The Secrets of Infidelity

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ABSTRACT

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<u>The Secrets of Infidelity</u>

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This dissertation examines secrecy and information seeking within the experience of infidelity in romantic relationships. Infidelity, or a violation of a contract (stated or unstated) regarding emotion and/or sexual exclusivity, is a relatively pervasive phenomenon in both dating and married relationships. Infidelity is frequently marked by secrecy, deception, and discovery. This dissertation employed the Investment Model, the Revelation Risk Model, Theory of Motivated Information Management, and Awareness Contexts to further understand how people in varying roles (i.e., rover, partner, lover) experience infidelity.

Participants were recruited from various cities throughout the U.S., with different backgrounds and experiences with infidelity. Namely, participants who had experience as either the person who engaged in infidelity, the committed partner to the person who engaged in infidelity, or the person who was the third-party lover were invited to complete a survey. Each survey was unique to the aforementioned experience, though many questions were common among the surveys. This dissertation employed a concurrent nested mixed method design, with the intent of expansion in order to achieve greater breadth and depth. Quantitative data was analyzed using various statistical procedures. Qualitative data was transformed using content analysis and subsequently analyzed using nonparametric statistical tests.

Results support the various components of the Investment Model; specifically, as commitment to the partner decreases, commitment to the lover increases. Moreover, people who are more satisfied in their primary relationship are more likely to reveal the existence of a secondary relationship. Many participants reported that a crisis of some kind would facilitate disclosure of their infidelity, though a majority of participants indicated a friend as being the ultimate confidante. Furthermore, partners noted that suspicion was often triggered by the rover's withdrawal, which subsequently led to the partner's engagement in espionage-type behaviors. Finally, partners reported the desire to find the rover guilty of infidelity (i.e., once the partners began information seeking tactics).

This study introduces multiple voices in the experience of infidelity. The transformation of motivation, awareness, relational scripts, and a proposed process of infidelity are considered in the discussion. Implications, limitations, and directions for future research are also presented.

Approved: _____

Claudia L. Hale

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Richard James Dowd. My journey from a Gogan to a Perfessor was filled with your high fives, low fives, and five P's. You are loved and missed.*

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This dissertation, in many ways, represents both the end and the beginning of journeys. This research is the culmination of my time as a student, an apprentice of academic research. More importantly, this dissertation serves as the gateway to my new adventure as a scholar. This pivotal transition would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and patience of the people in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Commitment and exclusivity are hallmarks of a romantic relationship (Fuhrman, Flannagan, & Matamoros, 2009; Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008; Rusbult, Onizuka, & Lipkus, 1993). Current research supports the notion that commitment tends to be organized around prototypes (Hampel & Vangelisti, 2008). According to Fehr (1988), features of the commitment construct include loyalty, responsibility, living up to one's word, faithfulness, and trust. Moreover, Johnson (1973) articulated three types of commitment: personal commitment (desire to remain in a relationship), moral commitment (feeling morally obliged to stay in a relationship), and structural commitment (believing that certain constraints preclude the dissolution of a relationship). Fehr's (1999) more recent study found that "commitment to close relationship partners is regarded as the essence of commitment. All other kinds [of commitment] are considered peripheral" (p. 92). That is, individuals consider personal relationships with their loved ones to be the prototypical example of commitment; the commitments one has to their country, political affiliation, neighbors, and the like are considered to be non-prototypical.

Exclusivity can be considered to be an important aspect of personal commitment. Weis and Slosnerick (1981) suggested that people hold one of two scripts regarding romantic relationships. The first, a proscriptive script, emphasizes mutuality and sharing within romantic relationships. People who subscribe to this script view love as exclusive; that is, there is an expectation that the relational partner will meet emotional and sexual needs. The proscriptive script "sees sexuality, love, and marriage as appropriately experienced in a single relationship" (Weis & Slosnerick, 1981, pp. 350-351). At the

other end of the spectrum is the social script, which views romantic relationships as non-exclusive; extramarital relationships are not feared. According to Weis and Slosnerick (1981), "individuals using this script are likely to disassociate sex, love, and marriage; it has been suggested that this disassociation makes extramarital sexuality more acceptable and less threatening" (p. 351). Weis and Slosnerick (1981) and Johnson (1970) have argued that non-sexual extramarital relationships, the type of relationship approved by those who adhere to a social script, act as a gateway to sexual extramarital relationships. Decades later, a similar argument was described by Glass and Staeheli (2003): "people who truly are initially just friends or friendly colleagues slowly move into the slippery slope of infidelity" (p. 2). Moreover, Werking (1997) argued that heterosexual cross-sex friends simultaneously negotiate the boundaries of the friendship and the role of romance and sex. According to Werking, cross-sex friends consider their commitment to others, sexual preferences, and their own life circumstances as they navigate the definition of their relationship.

Much of the extant research has focused on answering the how, why, and who of extradyadic relationships, no longer limiting research to married couples (for a review, see Blow & Hartnett, 2005b; Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007; Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2011). A line of research dedicated towards understanding infidelity is not surprising; the statistics of extradyadic participation are staggering. As of the 1990s, an estimated 24.5% of men and 15% of women reported having an extramarital sexual affair sometime in the life of their marriage (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Additionally, Weiderman and Hurd (1999) found an even larger prevalence of extradyadic involvement in dating relationships. Extant research has demonstrated overwhelming support for the

occurrence of extradyadic relationships. Of course, the frequency at which these relationships happen is only one reason why they are important for scholarly research. How these relationships are maintained, how and the nature of the secrets that are kept, how partners discover the third party, and any social support available for the extradyadic partners are just a few areas that remain to be understood by scholars. Thus, this dissertation seeks to provide answers to some of the questions raised about these relationships.

## Key Terms

This dissertation focuses on two major concepts: infidelity and secrecy. Both areas of research have been conducted using several different definitions. For the purposes of clarity in the following section, past definitions of these constructs are discussed as well as the definition employed in this dissertation.

### *Infidelity*

#### *Frequency & Gender*

Extradyadic involvements are devastating to primary relationships. Extramarital sex is the most cited cause of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Betzig, 1989; Previti & Amato, 2004; Steiner, Suarez, Sells, & Wykes, 2011). Furthermore, sexual infidelity committed by a woman, either actual or suspected, is the leading cause of spousal battery and homicide (Shackelford, Besser, & Goetz, 2008). Infidelity is also rated by couple therapists to be the single most difficult problem to treat in therapy (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Despite the destructive power of extradyadic involvement, in the early 1980s, Thompson (1984) estimated a 40% -76% probability of at least one member of a married couple having an affair of some kind. Although Thompson did not stipulate what

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types of behaviors are necessary to consider the involvement "an affair," Atkins et al. (2001) were more specific, proposing that 20% - 25% of all Americans will have sex with someone other than their spouse while they are married. This figure echoes Laumann et al.'s (1994) study, reporting that 25% of married men and 15% of married women admitted to having engaged in extramarital sex at least once. A conservative interpretation of these figures implies that, although a little more than half of all married couples remain monogamous, approximately 25% will experience some form of infidelity over the course of their marriage. Moreover, despite the fact that much of the research has focused on marital couples, dating relationships appear to be more susceptible to infidelity. According to Boekhout, Hendrick, and Hendrick (2003), 59% of college men and 44% of college women reported being sexually and/or emotionally unfaithful at least once. Wiederman and Hurd's (1999) findings suggest that, as high as the numbers reported by Broeckhout et al. are, they potentially under-report sexual infidelity as, in Wiederman and Hurd's research, 75% of men and 68% of women reported having engaged in extradyadic dating and/or sexual activity while in a serious relationship. Although dating infidelity is not a new phenomenon, scholars have only recently begun to turn their attention to the dating couple. More research is required to understand infidelity in various romantic contexts (e.g., dating, cohabitation, engagement).

Biological sex has received much of the spotlight and has been found to be the most direct predictor of infidelity (Blow & Hartnett, 2005b). The aforementioned statistics demonstrate a gendered pattern in extradyadic involvement. Namely, men are more likely to have extradyadic involvements and will do so with a greater number of

partners than will women (Lawson, 1988). Furthermore, men are more likely to see their extradyadic involvements as justified and, thus, experience less guilt when they engage in those behaviors (Spanier & Margolis, 1983). One of the largest discrepancies between the sexes is the type of extradyadic involvement that occurs. Specifically, men are more likely to have physically intense, sexual experiences; whereas, women are more likely to engage in an emotional bond or some combination of emotion and sex (Glass & Wright, 1985; 1992). Some researchers have even argued that the infidelity frequency numbers for women are misleading because it was not until Glass and Wright's 1985 study that three types of infidelity were defined: sexual, emotional, and a combination of sexual and emotional. When all three forms of infidelity are considered, it was hypothesized that males and females might be closer in frequency than previously imagined (Olive & Hyde, 1993; Wiederman, 1997).

*Definitions*

Original definitions of infidelity dealt primarily with sexual exclusivity in the context of marriage (Green, Lee, & Lustig, 1974; Kinsey, 1948; Peck, 1975; Salzman, 1972). The earliest definitions stem from the legal field, where the term *adultery* was used to describe sexual relations with anyone other than one's spouse (Thompson, 1983). Kinsey (1948) became famous for his examination of not only general human sexuality, but also his numerous surveys regarding spousal sexual infidelity. Succeeding psychologists supported a narrow view of infidelity, despite awareness of emotional infidelity. According to Salzman (1972), infidelity is defined as either overt or covert sexual behavior with another person by a partner, either married or unmarried, involved in an exclusive relationship. Given this limited view of infidelity, data overwhelmingly

supported the stereotype that males engage in infidelity significantly more frequently than females. However, more recent research has found that females are engaging in infidelity at rates that are similar to those of males; they are simply taking part in a different type of infidelity. Thus, more recent definitions were created to encompass all plausible types of infidelity (e.g., emotional, sexual, combined-type). More specifically, in addition to sexual acts outside of the relationship, emotional infidelity "occurs when one person's partner channels resources such as romantic love, time, and attention to someone else" (Shackelford, LeBlanc, & Drass, 2000, p. 644). These more recent definitions range from the vague and all encompassing to the binary. For example, Kluwer and Karremans's (2009) definition includes any number of behaviors or communicative acts that "violate basic relationship norms regarding partners' interactions with others" (p. 1299). Particularly because norms oftentimes evolve through interaction and are not explicitly decided upon, there can be many different interpretations of what constitute violations of a norm. Weeks, Gambescia, and Jenkins (2003) offered a categorical definition, focusing on the two major types of infidelity: "violation of the couple's assumed or stated contract regarding emotional and/or sexual exclusivity" (p. xvii). Weeks et al.'s definition creates a space for emotional infidelity and combined-type infidelity, as well as clarifying the open communication (or lack thereof) of an exclusivity contract between relational partners. Furthermore, this definition can be applied to a variety of relationship contexts and sexualities, while providing for the idiosyncratic nature of relational rules and norms. For the purposes of this dissertation, infidelity will be defined as a "violation of the couple's assumed or stated contract regarding emotional and/or sexual exclusivity" (Weeks et al., 2003, p. xvii).

In an attempt to remain objective in the discussion of infidelity, researchers use several different terms to describe these types of relationships or experiences: (a) infidelity, (b) extramarital affairs, (c) extramarital involvement, (d) extramarital sex, (e) cuckoldry, and (f) extradyadic involvement. Each of these terms achieves value-neutrality, to at least some extent, but some speak more specifically to certain relational types than others. For example, extramarital affairs, extramarital involvement, extramarital sex, and cuckoldry all specify violations of a married relationship, thus neglecting all other variations of romantic relationships. Although *infidelity* negatively connotes a breach of agreed upon rules, extradyadic involvement is not typically studied from a dark side perspective without that breach of commitment to relational rules. Since this dissertation examines the violation of agreed upon loyalty rules across relational types, *extradyadic involvement* and *infidelity* are the terms best suited to encompass all relationship situations.

In keeping with objectivity, three role-identifying terms are employed throughout this dissertation: rover, partner, and lover. The term *rover* identifies the attached individual who engaged in infidelity; *partner* is used to identify the person committed to the rover; and *lover* is employed to discuss the third-party individual involved with the rover.

Furthermore, much of the extant research examines differences between male and female perceptions, behaviors, and experiences with infidelity; namely, research examines sexual acts as the primary type of infidelity. In order for clarity throughout this dissertation, the term *sex* will refer to sexual acts between relational partners. The terms

*gender* and, if necessary for greater clarity, *biological sex* will be used when males and females are being discussed.

<div align="center">

*Secrets*

</div>

*Definitions*

Literature on secrets has two very different conceptualizations of this concept. One body of work treats secrets as a process of concealment, while the other treats secrets as the thing to be concealed. According to Bok (1989), a secret can be anything that requires concealment, whereas to keep a secret is to intentionally prevent information from reaching a certain person. Thus, the word *secrecy* refers to the resulting intentional concealment. Secrecy can also refer to the method by which information is concealed (Bok, 1989). Bok's definition is a strong starting point, but can be easily confused with the conceptualization of privacy. How do privacy and secrecy differ?

Perhaps the answer lies in information ownership and who expects access to information. Bellman (1981) defined *private* as establishing sole ownership rights to some knowledge. On the other hand, Bellman stated that secrets involve "information that the other person may have rights to, but that the possessor chooses, is told to, or is obligated to withhold" (p. 4). According to Wegner, Lane and Dimitri (1994), a secret is more than a mere disparity in knowledge between people, or even a bit of information that is consensually granted to be private. Secrets involve the interests of those who are excluded and so should be understood as socially targeted (p. 287). Wegner et al. (1994) took Bellman's definition a step further by adding an affect clause. Wegner et al. made it clear that secrets, as opposed to privacy, hold the potential to affect a relational other. In addition to interests of the excluded, Kelly (2002) identified the key

difference between privacy and secrecy as being whether the relational partner expects access to the hidden information. If the relational partner does not expect access, then the information is private and might remain hidden without any relational implications. When relational partners expect to be told the hidden information, a secret exists and the secret-keeper must make subsequent decisions to continue concealing or to reveal the secret. Kelly's (2002) conceptualization places the definitional burden on the confidant or relational partner: "expectations are defined from the perspective of the potential confidant in a particular relationship, rather than defined according to some general rule about various social contexts" (p. 195).

A synthesis of these three definitions provides the best definition of secrecy for the purposes of this dissertation: information another has an interest in, rights to, and expects access to, but that the possessor intentionally withholds, thereby excluding the other. Whereas private information is typically characterized by sole ownership, secrets always involve the interests of others. Thus, these additional parties have an impact not only on the final decision to reveal secrets, but also in determining the criteria to be revealed.

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

Infidelity, or the "violation of the couple's assumed or stated contract regarding emotional and/or sexual exclusivity" (Weeks et al., 2003, p. xvii), is a relatively pervasive phenomenon, occurring in nearly 25% of married couples (Atkins et al., 2001) and anywhere from 45% to 75% of dating couples (Boekhout et al., 2003; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Currently, infidelity is the most cited cause of divorce (Amato & Previti,

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2003), is the most difficult problem to treat in therapy (Atkins et al., 2001), and is the leading cause of spousal battery (Shackelford et al., 2008).

Given the gravity of the act of infidelity, individuals might be driven to keep incidences of infidelity a secret. Whereas privacy indicates sole information rights and can rely on active or passive strategies, secrets specifically involve information another has an interest in, rights to, and expectations of access to, but that the possessor intentionally withholds, thereby excluding the other. The active nature of secrecy creates a space for investigation into the strategies individuals employ to reveal or conceal engagement in relationship-threatening behaviors, as well as the strategies individuals use to uncover secrets.

The current chapter provided a rationale for examining infidelity and secrecy, as well identifying key terms and definitions for those terms. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant theories and literature on infidelity, secrecy, and information seeking. Additionally, hypotheses and research questions derived from the reviewed theories are provided.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL REVIEW

Several theories, when pieced together, can provide a lens to better understand infidelity, secrecy, and information seeking. More specifically, the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980), the Revelation Risk Model (Afifi & Steuber, 2009), and the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Afifi & Weiner, 2004) are discussed, in addition to supplemental theories (e.g., Awareness Context Theory and Interpersonal Deception Theory).

## Infidelity Theoretical Framework

Although research on infidelity has benefited from variable analytic studies, theoretical agreement is lacking. Researchers have found various predictors as to why people engage in infidelity, including relationship dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, attraction to another person, revenge, and feelings of inequity in the relationship (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Drigotas, Safstrom & Gentilia, 1999; Glass & Wright, 1985; Roscoe, Cavanaugh, & Kennedy, 1988; Seal, Agostinelli, & Hannet, 1994).

Relationship satisfaction has also been a large focus of academic and clinical research. Buss and Shackelford (1997) found that men who complained about their partner's moodiness and sexual withholding reported greater likelihood of kissing other women, and women who complained that their husbands sexualize others reported a greater likelihood of flirting with other men. For both men and women, dissatisfaction with marital sex was found to be a predictor of susceptibility to extradyadic involvement. Glass and Wright (1985) found a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and involvement for all three types of infidelity: sexual, emotional, and combined sexual and emotional. Moreover, these researchers found that relationship dissatisfaction was mostly

tied to emotional infidelity. Men and women who engaged in the combined type of infidelity were even more dissatisfied with their marriages than those who engaged in a single type of infidelity (i.e., sexual or emotional). Given the abundance of studies demonstrating a connection between relational dissatisfaction and infidelity, Rusbult's (1980, 1983) Investment Model is best situated to provide a theoretical background for infidelity.

