic gain (Murstein, 1974; Walker et al., 2011; Westermarck, 1926).

In addition to such purposes, marriage has also been connected to religion and politics (Cott, 2000; Milne, 2011; Murstein, 1974). Even though marriage may predate religion (Milne, 2011), many people commonly associate marriage with religion. This connection may have begun when the church recognized marriage as a religious endeavor. For instance, Murstein (1974) described that the Old Testament depicted some of the oldest forms of marriage within nomadic and Semitic clans. Within Hebrew clans, marriage was viewed as a divine practice (Murstein, 1974). The conceptualization that marriage is divine is also found in the Catholic Church. For instance, in the thirteenth century the Catholic Church, within the New Testament, declared marriage to be one of the seven sacraments in which the marital unity was a symbol of Christ and his relationship to the church (Milne, 2011; Murstein, 1974). With this, the church also declared extramarital heterosexual acts of sexual infidelity to be a sin (Milne, 2011; Murstein, 1974). Meaning, the Catholic Church proclaimed that affairs or acts of infidelity were considered a religious sin that should be avoided. In addition, early American settlers, commonly of the Protestant faith, continued to recognize marriage as a divine or religious fulfillment similar to the Catholic Church (Cott, 2000; Milne, 2011). Although other branches of Christianity have since rejected the notion that marriage is a sacrament or divine sanction, the notion that infidelity is a sin remains prominent (Milne, 2011).
In addition to religion, philosophical changes in society such as romanticism, the Victorian era, the industrial revolution, and the sexual revolution influenced the conceptualization of marriage, marriage practices, and marriage regulations (Murstein, 1974). For example, the America settlers began to select spouses based on physical ability to immigrate from Europe (Murstein, 1974). As a result of the challenging journey, the newly formed America was populated by more men than women, therefore, any man not married was viewed as failing to fulfill a civic duty and was disloyal (Murstein, 1974). The new American government also influenced marriage practices by taxing unwed men within certain states, promoting monogamy within the Republican party, rejecting the legalization of a polygamist marriages, and discouraging divorce (Cott; 2000; Murstein, 1974). For example, former president of the United States Ulysses S. Grant promoted monogamy and discredited Mormon polygamists (Cott, 2000). The institution of marriage within the United States is deeply connected to Christian and political philosophies (Cott, 2000). While, historically, many authors expressed concern about potential revisions of marriage, changes were made (Cott, 2000).

Fast-forward through American history, and the connection between the government and marriage adjusted as a result of the changing zeitgeist (Milne, 2011). The United States Supreme Court began to separate church and state within marriage. The Supreme Court ruled that marriage was a civil contract regulated by law, which people enter into freely and equally. Meaning the government, specifically each state’s government, could have legal regulations regarding marital unions. Theoretically, the
separation of church and state influenced the perspective that marriage is a legal union rather than only a religious union.

Even though attempts for separation of church and state were made, and views on monogamy and sex were changing during the sexual revolution in the 1970s, many states continued to recognize religious solemnization of marriage (Buuck & Dijkstra, 2000; Milne, 2011). This ultimately continued to recognize and value the religious perspectives of marriage, monogamy, and casted infidelity as a sin. While marriage as a construct is ancient (Milne, 2011), so too is the expectation for avoiding extramarital sexual relationships or acts of infidelity. Yet, monogamy remains a difficult expectation to maintain and infidelity occurs frequently, and in many forms (Stuchell, 2013).

**Monogamy**

Monogamy can be defined as a committed relationship between two persons who remain sexually and emotionally faithful to one another (Kampowski, 2015; Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013). Although monogamy is considered to be a cultural norm and expectation within the dominant culture in United States of America, not every culture or nation prefers monogamy (Bauch & McElreath, 2016; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Jackson, 2014; Stuchell, 2013). For example, monogamy is “found in only 15-18 percent of societies worldwide” (Stuchell, 2013, p. 839). Monogamy is maintained predominantly in large, agricultural, and affluent nations (Bauch & McElreath, 2016; Stuchell, 2013).

Murstein (1974) described that monogamy is one of the four classifications of marriage. In addition, monogamy is believed to have “existed from the beginning of the
human race” (Murstein, 1974, p.11). However, Stuchell (2013) identified monogamy as a construct was created in European cultures as the driving force behind marriage surrounded wealth and social status. As the economy, politics, and society evolved to be more complex in Europe, large discrepancies between classes peaked and inequality became prevalent (Stuchell, 2013). The changes financial and societal changes ultimately affected the purpose of marriage and the selection of spouse (Stuchell, 2013). For example, men from more affluent families were credited as the most desirable, whereas men in poverty were often less desirable. While this led to selectivity in marriage, the expectation for monogamy allowed for a larger marital market (Stuchell, 2013), thus, resulting in more potential partnerships.

In addition to a more diverse marital market, Stuchell (2013) noted that monogamy has been linked to reducing age discrepancies between partners, increased the per capita gross domestic product, decreased fertility, and increased gender equality. Furthermore, Stuchell (2013) discussed statistics that men are less likely to commit violent crimes such as murder and rape and are less likely to abuse chemical substances and alcohol while in a monogamous marital relationship. She further articulates that monogamous marital unions are associated with fewer incidents of domestic violence, spousal homicide, sex traffic, female genital mutilation, and coercive sex. Also, Stuchell (2013) described children having lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, in families with monogamous nuclear families compared to polygamist and remarried families. Finally, monogamy is connected with higher rates of paternal investment in child rearing (Bauch & McElreath, 2016; Stuchell, 2013).
Infidelity

While acts of infidelity have been considered taboo and even sinful since the early thirteenth century or earlier (Clark, Braun, & Wooles, 2015; Milne, 2011; Murstein, 1974), they commonly occur and in various forms. In fact, infidelity or adultery was punishable by death for both Hebrew men and women, although women were only legally punished (Murstein, 1974). Later, the Catholic church still recognized infidelity as a sin, yet allowed for punishment to be given in the form of penance (Murstein, 1974). The notion that infidelity is a violation which should be prevented is historical (Milne, 2011; Murstein, 1974). In a committed, monogamous relationship, there is a known rule that requires partners to only seek their sexual and intimacy or emotional needs through their significant other. The act of meeting these needs or having these experiences met by someone other than a partner is considered infidelity, and it is considered to be a clear and unacceptable violation (Butler et al., 2010; Mao & Raguram, 2009; Moller & Vossler, 2015).

Types of Infidelity

Infidelity is a secret and forbidden relationship in which a person’s needs are met by someone external of a committed monogamous relationship, such as marriage (Richardson, 1988). Infidelity is commonly considered a violation of a monogamous relationship (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Campbell & Wright, 2010; Richardson, 1988). By such a definition, persons in an open relationship, open-marriages, or who are polygamists may not experience infidelity. However, relationships and individuals may construct their own rules regarding how fidelity is maintained. Clearly, there may be
variability in defining, conceptualizing, and understanding infidelity. Blow and Hartnett (2005) described the significant variability in infidelity, which include one-night stands, sexual touch, sexual coitus, emotional connectedness, and more. While some view sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity separately, a more accurate depiction is that of a “continuum of sexual involvement and emotional involvement” (Blow & Hartnett, 2005, p. 220). Furthermore, some scholars have described categories of infidelity including the ambiguous category, the deceptive category, and the explicit category (Cravens, Leckie, & Whiting, 2013; Wilson, Mattingly, Clark, Weidler, & Bequette, 2011). Acts such as flirtatious talking, exchanging gifts, hanging, hugging, etc. are part of the ambiguous category of infidelity (Cravens et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2011). Intentionally lying and not disclosing information to a partner are examples of the deceptive category of infidelity (Cravens et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2011). Acts such as sexual touch and intercourse are part of the explicit category (Cravens et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2011). In addition to these categories, infidelity is commonly conceptualized into different types of infidelity, such as sexual, electronic, and/or emotional. Sexual or behavioral infidelity, electronic infidelity, and emotional fidelity are described further.

**Sexual or Behavioral Infidelity**

Traditionally, infidelity is thought to be sexual acts that occur in secrecy between at least one other person whom is not within the marriage or committed relationship (Urooji, Haque, & Anjum, 2015). Guitar, Geher, Kruger, Garcia, Fisher, and Fitzgerald (2016) defined sexual infidelity as being in a monogamous relationship and vowing to remain sexually exclusive yet engaging in a sexual activity with someone outside of the
relationship. Consider a common depiction of a traditional affair as a fictional example. Note, the persons described in the example are fabricated individuals. Bob and Sue have been married for 12 years and have two children. Lately, Bob and Sue have had less time together for sexual intimacy due to the overwhelming responsibilities of their careers and parenting. Over time, Bob began to spark a connection with his colleague, Linda. Bob and Linda meet a few times a week at a local motel during their scheduled lunch breaks. During these meetings, Bob and Linda engage in consensual sex. Since Bob is not married to Linda nor is he single, this would be considered a sexual act of infidelity. Generally speaking, patterns or repeated sexual acts outside of a marriage are irrelevant to the definition and understanding of infidelity. For instance, even if Bob and Linda had sex one time as opposed to several times a week, it would still be an act of infidelity.

Sexual infidelity has been shown to elicit significant emotional distress in men, women, heterosexual individuals, and homosexual individuals (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Yet, participants who reported less intimacy, or a love bond, experienced higher levels of anxiety and distress than couples who reported a deep bond (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). The limited emotional bond may decrease the sense of betrayal yet increase the experience of suspicion of whether or not the partner had been honest about the affair; thus, resulting in higher levels of anxiety compared to emotional infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

**Electronic Infidelity**

Historically, infidelity was thought to occur during live sexual encounters; however, with the influence of the internet and technology an additional form of
infidelity has emerged known as online infidelity (Cravens et al., 2013; Mao & Raguram, 2009). Mao and Raguram (2009) define online infidelity as “a romantic and/or sexual relationship with someone other than the spouse, which begins with an online contact and is maintained mainly through electronic conversation that occur through e-mail and chat rooms” (p. 302). Over 12 million people are estimated to use the internet to engage in sexually pleasurable activities (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). These activities range from cyber flirting to viewing pornographic pictures to having a sexually driven conversation through instant messaging or chat rooms with another person (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). In addition, specific websites have been created to serve as a platform for extramarital relationships. These websites, such as Ashley Madison lead to sexual encounters in which some form of sexual behavior is presumed to happen. However, not all cyber infidelity leads to sexual behaviors. Due to this, some have argued cyber infidelity is not real infidelity because real sex or sexual behaviors did not occur (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). From this perspective, cyber infidelity is viewed similarly to masturbation to pornography (i.e. no extramarital physical contact). Conversely, Hackathorn and Harvey (2011) argued “perception is reality,” and in the case of cyber infidelity, engaging in an extramarital dyadic relationship can have lasting and damaging effects on a person and a relationship (p. 101).

Even though people engaging in online infidelity may not engage in extramarital sexual conduct, it may be just as problematic as the attention, intimacy, and attachment is created with someone other than their partner or spouse (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Russell et al., 2013). Furthermore, Cravens et al. (2013) studied infidelity experiences
through Facebook and found that many participants reported emotions of hurt and broken connections with their spouses. For example, some participants made statements of “I feel like cheating in any form on your spouse is a deal breaker for me,” and “I don’t know the answer-to me it is cheating whatever way you look at it” (Cravens et al., 2013, p. 82). Acts of infidelity can be detrimental to an individual and to a relationship or marriage, often resulting in divorce (Russell et al., 2013).

**Emotional Infidelity**

Infidelity has been found to be experienced by people who are married, dating, and cohabitating (Urooj, Haque, & Anjum, 2015). Defining and distinguishing between emotional infidelity and sexual infidelity has been difficult (Guitar et al., 2016). Many scholars and participants have found it challenging to determine if emotional and sexual infidelity are dichotomous experiences (Guitar et al., 2016). Meaning that sexual and emotional infidelity have been thought to occur together more often than not. Guitar et al. (2016) studied emotional infidelity and reported a definition generated by undergraduate participants. Emotional infidelity was defined as “being in love or more dedicated emotionally to someone other than the partner, or family, someone with romantic potential” (p. 6). In addition, specific elements that informed the definition included: being attached or dedicated to another person, engaging in behaviors that cultivate a relationship and thus problems in their current relationship, behaviors such as flirting, and having sexual or romantic feelings for another person. These elements and definition convey that the participants hold ideas that being in love with more than one person at a time would create distance and problems in the committed monogamous
relationship. Furthermore, emotional infidelity has been linked to greater experiences of emotional distress and anger than sexual infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). This finding may reflect that emotional infidelity is hurtful because it is a direct breach of a greater commitment and bond or love (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). For example, a couple who has been married for 30 years may experience significant emotional distress over emotional infidelity because they have established a commitment bond, intimacy, and an expectation for monogamy more than a newly formed couple who have not developed the deep emotional bond.

Understanding and defining infidelity and the varying types of infidelity has received significant attention in scholarly works (Cravens et al., 2013; Gangstead & Thornhill, 1997; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Mao & Raguram, 2009; Mark et al., 2011; Schmitt, 2004). As previously discussed, there are four main types of infidelity, yet the common factor within each is the hurt that people may feel from such an event (Butler et al., 2010; Mao & Raguram, 2009; Moller & Vossler, 2015). When considering acts of infidelity, cultural differences and risk factors should be considered as well. These topics are discussed next.

**Cultural Differences and Risk Factors of Infidelity**

Culture can be viewed as a platform for individuals to create reality, meaning, and knowledge (Gergen, 2009). Therefore, culture can influence how people understand relationships, monogamy, and infidelity. Various elements can be considered to be a part of a person’s culture, including gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, race, ethnicity, religiosity, disabilities, beliefs, values, norms, etc. (Allen, Atkins, Baucom, Snyder,
Gordon, & Glass, 2005; Hook, Farrell, Ramos, Davis, Karaga, Van Tongeren, & Grubbs, 2015; Huebner, Neilands, Rebchook, & Kegels, 2011; Schick, Rosenberger, Herbenick, Calabrese, & Reece, 2012). These elements may be confounding and may influence one another and mental and emotional distress may occur as a result of incongruence between them (Allen et al., 2005; Hook et al., 2015; Rogers, 1959), yet there may be numerous differences and/or incongruences. For example, Urooji et al. (2015) described Pakistani men as “not answerable to anyone whether they commit emotional cheating, sexual cheating, or both” (p. 430). Compared to Pakistani women who are considered dependent on men and “the cultural practices teach them to accept even blame” (p. 430). Urooji et al. (2015) highlighted the influence of both elements of race and gender on infidelity.

Considering cultural differences, scholars have commonly discussed risk factors present in contextual situations and interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Jeanfreau et al. 2014). Allen, et al. (2005) described predisposing factors that may influence the likelihood of a person engaging in extramarital affairs. These factors exist before the marriage occurs and are considered to be interpersonal by nature such as gender (Allen et al., 2005). Campbell and Wright (2010) also identified interpersonal factors such as personality, family of origin, sexual history, and attitudes about relationships as risk factors. For example, being more independent and autonomous may lead to couples living separate lives; thus, potentially leading to infidelity (Campbell and Wright, 2010). Intrapersonal characteristics such as “gender, age, education, religiosity, political orientation, and race are correlates of
infidelity” (Campbell & Wright, 2010, p. 334). Allen et al. (2005) asserted that individuals who obtained advanced degrees (i.e. higher education) may hold less biases and may be more understanding of extramarital affairs. As a result, those with higher education may be at risk for infidelity.

Campbell and Wright (2010) noted that religion is also a potential factor of infidelity. For instance, those with traditional religious views may be more likely to remain faithful and married, even if the marriage is unsatisfying, out of views regarding moral obligation(s) (Allen et al., 2005; Campbell & Wright, 2010). Hence, couples with a flexible religiosity may be more likely to experience extra marital affairs. These factors can be viewed as internal or intrapsychic (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Jeanfreau et al., 2014). Internal factors may influence perceptions regarding a relationship. People who perceive their relationship as having low satisfaction, low sexual satisfaction, high conflict, and lacking in support may be more likely to seek affairs (Campbell & Wright, 2010).

In addition, Hook, et al. (2015) studied the relationship between religiosity, sexual values, and sexual behavior to determine how much a person behaves according to their sexual values and religious beliefs. In their first study, Hook et al. (2015) determined a negative correlational relationship, \( r = 1.12, \ p = .007 \), between the variables and reported that “participants who were more religious reported less sexual congruence, even when actual sexual behavior was held constant” (p. 181). Meaning that religious beliefs may not influence sexual behavior practices. However, in their second study Hook et al. (2015) found a positive correlational relationship, \( r = .18, \ p = .25 \), between
sexual behavior and self-forgiveness. Furthermore, a negative relationship was found between spiritual struggle and perceptions of wrong sexual behavior. Therefore, Hook et al. (2015) concluded that people may be more concerned meeting their sexual needs and behaviors than practicing monogamy solely for religious beliefs. Meaning, persons who hold strong religious convictions may struggle to obtain congruence between sexual beliefs and practices, which may result in distress (Hook et al., 2015). Even though Hook et al. (2015) studied the relationship between these variables, infidelity was not explicitly studied as a variable. Therefore, more research is warranted.

Contextual factors, also known as external factors, include social status, social life, career advancement or environment, life changes, and urban settings, may allow for more opportunities for a disconnect from a partner (Allen et al., 2005; Campbell & Wright, 2010, Jeanfreau et al., 2014). For example, female participants reported that they were more likely to engage in an affair when their husband started a new job and when they felt as though they had less time with their spouse (Jeanfreau et al., 2014). Furthermore, external factors may allow for a person to have more opportunities for creating extramarital experiences, opportunities for meeting potential sexual partner, and an increased chance for anonymous sex which would result in a decreased chance of getting caught (Allen et al., 2005; Campbell & Wright, 2010; Jeanfreau et al., 2014). For example, a person living in a large metropolitan city may be able to use a mobile application, such as Tinder, to identify potential sexual partners within a certain distance. The dense population of an urban city may have more potential sexual partners. Furthermore, Allen et al. (2005) described that men living in urban areas are more likely
to engage in extramarital affairs than women living in urban areas. This is consistent with the prevalence rates of infidelity discussed next.

Another external risk factor associated with infidelity is social life or perceived social acceptance of infidelity (Allen et al., 2005; Campbell & Wright, 2010). These factors may allow for a person to feel supported and understood when engaging in an affair (Allen et al., 2005) or allow for unmet needs to be met by an extramarital partner (Jeanfreau et al., 2014). For instance, Jeanfreau et al. (2014) reported that women were tempted to engage in an affair when they felt a need for intimacy and a disconnect from their partner.

**Prevalence Rates of Infidelity and Sexual Orientation**

Prevalence rates of infidelity vary within the literature; therefore, a true representation of the rates of infidelity may not be known. For instance, Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) reported 11% to 23% of married individuals in the United States have experienced at least one incident of infidelity. Furthermore, Russell et al. (2013) reported approximately one fourth of couples experience infidelity, and specifically, 25% of men and 20% of women report being unfaithful or cheating on their significant other. In addition, Smith (2006) described individuals under the age of 40 reported engaging in extramarital sex more often than individuals who are older than 40 years. However, this difference may be due to biological responses of sexual drive rather than generational factors such as age and values (Elmisse & Tebaldi, 2008).
**Heterosexual/Sexual Majority Rates and Experiences**

Reported prevalence rates of infidelity vary between 11% to 25% or more (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Russell et al., 2013). The varied statistics may be due to stigma or shame experienced and/or due to the ways in which a couple or person defines infidelity (Moller & Vossler, 2015). In addition, acts of infidelity may not be experienced based on the dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual acts (Denes, Lannutti, & Bevan, 2015). For example, individuals who identify as heterosexual may engage in same-sex acts of infidelity. Denes et al. (2015) reported the increased awareness and/or recognition of heterosexual same-sex infidelity by describing that college-age women reported a desire for same-sex relations and reported a noticeable rise in African American male-to-male sexual relations in individuals who identify as heterosexual. These findings described by Denes et al. (2015) suggest that heterosexual couples may also face temptation for infidelity across sex and within same sex. Furthermore, men may experience more distress when their female partner has sex with different male more compared to sex with another female, which connects to the evolutionary theory of infidelity (Denes et al., 2015). In addition, women may respond more negatively to their male partner’s infidelity when it is with another man (Denes et al., 2015). However, this finding does not connect with other research in which findings reported conveyed that both men and women experience emotional distress to sexual and emotional infidelity (Denes et al., 2015; Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Richardson, 1988; Urooji et al., 2015).
Same-sex/Sexual Minority Rates and Experiences

With the recent legalization of same-sex marriages in the United States, there are limited accounts of extramarital affairs or rates of infidelity within same-sex or sexual minority or sexual affectional marriages (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Schick, Rosenberger, Herbenick, Calabrese, & Reece, 2012). Furthermore, as a result of stigma and discrimination of same-sex partnerships may have influenced the research conducted and understanding of gay and lesbian relationships (Martell & Prince, 2005). Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) suggested that the norms and expectations within same-sex relationships may not be as commonly known as opposite-sex sexual relationships. In addition, Martell and Prince (2005) noted that “same-sex couples do, in many cases, approach relationships differently than their heterosexual counterparts, and there is a great variability in relationships” (p. 1429). Therefore, same-sex couples may have more freedom to construct expectations around fidelity than opposite-sex couples (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Martell and Prince (2005) offered an example that some same-sex couples may define infidelity as violating an agreement about the frequency of extra-relational sexual encounters and/or with whom sex occurs.

Even though there may be some variation on the definition and expression of infidelity within same-sex couples, it is still harmful and confusing (Clarke et al., 2015) and can cause cognitive dissonance (i.e. mental health distress) when incongruence is experienced between identity and behaviors etc. (Rogers, 1959; Schick, et al., 2012), and it is not a new phenomenon (Sagarin, Becker, Guadagno, Nicastle, & Millevoi, 2003). For example, Clarke et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study using story completion
methods to determine the participants’ perspectives of same-sex infidelity. The participants were asked to complete a narrative of a man who cheated on his wife (i.e. sexual and emotional affair) with another man. A few participants rejected the husband’s same-sex relationship and others reported the husband had hidden homosexual tendencies and reported his infidelity was the worst case and consisted of identifying the relationship as “dirtier” and “riskier” (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 163). Their findings conveyed that same-sex couples may experience additional stigma and stereotypes with infidelity than opposite-sex couples, yet infidelity was still considered alarming.

On the other hand, Sagarin et al. (2003) utilized a logistic regression analysis to predict the jealousy responses of same-sex versus opposite-sex infidelity. Same-sex infidelity was reported to have less experiences of jealousy than opposite-sex infidelity $F(1,504)=40.03, P<.001$. Sagarin et al. (2003) conceptualized that the decreased jealousy may be due to the reduced risk of conception, however, a different study reported that same-sex couples experience distress when infidelity occurs (Leeker and Carlozzi, 2014).

Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) collected data from 296 individuals, both heterosexual and homosexual. The participants were recruited from an undergraduate psychology course and same-sex organizations consisted of “72 lesbians, 114 heterosexual women, 53 gay men, 57 heterosexual men” (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014, p. 73). Furthermore, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the infidelity expectations questionnaire, the continuous emotion ratings instrument, and Sternberg’s triangular love scale.
When infidelity, or a violation of the agreement regarding sexual and emotional fidelity occurs within same-sex relationships, it leads to distress (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Distress, according to Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) was comprised of emotions of anger, humiliation, anxiety, and jealousy. Furthermore, Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) reported that men and homosexual individuals score similarly and consistently in each of these domains; which reflected that homosexual individuals reported experiencing less distress regarding sexual infidelity when compared to women and heterosexual individuals.

In addition, sexual orientation and commitment were significant predictors of experiencing distress of emotional infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Sexual orientation was found to account for three percentage of the variance of emotional distress (i.e. anger, jealousy, humiliation, and anxiety) (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Even though the small percentage was reported, Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) described it being statistically significant and finding that homosexual individuals experienced less humiliation than heterosexual individuals. In addition, no significant difference was found between heterosexual and homosexual participants’ experiences with sexual infidelity versus emotional infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). For example, both groups reported feeling more anger and humiliation with sexual infidelity than emotional infidelity. One the other hand, participants reported experiencing more jealousy and anxiety in response to emotional infidelity, compared to sexual infidelity. (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).
Overall, Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) found that heterosexual individuals scored higher on emotional distress compared to homosexual individuals, but no significant difference was found between emotional and sexual infidelity in either group. Significant differences were found comparing sexes rather than sexual orientation (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). This finding is consistent with some previous research regarding sex behaviors, gender, and infidelity (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Richardson, 1988; Urooji et al., 2015). However, the findings may have been influenced by participants selecting socially desirable responses and responding to hypothetical scenarios (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). In addition, other variables such as age, marital status, and race may have had a confounding effect on the results (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

**Gendered Experiences of Infidelity**

Gender roles – or scripts – are socially constructed, learned, and reinforced across many cultures (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011; Richardson, 1988). These learned scripts influence perceptions and behaviors within a relationship, including but not limited to power, domestic responsibilities, financial responsibilities, intimate needs, and expectations (Lammers & Maner, 2016). Sexuality may fall under the umbrella of expectations, needs, or even a responsibility depending on a person’s perception (Rathus, Nevid, & Fichner-Rathus, 2008). For example, women in the United States have largely experienced the exploitation of their sexuality through objectification and sexualization (Nowak, Fox, & Ranjit, 2015) and within intimate relationships and power within relationships (Lammers & Maner, 2016). On the other hand, women are expected to be
virtuous and benevolent creatures who serve as “sexual gatekeepers” (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011), deciding when sex occurs and when it does not.

Furthermore, Nowak et al. (2015) summarized that women tend to be dehumanized and objectified more when they engage in behaviors that deviate from social norms, such as infidelity. Therefore, women tend to be viewed negatively and judged more harshly and more frequently than men, this is known as the double standard (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000). In fact, men tend to be forgiven for acts of infidelity than women (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000). In addition to the double standard phenomenon experienced, there is a conception in which men a strong biological drive to procreate with as many women as possible for evolutionary purposes (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Hazan & Diamond, 2000). This evolutionary premise has lead scholars to hypothesize men would be most upset by their female partner engaging in sexual infidelity due to the potential of not procreating and/or ending up raising another man’s child (Ward, Kelley, & Church, 2012). In addition, sexual behaviors are largely more endorsed and accepted for men than women. For example, women are expected to be sexually restrictive and to withhold from having sexual encounters without an emotional attachment (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). This connects with accounts that women are more likely to be upset by emotional infidelity then sexual infidelity (Ward et al., 2012), while men are expected to be more promiscuous and less emotionally invested than women (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). Hackathorn and Harvey (2011) described women being more disproportionately stigmatized for extramarital affairs than men, resulting in a double standard.
The messages men and women receive regarding relationships and sexuality are different and may have an impact on the perceptions and experiences of infidelity. Researchers have studied the differences between sex and responses to sexual and emotional infidelity (Guitar et al., 2016; Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Sharpe, Walters, & Goren, 2013). For example, Sharpe, et al. (2013) studied the perceptions of acceptance of infidelity of women compared to men based on past infidelity experiences, using mock vignettes. Sharpe et al. (2013) reported finding that both men and women had more acceptance and forgiveness of infidelity behaviors of the opposite gender.

In another gendered example, some women may identify a wide range of behaviors as infidelity (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). In addition, women report being more upset about cyber-infidelity than men (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011). This finding connects with additional research which indicated women are more likely to be upset by emotional infidelity than sexual whereas men are more likely to be upset by sexual infidelity (Guitar, et al., 2016). However, Leeker and Carlozzi (2014) found that men and women reported experiencing jealousy more when their partners engaged in emotional infidelity than sexual, yet they had different responses to sexual infidelity. For example, women and men reported higher levels of anger when their partner engaged in sexual infidelity (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Furthermore, Urooji et al. (2015) found that married Pakistani women reported a higher perception that their spouse would commit emotional infidelity. Women also reported it would be harder to forgive emotional infidelity (Urooji et al., 2015). Furthermore, women tend to report emotional
disconnection as a primary reason for committing infidelity (Urooji et al., 2015). Men, on the other hand, reported perceiving higher rates of sexual infidelity from their spouse and indicated sexual infidelity would be the hardest to forgive (Urooji et al., 2015). These findings convey that women may need a stable and sustainable emotional connection within a committed relationship compared to men who may need a stable sexual relationship. Furthermore, men and women appear to have differing needs. Even still, within sexual infidelity, both men and women identified sexual intercourse as the most hurtful, followed by heaving petting and kissing (Ward et al., 2012).

There are also differences between men and women in judging infidelity and feelings of guilt or remorse for committing infidelity. Hackathorn and Harvey (2011) found that men and women both tend to judge their same sex’s behaviors of infidelity less harshly than the opposite sex’s behaviors. This finding implies both men and women may be able to rationalize or empathize more with their same sex group than the opposite sex. This may influence expectations and experiences of infidelity. Men reported feeling more guilt when committing sexual infidelity compared to emotional (Fisher, Voracek, Rekkas, & Cox, 2008). Whereas women reported feeling more guilt after committing emotional infidelity compared to sexual infidelity (Fisher et al., 2008). In addition, women reported being more likely to end a relationship after infidelity occurred compared to men (Urooji et al., 2015). Furthermore, Denes, Lannutti, and Bevan (2015) argued that women were more likely to terminate a relationship when same-sex infidelity occurred compared to different-sex. Meaning, women may have been more forgiving when male-to-female sex occurred compared to male-to-male. In comparison, Denes et
al. (2015) reported findings that men were more likely to terminate a relationship when different-sex infidelity occurred compared to same-sex infidelity. That is, when their female partner had sexual relations with another male versus a female. In fact, men reported higher rates of sexual arousal from same-sex infidelity (Denes et al., 2015). Therefore, men may have been more forgiving when female-to-female sex occurred.

Guitar et al. (2016) identified some gender-based differences in defining and distinguishing sexual and emotional infidelity. For example, women were more likely to believe sexual and emotional infidelity could occur without the other, meaning emotional infidelity could be experienced without sexual acts, and sexual acts could be experienced without an emotional connection. Compared to women, men also believe sexual infidelity could occur without an emotional connection. Furthermore, both men and women believed emotional infidelity could occur without sexual acts or sexual infidelity. This conveys that women may perceive infidelity from multiple perspectives and may be able to conceptualize types of infidelity as being separate.

**Infidelity and Divorce**

Marriage continues to be a life goal that many Americans strive for and expect to accomplish successfully. Approximately 85% of Americans will marry at some point in their lifetime (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Of the 85%, the majority will marry for love and personal fulfillment. The idea of marrying for love is widely accepted and even expected in current mainstream society; yet historically people often married for social, economic, and political purposes. Some scholars argue that the industrial revolution can be credited with these changes (Campbell & Wright, 2010). The industrial revolution
strengthened opportunities and desires for personal fulfillment, satisfaction, and autonomy thus generalizing to the pursuit of marrying an ideal soul mate and having a never ending, satisfying relationship (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Currently, there are currently 2,245,404 marriages in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Considering Campbell and Wright (2010), we can assume that most of these individuals may have in fact married for love and may have good intentions of making their marriage last. However, demographics conclude that having a lifelong marriage proves to be difficult, particularly when cohabitating before marriage, and that divorce is extremely common (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). The Center for Disease Control and Prevetion (CDC) (2017) reported 827,261 marriages in the United States were terminated through divorce. Furthermore, Campbell and Wright (2010) wrote that “by 1974, divorce surpassed death as the most common way to terminate a marriage” (p.330). One large factor that leads to divorce is infidelity.

Approximately 50% of couples who experience an infidelity crisis will end their marriage through divorce (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Tuttle and Davis hypothesized that one of the confounding variables that may mitigate termination of marriage through divorce after infidelity is religiosity (Tuttle & Davis, 2015). Tuttle and Davis (2015) utilized structural equation modeling with a sample of 763 participants to determine the likelihood that religious couples would divorce after infidelity. Furthermore, divorce was coded nominally (0= no divorce, 1= ended in divorce or permanent separation) for the purpose of their study (Tuttle & Davis, 2015), thus participants who devalued divorce due to religion would still be included in the terminating a marriage category. In
addition, infidelity was also categorized dichotomous parts and focused on sexual infidelity (i.e. o=no, 1=yes) (Tuttle & Davis, 2015). Religion was measured using exploratory factor analysis of seven items with an alpha score of $\alpha=.89$ (Tuttle & Davis, 2015). The results from their study revealed that religion did not have a significant influence in predicting divorce but that marital stability and happiness did predict divorce after infidelity (Tuttle & Davis, 2015). These results suggest that if couples still maintain a positive perception of their marriage, even after infidelity occurred, they may be less likely to divorce. Thus, counselors may conceptualize the marital bond as being an important variable when working with clients. This is consistent with Tuttle and Davis’s (2015) description that infidelity does not necessarily influence marital stability. Therefore, the relationship bond may be as important as personal values or attributes when predicting infidelity. Nonetheless, infidelity influences the high rates of divorce in the United States; therefore, many scholars have attempted to identify risk factors associated with infidelity.

**Theories of Infidelity**

Infidelity has been widely researched including prevalence rates, predictive factors, cultural differences, emotional and psychological experiences of infidelity, and more (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; Campbell & Wright, 2010; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Levy & Kelly, 2010; Richardson, 1988; Russell et al., 2013). Clinicians and scholars have noted that infidelity commonly occurs as a result of a dissatisfied relationship (Lammers & Maners, 2016). Furthermore, Lammers and Maners (2016) found that individuals with power are more likely to engage in infidelity. In addition to research such as these
examples, scholars have applied theories to infidelity in an attempt to explain extra-marital acts. The most common theories discussed in the literature include the evolutionary theory, John Bowlby’s attachment theory, and social exchange or investment models (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Fricker, 2006; Levy & Kelly, 2010; Schade & Sandberg, 2012).

**Evolutionary Theory**

Since the inception of Charles Darwin’s work on evolution, sex, and reproduction, scholars have utilized evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology theories to speculate why individuals in monogamous relationships engage in infidelity (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Fricker, 2006). Evolutionary theorists described men and women’s sexual behaviors are influenced by fertility and child rearing opportunities (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Hazan & Diamond, 2000). For instance, men may strive to engage in sexual intercourse with numerous partners to increase the chance of spreading their seed and passing their genetic material to a new generation (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Fricker, 2006; Gangestad & Thornhill, 1997). Furthermore, men have minimal responsibility in the investment of conception and child rearing and therefore can engage in sex with multiple partners compared to women (Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Ward et al., 2012). Whereas women may be prone to seek a long-term relationship to increase the chance of conception and have more responsibility of investment with conception and child rearing (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Ward et al., 2012). Elmslie and Tebaldi (2008) and Ward et al. (2012) speculated an economic and biological based premise that men and women both utilize a cost-benefit strategy to determine the most
advantageous genetic outcome. For instance, men may determine whether or not to
distribute their resources and invest within the family or in an extramarital relationship,
and therefore they may be more upset by sexual infidelity (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008;
Ward et al., 2012). For instance, Ward et al. (2012) conducted an analysis of variance to
determine significant differences between sex, sexual orientation, relationship status,
medications used, and distress of infidelity. A significant difference in the distress
experience-based type of sexual behavior was found (Ward et al., 2012). Sexual
intercourse was reported as the most distressing (M=.45, SD=.99), which may support the
evolutionary theory that the possibility of child rearing may influence experiences of
infidelity.

In addition, based on the evolutionary theory premise, men with the most
desirable genetic material may essentially be in high demand (Gangestad & Thornhill,
1997). Thus, Elmslie and Tebaldi (2008) argued that men may cheat because of their
own characteristics as opposed to their spouse’s. However, Hazan and Diamond (2000)
noted that men reported female youth and attractiveness as a primary factor in choosing a
mate. Furthermore, Fricker (2006) reported that men may be more likely to seek out
short-term sexual relationships to spread their genetic seed. Therefore, engaging in a
monogamous relationship can be viewed as a cost-benefit decision for men (Fricker,
2006; Ward et al., 2012). Meaning, being monogamous may cost men the opportunities
of short-term sexual encounters with different women yet may result in a stable family
(Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Fricker, 2006; Ward et al., 2012).
On the other hand, women may cheat to conceive a child with the most desirable genetic material and to obtain investment from men (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Fricker, 2006). Therefore, women cheat based on their partner’s characteristics rather than their own (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Fricker, 2006). This depiction aligned with the Hazan and Diamond’s (2000) report, which showed that women seek attributions of intelligence, appearance, earning potential, and social status when choosing a mate. In addition, there is a relationship between risk of infidelity and fertility. The risk of infidelity in women decreases as the drive and potential for conception (i.e. fertility) decreases (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008). This assumption was researched by Elmslie and Tebaldi (2008) who found a significant difference in sex behaviors of men and women’s age and the likelihood of infidelity. A U-shaped curve was found with statistical analysis, which peaked at age 45 for women and then decreased (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008). This finding suggested that women 45 years and older are less likely to engage infidelity. Since women may experience menopause from age 45 to 60 years old, with an average age of onset being 50 years old (Braem, Voorhuis van der Schouw, Peeters, Schouten, Eijkemans, Broekmans, & Onland-Moret, 2013), this finding conforms with the evolutionary theory that the motivation for infidelity may be based on reproductive drives (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Fricker, 2006). Furthermore, a U-shaped curve was also found for men, peaking at age 55 and then decreasing (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008).

Gangestad and Thornhill (1997) described long-term relationships between humans may reflect cultural adaptation to replicate genes and to ensure adequate child
rearing practices. Yet Gangestad and Thornhill (1997) also found that due to advanced technology in contraceptives, long-term relationships may not be completely linked to parenting obligations or desires anymore. In addition, Hazan and Diamond (2000) expressed that if humans were merely influenced by evolution when practicing mating and sex, then the presence of short-term non-monogamous relationships would be high and normative, yet humans tend to maintain a relationship for several years after child conception. Therefore, an intrinsic biological drive to reproduce and choose an extramarital mate based on genetic endowment, and conception may not be the most valid or only explanation of sexual behaviors and infidelity.

**Attachment Theory**

In addition to interpersonal, intrapersonal, and contextual risk factors, and the evolutionary theory, researchers have addressed attachment bonds between partners as a risk factor and explanation for infidelity as well (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Fricker, 2006; Levy & Kelly, 2010). Many know about John Bowlby’s work regarding attachment development with infants and caregivers (Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). Bowlby (1979) noted that the attachment theory is a way of understanding the importance of and ways in which humans strive to make and maintain strong emotional bonds with one or few people such as parents and/or a spouse. In his research, Bowlby studied attachment within humans and described attachment behaviors as innate or preprogrammed (Bowlby, 1979; Bowlby, 1988). Thus, four observable behaviors were identified toward an attachment figure such as a mother (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). First, people seek to remain physically close to one another and connected (i.e. proximity...
maintenance) (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Second, people need and seek out comfort (i.e. safe-haven) (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Third, people may experience separation anxiety when they are separated from their attachment figure for too long (i.e. separation distress) (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Fourth, people need security to safely and successfully explore the world (i.e. secure base) (Hazan & Diamond, 2000).

The ability to form a secure base or a secure attachment with another human offered implications for intimate relationships (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Bowlby, 1979; Fricker, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). In fact, Bowlby (1988) reported that attachment behaviors are not confined to infants and mothers and attachment bonds remain influential throughout a lifespan. It is conceptualized that people engage in the safe four attachment forming behaviors with their spouse or partner as they did with their care givers (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Therefore, many researchers applied his theory to intimate relationships and by extension, sexual behavior (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). Attachment theory, as applied to intimacy, described that people may strive for a close proximity to an intimate partner who provides attachment and security (Fricker, 2006). In addition, people mentally assess how available their partner is for intimacy and meeting their needs, resulting in “strong cognitive and behavioral patterns of responding to others” (Russell et al., 2013 p. 2). In addition, people may experience high or low levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, and both may result in feelings of insecurity and thus lead to various behaviors such as cheating (Russell et al., 2013). For example, people who experience high levels of attachment anxiety maybe more likely to perceive their partner as being
less available, may feel insecure and have low tolerance for this feeling; therefore, the individual may be more likely to engage in an affair or cheat as a means of meeting own needs. Attachment within adult intimate relationships is often described as attachment types or styles including secure and insecure (i.e. anxious and avoidant) (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Russell et al., 2014). These types and the connection to infidelity are discussed next.

**Secure attachment type.** Bowlby (1979) remarked that feeling a sense of security is a primary goal of the attachment system. When a child forms a secure attachment base with an attachment figure such as a parent, friend, or sibling (Doherty, & Feeney, 2004) he or she may then be equipped to transfer the attachment bond to an intimate relationship. A secure attachment allows for both partners to have an interdependent connect which fulfills a sense of trust, safety, and comfort for both partners without being enmeshed (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006). Russell et al. (2013) described persons with a secure attachment style will perceive their partner as being close and available to meet his or her needs. This is consistent with the primary attachment components, described previously, which allow a person to create a secure base or safe-haven to receive psychological and emotional comfort when experiencing distress (Doherty & Feeney, 2004). For example, a partner with a secure attachment style would be comfortable forming an intimate bond with his or her partner and would not become overly dependent or enmeshed and would not worry significantly about being abandoned (Orzeck & Lung, 2005). This assumption in turn influences the person’s behaviors (Russell et al., 2013). Furthermore, individuals with a secure attachment type are
commonly drawn to commitment relationships with many consistent with normative practices of fidelity (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Orzeck & Lung, 2005). Therefore, Russell et al. (2013) implied that those with a secure attachment type may be more likely to maintain fidelity because of not needing to seek an attachment bond or proximity to an attachment figure that is outside of a marriage or relationship. In addition to secure attachment type, there is are two types which are considered insecure (Russell et al., 2013). Understanding the implications of insecure attachment types in adults is important, as it may be a predictor of infidelity (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; DeWall, Slotter, Finkel, Lunchies, Lambert, Pond, Deckman, & Finchah, 2011; Russell et al., 2013).

**Avoidant attachment type.** Another component of attachment theory is the notion of attachment avoidance (DeWall, et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2013). DeWall et al. (2011) noted that people with an avoidant attachment type tend to feel uncomfortable with psychological and emotional intimacy and therefore may strive to maintain an emotional distance and detachment from their significant other. Such a comfortability with detachment may decrease the person’s interest and investment in a committed and monogamous relationship and tend to terminate relationships more compared to secure attachment styles (DeWall et al., 2011; Orzeck & Lung, 2005). By analyzing two longitudinal data sets from couples, Russell et al. (2013) found that husbands were significantly more avoidant on attachment then wives. For instance, Russell et al. (2013) reported t statistics highlighting the significance: $t(71) = 2.14, p<.05$ for study 1 and $t(134) = 4.38, p<.01$ for study 2. While attachment avoidance may be more of a defense
mechanism used for self-protection, it is presumed to be a form of insecurity and believed to lead to infidelity similar to attachment anxiety. However, Russell et al. (2013) found that “partner’s attachment avoidance was negatively associated with own infidelity” (p. 9). These finding have implications pertaining to attachment theory and couples. If an individual is more comfortable with a partner’s emotional or attachment avoidance, and less comfortable with their own attachment anxiety, one may wonder if fidelity is more of an internal and personal responsibility rather than a couple’s shared responsibility. In addition, implications regarding which counseling treatment, linear versus systemic, is most appropriate when working with couples and infidelity.

