

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth After Infidelity

Thelma J. Carpenter-Ellis

Department of Community Care and Counseling, Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University

2023

African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth After Infidelity

Thelma J. Carpenter-Ellis

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

Approved by:

Name and degree, Committee Chair

Dr. Scott Edgar, PhD., D, Min.

Name and degree, Committee Member

Dr. Stacey Lilley, PhD

Abstract

This transcendental phenomenological study aims to examine African American women's posttraumatic growth experience after infidelity without compromising health-related issues. This phenomenon of PTG after cheating needs to be thoroughly analyzed and added to the literature. The research questions are: (1) How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity? (2) How do African American women describe characteristics that were [e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity] vital for their resiliency post-infidelity? and (3) How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview [e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith] because of marital betrayal? Some individuals experience growth after infidelity; this study will seek to answer why some grow after infidelity trauma rather than succumb to health-compromising issues. The answer to this question will add to the body of research and help mental health professionals implement strategies to help individuals and couples during recovery. The theories guiding this study are the attachment theory by Bowlby and Ainsworth, the emotionally focused couple's theory (EFCT), directed by Johnson & Greenberg, and systems and family systems theory researchers von Bertalanffy and Bowen. The research data is a transcendental phenomenology design of eight African American women with posttraumatic development after infidelity in Bloomington, IL.

Keywords: Infidelity, attachment bond, health, attachment injury, trauma, growth

Copyright Page

© 2023 Thelma Carpenter-Ellis

All rights reserved.

Dedication

First, I dedicate my dissertation to my parents, Allen and Aldean Carpenter, who showed me the epitome of God's love and care. They always believed in me and encouraged me throughout life: my brother, Eddie Carpenter; my grandmother, Willie Ella Barney (best grandma ever); and my granddaughter, Ciara Mosely (a precious jewel). Each above-referenced individual played a pivotal role in my life while on earth, and I am better because of their influence.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge those who helped me navigate this journey through their support, encouragement, and helpful “spirits.” A hearty thankfulness to my spouse, Alfred Ellis, Chair, Dr. Scott Edgar, and reader, Dr. Stacey Lilley. Editor, William Gribbin; my niece, Dr. Doristine Cornelius, Dr. Richard Green, Dr. Ganella Smith, Dr. Katina Williams, Dr. Latonya Harris; my granddaughter, Brein Mosely (doctoral student); grandson, Deonté Mosely, ISU graduate (Choral Director); my daughter, Latrece Ellis (Claims Underwriter) and sister, Lenora Beets, Anna Carpenter-Mims, Arlean Franklin and Willie Hampton, brother, Charlie Carpenter, Renee Taylor, my cheerleader, and a member of my Church family for their unending support and believing in my ability.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Copyright Page.....	3
Dedication	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
Table of Contents	6
List of Tables	14
Chapter One: Introduction	15
Overview	15
Background	18
Historical Perspective	18
Social and Physical environments	19
Social Context.....	19
Theoretical Contexts	19
Situation to Self.....	23
Problem Statement	24
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance to the Study	25
Research Questions	26
Definitions.....	27
Summary	28
Chapter Two: Literature Review	29
Overview	29

Theoretical Frameworks	30
Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)	31
Systems Theory.....	33
Related Literature.....	34
Infidelity.....	34
Prevalence of Infidelity Statistics	37
Attachment Injury	38
Betrayal	39
Health-Related Issues.....	40
Psychological	40
Physiological.....	43
Self-Esteem	48
Forgiveness	49
Communication.....	50
Therapy	51
<i>AIRM</i>	51
<i>IBCT</i>	53
Trust	54
Christian Worldview: Marital Therapy.....	56
Implications for Pastoral Counseling.....	57
Summary	58
Chapter Three: Methods	61
Overview.....	61

Design	61
Research Questions	62
Setting	62
Participants.....	62
Procedure	63
The Researcher's Role	64
Data Collection	64
Method One: Interview Questions	65
Questions.....	66
Method Two: Journal Writing	67
Data Analysis	68
Trustworthiness	69
Credibility	69
Member checking.....	69
Field Notes	70
Dependability and Confirmability	70
Transferability.....	71
Ethical Considerations	71
Informed Consent.....	71
Summary	72
Chapter Four: Findings	73
Overview	73
Purpose Statement and Research Questions	73

Participants.....	74
Aiya.....	74
April.....	75
Bea.....	76
Denise.....	76
Ella.....	77
Esther.....	78
Nefertiti.....	79
Taya.....	79
Results.....	80
Theme Development.....	80
Research Question Responses.....	87
Participants.....	87
Aiya.....	87
April.....	88
Bea.....	88
Ella.....	88
Esther.....	88
Nefertiti.....	89
Taya.....	89
Participants.....	89
Aiya.....	90
April.....	90

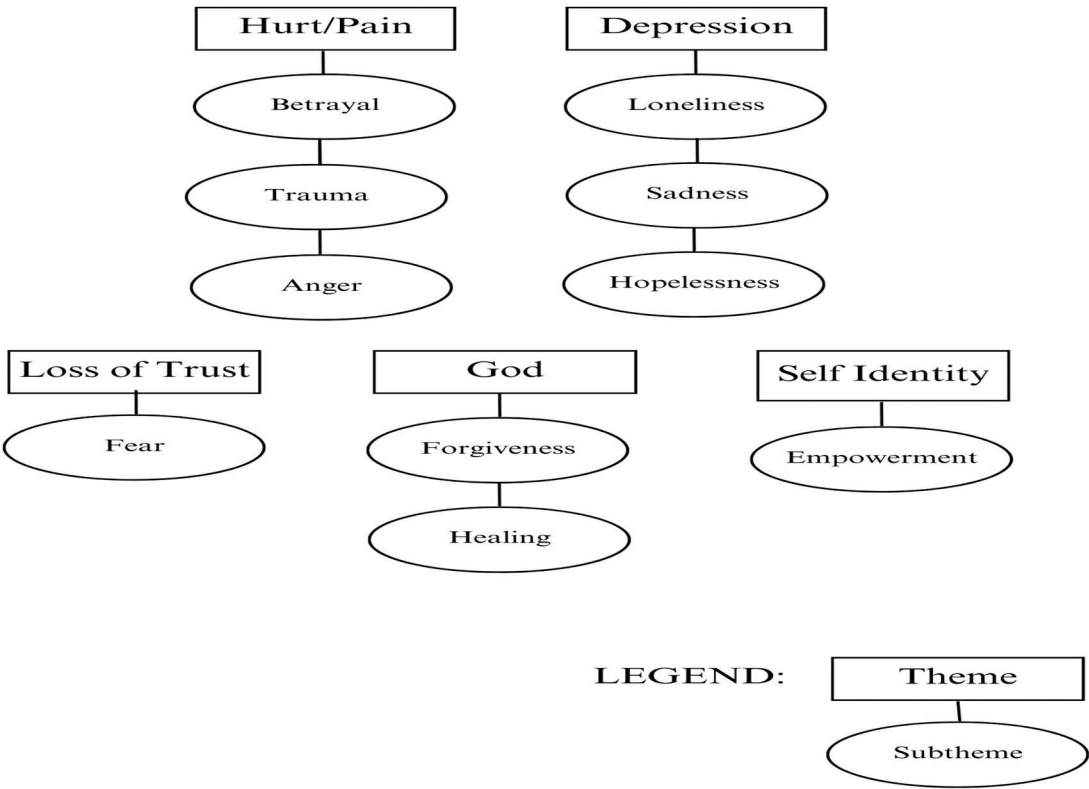
Bea	90
Denise	91
Ella	91
Esther	92
Nefertiti	92
Taya.....	92
Participants' Responses	93
Aiya.....	93
April	94
Bea	94
Denise	94
Ella	95
Esther	95
Nefertiti.....	95
Taya.....	95
Participants' Additional Insight	96
Health Compromising Issues	98
Summary	99
Chapter Five: Conclusion	101
Overview	101
Summary of Findings.....	101
Themes.....	101
Research Questions.....	102

Participants.....	103
Discussion	104
Theoretical Literature.....	104
Attachment Theory	106
Emotionally Focused Couples' Therapy.....	106
Empirical Literature	107
Table 1: Emergent Themes / Sub-themes	108
Implications for Mental Health Practitioners.....	109
Theoretical Implications	109
Empirical Implications.....	110
Practical Implications for Mental Health Workers	110
Delimitations and Limitations.....	111
Delimitations.....	111
Limitations	112
Recommendations for Future Research.....	112
Summary	113
References	115
APPENDICES	142
Appendix A.....	143
IRB Approval.....	143
Appendix B	144
Recruitment Flyer	144
Appendix C	145

Permission Request Letter	145
Appendix D	146
Participant Recruitment Letter	146
Appendix E	147
Screening Questionnaire	147
Appendix F	148
Informed Consent Form	148
Appendix G	152
Interview Questions	152
Appendix H	153
Observation Journal Writing Prompt	153
Appendix I	154
Participant Withdrawal Form	154
Appendix J	155
Emergent Themes and Subthemes	155
Appendix K	156
Interview Transcript: Aiya	156
Appendix L	175
Interview Transcript: April	175
Appendix M	184
Interview Transcript: Bea	184
Appendix N	193
Interview Transcript: Denise	193

Appendix O	206
Interview Transcript: Ella	206
Appendix P	214
Interview Transcript: Esther	214
Appendix Q	230
Interview Transcript: Nefertiti	230
Appendix R	242
Interview Transcript: Taya	242

List of Tables



Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Marital infidelity is becoming a norm today and one of the leading causes of divorce, with half of the marriages in the United States ending in dissolution (Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Fleming, 2022). Unfaithfulness impacts everyone associated with the involved and the noninvolved by dividing families and marital commitment (Dehghani et al., 2021). Marital infidelity could be considered a “crisis” in the United States, with a prevalence of 18% to 49% of men and 12% to 31% of women involved in extramarital trysts (Warach & Josephs, 2021; Labrecque & Whisman, 2017; Fincham & May 2017; Lisman, 2021). Infidelity has fashioned this phenomenon because it causes instability, destabilization, and ruination in relationships (Warach & Josephs, 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Lonergan et al., 2021).

Emotional wounds from extramarital affairs weaken the marital bond and result in psychological and physiological trauma (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021). Researchers further discovered that the detrimental impact of infidelity destroys the assumptive world of the betrayed (Fleming, 2022; Warach & Josephs, 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021). This distress impacts intimacy, loyalty, and trust, which causes the couple's secure attachment to become insecure (Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019). Secure attachments are established in marriage on a covenant of faith, safety, and commitment (Dehghani et al., 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Parker & Campbell, 2017).

Johnson (2019) found that the above-referenced secure attachment tenets are essential for closeness and lasting relationships. Once trust is broken, the injured party's real world becomes shattered, resulting in relationship breakdown and possible divorce (Dehghani et al., 2021;

Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Fleming, 2022). Correspondingly, infidelity interrupts the emotional wellness of the noninvolved party. For example, infidelity impacts mental health through depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Cano & Leary, 2000; Shrout & Weigel, 2021). The before-referenced emotional influence could result in a deficit view of self and behavioral wellness (Shrout & Weigel, 2020; 2018; Allen et al., 2005).

However, the research substantiated that wounds of infidelity can lead to growth (Gleeson et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020; Zeligman, 2020). The devastating influence has caused some to regress and others to achieve and excel (Zeligman et al., 2020; Gossner et al., 2022). This phenomenon of PTG after betrayal needs to be thoroughly analyzed and added to the literature. This addition will aid therapists with their counseling practices when providing relational counseling, coaching, and mentoring to help distressed individuals/couples—these practices should enhance growth. Recent studies reveal gaps in the literature regarding why some experience posttraumatic growth without compromising health-related issues (Shrout & Weigel, 2021; Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Brooks et al., 2019).

This research on African American women's posttraumatic growth after infidelity will add to the body of the literature and consist of the findings established from the following research questions (1) How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity? (2) How do African American women describe characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) that were vital for their resiliency post-infidelity? and (3) How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview [e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith] because of marital infidelity?

The dearth of literature is partly due to self-reports and retrospective appraisal (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). Likewise, capturing infidelity aftermath in real-time is challenging, and recollections often need to be more specific and can create a bias (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). There has been extensive research on attachment injury caused by infidelity. However, samples have been smaller, not providing adequate data to elucidate why some experience PTG (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). Because the data used in some of the research was cross-sectional and causal, inference about the relationship directions cannot be made, which creates another limitation.

Similarly, sexual minorities were not included in numerous studies, making the data not generalizable (Warach & Josephs, 2021). Cultural consideration should always be a factor because cultural beliefs play a pivotal role in how individuals respond to trauma (Warach & Josephs, 2021). The present study addresses this gap in the literature by examining the lived experiences of African American women that experienced posttraumatic growth following an attachment injury of infidelity.

There is minimal research on minorities (African Americans) regarding their psychological well-being and marital satisfaction because most current studies are on Caucasians who are well-educated and heterosexual (Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Warach & Josephs, 2020; Lonergan et al., 2021). There is a need to explore and examine the growth of African American women's experience after infidelity. Cultural considerations and the link between relationship adjustment and health performance are also considered (McNeil et al., 2018). However, previous research has confirmed the association between mental health and relationship bliss (Kuros et al., 2008; Whisman, 2001). These before- mentioned findings must be more generalizable to people of color because the sample population mainly comprises the dominant culture (Bryan et al., 2010).

Background

Historical Perspective

Infidelity is not uncommon and had its inception during biblical times. Matrimony was meant to be monogamous, with the husband and wife committed to each other (Genesis 2: 21-22). What God had ordained and instituted was perfect; however, due to man's fall, humankind was no longer living in an ideal state when sin entered. Through Adam, sin and death entered the world and corrupted humanity, leading to a man being born into the original sin (Genesis 3: 1-24, KJV). Sin ignites conflict, which occurs in marriages when infidelity happens.

Many old patriarchs had wives and mistresses (Deuteronomy 17:17). These violations of God's original covenant for husbands and wives caused discord. An example is Father Abraham's affair with Hagar; his adultery caused jealousy between his wife and mistress (Genesis 16:1-5, KJV). Likewise, Hannah and Peninnah were at odds because they were the wives of Elkanah. Peninnah had children; Hannah was barren and made fun of by Peninnah (1 Samuel 1: 4-6). Today's society is like biblical days; widespread betrayal in marriage still exists.

Infidelity has become so pervasive that it is anticipated that many married men and women will be involved in an affair in the United States (Lonergan et al., 2020; Warach & Josephs, 2021). More specifically, researchers discovered that one in three men and one in five women partake in acts of betrayal during their marital lifetime (Laumann et al., 1994; Tafoya Spritzberg, 2007). For example, one of the ethnographic studies that included sixteen different cultures discovered that betrayal was one of the most common factors behind marital dissolution (Conroy et al., 2018). Likewise, a meta-analysis of 50 studies revealed that 34% of men and 24% of women have engaged in sexual relations outside marriage (Ledbetter, 2015). The progressing complication of marital infidelity, dating back to ancient times, is deeply rooted in civilization.

Social and Physical environments

Social Context

Adultery is one of society's most critical social issues and a regular practice accepted by many (DeCastro-Bofill et al., 2016; Summers et al., 2020). On the other hand, infidelity is abhorred because it threatens the marriage union, dissolves families, and increases the divorce rate (Jahan et al., 2017; Allen & Hawkins, 2017). A research study found that 74% of females and 60% of males allege that adultery is inexcusable (Nami, 2019). The social context of adultery in literature is enveloped in social and physical premises.

The family is one of the most salient institutions known to humankind and comes with its set of dilemmas (Ghochani et al., 2020). As stated earlier, the family is part of a system and subsystem, with everyone contributing to the issues, overall functioning, and resolving matters (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bowen, 1960). Social and personal factors cause many marriages in the U. S. to end, such as childbearing, two parents in the workplace, economic status, higher education, and changing attitudes towards marriage (Smock & Schwartz, 2020). The physical environment of industrialization and modernization have influenced the family structure, affected the modern family, and impelled the divorce rate (Laland & Brown, 2006; Longstreet et al., 2019; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2014).

Theoretical Contexts

Attachment theory, EFCT, and systems theory are the guiding principles for this research. Marriage is a form of attachment, and infidelity causes detachment in relationships (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Lonergan, 2020; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). A broken bond causes an injurious wound to the non-involved party (Lonergan et al., 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021).

This wound can escalate emotional and physical problems such as digestive, heart, and lung-related problems (Fincham & May 2017).

Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders can incite a committed relationship due to infidelity (Fincham & May 2017). Likewise, some experience adjustment disorders, and PTSD, during the aftermath of monumental betrayal (Fincham & May 2017). The historical, social, and theoretical contexts of marital infidelity are the backdrop for this proposed study of why some are experiencing growth rather than compromising health-related behaviors. This study aims to examine African American women's posttraumatic growth after infidelity in some individuals rather than health-compromising issues. Cheating and posttraumatic flourishing are of great interest because seeking to understand and expand on the limited current research will further augment the literature for couples and therapists by deepening their comprehension of this occurrence.

Infidelity affects the involved and noninvolved parties, extended family and friends, and the mental health practitioner (Whisman et al., 1997). Infidelity is complex to address and facilitate in counseling (Dehghani et al., 2021; Weigel & Shrout, 2018; Fincham & May 2017, Allen et al., 2005; Cano & Leary, 2000). This researcher has encountered challenges in treating both the betrayed and couples in sessions. For example, the injured party is shattered by treachery and has difficulty understanding what happened. The non-involved has a wide range of emotions that negates efficacious communication. In contrast, the betrayer is typically silent or disengaged, which further causes tension and conflict within the marriage.

Treatment is complex because the wound's severity is paramount, and the feelings are robust, leading to varied emotions of distress, sadness, anger, and frustration (Weigel & Shrout, 2018; Fincham & May 2017; Allen et al., 2005; Cano & Leary, 2000). There has been a plethora

of research on marital infidelity and some of the effects of a weakened marital bond and marital happiness/dissatisfaction. The current literature findings have created a wealth of knowledge for couples who pursue therapy. The knowledge gained helps with healing, understanding, compassion, and more excellent dialogue to work through the recovery/dissolution process. For instance, open and honest discussion and forgiveness contribute to the relationship's homeostasis (Zeligman et al., 2020; Dehghani et al., 2021).

This study will supplement the literature for individuals, married couples, and mental health practitioners. Moreover, the data will complement and extend professionals' knowledge base as they work with couples. The added expertise of what worked for the betrayed during their recovery can supplant therapy sessions with the injured party as well as in couple's sessions. This extension will be based on the data analysis from African American women's lived experience of posttraumatic growth after infidelity.

Based on the exponential current research, this knowledge will provide a rich and thick piece of information that could enhance therapeutic techniques. Clients could apply these learned strategies to actuate recovery and growth after a marital affair. It will authenticate current research findings based on the lived experience of individuals who have journeyed to healing. These individuals' testimony of survival without health-compromising issues, the vital central ingredients to help heal attachment injuries, and the emotional connection within the family system and subsystems are invaluable.

Infidelity is a challenging phenomenon to understand in committed relationships. Does this quandary cause one to ask was their relationship worthwhile when this happening occurred? This phenomenon has existed since biblical days dating back to our Lord's year (1 Kings 11:3; Judges 19-21). The sin of extramarital relations has continued since and has become more

prominent and emboldened (Lonergan, 2020; Fincham & May 2017; Allen et al., 2005; Labrecque & Whisman, 2017), while some still denounce such immoral behaviors (Greeley, 1991; Negash et al., 2014). It is almost as if many accept didactic affairs daily, with 40% to 50% of marriages in the U.S. ending in divorce (Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021).

Infidelity in marriage causes such devastation that it becomes almost impossible, naturally speaking, to overcome and establish a new safe, secure future (Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2004; Fleming, 2022; Lonergan et al., 2021). This predicament is due to a breach in the marital stability that was once secure and now has become unsafe and unsteady, shattering the presumed world (Fleming, 2022). Such injurious wounds develop into a progressive malignant wealth of emotional and physical health difficulties for the injured party (Butler et al., 2022). The laceration of deceit can ensue in adjustment issues, depression, acute stress, and PTSD, all mental health related (Fincham & May 2017; Butler et al., 2022; Warach & Josephs, 2021).

Besides, the pain of deception can lead to risk-taking behaviors such as eating disorders, drug, and alcohol use/abuse, promiscuous sexual behavior, and domestic violence, which are health-related physical issues (Fincham & May 2017). Despite the tumultuous harm of infidelity, some are experiencing growth (Zeligman et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020). Change comes with a price; it is not simply because these individuals miraculously recover, but what makes them more resilient?

Current literature shows that some individuals grow because of their relationship with God, support systems, and higher self-esteem (Zeligman et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020). This study will further investigate sparseness in the research on posttraumatic growth after infidelity. Moreover, this investigation will be completed by examining and exploring the

experiences of African American women and their journey to growth after infidelity rather than compromising health-related issues.

Situation to Self

The researcher has worked with married couples for 15 years and found infidelity formidable and traumatic for those involved. Likewise, she has witnessed numerous couples separating and divorcing because of marital conflict and strife. The phenomenon of infidelity interests this researcher because couples need to help understand its causes and how to recover from such an injurious wound. The philosophical assumption the researcher brings to this study is ontological.

Ontology deals with the science and study of being, including reality and one's truth, based on lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The belief that marital infidelity has deeper root causes than the involved and noninvolved realizes, and for every reason, there is a remedy when understood and empowered to make changes. Marital infidelity only happens with a precipitating factor, belief, value, or level of confusion ensuing. Moreover, infidelity often shapes the injured party's worldview (Fleming, 2022).

A constructivist worldview has sculpted this study. The notion that individuals make meaning of their experiences as a basis for their reality is salient. This meaning is crucial to learning about the experience. Also, a biblical worldview as a Christian is primary to life challenges and resolutions because answers can be found in the Word of God. The Bible is a guide guidebook for a sinful world and people.

Problem Statement

The problem is that infidelity is a global occurrence that results in the devastation and ruination of marriage (Fincham & May 2017; Lisman, 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021). Moreover, infidelity is one of the leading causes of marital demise in the United States, with approximately 40% to 50% ending in divorce (Lonergan, 2021; CDC, 2015). Adultery leads to betrayal of trust, destroys families, and causes a deep marital wound (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Lonergan et al., 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021). The betrayed party often suffers emotional and physical health-related issues, while some continue to experience growth (Fleming et al., 2022; Lonergan et al., 2021; Zeligman et al., 2020; Gleeson et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020). Recent studies have revealed a gap in the literature as to why some grow and others remain compromised psychologically for years (Shrout & Weigel, 2021; Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Brooks et al., 2019).

Most research samples were heterosexual, homogenous groups of well-educated Caucasians, and marginalized populations were excluded (e.g., lesbian, bi-sexual, gay, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) community, and African Americans). Another limitation is whether the noninvolved partner had preexisting mental or physical health issues prior to infidelity; this leads to insufficient information to identify health-compromising behaviors correlated with growth (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). There is a gap in the literature about why some begin experiencing growth rather than health issues after the trauma of infidelity. The researcher has chosen a phenomenological transcendental study to examine the lived experience of African American women's posttraumatic growth after infidelity to help explicate this phenomenon.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe African American women's posttraumatic growth after infidelity. The research study will include 10 female participants in Bloomington, IL. At this stage in the research, posttraumatic growth is defined as the genesis after a traumatic occurrence (Zeligman et al., 2021; Gleeson et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020; Gossner et al., 2021). The theories guiding this study are Attachment Theory (AT), Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT), and Systems theory (ST).

Infidelity deals with attachment, betrayal, broken trust, safety, and a fragile marital bond, established in these theoretical orientations (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Lonergan et al., 2020); Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). The attachment theorists are Bowlby and Ainsworth; the notion behind the work of Ainsworth and Bowlby is that attachments begin in childhood and impact a child's development (Bowlby, 1940; Ainsworth, 1963). To survive, develop, and thrive, infants must feel a sense of safety, trust, and attachment to a significant figure, such as their parents/guardians (Bowlby, 1940). The researcher will explain the factors that propelled growth and diminished long-term mental and physical health-related issues.

Significance to the Study

This investigation is noteworthy to mental health practitioners and couples because the research should provide practical ways to lessen the impact of infidelity trauma. A diminished effect should aid in reducing maladaptive problems in the physical and mental domains. The sample will consist of married and divorced women 18 years and above who have lived experiences of infidelity. The researchers found that positive self-esteem, family support, and emotional stability help individuals progress after a traumatic experience (Wilder et al., 2020; Gleeson et al., 2021; Zeligman et al., 2020; Fleming, 2022).

The research findings should provide knowledge. Knowledge is power, and accurate information provides tools and strategies that have worked for these participants. These practices can assist individuals through recovery and forgiveness (Gleeson et al., 2021; Zeligman et al., 2020; Fleming, 2022). Healing and forgiveness help with recovery, and everyone that experiences marital infidelity suffers an injury (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021; Fleming, 2022; Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Brooks et al., 2019). An emotional injury requires healing to progress and recover (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Zeligman et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020). The vital steps to recovery from those whose situations have ameliorated are necessary information to disseminate to the wounded; this is the researcher's observation, coupled with the current literature on infidelity and posttraumatic growth.

Research Questions

The questions related to this phenomenon are constructed to coincide with the purpose of the research. These questions illuminate the gap in research by examining and describing the experiences of women of color who experience growth rather than health-compromising issues following marital infidelity. The study further seeks to answer the following aggregate questions:

RQ 1: How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity?

RQ 2: How do African American women describe characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) that were vital for their resiliency post-infidelity?

RQ 3: How do African American women describe the changes (e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith) in their assumptive worldview because of marital betrayal?

Definitions

1. *Attachment* is a bond where a person connects safely with one another and usually originates in infancy (Bowlby, 1940; Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1968).
2. *Assumptive world* is what one believes and holds to be true (Olson et al., 2002; 2011; Butler et al., 2022; Fleming, 2022).
3. *Betrayal* is a duplicitous act that one person commits against another and can be defined as disloyalty (Shrout & Weigel, 2021; Lee & O'Sullivan, 2019, p.1736).
4. *Infidelity* is the ultimate betrayal in marriage, where one commits an act of unfaithfulness against their spouse with a third party (Lonergan et al., 2020; Shrout & Weigel, 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2018).
5. *Health Compromising issues* are trauma-based occurrences that impact mental and physical overall well-being (Girard et al., 2020; Johnson, 2019; Dehghani et al., 2021).
6. *Injury* results from a trauma or devastating wound, such as broken marital trust/vows (Lonergan, 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021).
7. *Posttraumatic* is defined as emotional distress stemming from involvement in a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association [APA]. 2022).
8. *Posttraumatic growth* is the genesis after a traumatic occurrence (Gossner et al., 2019; Zeligman et al., 2020).
9. *Physiological issues* are physical-related challenges caused by psychological distress that result in physical health-related dilemmas (Holder et al., 2000; Ezzati & Riboli, 2013; Walsh et al., 2013).

10. *Psychological issues* are mental health challenges caused by severe distress that result in mood disorders (e.g., stress, depression, anxiety, and PTSD (King & LaValley, 2019; Priem & Solomon, 2011; Knobloch et al., 2013)).

Summary

Infidelity is a growing widespread global problem that results in a breakdown of the marital union by creating a monumental wound. This injury ignites and leaves a gaping laceration of devastation. This devastation results in health-compromising related dilemmas (e.g., emotional and physical) challenges to the non-involved. This phenomenological study examines how African American women experience posttraumatic growth after infidelity, void of health-compromising issues (e.g., psychological, and physiological behaviors). This research should enhance the literature based on the lived experience of women who have experienced this phenomenon and what incited their resilience after their emotional and physical turmoil.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Infidelity is a worldwide pandemic, with a prevalence of 18% to 49% of men and 12% to 31% of women involved in duplicitous acts (Warach & Josephs, 2021; Labrecque & Whisman, 2017; Fincham & May, 2017; Lisman, 2021). Unfaithfulness is considered a norm today, with approximately half of marriages in the United States ending in divorce (CDC, 2015; Lonergan, 2021). Much research is on infidelity betrayal and its concomitants (e.g., marital distress, strain, broken trust/dreams, and dissolution). The repercussion of a matrimonial injury causes emotional and relationship devastation (Johnson, 1985; Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Parker & Campbell, 2017). These wounds emanate psychologically and physiologically throughout recovery (Johnson, 1985; Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Parker & Campbell, 2017).

Nevertheless, few studies have examined why some people experience posttraumatic growth rather than health-compromising issues (Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Warach & Josephs, 2021). The recent studies reveal a gap in the literature as to why this phenomenon exists and what makes some excel and other suffers years of dismay after broken marital security (Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Lonergan, 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Brooks et al., 2019; Fleming, 2022). To examine and fill this gap in the literature, this researcher plans to conduct a transcendental phenomenological study that examines the lived experiences of women of color who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2013).

This study examines women of color's posttraumatic development following infidelity rather than health-compromising related issues. This study will seek to answer the following questions about this phenomenon (1) How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity? (2) How do African American women describe

characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) vital for their resiliency post-infidelity?

(3) How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview (e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith) because of marital betrayal?

Theoretical Frameworks

The Attachment Theory (AT), Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT), and Systems theory (ST) are the grounding agents for this study. Infidelity deals with attachment, betrayal, broken trust, safety, and a fragile marital bond, established in these theoretical orientations. The attachment theorists are Bowlby and Ainsworth; the notion behind the work of Ainsworth and Bowlby is that attachments begin in childhood and impact a child's development (Bowlby, 1928, 1940; 1968, Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1968). To survive, develop, and thrive, infants must feel a sense of safety, trust, and attachment to a significant figure, such as their parent/guardians (Bowlby, 1928; 1940).

Shielded attachments develop during infancy, according to Bowlby. Mothers who were connected to their babies raise children who grew up more anchored than those with disconnected mothers (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963). Conversely, those children whose mothers were less sensitive exhibited insecurities (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963). A safe devotion is robustly aligned with maternal sensitivity (Bowlby, 1928). Attachment means securing self safely and lovingly with another person through bonding (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963). Attachment theory helps to explain why a disconnect inhibits individual relationships from striving when there is a lack of connection (Bowlby & Greenberg, 1963; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). Moreover, a fragile marital disconnection causes attachment difficulties in reconnecting within the marriage (e.g., safety, intimacy, and trust). Security and trust are consequential to

marriage survival which is vital for the relationship's longevity (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). In cases where the couple does not revitalize or one refuses to resume, the marriage cannot survive because it is devoid of attachment (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Lonergan et al., 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021). Therefore, the researchers conclude that a marital bond is a form of wholesomeness for the couple's happiness and longevity.

Furthermore, Butler et al. (2022) found that spouses attempt to cohere throughout their relationship, especially after infidelity. The authors found that the couples rotate, drawing into and drawing out from each other during this process (Butler et al., 2022). Since trust is a factor for the noninvolved, the involved may lean out when the betrayer leans in. Conversely, Butler et al. (2022) discovered that when the noninvolved tries to reconnect, the involved may stonewall and lean out. This negative cycle disallows couples to revitalize their bond, which is essential for the relationship's survival.

Allochronic behaviors are standard patterns as the couple navigates the dilemma of adultery with robust apprehension on both sides (Butler et al., 2022). Leaning in and leaning away are equal catalysts to help the recovery process when the couple decides to remain together and regain a secure attachment (Butler et al., 2022). Butler et al. (2022) further argued that these attachment-organized responses are salient to reestablishing intimate relational joining. A strong connection exists between bonding and secure attachment (e.g., Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Butler et al., 2022; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020).

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)

Johnson & Greenberg (1985) are the founders of EFT, which is grounded in a humanistic approach that deals with emotions. These emotions are rooted in secure attachments, a

relationship-bonding mechanism that starts in infancy (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963; Johnson & Greensburg, 1985). The mindset of EFT is to help couples overcome attachment injuries by de-escalating their distress (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Makinen & Johnson, 2006). For example, the therapist creates an environment of safety for the couple to dialogue, which helps to alleviate their apprehension and paves the way for communication.

The assertion behind EFT is to help couples learn to interact cohesively by strengthening their emotional connection through exploring their sentiments in a safe environment (Johnson, 2004). This method helps them address their unmet needs and vacate their negative interaction cycle (Johnson, 2004; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). This model is more comprehensive because it mainly focuses on understanding the couple's dynamics and what is happening. It is like methods used in integrative behavioral couples therapy (IBCT). In essence, EFCT is driven by previously cited issues.

The context of emotionally focused therapy is working with agitated couples and those that have experienced an interruption in the unity of marriage (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Wittenborn et al., 2019). Moreover, EFT is an empirically based approach that has proven results in helping couples overcome anguish by neutralizing pessimistic interactions, ongoing stress, and emotional discord (Johnson et al., 1999). For example, EFCT incorporates the previously mentioned grounding theories (attachment and systems theories) in the therapeutic process to assist distressed couples.

Each of the above-referenced theories has a long-standing history and coupled together, provides evidence-proven methods to understand and help couples navigate perturbing events through secure attachments, emotional intimacy, and the family system (Bowlby, 1963; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988; Johnson, 1996, 2002, Bowen, 1960; Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Understanding is the principle, and the undergirding of attachment theory lends well with EFCT and ST in explaining the role of the family, attachment, and wedding relating to conflict and distress. In the case of marital infidelity, pain often leads to posttraumatic duress (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Denton et al., 2012; Dessaulles et al., 2003; Wittenborn et al., 2019).

Thus, EFCT helps alleviate posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health-compromising issues such as depression, dissension, unfaithful acts, and acute health-related conditions (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Denton et al., 2012; Dessaulles et al., 2003; Wittenborn et al., 2019). Research has revealed the need for security in relationships whose genesis begins and ends with the lifespan (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963; Johnson & Greensburg, 1985). Attachment security is essential for one's emotional and physical connection to significant others, and without this interconnection emotional stability can be undermined (Johnson, 2005). Thriving and prolific/perilous functioning originate within the family system (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Systems Theory

Ludwig von Bertalanffy developed a systems theory (ST) in the early 1920s, assuming that a sole organizational system can be utilized to understand living creatures and social groups (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The family system is intertwined, and everyone contributes/influences the unit and not in solitariness (von Bertalanffy, 1968). ST is rooted within the science of biology and focuses on the individual and group within its ecosystem, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral consequences from divergent perspectives (von Bertalanffy, 1968). For example, betrayal begins as a thought based on the couple's interpersonal relational dynamics. If the spouse with ideas of infidelity acts on them, it is considered an action with comportment outcomes (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Systems theory has been applied to psychology to help mental health professionals comprehend the family unit as comprehensive (Bowen, 1960). Bowen developed the family systems theory (FST), which considers the family an emotional team. They cannot be understood in isolation but as a component of the family or origin. Thus, the clan should be treated as a unit for the best outcomes regarding infidelity. The family is indispensable in its recovery and emotional wellness when disturbances occur.