*Investment Model*

Rusbult's Investment Model (1980, 1983), grounded in Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), provides explanatory and predictive power in regards to people's continuance in relationships (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) is based largely on the premise that people seek out and continue in rewarding relationships. More specifically, relational partners aim to maximize rewards and minimize costs for both themselves and their partners. Partners who raise costs, or lack the ability or willingness to provide rewards, will increase dissatisfaction within the relationship leading to the potential of eventual relational dissolution. According to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), "the basic assumption running throughout our analysis is that every individual voluntarily enters and stays in any relationship only as long as it is adequately satisfactory in terms of his rewards and costs" (p. 37). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) identified several categories in which rewards might fall: (a) abilities or certain traits that tend to be more favorable (e.g., generosity, enthusiasm, sense of humor, sociability); (b) propinquity or contact and acquaintance between individuals; (c) similar attitudes (e.g., religious and ethnic backgrounds); (d) complementary needs, or the symbiosis that can occur in difference; and (e) power and

status, or that people tend to make relational choices within their own or adjacent status levels. Thibaut and Kelley (1978), in the revision of their Theory of Interdependence, stipulated that rewards refer to whatever gives pleasure and gratification to the person. Costs refer to factors that inhibit or deter the performance of any behavior or segment of behavior—factors such as physical or mental effort or pain, embarrassment or anxiety, and the arousal of conflicting forces of competing response tendencies of any sort. So, although rewards and costs might have the ability to be categorized, they are largely idiosyncratic to the relational partners.

In order to assess the adequacy of the relationship, relational partners require some way of determining the "acceptability of the outcomes they receive from it" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978, p. 8). Thibaut and Kelley (1959, 1978) described two standards to ascertain the receipt of outcomes: the comparison level (CL) and the comparison level of alternatives (CL$_{alt}$). Assessment of CL determines the level of satisfaction in the relationship. CL reflects the quality of the outcomes a person believes they deserve in a relationship and is a function of past experiences, all variants of potential outcomes, the observation of others, and the attainability of the outcome. Outcomes that fall below the baseline of CL indicate an unsatisfactory relationship, whereas outcomes that exceed the baseline are indicative of relational satisfaction.

Comparison level for alternatives (CL$_{alt}$) is the "lowest level of outcomes a member will accept in light of available alternative opportunities in other relationships" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978, p. 9). CL$_{alt}$ is determined by the quality of the alternative sources for outcomes outside of the relationship. As alternative outcomes become increasingly attractive, relationships increase in instability. If the alternative outcomes to

the relationship are not as rewarding as the outcomes within the relationship, the relationship will experience greater stability. Relational partners will be more dependent on relationships that provide greater rewards than the rewards that could be sought/ provided elsewhere.

Rusbult's Investment Model (1980, 1983) expands the elements of Interdependence Theory to analyze commitment to relationships. Thibaut and Kelley's Interdependence Theory (1959, 1978) suggests that dependence on a relationship increases with the increase of satisfaction (via rewards versus costs) and to the extent that alternatives to the relationship are poor (i.e., a person has no choice but to continue with that partner). Rusbult's (1980) Investment Model adds the concept of *Investment Size* as an important construct involved in commitment. Investment size refers to the magnitude and importance of the resources within a relationship: resources either that the parties bring into the relationship or that are developed during the relationship. Not only are resources the things gained from the relationship but, also, resources have the potential to decline in value or be lost entirely upon the termination of the relationship. Investment size relates seamlessly with Interdependence Theory in that people form relationships with those who have resources. Akin to the propositions of Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) that people disclose personal information in the hopes that their partner will not only reciprocate but that, doing so, will bring the partners closer together, the Investment Model presumes that partners will invest resources in order to improve their relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998). Investing resources thus leads to increased commitment by increasing the threat of losing those resources and therefore making relational termination costly.

The Investment Model further suggests that commitment is an outcome of dependence, defining *Commitment Level* as "intent to persist in a relationship, including long-term orientation toward the involvement as well as feelings of psychological attachment" (Rusbult et al., 1998, p. 359). As individuals become increasingly dependent on a relationship, they develop a stronger commitment to the relationship that then increases the likelihood the relationship will continue. According to Rusbult et al. (1998), commitment is,

> a sense of allegiance that is established with regard to the source of one's dependence … the psychological experience of commitment reflects more than the bases of dependence out of which it arises. Commitment is the psychological construct that directly influences everyday behavior in relationships, including decisions to persist—that is, commitment mediates the effects on persistence of the three bases of dependence. (p. 360)

Rusbult (1980, 1983) identified two types of potential investments: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic investments typically preexist the relationship and become linked to the relationship (e.g., mutual friends, shared material possessions). Intrinsic investments are those resources that are put directly into the relationship (e.g., time, effort, emotion). Investments have the potential to be both rewarding and costly, depending on the nature of the resource. Paying for a partner's debt and inputting emotional effort can be costly, but helping a partner to succeed and sharing life's joys can be rewarding. The primary difference between a reward/cost outcome and investments, per Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978), is that, once invested, extrinsic and intrinsic investments cannot be easily removed from the relationship. Investments function to increase the cost

of ending the relationship—to leave a relationship is to sacrifice invested resources (Rusbult, 1983).

Thus, the Investment Model holds two primary propositions. First, individuals will feel more satisfied with relationships that provide high rewards, involve low costs, and exceed their expectations for close relationships (i.e., CL). Second, people will be more committed to a relationship to the extent that the relationship is satisfying, the quality of alternatives (i.e., $CL_{alt}$) is low, and the individual has invested extrinsic and/or intrinsic resources (Rusbult, Johnson, & Murrow, 1986). The Investment Model's propositions have been supported in various relational contexts, such as friendships, marital relationships, dating relationships, gay and lesbian relationships, as well as relationships within organizational settings (Rusbult & Farrell, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1986; Rusbult, Lowery, Hubbard, Maravankin, & Neises, 1988; Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

In the context of infidelity, the Investment Model offers a theoretical framework that not only explains the findings of previous studies, but has withstood tests of infidelity prediction (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). Much of the extant literature, as mentioned earlier, has demonstrated low satisfaction (Glass & Wright, 1985) and interest in a new partner (Cann & Baucom, 2004; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989) as frequently cited justifications for infidelity. These reasons for infidelity speak directly to the tenants of the Investment Model, which uses commitment as the primary gauge of relational persistence. As commitment declines (per the calculation of satisfaction, investments, and alternatives), the likelihood of infidelity increases. The Investment Model can explain why a relatively happy partner might engage in extradyadic activities, as well as why an unhappy partner might choose to remain in an unsatisfactory relationship.

Drigotas, Safstrom, and Gentilia (1999) identified commitment as a *macromotive* in relationships, insofar as feelings of commitment

> (a) subjectively summarize the nature of an individual's dependence on a relationship; (b) direct reactions to both familiar and novel situations; and (c) shape tendencies to engage in prorelationship behaviors, even when such actions may be costly, effortful, or otherwise contrary to the individual's immediate self-interest. (p. 510)

Therefore, using commitment as a point-of-comparison construct, relational partners are able to assess the importance of their relationship and what stands to be lost from the infidelity, as well as anticipate possible reactions to the self's or the partner's infidelity and what preventative or restorative measures can be taken.

The consideration of the dyad as a single entity or identity has been acknowledged by several theorists and is known as *transformation of motivation* by Interdependence Theory (Rusbult et al., 1998; Thibaut & Kelley, 1978). Transformation of motivation is the process by which individual interests in relationships become subsumed within each other and transformed into consideration of what is best for the relationship or the partner over the self. Transformation of motivation has implications for infidelity in relationships such that individuals are more likely to consider the outcome of their actions and the consequences those actions might have for themselves, their partner, or the relationship (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999). Additionally, transformation of motivation enables partners to take a more long-term view of the relationship, analyzing not just immediate consequences but how present actions can

affect commitment in the longer term (Rusbult et al., 1998) thereby limiting the possibility for infidelity.

The Investment Model has successfully predicted dating infidelity, as well as adult romantic relationships (e.g., marriage, cohabiting), based on a number of variables and demographics (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999; Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1986). Rusbult et al. (1998) developed the Investment Model Scale from Rusbult's previous work on the Investment Model. The Investment Model Scale has been used in subsequent research concerning abusive relationships (Rhatigan & Axsom, 2006), dating relationships (Drigotas, Safstrom, Gentilia, 1999), longitudinal studies of married couples (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2001), and even brand loyalty (Li & Petrick, 2008).

Research has successfully pinpointed the frequency of infidelity, who is engaging in extradyadic activities and why. These strides are important for clinicians, academics, and lay people alike. However, much of the infidelity literature examines the primary relationship and neglects secondary or extradyadic relationships.

Extant research has determined that people generally believe infidelity is wrong and damaging to relationships. Because of the negative stigma infidelity carries, keeping any such behavior secret seems to be most important.

<div align="center">Secrets</div>

Many relationships experience secrecy at some point during the relational lifespan. In fact, many people often report keeping at least a few secrets from relational partners (Caughlin, Scott, Miller, & Hefner, 2009). Secrets are antithetical to the prototypical healthy relationship, which is oftentimes marked by openness and honest disclosure. The revealment of a secret is a risky choice, given the damage the mere *act* of

secret keeping can cause, which can include varying degrees of deception. Typically, a secret keeper has two options: to reveal the secret or to conceal the secret. Therefore, a review of literature regarding revealing and concealing follows.

*Revelation*

Medical and psychological research has shown that concealing secrets can contribute to numerous health problems, such as headaches, nausea, and back pain (Kelly, 1999). People who conceal personal information tend to be more anxious, shy, and depressed, compared to those who do not conceal information (Kelly, 1999; Stiles, Shuster, & Harrigan, 1992). In an examination of the health effects of writing about traumatic experiences, which are oftentimes kept secret, Pennebaker and Beall (1986) asked undergraduate participants to write for four consecutive days about: (1) a trivial event, (2) the facts regarding a personal traumatic event, (3) the emotions regarding a personal traumatic event, and (4) both the facts and emotions regarding a personal traumatic event. The participants who wrote about both the facts and the emotions regarding the traumatic event made fewer subsequent visits to the health center during the six months between the last day of writing and the follow up. Thus, revelation of personal traumatic events improved immunological functioning. Pennebaker and Beall determined that health benefits were dependent not just on the communication of the traumatic events, but on the depth of the expression of thought and emotion. In addition to the sheer health benefits of revealing secrets, several different theories have emerged to explain why people disclose their secrets.

*Early theories of revelation*

Catharsis is generally understood to mean a venting of pent-up emotions or a behavioral expression of emotions (Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack, 1999; Kelly, 2002). Catharsis is largely found in the field of psychotherapy as an integral part of various approaches to therapy (Kelly, 2002). Catharsis and the cathartic method, or the talking cure, is hypothesized to work because inhibiting behavior, thoughts, or feelings over a period of time places cumulative stress on the body and mind. Thus, purging inhibitions (i.e., catharsis) relieves the body and mind of this undue stress (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Pennebaker, Mayne, and Francis (1997) conducted two studies examining catharsis in the context of trauma and found that individuals experienced greater health when they disclosed traumatic events. Better health was also associated with the use of positive emotion words relative to negative emotion words. Furthermore, writing about trauma has been linked to higher grades among college students (Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996). Although Pennebaker's program of research deals specifically with catharsis of traumatic events, laypeople tend to view catharsis as an effective strategy for dealing with secrets and perceive other people to value catharsis more highly than gaining insight into secrets (Kelly, 1997). However, traumatic events are not always considered to be secret information and secrets are not always about traumatic experiences. Through the fever model, Stiles (1992) provided a big picture of catharsis and brought catharsis out of the specific instances (i.e., traumatic events) employed by Pennebaker.

Stiles' fever model is based on the underlying assumption that distressed people will be compelled to disclose their distress due to internal pressure (Stiles, 1987). When

confronted with psychological distress (i.e., anxiety, depression, fright, anger), individuals are more likely to disclose in order to gain psychological homeostasis, as well as to promote self-understanding (Stiles, Shuster, & Harrigan, 1992). Thus, according to Stiles et al. (1992), "the relationship of disclosure to psychological distress is analogous to the relationship of fever to physical infection: both are indicators of some underlying disturbance and part of a restorative process" (p. 980). According to the fever model, distress can lead to exaggerated intrapersonal communication (e.g., thoughts, feelings) and can distract the individual from focusing on events happening around the self (Stiles et al., 1992). People will disclose more frequently during times of distress because they tend to be consumed by their own selves and are less attuned to the people, events, and objects around them. Put simply, "people who are distressed are preoccupied with their problems" (Stiles, 1987, p. 261).

Similar to Stiles' fever model, Lane and Wegner (1995) also assume the secret keeper becomes preoccupied by thoughts surrounding the secret, thus getting caught in a circle of thought suppression and intrusion. One fundamental assumption of Lane and Wegner's model is that most people use thought suppression as the primary strategy in maintaining a secret; that is, the secret keeper will try to think of other things besides the secret in order to refrain from revealing the secret. However, thought suppression appears to be a catch-22. When people actively try not to think of something, the very act of suppressing the information makes that information hyper-accessible. Thus, thought suppression creates the cognitive environment for the secret to intrude, ensuring the secret takes center stage in cognition. This intrusion causes a renewal of efforts at thought suppression; thought suppression and thought intrusion occur cyclically in response to

each other. People might choose, then, to disclose the secret in order to alleviate some of the cognitive consequences of secret keeping.

Although much of the extant research on "revealment" is found within a psychological framework, communication scholars are beginning to examine secrets from an interactive lens. For example, Vangelisti, Caughlin, and Timmerman (2001) examined the criteria people use to decide on the revelation of family secrets. Each criterion supports the social aspect of secrets by requiring the consideration of the other in the decision to reveal or to continue concealing the secret. Vangelisti et al. developed 10 categories of criteria. Participants reported revealing secrets if: they felt revealing would help the other person; they found out the person with whom they were speaking had a similar experience; they were asked directly or circumstances would reveal the secret anyway; the problem was escalating or there was a recurrence of the problem; they knew they would not be attacked or rejected; the topic came up in conversation; the secret would bring the revealer and the other closer together; there was an important reason the other needed to know the secret; they were given permission to reveal; and/or the possessor and the other shared a family membership. The final (eleventh) category covered those individuals who indicated that under no circumstances would they reveal a secret. Interestingly, Vangelisti et al. determined that the topic of the secret was independent of the criteria used to make the decision to reveal or conceal the secret.

*Revelation risk model*

Afifi and Steuber (2009) created the Revelation Risk Model (RRM) through a combination of the preceding theories/concepts (i.e., the fever model, catharsis, and criteria for revelation) and the concepts of risk and communication efficacy. The RRM

not only summarizes many foundational ideas in information regulation research (e.g., secrets, disclosure), but provides the most comprehensive theoretical framework to explain decisions to continue concealing secrets or to reveal them, as well as the strategies people use in revealment.

The RRM first and foremost proposes that people assess the risks involved with disclosure of their secrets. An individual's assessment of these risks can predict willingness to disclose secrets to either a confidant or the target. Feelings of risk stem from three sources: (1) risk to the self (self-protection); (2) risk to the relationship (relationship protection); and (3) risk to other people (other protection). According to Afifi and Guerrero (2000), self-protection involves concealing secrets in order to protect the self from ridicule, embarrassment, prodding, or general exposure. Oftentimes, self-protection can emerge from negative past experiences. Relationship protection "focuses on individuals restricting their privacy boundaries in an effort to preserve their relationship or prevent it from harm, to protect a cohesive bond that already exists, or protect other relationships" (Afifi & Steuber, 2009, p.148). Lastly, other protection describes the individual's concern for the other if the secret were to be revealed. Individuals might worry about hurting the target of the secret or the feelings of others who surround the target (e.g., family member).  The greater the disclosure risk from any of these three sources, the more likely people are to continue concealing their secret. Moreover, the risk associated with a secret is largely based upon the valence of the secret. Negative secrets will pose a larger risk, which might be one reason why some people report never sharing a secret, no matter the circumstances.

In addition to risk assessment, the decision to reveal a secret is affected by a number of conditions. Similar to Vangelisti et al.'s (2001) criteria for revealing secrets, Afifi and Steuber (2009) outlined three primary conditions under which people are more likely to reveal a secret: (1) the teller had a need for catharsis; (2) the respondent needed to know or had a right to know the information; and/or (3) the teller was confronted with a request from the target or others for the secret. As previously discussed, people have been known to reveal secrets to purge themselves of the stress associated with keeping the secret. People often reveal secrets simply to feel better or gain new insight into the secret or their self.

As suggested by Petronio's (2002) Communication Privacy Management theory and Kelly's (2002) research on secrets, people outside of the secret can have ownership rights to the concealed information. Ownership rights might also be present without the outsider's knowledge; that is, the target might not be aware the information exists. The secret keeper could be the only party who knows the target should be included in the secret. Afifi and Steuber (2009) argued this discrepancy in awareness can incite cognitive dissonance, whereby the act of concealing pertinent information sits in contradiction to the script for healthy relationships. Concealing information from relational partners can create feelings of guilt, which can lead to rumination, particularly if the secret keeper is aware of the target's ownership rights. Afifi and Steuber's (2009) second condition under which people reveal secrets makes use of Lane and Wegner's (1995) preoccupation model. As previously discussed, the preoccupation model details the cognitive processes within secret concealing and revealing. More specifically, when individuals actively conceal information, they are more apt to become preoccupied with the very information

they are trying to hide. The more people try not to think about the secret, the more they cannot stop thinking about it. Thus, people oftentimes reveal their secret to break the rumination and guilt associated with concealing information.