Anxious attachment type. Bogaert and Sadava (2002) found that adults with attachment anxiety, or insecurity, are more likely to have short-term relationship patterns and experience a desire for more casual sex, thus increasing the susceptibility to affairs. In fact, high attachment anxiety was positively associated with infidelity in women (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002), which suggests how significant an attachment bond may be for partners. Furthermore, Russell et al. (2013) determined that individuals who score one point higher than the mean on attachment anxiety were two times more like to seek affairs. Interestingly, Russell et al. (2013) utilized data from two longitudinal studies and controlled for individual differences (e.g. the big five personality traits) and found that attachment anxiety was influenced by both partners. Therefore, if neither partner felt secure and felt their needs were being met, then infidelity would likely occur. Furthermore, this finding may reflect that attachment type may be experienced reciprocally.
Social Exchange Theory

In addition to the evolutionary and attachment theories, the social exchange theory has also been described and applied to predicting and explaining infidelity (Lammers & Maner, 2016; Munsch, 2015). The social exchange theory is steeped in sociology, connected to economics, and can be conceptualized as a reciprocal market in which both partners exchange a good (i.e. need or social behavior), such as economic resources, love, sex, and domestic responsibilities (Homans, 1958; Munsch, 2015). Couples may negotiate this exchange and/or follow gender normative scripts, which can influence the type of relationship created (Munsch, 2015). Furthermore, power and control are variables which are often described in social exchange theory regarding intimate relationships (Munsch, 2015). For example, partners who earn the most money and have more control over the couple’s finances may have more influence and power within the relationship (Lammers & Maner, 2016; Munsch, 2015). Furthermore, Lammers and Maner (2016) argued that power influences unethical behavior, such as infidelity, because “powerful people feel psychologically liberated from the influence of social restraints and, as a result power decreases the likelihood that they will follow normative patterns of behavior” (p. 55). Munsch (2015) also described power as a significant predictor of infidelity.

Lammers and Maner (2016) collected data from 610 Dutch individuals and utilized correlational statistics to determine the relationship between power and infidelity. From their analysis, power was found to be a predictor of infidelity – $X^2(3) = 31.27$ – with a medium effect size of $V = .26$. In addition, gender was not a moderator for power –
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\( X^2(3) = 4.70, p = .20 \). Lammers and Maner (2016) also found that power does not simply increase sexual drive or behaviors of casual sex. Therefore, women and men may both be able to maintain power within a relationship, but the experience of power may influence a partner’s comfort with and participation in infidelity (Lammers & Maner, 2016). This finding can be conceptualized as aligning with the social exchange theory because the partner with more power and influence may be less dependent on the other and therefore may have more influence in bargaining exchanging of “goods” within the relationship (Munsch, 2015). Furthermore, the partner with more power may perceive that the relationship has more costs than it does rewards, and therefore, the partner may be inclined to gain such rewards for an extramarital partner. For instance, Buunk and Dijkstra (2000) noted that people enter and maintain a relationship based on costs and rewards or benefits. If a monogamous marriage reaches a point of high cost (i.e. contributing more than one’s partner) with little room for rewards (i.e. homogenous exchange of resources), infidelity may be likely to occur (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Munsch, 2015).

**The Investment Model**

The premise of the investment model is that persons remain in a relationship based on commitment (i.e. valuing commitment) (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999; Le & Agnew, 2003; Mattingly, Wilson, Clark, Bequette, & Weidler, 2010). Additional constructs of satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size are also components of the investment model (Mattingly et al., 2010). Even though people may differ in their definitions of what constitutes infidelity (Mattingly et al., 2010), the
investment model may be used to hypothesize why people cheat. For instance, people may cheat or act in infidelity when they de-value commitment, are less satisfied in the relationship, have high quality partners as options for extra-marital affairs, and have little invested in the marriage (Drigotas et al., 1999; Le & Agnew, 2003; Mattingly et al., 2010). Furthermore, Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, and Elder (2006) studied the relationship between sexual satisfaction, marital quality, and marital instability among 283 middle-aged married persons utilizing autoregression models of analysis. Yeh et al. (2006) reported that high levels of sexual satisfaction and marital quality result in less marital instability overtime. Yeh et al. (2006) added that “the effects of sex on marital relationships are essential, and the causal sequence whereby sexual satisfaction influences marital relationships is similar for both men and women, even though sex may have different meanings to men and women in their relationship” (p. 342).

Utilizing the investment model to predict dating infidelity, Drigotas et al. (1999) predicted that a person’s level of commitment would influence their dependence, influence their relationship behaviors, and predict infidelity while dating. Even though Drigotas et al. (1999) did find that the investment model “significantly predicted subsequent extradyadic behavior of the course of a semester” (p. 515), they also reported a limitation of the study was that the instrument used did not measure infidelity accurately. Furthermore, in a second study, Drigotas et al. (1999) found no significant main effects between gender and dating infidelity in college aged students during a semester break. Even though the researchers found statistically significant results, based on the limitations there is not a clear relationship between this model and predicting
infidelity. Furthermore, the researchers did not sample married persons, therefore, further research is warranted. In addition, Mattingly et al. (2010) attempted to determine which factors (i.e. ambiguous, deceptive, and explicit) accounted for more of the variance in perceptions of infidelity as related to the components of relationships (i.e. commitment, satisfaction, etc.) and religiosity. Utilizing a factorial analysis and an analysis of variance test, Mattingly et al (2010) found that the three components accounted for 77.96% of the variance. Specifically, the reliability of each factor included “ambiguous behavior = .90, deceptive behavior = .75, and explicit = .93” (Mattingly et al., 2010, p. 1471), all of which indicated a strong reliability.

Even though several scholars have utilized the investment model to attempt to predict and understand aspects of infidelity (Drigotas et al.; Le & Agnew, 2003; Mattingly et al., 2010), none have attempted to understand if the investment model helps couples maintain monogamy. For instance, Drigotas et al. (1999) studied how the investment model predicts dating infidelity, not marital infidelity nor practices of marital monogamy. In addition, Mattingly et al. (2010) attempted to determine how types of behavior and the value of religion relates to the perception of relationship quality, dating, and infidelity definitions. Therefore, additional research is warranted to understand how couples maintain monogamy successfully.

**Personality Types and Infidelity**

Researchers have also studied the influence of personality factors or types in predicting and explaining infidelity, including the Big Five personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience.
(Mark et al., 2011; Orzeck & Lung, 2005). Orzeck and Lung (2005) described the inception of the Big-Five factors of personality originated in the 1980’s by Goldberg. Openness to experience is defined as exposing oneself to unconventional and challenging sensations and/or thoughts (Barta & Kiene, 2005). In addition, an openness to experiences may include attributes of “intelligence, creativity, cultural values, curiosity, perceptual ability, and insightfulness” (Orzeck & Lung, 2005, p. 276). Neuroticism is defined as experiencing negative affect and low emotional stability, whereas extraversion is defined as experiencing positive affect, dominance, sociability, etc. (Barta & Kiene, 2005; Orzeck & Lung, 2005). Conscientiousness is described as the ability to follow rules and function in task-oriented roles (Barta & Kiene, 2005). Agreeableness is characterized as avoiding conflicts within relationships, generosity, trust, and empathy (Barta & Keine, 2005; Orzeck & Lung, 2005).

Orzeck and Lung (2005) studied the differences between people who have affairs and those who do not. Data was collected from 208 participants who complete the Trait Rating Adjectives Questionnaire. Participants completed the instrument based on their personality and their partners’ personality or how they perceived their partner’s personality to exist. Orzeck and Lung (2005) described findings significant differences between cheaters and non-cheaters in personality factors of extroversion and openness to new experiences. For instance, self-reported extroversion was significant at $F(1,102)=7.93, p<.01$, and self-reported openness was significant at $F(1,102)=7.18, p<.01$ (Orzeck & Lung, 2005). Furthermore, individuals who reported being unfaithful or cheating had higher mean scores on all five factors compared to individuals who reported
being monogamous (Orzeck & Lung, 2005). Other research has been conducted to determine the relationship between the Big Five factors and infidelity, such as Schmitt (2004). Schmitt (2004) studied personality factors in relation to risky sexual behavior and infidelity within 10 different world regions. For example, Schmitt (2004) reported a significant relationship between low levels of agreeableness and infidelity among North American men and women. Furthermore, Schmitt (2004) reported extroversion was significantly related to infidelity in men – $r(1413) = 2.29, p < .01$ – but was not significant for women. This finding contradicts part of Orzeck and Lung (2005) reported findings regarding extroversion and infidelity. In addition, Schmitt (2004) reported that openness was not significantly related to infidelity, which also contradicts the reported findings of Orzeck and Lung (2005). Schmitt (2004) reported that the findings within North Americans were also found in the other countries, with the exception of agreeableness in South American women. For example, South American women who reported having low levels of agreeableness disclosed being more likely to engage in infidelity (Schmitt, 2004). In addition, Schmitt (2004) described that “low conscientiousness was associated with higher levels of relationship infidelity across all cultures for both men and women” (p. 312). Overall, patterns of the Big Five factors being connected to infidelity were present in numerous cultures (Schmitt, 2004), but across studies, there are some mixed results.

**Treating Infidelity in Couples Therapy**

When infidelity occurs, couples may choose to divorce (Campbell & Wright, 2010) or may attempt to reconcile and mend the relationship. Certainly, some couples do
not seek counseling services after an affair occurs; however, many couples do. In fact, infidelity is one of the most common presenting concerns in couples counseling (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Couples who have experienced infidelity may experience an array of emotions including but not limited to, anger, jealousy, confusion, helpless, fear, and bereavement (Scuka, 2014). This is one of the reasons treating infidelity can be complex (Scuka, 2014). Currently, treating infidelity within counseling occurs after the adverse event has occurred. In addition, counselors are expected to understand the confounding effects that sex, sexual orientation, and perceived emotional connectedness or love has on the emotional experiences of infidelity when working with couples (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

There are numerous interventions and models a licensed counselor can use to work with couples who have experienced fidelity (Abrahamson, Hussain, Khan, & Schofield, 2012; Marin et al., 2014; Scuka, 2014). In their clinical work, counselors may conceptualize helping clients work through infidelity by working toward forgiveness and repairing the relationship bond (Scuka, 2014). One of the most common evidence-based approaches used to heal attachment injury is called emotionally-focused couples therapy (EFT) (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). For example, Makinen and Johnson (2006) utilized a quasi-experimental design to determine the efficacy of emotionally-focused couple’s therapy in treating attachment injury and reported that most couples they identified resolved their attachment injury through counseling.

When using EFT, counselors adopt the understanding that intense emotional pain and trauma that can occur from a violation such as infidelity, leaving a spouse feeling
abandoned (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). Emotionally focused counselors assume that couples need skills to address emotionality and create a secure attachment bond (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). Counselors begin by helping the couple explore emotions and cognitions regarding the act of infidelity and their relationship to help rebuild trust and forgiveness (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). For example, Scuka (2014) described counselors commonly begin by meeting with the couple together for a joint session in which both partners process their perspectives in the relationship. Furthermore, Makinen, and Johnson, (2006) wrote that counselors must help couples de-escalate in the early stages of counseling to provide the opportunity to rebuild attachment through reengagement. Counselors help to ensure a safe environment for both partners so that the unfaithful partner does not need to become defensive nor feel as though he or she is on trial. The counselor guides empathic listening, integrates communication, and challenges negative cognitions through reframe (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). The goal is to allow for the couple to be able to accept responsibility, express empathy, and to begin to engage emotionally again in order to recreate a secure attachment bond. Over time, the counselor is looking for the couple to seek support through one another and to co-create a new marital narrative without defensiveness (Makinen, & Johnson, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). The counselor then exaggerates and generalizes positive changes and attachment bonds by introducing positive interactions, strengthening comfort reassurance, and opportunities to increase intimacy (Schade & Sandberg, 2012).
The emotionally focused couple’s therapy model is one commonly used approach to help couples who present with infidelity and attachment concerns. Another method is to help the couple strengthen their attachment bond (Jeanfreau et al., 2014). Jeanfreau et al. (2014) commended couples that put the children to bed early, have planned private time, increase positive attention between partners, and have effective communication and problem-solving skills. Therefore, counselors provide intervention through reframing, teaching communication skills or active listening skills, problem solving skills, conflict management skills, and coping skills (Jeanfreau et al., 2014). These interventions clearly attempt to maintain and or strengthen a functioning attachment bond between two partners.

While couples counseling is widely used, and proven to be an effective treatment for infidelity, services continue to assume a reactive approach. Treatment or help is provided after infidelity, and the trauma has already occurred as an intervention for the distress experienced. There are very few treatment modalities that offer a preventative approach and understanding of infidelity. Within couples counseling, there are a few preventative modalities which focus primarily on pre-marital counseling (Dasmain, 2014; Tambling & Glebova, 2011).

Dasmain (2014) described that although pre-marital counseling has existed since 1932, it wasn’t until the mid to late 1970’s when couples began seeking such services. Additionally, many of the pre-marital assessments and programs are educational and focus on increasing couple’s skills and marital satisfaction (Dasmain, 2014). There are five well known and used assessments for premarital counseling (Larson, Holman, Klien, }
Busby, Stahmann, & Peterson, 1995). For instance, PREPARE-ENRICH is used in pre-marital counseling or couples counseling, which focuses on helping couples improve their relationship through skill building (Dasmain, 2014; PREPARE/ENRICH, 2016). Furthermore, the FOCCUS assessment is a Catholic-based pre-marital assessment which predicts marital satisfaction with 75% accuracy and a reliability score ranging from $\alpha = .86-.98$ (Larson, et al., 1995). Personal attributes, values, and factors related to demographics were utilized as variables which may influence marital satisfaction (Larson, et al., 1995). Another commonly used assessment is the Cleveland Diocese Evaluation for Marriage (Dasmain, 2014; Larson et al., 1995). This instrument consists of 275 items, predicts marital satisfaction or quality with 81% accuracy, and has an internal reliability of $\alpha = .78-.81$ (Larson et al., 1995). This instrument assesses religious values which are consistent with the Catholic church and preparedness for marriage (Larson et al., 1995). Another inventory is the preparation for marriage (PREP-M), a 204-item survey that assesses interpersonal attributes, demographic factors, and support systems to predict marital satisfaction with 96% accuracy. In addition, this instrument has a reliability of $\alpha = .64-.88$ (Larson et al., 1995). Finally, the pre-marital inventory profile (PMIP) consists of 140 items and predicts 78% of the factors related to marital satisfaction (Larson et al., 1995). Furthermore, it has a reliability score of $\alpha = .64-.79$ and assesses expectations, temperament, substance use and other mental illnesses, demographics, and personal interests and values.

In addition to such instruments and programs, John Gottman has researched marital satisfaction and divorce for several years in his love lab. Gottman and Silver
(1999) described being able to predict divorce with 91% accuracy after observing couples for three minutes in his love lab. Gottman and Silver (1999) identified four of the primary predictors of divorce, including a harsh startup, the presence of the four horsemen, flooding, and body language. The harsh startup consists of the couple beginning a fight or conversation with a negative tone, such as criticism (Gottman & Silver, 1999). The four horsemen are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling (i.e. being non-responsive). Flooding consists of a sense of feeling overwhelmed by your spouse’s responses to you. The body language factor consists of a person’s physiological response to their partner and their communication, such as an increased heart beat (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Additionally, Gottman and Silver (1999) described that most couples can still repair a marriage that has these predictive variables through his seven principles, which focus on helping a couple reconnect, maintaining a connection and meaning, knowing how to problem solve, and/or coping with unsolvable problems. Even though these assessments and programs, such as PREPARE-ENRICH and Gottman and Silver’s (1999) work, have strong psychometric properties, predict marital satisfaction, and predict marital dissolution, none of them directly focus on infidelity and maintaining monogamy; therefore, additional research is warranted.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

Marriage, monogamy, and infidelity have been researched *ad nauseam* (Milne, 2011; Outhwaite, 1981; Walker, et al., 2011). Infidelity has been shown to be prevalent in couples (Leeker & Carozzi, 2014; Russell et al., 2013), is the second most common presenting concern for couples counseling (Leeker & Carozzi, 2014; Scuka, 2014), and
leads to divorce (Campbell & Wright, 2010). There is little research which seeks to understand how couples maintain fidelity. The purpose of this research is to expose a theory which explains how couples successfully maintain fidelity. Due to the purposes of this study, qualitative research questions were generated to gather qualitative data. The research questions include:

1. How have married persons experienced maintaining monogamy/fidelity?
2. How do married persons explain their success in maintaining monogamy/fidelity?
3. What meaning do married persons create from successfully maintaining monogamy/fidelity?

**Conclusion**

The information presented in this chapter included a historical perspective of the construction of marriage, monogamy, and the cultural chastising of infidelity. In addition, infidelity was extensively discussed and included the types of infidelity, prevalence rates, previous research, theoretical assumptions of infidelity, the effect on divorce, and clinical counseling services for infidelity. Overall, the information presented can be summarized thusly: infidelity is commonly viewed as a traumatic betrayal against one’s partner, regardless of the type, which approximately 25% of couples face (Russell et al., 2013; Scuka, 2015). As a result of the damage infidelity can cause, researchers have attempted to explain and predict infidelity by examining the Big-Five personality traits, attachment styles, and evolutionary perspectives in relation to cheating (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Gangstead & Thornhill, 1997; Mark et al., 2011).
Even though such research can be valuable to the counseling field and counselors, couples who successful maintain fidelity and prevent infidelity are frequently overlooked. Logically, if approximately 25% of couples experience infidelity, then the majority of couples (i.e. 75%) either maintain fidelity or do not report their experiences. Therefore, if infidelity is viewed as a problem which should be prevented, more research is needed in order to understand how couples maintain fidelity. A qualitative research study was designed in order to fulfill this gap in the literature. Chapter two of this dissertation will describe the qualitative study designed and the procedures used.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Information about marriage, monogamy, infidelity, and counseling treatments for infidelity were presented in chapter one. Currently there is a gap in the literature regarding infidelity. There has been little research conducted which identifies how couples maintain monogamy. Therefore, this study was designed in an attempt to fill this gap. The information in chapter two outlines the qualitative research, grounded theory, the methods and procedures used, and the sample of whom data was collected from for this study.

Purpose

Culturally, infidelity has been constructed as an inappropriate behavior that should be avoided (Milne, 2011). Yet, approximately one fourth of couples experience infidelity (Russell, Baker, & McNulty, 2013). As a result of infidelity, many couples divorce and/or seek couples counseling after the experience (Campbell & Wright, 2010).

There are numerous counseling modalities and self-help books that focus on helping counseling heal and repair a marriage after an experience with infidelity. Overall, infidelity, marriage, and couples counseling for infidelity and affairs have been researched widely. However, the focus of this research has been to understand, predict, and treat after the fact. Meaning, the counseling field currently operates from a reactive approach despite the evidence of high prevalence rates, potential risk factors, and the damaging effects it can have on a couple (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Butler, Rodriguez, Roper, Feinauer, 2010; Schade & Sandberg, 2012).
A dearth of research has focused on couples and individuals who have successfully practiced fidelity. Understanding how couples successfully maintain fidelity could generate new understandings regarding preventing infidelity. Therefore, if a theory could be generated to understand how couples successfully practice fidelity, perhaps counselors could assume a preventative approach with couples. Developing a preventative intervention for infidelity may ultimately help couples avoid the damaging and traumatic experience of infidelity.

Literature searches were conducted using primary databases such as EBSCOhost. Key terms searched included infidelity, prevention, affair, affair-proof, monogamy, prevention couples counseling, infidel*, protective factors, and preven*. The search yielded limited results. A self-help book titled *His Needs, Her Needs Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* written by Willard F. Harley, Jr. came up in four volumes, however, this book is not based on research and was not listed as peer-reviewed. When filters of peer-reviewed and full text were included in the search, zero results were found. The searched indicated there is currently a dearth of research that focuses on understanding how couples successful maintain fidelity. The purpose of this study is to expose a theory which identifies and explains the experience of fidelity.

**Research Questions**

Due to the purposes of this study, qualitative research questions were generated to gather qualitative data. The research questions include:

1. How have married persons experienced maintaining fidelity?
2. How do married persons explain their success in maintaining fidelity?
3. What meaning do married persons create from successfully maintaining fidelity?

**Qualitative Research**

It is commonly known that fidelity continues to be an expectation within monogamous married unions in the United States. Even though fidelity is expected, approximately one fourth of couples experience infidelity (Russell et al., 2013). In fact, infidelity continues to be the second leading reason couples seek counseling (Butler, Rodriguez, Roper, & Feinauer, 2010). While there is a significant body of research which seeks to predict infidelity and understand the traumatic effects it can have on an individual and marital relationship (Schade & Sandberg, 2012); there is scant research which seeks to understand how monogamous couples experience, understand, and construct meaning from maintaining fidelity.

Quantitative researchers tend to assume a positivist approach when attempting to understand the relationship between variables; however, some scholars have argued that statistical tests cannot capture the experience or meaning of a phenomenon (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). Understanding a persons’ individual experiences, understands, and constructs meaning of a life event or a phenomenon within a specific context calls for qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative research emerged as a result of movements toward post-positivism (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) which challenged empirically-based absolutes. Ultimately, qualitative research identified that phenomena cannot be researched from a positivist or empirical stance because what is known cannot
be removed from the knower (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Meaning that data cannot be purely objective (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Qualitative research methods focus on individuals constructed meanings and experiences (Charmaz, 2014). This study seeks to gain insight and an understanding about how married persons’ experience fidelity and the meaning they make from this experience. Therefore, qualitative grounded theory best fits the purpose of this study. Constructivist grounded theory is flexible and descriptive a branch of qualitative research which expose a theory that is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory adheres to social constructionist epistemologies that reality and knowledge are constructed socially through language (Gergen, 2009). This differs slightly from grounded theory because a theory is found in the data with traditional grounded theory compared to constructivist grounded theory where the theory is co-constructed (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory was selected for this study due to the interactive data collection method of semi-structured interviews and because the goal is to expose a theory which is co-constructed between the research and the participants regarding the participants’ constructed meaning and experiences with fidelity.

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is a rigorous qualitative approach which aims to explore individual and societal phenomena within social contexts (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, grounded theory research centers on understanding people’s actions,
meaning made, and the understanding of their situation or phenomena experienced (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

There are approximately nine essential elements of grounded theory. These elements include: (a) data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, (b) actions and processes are analyzed, (c) systematic and comparative analysis methods are used, (d) new conceptual categories are ‘grounded’ in the data, (e) categories are developed inductively, (f) the purpose is to expose or construct a theory, (g) researchers engage in theoretical sampling, (h) diverse categories and processes are studied, (i) focus on developing a category as opposed to application to an empirical topic (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Overall, grounded theory operates from these flexible guidelines to expose a theory that is “grounded” in the data. Charmaz (2014) postulated that the exposed theory is a result of co-constructing the data through language between the researcher, the participant, and the data.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Constructivist grounded theory is identified as a version of grounded theory that assumes that theories are not discovered; rather, theories are co-constructed by the researcher, the participants, and the analyses of the data (Thronberg & Charmaz, 2014).

This version of grounded theory is rooted in the social constructionist epistemology in which what is known cannot be separated from the knower. Meaning, reality and phenomena and meaning are created through language (Gergen, 2009). Therefore, the notion of an absolute truth or reality is fundamentally implausible since
reality is constructed. Ultimately, there are multiple realities with numerous possibilities, understandings, and meanings (Gergen, 2009).

Understanding the social constructionist epistemology, Charmaz (2014) argues that a theory is constructed and exposed through a systematic and flexible process which begins with research questions, recruiting and sampling participants, collecting and analyzing data in tandem using constant comparison, and resulting in theory building and theory dissemination. Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory utilizes constant comparative analysis and codes in several phases (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Constant comparative analysis is an interactive and interactive process of working through the coding phases to identify core codes and categories and ensuring the validity of the emerging codes by making comparisons between and within the data (Charmaz, 2014). By doing this, researchers are abductive and securitize the data to reach a theory which explains a phenomena or case better than another possible hypothesis (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Finally, constructivist grounded theory analysis occurs in phases. The use of the term “phases” is intended to aid in conceptualization of the process, as analysis within grounded theory may be fluid due to constant comparison methods (Charmaz, 2014). Even though these phases are not linear, and researchers move systematically between each phase, coding within constructivist grounded theory begins with initial coding (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The first phase is open coding or initial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Thronberg & Charmaz, 2014). Coding is the process of labeling and defining pieces of data that are connected or similar (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).
During the initial coding phase, also known as open coding, researchers remain open to the data while interacting with and becoming familiar with the codes (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). During this phase, a line-by-line coding approach is used. Line-by-line coding entails coding gerunds present in each of the transcribed semi-structured (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Gerunds are the noun form of a verb and they allow a researcher to “see the familiar in a new light” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 156) by focusing on processes and actions within the data. Furthermore, during the initial coding phase constant comparative methods are used. Thornberg and Charmaz (2014) describe constant comparative methods, which entails making comparisons between and across data to data, data to codes, and codes to codes to begin to identify similarities and differences, thus resulting in the sorting and categorizing of the initial codes.

Once the initial codes are sorted and clustered, researchers move to the second phase, which is known as focused coding or selective coding (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding is the process of making comparisons between the initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). A researcher works through the codes that emerge in the initial phase to identify “one core category” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 158). Researchers identify and label the core category by sensitively exploring which codes are presented most frequently and represent the dynamics in the data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Ultimately, focused codes will allow a researcher to identify conceptual categories by defining and analyzing the relationship between data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Additionally, constant comparative methods are also used during the focused coding phase as well. Constant comparison of focused codes entails making comparisons
between and across the grouped codes to the conceptual categories – categories to categories (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, categories are compared to individuals, contextual factors, temporal factors, and actions or experiences (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz (2014) stated “initial and focused coding will suffice for many projects” (p. 147). Even though the first two levels of tend to be sufficient, a third level of coding was also done to identify the relationship between codes and expose a theory (Charmaz, 2014). A third phase that is commonly utilized within constructivist grounded theory is theoretical coding. During the theoretical coding phase, researchers begin to assess with the data in a manner which depicts the relationship and inactions between categories and codes (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Through the assessment of the interaction between categories and codes, a hypothesis can be formed and developed into a theory that is grounded in the data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical codes highlight ideas and perspectives that guide the depiction of an analytic description of the relationship found within the categories (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical codes typically consist of ideas, terms, and epistemologies from previous theories (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

**Participants**

A total of 10 participants were recruited to complete two to three semi-structured interviews which lasted for approximately one to two hours in length for each interview. Participants were eligible for the study based on inclusionary criteria, which consisted of being an adult, legally married, identified as practiced fidelity or monogamy in their
marriage, and able to read and speak English. Participants were required to be fluent in English to participate in the semi-structured interview and in order to complete verification processes such as member-checking.

Recruitment of participants began with utilizing the internet. A call for participants was posted multiple times on websites such as, but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Furthermore, participants were also recruited through a professional counseling listserv called CESNet. Participants were also recruited using flyers and word of mouth efforts. For instance, flyers were posted in community centers such as churches, hospitals, libraries, recreational centers, and grocery stores within Ohio.

To ensure that data was obtained from the intended minimum sample size, plans were made to recruit participants using newspaper and radio advertisements. Newspapers were selected in both urban and rural areas such as the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the Record-Courier in Kent, Ohio. The recruitment material aligned with the informed consent material and included the purpose of the study, requirements of participation, information on risks and benefits of participation, and confidentiality.

Description of Participants

To protect the identity of the participants, their names were changed on the transcripts of the interviews and within this chapter. Basic demographic information was determined through the semi-structured interview.

*Tiffany*
Tiffany was a 29-year-old, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, Caucasian female living in the Midwest of the United States. Tiffany had been married twice at the point of the interview and had one child from her first marriage. Tiffany reported being married for one year and six months at the point of the interview. Tiffany worked in the medical field and had a high school degree.

*Frank*

Frank had been married since 2007 and had been with his spouse since 2000. Frank identified as a 37-year-old, heterosexual, cisgender, White male with an advanced college degree in the mental health field. Frank worked and lived in the Eastern part of the United States.

*Rose*

Rose was a 36-year-old heterosexual, cisgender, Jewish female. Rose worked in the mental health field and was pursuing a doctoral degree. Rose had been married to her spouse for three and a half years. Rose lived and worked in the Northeastern part of the United States.

*Melissa*

Melissa was a 32-year-old heterosexual, cisgender, White female who lived and in the Northeastern part of the United States and worked in an educational setting. Melissa described having children and being married for 13 years.

*Barbra*
Barbra was a middle aged, Caucasian, heterosexual female who lived in the southern region of the United States. Barbra was pursuing an advanced degree in the mental health field and described being with her partner for 13 and a half years.

Lisa

Lisa was a middle-aged heterosexual, Italian-American female, who was married for 22 years to a person in the military and had two kids. Lisa had an advanced degree in the mental health profession.

Cindy

Cindy identified as being an African-American, heterosexual, differently-abled, Christian female. Cindy described being socially and economically disadvantaged in her youth. Cindy worked in the public-school system and had been married for nine years. Cindy reported having no children.

Linda

Linda was married for eight years. Linda was a heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, White female. Linda described having a young child and working in the mental health field. Linda had an advanced degree in the mental health field.

Anna

Anna was a middle-aged, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, White female. Anna reported being an international student who was pursuing a doctoral degree in the Northeast. Anna had been married for three years and had no children.
Philip

Philip had been married for 19 years and was a heterosexual, cisgender, White, Christian male. Philip had an advanced degree related to religion and mental health. Philip had three children and worked in the southern region of the United States.

Description of the Researcher

All of the interviews were conducted by me, as the primary researcher. I am a Caucasian, cisgender, heterosexual, female with professional interests in couple’s therapy and mental health services. I currently am a licensed professional counselor (LPC) and hold a national certified counselor certificate (NCC). I earned a bachelor’s degree in Psychology with an emphasis in mental health and a Master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling from a school accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). I am currently a doctoral student pursuing a doctorate of philosophy degree in Counselor Education and Supervision. This research topic is of interest to me because of my professional experiences offering mental health services to couples, individuals, and families. My personal and professional biases regarding infidelity include that I believe it is harmful to couples and that it can be prevented. Furthermore, I hold the assumption that married persons in a monogamous relationship value fidelity. In addition, it is important to note that I personally value monogamous relationship but do not hold this as a professional value. For example, I would offer counseling services to couples who identified as polygamist and/or were in an open marriage or relationship. Therefore, this bias was
monitored utilizing verification procedures. I utilized these procedures to ensure that I was not influencing the emerging theory or codes.

**Methods**

A procedural outline was created before data collection and analysis occurred (see Appendix F). Upon approval from the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix E), recruitment of participants began. Participants were provided with written and verbal informed consent to participate in the study and consent to be audio recorded (see Appendix A). The methods used in this study include collecting data from individuals in two semi-structured interviews. The first set of semi-structured questions were generated prior to any interviews (see Appendix C) and the second set of semi-structured interview questions were made based on the gaps in the data (see Appendix H). Research memos were used to aid in documenting interactions with the data and to aid in bracketing (see Appendix B). Memos were constructed based on Charmaz’s (2014) description of memo-writing within constructivist grounded theory. In addition, member-checking, peer review (see Appendix D), the use of a research journal, and an external audit were each used in the study to establish verification and trustworthiness.

**Data Collection**

The primary method of data collection included semi-structured individual interviews (see Appendix D) with participants who were 18 years or older, legally married in the United States, and who identified as having been faithful. The individual interviews were held in a private location. The interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90
minutes. The interviews were audio recorded using an electronic recording device. The
interviews were transferred to a password protected computer to be stored and were
deleted from the recording device. In addition, the audio recordings were saved to a
backup device and kept locked in a secure location. Each interview was transcribed
verbatim into text format by either the researcher or by a professional transcriber who
signed a confidentiality agreement to not disclose any information he or she became
privy to in the role of a transcriber for this study. All names from the audio recording
were changed to a pseudonym in the transcription to protect confidentiality. All audio
recordings were destroyed once transcriptions were completed.

**Interview Format**

The individual interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 60-90
minutes. In depth interviews were the primary source of data collected. The interviews
were semi-structured. A semi-structured interview format allows a researcher to follow a
set of guiding questions with additional probes and clarification statements or questions
used to expand a participant’s description of their experience and meaning (Hatch, 2002).

**Organization and Reflection**

Constructivist grounded theory allows for researchers to interact with the data and
to “attend to what we hear, see, and sense while gather data” (Charmaz, 2014, p.3).
Memos can be used to assist the researcher in reflecting and documenting the interactions
and relationships presented in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Memos allow a researcher to
analyze and conceptualize the data early in the process and is considered a vital step in
the analysis and data collection phases in constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Verification and Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is accomplished when the reader is persuaded or feels confident that the findings are accurate and are of note (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). Several methods were used to develop trustworthiness and verify the accuracy and credibility of the data. These included member-checking, memo writing, peer review, and an external audit. Each method is described in length in the procedures. Furthermore, a research journal was kept to aid in bracketing and processing the research experience.

Procedures

Upon approval from the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) participants were recruited using word of mouth methods, advertisements at community buildings such as hospitals and churches, and through professional counseling listerves such as the counselor education and supervision listserve (CES-NET). Participants were provided with information regarding the study and informed consent electronically and were asked to sign agreements and returned them to me via email. Confidentiality was upheld by assigning pseudonyms to the participants and by keeping the data on an encrypted password protected computer. Once participants signed the informed consent information, data collection and analysis in tandem, in accordance with constructivist grounded theory, occurred in two phases (Charmaz, 2014).
An unexpected adverse event occurred at the beginning of the recruitment stage. The university email account may have been hacked while the researcher was in communication via email with approximately three to five participants. The incident was immediately reported to the Kent State University information technology professionals who helped investigate the potential account hacking, remove access from any foreign IP addresses, change the password on the account, and monitor the activity. After the account was re-secured, the incident was reported to the dissertation co-chairs and to the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Kent State University IRB required the primary investigator and student investigator completing the dissertation study to complete an unexpected adverse event form (see Appendix G). It is unclear the degree to which the university email may have been accessed by an unapproved party, or whether or not any participant information was obtained or reviewed by anyone other than the student researcher. However, during this time, communication with participants strictly included informed consent and scheduling of interviews. No transcriptions or data existed at the time of the incident. Finally, the university email account was continuously monitored for further hacking throughout the duration of the study, and no incidents were discovered.

Sampling Procedures

Sampling procedures consisted of purposeful sampling based on inclusionary and exclusionary criteria and theoretical sampling to guide data collection (Charmaz, 2014). The inclusionary criteria consisted of individuals 18 years or older, who were legally married at the time of the study, who could read and speak English for member-checking
purposes, and who identified as having been faithful in a monogamous relationship. Exclusionary criteria consisted of individuals who are younger than 18 years old, those who could not read and speak English, and those who identified as not being legally married or having been faithful.

Obtaining data from a diverse sample is important within constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, efforts were made to obtain data from a heterogeneous sample. Criteria for the heterogeneous sample were based on the United States Census Bureau: age, gender, socioeconomic status, religion and spirituality, atheism, duration of marriage, veteran status, disability, education attainment, race, family type, birth place (foreign born and native born), and number of remarriages (United States Census Bureau, 2010 Census).

Theoretical sampling. There are multiple branches of qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). Constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative research approach which uses a large theoretical sample size and constantly compares data points against one another in order to expose a theory that is confidently emerges from the data (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory holds that theories are not necessarily found in the data, rather it is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory was selected to expose a theory of understanding and explaining the experience of marital fidelity.

Constructivist grounded theory seeks to allow data to “speak for itself” by collecting multiple cases (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 154). Therefore, the constructivist grounded theory approach calls for larger qualitative sample sizes.
((Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The intent when gathering numerous cases with a large sample size is to collect enough pieces of data that the theory that emerges from the data can be transferable to multiple individuals and populations (Charmaz, 2014).

Theoretical sampling is a sampling method specific to constructivist grounded theory which involves following tentative constructs to obtain further relevant data from a sample (Charmaz, 2014). The theoretical sampling and data continue to interact and guide the research to obtain more cases based on the tentative constructs or codes (Charmaz, 2014).

Theoretical sampling was used in this study in tandem with data collection and analysis. To begin, married persons who identified as having been faithful or practiced fidelity in a monogamous relationship were recruited. Next, individual interviews were completed with four participants in a semi-structured format, transcribed and analyzed the data to identify tentative codes. Upon identifying the codes, the codes were used to guide additional data collection in the second round of interviews. For example, the first round of analysis and data collection revealed gaps in the data (i.e. categories with limited analytic power) (Charmaz, 2014). From these identified gaps, the questions for the second interviews were created (see Appendix H).

**Phase One**

Data was collected from 10 individuals who completed an individual semi-structured interview. Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2014). Constant comparative analysis is
the process of systematically holding units of data against one another (Charmaz, 2014). Memos were used as a medium to document my reactions, hunches, and thoughts during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, a methodological journal was kept to organize the memos throughout the process. In addition, the journal was brought to each interview and was readily available during analysis. When writing the memos, freewriting and informal approaches were used (Charmaz, 2014).

**Verification and Reflection**

During phase one, two verification procedures were used. First, member-checking was used after each interview was completed and transcribed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The participants were provided with an electronic copy of their own transcribed interview. The participants were asked to read the transcribed interview and to provide feedback or edits if appropriate. Member-checking was utilized to allow for the participants to comment on the accuracy of the interview and, by extension, the credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

Second, a peer review was used during phase one for verification purposes. Peer review is the process of processing the data collection and analysis experience and allowing an external colleague to review the data to verify the accuracy of the methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1984). A doctoral student, pursuing counselor education and supervision at Kent State University, with training and experience in qualitative research was recruited to review the data. Furthermore, the peer reviewer and I engaged in dialogue regarding the data and analysis experience to process personal biases, identify
discrepancies, and to address the logic and process of forming the codes and meanings understood. The peer review process was used to guide the data analysis and data collection. This is known as theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is the process of following the emerging theoretical direction and to collect more data to fill any gaps (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The peer reviewer and I reached consensus regarding the gaps in the data. These gaps informed the second set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix H).

**Memo writing and research journaling.** Following the first interviews, a research memo was completed in order to document the emerging codes and comparisons made during the data collection and analysis process. Furthermore, memos were used as a medium to document reactions, hunches, and thoughts during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). A methodological journal was kept to organize the memos throughout the process. In addition, the journal was brought to each interview and was readily available during analysis. Each memo documented the data and interaction with the data.

**Phase Two**

Phase two of this study began immediately following the peer review verification procedure. Once the peer review process was complete and a consensus about any gaps in the data was reached, the second round of interview questions was developed and participants were contacted via email to set up a second interview. All of the participants completed another round of semi-structured interviews that were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using constant comparison methods. There were no drop-outs
among participants. The interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Immediately following the completion of the second interviews, the verification processes discussed below occurred in addition to constant comparative analysis.

**Verification and Reflection**

After completing the second round of interviews, member-checking occurred and the participants were given an electronic copy of their transcribed interview and were asked to provide any corrective feedback necessary. In addition to member-checking, a research memo was completed after each interview to document the analysis and data collection process. Finally, an external audit was completed during phase two for verification of the accuracy of the analysis. The external auditor was an adjunct professor at Kent State University with significant experience in grounded theory research. External audits are typically completed by an expert in grounded theory methods (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The goal of external audits is to provide to assess and verify the accuracy of the emerging codes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

**Memo writing and research journaling.** Similar to the first phase, research memos were completed following the second interviews. These memos were used to document the emerging codes and comparisons made during the data collection and analysis process. Furthermore, memos were used as a medium to document reactions, hunches, and thoughts during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). In addition to memos, a research journal was kept to organize my thoughts, reactions, concerns, etc. throughout the process. Finally, the research journal and memos were brought or were readily accessible during each interview.
Analysis

Constant comparison analysis in phase two consisted of initial coding and focused coding, followed by theoretical coding. Similar to phase one, a line-by-line approach was used in which the data was coded gerunds openly and quickly (Charmaz, 2014). Comparisons were made between codes within phase two and between phase one and two codes. In addition, comparisons were made between interviews. Focused coding was used following the initial coding. Consistent with phase one, focused codes were selected by determining which codes which were presented in the data frequently and/or had significant meaning or value (Charmaz, 2014). Then the codes were compared to determine similarities and differences. Additionally, comparisons were made between codes in order to begin developing categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Initial Coding

Coding data allows for the process of connecting the data to a theory to begin (Charmaz, 2014). Coding entails labeling or naming units of data by grouping, categorizing, and summarizing segments of data (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory follows three types of coding within constant comparative analysis which include initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). The first two steps of coding, initial coding and focused coding, where used during phase one. Initial coding focuses on actively naming or labeling small segments of data (Charmaz, 2014. During the initial coding phase, a line-by-line coding was used in which gerunds (i.e. nouns used as verbs) were coded (Charmaz, 2014). Coding gerunds allowed an interaction to occur with the data, from the participant’s perspective, and to
begin to define the meanings conveyed (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, the qualitative software called NVivo was used to help organize codes. Constant comparative analysis was used during the initial coding step by holding units of data against one another to make comparisons and distinctions between and across data points. For example, gerunds were compared to other gerunds within the same interview and across different interviews.

**Focused Coding**

Immediately after completing initial coding, focused coding was used. Focused coding is the process of comparing the initial codes by organizing, synthesizing, and integrating the numerous amounts of data from the initial coding phase to further advance the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014). Focused codes tend to be more conceptual in nature and allow for selective coding and the grouping of similar units of data (Charmaz, 2014). Focused codes were identified by selecting codes which were presented in the data frequently and/or had significant meaning or value and were charted (Charmaz, 2014). Constant comparison analysis was used during the focused coding stage, which included determining similarities and differences between codes within and across interviews in order to develop categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Focused codes were identified by selecting codes which were presented in the data frequently and/or had significant meaning or value (Charmaz, 2014). Then, the codes were studied and comparisons were made between codes. Additionally, comparisons between codes were made to begin to develop categories during phase one and phase two (Charmaz, 2014).
**Theoretical Coding**

Unique to phase two, theoretical coding was used based on the selected focused codes (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding is a sophisticated approach used to highlight the form of the focused codes and relationships between them to generate an emerging theory and apply it to various schemas (Charmaz, 2014). Hernandez (2009) noted that theoretical coding is described as both a verb and a noun. Theoretical coding is the practice of connecting focused codes to expose theoretical codes which convey the relationship between codes and can pull all other codes under it (Hernandez, 2009).

Part of theoretical coding lies within the ways in which the researcher works with the data in order to expose the relationships between the focused codes (Charmaz, 2014; Hernandez, 2009). For instance, researchers must remain sensitive to the theory that is emerging and not mistake one core code as the emerging theory (Hernandez, 2009). In addition, researchers may use *in Vivo codes* to identify the actions or behaviors presented which often resolve the problem (Hernandez, 2009). To ensure theoretical sensitivity, research journaling was used to process and reflect on the emerging codes. Comparisons were made between and across codes to assess and analyze the relationship created between codes. Theoretical coding occurred by mapping out the relationships between codes and processing which codes had more analytical power to expose the overall theory (Charmaz, 2014).

**Conclusion**

Chapter two included information about qualitative research, grounded theory, and descriptions of the procedures used in this study. Researchers using grounded theory
conduct constant comparative analysis using several stages of coding and are guided by theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). This study followed these grounded theory processes and included specific methods to generate trustworthiness, including peer review, auditing, and the use of memos. Participants were selected for this study based on the inclusionary criteria of speaking and reading English, being legally married, having never engage in infidelity, and being willing and able to complete two to three semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using constant comparative analysis and were coded in three stages. Theoretical sampling was used to collect more data during the second phase of the study and the data were code and analyzed consistent with the first stage and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Data collection and analysis was conducted until saturation was reached and a theory was exposed. The next chapter will describe the results of the analysis and outline the theory that emerged from the data.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Data was collected through two semi-structured interviews from 10 adults who met the inclusionary criteria discussed in chapter two. A demographic description of the participants was presented in chapter two. Table 1 below is a depiction of the information each participant presented during the interviews.