Interconnectedness is a crucial part of marriage, and each spouse contributes to their joy and happiness (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bowen, 1960). The ST and FST look at the familial group holistically as all intertwined active components in the various aspects of the relationships (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bowen, 1960). ST, like the previously described theories, is useful in treating mental and physical health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse) and the unit unabridged. Mental and physical health difficulties are inevitable after infidelity.

Related Literature

Infidelity

Sexual infidelity is one of the leading causes of divorce and trauma injury to the betrayed (Warach & Josephs, 2021; Fleming, 2022; Lonergan et al., 2021). Loyalty and commitment are expected in marital agreements (Fife et al., 2021). In cases of marital disloyalty violations, the individuals' assumptive world is challenged (Cann et al., 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Fleming, 2022). Fleming posited that an injury infiltrating a moral or spiritual code could create a loss of moral certainty, faith, and hope.

These shattered injuries may result in problems beyond human control that penetrate deep-seated honorable postulations about the world and self (Fleming et al., 2022). Some

antecedents are predictors of infidelity, such as insecure attachments, dissatisfaction, and unmet needs (Martin et al., 2014; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985, 2019, 2004; Barta & Kiene, 2005).

Moreover, individuals with disrupted attachments are more likely to have an affair (Warach & Joseph, 2021; Johnson, 2019). The mainspring of unfaithfulness could derive from divergent reasons such as marital dissatisfaction, lack of sexual activity, retaliation, and loneliness (Martin et al., 2014). Researchers have also found that power, attention-seeking (Fisher, 2007), and immaturity catalyze duplicity (Martin et al., 2014).

In addition, factors associated with the risk of cheating include the level of commitment that engulfs marital happiness/quality and investment (Rusbult, 1980). The extent of individual satisfaction and reduced alternatives yield greater interest/involvement and the likelihood of refraining from extramarital relations (Drigotas et al., 1999). Urganci et al. (2021) discovered an association between relationship dedication and infidelity (Fincham & May 2017). Moreover, Fincham and May (2017) found that individuals with unrestricted sociosexual orientation and a lack of relationship quality will likely engage in adultery.

Sociosexual orientation is an individual's willingness to cavort outside marriage (Fincham & May 2017). A poor-quality relationship correlates with the probability of infidelity through unconstrained sociosexuality versus a high-quality connection that typically sustains faithfulness (Fincham & Ma, 2017). Cheating in relationships can also occur when a partner is discontented with their relationship because of having unmet needs (Barta & Kiene, 2005; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985).

The most frequent traits the researchers found to be amalgamated with marital infidelity are (a) neuroticism, (b) agreeableness, and (c) conscientiousness (Altgelt et al., 2018). Disloyalty remains prevalent in relationships, contributing to intimate partner relationships' betrayals, such

as personality types, mental stability, and happiness (Altgelt et al., 2018). Infidelity (e.g., emotional and physical) is manifested on levels that include the Internet, which has become a dating ground for relationships (Vossler et al., 2020; Abbasi, 2019).

Vossler et al. (2020) revealed perceptions of Internet infidelity among those who engage in online affairs. Cyberspace cheating has become a private and public place for users (Vossler et al., 2020; Abbasi, 2019; Pazhoohi, 2019). Individuals view infidelity differently; females are more concerned about psychological affairs but look at sex as cheating (Vossler et al., 2020; Abbasi, 2019; Pazhoohi et al., 2019), while men often view sexual relations as infidelity and discount emotional involvement as cheating. The crisis impact of disloyalty in any embodiment results in a destabilization of emotions.

Similarly, Pazhoohi et al. (2019) discovered the involved and the noninvolved emotions in both natural and fantasized affairs to be upsetting. Their findings further revealed that individuals from both sexes experience a more significant emotional impact from fantasized affairs. Lovemaking created in the mind is the same as actual infidelity and leads to turmoil, although some would disagree (Pazhoohi et al., 2019). Infidelity causes anguish and weakens marital closeness (Johnson, 1985; Emerman, 2018; Lonergan, 2020; Dehghani et al., 2021).

Extramarital relations involving the world wide web have increased (Abbasi, 2019). Furthermore, Abbasi posits that individuals addicted to social network sites (SNS) will likely have fidelity issues. Internet fidelity is rising among users of all ages (Abbasi, 2019; Vossler et al., 2020; Pazhoohi et al., 2019). These Web users invest an inordinate amount of time establishing friendships, social connections, and love affairs.

Many view the SNS as having secret romantic interludes with their partner being oblivious (Abbasi, 2019). Based on this study, cheating affects psychological well-being (e.g.,

emotionally and cognitively) when individuals concentrate more on their agony and ruminations. Web affairs are just as hurtful as other types of infidelity; cheating is painful, causes stress, and steadily rises in the United States (Vossler et al., 2020; Pazhoohi, 2019; Abbasi, 2019; Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021).

Prevalence of Infidelity Statistics

Infidelity is one of the leading causes of divorce in the United States, with approximately 40% to 50% of marriages ending in demise (Lonergan, 2021; CDC, 2015). Comparingly, the research presented in Chapter one revealed that marital infidelity is a crisis in the United States (Warach & Josephs, 2021; Labrecque & Whisman, 2017); Fincham & May 2017; Lisman, 2021). Furthermore, in the U. S., adultery is committed at a widespread presence of 21.2% of men and 13.4% of women (Labrecque & Whisman, 2017).

Fincham & May (2017) found that 20-25% of all marriages deal with infidelity. Infidelity's predominance is high among married individuals; 30% to 60% of men and 20% to 50% of women engage in at least one adulterous encounter (Lisman, 2021). Affairs often result in marital cessation, with pervasiveness in 50% to 65% of couples seeking therapy for such betrayal (Atkins et al., 2001).

Most couples enter counseling for relationship issues with underlying sexual-related problems (Edmond et al., 2021). Twenty-eight percent to fifty-eight percent of couples seeking therapy identify sexual relations as a reason for seeking counseling (Boisvert et al., 2011; Doss et al., 2004). The research reveals that infidelity is an ongoing quandary that needs intervention. Infidelity is one of the most challenging issues to treat in therapy (Gossner et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2021; Edmond et al., 2021). Moreover, 90% of all clinicians will collaborate with individuals who have endured traumatic infidelity (Kilpatrick et al., 2013).

Therapists discovered that sexual issues are everyday marital discourse and taxing to navigate, while couples cited sexual desire and frequency of sex were problematic in their marriage (Edmond et al., 2021; Boisvert et al., 2011; Doss et al., 2004). Besides, nearly 60% of these couples experience clinical symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety, panic, and adjustment disorders) because of infidelity (Lasser et al., 2017; Roos et al., 2019; Whisman, 2015). The dismantling resulting from infidelity could lead to divorce, which has a lasting impact.

Divorce often occurs after infidelity, but not in all cases (Carter, 2016, 2018; Clayton et al., 2013). Marital dissolution has many emotional and physical health ramifications, such as anxiety, depression, stress, substance dependence, and immune issues (Foran et al., 2015; Robles et al., 2014; CDC, 2015). The involved partner's behavior interrupts the noninvolved assumptive world and causes a monumental wound in marital security, leading to a fragile attachment (Girard et al., 2020; Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Fleming et al., 2022).

Attachment Injury

An unshakeable marriage attachment bond is indispensable and provides conjugal protection, and if broken, it causes a catastrophic injury (Butler et al., 2022; Olson et al., 2002). Attachment injuries are devastating cataclysmic impacts that violate the marital covenant agreement (Johnson, 2005; Johnson et al., 2001; Schade & Sandberg, 2012). After betrayal, the couple must reattach for their relationship to survive/heal (Butler et al., 2022). These auxiliaries facilitate healing after deceit and serve as a stimulus for change (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Butler et al., 2022; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Mitchel et al., 2020; Tim & Blow, 2018).

Intimacy is a basic human need and leads to attachment (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1968; Martin & Gueguen, 2015). An attachment injustice compromises trust and relationship stability (Johnson, 2005; Fleming et al., 2022). A portion of the restorative bond is the responsibility of

the involved partner (Mitchel et al., 2020). The betrayer plays a pivotal role in corrective actions relating to restoring and cultivating trust and stabilizing the marital partnership (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2020; Tim & Blow, 2018). Recovery is possible as the couples begin to realign and reassess, which helps protect their relationship and reconstruct the marital covenant (Butler et al., 2022; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Zeligman et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020).

The abovementioned process is described as an organized attachment response designed to protect the relationship as palliate (Butler et al., 2022; Johnson, 2004; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). Attachments are powerful; when this linking becomes unstable, mental disorders can emerge when a partnership is affected (Tironi et al., 2021; Fleming, 2022). Emotional wellness obstacles present after a breach of trust.

Betrayal

Betrayal as a form of relational abrasion is crucial in identifying and understanding the role of adultery and relational injury among married couples (Lonergan et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). Because of the relational wound of the betrayed, the psychological damage and attachment injuries are precipitating factors of other mental health problems that ensue after infidelity. The breach of faith leaves the attachment security fragile by broken trust following disloyalty (Raftar & Shareh, 2022). After infidelity, couples must face making decisions concerning their marriage that come with uncertainties (Raftar & Shareh, 2022; Fleming, 2022).

These couples must become reconciled to the following risk factors (a) a longer healing process and (b) the risk of subsequent affairs and the injury of ongoing deceit (Raftar & Shareh, 2022). Infidelity origination could entail meeting in different places such as churches, bars, business trips, online, and the workplace, impacting the couple's alliance (Carter, 2019; Vossler

et al., 2020; Pazhoohi et al., 2019). The weakening of the relatedness occurs when a deep involvement originates and continues with the extradyadic individual (Carter, 2019). Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Lonergan et al. 2020).

These wounds produce emotional duress and stress-related and maladaptive behaviors in the noninvolved (Roos and O'Connor, Canevello, & Bennett, 2019; Steffens & Rennie, 2006; Whisman, 2015). A durable attachment is a sustainer in relationships and assists the couple in remaining anchored in a trusting and safe union (Emerman, 2018; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). When marital deception occurs, the couple's stability weakens (Parker & Campbell, 2017). Infidelity has lasting effects and inflicts traumatization in the lives of the involved and noninvolved, their children, and extended family (Mitchell et al., 2021).

The emotional health of the betrayed and the betrayer is impacted by their insecure attachment. A limitation of this research is that the participants in heterosexual relationships were primarily Caucasian well-educated, financially secure women; marginalized populations were excluded (e.g., minorities, same-sex, queer, and conjugal relationships). A more diverse sampling is required to show causality for underrepresented populations.

Health-Related Issues

Psychological

Attachment insecurity can originate on several levels in the emotional and physical domains (Tironi et al., 2021). A disquieting experience is an abnormal psychological or behavioral state of mind resulting from emotional stress injuries (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) December 7, 2022. Contrastingly, mental health is the psychosocial state of someone functioning at a satisfactory emotional and behavioral adjustment (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) December 7, 2022. Hence, the emotional impact of mental health related to marital infidelity is a trauma-based

occurrence that influences the noninvolved spouse's overall wellness (Girard et al., 2020; Johnson, 2019; Dehghani et al., 2021).

The enveloping impact of infidelity distress sways the injured spouse's reasoning capacity amid the turmoil that creates anxiety and distrust. These authors further determined that there are emotional and mental health implications due to infidelity. (Dehghani et al., 2020; Warach & Josephs, 2021). The trauma impact based on this study is attachment-related victimization and mental and physical-related trauma. Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral health involves thoughts, feelings, and actions (Warach & Josephs, 2021). Negative emotions, pain, and depressive disorders equate with psychologically related behaviors (Knobloch et al., with Carpenter, 2007; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010; Knobloch et al., 2013; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011).

Once infidelity is disclosed, conflict arises, some couples remain married, and others seek dissolution of marriage (Carter, 2016; 2018; Clayton et al., 2013). Betrayed partners also report shame, victimization, powerlessness, and rage following a partner's infidelity (Bird et al., 2007; Gordon et al., 2004). Unregulated feelings can emerge during emotional divorce, which is a closure of the sexual cycle within the marriage based on the different roles of the participants (Antunes et al., 2010). Thus, psychological consequences include enervated health, stress, depression, anxiety, and adjustment disorders (Previti & Amato, 2004; Knobloch et al., 2016; Warach & Josephs, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021).

Pessimism, emotional pain, and depression are results of relationship distress that ignite psychological consequences ensuing from stress (King & LaValley, 2019; Priem & Solomon, 2011; Knobloch et al., 2007; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010; McLaren & Solomon, 2014; McLaren et al., 2011, 2012; Knobloch et al., 2013; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010). Turmoil has a negative connotation: relationship dilemmas are deemed harmful, and pleasantries are more favorable

(Solomon & Priem, 2016; Weiss, 1980). There is a correlation between relational disturbance, stress, and depression linked to health-compromising behavior (Lazarus & Folman, 1984; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1996).

Distress negatively corresponds to one's ability to partake in sound decision-making, such as self-care (sleeping, eating healthy, exercising, and regulating emotions (Solomon et al., 2016). Additionally, heightened stress and depression increase hurtful/harmful behaviors such as relationship demise (Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Barber & Cooper, 2014; File et al., 2013). The risky behaviors mentioned earlier are typical when dealing with acute stress (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). Mental pressure clouds judgment, and excessive tension harm psychological and physiological health wellness (Shrout & Weigel, 2020). Infidelity leads to a defeatist attitude, depression, stress, and more intense psychological issues such as chronic stress and PTSD (Brown, 2001; Glass & Wright, 2007; DeCastro-Bofill et al., 2016; Summers et al., 2020; Roos et al., 2018; Shrout & Weigel, 2018; Wang et al., 2012; Cano & O'Leary, 2000). PTSD is defined as emotional distress stemming from involvement in a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022).

The diagnostic criteria for PTSD are persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame themselves or others. A steady depressed emotional state (e.g., fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame) can lead to diminished interest or participation in significant activities ("APA"). The researchers found that individuals' responses to marital infidelity are like PTSD symptoms of shock, confusion, anger, depression, impaired sense of self, and lowered esteem in personal and sexual matters (Perkins-Porras et al., 2015; Puechlong et al., 2020).

Individuals that suffer betrayal can experience intrusive thoughts and flashbacks (Freedman et al., 2020). For a diagnosis of PTSD, at least two symptoms that began or worsened after the stressor must be present (a) stability or (b) aggression (such as having angry outbursts) and risky or destructive behavior (for example, driving recklessly). The DSM-5 focuses on the behavioral symptoms accompanying PTSD and proposes four distinct diagnostic clusters. The clusters are described as (a) re-experiencing, (b) avoidance, (c) negative cognitions, and (d) mood and arousal. Emotional wellness disturbed can cause issues in the physiological domain triggered by stress-related physical health consequences (Fleming et al., 2022).

Physiological

Marital infidelity leads to disturbing health behaviors such as substance use/abuse, risky sexual behaviors, domestic violence, poor eating habits, and a dearth of overall self-care (Ezzati & Riboli, 2013; Holder et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2013). Fleming et al. (2022) found that infidelity prompts stress-related physiological consequences for the betrayed party (e.g., stress, headaches, and digestive issues). The depth of betrayal can result in the betrayed feeling degradation, rendering the noninvolved partner incapable of making prudent decisions or indecisiveness that channels energy into unhelpful behaviors (Knobloch et al., 2016).

Although these behaviors can be detrimental, many continue to engage, partly due to their make-up, through coping, self-fulfillment, emotional dysregulation, and self-value (Walsh et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2014). However, this notion has not been tested; current research seems to lend toward the devastation of infidelity and its impact on the psychological and physiological wellness of the noninvolved, resulting in numerous illnesses in both previously mentioned domains (Lonergan et al., 2020; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Weigel & Shrout, 2020).

Relationship dismay arises from individual conflicts (King & La Valley, 2019). A battle develops when there is a lack of effective communication, solution-seeking, passive behaviors, and desired needs (Knobloch et al. & Wehrman, 2015; Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Couples with chaotic relationships are said to have more disagreements, anger, and dissatisfaction (King & LeValley, 2019; Scheinfeld & Worley, 2018; Theiss & Solomon, 2006). These couples typically have poor communication and avoidant issues that negate resolving conflict, which is essential to efficacious communication and heuristics (Theiss & Estlein, 2014; Theiss & Nagy, 2013; Knobloch et al., 2015; Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018). Infidelity has undesirable consequences and can escalate thoughts of suicide and a depressed mood (Baucom et al., 2017).

In general, stressful life events often increase the chance of becoming ill, Turner, (2010) and are associated with poor mental and physical health (Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007). Cano & O'Leary (2000) assert that "wives are six times more likely to be diagnosed with a major depressive episode after discovering their husbands' infidelity." The literature reflects limited research on the connection between cheating and physiological health. However, the research on the interrelatedness of stressors to emotional and physical health consequences, encompassing destructive behaviors, is well-developed (Cano et al., 2000; Olson et al., 2002; Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007; Bird et al., 2007; Turner, 2013).

Health-compromising behaviors include but are not limited to alcohol, nicotine, or other drug use, overeating, minimal physical activity, and unprotected sex (Walsh et al., 2013). A limitation of the research is self-reports that may not be as accurate due to the participants' recollections of changes in their emotional health and behavior engagement following the infidelity (Walsh et al., 2013). Moreover, individual self-reports may result in bias. In addition, it

is unlikely to capture reactions to infidelity in real-time (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). The research data were cross-sectional, and causal inference about the directions of these relationships could not be made. Despite health-compromising behaviors for some, many experience growth after relationship infidelity (Zeligman et al., 2020).

Posttraumatic Growth

PTG symbolizes effective changes in a person's life after an unfortunate phenomenon (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Zeligman et al., 2020). Following a detrimental impact, an individual's reality and what they believed to be actual become challenged, and mistrust and doubt enter their cognition (Cann et al., 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Fleming, 2022). Boehmer et al. (2020) asserted that PTG is mainly through individuals' self-disclosure. The researchers believe these self-reports may mirror their coping mechanisms (e.g., dissociation and passivity) and limited atypical survival mechanisms (Cheng et al., 2018; Sumalla et al., 2009; Zoellener & Maercker, 2006). However, the authors are not refuting that some flourish; many may claim growth, but it may be assumed.

Boehmer et al. (2020) research raises a question: What is the possibility that one can fathom growth as a coping mechanism? The researcher hopes this question will be clarified as she researches posttraumatic growth after trauma. The researchers (e.g., Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wilder et al., 2020; Wittenborn et al., 2019; Zeligman et al., 2020) found that posttraumatic flourishing is possible through healing recovery, self-esteem, support system, and Christian faith. Conversely, other researchers found that illusory growth may directly correlate to how they inwardly process subjectively what has happened to them and wishfully proclaim change (Cann et al., 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Another question is incited from this notion of illusory growth; What is the possibility that growth is a figment of one's imagination? The authors found that illusory growth may be ignited after an injurious event but not altogether influenced by the event in its totality. Moreover, growth is a process, and trauma is life changing (Boehmer et al., 2020). Boehmer et al. (2020) purport that it is salient to distinguish between posttraumatic growth and illusory growth. A distinction between real and imagined growth is crucial because the appropriate intervention based on false growth is needed. Psychoeducation is utilized for comprehending PTG (Taku et al., 2017; Orille et al., 2019). The phenomenon of illusory growth is still unclear, and more research is required.

Trauma is a life-changing event that results in an individual feeling a sense of loss and uncontrolled emotions (Zeligman et al., 2020). After a traumatic event, multifarious individuals have experienced PTG, and other positive life changes based on years of research (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). An individual's relationship with God influences coping with trauma symptoms and perceived growth (Zeligman et al., 2020). Interestingly, the presence of burgeoning growth does not negate the existence of pain. Likewise, PTSD symptoms do not preclude an individual from experiencing growth (Zeligman et al., 2020).

The researchers recommend future studies to evaluate psychological measures and to test psychological and physiological stress responses to a partner's betrayal. The current research findings were not definitive in Shrout & Weigel's study to substantiate whether people with poor mental health and who engage in health-compromising behaviors would be in relationships where infidelity is more likely to occur. The authors assumed that individuals who participated in the study might still be affected by mental health problems and at risk of health-compromising behaviors within three months of being betrayed.

However, due to insufficient information in the current findings, some individuals might have had mental health and health-compromising behaviors before the infidelity (Shrout & Weigel, 2018). A limitation is whether the noninvolved partner had preexisting mental or physical health issues before the infidelity. Additional research is needed to examine objective physical health and fitness measures to examine the betrayed partner's reactions and behavior after an affair. For example, a physical action to help explain the betrayed partner's response to the stress of adultery is to measure the cortisol reactivity in abnormal responses to stress which correlates to mental and physical health problems (Sapolsky, 1999). Despite the research, there was still a gap in why some experiences growth after infidelity and marital dissolution.

The researchers in this study had too few participants identifying health-compromising behaviors, which restricted the variance and the ability to create a meaningful variable. This study investigated why some are experiencing growth rather than health-compromising behaviors and will extend the body of knowledge in clinical work with clients. PTG does not happen overnight but through forgiveness, recovery, and healing. Trauma is attributed to psychological states of profound distress that stimulate negative cognitions.

When this stimulation is significant enough, the researchers found that it may influence patterns and force individuals to revise faulty assumptions and irrational beliefs (Ogińska-Bulik & Michalska, 2021; 2020). The individual's ability to process the wound properly to make sense and meaning from the event and adjustor adapt to the new usual way of life helps restore growth potential (Briere & Scott, 2015). The researchers further asserted that the following facets are crucial in effectively processing trauma (a) cognitive restructuring, resolution/acceptance, (b) downward comparison, and (c) two negative strategies: denial and regret.

This conversion of cognitive processing can yield growth changes as the individual establishes a new normal. In the finale, for any traumatic experience, there are usually comorbidities, such as depression, anxiety, panic disorders, and stress-related disorders, such as acute stress disorder and PTSD. There is hope for the betrayed spouse, but the devastating impact has many effects, as mentioned earlier, for years to come. Posttraumatic growth can be correlated with trauma types such as trauma wounds, coping styles, ruminations, and social networks (Brooks et al., 2019).

The above factors are salient in a thriving and non-thriving mindset (Brooks et al., 2019). Trauma directly results from how individuals manage their psychological functioning and developmental life stages (Brooks et al., 2019). Healing is essential to growth, and this becomes possible as the couples begin pulling in and pulling out, which helps shield their relationship and reconstruct the marital bond (Butler et al., 2022). The process above is described as an organized attachment response designed to protect the relationship as healing occurs (Butler et al., 2022).

Each partner experiences some stress, often associated with attachment injury for the noninvolved and guilt-related pressure for the involved. Growth comes from changes that include support, a strong sense of self, forgiveness, communication, therapy, and religious faith (Zeligman et al., 2020). These facets are explained in the proceeding paragraphs. Unfaithfulness has a lasting impact on marital relationships with or without high esteem.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a crucial protective measure when working through infidelity (Shrout et al., 2020). Individuals with high esteem will likely traverse hurtful and harmful situations in a diminished fashion (Shrout & Weigel, 2020). The impact of health-compromising wellness associated with infidelity is well documented in the literature. There is current research on

protective factors that reduce the traumatic impact of infidelity. The study conducted by Shrout and Weigel (2018) discovered that negative appraisals of infidelity increase emotional disturbance in the betrayed partner. Further, they found that self-esteem is a stress cushion that moderates a correlation between the negative impact of infidelity stress and psychological symptoms.

Self-esteem is a damage control and self-propelling agent in recovery (Shrout & Weigel, 2020). The non-involved perception plays a vital role in processing the trauma and their reaction to the unpleasant impact. The crisis impact of this study is emotional and mental health challenges (e.g., anxiety and depression symptoms). These challenges harmonize with stressful thinking and related crisis dilemma patterns that require repair. The research can prove helpful in counseling practices with singles and married couples because positive self-esteem and forgiveness catalyze fortitude and growth.

Forgiveness

After infidelity, forgiveness is essential to repair the security bond (Emerman, 2018). Forgiveness is a precursor to change and moving forward. Men and women perceive and respond to infidelity differently (Thompson et al., 2020). Men are more likely to ignore emotional infidelity, while women are most likely to forgive a sexual affair (Thompson et al., 2020). However, forgiveness does not mean the betrayed spouse will remain in the relationship (Thompson et al., 2020).

Individuals are more felicitous to experience growth after infidelity when they accept their emotions and embrace where they are as they look toward the future (Campbell-Sills, Barlow; Brown & Hoffman, 2006). Traumatic symptoms are closely related to emotional strain, catastrophic thinking, exhaustion, and lack of personal resources (Oginska-Bulik & Michalska,

2021; 2020). Trauma symptoms can hinder and propel growth. Recent studies show that posttraumatic growth (PTG) can result as a direct response for survivors of traumatic experiences (Ogińska-Bulik & Michalska, (2021; 2020). Infidelity is a form of emotional turmoil Ogińska-Bulik & Michalska, (2021; 2020). Proven dialogue is crucial to propel and navigate any relationship and process through trauma.

Communication

Communication is vital for couples to work through angry emotions (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). Teams must adhere to several factors to assist them in meaning-making and healing for the offended. The offending spouse plays a significant role in helping the offended spouse's recovery process by being transparent, open, and honest, which are salient tenets in restoration (Abrahamson et al., 2012; Baucom et al., 2017; Butler et al., 2021; Fife et al., 2011; Olson et al., 2002). A spouse's ability to transmute helps the couple transcend infidelity and reestablish trust and connection, while for others, healing may remain tentative and incomplete (Baucom et al., 2017; Butler et al., 2021).

The developmental model of marital competence (DMMC) aligns with the notion that efficacious communication correlates with healthy marital outcomes, including sexual satisfaction (Carroll et al., 2006). DMMC comprises three facets: (a) marital aptitude, (b) communication skills, and (c) interpersonal virtues and intrapersonal identities in marriage (Burleson & Denton, 1997; Carroll et al., 2006). Couples must work through conflict remediation and problem-solving in their relationship (Burleson & Denton, 1997; Carroll et al., 2006).

In doing so, couples can better resolve conflict and have a healthier relationship, marital bliss, and sexual satisfaction (Burleson & Denton, 1997; Carroll et al., 2006). Likewise,

Mitchell et al. (2021) found congruities between couples that remain together after infidelity. They further discovered that spouses reacted anomalously with processing and discussing issues surrounding the affair. The aftermath of infidelity could require professional help during the resolution/recovery or the dissolution process (Lasser et al., 2017; Roos et al., 2019; Whisman, 2015).

Therapy

Relational counseling is crucial after infidelity. However, there is minimal data on the percentage of couples seeking therapy because of adultery (Barraca & Polanski, 2020). The research revealed that 25% of couples attend therapy because of infidelity, and 30% disclose the affair to the therapist during counseling (Glass & Wright, 1992). Marital counseling is time-consuming and involves couples learning to communicate effectively with increased understanding and empathy within a safe environment (Dehghani & Dehghani., 2020; Johnson, 2019). Two therapeutic methods with empirical-based approaches (AIRM and IBCT) are highlighted below.

AIRM

A model to help couples recover is the attachment injury resolution model (AIRM) and Integrative Behavioral Couples Counseling (IBCT). AIRM is grounded in emotionally focused couples therapy (EFT). Couples participating in EFT increase relational quality through effective communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and trust rebuilding to help alleviate distress and reconnect as a unit (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). Previous studies indicated that marital infidelity creates severe emotional impacts for the injured couple, leading to posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anger, frustration, loss of identity, and feelings of inferiority (Catalina, 2017).

Couples face an exponential divide in their relationship because of the above-referenced themes caused by infidelity (Guitar et al., 2017). Marital infidelity breaches one's assumptive world and profoundly affects the betrayed cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially (Fleming et al., 2022). The impact in the above domains compounds the healing process and prevents the reconnection of the safety bond that benefits the reunification of the marital covenant (Rokach & Philibert-Lignieres, 2015). To avoid further disconnection, AIRM has been proven effective in aiding distressed couples (Brubacher, 2018).

Brubacher (2018) discovered the utilization of a change strategy for improving the couples' injured relationships through AIRM. The AIRM therapeutic approach is rooted in the attachment theory and expanded from the empirical theory and practice of emotionally focused couple therapy (Halchuk et al., 2010). Furthermore, AIRM is documented as successfully aiding couples in forgiving and healing the intimate bonds between couples injured by marital infidelity (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020).

The sole premise behind AIRM is to assist couples based on the notion and research on ways to resolve injuries in emotional relationships through productive dialogue, availability, and responsiveness to each other's needs (Franckowiak, 2017). A study was conducted with 14 couples wounded by infidelity; Sarantopoulos (2015) found that emotionally focused couple therapy based on AIRM is effective. The findings revealed that the couples reported lesser overall emotional symptoms (e.g., stress, depression, and mistrust).

Similarly, EFCT is an empirically based therapeutic intervention for couples injured by infidelity. Makinen and Johnson (2006) used emotionally focused couple therapy based on the attachment injury resolution model as a restorative measure. The results indicated the effectiveness of this therapeutic approach in resolving trust and forgiveness. Based on the

findings of this study, 15 couples could resolve their attachment injuries and report a higher level of marital adjustment, faith, and forgiveness for an offense. EFCT focuses on emotions, and ICBT has a behavioral and an emotional acceptance component.

IBCT

ICBT focuses on education through instruction on regulating emotions, mindful practice of problem-solving, and exploring what led to betrayal (Christensen & Doss, 2017). IBCT assumes that both partners are responsible for the problems in their relationship, but the duplicitous one is responsible for the traumatic injury (Christensen & Doss, 2017). The researcher chose ICBT as a facet of the healing and growth process of marriage counseling because it is vital for recovery. Healing is a journey and needs evidence-proven counseling research to aid in the helping process. The relational history of each partner is explored as to how they communicate and resolve conflict. Strategies dedicated to behavioral change are crucial.

The focus is on empathic joining using DEEP as a portion of treatment in IBCT (Christensen & Doss, 2017). The acronym meaning is as follows: Differences among the partners that serve as contributing problems, Emotional sensitivities, and vulnerabilities that tend to be activated by these differences. External circumstances may escalate the first two difficulties and patterns of interaction that the couples use to navigate the resulting problems, leading to Polarization (Christensen & Doss, 2017). IBCT is a therapy that erupts change in the couple's development.

The developmental life stages and how they impact healing are crucial to research because many individuals grow rather than suffer mental and health compromises (Christensen et al., 2014). The healing process is a potent component of life transformation (Christensen et al., 2014). Infidelity causes ruination, but many individuals encountered healing over time, even

when distress was heightened at the beginning of the discovery. These individuals move from discord to growth (Christensen et al., 2014).

The researchers found in limited studies that some grow while others suffer compromising health-related issues (Christensen et al., 2014). This study could prove valuable in uncovering why emotional and physical health issues immobilize many while others flourish after infidelity. A portion of the recovery process has implications for counselors to help the couple during the healing process. Emerman (2018) found that couples who communicate are more likely to have greater intimate connection and satisfaction. Equally, trust is a robust component of rebuilding a broken relationship (Dehghani & Dehghani., 2020; Johnson, 2019; 2004).

Trust

The trust-rebuilding process after an injury attachment is paramount for those who remain married. Healing and recovery are pertinent to marital survival after an affair; the following authors posit that forgiveness, communication, and conflict resolution during the aftermath of an experience are vital (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Barraca, 2017; Christensen et al., 2014). Moreover, the necessary components of healing recovery after infidelity are (1) onus, (2) efficacious communication, and (3) openness and honesty (Bird et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2020; Olson et al., 2002). Likewise, rebuilding trust, making sense of what happened (meaning), and forgiveness are also essential (Abrahamson et al., 2012; Bird et al., 2007; Olson et al., 2002).

Both parties' role in the recovery process is vital, although there needs to be more research on both spouses' role in the recovery process (Mitchell et al., 2021). The mental health professional is an important catalyst to help facilitate change in couples' marriages through

facilitation and guidance (Barraca, 2017; Christensen et al., 2020; Greenberg & Johnson, 1986; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). To help couples, the clinician must remain neutral and assist with de-escalation, validation, and garnering the couple's trust (Barraca & Polanski, 2020). Another counseling component is for the therapist to help the couple reconstruct trust (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Christensen et al., 2020; Johnson, 2019).

The premise behind this technique is for the couple to avoid polarization because everyone loses in such cases (Barraca & Polanski, 2020). Polarization stifles the marital bond, which is crucial for the couple to progress in rebuilding trust. The above-referenced authors posited that the noninvolved party must not hold the offense over the involved spouse's head, but must work toward recovery through mutual understanding, forgiveness, and trust through open and honest communication (Barraca & Polanski, 2020). The couple needs to regulate their emotions to avoid extremely defensive and accusatory responses amid their pain and despair (Barraca & Polanski, 2020; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Johnson, 2019; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020).

Affairs are one of the top reasons couples seek therapy, which comes with complexities during marital counseling (Lisman, 2022). Treatment helps relieve some psychological distress and promotes emotional wellness after infidelity (Barraca et al., 2021; Welch, 2019). The crisis impact based on this study is an attachment injury that harms the psyche. Likewise, the emotional distress of infidelity has implications for the noninvolved and involved parties (Mitchell et al., 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). Hence, the marital foundation is formulated to be everlasting (1 Corinthians. 3:11, KJV).

Christian Worldview: Marital Therapy

Marriage is God's design and is meant to be an enduring foundation from a biblical perspective (1 Corinthians, 3:11; Ephesians 5: 31-32). Christian clients are apropos to work with therapists with a spiritual base and incorporate these beliefs and values in the therapeutic process (Association of Pastoral Counselors, 2000; Ripley et al., 2001; Rose et al., 2008; Schaffner & Dixon, 2003). Marital wellness is a catalyst for change and motivation of the believer (Brimhall & Butler, 2007). Likewise, a client's relationship and perception of God may lead to a de-escalation of emotions and provide grace, humility, and collaboration to resolve discord (Butler & Harper, 1994).

A Meta-analysis of 103 studies exhibited a correlation between spirituality and religious coping linked to posttraumatic growth and a greater connection to a family of believers and a higher spiritual level (Prati & Pietrantonio, 2009; Bray, 2013; Michael & Cooper, 2013). Growth has many components, and one of them is the treatment process and a spiritual foundation. God designed the marriage covenant to be the foundation of the home. He created this union between husband and wife for the two to become one (Genesis 2:24, KJV).