Afifi and Steuber's (2009) third, and final, condition that can prompt secret revelation is the extent to which people ask for the information. Lane and Wegner (1995) introduced the idea that individuals outside of the secret might inadvertently pressure the secret keeper to reveal the secret. Unintentional pressure to reveal can be manifest through conversation on the topic of the secret, or even by the target's mere presence. Afifi and Steuber (2009) asserted that, in addition to indirect coercion, friends and family who know about the secret might attempt to convince the secret keeper to reveal the information to the target. Essentially, Afifi and Steuber (2009) argued that pressure to reveal a secret can be direct or indirect.

In addition to risk assessment and willingness to reveal, the RRM includes communication efficacy as an important aspect of the decision to reveal a secret. Communication efficacy, or the ability to effectively communicate information to another individual, fluctuates with the risk assessment of revealing the secret. According to Afifi and Steuber (2009),

> when the assessment of the risk is high, people should feel less confident in their ability to disclose the secret. In other words, when people are worried about what might happen to themselves, their relationships, or others, they are more likely to believe that they would not know how to talk about the secret in a way that will produce a positive outcome. (p. 150)

Taken together, the RRM successfully explains and predicts an individual's decision to reveal a secret. Essentially, individuals assess the risk to themselves, the relationship, and others who are associated with the secret or the disclosure. The valence of the secret and the degree of closeness to the target of disclosure both influence the assessment of risk. Once risk is assessed, individuals evaluate their willingness or readiness to reveal the secret. Individuals are more likely to be ready to disclose secrets for catharsis, if the target individual needs to know the secret, if there is external pressure to reveal the information, and/or if they are confident in their ability to communicate the information (i.e., communication efficacy).

Although a more practical application, Kelly's (2002) decision-making flow chart shares a few aspects with the RRM. Kelly (2002) suggested that secret keepers ask themselves four key questions in regards to disclosing information: (a) is the hidden information secret (i.e., does the other person expect access); (b) is the other person an appropriate confidant (i.e., discreet, nonjudgmental, accepting); (c) is the other person likely to discover the secret; and (d) is the secret troubling in the relational context? Kelly's (2002) model helps the user quickly assess risk and their personal readiness to reveal the secret. Kelly's (2002) model is a nice shortcut, but the RRM offers a more thorough lens for understanding and predicting the disclosure of secrets.

*Strategies to reveal secrets*

Once an individual makes the decision to reveal a secret, he/she must communicate that secret in some fashion. In a second study concerning the development of the RRM, Afifi and Steuber (2009) investigated the strategies that individuals use when they are disclosing their secrets. Results confirmed six categories of strategies: (a)

preparation and rehearsal; (b) directness; (c) third party revelations; (c) incremental

disclosures; (d) entrapment; and (e) indirect mediums. Preparation and rehearsal includes

practicing the disclosure of the secret with other people first in order to create a script for

revelation to the target. Directness includes telling the secret in a face-to-face situation,

either by the secret-keeper's instigation or another person's request for information. Third

party revelations occur when the secret-keeper discloses to a person, knowing that the

recipient of the disclosure will pass along the information to subsequent others (including

the target). Incremental disclosures involve testing the waters by telling portions of the

secret in order to gauge the recipient's reaction. Entrapment involves the secret-keeper

being forced to disclose the secret, either through direct confrontation or situational

necessity. Finally, indirect mediums involve the secret being disclosed through various

types of media (e.g., telephone, email). Participants mixed and matched various

strategies, although a greater degree of risk predicted greater use of entrapment or

preparation (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Research on the strategies employed in the

disclosure of secrets remains an area of research in need of growth.

Although nearly every article on secrets states that there is an abundance of

literature on concealing and revealing, citations are almost never provided in regards to

secret keeping. In actuality, very little scholarship has focused on why and how people

conceal secrets. Research on secrets has been largely devoted to the cognitive processes

behind keeping secrets and the processes and effects of revealment. When scholars do, in

fact, include a discussion of concealing secrets, it is typically a small paragraph offered in

juxtaposition to why people reveal secrets (Afifi & Caughlin, 2006; Caughlin &

Vangelisti, 2009; Kelly, 2002; Kelly & McKillop, 1996). The irony is that the

examination of concealment requires some degree of revealment by the research participants. Despite the paradoxical nature of scholarly work in understanding concealment, there have been some interesting insights into the world of the secret keeping.

<center>*Concealment*</center>

*Reasons to conceal*

Even though a multitude of reasons exist for why a person would want to keep a secret, scholars have identified a number of common ones. Vangelisti's (1994) seminal piece on the functions of family secrets was the first to discuss the most commonly held reasons for keeping secrets. Even though Vangelisti's work was conducted under the guise of family communication, many of the reasons cited in her studies demonstrate transferability to other relational situations. One of the most frequently cited reasons for keeping a secret is out of fear of negative evaluation by others (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Caughlin & Petronio, 2004; Lane & Wegner, 1995). More generally, secret keepers demonstrate a concern towards unknown reactions if the secret were revealed. In relation to a fear of reaction and evaluation from others, people oftentimes keep secrets to maintain relationships. Individuals often report keeping secrets because they are concerned that disclosing the information might harm their relationship with the person to whom they thought about revealing the information (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Additionally, secrets can involve more people than the secret keeper. For example, a crime could be committed by two (or more) friends. Infidelity, the focus of this dissertation, involves, at minimum, two people and, arguably, at least three: the two persons engaged in the extradyadic affair and the person who is in a relationship with one

of them. Essentially, in many (most) cases, individuals keep secrets to maintain a

relationship with the person who shares their secret.

Secrets can also be kept as a form of defense (Petronio & Bantz, 1991). Petronio

and Bantz (1991) conducted a study examining the use and effect of prior restraint

phrases (e.g., "don't tell anyone this, but…") and found that, more often than not, when

individuals used prior restraint phrases (PRP), they expected the information to be passed

on. Thus, when people share secret information, they are quite aware of the potential

ramifications of that disclosure. The recipients of the disclosure, according to Petronio

and Bantz, live up to the assumption that they will pass along the secret. Not only do

secret keepers choose to maintain their secret to protect risking trust in the relationship,

but also to prevent the information becoming a weapon (Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-

Theune, & Miller, 2005).

As introduced earlier in the discussion of the RRM, individuals sometimes keep

secrets because they anticipate the disclosure will be challenging and perceive their own

communication efficacy or that of the target of the disclosure to be lacking (Afifi &

Steuber, 2009). Finally, Vangelisti (1994) and Petronio (2002) agree that, occasionally,

people keep a secret due to privacy, or the belief that the information is not relevant to

others.

*Strategies for concealing*

Very little scholarly research exists in regards to types of strategies used to

conceal information. Caughlin et al. (2009) broke new ground in the secrets literature by

contributing a two-part study on putative secrets. Putative secrets exist in situations

where "from the perspective of the secret keeper, the information is supposedly a secret,

but, unbeknownst to the secret keeper, the information is actually known by another person, whom we refer to as a putative secret perceiver" (p. 714). Caughlin et al. were among the first to examine secrets from the perspective of someone other than the secret-keeper. In the first study, putative secret perceivers responded to an open-ended question dealing with how the secret keeper concealed the information from others. A measure was created from open coding conducted in the first study. Factor analysis of the measure indicated four types of strategies to conceal secrets. The first was overt deception and is characterized by blatantly trying to cover up the information, lying to keep the secret, hiding the secret, or making false statements. Topic avoidance, the second strategy, is characterized by avoiding subjects related to the secret, not introducing the subject of the secret, or changing the topic of the conversation. The third strategy, physical avoidance, is characterized by the secret keeper avoiding seeing the target, or attempting to avoid conversation with the target. The fourth and final strategy, acting normal, is characterized by pretending as though nothing unusual was happening or that everything was fine. The strategies reported are consonant with extant literature on deception, thus a brief overview of interpersonal deception theory and deceptive strategies follows.

*Interpersonal deception*

Interpersonal deception theory (IDT), as articulated by Buller and Burgoon (1996), is the first theory of deception from an interaction-based perspective. IDT privileges the social factors that influence deception, such as the dynamic nature of interpersonal communication. First, deception is defined as, "a message knowingly transmitted by a sender to foster a false belief or conclusion by the receiver" (p. 205). IDT is based on three underlying assumptions: humans are goal-oriented; information

management is fundamental to communication; receivers are active participants in deception (Burgoon & Buller, 2008). These three primary assumptions were used as a launch pad for IDT's original 18 propositions (1996) and subsequent addition of three propositions (2008), which "cover the entire process of deceptive communication" (Burgoon & Buller, 2008, p. 229). Generally speaking, IDT offers these overarching principles (for a review of specific propositions, see Burgoon & Buller, 2008): communication evolves; people adapt to their conversational partners; their [the deceivers] success in being understood and believed is influenced by their own feelings, thoughts, and actions, and the conversational context. IDT predicts that deceivers capitalize on people's trust in one another's truthfulness (p. 235).

Moreover, Buller and Burgoon's IDT differentiates between strategic and nonstrategic deception. Strategic deception need not be conscious and completely reflexive, but is goal-oriented and can reflect varying degrees of intention and awareness (Buller & Burgoon, 1996). Interactants can oftentimes demonstrate subconscious, unintentional behavior. Known as *leakage* in deception literature, nonstrategic deception "usually reflect[s] perceptual, cognitive, and emotional processes accompanying message encoding and decoding or the communicative situation" (Buller & Burgoon, 1996, p. 207). Specifically, strategic behaviors are manipulated by the deceiver to foster an image of veracity; whereas, nonstrategic behaviors are cues that are leaked out of the deceiver, thereby allowing some degree of deception detection.

O'Hair and Cody (1994), upon reviewing deception literature, pieced together a 5-level taxonomy of deceptive behaviors or communicative acts. O'Hair and Cody's taxonomy appears to largely agree with Buller and Burgoon's IDT assumptions and

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principles. The first, and most obvious type of deception, *lies* represent direct acts of falsification to foster a belief in the receiver that is contrary to the truth. *Evasion*, also known as equivocation, is intended to sidestep or redirect communication away from the truth or the secret. *Overstatement* is used to exaggerate the facts, whereas *concealment* is used to omit, hide, or disguise the truth. Finally, *collusion* is a set of behaviors in which the deceiver and the target collaborate in the deceptive act.

## Information Seeking

When individuals encounter uncertainty, one response is to seek out more information, in order to manage that uncertainty. Uncertainty is more likely to exist in particular situations, at certain times, and within certain relationships. Information seeking behaviors are often marked by a desire to reduce uncertainty and some degree of efficacy. A review of literature regarding awareness contexts is presented, followed by the theory of motivated information management.

### *Awareress Contexts*

For communication scholars, the systematic inquiry of events within an interaction is paramount. Particularly in variable analytic examinations, factors that affect an interaction (e.g., satisfaction, gender, efficacy) are studied to gain answers to posited research questions. Of interest here are the awareness contexts that surround and affect interactions.

> An awareness context is the total combination of what each interactant in a situation knows about the identity of the other and his [sic] own identity in the eyes of the other …. A more general definition of awareness context is the total

combination of what specific people, groups, organizations, communities or

nations know about a specific issue. (Glaser & Strauss, 1964, p. 670)

In the larger category of infidelity, awareness contexts can set the stage for information

seeking (or lack thereof) by the relational partner. Although Glaser and Strauss' (1964)

articulation of awareness contexts is offered in relationship to death and dying research,

their typology of contexts is useful for the purposes of this dissertation. First, the open

awareness context exists when each interactant is aware of the other's true identity and

their own identity from the perspective of the other. Within the scope of this dissertation,

for example, an open awareness context occurs when both relational partners know about

the extradyadic behavior and are aware of each other's knowledge. A closed awareness

context exists when one interactant does not know either the other's identity or his/her

own identity from the perspective of the other. For example, oftentimes, only the partner

engaging in extradyadic activities knows about the infidelity, thus creating a closed

awareness context. A suspicion awareness context is an adaptation on the closed

awareness context, such that one interactant suspects the true identity of the other or the

other's view of his identity, or both. For example, an extradyadic relational partner might

believe he/she is operating within a closed context, where there actually is a suspicion

context in which the monogamous relational partner is testing suspicions. Finally, a

pretense awareness context, a modification of the open context, occurs when both

interactants are completely aware but pretend not to be.  In other words, both relational

parties know about the extradyadic involvement, but choose not to acknowledge it.

    As introduced by the suspicion context example, awareness contexts are subject to

change depending on interactions. With each line put forward by the interactants, an open

context can quickly shift to a pretense context, and then to a closed context. That is, a stable awareness context does not exist; each awareness context is relatively as stable or unstable as the next. However, "within a given substantive area, differential degrees of stability may become apparent" (Glaser & Strauss, 1964, p. 671). Glaser and Strauss (1964) offered dying as one substantive area that might least often experience a suspicion context as, in each interaction with doctors and staff, the patient's suspicions will be resolved. In the case of infidelity and secrets, the suspicion and closed awareness contexts are likely to be more common within relationships. Much of the existing research has been conducted from the open or closed context; either individuals act to conceal their secrets, or they decide to reveal their secrets. Very little research deals with communicative behaviors in a suspicious context or a pretense context. Therefore, the following sections deal with secrets from the target's perspective. More specifically, how a target might move from a closed context to either one of suspicion, pretense, or openness.

<p align="center"><em>Uncertainty Management</em></p>

The major premise of uncertainty reduction theory (URT) is that, when strangers meet, their primary goals is to reduce uncertainty and/or be able to predict the behaviors of the other. Berger and Calabrese (1975) defined uncertainty as people's inability to do this very thing: predict their own behavior and the behavior of others. The theory has 7 axioms that provide for a general relationship between decreased verbal communication, nonverbal expressiveness, intimacy of content, similarity between partners, and liking, and increased information seeking and reciprocity.

The theory has since developed and become more nuanced, accounting for uncertainty within established relationships (Berger, 1987; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985), and is able to address doubts individuals experience within close relationships (Knobloch, 2007). Extant research has highlighted four types of uncertainty. Relational uncertainty is the confidence people have with their involvement in an interpersonal relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). According to Berger and Bradac (1982), relational uncertainty is an umbrella, encompassing self, partner, and relationship ambiguity. Self-uncertainty deals with the confidence individuals have about their own commitment to or involvement with a relationship. Partner uncertainty involves the confidence people have with their partner's commitment to and involvement in an interpersonal relationship. Relationship uncertainty focuses on the ambiguity individuals experience about the dyad as a unit. Knobloch and Solomon (2002) proposed that relational uncertainty encompasses "four content areas: (a) norms for appropriate behavior within the relationship, (b) mutuality of feelings between partners, (c) the definition of the association, and (d) the future of the relationship" (p. 245). Each of these four areas can instigate various attempts at information seeking in order to reduce or manage respective uncertainty.

*Theory of Motivated Information Management*

Demarcated within interpersonal communication, the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM) offers the best theoretical framework in regards to information seeking for this dissertation. Not only is TMIM specific to interpersonal communicative acts, but TMIM also applies particularly to individuals who are actively interested in managing uncertainty (Afifi & Weiner, 2004). Unlike Berger and

Calabrese's (1975) URT, TMIM takes a similar view of uncertainty to that of more recent literature (e.g., Babrow, 2001; Brashers, Goldsmith, & Hsieh, 2002; Gudykunst, 1995); specifically, uncertainty is not necessarily something to be reduced, but managed. Both types of situations exist where people might want to increase their uncertainty (e.g., health diagnoses, relational turbulence), or decrease their uncertainty (e.g., relational development, new employee orientation). Moreover, TMIM asserts that individuals are more likely to manage uncertainty that surrounds information they perceive to be important.

Afifi and Weiner (2004) defined uncertainty as ambiguous, complex, or unpredictable details of a situation; unavailable or inconsistent information; or insecurity in the state of knowledge. TMIM proposes three iterative, interdependent, hierarchical phases in the process of uncertainty management: interpretation, evaluation, and decision. One key contention of TMIM is that uncertainty creates anxiety, which is the primary motivator to manage uncertainty. The first two propositions of the theory are extracted from the assumption that information and uncertainty management begins with anxiety and comprise the interpretation phase:

> Proposition 1: The size of the mismatch between actual and desired levels of uncertainty (i.e., uncertainty discrepancy) about an important matter leads, in a linear fashion, to uncertainty-related anxiety.

> Proposition 2: Anxiety partially mediates the association between uncertainty discrepancy and the information-management process. (Afifi & Weiner, 2004, p. 175)

The interpretation phase occurs when individuals become aware of an important issue

that requires some degree of uncertainty management and anxiety reduction. Once

individuals become aware of their desire to manage uncertainty, they enter the evaluation

phase. The evaluation phase consists of two perceptions: (a) outcome assessments, or the

expected outcomes that an information search might generate; and, (b) efficacy

assessments, or the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as able to reduce

anxiety through an information search. Outcome assessments are made based on the

perceived benefits and costs from an information seeking strategy relative to the

importance and probability of that assessment. In other words,

> Proposition 3: The likelihood of seeking information is a function of the weighted
>
> combination of the three outcome assessment components (outcome assessment,
>
> importance, and probability). (p. 178)

Efficacy assessments are conducted based on the individual's perceived coping efficacy,

communication efficacy, and target efficacy. Coping efficacy reflects an individual's

emotional, instrumental, and network support needed to manage the process and

subsequent results of any particular information management strategy under

consideration. Communication efficacy is commonly defined as an individual's perceived

ability to achieve the communication tasks necessary to complete the chosen information-

strategy (e.g., disclosure, concealment). Finally, target efficacy is the belief that the

information-holder is able and willing to provide accurate and complete information.