Table 1

Brief Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>married for 1.5 years</td>
<td>divorced once</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>medical field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>married for 10 years</td>
<td>children not disclosed</td>
<td>doctoral degree</td>
<td>mental health field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td></td>
<td>married for 3.5 years</td>
<td>lives in northeastern USA</td>
<td>doctoral student</td>
<td>mental health field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>married for 13 years</td>
<td>has children</td>
<td>educational setting</td>
<td>mental health field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbra</td>
<td>Middle-aged</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td>married for 13 years</td>
<td>divorced once</td>
<td>doctoral degree</td>
<td>mental health field, spouse in military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Middle-aged</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Italian-American</td>
<td></td>
<td>married for 22 years</td>
<td>2 children, doctoral degree</td>
<td>mental health field</td>
<td>in the military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Age not disclosed</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>doctoral degree</td>
<td>mental health field</td>
<td>1 child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Middle-aged</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>International doctoral student</td>
<td>works in translation field</td>
<td>no children</td>
<td>married for 3 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Philip: Age not disclosed, heterosexual, cisgender, Caucasian, Christian, lives in southern USA, works in religion and mental health fields, doctoral degree, 3 children.

Cindy: Age not disclosed, heterosexual, cisgender, African-American, differently-abled, Christian, doctoral candidate, worked in public-school setting and mental health field, no children, region not disclosed.

Grounded theory methods were used to find a theory to answer the research questions. This study had three research questions:

1. How have married persons experienced maintaining monogamy/fidelity?
2. How do married persons explain their success in maintaining monogamy/fidelity?
3. What meaning do married persons create from successfully maintaining monogamy/fidelity?

Grounded theory methods were used to collect and analyze data from ten adults who were legally married, identified as having been monogamous, and who were fluent in English. Each participant was interviewed twice. The data was analyzed using constant comparison and was coded with initial coding (i.e. line-by-line for gerunds), focused coding (i.e. the sorting and categorizing of initial codes), and theoretical coding (i.e. exposing the relationship between the focused codes) (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, several verification processes occurred throughout the study to establish trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). These included memo-notes, maintaining a research journal, member-checking, bracketing, peer review, and an external audit.
The constant comparative analysis exposed the reciprocal nature of monogamy and the theory that monogamy is both the cause of and a result of small, continuous, and consistent efforts in areas of coping, boundaries, sex in a relationship, building a secure attachment or emotional connection, fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy, and practicing congruence. Each of these categories can be conceptualized as protective factors which influence and are influenced by the other. The relationship and presence of each protective factor helped the participants maintain monogamy (See Figure 1).
Figure 1. Protective Factors of Monogamy Theory. Monogamy is both the cause of and a result of small, continuous, and consistent efforts in each protective factor which include:

(a) practicing congruence, (b) fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy, (c) building a secure attachment or emotional bond, (d) sex in a marriage, (e) behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries, and (f) coping individually and as a couple.

In Figure 1, you can see the relationship between and across the protective factors. These relationships helped ground the overall sense of duality that monogamy is
both not the primary daily focus of a marriage and an ever-present entity in a marriage. Furthermore, each protective factor or category consisted of multiple sub-categories.

**Building a Secure Attachment/Emotional Bond**

Having a satisfying and secure attachment or emotional bond with one’s spouse was a strong and consistent theme within the data. This protective factor was found to be comprised of subcategories of intimacy, enjoying the relationship, communication, and knowledge and exposure to healthy relationships. Furthermore, when individuals feel emotionally connected (i.e. in love), feel as though their emotional needs are met, and have a sense of togetherness, they are less tempted to seek both emotional and sexual affairs. For example, Melissa described “once I met my husband I had no interest in anybody else.” In addition, Tiffany stated “I just like… with *Simon, I just love him so much I could never do anything like that to hurt him.” Furthermore, Linda offered that any extramarital connections would not be as fulfilling as the connection with her spouse. For example, she described “o that’s not a draw for me really but also knowing emotional connection um like even if I were to entertain connecting with someone else I think cognitively and emotionally would realize that it wouldn’t meet my needs so I think that that's a big part of it…” Linda also noted that if her emotional needs weren’t met by her spouse she may be at more risk for infidelity. She said,

like if I were feeling like I needed an emotional or intimate connection with someone else because I wasn't getting my needs met from him at the time um so I could see myself based on that scenario I could see myself being more open to the idea I think that the stopgap measure would be there and some of those principles
like the especially the ones from my faith, tradition, as well as, maybe not so much about the family unit except I will say that having a son you know having a child makes it even harder I would say to violate the relationship you want to try even harder make it work because there’s someone else to think about so I guess from that perspective the family unit like what will it is do for my son um it would be like the last resort probably thoughts but they would be very powerful thoughts for me.

It was evident the importance of fostering a strong a secure attachment bond was present throughout the data. Participants described creating and maintaining this bond through intimacy, enjoyment of the relationship or marriage, communication, and understanding healthy relationships.

**Intimacy**

Intimacy was found to be one aspect of building a secure attachment or emotional bond. Participants described many ways of fostering intimacy with their spouse. These codes will be discussed in this section.

**Focusing on the relationship.** Part of forming intimacy is the expectation that the quality of the relationship is the primary focus for partners. For instance, Linda described “making sure that we have still prioritized attention to each other.” Rose also thought “it’s not something either of us are fighting, however, all of that other stuff about the relationship really does help. I know my husband has said to me repeatedly that there is no way he would fuck this up because it is so good in other ways that I wouldn’t have to worry. And I believe him. He is where he says he’s going to be all of the time.” Philip
also believed that the quality of the relationship is of great important for fostering intimacy, a secure attachment, and maintaining monogamy. For example, he described the reason that we do these things is because we want our relationship to be fulfilling. You know we want to be happy with each other…you know and we want to want to make each other happy. And the byproduct of that means that we don't have to look somewhere else for our fulfilment …is a happy…large byproduct but it’s really more about how are we deepening our relationship. How are we making our relationship really rich and rewarding?

**Remaining open to giving and receiving intimacy.** Another aspect of intimacy is the idea of continuously being emotionally open to one’s spouse to deepen intimacy. Barbra said, “I think things you're turning towards one another rather than turning away from another and it just um…makes it the source that you go to when you know when you want to be with someone.” The idea of being emotionally present and accessible to your spouse was also articulated by Philip, who said “we reaffirm that with each other you know that we’re constantly reminding each other and telling each other you know we are in this together we’re with each other were not interested in deviating or going outside marriage for those needs.” Rose presented a similar notion of expecting and being prepared to continuously embrace intimacy with her husband. She said,

um and I think it’s just kind of like more and more and so because we had that appreciation as well for what we have…we don't… you know I’m not saying in 10 years we wouldn’t take it for granted to an extend because I think that’s the danger anybody might face but I think it is harder for us per se to fall into that trap
because every day I think we’re both like oh my gosh this is really our life? Like and we will see have just those little things like uh just out of nowhere like oh I am so happy this is our life you know? And just joining in those moments… just little bits to check in and make sure the other is happy.

Furthermore, Philip offered concrete examples of efforts to continuously build intimacy. He stated,

um during the separation um something that a lot of people find sickeningly cheesy my wife does this if she goes on a trip or if I go on a trip she’ll put notes in my luggage or leave notes under the pillow you know…so those kinds of things um you know…trying to try to connect with each other while we’re away and then at various points just in the day regularly I think that we make points of contact. I think that they are ways that we are constantly trying to affirm each other and in some way, we’re you just trying to let you know hey I am still here I’m still connected with you, I’m still thinking about you.

**Maintaining intimacy by reconnecting emotionally.** Because remaining emotionally open to their spouse was described as important, participants also identified that finding new ways to reconnect emotionally as important as well. Philip said “yeah one other thing that I was thinking about is that you know over the course of 19 years you either get stuck in ways of talking to each other that are either barely functional…or… mildly dysfunctional or you start find new ways to talk to each other and so one of the things that I have found that uh that I do is I have new way. ” In addition, Tiffany identified the risk factor of reduced intimacy or emotional connection. She said,
I feel like if we ever got to that point we would need to figure out a way to get on the same page again. Like I don’t ever want to be to that point. Where you are just like living day-to-day disconnected and just blah going through the motions. So, if I ever did get to that point I would definitely like see a counselor or figure out what would work for us to get back on track because I don’t ever want to be like that. But I mean if that did happen it would, I would definitely…it would be a lot harder to um…like resist temptation you know what I mean?

Furthermore, Lisa described overcoming a challenging moment in a relationship and being able to reconnect. She said, “you have to put the effort into making it pass. Like sometimes I’ll say like ‘hey what’s going on with us? Where are we at?’ you know?”

Finally, Melissa discussed being able to be honest and vulnerable to identify “a symptom of something else that there’s a deeper issue there” which could result in emotional reconnection and deepening intimacy in a marriage.

Accepting that intimacy takes planning and effort. Furthermore, Linda and Cindy both identified that intentionally planning time to spend with their spouses was an important factor in deepening intimacy, which connects with ensuring a secure attachment bond which becomes a protective factor for monogamy. Linda said,

"um I think it's more just emotional intimacy and making sure that we that we’ve made time for that with each other especially with a kid and maybe in 10 years another kid…um making sure that we have still prioritized attention to each other because that’s something especially in the past couple years with having a small child that’s something we realized that’s really hard to do when you're when
you're a parent it's really easy for all of your time as a couple to feel like you're either like rotating shifts like but like to actually still find ways to connect to other and that's been a challenge so I think I think that's probably would be the biggest test of our relationship in the next 10 years and again I kind of tie monogamy to the quality of the relationship.

Cindy also described purposefully planning time spent as a couple. She stated, now one of the things that my partner and I do is every Saturday night it is Saturday night date night…so even when I was at the conference we had our date night via Skype. I had ordered from the same place you know like remotely and we agree to meet and took a little time to carry on our tradition. And I think you know like being able to spend quality time together and what we will do is power all of our electronic devices. Let individuals know how to reach us in the event of a crisis and we just have that time.

**Continually demonstrating intimacy.** The idea of making effort to continuously showing affection and intimacy was shared by other participants as well. For instance, Barbra discussed cherishing and protecting time as a couple to maintain the intimacy and emotional bond. She stated,

Either individually or as a family or as a couple or whatever so we always maintained a date night at least two or three times a month like ever since she was born. Even when we first had her you know, we have to means do this, we had night nurse come the first four weeks twice a week so that we could um have one night where we could you know go to bed at the same time and maintain as
sense of feeling like a couple. So, I think that is definitely a protective factor in the sense of maintaining like the spark and being very conscientious that like this relationship is very important and it needs to be maintained you know that the relationship doesn’t just happen.

The result of the continual effort is the result of having that one person in the world that that knows you better than anybody and you know and you’re lucky when that’s your partner versus you know your best friend. So, there’s that saying that there’s never a place more lonely then being with someone that you don't want to be with, right? So, um and I think there is nothing more fulfilling than being with someone that you deeply want to be with and respect.

**Taking risks to deepen intimacy.** Participants also acknowledged that building intimacy is not always easy and often means taking risks to be vulnerable with your spouse. Yet, it is important to direct intimacy toward your spouse. Therefore, taking risk to deepen intimacy with your spouse was found to be another aspect of intimacy, emotional connection, and maintaining monogamy. Frank said, “I automatically see it as something that I can ask myself why am holding back in my relationship with my partner? What is scary about where we’re at right now and the sort of risk and vulnerability exploring this together as opposed to redirecting my intimacy in another direction where I get immediate gratification in a safe way.” Philip also described the importance of “being willing to have that risk” when forming points of intimacy and exposing your inner thoughts, desires, wants, etc. He noted that one’s ability to fulfill
taking risk is comprised of a willingness and the level of trust in a relationship. He stated, “and again, a lot of it goes back to trust. Have you built a foundation of trust with this person? That they value you and that they know what kind of person you are.” Philip’s depiction of taking risk connected with Barbra’s idea that there is a sense of evolution with intimacy. She said “you know you have to allow your intimacy to evolve as well. And there’s nothing you know more desirable than deeply knowing each other.” Barbra had a clear understanding of the benefit of taking risk to deepen intimacy. Melissa also believed in an evolutionary perspective of intimacy in that it may deepen over time and with practice. She said “it’s definitely different more committed and deeper level of a love than it was when we were first married and dating.” Frank also offered the idea of putting the risk into context of deepening intimacy. He described “um you know I like the phrase ‘risking for fullness’ or for fuller life as a way to think about leaning into vulnerability…um you know courage again; the root of courage is heart and I think that it definitely takes a lot of heart to be present with someone through all their stuff uh and trust someone to be present um to you for your stuff.”

**Cultivating intimacy by practicing empathy.** In relation to taking risk to deepen intimacy, participants conveyed the value of having empathy for their spouses as a component of intimacy and strengthening the attachment bond protective factor. Linda said, because again it’s so personal that if you um…I don’t know…if your partner’s sense of worth or something is wrapped up in that and you’re going full-fledged into like giving I guess like firm feedback about experience it might not go over
very well [laughs]. But I guess what I am thinking is I know how my husband can take feedback so I know if I come off as critical, especially about sex, he’s not going to take it well. And it’s going to be a source of insecurity for him. Lisa also described having empathy and sensitivity to her husband’s needs and life stressors. She said

um… and I would say too just like being more sensitive to where one another is at you know what I mean? Like even if I was interested in having sex and he’s getting up early like I am going to leave you alone. You know? Plus, I just worked a 14-hour day [laughs] you know? While we didn’t have those problems in when we were 22, we weren’t doing the things we are doing now. I think it’s been more like things like that. Like the creativity isn’t necessarily new we’ve kind of done that all along but I think it’s just been more sensitive to one another. I can’t imagine a point in time where we were insensitive, I don’t want to say that…I just feel like uh…it’s just being more aware of what the other person needs. Finally, Tiffany also described “thinking about each other’s feelings and knowing that he counts on me.” Each of these participants described a deep level of awareness and compassion for their spouse’s feelings, needs, desires, etc. which can be described as empathy.

**Perceived acceptance and love.** One aspect that was found related to intimacy was the perception that their spouses understand and accept their personal faults, limitations, or unique quirks. Rose stated, “yeah it doesn't is not logical but I own a lot of
my stuff...I’m like it’s not logical... it’s just my anxiety and he's really understanding of that...[laughs] really understanding and he tries to accommodate that when he can and I try not to make him too crazy, you know?” Furthermore, Tiffany described feeling completely secure physically because her husband accepts her. She said, “that does help with feeling secure and comfortable yourself because I know that he loves me unconditionally and he thinks that I am beautiful and he knows I feel the same way. Especially because we don’t talk about how other people look.”

**Recognizing and acknowledging the intimacy given from spouse.** Participants also identified respecting their spouses as a part of developing intimacy as well. For example, Tiffany described that she and her husband consciously speak to one another with respect. She said,

well we never call each other names. I don’t know. We don’t yell at each other because we feel like once that line is crossed it just gets worse and you just start treating each other worse the worse because...I don’t know you just wouldn’t want to put fire on it. It’s not good. So, we just chose to talk. I mean we have our disagreements. We just choose to like the way that we talk to each other...is how you would talk to somebody that you fully respect and love because I think sometimes in relationships you love somebody but you just don’t treat them that way you know what I mean?

Similar to Tiffany, Cindy described the role that respect has within her marriage. She said,

um the way I decided monogamy was for me had to do with both my upbringing
and then also I wanted um…I wanted exclusivity and I believe that when you are equal yolk and as far as when two become one in the marriage you, know? It is a marriage institution and there is no more um I it becomes us and we and then also respecting myself, my body, and also respecting my husband throughout that process.

So, for Cindy, respect entered into her relationship simultaneously as she chose monogamy for herself. Furthermore, Linda described that how she views her husband and his positive attributes helps her maintain monogamy by deeply respecting him. She stated, “I would say it’s much about how I view him, and this is not self-deprecating, like he is a better man than I am. He is a stronger person than I. He is, uh… I can’t begin to tell you how what an amazing individual he is and how like I’ve had a string of very unsimilar men before him in my life.”

**Giving and receiving respect to maintain intimacy.** In addition to respecting their spouses, participants discussed perceiving that their spouses respected them as well and that there was an overall shared respect for their marriage and the lives they built together. Lisa described it this way:

when I look back yes, it is about commitment but it’s also about respect I would say that he has the same respect for me I’ve never felt disrespected by him I’ve never felt put down by him I’ve never felt belittled or berated by him and that’s not necessarily tied to monogamy but it could be tied to my looking at something else you know what I’m saying? Or for someone else and so I think for me it’s about respecting us and respecting our children we are raising two boys I have
two boys that are 13 and 16 and so you know I think he’s a phenomenal model of a man as far as hard to treat your partner you know what I am saying? Or for someone else and so I think for me it’s about respecting us and respecting our children.

Philip also identified that his respect for his marriage and his spouse influences his behaviors to maintain monogamy and remain open with his spouse. For instance, he said, “Yeah, I think, I did talk about the idea of openness before but it’s one thing for me out of respect for our relationship to want to disclose things that I think you know I don’t her finding out about this and it being taken out of context. Me being proactive in order to preserve is very different than her trying to pry.” Linda also described a sense of disclosure in her marriage in relation to respect. She offered that she would be shocked if her husband cheated on her and this would lead her to question “love and his value of me.” Therefore, she continues to perceive and believe her spouse respects her and remains faithful to her as she does to him. In addition to having respect for her spouse, Rose also said, “it’s finding the right person that deserves it” when discussing giving her intimacy and monogamy to her husband. Another aspect of respect within intimacy, discussed by Barbra, was the perspective of having experienced challenging times together and overcoming those times. For example, Barba said,

I think another thing would be like the things that we had gone through in life. I've always been kind of intrigued by the statement you know that’s the mother of my child or that’s the father of my child. And I think it captures the idea of when you gone through things together there’s even a more heightened respect and
reverence for the other person.

**Viewing spouse from a positive perspective.** Participants also described maintaining positive beliefs about their marriages and about their spouses which influenced deepening intimacy. For instance, Rose discussed believing or having a sense that she and her husband support each other’s individual development. She explained that her husband supports her pursuing a doctorate and that she supports him in his career. She said “um and being so generous with that and not holding that over me in ways you know it’s that other support too of helping them…you’re supporting their individual growth as well… it’s not just the marriage.” Lisa also described perceiving that support exists in her marriage. She provided the example that while she was pregnant her husband said “I am getting out of the Marine Corp” and that she chose to support him without hesitation. She remarked she told her husband “uh... okay! I am not working, but sure no problem!” because she and her husband support one another and are “flexible” with each other. Even with the perceived support within her marriage, Rose acknowledged, feelings of infatuation lessen over time but that she perceives that her husband continues to put her first. She offered an example that her husband’s best friend moved back Israel so a month after we were married he moved back but he had no place to live so he lived with us for like a month. And we had a suite in the basement but I’m like we just got married…but I understood he needed to help him out and stuff. But if that relationship now and then um…and now he’s better about and things I think have evened out but in the beginning, it was…if he had had that real emotional connection to his best friend even…even if there's no like
romantic kind of thing... I know that that would have been an issue.

**Remembering spouse’s positive attributes.** Furthermore, participants described having a perception that they lucked out in marrying their spouse. For instance, Rose said,

I think a lot of times when I catch myself maybe being irritated or something…something that really in a logical rational person would be like…but I am like they know they know with me…but then whenever I come home one thing isn't done I now go back and I like all of the things that he does do on a daily basis and all the ways that he supports me and that this little thing doesn't negate any of that and that I don't want to browbeat him personally when he is so good and overall amazing…but I feel like he is honestly…I couldn’t believe someone so good came in a package that pretty.

Viewing a spouse in a positive light was shared by Philip and Lisa as well. Philip said

“um…you know how just a lot of times I'll just take time to watch her. Um you know just to kind of you know whether it's something that she’s doing with the kids or just you know she might just be changing clothes...you know just take the time just to watch her and still look at her and admire her…physically or whether it's you know in a way that she's relating with people um so that's something that's internal um... I think you know one of the other things that I do is when she um... I mean there are some things that drive me crazy about her not a good way um and so I will vent to myself but then I’ll also remind myself that hey if this is the worst thing I have to deal with I’m in pretty good shape.”
Furthermore, Rose maintains the perspective that her marriage is better than past relationships. She offered an example and said,

the relationships when…that you know that I wasn't happy in…and after some time…I either felt I was pulling too much to either like you know my boundaries were being ignored or you know our boundaries didn’t match or like or I was so unhappy but I felt stuck and I... you know it just turned into weirdness and getting you know… me but me still trying to explore other options you know and getting in very…it is like no you’ve been a real jerk and you've done all of this stuff and you’ve been messing with my head and so I’m going to out there but you think, you know?

In addition, Lisa described “I think it’s how again, like is said in the last call he’s an incredible human being who puts up with me and all of my ridiculousness.” There is a shared effort of maintaining positive perspectives of their spouses. Finally, Anna described being able to recognize when her husband gives her appreciation as well. She talked about a night when she insisted they have a date night and said “was like we haven’t being out on a date at night for a while and we went and he would not stop thanking me because he's like we really needed that.” Finally, Lisa said, “I would never risk losing what I have with him over the possibility of not being monogamous you know what I am saying?”

**Sharing life with one’s spouse.** Another aspect of intimacy discussed by participants was the perspective that they fully shared their lives with their spouses. For instance, Anna offered the perspective that she has a constant place in her husband’s
daily life. She said,

I meet his coworkers…I meet…he plays volleyball a lot in and I meet people from volleyball. When I show up to his games which he loves by the way because he loves to include me in his things…and that’s what I am talking about. And people will be like oh you’re *Sarah I heard so many things about you...and I don’t think they’re lying to me. It's authentic because then they start telling me things that he said about me.

Anna’s experience also connected with Tiffany’s. For instance, Tiffany said “um I mean like I said we enjoy being together and we keep things open and I mean like he’s not hiding his phone I am not hiding mine and…social media isn’t like a huge deal to us. Like I mean…he has no problem with me being on his.” Furthermore, Melissa described wanting to share everything with her husband. She said “he is my best friend like…even before I feel like my husband, I feel like he's my best friend…so who do…who is the first person to tell?”

In addition, participants talked about sharing life tasks and major life decisions. For instance, Lisa described sharing parenting tasks and her perspective that he respects her. She said “I think for me it’s about respecting us and respecting our children we are raising two boys I have two boys that are 13 and 16 and so you know I think he’s a phenomenal model of a man as far as hard to treat your partner you know what I am saying?” Furthermore, Lisa also discussed sharing the decision and burden of deciding to stop having children with her husband. She said, “when we wanted to stop having children, he offered to have a vasectomy and I was like, you know let’s not mess with
anything down there…let’s make sure it’s all good by you and I’ll just take care of me, you know?” Linda also described sharing life tasks in order to maintain a sense of intimacy. She said

I think it's more just emotional intimacy and making sure that we that we’ve made time for that with each other especially with a kid and maybe in 10 years another kid um making sure that we have still prioritized attention to each other because that’s something especially in the past couple years with having a small child that’s something we realized that’s really hard to do when you're when you're a parent it's really easy for all of your time as a couple to feel like you're either like rotating shifts like but like to actually still find ways to connect to other and that's been a challenge so I think I think that's probably would be the biggest test of our relationship in the next 10 years and again I kind of tie monogamy to the quality of the relationship.

**Making commitment have meaning.** The final component of intimacy as a part of maintaining a secure attachment bond was a sense of valuing monogamy and one’s spouse on a deeper level after being married. For instance, Frank described intentionally testing the value of monogamy prior to marriage. He said, “um though I would say I say the testing of those boundaries or I should say the testing of that definition of fidelity or monogamy looks slightly different before and after marriage.” Frank’s experience connected with Rose’s experience as well. For example, Rose said, “I guess in the very beginning you know I had some things finishing up that…some lose ends to tie up…I had things that people needed to respond to and so like maybe the first couple weeks overlap
but that’s like dating.” Cindy also described experiencing how dating impacted her marriage and expectations of monogamy. She said, “how this impacted my marriage is that when my husband and I were dating you know as far as me when it can to trust and understanding. I am one of those individuals…is not about guarantee…it’s giving 100%. And so, I wanted to find out what was his definition of monogamy.” Furthermore, Lisa experienced a new level of awareness after getting married. She shared,

he’s like ‘we are going to have to move a lot’ and I’m like ‘okay that sounds fun!’ you know what I mean? And you don’t know or whatever, and you end up having a wedding, and that’s fun, um then once you move, it’s like ‘holy crap I don’t know anyone here and I’m lonely and you’re gone all the time’ and um the thing about North Carolina these were the last years of flight school, so he was gone all of the time, like that’s just the way it works, and here I am, stuck in the middle of nowhere. I had been living in New York most of my life and now here I am in like rural North Carolina, like, are you kidding me? How did I get here? You know? So, there’s that sense of like ‘what am I doing with my life?’ you know? So, that’s kind of how I think, he saw in that in me, and where I was, and um he just kind of knew I had to get back home.

Cindy also described having a deeper appreciation or value of her husband after getting married as well. She said,

I had known him for ten years prior to when we started dating. And I joked about how he was not my type…I was like he’s too nice and he seems to like that model type chick. Um there were like two types he had…the model type chick that was
great arm candy by lacking substance… but no he only had one girlfriend before me and it didn’t last long and she cheated. And so, with him when we started talking about our values and that’s when he started talking more and more about how he made that decision and what else...I had to think about asking myself what it was I wanted. And so, with him you know we talked more and more about the concept of monogamy and then also you know as far as with urges and things because that was…oh yes what I will disclose is that there was one point in our relationship…um there was someone else that I found myself beginning to get emotionally attracted to.

**Enjoying the relationship**

Participants expressed enjoying their relationship or marriage as part of maintaining a secure attachment or emotional bond as well. Enjoying the relationship or marriage was the second sub-category found for the protective factor of maintaining a secure emotional bond and was comprised on multiple codes, which are discussed next.

**Playing with one’s spouse.** For instance, Rose said, “it’s never an extraneous thing.” In addition, Tiffany said,

I have fun with him. I am always flirting with him or always spanking his butt and [laughs] and hug him and love him and kiss him even in public. I mean like he is mine and I am his and I don’t ever think about anyone else because we are always flirting with each other and we enjoy being together, we are best friends. I mean we are always like playing together and we just do fun things so infidelity doesn’t cross my mind.
Barbra also enjoyed her husband. She said, “I think it goes back to that my husband is my best friend and my first choice and wanting to do things with and wanting to talk with.” Furthermore, Barbra believed she and her husband shared a similar sense of humor, so much so that she described it as “our sense of humor,” and that it helped deepen their emotional bond.

**Prioritizing the relationship and one’s spouse.** Participants also described putting their marriages first, which was found to be a component of creating an enjoyable marriage as part of maintaining a secure attachment or emotional bond. For instance, Lisa said, “you know it’s still about the two of us it’s not about anyone else or anything else.” In addition, Barbra and her husband intentionally protected their time as a married couple when they had their child. She said,

I mean literally the first week I had my daughter and we brought her home and I had complications but um we invested in having a night nurse come a couple times a week just so that we could go into the bedroom and watch TV for a couple of hours and go to sleep together. So, you know like we did things to make our relationship always important.

Her example conveyed the importance of setting a boundary such as this as one method of continuing to enjoy the relationship. Lisa also described being aware of the need for time allocated for their marriage and enjoying each other when her husband is not traveling for work. She said,
my husband and I both work a lot. That’s reality of it and I sometimes worry like are we working too much? You know? But part of is that you know we are busy and so we…When we are apart we are not off gallivanting, you know? We are not off um…you know we probably should have a better social life than we do. [laughs] But we work a lot. The both of us. And so, I guess we value the relationship by the fact that and I told you last time he travels. And when he’s home it’s like this is good, you’re home, let’s enjoy this because you’re not always home and that’s a big part of it I would say. Is that he travels and while that can be a risk factor for some folks. For us it’s like let’s enjoy it while you are here and then when you’re not here.”

In connection, Anna talked about intentionally planning dates and getting out of the house to prioritize spending time together as a couple. She said, “We tried really separating that time…and for me because I work and I’m studying and I’m at the house all day…sometimes leaving the house helps me because it really helps me disconnect.” Part of intentionally planning to spend time together is due to the reality that life can become busy. Similarly, Rose described meeting the needs of the relationship. She talked about being

“really busy! so you know like on Saturday night Saturday afternoon I work half a day on Saturdays and five clients and I come home…he was coming home…and I was like we’re just calling like tonight we’re doing absolutely nothing and it’s like…but that happens once every six weeks…seven weeks because then in the summer he is working 70 hours at his job job.
Linda also talked about the importance of making sure that we’ve made time for that with each other especially with a kid and maybe in 10 years another kid um making sure that we have still prioritized attention to each other because that’s something especially in the past couple years with having a small child that’s something we realized that’s really hard to do when you're when you're a parent it's really easy for all of your time as a couple to feel like you're either like rotating shifts.

Barbra too talked about balancing time as a couple when having kids. She said I mean we do a lot to maintain the relationship. Even when my daughter was very young we made a commitment that the best thing we could do for her…and she’s 10 now so…um would be to provide a stable and loving relationship for her to witness and so both feel that in doing that you know dates are very important. You know time as a couple very important. Versus you know being very child focused we are very family focused and like what are the needs that need to be met for us to all be doing well? Either individually or as a family or as a couple or whatever so we always maintained a date night at least two or three times a month like ever since she was born. Even when we first had her you know we have to means do this we had night nurse come the first four weeks twice a week so that we could um have one night where we could you know go to bed at the same time and maintain as sense of feeling like a couple. So, I think that is definitely a protective factor in the sense of maintaining like the spark and being
very conscientious that like this relationship is very important and it needs to be maintained you know that the relationship doesn’t just happen.

Even though Anna doesn’t have children, she too felt spending time together was important. Anna described that her husband’s “schedule changes, my schedule changes so it’s kind of random but for instance last week I noticed we hadn’t gone out to eat together by yourselves in over a month or maybe longer…and especially not like because the last time we’ve done it because of his off days at work had been like brunch thing.”

She also described intentionally cultivating the feeling of a date when they do spend time together. She said,

we don’t have such busy lives and we feel very you know apart from each other. It’s kind of random right now but yeah it's usually something that will take me out of the house or sometimes I cook a special meal or we both together cook a special meal and sit down at the house talk…because of his times and my eating times we usually don't eat together, we eat at different times so even just the finding time to sit down to dinner is important, but yeah it’s usually a special time and it doesn't…we don’t have like a schedule like every Thursday night or anything like that. But when we do we…maybe it's something more special like the weekend getaway or now going to My country and I really for him to take time off and come with me and those times are special.
Rose gave an example of “even when we are most busy we try to get in at least a 20-minute walk together. Like take the dog for a walk for something so just that kind of time.”

**Celebrating the relationship and creating excitement.** Linda also conveyed the importance of taking time to intentionally celebrate the relationship. She described planning a family trip to “…Mexico” and that they “have been meaning to get away.” Finally, Lisa discussed being fully present and enjoying the time she gets with her husband and missing him when he is gone. She said,

> when he’s gone, God help me, if it is more than like five days, but I have this thing, and you’re going to laugh, like where I usually only count nights, like I go to bed and I’ll be like ‘three more nights until he comes home’ but if he’s going to be gone for a long time [chuckles] I have a different rule in my head I don’t count night until there is less than 50% of the nights left so [chuckles] like if he’s going to be gone for 10 days I don’t count nights until day 5 because again I’m sad, you know what I am saying? That it’s going to be two weeks until I see him again.

Another part of enjoying the relationship and ensuring a secure attachment or emotional bond as a protective factor was the sense of being an active participant in cultivating an exciting life and marriage. For instance, Barbra reflected, “um…realizing that for any relationship to be good I have to be good and I have to sort of be excited and passionate about my life and then I can be good in the relationship. So, I think in my first
marriage was bored a lot and I was like seeking things outside of myself to kind of reconciled things that I wasn't happy with in my life.”

**Continuous effort and desire for the relationship and spouse.** Participants described the importance of continual effort to maintain an enjoyable marriage. For example, Cindy described it as “something that is going to be constantly a work in progress.” Barbra also discussed making effort in the marriage as “you are making each other paramount and you’re deeply investing in one another and the result is you want to be together more.” Melissa too said that it is an “ongoing thing.” In addition, Frank stated, “as you’re probably hearing or discovering is that there is so much work involved in a healthy relationship that can maintain a monogamy that isn’t sort of just being roommates. You know? And it takes a huge amount of energy and patience.”

Philip also discussed making efforts in his marriage to prevent issues. He said, “yeah so but I think what I am trying to say is we both see that we are making an effort to do those things more and really it is much more about the recognition that we can both have that ongoing effort for us to be kind to each other and to be um you to recognize that were in this together you know that kind of thing.” Philip’s narrative directly connected with Anna’s view of preventing issues. She said intentionally making effort in the relationship is “something that I look forward to continuing to do, especially when life gets busy…take that time off and communicate more importantly and like you talked about here prevent…preventive medicine…more than you know try to fix something when it’s broken.” Tiffany noted how humans crave the feeling of being in love. She said, “That’s just human nature we love that feeling [laughs]” and to keep the feeling of
love and enjoyment in a marriage alive, effort must be made. She described the need for ongoing effort in maintaining an enjoyable marriage as a part of ensuring a secure attachment or emotional bond. She discussed having the expectation that life will get busy. She said “stuff is to be expected but you have to make an effort…an ongoing effort.” For Melissa, making the effort and showing her husband attention and affection occurs in daily life tasks. She said, “In a lot of different ways you know there is that saying it starts in the kitchen which I mean it’s just showing that other person that you care for them.”

Another part of making effort in a relationship is remaining open to wanting to make and effort and maintain a desire to continue the relationship. Rose described having “a willingness to come out and you know be more vocal but that you know took time but I think again it comes to that core of we both want this relationship.” In addition, Barbra said. “I’m thinking about more than the characteristic about me not wanting the relationship to end.” Rose also described having a sense of not wanting anyone else other than her husband. She said, “it’s a very different kind thing that when you know you want and are working on it. I'm not wondering. I’ve know that for five years… I just have no interest. No interest.” In addition, participants presented having a point of curiosity in the relationship and a curiosity in monogamy. For example, Linda described

an interesting thing happened when we got married and I don't understand don't really understand it um I was thinking about it in preparation for this interview but there's something about getting married well was worried I was worried that when
we did get married I would still feel like flirting with other guy and still in some ways be drawn to that and for whatever reason it's like once we got married and I honestly became almost chuckles] like turned off by being approached by other men who it was a weird transition and I still don’t really understand it um I but I just haven't had the desire since we've been married to be with anyone else.

**Actively meeting needs.** Being involved with meeting each other’s needs was found to be a component of creating an enjoyable marriage. For example, Lisa talked about how she and her husband became more sensitive to each other’s needs rather than meeting their own individual needs over the years. She said, “I just feel like uh…it’s just being more aware of what the other person needs.” Her description presented a deep satisfaction with the marriage by willing to meet her husband’s needs. Rose also discussed being able to meet each other’s needs in multiple aspects of life. For example, she talked about encouraging her husband to meet his occupational needs. She said, “I want to make sure he doesn't feel like he's not getting to do what he really wants to do which is to have his garage.”

In addition to meeting each other’s needs, participants discussed being aware of their own needs as part of maintaining and enjoyable relationship. Hence, there was a sense of shared responsibility in creating a fulfilling emotional bond as a protective factor. For instance, Cindy added, “I had to think about asking myself what it was I wanted.” Furthermore, Barbra talked about the importance of self-awareness. She said, “I think being able to explore one's life and what's really important to them and what they anticipate and what they expect” within relationships.
Developing and maintaining trust. The development and strengthening of trust as a foundation in a marriage was found to be another aspect of enjoying the relationship as a part of the attachment or emotional bond protective factor. For instance, Linda said,

I think it says that I can be trusted because you know relationships really hard and messy and there's ups and downs and um so especially when things are really tough it's good to have like a foundation and I think trust is one of those big foundational things so it's like I you know I can be trusted...um I value you um and I'm committed to this.

In addition, she described being able fall back on that foundation as a prevention. She said,

you know my husband and I have been married long enough and we’ve known each other long enough to know that um especially depending on the seasons of your life and especially a small kid um I think I think the worst of each other sometimes too and um I think that you have to have some sort of grounding like foundational thing in your relationship to when things are really bad like oh my gosh this relationship is going south this you know how we can make it through that you can say you know at the end of the day we are committed to each other and we’re going to get through this because were not to give up even if I see even I've seen you at your worst and if you’ve seen me at my worst um there's that like structural integrity [chuckles] that monogamy adds in my mind.
Rose also described the evolution of trust in her marriage by “getting okay with trusting each other.” Tiffany talked about not deepening trust because she wouldn’t want to hurt her husband or be hurt in that way. She said, “I wouldn’t want him to ever do anything like that to me so there's no way I would do it to him.” Philip described strengthening trust in his marriage as well. He said, “um you know just be really honest about who it is that we’re seeing um when we are not together. Um you know…sharing with each other you know how conversations go with other people um you know um talk about what we feel that we may need more of or less of in our relationship.” Philip’s narrative connected with Lisa’s. For example, Lisa described learning to give and receive trust based on life circumstances. She stated, “you know we had things where it is just the way our life is where I’m going to trust you or you’re going to trust me so through that time, and through that trust we just learned to trust one another.” Additionally, Rose talked about being able to give and receive trust within her marriage as well. She said,

We don’t want the other one to question so because then it’s that doubt that can create and then irrational things happen. So, we don’t give the other one any reason to question. Like is said, he’s always where he says he’s going to be. I am where I say I am going to be. Not matter what is going on, we don’t have to check in constantly but he spends a lot of time working on cars. He has a garage where he works on cars and I do know and I’ve never driven by just to see if he is where he says he is because he gets home sometimes at 3 am or 4 am if he is working really late. But I do know if I ever drive by, he would be there. Maybe there were times where I just, I don’t know if I ever dropped in, maybe once in
the last two and a half years. Maybe once because it had been 8 hours and I didn’t get a text back, so I was kind of like you know because the garage is 10 minutes away, it’s not like a big deal. But again, here. And just the one time being there, working on cars, getting all greasy just kind of I know he gets lost in what he is doing. It’s like okay cool. There is no double talk. And the same thing for me. He can trust me and anytime, even at school, I had one of the guys in our program in my cohort but we had a study for psychopath and he came over but I’m like just so you know this is the kid, he’s coming over to study, and these are the things be about him and please stop in any time I’d love for you to meet him.

Finally, Anna talked about the importance of being able to trust her husband. She said, it’s important because he's a people person and he’s very charming. He’s in sales right now and I’ve known because I'm a woman…I’ve sensed female friends of his that I’m like in case you haven’t noticed this person is attracted to you. Luckily none of us is jealous….which is a big thing for him because he has a lot of female friends and he's told me that I could not you know stand to be with a woman that's over me all of the time but sometimes it really bothered me so much… so I said you know I’m not jealous because I trust you but if this person…you know it kind of bothers me because I feel that she's hitting on you. But yeah again the fact that he includes me so much in everything that he does adds that extra layer of trust I never thought about the way I guess.
Perception of strengthening a relationship through adversity. In addition to trust in their marriages, participants described having a perspective that their marriage had grown from experiencing a lot in life together. For instance, Rose said, “you know we kind of started acting…like we kept growing from the beginning and here our fights now are you know less intense or shorter.” Lisa talked experiencing various stages of life with her husband within the military culture and learning to rely on each other. She said,

Because with military every time you moved, you’re kind of alone, and it’s just the two of you, know what I’m saying? And even though we loved having a military family, don’t get me wrong, um when we got married, we were so freaking young; we had no idea, and so - okay - yes, I was 23 he was 24 okay when we got married and I feel like in my mind that is young [chuckles].

Communication

Communication was found to be another subcategory of the secure attachment or emotional bond protective factor. Overall participants discussed having a sense of significantly valuing communication in a marriage to remain emotionally bonded. The purpose of communication varied though.

Checking in or daily communication. Cindy talked about continuously “checking in and making sure we are on the same page.” She also described the how communication helped her and her husband plan and overcome a financially stressful time. She said,
I remember I was like there was one that was out of state and I was like I want to go there! But at the time realistically I wouldn’t have been able to afford it. And so, I had to really think about it and I remember we sat down and we started talking...the same thing now that I am getting ready to the end of my program...and a few of my peers were telling me that I was crazy because um I had got an offer for what would be like a lovely position for someone but I said I haven’t found the right position for me and my family.

Linda too gave an example of how communication may influence her marriage. She described communicating and reflecting about sex with her husband and the sense of uniqueness and security they share. She said,

I was talking to my husband about this recently too I think we’re both very that we waited until we were married to have sex because to us like we’re the only sexual partner each other has ever known and there's something really kind of special about that and it is also kind of keeps out of it keeps someone else out of our marriage and even when were intimate we know that the other person's not thinking about how so-and-so did it chuckles] or something.

Furthermore, Lisa talked about how valuable communication is in her marriage to remain connected. She said,

So, you know so much of that is communication like so much of that is communication. And that didn’t happen overnight, don’t get me wrong. But I remember, this is just an example, once I was like I just want to go away because
I never go away, I am always home watching the kids and he’s travelling all over the world, you know what I am saying?

Anna also described valuing open communication in her marriage. She said, “I mean we’re just open with each other... we talk about things.” In addition, Melissa said, “I feel like that comes back to the open communication and just talking.” Melissa also said, “it’s just being open and communicating on a regular basis and never losing that.” Rose too felt open communication with her husband was important and that if she felt attracted to another person this would be a que that communication has died down in her marriage. She noted, “and then sometimes just checking in if I am feeling a certain way and not letting it go, not hiding feelings. I have never really been faced with having feelings for another person but if I feel like we are not communicating as well or something.” Like Rose, Anna felt that “communicating would be important” with her husband if she were to experience an attraction to another person. Furthermore, Philip said, “so, you know, supporting each other emotionally. Trying to have conversations regularly where we you know where we are telling each about things and letting each of you know when we are hurt.” Barbra also discussed the importance communicating issues. She said, “I think it’s having a lot of honest conversations so tackling things head on versus you know maybe taking the easy way out and avoiding the confrontation or letting something fester um because we have a lot of honest conversations about how things are going.”

**Expressing needs.** A part of checking in and letting your spouse know how things are going is being open and expressing your needs. Philip described openly communicating about desires such as “the things that we want from each other um that
may not necessarily be needs but just desires that we have.” Rose also described clearly communicating her needs. For instance, she offered an example where she told her husband what she needed during a stressful period in her academic career. She talked about her husband

understanding like my schedule or when for a week, I can’t even look at you...like please get out of the house...like you need to leave! Like this morning, I had to say that because I had all of this stuff to finish up you know and he’s going working you know and I’m like no you need to get out of the house now! It doesn’t… it is not logical but I own a lot of my stuff...I’m like it’s not logical. It’s just my anxiety and he's really understanding of that…[laughs] really understanding and he tries to accommodate that when he can and I try not to make him too crazy you know try to communicate that.