There are guidelines for coping with a husband and wife; a man is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. Likewise, the wife must honor and respect her husband in submission to God's will (Ephesians 5:22-25). The marriage is elaborate in its design with numerous facets. These dimensions are not easily navigated and require spouses to remain committed, work through their issues with productive communication, and use kind words to alleviate strife (Proverbs 15:1). The scriptures declare, "When we are in distress and trouble, God is present and ready to aid in times of despair and crisis" (Psalms 46:1).

The Bible further denotes, "When we face troubles everywhere, we should not be distressed, puzzled, or in to act in desperation; but are always to bear the body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4-10). Incorporation of the Word of God in the healing process can catalyze change. The Christian Life Model (CLM) is empirically based and has proven validity in helping couples heal and grow after a traumatic experience (Wilder et al., 2020). The CLM envelops a comprehensive view of the individual's mental, physical, spiritual, and social wellness and drives nurturing and fruitful attachments (Wilder et al., 2020). The essence of working with the total man in all the above-referenced domains is salient. Counselors must be cognizant of infidelity and sexual relations being problematic in marriages (Glass & Wright, 1992; Barraca & Polanski, 2020; Lisman, 2022; Johnson, 1985; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020).

Sexuality is a part of God's creation; He established sexual intimacy for the married, and when fornication/adultery occurs outside of this covenant, it is considered a sin. Sin brings destruction and is the root cause of infidelity (1 John 3:8, KJV). The biblical worldview is to honor the marital covenant and remember the directive of God, "What He has joined together, let no man dissolve it" (Mark 10: 9, KJV). Suppose one partner has withdrawn and refuses to return to the spouse, not wanting a divorce. In that case, God has called that person abandoned to peace (1 Corinthians 7:15, KJV). The Christian worldview has many implications for the Christian counselor.

Implications for Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral counseling implies being armed with knowledge based on clarifying and understanding patterns and factors that affect marriage. The Bible declares that "we are to study to show ourselves to be approved and a workman, not to be ashamed who can divide the word of

truth" (2 Timothy 2:14, KJV). Therapists with the proper skillset can implement strategies and techniques to help the couple work through negative factors affecting their relationship by replacing the negatives with positive reactions. This notion aligns well with EFCT, AT, and family systems theory that incorporates emotions, attachments, and the family or origin.

The pastoral counselor can work with the client toward healing and restoration based on the research that marital injury impacts individuals emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Forgiveness could be a goal to help resolve the relational injury (Mutter et al., 2010). The couples' marital health, spirituality, and faith are robust tenets for satisfying and changing the relationship (Mutter et al., 2010). Forgiveness leads to healing and stimulates growth and change (Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Wilder et al., 2020). The study encourages all relationship therapists to receive formal training in sexuality to become better equipped to address sexual issues in couple's therapy. Therefore, pastoral counselors are to seek knowledge and garner understanding to help others (Proverbs 4:7, KJV).

Summary

Infidelity is an act of betrayal or engaging in a sexual act outside of marriage (Lonergan, 2021; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021). Adultery is an ongoing problem, with nearly half of marriages in the United States ending in dissolution (CDC, 2015; Lonergan et al., 2021). Duplicity leads to a weakened marital attachment, which causes a relational incapacity resulting in health-compromising issues (e.g., mental and physical health problems and a detached bond) according to Johnson, 1985; Dehghani et al., 2021; Lonergan et al., 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2021.

This study is grounded in three theoretical orientations that helped the researcher understand this phenomenon in the context of psychological and physiological health and the

couples' relationship to the relationship injury caused by infidelity. The attachment theory is based on how early attachments are formed and how this formation is carried from infancy to adulthood (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963). These initial safety connections play a vital part in shaping the emotional wellness of individuals versus unstable cognitions. Similarly, according to Johnson & Greenberg (1985), early attachments help meet unmet needs. EFT focuses on de-escalation and softening to neutralize emotions and assist with safe and healthy reattachments (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985).

Likewise, the ST and FST look at the family unit operating as a unit, not in isolation. These theories are salient when working with and understanding distressed clients and helping with healing and growth. However, in some cases, individuals experience growth rather than psychological and physiological problems after betrayal (Zeligman et al., 2021; Wilder et al., 2020; Gossner et al., 2020). The latter needs greater exploration of why some are experiencing growth rather than health-compromising issues.

Examining posttraumatic growth after infidelity in women of color will add to the body of literature and enhance the knowledge of others in the field. This information will be about pivotal aspects of growth following infidelity. Salient recovery/healing points that clinicians can use to share in their practice while working with clients experiencing infidelity and growth could prove beneficial as others build on this body of knowledge and future research. Perhaps, psychoeducational literature could develop, or seminars with the newly discovered knowledge could prove invaluable.

Much research has been done, and knowledge has been gained because of the consistency in the literature about infidelity, its potential causes, consequences, and trauma ensuing mental and physical health-related issues. Most of the literature overlaps with the peer-reviewed related

articles about adultery. Researchers have shown that marital infidelity ignites a relational and attachment injury that ruptures the couples' unity (Johnson, 1985; Dehghani et al., 2021; Lonergan, 2021).

However, research on the association between infidelity and physiological health needs further exploration. There is a correlation between stress, emotional and physical health consequences in the existing body of literature (Cano et al., 2000; Olson et al., 2002; Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007; Bird et al., 2007; Turner, 2013). Infidelity is one of the leading causes of marital demise in the United States. Hopefully, advanced research will continue expanding the behavioral sciences database to provide up-to-date knowledge to all helping professionals.

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

This qualitative study will examine how women of color experience post-traumatic growth after infidelity without compromising health-related issues. Research has revealed ongoing infidelity issues in the United States, with half of the marriages ending in divorce (Lonergan, 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Fleming et al., 2022). This section will cover an overview of the research method, design, research questions, participants' recruitment process, the procedure for the study, data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, and informed consent. The topics mentioned above are explained in the following paragraphs.

Design

The methodology for this study is qualitative, using a transcendental phenomenological design. Phenomenology is appropriate because it deals with an occurrence to gain a deeper insight based on lived experiences (Husserl, 1973; Creswell & Poth, 2013; Moustakas, 1984). Phenomenology understands human science from a life-world viewpoint (Moustakas, 1984). This notion of lived experiences was the rationale for using a transcendental phenomenological monocle focusing on individuals' experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2013). Intentional experiences are acts of consciousness where thoughts, memories, perceptions, emotions, and judgment are evoked to comprehend their essences (Husserl, 1973). Thus, meaning is the “heart” of the transcendental phenomenology of science (Husserl, 1973, p. 80).

Therefore, the researcher will bracket her personal views and experiences for the participants' contextual explanations (Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1925, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), bracketing is the initial step in phenomenological

reduction. The phenomenon's ethos from the participants' lived experience shall provide for in-depth data analyses as described by Moustakas (1994).

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do African Americans describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity?

RQ 2: How do African American women describe characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) that were vital for their resiliency post-infidelity?

RQ 3: How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview (e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith) because of marital betrayal?

Setting

The public library in Bloomington, Illinois, will be the setting for face-to-face interviews. The interviews will be conducted in a private reserved office within the facility. Similarly, a secure Google Meet platform will be used for clients who cannot do in-person interviews. Recordings will be used for each setting to afford proper data gathering and allow the investigator to provide full attention to the participants and complete the transcriptions later (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

Participants will be selected through criterion purposeful sampling of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1984; Creswell & Poth, 2018; and Heppner, 2016). The study will include 10 women of color who are married or divorced and have first-hand knowledge of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989). Polkinghorne (1989) suggested interviewing a range of five to twenty-five participants who have experienced the phenomenon to ensure data saturation. In addition, the volunteers must meet the age criteria of

18 and above. The participants will be selected through four phases, explained in the following paragraph.

Procedure

The research proposal will be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for final approval to study human subjects. There will be a four-phase process to recruit individuals that have experienced infidelity, such as (1) referrals from local clinicians in the field, (2) snowballing, (3) business colleagues, and from (4) local churches. The individuals utilized to garner referrals will be contacted through emails or telephone calls. Interested participants will receive a screening questionnaire; selected individuals will have an orientation via phone.

During the meeting, the researcher will cover (a) confidentiality, (b) informed consent, (c) answering questions, and (d) discussing the methods of data collection (e.g., interviews and observation). The informed consent will be signed, which includes a confidentiality statement. For participants willing to continue participating, the informed consent form will be emailed or mailed to their homes. If mailed, a return self-addressed envelope will be included.

The researcher plans to use a software data program (MAXQDA) to transcribe unabridged interviews and use thematic analysis to analyze common themes until data saturation (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2013). Reaching data saturation allows for future study replication (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2013). Common themes will accomplish this task from the participant's experience with the research questions answered by the interview questions. This description consists of "what" the participants experienced (textural) and "how" the incident happened (structural). The what and the how will exhibit the nucleus of the phenomenon and its meaning from the participants' unique experiences of growth (transformation) after infidelity (Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1925/2011; Creswell & Poth, 2013).

The Researcher's Role

The researcher is a doctoral-level analyst with a post-secondary counseling and human development degree (MA) who operates a comprehensive counseling practice where she is the founder and CEO. She works with individuals and married couples who have experienced marital infidelity. She has found it very challenging to traverse betrayal with couples like the researchers in literature. The researcher has suffered a few betrayal injuries, but does not think those experiences will result in bias. However, as the researcher works through the data collection and analysis, she plans to remain aware of potential bias and abstain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994) by separating her experiences from the researched topic through bracketing (Creswell, 2013).

The participants will be solicited through counseling practices in the community, through business colleagues, by employing the snowball method, and by soliciting local Churches within the community. The researcher will seek ways to incorporate best practices in understanding issues that arise individually and collectively in relationships. As a Christian, the belief that marriage is the foundational fabric of society and that we must contribute to its wellness undergirds this study. One way to accomplish this is by adding knowledge to the existing literature body and garnering a greater understanding of women of color's posttraumatic growth after infidelity.

Data Collection

A critical aspect of qualitative inquiry is rigorous data collection techniques. For most qualitative designs, interviewing is a salient required data-gathering method (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, it is recommended that qualitative studies have a minimum

sample size of at least 10 participants to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data assemblage techniques will encompass interviews and observations (Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 1994). The analyst plans to employ semi-structured and common questions that will assist with building a research relationship between the analyst and participants. The interview questions are open-ended based on the interview protocol (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, a separate meeting (e.g., a phone call) will be conducted for follow-up clarification questions. This process shall be explained as part of the participants' expectations.

The interview questions protocol will include the interviewer's name, an alias for the participants, place, time, and date. The interviews will be conducted using a private meeting room at the Bloomington, Illinois Public Library or a secure Google Meet platform for clients who cannot attend in person. Each interview will last for 60 minutes and be spread over 30 days to allow for processing, validating the accuracy, and revisiting questions for clarification and understanding.

Method One: Interview Questions

The data collection methods are interviews and observation (e.g., through journal writing). There is a collection of information from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon using in-depth interviews. Moustakas (1994) suggested asking two broad questions (a) What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon, and (b) What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? These two questions focus on gathering data that will lead to a textural ("what happened") and structural (e.g., "how the phenomenon was experienced") description of the participants' experiences (Moustakas,

1994). After the initial opening questions, Moustakas's two broad above-referenced questions will be utilized. Next, the following questions will be employed in a semi-structured and open-ended format.

Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.
2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?
3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?
4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?
5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.
6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?
7. What helped you through this challenging time?
8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?
9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?
10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?
11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.
12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth a part of your growth?
13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?
14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that I have yet to inquire about?

Each interview question is designed to answer the overarching RQ about the phenomenon of posttraumatic development after infidelity without health-related compromising issues. Questions one through three provide rapport building, gathering data that will lead to a textural and structural description of the experiences and ultimately provide an understanding of the participants' everyday experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Questions four and five explore health-compromising issues the participant experienced in the psychological and physiological domains. Next, questions six through nine deal with the healing and recovery process; and the journey to get there, while questions ten through thirteen examine PTG and the attainment of burgeoning (e.g., family and friends support, emotional wellness, and religious faith). The final question, number fourteen, allows the participant to add anything else from their viewpoint that was not inquired by the researcher (Patton, 1990). This allows the participants to remain experts in their life experiences and further validates the importance of their participation. Rapport-building and data-gathering questions are detailed below. To help collect additional data from the participants, an observation journal will be employed.

Method Two: Journal Writing

Method Two will consist of an observed journal writing prompt where the participants will journal specific components to an interview question for the last 10 minutes. Writing will help the participants formulate thoughts and reactions to those contemplations and feelings. Similarly, a reflection through writing activity can provoke other thoughts about additional research questions that the analyst might not have entertained.

The following prompt will be utilized as the final portion of the interview for observation: How has your experience shaped your worldview? This journal cue question will be

valuable in grouping the data into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2013) and will allow the analyst to answer RQ three, how has their experiences changed their assumptive world.

Data Analysis

The data analysis will encompass inductive and deductive processes to establish patterns and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2013). The following methods will be deployed to complete the analysis process. Data analysis steps build on the data from the first and second research questions. The data analyst plans to use a data software program MAXQDA to help with the analysis of the research (e.g., interview transcriptions and highlights "significant statements," sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experience the phenomenon, called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994, p. 10). Horizontalization is the second step in data analysis when conducting a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994).

Next, these significant statements' meanings are categorized into themes using the MAXQDA data software program. In the development of textural and structural descriptions, the significant statements and themes are then used to write a description of what the participants experienced (textural description). These descriptions will be intertwined according to the divergent participant's experiences and provide a deep and rich account of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). A composite of the textural and structural descriptions will be synthesized to show the essence of the transformation into its meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher will use the following techniques for data analysis: (a) organizing data files, (b) developing initial codes, (c) describing personal experiences through bracketing, (d) identifying salient "statements" and establishing a cluster of meanings, (e) developing salient statements and grouping them into meaning units, (f) and developing the textural description ("what happened") and structural description ("how the phenomenon was experienced"). The

relevant topics will be grouped into teams of meaning for textual descriptions. These descriptions will be quoted precisely as the participants stated, and a structural report will be crafted (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, the researcher will develop the essence, using a composite description of the lived experiences of African American women's post-traumatic growth after infidelity. Compiling the collected data from the interviews, observations, and discussions makes it easier to understand and communicate with others (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Several methods ensure trustworthiness and are detailed below and are vital to research findings for assessing reliability (Stahl & King, 2020). These methods are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility can be promoted by using varied processes of triangulation. Triangulation is achieved by using multiple procedures from the field to establish identifiable repetitive patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). Based on the data analysis, the participants will vouch for the accuracy of their described experience through member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2013). In addition, the researcher will transcribe continuously from beginning to end, which helps provide credible and reliable information.

Member checking

This information must be dependable and transferable to expand the body of knowledge. Member checking and field notes are part of establishing credibility. A salient portion of credibility and validation is having the participants check a final copy of their themes. The purpose of member checking is to confirm the accuracy, make clarification changes, and add input to emerging themes (Creswell, 2013).

Field Notes

The researcher will use field notes as a guide during the research process and for documentation (e.g., participants' reviews, transcribed notes, peer-reviewed Canvas, Zoom meetings, and emails with comments from the chair and reader of the researcher's manuscript). The folders containing information related to the research will be maintained for two years and then eliminated through shredding.

Dependability and Confirmability

The second technique of the audit trail ensures the confirmability of the research study findings based solely on the participant's voice (Stahl & King, 2020). The audit trail is likened to a "counterbalance" system and is to be as accessible as possible from the analyst's biases or assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2013, p. 11). Furthermore, the audit trail comprehensively illustrates the study's findings based on participants' stories (Stahl & King, 2020). The trails describe how the data was collected and analyzed. The third technique is reduction and saturation, two essential analysis methods for phenomenological research.

Bracketing is used so that the study's various coincidences are not obscured from its real essence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers often choose emotionally charged topics when they begin with preconceived notions or develop them. Thus, bracketing protects the analyst (Creswell & Poth, 2013). The data analysis process is done collectively and continues to become saturated (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation means using adequate, quality data in a qualitative research study and is further described as a point where new data has ceased (Saunders et al., 2013).

Transferability

The fourth technique is transferability (reflexivity), a critical component of qualitative research that allows the investigator to engage in self-reflective praxis (Olukotun et al., 2021). This reflection allows the analyst to identify tension areas that need more inspection (Olukotun et al., 2021). The process of reflexivity further enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of information (Creswell & Poth, 2013). The research needs to be a thick, rich description that is meaningful and transferable report to demonstrate credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study will synthesize the textural and structural transformation utilizing detailed descriptions and recollections of the participant's lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2013; Denzin, 1984). The participants' complex experiences allowed for the essence of their posttraumatic growth (transformation) to be shared in a precise descriptive format that denotes the nature of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2013, p. 228).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are guiding principles that govern how scientific research should be conducted and disseminated. Ethics are established rules governing the expectation of one's behavior and the behavior of others. Thus, ethics can be known as the standards of conduct that guide researchers' conduct responsibly (American Counseling Association, 2015). When researching plausible solutions, some matters to consider are the site and individual power issues (e.g., within one's work environment, friends, and family) to be avoided.

Informed Consent

Informed consent regarding study procedures and individual rights will be explained, and permission will be obtained for participation (IRB). In addition, confidentiality is salient; therefore, recordings and data collection (e.g., field notes) should be stored in secure locations-

locked (e.g., file cabinets and electronic storage) with security system protection and passcode security on personal computers.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study examines people of color and their experience of posttraumatic growth after infidelity. A secondary consideration is why some people grow rather than experience health-compromising maladies. This study intends to add to and extend the body of knowledge in research. This contribution is accomplished by three overarching research questions that gain more insight into the lived experience of women of color that have experienced the phenomenon.

The questions to help answer the phenomenon are (1) How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity? (2) How do African American women describe characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) that were vital for their resiliency post-infidelity? and (3) How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview (e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith) because of marital betrayal?

The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and observations (journal writing) to gain greater insight into the individuals' worldviews and the meaning of their experiences. Next, the data collected will be grouped into “significant statements, the cluster of meaning and meaningful units, and themes for a detailed analysis. The analysis will ensure the “essence” of the phenomenon, research findings' trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020). Adherence to the ethical guidelines cited in the American counseling association (ACA) will be followed to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and non-maleficence when collaborating with human subjects.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

This chapter restates the purpose of this study and reviews the study's guiding research questions. The sections of this chapter included descriptive portraits of the participants and their interaction with the phenomenon. The findings were cultivated through data analysis of their rich descriptions gained during the semi-structured interview and observation through a journal writing activity. Results are presented under two headings, each utilizing a narrative arrangement to illuminate the participants' experiences. The first heading is presented as emergent themes and sub-themes in the data. The second heading offers definitive answers to the research questions. The participants' words are used to provide detailed, thick descriptions of their lived experiences concerning infidelity and posttraumatic growth. The culmination of Chapter Four ends with a summary.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the research study, African American women's posttraumatic development after infidelity. The developed research questions assisted in providing an operational framework for this study. The reiterated research questions are:

RQ 1: How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity?

RQ 2: How do African American women describe characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) that were vital for their resiliency post-infidelity?

RQ 3: How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview [e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith] because of marital betrayal?

The research questions used in this study were impelled by the study's purpose and were composed to provide an understanding of the participant's experience with the phenomenon. Similarly, data analysis was performed under the guidance of the research questions. Answers to the research questions have been presented through thematic impressions of the textural ("what happened") and structural ("how the phenomenon was experienced") descriptions of the phenomenon. A portrait of each participant is below.

Participants

The individuals' marital journeys are distinctive to each participant in this study, who shared their experiences of marital infidelity and posttraumatic growth. The participants were of divergent ages ranging from 37 to 66 years of age. Participants used in this study followed the participant requirements detailed in Chapter Three.

Interview quotations included in this study were transcribed verbatim. The researcher refined some words or phrases without changing the meaning of the participants' responses. Pseudonyms were provided to protect participants' identities, and their profile is presented and arranged by their pseudonyms below. The portraits illustrate the personal experience circumscribing each participant's encounter with the phenomenon.

Aiya

Aiya is a 44-year-old mother of one and has built her life as a mother and wife. She had a child with her ex-husband of 13 years and was a bonus mother to his children. She is in her

second marriage of five years, and no children are in this union. Aiya was born prematurely on August 17, 1978, and is the third child and is her mother's namesake. Her mom was a prostitute and a drug addict who was addicted to drugs. Aiya reportedly died twice during delivery. She was neglected and abandoned by her birth mother. Her story goes on about being left alone in hotel rooms during her first eight months of life and left with a babysitter for what was supposed to be a few days and ended up being seven years. Now, she calls the babysitter her mom.

Aiya shared that she is identical to her mom and did not understand that this would be a massive problem growing up. She believed her biological family treated her like the liar and thief her mother was. The family's behavior caused Aiya to think something was wrong with her for a long time. Her school days were tough; she was picked on because of her appearance (e.g., clothes, hair, and light skin). She had to learn forgiveness after holding onto too many painful grudges. This forgiveness included her parents and family members who caused her harm and pain. Her journey with God has not been flawless but consistent; Aiya has attained success despite her adversities. She is a doctoral student who works in higher education and is the Founder and CEO of her business.

April

April is a 43-year-old mother of three; one is deceased. She grew up as an only child in a two-parent home. Growing up in a regimented home with a strong, disciplinarian father and a nurturing mom, she struggled. April did not have the best relationship with her dad but always wanted to have one. She was an average student in school but was rebellious and disliked authority figures. April did not have many close friends and often antagonized others. She was on the verge of being expelled because of ongoing defiance as a high school student. She always wanted to belong and fit in but needed to figure out how. April has been married three times,

twice to her first husband for 8.5 years (eight years the first time and five months the second time, and to her ex-husband for four years). She says that “she is happily single.” She works for an insurance company as an underwriter and enjoys what she does.

Bea

Bea is a 66-year-old divorcee after 18 years of marriage. She grew up in a two-parent home, and her parents are still alive. There were seven children born to her parents’ union. Bea had a rough beginning; she was seven when an uncle raped her. By age 19, she was a single mother of two boys. During her early twenties, she was raped by her boyfriend and his brother. Her first marriage was an elopement that lasted five years; they had two boys in this union. Bea said the boys’ dad was in their lives during their pre-teen years and that by the time they were 13 and 14, he died in California at age 34.

Bea had a long-term live-in relationship with her second husband before their wedding. Bea reported that after giving her life to Christ, she was engaged to be married within a week, and her soon-to-be husband gave his life over to Christ. He wanted a short engagement, and they were married on January 30th, 1999. Little did she know that 18 years later, she would be fighting for her sanity again.

Denise

Denise is a 37-year-old wife and mother of three. She grew up in a two-parent household in Chicago, IL, with her mom, dad, and younger brother. Her mom worked at a mental health facility, and her dad was a city bus driver. Her parents never married, and they separated when she was a senior in high school. She shared that her parents had issues affecting her view on relationships. Learning about her father’s infidelity caused Denise to lose much respect for him.

She described her dad's unfaithfulness as one of the most traumatic events during her childhood. Her parents' relationship was very toxic, so she looked forward to them ending their relationship.

When she experienced infidelity in her marriage, it felt like an old wound was cut open. Her parents were not the most outstanding example of a healthy relationship, but they were good parents. Moreover, Denise's mother's work inspired her to pursue a profession in mental health. She spent much time there after school, which sparked her interest in mental health. She completed an internship for counseling at this same agency, and was offered my first job as a counselor.

Ella

Ella is a 48-year-old divorcee, the youngest of four girls raised by a single mom who was also a teenage mother. Her parents married each other twice. Ella's dad served in the Army and later in the Army Reserve. He became a police officer later in life and served in that capacity until cancer claimed his life. He was an ordained minister who introduced Ella to Jesus early in life. This was the most significant thing she shared that her father had ever done, outside of contributing to her conception.

Her grandfather (father's father) was brutally abusive to Ella's grandmother. Her father took on this same behavior; he was also an extreme womanizer with pedophile tendencies. Ella's mother's mother was a single mom with five children before she met her grandfather with whom she had another five children, bringing the total to 10. Her grandfather accepted them all as if they were biologically his. Ella remembers her grandmother as being a jack of all trades and brilliant. She was a seamstress, crocheter, knitter, cosmetologist, fantastic cook, and a lifelong

learner. She never got a driver's license but could give anyone directions on how to get anywhere in the city.

Likewise, her grandfather was the original Uber, owning a well-known, prominent cab stand on the west side of Chicago. He was extremely wise and financially “savvy” even though he only had a third-grade education; his mom was a formerly enslaved person. He was one of the most remarkable men Ella had ever known and an equally great provider. She believes she is who she is because of her rich examples, and not-so-good experiences.

Esther

Esther is a 66-year-old separated woman. She lived an extraordinary life without knowing it was a struggle for her mom, who worked two jobs to make ends meet. Her mother became a nurse to care for Esther and her sister, Michelle. Esther moved around with her family, and this enriched her life. They moved from Florida to Virginia when she was 14. Her mother wanted Esther and Michelle to live their lives as an adventure. Esther attended high school and junior college in Texas.

At the time, she was not the best student and was a social butterfly. She was a cheerleader and dance team captain and ran for Ms. Black San Antonio. Furthermore, she enjoyed speech, dramatization, ballet, tap, and jazz classes. She moved to Belgium in her early twenties and traveled to various countries, including England, Italy, France, and the Netherlands and enjoyed life there. One night, Esther went to a revival and gave her life to the Lord. She later met and married her husband in Iowa. He was a minister and because of his calling, she knew there would be challenges; but never thought infidelity would be one of them.

Nefertiti

Nefertiti is a 41-year-old divorcee who has had to overcome adversity since childhood. Her birth mom was imprisoned when she was seven, and from a young age, she desired stability that could not be disrupted momentarily. She was mature and purchased her first home at 21-years old. She described herself as a giving, loving and caring person. Her desire when she purchased her home was that it was not just for herself or their immediate family.

She has been instrumental in raising kids for whom she did not give birth, a testament to who she is. She is selfless, makes many sacrifices for others, and loves helping people. She further shared that she thrives off seeing others prosper while using the tools she has provided them. Nefertiti posits that her motto is knowing and understanding that life is not about her but the impact she has on others, so she tries to be intentional daily.

Taya

Taya is 52 years old, and grew up in a household with a mother, father, and four other siblings in the Henry Horner Projects in Chicago, IL. Her father left home when she was eight years old, which caused her life to change drastically. She searched for love in all the wrong places and found what she thought was love in all the false faces. She has been married twice and, in both relationships, experienced betrayal. In the first marriage, infidelity was open and not concealed, and his affairs were with multiple women.

Taya was affected by his behavior, which went on for some time. Furthermore, her first relationship was abusive. However, it allowed her to accept things more because of what would happen if she tried to do anything about it. Once divorced and remarried, she never thought that infidelity or abuse would be encountered again. Unfortunately, she experienced infidelity in her

second marriage. Marital dissolution was not what Taya desired; however, her spouse pursued it, and the Judge granted it.

Results

The results from the data analysis are presented under two headings: themes development and research questions responses. The content under the first heading is organized into thematic categories and subcategories as each relates to the phenomenon. The second heading provides conclusive answers to the research questions that guided this study. The participants' own words have been used to show their lived experience with the phenomenon.

Theme Development

The findings from this study are arranged under five themes: (a) hurt/pain, (b) self-identity, (c) depression, (d) loss of trust, and (e) God. Sub-themes developed as themes emerged and were provided for greater understanding of the participants' experience with the phenomenon. The sub-themes were trauma/betrayal, empowerment, hopelessness, anger, fear, and forgiveness. Appendix J provides an outline of the themes and sub-themes in this section.

Hurt/ Pain

The first theme recognized through data analysis was hurt/pain. Each participant discovered their spouse's infidelity and were shocked, hurt and suffered the emotional pain of betrayal. The participants' traumatic experiences involved a journey from dismay to self-discovery. Each of the participants did not suspect anything out of the ordinary until they noticed a change in their husband's behavior. The assertions below offer an explanation into the participants explanation of their lived experience of hurt/pain. Each lady was blindsided by their spouse's infidelity and shared their insights as followed.

Some participants described their hurt and pain exhibiting in the form of shock. Aiya shared, “After confronting him, I cried my way through the whole night of church service.” She felt betrayed because she was not aware that her husband had been unfaithful.” April recalled, “When I think back on things that he did and the lies. I was angrier because I knew what was going on, but he would insult my intelligence to make it seem like I was the “crazy” one.” And feeling betrayed because I was expecting to be with the person for the rest of my life, and now you tell me that you found somebody you wanted” was recounted by Bea. Bea went on to say she suffered from trauma related feelings and often “responded in a mean manner.”

Denise remembered, looking back, “There had been many signs, and even other people had noticed things and were trying to tell me something else was going on. I felt betrayed.” Similarly, Ella that her husband “would not tell the truth, would not be faithful, but we each decided to stay together. I remember feeling betrayed and remember loving blindly.” Esther shared, “There was hurt and there was pain. Ever since that day I question whether someone could love me for my outside before knowing my inside.” Esther described the level of betrayal surprising to her because she knew they would have trials, “but never unfaithfulness.”

Nefertiti recanted, “I noticed the change in his behavior and his disposition, so he would get a little short with me or would give vague answers when I asked him questions.” The act of infidelity is a form of trauma according to her. Taya shared, “Unfortunately, I think that hurt me more because it was so unexpected, and I thought I did everything possible to make my marriage work.” Taya was completely caught by surprise because she did not think that her husband would deviate from their marital relationship.

The participants each endured a level of shock that resulted in their feelings of hurt/pain, and betrayal that made them question things about themselves such as their beauty, desirability, and sense of self. Their depiction is highlighted below.

Self-Identity

The second theme is self-identity, and the sub-theme is empowerment. Each participant described their personal growth experience through self-reflection, learning to love self and increased self-discovery. Responses collected during participant interviews regarding posttraumatic development are supported by each participant's lived experience with the phenomenon. Each participant seemed eager to share their stories with a sense of humility and compassion.

Aiya described her experience with infidelity when "I started to realize who I was, and that I had a lot going on for myself that I did not need anyone to tear down. I defined myself as a wife and mother and those were the things that exemplified me in so many ways. And so, the separation not only made me question, who am I without that?" Once Aiya started focusing on herself, learning to love and accept who she was led to empowerment. She fondly stated, "I am able to take care of myself financially and to love me."

April delineated, "After the infidelity, I thought I was inadequate and that something was wrong with me, and not doing things right. I think my self-esteem helped to build my confidence." Bea recalled, "I have always liked myself. I just try to make a habit every morning to tell myself, 'You are beautiful and strong, and can make it through this day, which has helped. Denise reported "My self-esteem was already kind of low, and after the cheating made it worse. My self-worth played a role because I knew that I was worth more. My self-esteem got better once I started taking care of myself better."

Ella recited that “We learn about ourselves through others, so people are necessary, this answer made me think about who I am. I have never taken the time to really do that, but I did my work to discover who I am. And I was like ‘Okay, you bring this, and you bring that’, so, now that I understand my value and do not allow me to be in places where a person cannot value me.” Esther communicated that, “I think sometimes I still struggle with my self-esteem, confidence and worth. I think my self-worth is good, but it is still a work in progress. I still struggle with that outside issue (facial keloids). Even though it has nothing to do or should not have anything to do with him now, but it is residual.”

Esther has proven many things to herself and grown. Still, the aftermath of infidelity has her questioning or feeling dismayed about her outer appearance and how it might impact future relationships without someone getting to know her inner self. Nefertiti specified that “Self-esteem and confidence are important because if you have experienced infidelity, you do start to interrogate yourself, especially women. You examine everything about yourself, whether you are good enough and look good enough. So, you must understand just who you are and understand your value. I had to learn and embrace that I had value.”

Similarly, Taya recalled, “My self-esteem, confidence and worth helped with my growth process because I think recognizing it and understanding who I am, have allowed me to grow. I can stand up for myself when we do not merit ourselves, then we tend to accept anything.” The participants were unanimous in their recollection of self-discovery that yielded empowerment, which is a potent tenant to their post-traumatic growth after infidelity.

Depression

The third theme was depression, and the sub-themes were loneliness and sadness. Each of the participants described their depression because of their spouse’s infidelity. Their described

experience is highlighted in the following statements. Aiya recalled, “I do know I just had this unbearable sadness for a while. This dejection made me feel stuck in my tracks like I just did not know what to do.” April remembered, “I felt that just things that I had done in the past that this was something I deserved. I lost myself in the relationship. Not feeling I was enough, made me feel unhappiness.”

Bea shared, “Mentally, it was bad. I did not realize that I was suffering from depression until I went for a regular checkup. And my doctor asked me how I was doing, and I just started bawling.” Denise recalled, “I had feelings of sadness, and a lot of crying spells. I had some sadness and anxiety and some PTSD. I was almost thinking irrationally.” While Ella remembered “the stress that I battled back and forth with my emotions. I felt as though I did not have to time to deal with emotions. So, emotionally, I just pushed it all down, so I carried it in the form of stress.”

Esther recounted that “I did not recognize it at first, I was depressed cause I remember him saying she would just lay around on the couch, and I am thinking to myself, yeah, I did. I said because I was in a place that was uncharted territory for me. I knew that I had to keep putting one foot in front of the other because of my children. I would say that I was stressed out a lot.”

Nefertiti recalled, ‘It was like a roller coaster, it was up and down; being depressed a lot of depression and just being in like a dark place. I did have suicidal thoughts, I remember during that time I was just hanging on by a thread, it was from week-to-week and sometimes day to day. I just had to fight like fight through, it was a lonely period because many times, infidelity is not what you talk about.’ While Taya shared, “I think mentally it made me feel like I lost certain control because of some things that I do. For instance, I do not appreciate sleeping in my

bed by myself, so I won't sleep in it. I will sleep in a chair; I just refuse to go to be in an actual bed because I do not like sleeping alone. One of the things I feel like I need to find a way to control certain things."

Loss of Trust

The fourth theme is loss of trust, and the sub-theme is fear. Each participant described their experience with the phenomenon as a loss of trust and several of the women were afraid because of their financial status and one wondered if anyone would love her like this again. The participants had this to say about trust and fear: Aiya stated, "The loss of trust was probably the biggest hit for me, just because it was like I had this solid foundation and all of the sudden it was very shaky and uncertain."

April recalled, "I know in the beginning of the process; I would never be in a relationship again. I was already a guarded individual, but it makes me more guarded where I do not trust what people say. I do not trust people's intentions." Similarly, Bea shared, "I was in shock, and I guess I still am in shock. Honestly, it hurts because I have lost trust." Denise remembered, "I just really did trust him. I thought that I had seen the stripper on multiple occasions, even at church during the service."