These three different types of efficacy culminate into the following proposition:

Proposition 4: The likelihood of seeking information is a function of the weighted

combination of the three efficacy assessments (coping, communication, and target

efficacy). (p. 179)

Furthermore, an individual's efficacy assessment is influenced by his/her previous

cost/benefit analysis (i.e., outcome assessment). Upon determining the rewards or costs

of a given information-seeking strategy, individuals subsequently decide whether or not

they can cope with those outcomes, or fully implement the strategy. Moreover, an

individual's efficacy assessment, the strength of which is determined by valence of the

prior outcome assessment, influences the selection of an information-management

strategy. Afifi and Weiner (2004) offered the following propositions in regards to the

relationship between outcome and efficacy assessment:

Proposition 5: Efficacy assessments are, in part, a function of the outcome

assessments.

Proposition 6: Efficacy assessments partially mediate the effect of outcome

assessments on the selection of an information-management strategy.

Proposition 7: The strength of efficacy's mediating effect in the outcome

assessment strategy selection association is a function of the valence of expected

outcomes. (p. 181)

The final phase, the decision phase, provides three general strategies to individuals who

are motivated to manage their uncertainty and affiliating anxiety: (a) seek relevant

information, (b) avoid relevant information, or (c) reappraise the uncertainty.

Berger and Bradac (1982) distinguished three strategies individuals typically

enact in searching for information: (a) passive strategies, which involve observation of

the target; (b) active strategies, which include asking third parties for information about the target; and (c) interactive strategies, or directly speaking with the target.

Occasionally the evaluation phase determines that the best decision for the individual is to avoid relevant information. Afifi and Weiner's (2004) TMIM specifically deals with active avoidance. When information seeking is deemed to be too risky or costly, individuals will stay away from situations or persons who can offer relevant information. In addition to avoiding information-laden situations, individuals will avoid information by declining opportunities to receive information. An individual, therefore, decides to manage uncertainty by maintaining it, rather than increasing or decreasing it.

The final option in the decision phase is cognitive reappraisal. Cognitive reappraisal requires individuals to reframe the importance of the issue, the desired level of uncertainty, or even the meaning of uncertainty. By reframing or reappraising the uncertainty and the issues that the uncertainty encompasses, individuals are able to reduce their anxiety, maybe even removing it completely.

Empirical analyses of information seeking strategies tend to focus on the three strategies outlined earlier: passive, active, and interactive. However, a need exists to understand how people enact these strategies when they are seeking information that is considered secret.

*Purposive Information Seeking*

Secrets are actively hidden, even though the information seeker might have a right to the information and expectations of full disclosure. The secret keeper might engage in various forms of deceit, avoidance (both physical and topical), or might deliberately attempt to "act normal." Few studies have examined how information-seekers employ the

three types of strategies in pursuit of information that is being actively withheld. Baxter and Wilmot (1984) identified several "secret tests" people perform to gain information regarding the status of their romantic relationships. Although relationship statuses are rarely *secret*, metarelationship communication tends to be face-threatening and is, therefore, a rarity in personal relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984). The secret tests individuals perform include: (a) questioning members of their social network about their perceptions of the relationship, (b) examining the partner's interest in competitors, (c) directly disclosing to the partner, (d) separating oneself from the partner, (e) reducing the rewards available to the partner, (f) publicly labeling the status of the relationship in the partner's presence, and (g) indirectly referencing the status of the relationship to the partner. In a follow up study to Baxter and Wilmot's (1984), Bell and Buerkel-Rothfuss (1990) discovered an additional secret test that they christened "espionage." Espionage can be categorized as snooping, reading the partner's diary or personal letters, or listening in on partner's phone calls. Additionally, nearly half of the tests (49%) led to a direct discussion about the state of the relationship with the partner. Thus, although relational partners are using covert "secret tests" to gain information about their partners, eventually 50% of these secret tests lead to an open discussion about the relationship. Each of these eight tests can be classified into one of the three overarching strategy types (i.e., passive, active, interactive), as outlined by Berger and Bradac (1982).

Baxter and Wilmot's (1984) article on secret tests is built on the assumption of honesty and truth in interaction with relational others. However, as earlier discussed, falsification, deception, and hiding information is common when an individual is trying

to conceal a secret. Therefore, what follows is an abbreviated review of deception detection literature.

*Deception Detection*

Often a focus of psychology research, deception detection literature is dominated by investigations of nonverbal leakage, or cognitive and behavioral "give-aways." Although nonverbal behavior is able to reveal or "cue" deceptive attempts, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the concealing and revealing of secrets, which appear to be more processual than punctuated. Extant deception detection literature focuses on success of detection versus non-success, or accuracy versus inaccuracy at the time of message delivery. Overwhelmingly, research demonstrates that humans are successful approximately 57% of the time (Kraut, 1980), only slightly better than detecting deception by random chance (for a review, see Feeley & Young, 1998). Perhaps the lack of accuracy can be attributed to various research designs, all of which were created with the underlying assumption that detection occurs immediately following the utterance of a lie. The premise that lies are discovered through immediately conveyed verbal and nonverbal cues only paints a portion of the picture.

Park et al. (2002) created an investigation to challenge the assumption that deception detection occurs at the time the lie is told, using verbal and nonverbal cues for the detection. In an exploratory study using open-ended questions, Park et al. found that only 2% of participants used verbal and nonverbal cues to detect deception within an hour of the message. Participants reported using third-party information, physical evidence, and directly solicited confessions most frequently. Participants were likely to combine methods, typically using physical evidence and third party information in

conjunction with solicited confessions (both direct and indirect). Moreover, lies were rarely immediately detected. Rather, a majority of lies were discovered more than an hour later, ranging from a day to a week to even, one year. Park et al.'s exploratory study provides an excellent starting point to investigate the multimodal pathway to deception detection.

The second trend in deception detection literature is an overwhelming focus on success versus failure, or accuracy and inaccuracy in detection. Although accuracy and success are interesting and necessary questions within the context of relationships, the impact of the act of deception detection can have on a relationship seems to be equally interesting and important. Laing (1966) articulated two axioms, "behavior is a function of experience; [and] both experience and behaviour are always in relation to some one or something other than self" (p. 12). In other words, within an interpersonal relationship, the behavior enacted towards each partner is mediated by the experience of each partner and vice versa. Therefore, the very act of engaging in deception detection should have an impact on subsequent interactions or on the relationship itself. One cannot say, according to Laing, how deception discovery attempts will affect relationships. Not only must the detection attempt be perceived, but, an interpretation is required, which is conducted according to some set of criteria. Consequently, interpretations of detection attempts can range from the positive (e.g., "my partner has taken an endearing interest in my workday") to the negative (e.g., "my partner does not trust me"). Most importantly, experience requires both the perception of the act and the interpretation of it. If detection is conducted without the perception of the deceiver, then this is a moot point. However, recent research shows not only that the deceiver's behavior can induce suspicion, but that

the deceived's suspicions can have a reciprocal effect on the deceiver (Burgoon, Bulker, Ebesu, White, & Rockwell, 1996). Receivers were more suspicious when senders sounded defensive, were perceived to dominate the conversation, and hesitant in responding to questions. Furthermore, senders were aware of suspicion on the part of the receiver, such that the perception of suspicion significantly altered sender behavior (Burgoon et al., 1996).

Burgoon et al.'s (1996) study provides initial evidence that suspicion can have immediate conversational effects, but scholarship exists that critiques the efficacy of the probing effect, also known as the behavioral adaptation effect (BAE). Buller and Burgoon (1994) posited that a suspicious interrogator probing a target would force the target to adapt their deceptive message to be more believable. The BAE has remained unchallenged by scholars because of its synergy with communication theory and ideology, mainly that communication behavior is goal-oriented and strategic (Levine & McCornack, 1996). However, empirical data has not supported the BAE (for a review, see Feeley & Young, 1998). In fact, some researchers have found that deceivers only appear more deceptive in probing contexts (DePaulo, Kirkendol, Tang, & O'Brien, 1988; Levine & McCornack, 1996). Like much of the deception detection literature, the BAE has been tested and evaluated primarily under experimental conditions, within a conversational setting. However, as previously established, deception detection does not always occur through probing; oftentimes, the detector uses other means to discover the lie. Research needs to test the BAE under conditions of espionage (e.g., physical evidence seeking, third party testimony) and direct confession solicitation.

Scholars have yet to understand the effect the information seeking process (e.g., seeking physical evidence, third party testimony, etc.) has on the deceptive process (i.e., the act of deceiving and detecting) and the relationship itself.

<center>The Lover</center>

Oftentimes villainized in popular culture or treated as a situational variable in academic literature, the 3rd party in an extradyadic context is yet to be the focus of any kind of empirical investigation from a communication perspective. The lack of extant literature is astounding given the importance of that person's involvement in the primary relationship. The 3rd party is typically identified as the "other woman," the "mistress," or the "kept woman." More recently, the word "lover" has gained traction in order to allow for the possibility of a man as the 3rd party. For the purposes of clarity, the word *lover* will be used to describe any individual, male or female, who is involved in a relationship, either knowingly or unknowingly, with another attached individual.

Within the last decade, psychology began a program to understand the role of the lover from an evolutionary perspective (Schmitt & Buss, 2001). These investigations, although preliminary, provide some insight into relationships that develop despite findings that romantic secrecy is often a burden to relationships (Foster, Foster, & Campbell, 2010). Borrowed from biology, the term *mate poaching* is used in psychology to describe "behavior intended to attract someone who is already in a romantic relationship" (Schmitt & Buss, 2001, p. 894). Short-term mate poaching occurs when poachers are seeking a short-term, temporary sexual relationship. Long-term mate poaching is characterized by the goal of relationship defection and the establishment of a new relationship (Schmitt & Shackelford, 2003). Mate poaching differs from the current

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conceptualization of the term *lover* in that mate poaching is defined as an intentional act, whereby the poacher is aware of the poachee (i.e., the individual whose partner is taken away). Although these contexts certainly occur, equally possible are contexts where a relational status is withheld until later in relationship development.

Schmitt and Buss (2001) confirmed that mate poaching is relatively common among undergraduate students, with approximately 50% of both males and females reporting experience with either short term or long term poaching. Poaching appears to cut across cultures, as well. Schmitt (2004), in tandem with members of the International Sexuality Description Project, investigated poaching behaviors in 53 countries. Results of the survey, involving more than 16,000 participants, indicates that approximately 50% of men and 40% of women engage in either short term or long term poaching. Moreover, mate poachers appear to be successful 50-60% of the time—males more often than females.

Evolutionary principles are currently the only explanatory mechanism used to understand poaching behaviors. According to Davies, Shackelford, and Goetz (2006),

at any one time during the evolution of human psychology, there likely will have been individuals who had mates and individuals who did not have mates. It follows that individuals who had only psychological mechanisms that motivated desire for and successful mating with unmated individuals may have been at a relative reproductive disadvantage. This is because they would have been out-competed in the arena reproduction by any men and women who, in addition, possessed psychological mechanisms that motivated the desire to mate with

already-mated individuals (under certain conditions) and the behavioral output

that enabled successful mating with them. (p. 299)

Furthermore, many hypotheses grounded in an evolutionary perspective are supported by

Schmitt and Buss's (2001) investigation. When men demonstrated that they were able

and willing to provide resources, they were more successful at poaching women away

from their current partners. In contrast, women were more successful at poaching when

they enhanced both their appearance and the male's ego, as well as providing easy sexual

access (i.e., in the case of short-term poaching). These findings reflect evolutionary

psychology quite nicely; attracting an individual who is already attached requires

demarcating oneself as superior in desirable qualities.

However, the evolutionary perspective does have limitations. For instance, Davies

et al. (2006) found that both sexes perceive the costs associated with poaching as

outweighing potential poaching benefits. Both men and women would choose to mate

with an unattached individual over an attached one. Therefore, according to Davies et al.

(2006), the only way for poaching to occur is under circumstances devoid of available

individuals, or the attached individuals must out-compete the unattached individuals.

Davies et al.'s (2006) results are contested in Parker and Burkley's (2009) findings in that

single females were more interested in poaching an attached male than pursuing an

unattached male. Parker and Burkley argued that an attached male has demonstrated the

ability to commit and has undergone a "pre-screening" by another female.

Clearly, research on lovers and mate poachers is still in its infancy. Of interest

here is the perspective of the lover, that is, how the lover becomes involved in the

extradyadic relationship, how the secrecy of the relationship is revealed or concealed

from their standpoint, the potential information seeking conducted, and any deceptive strategies either enacted or detected.

<center>Research Questions</center>

Research on infidelity yields a high volume, yet remains devastatingly incomplete. Although extant research exists predominately within the psychological and clinical realm, infidelity provides a context rich with various communicative practices. Many of these communicative practices are presumed to be relatively absent from monogamous relationships, oftentimes contradicting what is indicated as the norm. That is, relationships are primarily examined with an assumption of openness, honesty, commitment, and fidelity. Extradyadic relationships, on the other hand, necessitate secrecy, deception, and a break of commitment and fidelity. To this end, examining the other side of relationships, a darker side—where the antithesis to the "healthy" relationship is the norm—is equally important. We know from recent research and popular culture, as well as potentially our own lives, that these relationships are relatively common. Although frowned upon, an estimated 25% of married individuals (Atkins et al. 2001; Laumann et al., 1994) and up to 75% of daters (Boekhout et al., 2003; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999) run the risk of entering into one of these relationships. Due to the narrow focus of the current research, scholars are still left scratching their heads about these relationships.

Glaser and Strauss's (1964) work on awareness contexts offers an interesting view of extradyadic relationships. Of course, one could say that research has examined infidelity from the assumption of either an open or closed awareness context. However, one could argue that much of extradyadic activity occurs either in the suspicious (i.e.,

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suspects the true identity of the other) or pretense awareness context (i.e., knows the true identity of the other, but chooses not to acknowledge it). Perhaps the most interesting communicative behaviors occur within the suspicious or pretense context. Namely, suspicion seems to be a major motivator in the extradyadic relationship; people keep secrets and deceive in order to keep suspicion at bay, and relational partners engage in espionage or information seeking tactics to satiate their suspicions. The pretense context perhaps lends itself more obviously to the relationship between the rover and the lover. Evolutionary psychology would argue that lovers are knowledgeable about their partner's status, even to the point that the 'attached' status is a desirable quality. However, there exists a logical argument for both a closed awareness context in these relationships (i.e., the lover is unaware of the partner's status), as well as a pretense context (i.e., the lover knows but does not acknowledge). From the standpoint of the primary partner, a pretense context might be an interesting platform to study cooperative deception.

Given the extensive literature on infidelity, certain hypotheses can be formed that enable a bigger picture of the infidelity context. Of interest here is how the primary and secondary relationships compare to and contrast with each other. Since these relationships coexist, they should be studied as one larger unit, rather than two separate entities. Therefore, using the Investment Model, the following hypotheses are advanced.

H1: As commitment to the secondary relationship increases, commitment to the primary relationship will decrease.

H2: There is a negative correlation between those who are satisfied in their romantic relationships and the decision to reveal their infidelity.

H3: There is a negative relationship between relationship length and the revelation of infidelity.

H4: Relational satisfaction is related to a person's role in the infidelity experience.

H5: Closed and suspicion awareness contexts will be most common in infidelity situations.

H6: The awareness context within the relationship is connected to the revelation of the extradyadic involvement.

Life is not a dichotomy; phenomena are rarely black and white. Of course, examining interactions as presence or absence enables nice and tidy findings. However, living is a messy process filled with grey areas, just as secret keeping is a murky business. Oftentimes, people don't completely reveal or conceal secrets. Rather, sharing sensitive information might be seen as an art form, carefully selecting which pieces to reveal and which should remain hidden. Scholars have taken a dichotomous approach to secrecy, but doing so only provides a piece of the puzzle. Therefore, the next set of hypotheses and research questions are posed in regards to secrets, information seeking, and awareness contexts.

RQ1: What criteria do people use most frequently to make the decision regarding disclosure of infidelity?

RQ2: To whom do people reveal their infidelity?

RQ3: Are disclosure criteria associated with infidelity dependent on who is receiving the revelation?

RQ4: What information seeking strategies do relational partners use regarding their partner's alleged extradyadic involvement?

RQ5: What is the desired goal of information seeking on the part of the relational partner?

RQ6: How do information seeking strategies differ depending on the relational context (i.e., dating vs. cohabiting)?

RQ7: Which party (i.e., primary partner, infidel, or lover) is more likely to engage in a pretense context?

RQ8: What types of partner behaviors stimulate a suspicious context?

<center>Chapter Summary</center>

The current chapter presented a review of relevant theories and literature on infidelity, secrecy, and information seeking. Specifically, infidelity was treated as a dynamic experience that involves the dual-process of (1) revealing and concealing and (2) information seeking. In order to probe further into the experience of infidelity, several hypotheses and research questions were advanced. Chapter Three describes the participants, study design and procedure, and the methods of data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods used to gather data to answer the research

questions and test the hypotheses posed in Chapter Two. The first section of this chapter

describes the procedures. The next section outlines the measurement of variables. The

remaining sections describe the methods of data analysis.

Procedures

All procedures were approved through Ohio University's Institutional Review

Board (see Appendix A). The following section describes the process of participant

sampling, methods for data collection, and the measures employed.

*Sampling*

Participants were recruited through a few different avenues with various success

rates. First, participants were passively recruited via AshleyMadison.com. Ashley

Madison is a dating website for people who are attached and looking to engage in

infidelity as well as for those who are single and looking for involvement with an

attached individual. With over 11 million users, Ashley Madison claims to be "the most

recognized and reputable extramarital affair company" (ashleymadison.com). A dummy

profile was created on the website which detailed the current study and solicited

participants. Although members of the Ashley Madison community were not directly

contacted, the website administrators suspended the dummy profile within 12 hours of its

creation. Problems with this particular venue of recruitment are discussed in the

limitations section.