Rose described a sense of a shared responsibility to communicate needs and to acknowledge her own personal issues or stress triggers. This sense of a shared or reciprocal responsibility to communicate was described by other participants as well. For instance, Anna said, “we talk every day…we talk on the phone sometimes he calls me and he won’t stop talking even though I’ve seen him in the morning you know and I see him at night…he is very communicative.” Philip also conveyed a sense of the reciprocal nature of communication in his marriage. He shared,

Yeah one other thing that I was thinking about is that you know over the course of 19 years you either get stuck in ways of talking to each other that are either barely
functional… or… mildly dysfunctional or you start find new ways to talk to each other and so one of the things that I have found that uh that I do is I have new way… I have created new ways of letting her know when I need something different like a change. So, and this is very just concrete and practical I soften my voice when… I present things as something that I would appreciate from her rather than trying to make a demand on her. Um so for example, the other day I went into to get our daughter… she's almost 2, so you know she was in her baby bed and I go in and I had to step over books on the floor. Uh my wife will sometimes will put her with her in there with several books when she needs to get something done without having to have a close eye on her… and so what I would like to happen is when that time is over for all the books to go back in the basket, and the basket be put where it belongs. But I had to step over all the books… um I was putting her to be… so someone had gotten her out and hadn’t put the books away. And I thought is it that hard? And so, I think I just said something like ‘um you know I really don’t want to this to feel like I am complaining… I don’t want to be nagging about this but I just think it would be easier if when you got her out if the books were put away.’ And it turns out that um I don’t know that she didn’t feel like she was responsible that time. Either the baby had thrown the books or… I don’t know what it was but think that just the way that I expressed that kept them from turning into like just kind of an argument over nothing. So, she was able to say ‘well you know actually this is what happened…’ and my response was oh okay. I felt like she had heard my point and I feel like she had heard what I was
trying to say and I felt like I heard what she was to say. And so, it’s just kind of a very simple just way expressing something softer as opposed to earlier in our marriage I probably would have said something like ‘hey you know it’d be really helpful if you just put books away when you get her out.’ Which is not soft at all…I mean it's much more likely for her to be defensive.

**Knowledge and exposure to healthy relationships.**

The final subcategory of the secure attachment or emotional bond protective factor that was found in the data was participants having knowledge and exposure to healthy relationships. Knowledge and exposure to healthy relationships included multiple aspects. These aspects and codes are discussed in this section.

**Realistic perspectives of relationships.** For instance, Lisa talked about part of having a healthy relationship is understanding marriages are complex and will be full of positive aspects and negative aspects. She said,

I know what you say, there are things that you drive you crazy but they don’t out weight the good things. And I think that’s exactly how I feel. I know there are [laughs] things about me that drive my partner crazy I am sure. I can almost list them for you. But fortunately, he doesn’t throw me out with those things that frustrate him and there are things about him that frustrate me but I think there is far more good than bad. And I recognize that’s not the case for everybody so I am not saying stick in a bad relationship because a bad relationship like being
abuse in some way or disrespected. I’m not implying that but I am implying that there’s good and bad in everything you know?

So, in part, there is an understanding that healthy relationships involve patience with one’s spouse, yet clear boundaries and expectations for shared respect and not having a tolerance for abuse within a relationship. In addition, Anna described observing how other couples may navigate respect and power and compared that to her own marriage. She said,

I know that his parents are having problems because of that. The father is…I guess I more like old school and the mother is doing a lot of things kind of like at this time of her life and they have a really bad relationship right now. My husband told me if you don't want to work and you want to be in the house and be a housewife and have kids I am fine with that but at the same time we came here because of my Ph.D. and he followed me so he's supporting me and he will always support me in whatever I want to do.

Comparing healthy and unhealthy relationships. The idea of comparing relationships was also discussed by Lisa who shared her assessment of her husband prior to marriage. She talked about comparing her husband to her past relationships and said, so like to meet him and have him be like so responsible and so lovely. This is kind of a funny story that when I met him, he talked a lot about his mom and his sister, and I was like ‘shut up talking about your mom and your sister’ like ‘oh my sister is really smart and play soccer’ and how his mom lives in Canada and she
scuba divers and it was like ‘okay whatever shut up.’ I was like 21 and 20 years old and I’m like ‘shut up’ I didn’t want to know about his mom and his sister but then going a long and I’m like ‘oh my god he loves his sister and his mom this much like he’s probably going to be an awesome husband and an awesome dad’ and I was right! [chuckles] You know what I’m saying like, I was right, he just has a tremendous moral compass and I say this to myself, he could never cheat on me because it’s just not in his moral sense, like I can’t explain, he’s just such a good guy, he and I shouldn’t say ‘it’s not a possibility’ because everything is a possibility but it would certainly rock my world and it doesn’t seem at all within his character um he’s too good of a person. Like we are like two sides like I’m the crazy mean one he’s the calm nice one you know what I’m saying? You know whatever there is a telemarketer he’s like ‘you get it I’ll be too nice or like too kind’ so, it’s just funny it makes for interesting parenting and interesting living we… I feel like yes, he is the reason behind all of it and again having had multiple boyfriends with multiple issues and I’m like WOW! You are fantastic!

Behavioral, Cognitive, and Relational Boundaries

Another protective factor which was exposed in the data was that of establishing behavioral, cognitive, and relational boundaries with external persons. Boundaries were described as an essential component of presenting oneself as taken or monogamous and removing or limiting opportunities for infidelity.
Keeping One’s Guard Up

There was a sense of having one’s guard up sexually and emotionally to not let anyone in other than one’s spouse because the risk is that temptation may build gradually and could lead to infidelity if left unattended. For instance, Rose said, “there are people that you encounter that are fascinating and interesting. Um…and yeah it’s really making sure you can’t have anything build off of those feelings.” Anna shared a similar warning, she described how diffused boundaries can be challenging to stop if someone doesn’t intentionally set boundaries. She shared,

because some people may confuse it with something that comes up naturally…‘oh you know I’m never going to be…but I want to be with someone …’ like no it can happen and so it’s part of that acknowledgement that yes it can happen to you that you can feel attracted to someone else, have a crush on someone else. I mean it can be mutual which is even more confusing so there's also that voluntary act.”

In addition, Frank also described a sort of “discipline” that comes with establishing boundaries. He said,

It’s sort of like you know, you don’t even…like the parallel with an alcoholic, you don’t even drive down the street of the bar that you used to go to. It’s just sort of you cut it off at the path and I think if you conduct yourself in a way where there are boundaries and you’re professional it sends the message to the other person pretty clearly that this person isn’t a possibility if they were try to do something or whatever else. You know?
Furthermore, Linda noted,

I think uh I mean I think I just tend to walk quickly and interact in limited ways with other men [laughs]. Aside from like you know close friends of ours you know mutual friends like I am thinking there was a person…there was a guy a couple of months ago, I was going grocery shopping and he walked straight by and said ‘hey how are you doing?’ And I just didn’t even respond to him [laughs]. It’s those kinds of things where it is probably very rude but I’m not sure how to respond and I don’t want to even open the door to really engage…so I think I was feel a little like a deer in the headlights when being approached or interacted with a guy who I don’t know who may be friendly towards me um….We’re navigating right now that we have neighbors who live nearby and they’re married and they have small kid too so our kids play together and there have been a couple of times when they have…just for a variety of reasons I’ll be alone with the husband as part of like while our kids are playing and I’m not really concerned about it but there is a general unease within me about that. About wondering like is this okay? I don’t want him to feel like we are getting to close or anything. So yeah I’d say I just kind of keep my guard up for the most part.

This idea of keeping one’s guard up was found in varying depictions within the areas of establishing boundaries behaviorally, cognitively, and relationally.
Behavioral

Behavioral boundaries were discussed by the participants by establishing boundaries with others through actions. People may commonly think of the behavioral aspects of setting clear boundaries. Behavioral boundaries were comprised on many elements which are discussed next.

**Setting clear boundaries internally and externally.** For instance, Philip gave an example of setting boundaries. He said,

such as you know if I am put the position to have dinner or be alone with a woman then I will often just talk to my wife about that before-hand if possible. But at the very least as soon as I have my next conversation with her. I remember I was recently at a business um…out of town for business and a colleague of mine, who is a woman, had dinner together. And it was kind of a spontaneous thing you know we were both there and we saw each other and it was dinner time and I was like ‘Hey do you know want to go get something to eat?’ And after that I thought ‘well you know just for the sake of being fully open with my wife, I want to tell her about the fact that we had dinner.’ And so, you know just little practical things like that I think that help safeguard the relationship. And just help build in a sense of openness with each other and so I guess I would say that’s an example that’s both outside and inside of the marital context.
In addition, Cindy reported, “I definitely don’t tolerate um cheating and I had a situation many years earlier where I was with someone who was like well…that’s what they wanted and I’m like no it’s not happening with me.” Cindy also said,

I think about you know like I might have a crush on someone or finding someone attractive, it doesn’t mean that I am being unfaithful. If I pursued it, that would be totally different. That would be cheating. And so, it shouldn’t be about you’re convincing the other person into being monogamous but it’s more or less thinking about from your perspective like what it means to be. You know? What does it mean to be sexually responsible? That’s the way I think about it.

Furthermore, Lisa talked about having even clearer boundaries after she got engaged. She said,

I think my thing was like once we were married, even like once we were engaged it was kind of like that’s it you know? There wasn’t another option on the table for me. And that’s just kind of how I am.” Lisa also described presenting herself as being taken and therefore is often confused when someone hits on her. She said, “no one else is appealing to me, like even though I say, like, I wouldn’t risk it, there is nothing else even appealing to me. You know there have been times in my life where lots of people have propositioned me or where I’m like ‘were they hitting on me? I’m not real sure,’ um, but like I said it’s not even a thought in my mind. I can’t begin to explain it because it’s not even a thought. I’ve had those
thoughts like ‘are you hitting on me? Did you really just ask me that?’ Um like I’ve been wearing a wedding band since you know I was 22 or 23 years old.

This ultimately resulted in her believing that part of it is respect like looking back over time it is respect and also probably not having opportunity [chuckles].” Additionally, Barbra shared her ideas regarding establishing clear boundaries and the risk of not having clear boundaries. She said, “I think just again understanding the risk and consequences of even entertaining…I mean like you know if you were put it in like a big spectrum it would be like far left never happening to far right that it is happening I would stay far left so…um I don’t think I even get close to the line.” She also said “um I think also we have similar you know again similar values I think that when we were to going and do things with other people we…um…we…you know we don’t go to places I that that…um how to say this?…I don’t think we go…like I don’t go out to bars or places that you know maybe I would be drawn to someone else. I think also even in um in like colleague or work relationships think that we always present, even when we are not together, as a couple. So, it’s almost like your spouse is with you when they’re not with you in the sense of talking a lot about your spouse when with mixed company or you know…. it’s just understood that I'm in the relationship by the way that I talk and engage in things. I definitely think its boundaries and I also think that it’s mindset of…you know…acting in a way that my spouse would be proud if they…like there’s not anything that would be embarrassing or um troubling to my spouse if he…you know if there was a
video tape you know….I mean now we have video tapes of everything…you
know if he were to see me out and about he would be proud of how I behaved.

Barbra also discussed

and so, I mean I know that um…just from early on you know I didn’t…you know
when I was single I looked all I wanted to. Um…but I think that is just ever since
the beginning of the relationship I’ve just purposely…if I’ve seen attractive man
or whatever I just didn't invest in it you know I would look away or you know
um…just be mindful of how I would want to be treated you know? Like so I think
that that takes some discipline even for my human nature perspective. You know
we’re drawn things that are attractive so you know I live in south Florida where
everyone is attractive so I think that's something that's been maintained over many
years of not kind of going there.

Barbra’s example of not viewing others as sexually attractive was shared by Tiffany as
well. Tiffany said,

like even in past relationship like I would say stuff would or he would say stuff
about other women…or even like on TV how good-looking that woman is and I
would do it…but with my husband, we don't even really go there. Because we
think it's totally disrespectful so we don’t even cross that line at all and never say
anything about any movie stars or anybody [laughs].

Tiffany also said “we wouldn’t be okay with running around and like if he goes out
partying and like that kind of stuff isn’t acceptable to us.” Furthermore, Tiffany shared
that she will set boundaries for others when they do go out and socialize. She said, “we show each other that we love each other in front of other people [laughs] because like some chick will be checking him out and I will like grab his butt [laughs].” Rose described negotiating clear boundaries with friends after getting married. She said,

Um we both like people that we can trust and that are loyal and keep them you know that you value that immensely but we’re not out you know it's not about hanging with friends we have other things going on in our lives too so those opportunities even if it was something…like they don’t even present themselves even naturally but I but I also feel like there was some discussion I know I discussed it [laughs] because he did have a few female friends even though they were in relationships, but if he to hang out one on one with them…you know…like I get it and I’m not you know I kind of had the rule was if you are friends with them before we met and it was a legitimate friend then yes but you are not allowed to make any new female friends are just friends in that way in a way and then for me and my boundaries I would never...I don't I don't want any…it's not about me being tempted as much as I just don't want to create any doubt in his mind. We’re both big on trust and honesty like those are areas that we probably both are very sensitive. So, I don't even want to put it there even if something so innocent could happen.

Finally, Cindy described maintaining privacy and not overly expressing marital issues with persons outside of her marriage as another way of establishing clear boundaries. She said,
we are not ever including other people...and so what else was the thing was not involving other people in our marriage. And what I mean by that is like the friends the family whatever. Not saying I may not solicit their feedback or their perspective on things but not putting them in my business and what I had to look at is quite a few of my female friends are either in unhealthy relationships or they have never been there and don’t plan on being there so it’s like how can somebody tell me how to sustain a marriage when you don’t even know what it means to be faithful [laughs] because I had that one friend who was like girl…when we were having the financial problems she was like I would cut him loose…because my husband went to a private university for college but took…his parents took out like a plus loan and what else had been the stressor.

Removing or limiting opportunities of infidelity. Participants expressed that it is the notion of closing off any opportunities for temptation or infidelity through one’s actions to reduce temptation and risk. One method of establishing boundaries was that of discussing boundaries and points of temptation with their spouse to reduce the perceived secrecy and power it may have. For instance, Philip offered the discussion that he watches pornography occasionally with his wife and his efforts to refrain from it. He stated “um you know this is something that my wife knows about something. It is something that we have talked about…it's maybe not thoroughly resolved issue but it's something that I try to you know not participate in.” Furthermore, Cindy described experiencing a connection or an emotional desire for one of her classmates and that she discussed it with her husband and through prayer. She stated, “I overcame that by talking
about it with my significant other, and also using my spirituality with prayer.” In addition, Anna too shared the idea of discussing boundaries and points of temptation. She said, “so if things were to get more out of control with your whoever you’re feeling attracted to I think communicating would be important although very dangerous as well because it can hurt the other person.” Finally, Frank described how boundaries as a part of monogamy are continuous yet tested. He stated,

um I guess it's just foundational. It’s implicit. It’s tested. It’s never even it’s never even really a question that it wouldn’t be um and that’s not to say you know we aren’t honest with each other about occasionally seeing someone else as physically attractive or something like that but because there is this commitment to it that monogamy...what was it I think it was a Turkish proverb before marriage one should keep opened and after marriage one should keep one eye closed. You just don't pay attention to those other glances you get from other people anymore.

Frank also expressed that he doesn’t naturally take risks. He said,

the other thing it means about me as a person is and I don’t think this entirely because there are always individual differences, right? And I know or you know my neo or my personality that I am risk avoidant to a large degree so monogamy I think it's just easier for someone like me I'm not oriented towards the super extroverted or flashy or you know risk seeking in ways that are going to put me situations where all it would be easy to break monogamy so I do think it is
important to highlight that I think for some of us marriage and monogamy are just easier.

Rose also described not putting herself in situations which maybe risky to her practice of monogamy. She said,

I guess some of it for me is not putting myself in the position to begin with. Like you can find someone physically attractive or I think ‘oh they’re really cool’ um or ‘they have really interesting ideas’ or I may be intrigued by this person and at the same time not follow the path that you might have followed when you were single. If that makes sense. You know, trying not put yourself in situations which cultivate anything further.

**Awareness of when boundaries are crossed.** Those examples convey how participants chose an action(s) (i.e. behaviors) to establish boundaries and reduce points of temptation. This connected with another component discussed which is idea of being aware if boundaries are being crossed. For instance, Barbra shared,

um I think there was at one point I had like uh…maybe I’m trying to think of how I would describe it…sort of a friendship I had with one of my colleagues and then I realized that it was getting a little flirtatious. Um…I’m trying to think when that was. I mean it was a few years back and um…we had classes together, we were working on projects together excreta and then um…I think that I realized that it was um a little too flirtatious. Um…a little like school crush kind of flirtation.
She further reflected that “I tend to be sort of a gregarious person you know um…I tend to be like a joker and very playful and that sort of thing. So, I think that invites certain kinds of interaction with people and then um…then I realized that it was like shifting to more of a flirtation kind of thing.” And with this awareness she was able to stop the flirtation and redirect attention to her marriage and her husband. She said,

how I handled it was I just stopped meeting with…I would you know not engage in um…in a banter like I was like it was one of those things like at one point I was ‘oh you know this has gotten a little too flirtatious and then there was the opportunity for like a certain person to join our…we were working on a project together and then um…I sort of invited one of my girlfriends to come and be part of that.

Barbra’s story connected with a message that Frank shared. He described deliberately testing his own behavioral abilities to commit to monogamy prior to marriage and thus refining his awareness of opportunities for infidelity, and ultimately establishing boundaries to remove those opportunities. He shared,

what I what I mean by that is while I would still say I maintained monogamy/fidelity before marriage there was more flirting with individuals that showed interests are almost as if to sort of test the enduring commitment to the marriage there was something to get out of my system before committing marriage [audio disconnect] any sort of reciprocal emotionally intimacy but knowing someone was interested and seeing how close I could get to certain line
to test my own commitment and interest in pursuing to you know what is now my current partner in life.

Anna also described having an awareness of situations where in which boundaries may be crossed. She said,

I think maybe from the individual perspective, I think I am thinking about me, but it also applies to him. The way you dress, how should I put it? I do in class, I don’t go out of the house a lot because I work from home but I think I’ve always been, especially because a Latina, we dress…we show a little more skin here if you will than you do in the U.S. And I think sometimes I may have been showing too much skin for standards there. And I’ve tried to be careful with that. Especially because most of my classmates are males and are men from Arab countries like Muslim men. So, they’re not used to seeing skin at all and all of a sudden, like last year, in my class I was the only woman. It would be like eight men and me and six of them were Arabs. So, we are talking about people who come a country where women are vailed. Or at least were the Hijab. So, and I felt sometimes that they felt attracted to me so trying to be a little careful with that. But not to the point of trying to cover myself up because naturally I am not like that. So, I think part of it…but I didn’t see myself like at risk of having an affair. There is one particular guy from Saudi Arabia that just happens to be extremely nice and more affectionate than men in his culture. So, I was confused by him a while and I was like I think he is hitting on me and I shared that with my husband and he was like I don’t think so I think he is just being nice. And then I
talked to my friend from Morocco who is closer to his culture and she was like no
that’s just the way he is with everyone. And after a while I realized he was
behaving like that with all of the women it’s just that way.

**Learning from experiences when boundaries were crossed.** Philip also shared
an experience, prior to marriage, where in which he was pursued by someone in a
relationship (i.e. he was the external person) and that he felt a sense of wrongness and
ended the temptation before it expanded into cheating. This ultimately deepened his own
sense of loyalty and reflected during the interview how he can have more loyalty for his
wife than others due to their intimate connection. For instance, he shared,

o, during this time, and this was 20 years ago, probably, or more. But, so there
was a woman that was with a guy that I was pretty close to. And I mean in fact, I
was in a fraternity and this man was um…like my pledge brother. And so, or not
my pledge brother but he was the guy that was like shepherdimg me through the
pledging process. So, he was already a member of the fraternity and I was a
pledge and he was the one that was guiding me through that. And this woman
that approached me and came on to me was his serious girlfriend. And so, when
that happened, I mean we were both intoxicated but the thing that kept going
through my mind as she approached me was that this is…you know but she is
with him. Right? And so, I think it was my loyalty to him that kept me from
following through with being intimate, physically intimate with her and that was a
very tempting situation because she was very attractive and you know very
desirable for me. Just in general. But that was kind of the thing that kept me
back. So, one of the things for me, I think, comes out of me for that is I don’t know whether it’s a trait that is maybe more prominent in me than it is in other people. But, I am a very loyal person. So, I think that does translate to my own monogamy because that is something is a value, that’s very fundamental for me. To be loyal. And I know this about myself in a lot of other areas in life. You know so when it comes to friendships, or when it even comes to certain work relationships, loyalty to people that you care about is a high value. And so, I think for me in times of temptation, that is something that is on my mind a lot as prominently featured, you know that acting on this would be a violation of my sense of loyalty to people that I care about. And I have greater loyalty to someone like my wife who I built a life with, who I have more loyalty for than this other person maybe.

**Reducing points of suspicion.** In tandem to reducing points of temptation, participants discussed reducing points of suspicion as a component of establishing behavioral boundaries. For example, Tiffany reflected on being open and sharing access to their cell phones and social media accounts. She said,

> I mean like I said we enjoy being together and we keep things open and I mean like he’s not hiding his phone I am not hiding mine and…social media isn’t like a huge deal to us. Like I mean…he has no problem with me being on his…you know like couples who are kind of shady they’re like hiding their phones and [laughs] I mean we’re just open with each other.
She elaborated further,

I just I am not a huge fan of social media but it helps me stay connected with friends and family so…and same with him. I mean when we’re together we try not to sit on our phones on Facebook and like I said we’re…we don’t keep that stuff hidden. Um…because I feel like social media like when it is all secretive and you’ve got passwords it’s just not okay. And it…because you’ve got people like I said from your past trying to message you and doing weird stuff on there. But I feel like in marriages if you’re going to have that stuff, be open with it, don’t be all secretive and having passwords and hiding your crap. If you’re going to have it as a married couple, you need to not keep it secret and you need to just…because it just creates and opens yourself up for the past coming to haunt you [laughs].

Finally, Rose also described reduced suspicion in her marriage. She discussed that her husband “didn’t leave me questioning” his actions or whereabouts.

**Making life adjustments to maintain boundaries.** Some participants described that individuals should make major life changes when setting boundaries and reducing points of temptation become difficult, and one feels a deep desire to or fantasizes about infidelity. For instance, Anna shared a story of advice she received about setting boundaries. She said,

I had talked about these things with him and he gave me an idea that I thought was cool was what would you do if you felt really attracted to someone like a co-
worker and he was like I would be willing to do anything it takes to keep my fidelity to my spouse. And he said if I need to quit my job and find a new one. Do it. If you need to move out of the city, change churches, whatever it takes it do it in order to prevent that from kind of like continuing…anything that needs to be done in order for it to happen…especially if it I something close like the example I gave you about the instructor is like up here…it’s…I don’t even see him like you know what I mean? But he was someone that I worked with or someone really close someone that you are collaborating with in school or whatever you need to see this person every day… eight hours a day more so than your spouse that’s when it gets messy.

**Cognitive**

Cognitive boundaries were also found within the data as a subcategory of the boundaries protective factor. Cognitive boundaries can be conceptualized as mentally establishing boundaries with others to prevent temptations of infidelity. Cognitive boundaries also included a re-investment or reminding oneself about the value of monogamy. Additional aspects are discussed further.

**Shifting cognitions away from external persons.** Philip described cognitively setting boundaries. He said,

so one of the things I do you know every once in a while probably more every once in a while…quite frequently you know we have connections with other people…um whether somebody that we just see in the grocery store good friend
or something that um of the opposite sex that I’ll just speak for myself…that I find attractive you know sexually attractive or just physically attractive or has attractive qualities and what I…one of the things that I will do is in that moment um I can maybe appreciate the good quality about that other person…but I remind myself that my marriage and my relationship is about more than just that thing, right? So, I remind myself of like a lot of the good qualities that my wife has…You know that she is kind and that she’s generous and that you know you narcissistically that she only has eyes for me.

Furthermore, Philip described cognitively shifting his perspective of someone he found attractive establish cognitive boundaries and reduce temptation. He shared,

I mean it was a time in our relationship maybe where I wasn’t really feeling all that close to her and there were some other people in my life um or there had been a string of other people my life that I was finding to be very attractive and just…I remember at some point…I don’t really remember where I was…but just at some point just the reality of the fact that attractive person just had a really nice figure and that it was attached with that person's personality…Right? And if I’m remembering correctly is one of those first times…if I am remembering correctly it was a person that I found really unattractive…there personality was very off-putting. Right? So, just something about that having a kind of a sexual or physical attraction to a person but also recognizing that personality for me that person…it just you know…that’s would have been a horrible person to live with for me.
Philip also stated that “the more that I do that the more that I practice that the easier it is.” Frank also mentioned adjusting his cognitions in relation to sexual or physical attractions. He said, “I think that I have sort of internalized that and I worked as a counselor for a long time, you know? I even worked with many females in my career and it’s just sort of second nature now, just to put their overall well-being first. I think, and again, that doesn’t negate sexual feelings or physical attraction, it just…I think I developed a habit of overriding it pretty well.”

**Finding value in platonic connections with other humans.** Furthermore, Frank described finding other connections with humans more rewarding than sexual or emotional infidelity. He shared,

so, when I can invest in another human being, even if I find them to be incredibly physically attractive and there’s even what could be chemistry, when I conduct myself where I invest in showing them a form of that it is about their full personhood. I find that more satisfying ultimately than um…I mean I’ve never acted on it but let’s say having a fantasy of that person and sort of using them in that way. I find the experience of investing in their whole self…I think that’s why I like counseling. It’s really a regular practice of instead of consuming the other as an end to meet my needs it’s sort of encountering the other and trying to nurture their sense of personhood in a way that is deeply satisfying.

Anna also described cognitively stopping any form of fantasy when she experienced a crush. She said,
I tried to stop entertaining the thought of you know fantasizing...part of life with this person.” Lisa too described having cognitive boundaries. She shared, “I guess like I said before but I’ll say this my husband travels a lot. He is gone a lot. And so, I think if I were to consume myself with thoughts about ‘I could do this while he’s gone’ or ‘he could do that’...like I would make myself crazy, you know what I’m saying?

Furthermore, Tiffany described mentally closing herself off to other partners. She said, “it’s almost impossible to even think about doing anything with anybody else.” This connected with Barbra who shared knowing she’s not interested in anyone else. She stated, “I do think that there is a cognitive piece of you just cognitively being aware of you know I’m not feeling it you know [chuckles] for this other person.”

**Maintaining fear of losing one’s spouse.** Participants also described cognitively strengthening the fear of losing the benefits of monogamy to ensure that the consequences outweigh the benefits of having any form of an affair. For instance, Frank described having vivid nightmares in which he commits infidelity and how it affects him and reminds him how he wants to remain monogamous. He shared,

I have had nightmares about infidelity. And I mean nightmares in the sense where I don't realize I’m dreaming and I’ve just made a decision that I know is going to destroy everything I love, you know maybe some sort of impulsive decision, some sort of sexual interaction in a dream and it isn't anyone I know or desire it’s just sort of say it’s just biology or the psyche doing what it does but I
think it’s interesting that those have been completely terrifying um and again using the word nightmare deliberately and I don’t see that as unhealthy either for what it’s worth. You know my understanding of the human creature is that we’re extremely complex and you know if monogamy is an evolved social construction we certainly weren’t always behaving that way and there’s reminisce of that deep in my collective unconscious or psyche or whatever and uh they’re finding their expression in my you know dream life and they’re not common or frequent but they definitely leave a mark the day after.

Furthermore, Linda described,

I feel like I know deep down that if I were to ever to go down that path at this point in my life that it would like the consequences of that…like to kind of keep with the narrative framework that I am talking through…the consequences that it would change my narrative pretty tragically. Like the repercussions of it would be so devastating that it would outweigh any potential benefit.

Rose also identified the consequences of infidelity as being a cognitive boundary to remain monogamous. She stated, “we also know that we are going to lose all of that other great stuff if we aren’t monogamous.”

**Daily choice to practice monogamy.** Another component of cognitive boundaries includes participants consciously making the daily choice to remain faithful. For instance, Anna said, “there's also an action and a conscious act of it. Of choosing every day to be with my husband and not even trying with other people that I may like or
feel attractive because I chose that. Sometimes it's difficult sometimes it's an effort.”

Frank also shared a story about finding peace in letting go of other opportunities and maintaining the choice to remain faithful. He shared,

Did you ever read the parable by Mulan Kindera? I think that was the one...where the main character is having this whole slew of exploitation, kind of a total heedless, and he is just sort of becomes tortured and obsessed by it and I don’t remember but the idea is that the unbearable likeness of being is that sometimes too much possibility is like you know if your being is so light that there’s nothing that grounds you, it’s unbearable. There is such a thing as too much possibility and you sort of become a prisoner of that possibility and so you could think of there’s literally thousands of momentary encounters a person could have. There are a lot of people in their world, with social media now, but it just, I could look at that from the start, down that long tunnel of experiences and say you know a. it’s not for me and b. I don’t think it would actually be rewarding. Even for what we know about neuropsychology now and the relationship with desire and all of that stuff that could even change my brain in a way that probably would introduce more suffering in my reality. So, I don’t know it’s somewhat of a logical choice too you know?

Furthermore, part of making this daily choice is pair with having the ability to cognitively process temptation. For example, Cindy described experiencing a romantic crush with someone other than her husband and being able to cognitively process her experience rather than act on her momentary desire. She said,
that was…oh yes what I will disclose is that there was one point in our relationship…um there was someone else that I found myself beginning to get emotionally attracted to and that was prior to marriage and I was wondering what was that about. And I think it was more or less you know like when you work with individuals on projects you spend a lot of time with the person and it was just something like within my spouse I was seeing as like needing more and this person seemed more open but I did not act on it and I remember I wound up talking to my partner about it and he…for one he was like I didn’t know you felt that way…and then also he was like how far this went? And I was like it’s not going anywhere further.

Anna too described being able to cognitively process temptation and different forms of infidelity as a method of practicing cognitive boundaries. She discussed experiencing a crush on a professor and how she established cognitive boundaries to understand and prevent infidelity. She said, “I am very rational too. So rationally I could understand that this was something completely…almost like a platonic love if you will.”

**Viewing infidelity as having more cost than reward.** The final component of cognitive coping participants discussed was that their perspectives of cheating were hypothetical and viewed as too much effort. For example, Lisa shared that cheating is “viewed very much as I am not going to put a lot of energy and effort into this.” She also discussed the idea of trying to develop a deep intimate connection with another person is exhausting. She said, “trying to start that with someone else [laughs] like it’s exhausting just thinking about it.” Furthermore, Melissa noted, “I don’t have any temptation,” which
connects with the cognitive boundary or guard that other participants have discussed as a component of the protective factor of boundaries.

**Relational**

The third component, or subcategory, of the boundaries protective factor found in the data focused on relationship boundaries. These boundaries help protect the relationship and maintain monogamy. Securing relationship boundaries includes many components.

**Reasonable expectations.** For example, participants described having reasonable expectations of their marriage and of their spouse as a boundary. Lisa shared, “I think as much as I say he’s my everything, I can’t make him be my best friend, and my therapist, and my lover too you know what I am saying? Like he is probably two of those three things but he can’t be all of them. So, um…you know it’s part of knowing that I have to not solely rely on him for everything.” Melissa also shared a similar message. She said, “like with expectations in general, like don't compare yourself to other couples and that doesn't mean that you guys are unhealthy or anything like that so.” However, having realistic expectations of your marriage and of your spouse doesn’t equate to making your marriage a secondary priority. For instance, Melissa argued that a marriage should come before even children: “your child is not always going to be around. They will grow up eventually.” Anna also shared a similar message about establishing a family rule in which the marriage is the main priority. She said,
I have friends that the problem of they sleep with their kids in their bed…until they’re like three or four and I'm like that no…this mommy and daddy…this is not…this is almost like a holy…um I’m not saying don’t let them in the room at all or in your bed but just that time at night where you need to protect kind of like your couple. So, taking those kinds times off.

**Belief that the relationship is special and meaningful.** Participants also described holding the idea that their spouse and/or their relationship was special enough for the commitment of monogamy. For instance, Cindy shared, “I think I had to be able to take charge of my choice and let go of let’s say what the Scripture may say…or what society is telling me. And helped with me being monogamous was my choice in my partner…in my spouse. You know he was somebody who inspired me creatively…um had a strong sense of humor and I realized that…what I had said earlier that equal yolk thing.” In this description, Cindy exemplified the strong relationship boundary that transcended even societal or religious messages about monogamy for her, and it boiled down to her relationship with her spouse. Furthermore, Anna described the importance of “trying to choose the right person” with whom you have the strong relationship bond and boundary that Cindy described. Similarly, Linda shared, we met when we were in college we actually met first week of college, we were together in the same dorm and we were dating other people at the time and it ended up supporting each other through our breakups and so we together for maybe a year um that first year and I started getting nervous because I had only dated one other person before I met my husband so I was kind of freaking out at
the intensity of our connection and the fact that maybe I was missing out in some ways on um finding someone else so we took a short break at that point but during that time I'd ever with anyone else.

Lisa also felt that her husband was special and how it connects with the relationship boundary and maintaining monogamy. She said,

So, um, so anyway that was kind of the irony of the whole relationship but then once I met him he was very different than any other partner I had been with, uh, just in, a little uh emotionally and everything about him he was very different. He was so welcoming and loving and so, um, that’s what it was. I hate to sound cheesy and corny and talk about love, but a lot of it was how it started and I think you as you stay together for a long time, we watched a lot of friends get divorced. We watched a lot of friends be unfaithful. He was a Marine so the military, uh, I shouldn’t say is known for, but kind of, there is a lot of military angst sometimes and in marital relationships. So, we went through friends get divorced and we watched friends we knew were being unfaithful and it was just something that was, from a moral standpoint, from an ethical standpoint, neither one of us could never do that to one another. I just can’t ever see that happening.

Finally, Rose also added, “we had you know we saw we had something really special we wanted to dedicate ourselves to.”

Participants also described that their partners courted differently than other or past suitors. For instance, Cindy said,
I think what really helped me was my like when it came to my husband was that he wasn’t so focused getting physical early. Our dynamic was like you know being with my partner and I say my life partner…is he um I remember early on like first and second date...you know talked about like views on religion and views on marriage and like started to go to deeper conversations and when he was sharing with me how not only was he celibate but he was waiting for whoever he was going to become intimate with was his future wife. I’m like okay I know this man better not be lying [laughs].

Furthermore, Rose also shared that her spouse courted her differently. She said,

I think looking back in the beginning when we started dating he would ask me to events that…you know he would ask me first. He’d ask to spend that time with me first it wasn’t like a guy’s thing like he got two tickets to the Ohio State and Michigan hockey game that they turned progressive field into a skating rink. He had gotten those tickets already asking for opening day one year for the Indians you know? Like right away kind of increase that honesty is not yet trust level where like you're not just doing it to like look good or I’m not like a third choice and all kind of build to that feeling of trust and monogamy you know fidelity like…he’s focused.

**Continued investment in intentions and expectations.** Finally, participants described the intention and expectation of remaining monogamous. This was found to be a part of the relationship boundary within the protective factor. For example, Barbra
shared the immediate expectation and established boundary of maintain monogamy. She said, “we never went through period of like are we going to agree to see other people or not see other people. Even dating stage…it was always exclusive.” In addition, Anna shared how she refrained from developing a crush further because of the relationship boundary. She said,

I felt a little guilty about I was like it’s just going to make him really really sad and it is not going anywhere because I am not trying to do anything, I don’t want anything to change.” Furthermore, Barbra shared, “So it’s the whole idea that you know there’s intense consequences too. You know can be intense consequences even on a level of like hurting my spouse’s feelings if he thought I was flirting with someone too obviously, there are much deeper consequences of being faithful. Um…. That it’s very rare that taking action on a fantasy and is worth the outcomes.

Coping Individually and as a Couple

Another protective factor found in the data was coping individually and as a couple. Subcategories of this protective factor include support systems, reframing, coping individually, coping as a couple, and deconstructing unattainable ideals and normalizing.

Support Systems

Having support systems has a helpful source of coping to maintain monogamy was discussed. Support systems were found to comprised of sources or resources from
which participants were able to receive strength, guidance, resiliency, etc. from someone other than their spouse. Such support systems may include family, friends, literature, religion. Aspects of this subcategory are discussed further.

**Friendships and counseling.** Lisa shared experiencing a period of doubt or questioning her decision to be married to and monogamous with her husband and how discussing it with a friend helped her overcome the difficult period. She said,

I think when I was younger, I definitely and I may have told you this last time but I definitely had this you know someone pursuing me and saying ‘oh did I make a mistake?’ you know? And I remember talking to a girlfriend about that and that was kind of how I coped with it. I talked to a friend of mine and she said to me ‘you know, *Lisa, I assume this is pretty normal.’ She was like ‘I assume that what you're feeling you and what you’re going through having gotten engaged 22 is probably pretty normal.’

Furthermore, Lisa shared another difficult period in her marriage where her support systems helped her marriage. She said,

something happened and he ended up getting the opportunity to go to New York and he said to me ‘if I could go to New York instead of Japan,’ he said, ‘would you want to go?’ and I said ‘yes!’ and I’m convinced that saved us. That truly saved our marriage. I mean, being closer to family, getting me back to some familiarity. Um and actually when we got to New York, it was much different than Cherry Point. The base in New York was like a real family friendly base.
We had friends with kids, and friends who we’re still friends with now, who are still married and that was 1996, you know what I’m saying?

In addition, Linda shared that family served as support and as role models for maintaining monogamy. She said,

think well regarding support systems helped the fact that we both of our parents are still together you know or they’re still with the person they married initially you years ago and that gives us a good model to follow if nothing else and of course you know if they were find out that we were being I don’t know tempted to not be monogamous anymore that I think that they would be very upset about that um yeah I think it should as far as we know there for parents have ever strayed from their marriage so I think that that helps provide us again with the model to follow.

Furthermore, Anna also described having a sense of support through counseling, when she felt tempted to cheat, which helped her remain monogamous. She explained, “I tend to obsess over things too much because of my personality and she told me just you know let it flow naturally but don't give it too much thought but also don't try to kind of like repress it.”

**Belonging to a community which supports monogamy.** Participants also described feeling connected to a community who supports monogamy as a method of coping. For example, Philip shared,
it’s like the social circles that we are a part of. So, my faith circle is or my religious circle is a Christian one and monogamy is certainly valued in that context. The friends that we chose for ourselves to have a kind of give and take relationship with, not that I would not…not that I would you know shun friends that cheat on their spouse or that kind of thing but I would not choose them as people that I am inviting into speak to my life. Right? Because that’s a quality or that’s a value that is not shared. So, the kinds of men that I invited into my inner circle, it’s both couples and men.

**Religion and/or spirituality.** In addition, Anna described choosing to consume media which connects with her religious community who supports monogamy. She shared,

> I am trying to follow a devotional which was not Catholic but it’s just some other…I don’t even know…some Christian whatever…but I like it. Um and I try to…I am not very very disciplined but I try to pray every morning so I’ve brought it before God like help me you know get over this. I brought in my therapy session to kind of talk about it. Um…and it just so happened that I was hearing something on the radio and they were talking about infidelity.

Furthermore, Frank shared a similar message to Philip’s in that he invests relationships which may hold him accountable to remain monogamous. He shared,

> well with accountability I guess I would say that all of my good friends are married and I think we would probably…we would support each other but there’s
just an unspoken commitment to I don’t know, an affair in the context of our relationships would just be a complete sort of taboo. I guess the accountability piece is we don’t sort of talk about are you being monogamous but when we do talk we deliberately talk in ways that are about investing in our families, in ourselves, and in our relationships and so the monogamy piece is just sort of the add on to that. You know? It’s just sort of comes to fruition when you are taking good care of yourself you’re more likely to have a healthy relationship. And when you have a healthy relationship you’re more like to remain monogamous. I guess, yeah I guess that’s the accountability piece.

**Reframing**

Another subcategory of the protective factor of coping found was reframing. Reframing was described as a cognitive process. For example, participants discussed having the ability to maintain a positive perspective of their spouse and their marriage during challenging periods and/or points of temptation.

**Reminding self of positive aspects of the relationship.** Philip described that when he is upset with his wife’s messes around the house he reframes the severity of the issue and reminds himself of his wife’s positive qualities. He shared,

> um just to reminding myself that even the worst things about her are really relatively minor thing when put the context of her whole personality and all the things that I have to appreciate about her um I don’t know…so an example is…so she has a very different organizational style than I do [chuckles]. Um...I like
things to be ordered and kind of neat and I may not always do good job of that myself but I have you know just a real desire to you know be able walk through the house without tripping over stuff [chuckles]. you know? that things are in their place, that. But the way that manifest is that things tend to be organized in piles and stocks rather than in files or folders. So, like in our bedroom there's piles of things so every once a while…and this happened recently, just the other day I’m walking through the bedroom and I’m trying to get ready and I'm just you know I’m having to step over a pile of close or I’m tripping over a shoe on the floor you know and I’m just under my breath I’m like why is it so hard to keep the room straight you know? And I’m kicking stuff and you know doing that little thing and in the process, I just you know I just remind myself alright this is not that big of a deal…I can get over this you know…you know…I know that she tries to keep things straight for me…that's not her way you know and so I just remind myself that it’s a compromise. It’s a compromise to share space with somebody who's very different person and sometimes after reminding myself that she probably has to put up with much more difficult things from me than I’ve dealt with from her. [chuckles] So that would be an example of kind of one of the ways that I have of reminding myself to think better about that.

Another example is that Anna tries to rationalize issues and remember her partner’s positive attributes, similar to Philip’s methods for reframing. She shared,

think mentioned just trying to rationalize everything and trying to think through things and trying to really think through the process of what it is that I am feeling
and why it is that I am feeling it and I am very rational so to trying to make sense of things. And looking at the positive things of my spouse. And trying to think of the idea that I am maybe idealizing someone based on one characteristic or just a few characteristics that I know. And you know it all ties together with the therapy that I am doing like the psychotherapy and talking through it. I don’t think I have done anything else. Everything is related to thinking, right? So, praying, thinking about it, trying to look at the positive things that my spouse has, and rationally comparing those and saying this is what I choose every day, right?

**Putting the issues into context.** Additionally, Rose described putting her relationship into context. She said,

It’s kind of like I guess taking a step back and getting out of the initial moment and looking at the big picture of things and my personal goals for a relationship. What I always wanted. Even if I didn’t know exactly what it looked like when I was younger. As I got older it became much more clearer and I could then like carry it out. You know what we are trying to build. What we have already established.

Rose also described that she reminds herself of her partner’s positive attributes when she is angry. For instance, she said,

I think a lot of times when I catch myself maybe being irritated or something…something that really in a logical rational person would be like…but I am like they know they know with me…but then whenever I come home one thing isn't
done I now go back and I like all of the things that he does do on a daily basis and all the ways that he supports me and that this little thing doesn't negate any of that and that I don't want to browbeat him personally when is so good and overall amazing.. but I feel like he is honestly...I couldn’t believe someone so good came in a package that pretty [laughs] you know but um its…And sometimes it’s just as easy as kind of looking at him like ahhh and just that feeling I try to think back to when we first met and we started dating because I don’t want to take him for granted. So, I think it kind of always doing that kind of work.

Anna also described putting the relationship into context. She shared a comparison of her husband to that of her crush or temptation. She said,

with this professor in particular I know he's married or with someone but he never ever talks about her. And I know they work as in the same field or profession in a certain area and I know from friends that have kind of like you know in a funny tone said that he will show up…and they work in community together…she will be like hi babe and he’s like don’t call me baby in front of my co-workers!! So that kind of like wanting to separate or hide I’m like see I would not like that…I would not be…I would not feel well with that and my husband is the exact opposite so those kinds of things I try to think about. And that particular thing was very important for me. The fact that he includes me and is proud of me and doesn’t want to hide me.
Furthermore, Anna also shared “I try to focus on my husband more and appreciate the nice things about him that I think the other person either doesn't have.”