Ella shared, "I was very distrustful of men. I have anxiety about trusting men like if they really have good intentions towards me and it does not have to be romantically, you know. It is just like men in general and I did not know that was there." Esther shared that, "It just told me that I was non-significant in his thoughts and heart at this time. I am going to put in these boundaries to protect myself. That is what it was for me about protecting myself for the future. Would I be able to trust him again?"

Nefertiti recalled, “There were times, I could not move; I could not go anywhere and felt like I was at a standstill mentally. It was more of a mindset when I felt ‘stuck’ being able to reconnect to people on a positive level and definitely.” Likewise, Taya shared, “I think I am still affected in some way even in new relationships. I think it puts me in suspense sometimes, or suspecting people to be unfaithful. You know, it was harder to trust people. I think that I probably have created a wall and not an opening. I think I carry baggage but understand that not everybody is the same. I think that it has put me on alert more. I do not allow myself to get too close and I am like, I am never doing this again.”

God and the participants’ Christian faith have been a catalyst of change through their dependence on Him and through the process of forgiveness. Each lady’s comment is below. Aiya shared, “I stayed within my immediate circle with women of faith. And so, I leaned on God a lot and had a lot of conversations with Him.” April recalled, “In the beginning, it was a struggle because I was dealing with a lot of anger. It was like my whole life did a complete 180, and I was doing greater without my husband than I was with him. So, God showed his glory through my mess and so that is what helped build my faith because I had to really lean on God because my life was such a m disaster.”

Bea recalled, “Having a committed faith and Church home coupled with studying the Word were instrumental. Likewise, the power of forgiveness was essential.” Denise shared, “My Christian faith grew more robust, and it made me realize that neither one of us really knew the true meaning of being married. I knew that I did not come this far as a Christian to fall apart. What, I am here, I am listening, what is happening, and what is this? I felt like my faith grew more potent because of this.”

Ella recalled, “I remember being angry with God, but I did feel unworthy and felt my value was compromised in God’s eyes because of the divorce because I knew it was not God’s intention. I am learning to seek Him more in all things.” Esther’s recollection was that the “Lord showed me that this originally was a test., and we were to trust him through whatever process. Nevertheless, it was still devastating for me, but not to the place where I would ever turn my back on God or even question him about it because I know he has an infinite plan.”

Nefertiti recalled, “My faith in God helped me a lot and kept me from not actually committing suicide and just not really, really, snapping off, because when you are angry, many emotions are present, and God’s help kept me from completely losing control.” Taya remembered, “My Christian faith continues to believe God and I was not angry with God and was still believing that we would be reconciled.” The participants’ posttraumatic growth process was promoted through the act of forgiveness and their religious faith with God’s guidance.

Research Question Responses

Research Question Responses are under their own heading and select participant quotes are denoted to support the responses to the research questions.

Research Question 1: How do African American women describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity?

Participants

Aiya

“I have grown 100 percent. Again, I think, you know the way that my divorce shook my foundation was alarming to me because I had not realized how much I was banking on my marriage. You are supposed to put that first and then you know everything else. I had to discover who I was as a person outside of being a wife and mother. Learning not to try to fix broken

things helped me in my burgeoning process. In addition, realizing that I contributed to the relationship issues was growth.”

April

“I have grown very much. I was always somewhat an independent person. However, sometimes circumstances and situations make you kind of lose that independence and you become codependent in bad situations. I have learned to like and appreciate me, and have come to know that I can make it on my own and have a level of happiness helped my growth process.”

Bea

“I have grown, and it is, you know, my relationship with God. The Holy Spirit that he allows to reside within us and just a deep desire of mine to be better. And in that process, understanding that that I still have value because that was what I grappled with. This journey has led to my growth and a stronger relationship with others and God. I am capable of loving and being love, but I do understand that even without that, I can be okay.”

Ella

“I really had to assess myself and my qualities. I had to begin to think of me, who am I? And I got a I got a chance to really sit down and evaluate; and finally said to myself, girl you are alright. I think taking the time and investing into who I am and accepting that aided in my growth process.”

Esther

“I think I have grown because I was younger when I married. I loved my husband. I believed everything that he said. I think now I would not believe you but would ponder the things that you tell me. And now I feel like I must listen in a different way. Granted, my heart

might be connected to you, but now I must operate differently.” The process is still evolving, and Esther is processing and defining her existence and purpose, which aided her growth process.

Nefertiti

“I have grown because infidelity is not your issue to take on. So, you must just remember your value and who you are and who God created you to be, and just embrace that over time. I just had to learn that as well. Also, accepting accountability for my part in the relationship breakdown was paramount.”

Taya

“I believe I have grown in several areas. I have grown stronger in (a) being able to have a voice, (b) stating what I will and will not accept, (c) allowing vulnerability at times and standing strongly on what I believe and (d) not allowing anyone to take total control over my life. So, I really think that I am stronger because of my experience with infidelity and being in a broken relationship. and it helps me to feel strong enough not to have a relationship.”

Research Question 2: How do African American women describe characteristics (e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity) that were vital for their resiliency post-infidelity?

Participants

African American women described how their Christian faith, sense of empowerment. through rediscovery of self with the support of family, and friends contributed to their resiliency post-infidelity. Their stories are depicted in the following paragraphs.

Aiya

“My best friend was moving in; I was surrounded by prayer and by things like that and so instead of going in the wrong direction. I remember one day while laying down praying and talking with God these words 365-day transformation came to my mind. And so, I made this decision that I would want to work on my emotions, and physical and financial health for a whole year. And so, I made the decision that I was not going to date, nor sleep with anybody. I was going to literally just focus on me because I had to acknowledge that from the age of 15 I had been in relationships. It was now time to focus on Aiya.”

April

Resilience for April came through several channels. She recalled, “Well, first and foremost, God, and my family. My parents and my children were my focus on and then I had one friend that was very instrumental. My healing was partly due to what a friend taught me. He helped me to know that it was okay to be vulnerable, to feel what I felt, and not to be okay, and to just have patience and kindness. Those were the things that helped me through the roughest points in my life. Nothing like having a good, good friend to lean on and get that support from because we need that when we are going through it.”

Bea

“Hmm, just like I said, God, first with prayers. And then with the family just being able to kind of keep my mind off things. So, I had to focus on family making sure that their well-being was okay because they were going through some things. So that made me not focus on the bad things. I think the fact that the group that we had at church for grieving helped. I did not realize that my divorce was a death to me. When they asked me to join the group, I was thinking it was for grieving people who had lost a loved one. I realized that my marriage had died, and I was

grieving for it. What helped me was I had my church, and friends at work that would not let me stay where I was at.”

Denise

“So, my family was supportive in the sense of if I ever wanted to leave my husband, of course, me and the kids would always have a safe, you know, place. I at that time did not feel like they were emotionally supportive because I just wanted to cry a bit and they were like, please, you know, just please it happens. You know, this is what happens or like it was the norm. I do not know, but they were supportive in that sense, like if I needed to go, I could have.

My religious and spiritual support, I mean, that was, you know, probably the biggest thing for me. You know, being able to pray and that and find scriptures to help me through it. And nobody in the church knew what was going on, nor really knew me well and knew anything about without it but it was just nice to be, I just felt safe, you know, even like Bible study. Nobody knew anything about me, but they just knew that I needed to be there.

Yeah, I think those were this as far as friends. I did have a few supportive friends. I have one friend that is also married. Her marriage is healthy from what I know. I do not know, you know, what might be going on behind closed doors, but so she did not judge. She, she let me cry and then talk to her and call her whenever. She lived all the way in Texas.”

Ella

“Oh, my relationship with God and not just that because I always had one but having a church home. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that that was the provision that God had made for me was to be planted exactly where I am, and I have been blessed by it. And ever since the Church has been the saving grace and a refuge for me. I have always believed that there was more, and that God had a special purpose for me that was grand. I want to fulfill what God has

for me. So that has been just a driving force behind anything that I encountered that I could still make it. First, I was very surprised to know that I am not a company of one. I learned a lot about others during this infidelity process.”

Esther

“A balance again where you began to feel like you could live. So, my healing process was a little longer maybe than some people. And I only say that because I am not the kind of person who jumps into relationships. You finish one relationship, and you just automatically jump in and into another. For me that was what I had to deal with, “

Nefertiti

“I was just like existing, so yeah, I just learned a lot about myself then, and then it just got to a point where I needed to transition out of that mentally, out of that dark place. I learned that. I needed to understand my value and what I was worth. And I needed to just get to know myself a lot more and was able to do that more after the divorce. But during that time, I just learned that about myself that I was a people pleaser. So, I was trying to please everybody else, or even please my ex-husband. I was trying to keep everything together or staying in something that may not have been healthy.”

Taya

“One of the things I think is helpful is that I was able to forgive, and we were able to be friends again. That was helpful because now I am not harboring any bitterness or anger or resentment and that allows me to continue to move forward. I think that there are some scars that are there, which are still affecting me in a sense. But I am aware of what is there and that is why I think that I am kind of at a standstill because to be honest I could have been married and moved on with life, but I do not think I am fully healed in a sense to be ready to be married.

Prayer was vital and I did some counseling, and it was not so much about getting over the relationship. My spouse made all the decisions and now I have to leave and find who I am and so I needed that counseling piece, and I needed a great support system. Those are some of the things that I think really help me through and lots of prayer. Family and friends played a great role. I think that if I did not have that support, I do not know where I would be. I literally had to rely on that support to get up, I mean.”

Research Question 3: How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview [e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith] because of marital betrayal?

Participants’ Responses

African American women described the changes in their assumptive worldview and elaborated on what caused them grow after infidelity trauma rather than succumb to health-compromising issues. Each participant’s worldview was shattered after experiencing the phenomenon. They shared that their self-esteem and their ability to trust were compromised. They had an extended journey to re-develop greater esteem and to rebuild trust. However, each woman shared that their Christian faith was strengthened because of their ability to forgive. A few statements from the participants reflect their experience and how it impacted on their worldview.

Aiya

Aiya recanted that she no longer covets relationships because “I learned how many women have stayed after multiple infidelities in their relationships. I look at love very differently and my aspirations in my marriage are very different than what they were previously. I have

learned to take my time and to look at things with clear eyes and I am no longer interested in broken things.”

April

April recalled how “My experience has shaped my worldview in that I do not trust people. Furthermore, I feel that there are not any good men left in the world. I feel that people are out for themselves, and that people are opportunists. With my experience going along with it but on the flip side of that, I know my special friend has taught me to how to love and trust people. And he has shown me that there are still good men out there that would treat me right. He gave me hope.”

Bea

Bea shared, “I see that people are doing whatever they want to do. Some are not aware how much they have hurt others. The world will continue to change, and I must continue to change with it. I do not view people as being good or bad. They are who they are, but sometimes they do not realize that they are making the wrong decisions, but for me, it has made me stronger.”

Denise

Denise shared, “My experience has caused me to be more guarded towards others and less trusting at times. But it also helps me appreciate the support and scope and skills that I did have. I now understand that marriage is bigger than me. And it is truly like a test or reflection of, my relationship with God. I still have a lot of work to do. But I do like the direction that I am going in.”

Ella

Ella recounted that her spouse's infidelity has restructured "my trust process. Previously I would blindly trust and not qualify people or situations for the trust I would offer. Now I am wired to not just give trust based on what I see or hear."

Esther

Esther remembered, "It allows me to understand that we are all different. Some of us are broken people with learned behaviors passed down through generations. However, it does allow us to know that there is hope for change if we are willing to admit and acknowledge errors and behaviors. I think about the phrase 'When we know better, we do better.' And that is significant because it proves that we can change. I think about broken people that can be all around us many times; they need love but sometimes it is difficult to present that love to them."

Nefertiti

Nefertiti, shared, "Okay, my experience has shaped my worldview by helping me understand people the way they are. And behaviors mean there is a story behind everyone's actions, whether they are personal beliefs or upbringing. It has helped me to understand that it is paramount to love and forgive people genuinely."

Taya

Taya shared, "My experience has shaped my worldview into thinking that all relationships have their ups and downs, but forgiveness is key. I think that anyone has the capability to commit adultery, but it takes a strong will to stay on the right path. I believe that our world is highly sexualized. And that we push sex and because some desires are not

communicated then some individuals may go after what they see rather than what they already have established.”

Participants’ Additional Insight

Question number 14 asked the participants to share what else might provide further insight into their viewpoint that the analyst had not required about. The following is a brief excerpt from their thoughts. Their detailed thoughts are in the Appendix associated with their name.

Aiya added, “I just want women to know who are going through this stuff or who have gone through this stuff that if you do the work on yourself. If you work on yourself, it will build light and light attracts, undoubtedly.”

April highlighted, “As I pointed out, and then I also think that we also have it a lot harder. And why I say that is because first, women in general, and I am not just talking about black women, just women. We are looked down on like ‘Men are here, women are here.’ And then you throw in being an African American woman-- that makes it a lot harder. It is like it is two strikes against us. We must fight harder.”

Bea recalled, “I have had to learn a lot of stuff all over again. And it was just me and the kids, and I have had my downs. When a crisis occurs, there are things that need to get done and they will.”

Denise recounted, “I think that when it comes to individuals who have gone through relationships where there's infidelity, it is hurtful. However, I think understanding that it is not your fault that the other person made their choice and decision. So, I think that that is a really important factor, and it helps one move forward when you recognize that it is not you.”

Ella shared, “Okay, so it has restructured my trust process. Previously I would blindly trust and not qualify people or situations for the trust I would offer. Now I am wired to not just give trust based on what I see or hear, but rather seek God for clarification.”

Esther recalled, “Moving forward is a process; it does not happen overnight. It does not, and each person moves on in their own way. Like I said before, moving on is fine. I am not the one to jump in one relationship after another after another trying to get whole again, I would rather be whole physically, mentally, emotionally before I go in or allow myself to step into another relationship and that is something that is very important as well.”

Nefertiti recalled, “I was saying it feels very hard if you are going through that situation. The meaning of divorce is death and it feel like you are dying. But at the same time, after death, we know that life occurs after as well. Whenever there is death, something must die to breed new life. So, remember that there is light, and then there's life. Like something is going to be birthed out of that trauma. It is usually going to be a new beginning. It felt like a new beginning, a new you, a new attitude. Just newness, a new way of thinking, a new way to embrace yourself and life. So, hang on. Get involved with support groups. Talk it out, talk it through, and you will make it. You will make it.”

Taya added, “I think that when it comes to individuals who have gone through relationships where there is infidelity; it is hurtful. But I think understanding that it is not your fault that the other person made their choice and decision. When you recognize that it was not you, it was their choice and their decision. I think that that is helpful because a lot of times we blame ourselves. So, I think that that is a really important factor, and it helps to move forward when you recognize that it is not you.

Many individuals experience growth after infidelity, however, some succumb to health compromising issues. These study participants shared their testimonial of growth and emotional and physical compromising challenges. Most of them were able to blossom after infidelity. However, two of the participants' journey lasted longer and they still experience struggle at times. Their story is highlighted below.

Health Compromising Issues

Each participant dealt with health compromising issues more in the psychological domains and a few in the physical domains. Bea, Denise, Esther, and Taya still have more psychological health related issues and are still in the process of healing. Aiya, April, Bea, Ella, and Nefertiti experienced more psychological than physiological issues but have gotten those domains stabilized as a part of their recovery process. Each participant's psychological and physiological issues are addressed in their statements.

Bea, Denise, Esther, and Taya each reported issues with mental health effects after infidelity. Bea and Denise sank into depression coupled with hurt and pain. The ladies were not aware that they were depressed. Bea realized it when her doctor inquired about her well-being, and she burst into tears. She wanted to just disappear, leave, and just keep walking. However, she denied ever having thoughts of suicide.

Similar, Esther would lie around on the sofa and realized she was not energetic when her spouse stated, "All you do is lay on the couch." Esther and Taya both reported hurt and pain that affected them mentally and they still have residual effects of psychological hurt of self-esteem issues, and suspicions of trusting others. Esther and Taya appear to be moving forward, yet, stuck in a portion of time where the trauma occurred. Esther never let her husband see her body in the light again, and Taya refuses to sleep in her bed because she does not like to sleep alone.

Aiya, April, Ella, and Nefertiti recalled how they were impacted emotionally and physically. For Aiya and April their emotional health was impacted more. Aiya shared that her emotional health was the biggest hit because it shook the foundation of her marriage and left it shaky and uncertain. Aiya did not recall physical health-related issues. She found depression set in and that she had to navigate through. Similarly, April found that she was stressed out, and experienced a decreased self-image. In addition, she lost a great deal of weight because of a decreased appetite (e.g., direct physical consequence of infidelity stress).

Ella reported having irritable bowel syndrome that was exacerbated by stress and she felt the emotional strain of her spouse's cheating. Nefertiti felt the trauma of psychological pain and had some very dark depressing moments, where she thought of suicide. She recalled, "I would snap out of it because my children needed me and would depend on God through prayer and faith enveloped with family support."

All participants dealt with health-compromising issues, and everyone has overcome or is currently moving forward, but it is still a journey for Esther and Taya in the psychological realm. The participants' narratives coincide with the research in Chapter Two that infidelity results in ruination and destruction of the marital bond and can have lasting effects (Johnson & Greenberg (1985), Lonergan et al., 2020; Warach & Josephs (2018), Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021). The stories also intersect with the finding of Grossner et al., 2020; Weidner, 2020; Zeligman, et al. 2021) that many experience growth after a traumatic experience.

Summary

The findings of this chapter confirmed that posttraumatic growth is possible after infidelity without long-term compromising health-related issues. However, health-related issues still exist for some of the women, especially in the psychological aspects. Each of the

participants in this study suffered psychological health issues (e.g., both short and long term), and several dealt with physiological issues because of infidelity. Based on the participants' responses after infidelity transpired, there was trauma and a myriad of thoughts and feelings. The emergent themes identified were (1) hurt/pain, (2) self-identity, (3) depression, (4) loss of trust, and (5) God. Followed by connecting subthemes of betrayal, trauma, anger, empowerment, loneliness, sadness, hopelessness, fear, forgiveness.

The above-referenced themes and sub-themes are indicative of a weakened marital bond that results after infidelity. Marital betrayal is directly correlated to hurt/pain that contribute to a loss of self, mental and physical health -related problems (e.g., depression, anxiety, self-esteem issues and somatic problems). Likewise, traumatic experiences can propel growth through, renewed commitment to God, acts of forgiveness, improved self-esteem, and empowerment. Crisis can undulate one's assumptive world and cause individuals to reevaluate themselves and their purpose based on lived experiences. Each theme represented a noteworthy component of the participants' described experience with the phenomenon and became an essential element in capturing the essence of the phenomenon. The participants recanted responses from the data provided described lived experiences of each participant' interaction with the phenomenon.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of African American women who experienced post traumatic growth after infidelity. Chapter Five encompasses six sections: (1) an overview, (2) a summary of findings corresponding to the study's purpose, (3) discussion of the findings and the implication in considering relevant literature and theory, (4) an implications section (methodological and practical), (5) an outline of the study's delimitations and limitations, and (6) recommendations for future research. A summary culminates this chapter.

Summary of Findings

The study explored the participants' experience with the phenomenon using transcendental phenomenological qualitative methodology, as Moustakas (1994) indicated. Data analysis evolved into a rich, thick description of the participants' experiences through the narrative accounts of their experiences. As discussed in the previous chapter, the emergent themes, sub-themes, research questions, and responses were documented. A summary of those themes is shared.

Themes

Five major themes emerged after analyzing the data. These included: (a) hurt/pain, (b) self-identity, (d) depression, (e) loss of trust, and (f) God. Sub-themes developed as themes emerged and were provided better to understand the participants' experience with the phenomenon. The sub-themes were trauma/betrayal, empowerment, hopelessness, anger, fear, and forgiveness. Each theme represented a noteworthy component of the participants' described

experience with the phenomenon and became an essential element in capturing the essence of the phenomenon.

The first theme to emerge was hurt/pain. Each participant experienced a traumatic occurrence of marital betrayal that resulted in hurt/pain that led to feelings of betrayal and anger. The second theme to the surface was self-identity. The participants shared that rediscovering who they are was empowering because many had their identity enveloped in their spouses and children's lives and not a clearly defined sense of self. The third theme to come out was depression. Depression is a direct interconnection of a traumatic occurrence. Some of the symptoms of depression are loneliness, sadness, and feelings of hopelessness, which each interviewee experienced and once had suicidal ideations without the intent of self-harm (Nefertiti).

The fourth theme to appear was the loss of trust. Trust is a tenant of marital success, and when it is broken or compromised, it results in feelings of apprehension (fear) and unsafety that cause one to reexamine their worldview as it relates to others. The last theme to materialize was God. The Christian faith catalyzed healing, forgiveness, and empowerment, burgeoning the participants to begin a forward movement. Most women in this study divorced; one is still separated (Esther), and one is still married (Denise).

Research Questions

Data analysis also led to decisive answers to each research question asked in this study.

Research Question 1: How do African Americans describe their personal growth experiences after marital infidelity?

Participants recounted their experiences as shock, hurt, pain, and betrayal. The participants went through a journey of pain and self-discovery, contributing to their

posttraumatic growth. Their healing process was daunting and ended with a renewed sense of self. The participants stated that a portion of their growth is attributed to their individual experience, family/friends, counseling, and religious faith. There was one exception, who did not feel as supported as she desired (Denise).

Research Question 2: How do African American women describe characteristics that were [e.g., personality, character, fortitude, sense of identity] vital for their resiliency post-infidelity?

Participants

The participants described personal characteristics related to their resiliency post-infidelity. Each participant had a level of fortitude and awareness aware of this innate strength. Each participant described the presence of God in their lives through the support of family, friends, and the Church that gave them the courage to preserve, endure and overcome. The power of prayer and increased understanding of the sinful nature of man and the power of forgiveness produced a change in their lives and made them stronger.

Research Question 3: How do African American women describe the changes in their assumptive worldview (e.g., trust, safety, attachment, religious faith) because of marital betrayal?

How has this experience changed your assumptive worldview? Method two was a data collection of observational journals writing. Each lady penned their answer with ease, confidence, and assurance. It was powerful to see the culmination of the interviews end with confidence and a renewed sense of their greatness, not only of themselves but of God's kingdom on earth. Their testimonies and strength shone through from the inception until the finality.

Discussion

The literature review in Chapter Two can be divided into three pertinent sections. The first section included an overview of Attachment, emotionally focused family therapy, and systems theory. The next segment covers the answers to the research questions; the correlation between the findings of this study and the theoretical and empirical literature outlined in Chapter Two is reflected in this section.

Theoretical Literature

The participants in this study indicated an awareness of their experiences of infidelity and their posttraumatic development after an affair with and without health-compromising issues. Hence, the participants primarily substantiated existing theoretical literature about their experience. This study corroborated previous research that attachments are essential to marital happiness, security, and relationship bond (Johnson, 1999, 2004; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Dehghani et al., 2020). Marital betrayal causes rumination, devastation, and potential marital demise (Lonergan et al., 2020; Warach & Josephs, 2018; 2020; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Dehghani et al., 2021).

This researcher believes that this study extends to the previous research because some experience growth after infidelity rather than suffer health-compromising issues (Zeligman et al., 2020; Gossner et al., 2020; Weidner, 2020). There was a dearth in the literature on posttraumatic growth after infidelity. In addition, there was a limitation because minorities (e.g., African Americans, sexual minorities, and women in general) were not the focus of research and posttraumatic development after infidelity trauma. The study must include all populations to serve them better and expand the knowledge body.

The study adds to the recent research by studying African American women's posttraumatic development after infidelity. In sum, the participants attested to the possibility and potential of growth after a traumatic experience without lasting health-related consequences. Although two of the participants still have some psychological effects from their experience. Posttraumatic change can occur after trauma and substantiates previous research (Zeligman et al., 2020; Wilder et al., 2020).

The present study contributes more to the field of mental health workers (e.g., therapists, psychologists, and mental health workers). It provides deep, thick, and rich information on why these participants flourished after trauma rather than succumbing to psychological and physical health-related issues. This study can aid practitioners in envisioning the most pertinent tips to these participants' growth, such as the healing process encompassing forgiveness, increased self-awareness, the support of family, friends, faith community, and prayer as healing mechanisms, and the establishment of a new "normal." The original knowledge and added knowledge should prove vital for helping professionals develop treatment plans and use healing tips and strategies within the therapeutic process that align with the grounding theories for this study.

Finally, this study of posttraumatic development after infidelity extends and sheds new light on the three grounding theories of the research. First, Attachment Theory (AT), Bowlby & Ainsworth contended that attachments are borne in infancy and carry through the lifespan. These theorists found that children who established secure branches in infancy were more likely to thrive than infants with detached attachments to their parents or caregivers. These children were more likely to be anxious and insecure. We could see this in the participant's marriages after infidelity, where they once thrived when their bond was secure, and now their bond is unsteady.

Attachment Theory

The nature of attachment security, when broken, as demonstrated by Bowlby and Ainsworth (1963), can cause one not to thrive/survive. We can see from the participants that most of their marriages did not stay after infidelity because of the broken marital covenant bond. The divorced couples could not reattach with the security of safety and trust essential to bonding (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1963; Johnson & Greenberg, 1985; Johnson, 1999; 2004, Dehghani & Dehghani, 2021). Each interviewee faced betrayal trauma, leading to hurt, pain, depression, and loss of identity and trust. The breakdown in their relationships caused a change in their worldview (Butler et al., 2022; Fleming et al., 2020). To reconnect after trauma requires therapy.

Emotionally Focused Couples' Therapy

The assertion behind EFT is to help couples learn to interact cohesively by strengthening their emotional connection through exploring their sentiments in a safe environment (Johnson, 2004). Thus, helping them address their unmet needs and vacate their negative interaction cycle (Johnson, 2004; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020). EFCT incorporates the previously mentioned grounding theories [attachment and systems theories] in the therapeutic process to assist distressed couples.

Systems Theory. Bertalanffy (1920) found that a sole organizational system can be utilized to understand living creatures and social groups (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The family system is intertwined, and everyone contributes/influences the unit and not in solitariness (von Bertalanffy, 1968). ST is rooted within the science of biology and focuses on the individual and group within its ecosystem, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral consequences from divergent perspectives (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The participants of this study attested to the

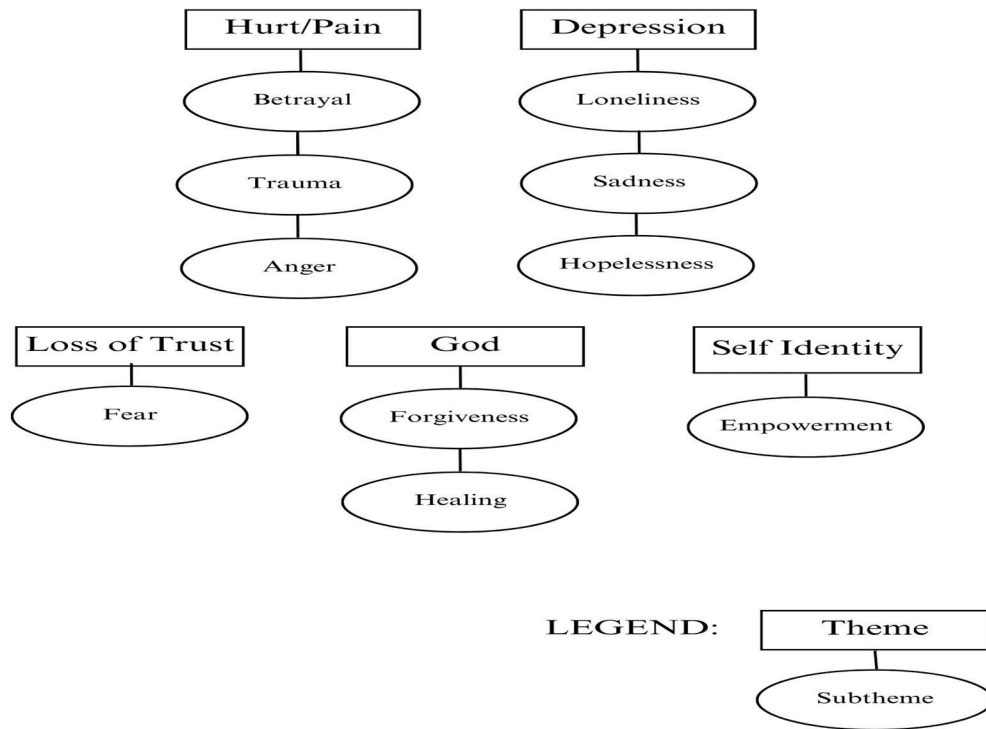
importance of the family as they navigated an uncharted path, which coincides with the salient need for the family as a cohesive unit.

Bowen (1960) developed the family systems theory (FST) and found that the family is an emotional team. They cannot be understood in isolation but as a component of the family or origin. Thus, the clan should be treated as a unit for the best outcomes regarding infidelity. The family is indispensable in its recovery and emotional wellness when disturbances occur.

Each of the above-referenced theories has a long-standing history and coupled together, provides evidence-proven methods to understand and help couples navigate perturbing events through secure attachments, emotional intimacy, and the family system (Bowlby, 1963; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988; Johnson, 1996, 2002, Bowen, 1960; Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Empirical Literature

As displayed in (**Table 1**), the participants of this study epitomized characteristics of the related literature surrounding the topic of posttraumatic growth following infidelity. Their lived experiences were compatible with the extant empirical research. The following subheadings offer further details regarding the relationship between the literature and the participants' experience.

Table 1: Emergent Themes / Sub-themes

Previous research discovered that infidelity causes psychological and physiological issues caused by severe distress that result in mood disorders (e.g., stress, depression, anxiety, PTSD risk-taking behavior, drinking, eating problems, and unsafe sexual practices (King & LaValley, 2019; Priem & Solomon, 2011; Knobloch et al., 2013). All participants denied any risk-taking behaviors, such as alcohol or sexual risk-taking. Aiya had thought of a wild adventure but had someone that kept her accountable and the respect she had for her daughter.

In this study, the participants recalled dealing with psychological issues more than physiological issues. However, two participants had physiological symptoms of nausea and irritable bowel syndrome. The current study focused on a particular segment of the African American population, considered a marginalized people, and was not included to the extent of generalizing based on previous research on posttraumatic growth after infidelity, which was

revealed as a gap in the current literature. As a result, this study will add to the body of knowledge of the lived experience of these women. This transcendental qualitative study provided rich, thick, and deep information about the lived experience of the participants.

Implications for Mental Health Practitioners

The theoretical, empirical, and practical significance of this study's findings leaves implications that license further consideration. Regarding theory, the participants' recollection of their personal lived experience and their meaning perspectives speaks to the guiding theories of this study. From an empirical standpoint, there is substantial literature on marital infidelity but a dearth of research on posttraumatic growth when explaining change after a marital affair. This study can enlighten the empirical field in counseling and psychotherapy.

Theoretical Implications

The study participants identified their experiences and affirmed that they suffered depressive and trauma-related symptoms. However, they reported that there was growth after a long journey of healing recovery. The grounding theories, AT, EFCT, and Systems theory, and their manifestations in the experiences of the participants corroborate (Bowlby & Ainsworth (1963) notion of the importance of attachments in relationships and the bond that is required in marital relationships with met needs as a catalyst for survival suggested by (Johnson & Greenberg, 1986; Johnson, 1999; Dehghani & Dehghani, 2020; Dehghani et al., 2021). Next, the family unit is intertwined and is viewed as a unit of connecting parts vital for their survival (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bowen, 1960).

The participants in this study described how their lived experiences of infidelity led to posttraumatic growth with and without health-compromising issues. Each of the participants journeyed through health-compromising issues. Still, they were diminished over time except for

two participants with longer-lasting effects in the psychological domain. Similar to the literature, the participants' experiences exhibited some of the same predictors of marital demise consequences when infidelity occurs. Previous research by (Lonergan et al., 2021; Warach & Josephs, 2018) found that half of the marriages in the United States end in divorce because of infidelity, and 80 percent of the participants in this study wound up in marital dissolution.

Empirical Implications

Much of the literature on African American women's posttraumatic growth after infidelity was reflected in the participants' experiences (**Table 1**). In a similar way to the literature, the participants' lives exhibited the same predictors of marital dissatisfaction and dissolution as previous researchers found. Half of the marriages in the U. S. ended in divorce (Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Fleming, 2022). Marital infidelity leads to rumination and devastation in relationships by weakening the marital bond, which results in instability in the marriage (Lonergan et al., 2021; Dehghani et al., 2021; Johnson, 2019; Fleming, 2022). Moreover, it shatters the assumptive world of the betrayed (Fleming et al., 2022).

Practical Implications for Mental Health Workers

As previously revealed, the participants in this study described how their marriages were infiltrated by infidelity and how they each suffered devastation in their marriages. Dismally for them, they became victims of their circumstances. Each was shocked when they learned of their spouse's betrayal, which led to a breakdown in their attachment security and caused a demise to most of the relationships except for the one who chose to remain married and is still separated and has no contact with her spouse.

Historically speaking, marriage since the beginning of time has had some challenges that derived from the fall of man (Genesis, 1673, chapters 1-3). The fall happened because of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God. Likewise, God's charge to the husband and wife is that they are to become one flesh and to love and cherish each other, and to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 2: 24; Genesis 1:28; Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19). In the participants described experiences, it was revealed that disobedience to God concerning the marital covenant caused ruination and devastation (e.g., hurt/pain, depression, loss of trust and identity) and ultimate a breakdown in the marriage and family system.

The participants in this study had a journey of suffering, self-reflection/refinement, renewed faith, evoked the power of prayer, and extended God's grace to their mate through the selfless act of forgiveness and empathy in three of the narratives. Their act of forgiveness propelled their growth and helped them discover themselves.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study included the participant's lived experiences with infidelity followed by posttraumatic growth. All of the participants of this study had firsthand experiences with marital infidelity. Therefore, this study's eligible participants were those who experienced the phenomenon. Although Denise and Esther experienced each delimiting criteria, they were the only exception since one is still married and the other has been separated for over ten years. There was no delimitation placed on age and social class. Delimitations were chosen to ensure the participants experienced the phenomenon.

Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative phenomenological research, this study has limitations inherent to its design. One limitation was the role of the analyst. However, this researcher followed the process of bracketing (Moustaka, 1994) parameters and attempted to show no bias as the primary instrument of data analysis. The process worked well without having any prejudgments about the phenomenon and allowing the participant's narratives to be their own with the researcher's biases set aside.