A large percentage of participants were recruited via snowball sampling. The online survey link was passed through social networks using email and Facebook, which provided exposure to an estimated 2,000 people. Additionally, the study was advertised through Craig's List and the *Chicago Tribune*. The Craig's List advertisements were placed within the community activities section of the website in the following major U.S. cities: Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, Las Vegas, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Portland, and Washington D.C. Each advertisement ran for approximately 6 weeks. The advertisements placed with the *Chicago Tribune* were run in both print and online versions of the newspaper, in the *TribLocal* section, from January 22nd through the 31st (see Appendices B, C, and D for advertisements).

Finally, several website administrators and discussion moderators were contacted for permission to recruit through their websites due to the specialization of these websites on romantic relationships or infidelity. All six websites denied access to their discussion boards or members (for a list of those websites, see Appendix D).

*Participants*

The initial sample was comprised of 414 participants. After removing participants who did not continue the survey following the screening question, or who completed only a small portion of the survey, the final sample was comprised of 262 participants. The rover group included 87 participants (26 males, 61 females). The partner group had 115 participants (35 males, 80 females), and the lover group had 60 participants (20 males, 40 females). Due to the unique characteristics of each group, the descriptive information for each will be presented separately.

*The Rovers*

Participant age ranged from 22 to 72 years ($M = 38.7$, $SD = 12.0$) with a predominately Caucasian racial/ethnic identity (82.5%) and a median income of $40,000-$60,000. Participant sexual orientation was chiefly heterosexual (80.4%), followed by bisexual (13.8%) and homosexual (5.7%). Most participants (65.5%) were married at the time of the extradyadic involvement, and a majority of lovers (90.3%) had knowledge of the primary partner. The relationship length between the rovers and their primary partners, prior to extradyadic involvement ranged from one month to 34 years ($M = 8$ years, $SD = 7$ years). Additionally, the length of the extradyadic involvement, from the rovers' experience, ranged from one night to nine years ($M = 1.5$ years, $SD = 2$ years). At the time of the study, 26% of the participants were currently with both their primary partner and their lover; 42% were with the primary partner but were no longer seeing their lover; 13% of rover participants had left their primary partner for their lover, and the remaining participants (19%) were no longer involved with either individual.

*The Partners*

Partner participant age ranged from 18 to 66 years ($M = 36.2$, $SD = 11.8$) with a predominately Caucasian racial/ethnic identity (84.3%) and a median income of $40,000-$60,000. Participants most frequently reported a heterosexual orientation (83.5%), followed by homosexual (11.3%) and bisexual (7%). At the time of the extradyadic event, two-thirds of the participants were either dating or married (33% and 34%, respectively); the remaining one-third of participants was, according to their reports, single, engaged, or living together. Relationship length prior to becoming aware of the

infidelity ranged from 2 months to 40 years ($M$ = 6.38 years, $SD$ = 7.61 years); a majority

of participants (78%) were no longer with the rover.

*The Lovers*

Participants in the lover group ranged in age from 19 to 69 ($M$ = 38.26, $SD$ =

13.41), were relatively evenly distributed in income (i.e., 76% of the sample was equally

distributed among the first four income brackets), and were predominately Caucasian

(87%). Participants were largely representative of a heterosexual orientation (92%),

followed by homosexual (5%), and bisexual (1%). The average relationship between

lover and rover lasted 2 years ($SD$ = 1.12 years), and ranged from one night to 15 years.

A majority of the participants (75%) were single when they entered into the lover-rover

relationship, and 69% were no longer seeing the rover at the time of participation in this

study.

<div align="center">

*Study Design*

</div>

The study employed a concurrent nested mixed method design (Creswell, 2008),

with the intent of expansion (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). A mixed method

design involves

> the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study
>
> in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority,
>
> and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the research
>
> process. (Creswell, Plano, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003, p. 212)

A mixed method approach to study design enables the researcher to simultaneously

generalize results from a sample to a population of interest and gain deeper insight into

the phenomena under investigation (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell,

2005). Moreover, a mixed method design with an expansion intent aims for both breadth and depth (i.e., to tell the whole story) by including multiple components (Greene et al., 1989).

Thus, a cross-sectional, non-experimental, concurrent nested mixed method design was used to satisfy the overarching exploratory/confirmatory goal of this dissertation. The quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed at the same time, and priority was equally divided between the two data forms (Creswell et al., 2003).

*Data Collection*

In their review of methodology within infidelity studies, Blow and Hartnett (2005a) suggested that anonymity should be a major criterion when conducting research on infidelity. Additionally, because this dissertation involves the examination of secrets, anonymity is paramount for reliable disclosure. In order to achieve complete anonymity, an online survey was created and dispersed. Not only do online surveys provide anonymity, online research can yield large sample sizes, higher statistical power, and enable the inclusion of participants from varying geographical and demographic backgrounds (Barchard & Williams, 2008).

Participants followed the link to the online questionnaire where they were asked to read an informed consent document before continuing. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, identification was not required for consent; rather, participants checked a box indicating consent. If participants provided consent, using a filter question, they were then routed to the questionnaire that corresponded to their role in the infidelity (i.e., rover, partner, or lover). Participants who had experience in two or three different roles in

infidelity were asked to complete the questionnaire using the most memorable experience or role.

<div align="center">Measures</div>

Three separate questionnaires were constructed from a combination of the following measures: Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988); Awareness Context Typology (Marwit, Meuser, & Bryer, 2005); Individuals' Criteria for Telling Family Secrets Scale (Vangelisti et al., 2001); as well as several open-ended questions (see Appendices E, F, and G).

<div align="center">*Relationship Assessment Scale*</div>

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, 1988) is a 7-item, general measure of relationship satisfaction. The scale is a unifactorial measure of relationship satisfaction with an inter-item correlation of .49, Cronbach's alpha reliability of .86, and test-retest reliability of .85 (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). Concurrent validity was supported by moderate to strong correlations with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (.80-.88) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (.64-.74).

Due to concerns of survey fatigue and mortality, the RAS was condensed to a 3-item measure for the purposes of this dissertation. Items that had the strongest face validity were chosen for inclusion on the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha for each dyadic combination resulted in strong reliability (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Cronbach's alpha Reliability on Measures of Relational Satisfaction*

| Dyad | α |
|---|---|
| Rover – Partner | .92 |
| Rover – Lover | .83 |
| Lover – Rover | .85 |
| Partner – Rover | .89 |

*Awareness Context Typology*

Glaser and Strauss's (1964) awareness contexts provide a theoretical framework for categorizing the quality of communication in illness and dying situations. Glaser and Strauss advocate a naturalistic interaction analysis, in order to determine the interplay of awareness contexts and how those contexts function within the larger structural condition. However, Glaser and Strauss offered the following caveat:

> the factor approach is useful only when the analyst is conscious of the location of
> his [sic] conceptual boundaries within a larger developmental, substantive
> scheme, and can thereby explain their relevance to his readers…. (1964, p. 678)

Given the sensitive nature of extradyadic involvement, a naturalistic interaction analysis, while desirable, would be incredibly difficult to achieve. Marwit et al.'s (2005) Awareness Context Typology measure, adapted from Glaser and Strauss's (1964) work

on awareness contexts, is a forced choice measure to assess previous and current states of awareness. The measure presents the four original awareness contexts, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1964), and requires individuals to choose the most representative context, given the specifics of the study. For this dissertation, participants were asked to select the awareness context most representative of their relationship.

*Individuals' Criteria for Telling Family Secrets Scale*

In a study conducted to uncover the criteria people use when deciding to reveal their secrets, Vangelisti et al. (2001) determined 10 criteria: intimate exchange, exposure, urgency, never, acceptance, conversational appropriateness, relational security, important reason, permission, and family membership. These 10 criteria were reflected in a 50-item measurement assessing an individual's criteria for telling family secrets. The original measure achieved reliability scores for the 10 criteria ranging from $\alpha = .77$ to $\alpha = .97$.

 Due to the length of the original measure and concern for survey fatigue and mortality, only the single most representative item for each category was included on the questionnaire. Items were selected based on the original report of the factor loadings such that items which loaded the strongest on each factor were included in the questionnaire.

Additionally, certain items were removed from the scale to better fit the purposes of the current study. For example, consider the item, "if I thought knowing the secret would comfort my partner, I would tell." Although there might be circumstances when the disclosure of a partner's infidelity would be comforting, this is surely not the norm. Items such as this that seemed counterintuitive were removed from the measure. The scale reliability alphas range from .77 to .97.

*Exploratory Questions*

Some research questions cannot be answered through scales or quantitative means. In order to preserve participant anonymity yet achieve meaningful responses, open-ended questions were included in the survey. These questions primarily targeted strategies to conceal information from the perspective of the infidel and the lover, the social network members these parties told about their involvement in a secret relationship, and information seeking strategies and outcomes from the perspective of the partner of the rover.

*Demographic Information*

Finally, each role (i.e., rover, lover, and partner) was explored in a series of questions about the length of their relationships, the current status of the relationship, sexuality, and other supplemental demographic information.

Data Analysis Procedure

*Primary Quantitative Analysis*

PASW 18, a statistical package for the Social Sciences, was used to analyze the data in this study. All quantitative scale data was tested using a t-test, factorial ANOVA, an independent samples t-test, Chi-Square cross-tabulations, and frequencies.

*Primary Qualitative Analysis*

The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. According to Berelson (1952), content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). Moreover, content analysis enables the researcher to discover and formulate categories for quantification (Berelson, 1952).

The rover and lover groups were asked to respond to three open ended questions each, and the partner group responded to four open ended questions. The rover group had 75 participants contribute qualitative responses (16% non-response rate); 111 participants in the partner group responded (3.5% non-response rate); and 59 participants in the lover group responded (1% non-response rate). These contributions resulted in a qualitative data sample of 739 units of individual responses to questions (for a detailed breakdown of responses by group, see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Table 2

*Rover Qualitative Response Rate by Question*

| Question | Number of Responses | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|
| Reason to disclose infidelity to partner | 23 | 30.6% |
| Infidelity revelation target and reason for disclosure | 41 | 54.6% |
| Strategies for infidelity concealment | 74 | 98.6% |

*Note:* Response rate calculated based on sample size for qualitative responses

Table 3

*Partner Qualitative Response Rate by Question*

| Question | Number of Responses | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|
| How infidelity was discovered | 110 | 99% |
| Signs of infidelity | 111 | 100% |
| Strategies used to discover infidelity | 105 | 94.6% |
| Desired outcome of investigating infidelity | 102 | 91.9% |

*Note:* Response rate calculated based on sample size for qualitative responses.

Table 4

*Lover Qualitative Response Rate by Question*

| Question | Number of Responses | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|
| Relationship involvement revelation target and reason for disclosure | 59 | 98.3% |
| Strategies to conceal relationship | 57 | 95% |
| Reasons for concealment or revealment to rover's partner | 57 | 95% |

*Note:* Response rate calculated based on sample size for qualitative responses.

*Constructing the Typologies*

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), conventional content analysis is the best approach when the aim of a study is to describe a phenomenon, particularly when existing theory and literature on a phenomenon is insufficient. Researchers avoid using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002); rather, researchers allow the categories to emerge from the data. This process is similar to the initial stages of grounded theory, as researchers immerse themselves in the data (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

The qualitative responses from each group were read repeatedly in order to achieve a sense of the patterns—the whole of the picture. Morgan (1993) recommended reading the data word for word to derive codes, highlighting exact words that best capture concepts. Through repeated readings of the data and paying particular attention to the specific language of the participants, categories for data emerged.

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*Partner Information Seeking Strategy Typology*

Category development yielded seven types of strategies: interrogation, spoke with friends of partner, direct disclosure, observing behavior, espionage, and accident. Using these seven categories, two coders independently coded 111 partner responses regarding information seeking strategies. This was done to determine the interpretability and exhaustiveness of the taxonomy. These categories, representative responses, and their frequencies are presented in Table 5.

*Interrogation* is an indirect information seeking process. Participants reported asking questions regarding the rovers' suspicious behavior, but never inquired about the infidelity directly. *Spoke with Friends of Partner* included any response that identified the friend of the rover supplying information, whether solicited or not. *Direct Disclosure* describes participants who asked their partner directly about his/her involvement in infidelity. A few participants mentioned watching the rover interact with the suspected lover. These participants were placed into a category named, *Observing Behavior*. Participants also reported following the partner, tracking his/her location through GPS, searching through emails, text messages, and Facebook. These behaviors were classified as *Espionage*. Some participants reported not using any strategy at all but, rather, finding out about the infidelity by *accident*. The *accident* category includes participants who reported accidentally witnessing the infidelity first-hand. Finally, participants reported the rover disclosing the infidelity without solicitation. Whereas the direct disclosure category involved direct questioning on the part of the partner, the *Unsolicited Truth*

category was reserved for those who described the rover approaching the partner of their own volition.

Table 5

*Partner Information Seeking Strategies, Examples, and Percentage of Sample Reporting*

| Strategy | *F* | *%* |
|---|---|---|
| *Interrogation*<br>"Badgering with questions." | 9 | 7.8 |
| *Spoke with Mutual Friends*<br>"I asked some very direct questions to our mutual friends (more my partner's than mine), and eventually wore the friends down, compelling her to tell me what was going on." | 15 | 13.0 |
| *Direct Disclosure*<br>"I asked him outright and he denied it." | 15 | 13.0 |
| *Observe Behavior*<br>"Deductive reasoning" | 8 | 7.0 |
| *Espionage*<br>"Sell (*sic*) phone tracking GPS, text-mail rerouting, hacked her e-mail accounts." | 47 | 41.0 |
| *Accidental*<br>"Stumbled across emails that he accidentally left open in a secret email account." | 27 | 20.9 |
| *Unsolicited Truth*<br>"He came right out and told me that he was with another girl and didn't want to be with my (*sic*) anymore. So I didn't have to try to confirm my suspicions." | 16 | 12.4 |

*Desired Goal of Information Seeking Typology*

Participants were asked to identify the desired outcome of their information seeking in regards to the rovers' infidelity. A close reading of the responses identified

five categories of potential outcome: truth, innocence, guilt, reasons for infidelity, and affirmation of sanity. Some participants indicated hoping to find the truth about their partner's suspicious behavior and were not interested in innocence or guilt. Other participants reported desiring to confirm either the rovers' innocence or guilt. Some partners indicated needing to hear reasons why the rover committed infidelity. Finally, some participants wrote responses that indicated a need to justify their sanity; that is, to confirm their suspicions and realize that they were right. Intercoder reliability for the categories ranged from .78 to 1.0 (see Table 9). These categories, their representative responses, and their frequencies are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

*Expected Outcome of Information Seeking, Examples, and Frequencies*

| Expected Outcome | *F* | % |
|---|---|---|
| *Truth* "Just something one way or the other. I was tired of 'knowing' without really knowing. I wanted to move on either way." | 25 | 23.1 |
| *Innocence* "Innocence because I did not want to believe it." | 24 | 22.2 |
| *Guilt* "I was hoping to discover my partner's guilt. Even if he was not cheating on me, he was lying to me." | 26 | 24.1 |
| *Reasons for Infidelity* "I was trying to understand why, especially since from my point of view things were going great." | 8 | 7.4 |
| *Affirm Sanity* "Get some mental clarity because it was driving me insane." | 5 | 4.6 |

*Signs of Infidelity Typology*

In order to determine what types of behaviors can pique suspicion in a relationship, partners responded to an open-ended question regarding the types of signs or indications that led to suspicions of infidelity. Through extensive reading of responses, five categories emerged from the data: withdrawal, caught in lies, territoriality, antagonistic, and hindsight.

Partners often wrote responses of the rover or the partner withdrawing from the relationship (labeled as "withdrawal"). The withdrawal was represented by a decrease in typical couple behavior (e.g., frequency of sex, quality of conversations, time spent together).

The second category that emerged from the data was catching the rover in lies (labeled "caught in lies"). Partners told stories of various situations where the rover provided information regarding whereabouts and company kept that was known by the partner to be false.

Next, partners described rovers as being territorial over their belongings, deleting call histories and text messages, changing email passwords, etc. Due to the protective nature of the behavior, this category was named "territoriality".

Some partners described the rovers as becoming more confrontational, picking fights, and taking an overly defensive position. These behaviors fell into the "antagonistic" category.

Finally, many participants noted not recognizing signs until after the fact. The

recognition of signs after the discovery of infidelity was labeled "hindsight". These

categories, representative responses, and their frequencies are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

*Indications of Rover Infidelity and Frequencies as Reported by Partners*

| Indication | *F* | % |
|---|---|---|
| *Withdrawal*<br>"She withdrew from me emotionally, and stopped calling as much (this was important as we were in a long distance relationship)." | 51 | 39.5 |
| *Caught in Lies*<br>"Catching him in small lies that didn't add up." | 7 | 5.4 |
| *Territoriality*<br>"Took his cell phone everywhere even on amusement park rides when I always held it in the past." | 14 | 10.9 |
| *Antagonistic*<br>"My partner was quick to anger and dismissive of my inputs into decisions that affected both of us." | 13 | 10.1 |
| *Hindsight*<br>"When I look back, there were usual things, like joining a gym and changing his style of dress." | 13 | 10.1 |
| *No Signs*<br>"None that I recognized." | 18 | 14.0 |

*Confidante Typology*

Category development recognized seven types of confidantes from the rover

group and the lover group: friend, roommate, family member, professional (e.g.,

therapist), lover, partner, and no one.