**Placing blame outside of the marriage/ externalization.** When challenges or issues in the relationship occur, participants described being able to place blame on external factors rather than their spouse. For example, Rose shared,

“we know that that's there and it's always a good connection when we’re together and sometimes it's just...um we’re just kind of lacking the actual time spent together but um we’re both so busy we’re both fulfilling other parts of ourselves...so it does is not as glaring at times...and then also leading up to that you know...maybe a year after we got married you know we had fertility issues as well and that's kind of...it kind of gets you out of the habit sometimes because sometimes you can't for weeks at times...because we were doing IVF and everything else...so you know that was kind of like that I think had you know had effected things but luckily it was something that we could that we could grow stronger with…together where I know…I don't think it has taken away necessarily because we could pick up…You know if we had a month on an island somewhere…I am making the face like it would be all good.

**Challenges are temporal.** Furthermore, participants also maintained the perspective that challenges are temporal as a component of reframing within the protective factor of coping. For instance, Lisa conveyed that challenging points in a marriage are temporary in her stated expectation of “sticking through the down times too,
you know?” Lisa further described having gone through challenging periods during her long marriage. She shared,

So, I just feel like part of it is… I guess my advice would be like stick with it just because you are in a dry spell don’t go running up and down the street to find someone else. Like it’s going to pass. But you have to put the effort into making it pass. Like sometimes I’ll say like ‘hey what’s going on with us? Where are we at?’ You know? Um… because there is not a lot of communication going on so that and I would say stick with it. I’m not going to say don’t go to bed angry because I do go to bed angry. [laughs] But… I would say kind of stick with it through what seems like the rough patches I think that would be…I think it’s very short sighted to think that a temporary situation is going to be a permanent one… think about now like social media like life is wonderful and fantastic. I didn’t have that when I was young and just getting married. But I think it’s that whole comparison in yourself thinking that the grass is always greener when really things just take time. Things are just hard.

In addition, Philip too shared the idea of sticking through difficult times that Lisa presented. Philip said, “I think that it means that for me it means that I may have to sometimes do things that are hard… instead of doing something that is um fun or pleasurable or easy in the moment.” Anna shared, “I am feeling much better about it now” regarding her temptation or crush on another man. Her statement exemplifies that temptation or challenges are not always permanent.
Furthermore, Cindy shared difficult times which included “experiencing some financial difficulties” and periods of transition where she was “getting ready to end my program,” which conveyed again the idea that difficult aspects in a marriage are temporal. Linda also shared this perspective and described it as “seasons of your life.” Barbra presented a similar idea to Linda’s. Barba shared married persons are “deeply and committed and you know your life changes from…in ways that you can never imagine between like losing parents and going through career changes together and you know fun stuff and scary stuff like your life evolves.” Tiffany also said, “things aren’t going to be happy always.” Frank described “taking turns” and having a “mutual sacrifice” when sharing an example of overcoming negotiating challenges such as “who gets to pursue a career first.” Finally, Frank also discussed holding hope that difficult times will pass and an emotional connection will happen with his spouse again. For instance, he said,

but it’s something you have to, you like that quote ‘you make the road by walking’ you have to walk that road in order to experience coming back together. Which then becomes the road that is trusted and always you to tolerate the next round of being out of sync and with each round you can sort of rest in that a little better. But initially it’s really hard because you’re like I don’t know what the road looks like!

**Normalizing.** Participants also discussed having the perspective that losing the feeling of infatuation (i.e. feeling of falling in love) is normal in a long-term and committed marriage. For instance, Linda shared,
I may have remembered like had memories of when I was single or dating and um...just kind of the excitement that comes from that stage of time. And kind of wished for that in some ways again. Um...that could be somewhat similar. I mean, it was never like a...well....You know, maybe there was a memory of a person who um...you know I had flirted with in the past or had had feelings for in the past and just the thought of it. I don’t know... of what would it be like to go back in time? Or even to run into that person again. I’ve not been in a situation of being placed in that like in real life but yeah just kind of thinking about it. And I think that in those cases, the thing that has kind of helped um...let’s see...I guess it’s just kind of viewing that as the past. Um...and kind of allowing myself to have the past be the past, you know what I mean? To allow myself to have had those kind of exciting moments but it’s where it ends. That being appreciative that I was able to experience some things just as part of you know growing up and sometimes I do feel like 'gosh it would be nice to have that feeling again’ or be in that situation again. But again, I guess it’s just kind of letting that be like my past narrative. And my current narrative is that you know I’ve committed to my husband to this new story line and that there’s not really room for that...for those kinds of things.

Linda actively normalizes and accepts the idea that the infatuation feeling is not sustainable in a long-term marriage. Philip also shared this perspective. For example, he described: “um and then you know there's always seasons of life where you don’t have as many strong feelings as maybe you once did.” He also shared the importance of “being
intentional about trying to cultivate some of that” because he understood it decreases with time. Finally, Tiffany shared a similar perspective. She said, “yeah and you know that feelings change a little bit and the excitement kind of goes away so it is a huge accomplishment.”

**Reassurances.** Even though accepting and normalizing some issues in a marriage were discussed, participants also discussed that finding points which reassure them they’re normal and that their marriage consists of aspects they desire in relationship was also described as a part of reframing. For instance, Anna provided an example of comparing her marriage to her other’s marriages and conveyed feeling happy and relieved to have the type of marriage she has. She shared,

> I am always comparing and contrasting myself with other people, right? That is interesting because my family here most of my siblings are not trying to…like they are serial daters. Not serial dates, that would be the opposite. They kind of jump from one girlfriend to the other. My actual brother who was here last night, doesn’t want to have kids, doesn’t want to get married. And the others are like too. They were dating someone at our wedding and now all of a sudden, he left. But they stay in good terms but they are not like, they don’t seem to be like in committed relationships so I do contrast myself or ourselves to that as well. And it’s an interesting question because actually last night we were here and he was with his new girlfriend and we don’t even know how long she is going to last. That’s kind of a joke that we made with my mom. But, that and the fact that we believe there might have been some intersection between the time he was living
with this person, he was not in an open relationship as far as I know, but it’s just this lack of commitment through…it’s kind of like going by your feelings. So, he was like I don’t feel like living with you anymore and I don’t think I love you anymore or we don’t fit so I am just going to leave. And all of a sudden, he is living with someone else. He takes it very lightly. So, I do see ourselves like contrasted to that. And last night not only were they here, he and my other two brothers are the same way. And the other people that were here, there were a bunch of people, but three of our cousins actually they will be my step cousins because they are the nephews of my dad’s wife and they are the same. This is a small town that we are from, so back in the day they were very popular and all of the girls in town were in love with them. And they’re all single as far as I know right now. So, it may sound like, I don’t know, I do feel that sometimes I may sound a little what’s the name a little arrogant or whatever but it’s not like that. I do see ourselves…like my husband is very affectionate. So, we were all sitting at the table yesterday and he was holding my hand and kind of rubbing my back and he does this all of the time. And I do see that all of them, and it just so happens to be that they are all boys like men really, and my sister. But my sister is really young right now and she is kind of dating someone but so, yeah, kind of contrasting myself to that and again thinking ‘this is crazy, there are some that are older than me’ and we don’t have that expectation necessarily that just because you’re older you must marry first or get together first or whatever. But, yeah seeing that contrast between us, I see it as like a solid couple. Obviously, we are
newly married so we are newlyweds in away. But I know these other guys that are 30 something or close to our age and just stay single. So, I do reinvest or reinforce this idea of yes this is what I chose and this is what I like because I think, I don’t know, and I understand I 100% respect people who chose to be single or celibate for their life. But these guys that are just kind of not that commitment to a relationship, or maybe they haven’t found the right one yet. And I feel very fortunate and I am very blessed that I am not in that position.

Furthermore, Rose described finding reassurance through her academic studies. She shared, “yeah you know I mean it’s funny in the sense of being a counseling student, just took family so we reviewed everything basic about Gottman. That is kind of there but like going through it it’s very reassuring because I am like we do that. We could work a little hard on that but that’s okay…Um those core things are definitely reflected.”

Finally, Barbra shared that she tries to remember the romantic experiences with her husband during the courting stage and the experience of falling in love. She said,

you know maybe that’s a great thing when you're in early 20 to have that I mean I have a friend that is newly engaged and I would say the dynamic of her courtship is very different than most in the sense of um…it just all went very quickly and I feel like she's missed the wooing part of it and certainly, my husband wooed me. You know like we got engaged on the Empire State building it was very romantic or whatever. But I think that there was a lot more depth to the relationship beyond that but I also I think personally would regret if there was none of that. You know? I mean it’s still…like my husband… I had wanted a special camera
for my graduation with my Ph.D. and he gave it to me before…you know he gave it to me early which was like I thought the most romantic gesture ever of you know giving me this like dream camera while I was going you know still going through my doctorate and um you know that stuff is still important but it’s just not the central you know focus of a relationship.

**Reflections.** Tiffany described that she and her husband reflect and remember the negative parts of past relationships as a method of reframing and remaining disciplined. For example, she said,

> We both have gone through relationships and we have learned so much and we know what we wouldn’t want and I guess it has kind of taught us a lot so it helps us stay disciplined and…um just thinking about how each other feels and those past relationships. Those past relationships have really like helped with the discipline like you know what I mean? Going through so much really helps you be more disciplined and thinking about each other’s feelings and knowing that he counts on me and I count on him.”

Tiffany’s reflection connected with Philip’s perspective that his marriage is the best and most meaningful relationship he has had and will ever have. Philip said,

> yeah and at this point in our relationship there…I honestly cannot imagine being able to build life with someone in such a rich way. I mean even if even if something were…I mean God forbid… even if something were to happen to her that she you know that I would lose her um that she would die or whatever…I just
don’t envision being able to cultivate as rich of a relationship with another person. Even if I found a really good person she will always be a part of me…In a very profound meaningful way.

Both Tiffany and Philip’s depictions convey that they maintain the perspective that their marriages are the best relationships that they have had, which ultimately helps them desire to stay faithful and married. Finally, Linda described reframing any minor connection or interest in another man would not be as deep and meaningful as the connection she has with her husband. She shared, “I think that I've learned to well it has just helped me learn that intimacy is so tied for me now to how much he knows me and how much I know him and the depth of that connection so it's something that like a casual encounter with someone else would not even come close to meeting those same need.”

**Individually**

Another subcategory of the protective factor of coping described by participants is the ability to cope individually. Coping individually could be conceptualized as including individual abilities to adapt or demonstrate resiliency. This section will discuss the components which were found to be a part of coping individually.

**Working with monogamy.** Frank presented a coping ability of allowing monogamy to shape him, rather than resisting it by allowing the practice of monogamy to align and work with his personal attributes. He said, “once you embark on that path for
me and I’m not saying everyone has to but for me to be something that you sort of let it bend your will and let it deconstruct you at times.” He also said,

it takes a huge amount of energy and patience. That’s what I think about earlier when we talked about in this interview about how monogamy is really a sacrament for me. And sacrament as being something that transforms you over time, that’s greater than your own individual needs. And I am sure you and I could think of a number of cases that individuals for various reasons who have not been set up to be able to do that like going back to insecure attachments, right? Or whatever else. And for that person like, their whole world and reality and what it means to connect and to experience intimacy is just so different from what I am talking about right. So…You know? I guess what I am trying to say is like yes there is a lot of work involved in this, but there’s also a lot different things that make this work easier for some of us than others.

Furthermore, Frank and Linda talked about fostering a sense of personal determination to maintain monogamy. For instance, Linda shared, “guess I mean it’s hard to extract those things but I guess for me I mean it’s still an um…I guess self-esteem piece of making something work and being successful at it you know from a personal fulfillment stand point. Um…that you know this is something about my character um…that I am not a person who is going to be another way.” Frank said,

you know I think of faithfulness as setting your heart on something and believing in the possibility of it for which there are no guarantees or certainty that can be
sort of promised but you are orienting yourself towards this idea you know or
again this transcending good in a way where you trust in its possibility and maybe
there is a little karma involved there in a way you know and not like cultural use,
you know karma as these sort of pre-delineated uh perceiving reality, your way
being in the world your way of interpreting things like it is something you
embody and the you when something comes to fruition like fidelity or faithfulness
it’s because your operating in the world is already oriented towards that end.

Furthermore, Cindy shared how she allows monogamy to shape her as well. She stated,
“for me outside of the marriage is more like something what I consider to be a personal
choice and for me I did…I may have spoken about this earlier…but for me it is being my
total self. And so, I look at it as something that I embarking on and being able to
relinquish control if that means anything.” Cindy also described that “I go back to me
evolving” when it comes to marriage, coping, and practicing monogamy.

**Avoiding pain.** Another component of individual coping participants expressed
was the idea of maintaining monogamy as a means of protecting themselves from the
pain infidelity would cause. For instance, Tiffany said,

I feel like not being faithful it’s just so…so much guilt…you feel guilty and so
sad. There used to be these feelings that go with it. Like staying with your spouse
and being faithful, you don’t have to worry about all of that crap. You don’t have
to worry about all of those bad feelings because the guilt and you’re mad at
yourself and it’s just not worth it at all. And so…you…I just feel like I’m mentally being faithful and staying with your spouse is so much healthier.

Furthermore, Linda also described remaining monogamous as a means of protecting herself. She shared that there is a “spiritual piece to that of protecting your heart” within monogamy.

**Changing cognitions.** Participants also described altering or changing their thoughts as an individual coping mechanism. For instance, Linda described being able to compartmentalize points of temptation or a sense of wishing to experience infatuation again. She said,

I guess it’s just kind of viewing that as the past. Um…and kind of allowing myself to have the past be the past, you know what I mean? To allow myself to have had those kinds of exciting moments but it’s where it ends. I guess it’s just kind of letting that be like my past narrative for those kinds of things…like the past being over and that’s done and that’s you know a way for me to push past the stuff in the way that we talked about. But um…and I guess there’s somewhat of a future…like a future perspective too. And this probably will sound pretty horrible but um…you know if something happens within the marriage to where we…you know our marriage was to end for whatever reason uh or something happened to my husband you know God forbid. I guess there’s that sense of being in a world…I guess I think about what would that look like for me, what would I um…I guess what would my options be at that point but that’s not really an
excitement of ooooh I would get those feelings again. It’s more just a practical level I guess. Um…a future perspective. I don’t know…again it’s kind of like it’s kind of on the same lines of um… you know my here and now is very ground in my relationship and um… so if I have thoughts that come in to play about maybe not even about specific people but just the experience of falling in love or being with someone I am able to push it to either to like a past or future category.

Linda’s narrative connected with Tiffany’s message of mentally embracing her choice to marry her husband and be monogamous. Tiffany said “you have to like really think about it your head ‘okay this is the person I married, this is who I am going to be with forever’ you just really have to treat them right [laughs] you know?”

**Balancing life roles and having a fulfilling life.** Participants also discussed having fulfilling lives which meet their needs as a part of individual coping. For example, Barbra shared, “I think that affairs happen a lot of time that have nothing to do with sex.” And that a coping method includes being passionate with other areas of life. I think that that…Big um…generator for lack of better terms of infidelity have to do with boredom or being out of sync with what you find meaningful in life or having purpose etc. and I think my husband and I had a conversation about this not too long ago, where we were both kind of laughing and saying you know like how do people even have time to have an affair? Because we’re both so involved with things that really matter to us that…um….that we don't…I don’t know…like even outside of the bars or
whatever that we really are not engaged in life in a way that affairs would happen because we are busy doing what we want to be doing and again it’s hard not to make the correlation between the before and after but in my first marriage I was so dissatisfied with life. And where it was heading so it added this like excitement factor to what was otherwise very unfulfilling. 

Linda shared connecting with a book she read which taught her one of the strategies that they gave besides being all things to your husband so that he doesn’t have to worried about anything else was making sure that you have your own stuff going on and your life. That you are busy and are able to throw yourself into something. I will go shop and buy something that I like or I will throw myself into work and just really be working hard in that way. So, I think just keeping myself busy and distracted too helps when she and her husband are a part for a long period due to work. Frank also described the value of being able to meet his own needs at times. He said, “I am not just sort of demanding that my partner meet my needs and questioning my needs and say what are these needs about? Are they consistent with my values?”

**Self-care and control.** Practicing self-care was also discussed as a method of individual coping. Tiffany expressed, “the more people let themselves go and they like get really depressed and they just don’t feel good and so you have to really take care of yourself physically and mentally in order to be a good partner in life…don’t neglect
yourself trying to take care of everyone else.” Furthermore, Barbra described practicing self-care to prepare herself for her second marriage. She said,

> you know in between my first and second marriage I spent a lot of time figuring myself out and doing the work to kind of get on the kind of path that I wanted to be and reconciling a lot of those things and then um…that's where I feel like there hasn’t needed to be that much discipline in this relationship because I'm pretty satisfied with where I’m heading and I’m so invested in what I want for my life.

Cindy described having an internal locus of control with managing her sense of security in her marriage. She said, “I think that has helped me with maintaining monogamy is making sure I validate myself and what I mean by that is making sure that I am secure and I am able to accept myself and not relying on my partner.” Furthermore, participants described having patience in moments of ineffective coping. For example, Rose described trying to approach conflict with “logic” and communication. She said, “I am not always this level headed when I say ‘hey baby, I am kind of feeling this way.’” She conveyed this allowed her to be patient with herself and recognize “when you kind of are coming from an emotionally reactive place and being able to call yourself on that and to figure out why you’re feeling that way and then talk about it a little bit differently.” Rose’s depiction of “calling yourself on that” resonated with Lisa’s narrative of accepting personal growth points and being willing to reflect and make changes as a part of individual coping. Lisa shared an example of traveling. For instance, she said,
I remember, this is just an example, once I was like I just want to go away because I never go away, I am always home watching the kids and he’s travelling all over the world, you know what I am saying? And that’s the challenge for us because he lives half of his life in hotels and he doesn’t want to go a hotel when he is home he wants to be home. And um I remember at one point we were talking about going somewhere and I was getting the way I always get and I didn’t realize I was this way until he called it to my attention. He said ‘I’m going to be honest with you, I don’t like going away with you because you get too crazy and you try to plan everything, you try to pack as much as you can, and you make it miserable for all of us’ and I was like oh wow! And like if he didn’t have the courage to say that, we never would have had another vacation in our life probably and he’ right, he was dead on right. Like I was that compulsive vacation, let’s do everything we can do, you know what I mean?

Furthermore, Lisa said, “So, I can totally have been like well too bad it’s your own bad deal but I was like I better work on that because I make my partner unhappy.”

Willingness to change. Anna also described a willingness to understand growth points and make changes. She shared her understanding of why she was tempted by another man other than her husband. She said,

um… I obviously don’t know him outside of class much so much of what I built in my head was probably idealized all of these things I am telling you are to tell you that I rationalized it a lot I was like I don’t even know him personally he
could be the worst husband in the world and I don’t know it. But I guess somehow I felt that I had to be disappointed by him to see…to kind of bring him down from that pedestal I put it on so all of this rationalizing and thinking through it helped me but still the feeling was there or the confusion if you will so I tried to pay more and more attention to my husband as well…by the way I guess usually when this happens…it doesn’t happen very often but there are a few times it happened to me it’s someone that has things that my husband doesn’t.

In this example, Anna conveyed being willing to reflect and make changes (i.e. cognitive coping) to maintain monogamy and remove the temptation of infidelity. In addition, Barbra shared cognitively coping individually by “understanding how fantasies are very different from reality. Like you can have a fantasy of what I might be like to be with another person but the reality of everything that’s involved in that it is very different. So, to recognize that fantasy is just a fantasy... that reality doesn’t live up to a fantasy.” Finally, Cindy shared the value of finding “a motivator for change” such as “accountability and also disciple” when needed.

Re-opening self to monogamy. The final individual coping mechanism found in the data was that participants cognitively re-opened themselves to monogamy. For instance, Philip described the necessity of to

turn towards one another in the relationship rather than being outward facing. So rather than…you know just that it’s about more than what you don’t do. In other words, it’s not just that we don’t have sex outside of the marriage relationship or
that we don’t seek emotional…you know that same kind of emotional fulfillment outside of the relationship but to me it really means that we’re actively trying to engage in those things together.

Philip’s narrative conveys that he is active in this process and continuously cognitively re-opens himself to monogamy rather than preventing infidelity. Frank also described cognitively opening to monogamy and his partner. He said,

I’d say I am pretty cognitively oriented and philosophically oriented so I read a book a while back that is in an entertaining read if you are interested in psychology and philosophy in that story you know Freud and Freud's early colleagues Bruner I can’t remember the name but they were during therapy with Nisha and there’s this pit point in the story where Bruner has an affair and he realized the process that the affair is just the redirecting of intimacy towards us safer direction because he he's afraid to go down to the next level of intimacy with his wife and for me I think and I read that over a decade ago and it is still in my brain and I think that’s a big part of how I just sort of approach the whole thing any sort of possible lust or desire, interest of another human being, beyond just like celebrating you know their uniqueness or their beauty or their talents or whatever else I automatically see it as something that I can ask myself why am I holding back in my relationship? With my partner. What is scary about where we’re at right now and the sort of risk and vulnerability exploring this together as opposed to redirecting my intimacy in another direction where I get immediate gratification in a safe way.
Finally, Rose conveyed cognitively re-opening is about “that willingness” that comes from within and helps her maintain monogamy.

**As a Couple**

Coping as a couple was also found in the data as a sub-category of the protective factor coping. The aspects which make up this subcategory are discussed in this section. Participants conveyed multiple elements within this category.

**Supporting each other.** participants have a sense of overcoming difficult points in life together and supporting one another as a coping. Linda said,

think another thing would be like the things that we had gone through in life. I've always been kind of intrigued by the statement you know that’s the mother of my child or that’s the father of my child. And I think it captures the idea of when you gone through things together there’s even a more heightened respect and reverence for the other person you know like we recently went through losing my husband’s…both of his parents in a short period of time and I think there's sort of like that aspect to like you know how can I be unfaithful when you know and I am speaking in terms of my husband but like how could I be unfaithful when my wife was with my parents you know when they went through what they went through or whatever or you know like I think it’s this mental process of what kind of person would do that when…So, the bond of some common experience that would…that would be a protective barrier around the relationship like you couldn’t even imagine doing that when what was sacrificed for you or what was.
Rose also shared having a sense of being able to address issues together. She said, “nothing comes to mind as far as issues that we can't address together even if there might be that you kind of tumultuous at first and then it kind of settles and you know to work at that. And it’s kind of that dedication to always feel that it's worth it all.”

**Address issues in the relationship.** Furthermore, Linda stated, “we don’t let things fester” and conveyed a similar idea of being able to address issues quickly and together. Lisa also described having experienced significant support from her spouse during challenging points in life. She said,

I’m painting like sunshine and roses don’t get me wrong like we have had bad times we’ve totally had bad times um I’ve talked about cherry point North Carolina and that was right after I had my son and while I wasn’t diagnosed I’m pretty sure I had postpartum depression um either that or I was just like doing a Ph.D. and having a job and having two kids under three and I was like not I mean there have been bad times. I’m not going to be like hey life is wonderful I mean absolutely not you know my father died from cancer he was there for me through that you know there has been some hard times and I think you just kind of stick with somebody through that and again that goes back to the respect like the fact that you didn’t leave me and/or hospitalize me uh when I was not doing well it speaks again to my profound respect for you.

In addition, Linda believed that experiencing difficult times brought “us closer together” and that they knew “we could get through some challenging things together.”
In addition, participants discussed being aware of emotions and/or issues and remains open to working on them. For example, Rose shared, “at the same time when we encounter our own junk and our own baggage we do come back to it because fixing and working on it is more important than avoiding it.” Barbra described that when issues are present she and her husband do not place blame and remain connected. She said,

we’ve bonded is our sense of humor even um…in arguments or whatever there’s always this like…sense of humor that keeps us connected even when we are fighting or annoying each other whatever. We use humor to keep um… I don’t know it’s sort of like we use humor in a way to keep us close to each other even when we're somewhat distancing each other with what we are arguing about.

Frank also described he learned to remain open while working on issues over time. He said,

I think there are times in the relationship when one either one of us can perceive that there’s a little bit space, non-productive space opening up in the relationship and is a little distance and I’d say our ongoing approach to that and I probably initiate it more than my spouse is to just sort of notice that um bring it up and then explore the reasons for it and give each other the space to sort of realize you know whatever I’ve been depressed lately or you know just sort of also acknowledge that we still have these deeply ingrained patterns of coping that are aren't always as productive as they could be some do contribute to potential space or hurt in the relationship but over time I’d say that we’ve learned that say for
example one of us just doesn’t want to be close for a few days that a that is not personal and if it is going to work itself out and c we just need to trust in the process again you know and we are going to get through it and that easier as time goes on because you’ve been through more and more of them where initially I would say they were a lot scarier for me where I was you know maybe my mind started to imagine more possible beliefs about why that was you know that certain sort of questioned the foundations of the relationship but it’s been many many years since that sort of has occurred and I don’t even know if those sorts of beliefs have occurred since we’ve been married over the last decade. It was more when we were dating.

Philip shared being aware of his emotions and periods of emotional disconnect. He shared a story and stated,

it was a time in our relationship maybe where I wasn’t really feeling all that close to her and there were some other people in my life um or there had been a string of other people my life that I was finding to be very attractive and just… I remember at some point… I don’t really remember where I was… but just at some point just the reality of the fact that attractive person just had a really nice figure and that it was attached with that person's personality.

He also shared “the more that I do that the more that I practice that the easier it is you know and maybe there have been….I mean I can remember fairly clearly when that
practice emerged.” Tiffany also described being aware of emotional disconnection and efforts to reduce it. She said,

you’re just [laughs] so worried about taking care of the kids or work or whatever else life throws at you so I guess that kind of stuff is to be expected but you have to make and effort…an ongoing effort…like husband and wife to take time for each other no matter what. And just think like your spouse is going to be there after your kids are grown up. You just want to like really cherish your relationship even with all of life crap that is thrown at you. Just really make an effort even though it is hard because you’re exhausted or you’re mad or whatever you have to just make an effort to make your spouse feel wanted and special sometimes and like I said it’s life sometimes like becoming a parent or like even if you don’t have kids it’s still you’re dealing with work or whatever else.

**Flexibility and adaptation.** Participants also described being flexible and adapting when issues do arise. For example, Lisa described changing roles and how flexibility helped both she and her husband. She said,

so right away I respected him I guess that’s my point is that right away I respected him um but I think it just grew in the way in which when I became a faculty member roles in our house switched dramatically because I teach graduate students and I teach nights and previously I was a clinician and I worked days so mom did all of the after school, mom did all of the homework I mean without even discussing it the roles switched he drives the kids everywhere and he’s the
homework guy and he’s the make dinner guy and like it’s fine it’s all good you know what I’m saying like it’s not even a problem I’m like there you go and just like when he was gone with the marine core for six weeks at a time when the kids were like 1 year on and 3 years old like that’s what you do you know you just kind of pick it up you don’t complain about it you know I just think the relationship over time has been more like because we also have other areas of our lives were we both have jobs and friends so I think that it’s not like everything and we can have a healthy perspective on life.

Another example, Anna described having an understanding and expectation that the relationship will evolve and maintaining a willingness to be flexible and hopeful during those points. For instance, she shared, “see that a lot of my friends that get really busy with a lot of kids and for whom those things that I talked about are like they literally need to put it on their calendars six months ahead of time because it’s just not going to happen. Um…this we heard a lot from couples as kind of a piece of advice and that’s something that I look forward to continuing doing especially when life gets busy.” Anna also described how she and her husband practice flexibility currently. She said,

like I said because we don’t have such busy lives and we feel very you know apart from each other. It’s kind of random right now but yeah it's usually something that will take me out of the house or sometimes I cook a special meal or we both together cook a special meal and sit down at the house talk…because of his times and my eating times we usually don't eat together, we eat at different times so even just the finding time to sit down to dinner is important.
In addition, Cindy described:

So what else my partner and I do...and I don’t want to sound graphic but we put intimacy on the calendar and what I mean by that around the time when we were having the financial difficulty I remember I kept saying that I wanted things to be spontaneous and it seemed like our times were more like premeditated and what I had to realize like just because I am young doesn’t mean I don’t have to plan for it. So, I had to learn not to just wait for the mood to strike but also making sure that we are in sync. And then…what else I think that has helped for me too is um like when talking about scheduling…talking about what is going on...not just assume that what I have going on in my life that is important or vice versa knowing that are both important. And so that was somethings that helped and then what else helped too is Oh God…we are not ever including other people...and so what else was the thing was not involving other people in our marriage. And what I mean by that is like the friends the family whatever...not saying I may not solicit their feedback or their perspective on things but not putting them in my business and what I had to look at is quite a few of my female friends are either in unhealthy relationships or they have never been there and don’t plan on being there so it’s like how can somebody tell me how to sustain a marriage when you don’t even know what it means to be faithful [laughs].

Furthermore, Frank described being flexible and remaining open to change. He said,
our interests to maybe personalities may you know will continue to grow and change you know why should we assume that we are going to be the same for the rest of our lives. Now I imagine if you push too far you could say well that might undermine the very idea of monogamy itself um but for the time being that one hasn’t come onto the table and I don’t think it will so there are limits to this sort of changing, evolving, process the limit is still within the context within this arrangement that we have together and this is maybe a little cliché but at our wedding someone read on a marriage by Kahlil Gibran and there is a line in there that talks about that the Cyprus and the oak don’t stand in each other’s shadow so that’s another way I guess of referencing this idea that you know we are two individuals growing together but not in a way that we’re overshadowing or you know ideally sort of blocking the sun and the possibility of whatever reaching for new horizons.

In addition, Rose also identified having flexibility as well. She said, “we’re growing together” and the value of keeping the focus and power within the marriage. She said, I think also my comfort with the marriage has increased to so that his friends are kind of around often you know helps him with the car stuff when he is working on car things because his friend isn’t really working full-time or anything yet. But it is just that's okay…but he’s not like on the phone constantly talking to them…female or male yeah... you talk to me first and also who is going to change things? I can help me things better in the marriage, they can’t.
Philip too shared his efforts to adapt and cope as a couple. He said, “I have created new ways of letting her know when I need something different like a change so, and this is very just concrete and practical I soften my voice when...I present things as something that I would appreciate from her rather than trying to make a demand on her.”

**Deconstructing Unattainable Ideals and Normalizing**

The final sub-category of the protective factor coping found in the data was deconstructing unattainable ideals in relationships and normalizing. This sub-category included multiple codes, which were found in the data. Each code is discussed in this section.

**Messages from society.** Participants described consuming messages from society which promote an idealistic, romanticized, and unrealistic portray of marriages which didn’t always connect with their experiences in marriage. For instance, Anna shared an example in which she conveyed her belief that maintaining monogamy takes effort or work and how others may not understand that. She said,

I think of our friends or my mom who says ‘no when you’re really really….You know you really really someone and that they’re the one because you’re not going to want anyone ever’ and I don't find that to be true. It can be true at times but it’s not true you can always be attracted to someone. We are humans after all…we are very like animals in many ways so kind of acknowledging that it’s active and it’s conscious and it’s sometimes it’s very effortful it’s not some kind of random magical feeling that you feel.
Deconstructing messages. Cindy described deconstructing messages that couples must be able to meet all of each other’s needs all of the time. Cindy said,

I had to realize my partner is not going to meet all of my needs. And so, when I first came in this...I kept saying he is my best friend…that’s my confidant...that’s my go to...he is my rock. And then I realized like he is not going to be able to fulfill all of those roles all of the time. So that’s when I realized I also in addition to being independent I as had to have other people some needs met from you know what and I mean by that is like with I like to go walking so I might have a female walking buddy um…when I you know like um let’s see like things that might be happening with shopping…I like to go shopping by myself and my husband is like oh I want to go do this or like let’s go to the movie we may want to see something different. And so, I had to look more within and so at one point I realized I was relying too much.

In addition, Melissa talked about deconstructing the expectation of feeling infatuated should be present for the duration of a marriage. She said, “it’s different when you're dating. When you first…it's more of a love infatuation kind of…but then the more years you’re with the person the love changes…so it’s definitely different more committed and deeper level of a love than it was when we were first married and dating.” Furthermore, Rose described that sexual excitement, desire, and even ability to be highly sexually active may change after being married as well. She said,
I have pain issues and that really started a little bit more after we started
dating…we used to go to the park…and we’d run-up in the Metropark…we’d run-
up and down all off trail…and that's if you translate like my mobility and stuff into
other places you know it can sometimes like…I don’t like having to put the brakes
on somethings and be like my back is killing me…it’s not about anything else you
know or you know we’re doing these progesterone shots and we’re not allowed to
for the next two weeks you know?

Barbra also shared, “It’s a different kind of attention than dating versus a long-term
commitment kind of thing.” Tiffany also described an understanding that sometimes
“you just get bored and the excitement is gone,” but she also shared having hope that
“doesn’t happen with us.” She also described shifts in the desire in their sex life with a
decrease in the sexual activity. She stated, “Well it kind of is something that has
happened. Not like that it has anything to do with him it was just like my hormones have
been so messed up that I haven’t like been in the mood at all.” Linda also shared an
understanding that their sex lives may come with challenges and described a sense of
working through these difficult times together. She said,

so part of our story with this is that we did wait until marriage which we still look
back on we’re glad we did but what that meant was we did not discover until our
wedding night that I have a…or had a condition called Vaginismus which makes
intercourse painful and there’s…I’ve done some research on it over the past… um
some of it I psychological, some of it is physical, and some of it is unexplained
but either way it requires um…quite a bit of like basically physical therapy where
you’re trying to train your body to relax and you know? So…that um…really impacted for years that impacted our…well for the first year of our marriage it really impacted our ability to have sex fully. Um…I went through a lot of physical therapy for it and then so it gradually got a little bit better. Um…funny thing is now that I have had a child it much better [laughs]. That really is something that…Um…anyway like it made it so that for us sex early in our marriage was something where my husband was worried about hurting me um…and I had even had some fears about if it was going to be comfortable or not.

**Sex in a Marriage**

Participants discussed the concept and experience of sex within a marriage as a protective factor which helps maintain monogamy. Four subcategories were found as components of this protective factor. These categories included emotional connection and sex, communication about sex, remaining sexually active, and coping with sex in a marriage.

**Emotional Connection and Sex**

Many participants discussed the value of meeting each other’s sexual needs within a marriage. This subcategory is comprised on many aspects, which are discussed in this section. The essence conveyed by participants is that emotional connection can help maintain sexual desire and satisfaction in a marriage. For example, participants described the importance of maintaining an emotional connection with their spouse and how this influenced sex within their marriage. Linda shared,
it’s that emotional connection between people that goes beyond the sexual part so like do you value me as a person and am I and do you kin of hold me as your person, your special person in your life and then if it hinges on that and for marriage it’s like that’s the biggest advantage of having a partner is that you’ve got somebody that’s in your corner and who’s going to be by your side and who has kind of pledged themselves to you and you can count on them and it’s really that emotional piece of that you know? To me, to not to be monogamous would be to um demean that in some way, to lessen the special place that person holds in your life.

Furthermore, Linda shared that sex isn’t the core reason she is married to her husband. She said, “sex has never been the core foundation of our relationship because first you know we were trying not to have it and then we were trying to figure out how to have it [laughs] um…and then now we are finally leveled out and like I guess in a normal way.” In addition, Linda shared, “I think it may be healthy not to let sex have a center stage in a relationship or like be the thing…like the thing that you seek out but that the other things kind of take that and other things are above that like the commitment and the love and affection and may not even always be sexual.”

**Willing to meet partner’s sexual needs.** Lisa also discussed the emotional or intimacy component of sex within a marriage and she described the importance of being willing to meet your partner’s needs. For instance, she shared,
I would say too just being more sensitive to where one another is at you know what I mean? Like even if I was interested in having sex and he’s getting up early, like I am going to leave you alone. You know? And I guess an example I am thinking of is like instead of it being like I am going to satisfy you and you’re going to satisfy me, we are okay now with being like no I am just going to take care of your tonight. That’s okay. So that’s kind of what I mean. It’s not like we have to do everything we would have done because you know sometimes we both just don’t need that. Like he needs it and I don’t or what have you, so.

In addition, several participants described that an emotional connection outweighs a sexual connection. For example, Rose shared, “it’s more about that guy feeling of connection and if you’re both in that place something like not having sex for a week for the first time and that’s like the longest you’ve gone. Again, it’s okay and don’t let that reflect…don’t panic.” Barbra also shared a similar perspective. She said, “I never have felt that it’s just sort of something that fulfills a need for either of our part in the sense like a physical need. I think that although it clearly serves a purpose, I think that it has always been more of a lovemaking you know?” Linda described her value of an emotional connection. She shared,

that would just be my bias again would be to who would hold that view um to me and I think this is why I keep restating in a different way is like to that person would hold sex, the sexual experience and the sexual pleasure as being somehow above the emotional intimacy and like the value of living out the highs and lows
with somebody and so maybe that’s just my difference is that I personally don’t set that priority.

**Understanding that the meaning of sex evolves in a marriage.** Another aspect of emotional connection and sex within a monogamous relationship that participants discussed is the idea of the meaning of sex evolves and deepens over time. For example, Linda shared how the meaning of sex evolved in her marriage. She said, the first couple of years the meaning was like how do we…we both felt like sex should have an important place in our marriage so we kept trying to make it work but it was frustrating. To be honest. So, it’s kind of transitioned from frustration and me feeling some guilt and feeling broken in some way um…to then…when we were first trying to get pregnant, the meaning of it, we both remarked about how different it felt to like really be trying to have sex with the purpose of having a child.

Furthermore, she remarked the deepening connection. She said, “I think there was something I can’t really explain but that there was something that felt kind of spiritual about that.” Lisa also described the evolution of the meaning of sex. She said,

I am thinking the right answer is that it is more meaningful, and it is like don’t get me wrong [laughs] that’s the right answer. I am like that is the answer but why? Find out why you want to say that. So, I do think it is because again like when you are young and whatever it was like…I shouldn’t say it’s just what you did, I am making myself sound like a loose individual but when we were in college and there wasn’t a whole lot of connection to it. We have a joke, my husband and I,
maybe I doolt you this last time, but I slept with him on the first date you know? And I’m like I tried to find all of my morals after I liked you. After I liked him and then I’m like oh I should sleep with you [laughs]. We laugh about this now because before when I didn’t care about you it was just something that you did, you know what I mean? But then once I cared about you I wanted to make it more special. You know what I am saying?

In addition, Tiffany shared, “I hope with us the meaning of it kind of stays the same. And I don’t want it to ever just be a chore [laughs].” Finally, Barbra described how courting behaviors and expectations to initiate sex evolve as well. She shared,

Early on you get flowers or you get candy or whatever but…and I have to say that you know in my younger years I was one of those women that was like caught up in you know…it needed to be like the movie kind of thing with the flowers and the chocolate and the romance and all of that. But I would say it is sort of a joke between my husband and I like you know doing the dishes and helping around the house is foreplay like there’s certain things that you know that’s the romance that he gives me at this stage of life is that you know he cares for me and I feel special in the sense I know that he’s working long hours excreta and he’s making this effort too.

**Remaining sexually active to foster emotional connection.** Additionally, participants described remaining sexually active in a marriage can help maintain an emotional connection. Therefore, a circular pattern was described between emotional
connection and sex, in that both influence and are influenced by the other. For example, Barbra discussed how remaining emotionally connected helps maintain sex. She said,

I mean and then I always have my previous marriage to compare it to. Where you know, I was younger and um…when I was married before but you know after time it [sex] became routine or something that I even resented. But it’s never felt like that with my husband. I think it’s because you know we probably um…are intimate a couple of times a week. So, I think that for us…that is…for lack of a better term, probably that’s infrequent enough for it not to seem like it’s routine and needs to be spruced up.

Furthermore, Barbra shared a perspective that she and her husband make effort to maintain sex in the marriage. She said,

I wouldn’t say it is totally easy to do that because you know there is so much going on. I would say that we don’t take it for granted like I think that there is some sort of nonverbal commitment that it is going to happen at least a couple of times a week like um…and without working on it would be easy for at least on my part, um for it to be overlooked. So, I think there’s sort of a standing commitment like this is what works for us and um…and that we are both committed to making that happen.

**Remaining open to giving self sexually to spouse.** Another component of the subcategory of emotional connection and sex that participants described was the idea that sex within a marriage and/or giving yourself sexually to someone as a special and
meaningful experience. For instance, Linda described how she and her husband waited
to have sex until they were married and therefore,

we’re the only sexual partner each other has even known and there’s something
special about that and it is also kind of keeps someone else out of our marriage
and even when we are intimate we know that the other person’s not thinking
about how so-and-so did it [laughs] or something. So, there is something like
really…I think there is some value to that idea of waiting and at least even if it’s
not waiting until marriage waiting for someone special.

Furthermore, Tiffany described how monogamous sex is more enjoyable to her. She
said, “I mean I don’t really like the cause sex thing, it just makes me nervous and
uncomfortable.” Therefore, she is able to meet her needs better within a monogamous
relationship such as marriage. Tiffany’s narrative connected with Linda’s as well. Linda
described believing that sex remains in a monogamous relationship such as marriage and
how the emotional connection which may follow that reduces the risk of cheating. For
instance, she shared how she and her husband were virgins when they married, and she
said,

so that context is helpful because it’s something where we were so attentive
within our relationship that…to go beyond that to consider like having that kind
of connection with someone else outside of the relationship that would be like
taking it to a whole other level you know? Um and so it’s just never something
that enters our minds I think I say for myself as well for him.
Finally, Lisa echoed the narrative that sex is important in a marriage and that sex and emotional connection are interrelated at times, so much so that she expressed an appreciation that she and her husband are both sexually healthy and explorative. For instance, she said,

it’s not the same old same old you know?...and so, that’s part of it too. I guess the other thing I’d say too, as I think about what you asked is health, like, thank God, we are both healthy and able to be sexually healthy and like I should add if there were things like E.D. [erectile dysfunction] like oh God, thank God, that stuff hasn’t happened to us yet and we when we wanted to stop having children, he offered to have a vasectomy and I was like you know let’s not mess with anything down there…let’s make sure it’s all good by you and I’ll just take care of me you know? We even joke about it because like God forbid something happen there! Right? [laughs].

**Communication About Sex**

When discussing sex in a monogamous relationship such as marriage, participants often described the importance of being communication about sex. This subcategory has multiple components, yet, the overall description that participants offered was that open and honest communication about sex was highly valued and important.

**Open and honest communication about sex.** Philip described the time it took to “get to know each other sexually” and explained:
we started having more open conversations about you know things we like to do 
with each other sexually and you know we’ve had conversations about things like 
maybe something I would want to do that she’s not sure about. So, we table it. 
You know? We say ‘okay well we will table it’ there is nothing that I would want 
sexually like in terms of a specific act or activity that would make or break the 
health of our sex life.

In addition, Philip also shared,

I think another just has been at various moments you now maybe taking some 
risk. Like, you know I mean anytime you try something new or you…I mean 
there are things that you know that you can try and it’s within the boundaries of 
what’s acceptable to not have to have a conversation about before. Like, a little 
different position or I mean just you know relatively minor things. But then there 
are things that you want to talk about. You don’t just kind of pull this thing out in 
the middle of sex. You want to have a conversation about it before hand. So, I 
think being willing to take some of those risks of either you know the little thing 
that you chose to try out or the little bit bigger thing that you talk about. I think 
being willing and shifting in the willingness to take that risk. Because the risk is 
that you can be rejected. And not only can you be rejected but there comes with 
it, the risk of that the other person, you know that your partner would either not 
like it or maybe even think something negative about you for having an interest in 
a particular thing.
Linda also described developing an ability to have open and honest communication about sex and her experience with “Vaginismus, which makes intercourse painful.” She also said, “over the course of our marriage we just developed I guess the ability to communicate about that [sex] and then now that...as it has become um...you know I really feel like I am past it completely now which is great. So now we’re really able to be enjoying it [laughs].” She also described how her husband also communicates about sex with her. For example, she shared that when they experience a period of less frequent sex “he’s usually very good at reassuring me that’s he’s just...and he works sometimes 80-90 hour weeks so it’s easy to buy the excuse that he’s just exhausted [laughs].”