The emergent themes were formed based on an unbiased perception and understanding of the participant's experience with the phenomenon. The second limitation connected to this study's design is transferability. Efforts were made to triangulate data so the reconstruction of the experience would be as accurate as possible. Still, without conducting a separate study with another group of participants from different regions of the county, it would be impossible to apply with absolute certainty the results of this study to similar experiences with the phenomenon in other cultures. This study's targeted population was African American women.

Recommendations for Future Research

It would be salient to do more research on posttraumatic growth with a larger sample size of women of color to generalize to the larger population. There is a need for more literature on posttraumatic growth because there are still gaps in the literature, and studies on women of color and sexual minorities would undoubtedly enhance the body of knowledge and provide more significant insights to practitioners. Recent studies have been done on Caucasian women that were mostly affluent and heterosexual. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative studies could be utilized. Qualitative studies would provide rich, deep, and thick knowledge. Moreover, the quantitative study could measure factors that led to growth and how those factors prohibit

health-compromising issues. A longitudinal study might be warranted to ascertain the precipitating factors why some retain the marital bond post-infidelity/divorce. Last, one could compare the role of trust and forgiveness in the healing process after infidelity. More research is needed to include the involved posttraumatic development after infidelity to study whether the involved is affected post-infidelity as the betrayer. The answer to the suggested recommendations should extend the body of knowledge and perhaps even help prevent some duplicitous acts.

The study filled a gap in the research; it is limited in its transferability to the larger population. Replicating this study could help determine if the findings are transferable. To uphold the purpose of the study, any attempts at repeating this research should follow the delimitations of the study as those were established to ensure a sample size that experienced the phenomenon. Expanding the sample populations to include other ethnic minorities and marginalized populations, and the involved would prove beneficial.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of African American women's posttraumatic development after infidelity. The participants of this study's recollection provided in-depth detail into their journey of pain/hurt, rediscovery, forgiveness, and growth. The key to moving forward was their ability to forgive. The participants' narratives gave the analyst some critical things to ponder. The most important "takeaway" from this study is that the true nature of attachment security is what God meant for marriage from the beginning.

When the covenant is taken seriously in marriage, some devastation can be prevented. In addition, the marital bond is such a strong attachment and can still exist when broken. Next,

growth and rediscovery of oneself are possible during and after infidelity without long-term health-compromising issues through our faith, support from others, trust in God, and the power of forgiveness. If the implications of this study manifest in practice, then its contributions will extend beyond filling the gap in the literature. The findings of this study have illustrated that the participants' experiences after marital infidelity led to their growth.

References

- Abbasi, I. S. (2019). Social media addiction in romantic relationships: Does the user's age influence vulnerability to social media infidelity? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 139, 277-280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.10.038>
- Abrahamson, I., Hussain, R., Khan, A., & Schofield, M. J. (2012). What helps couples rebuild their relationship after infidelity? *Journal of Family Issues*, 33(11), 1494-1519.
- Aguas, P. (2022). Fusing approaches in educational research: Data collection and data analysis in phenomenological research. *Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5027>
- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1963). The development of infant-mother interaction among the Ganda. In B. M. Foss (Ed.), *Determinants of Infant Behavior* (pp. 67–104). Wiley.
- Allen, E. S., Atkins, D. C., & Baucom, D. H., Snyder, D. K., Gordon, K. C., & Glass, S. P. (2005). Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors in engaging in and responding to extramarital involvement. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, pp. 12, –101–139. <https://doi:10.1093/clipsy/bpi014>
- Allen, E. S., & Baucom, D. H. (2004). Adult attachment and patterns of extradyadic involvement. *Family Process*, 43(4), 467–488. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2004.00035.x>
- Allen, S., & Hawkins, A. J. (2017). Theorizing the decision-making process for divorce or reconciliation. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 9(1), 50–68. Crossref.

- Altgelt, E. E., Reyes, M. A., French, J. E., Meltzer, A. L., & McNulty, J. K. (2018). Who is sexually faithful? Own and partner personality traits as predictors of infidelity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 35(4), 600-614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517743085>
- Amato, P. R., & Rogers, S. J. (1997). A longitudinal study of marital problems and subsequent divorce. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 59(3), 612–624. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353949>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>
- American Counseling Association. (2014). 2014 ACA code of ethics. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2014-code-of-ethics-finaladdress.pdf>
- American Counseling Association. (2005). ACA code of ethics: As approved by the ACA. Governing Council, (2005). *American Counseling Association*.
- Allen, E. S., Atkins, D. C., Baucom, D. H., Snyder, D. K., Gordon, K. C., & Glass, S. P. (2005). Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual factors in engaging in and responding to extramarital involvement. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, pp. 12, 101–130.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- Antunes, A. L. M. de P., Magalhaes, A. S., & Feres-Carneiro, T. (2010). Litigios interminavela:

- Uma perpetuacao do vinculo conjugal? *Aleheia*, Article 31, pp.199–211. Retrieved From <https://www.reda.uc.prg/articulo.oaid=115016959016>
- Apostolou, M. (2019). Why Greek Cypriots cheat? The evolutionary origins of the Big-Five of infidelity. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*, 13, 71–83.
- Atkins, D. C., Baucom, D. H., & Jacobson, N. S. (2001). Understanding infidelity: Correlates in a national random sample. *Journal of Family Psychology*, (pp. 15, 735–749).
- Atkins, D. C., Yi, J., Baucom, D. H., & Christensen, A. (2005). Infidelity in couples seeking marital therapy. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Article 19, pp. 470–473.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.19.3.470>
- Barraca, J., & Polanski, T. X. (2021). Infidelity treatment from an integrative behavioral couple Therapy perspective: Explanatory model and intervention strategies. *Journal of Marital And Family Therapy*, 47(4), 909-924– <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12483>
- Barta, W. D., & Kiene, S. M. (2005). Motivations for infidelity in heterosexual dating couples: The roles of gender, personality differences, and sociosexual orientation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*. Article 22, (pp. 339-360).
<https://doi:10.1177/0265497505052440>
- Baucom, D. H., Pentel, K. Z., Gordon, K. C., & Snyder, D. K. (2017). An integrative approach to treating infidelity in couples. In J. Fitzgerald (Ed.). *Foundations for couples' therapy:*

Research for the real world (pp. 206–215). Routledge.

Berth, F. (2021). Discovering Bowlby: Infant homes and attachment theory in West Germany after the Second World War. *Paedagogica Historica*, pp. 1-17 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2021.1934705>

Bird, M. H., Butler, M. H., & Fife, S. T. (2007). The process of couple healing following infidelity: A qualitative study. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 6(4), pp. 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1300/J398v06n04_01

Boisvert, M. M., Wright, J., Tremblay, N., & McDuff, P. (2011). Couples' report of relationship problems in a naturalistic therapy setting. *The Family Journal*, 19(4), 362-368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480711420044>

Bowlby, J. (1940). The influence of early environment in the development of neurosis and neurotic character. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, XXI (pp. 1–25).

Bray, P. (2013). Bereavement and transformation: A psycho-spiritual and post-traumatic growth perspective. *Journal of Religion & Health*, Article 52, pp. 890–903. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9539-8>

Brimhall, A. S., & Butler, M. H. (2007). Intrinsic vs. extrinsic religious motivation and the marital relationship. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 35(3). pp. 235-249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180600814684>

Brooks, M., Graham-Kevan, N., Robinson, S., & Lowe, M. (2019). Trauma characteristics and posttraumatic growth: The mediating role of avoidance coping, intrusive thoughts, and social support. *Psychological Trauma, 11*(2), 232–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000372>

Burleson B. R., Denton W. H. (1997). The relationship between communication skills and marital satisfaction: Some moderating effects. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 59*(4), pp. 884–902. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.2307/353790>

Butler, M. H., Gossner, J. D., & Fife, S. T. (2022). Partners taking turns leaning in and leaning out: Trusting in the healing arc of attachment dynamics following betrayal. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 21*(3), 233–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2021.1926388>

Campbell-Sills, L., Barlow, D. H., Brown, T. A., & Hoffmann, S. G. (2006). Effects of suppression and acceptance on emotional responses of individuals with anxiety and mood disorders. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, Article 44*, pp. 1251–1263. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/10731911114082.31>

Cano, A., & O’Leary, K. D. (2000). Infidelity and separations precipitate major depression. episodes and symptoms of nonspecific depression and anxiety. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Article 68*, pp.774–781. <https://doi:10.1037/0022-006X.68.5.774>

Cardaciotto, L., Herbert, J. D., Forman, E. M., Moitra, E., & Farrow, V. (2008). The assessment

of present-moment Awareness and acceptance. *The Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale*

Assessment, Article 15, pp. 204-223. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1073191107311467>

Carroll J. S., Badger S., Yang C. (2006). The ability to negotiate or the ability to love?

Evaluating the developmental domains of marital competence. *Journal of Family Issues*,

27(7), 1001–1032. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0192513X06287248>

Carter, Z. A. (2019). The phenomenon of cold marital detachment and extramarital attachment in

Facebook cyber infidelity and the online disinhibition effect: *Journal of*

Psychology and Christianity, 38(1), 47–56.

Catalina, W. M. (2017). Emotion-focused couples therapy, person-centered and experiential

psychotherapies. *Journal of the World Association for Person-Centered and Experiential*

Psychotherapy and Counseling, 16(3), 236–255. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Google

Scholar] Pen URL

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015). *Marriages and divorces*. Retrieved from

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>

*Cheng, Y., Tseng, P., Lin, P., Chen, T., Stubbs, B., Carvalho, A. F., Wu, C., Chen, Y., & Wu,

M. (2018). Internet addiction and its relationship with suicidal behaviors: A meta-

analysis of multinational observational studies. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*,

79(4) <https://doi.org/10.4088/JCP.17r11761>

Chi, P., Tang, Y., Worthington, E. L., Chan, C. L. W., Lam, D. O. B., & Lin, X. (2019).

Intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators of forgiveness following spousal infidelity: A stress and coping perspective. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 75(10), 1896–1915.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22825>

Christensen, A., Doss, B.D., & Jacobson, N. S. (2020). Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy.

A therapist guide to creating acceptance and change. W. W. Norton & Company.

Christensen, A., Doss, B.D. (2017). Integrative behavioral couple therapy. *Current Opinion in*

Psychology, 13, 111-114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.04.022>

Christensen, A., Doss, B.D., & Jacobson, N. S. (2014). *Reconcilable differences, second edition:*

Rebuild your relationship by rediscovering the partner you love without losing yourself.

Guilford Press.

Coop Gordon, K., & Mitchell, E. A. (2020). Infidelity in the time of COVID-19. *Family*

Process, 59(3), 956–966. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12576>

Convoy, A. A., McKenna, S. A., Comfort, M. L., Darbes, L. A., Tan, J. U., Mkandawire, J.

(2018). Marital infidelity, food insecurity, and couple instability: A web of challenges for dyadic coordination around antiretroviral therapy. *Social Science and Medicine*, 110–117.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sociomed.2018.08.006>.

Corfield, P. J. (2014). 'An age of infidelity': Secularization in eighteenth-century England. *Social*

History (London), 39(2), 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2014.914785>

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among Five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design; Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.

Dalglish, T., Black, M., Johnson, D., Bevan, A. (2020). Transdiagnostic approaches to mental health problems. *Status and future directions*. *J. Consult. Clinical Psychology*, 88, 179-195.

Damo, D. D., & Cenci, C. M. B. (2021). Emotional divorce: Similarities and differences according to the position occupied. *Trends in Psychology*, 29(3), 505-518. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-021-00088-w>

DeCastro-Bofill, F. R. A., Barrameda, M. J. M., Dadivas, M. C. S., Panganiban, E. R., & San Jose, A. C. G. (2016). Living with a Broken Vow: The impact of parental infidelity among late adolescents in establishing romantic relationships. *Universal Journal of Psychology*, 4(5), 228–235. <https://doi.or/10.13189/ujp.2016.040503>

Dehghani, M., & Dehghani, Y. (2021). Comparison of attachment injury resolution model and integrative couple therapy on trust reconstruction among the injured women by marital infidelity. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, pp. 1-19
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2021.1967223>

Dehghani, M., Aslani, K., Amanuelahi, A., & Rajabi, G. (2020). The effectiveness of the

- attachment injury resolution model (AIRM) on increasing among the injured women with marital infidelity: A case study approach. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 48(3), pp. 283-297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2020.173483>
- Denton, W. H., Wittenborn, A. K., & Golden, R. N. (2012). Augmenting antidepressant medication treatment of depressed women with emotionally focused therapy for couples: A randomized pilot study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(s1), 23-38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2012.00291.x>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Descartes (1977). *The essential writings* (J. Blom, Ed.). Harper Row.
- Dessaulles, A., Johnson, S. M., & Denton, W. H. (2003). Emotion-focused therapy for couples in the treatment of depression: A pilot study. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(5), 345-353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180390232266>
- Doss, B.D., Simpson, L. E., & Christensen, A. (2004). Why do couples seek marital therapy? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35(6), 608-614. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.35.6608>.
- Drigotas, S. M., Safstrom, C. A., & Gentilia, T. (1999). An investment model prediction of dating infidelity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Article 77, (pp.509-524).
- Emond, M., Byers, E. S., Brassard, A., Tremblay, N., & Peloquin, K. (2021). We are addressing

- sexual issues in couples seeking relationship therapy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.1969546>
- Ezzati, M., & Riboli, E. (2013). Behavioral and dietary risk factors for non-communicable diseases. *New England Journal of Medicine*, Article 369, (pp. 954-964).
- Farber, M. (1943). *The foundation of phenomenology*. SUNY Press.
- Fife, S. T., Stewart, C. M., & Hawkins, L. G. (2020). Family-of-origin, sexual attitudes, and perceptions of infidelity: A mediation analysis. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 48(2), pp. 142–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2019.1684218>
- Fife, S. T., Theobald, A. C., Gossner, J. D., Yakum, B. N., & White, K. L. (2022). Individual healing from infidelity and breakup for emerging adults: A grounded theory. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 39(6), pp. 1814-838. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075211067441>
- Fincham, F. D., & May, R. W. (2017). Infidelity in romantic relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Article 13, (pp.70-74).
- Fleming, W. H. (2022). Complex moral injury: Shattered moral assumptions. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61(2), 1022–1050. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01542-4>
- Fletcher, K., & Macintosh, H. (2018). "It is about us, you know?" Relapse in emotionally focused couples therapy for addictions. *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, 18(4), 364–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1533256X.2018.1517008>

Foran, H. M., Whisman, M.A., & Beach S, H. Intimate partner relationship distress in the DSM-

5, *Family Process*, 54(1), pp. 48–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12227>

Franckowiak, J., & Lafontaine, M. F. (2017). Attachment, trust, and satisfaction in relationships:

Investigating actor, partner, and mediating effects. *Personal Relationships* 24(3), 640-

662. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/pere.1220334883>

Freedman, S. A., Reshef, S., & Weinige, C. F. (2020). Post-traumatic stress disorder and

postpartum depression and their reported association with recent labor and delivery: A

questionnaire survey cohort. *International Journal of Obstetric Anesthesia*, 43, 18–24.

Crossref. Pub-Med.

Gautam, V. (2022). Examining relationships among festival satisfaction, place attachment,

emotional experience, and destination loyalty. *Leisure Sciences*,

pp. 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2022.2099493>

Ghochani, M., Safarian Toosi, M. R., & Khoyneshad, G. R. (2020, 2021). Investigation of the

effectiveness of combined couple therapy for couples on the improvement of intimacy

and PTSD. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 49(3), 299–

20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2020.1813657>

Girard, A., Connor, J. J., & Woolley, S. R. (2020). An exploratory study of the role of infidelity

typologies in predicting attachment anxiety and avoidance. *Journal of Marital and*

- Family Therapy*, 46(1), 124–134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12371>
- Glass, S. P., & Wright, T. L. (1992). Justifications for extramarital relationships: The association between attitudes, behaviors, and gender. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 29(3), 361–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499209551654>
- Gleeson, A., Curran, D., Reeves, R., Dorahy, M., & Hanna, D. (2021). A meta-analytic review of the relationship between attachment styles and posttraumatic growth. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 77(7), 1521–1536. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp>
- Gossner, J. D., Fife, S. T., & Butler, M. H. (2022). Couple healing from infidelity: A deductive qualitative analysis study. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2022.2086231>
- Greely, A. M. (1991). *Faithful Attraction: Discovering intimacy, love, and fidelity in American Marriage*, Tor.
- Guitar, A. E., Geher, G., Kruger, D. J., Garcia, J. R., Fisher, M. L., & Fitzgerald, C. J. (2017). Defining and distinguishing sexual and emotional infidelity. *Current Psychology*, 36, 1–3. <https://doi:10.007/s12144-016-9432-4>
- Hatch, S. L., & Dohrenwend, B. P. (2007). Distribution of traumatic and other stressful events by race/ethnicity, gender, SES, and age: A review of the research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Article 40, pp. 313–332.
- Halchuk, R. E., Makinen, J. A., & Johnson, S. M. (2010). Resolving attachment injuries in

- couples using emotionally focused couples' therapy: A three-year follow-up. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 9(1), 31-1348. Crossref.
- Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K., Wilson, K. G., Bissett, R. T., Pistorello, J., Toarmino, D., Polusny, M. A., Dykstra, T. A., Batten, S. V., Bergan, J., Stewart, S. H., Zvolensky, M. J., Eifert, G. H., Bond, F. W., Forsyth, J. P., Karekla, M., & McCurry, S. M. (2004). Measuring experiential avoidance: A preliminary test of a working model. *The Psychological Record*, 54(4), pp. 553-578. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03395492>
- Heppner, P. P., Wampold, B. E., Owen, J., Wang, K. T., & Thompson, M. N. (2016). *Research design in counseling* (4th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Hertlein, K. M., Chang, J., VanYperen, A., Fatkin, K., & Nakamura, S. (2021). Experiences after infidelity via Internet communication: Surveillance, ambivalence, and termination. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, pp. 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.1907568>
- Holder, H. D., Gruenewald, P. J., Ponicki, W. R., Treno, A. J., Grube, J. W., Saltz, R. F., Roeper, P. (2000). Effect on community-based interventions on high-risk drinking and alcohol-related injuries. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 284(18), pp. 2341-2347
- Husserl, E. (1970b). *Logical investigations* (Volumes 1 & 2). J. N. Findlay, Trans). Humanities Press.

Husserl, E. (1975). *The Paris lectures* (P. Koestenbaum, Trans.) (2nd ed.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Husserl, E. (1965). *Phenomenology and the crisis of philosophy* (Q. Lauer, Trans). Harper Row.

Jahan, Y., Chowdhury, A. S., Rahman, S. M. A., Chowdhury, S., Khair, Z., Huq, K. A. T. M. E., et al. (2017). Factors involving extramarital affairs among married adults in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Medicine and Public Health*, (5) 1379-1386.

<https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph.20171506>.

Johnson, S. M., & Greenberg, L. S. (1985). Emotionally focused couples' therapy: An outcome study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 11(3), 313–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.1985.tb00624.x>

Johnson, S. M., Makinen, J. A., & Millikin, J.W. et al., (2001). Attachment injuries in couple relationships: A new perspective on impasses in couple therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 27(2), 145–155.

Johnson, S. M. (2005). The evolution of couple therapy. *The Psychologist: British Psychological Association*, 18(9), 538–539.

Johnson, S. M. (2004). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection*. (2nd ed). Brunner-Routledge.

Johnson, S. M. (2019). Attachment theory in practice: *Emotionally focused therapy (EFT) with*

Individuals, couples, and families. The Guilford Press.

Kilpatrick, D. G., Resnick, H. S., Milanak, M. E., Miller, M. W., Keyes, K. M., & Friedman, M.

J. (2013). National estimates of exposure to traumatic events and PTSD prevalence using DSM-IV and DSM-V criteria. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 26(5), 537-

547. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.21848>

King, M. E., & La Valley, A. G. (2019). Partner interference, emotion, and relational outcomes:

A test of relational turbulence theory in early dating relationships. *Southern Journal of Communication*, Article 84, (pp. 287–300).

Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A., & Wehrman, E. C. (2015). Communication of military couples

during deployment: Topic avoidance and relational uncertainty. In E. Sahlstein & L. M.

Webb (Eds.), *A communicative perspective on the military: Interactions, messages, and discourses* (pp. 39–58). Peter Lang.

Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2011). Depressive symptoms and mechanisms of relational

turbulence as predictors of relationship satisfaction among returning service

members. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(4), 470-

478. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024063>

Kohls, N., Sauer, S., & Walach, H. (2009). Facets of mindfulness----Results of an online study

investigating the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory. *Personality of Individual*

Differences, Article 46, pp. 224-230. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2008.10.009>

Laaser, D., Putney, H. L., Bundick, M., Delmonico, D. L., & Griffin, E. J. (2017). Post-traumatic growth in relationally betrayed women. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 43(3). 435-447. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12211>

Labrecque, L. T., & Whisman, M. A. (2017). Attitudes toward and prevalence of extramarital sex and descriptions of extramarital partners in the 21st century. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 31(7), 952-957. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000280>

Laland, K. N., & Brown, G. R. (2006). *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, 15 (U.S.A: Wiley), 464. <https://doi.org/10.1002/evan.20093>

Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. University of Chicago Press.

Ledbetter, S. (2015). Jealousy-the impact of sexual vs. emotional infidelity. *Medical Press*, 10(1).

Lee, B. H., & O'Sullivan, L. F. (2019). Walk the line: How successful are efforts to maintain monogamy in intimate relationships? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48(6), 1735-1748. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1376-3>

Leeker, O., & Carlozzi, A. (2014). Effects of sex, sexual orientation, infidelity expectations, and love on distress related to emotional and sexual infidelity. *Journal of Marital and Family*

Therapy, Article 41, 68-91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2012.00331.x>

Lisman, C. G., & Holman, A. C. (2021). Cheating under the circumstances in marital relationships: The development and examination of the propensity towards infidelity scale. *Social Sciences (Basel)*, 10(10), pp. 392. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsc>

Lonergan, M., Brunet, A., Rivest-Beauregard, M., & Groleau, D. (2021). Is romantic partner betrayal a form of traumatic experience? A qualitative study. *Stress and Health*, 37(1), 19-31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2968>

Longstreet, P., Brooks., S., & Gonzalez, E. S. (2019). Internet addiction: When the positive emotions are not so positive. *Technology in Society*, 57, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2018.12.004>

Makinen, J. A., & Johnson, S. M. (2006). Resolving attachment injuries in couples using emotionally focused therapy: Steps toward forgiveness and reconciliation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74(6), 1055-1064. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.74.6.1055>

Makinen, J. A., & Edgier, L. (2011, 2013). Rebuilding bonds after the traumatic impact of infidelity. In J. L. Furrow, S. M. Johnson, & B. A. Bradley (Eds.), *The emotionally focused casebook: New directions in treating couples* (pp. 247-268). Routledge.

Martin, R., Christensen, A., & Atkins, D. C. (2014). Infidelity and behavior couple therapy.

- Relationship outcomes over five years following therapy. *Couple and family psychology: Research and practice* 3(1) pp.1-12. <https://doi:10/1037/cfp0000012>
- Mikucki-Enyart, S. L., & Caughlin, J. P. (2018). Integrating the relational turbulence model and a multiple-goals approach to understanding topic avoidance during the transition to extended family. *Communication Research*, Article 45, (pp.267–296).
- Mitchell, E. A., Wittenborn, A. K., Timm, T. M., & Blow, A. J. (2021). Examining the role of the attachment bond in recovering from an affair. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 49(3), 221-236
<https://doi-org.lib-e2.lib.ttu.edu/10.1080/01926187.2020.1791763>
- Mitchell, E. A., Wittenborn, A. K., Timm, T. M., & Blow, A. J. (2022). Affair recovery: Exploring similarities and differences between injured and involved partners. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 48(2), 447-463. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12538>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Munsch, C. L., & Yorks, J. (2018). When opportunity knocks, who answers? infidelity, gender, race, and occupational sex composition. *Personal Relationships*, 25(4), 581-595.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12261>
- Naimi, L. (2019). Effect of Spiritual-Religious Interventions on Increasing the Sense of Calmness and Forgiveness in Women Who Have Experienced Marital. *Health*,

Spirituality & Medical Ethics Journal, 6(4), 16–22.

<https://doi.org/10.29252/jhsme.6.4.16>

Negash, S., Cui, M., Fincham, F. D., & Pasley, K. (2014). Extradysadic involvement and relationship dissolution in heterosexual women university students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 43(3), 531–539. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-013-0213-y>

Negash, S., Carlson, S. H., & Linder, J. N. (2018). Emotionally focused therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing: An integrated treatment to heal the trauma of infidelity. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, pp. 7, 143–157. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cfp0000107>

Olson, M. M., Russell, C. S., Higgins-Kessler, M., & Miller, R. B. (2002). Emotional processes following disclosure of an extramarital affair. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 28(4), 423–434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2002.tb00367.x>

Olukotun, O., Mkandawire, E., Antilla, J., Alfaifa, F., Weitzel, J., Scheer, V., Olukotun, M., & Mkandawire-Valhmu, L. (2021). An Analysis of Reflections on Researcher Positionality. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(5), 1411–1426. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.4613>

Parker, M. L., & Campbell, K. (2017). Infidelity and attachment: The moderating role of race/ethnicity. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 39(3), 433–451.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Sage.

Pazhoohi, F., Silva, C., Pereira, L., Oliveira, M., Santana, P., Rodrigues, R., & Arantes, J.

(2019). Is imagination of the infidelity more painful than actual infidelity? *Current*

Psychology, 38(2), 572-578.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-017-9637-1>

Peloquin, K., Byers, E. S., Callaci, M., & Tremblay, N. (2019). Sexual portrait of couples

seeking relationship therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 45(1), 120–133.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12328>

Perkins-Porras, L., Jockes, K., Bhalla, N., Sutherland, C., & Pollard, M. (2015). Reporting of

posttraumatic stress disorder and cardiac misconceptions following cardiac

rehabilitation. *Journal of Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation and Prevention*, 35(4), 238–

45. Crossref. PubMed.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S., Valle & S. Halling

[Eds.], *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* [pp. 41–60]. Plenum.

Puechlong, C., Weiss, K., Le Vigouroux, S., & Charbonnier, E. (2020). Role of personality traits

and cognitive emotion regulation strategies in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

among flood victims. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, p. 50, 101688.

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/Crossref>

Previti, D., & Amato, P. R. (2004). Is infidelity a cause or consequence of poor marital quality?

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 21(2), pp. 217-230.

<https://doi:10.1177/02654075040413>

Priem, J. S., & Solomon, D. H. (2011). Relational Uncertainty and cortisol responses to hurtful

and supportive messages from a dating partner. *Personal Relationships*, 18, 198-223.

Raftar Aliabadi, M. R., & Shareh, H. (2022). Mindfulness-based schema therapy and forgiveness

therapy among women affected by infidelity: A randomized clinical trial. *Psychotherapy*

Research, 32(1), pp. 91–103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2021.1913294>

Robles, T. F., Slatcher, R. B., Trombello, J., & McGinn, M. M. (2014). Marital quality and

health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(1), pp. 149-187.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031859>

Rodriguez, L. M., Knee, C. R., & Neighbors, C. (2014). Relationships can drive some to during

Relationship-Contingent self-esteem and drinking problems. *Journal of Social and*

Personal Relationships, 31, 270-290.

Rokach, A., & Philibert-Lignieres, G. (2015). Intimacy, loneliness, and infidelity. *The Open*

Psychology Journal, 8(1), 71–78. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874350101508010071>

Roos, L.G., O'Connor, V., Canevello, B A., Bennett, J. M. (2019). Post-traumatic stress and

psychological health following infidelity in unmarried young adults. *Stress and Health*,

35(4), 468–479. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2880>

Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the

- investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Article 16, (pp. 172-186).
- Sapolsky R. M. (1999). Hormonal correlates of personality and social contexts: From non-human primates. In C. Panter-Brick & C. M. Worthman (Eds.), *Hormones health and behavior: A socio-ecological and lifespan perspective* (pp. 18-46). University Press.
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & quantity*, 52(4), 1893–1907.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>
- Schade, L. C., & Sandberg, J. G. (2012). Healing the attachment injury of marital infidelity using Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy: A case illustration. *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 40(5), 434-44. Crossref.
- Shrout, M. R., & Weigel, D. J. (2018). Infidelity's aftermath: Appraisals, mental health, and health-compromising behaviors following partner's infidelity, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, pp. 35, 1067–1091. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407517704091>
- Shrout, M. R., & Weigel, D. J. (2020). Coping with infidelity: The moderating role of self-esteem. *Personality and Individual Differences*, p. 154, 109631. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.109631>
- Smock, P. J., & Schwartz, C. R. (2020). The demography of families: A review of patterns and

- change. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 9–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12612>
- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1), 26-29.
- Stavrianopoulos, K. (2015). Enhancing relationship satisfaction among college student couples: An emotionally focused therapy (EFT) approach. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 14(1), 1-16.
- Stevenson, B., & Wolfers, J. (2007). Marriage and divorce: Changes and their driving forces, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21(2), 27-52. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.21.2.27>
- Tafoya, M. A., Spritzberg B. H. (2007). The dark side of infidelity; Its nature, prevalence, and communicative functions. In B. H. Spritzberg, & W. R. Cupach (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (2nd ed., pp. 201-242). Erlbaum.
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L.C. (2004). Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry*, Article 14, (pp. 1-18).
- Theiss, J. A., & Estlein, R. (2014). Antecedents and consequences of the perceived threat of sexual communication; A test of the relational turbulence model. *Western Journal of Communication*, Article 78, (pp. 404-425). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2013.845794>

- Theiss, J. A., Estlein, R. & Weber, K. M. (2013). A longitudinal assessment of relationship characteristics that predict new parents' relationship satisfaction. *Personal Relationships*, Article 20, (pp. 216-235). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2012.01406.x>
- Theiss, J. A., & Nagy, M. E. (2013). A relational turbulence model of partner responsiveness and relationship talks across cultures. *Western Journal of Communication*, 77(2), 186-209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2012.72074>
- Theiss, J. A., & Solomon, D. H. (2006). Coupling longitudinal data and multilevel modeling to examine the antecedents and consequences of jealousy experiences in romantic relationships: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Human Communication Research*, 32(4), 469–503. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2006.00284.x>
- Thompson, A. E., Capesius, D., Kulibert, D., & Doyle, R. A. (2020). Understanding infidelity forgiveness: An application of implicit theories of relationships. *Journal of Relationships Research*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jrr.2019.21>
- Timm, T. M., & Blow, A. J. (2018). Healing the relational wounds from infidelity. In D. Flemons & S. Green (Eds.). *Quickies: The Handbook of Brief Sex Therapy* (2nd ed). (pp. 115-140). W. W. Norton.
- Tironi, M., Charpentier Mora, S., Cavanna, D., Borelli, J. L., & Bizzi, F. (2021). Physiological factors linking insecure attachment to psychopathology: A systematic review. *Brain*

- Sciences*, 11(11), 1477. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci11111477>
- Turner, R. J. (2013). Understanding health disparities: The relevance of the stress process model. *Society and Mental Health*, 3(3), 170-186
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869313488121>
- Valenzuela, S., Halpern, D., & Katz, J. E. (2014). Social network sites, marriage well-being, and divorce: Survey and state-level evidence from the United States. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 94-101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.034>
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human Science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.
- von Bertalanffy, (1968). *General system theory: Foundations, development, application*. George Braziller.
- Vossler, A., & Moller, N. P. (2020). Internet affairs: Partners' perceptions and experiences of internet infidelity. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 46(1), 67-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2019.1654577>
- Walsh, J. L., Senn, T. E., & Carey, M. P. (2013). Longitudinal associations between health behaviors and mental health in low-income adults. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, Article 3, (pp. 104–113).
- Wang, C. D., King, M. L., & Debernardi, N. R. (2012). Adult attachment, cognitive appraisal, and university students' reactions to romantic infidelity. *Journal of College*

Counseling, 15(2), 101-116. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2012.00009.x>

Warach, B., Josephs, L., & Gorman, B. S. (2018). Pathways to infidelity: The roles of self-serving bias and betrayal trauma. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 44(5), 497-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2017.1416434>

Warach, B., & Josephs, L. (2021). The aftershocks of infidelity: A review of infidelity-based attachment trauma. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 36(1), 68-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2019.1577961>

Weiser, D. A., Shrout, M. R., Thomas, A. V., Edwards, A. L., & Pickens, J. C. (2022). “I’ve been cheated, been mistreated, when will I be loved”: Two decades of infidelity research through an intersectional lens. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221113032>

Welch, T. S., Lachmar, E. M., Leija, S. G., Easley, T., Blow, A. J., & Wittenborn, A. K. (2019). Establishing safety in emotionally focused couple therapy: A single-case process study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 45(4), 621–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12398>

Whisman, M. A. (2015). Discovery of a partner affair and major depressive episode in a probability sample of married or cohabiting adults. *Family Process*, 55(4), 713–723. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12185>

- Whisman, M. A., Dixon, A. E., & Johnson, B. (1997). Therapists' perspectives of couple problems and treatment issues in couple therapy. *Journal of Family Psychology, 11*(3), 361–366. Crossref.
- Wilder, E. J., Garzon, F., & Johnson, E. L. (2020). The Life model is a Christian multi-modal approach to therapy utilizing inner healing prayer. *The Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 39*(1), 49–64.
- Wittenborn, A. K., Liu, T., Ridenour, T. A., Lachman, E. M., Mitchell, E. A., & Seedall, R. B. (2019). Randomized controlled trial of emotionally focused couple therapy compared to treatment as usual for depression: Outcomes and mechanisms of change. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 45*(3), 395–409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12350>
- Wittenborn, A. K., Culpepper, B., & Liu, T. (2012). Treating depression in men. The role of emotionally focused couple therapy. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 34*(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-012-9176-8>
- Zeligman, M., Ataga, J., & Shaw, Z. (2020). Posttraumatic growth in trauma survivors: Associations with attachment to God and God's representation. *Counseling and Values, 65*(2), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cvj.12135>

APPENDICES

Appendix A**IRB Approval****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 27, 2023

Thelma Carpenter-Ellis
Scott Edgar

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-1528 African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity

Dear Thelma Carpenter-Ellis, Scott Edgar,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: June 27, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity

Are you 18 years or older?
Have you been married or divorced?
Are you an African American female?
Have you experienced infidelity?
Have you experienced posttraumatic growth after infidelity?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you might be eligible to participate in a research study.

This research study aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity rather than health-compromising health-related issues.