*Codebook Development*

A codebook (see Appendix H) was created from the initial qualitative analysis of the data. Units for coding were defined based on two separate distinctions (words and themes), depending on the question. For questions related to the target receiving the disclosure, the coding unit employed was the single word. For all other questions, coding units were created based on two types of themes: either a single thought unit or a motif. According to Smith (2000), a theme can be

> the expression of a single idea, a statement about a topic, or a motif. A theme may be expressed in a few words, a phrase, or one or more sentences…each theme in a text unit is identified by some specified criterion and then classified according to its properties. (p. 321)

In the codebook, single thought units are defined as a single idea relevant to the question. For example, strategies for each group were coded into single thought units. Some participants wrote paragraphs of strategies; each unique strategy was identified as a single unit. The second type of theme, the motif, was used to analyze questions that provided a paragraph of content (i.e., rather than a list).

*Coder Training and Reliability*

Six coders (two Caucasian males and four Caucasian females) were recruited to code the data. Since each group was self-contained, two coders were assigned to each group. All coders were trained together on the codebook and the survey software that hosted the code sheet. After an hour of training on the categories and coding units, intercoder reliability was calculated for each coding team using a random sample of qualitative responses from the appropriate group. Cohen's kappa was conducted for each

question in each group (see Tables 8-10). Cohen's kappa is frequently used to measure

agreement between two raters (Berry & Mielke Jr., 1988) and makes a correction for

agreement by chance (Stemler, 2001).  Categories that resulted in a low reliability ($k <$

.80) either were reconstructed or the coders were retrained. For some categories,

intercoder reliability remained low after attempting to reconstruct the category and after

spending more time training the coders. A discussion of these categories and the

limitations is provided in Chapter Five.

Table 8

*Intercoder Reliability (Cohen's Kappa) and frequencies for Rover Responses*

| Item | Category | *k* | *F* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reason for infidelity revelation | Guilt | 1.0 | 4 |
| | Preference for Honesty | 1.0 | 5 |
| | Create Change | 1.0 | 5 |
| | Forced Disclosure | 1.0 | 6 |
| Person revealed to | Friend | 1.0 | 23 |
| | Professional | 1.0 | 3 |
| | Family Member | 1.0 | 8 |
| | Partner | 1.0 | 2 |
| | Lover | 1.0 | 2 |
| | No One | 1.0 | 16 |
| Why revelation receiver chosen | Trust | 1.0 | 9 |
| | Similar Experience | 1.0 | 5 |
| | Understanding | 1.0 | 6 |
| Strategies to keep EI secret | Time/Space | .88 | 26 |
| | Territoriality | 1.0 | 34 |
| | Verbal Strategies | .86 | 36 |
| | Lover Selection | .83 | 10 |
| | No Disclosure | .70 | 13 |

Table 9

*Intercoder Reliability (Cohen's Kappa) and frequencies for Partner Responses*

| Item | Category | $k$ | $F$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Path to discovery | Connect the Dots | 1.0 | 6 |
| | Witness | 1.0 | 18 |
| | Word of Mouth | 1.0 | 33 |
| | Lover Disclosure | 1.0 | 9 |
| | Partner Disclosure | .78 | 34 |
| | Snooping | .80 | 42 |
| Signs of partner's infidelity | Withdrawal | .80 | 51 |
| | Caught in Lie | 1.0 | 7 |
| | Territoriality | 1.0 | 14 |
| | Antagonistic | .64 | 13 |
| | Hindsight | .77 | 13 |
| | No Signs | 1.0 | 18 |
| Information-seeking strategies | Interrogation | 1.0 | 10 |
| | Spoke with Mutual Friends | 1.0 | 16 |
| | Direct Disclosure | 1.0 | 16 |
| | Observe Behavior | .64 | 8 |
| | Espionage | .70 | 46 |
| | Accidental | 1.0 | 27 |
| | Truth | 1.0 | 16 |
| Expected outcome of information-seeking | Innocence | 1.0 | 30 |
| | Guilt | .78 | 32 |
| | Reasons for Infidelity | 1.0 | 8 |
| | Affirm Sanity | 1.0 | 5 |

Table 10

*Intercoder Reliability (Cohen's Kappa) and frequencies for Lover Responses*

| Item | Category | k | F |
|---|---|---|---|
| Person revealed to | Friend | 1.0 | 58 |
| | Roommate | 1.0 | 6 |
| | Family Member | 1.0 | 14 |
| | Professional | 1.0 | 2 |
| | No One | 1.0 | 12 |
| Strategies to keep EI involvement secret | No Disclosure | .77 | 15 |
| | Privacy | .83 | 21 |
| | Deception | .77 | 16 |
| | Territoriality | 1.0 | 4 |
| | Strategic Communication | .64 | 6 |
| | Behave Normally | .73 | 23 |
| Reasons for keeping involvement secret | Protection | .68 | 31 |
| | Apathy | .63 | 18 |
| | Guilt | .83 | 15 |
| | Not My Place | .77 | 7 |
| | Confessed | 1.0 | 1 |

Chapter Summary

The current chapter sought to explain the sampling and data collection procedures for this dissertation. This chapter described the participants, presented the various measures employed, and explained both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Results of this dissertation follow.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS

Using the methods detailed in Chapter Three, the major results of this dissertation are presented here. The results are organized as presented in Chapter Two, beginning with the hypotheses and concluding with the research questions.

## Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis suggested a negative relationship between commitment to the primary relationship and commitment to the secondary relationship (i.e., between rover-partner and rover-lover). This hypothesis was tested and supported using a Pearson product moment correlation. As commitment to the partner decreases, commitment to the lover increases ($r = -.29$, $p < .01$). A post-hoc power analysis was performed for the first hypothesis, with parameters set to a .05 alpha level and a medium effect size of .30. The analysis resulted in achieved power of .96.

## Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis proposed a negative relationship between those who are satisfied in their romantic relationship and the decision to reveal the infidelity. Satisfaction, as measured by the adapted Relationships Assessment Scale, was compared to the decision to reveal the infidelity. Decisions to reveal were treated as a dichotomous, yes or no, variable. Therefore, an independent samples t-test was conducted on the rover data. Although significant, data analysis did not support the second hypothesis, $t(83) = 2.18$, $p < 05$. People who are *more* satisfied in their relationship ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.16$) are more likely to reveal their infidelity secret than people who are less satisfied in their relationships ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.17$). A post-hoc power analysis was performed for the

second hypothesis, with parameters set to a .05 alpha level and a large effect size of .80. The analysis resulted in achieved power of .84.

## Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis speculated a connection between relationship length (i.e., rover-partner versus rover-lover) and the revelation of infidelity. Two separate independent samples t-tests were performed on each dyad. The first t-test, examining the relationship length between the rover and partner and revelation of infidelity, was not significant, $t(83) = -1.13$, $p > 05$. The second independent samples t-test, examining the relationship length between rover and lover and the revelation of infidelity, was significant, $t(23.2) = 2.24$, $p < 05$. The longer the relationship between lover and rover, the less likely the rover was to disclose the infidelity to the partner. A post-hoc power analysis was performed for the second test within the third hypothesis, with parameters set to a .05 alpha level and a large effect size of .80. The analysis resulted in achieved power of .86

## Hypothesis Four

The fourth hypothesis proposed a difference in relational satisfaction based on the person's role in the infidelity. For this hypothesis, there were four groups (i.e., rover-partner, rover-lover, lover-rover, partner-rover) and one continuous variable, thus a one-way ANOVA was conducted on the data. The Omnibus F was not significant, $F = 1.69$ $(3, 338)$, $p > .05$, indicating no significant differences between groups.

## Hypothesis Five

The fifth hypothesis predicted that closed and suspicion contexts would be more common in extradyadic situations than open or pretext contexts. Frequency analysis

partially supported this hypothesis. The total frequencies of all the groups demonstrated the closed awareness context to be the most common ($n = 137$), followed by the open context ($n = 66$), the suspicion context ($n = 39$), and finally, the pretense context ($n = 20$). For specific percentages per group, see Table 11.

Table 11

*Awareness Context Frequencies by Role*

| Awareness Context | Rover | | Partner | | Lover | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *F* | *%* | *F* | *%* | *F* | *%* |
| Open | 14 | 16.1 | 12 | 10.4 | 40 | 66.7 |
| Suspicion | 19 | 21.8 | 18 | 15.7 | 2 | 3.3 |
| Pretense | 2 | 2.3 | 5 | 4.3 | 13 | 21.7 |
| Closed | 52 | 58.4 | 80 | 69.7 | 5 | 8.3 |

*Note*: Percentages are calculated within the group total, rather than between groups.

## Hypothesis Six

The sixth hypothesis suggested a relationship between the awareness context within the relationship and the revelation of the extradyadic involvement. A chi-square cross-tabulation was performed to examine the relation between revelation and awareness context. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2$ (3, $N = 87$) = 62.32, $p <$ .01. Given the small sample size, the likelihood ratio was also consulted and found to be significant, -2Log$\Delta$ (3, $N = 87$), = 58.81, $p < $ .01. Further analysis of the standardized residuals shows that an open awareness context is related to the revealment of the

infidelity ($z$ = 6.3) and a closed awareness context is related to continued concealment of the infidelity ($z$ = -2.8).

<div align="center">Research Question One</div>

The first research question addressed the criteria people use when making a decision regarding the disclosure of their secret. A frequency analysis was conducted on the individual items from Vangelisti et al.'s (2001) Individuals' Criteria for Telling Family Secrets Scale. Participants who agreed or strongly agreed with a particular criterion were considered to support or make use of that criterion. For both the rovers and the lovers, disclosing the secret appeared to require some type of crisis that necessitated their disclosure (22% and 19.1% respectively; see Tables 12 and 13 for detailed frequencies).

Table 12

*Rovers' Criteria for Disclosing the Secret*

| Criteria | *F* | % |
|---|---|---|
| If a crisis arose necessitating disclosure | 58 | 22.2 |
| If secret disclosure was inevitable | 42 | 16.1 |
| If the secret involved a problem and problem worsened | 42 | 16.1 |
| No chance for disclosure | 40 | 15.3 |
| If I knew my partner would accept me after disclosure | 30 | 11.5 |
| If partner first disclosed something similar | 18 | 6.9 |
| If disclosure fit into the conversation | 10 | 3.8 |

*Note:* Disclosure target is the primary partner.

Table 13
*Lovers' Criteria to Disclose the Secret*

| Criteria | $F$ | % |
|---|---|---|
| If a crisis arose necessitating disclosure | 50 | 19.1 |
| If the secret involved a problem and problem worsened | 41 | 15.6 |
| If I knew my confidante would accept me after disclosure | 40 | 15.3 |
| If secret disclosure was inevitable | 39 | 14.9 |
| If disclosure fit into the conversation | 32 | 12.2 |
| If confidant disclosed something similar | 28 | 10.7 |
| If I trusted my confidante more | 22 | 8.4 |
| If my partner thought it was okay to tell | 22 | 8.4 |
| No chance for disclosure | 8 | 3.0 |

*Note*: Disclosure target is a confidante.

## Research Question Two

The second research question focused on determining any differences in decision criteria based on the target of the disclosure. In other words, do people use different decision criteria depending on who will be receiving the disclosure? Initial frequency analysis, as conducted for research question one, indicated that both the rover and the lover participants used the threat of a crisis to facilitate disclosure. Subsequent decision criteria are different for each target, as seen in Tables 12 and 13. Limitations to this data and analysis procedure are addressed in Chapter Five.

Research Question Three

The third research question was concerned with determining who acts as the confidante for the rovers and lovers. A frequency analysis was conducted on the coded units from the open-ended responses for each group. For both groups, friends were the most commonly reported confidantes (28.9% for rovers and 72.4% for lovers). For the rovers, keeping the secret to oneself was reported second most frequently (see Table 14). For the lovers, disclosing to family members or not disclosing at all were reported with equal frequency (see Table 14).

Table 14

*Confidante Identification*

|  | Rover | | Lover | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Confidante | F | % | F | % |
| Friend | 22 | 28.9 | 42 | 72.4 |
| No One | 12 | 15.8 | 10 | 17.2 |
| Family Member | 6 | 7.9 | 10 | 17.2 |
| Professional | 3 | 3.9 | 2 | 3.4 |
| Roommate | - | - | 3 | 5.2 |
| Lover | 2 | 2.6 | - | - |
| Partner | 2 | 2.6 | - | - |

Research Question Four

The fourth research question focused on the information seeking strategies used by relational partners. Individual strategies were coded using the typology presented in Chapter Three. A frequency analysis determined that espionage was the most popular information seeking strategy (41%). That was followed by accidental discovery (20.9%), then by speaking with mutual friends and direct disclosure (13% each), receiving the unsolicited truth (12.4%), interrogation (7.8%), and observation of behavior (7.0%). Additionally, on average, participants relied on one strategy to find information. Participants most frequently reported employing only one strategy (64.8%), followed by two strategies (18.1%), zero strategies (16.2%), and least frequently, three strategies (<1%).

Research Question Five

Research question five sought to determine the partners' desired outcome from their information seeking. Recall Chapter Three described desired outcomes as being coded based on the theme of the response. Frequency analysis of the dominant themes revealed that a large percentage of partners hoped to find the rover guilty of their suspicions (24.1%), followed closely by the truth (23.1%) and then by their innocence (22.2%). A few participants mentioned wanting to know the reasons for the rovers' infidelity (7.4%) and to achieve some form of affirmation of their sanity (4.6%).

Research Question Six

The sixth research question focused on the different information seeking strategies based on the relational context. For example, given that dating couples do not necessarily share a home, are their information seeking strategies different from those

who cohabitate? A Kruskal-Wallis test, a nonparametric test used to test the difference between more than two independent groups, was not significant across all relationship context categories. There does not seem to be a difference between those who are dating, cohabitating, engaged, or married in their information seeking strategy.

## Research Question Seven

The seventh research question focused on determining which party (i.e., rover, partner, lover) would be more likely to acknowledge a pretense context. The lover group reported the pretense context most frequently out of the three groups, with 21.7% stating that they were aware of the rover's partner, but never openly discussed him/her. A smaller portion (4.3%) of the partner group stated that they were knowledgeable about the rover's infidelity, but did not discuss it. Finally, the members of the rover group reported being least likely to be engaged in a pretense context (2.3%).

## Research Question Eight

The last research question focused on determining the types of partner behaviors that can stimulate a suspicious context. Although the types of behavior and representative examples are provided in Chapter Three, a frequency analysis demonstrates that withdrawal is the most commonly reported sign (39.5%) of the rover's infidelity. Next, most participants did not see any signs or indications of infidelity (14%), while some noticed the rovers were becoming more territorial or protective of their belongings than before (10.9%) and noticed that the rovers had become antagonistic and confrontational (10.1%). Moreover, many participants noted that hindsight provided them with the insight into the rovers' signs: only a few were able to catch their rover in some kind of lie (5.4%).

Chapter Summary

This chapter reported the major findings of this research. The chapter presented differences and relationships between groups and variables, as well as frequencies of behavior types. The next chapter will discuss the results of this study in connection with theory and extant literature.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Although research on infidelity, secrecy, and information seeking abounds, few studies have examined the convergence of all three. In fact, in order to understand the full picture of infidelity, an investigation focusing on the perspectives of the three parties (i.e., rover, partner, lover), and the consideration of infidelity as a process, rather than a punctuated moment, seems necessary. In that vain, this dissertation sought to achieve an initial understanding of the infidelity process by conducting exploratory research concerning the views of the three dominant parties.

The first two hypotheses focused on the relationship between satisfaction, commitment, and the decision to reveal the infidelity. The results of the study indicated that the level of satisfaction with the primary partner decreases as the level of satisfaction with the lover increases, and vice versa. Moreover, rovers who are satisfied in their relationships with their primary partners are more likely to disclose their extradyadic involvement to said partner than are those who are less satisfied in their relationships. Previous research (for a review, see Blow & Hartnett, 2005b) overwhelmingly supports the link concerning satisfaction levels between rover and partner, as relational satisfaction has been found to be a primary predictor of infidelity. Moreover, the Investment Model provides a theoretical lens through which to understand varying commitment levels. Recall from Chapter Two that the second proposition held by the Investment Model is that people will be more committed to a relationship to the extent that the relationship is satisfying, the quality of alternatives is low, and the individual has invested some form of resources (Rusbult, Johnson, & Murrow, 1986). The data not only reflects the dissatisfaction between the rover and the partner, thus leading to a decrease in

commitment, but as the satisfaction with the lover increases, the rover becomes increasingly committed to that lover.

The Investment Model, as well as Interdependence Theory, provides an approach for understanding the findings concerning the second hypothesis (i.e., satisfaction is related to disclosure). Transformation of motivation (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), as named by Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978), describes the process by which individual interests in a relationship become unified and transformed, thereby focusing on what is best for the relationship. Although there was a question on the survey asking rovers about the reason of their disclosure, many chose not to answer the item ($n = 76$, 87.3% non-response rate). Despite the high non-response rate, three of the four categories that emerged from the data in preliminary coding stages alluded to disclosing their secret out of guilt ($n = 4$), a preference for honesty ($n = 5$), or a need to create some form of change in the relationship (i.e., act as a catalyst to shift the relationship from its current state) ($n = 4$). So, although the transformation of motivation cannot be confirmed, the possibility exists that rovers disclosed their affair in order to move forward with their relationship in a context of honesty, a decision made for the sake of the relationship. In fact, a majority of the rovers who disclosed their infidelity ($n = 19$, 57.9%) were still with their partner at the time of the study. Only a small percentage of those who did not disclose their infidelity (42.1%) were still with their primary partners, and of those, 86% reported that they were still seeing their lover at the time of the study. For the rovers who continue to conceal their infidelity and remain with both lover and partner (86%), Thibaut and Kelley (1978) might argue those rovers have not entered into the transformation of motivation.