**Communication about satisfaction, desires, and insecurities.** Lisa described the value of communicating about sex as well. She said,

even in college from a young age we were kind of like hey let’s do this, let’s do that. Let’s try it out. So, and that continued like that didn’t change per se. You know? But I think like how essentially, we evolved as more like probably a lot more communication. Like I can’t imagine when we were younger I wouldn’t have told him things about wants or dislikes you know what I am saying? So, that’s a big part is the communication probably has changed.

She discussed the importance of communicating about likes, desires, and fantasies regarding sex. She said, “communication through sex like is this good for you? Is this not good for you? What do you want? Fantasy, all of those things. But even just in life I
think just open communication in life it makes people being willing to stick with it.” In addition, Linda shared that she and her husband communicate to “make sure we’re both like sexually satisfied.”

Barbra and Rose also both described communication about sex. Barbra said, “So be like checking back in you know what's going on? What's really going on? You know how are you dealing with that or whatever.” Furthermore, Rose shared,

I think I am perhaps forgetting that along the way there was more discussion about things. Because for the most part he and I tend to pepper in important discussions as a continuing discussion. At times, it’s not always ‘we have to talk, we haven’t had sex in two weeks.’ It’s kind of like as the days go by it’s like ‘yes, okay I am still busy and you know oh my back’ you know because I have back issues. Have a discussion and talk about your expectations for both of you and also if you’re feeling insecure then again just talk [laughs] about it.

Tiffany discussed the value of being able to openly discuss sexuality and insecurities with her husband. For instance, she said,

Well with me I have always been really insecure about my body so it makes it hard to like open myself up sexually. I’m always like worried um…so it was hard at first because I was like trying to cover myself up and was super uncomfortable but he has made me feel really comfortable about myself and loves the way I look and so it is easier to open up myself up and not think about that all the time like ‘oh my gosh I hate the way I look I can’t be naked’ [laughs].
In addition, Rose described receiving validation from her husband as well as part of courting behaviors with sex. She said,

it’s always present. I think there's a difference between that you know the actual act of sex versus still being attracted and telling each other you’re attracted to them to day in and day out building those blocks for sex you know? If I just am wearing my schemata’s and I am walking around the house and t-shirt with holes in it and you like boxer shorts whatever and he’s like you're so sexy. ‘Okay! Awesome!’

Honoring sexual limitations and boundaries. Lisa discussed the importance of discussing and honoring boundaries of new sexual experiences as part of communicating about sex. For example, she shared, “very now then you know he will like tell me a fantasy… okay…and we might try that and I might be like ‘no, you stick with that fantasy babe because that’s all you’re going to get from me’ [chuckles], you know it’s one of those things where, we try to share like that, and I think that’s healthy, maybe it’s me, but I think it’s healthy.”

Overall, participants conveyed the importance of communicating honestly about sex, sexual fantasies, desires, satisfaction, needs, insecurities, and boundaries with their spouse as a part of maintaining monogamy. Additionally, several participants who had been married for 10 years or longer offered insights that communication about sex does take some risk and may become easier over time or with practice.
Remaining Sexually Active

Another subcategory of sex within a marriage that participants described was remaining sexually active. The aspects which participants discussed which make up this subcategory are discussed. These aspects included (a) keeping sex exciting and fresh, (b) making time and preparing for sex, (c) efforts to remain sexually active in a marriage, (d) purposefully finding spouse desirable, (e) sexual creativity, (f) understanding the roles of sex in a marriage, (g) reducing pressures and expectations around sex, (h) active participation in cultivating sexual activity, and (i) appreciating sex with one’s spouse.

Keeping sex exciting and fresh. Lisa described her perspective that sex in her marriage is exciting and fresh. She said,

thankfully it’s that commitment and that faithfulness, to me, that um, that is why it’s there, you know, and I don’t know how much you want to talk about sex, but it’s not boring, it’s not dry, it’s exciting all of the time. Um it’s still about that chemistry. It doesn’t have to be like, whatever, same old, same old. It hasn’t been that way in 20 years, you know, change it up and make things different.

Making time and preparing for sex. Additionally, participants discussed having intentionality in making time for sex. In their narratives, they conveyed the deconstruction of the message(s) or ideas that sex should always be spontaneous in order to be satisfying and good. For example, Linda shared preparing her body to have sex by “trying to train your body to relax.” In connection, Tiffany described preparing herself for sex as well when she feels disconnected sexually. For example, she shared an
example of her current pregnancy interfering with her normal sex drive. She said, “it is just how I am feeling so meditation helps and just really thinking about how I love him and the meaning and how much we both enjoy it and the connection and there is just so much that you have to like meditate about and think about and that really helps me.”

Furthermore, Rose also described preparing her body and mind for sex with her husband. She said,

We are both anxious people. There is no secret there. And if we are both crazed from work and just mentally exhausted but you know we can go out for some appetizers and a cocktail or something and it just in those moments we kind of get back to and I mean sometimes it doesn’t happen right away because again you’re both having that heightened level and it’s not like you just go out and it comes right down but even you know all jokes aside it’s just like as soon as we both have that time after one of those dry patches it kind of just happens. Last year I remember this because it was right at that Indians game but talking and like talking to someone who was in a two-year relationship or something and talking about that they hadn’t had sex for it seemed like weeks from what they were saying. And I was like last night we had like date sex. But it’s like maybe two or three times a year that it’s just the kind of that raw stuff that existed right in the beginning.

Furthermore, Linda talked about planning sex with practicality and purpose. She described: “As unsexy as that is. We just have to plan a time and I would have
to...usually it was me really saying you know ‘we need to’ [laughs] and um...like when are you going to have energy? When are you going to have time? And making sure that we’re able to find a time to connect.” Barbra also shared that she and her husband intentionally make time for sex. For instance, she discussed that sex is “special between us and it’s the kind of thing that we make time for.” Furthermore, Lisa described making a point to have sex with her husband. She said “you know, making sure that we are romantic and sexual when he’s home because he’s not home a lot, you know, what I’m saying so um, you know, that’s kind of a strategy, like, making sure like ‘hey if you’re going to be home for four days, let’s make sure that things get done because you know because you’re going to be gone.”

**Efforts to remain sexually active in a marriage.** In addition to planning and making time for sex, participants discussed making efforts to remain sexually active. For instance, Rose shared,

I think for us it comes down to just getting that time together where you know we are on vacation, it’s like he might say something like ‘well I have all of this work to do’ and I’m like ‘I have all of this work to do too, but at the same time we need to spend that time together as well.’ Because our healthy, happy marriage really fuels both of us to be productive individuals. Yeah so, stuff like having that really safe home base has allowed us, in a short amount of time for both of us in our backgrounds to really excel individually and it’s that whole connection. So, it’s...sometimes it’s also in the interest of your personal advancement.
Furthermore, Rose shared, “I don’t like having to put the brakes on somethings” when describing being in the moment sexually. This connected with Barbra, who shared,

I would say if we didn’t work at it I wouldn’t say it is totally easy to do that because you know there is so much going on. I would say that we don’t take it for granted like I think that there is some sort of nonverbal commitment that it is going to happen at least a couple of times a week like um…and without working on it would be easy for at least on my part…um for it to be over looked. So, I think there’s sort of a standing commitment like this is what works for us and um…and that we are both committed to making that happen.

Furthermore, Melissa also shared making a commitment to have sex. She said,

I mean it’s just got to commit to it like…like kids for example we have a four-year-old so she…and especially when she was little…like you’re just exhausted and you work full-time you just you commit. I mean there was nothing in particular that we did, you just know that it’s a part of your relationship…so plan for it yeah and I mean it’s a phase you know what I mean? It’s a phase so.

**Purposefully finding spouse as desirable.** Another method of remaining sexually active that Linda shared was purposefully finding her spouse attractive. For instance, she discussed the value of remembering “to look at your partner and be attracted to them.” Furthermore, she shared a story of her mother offering advice about remaining sexually active with one’s husband. Linda said,
I do remember before I got married my mom sat me down and had a conversation with me about sex. And she was saying how…just very openly how there had been times in her marriage when sex was the least important thing in her life and she didn’t want to do it or wasn’t even enjoying it and she just told me that her values system was that it had an important place in the marriage and it you know that it was her way of connecting with my dad too. And so, she just urged me she said there were times when she wasn’t up for it but she realized that if she just kind of let herself go and try that over time she would start enjoying it more and wanting it more. Which doesn’t paint a very romantic picture but I think her point was just it’s an important gift for your spouse too. Um…for the health of the relationship that her encouragement was for me to kind of always be first of always be willing…a willing participant…but them also like always be checking in and offering.

**Sexual creativity.** Another component of remaining sexually active in a marriage is the idea of sexual creativity and investment. For example, Tiffany discussed how flirtation can cultivate excitement: “I am always flirting with him or always spanking his butt [laughs].” In another example, Lisa described keeping sex fun and adventurous with her husband. She said,

I was going to say, like you know, like, sex is still fun. It’s still fun and it’s not the same thing and I’m not even joking about changing it up and also like changing like ‘you want to do this? Okay…I am going to try it but if I’m not digging it I’m going to tell you I’m not digging it and we’re not going to do it
again’ you know what I’m saying? That’s just kind of how we are and it’s good like that, you know? So, I definitely think that’s part of it, like, I think part of it is people get bored sexually, when they’re not monogamous…people get bored romantically they’re not having their needs met.

Furthermore, Lisa shared how sexual creativity has been present within her relationship to be the antidote to boredom and routine. She said,

again, I think we were always pretty creative from the get go you know what I am saying?...Um again I think a lot of it is respect and commitment before when you asked me what it means to me I said faithfulness and a lot of it is respect for me like I would never disrespect you in that way I would never and like I think because the two of us have enough fun sexually together we would never introduce a third party like some couples’ gig like hey why don’t we bring in a third person or another couple or whatever like that’s never us because we are never I don’t think anyway I am speaking for myself but I think he would agree we are never bored you know or like we need something else here to make this exciting you know what I mean? If you need something else here buy a toy or something like that.

Philip also described investing in keeping sex exciting in his marriage. He said, “I guess we would find ways to make it new and fresh again. You know we would experiment and you know with things that we had not previously done before. And that would, whether it was a new position or you know just bringing something you know new in like a toy or
you know, whatever.” Furthermore, Cindy also shared this idea. She described “thinking of new ways and so sometimes it might be something as literal as like naughty texting or even um…you know like um…so sometimes I may just even go on the normal offering instead of him offering because [laughs] or just putting like on items of undergarments on for bed kind of like you know?” Tiffany also shared,

keep things exciting and don’t be all missionary all the time. There’s other places you can go to make it more exciting. Also keep things exciting and try new places and new things and different things. The same gets boring and you don’t like dread it you know what I mean? I want the meaning to always mean the same and feel the same and I know for a lot of people it changes because you just get bored and the excitement is gone and…but hopefully that doesn’t happen with us.

Finally, Barbra shared how building anticipation for sex can help infuse creativity, investment, and desire as well. She shared, “I deeply sexually desire my husband.” She also shared, “I would say that you know we probably give each other some signal during the day like you know tonight is the night kind of thing and so there’s some anticipation of it.”

**Understanding the roles of sex in a marriage.** Lisa shared the importance of remaining sexually active and open in a marriage and the various roles sex may play. For instance, she said, “it’s something you need to do, you need to be sexually active in order to keep a relationship going. So, sometimes it’s meaningful and sometimes it’s purposeful, and sometimes it’s just necessary.” In addition, Philip shared:
You know that nothing would be done without consent and there wouldn’t be pressuring but that we both had this view that we were to be available to each other sexually, and that just like ‘oh I don’t really feel like that right now’ was not going to be…it was going to be respected, but it wasn’t going to be like played against each other, right? So, we both had this view that everything would be consensual but that we would not withhold from sexually. And not to get something that we wanted out of the relationship. I mean it never even occurred to us, I don’t think, that that was an appropriate way to treat a spouse. And so, withholding was never an issue. There was lots of sex and so one of the ways that that evolved though is that we, I think that we learned to be just more creative and inventive with each other. We, over time, went through seasons where the sex was a little more mundane and a little bit you know not quite as exciting.

Barbra also shared:

yeah I mean I am going through pre-menopause so my body is changing, my just…everything changes and don’t you really expect it. And so, I think for me…it has been more of a recommitment that sex um…would be continued to be important. So, I mean just even recently I went and got out on a replacement therapy just because sex was painful and it was a big emotional roller coaster and I think that if I weren’t in a relationship and I again I wasn’t committed to it, I would just…It wouldn’t…like the lack of physical sex drive excreta wouldn't be an issue for me I would just be like fine you know? [laughs] I could take it or leave it but um…but there is a commitment on my part because I mean, and I
don't know if I mentioned earlier but my husband is five years younger than me. So, it’s just you know I think it would be a disservice to him. So, and that I’ve had to make kind of um…mental shift over because I don't really like medication, I don’t like taking stuff but I was you know I am taking it because I think it's important. So, I would say that would be a major shift in thinking from my perspective.

Furthermore, Tiffany shared:

I don’t know I feel like a lot of times women get in the habit of just saying no [laughs] I have a headache or I am tired so maybe just like in the future I would just try my best not to say no all of the time even though maybe I don’t feel like it but…I don’t know…but you have to like go to a place in your head [laughs] or at least I do and like think in my head ‘okay you love this person and this is like a deep connect and this is what married couples do for that connection’ I mean there are other things too of course but it is just something that you enjoy you have to like get yourself out of this funk. Like it’s kind of like meditation like ‘come on like what is going on with you, get yourself together’ and it never has anything to do with him. It is always me. It is just how I am feeling so meditation helps and just really thinking about how I love him and the meaning and how much we both enjoy it and the connection and there is just so much that you have to like meditate about and think about and that really helps me.
Finally, Rose also discussed the value of remaining sexually open to her husband. She said,

Like I have to be mindful and keep bringing myself back to what I am doing but [laughs] can take you out then I feel confident. My confidence allows me to be a better partner but like you said feeling that you are still attractive and even on those nights where it’s like you know I did physical therapy and it’s seriously just my back that’s not good. But I don’t just say ‘Baby, no my back! Get off’ it’s ‘oh I am so sorry, please let’s try tomorrow’ or ‘my back is really just hurting me right now’ and you know kiss, hug, snuggle.

Frank also described having an understanding of the various roles sex may have in a marriage. Frank said,

Which is probably sex more as connection and intimacy. And then the lower expression of desire, which usually comes pretty soon after the first expression is more about um…pleasure and experience. Um… and so the former is more staying within your safety boundaries and the latter is more exploratory. It’s not like um how do I say it? It’s still within the safety boundaries but it’s just more about I don’t know, release or something like that. Um and the cycle fits in because at least more me, we are both accepting of this in our marriage. There has been a lot of understanding that both of those may have a place in our relationship. And that if we have just one or the other it is going to be an unhealthy sex life for us. Sometimes it needs to be about intimacy and sometimes
it needs to be about just physical and both are important and so, the way it has changed over time has been about just understanding that better. And also, understanding that we each have sort of seasons and cycles and that we are not always going to be synchronized and that we need to learn how to communicate and assume the best about each other in those times and be patient and be gracious and um…you know but still ask for what we need and trust that each other can sort of will do as much as we can for one another but there’s also can have the courage to say no we can’t get there today. I think there is a lot of meaning in there. If I had to sort of…yeah there are a lot of layers. I guess if I had to distill it down in my own words I’d say again it has to do with…I don’t know. Maybe I won’t distill it. You can sort of root through the layers and give it language because as I am trying to name it I am realizing that there is not really one thing. Not really one saying or phrase that fits for me. It will evolve. You know? As well will everything about who you are and your relationship. It doesn’t mean you’ll wake up ten years from now and won’t recognize each other. It’s sort of intentional. But it does mean ten years from now you’ll have hopefully, seen new dimensions and depths and aspects of each other and cultivated a real sort of compassion and acceptance for those and for one another. But in terms of sex specially, I would say…what’s that quote? Some said ‘get married three times to the same person. The first time for sex, the second time for children, and the third time for companionship.’ I think you know that children play in the second part may have been questioned a bit more these days as people
are getting married later. But I think that still captures you know knock yourself out but sort of make sure you’re investing in the full sort of part of your personhood with one another. Because you know if it’s all about sex, you’re going to be disappointed [laughs].

Furthermore, Rose said,

well, I think instead of…I guess I feel like it takes on many different meanings. There’s different categories of sex in a marriage, I think. Like we were talking about like the passionate first date or when you’re first dating kind of sex. And then the just biological you know I am feeling really tense [laughs] kind of thing so let’s help each other out and then there’s the you’re into it, it’s fun and everything but it’s also… it’s still like not the best ever but it’s maybe 60-80% or something of the date sex. And that’s sometimes just because you’re thinking about other things. You have so much on your mind, it’s hard to be as in the moment.

Reducing pressures and expectations around sex. Another aspect of remaining sexually active in a marriage that Linda shared was reducing pressures and expectations around sex to keep it fun and enjoyable. For example, she shared:

So, if you are putting a lot of expectations on it…if you’ve had a lot of partners in the past…and I am glad this is something I haven’t had but in my mind if a person has had a lot of partners in the past I would think it would be difficult to not compare their spouse with those partners. And I would think that that could be
really damaging. So, that’s kind of the point too, of not trying to make it or not
taking it too seriously or giving it a larger than life presence in the marriage.
Yeah I guess my suggestion for newlyweds figuring it out would be and I think it
goes hand-in-hand with that not making it such a serious thing either like you
don’t need to sit down and have a family meeting.

Furthermore, Linda also described reinforcing the positives of sex. She shared, “for me I
think it’s just like trying to use positive reinforcement [laughs]. In more subtle ways.”

**Active participant in cultivating sexual activity.** Being an active participant in
cultivating a healthy and active sex life within a marriage was discussed by participants
and was found to be another subcategory of the protective factor of remaining sexually
active. For example, Philip shared:

Yeah I think there has been a couple of things. I think there was one, there’s
probably been a few times that I have become more passive in terms
of…Initiating but also just the engagement. Has been more passive. Like kind of
an expectation that she is going to drive the encounter I guess. And I have found
that has led to less excitement in sexuality. I think for both of us. And obviously,
I can speak fully for her but I know for me, it’s led to a little complacency and I
think there’s been some like inappropriate sense of entitlement I guess. That has
gone along with that. Like, just an expectation that she is going to please me
sexually. And so, shifting my thinking to ‘you know what, I am going to be more
engaged in this. Even if I am not necessarily feeling it in the moment, I am just
going chose to be more engaged in it’ you know ‘I’m not going to just lay back and receive, I am going to try to cultivate my passion for her.’ Um I am going to take the initiative in initiating sex or just I am going to be more active, a more active participant rather than a little more passive recipient. I think that’s one shift in my thinking that has just I think really led to some more explosive vitality in our sexuality.

Lisa shared her perspective of “changing it up, keeping it fresh” as a means of being an active participant in cultivating sex with her husband. Furthermore, Lisa and Linda both described enjoying their husbands sexually. For example, Linda shared, “now it’s a much more enjoyable thing” as she discussed exploring sex with her husband and experiencing challenges. Lisa also discussed valuing intimate times with her husband when he is home from his military duties. She said,

think what happens, it’s because of like the um, and I wouldn’t say it’s anything like super creative, but I think sometimes, because of the long absences, you know what I mean, we have apart from one another, um, sometimes we do when we do get back together it can be all the more exciting and more passionate you know what I am saying? So, we are kind of caught in that anyway and I am kind of caught up in being with you physically if I haven’t been with you physically in so long.

**Appreciating sex with one’s spouse.** Philip also discussed appreciating the sexual experiences they share with their spouses and learning about healthy sexuality as
well, which were found to be a part of the remaining sexually active protective factor.

For example, Philip discussed:

so, and that was something [sex] that we both were looking forward to very much about our relationship. We were not sexually active before our wedding day. So, it was all of this exploration and just newness of it and you know I had some warped ideas about it from…that got imported in through pornography but it still was very much just us figuring out how it worked you know and we had both read some about what good healthy sexuality is prior so there was some good input and so we just played and we just experimented with each other.

Furthermore, Philip discussed:

a big part of my journey has just been learning healthy sexuality and that’s, I mean that’s not even necessarily related to the marriage or a relationship so much. Just as is a growth in me. Well, I mean I think one of the things in my faith community and Christian circles. I think there is a lot of repressed thinking about sex. I don’t know that that’s necessarily advice or it is more helping people shift their thinking. So, that is one thing that comes to mind immediately and that wouldn’t be necessary for everyone. But I think some people would. I think I would also want to say to newlyweds that um…I mean some specific things I think women do tend to be the partner that would like withhold. And so, I would want to encourage women not to use it as a power component and I would want to teach or tell men to be more giving and more generous. And I would also want to
help men and women understand the differences that the two sexes have in terms of what orgasm is and what orgasm means, how important it is, and sexuality. You know, what kind of needs cluster around sex that are different between the sexes and of course those are generalizations. But you can learn a lot about, at least finding a good starting point from exploring with your spouse from the generalities. And then from there go into just specifics of your spouse. And I would want to tell them to use it as a way to have fun with each other.

**Coping with Sex in a Marriage**

Another subcategory of the protective factor of sex in a marriage is coping with sex in a marriage. Coping with sex in a marriage was found to be more narrow than the codes of coping individually and coping as a couple. For instance, coping with sex in a marriage specifically addressed managing adverse or stressful times regarding components of sex, rather than practicing resiliency (i.e. coping) in broad sense (i.e. applied to numerous adverse moments). For instance, this subcategories included: (a) redirecting sexuality toward one’s spouse, (b) addressing points of sexual disinterest, (c) reframing and coping with periods of infrequent sexual activity, (d) patience and acceptance with sexuality in a marriage, (e) perceptions about sex with one’s spouse, and (f) appreciation and valuing periods of frequent sex.

**Redirecting sexuality toward one’s spouse.** Barbra shared an example of how she was able to redirect sexual needs (i.e. temptations) away from others and back to her husband to prevent any violations from occurring. She shared:
Um…a little like school crush kind of flirtation and um… how I handled it was I just stopped meeting with…I would you know not engage in um…in a banter like I was like it was one of those things like at one point I was ‘oh you know this has gotten a little too flirtatious.’ And then there was the opportunity for like a certain person to join our…we were working on a project together and then um…I sort of invited one of my girlfriends to come and be part of that. I think it was that I was getting back in shape after a couple of years after having my daughter. So, I think I was um…probably I don’t know…I don’t know if I want to say susceptible to it or um…I think I was shifting in my way of being in the world in the sense that you know I was getting in better shape and wearing more attractive clothing. I wouldn’t say it was like more revealing clothing but it was just more like when you lose weight you wear clothes that accentuates that you're getting in shape and I think that…that was probably…I think I was probably putting a different energy into the world than I had previously.

**Addressing points of sexual disinterest.** Explore points of being sexually disinterested was found to be another component of coping with sex in a marriage. For instance, Cindy shared:

I was trying to figure out where that was coming from. I think for me; it was difficult to stay motivated from certain pressures and I started talking to three my close friends and one of them had like a totally different take. I remember she was like, she had said like ‘I don’t you ever talked about like sex or intimacy or anything before’ and I think part of it had to do with intimacy is from there and so
I think the family stuff limited me from being like truly expressive when talking to others about it. Whereas I mean, I would talk to people like oh you know I’m so irritated in the counseling profession yet when I need to get help it’s like okay I am feeling irritated because I am not able to enjoy foreplay. It was more like don’t go there and so for a while I pondered was it like acknowledging a character flaw of mine or even something like that. And so, I think we are talking to people, when they are able to not just offer insight, like reflect and it was just interesting to hear what I was saying like how to approach it because it was a friend telling me like try this and I’m like ‘no no! that’s not what it is’ and realizing that it is [laughs].

**Reframing and coping with periods of infrequent sexual activity.** Another component that participants discussed was reframing dry patches or points of sexual disinterest as due to external factors rather than being rejected by their spouse. For example, Linda shared, “I don’t know that we’ve had um…maybe or maybe not the opportunity to notice rough patches if they were there. Just because you know it was something where it was an external force.” In addition, Barbra shared that dry patches or periods of infrequent sex maybe due to “having a child, traveling, schedules, being generally tired that kind of thing.” Similarly, Melissa shared, “we’re just hammered with that all the time and that of course if you expectations of what it’s supposed to look like in a marriage and it's just not reality. Because like I said, kids, anything job changes, I mean it just all affects it.” Finally, Rose decried, “You know when I am studying for finals, I can’t just flip a switch and not have my exam in my mind.” She also discussed
“learning how to not take that change [in sex frequency] you know, I know we’ve talked about it a lot, but as an indicator of the relationship.”

Rose and Anna both also elaborated on the perspective that sex doesn’t have to reflect the health of a relationships. For example, Rose said “that [sex] doesn’t last forever and you know kind of not equating how often we are having sex to the health of our relationship.” In addition, Anna shared a story and said,

my dad was talking to me the other day about my sister. Long story short, she just came back from the U.S. and she was living in California. She’s kind of difficult, she’s only 21 but she’s kind of lost and doesn’t know what she wants in life. So, she came back and applied for a student visa and she was rejected. She also reunited with her boyfriend from before she left so my dad was talking to me about a conversation that he had with her and she was telling him ‘I don’t know if this is real love’ and he was kind of trying to give her advice. He did admit that he did say ‘I may not be the right one to give you the advice because I have obviously been through a divorce and when I got married I was super in love’ but again, this idea of trying to think about these things by seeing examples of what I think is a good or bad example. And he said he was giving her advice and one of the things he was telling her you know is sex good? And I didn’t want to argue with him but I don’t think that’s the right question to ask because again it’s this idealization that sex is always going to be great and I know that’s not necessarily the case. Especially for women who may attach a lot of emotions to it. The things that we talked about before, if you go through a difficult time in your
marriage, sex may not be great or there may be no sex and that doesn’t mean that you are up for divorce. It just means that things are not going well so there may be times when sex may not be good and I don’t think that’s one of the things that defines your marriage. I think it’s the opposite depending on how good you are, that’s going to be good or not. I didn’t want to argue with him but again these ideas are really engrained in people here that you must have good sex because if not then your relationship is dying pretty much. And then I have another friend from Argentina who lives in the U.S. and a while ago my mom was there last year so we went for Christmas. And apparently, she told my mom she was one the verge of divorce for the third time with my husband because we are going through a difficult time ad one of the things she is that they hadn’t slept together in months. And my mom was like ‘oh she told me that they haven’t had sex in months, so that’s it, right?’ And I talked to her the other day and she’s been through therapy because she was going through a hard time herself and they’re doing very well right now. They went through counseling and so I think that the idea that that’s going to be it and now your relationship is dying is just…or defining your relationship based on that aspect, I saw that as a cause and effect kind of thing. Sex is bad and therefore your relationship is not good, I see it is as the opposite way. If you can work through things there are more emotional and through your relationship, then because of that sex may get better.
Another code found in the data which conveyed participant’s coping with sex in a marriage the idea that periods of sexual infrequency are normal and the expectation that a person must cope and wait. For example, Frank discussed:

For me, and for her, it’s been about accepting that there are cycles. So, what that means specifically is, the way it’s shaped over time is that it’s been accepting that…uh….For me, there is a cycle. And the cycle looks like my preferences is for the higher expression of desire. Which is probably sex more as connection and intimacy. And then the lower expression of desire, which usually comes pretty soon after the first expression is more about um…pleasure and experience. Um…and so the former is more staying within your safety boundaries and the latter is more exploratory. It’s not like um how do I say it? It’s still within the safety boundaries but it’s just more about I don’t know, release or something like that…And also, understanding that we each have sort of seasons and cycles and that we are not always going to be synchronized and that we need to learn how to communicate and assume the best about each other in those times and be patient and be gracious and um…you know but still ask for what we need and trust that each other can sort of will do as much as we can for one another but there’s also can have the courage to say no we can’t get there today. And I would also say just to learn how to tolerate the fact that you’re going to be out of sync sometimes and sometimes you won’t be able to control how long it is you’re out of sync. If there is a big loss, or maybe one person ends up with a care taker role, or depression, or adjustment stuff going on. Like, you know you’re going to be out
sync and when you’re out of sync the sex goes with that. If you can’t tolerate that and leave space for that you’re going to be in trouble. So, learning how to tolerate being out of sync and trusting that you will come back into sync if that’s your intention.

In addition, Rose shared:

but even you know all jokes aside it’s just like as soon as we both have that time after one of those dry patches it kind of just happens. Last year I remember this because it was right at that Indians game but talking and like talking to someone who was in a two-year relationship or something and talking about that they hadn’t had sex for it seemed like weeks from what they were saying.

When a spouse doesn’t want to have sex, participants described legitimizing and understanding this as a method of coping. For example, Lisa shared:

I think part of it for me cognitively, like I said those dry spells often come…are initiated by me or initiate isn’t the word [laughs] but sort of you know created by me. So, I think part of that has been my own like…he’s never ever said a word about my weight. He’s never ever said a word about me being unattractive. He’s never ever rejected me in some way because of my weight. It’s more or less he rejects me because I’m being a bitch you know? If he’s going to be annoyed with me, he’s going to be annoyed because my attitude is crappy you know?
Patience and acceptance with sexuality in a marriage. Another code which surfaced in tandem to the previous code discussed is that participants practice patience for their spouse’s sexuality. For instance, Philip offered:

I think one more thing is that I would to advise the couples to have compassion for each other sexually. And I think what I mean by that is that we all have our hang-ups. You know we all bring life experiences and things and in some cases, sexual dysfunction in with us and so if you’re about to have compassion for your spouse in areas of sexuality, that will go a long way.

In regards to one’s own sexuality, participants discussed having self-acceptance and practicing self-care to maintain sexual interest and excitement. For instance, Tiffany expressed an awareness about her own limitations to fully enjoy her sex life with her husband and shared that she intentionally engages in self-care such as “eating healthy and exercising so I feel good about myself and have more energy and it helps my mood.” In addition, she said, “so I have to take care of myself like physically and mentally in order to like…for me to feel like he’s comfortable with how I look because I can’t…like if I am not comfortable with how I look how is he going to be? [laughs].” Lisa described practicing self-care to cope with points of reduced sex in her marriage and to ultimately feel more attractive and confident. She said,

Um…well I think for me part of our dry spells would involve points in time in my life when I was heavy. But like when physically my body was not the way I wanted it to be you know what I am saying? And that would lead to me staying
away or wearing lots of clothing to bed. Like the things that I don’t normally so
um…I think so cognitively and interestingly enough I am one of those people
who can like gain and lose 20-30 pounds like every 5 years, it’s just kind of who I
am. So, sometimes I am on the high scale and sometimes I am happy about where
I am so since we’ve been married 20 plus years he’s been through these cycles
every five years and I am not talking about pregnancy I am just talking about life.
So, I think part of it for me cognitively, like I said those dry spells often
come…are initiated by me or initiate isn’t the word [laughs] but sort of you know
created by me. So, I think part of that has been my own like…he’s never ever
said a word about my weight. He’s never ever said a word about me being
unattractive. He’s never ever rejected me in some way because of my weight.
It’s more or less he rejects me because I’m being a bitch you know? If he’s going
to be annoyed with me, he’s going to be annoyed because my attitude is crappy
you know? But it’s never about the physical stuff. So, for me it’s that reminder
of that again. For me it’s kind of a reminder of my irrational thinking is irrational
[laughs] you know what I am saying?

This connected with Linda, who said, “I’ll go for a run or something which helps me feel
healthy and attractive in a way because I am keeping myself looking as I want to look.”
In addition, Cindy shared the value of reducing stress personally to remain sexually
active and invested. She said,

Um…my spouse had experienced employment disruption and we had more stress
like as far as I was going into my doc program and saving, like saving money, and
so, that was something I found made me desire it less. And then I would definitely say around 2012-2013 it was more around I had some health issues too but because it was early on in my program, I was not necessarily interested in the physical intimacy aspect and it was more of like um…I knew it eventually had to happen but I would think of it and I was trying to figure out where that was coming from.

Finally, Linda shared a similar perspective. She said, “my husband works a really demanding and stressful job where he’s away a lot or working really long hours so I think the major hurdle for us is just him having the time and even the energy [laughs].”

**Perceptions about sex with one’s spouse.** Other points found in the data which reflected coping in regards to sex in a marriage were the ideas of perceiving that their partner doesn’t pressure them about sex and that sexual needs are reframed as only one aspect in a marriage, therefore, the intensity of the problem of a dry spell or infrequent sex can be challenged. For instance, Linda described “having waited until marriage to have sex because to us sex is just like one little part of everything.” Furthermore, Rose shared that her husband is “understanding like my schedule or when for a week I can’t even look at you.” Finally, Frank described reflecting on his relationship to sex in general. For example, “and another layer to that coping, for me, is really thinking about my relationship to sex. So, let’s say if I am experiencing sexual desire in our relationship, trying to be honest with myself about what is fueling that desire.”
Appreciating and valuing periods of frequent sex. The final points found in the data surround coping with sex in marriage include practicing appreciation for the points when sex is more exciting and frequent, while maintaining the perspective it may be normal if the frequency of sex decreases over time. Philip, for example, said, “I think one of the things, one of the ways that my sexuality has evolved is that you know in the beginning sex is new and the novelty of just having sex with someone, regularly is just thrilling,” which conveyed that he reflected on and appreciated the thrilling aspect of sex with his wife. In addition, Rose shared:

it’s like maybe two or three times a year that it’s just the kind of that raw stuff that existed right in the beginning because after you’ve been married, going on four years, it’s just kind of reassuring that that is still there. And all of the other times it’s always like…it never feels like icky like I don’t want to be with this person. But it’s just kind of like ‘yeah!’ it’s always top notch [laughs] but a few times a year you get that…you’re like ‘oh yeah! That’s what it used to be like!’ In addition, Philip shared:

You know we would just find ways to kind of make it fresh or make it revitalized again. And so, there has been dips and valleys you know there’s been seasons where neither of us seemed to be incredibly interested, or had the time, or energy. You know particularly after the kids were born, things like that. But we were married for 10 years almost before we had kids. So, there was a lot of time to get to know each other, sexually. And so, now I think we’re in a place where, I mean I think we are still pretty active and we still will you know try new things. We started having more open conversations about you know things we like to do with
each other sexually and you know we’ve had conversations about things like maybe something I would want to do that she’s not sure about. So, we table it. You know? We say ‘okay well we will table it’ there is nothing that I would want sexually like in terms of a specific act or activity that would make or break the health of our sex life.

Rose shared, “Well, it used to be [laughs] like you know you’re first dating and you’re like bunnies. It’s like we are both more tired, you don’t have the burst of energy that like no matter what is going on you could go a month without sleeping when you first start dating.” Finally, Anna shared:

it did concern me because I was like okay am I experiencing what everyone talks about and am I going to stop feeling attracted to him? You know physically. But then I realized, because everyone talks about this like the passion slows down, but then I was like this is part of it and it’s just what happens and I can’t make a big deal out of it. And then other times or another solution if you will, that we found is that when it is that part of the month when I am more at risk of getting pregnant if you will, we do use a condom because you know when I am into it and I am feeling it I am like I am not…I do want to enjoy this time as well. It’s not fun, you do want to keep feeling that initial feeling but again, I know that’s what happens so I don’t see it as an ‘oh my gosh, did I chose the right person’ because I totally expected this to happen.
Fostering Values and Beliefs Which Support Monogamy

The next protective factor of maintaining monogamy found in the data is fostering personal values and beliefs which support monogamy. This protective factor is comprised of learning about monogamy, culture and family, and individuality and monogamy. Each subcategory includes various codes which will be outlined and discussed in detail.

Learning About Monogamy

Learning about monogamy is one of the subcategories within the fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy. This subcategory is comprised of multiple codes. These codes included: (a) exposure to monogamy, (b) constructed monogamy and values, (c) personal values or standards, (d) awareness of culture and societal messages of monogamy, and (e) learning to cultivate healthy forms of desire.

Exposure to monogamy during youth. Most participants discussed learning about monogamy growing up and then eventually learning more about it as a construct through work or personal interests. Frank and Barbra shared witnessing monogamy growing up as well but even eventually confronting issues before committing to monogamy. For instance, Barbra said she “witnessed monogamy growing up” and Frank shared, “I never ever really considered anything other than monogamy.” He added that monogamy was

sort of conditioning got in my bones which talking about marriage in a sacred way and I’ve seen marriages and I have been blessed to see marriages in my life that
are really beautiful and stand out as models I guess. My own parents had a
terrible marriage and got divorced but I’ve been blessed to see some really
beautiful ones. My in-laws for example uh and so yeah, I think that the use of
sacred is partially related to my religious upbringing and some modeling I
observed just yeah, some good ones I saw as examples…but even before that,
having parents who got divorced I wrote each of my parents a letter asking them
to example why I should invest in this institution given that it caused so much
hurt in our family. Why should I give marriage and monogamy a chance? And to
my parents’ credit they wrote these beautiful letters back that I’ve referenced
multiple times in my life and that’s not just to say I think I am oriented towards
sort of being loyal to people, and once I decide I am going to invest in a person, it
takes me a long time to make that decision but once I do, it is sort of for life.

**Constructed monogamy and values.** Frank shared learning to allow monogamy
to “mold you” and let it be the lens through which you live and operate. So, in a sense,
he learned to work with monogamy rather than against it in order to continuously
maintain monogamy without extreme effort. He said,

> guess where monogamy fits in is it is just it’s a combination um so it’s not even
> having to fit in it’s just it's in the background and it becomes so the sort of lens
> through which the other more pressing issues of the relationship are navigated like
> when we lose parents or when you lose a child or when you deal with lots of
> things you know monogamy is in the background and that you don’t have to
> spend a lot of energy on it I guess.
Similarly, Philip described having an awareness that monogamy fits the type of lifestyle he desired as a goal for himself. He said, “just began to sense a greater appreciation for and desire to have that be a growing and vibrant part of my life.” In addition, Lisa expressed having a personal interest in monogamy and an interest in reflecting on monogamy because “it’s something I never really thought that much about I just felt like this is who I am, and this is who we are” prior to participation in this study.

Another component of this subcategory of learning about monogamy was the idea of valuing monogamy and maintaining other values which support monogamy such as honesty. For instance, Anna described:

mm-hmm but what I value the most is just being honest and upfront about what I really really dislike and do not appreciate is when cheat in the normal sense of the word. Pretend like they have a prefect life with kids with you know whatever and then they have in Spanish we say two lives, double life, is that a word in in English?

Furthermore, Cindy shared monogamy as a personal value and choice. She said, “or me outside of the marriage is more like something what I consider to be a personal choice and for me…And so, it shouldn’t be about you’re convincing the other person into being monogamous but it’s more or less thinking about from your perspective like what it means to be.”
Personal values or standards. In connection to having monogamy as a personal value, the code of remaining congruent to self and values was found. Philip, for example, shared:

one of the things for me, I think, comes out of me for that is I don’t know whether it’s a trait that is maybe more prominent in me than it is in other people. But, I am a very loyal person. So, I think that does translate to my own monogamy because that is something is a value, that’s very fundamental for me. To be loyal. And I know this about myself in a lot of other areas in life. You know so when it comes to friendships, or when it even comes to certain work relationships, loyalty to people that you care about is a high value. And so, I think for me in times of temptation, that is something that is on my mind a lot as prominently featured, you know that acting on this would be a violation of my sense of loyalty to people that I care about. And I have greater loyalty to someone like my wife who I built a life with, who I have more loyalty for than this other person maybe…I do think that for me, it has impacted my faith. Because there have been times of doubt. Religious doubt. Spiritual doubt. And my sense of loyalty has pressed me to make sure that that was well founded before abandoning my faith. But I don’t think that my faith, I don’t think for me, I don’t think it’s worked the other way around. But in terms of thinking about why I am loyal, I think that’s very much rooted emotionally in who I am and it’s not a function of something that I worked out that is because of a of consequence of my faith or my faith practice.
Philip further explained that for him monogamy does align with his values more than concepts such as accountability and discipline when it comes to maintaining monogamy. He shared:

I have a rocky relationship with the idea of both of those things. I think the idea of accountability is beautiful, but practically it’s riddled with problems, I think. First of all, I am not sure that I really want someone who is going to be constantly asking me about areas of my life where I need accountability. I am afraid that I might start to avoid that. And I certainly don’t want to do that. And if it’s accountability that is left up to me to approach someone for issues that I am working with in my own life, I don’t find that a persuasive means of accountability at all. I am just not going to bring it up with the person if it is something that I am. So, on the one had having one people to kind of hold your feet to the fire, that again is a beautiful idea but I don’t know how…you know…I don’t know. I just I have heard a lot about accountability in a lot of different areas in my life and I have never found it be something that is all that useful. So, the practicality of it. And I think that I have similar thoughts about the idea of discipline. You know we only have so much will power and there is a lot of evidence to show that you know it’s used up. Like, physical strength and then refresh and ultimately it is a pretty ineffective form of…you know just like raw discipline is a pretty ineffective form of creating things in our lives. I think there is much more practical and useful ways of creating change than just trying to discipline or way into it. and so, I think that some people do talk about it but
personally I think they are fooling themselves by in large. I think that they think they are really disciplined when actually there is some other things that are going on. So, you know but that’s my view. I mean I don’t know. I think I think that because I don’t consider myself to be an exceptionally disciplined person. And so, I will probably run it all through that grid. Yeah so, on the other hand you could say that having people in your social circle that have the same values is a form of accountability and that that helps you to stay disciplined when there are temptations that come your way. But I guess my association of discipline is with that raw will power notion of it and so and them my idea of accountability is more of that direct, I have someone who is going to hold my feet to the fire or I have someone who is going to come along side of me you know if I look like I am heading the wrong direction and he or she is going to say to me ‘hey don’t you know that you value your marriage and you don’t want to do this’ and that is somehow going to be effective in stopping me from doing what I have plans to do. I find that to be utterly unpersuasive. And maybe it’s just because I know that for myself that will not work. Having someone tell me what I need to be doing and thinking that is going to make me engage in that behavior when what I want to do is something else. To me, sounds ludicrous.

Furthermore, Cindy described that practicing monogamy was a way of “being my total self.” Linda also added,

this is something about my character um…that I am not a person who is going to be another way and I guess what else would say…yeah I think that’s a big thing.
And um…I don’t know I can’t think of anything that we’ve explicitly done to say like hey we are going to be monogamous and here’s how we are going to make it work [laughs]. I think it’s all just part of who we both are as people and then our commitment to each other. Yeah.

Lisa also shared that monogamy fits with her personal value of her family: “I mentioned before not only dishonoring my husband but not dishonoring my children you know what I am saying? And part of that valuing family is providing for my family so…even if I had the time and energy it wouldn’t be something I would pursue. I am accountable because I value our relationship and I value, you know what I am saying.”

In addition, Barbra shared, “I try to behave in a way that I would be proud of even if no one were watching,” which aligns with her personal values and monogamy. This connected with Tiffany’s narrative as well. Tiffany noted, “if you’re doing stuff with other people you are not honest.” Finally, Frank also shared that monogamy fits him and his personal values. He said,

I am the oldest of four children and I have a younger sister and from an early age, going back to high school, I frequently found myself in a situation where I was a confidant for my sister and her friends and many of them were attractive you know? My hormones were certainly present and we were only two years apart but, I don’t know I just felt like I was always sort of I am biasing monogamy because it concerns how I experience myself and my level of risk taking. It’s hard to imagine anything that would be insurmountable. Including an affair, you know? You invest in yourself in a way early on in terms of you being well-
disciplined. You free up…you don’t spend a lot of energy on your life being torn. And you free up…that doesn’t mean life isn’t full of tensions and paradoxes but your will, there is less cognitive dissonance maybe and you have the energy to sort of pursue things you want in life as opposed to avoiding the things you’re afraid of or don’t want [laughs].