Participants will be asked to:

Participants will be asked to complete an audio-recorded interview while also completing a journal writing activity (60 minutes total). Participants will also be asked to read their transcripts and complete the member-checking process after the researcher has analyzed the data. The member-checking ensures the researcher catches the participant's true meaning of their experience (15-30 minutes).

Participants will be awarded a dinner certificate to Texas Roadhouse for \$25.00 as a token of appreciation. The gift certificate will be awarded upon completing all the research requirements from the participants. The conclusion will be deemed completed after the member-checking process is completed. If a participant withdraws from participation, that participant will receive a lunch certificate of \$10.00 for their willingness to be a part of this research study.

If you want to participate, complete the survey that will be sent to your email address. Please get in touch with the researcher at the phone or email address below with any questions. A consent document will be sent to your email after your eligibility to participate in the study has been determined.

Thelma Carpenter-Ellis, a doctoral candidate in the School of Behavioral Health Sciences at Liberty University is conducting this study. **Please get in touch with Thelma Carpenter-Ellis at (309) 830-3968 or tcarpenterellis@liberty.edu for more information.**

Appendix C

Permission Request Letter

Permission Request Template

May 5, 2023

Dear Pastor Bennett,

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my research project is African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity. My research is being conducted to fill a gap in the literature by examining why some grow rather than experience compromising health-related issues.

I request your permission to assist and have interested congregants in your congregation contact me at [REDACTED]. If you are willing to help, please post the recruitment flyer, and disseminate it to your congregants. Participants will be asked to complete the attached screening questionnaire/contact me to schedule an interview/etc. Participants will be presented with informed consent information before participating. Participating in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. The study procedures are as follows:

To participate, you must be 18 years or older, have been married /divorced (10 years or less), and have experienced marital infidelity and growth following this traumatic experience. Participants are asked to commit to a video meeting where the researcher will explain expectations, confidentiality, informed consent, member-checking, answer questions and explain the withdrawal process. Participants must also participate in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person, or secure video interview, which includes answering questions about their experience and completing a writing activity during this process for the researcher to observe.

Each participant must complete the member-checking process after the researcher has analyzed the data. The member-checking ensures that the researcher captures the participant's true meaning of their experience. It should take approximately 2.5 hours to complete all the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission response letter document is attached for your convenience and must be returned on your church's letterhead.

Sincerely,

Thelma Carpenter-Ellis, M. Ed., LCPC, CIRS
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Participant Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Template: Email, Letter, or Verbal Script

May 15, 2023

Dear Participant,

As a student/doctoral candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. My study aims to fill a gap in the literature by examining the lived experience of African American women's posttraumatic growth after infidelity rather than compromising health-related issues. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To participate, you must be 18 years or older, have been married /divorced, be an African American female, and have experienced marital infidelity and growth following this traumatic experience. If willing, participants will be asked to complete an audio-recorded interview while completing a journal writing activity (60 minutes total). Participants will also be asked to read their transcripts and complete the member-checking process after the researcher has analyzed the data. The member-checking ensures the researcher catches the participant's true meaning of their experience (15-30 minutes).

Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the participants' identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule an interview to be screened.

A consent document will be sent as an email attachment after you have contacted me and expressed interest in participating in my study.

The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign the consent document and return it to me at [REDACTED] before the time of your interview.

The participant who completes the study will receive a dinner certificate from Texas Roadhouse for \$25.00. If a participant withdraws from participation, that participant will receive a lunch certificate of \$10.00 as a thank you.

Sincerely,

Thelma Carpenter-Ellis
Doctoral Candidate
[REDACTED]

Appendix E**Screening Questionnaire**

This research study aims to examine African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity. To participate in this study, the participants must meet the criteria below:

Directions: Please answer each question by circling a Yes or No response.

Questions	Answers	Answers
1. Are you 18 years or older?	Yes	No
2. Have you been married /divorced for at least ten years or less?	Yes	No
3. Are you an African American female?	Yes	No
4. Have you experienced infidelity?	Yes	No
5. Have you experienced posttraumatic growth after infidelity?	Yes	No

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you might be eligible to participate in a research study.

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form

Title of the Project: African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity

Principal Investigator: Thelma J. Carpenter-Ellis, Student/Doctoral Candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences, Community Care & Counseling, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age, or older, an African American female, have been married /divorced and have experienced marital infidelity and growth following this traumatic experience. Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The study aims to examine African American Women's Posttraumatic Growth after Infidelity. This study is being conducted to fill a gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge as to why some grow after infidelity without compromising health-related issues.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

1. Complete an audio-recorded the interview process, which includes questions about your experience (e.g., informal with open-ended questions, while completing a journal writing activity (60 minutes total).
2. Read your transcript and the developed themes (15-30 minutes). The member checking is to ensure the researcher's information is accurate. This process of checking for accuracy will happen after the researcher has analyzed the data and before including it in the research findings.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include adding to the body of literature and helping mental health professionals in the behavioral health field. These research findings will add additional tools that practitioners can use when assisting individuals in working through and recovering from

infidelity and minimizing psychological and physiological health issues. Mental health professionals might use teaching methods based on new knowledge to educate clients about the steps to recovery to help with psychological and physiological pain after discovering their spouse has been unfaithful.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. However, due to the traumatic impact of infidelity, there may be some emotional distress during the interview process. Minimal risk, but the possibility of psychological stress exists. The risks involved in this study might include flashbacks and upsetting emotional pain. The intensity of emotional pain depends on where the participant is in her healing process, and having to remember and discuss the traumatic experience can be triggering. Triggers lead to the possibility of psychological discomfort from being asked to recall and discuss prior trauma. To reduce risk, I will take the following steps to assist, observe the participant's reactions, pause/stop the interview, and reconvene later (e.g., rescheduling the appointment and providing referral information for professional counseling if deemed appropriate).

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Your data may be used in future research studies. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked personal file cabinet only the researcher can access. After three years, all electronic and paper records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted/erased. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. The participant will be awarded a dinner certificate to Texas Roadhouse for \$25.00 as a token of appreciation. The gift certificate

will be awarded upon completing all the research requirements from the participants. The conclusion will be deemed completed after the member-checking process is completed. If a participant withdraws from participation, that participant will receive a lunch certificate of \$10.00 for their willingness to be a part of this research study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your participation will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Thelma Carpenter-Ellis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Thelma at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Scott Edgar, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix G

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.
2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?
3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?
4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical /emotional health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?
5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.
6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?
7. What helped you through this challenging time?
8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?
9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?
10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?
11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.
12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?
13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?
14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that I have yet to inquire about?

Appendix H**Observation Journal Writing Prompt**

The following prompt will be utilized as the final portion of the interview for observation. How has your experience shaped your worldview?

Appendix I**Participant Withdrawal Form**

The Liberty University Institutional

Review Board has approved.

this document for use from June 28, 2021

Protocol # 45 CFR 46: 101 (b)

HOW TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY

I, _____, have decided to exercise

my right to withdraw my participation from the qualitative research study titled:

“Surviving the Affair: A Phenomenological Study of the strategies couples utilize to repair their marriage successfully after the occurrence of infidelity.” I have had all of my questions answered, and I understand that all video/audio recordings or data collected about me will be destroyed and will not be used as a part of this study.

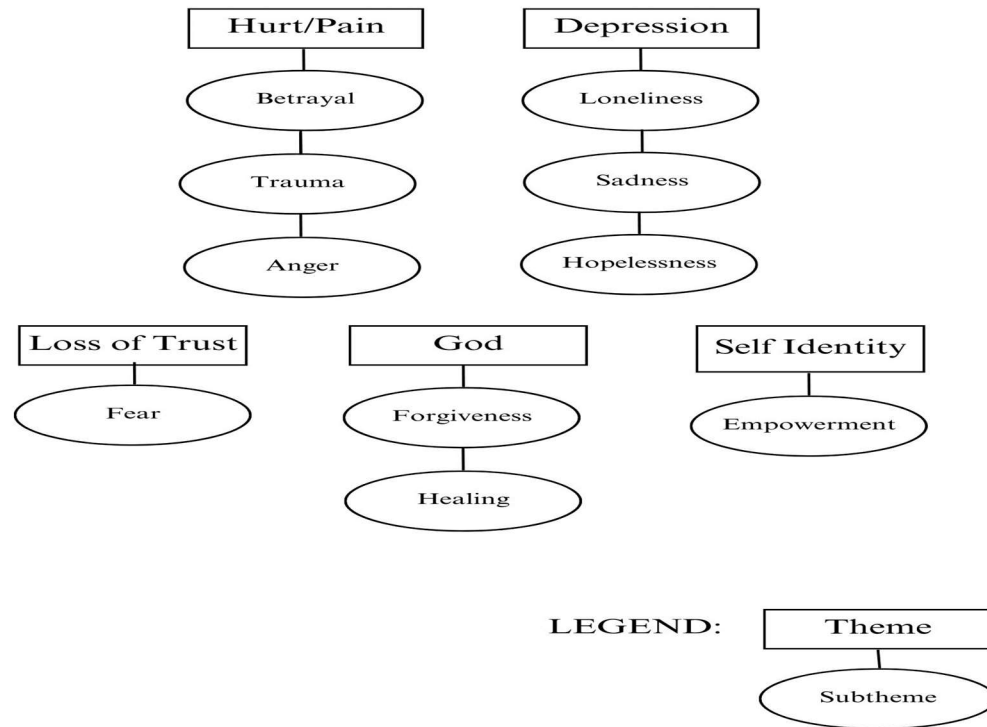
My signature on this form is my consent to revoke participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____ (Participant)

Signature: _____ Date: _____ (Researcher)

Appendix J

Emergent Themes and Subthemes



Appendix K

Interview Transcript: Aiya

Interview questions (Semi-Structured, open-ended)

Aiya

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

Yes, I am. 44 years old and be 45 in a couple of months. I have been married and remarried for five years and have a 17-year-old daughter. I work in higher education and have a business that I run, and I think, I said I'm a student, so I have been going to school for the last seems like forever, it feels like at least 15 to 16 years.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

I was married for almost 13 years to my ex-husband, and within our relationship, there was a moment where I learned that this was the first time that something ever happened to us. It was. I have never been the type of woman to like to check phones, follow up with people, and try to check their status and where they are. So, I guess I could be an easy target to cheat on because I am not searching for that stuff. But there was a moment in our marriage at around, I think, about the tenth year, he was acting different.

He was acting strange, and I saw him treating his phone differently and sneaking off to make phone calls a little more. But again, I didn't. Think a whole lot about it. I had a lot going on taking care of kids, and he had four children that I also helped to care for on top of the daughter we had together. And so, it was this one moment. We were getting dressed to go to church; it was a late night. It was like New Year's Eve whereas tradition has it, we were going to go into the new year together, and he was in the shower, and his phone just kept covering him. And again, I am not one to check phones, but something was like, look at this phone.

And so, I picked the phone up, and it was a message from a woman who was talking about how excited she was to be going out of town with him and all this and that he was supposed to go out his now, which he often did to visit a friend in St. Louis. Again, I had no problem. I want you to have a life of your own. I want you to do what you want to do. And then for me to find out that he was going to take this woman with him. And so, I confronted him that evening, and it was a girl that he met on his route while working; she lived in Springfield. He claimed nothing ever happened.

That was going to be their first time, you know, going anywhere together. And so, I told him that evening that I was done. And so I went to church, of course, and cried through the whole night of service. And he went and talked to our pastor and begged the pastor to talk to me, and so he brought me into the office with the pastor. The pastor was like Aiya, you know he is sorry the pastor pleaded his case for him, and there was something in me that just knew that I was not like done, right? I was angry, but I knew I was not done. And so, I told the pastor and him that this is your one get out of jail free card, and I told Pastor, our pastor I said you know if anything like this happens again. I am done.

Please do not call me in this office and try to talk to me about this. I am telling you that I am not going to do this again. And then the pastor called us into the office, made me bring the kids into the office, and made my ex-husband apologize. He did not say what he did in front of the kids, but he apologized for disrespecting the family and promised it would never happen again. All this and that. And so, we carried on. Things were not the same, but I was trying to pretend it was the same. And so, at this time, I was about to start my next journey in my education.

I finished my master's, and the master's was hard on the family. And so, I asked the family, I asked him, I said, you know, I was thinking about getting my doctoral degree, but I do not want to do it if it is going to risk our family. And he promised me, no, I am sorry for anything I have ever done. I want you to keep pursuing what you want to pursue. I am going to support you. And so, I went ahead and got into the program within that first year, he just really started to act very strangely. I had no clue, but he started messing around with a lot of different women.

And women I knew, women that were in my church, women that were, friends, family friends, things like that. And again, I didn't know any of this. And what ended up letting me find out was his sister. Because They were. There was a day when he took my kids over to his family's house, and some of his family does not like me, which I'm okay with. And they talk badly about me in front of my kids. And so, when they came home that day.

My ex-husband took the kids back in the room, had this conversation with them and when they came out, I said, what was that about and he said, well, you know I learned that, you know, my sister was talking bad about you. So, I was telling the kids not to let that happen. And do not listen to stuff like that. And then I was like, well, were you not there? How did you hear? And he was like, well, so and so told me. And that so-and-so was his sister's best friend. And I was like, why would she tell you that against her best friend? He was like, well, she just felt that no. I was like, okay. So, the next day I called his sister and said, "I do not appreciate that and please do not do that. I don't care what problems you have with me that have nothing to do with the kids". And she was like, well, where did you hear this from? I told her that her brother told me, and she's like, well, where did he hear that from?

And I said, well, from your best friend. And then she was like, oh, well, you need to find out why they have all these side conversations. You may need to be asking questions about that. That is what you need to ask. So, she pretty much taught me that they were messing around. So, I had to go through my emotions and inspector gadget mode. Of trying to figure it out, how can I, because I know neither one of them is going to tell me the truth.

So, I decided to then go through my phone logs. And I saw that he had been talking to this person. Within one month, there were almost seventy phone calls on my bill. And so that was my confirmation. And so, after that was when I realized what was happening. I put him out, but amid all that, I was asking God for some clarity because, again, my marriage was important to me, but within that clarity, I learned everybody he was sleeping with and everything that was going on right up under my nose that nobody felt it was important enough to tell me. And so that was when I knew that it was over.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

I felt very hurt. I remember I was lost in the beginning because I had turned my attention to family, school, and church, those are my themes with family being a priority and so my whole meaning was to be a wife and a mother. Those were the two things that defined me in so many ways. And so, the separation not only made me question, who am I without that? It also took, you know, split up the kids and had this moment of me some of them still dealing with me, some of them not. So, it was just a lot of confusion. A lot of Just not knowing what to do. And. Just acknowledging all the unknowns. That and the question of what's been happening what my kids knew, and then, and I forget to add I am sorry I forgot to add that one of the women that he was cheating with have been around my kids like actually both of these women were but the other

woman I want to hear her name all the time because she ran a football team that he coached for, and so my kids were around her like at her house doing things like that.

And I was not thinking about it because this was who he worked for. That was like a moment of just like, how could you do that? So, I think it was a lot of breakdowns that I was not expecting or ready for. When you say a lot of breakdowns that you were not ready for or expecting, can you elaborate more on that? So, emotionally, it was a lot of, just I was stuck in one spot for a long time like it was It put me into this like deep sadness. The other thing was you know, I did not know that I held a lot within, but like. I was the only person, you know, that a lot of people knew or even in my family other than my grandmother who had this long marriage who had this, especially within my age group.

So, there were a lot of people looking up to me and looking up to my marriage and joining me to have what I had even though they didn't know what I had and so I did not really know what it was like. Like an award, I was carrying with me. I did not know that I was holding that in that way, and I was. So, when that had when that broke down, I was like, what do I have right now? You look like, what do I have? So, it was just this moment of like feeling all of that just blowing away. It was like wasted years.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

I think emotionally was probably the biggest hit for me. Just because again, it was like I had this solid foundation, and suddenly it was very shaky and uncertain. Now the only thing I had on my side for me, which I cannot say I ever had previously, because of previous relationships, it's not the first time I have ever cheated on, but with my husband it was different. And so previous relationships I was in a space where I could not take care of myself, it was like I

was depending on people financially and I was depending on how I was a young girl. But currently, I was the person with the money. I was the person who took care of everything. So, I did not have to deal with what I was going to do, where was I going to live? Like, that was his concern, he needed to figure that out.

So, that was a moment for me because I was not shaken to the core of having to figure out what is going to happen next. But the emotional piece for me was I am a very loyal person. Like I am a person that once I have dedicated to something, I am going to stay dedicated to it. I love God and I love the things that I have dedicated to with that. And so, I kept thinking like am I going to disappoint him by not continuing in my marriage? And I, you know, I talked a lot to God, and he clarified with me some things, but he clarified with me some things. But so, I think that was more did not necessarily even think about my ex-husband. I just did not want to let it Him down.

The other pieces were like I thought about all the people in the past that. That is something to say about my marriage or told me I shouldn't have married him in the first place. And I was like, oh, even though we made it thirteen years, like who was going to then rub that in my face. My other stress was all the people that were really pressuring me or making me feel bad for you know not for putting them out for not being with them and he was running around doing this whole pity party making everybody feel sad for him because he was not telling the truth. But I was still so busy trying to protect him at the same time and protect my child away from all of those things so I was not telling people the truth either and so I think my emotional stress was more so trying to protect everybody else but myself.

And so, I do know that I just had this unbearable sadness for a while. And it just kind of, again, it just made me just stay stuck in my tracks like I just did not know what to do. But I can

truly say that I did not stay there very long. Only because I had people around me who were just there to protect my heart. They helped push away the negativity of what was being said and helped me with my daughter and stuff like that. So that was really I think without that, I probably would have been in trouble.

But physical health, again, I went to this emotional stance. But once I got out of that. Then I kind of reverted to this. Alright, what do I need to do to make everything better? And so, I do not think my physical health was an issue. It got better because I was determined to work on myself and stop worrying about everybody else. So again, it was mostly an emotional hit for me.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

That was an immediate thing for me, and I think the most challenging part was, again, you still have this child that you have got to think about. And still navigate their feelings because one of my biggest goals if I ever had a child was to raise them in a two-parent household. So even through whatever I was going through with him, my daughter, all she knew was mommy and daddy, and that was her comfort and safety. And so, suddenly that was shaken. And with it being shaken, I also cannot tell her why it is shaken, you know. And so, it is this moment daddy was here and now he is gone. And so, I think those were my times where I just felt like, what am I supposed to do now? Like what is this supposed to be?

I still had to worry about school. I ended up almost failing the two classes I was in that summer. You see because that read like who can read who can think who can write who can be creative in those moments. And fortunately, I had a very. I was in the same position that I'm in now and I have always had a very good supportive supervisor. And so, I was not in this position. No, I was in my previous position, but I still had a very supportive supervisor who kind of knew

what was going on and did not put extra expectations on me. So, I think my routine was just like when I left work, I went home. I was in bed. Yeah, those are some hard times.

I have always had some anxiety and depression but did not necessarily know how to call it because that was not something we did when we were younger. I also learned that that was what it was as I was navigating. The stuff that my daughter was going through. And so, watching what she was experiencing and getting those things diagnosed, then let me know. Oh, that is what you were going through too.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

I was laying down one day and I was praying I was talking, and the words came 365-day transformation. That was like what came to my mind. And so, I made this decision that I would work on my emotions, and my physical and financial health. All those things for a whole year. And so, I made the decision that I was not going to go, like I was not going to date. I was not going to try to court people. I was not going to sleep with anybody. I was going to literally just focus on me. Because I had to acknowledge that from the age of fifteen had been in relationships.

Long-term relationships like back-to-back-to-back. And if one ended, I just started a new one. And so, I acknowledge that I never really spent any time by myself. And so that was like what turned things around for me was her and then me being surrounded by every reminder of you know, God's grace and all of those things that I was ready to forget about.

So, you know, I think I was mad. I feel a little mad at God. You know what I mean? I am a little mad about a few things. So, I was ready to be like to get this mess. I stayed loyal. I was dedicated and I still didn't get what I was supposed to get. So, I'm about to act the fool. But I was reminded that that's not how this works. And so that was like my big turnaround.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

So, the funny thing is I, one of my best friends, was going through a lot with her apartment that she was in. Her apartment had mold that the landlords were not taking care of. She was getting sick, and she had been searching as searching for a place. But she was not finding anything and always told her that was God doing that for me. So, since she could not find a place, I was in this house by myself with my daughter, and I just offered it to her.

I would love it if you just came to stay until you figured out where you wanted to be, and my house had like a it was almost like an apartment of its own in the basement. It had a bathroom kitchen everything. That is how I offered that up to her. And so, she moved in. And to me, I think that was my big saving grace right there because one she is a charge girl so she you know everything. She is very loyal in those ways, and I think for me my coping mechanisms could be unhealthy.

So, my mind thought, I have been married thirteen years and my first thought was about being out there. I am about to go act a fool, which I probably would have if she had not moved in. And so, so I always say that she kind of saved me from myself because I do know how to cope by probably will not call it using people, but using them for what I want and not allowing myself to connect.

I do know how to disengage and so that was my goal. I was about to use folks for what I want, and I am not about to engage with none of. And so, so that was truly my goal. But when she moved in, when she moved in, it was, you know, you can't do that freely. Of course, I would have never done anything with my child home or had people over, but like she was going to see her dad on the weekends, so I was alone some of those times. Hey, I like shoot, but with my best

friend moving in, I was surrounded by prayer. I was surrounded by things like that and so instead of going in that direction.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

Well, the truth is I really did not have a lot of support other than my friends, right? So, my two best friends, I will say they were very supportive. But other than that, I mean, people would. I think I saw a lot of people who were kind of feeling bad for me, but not necessarily support sources. The people I thought would be support sources were really working, seem to be working for him. Because they were constantly trying to, you know, ask me to reconsider, ask me to think about it, ask me to include in my pastor. And so, my pastor was trying to be supportive but also push for this rekindling. And so, I remember because my pastor had met with me all the time at this time.

And so that was this one day where I had to say to him, and so that was this one day where I had to say to him, I was like, you. You are speaking as our friend right now. I said because I know you love us, and I know you love us as a relationship when it comes to being our friend. But you're not speaking to me as a pastor. So, I need you to choose which one you are going to be in this conversation.

So, you are not further confused because I need you to pick which one you are going to be right now because the friend, I am not about to meet with the friend no more. I am trying to meet with my pastor, and so once I said that to him, it was this clarity that he understood that he was not speaking as the pastor, he was speaking to me because of his love for us as his friends. And so that helped and that was when. Yes, that's good. I started to feel his support as well.

But it did feel like a very lonely journey. And if I like a journey just because it did not help me to sit in a corner and bash him and talk about him and you know call him out his name like that wasn't helpful to me. I am a person that must make sense of everything. And so, I think one of the biggest things during my transformation was me acknowledging that I played parts in this too.

You know, even I was not unfaithful. I knew even before I knew he was unfaithful; I did not trust him. He had not made good decisions for our family. And so, when you stop making good decisions for the family. I am not letting you run anything anymore. You know what I mean? So, I was very, like I paid the bills. I did all these things because he was terrible at them, and it was not that he. was okay with it.

Like he wanted to be the man of the house. Just was not good at it and so I didn't let them be. And so, I had to acknowledge that there was a place where I did not empower him in any way. I just told him we got out of the way. And so, I think I knew well enough the type of man that he was, and he is a person that likes accolades.

He is a person that wants to be the center of attention and things like that. And for me, I do not care about being the center of attention, but I become the center of attention and he hated that too. And so, there were so many things working against us in those ways, but because I could not change it, I just didn't care about it. And so, I just moved on with our lives and took care of our family. And so, I had to acknowledge that there were pieces that I played in this as well.

He did not have to respond the way he did, but I could not only blame him, and I think that is when I was able to truly start healing from it. Because if the blame just blaming him, I

would not be healed at all. I was just getting angrier. And so, I think that was my biggest turnaround was acknowledging that I played a part in this.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

Oh again, I think, my close circle, were the ones that were supporting me. I did not really feel supported. All his family had turned on me and were saying horrible things about me. For example, they said that “I think I am better now. I have got this education and now I am ending my marriage.” It was always on me even though they knew everything that he did because they were always on me even though they knew everything that he did because they were complacent in that they knew everything that he did because they were in place and everything that he did.

My mother did not know how to support me. And then I have a lot of women in my life who were like girl that is bad all your dating is bad you better keep the one you got. I am as if that is not the most foolish thing I have ever heard. And so, I stayed to myself a lot and I stayed to that immediate circle. But I do know that that because my immediate circle are women of faith.

Yes, they spoke a lot of life into me within that realm and so I leaned on God a lot. I had a lot of conversations with him, and I remember, it was something my pastor said to me, and he was like, Aiya, you got to stop. It is okay because I only have access to this, and I am sorry. You waste the name, but he alright, and he was like, he said, you got to stop trying to pray like you think you are supposed to pray because that was my dilemma.

Similarly, I thought there was a right way to pray in a right way, a right way to talk to God. And so, he was like, you got to find your own way. And I was, if I see how, it gave me a long time ago so, I remember when I was still in this dilemma of am I supposed to be fixing my marriage or am I supposed to be keep going? So, I remember saying to the God I was like,

listen, I do not want this dude. I say dude, I said a negative word. I was like, I do not want this dude. But if you want me to have you will not have to show me because I am not, I am not about to work to fix this.

And after that was when more stuff was uncovered about things that he was doing. And so, so that kind of made me feel this closer connection and that you know, was listening to me. Excuse me and so I have leaned a lot on faith, during this time. And my daughter, you know, was amazing as well. I was watching her go through. I was watching her be depressed too. So having to try to pull her out of depression while in depression was very hard, but we grew together. So, I think she is what helped me snap out of it a lot faster.

Yeah. So again, I think in the beginning I questioned everything, you know, and I went through that before, you know, and I was younger and had some terrible experiences, I questioned, God and, you know, was this, was it even worth it? And so, I had spent a lot of years away from church and my ex-husband's family is the reason I started going back to church. So, after this go, I remember going through this anger phase.

I remember going through this anger phase of just like listening. I did what I was supposed to do. Why is it like this? And so, I started questioning a lot of that and the being hurt because some of the heart was done by people in church and so I did go through this moment of really thinking about walking away from it. But again, I think there's always been this stronghold in my life even when I am angry.

And so, I think again that God brought my best friend to me in a hard situation for her to not have been able to find an apartment. For her to not have been able to find an apartment was predicted in those apartments everywhere. So, it was just this meaning behind it all. And so, because of that, I knew that I had to stand strong and lean in as opposed to stepping away.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I have 100% grown. Again, I think, you know, how the way that my divorce shook my foundation was like alarming to me because I had not realized how much I was banking on and you know in a marriage you're supposed to put that first and then you know everything else, and I don't think I did that I think I was putting the covenant of marriage first. And so, because of that, it was so it had such a heavy meaning to my life and again upholding the standard that everyone was looking at and you know looking at and you know looking at and looking up to.

And so that was a shock to my system, and I never wanted to be in that space again. There was this other piece of me that learned, you know, that what I acknowledge that I had never been like single since fifteen I was like, why? Well, I had not been single, and I remember guys danced to me like, do you even like being around yourself? Like do you enjoy time with yourself. I enjoyed fixing things, and I enjoyed being a person that people leaned on and counted on. I enjoyed being someone that people needed. And so, I learned to feel those spaces. Really with broken things because if it is not broken, I cannot fix it. Therefore, I was attracted to broken things, and that was not healthy.

And so, I had to like that and so I spent because I stayed single for almost It was almost four years and single, I mean single, I didn't date, I didn't do anything. And so, during that time it was like I dedicated myself to dating me. And so, I would like to go to the movies by myself to eat dinner by myself too, you know. I had to spend holidays by myself because my daughter would be gone with his family and things like that. So, it was these moments of just really learning how to. Like me and who I who am I and who do I want to be and so I think that was a big, big growth moment for me. It was also a moment of healing. Because I realized that I had a lot of stuff in me that I had not dealt with.

A lot of hurtful things like that that I had never I stayed so busy taking care of other things. So that I didn't have to think about those things. And so, I forced myself to think about them and deal with them and, you know, navigate it and, I started therapy and all those things that were needed to break those things down. And the sad thing is I knew the why behind so many of it so many things on my own.

It was just that I did not want to acknowledge it. So, my biggest growth was in those areas and healing. And I didn't have any intention of marrying again. I kind of convinced myself I did not want to, but I knew that if I was ever going to date again, I needed to heal from the stuff that I kept bringing into these relationships because I did not want to bring in into a new relationship.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

Yeah, I, so I did start counseling. I mean, sadly, I didn't meet. I didn't run into a good house phone until just recently, but. But it was still helpful to have someone to talk to. I think the thing about me probably being a counsel myself was that as I was talking, I also recognized what it was for myself. She was just kind of there and getting paid. And so, but I think it. That's the way it happens when counselors get counseling.

Yeah, I am like, oh, that was what it was. It was still a step that I needed. I have never been one that didn't believe in counseling. Now I have always believed in it and thought it was very important. Just could not always afford it and so, I think it was, it was important for me to have somebody to at least talk about some of this stuff with.

12. How did your self-confidence, self-esteem and work play a part in your growth?

I think the more that I was able to remove baggage off my shoulders and remove, you know, some of those past hurts, you know, I have never been a person that necessarily lacks

confidence, but I think my confidence was built in other people. And so, in what I could do for people, right? And so, I ended up, I ended up dependent on that a little too much. So, as I was stripping myself of some of those things and clearing, you know, some of that fog that was still in my head. I started to realize who I was, who I was.

And that I had it going on like I had a lot going on for myself that I did not need to allow anyone to tear down. And. I also had to stop making myself smaller for people because I think in my marriage my previous marriage, I would have to make myself smaller in the room because he wanted to take up the space. And again, it's not that I try to take the attention.

It was just people who were drawn to me. And so, I knew how much he hated that. So, I always had to make myself smaller And so I knew that I didn't want anything else in my life that I had to be smaller with. So, I think in the end, I had grown into you know the big girl trials that I have been trying to wear for so long I finally grew into them and understood that I didn't have to deal with anything else that would harm me.

13. What role did your emotional connection and personal strength play?

Although it felt like it wasn't there, it really was bearing you up as you were going tough. So, what would you say that those emotional connections and your own personal strength played in your recovery. Well, shoot that probably everything. I think my emotional connections though. I'm not sure necessarily if it was any of their words that ever helped me. I think it was more than being like armor bears; you know, they were protecting me more.

And protecting me from myself. And so, I think those were the key things from them. I think as far as strength goes; I think most of my life. I have had to wear strength like on my sleep like I have had to be strong. Whether it was real or not, I had to appear strong. I had to be the toughest one in the room, I had to be the first one to swing so people know when no punk

like that who was I was. I think my strength in this one was allowing myself to be vulnerable and allowing myself to, be broken down.

So that I could be put back together. And so, I think that I was a lot smarter, wiser and I did not only use physical strength in this one. I had to use mental strength and. All of that together made me stronger and able to get to where I needed to. Okay, how long would you say it took you once the discovery took place?

And you finally went through divorce. Before you began to feel. More like yourself and that you were really beginning to work through was it three months six months a year, two years, three years about three years. Okay, and then the last thing in this is there anything else that you think would be good? For me to know and for other women to know that we'll read this dissertation. That maybe I did not ask you about.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

Yes, I think the biggest thing is what I tell women who go through some of this stuff, and we have conversations. I told him about the biggest thing for me was forgiveness. But more so forgive me. For a lot of things that I allow myself to be blind too. Accepting responsibility. I think we don't like to accept responsibility when someone has done us wrong because it's easy to sit in that, but accepting responsibility was a big, big thing for me and then acknowledging my worthiness because I had a lot of people telling me. At your age, it is going to be hard to find somebody else. You are educated. Who knew being educated actually put you at the lower list of men's aspirations and then you know I have always been a big girl so then people say and then you are a big and so they really made me, almost convinced me that I was like unlovable in these

spaces of dating and so that was something that, I did not expect that to hit me the way that it did.

And so even though I built strength in so many other areas, you know, three years down the road, they are like, oh, you may be good, but you are not going to find nobody. And I am like, oh, and, and so I just want women to know who are going through this stuff or who have gone through this stuff or who have gone through the stuff that if you do the stuff or who have gone through the stuff that if you do the work on yourself. It builds light and there's no way that nobody's going to be attracted to light. There's no way.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

So, when you ask the question that immediate thing that came to mind, which is something I say often is, I no longer covet. But there's relationships like, I used to really aspire to be the one married for 30, 40, 50 years. But what I learned in this process is that those years mean very little if a woman is not being honored and if they are not being loved and cared for.

And throughout this time, I learned how many women have still by multiple infidelities in their relationships and I do not, I do not knock them for that, but I was coveting some of these marriages thinking, oh, this is perfect. This is what it is supposed to be, not knowing. The hell that many of them have been going through. And so, for me now, I look at love very differently.

How I think as black women and I think women in general, but black women we were raised to believe that love is supposed to be this battle and it is supposed to be tough and it is supposed to have these ups and downs and you are supposed to fight for you know that right or that day. And I do not believe in any of that anymore. I do not think love is supposed to be hard.

I think experiences can make things hard, but love itself should not be hard at all. And so, so I look at love very differently and my aspirations in my marriage are very different than what they were previously, and I have learned to take my time and to look at things with clear eyes and I am no longer interested in broken things.

Appendix L**Interview Transcript: April**

April

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I am a forty-three-year-old mother of three, one is deceased. I have been married three times, twice to my first husband and once to my ex-husband. I am happily single, and works for an insurance company as an underwriter and enjoy what I do.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

There was a situation that I know that was emotional to start with and then I know that there were some that had become sexual that he never admitted to, but he had got caught.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

A lot of how I have been affected is that it made me feel like I was not good enough and that something was wrong with me. I was not doing things right, and then it just is still sometimes I still get angry. Sometimes when I think back about the things that he did or the lies; I think I was angrier because I knew what was going on, but he would insult my intelligence to make it seem like I was the crazy one and I was just coming up with things, but I knew. I knew in my heart of hearts what he was doing, and I knew it was true.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

Mm, it was affecting me emotionally and really impacted my self-esteem. It was like I stated before I did not feel that I was enough. It made me where I was already a guarded individual, but it makes me more guarded where I do not trust what people say. I do not trust people's intentions.

And so, I am trying to do a little bit better with that, but I really do not take people at face value, especially new people.

And then as far as physical, there was a point in time that I lost a lot of weight because I just did not have an appetite. I did not want to eat. I was stressed out. So, I had dropped a lot of weight. It probably at times aged me physically because I just always felt weighted down and just burdened.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

I think I always felt that because of what I had done in the past and this is something that I deserved. I remember we first got involved together, even though I was separated from my then spouse. We had started a relationship even though I was going through a divorce. So, I know a lot of times people always say you lose them how you get them.