The transformation of motivation further explains results from the third hypothesis; that is, the longer the relationship with the lover, the less likely the rover was to disclose the infidelity to their partner. Just as a context of honesty between rover and partner is likely characteristic of the transformation of motivation, so too is the concealment of the infidelity and the transformation of motivation between rover and lover. Thus, although admittedly speculative, taken together, this research suggests the following three step process: (1) romantic partners become rovers due to relational dissatisfaction with the primary partner and an attractive alternative, (2) during the time of extradyadic involvement, the rover increases his/her relational satisfaction with the partner or lover (either due to circumstance change in the primary relationship or due to the relationship with the lover), and finally, (3) the increase in satisfaction with one of the relationships prompts the rover to disclose or to continue concealing the infidelity in order to strengthen the relevant relationship. The data support the idea that the transformation of motivation is an important element for sustained commitment, and perhaps even monogamy, in a romantic relationship.

Even though there was a large success rate in infidelity disclosure and continued romantic involvement, the majority of participants did not disclose the infidelity to their partner (78%). The decision to continue concealing the infidelity is consistent with the finding of the fifth hypothesis that the closed awareness context was the most common context among rovers and partners, followed by a suspicion context. For rovers and partners, extradyadic involvement was, apparently, largely concealed successfully, and when it was not, partners found themselves in the suspicion context. Lovers, on the other hand, reported experiencing the open context most often. Lovers were not only aware of

the rover's partner, but specifically, the open context requires discussion of the rover's partner. The pretense context, reported second most frequently by the lovers, alludes to the lover knowing of the rover's relationship with the partner, but choosing not to acknowledge it. In the pretense context, the lover knows his or her role in the extradyadic involvement, but the rover and lover do not discuss the partner, thereby fostering a climate of ignorance.

Glaser and Strauss (1964) are clear that awareness contexts are not static; rather, within substantive areas, contexts can be more or less stable with each interaction. Given the amount of secrecy involved in extradyadic involvement, the stability of the closed and suspicion contexts are logical. However, the possibility exists that the suspicion context occurs more frequently than is reported. As indicated by Glaser and Strauss (1964), "the successive interactions occurring within each type of context tend to transform the context…thus, a closed context can be shattered by arousing suspicions; but if suspicions are quelled, the closed context is reinstituted" (p. 671). Since the question on the survey asked about the awareness context at the time of the infidelity, participants were most likely recalling the enduring, stable context. That is, suspicion contexts superficially seem to be the most fleeting of the contexts; as corroborated by the Theory of Motivated Information Management (Afifi & Weiner, 2004), people seek to manage their uncertainty in relationships. Thus, a suspicion context would likely be resolved, either by movement back into a closed context, or movement into an open context. Since the closed context is the most frequently reported context, one might assume that closed and suspicion contexts more often tag back and forth, whereas an open context and a pretense context are final outcomes. The sixth hypothesis illuminates this potentiality; closed

contexts were related to continued concealment of the infidelity, whereas open contexts were related to the disclosure of the infidelity. Therefore, once the infidelity is revealed, it would be difficult to immediately return to a closed or suspicion context.

The last research question focused attention on the types of behavior that might shift the awareness context from closed to suspicious. The content analysis of open-ended responses revealed six categories of suspicious behavior: withdrawal, territoriality, antagonizing behavior, catching the rover in other lies, and hindsight. The most common behavior sparking a suspicion context was a withdrawal from the partner or relationship. One partner provided a list of different types of withdrawal patterns: "less frequency in phone contact, physical contact, diminishing sex life, general loss of interest, using Facebook around me all the time when we would see each other." Another participant alluded to a break in relational norms: "less communicative, emotional detachment, and breaking patterns." The second most common suspicious behavior was a protectiveness of personal belongings, the rover suddenly becoming territorial. One participant noted, "He would hide his cell phone, he put a password on his computer so I couldn't use it, he changed all of his passwords to his email accounts (we used to share email password [sic])." A few participants discussed the deletion of email messages and texts, finding empty inboxes. Just as often, participants noted the rover becoming antagonistic or confrontational, as exemplified by this participant's response: "he would always pick fights with me and degrade me to make me feel I was causing his unhappiness." A few participants explained catching the rover in other lies, which led to their suspicion. According to one participant, "I caught him in lies a lot. Like he would say he was working, training, with a friend… and when I would call I would find they hadn't seen

him in weeks." Finally, some participants discussed the value of hindsight and that many of the signs were not noticed until after the fact: "when I look back now there were signs that I should have picked up on. He often worked late or would say he was going out golfing with the guys from work." Interestingly, in the hindsight category, behaviors that were relatively innocuous at the time are ascribed a suspicious context in hindsight. Perhaps suspicion contexts are needed in order to engage in sensemaking after the death of a relationship; that is, maybe suspicious behavior is more easily recognized after the event than not at all.

For many partners, the suspicion context led to an active search for information about the rovers' alleged extradyadic involvement. The fourth research question resulted in the identification of seven categories of information seeking strategies employed by the partners: espionage, accidental discovery, speaking with mutual friends, direct disclosure, receiving unsolicited truth, interrogation, and observation of behavior. Many of these strategies were used in combination; rarely were they relied upon as a single strategy. These strategies are consistent with Park et al.'s (2004) findings in regards to deception detection; people seek out third-party confessions, physical evidence, and use a combination of various methods when trying to confirm deceit. First, espionage was characterized by snooping through the rover's phone, Facebook, email, belongings, etc. One participant admitted to "cell phone tracking GPS, text-mail rerouting, hack[ing] her e-mail accounts." Yet another participant described similar technology-based espionage: "went through her phone records, put a keystroke capture program on our computers to record her emails and passwords. Checked her Facebook account and the various men on it." Other participants explained covertly checking in on the partner, e.g., "followed him

on a night I purposely told him I would be out of town." The next most frequently reported strategy was no strategy at all. Many participants (20.9%) indicated that they did not use or have a strategy after seeing suspicious signs. However, 13% of the participants indicated either speaking with mutual friends, or requesting the truth from the rover regarding their infidelity. Oftentimes, these two strategies were listed in tandem: "I asked him point blank, and asked some of our friends about how they viewed the friendship." Other participants (12.4%) noted the rover telling them about the infidelity, without solicitation or provocation: "He came right out and told me that he was with another girl and didn't want to be with me anymore. So I didn't have to try to confirm my suspicions." The least commonly reported strategies indicated some form of interrogation (7.8%) or observation of behavior (7%). Interrogation was marked by a battery of questions rather than a single question of guilt, as highlighted by this participant: "I badgered him with questions." Finally, observation of behavior includes watching the rover interact with friends and coworkers, monitoring behavior on the phone, etc. For example, "we all worked together, so I started to pay attention to the interaction between him and her." These findings support Park et al. (2004); rarely do information-seekers, or deception-detectors, rely on the real-time delivery of information in order to make decisions about the veracity of a statement or event. In the current study, participants used an average of 2 strategies in order to detect the rover's infidelity, relying primarily on physical evidence and third party disclosure.

This study assumed that partners held a desired outcome when they engaged in information seeking strategies. Specifically, this dissertation was interested in knowing what outcome (e.g., guilt, innocence) the partner sought through their search. Content

analysis of the open-ended responses uncovered five dominant outcomes of an information search: guilt, the truth, innocence, reasons for the infidelity, and affirmation of sanity. Predominately, partners reported wanting to find the rover guilty of infidelity (24.1%). A small contingent (4.6%) alluded to wanting to find their partner guilty in order to affirm their sanity. This response sheds light on the desire for a guilty outcome, as stated by this participant: "I felt that she was lying. I basically knew she was. But she insisted she wasn't. So I was hoping to find out that she was guilty, because if she was innocent that means I would have been crazy." Many partners described wanting a guilty outcome because they "wanted to be right," to "confirm their suspicions," and "to confirm I wasn't crazy for being paranoid." Others described wanting a guilty outcome to give them a way to end the relationship, as stated by this participant: "Relief that I could finally be done with this dirtbag. He hadn't been super nice lately but I felt I couldn't break up with him because he seemed to be taking his parents' divorce so hard." Other participants explained wanting to know the truth, regardless of guilt or innocence: "prove or disprove instincts," "I just wanted to know what was going on," and "I just had to know one way or another." Some participants spoke about a hope of innocence, e.g., "I was hoping that I was over-reacting and that I was wrong." Less frequently, and sometimes in tandem with a guilty or truth outcome, participants wanted to know the reasons for the rovers' infidelity. One participant explained,

> I was hoping to find the truth and if confirmed, to find the reason. If it is only
> about sex, then I would be more open to letting it happen. In all cases so far, it has
> not been about the sex. In one case it was the inability to say no to an ex, in the

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next it was cause by panic of our wedding day approaching and needing drama, in

the next two it was depression and a need to feel that first love feeling.

Another participant stated, "I was trying to understand why, especially since from my

point of view things were going great." The few participants who indicated not having a

desired outcome also indicated not participating in active information seeking. For those

participants, the information was brought to their attention unsolicited. Further,

examination of the whole response (i.e., across the single participant's entire set of data)

indicates that these participants, to a large extent, cited never entering into a suspicion

context.

As mentioned earlier, rovers were asked why they chose to reveal their infidelity.

Since only 19 rovers had the experience of revelation, this question was primarily

exploratory. The thematic analysis indicated four themes: guilt ($n = 4$), preference for

honesty ($n = 5$), create change ($n = 4$), and forced disclosure ($n = 5$). These themes are

largely inconsistent with the results from the first research question. Namely, a majority

of the rover sample reported items congruent with forced disclosure as their primary

criteria to disclose their secret. For example, participants agreed that they would reveal

their secret (1) if a crisis arose necessitating disclosure, (2) if the secret disclosure was

inevitable, or (3) if the secret involved a problem and the problem worsened. Participants

were less likely to agree that disclosure would occur with a condition of reciprocation, if

the disclosure fit into the conversation, and even if the rover knew the partner would

accept him or her after disclosure. Although the criteria to reveal the secret do not seem

to be in support of the open-ended responses from the minority, Vangelisti et al.'s (2001)

measure assesses the following dimensions: intimate exchange, exposure, urgency, never,

acceptance, conversational appropriateness, relational security, important reason, permission, family membership. For the rovers in the current study, an important reason, risk of exposure, and urgency were the most commonly selected criteria for hypothetical disclosure. For the rovers who had the experience of disclosure, forced disclosure and a preference for honesty were the most commonly reported, although by a negligent margin.

For the lovers, the decision criteria to disclose the secret to a confidante were similar to the criteria for the rovers; an important reason, urgency, and acceptance ranked in the top three, with only a 0.4% difference between the third (acceptance) and fourth (exposure) most frequently reported criteria. Lovers appear to be disclosing the secret to their friends for the same reasons that rovers would disclose the secret to their partner. Moreover, in an open-ended question, lovers reported keeping the secret from the partner out of a need to protect the partner ($n = 22$), guilt ($n = 13$), apathy ($n = 12$), and a feeling that the lover did not have a reason to be involved in the interests of the primary relationship ($n = 4$).

Although the partner is left in the dark by the rover and the lover, both parties share their secret relationship with their friends. An overwhelming number of lovers (72.4%) and a fair amount of rovers (28.9%) disclose the infidelity to a trusted friend. For the rovers and lovers who chose not to share the secret with a friend, the rovers ultimately do not tell anyone (15.8%), and the lovers will either share with a family member (17.2%) or no one at all (17.2%). Afifi and Steuber (2009) posited three conditions under which people would likely reveal their secrets: (1) need for catharsis, (2) target had a right to know or need to know the information, and (3) the target directly requested

disclosure. Rawlins (1983) addressed the dialectic of openness and closedness in friendships; namely, friendship is not only marked by candor, but also by restraint. Friendship is often assumed to exist in a context of openness; however, Rawlins (1992) argued that friendship is simultaneously expressive and protective. Although rovers and lovers might want to share their infidelity with their friends, doing so might not be in the best interest of the friendship or for their self.  Moreover, according to Rawlins (1992), friends protect each other by respecting their private boundaries. Synthesizing Afifi and Steuber's (2009) conditions of disclosure and Rawlins' (1983; 1992) discussion of friendship, the rovers and lovers who chose to disclose likely did so out of a cathartic need.

<center>Implications</center>

Unlike previous research concerning infidelity, the current study positions infidelity as a process that unfolds and evolves over time. For many couples, infidelity involves secrecy, deception, and withdrawal from the primary relationship. These behaviors from the rovers are met with suspicion and espionage from the partner. Moreover, to a large extent, research has not yet focused on how the lover fits into the primary relationship.

This research provides the beginnings of a process model for extradyadic involvement. Extant research has demonstrated a strong relationship between satisfaction and infidelity; decline in satisfaction between the rover and the partner is related to a rover committing infidelity. As the rover's commitment to the lover increases, the rover's commitment to the partner decreases (and vice versa). The longer the relationship continues between the rover and lover, the less likely the rover will be to confess the

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infidelity to the partner. During the rover's extradyadic involvement, partners are likely

to enter into a suspicious context at some point in time (i.e., questioning their partners'

fidelity). Most often, the rover's withdrawal from the relationship triggers the partner's

suspicion. Upon entering into the suspicion context, many partners actively engage in

espionage-type behaviors, with the hope of confirming their partner's guilt or discovering

the truth behind the suspicions. The partners who sought out guilt were more likely to be

without the rover at the time of the study, indicating that motives behind an information

search might be related to relationship disengagement. That is, once a suspicious context

is triggered within a romantic relationship, the healthy relational scripts are broken,

making repair more challenging.

Although extradyadic relationships can begin with a discrete event, that event is

embedded within larger relational experiences and circumstances. Through this research,

we are able to glean an initial understanding of what happens in a relationship when

commitment is shared and secrets begin to leak.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The results of this dissertation provide an additional piece in the process of

infidelity, no longer limiting the investigation to relational satisfaction and gender

differences. Furthermore, by expanding the criteria of inclusion to the partners and

lovers, this study was able to gain insight into how people in different roles experience

infidelity. Although these contributions are interesting and important, the research did

face several limitations.

First, the sheer topic of this dissertation has inherent constraints. Despite the

primary interest in secrecy and information seeking, infidelity is severely stigmatized in

society. Upon receipt of the initial study solicitation, prospective participants

demonstrated a strong reaction to the study. Many people felt the need to comment on the

inappropriateness of the research and, more often, were compelled to share either their

lack of experience (e.g., "sorry I can't help you, I've never had that experience, and I

know none of my friends have either"), or that they had the role of the partner in the

extradyadic involvement (e.g., "I was the one cheated on, does that qualify?"). For those

who did qualify, many might not have wanted to admit, share, or reflect on their

experiences, despite guarantees of anonymity. Recounting a difficult and sensitive time in

a relationship, particularly to a cold non-responsive internet questionnaire, can be less

than desirable.  Thus, securing a large sample was difficult due to the topic of the

research. Although initial attempts were made to form a relationship with various

websites dealing specifically with the experience of infidelity, these attempts were largely

unsuccessful. Researchers interested in this area, in an effort to gain a larger number of

contributors and a richness of experience, could spend time cultivating ties and

relationships with support groups and online communities tailored for the infidelity

experience.

Second, this dissertation used a national survey, which carries several limitations.

Although a national survey provides a sample more representative of the national

population (in comparison to a convenience sample), the questionnaire required greater

brevity than the ideal. Due to a concern over mortality, the questionnaire was kept to the

bare minimum number of items necessary to assess the hypotheses and research

questions. For example, The Criteria for Telling Family Secrets (Vangelisti et al., 2001)

and the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) were both reduced by 50% in

order to shorten the questionnaire. The need for a short questionnaire negatively impacted the amount of data that could be gained from this endeavor. Furthermore, despite preemptive editing of the questionnaire, this dissertation had a rather high mortality rate (37%). The sample size, mentioned as the first limitation, constrained certain analyses (with respect to the rover and the lover) to exploratory investigations. Future research could institute some type of reward system to entice participants into the study and ensure the completion of the questionnaire.

Third, this dissertation relied solely on self-report, cross-sectional research. Given the non-experimental nature of the study, the results of the data analyses are best understood as reports of personal experience. Although patterns of communication behaviors were found in some of these reports, claims of causation cannot be advanced from this data. Moreover, self-report measures, while useful to examine a person's experience, are inherently limited by memory accuracy and experiential bias. Therefore, the data are subjective accounts, mostly from events past, and should be interpreted as such.

This dissertation surveyed individual participants for a phenomenon that is triadic, at the most fundamental level. The individual experience is valuable and interesting, but that experience is always situated within a larger system. This dissertation was only able to garner one-third of the complete extradyadic experience. In order to gain a more complete picture of the infidelity process, intact lover's triangles should be studied. Likewise, the social support network of the various system parts would be an interesting future avenue for research.

Although pop culture paints a picture of infidelity as a one-night event, the descriptive data from this research would suggest otherwise. This dissertation's participants reported involvement ranging from one night to fifteen years. Both the shorter and lengthier relationships echo the arguments proposed by Schmitt and Shackelford (2003); that is, short-term mate poachers typically seek temporary sexual relationships and long-term mate poachers seek relationship defection. Although not a direct question to the participants, we might assume that the shorter rover-lover relationships might be largely characterized by gratifying sexual needs, whereas the longer relationships are more reflective of the establishment of a new relationship. Future research should examine motivations for maintaining rover-lover relationships, as well as investigate the initial stages of development.