**Awareness of cultural and societal messages of monogamy.** Another component of this subcategory that was found in the data includes having an awareness of societal messages regarding valuing monogamy. For instance, Anna shared:

> It’s mostly to do with relationships so I’m like okay this is telling that this time of our lives you know that there is movie and there's always an issue cheating soap opera or double lives or falling in love with someone but you can’t be with them. So, I think as a society it tells us something about where we’re at and I have mixed emotions about that also because I like it but at the same time this is such a sad depiction of what it is like to be in a relationship…so…I think that we as a couple and me personality try to stand up to the trends that we see this open relationship and again I don’t want to judge people who are in an open relationship I think it’s completely respectful.”

Furthermore, Frank shared that monogamy implies that there's a sense of you know character and trustworthiness and commitment and endurance and perseverance a lot of virtues you know that I think are admirable. On the other hand guess part of me feels like capitalism is
good at turning everything into a commodity and putting a price on it and um that has a way of undermining what I would say are like virtue ethics uh that created a nice stability or foundation to for a relationship or this society know the idea that some things are for sale, somethings aren’t able to be purchased some things um like intimacy or connection or you know monogamy uh when I guess maybe the thought those things undermine the virtues that I think that monogamy needs to exists and reinforces such as you know um faithfulness and commitment and perseverance.

Learning to cultivate healthy forms of desire. Frank discussed learning how to cultivate a healthy form of desire in life. For instance,

the hungry ghost is suffering, you’re always hungry but never placated and so my monogamy self-care is about building a healthy relationship with my desire so that my desires, I don’t know, I guess like learning how to take that sort of longing or yearning for this substance, whatever it is, and turning that inward as sort of a way of transforming my ego and that becomes an education of my desire. Where I am less likely to be sort of over stimulated by the next beautiful thing that walks by or you know and that could be a new job, that could be a person, it could be something on a commercial they’re trying to tell me is going to complete me. I am sort of more resilient against that stuff overall. And I see it for what it is. It’s a momentary pleasure that doesn’t meet the deep needs that I have. Desire is a beautiful thing but if it’s not disciplined and explored it can be the destruction of a person as well….Well, again I don’t often find myself in those situations
where it would happen but I think one thought that comes to mind is just shifting that desire which would be more about consuming the other, treating the other as an object, to I don’t know if you’re familiar with Martin Groubert’s work but it’s really, I thou versus I id. In an I-thou relationship, I actually find it and I am fortunate for this reason, to be more satisfying.

**Culture and Family**

The second subcategory found in the data as part of the values and beliefs which support monogamy protective factor is cultural and family. Participants described how culture and family influenced their values and beliefs formed about monogamy. This subcategory included: (a) religion and family values, (b) monogamous lifestyle, (c) family patterns, and (d) shared values and culture with one’s spouse.

**Religion and family values.** Cindy shared, “Um the way I decided monogamy was for me had to do with both my upbringing and then also I wanted um…I wanted exclusivity and I believe that when you are equal yolk and as far as when two become one the marriage you know it is a marriage institution and there is no more um I it becomes us and we and then also respecting myself, my body, and also respecting my husband throughout that process.” In addition, Philip described religion being a part of his family and culture by being raised to value monogamy from his religion and regularly “attending a Christian church.” Rose shared, “so if anything, you know that the more just the familiar culture versus religious.” In addition, Tiffany described identifying and as Christian culturally as well and “that the Bible says and wanting to be a good Christian and really live that kind of life. I mean you’re not supposed to be…you’re not supposed
to cheat on your spouse [laughs].” Cindy also described “using my spirituality with prayer” to prevent infidelity.” Similar to Cindy, Anna described being Christian and believed that God helped her prevent infidelity. For instance, she said “I am not very very disciplined but I try to pray every morning so I’ve brought it before God like help me you know get over this. I brought in my therapy session to kind of talk about it… and I think praying was the thing that helped me the most.” Furthermore, Barbra discussed how she learned about sexuality through religion growing up. She said,

    I think I was influenced by the progression of that initial marriage because I was you know a cradled Catholic which means I was born Catholic and went through all of sacrament um and um… you know early in my understanding of my sexuality etc. and like the pressure to be in a committed relationship when you are having sex you know a young woman. And then you know I came from the narrative period of I’m in my 40s now but I came from the period of you know good girls. You know there are two different kinds of women. There are women that sleep around and then there is women who are committed in relationships and of course I wanted to be in the latter of those.

In addition, Barbra shared that religion did not teach about compatibility though and described herself as “a questioning Catholic for a long time.” For instance, she said,

    um and I wasn’t really thinking a lot in terms of long-term compatibility with my husband. And so, I think that lead me to not be faithful… was the fact that I didn’t really respect him as a person. Um in the long run you know we were great
friends and you know when we did split up the heartache was around the loss of the friendship not so much the loss of an intimate relationship. And um we just weren’t aligned in many many areas and so um in comparing that to my relationship with my with my husband now we’re just compatible across the spectrum. Like I am very attracted to him both physically and mentally and we have….We hold very similar values and things and um which is a key part of us being monogamous.

Finally, Anna described monogamy as “a calling” from her religion.

**Monogamous lifestyle.** Another aspect of culture and family which participants presented includes cultivating a lifestyle which promotes monogamy for their marriage and for their families. For example, Philip described:

I am thinking of other things that are maybe a little less, maybe a little more practical and specific and a little bit less like constructs maybe. Such as you know if I am put the position to have dinner or be alone with a woman then I will often just talk to my wife about that before-hand in possible. But at the very least, as soon as I have my next conversation with her. I remember I was recently at a business um…out of town for business and a colleague of mine, who is a woman, had dinner together. And it was kind of a spontaneous thing you know we were both there and we saw each other and it was dinner time and I was like ‘Hey do you know want to go get something to eat?’ And after that I thought ‘well you know just for the sake of being fully open with my wife, I want to tell her about
the fact that we had dinner.’ And so, you know just little practical things like that I think.

Furthermore, Barbra shared, “I think it goes back to my idea that it is a mindset. So, if I have a mindset that my husband is the place I go to that’s like the source of what I want it’s very different than I have to work at being faithful. It’s like they’re very counter to one another.” Frank described creating a lifestyle which fits monogamy in numerous ways in his daily life. He said,

Yeah I don’t know just general stuff comes to mind. I mean reflection, listening, like paying attention, like mindfully paying attention to what is fulfilling and to what is not. Confronting baggage, so for example like writing that letter to my parents. Lots and lots of reading. Probably I think examples were laid down for me even though my own parents didn’t stay married. They still really, they tried really hard to sort of manifest the best of the institution that is the married life and the monogamous life. I mean there’s so many things.”

**Family patterns.** Furthermore, participants described practicing monogamy due to family patterns and modeling monogamy for children. For example, Philip said,

so to knowledge my parents have been monogamous for their entire marriage and they were married very young. I think that they’ll be going on 40 years. This October will be 40 years I think for them um father's parents passed away, both passed away 2013. I think they were...they were approaching 70 years um and my mother’s parents are still living and they’re in somewhere in 60 some years of
marriage and they’re both living and together so it very much is an um a
generational um, I mean in many ways it is an expectation. It’s mainly an
expectation that this is this what marriage means it is a lifelong faithful
commitment.

Furthermore, Barbra described: “we do a lot to maintain the relationship. Even when my
daughter was very young we made a commitment that the best thing we could do for
her…and she’s 10 now so…um would be to provide a stable and loving relationship for
her to witness.” In connection, Philip also expressed intentionally modeling monogamy
and “good behavior” in relationships such as arguing with his wife “in constructive ways
particularly when the kids are around” in order to “teach my children that it's okay to
argue um as long as you’re doing right or doing it in a way that’s healthy and um that I
also want to show…I’ve got two boys so I also want to show my children…my boys in
particular what it means to be a good husband and cultivate a healthy relationship.”
Finally, Linda described that monogamy has “cultural-political-social perspectives” that
can lead to “maintaining [family] stability in that way.”

**Shared values and culture with one’s spouse.** Participants also described
sharing culture, values, interest, and life goals as aspects which helped maintain
monogamy. For example, Barbra shared:

I think also we have similar you know again similar values I think that when we
were to going and do things with other people we…um…we…you know we don’t
go to places I that that…um how to say this?…I don’t think we go…like I don’t go
out to bars or places that you know maybe I would be drawn to someone else. I think also even in um in like colleague or work relationships think that we always present, even when we are not together, as a couple. So, it’s almost like your spouse is with you when they’re not with you in the sense of talking a lot about your spouse when with mixed company or you know….it’s just understood that I'm in the relationship by the way that I talk and engage in things.

Furthermore, Anna described her husband is proud of me…he talks about it he shares my culture from My country…he does a lot of things that Argentineans do…even the accent…we speak Spanish at home and he also graduated from the Masters in transition…so those things and that kind of recognition. like he will go to a bar after playing volleyball with his buddies and he will invite me. The other day they went after tournament and I happened to around he was come come please come have dinner with us…and I was okay I’ll go and they were all guys and I’m like there are no women here and he was like it doesn’t matter he was proud to have me there. so that sort of recognition um I really appreciate because I know some men…well and women I guess as well don't it…they kind of want to.

Finally, Anna said that she and her husband have shared life goals of “hoping to raise kids in a religious setting so I would say God is part of the equation it’s a triangle so you owe that to him um…you know whatever church or religion they decide to belong to there’s also that accountability there.”
Individuality and Monogamy

The final subcategory of the protective factor of fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy found in the data is individuality and monogamy. When participants spoke about monogamy, they often described it from the context of being within a marriage and/or from the context as an individual. This subcategory included: (a) individuality is not stifled, (b) monogamy leads to self-improvement, and (c) belief that monogamy is healthy.

Individuality is not stifled. One component discussed is the idea that maintaining monogamy doesn’t deplete aspects of individual personhood. For example, Frank shared that monogamy is greater than oneself one’s own needs, interests, desires, sort of ego gratification um because it is and transcending good it is something that through a mutual investment with another person and I am fortunate to have found this with my partner you commit to this thing that is greater than your own individual desires and let it sort of break you apart over time um you know um I don’t know um let it smooth out your rougher edges the parts of your individuality and it’s not clashing with individuality there is still lots of freedom and room where to breath in it but sort of like um I’m trying to think of an example so um I guess like decisions like where to live who gets to pursue a career first that most aligns with their sense of their vocational identity or you know like this sort of taking turns mutual sacrifice. You know so I went to grad school for six years to get my doctorate and my wife worked at that time and now I got a job and now she’s job
she's pursuing something she's really interested in um yeah that would be an example of mutual sacrifice and there’s a trust that the marriage is bigger than each of us.

Anna shared her husband enjoys individual activities such as “playing volleyball with his buddies.” Furthermore, Lisa shared:

I just think the relationship over time has been more like because we also have other areas of our lives were we both have jobs and friends so I think that it’s not like everything and we can have a healthy perspective on life I think it’s more about the way in which we’ve shown one another respect and the way in which we’ve continued to share and like share responsibilities and share our lives together.

In addition, Lisa offered another example of how her monogamous relationship doesn’t stifle her individual needs. She said,

I am just a person also who could never stay home. I love my children but I could never be a stay at home mom. So, again from the get go he has been okay with that you know what I mean? [laughs] I think at one point in time he said to me, ‘you could stay home.’ And I’m like no, do you want me to? And he’s like ‘no, but I am saying you could’ and mean while we spent ridiculous amounts of money on daycare but he just knows that’s who I am.

Rose said “we’re both fulfilling other parts of ourselves” and that “it also allows us to be individuals” and noted that her husband enjoys cars and still has time to “teach himself
more car stuff.” Finally, participants also explained that maintaining monogamy doesn’t feel like a burden. For instance, Anna said, “it’s something that comes out naturally.” In connection Rose said, “the marriage is never something just extra and it’s never a burden it’s like the center for both of us.”

**Monogamy leads to self-improvement.** Both Frank and Rose also described that monogamy leads to self-improvement. Frank shared:

Um I don’t know so I guess I would talk about it as a sort of self-transcending good that is greater that oneself one’s own needs, interests, desires, sort of ego gratification um because it is and transcending good it is something that through a mutual investment with another person and I am fortunate to have found this with my partner you commit to this thing that is greater than your own individual desires and let it sort of break you apart over time um you know um I don’t know um let it smooth out your rougher edges the parts of your individuality and it’s not clashing with individuality there is still lots of freedom and room where to breath in it but sort of like um I’m trying to think of an example so um I guess like decisions like where to live who gets to pursue a career first that most aligns with their sense of their vocational identity or you know like this sort of taking turns mutual sacrifice. You know so I went to grad school for six years to get my doctorate and my wife worked at that time and now I got a job and now she’s job she's pursuing something she's really interested in um yeah that would be an example of mutual sacrifice and there’s a trust that the marriage is bigger than each of us.
And Rose stated that maintaining monogamy has some personal “incentive as well and I guess you know we reconnect by spending that time together knowing when it is time you know when we have been so individually involved.” Furthermore, this connected to the code that monogamy serves as a foundation for resilience in a relationship. For example, Rose shared, “I think it’s actually it's really good that we’re getting this part solid.”

Belief that monogamy is healthy. Finally, participants described holding the idea that monogamy is healthier than cheating. For example, Tiffany described:

I mean it just…I feel like not being faithful it’s just so…so much guilt…you feel guilty and so sad. There used to be these feelings that go with it. Like staying with your spouse and being faithful, you don’t have to worry about all of that crap. You don’t have to worry about all of those bad feelings because the guilt and you’re mad at yourself and it’s just not worth it at all. And so…you…I just feel like I’m mentally being faithful and staying with your spouse is so much healthier.

Anna shared, “it is important to me but I also do believe to again going back to the idea of preventive medicine.”

Practicing Congruence

Congruence is the final protective factor found in the data. Furthermore, the protective factor congruence was comprised of four aspects which included practicing monogamy to maintain their ideal self, learning from infidelity to guide current and
future actions, taking period of preparation for monogamy, and practicing monogamy to maintain an ideal family. Each component or subcategory will be discussed next.

**Practicing Monogamy to Maintain their Ideal Self**

Practicing monogamy to maintain their ideal self was found to be the first subcategory of the practicing congruence protective factor. Participants conveyed that practicing monogamy allows them to be true to themselves. This sub-category included: (a) hurting one’s spouse doesn’t fit their self-concept, (b) personal fulfillment, (c) monogamy fits with self-concept, (d) individual needs met through monogamy, (e) practicing monogamy leads to positive perspectives of self, (f) personal sense of hope in ability to practice monogamy, and (g) fostering high self-worth in multiple roles in life.

**Hurting one’s spouse doesn’t fit their self-concept.** One aspect of practicing monogamy to maintain their ideal self is that the idea of cheating or hurting their spouse hurts them. For instance, Barbra shared, “then you know when I was younger I didn’t…I don’t think I really recognized that you know actions build on each other and you can put a ball in motion and before you know it you’re acting incongruent with who you know yourself to be.” In addition, Tiffany said the idea of “hurting him makes me sick to my stomach.” Lisa described:

I guess part of it, and I don’t know if I’ve mentioned this, and my husband, he’s um…his parents are divorced and while they have a great relationship and while his step mother is very nurturing and cares and he has a step sister. In the past, um, you know he said sometimes ‘I’m not really sure when she came into the
picture. I was kind of young’ so there is a little bit of this implication that something had happened in his family where you know perhaps there was a new woman before his mother was actually gone, and again, I just feel like I would never I would never dishonor him in that way. I would never disrespect him in that way, especially because I know that was a hurting period for him in his childhood. I would never.

Finally, Philip shared, “So I think that that is something that um you know just what would it be like to you know hurt her and what has it been like in the past that I have hurt her. Um so for me I want to very selfishly…I want to avoid that you know my own pain um and how I would feel if I caused pain to her.”

**Personal fulfillment.** Another aspect found in the data was the sense of personal fulfillment from focusing on monogamy. For instance, Lisa said, “it gives me personal fulfillment because for me there’s a lot of things. Not even physically, okay, for me it meets my needs emotionally as well. That’s a big part of it. For me it meets my emotional needs which is that I…my life is chaotic enough as it is.” Furthermore, Frank said that maintaining monogamy “says something honorable” about himself. Finally, Frank shared, “I derive an enormous amount of well-being from being in a safe monogamous, trusting relationship and I don’t think I would function nearly as well without it. Um and I think my spouse would say the same thing…I can’t imagine living a world like that and I consider myself very blessed that I have at least one person.”
Monogamy fits with self-concept. Furthermore, participants described monogamy as an entity that is a part of self, fits with their personhood or character, and is a personal need. For example, Rose said, “personally I think it’s something that I realized that I needed in a relationship for myself.” She also further shared, “even when we were dating it was important to me I think looking back.” Frank also shared, “I think probably how I understand myself concept in a lot of ways, is being in a relationship.” In addition, Linda described that monogamy is healthy for her and fits her personally and reflected:

well it was just interesting to me too because you know it is an interesting idea to me that monogamy could be construed as unhealthy in some way because to me again with everything we’ve talked about to me it has so many like I said it can be be hard work to keep a strong relationship going but the monogamy helps keep the relationship strong so to me at such an interesting think that think about like you know to let myself think about what it would feel like it or what would it be like in a practical sense if we were just free I don’t know free to have multiple partners and I think that again it is not just about sex for me I think it would weaken the core strength of our relationship is.

Furthermore, Melissa described that having multiple partners or practicing polygamy or infidelity would not fit her personal character and personality. She said,

I am sure it is easier for some…I’ve got to believe that it’s got to be a little bit personality too...for people that are a little more relational you know? Who can
juggle…[multiple relationships]…I couldn’t imagine trying to…because it’s like I said…well and then if you have children it’s like how do you balance…? It's hard enough just doing it with one…like one family let alone having several.

**Individual needs met through monogamy.** In addition, participants shared that monogamy met their emotional needs and their family needs. For instance, Lisa said

um…for me like emotionally I need grounding. At that grounding for me is my family. Like that value for me is that my family, obviously, started by husband and I right? And our sex relationship. But I am just saying for me really that yes it fulfills my physical needs but I guess technically you could argue not being monogamous would do that. But it wouldn’t fulfill my emotional needs. And that’s my whole point is that it really fills me emotionally again he’s like a part of me, not really but in a way, he is. I know that partners die and partners go but I physically feel like if he was not in the picture I would be missing a part of my body. I would be missing a part not just my soul like my physical being and my soul for sure.

Furthermore, Melissa conveyed how monogamy gives her a sense of security in her marriage. She said, “just mean like having another relationship…I wouldn’t…I'm sure I would have jealous feelings towards the other person and be constantly comparing myself.”

**Practicing monogamy leads to positive perspectives of self.** Other aspects of practicing monogamy to maintain their ideal self which participants described included
being proud of being monogamous; that monogamy connects with their morality and sense of meaning; and having self-discipline. Rose said that monogamy “means something to me.” Philip shared having an understanding and respect for differing views on marital practices and offered “but for me it is very much connected with morality and right behavior and right living…but not so much in the sense that you know to not do this means that we’re bad people or only think about it that way. But morality in my conceptualization is about governances that help us to engage in healthy and fulfilling and satisfying ways of living.” Furthermore, Barbra described feeling proud of removing temptations and maintaining monogamy. She said, “I mean I do remember thinking to myself after I stopped the flirtation, that I was like I’m glad that I stopped up flirtation because I’ve seen how quickly the dynamic shifted. So, it stayed with me from that perspective. But um I don't remember what was happening at home.” Tiffany also shared a sense of feeling proud to be monogamous. For instance, she said “Just staying with your husband and um…just giving yourself completely to them it’s like unheard of these days so and just it just makes you feel proud and makes you feel like you’re not going with the rest of society and you’re just…it makes you feel strong.” Finally, Anna described having self-discipline in maintaining monogamy which helped her maintain an ideal self. She said,

And discipline and everything we have been talking has to do with that because what I see like what I told you before with my siblings is the opposite of that. It’s like I have been living with you for a year, I thought I loved you, but you know what I don’t anymore. Or I don’t feel like being with you anymore and there are
other girls I feel being with so bye I am leaving and I don’t see that as disciplined or self-disciplined if you will. Which I think they are probably synonymous in this case. But I do think they influence monogamy to a lesser or greater extent and accountability towards whatever institution or religion or maybe society. Maybe society there are people that especially in my country that worry a lot about what other people will think. What your family will think. Like oh my gosh what will they think if I get a divorce, let’s just stay. Or maybe back in the day there was so I do see that as accountability. It may not be as good from my point of view, but I do think they influence monogamy in that sense.

**Personal sense of hope in ability to practice monogamy.** Participants also described having a sense of hope in monogamy in tandem to position the possibility of infidelity as a laughable and unrealistic notion. For instance, Frank shared:

> you know I think of faithfulness as setting your heart on something and believing in the possibility of it for which there are no guarantees or certainty that can be sort of promised but you are orienting yourself towards this idea you know or again this transcending good in a way where you trust in its possibility and maybe there is a little karma involved there in a way you know and not like cultural use, you know karma as these sort of pre-delineated uh perceiving reality, your way being in the world your way of interpreting things like it is something you embody and the you when something comes to fruition like fidelity or faithfulness it’s because your operating in the world is already oriented towards that end.
Tiffany also described holding hope for monogamy for her marriage but also presented her perspective of preserving monogamy compared to mainstream society. For instance, she shared:

I just think with the way things are these days…Like monogamy isn’t as…oh what’s the word I am looking for…it doesn’t happen as much as it used to. Like back in the day I feel like it’s just how it was…you were with that person and that person only I mean it was the of the world if somebody divorced or cheated on their spouse and now I feel like it happens more and more. So, thinking about that you just want to fight what’s happening now and go back to the way it used to. Don’t be like everybody else just keep on just be faithful…So people’s way of thinking was a little bit different than now because people cheating on one another happen so much we’re just like oh whatever…it happens like no it’s not supposed to just happen. [laughs] So that's the way of thinking I guess.

In connection, Lisa shared watching others experience infidelity and said,

I think you as you stay together for a long time, we watched a lot of friends get divorced. We watched a lot of friends be unfaithful…Uh…He was a Marine so the military, uh, I shouldn’t say is known for, but kind of, there is a lot of military angst sometimes and in marital relationships. So, we went through friends get divorced and we watched friends we knew were being unfaithful and it was just something that was, from a moral standpoint, from an ethical standpoint, neither one of us could never do that to one another. I just can’t ever see that happening.
Furthermore, Lisa described how cheating would be a violation. She said,

So, it’s funny because I can’t explain this, it’s not always like ‘oh my gosh’ you know I’d be hurting my husband, of course I would be, I think in the moment I also don’t think I recognize it right away. I mentioned this last time, I’m not very savvy since I have been out of the single scene. I don’t think I recognize it right away and it’s always been kind of someone else calling it to my attention like ‘oh so and so is being horrible with you’ and I’m like ‘what do you mean?’

Rose also described having the perspective that monogamy and commitment is better than being single to her. She said, “it is better than I ever could think…like I’m getting along cohabitating you know well but he is also very tolerant and understands sometimes…he doesn’t give me hard time when I am crazy.” Cindy also shared how her husband fits with her sense of ideal self with his beliefs. She said,

it means because I definitely don’t tolerate um cheating and I had a situation many years earlier where I was with someone who was like well…that’s what they wanted and I’m like no it’s not happening with me and so my husband he shared that he believed in having only one mate at a time. And this something that we frequently have revisited as far as like the vows being sacred and figuring out what the heck is going on.

She further shared:

in my husband’s case I was like this you know my now husband I am like this is a little too good to be true when he was telling me about how he wants to get to
know the total person and for me I had also take a step back as far as sexual desire because when we started dating initially… I had known him for ten years prior to when we started dating. And I joked about how he was not my type… I was like he’s too nice and he seems to like that model type chick. Um there were like two types he had…the model type chick that was great arm candy by lacking substance…but no he only had one girlfriend before me and it didn’t last long and she cheated. And so, with him when we started talking about our values and that’s when he started talking more and more about how he made that decision and what else… I had to think about asking myself what it was I wanted. And so, with him you know we talked more and more about the concept of monogamy and then also you know as far as with urges and things because that was… oh yes what I will disclose is that there was one point in our relationship… um there was someone else that I found myself beginning to get emotionally attracted to.

**Fostering high self-worth in multiple roles in life.** Participants also described how having value and a sense of an ideal self in other areas of life also helped them maintain monogamy. For example, Lisa shared, “again even if I had the time and energy it wouldn’t be something I would pursue. I would take up a hobby or something.” Furthermore, Barbra shared,

I think that it has a lot to do with just being passionate with other areas of life. I think that that… Big um… generator for lack of better terms of infidelity have to do with boredom or being out of sync with what you find meaningful in life or having purpose etc. and I think my husband and I had a conversation about this
not too long ago, where we were both kind of laughing and saying you know like how do people even have time to have an affair? Because we’re both so involved with things that really matter to us that…um….that we don't…I don’t know…like even outside of the bars or whatever that we really are not engaged in life in a way that affairs would happen because we are busy doing what we want to be doing.”

Melissa also echoed this message by describing her belief that infidelity may be a symptom of another issue. She said, “like I said it’s these other things that you know are the root and whatever your sex life is something it’s just a symptom of that so.” Philip also shared a similar idea of investing in reaching congruence in personal and professional aspects of self. He shared how he has a personal and professional investment in monogamy. He said,

I have invested professionally in talking through ethical issues that surround monogamy and infidelity. I can remember one conversation in particular where a colleague and I discussed how we would approach couples who were swingers. And of course, that’s not, I know that’s not exactly what you’re talking about because you’re talking about I think infidelity among couples who have chosen to be faithful um, and then of course in teaching. I also teach marital therapy. And so, in teaching in that we discuss you know the damage that infidelity does and we teach how to help people recover from it, couples recover from infidelity.
Learning from Infidelity to Guide Current and Future Actions

Learning from monogamy to guide current and future actions was another subcategory found in the data. This subcategory included multiple codes. These included: (a) learning lessons from others, (b) empathy for and exposure to infidelity, and (c) small and manageable victories lead to long-term maintenance of monogamy.

Learning lessons from others. participants described learning lessons from others. Anna shared:

I mean it became obvious even though we were children than they had been together for a while. Or they had been I don’t know, had been sleeping together at least. I know from other people, including my sister, that they have been through a lot. They have themselves, considered a divorce seriously and as far as I know they haven’t always been monogamous. Even as a couple but they chose to stay together so even through that, I don’t know, because I don’t talk about that with as much. Like if they have been with anyone else since…they have been together for 22 years now. But even there you know I do compare us to them. Like an older couple you know that has been through a lot but they still stayed together and I hope to remain with my husband but not going through the very hard times that they have been through.

Linda shared,

well first of all I think it [monogamy] means commitment to the other person um and not just not just commitment in terms of sexually but like emotionally
committed because I think you know I’m thinking this might be kind of off point but I am to give the client I am working with now who is dealing with infidelity and is trying to determine if she wants to continue to relationship or not and what I am realizing…working with her too because your client teach us so much about ourselves.

Furthermore, Philip shared:

I have seen the destructiveness of infidelity in my client’s lives and I have seen couples struggle with or individuals struggle with whether to pursue or continue affairs. And so, in my clinical work, that is a value that often comes up for clients and also for couples. Individual clients and couples. And so, in that work there is a balancing between doing or trying to do what’s best and not violating the values of your clients. And so, there have been times where it has been very difficult for me to reorient myself to my client’s values because their values are so far skewed from my own. So, outside of that. But, it did open up a lot of interesting dynamics and so I think that is relevant because you know we would have those conversations based on our values. And balancing that with ethical codes. And so, I think that was actually a way for me to reaffirm my own value of monogamy. While at the same time being able to hold in my mind the reality of working with people with different values. Right? So, it both reinforces for myself, personally, and also enables me to be more compassionate and empathetic for people who don’t share those lives.
In addition, Cindy shared that she witnessed people maintain monogamy such as “role models within my family.” Cindy also shared how she learned from family members who have experienced infidelity. She described:

now the thing is um as far as role models within my family there was a lot of long lasting marriages. On the other had I also started to see within my family cases of adultery where those individuals stayed married and tried to work through their existing issues so, so for me it was more or less not about like we have an argument and like okay I want to get a divorce, not being able to talk about it at the source at the root and so I got to see my grandparents were married for 50 plus years before they succumbed and like my dad’s brother who passed away last April…he um he was a strong role model for me and um his widow…they were married for 51 years and they were literally each other’s best friend. Spent most of the day together when they retired…they volunteered at the community center together…and they had a lot of ups and downs especially with financial issues. But watching them there. Now what is interesting is both my husband and I um our parents have been…like my parents have been married now for 42 years…they were together a total of 44 years where of you know being like engaged and they were married in January in ‘74. Now what I will disclose is my father was adulterous twice within the relationship. And I didn’t find out about it until adulthood but it explained um some issues like around ‘95 when I was in high school…that would have been the second time. And what happened...my dad
wound up fathering two…two children um with his mistress and I found out about one of them while I was in school...in college.

Anna also shared that she witnessed emotional infidelity. She said, “my parents are divorced and I believe it's not official but one of the main reason was that my father started being with someone else. Not just sleeping around with women but this particular woman that actually he married after he divorced my mom.” Anna also shared, “kind of grew up seeing this and I guess I normalized it and I’m like no that’s not normal anymore. But I am seeing it through friends that that commitment is a big issue but it's happening everywhere especially for men.”

**Empathy for and exposure to infidelity.** Furthermore, participants also described having exposure to or experience with infidelity in past relationships and shared how it influenced their commitment to maintaining monogamy in their current marriage. For instance, Lisa shared, “when we first met, we were both dating someone else. We were both unfaithful to our other partner with one another.” Barbra shared having a deeper understanding of monogamy as a result of experiencing infidelity in the past. She added, “I guess there is also a deeper understanding given my previous experience.” Finally, Tiffany, Anna, and Linda shared having a sense of empathy for the pain that infidelity can cause and how that influenced their congruence. Linda said,

I am realizing that it's not so much the actual sexual act that she's upset about um of course she is but it's more the fact that she wants him to know how much it hurt her and she what she wants it to have hurt him too and I guess that’s my way of
saying um it's that emotional connection between people that I goes beyond the
sexual part so like do you value me as person and am I and do you kind of hold me as your person your special person in your life and then if hinges on that and for marriage it's like that that's the one biggest advantages of having a partner is that you’ve got somebody that’s in your corner and who’s going to be by your side and who has kind of pledged themselves to there and you can count on them and it's that really emotional piece of that you know to me to not be monogamous would be to um demean that om that in some way, to lessen like to lessen the special place that that person holds in your life.

In addition, Tiffany said, “I think about how I would feel if he did that to me. Right there is enough to keep…I would just be devastated if he ever did anything like that to me.” Anna said, “for some people it’s an absolute deal breaker but I think you can recover from that so I see it as actually what you want to shoot for but I also…I am starting to think that it's not something that is actually unforgivable I guess it depends on a case-by-case. Because you could still recover from a break…from breaching that that commitment.”

Small and manageable victories lead to long-term maintenance of monogamy. The final component found in the data as part of learning from infidelity to guide current and future actions includes the idea that small victories lead to long-term maintenance and maintaining monogamy is an ongoing effort. For instance, Frank shared:
This is very abstract I guess the way I am talking about it. But really, I think discipline and again that would be the way I talk about the education or desire. That’s essential that I find a lot of inspiration in the two early Greek philosophers and they talked about spiritual athleticism [laughs] and this idea that you can be a spiritual athlete and the word athlete is important because I think it’s about training and it’s about practice and it’s about repetition. If you commit yourself, it certain types of practices they can remake your character that creates more suffering in your life or less suffering. And so, you know monogamy would just be one of the fruits of forming a discipline early on that you know like a concrete example of that is regardless of your moral views about pornography, you don’t view pornography. You know and I’m not going to say I never have viewed pornography. But in general, I make it a discipline to not even go down that road because it starts to train my brain in ways that I just don’t want to have to deal with and it affects the intimacy of relationship in a way that I don’t want to have to deal with. It’s staying unrewarding. So, you discipline early on and re-invest that desire in a different sort of project or having a hard conversation with your spouse, or whatever else. So. I probably sound like a total moralizing [laughs] I just thought I probably sound very traditional but I think that’s important I am not an old guy, I am 37 years old, but this stuff I think is what and at the risk of generalizing it, I think is what young folks like millennials and even younger probably I don’t know, my biases are coming out here but I think they would find this stuff rewarding and meaningful as opposed to like the grinder world and
whatever those apps are now that just, it’s turned it into again I talked about
spiritual athleticism, it’s turned it into recreation in ways that I don’t know,
maybe people do find that really rewarding. I should read more about that but.

**Period of Preparation for Monogamy**

The third subcategory of the protective factor congruence found in the data was
the idea of having a period of preparation for monogamy. Meaning that participants had
an identifiable experience or experiences of becoming ready to commit to monogamy.
So, in a sense, none of the participants were randomly thrown into being monogamous.
Each code within this subcategory is discussed next. This subcategory included: (a)
development and exploration, and (b) exposure to fidelity and infidelity.

**Development and exploration.** Rose described being developmentally ready and
able to understand the severity of committing to and practicing monogamy. For instance,
she said, “I waited for a long time for that and I think you know, I was 32 when I met him
and I’m wondering too how that also impacts all of this all of this and he was younger he
was 27 going 28 so about five years younger…but maturity wise and everything than like
people when I was dating like 40-year-old so.” In addition, Anna described how she and
her husband discussed monogamy prior to marriage and shared:

I asked him that question because one the books…we also read on our own a very
beautiful book that a friend of ours lent us for preparing…it was kind of like
personality based…we didn’t finish it but I think was called…I don’t know it was
something like before getting committed or engaged or something like that. And
it talked about the different types of fidelity which I had never thought about… it could be financially infidelity, emotional….And I asked him because I was kind of interested…if I were to cheat you what would be less forgivable if I were to sleep with someone or if I were to fall in love with someone and he said no sleeping with someone would be an absolute no.

Furthermore, participants discussed experiencing period of questioning or challenging monogamous values to ensure they fit with them. For example, Anna shared how her father’s emotional infidelity influenced her. She said,

that situation and what happened…growing up, when I was a preteen I was like why am I going to married if I am just going to get divorced? You know the typical thing. And then I became a Christian and I saw better role models if you will. Really, really beautiful couples that have been together for a very long time and had a beautiful religion…and I was like okay this actually sounds like a good idea. Um…my brother on the other hand took it completely the opposite way and he was like I am never going to married, I am never going to have kids, I don’t believe in God and he does whatever he wants. He was living with someone and then they broke up in very good terms…he left and he dated someone else and that's goes about life. Um…for me it was more like the opposite. So, I guess culturally we’re not polygamist in My country, that’s not allowed. Most people are Catholic, it’s not the official religion of the country anymore but most, even my friends…if they never go to church because they won’t define themselves as Catholic, but when you get married…you may get married in the Catholic
Church…because it is culturally just the way it is. There's a lot of problems with infidelity and divorce and…but monogamy is still culturally what you want.

Linda also shared how she and her husband tested the relationships prior to the commitment to the relationship and to monogamy. She said,

I expected us to get engaged basically right after college to get that together so long and we had been talking about marriage but we both ended up going actually went and did some work together in another country and he told me later [chuckles]...that he didn't want to propose before we went away because he knew we were going to be meeting up with a lot of challenges and I think he was kind of anxious to see how we deal with. Um but it actually ended up bringing us closer together you know we you I speak Spanish the Spanish-speaking country so he relied on me in a lot of ways and I think that it just helped us solidified we could live together.

**Exposure to fidelity and infidelity.** Participants discussed being exposed to the constructs and values of monogamy and infidelity through various methods such as readings. For instance, Anna shared being exposed to religious narratives of forgiveness of infidelity and how that prompted her to think and reflect on monogamy even more and consider how others maintain monogamy. She said,

that is something I think about…I don’t want to say a lot but I think about. I still kind of struggle when I think about what would happen if one of us were to break that fidelity. Is that actually a cause for divorce? The church we're attending
right now and most of the things that I have seen say no, you can fix it…you can recover from that. Um…but it’s something that I give a lot of thought to. My husband and I have very beautiful relationship right now, but I think about what would I do if I were learned that he cheated on me…I guess I try to come up with answers but I don’t think I can. I have to be in the situation to see…for some people it’s an absolute deal breaker but I think you can recover from that so I see it as actually what you want to shoot for but I also…I am starting to think that it's not something that is actually unforgivable I guess it depends on a case-by-case. Because you could still recover from a break…from breaching that commitment.

Frank conveyed frequently taking lessons from authors of books and articles, etc. to influence his cognitive processes of monogamy and his relationship practices. For instance, he shared:

like I said I’m more cognitively oriented so there another quote I just keep in my head from the poet Rumi, and Rumi says that love is a willingness to nurture the mystery of the other and that’s I think that kind of aligns with that you know intimacy and leaning into the vulnerability of the relationship you know leaning into that mystery you know the unknown parts of it are kind of scary and uncomfortable I just sort of have embraced that as a philosophy like the other thing from the novel they’ve all be helpful.

Finally, Philip expressed how he reflects on his understanding of what monogamy is. He said, “I have a great apperception for the fact that is being defined not just as sexual
faithfulness or fidelity. Um but that it also has to do with emotional faithfulness and really, I think...I mean...a way of conceptualizing it is is almost that two individuals are committed to and turn towards one another in the relationship rather than being outward facing.”

**Practicing Monogamy to Maintain an Ideal Family.**

The final subcategory of the congruence protective factor was the idea of practicing monogamy to maintain an ideal family. This subcategory was comprised of codes which included: (a) purpose of monogamy, and (b) accountability and family. These codes are discussed further in this section.

**Purpose of monogamy.** Participants described the essence of monogamy or the purpose and how it influences their practice of it. For instance, Rose expressed having a desire to continue to practice monogamy to give back to her husband. She said, “you feel it but you feel that genuine kind of thing where you’re not trying to do it you just want to give it back too so you take that more into consideration so.” In addition, Rose shared how she is monogamous to show respect to her husband and said, “it's a respect you know so part of that is also balancing and it just means that that's how I show my commitment.” In connection, Tiffany expressed that she is monogamous because it is the essence or the point of being in a committed relationship to her. She said, “um but I mean that’s the whole thing about a committed relationship is being with that one people otherwise what is the point?” Finally, Rose shared how monogamy means maintaining sexual and emotional connection with her husband and how that influences her actions in order to maintain an ideal family. She said,
then you know sexual relationships and connections and I know in the beginning your definition also included that emotional and there have been times where I know that I was getting emotional needs met from someone that wasn't my partner at the time [ex-boyfriend not current husband] you um and probably vice versa and I know I wouldn’t stand for that...you know and even...even if he...he has a best friend that very beginning of our relationship...well he wasn’t too big of an influence because he had moved and then he moved to Israel for a bit which was kind of good because they were so close like brothers almost it was...I felt like some time it was almost intruding without...but I don't want to be like that person.

**Accountability and family.** Participants also described having a deep sense of meaning, purpose, and connection to monogamy through maintaining a family and accountability that may come with that. For instance, Philip shared that having a family influences his expectations for monogamy. He said,

> Um so I think that also reinforces the importance of family. Which also connects with the idea of monogamy. Because if we are going to be together as a family there’s going to be some expectations about faithfulness to each other in a variety of ways. Um and then the other thing that I do ...that I personally do that I’m not sure whether my wife does but she might I mean I have a feeling that she does...but I also think about my children and just ways in which you know that I am trying to be good father want to be a good father….and a lot that in my mind is modeling good behavior.
Furthermore, Cindy shared how accountability influences her practice of monogamy.

She said,

“Alright when I think about personal accountability and when I also think about discipline I think about that personal responsibility. Because again to me like my definition of marriage or commitment is the legal contract that you are making not only before God but also making it before family, friends, witnesses, and it’s like those vows that you are making to others. And so, that accountability and also discipline that can also turn into being a motivator for change. So, like, earlier…I keep saying earlier [laughs] but I think about you know like I might have a crush on someone or finding someone attractive, it doesn’t mean that I am being unfaithful. If I pursued it, that would be totally different. That would be cheating. And so, it shouldn’t be about you’re convincing the other person into being monogamous but it’s more or less thinking about from your perspective like what it means to be. You know what does it mean to be sexually responsible. That’s the way I think about it.

**Conclusion**

The theory outlined within this chapter was found within the data based on grounded theory data collection and analysis. In essence, maintaining monogamy can be achieved through small, continual, and consistent effort in each one of the six protective factors. These protective factors included (a) practicing congruence, (b) fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy, (c) building a secure attachment or emotional
bond within the relationship, (d) sex in a marriage, (e) behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries, and (f) coping individually and as a couple. These protective factors interact with one another in a circular or reciprocal manner and do not stand alone. Furthermore, each protective factor was comprised of several sub-categories, which were discussed throughout this chapter. A discussion of the results, implications, and suggestions for future research are discussed in chapter four.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Infidelity is a common presenting concern in couples counseling (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Prior to this research study, a significant amount of research had been completed on multiple aspects of infidelity, such as prevalence rates, cultural aspects, theories of infidelity, and counseling treatments (Allen et al., 2005; Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Butler, et al., 2010; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Denes et al., 2015). However, no research had been completed on understanding how couples maintain monogamy or prevent infidelity. Therefore, in this study, data was collected and analyzed answer the following research questions:

1. How have married persons experienced maintaining fidelity?
2. How do married persons explain their success in maintaining fidelity?
3. What meaning do married persons create from successfully maintaining fidelity?

Grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis were used to expose a theory, within the data, which explained how couples maintain monogamy (Charmaz, 2014). The theory found was fully explained in chapter three but is summarized, interpreted, and compared to current literature in this chapter. Furthermore, implications, limitations, suggestions for future research, and the experience of the researcher are covered in this chapter.
Main Findings

Each participant contributed to the exposure of a theory which explains how couples maintain monogamy by sharing their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of practicing monogamy. The theory that monogamy is maintained by small, continual, and consistent efforts in each protective factor area was found in the data. The protective factors included: (a) practicing congruence, (b) fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy, (c) building a secure attachment or emotional bond, (d) sex in a marriage, (e) behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries, and (f) coping individually and as a couple. Each protective factor was described in depth in chapter three. The protective factors of monogamy theory, incorporated individual, yet systemic possibilities for maintaining monogamy. For instance, participants offered their personal accounts of experiences, skills, and perspectives of how they maintained monogamy themselves. Yet, many participants also described how their spouse maintained monogamy, from their perspective.

Furthermore, the systemic nature within the protective factors of monogamy is also evident through the circular relationships between and across each protective factor. For example, the protective factor of building a secure attachment or emotional bond was found to influence and be influenced by sex in a marriage. Even still, the foundational premise of maintaining small, continual, and consistent efforts in each protective factor (i.e. building a secure attachment/emotional bond and sex in a marriage) was present and influential to the circularity found within theory. Understanding each protective factor
and the relationships within the theory, a second literature search was conducted and will be discussed in this chapter.

**Practicing Congruence**

The protective factor of practicing congruence was fully described in chapter three, but it can be summarized as practicing monogamy in order to maintain the perception of an ideal self and an ideal family. Behaving congruently to foster an ideal self is a core component of the person-centered counseling theory (Rogers, 1959). Nonetheless, the finding of practicing congruence as an aspect of maintaining monogamy appeared to be original (i.e. not yet connected to any literature regarding practicing monogamy). However, the concept of congruence may be connected to cognitive dissonance theory, not just to the person-centered counseling theory. For example, people tend to behave in ways which align with their attitudes and beliefs (Sharpe, Walters, & Goren, 2013) and when they do not, they risk experiencing mental, emotional, and physical consequences of incongruence or cognitive dissonance (Heubner et al., 2011; Schnick et al., 2012; Sharpe et al., 2013).