So, I felt like it was a punishment for the things that I had done or the choices that I had made. And then a lot of people told me not to marry him. So, I think part of it was pride in trying to prove that people were wrong. And so, I stayed a lot longer than I needed to. It was more detrimental; I should have left. I should have never married. I should not have because all the signs were there.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

Just taking time for myself and learning who I was. A lot of times, I had lost myself in that relationship, so just spending time focusing on myself, learning who I was as a person, learning to love myself, and learning to know that I was there was nothing wrong with me. Even if I were the perfect wife, he still would have done what he was going to do. So that was most helpful in just taking the time to.

Just focusing on me by myself and learning who I was again, and that helped me with my healing process and then just having some people available to assist. I guess other good male friends in my life showed me how a woman is supposed to be treated and respected. It probably took about a good, how about a year and a half, I would say. The healing process, I do feel like I have healed through it because I have gotten to the point now that I do not wish anything was wrong with him. I do not have any hard feelings towards him.

And then I do know that because I know at the beginning of the process, I know that I said I was done. I would never be in a relationship again and wanted to be, but now I know I am at the stage now that I am open to love again. However, I am enjoying still being by myself not having to answer anybody and just doing me.

Having that partnership in the beginning I was scared to be by myself because I had been in long-term relationships. But now I don't feel that way. I enjoy being by myself. And just not having the answer to anybody and I can be my authentic me and I think once I learned to love myself and know who I am and that I can do it by myself. I was okay being by myself because in all actuality I have been doing it by myself the whole time.

I just had a dead weight, and they were talking. It is so important to love yourself. So, did you feel empowered when you began to love yourself even more than give of yourself to someone that was not given back? Yeah, I did feel more empowered and being more empowered and loving myself. I know what I will and won't be willing to take so when I say I love myself I am okay I can take my stuff on. I can go to the movies. I can go to dinner and be perfectly fine. By myself. And I enjoy it. Nothing like dating yourself.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

Well, first and foremost, God. I had to look to him a lot, and I would say my family. My mother, father, and my children because I had to have something to focus on and then I had one friend that was very instrumental. My healing was where he taught me that he showed me that it was okay to be vulnerable and that it was okay.

To feel what I felt, and it was okay not to be okay and to just have patience and kindness. And making the time when I needed time. Those were the things that helped me through the roughest points in my life. Nothing like having a good, good friend to lean on and get that support from because we need that when we are going through it.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

Hmm, just. Like I said, God first with praying. That was a lot. And then with the family just being able to kind of keep my mind off things. So, I had to focus on them making sure that they were well, and that they were okay because they were going through some things. So, I had to make sure that they were okay. So that made me not focus on the bad things.

And then like I said, with my friend, just setting a bar and knowing that he made me feel as though. I was important no matter what he had going on in his world because his life was busy. If I said I needed 30 minutes, he would make that 30 minute. He would allow me to cry laugh, yell scream, and sometimes it went over the 30 min, and even if it was two hours, he still never rushed it. He just made that time. And so, because I always had the mentality. And especially an African American in our culture, that weakness is not an option. Crying is a sign of weakness.

So, A lot of lot of that, I just would bottle up my emotions but it he taught me that it was like I said it was okay to you know, cry, it was okay to be vulnerable that my feelings were valid,

like he validated that for me. He helped me feel like I was important, and that my feelings were valid and that really helped me through a lot of my darkest times. I stated before I am a very private person, so I do not always share my innermost feelings.

Now, I had safety and knowing that I could share those, and it was no judgment no matter what I was doing. I am sure sometimes things I was thinking or feeling were crazy. However, he did not make me feel like I was crazy. He validated those feelings, and he knew. And sometimes with people we talk too much when we are trying to help so he had the wisdom to know when to just allow me to talk. And then he knew when to say something. His presence and friendship really helped me tremendously.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

In the beginning, it was a struggle because I was dealing with a lot of anger. But God always showed his faithfulness and so, through Me leading my situation. It was like my whole life did a complete 180, and I did I was doing greater without than what I was with. So, God showed his glory through my mess, and so that was what helped build my faith. I really had to lean on God because my life was such a mess. I did not know where to even begin to try to fix it. But it has just been blessings upon blessings upon blessings. So, God has just been great.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I have grown very much. I was always an independent person. Sometimes, circumstances and situations make you kind of lose that independence and you become codependent in bad situations. Through this ordeal, I have become very independent. I can think for myself and stand for something because I was not really standing for anything I was falling for anything, and I trust myself. I have shown myself that there is nothing that I cannot get through, or that I cannot do. So, I am successful in my work and can take care of myself financially.

I know at the end of the day that I can do it on my own. So, it has made me a much stronger person. And it is also through my situation I know what to look for and what I am willing and not willing to accept. So, it has really helped me to weed out a lot of bad people, not, I should not say bad people, but the ones that are not right or what do not have the qualities that I want or desire. So, even though it was a bad situation. I am grateful to him because he taught me what I should not accept and what I deserve if that makes sense.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

I did go through counseling and, I think in the beginning because I still was wanting the situation to work in my marriage to work. I really wasn't receptive to what the counselor was saying at all because a lot of you know I have tried counseling a couple of different times and they what they said something I was not trying to hear.

I was like that is not the right counselor for me because, but they were telling the truth, but just at that time; I just was not too willing to accept what they were saying because I still wanted my marriage to work. At that point in time but reflecting and thinking back on the things they were saying, 100% they were telling the truth, and they were advising me right I just was not trying to hear what they were trying to say.

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

I think they are a lot better. I think also what help build my confidence as well as my self-esteem. And my word is I also, again, that's God. And I think God had positioned me. In situations where people saw through my wall. And they could still see my heart and I know, especially with my job that really; he placed me where I had supervisors and trainers and employees that were very positive.

They saw my worth what I had to offer even though I kind of was hiding and trying to sit back and not be seen. However, they pushed me in the forefront and a lot of times I would get upset because I am like I do not want to be in the court front, but they kept pushing me. It built my world, and it built my confidence and self-esteem.

So, and then new friends that I met in my life. Also, they built all of that, so I just think it was the time and the place. But that did not come until after I started working on myself. So, I am a strong believer in that when you have yourself figured out, and you have some love and your spirit is right, that is when you draw the right type of people. that helps build you and not tear you down.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?

God just positioned me to be able to have some instrumental people in my life that helped me see what my worth. Yes, and people would encourage me a lot of times when I did not even see it myself. Nevertheless, they saw it and they would not allow me to just sat back; they forced me and pushed me to be better.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

Infidelity can just really break you. As a person. I'm an especially a woman and especially as an African American woman, and that it can really break you down. And especially when They leave you for. Another nationality. Because a lot of times we as black women, we are strong. A lot of us have standards. A lot of times we don't just stand for anything because it is hard. We, it's hard for us. And a lot of times we have that misconception that we are an angry black female, or we are considered b-----.

And that is not the case and a lot of times that a scam too as women and we are not that we just, we have a lot of responsibilities. And things that we must deal with, a lot of times I think as black women, we are so misunderstood, but, if we have any standards that we stand for anything, if we want to accept anything, we are considered aggressive. That is hard, I have had to deal with that where I have been called aggressive, and I have been called a b_____, and you know deemed an angry black female and that is not who I am at all.

You are just not going to treat me any kind of way and I am just not going to stand for anything so that or we are told that we are not submissive enough. I pointed and then I also think that we also have it a lot harder. And why I say that is because first, women in general, and I am not just talking about black women, just women. We looked down on like men are here, women are here. And then you throw in being an African American woman.

That makes it that hard. It makes it a lot harder. It is like two strikes against us. We must fight harder to prove ourselves and that is not easy, so it is hard for us when we are going into the world, and we must work in corporate America or deal with the public and then we come home, and are being berated at home. That sets up a lot of resentment and things, so I never had really looked at it like that until I had moved south. And had to deal with that. I think it is worse down south than what it is. More northern states. But it is not easy for black women to find their place. We have a lot that We have, we carry a lot on our shoulders. We really do.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

How my experience has shaped my worldview is that I do not trust people. I feel that there aren't any good men left in the world. I feel that people are out for themselves, and that people are opportunists. With my experience going along with it but on the flip side of that, I know my

special friend has taught me to how to love and trust people. And he has shown me that there are still good men out there that would treat me right. He gave me hope.

Appendix M

Interview Transcript: Bea

Bea

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I am a 64-year-old blue collar worker, born and raised in Illinois. I am one of seven children, five are still alive. I drive a bus for a local school district and am proud to be able to take care of myself, financially. I have two adult sons and have no biological grandchildren, but have one step grand.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

I did not find it; well, I guess I found out before. I want to say this, so that you will understand because it is kind of hard to explain the affair. I found out about it after he asked for a divorce. He just told me he had met somebody, but he did not say that he had been with this person for quite some time. I was pretty much in shock, so I never really got to the place where we were arguing or calling them out of name.

Most of my time was spent crying and feeling that I was betrayed, you know, expecting to be with this person for the rest of my life. And now you tell me that you met somebody you wanted of course and then. As we began separating. I found out that he had done other things that I knew nothing about.

I guess I am the type of person that after a while, I just cannot just sit there and cuss you out. I was still mean to him. Likewise, I was still, I was still in shock, and I guess I still am in shock. Even though I am better than I was when we got divorced. This is the second time that I have had a husband that committed infidelity, you know, that was not true to the marriage vows.

I do not know how to explain it. Okay, honestly, it hurts because you had trust. I have lost that trust. Oh. And I just. I mean, if he ever said, "I want to come back, it is not happening

because I cannot believe I will trust this person again. I can talk to him without being upset.

However, as far as being back as husband and wife, that would never happen.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

Right now, "I have got to the place where I do not trust any man. I do not compare them to him, but I am very careful when men come to speak to me because even now six years after divorce, I have dated a couple of times and they have lied. So, we are just friends and that is it. I just, I do not know. This is something that is okay, I have decided if for my life that I am not looking for anybody else."

I am just going to and what I have been doing is just trying to take care of myself. Furthermore, just being more in the Word of God because that is what is right now making me stronger. I need somebody in my life. I want somebody in my life, but I figured out that I really do not need that in my life.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

Mentally, it was bad. I did not even realize that. I was suffering from depression until I went for a regular checkup. And my doctor asked me how I was doing, and I just started bawling. I mean I have a therapist that I talked to that I have been talking to and still talk to. It is good. But I didn't realize how bad it was until I talked to her. So, I was on an antidepressant for about a month until I got to the place where I had no feeling at all or anything. And it was like, I do not like that because I prefer to feel than cover it up. I am not a drinker; I may have a glass of wine every now and then.

I, you know in your younger years, it was things you try, and you realize all that is not for me. So, I just deal with it without the drugs and without the alcohol. I just talk to people who I need to talk to. I do not think it really affected me that much physically because I really did not stop eating.

Excuse me, and I really did not eat a lot. It could have been just my medication because I do have high blood pressure and that has caused me to gain weight. On the other hand, maybe the mental part of it. When you are in depression, there are things you just do not do that you used to do. Like I used to walk a lot. I walked a lot, and I stopped doing that.

So that was probably why I gained weight the way I did. It was just that I did not do anything, until I mean, you know, until I finally got somewhere where, okay, you must do this. But that was the physical part of it. I just stopped my exercise routine. Yes, and that is one of the signs, you know, when you are it can affect you physically. I started losing my hair. So, of course I began wearing wigs.

But, yeah, and at the time that we went through all this, I was still working. I had to fight not to cry while driving a school bus. The trauma resulted in my having to stop driving for three years and I just started driving again.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

During COVID 2020 to almost 2022, even though I got up, and did what I had to do, went to work and all that. I still felt stuck and was not moving either way. I was just right there. It was like no matter how much I pray no matter how much I read the Word of God; I was stuck. And I cannot tell you what happened. I do not remember what happened that let me out of it.

Okay, alright. I noticed that there seems to be a little bit of a motion as you talk about it. So, as you are interviewing today and talking about it, does it stir up some emotions within you? It does. It still does; I mean, it has been six years, and it still does result in some emotional times.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

I think the fact that the group that we had at church for grieving. I did not realize that my divorce was a death to me. Let me when they ask me to join the group, I am thinking is because people you're grieving people have died but yeah, my marriage had died, and I was grieving for that marriage. What helped me was I must arrange in the church, but I had friends at work that would not let me stay where I was at.

They knew even though if I said, okay, I'm going on. I go with you guys. At least I was not sitting at home. They made sure of that, so, for birthdays, they did not care that I did not buy them anything if I was there. And that helped a lot because there were a few that were still married. Others that were not and the ones that were not, I could not listen to their advice because they had not been where I had been.

The ones that were married were having problems but then it worked they worked it out. But in a way they understood because the two of them had been separated in her and the husband got back together. So, I think that was one of the biggest things that helped me. Was they would not let me sit. They were calling my phone repeatedly up until I finally just like, okay, I am going, I am going. And that helped a whole lot. Not just my therapist, but that really helped to know that there are some people that asked me. I mean, I know there were a lot of people that cared about me, but I was not sure how good a friend these people were until that happened.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

Yeah. My church, especially my doctor, I understand just letting me talk even though my appointment was only supposed to be like 30 minutes. She let me talk for at least an hour.

Sometimes and then you know we just talked through a few things, and it helped a lot. My friends, church and my doctor helped me through this a lot.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

They, especially my family, were helpful first during the beginning processes of going through a divorce and even afterwards. They made sure they called, I was always calling, but then when this happened, I stopped calling. So, they would always call, but at least I would answer. I would not just, well I am just going to blow it off. I do not feel like talking because in my mind, my mind, I need to talk to somebody. So that is pretty much what helped me. It was weird to say you are depressed and you do not want to do all this stuff, but you know that if you do not answer, they are going to come looking.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

I was already in the church, and attending Bible study with the church. During the time that we did not have service. Before zooming and all that, I would get up every morning and cry in front of the window. My Bible was right there, and the voice to say, you know, it is time, and I just opened my Bible up, just where it was in red. And whatever that scripture was, I would try to study on that scripture and ask myself questions, and answer those questions.

I would take tons of notes and I do not want to get rid of them. I read through and it is like yes this would help me. Just, trying to keep that faith. It is going to be alright. It is hard, but it is going to be alright.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

Well, I believe I have grown by forgiving. That was the biggest thing I had to forgive him for what happened. I had to forgive this other person that he is with. For what they did. I mean, I cannot save them; I cannot. You know, the Lord forgives me for my sins and forgives them for their sins. They must do that for themselves. And then the process of growing in my studying, I have been able to help others when they ask me a question.

They always ask me to pray for them, and I have even been able to help. Their situation was a little bit worse than mine because we did not physically fight, we split. But some of these people have and I have had to help. A few people literally go pick them up from their house and take them to a safe house but talk to them about the Lord and about how I got through this. And so, I feel like I mean, I always said I wanted to do a little bit of something like this several times without even realizing until after I have done it.

It was like, oh, my prayer was answered. I was able to help this person or these people through this. What I am still going through but I am stronger so I can help somebody else. I never helped people spiritually because I have never seen myself as a missionary, but I am in a way. I am being able to help them my way.

The way I and I guess what God wants me to do, but I do not have to be a missionary to do that. I have always been a helper. I have always taken care of people that were sick. I was a nurse's aide at one time. Now I am kind of shifting a little bit to spread the work. That is what I always said I wanted to do was spread the word a little more.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

Yeah, my counselor is married, happily married. So, she in a way, I mean, she understands the mental part of. But she does not understand how broken my heart is. So, I have learned to ask for help when I need it. So, I called someone, and I said I needed to talk. It will be

helpful, you know, just like the phone. That is all I asked. You do not have to say anything. Let me talk and they want to say something that is fine, but I am getting better at asking for help.

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

I have always liked myself. Oh, and I do not know. I just try to make a habit and I have done well with it when I get up in the morning, I wash my face and brush my teeth. I tell myself you are beautiful. You can make it through this day. You are strong and this has helped. That was your self-esteem, your confidence, the ability that you feel that you are, what you can do. Okay. Okay, my confidence. I guess I got a little stronger because I was not ever planning on going back to driving. It was especially at being 60 plus, I was not on doing that.

But I went ahead and did it and realized that I had not forgotten anything. That you could still do this. And I did it. I did it in less than three weeks. It was supposed to take two months. I did all the training, everything within two to three weeks and got my license back. As a woman, I do not feel as weak as I thought I was. I have learned that it was all right to cry. Get up, wash your face, and keep it moving because you are going to be all right. I mean, after going through this. I thought I there was nobody there got you to know you think, no one is going to love you like that again.

But, like I said, getting up every day.

Having affirmations of what you want your day to be like; this is what I am doing today. This is how I look today and now it is like I really do not have to say it. I just get up, call my hands like, go ahead on. And keep it moving and I feel good. You know, I, get up in it is like, okay, I feel this little pain, but I am all right, that means I am still alive. I can still move, and I just keep it moving.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?

It played a big role because I think if I didn't have my family or friends. I thought about just walking away. Not taking anything with me, not a phone, nothing, and just walking away, literally walking away. But they played a big part in helping me stay grounded. You know and understand that you got to be heard. This is like but you can still make it. It is going to take a while. You know, I mean even during this time of my divorce had a death in a family And, I still do not understand that it hurts. But I am going to be okay.

I am still working on it. There I have those days; I had a day last week. But then I just kept it moving. I got up, you know, then my little cry for 15 to 20 minutes and decided to get moving, do something. And I am fine. I can do it. They just played a big part in helping my family, friends, and church. Without them, like I said, probably would not even be here. However, I have never thought about suicide.

So, to me just walking away is just walking away. I would not, I would not, I have never thought about suicide. I just thought about just walking away. It is starting over, leaving everybody. It is already forward, but. I mean, even when my kids were little and I went to a small, I guess it was. Small depression. Okay. Oh. But then everybody has played a big part in my life, and I really appreciate it.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

Really, I cannot think of anything. I mean, I have had to learn a lot of stuff all over again. And it was just me and the kids. I was used to paying bills and all that. And I have had my downs. You know but I am back where I was. Back where I was even when they were little. Then this and this needs to be done and this is the way you do it.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

I am going to read this and then maybe I will add a little bit more. I see that people are going to do what they want to do when they want to do it. Not all of them see how much they have hurt the one that they love. The world will continue to change. And I must continue to change with it. I do not view. These people as being good or bad. They are whose they are. However, sometimes they do not realize that they are making the wrong decisions, but for me, it has made me stronger. I have learned from these. Things that have happened in my life.

Appendix N**Interview Transcript: Denise**

Denise

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I am a 37-year-old mother of three and a professional licensed clinician. My children range in age from two to six years of age. I grew up in Chicago and lived in Georgia for a while and is currently relocated to Bloomington, IL, where I work in the social services field for a not-for-profit organization. My spouse and I have been married for 10 years.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

So, I found out that my husband was cheating, in October 2018 that was. About 3 or 4 months after. Our second child was born. Our son. And it turned out to be the lady that he was a stripper, that he ended up having an affair inside the strip club, and then after doing some more investigating, I also found out that he had met up with about three or four other women. For other services that were not considered like actual sex but like massage and things like that

Well, at first, he lied about it. And said that he did not sleep with her even though I had been messaging the lady and she said that he did and at first, I believed him. And figure maybe she was just, you know, trying to play a game because she thought it was funny. And after looking her up on social media, apparently, this was something she did a lot because a lot of women were on there, you know, getting on her about what she had done with their husbands.

And he blamed me, and he said it was because He wasn't getting enough attention, and his exact words were when was the last time you touched me. And the only reason why I ended up believing it, well that and because the lady has shared. Some other information that no one

else would have known that he shared with her. I guess have been talking to her about personal stuff, but according to her he never told her that he was married.

So, once he found out that he had a young baby because it sounded like she wanted to go pursue something with him outside of the strip club or something like she started having feelings or something. But when she found out he had a young baby, she cut it off. He wanted to sleep with her again and she said no. I was able to recognize that my attention was not really on him like that. Probably that entire year and this was October towards the end of the year because I was pregnant for most of the year, and I had a one-year-old and no family support and he worked for jobs. He was gone all the time and I tried to be an understanding wife. I do not think he needed four jobs.

However, he liked what he does, and he also liked being out of the house. And I thought that a lot of those times he was away at work. So, he was not as overworked as I thought because he was having a good time. But I do blame myself because I knew that it had been several months since we had had sex. And partially because most of that time, as I said, I was pregnant and this was a rough pregnancy, this one.

We were not expected to have two kids under two. We wanted more kids, but we thought it was going to be a little bit more spaced out. I ended up having to have physical therapy and everything after that pregnancy because it was just rough on my body. So, physical intimacy was the last thing on my mind. I also was not receiving any emotional support from him. So, it made it very easy for me to just kind of check out physically.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

I remember feeling stupid like I had done something wrong. I remember feeling very naïve because looking back there have been plenty of signs and even other people had noticed things and were trying to tell me something else was going on, but I felt betrayed. I really had a hard time trusting people, even people that I confided in about it.

It was kind of like well, you do not leave, right? Or I told you so or you know it was just not a whole lot of sympathy. I even confided in his mom, which was, you know, maybe not the best idea because of course she is going to take her son's side. And her response was like, what did you do? Like, you know, what did you do to contribute to that?

It had to be a reason, you know, this was my fault. So that is, you know, I felt like you know, like I said, I felt sick, I feel traumatized. I did not really sleep well. Just a lot of anger and sadness. I had a lot of crying spells and was venting to any and everybody about it.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

So, with my Mental Health, I do think I probably had some feelings of sadness around it. I guess I am hesitant to say it was like full-blown depression because I still had to function and things like that, but some sadness, anxiety, and PTSD. I was constantly checking his phone, checking his location. I was almost thinking irrationally. I thought about putting the kids in a car and following him. Thought that I had seen the stripper on multiple occasions.

Even at church during service, it was a woman that looked like her. And imagine all the things that I would say if I, you know, and I even actually texted her again weeks later. I do not know what I was expecting, but she did not respond. Of course, maybe by this time she probably blocked my number or changed it, but just still asking for more answers and like how far was it really going? So, it really consumed my thoughts, you know, for a long time.

Physically I would get sick and nauseous when I thought about it, whenever I would pick up his phone. Or search his stuff or like, search old electronics like his tablet but of course by that time, he was smart and deleted stuff. But I was still able to find a few things. To piece some things together. But, yeah, so I was just physically sick a lot from thinking about that.

Losing weight and I see I joined Weight Watchers. I had him pay for a trade meal. I was doing physical therapy like I said to help with like my healing and back pain and things like that. To try to pull myself out of it, especially if I had decided to stay. It was like if you know if I am going to stay, I must at some point get over it. So that was what I did. I even connected with another mom, because I was a stay-at-home mom, so I connected with another stay-at-home mom who had a son around the same age as my kids. We had play dates and things like that.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

I felt stuck when I was forced to shut it down and not talk about it. You know, I could not go to him for answers like he did not want to talk about it, and I just felt stuck like I did not have a voice. So, like you owe me that much. We also had small children in a town where I did not have anybody. I was at least twelve hours away from my home and my family. And so, I just felt like I just had to suck it up and accept what happened and hope that it did not happen again, but figure out how I can become more independent because I was independent before getting married I just kind of like hey I am married now, I trust this person.

Let my guard down and like, well, she wanted me to work four jobs. Somebody got to be here with the kids. And so. I thought it was working and it was. So, I felt like I had given up on myself and like I did not really have any way out. Oh, even times where I would get too mad and just really wanted to leave. I really wanted a break. You know some type of separation and I

tried and for a month in Chicago. And he kind of stopped me and the whole time calling and things like that. We use the kids as an excuse if I decide not to answer my phone that day.

And trying to win me over with gifts and things like that. And I felt stuck too because I did not really get a whole lot of sympathy from him. My dad was a habitual cheater on my mom; I could not go to him for some help. Oh, and my mom, of course, her being cheated on multiple times. It was like I told you so or you know. I do not know, just nobody really seemed to care too much. So, it was after a while it was like stop complaining. I did not want to hear anything about it, so I just must like deal with it and hold it in and not say anything.

What was it like keeping all of that in? It was hard and I really think, exercise and I mean it was as simple as that is like some days, I would be like so feel with so much rage and anger towards him. I did not even want to be in the same room. And he just seemed so arrogant about it. I really did not get a full apology until a year or so later, you know.

So, I just run, you know, on the trail. I started to write in a journal, but you know, it works sometimes. And, like I said, I just. I think between exercising and my spirituality, I think that helped and trying to have a better understanding of the why. And learning a little bit more about James and we did this ministry that really opened my eyes up to a lot of things about both of us.

I am an open book, but just me and James have been, we have been married for ten years, so we have been together. I have lost count probably like 15 years and it is still so much that I am still trying to figure out about a lot of struggles, a lot of challenges. And. You know things that he is still trying to overcome so that kind of softened my heart a little bit. On top of the fact that we have children together. So, even if I leave, I still must deal with him, you know, for our kids like we still must be okay with each other.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

What really helped me, ironically, was that marriage ministry that I was like. I went in there with a plan to just make him look bad and you know just like whatever this is what you want to do because one of his Firefighter, I think it was a lieutenant, had kind of referred him to this ministry to him and his wife had gone through it. And I just really wanted to put him on blast and tell my story. But what ended up happening is, I ended up learning a lot about myself.

I need to build my relationship with God and learn about forgiveness. Even forgiven my father, you know, for stuff. Recognizing that I have. Kids now and I do not know when or if I had already dropped the ball with them. I want them to forgive me. You know, just really learning the true meaning. And made the link between my husband's trauma and you know his actions to that and understanding my contribution because the cheating was just like a symptom of some problems that we were having in our marriage.

So obviously that going through that program. It made the cheating somehow make our marriage stronger. Now it's like, well, that's probably the worst thing that can happen in our marriage. A lot of stuff was out in the open. It is like we have got to trust each other now with this information and we might as well. You know, try to do better, but That last that feeling lasted. While I was in that program.

That program ended, we renewed our vows and moved back to Illinois. Things unraveled again COVID and the death of his sister, his mom moving in with us. And then my dad had a stroke. Amid that, I was pregnant a third time, which wasn't planned, but we didn't do anything to stop it. And it was just like I was triggered all over again when his mom moved in. I felt I and I was here with her, two kids and I was pregnant. And He was gone. We moved to Illinois is like

a fresh start with that close to the family and we and he was only going to work one job I was going to get back to my career.

We just got this all mapped out and that completely went out the window and I went back. It felt like I couldn't trust him again. Like I was, feeling betrayed and not trusting him and all of these things. I started taking his phone again even though I did not find anything this time. We had arguments and I was throwing up the cheating again, then I realized I really have not forgiven him. You know, forgive him.

And. It was not until, so. We had our baby. He is two years old now. My dad is doing well, you know, for the most part from his stroke. Oh Grief, you know, my husband is always dealt with grief. In a different way, because he has so much of so he's pretty. You know, resilient so it did not break him down too much. But what I think really helped is that he also got serious about therapy. And his own healing. And I have seen a big change with that. And I that once I saw his efforts because I knew I was making the efforts and the changes, and I always felt like somebody told me something for staying around and sticking around.

I was almost questioned and died like. Okay, this is what they told me in this marriage ministry that you know I am supposed to stick it out and it was our brainwashed. I'm, you know, I'm doing this forgiveness thing. I should be getting some type of reward or something. But you know, the truth is I hadn't really forgiven him. And I back down this road of, oh, I got into therapy myself too.

I had two panic attacks that did not have anything to do with infidelity. It was around the time we moved back here during COVID. There was a big riot that broke out near my mom's home in relation I think George Floyd at the time, and it was just a lot of stuff. You know, my

dad and his stroke and all of that. So, I started having some anxiety and I got into my therapy and really processed all over again the infidelity.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

So, my family was supportive in the sense of if I ever wanted to leave my husband, of course, me and the kids would always. Have a safe, you know, place. I at that time it didn't feel like they were emotionally supportive because I just wanted to cry a bit and they were like, please, you know, just please it happens. You know, this is what happens or like it was the norm. I don't know. But they were supportive in that sense, like if I needed to go, I could have.

My religious and spiritual support, I mean, that was you know, probably the biggest thing for me. You know, being able to pray and that and find scriptures to help me through it. And nobody in the church knew what was going on, nor really knew me well or knew anything about without it. However, it was just nice to be, I just felt safe, you know, even like Bible study. Nobody knew anything about me or if I cried what I was crying about, and it felt good to just. Be able to be in the moment and no, not that they did not care, but it's just like they need to know, but they just knew that I needed to be there.

Yeah, I think those were this as far as friends. I did have a few supportive friends. I have one particular friend that is also married. Her marriage is healthy from what I know. I don't know, you know, what might be going on behind closed doors, but so she didn't judge. She, she let me cry and then talk to her and call her. She lived all the way in Texas. But she sent me these cards for women it was like scriptures and positive affirmation on there. She said, a diffuser with like essential oils and just that I never even would have thought about would have helped.

At first, I was like, okay, but then I thought about it. I'm like, this is some self-care. Things instead of her trying to tell me oh you need to leave him or anything like that she just sent

me some things without I did not even have to ask you know, to just to kind of help me get through and then about us and she was sending you things that could kind of help you because the diffuser and things kind of kept your emotions and all the sense and things.

And she was showing you that she loved you and that she was available to you without even saying. A word about what you are because you knew you were traumatized and going through some things, but she was just there and it kind of just helped you to be and it made you feel good that she was thinking about you. But also, she just allowed you to be. And sometimes when you're going through, we just need to.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

My family was not supportive when it came to my emotions, but they supported me if I needed or wanted to come home. I attended church during this time and had not become well-known and no one knew much about me, which was comforting because I could just be, and somehow, they knew I needed to be there. I also had a close friend in Texas that supported me and that was helpful. I could talk to her whenever needed.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

I think my Christian faith grew more robust and it made me realize that neither one of us really knew the true meaning of what it meant to be married. And so, I have got in your marriage. And our marriage had we knew, you know, on the surface, because you hear it at first and all of that. But then when we were tested with that. We failed a lot of times and that led to that. So, when the cheating happened, I was not asking questions because it wasn't like we had a perfect thing anyway.

Our stuff was messed up anyway. Having babies and just not addressing stuff and you know it was really messed up moving away from our course we would just like Doing stuff and we were not really seeking God for guidance they knew better pretty much. We knew and we just kind of got lost in our own needs and things like. Marriage. But we didn't really know how to apply what we knew. Add the information from premarital counseling and things, but our parents were not married. We did not have good examples of how to really apply this stuff in real life. I did not question God.

I wanted now it's like a wakeup call like okay I'm listening now because I know that I just did not have these two beautiful babies and you know my husband is the only person I've ever been intimate with ever slept with or anything. And I am like, I know that I did not come this far as a Christian for it to fall apart.

Like this, why I am here, I am listening. What's happening? What is this? I feel like it grew more potent because of. Thank I would have. 1 Even prayed as much or reached out as much if it had not happened If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

10. Share with me if you think I have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I think that I have grown spiritually. I have also learned how to love myself better and how important self-care is. I have learned healthier coping skills and is more intentional about setting boundaries with everyone in my life.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

Well, I was not in individual counseling when that happened, but we were in couples counseling before I found out. Unfortunately, I allow Jesse to pick the couples. I knew when we

first started having problems in marriage while I was pregnant. We have been having problems when they got bad. I was still pregnant.

And so, I told him to find us a couple counselor and I trusted him. So, we were going for months, and we would spend a lot of time arguing and I think she might have been a little scared of us at some point. But later, I found out that my husband had picked this counselor because he was physically attracted to her.

And once she found that out, of course, we could never go back to her. So, it was not helpful, you know, during that. And I did have an individual counselor right after I had my daughter because I thought that I might have been dealing with some postpartum depression. Right, cause after her she was my first child, and it turns out that I was not, but I went to a few sessions with this lady that my insurance had hooked me up with and it just was not a good fit at all with her.

I went to two sessions or maybe three. I do not know, but I just could not really connect with her. So, I was that I needed some therapy. I just really could not find anybody. I did a few individual sessions with the couples. So yeah. It was in that situation at that time therapy was not super helpful.

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

Well, my self-esteem was already kind of low. You know, before I even found out about cheating. But when I found out about it, that just made it worse. So, that is what I tried to work on the most in my healing. Well, I would say my self-worth probably played a role, because I knew that I was you know, worth more. You know what was happening. And you know my self-esteem got better once I started taking care of myself better than I did before infidelity. So, I think that that did play a big role in helping me heal.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?

You know, they were used as tools and outlets. As far as coping skills, so concerned, I did not feel 100% alone, you know. So, I would say, you know, it helped in that man. I don't think I would have been able to even get this far my heel and if I didn't have anybody you know no church, no friends that would have been rough.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

I do not know. I don't know if I have any more. Insights. I mean, I do not know if this would count but. If I had an opportunity to know that I'm that I'm you know more healed than I was and have a little bit more confidence and things like that. If I was to travel back in time and that happened again.

I would have separated for some months, and I think that journey would have been much more progressive if I was healing in a different environment, not in the same environment that I was suffering. And constantly just still know they are, I think, have we given ourselves some time apart? Not necessarily a divorce, you know, not like a legal separation, but you know, especially since I wasn't working, I wish that I had taken the kids back up, you know, taking up on that offer.

So, get that time and heal and really. You know build me back up emotionally and financially. And they, you know, I think that that would have helped me even more, but that didn't happen. So, you know, I'm still grateful for the progress that I have made, but I do think about that a lot. Like what if I had. You know, left, you know, for what we have, what I have come back with we have, you know, for what we have, would I have come back with we have, you know, still been together or would I?

You know, I have had the confidence to move on. Like, did I still want to be married? After this infidelity because of my self-esteem or I could not do any better or it was just something that I really wanted the marriage and so I do really question myself on that too much because now I am in the marriage because you know I want to be. I feel like I was just in it because it was convenient and because I had I was not working, and I had kids and all of that. They really played a role in my self-esteem a lot. Even though I was making progress I would always kind of question that a lot.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

I hope I answered this right, but I just said that my experience has caused me to be more guarded towards others and less trusting at times. But it also helps me appreciate the support and scope and skills that I did have. Oh, while going through what I went through in my marriage. I now understand that marriage is bigger than me. And it is truly like a test or reflection of, my relationship with God. I still have a lot of work to do. But I do like the direction that I am going in.