Finally, the open-ended responses from the partners had very clear narrative characteristics and structure, as opposed to the other roles surveyed. Future research should investigate the narratives that various experiences with infidelity create; not only from the infidelity participants' perspective (i.e., rover, partner, lover), but also narratives from the people who bore witness to the infidelity.

## Conclusion

Infidelity, or a violation of a contract regarding emotional and/or sexual exclusivity, is a relatively pervasive phenomenon in both dating and married relationships. In many ways, this dissertation conceptualized infidelity as an experience that unfolds over time and oftentimes involves secrecy and information seeking behaviors. This process is marked by concealment strategies, suspicions, transfer of awareness contexts, and thoughtful information seeking strategies with desired outcomes.

Although this dissertation was able to make initial strides towards conceptualizing

infidelity within a larger system, this area of research still needs to pursue multiple voices

and experiences in order to gain a true understanding.

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# APPENDIX A:  IRB APPROVAL FORM

**OHIO UNIVERSITY**
Office of the Vice President for Research

**11X222**

Office of Research Compliance
RTEC 117
Athens, OH 45701-2979

T: 740.593.0664
F: 740.593.9838
www.research.ohiou.edu

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below.  This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

7

**Project Title:**   Secrets of Infidelity

**Primary Investigator:**   Megan  Dowd
**Co-Investigator(s):**

**Faculty Advisor:**   Claudia  Hale
(if applicable)

**Department:**   Communication Studies

*Rebecca Cale*

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

12/05/11
**Approval Date**

12/04/12
**Expiration Date**

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above.  If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

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APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT VIA EMAIL

Hello,

As you may know, I am working towards completing my doctorate degree in Communication Studies at Ohio University. As part of the completion of that degree, I am currently pursuing a research project that would benefit from your participation.

My research focus is on the process of infidelity in romantic relationships. If you have experience with infidelity, either as the person who committed infidelity, the person whose partner committed infidelity, or the 3$^{rd}$ party who got involved (the lover), I would really appreciate your help. **In a private space, away from potential on-lookers or passers-by, please follow the enclosed link to answer a set of questions about your experience.** The questionnaire should take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. The questionnaire is completely anonymous.

Please share this email with anyone who might be interested.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at md617908@ohio.edu.

Thank you,
Megan Dowd

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT VIA CLASSIFIEDS

Online Communication Research Study Seeks Participants
Researchers at Ohio University are looking for adults aged 18 or older to participate in a study on romantic infidelity. If you have cheated, been cheated on, or gotten involved with a married/taken individual, you qualify for the study. **In a private space, away from potential on-lookers or passers-by, please click the following link to answer a set of questions about your experience.** The study will take 15-20 minutes of your time **and is completely anonymous**.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT VIA DATING WEBSITE

Hello,

I am a doctoral candidate at Ohio University and am conducting a study on the process of infidelity in romantic relationships. If you have experience with infidelity, either as the person who committed infidelity, the person whose partner committed infidelity, or the 3$^{rd}$ party who got involved (the lover), I would really appreciate your help. **In a private space, away from potential on-lookers or passers-by, please follow the enclosed link to answer a set of questions about your experience.** The questionnaire should take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. The questionnaire is completely anonymous.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at md617908@ohio.edu

Thank you.

APPENDIX D: WEBSITES THAT DENIED RECRUITMENT ACCESS

Administrators/moderators of the following forums were contacted and recruitment was not allowed:


1. **survivinginfidelity.com**: A social support website for partners of rovers.

2. **ivillage.com**: An online community targeted towards women. Specifically, the website offers several different types of forums about dating, sex, family, relationships, etc., and boasts more than 30 million unique visitors per month.

3. **talkaboutmarriage.com**: A website that hosts a multitude of forums regarding marriage advice and relationship help, with over 39,000 members.

4. **the-other-woman.com**: A website specializing in support for the other woman/man (i.e., a person involved with an otherwise committed individual).

5. **gloryb.com**: An online community specifically tailored to the other woman/man.

Directions: As you answer the following questions, please keep your **primary** partner in mind. This is the person with whom you are/were expected to be exclusive.

1. How well does your primary partner meet your needs?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | | Average | | Very Well |

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Unsatisfied | | Average | | Extremely Satisfied |

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | | Average | | Excellent |

Please select the **single** item most representative of your primary relationship:

4. I openly discussed my infidelity with my partner as soon as the infidelity began.

5. Even though we both know about my infidelity, we pretend that it isn't happening.

6. My partner does not know about my infidelity and I work to keep it hidden.

7. My partner might be suspicious about my infidelity, but I work to keep it hidden.

8. If you revealed your infidelity to your partner, why did you decide to tell them?

Please respond to the following questions:

9. Who did you talk to about your infidelity before telling your partner (e.g., sister, best friend)? Why did you choose that individual?

10. Please discuss strategies you used to keep your secret hidden from your partner.

Please respond to the following questions, regarding the secret of your infidelity, keeping your primary partner in mind.

11. If my partner first disclosed something along the same lines, I would reveal the secret.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree      Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

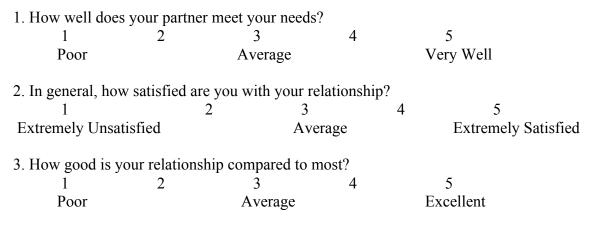12. I would tell if my partner and I were having a "heart to heart" discussion.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree      Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

13. I would tell my partner if I knew he/she was likely to find out the secret.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

14. If my partner asked me about the secret, I would tell him/her.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

15. If I couldn't hold in the secret any longer, I would reveal it to my partner.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

16. If the secret started causing more difficulties than it currently does, I would tell my partner.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

17. I would never tell my partner.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

18. If I knew my partner would still accept me after hearing the secret I would tell.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

19. I would tell the secret to my partner if we were discussing a subject related to the secret.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

20. If there was a pressing need for my partner to know the secret, I would tell.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree     Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree      Strongly Agree

Please respond to the following questions keeping your **lover** in mind. This is the person outside of your main relationship with whom you engage in sexual and/or emotional infidelity. If you have had more than one lover, please use the most recent experience.

21. How well does your lover meet your needs?
     1              2              3              4              5
     Poor                       Average                     Very Well

22. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
     1                      2              3              4                5
  Extremely Unsatisfied                 Average              Extremely Satisfied

23. How good is your relationship compared to most?
     1              2              3              4              5
     Poor                       Average                     Excellent

24. Does your lover know about your primary partner?

          Yes           No           I Don't Know

Finally, please answer the following questions about yourself:

25. What was your relationship status with your primary partner at the time the infidelity occurred?

Dating                 Living Together              Engaged                Married

26. How long were you together prior to the infidelity occurring?_____months/years

27. How long is/was your relationship with your lover? _____ days/months/years

28. Are you still currently with your primary partner?

     Yes              No

29. Are you still currently seeing your lover?

     Yes              No

30. What is your age?    _____

31. What is your biological sex?

     Male              Female

32. What is your sexual orientation?

     Heterosexual              Bisexual              Homosexual

33. What is your ethnicity or race?
  1   Caucasian American           4   Native American
  2   African American             5   Asian American
  3   Hispanic American            7   Other (please specify): _____

34. What is your individual income level?
  1   0 – $20,000 per year          4   $60,000 – $80,000 per year
  2   $20,000 – $40,000 per year    5   $80,000 – $100,000 per year
  3   $40,000 – $60,000 per year    7   $100,000 + per year

Directions: As you answer the following questions, please keep your partner in mind. That is, the person with whom you were involved, either with or without knowledge that he/she was already attached.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | | Average | | Very Well |

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Unsatisfied | | Average | | Extremely Satisfied |

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | | Average | | Excellent |

Please select the item most representative of your relationship:

4. I openly discussed with my partner his or her other relationship.

5. Even though we both knew about my partner's other relationship, we pretended that it didn't exist.

6. I did not know about my partner's other relationship until after we had been together for a while.

7. I was always suspicious that my partner had another relationship.

Please respond to the following questions:

8. When we are involved in a secret relationship, sometimes we feel the need to tell someone about our secret. Who, if anyone, did you share your secret with?

9. On the other hand, there may be situations where we will try to keep our secret relationship hidden from those around us. What strategies did you use to keep your relationship a secret?

10. At any point during your relationship, did you feel compelled to tell the person who was being cheated on?

11. What were your reasons for either keeping your secret or telling it to the person who was being cheated on?

Please respond to the following questions regarding the secret you keep about your relationship. Assume the secret is your relationship and the person you are considering disclosing to is your most trusted friend or family member (i.e., *confidante)*.

12. If my confidante had a similar problem, I would reveal the secret.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

13. I would tell my confidante if it was inevitable that the secret would be revealed to him/her anyway.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

14. I would tell my confidante about the secret if he/she questioned me directly.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

15. I would reveal the secret to my confidante if the secret became a more critical concern than it is right now.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

16. I would never tell my confidante.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

17. If I knew my confidante would still accept me after hearing the secret I would tell.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree   Neither Disagree nor Agree  Somewhat Agree
Strongly Agree

18. I would reveal the secret to my confidante if it seemed to fit into the conversation.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

19. If I trusted my confidante more than I do now, I would reveal the secret.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

20. If a crisis arose that necessitated my revealing the secret to my confidante, I would tell.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

21. I would tell my confidante if my partner thought it was okay to tell.
Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Somewhat Disagree       Neither Disagree nor Agree       Somewhat Agree       Strongly Agree

Finally, please answer the following questions about yourself:

22. What was your relationship status when you became involved with an attached individual?
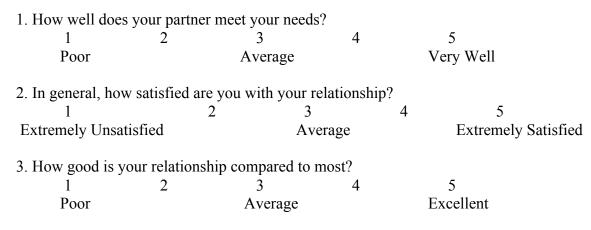
Single     Dating Someone     Living with Someone     Engaged to Someone  Married to Someone

23. How long is/was your relationship with the attached individual?__days/months/years

24. Are you still currently seeing this person?

      Yes          No

25. What is your age?    _____

26. What is your biological sex?

      Male          Female

27. What is your sexual orientation?

      Heterosexual          Bisexual          Homosexual

28. What is your ethnicity or race?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Caucasian American | 4 | Native American |
| 2 | African American | 5 | Asian American |
| 3 | Hispanic American | 7 | Other (please specify): _____ |

29. What is your individual income level?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0 – $20,000 per year | 4 | $60,000 – $80,000 per year |
| 2 | $20,000 – $40,000 per year | 5 | $80,000 – $100,000 per year |
| 3 | $40,000 – $60,000 per year | 7 | $100,000 + per year |

APPENDIX G: SURVEY FOR PARTNERS

Directions: As you answer the following questions, please keep your partner in mind. That is, the person with whom you were involved, who engaged in infidelity during your relationship.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | | Average | | Very Well |

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Unsatisfied | | Average | | Extremely Satisfied |

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor | | Average | | Excellent |

Please select the item most representative of your relationship:

4. My partner openly discussed the infidelity with me.

5. Even though we both knew about my partner's infidelity, we pretended that it didn't exist.

6. I did not know about my partner's infidelity until I discovered it.

7. I was always suspicious that my partner engaged infidelity, but was never able to confirm it.

Please respond to the following questions:

8. How did you find out about your partner's infidelity?

9. Were there any signs or indication that your partner might be engaging in infidelity? If so, what were they?

10. What were some of the strategies you used to discover your partner's infidelity?

11. What were you hoping to discover from trying to confirm your partner's infidelity?

Finally, please answer the following questions about yourself:

12. What was your relationship status when you found out about the infidelity?

Single    Dating Someone    Living with Someone    Engaged to Someone  Married to Someone

13. How long is/was your relationship with your partner? _____months/years

14. Are you still currently seeing this person?

      Yes            No

15. What is your age?    _____

16. What is your biological sex?

      Male           Female

17. What is your sexual orientation?

      Heterosexual            Bisexual                Homosexual

18. What is your ethnicity or race?
   1   Caucasian American       4   Native American
   2   African American         5   Asian American
   3   Hispanic American        7   Other (please specify): _____

19. What is your individual income level?
   1   0 – $20,000 per year       4   $60,000 – $80,000 per year
   2   $20,000 – $40,000 per year  5   $80,000 – $100,000 per year
   3   $40,000 – $60,000 per year  7   $100,000 + per year

**Rover Question 1:**
If you revealed your infidelity to your partner, why did you decide to tell them?
**Coding Unit: Theme**

*Guilt* – Participant alludes to, or states feeling guilty.

*Preference for Honesty* – Participant demonstrates the need to be honest (freewill honesty – never having been confronted by their partner)

*Create Change* – something in the relationship needed to change; coming together as a stronger partnership, or ending things all together.

*Forced Disclosure* – participant was approached by partner, or was somehow caught in the act, which forced the disclosure

**Rover Question 2:**
Who did you talk to about your infidelity before telling your partner (e.g., sister, best friend)? Why did you choose that individual?
**A. Coding Unit: Word**

*Friend*

*Professional*

*Family Member*

*Partner*

*No One*

*Lover*

**B. Coding Unit: Theme**

*Trust*

*Similar Experience*

*Acceptance/Understanding*

**Rover Question 3:**
Please discuss strategies you used to keep your secret hidden from your partner.
**Coding Unit: Single Thought Units**

*Time/Space Strategies* – Affair occurred out of town or when primary partner not around

*Territoriality* – Participant changes passwords, deletes text messages, creates new email address, kept phone close to person

*Verbal Strategies* – Participant explains various reasons provided to partner to gain time away, does not provide specifics, bald face lie regarding whereabouts

*Lover Selection* – chose lovers not affiliated with social network

*No Disclosure* – participant states they did not tell anyone of the affair (i.e., only the lover knows)

**Lover Question 1**
1. When we are involved in a secret relationship, sometimes we feel the need to tell someone about our secret. Who, if anyone, did you share your secret with?
**Coding Unit: Word**

*Friend*

*Roommates*

*No One*

*Family Member* (including ex-wives)

**Lover Question 2**
2.On the other hand, there may be situations where we will try to keep our secret relationship hidden from those around us. What strategies did you use to keep your relationship a secret?
**Coding Unit: Single Thought Unit**

*No Disclosure* – never spoke of the affair, avoided people who might be intrusive or question the lover

*Privacy*– engaged in affair in a location away from home/work, did not demonstrate affection in public, or stayed out of public view

*Deception* – deceived friends, family, etc of whereabouts

*Territoriality* – delete texts

*Strategic Communication* – kept emails, texts, phone calls to a minimum; ensured rover was alone before contacting

*Behaved Normally*  - participant alludes to not changing their behavior

**Lover Question 3**
3. What were your reasons for either keeping your secret or telling it to the person who was being cheated on?
**Unit: Single Thought Unit**

*Protection* – prevent harm to the lover-rover relationship or the rover-partner relationship/family

*Apathy* – demonstrates a lack of caring for the partner, the rover, or the relationship between the lover and the rover

*Guilt* – demonstrates a feeling of shame or guilt

*Not My Place* – participant alludes to it not being their business or place to share the secret

**Partner Question 1:**
How did you find out about your partner's infidelity?
**Unit: Single Thought Units**

*Connecting the Dots* – participant mentions connecting behaviors or pieces of information, putting together a puzzle, piecing it together

*Witness* – saw the cheating in person

*Word of Mouth* – found out through a party not-involved (family, friends)

*Lover* – the rover's lover admitted it

*Partner Disclosure* – partner admitted it

*Records* –phone bills, facebook, some form of paper trail

*Snooping* – active behavior of going through partner's phone, belongings, email accounts

**Partner Question 2:**
Were there any signs or indication that your partner might be engaging in infidelity? If so, what were they?
**Unit: Single Thought Units**

*Withdrawal* – decrease in typical couple behavior (i.e., frequency of sex, quality of time or conversations, time spent together)

*Caught in Lies* – victim knew the rover was lying

*Territorial/Protective of Items* – keeping cell phone close, changing passwords, deleting text messages/emails

*Antagonistic* – picking fights, being argumentative, confrontational

*Quality Time* – spending more time with a specific individual

*Break of Normal Patterns* – new behavior patterns that have never been seen before

*Hindsight* – realizing the signs after the fact

*None*

**Partner Question 3:**
What were some of the strategies you used to discover your partner's infidelity?
**Unit: Single Thought Units**

*Interrogation* – ask questions about suspicious behavior

*Spoke with Friends of Partners* – friends of partners provided information

*Direct Disclosure* – asked directly about the infidelity

*Records* – read text messages, emails, facebook, browser history

*Observing Behavior* – watching partner's behavior around suspected lover

*Espionage* – followed the partner, drive by to double check locations,

*None/Accidental*

**Partner Question 4:**
What were you hoping to discover from trying to confirm your partner's infidelity?
**Unit: Theme**

*Truth*

*Innocence*

*Guilt*

*Reasons for Infidelity*

*Affirm Sanity* – participant alludes to needing to prove sanity