Considering this perspective, the protective factor of practicing congruence, does align with current literature regarding cognitive dissonance and behaving congruently to avoid mental and emotional distress. For instance, Frank described having nightmares of being unfaithful or cheating and conveyed that he experienced mental, physical, and emotional distress including fear, lack of sleep, and worry as a result. Frank’s experience may be understood as a method of maintaining congruence and avoiding emotional distress by behaving incongruently (i.e. cheating when he believes in monogamy).
Furthermore, Barbra described practicing congruence by behaving in a way in which she and her husband would be proud of. In her example, she implied avoiding distress (i.e., embarrassment) from behaving incongruently with her values and attitudes of monogamy. Finally, Tiffany and Philip both described experiencing emotional distress when they imagined hurting their spouse through infidelity. These examples of practicing congruence connect with the cognitive dissonance theory because participants avoided physical, emotional, and mental distress by behaving congruently with their attitudes and beliefs toward monogamy, thus maintaining an ideal self and ideal family (Heubner et al. 2011; Rogers, 1959; Schnick et al., 2012; Sharpe et al., 2013). Even still, the exposed theory and the protective factor of practicing congruence also added new information to the current literature on cognitive dissonance, couples counseling, and wellness due to the multidimensional and reciprocal nature of the theory.

**Fostering Values and Beliefs which Support Monogamy**

The protective factor of fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy was found to be comprised of three categories which included: (a) learning about monogamy, (b) culture and family, and (c) individuality and monogamy. Some researchers studied the concepts of morality and religion as related to aspects for infidelity, since religion can be viewed as a value and/or a belief. For instance, Mattingly, Wilson, Clark, Bequette, and Weidler (2010) conducted a quantitative study to determine which factor (i.e. ambiguous behaviors, depictive behaviors, or explicit behaviors) accounted for more of the variance of dating infidelity behaviors. Furthermore, Mattingly et al. (2010) utilized correlational tests to determine if the
variables (i.e. religion, investment size, quality of alternatives, commitment, and satisfaction) related to perceptions of dating infidelity. The researchers reported investment size, quality of alternatives, satisfaction, religion, and commitment were not significantly related to deceptive and explicit behaviors of infidelity. Furthermore, ambiguous behaviors of dating infidelity, such as hugging someone other than spouse or having dinner with someone other than a spouse, were positively correlated with religion, relationship satisfaction, and having few alternative options for partners. Mattingly et al. (2010) postulated that these correlations may be explained by morality. Moreover, the researchers did not address if a relationship between religiosity and preventing infidelity or practicing monogamy was present. The analysis conducted essentially measured how participants define or categorize infidelity behaviors (Mattingly et al., 2010). Therefore, it is clear that the results from this dissertation study did not directly confirm the information provided by Mattingly et al. (2010). In this study, religion and spirituality were described by participants as sources which helped them overcome temptations but were not described as the primary reasons they maintained monogamy. For instance, as discussed in chapter three, Philip shared that he is able to maintain monogamy based on his own personal attributes, such as loyalty, rather than because of his faith.

In another study, Hook et al. (2015) studied the relationship between religious values and sexual behavior. As discussed in chapter one, Hook et al. (2015) found a negative correlational relationship between high religiosity or religious commitment and sexual congruence (i.e. practicing sexual acts which align with their values and beliefs). Therefore, the theory exposed from this dissertation study is not consistent with the
results presented by Hook et al. (2015). For instance, fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy was a protective factor found in the data. In addition, the majority of the participants self-identified as religious. Even though many participants indicated that religious values were not the reason they practiced monogamy, many expressed how religion or spirituality helped them maintain monogamy during difficult periods (i.e. temptations). Even still, religion and spirituality were only one aspect of the protective factor.

In a different study, Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999) researched if dating infidelity could be predicted by the investment model. As discussed in chapter one, the investment model is used to conceptualize relationships within social psychology (Drigotas et al., 1999; Le, & Agnew, 2003). The premise of the investment model is that commitment is the central variable in intimate relationships and influences a person’s likelihood to continue the relationship (Drigotas et al., 1999; Le, & Agnew, 2003). In addition, similar to the exchange theory, satisfaction, effort or investment size, and quality of alternative options, also may influence a person’s likelihood to continue the relationship (Le & Agnew, 2003).

The premise of the investment model has logical and understandable connections to relationships and preventing infidelity. However, the theory found in the data from this study had loose connections to the investment model and did not fully support it. There were some minimal connections between the investment model and the protective factor of fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy. For instance, participants described how their relationships and connections with their spouses were
significant enough to make a commitment (i.e. the first component of the investment model). However, participants did not indicate that commitment was the sole reason they maintained monogamy. In fact, many participants described how having respect for their spouse influenced their monogamy practices more than the act of committing or becoming legally married. For instance, Barbra shared that she was unfaithful in her first marriage because she did not respect her husband. Furthermore, Barbra noted that she has respect for her current husband and described how such respect connects to her desire to maintain monogamy.

Furthermore, the second component of the investment model (i.e. size of investment) (Le & Angew, 2003) was not completely supported by the theory found in this study. For example, some participants described how having children influenced their perceived attachment or closeness to their spouse but did not indicate that having children (i.e. an investment) solely prevented infidelity. In fact, Melissa directly noted holding the perspective that children leave the home eventually, and therefore the couple cannot solely rely on children to prevent infidelity or divorce. Finally, the third and fourth components of the investment model (i.e. satisfaction level and quality of alternatives) are discussed under building a secure attachment or emotional bond and behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries.

**Building a Secure Attachment or Emotional Bond**

The satisfaction of a relationship is another part of the investment model (Le & Agnew, 2003). Participants did convey feeling fulfilled and satisfied by describing how they foster a secure attachment or emotional bond with their spouse (i.e. feel emotionally
Even still, the participant’s descriptions focused more on attachment rather than investments within the relationship. Therefore, the results from this study are more consistent with the attachment theory rather than the investment model. For instance, the protective factor of building a secure attachment or emotional bond was consistent with the literature on attachment theory (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Bowlby, 1979; Fricker, 2006; Hazan & Diamond 2000; Levy & Kelly, 2010). Subcategories of this protective factor included: (a) intimacy, (b) enjoying the relationship, (c) communication, and (d) knowledge and exposure to healthy relationships were found within the data. Furthermore, each subcategory was comprised of several codes. These subcategories and the overall protective factor of building a secure attachment or emotional bond was used to make comparisons with the current literature.

As described in chapter one, attachment theory stems from the work of John Bowlby who studied the relationship between a child and a mother; he postulated that humans need to maintain strong and positive emotional bonds with others such as a spouse (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Bowlby, 1979; Fricker, 2006; Hazan & Diamond 2000; Levy & Kelly, 2010). Furthermore, maintaining a secure attachment consists of meeting four needs, which include: (a) proximity maintenance, (b) comfort seeking or safe-haven establishment, (c) reduced separation distress, and (d) having a secure base to explore and navigate the world (Bowlby, 1979; Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Each of these needs or domains were conveyed by participants, thus, the protective factor of building a secure attachment or emotional bond is consistent with the current literature on attachment theory.
The first domain of proximity maintenance, which is the idea that people need physical closeness and connection to one another to maintain a bond (Hazan & Diamond, 2000) was conveyed by participants. For instance, the subcategory of enjoying the relationship consisted of many examples in which participants intentionally made time for their spouse. Lisa often shared how she and her husband look forward to and value the time they spend together (i.e. date nights, sex, playful encounters, etc.) even more because her husband travels for work in the military. Cindy and Anna also shared examples of planning out date nights or planned dinners at home as important moments of connection. These examples directly connect with the aspect of proximity maintenance because they conveyed how participants remain physically close and connected to their spouse. Meaning, neither them nor their spouses needed to work very hard to receive attention.

The data was also consistent with the second domain in attachment theory of needing and seeking out comfort (i.e. safe-haven) (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). This domain was conveyed by participants as they described moments of deepening their intimacy. Intimacy was a primary category within the protective factor of building a secure attachment or emotional bond. For instance, participants described feeling supported by their spouse. Participants also reflected that they had their marriage and spouse to fall back on during adverse times, which directly conveys that they experienced their spouse and their relationship as a safe-haven. In addition, elements of intimacy directly fit with establishing a safe-haven (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). These elements included: (a) establishing trust, (b) having empathy for one’s spouse, (c) having deep
respect for one’s spouse, (d) valuing one’s spouse and marriage more after committing, and (e) an overall sense of ‘us’ as a couple.

The data was also consistent with the third aspect of attachment theory which is known as experiencing separation distress (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Even though participants did not directly state that they experienced separation distress it can be inferred based on the data. Participants shared examples of consistently prioritizing their spouse and marriage over other life-tasks and roles. This included remaining relationship-focused rather than child-focused in order to protect the value of the marriage and ultimately protect the attachment or emotional bond. Essentially, participants portrayed how disconnected they may feel (i.e. separated) when their spouse focuses too much on life-tasks or roles outside of being a married partner such as being a parent, a veteran, a brother, and so on.

The protective factor of building a secure attachment or emotional bond was also consistent with the fourth domain of attachment theory which is conceptualized as having a secure base (i.e. the marriage) to successfully navigate the world (Hazan & Diamond, 2000). Participants frequently expressed a sense of feeling lucky to share their with a person who accepts them and their flaws. Furthermore, a prevalent code found in the data was that monogamy does not detract from one’s personhood; rather it enhances them as individuals, meets their needs, and was a source of positivity. This clearly connected with the notion that their marriage or relationship was viewed as a secure base or foundation from which they could safely grow as a person.
Russell et al. (2013) described that if a person perceives their spouse as being unwilling or unable to establish a secure attachment, then that person may be at a higher risk for infidelity. The notion presented by Russell et al. (2013) was connected to the data. Codes regarding perceptions of one’s spouse were commonly found. For instance, participants described the belief that their spouse appreciates and deserves their monogamous practices. Furthermore, even though none of the spouses were interviewed nor present during the interview, the participants often offered narratives to convey their spouse’s experiences. Therefore, the protective factor of maintaining a secure attachment or emotional bond is consistent with the literature presented in chapter one. However, the theory exposed in this study still added to the existing gap because little to no research had been conducted which outlined how maintaining a secure attachment or emotional bond helps maintain monogamy and prevent infidelity. For example, scholars researched how insecure types of attachment may be risk factors for infidelity (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; Bowlby, 1979; Fricker, 2006; Schade & Sandberg, 2012) and postulated that a secure emotional attachment may make a person less likely to terminate a relationship (Mattingly, et al., 2010), yet scholars did not specifically determine how people prevent infidelity and maintain monogamy. Furthermore, the reciprocal relationships between protective factors and the theory as a whole is also new information which can be applied to the current literature regarding attachment theory and monogamous practices. The ability to maintain a secure attachment or emotional bond with one’s spouse may result in preventing an extramarital attachment bond (i.e. emotional infidelity).
Sex in a Marriage

As described earlier, this study utilized sexual and emotional infidelity definitions. The results indicated that participants partly maintain emotional fidelity by fostering a secure emotional bond with their spouse and by establishing boundaries with others. In addition, the results indicated that participants also partly maintain monogamy by engaging in a healthy sexual relationship (i.e. sexual activity, communication about sex, remaining emotionally connected, coping with sex, & practicing creativity). It is commonly known and understood that sexual activity may be an expectation amongst married persons. Participants expressed a sense of duality with the importance of sex in their marriages. On one hand, they described it as being important and feeling a sense of wanting to fulfill their spouse’s sexual needs as well as their own. On the other hand, participants conveyed that sexual activity, frequency, fulfillment, or desire may be fluid and that there is more to a monogamous marriage than sex. Every participant easily described positive attributes of their spouse. This conveyed a sense of pride and admiration for their spouse beyond sex. For example, Philip explicitly described how his wife’s qualities and the connection they have outweighs any sexual desire or interest in another woman. Therefore, this protective factor within the theory of maintaining monogamy partly supports and partly contradicts literature regarding sex practices.

Yeh, Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, and Elder (2006) utilized previously collected longitudinal data to examine the relationship between sex, marriage stability, and marriage quality. They used an autoregression analysis and found a connection between satisfying sex and marital quality. However, they also found that marital quality was a
moderating variable to satisfying sex. Therefore, the results of this current study partly supported the findings reported by Yeh et al. (2006). For example, participants noted that the emotional connection (i.e. marital quality) with their partner was more valuable than pure sexual satisfaction in their motivation to maintain monogamy. However, the results from this study highlighted a reciprocal relationship between emotional connection or attachment bond and satisfying sex whereas the results from Yeh et al. (2006) only indicated that marital quality had a moderating interaction with sex, not a reciprocal relationship.

As described in the first chapter, the evolutionary theory has been used to attempt to explain infidelity. Evolutionary theorists described that men and women may cheat and experience the consequences of cheating based on reproductive and biological reasons (Elmeslie & Tebalid, 2008; Hackathorn & Harvey, 2011; Hazan & Diamond, 2000; Ward, Kelley, & Church, 2012). Men may cheat as a means to increase the chance of their genetics being passed on and surviving through procreation. Due to a theorized evolutionary drive to spread sperm, men may be more distressed by sexual infidelity because it may result in the conception of a child who may or may not be their genetic offspring. Thus, men may be ‘trapped’ into raising a child who is biologically not theirs. Women, on the other hand, may cheat as a means to achieve stability and security in raising offspring. Therefore, they may find emotional infidelity more distressing than sexual infidelity (Ward et al., 2012).

The results from this study did not support the evolutionary theory for several reasons. First, the participants had not experienced infidelity in their current marriages,
even after several years of monogamy and children. According to evolutionary theorists, the male participants would have an urge to cheat after procreating with their current spouse in order to spread their genetics further, which the participants did not indicate. Second, participants discussed how procreating and having a family increased their feelings of accountability and motivation to not cheat. Third, participants described the relationship and the connection as the primary focus rather than being focused on innate and evolutionary urges (i.e. being partner-focused rather than child-focused). Fourth, participants discussed their abilities to cope during periods of infrequent sexual activity (i.e. dry patches) while remaining monogamous. This indicated that the participants were not purely driven by a biological need to procreate; rather it indicated that an attachment or value of the relationship may be more influential as a motivator to maintain monogamy than evolutionary urges.

**Behavioral, Cognitive, and Relationship Boundaries**

The protective factor of behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries are compared to the current literature. This section has limited discussion points because there is less research which connects to the protective factor and the codes within it. Even so, this protective factor can be considered and critiqued by applying it to a few of the theories discussed in chapter one, including the social exchange theory, the investment model, and the evolutionary theory.

The social exchange theory and the investment model have significant similarities, and therefore, will both be discussed in this section as related to the findings of this study. Assuming either model, infidelity can be explained as the cost of a
relationship outweighing the benefits (Lammers & Maner, 2016; Le, & Agnew, 2003; Munsch, 2015). The quality of alternatives (i.e. other options) factor is included in the investment model (Le & Agnew, 2003). This means that a person may be more likely to maintain a relationship if there are fewer quality options for alternatives. In a sense, individuals continuously compare their partner to other potential partners and remain in a relationship if their current partner is the better option. This premise was not completely supported by the findings of the current study. Many participants described establishing boundaries early and consistently with others in order to maintain monogamy and prevent a perspective of alternative options. Linda shared how she continuously has her guard up with other men. Frank also described establishing boundaries and redirecting his sexual interests towards his wife rather than another female. Philip, on the other hand, did express how he reminds himself that another sexually attractive woman would not be as compatible as his wife. Thus, viewing his wife as the better option. Philip’s experience may be noted as partial support for the premise. Yet, he also contextualized that by explaining that he considers the connection he has with his wife to be unique and special (i.e. always the better option by default due to the uniqueness). This finding (i.e. behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries protective factor) may offer a different perspective to these theories of infidelity in that the participants didn’t allow opportunities to find a better mate, regardless of the turbulent times (i.e. cost of a relationship). Ultimately, the participants may have continuously experienced this protective factor so that the relationship never felt like an extreme burden and seeking other mates never became a viable option.
The protective factor of establishing behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries did not support the evolutionary theory discussed in chapter one. For example, participants described being closed off or having one’s guard up with others as a means of establishing boundaries and essentially presenting themselves as ‘taken.’ If the evolutionary theory was supported, participants may have explained having loose boundaries and presenting themselves as available sexual partners to procreate. Furthermore, participants also stopped cognitions related to potential sexual partners. The ability to cognitively stop fantasizing was described and found within the data as a method of cognitive boundaries. This example reflects that participants continuously establish boundaries to prevent infidelity (i.e. the spreading of genetic material outside of a marriage); therefore, the evolutionary theory of infidelity as applied to this protective factor was not fully supported in this current study.

**Coping Individually and as a Couple**

Coping individually and as a couple was found to be another protective factor within the exposed theory. As discussed in chapter three, this protective factor was comprised of several categories which included: (a) support systems, (b) reframing, (c) individual coping skills, (d) coping together as a couple, and (e) deconstructing unattainable ideals/normalizing. Essentially, participants described a duality between investing effort in the relationship to ensure a quality marriage while simultaneously being able to cope during adverse periods in a relationship. This protective factor connects with multiple theories and research discussed in chapter one.
First, this protective factor can be conceptualized as connecting to Bowlby’s attachment theory. For instance, even though couples attempt to maintain a secure attachment type, there are periods when couples may experience insecure attachment types known as avoidant attachment and anxious attachment (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002; DeWall, et al., 2011; Russell et al., 2013). As previously discussed, couples may be at a higher risk for infidelity and/or relationship termination when they move into an anxious or avoidant attachment type (DeWall et al., 2011; Orzeck & Lung, 2005; Russell et al., 2013). In connection to the findings in this current study, participants often described not having the “perfect relationship” and indicated they experience challenging periods. They also reported the value of being able to cope, know that they will reconnect, and understand that challenging periods are temporary and will not last forever. This perspective reflects that participants may be better able to cope while experiencing an anxious or avoidant attachment for a brief period without catastrophizing the problem and seeking to meet needs through extra marital affairs (i.e. infidelity).

Second, this protective factor can also be connected to the social exchange theory discussed in chapter one. As previously reported, the economic premise of the social exchange theory is that couples may cheat due to the cost (i.e. contributions) of a relationship exceeding the rewards (i.e. goods) (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2000; Munsch, 2015). The social exchange theory was loosely connected to the data in this study. Participants often described having the perspective that their spouse contributes to their marriage in a beneficial way and that challenging periods are normal. For example, many participants described their spouse with positive attributes during the interviews. Anna shared how
she valued and respected that her husband strives to support her emotionally and financially as she pursues an advanced degree. Lisa shared that her husband contributes to her well-being, their relationship, and believes that he may be a better person than her. This conveyed the deep respect she has for him. Overall, participants continually oriented their perspectives regarding their spouses and their relationships in ways which supported the idea that the marriage is worth the cost. In a sense, participants actively diminished the severity of any cost (i.e. adverse event) within their perceptions, which supports part of the social exchange theory. However, the participants did not articulate a threshold of a cost which would cause them to cheat.

Third, the concept of coping with adverse events is not new within the counseling profession. For instance, Johnson, Horne, and Galovan (2016) described how couples offer and receive dyadic support in a reciprocal and developmental nature. The researchers stated “Both males and females in young adulthood and midlife, supportive dyadic coping consistently declined over the 5-year span of this study” (p. 2038). Even though Johnson et al. (2016) reported a significant finding, it is evident that the results for this current study do not fully support their findings. For example, participants in this current study had been married for varying years (i.e. 1-29 years) and yet, the protective factor of coping individually and as a couple was still found in the data. For the participants who had been married for over five years, they spoke about coping as an important component and presented a sense of patience. For the participants who had been married for less than five years, they spoke about coping in a future-based goal-oriented perspective. For instance, Anna reported not having faced significant issues
such as “having kids yet” but also described having an awareness about the coping that will need to occur when they do have kids. Furthermore, participants described approaching phased life events, such as career planning, kids, the death of family, and so on as a unified team or system. The unified approached reportedly helped them cope together and maintain a connection to their spouse. Barbra described coping as a couple from the death of parents and shared feeling closer to her husband as a result. Frank offered a narrative of how he and his wife coped individually while taking turns pursuing occupational goals and still remained connected. These examples aligned with researchers who described the importance of coping as a couple and being a unified system when facing difficult periods, such as career navigation (Lin, Chen, & Li, 2016; Schalk, 2016).

**Implications**

The theory generated has some clinical and educational implications for professional counselors and counselor educators. Even though future research is needed to determine the quantitative effectiveness of the theory, it can be used in several ways. The implications and suggested applications are discussed in this section.

Counselor educators and practicing counseling professionals may utilize this theory to conceptualize couples in counseling. One of the most important first steps when working with couples is to complete an assessment (Long & Young, 2007). A beginning assessment typically consists of screening for violence, joining the system and hearing from both individuals, understanding patterns, understanding the background of the couple, and so on (Long & Young, 2007). This theory can be applied to a preliminary
assessment as supplemental knowledge of the couple and can help the counselor identify strengths. Counselors may utilize protective factors to conceptualize couple’s needs and goals. For instance, if a couple attends counseling with a presenting concern related to parenting, the counselor may also assess for the protective factor of coping individually and as a couple to obtain information related to the use of coping skills.

Bibliotherapy is a commonly accepted practice in counseling and supervision (Long, 2010). This qualitative dissertation may allow couples to create meaning and connections to their own experiences (Charmaz, 2014). If a couple seeks counseling to regain a sense of connection or emotional excitement for one another, they may benefit from reading how these participants expressed ways in which they remain connected and ultimately how they maintain monogamy. Even though generalization is not the intent in qualitative research, the findings may be transferable to those who may be similar to the participants (Charmaz, 2014). Such as married persons who are predominately Caucasian, adults, with exposure to a religion or spirituality, who have a college education, who are employed, and who have knowledge or experience in the mental health field. If the results are transferable to people who are similar to the participants, they may be able to learn about these results and create their own meaning and connections to the data, the protective factors, and the theory.

There are also implications for advocacy in the mental health field and prevention-based counseling services. Infidelity is a traumatic and common presenting concern within couples counseling (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014). Counselors may offer psychoeducation workshops which infuse the findings from this theory to help
individuals and couples prepare for maintaining monogamy in a relationship. Even though this theory may have future implications for trainings, additional research is needed first to determine the generalizability of the findings since the purpose of this study was to expose a qualitative theory rather than to quantitatively generalize the results to the whole population. If the theory is quantitatively evidence-based, then an infidelity prevention program could be offered to the general public to help individuals and couples protect monogamy and prevent emotional distress (Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014).

Participant Contributions to Findings and Process

The majority (i.e. seven out of 10) of the participants had occupational roles within or related to the mental health field. Their education level and mental health-related work experiences may have influenced their candor and the language presented to describe their experiences of maintaining monogamy. For instance, the protective factor of practicing congruence was found within the data and labeled as such due to the language used by the participants. Barbra described her experience as being congruent. Congruence is a core component of the person-centered counseling approach developed by Carl Rogers and is vital to the helping relationships. Even though individuals who do not have counseling knowledge may understand the definition of congruence, they may not have labeled it as such. Many of the participants expressed a personal interest in monogamy and couples in general. This may have affected the results found because most participants were eager, willing, and were open to reflecting on their experiences.
In addition, as described in the second chapter, all 10 of the participants completed member-checking for each interview. Participants reviewed the transcriptions of their own individual interviews and gave feedback, if applicable. The corrective feedback received from the first round of interviews primarily focused on punctuation. Three participants requested to have periods used in certain paragraphs to reduce run-on thoughts. Participants also offered feedback that they felt heard and their message was recorded accurately. The only feedback received regarding the second interviews centered on approval (i.e. the transcription was accurate and reflected the message and meaning). None of the participants had corrective feedback for the second interviews.

**Limitations**

One of the major differences between quantitative research and qualitative research is that qualitative research is not intended to be generalized to the whole population (Charmaz, 2014). However, within grounded theory qualitative research, the intent is to collect a large amount of data from a wide and diverse group of participants so that the exposed theory could essentially have transferable meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Even though efforts were made to obtain data from diverse individuals, one of the limitations of this current study includes diversity. For example, most of the participants identified as Caucasian. One participant out of 10, identified as Black. All of the participants identified as cisgender and heterosexual. Furthermore, most of the participants were religious or spiritual (i.e. Christian, Catholic, or Jewish) at one point in their life. The majority of the participants held college degrees and were employed in
occupations which required a college degree. One participant described being married to a spouse in the military. Finally, one person identified as being differently-abled.

Another limitation was that most of the participants worked within the mental health field. As previously discussed, the participant’s backgrounds may have influenced their life experience, experiences with maintaining monogamy, interpretation of the questions during the interviews, and the responses given. Therefore, the findings may not be as easily transferred to readers who do not align with the participant’s backgrounds.

Another limitation of the study is that the majority of the interviews were completed through technology such as a telephone or a web-based conference (i.e. Zoom or Skype). Four out of the 20 total interviews were completed in person. This may have influenced the data collection process by limiting the rapport built between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, two of the interviews completed in person were done in a confidential office at the participant’s place of employment. Even though the participant requested to meet in her office, where confidentiality and privacy were ensured, this may have influenced her comfortability in the interview process. For example, these two interviews were slightly shorter in duration compared to the other 16 interviews. The participant may have felt pressured or a desire to keep the interview short to resume her work. As a result, the two interviews may have had less weight in the coding process, therefore can be considered to be a limitation. In comparison, the other in person interviews lasted longer and the participant presented as more comfortable by being more detailed. Therefore, these two in person interviews may have had more weight in the coding process due to length and due to the amount of data provided.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study was qualitative and attempted to fill the current gap in the literature within couples counseling by seeking to understand how couples maintain monogamy. As discussed in chapter one, infidelity is a common presenting concern for couples (Butler et al., 2010), yet the majority of married persons maintain monogamy. The theory exposed the grounded theory methods offered an understanding and explanation of how the participants maintain their monogamy. Due to the notion that qualitative research is not intended to be generalized, I believe the next line of research should be quantitative in nature. I plan to utilize a quantitative design, methods, and statistical analyses to determine the effectiveness of the theory found in this current study. After the theory is measured for effectiveness, licensed professional counselors could be taught to utilize the program in their practice and more research could be done to determine the utility of the program. Research could also be conducted surrounding preventative mental healthcare within couples counseling. For example, a longitudinal quantitative study could be completed to determine if this theory can help couples maintain monogamy and prevent the damaging experience of infidelity.

Additional research could be conducted within each protective factor to determine the amount of variance each factor has as a predictor for maintaining monogamy. Understanding which factor accounts for most of the variance in maintaining monogamy could guide and inform couples counseling work. In addition, future research could be completed to develop a valid and reliable assessment for predicting and maintaining monogamy.
Furthermore, individuals who identify as sexual/affectional, gender expansive, or LGBTQ+ were not present in this current study. Therefore, a future research inquiry related to sexual/affectional and/or gender expansive relationships and how monogamous practices are maintained could be completed. For example, the grounded theory methods used in this study could be replicated and data could be collected and analyzed from sexual and/or affectional minority individuals in a monogamous relationship to expose a theory of sexual/affectional and/or gender expansive maintenance of monogamy.

Another line of future research could focus on persons and/or couples who have cheated previously but are currently maintaining monogamy. For example, one participant in this study reported having been unfaithful in her first marriage, but not in her current marriage, and she described having a deeper perspective of monogamy as a result. Qualitative research could be conducted to understand how they maintain monogamy after experiencing infidelity.

The relationship(s) between these protective factors and other forms of marital distress (i.e. domestic violence, family cycle stages, parenting, use of drugs and alcohol, etc.) could be investigated. It is possible that a lack of protective factors contributes an escalation of an adverse event. With future research, we could understand how protective factors help couples navigate distress.

More research could also be conducted to understand how couples experience practicing monogamy since this study focused on individuals. Even though couples were intentionally not sampled for this study, many of the participants discussed their spouse and his or her monogamous behavior as well. Conducting qualitative interviews with a
couple together, to understand how they maintain monogamy, may offer different and meaningful data for the counseling field.

Understanding how couples maintain monogamy together or as a system, additional research could be completed to understand how polyamorist persons define and maintain fidelity or faithfulness. Even though polygamist may have multiple partners, they may view their relationships as being faithful or practicing fidelity. Collecting and analyzing qualitative data about polygamist persons’ experiences with faithfulness may offer different and meaningful information which could have implications for couples counseling as well.

Generational differences and courting style (e.g. meeting in person, being set up by a friend, meeting through dating services, etc.) could be researched to determine the expectations, understanding, and maintaining monogamy. For instance, all or the participants in this study were adults and none of the participants described meeting with spouse through technology. It is commonly known that technology can be used in dating and relationship experiences. People may be able to use dating apps or websites to find a sexual or romantic partner. Therefore, grounded theory methods could be used to expose a theory which explains how monogamy in non-married dating relationships is experienced and maintained. Furthermore, similar methods could be used to understand how monogamy is maintained in strictly online relationships, long-distance relationships, or amongst persons who met through technology.

Finally, additional research could focus on understanding how diverse persons maintain monogamy. The current study had some diversity amongst participants;
however, it can be broad and therefore, future research could address: (a) rural residency, (b) urban residency, (c) atheism, (d) ability and disability status, (d) career type (i.e. farming, business, education, etc.), (f) education level, (g) socio-economic status, (h) international cultural experiences with monogamy, (i) persons in recovery, and (j) those who have a mental or emotional diagnosis, and other diverse groups. Understanding how monogamy is experienced and maintained within various groups and underserved populations may offer rich and meaningful data for the couples counseling field.

**Experience in Reflections of the Researcher**

I found the participants to be very open and honest in their reflections about their experiences with monogamy and being married. I often asked sensitive questions, which participants willingly answered. I began the interview process aware of the fact that I would be gaining access to personal and intimate details of each participant and of their marriage. Understanding that relationships can be a very important aspect of a person’s life, I approached the interviews with curiosity and non-judgement. I felt honored to have the unique opportunity to learn about the participants’ intimate relationships and perspectives regarding monogamy and marriage.

Interviewing each participant twice was a unique experience for me, which I ended up greatly appreciating. Participants described multiple reflections after the first interview, which seemed to lead to personal growth. I was deeply moved by this. I also found myself reflecting on my own relationship, my understanding of working with couples in counseling, and my monogamous practices based on the participant’s
narratives. Finally, the theory found helped strengthen my personal and professional perspectives of the meaning that relationships can have in a person’s life.

I learned several lessons throughout this research process. First, if I were to replicate this study, I would not use the qualitative software called NVivo. I used NVivo to complete and organize my initial codes for all 20 cases. Even though it was useful and helpful in organization, I found it to be a slight barrier for me in becoming fully immersed in the data during the first stage of coding. There were points when I felt the urge to physically work with the data in a tangible way in order to fully be ‘in it’ but couldn’t due to using the software. In addition, the type of NVivo I had access to through the institution did not have functions which would have been useful for the focused and theoretical coding stages. Therefore, I moved the codes from NVivo to word in order to complete these steps. Even though this didn’t become a limitation in the study, I reached the conclusion that I would not use NVivo in the future.

Another component of this process I would do differently in the future is that I would limit the interviews conducted via telephone. Even though I had to out of necessity and living too far away from most of the participants to meet them face-to-face, I think using Zoom or Skype may have offered a different experience. In any future qualitative interviews, I plan factor in time and plan for several minutes of rapport building. Reflecting back to the interviews, I often felt concerned about not taking up a significant amount of the participant’s time, and therefore I began the interview conversation immediately after answering any questions from the participants.
Finally, in the future I plan to include the participants more in the member-checking process. For instance, I provided the participants with a transcription of their interview and asked them to offer any points they’d like to change and/or if it captured their narrative correctly. Even though this verification process was done in accordance with standard member-checking, I think having more of a conversation would have offered additional opportunities for construction of the data (Charmaz, 2014). In the future, I plan to do this and to use analytic memos to document and reflect on the experience of member-checking with the participants. Overall, I believe this research study was a valuable experience for me on a professional and personal level. I look forward to continuing research on preventing infidelity and maintaining monogamy.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to expose a theory which explains how the participants successfully maintain sexual and emotional monogamy. Grounded theory data collection and analysis methods were used and revealed the theory that monogamy is both the cause of and a result of small, continuous, and consistent efforts in each protective factor which included: (a) practicing congruence, (b) fostering values and beliefs which support monogamy, (c) building a secure attachment or emotional bond, (d) sex in a marriage, (e) behavioral, cognitive, and relationship boundaries, and (f) coping individually and as a couple.

This theory of maintaining monogamy through the six protective factors has the potential to be applied to counseling practices, future scholarship and research endeavors, and in the training and supervision of counseling students. Within counseling practices,
professionals may use this theory to conceptualize clients and guide advocacy efforts for prevention-based counseling services for couples. This study may be used in couples counseling by offering the couple to read the findings and create their own value and meaning. Finally, this theory adds to the current literature on couples counseling by changing the perspective of working with infidelity. For example, substantial research regarding risk factors, prevalence rates, theoretical explanations, consequences, and clinical treatment of infidelity had been conducted. However, the focus of this study was based on the notion that the majority of couples successfully maintained monogamy (Russell et al., 2013), attempted to understand this, and exposed a theory which explained how the participants protected and maintained monogamy.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS
Informed Consent to Participate in Doctoral Research Study

**Study Title:** Understanding how couples maintain fidelity: The development of a Theory of Protective Factors using Grounded Theory

**Principal Investigator:** Betsy Page, Ed.D., & Marissa, Fye, M.S.Ed., Doctoral Candidate, Jason McGlothlin, Ph.D., & Phillip Rumrill, Ph.D.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding as to how married couples maintain fidelity (i.e. monogamy) in order to expose a theory of protective factors for infidelity.

**Procedures:** Participants are eligible to participate in this study based on the inclusionary criteria of: 1) being 18 years or older, 2) being legally married in the United States of America, 3) identified practicing fidelity or monogamy in their marriage, 4) being able fluent in English. Participants will be asked to complete two to three semi-structured interviews. The total duration of interviews will last approximately 4.5 to 6
hours. Participants will be asked to review the transcriptions from their individual interview for the purpose of member-checking. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and participants may choose to terminate their involvement at any time without penalty.

**Audio and Video Recording and Photography:** Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for the purpose of data analysis. Participant’s information and data will be kept confidential. Participants will be provided a pseudonym to protect their identity. All confidential information will be stored on an encrypted computer and destroyed at the completion of the study.

**Benefits:** By describing ways in which participants have successfully maintained monogamy, participants may experience benefits of increased self-esteem, improved martial satisfaction, pride in his or her marriage, and may identify ways to continue to successfully maintain monogamy, etc. However, participation in this study may yield results which can have significant implications for prevention counseling services, couples therapy, and generating a theory which describes how to prevent infidelity.

**Risks and Discomforts:** There are no expected risks or discomforts of participating in this study beyond those encountered in everyday life.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:** All participant information will be kept strictly confidential within the legal limits. Participants will be provided with a pseudonym. All research materials, including participant’s interviews, will be stored on a password protected computer. The research materials will be permanently destroyed upon the
completion of the study. The data yielded from this study may be presented in a research manuscript for the purpose of publication and/or professional presentations.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, however, taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

**Contact Information:**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Betsy Page, Ed.D. at 330-672-0696, Jason McGlothlin, Ph.D. at 330-672-7977, Phillip Rumrill at 330-672-0600, or Marissa Fye at mfye3@kent.edu This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.
Consent Statement and Signature

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

_______________________________  _________________________
Participant Signature            Date
AUDIOTAPE CONSENT FORM

Understanding how couples maintain fidelity: The development of a Theory of Protective Factors using Grounded Theory

Betsy Page, Ed.D., & Marissa, Fye, M.S.Ed., Doctoral Candidate, Jason McGlothlin, Ph.D.,& Phillip Rumrill, Ph.D.

I agree to participate in an audio-taped interview about my experience maintaining fidelity in my marriage as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Marissa Fye may audio-tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

__________________________________________________________________________

Signature Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____want to listen to the recording  _____do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Marissa Fye may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____this research project _____publication _____presentation at professional meetings

__________________________________________________________________________

Signature Date
Conditionality Agreement for Professional Transcription

I _____________________________ agree to serve as a professional transcriber for the audio recordings of the participants’ interviews and agree to maintain confidentiality of any information which I may be exposed to as a transcriber. I will not reveal any information related to the interviews I transcribe to anyone other than the researcher, Marissa Fye. I am aware that violation of this confidentiality agreement will result in the termination of my services and may result in legal action.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature Date

Witness Signature Date
APPENDIX B

MEMO NOTE FORMAT
## Memo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comparisons</th>
<th>Notable observations</th>
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APPENDIX C

FIRST SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS
First Interview Guiding Questions

1. How long have you been married and faithful?
2. How did you decide to practice monogamy in your marriage?
3. What does fidelity mean to you?
   a. What does it mean about you as a person?
   b. What does it mean about you as a spouse?
4. What meaning do you make from practicing fidelity?
5. How do you continue to maintain fidelity?
6. What do you plan on doing to continue fidelity in the years to come?
7. Tell me how you identify culturally.
   a. Does any aspect of your culture influence your experience with fidelity?
APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF PEER REVIEW NOTE
Peer Review Note Format

1. Date and time of peer review.
2. Main topics covered.
3. Peer reviewer’s reactions.
4. Peer reviewer’s suggestions.
APPENDIX E

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER
RE: IRB # 17-108 entitled “UNDERSTANDING HOW COUPLES MAINTAIN FIDELITY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORY OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS USING GROUNDED THEORY”

Hello,
I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as a Level II/Expedited, category project. Approval is effective for a twelve-month period:

March 8th, 2017 through March 7th, 2018

For compliance with:

- DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects (Title 45 part 46), subparts A, B, C, D & E

*If applicable, a copy of the IRB approved consent form is attached to this email. This “stamped” copy is the consent form that you must use for your research participants. It is important for you to also keep an unstamped text copy (i.e., Microsoft Word version) of your consent form for subsequent submissions.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB tries to send you annual review reminder notice by email as a courtesy. **However, please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials.** Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date. [Visit our website](#) for forms.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design, or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); [FWA Number 00001853](#).
To search for funding opportunities, please sign up for a free Pivot account at [http://pivot.cos.com/funding_main](http://pivot.cos.com/funding_main)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at [Researchcompliance@kent.edu](mailto:Researchcompliance@kent.edu) or **330-672-2704** or **330-672-8058**.

Bethany Holland | Assistant | **330.672.2384** | bhollan4_stu@kent.edu
Tricia Sloan | Coordinator | **330.672.2181** | psloan1@kent.edu
Kevin McCreary | Assistant Director | **330.672.8058** | kmccrea1@kent.edu
Paulette Washko | Director | **330.672.2704** | pwashko@kent.edu
Doug Delahanty | IRB Chair | **330.672.2395** | ddelahan@kent.edu
APPENDIX F

PROCEDURAL OUTLINE
Procedural Outline

1. Obtained IRB Approval

2. Began Sampling
   a. Posted on social media (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram)
   b. Posted on the listserve CESNet
   c. Posted flyers in community locations (i.e. hospitals, churches, libraries, etc.)

3. Phase 1-
   a. Obtained informed consent and consent to be recorded from participants
   b. Completed semi-structured interview
      i. Duration of interview approximately 60 to 90 minutes
      ii. Used initial guiding questions
      iii. Audio recorded the interview
   c. Verification and reflection of initial interview
      i. Interview was transcribed verbatim
      ii. Coding and data analysis began
         1. Initial coding
2. Focused coding

iii. Memo writing occurred

iv. Member-checking occurred

1. Changes made if necessary

v. Peer review

1. Used format provided

4. Phase 2

a. Second semi-structured interview occurred

i. Theoretical sampling

ii. Duration of interview was approximately 60 to 90 minutes

iii. Audio recording of interview

b. Transcribed interview verbatim

c. Memo writing occurred

d. Data analysis occurred

i. Initial coding

ii. Focused coding

iii. Theoretical coding

e. External Audit
APPENDIX G

UNEXPECTED ADVERSE EVENT
INSTRUCTIONS for INVESTIGATORS:

1. Complete this form to summarize new risk information arising from events since the last IRB review (initial or continuing).

2. Submit this completed document to the IRB office at RESEARCHCOMPLIANCE@kent.edu. To submit the form with a typed signature, the form must be submitted from the Investigator’s @kent.edu email account. If completed form is signed and then scanned as a PDF attachment, the @kent.edu email requirement does not apply.

3. Do NOT begin data collection prior to receiving notification from the KSU IRB that the research has been fully approved.

DEFINITIONS

Unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others:
The Office of Human Research Protections considers unanticipated problems, in general, to include those events that:

(1) Are not expected given the nature of the research procedures and the subject population being studied; and

(2) Suggest that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm or discomfort related to the research than was previously known or recognized.

Unanticipated problems can occur in any type of research (medical or non-medical) and may involve physical, psychological, social, legal, or economic harms.

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Section I - KSU Investigator Information

Last Name: Page First Name: Betsy

Title of Study (should match Human Subjects Research Application)

Understanding Couples Maintain Fidelity: The development of a theory of protective factors using grounded theory

1. Details
### Is the event related to a research study that has been reviewed/approved by an (external) IRB, (one other than the Kent State University IRB)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### If Yes \(\rightarrow\) Has the external IRB been notified of the event?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes (\rightarrow) attach copy</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Name of Institution providing external IRB approval:

### Name of contact person at external IRB:

### Contact information for external IRB personnel:

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1. Have there been any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others?

   The Office of Human Research Protections considers unanticipated problems, in general, to include those events that:

   (1) Are not expected given the nature of the research procedures and the subject population being studied; and

   (2) Suggest that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm or discomfort related to the research than was previously known or recognized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| No |
Yes ➔ Provide a summary of new risk information below. *Do not list each event separately or include participants’ personally identifiable information.*

The Kent State University email account used to recruit participants was hacked. The researcher reported the issue with the Kent State University information technology security team and followed their instructions to remove the issue and gain protection again. The email account has not been hacked since. It is unknown if any confidential information was viewed or not.

2. Have there been any adverse events that were unexpected or that occurred at GREATER THAN the expected frequency or level of severity as documented in the research protocol, the consent form, and/or other available information (e.g., investigator brochure or IND application for an investigational drug)?

☐ No

☐ Yes ➔ Provide a summary of new risk information. *Do not list each event separately or include participants’ personally identifiable information.*
APPENDIX H

SECOND ROUND OF QUESTIONS
Second round of questions

1. During points of temptation, even the slightest bit, how did you overcome this?
   a. Was there anything you noticed about yourself at that time? (i.e. coping, burnt out)
2. How do you reconnect or reinvest in valuing monogamy personally/ apart from your marriage?
   a. What is one of the biggest things that helps you re-invest?
3. How has your perspective of sex with your partner changed over time with them?
   a. What advice would you tell newlyweds about how their sex lives may evolve?
4. How are you able to recreate sexual and intimate excitement and fulfillment with your spouse?
   a. Meaning?
5. How have you changed your thinking or overcome a rough patch or being sexually unfulfilled?
6. Other than boundaries, can you think of other behaviors which help prevent infidelity?
7. How do the ideas of accountability and disciple influence monogamy for you, if at all?
8. Aside from building a quality relationship, how does fidelity give you personal fulfillment?
9. When you reflect on your life and marriage, do you think that you have created a lifestyle which supports monogamy? If so in which ways?
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


https://kent.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/illiad.dll?Action=10&Form=75&Value=483713


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