Appendix O

Interview Transcript: Ella

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I am a forty-eight-year-old mother of two adult children. I am an aspiring professional fashion designer in the process of launching her business during the fall of 2023, which I am passionate about design. I love anything that deals with fashion. I am a recent divorcee (2021) and have not had the best experiences in relationships. My life has been so different since the divorce.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

Oh, many times over actually throughout my life, I have not been very successful in relationships, so, I had someone, a few people, but this person I was very in love with. He was just a chronic cheater. He just was and would not tell the truth. And instead of just, you know, accepting that and saying, you know what a relationship is not good for me.

He chose to stay and so did I. And I endured that for probably, you know, maybe, a year and a half. It is very hard. Now, I know this as a married woman you experienced infidelity, but you're not referring to your ex-husband right now, right? He lied a lot as well. So, he was on a dating app. that I was not aware of. I had a friend who introduced us.

I was not aware of their secret. Hey, meetings and conversations and I just was not aware that this was a character trait for him until I was knee-deep in marriage. and financial, so I could not walk away as quickly as I would have had I been in just a relationship because we were tied financially and so just my living where was I going to live?

You know I had to figure it out before I left. He was on his Instagram. On his Instagram and Facebook, he had all these random people that he would accept their friend request and then,

you know, swear that, you know, he didn't know any of them, but he accepted their first request. Okay, because he is just friendly, and so on Instagram, a lady posted something on his page to warn women.

She stated, “do not trust him and that he will just get what he wants from you and then throw you away”. That was how I found proof. He is incapable of telling the truth. So, he just would not agree. I tried to have conversations with him. So that was not recourse, but because I could never get the truth out of him and so I decided that I wanted to find out and I did.

Uh, I asked a lot of probing questions. I guess it was just, you know, task play for me because I already knew that he was not going to be honest. I was already prepared to move on. I had already had all my ducks in a row. My mom told me that you know never say anything to a man when you are not ready to do anything about it. Otherwise, you are just nagging, and it discredits you. So, I had been looking for places. I found an apartment and I paid for him to go and visit his daughter in Maryland, and I left him while he was gone.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

So, I just, I really do remember being betrayed by him and my close friend. This friend was adamant about hooking us up. So, I remember that I remember, loving blindly. I remember the hurt just to hurt the pain of mourning someone and a relationship. Yes. if someone or that was with someone who is still alive, which is much harder than, you know, when they are to see so I just remember all of that.

I was wrong with that. So how far into your relationship before you found out your husband was cheating and how long had you been married? Oh, the ink was not even dry. So, we

got married in September by January, he was cheating. Okay, so you felt hurt, betrayed those were the type of feelings. I felt alone.

So, I come from a close-knit family. I did not at the time really discuss it with my sisters. I have three siblings. I did not at the time really discuss it with my sisters. I did not discuss it with them. I discussed with my mom just snippets because she is a sounding board, and I was alone. Yes, I was very depressed. I felt like a failure.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

Okay, so, physically, I suffer from IBS. So, any stress exacerbates my condition and I'm bowled over. I am just in pain and just have all kinds of stomach issues and then I'm badly with, you know, my bowel movements. So that was one of the things that I suffered from. And I suffered from that for quite some time. Like really, I want to say almost a year, I battled that.

I did not allow myself to really focus on my emotions. I had my son who was still in high school trying to get him to finish school and move. I had work and was a full-time student. I did not have time to deal with any emotions I had things to do so. I did not have time to deal with any emotions.

So, emotionally I just pushed it all down and so, emotionally I just pushed it all down and so I carried it in the form of stress. I dealt with my feelings once I relocated here in October 2021. I felt like, now I could breathe, now I can deal, you know, and, yeah, it took a long time and I think that now still I still have my moments where you know it comes up and I was very distrustful, of where you know it comes up and I was very distrustful of men.

I still have anxiety when it comes to men. In addition, I have anxiety about trusting men like if they really have good intentions towards me and it does not have to be romantically, just

men in general and I noticed that about myself and I was like, wow, I did not know that that was there.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

So, we were still in the same house. My son was working; and he was in the school where my son was working. So, I would have a bit of a respite. Some nights where he would be at work. I was like I said, full time student and working. I never considered suicide, but I really did not have a desire to really go on in the way that life was happening.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

Oh, my relationship with God. And not just that because I always have one, but having a church home. I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that that was the provision that God had made for me was to be planted exactly where I am. I have been blessed by it ever since and that has been the saving grace it really has been a refuge for me.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

I have always believed that there's more. I've always believed that God had, and I am sure other people do but I've always believed that God had a special purpose for me. that was grand And so I want to fulfill that. So that has been, just a driving force behind anything that I encountered that Yeah, you could still make it. You still you still got stuff to do.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

First, I was very surprised to know that I am not a company of one. I learned a lot about others doing this process. They shared their experience which I had no I had no, idea about. So, I was very shocked by the fact that they had to experience quite a bit of what I had experienced. So, then, you know, being validated that I'm not alone, that, you know, you can make it, you still

have value, you still have words, and that we're here for you. I do feel like, you know, they hold me up sometimes.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

I felt I remember being angry with God, but I did feel unworthy. I felt, I really felt unworthy. I really felt like. My value was somehow compromised in God's eyes. And that it was hard for me with a divorce thing because I was like, well, I know that, you know, that's not what God intended. So, I stayed longer because of that, and I grappled with that, you know, just, period just accepting the fact that this is my reality, but this is not pleasing to God.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I got to get my credit to God, So. I have grown. And. It is, you know, God. My relationship with him and the holy spirit that he allows to reside within us and a deep desire of mine to be better. And in that process, understanding that that I still have value because that was what I grappled with. In the past though I would reward myself with food that would be my reward because I do not drink or smoke or anything. It was a comfort to you when you were eating.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

I have had therapy. I had a counselor, but she was not available, and I tried other ones, and I just did not feel connected. So, I am going to forget that, and I am going to do it on my own. And you know God is going to have to be my counselor. He is a wonderful counselor. Yes, he is.

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

I have strong self-esteem. However, I had to reassess the relationships that my life and especially this one. And my tolerance for certain things being so high. It just did not calculate

right. How is it high, but you're willing to accept this. So, I had to accept that while I had a high sense or thought of myself. The level of respect that I carry for myself. I allowed it to be compromised too much for it to be at a healthy level that I w needed it to be.

I had to have examine that. It was hard. It was tough to admit that. But these triplets forced you into where you are now. Yes, they did. Yes, absolutely. I carry them with me everywhere. Okay, so with my self-esteem, I stopped meeting outside validation from anybody including my own children. So, I decided that self-esteem is something that I must give to myself, it is not hinged on the response the thoughts the contribution of anybody else so I stopped seeing that and I had to be intentional because habitually that is where I would go in my mind.

Even subconsciously, I would just do that, and I stopped needing that. Just saying to myself girl you are loved, and then as far as my confidence. I stopped allowing myself to be shaken by the energy that I might meet no matter where I went because it is not always receptive, but that is not mine to carry either. You know, somebody does not receive me does not mean that is personal; they do not even know me half the time.

So, I stopped embracing that and just held on tighter to what I already presented when I arrived. And letting that be enough. My value, I started to look at myself because I always thought I was more of a humble person. The reason being, because a lot of times, I would think people pleasing and, you know, and all that validation-seeking. It is my job to think well of me. And so, I started being okay with thinking well of me does not mean that I think any less of you. This is what I owe to myself. And so, I started, just embracing that more and more and that has been my saving grace.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?

We learn about ourselves through others. So, people are necessary, and I got to a place to where I understood that I guess because that, you know, woke up one day and God said go to church and I was like, well, what church am I going to go to? My sister told me where to go. And so, I went and have been well received there, and I thank God for that. And so having people that genuinely receive you. With just you that you, you know, nobody knew me, but they received me well, nonetheless.

It was eye opening for me because prior to that, that was not my experience in new places. So, you know, so God did a new thing. It is possible and that is what you should expect and that's what you know can happen. And, you know, being able to offer what I give as well. All of that has been, has been very uplifting.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

Okay, so it has restructured my trust process. Previously I would blindly trust and not qualify people or situations for the trust I would offer. Now I am wired to not just give trust based on what I see or hear, but I communicate with the father on most matters. My hope is to get to a place where I seek Him on all matters, but that is my process. It does not matter what Ella thinks or feels. I take it all to him and let Him figure it out for me, and then wait for him to give me clarification.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

Okay, so it has restructured my trust process. Previously I would blindly trust and not qualify people or situations for the trust I would offer. Now I am wired to not just give trust based on what I see or hear but I communal with the father on most matters. My hope is to get to

a place where I seek him on all matters, but that was my process. I would take it to him and then be like, you know. I think you said this. No, I wait for him to give me clarification.

Appendix P

Interview Transcript: Esther

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I am a 66-year-old professional woman who has been married for over twenty years and have three grown children and six grandchildren. I am in a different place in life, and regret not starting some things earlier, and am grateful for having accomplished what I have. My spouse had an affair and abandoned our marriage to be with his lover. I was financially dependent on him as a stay-at-home mother, having no formal education.” Currently, I am a licensed marital and family therapist. Although I have been separated for years, we have not divorced. My experience was a catalyst to drive my pursuit of obtaining a Bachelor of Science in psychology and social work, followed by a master’s in marriage and family therapy.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

I knew that we would have trials. I knew that there would be circumstances that we would have to go through as part of a marriage, but I never ever in my wildest dreams thought that that would be. The catalyst to eventually destroyed the relationship, marital union, and the family. How did you find out about the affair? Oh, that is interesting because my husband is very charismatic. He is soft spoken and gentle, which women always gravitated to that persona. So even in the work field, I knew that there were women that were attracted to him. But I never thought that he would act on it.

I would tell him, and say, oh, you know, this young lady seems to have a very big crush or is really into you. Is there anything I need to be concerned about and he would always say no. But God is good because He would always let me know if I needed to really be concerned about a specific person’s behavior, or interactions. And so, the closer I was or am to God, the more

intense that that discernment. So, this one time, that I know for sure was an affair. My husband was at a point where he had lost his job. And we know that when you lose your job, you lose your identity, especially men being the providers of the family.

And so, I knew he had lost some of his faith and I recognized that and so of course, you know, you pray and say, okay, Lord, please work this out with a new job. Well, he did get a new job and his supervisor was excited. However, the way that they interacted with each other was noticed. And for me, I am not a jealous person, but it was something about her excitement. Then he described how she was at the job and how she introduced herself to him, and he was very excited about it. You know, he would say, oh, you know, she is from another country. She takes care of all her family back in the old country. She has kids to raise and so that was, and I do not know if it was enticing but anyway it resonated with him.

And so, then he started, you know, working odd hours from what the normal schedule was. He was only supposed to work one week in a month. Well now he is working every weekend during the month, missing an action. He stopped going to church and those are different, that is a different personality. And so, I would question him about it. He would say, I am just sick. I do not feel well, and the kids and I would leave and go do what we needed to do and come back and so There was a time when I went to look for him. I could not find him at work.

And I remembered this young lady, he had said her name and everything. And so, I went because I am like, if you are not at work, then where are you? And he would not answer my calls either. Which is unusual because you never know if it is about the kids or what. So, we always had communication. But this time we did not, and so he was ignorant enough to write her name and address down.

And God is good; He showed me exactly where it was. Yeah, and I went looking and lo and behold, there was my car, my other cars not mine, it was our car. So, we had two cars, and we went there under cars in a parking lot. Went to the house and knocked on the door and a little boy answered, but my husband was not in sight where I could see him. So, he went and got my husband. It took about five minutes for him to reveal himself, which seemed like forever for him to come out.

I stood there. I said no because I needed to know for myself what exactly was going on. And I am if you give me the truth, you tell me the truth. I am good. I can process that. I can deal with it. But if you don't give me the truth, then it makes me wonder. So, he came out and he was carrying her trash. And I said to myself, you do not even carry the trash at our home anymore. Why are you carrying this woman's trash out? And yeah, you are a nice guy I get all of that, but it angered me.

The fact that he was there and then doing or taking care of her home, and not his own home. And I said to him, I need you to tell me what is going on. He walked past me, ignored me, and left. I sat in my car. I remember calling, I was calling a friend to talk to her. At the time, but she was not available, and I sat in my car, and I was like, I cannot believe this. I said out of everything that we could go through, this is the one thing that just shook me because even in my right mind I knew it was not necessarily anything to do with me.

It had to do with the choices and decisions and how he was feeling. But it does not negate how we as women feel when our mates. Are being are cheating. So, then we internalized it, and I did. Am I not cute enough? They are not thin enough and then you start doing that introspective search for what is wrong with me. Moreover, even though on the inside, I knew that it had not

necessarily anything to do directly with me, but it did make me wonder, what is wrong, and where did I fall short and what did I do?

I always took much pride in being a good wife, a good mother. Taking care of the home, providing the meals, cooking, all those scenarios. Being available mentally, emotionally, physically. So, I kept trying to figure out what it was. What would draw you to someone else? And I must be honest, I never ever to this day, got an answer as to what happened, and why?

So, I am back at the house. He went to the house and told my children, which angered me even more. Oh, your mom is upset with me because I was helping a friend move. And I said to my children, you all know that we are all servants. And I would not be upset with your dad helping anyone move or what have you because that is just who we are.

And so, the fact that he brought them into the equation. Just took me to another level. But not to where I am physically trying to fight or be verbally argumentative or anything like that because that is not necessarily my nature. But we did go outside, and we talked. There were specifics, I was like, well, this is one thing that really bothered me. I said, well, and did you at least use condoms? To protect not just yourself with me because whatever you are doing out there now you are bringing it home to me and you did not even have the nerve or the audacity to say, hey I am doing this. You could potentially bring home a death warrant if it was AIDS.

To me, it just told me that I was non-significant in his thoughts, in his heart at the time or anywhere. And that got me because we had three young children, and now I am susceptible to whatever it is that you are doing outside. And that did hurt, it was like, man; I thought I was a little bit higher on the totem pole. I see that I am not, and so, we had these conversations.

I called this brother-in-law. His brother, my brother-in-law, said, hey, you know, you need to talk to your brother. You know, there are things that should not be happening. And so,

he came over, but he was not very helpful. In that it is very difficult for siblings to separate the sibling aspect. When there is or wrong because there is a different connection between the siblings than it is between the husband and wife.

And many times, people will support the siblings even in their wrongdoing, or they just choose not to even be involved at all. And he, the brother-in-law and I were good friends up until that point and after that, we did not really talk, or interact a lot. After that there is no communication now. He said he was sorry. But once again, that discernment, it was not a heartfelt sorrow.

I am saying it because this is what I need to do. And that bothered me as well because now you are just going through the motions. First, you are not acknowledging why you decided to step out because for me it was you who stepped out. If we are going to make it work, then you need to identify what it was that caused you to step outside the boundaries. I could never get that answer. And then he would be upset if I had questions. He was like, well, you know, I do not really want to talk about it.

You know, it is over. You know, you should let it go. And I said, well, how can I let it go when I do not have any information? And I said it was not about the act, what you did intimately. It was for me the fact that you did it. Furthermore, you cannot identify or tell me why. If you know why you can put it in place where, okay, this, if I find myself feeling like this, I am going to do this or if I feel like I am anticipating it, I am going to put in these boundaries to protect myself.

Protecting my marriage and protecting my family is what it was for me about protecting myself in future relationships. This act of betrayal left me in a place where I just did not know what it was, and would I be able to trust them again? And even after he acknowledged that he

cheated; he was supposed to break it off. According to him, he was going to break it off with this young lady.

However, during our conversations, I would say well have you called her and told her that hey it is over. I am going to stay with my wife and kids. He was like no, I just have not done it. I do not know how to do it. I said, you pick up the phone, you go to her in person. However, you need to do what and just say, hey, it is over.

So eventually he said, yes, I did it. Well, God is good, one more time. Yeah, so normally, he handled, there were times when I would do all the bills. But at this juncture, he was doing the bills. So, I really did not open the charge cards and bill payments I just did not because he was handling it at that time.

He was scheduled to go on a trip to teach from Thursday to Monday. I said that was strange because you do not normally do teaching on the weekends like that with your job. But he was like, yeah, I got to go. I am going to leave on Thursday and so the kids and I were excited because we used to go to the airport and watch him depart. But we would go to the airport, walk him in, watch him get on the plane, wave, and all, so everybody was excited.

Dad's going on a trip. He did not want us to take him to the airport. He said, "oh, no, my flight is too late the kids are in school." I said it is only maybe an hour that they will miss, they would be able to catch up on their work. I said it was just something that we always did as a family. And he kept saying, "no, no." I want the kids to go to school. I will drive myself and leave the car at the airport, that way when I get back you do not have to come and pick me up. But that was always our routine. So now I am like, okay, this is a different routine.

So, the mail came in, I cannot remember which bill company it was, but I opened it up and behold, he had charged for two flights on his charge card. And it was not for me. It was for

this other young lady. I am like, what the heck? So, I called him because he was at work. I remember the day I was doing laundry that day. I was in shock because you told me first that it was done. And now I see that you are preparing to fly out of state with someone else and stay over the weekend.

And I said, so basically what you told me was all lies. So, he came home, and he is like, yeah, we talked about, and he was like, I just couldn't do it. I could not let it go. Then we went to counseling from there. He said he loved both of us. Like you have only known her for a few months. You have known me for twenty years; I was already self-conscious after I found out the first time.

I remember what he wanted to be intimate it was very difficult because I did not want him to see my body anymore, He never saw my body after in the light. After that I kept it covered And I remember I was like, oh man. I, not that I. I wasn't one that flaunted the body, but I wasn't. One that hid it necessarily either you know through in our room or dressing or whatever I, so now you do not get to see any of that.

Perhaps now, I am ashamed of what this creation is because now you do not appreciate it. And how, you know, and all those different emotions and even it makes me emotional now because it was like, and you accepted me. We loved each other and you will allow someone else in, and I recognize the battle.

I recognize this spiritual man and I recognize the natural man. And I recognize that there is always going to be a battle. But the fact for the fact that you are a man of God and you professed to be a man of God. And yet you allow yourself to fall into this trap, and destroy your family. I think that was very pivotal for me. I recognize that we all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. I got that and had not even had a problem with the fact that I would forgive you if

you were honest and tell the truth. And when you lie, then it is like, I do not even know who you are anymore. I do not recognize you.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

I remember feeling the hurt and pain which caused me to struggle with my outside, Although, I know my inside is beautiful and that is alright. It has left me in a place where I really do not know if a man will be attracted to who I am on the outside because men are visual, and they like whatever they like. Ever since that day I question whether someone could love me for my outside before they get to know my inside or be attracted to my outside before they get to know my inside if that makes sense.

And so even in 2023 that has been huge issue for me. And this is predicated on the face or whatever (participant has facial keloids). Will this still be an issue because I do not know what it was that he found attractive in her. I never saw her, so I have no idea what she looked like, and it really does not matter.

The fact is I internalized that I am not beautiful enough. And I try to fight it, but there are times when it is very difficult to combat and the second battle is, am I good enough? I was a good wife and a good mother. I even gave up the very essence of who I was to satisfy my husband to be a good mother for the children through cooking and cleaning,

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

Totally, I was depressed because I remember him saying he would just lay around on the couch and I am thinking to myself, yeah, I did. I said because I was in a place that was uncharted territory for me. I have never experienced this, so I did not know what that looked like

in a marriage. I mean, when you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, that is a different thing because everybody's still trying to find for themselves what they want, what they do not want. So that was totally different, but in a committed relationship, in a marriage, it is more devastating.

Where you have two people who love the Lord and that are living or at least trying to live their best before him. It did depress me, although I did, like I said, I did not recognize it at the time. I knew that I had to keep putting one foot in front of the other because of my children. That helped me to say, hey, look, regardless of whatever is going on, they must have at least one parent. That helped them stay anchored, and that is keeping them going. They knew there was something happening they did not quite understand what it was. I did not feel led to tell them about infidelity because they were kids.

And there are just certain things you do not share with your kids at young ages. And I remember one time my middle son, because he was a dad's boy, you know, they talked about the Bible, they talked about preaching, they talked about all these different things and so his relationship with that child was different. And one day my son said something to me that just made me snap and I said, you know, you think your father is all perfect.

And he was kind of intimating that I was the person that was causing the issues. Our son suggested that I should have just let it go, and I said your dad has been cheating and I just let him have it. He was on the phone with his dad but would not ask him. However, his dad said, yeah, that is true; I found this out later. But as far as my emotion, like I said, it was, I tried to stay in a place where I could hear God. I tried to stay in a place where my children would be healthy and safe in the environment. And then I still try to work on making sure that we fix whatever was broken.

Even though I still was not sure what that was. And then as far as physically, I do not know if I did anything differently. You know, I mean, I am not a “druggie”, nor do not drink and smoke and do any recreational drugs or any, but I do tell you this there was one time, so I wanted to be noticed. And so, I put on my little mini-jean skirt. I put on a cute little top and some high heels, and I decided to go to the store. I came downstairs looking off and was told I looked nice.

I was going to go find somebody that was say you are beautiful you're gorgeous what have you. There you have it, there was not a man in the store. And I said, Lord, you are so funny and said that is so wrong. I said, even though I would not have acted on the physical, but just to be able to hear someone say you are beautiful. And so, I forgot about that and so I and I left for myself because I am like, you could have opened the door. They had a bunch of men in there to say, oh, you look good.

I would not like I say not acting on it, but just the fact that I was like, I'm going out of here. I am going to go and look. And if see if anyone is saying, oh wow, you know, you look good or what have you, but God in his infinite wisdom did not allow any men in the store at that time. I just laughed at myself, and I am so thankful I can laugh at myself even in hard times.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

I felt stuck because I did not know what I could do in this situation. Is my marriage going to dissolve? If so, where am I going to go, uneducated, three kids who is going to take us in. So, I and then the fact that we always had a joint checking savings. However, when he lost his job, we depleted all of that. So, there it was not like there was money in the bank.

I can take it out and do what I want with it. I was totally dependent on him. And I remember teaching young ladies and married wives about being, all, together on one accord. You do not have to worry about having your own making, well, I now understand that. That is not

true because you do not know when that other party will act up, or do things that are not good for the relationship.

This was a time for me when I felt like what am I going to do, and what should my decision be? However, I did not know what decision to make. I did not want to be the one to break up the family, to break up the children. And so it was, it was difficult. And I felt like I stayed stuck for a long time.

There was always fear because I did not work. But I did not know he would always pay the bills such as the mortgage, the lights, the gas. If you are trying to share it with another party that means our household now must live on a lesser amount of money to take care of it. I remember having dreams about people coming to the house and kicking us out and putting our furniture out, it was very difficult during that time as well.

And then I started going back to work. I got a job so that I could go to work after the kids were off to school and back home so they would not have to come home to an empty house. We were always in places where it was just us. And so, it was scary to live in a place where you do not know a lot of people.

And then you might have to rely on them and then it was like, are they going to take care of your kids and is there anything that you need to worry about with them? I did not have that as an option. We lived in the Midwest, and it was always just us. I mean, we have friends, but not anyone that necessarily wants to take on watching three kids after school.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

So, my healing process was a little longer maybe than some people. And I only say that because I am not the kind of person who jumps into one relationship after another. You finish one relationship, and you just automatically jump into another. Trying to figure out what my

future looks like, where I should go, what I should do. And that took a minute because consciously and subconsciously I was hoping he was going to get it together.

My prayer was that he would recognize the wrong ask for forgiveness, truly mean it, and then work towards mending and healing. The relationship between us. And so, I think for several years. I want to say maybe six or seven years, I was content to wait. I said content to wait in hopes that he would get it together. However, at the same time, I started going to school because that was always something that I wanted to do. I completed the first degree and worked and just try to make a better life for myself and for the kids.

Education for me was survival. I was more in survival mode; and in a place where I had to make changes. Everything was now on me, and I had to do something to get a better education and to secure a better job. Then even thinking about anything because I did not have time. I had too much on my plate. And then maybe after year seven; I was able to allow myself time to think about the future.

What that might look like, I decided where I was like, I do not want the man back because I do not know who the man is anymore. And I would be afraid unless God came in and did something miraculous, or wrote on the wall take him back. Taking him back for me would not, or was not an option anymore because so much time had passed. One thing I always look at when the Lord says that if you have an aught, or if you have done something wrong, you need to go back and at least apologize and ask for forgiveness and that had not happened for me.

I was like, he is not going to ever do that. And so, and I was not looking necessarily for answers from him. I just wanted the apology to say hey. I was wrong.

There are times when I can be honest, it is okay. Yes, I want to be married. Yes, I would love to have someone in my life. I do not want to grow old by myself, and I am open to that

especially since my kids are grown. I did want anyone in my life until my children are grown and out of the house. So, I think now in 2023 I am better about being opened.

But I must be honest, I am very selective about what I will accept and what I will not accept, especially at this age. So, I still give people the benefit of the doubt. I try to be open enough to understand that we all have a past. And my pain and my struggle from my past cannot be put on that other person. You know, I take them at face value and if they do have a behavior that gives me a red flag. I will probably act on it quicker than I did in this relationship.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

The Lord for me was very pivotal in that moment and then I have some friends that supported me emotionally. They allowed me to talk. Right. I must admit they didn't say, oh, you should divorce him. They allowed me to make that decision. You know some friends do not, they will sell just let them go. However, they really allowed me to speak my truth and then they allowed me to make whatever decisions I needed to make.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

Yeah, they were like I said, previously they were there. They allowed me to navigate or help me to navigate because it was, so it was uncharted territory for me. My parents helped, you know, with supplying the initial payment for the divorce and things like that. So, you know, I had people there; they were not in town with me, but they were available via telephone or a car ride away or what have you.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

The Lord showed me that this originally was a test. We were supposed to trust him through whatever process that was put before us. And so, because I knew it was a test, I was not

angry because I knew what God was doing. Nevertheless, it still devastated me. I was never at a place where I would turn my back on God, or even question him because I know he has an infinite plan.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I think I have grown because I was younger when I married. I loved my husband, and believed everything that he said. I think that I would not believe everything that a man would say at this juncture, but would ponder the things that he tells me. And now I feel like I must listen in a different way. Granted, my heart might be connected to you, but now I feel like I must protect myself.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

Oh, that is funny because we did the counseling. My husband at the time would not talk a lot about the process. He just sat there like a lump on the log. So, the counselor, you know, split us up and basically said, hey, you know, if you are not going to be with her, if you do not want to be with her, you need to let her know. When she talked to me. I found it interesting. She said you are very clear, and you are very direct, and she said, if but for him, you would not need to be in here.

And if I am, where am I off and what is it that I can do to change that? Hmm. I do not automatically project it onto the other person. I always look at myself first. So, it really helped by validating that I was not crazy. Because sometimes you begin to feel crazy, like I do something, what am I not understanding about?

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

I think, sometimes I still struggle with self-esteem, I think my self-worth is good, but I still struggle a little bit. Like I said before, I know that is a work in progress and is something

that continues to change and evolve. There are days when I just put it on a back burner., I do not have time to deal with this, let me just get done, I need to get done. Like I said, I like my inside, but I still struggle with that outside. Even though it has nothing to do or should not have anything to do with him now. But it is still the residual of what happened.

Because there was like a fire under my foot. And it says, you got to do something. You just cannot sit here. And so, it was like fighting an uphill battle. And I knew I had to fight it and so have time to be woe is me. I am scared or whatever it was you got to get this time, you cannot sit here and die.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?

I think whenever we find ourselves going through difficult situations. We will always kind of pause and wonder. What have I might be doing wrong, but recognizing that my friends, my family, they were like you can do anything that you want to do. You just must figure out what that is. And allowing myself to say, you know what, I can do it.

I can move forward. But I think what held me captive was the fact that my heart was still attached to this person. And so, once I recognize, okay, put them on the back corner and get going. They supported me and encouraged me. I could ask them questions, you know, that I had for school or what have you.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

I think when I look at my viewpoint, the introspective search is important. The counseling portion of course is important. Learning who you are now. And that this season is very important. Likewise, allowing yourself to heal from the circumstance that you have found yourself in. And one thing is knowing that the anger, bitterness and the hurt that you feel is

normal. It is imperative that you can control your emotions properly. I am not going to retaliate, or argue excessively or anything like that because it does not do you the person any good. And secondly it does not hurt that person because they have already moved on.

It only hurts you. I would point out is that whatever you go through in your marriage should remain with you and your spouse and not your children. It can cause damage to them. Please hear me, it causes damage, and it alters who they become because you have inflicted upon them, your anger, your bitterness, and your hurt.

So now they have changed, and now they are learning how to not be respectful or considerate or kind. And so, it is a ripple effect, and you have to kind of figure out a way to keep it from rippling. Likewise, when it comes to moving on, I think that recognizing the issues that you have and moving forward is a process. It does not happen overnight. Each person moves on in their own way. Like I said before, moving on is fine. I would rather be whole physically, mentally, emotionally whole before moving on.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

It allows me to understand that we are all different. Some of us are broken people and we have behaviors that have been learned and passed down through generations. When we view a person from childhood to adulthood; we can establish the root of a behavior. But for me, it does allow us to know that there is hope for change.

If we are willing to admit and acknowledge eras and behaviors and to make conscious decisions to change. I think about the phrase when we know better, we do better. And that is significant because it proves that we can change. If we can be motivated to change, I think about broken people that can be all around us, and many times they need love. But sometimes it is difficult to present that love to them.

Appendix Q

Interview Transcript: Nefertiti

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I have had my CNA for almost 20 years now and have been at a major insurance company for 18 years. So, I am a forty-one-year-old African American. I was previously married for 20 years. I got married at 19, and then we had six kids from this union. My spouse and I divorced when our youngest was two and have been divorced for four years. So, our kids are ages 21, 19, 13, 12, 11, and 10.

I currently work two jobs. So, I still utilize my CNA license. I work for a nursing facility and have been there for about two years. So, in my job now, I am a claim representative and serve as a licensed adjuster. I go into people's homes and determine coverage when they file a claim, and basically, I will write up a report.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

So, I have experienced trauma because of infidelity. It started probably after my ex-husband was working at a car dealership. With other individuals, I would say they had they were not a good influence on them. Yes, he makes his own choices and decisions. But it was just a negative undertone at that job, and he stayed there for about ten years, where he met his mistress.

He had that relationship and left it after about ten years. Not like consistent, but just like off and on over that time. So, I noticed the change in his behavior and his disposition. For example, he would get a little short with me or give vague answers when I asked him questions because I was noticing the change in his behavior.

His behavior caused me to look at more details such as phone workers, history, etc. And that is when it came to light when I was confronting him. And when I confronted him initially,

he was very sorrowful. We discussed it, but we still need to deal with it. In a way that we should have talked about things. We talked about it, discussed it, and it was dusted under the rug.

So then, it died down the different behaviors, but after a while, those behaviors returned. Because we did not deal with it the way we needed it to. So, when we went through it again, we did some counseling. We attended counseling several times, discussing accountability and dealing with your behavior, it would go smoothly. The relationship between him and I would run smoothly. But he continues to hang out with people that were just not on the same level as having a family as he had.

Moreover, there were just a lot of negative influences which influenced his behavior. So, he can pay you too. Engage in those activities, and so yeah, for up to 10 years. And during that time, as I said, there was no accountability if we were in counseling. How many of us were dealing with the behaviors? Once we stop counseling. Then the accountability went out the door.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

So yes, I was affected emotionally, and I responded to my children in an emotional manner. There was a dark period. I think that lasted about a year or maybe even longer, where I left mentally; I feel like I tapped out and was existing. And then there was much fill in the confusion of re-evaluating what you did right or wrong. Being lonely, this was a lonely period because, many times, infidelity is not something that you talk about. You just do not talk about that. So yeah, that was a lonely period. It may be angry, and then it would make me lash out. It would change.

My answers will be sharper. So, I was more short-fused, and at the same time, I was still trying to put on this other type of persona. And be there and be in spaces and build spaces. That

I needed to feel. And then be there for my kids. But there was 1 point where I just tapped out, however. I was just. I was in a zone. I was just like existing, so yeah, I just learned a lot about myself then, and then it just got to a point where I needed to transition out of that. Out of that mentally, out of that dark place. What did you learn about yourself?

I learned that. I needed to understand my value and what I was worth. And I needed to just get to know myself a lot more. I was able to do that a lot more after the divorce. But during that time, I just learned that. About myself, I felt like I was a people pleaser. So, I was trying to please everybody else, or even please my ex-husband. I was trying to keep everything together or staying in something that may not have been healthy.

I felt like I was a people person, but at the same time, I felt like I had to be comfortable. Knowing and understanding why I stayed all that time is because, ultimately, I was trying to keep our family unit together. Even though it meant sacrificing myself and sacrificing my happiness. I was just trying to keep everybody happy and keep it under one unit. So, then I just learned that, as time went on, that I can no longer operate like that. I had to do what was best. For me so that I could be fulfilling for others as well.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD)?

So, I would say that. I was stressed out a lot. And then emotionally, it was like a roller coaster. It was up and down. I dealt with like I said, bits of anger being short and being depressed, a lot of depression. And just being in like a dark a dark place. You are trying to help somebody understand how you feel and how their behavior is hurting you. But their response pretty much is like they do not care.

So yes, that is pretty much how I felt about that. I had suicidal thoughts, I was really, I remember during the time I was just hanging on by a thread. It really was God that kept me honestly, from week to week and sometimes it will be day to day. But yeah, I did have suicidal thoughts. And then, I will snap out of that, understanding that my kids needed me. So, I just had to fight like fight through it. And then physically yes, I was just stressed. I would get headaches and feel tired.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

So, there were periods of that, like I said, you just kind of when you are emotionally scarred, and you have not dealt with those. You have not dealt with trauma. I never looked at infidelity as being a trauma until after I was out of the relationship. And then I started talking and had a different conversation, now, I understand it.

Yes. It was a very traumatic situation. And, so yeah, there were a lot of periods where I felt stuff. And I remember just being in my room lying on my bed. They were like, I could not move, or go anywhere, and just feeling like you are at a standstill mentally. I felt that way a lot. And then to pick myself up out of that, I just really had to. I just really had to pray and just I remember saying God this cannot be what my life is supposed to be like. And as I began to just think about how I wanted things and how I wanted to operate. That's what helped me come out of that, it is a mindset.

Yeah, so like, even with the suicidal thoughts, and the fill in stuff like in a cause sometimes you can allow your you can I will not say allow yourself but it's you can, I will not say allow yourself but you can go off into a dark place and sometimes I think too I will sell you some disappointment and so used to being heard or feeling like why it's me I think I would get stuck in those places too.

And I think that too I was comfortable. In those places in, not expecting more or not expecting better. I think that that was just a mindset like when I will feel stuck or depressed. It is like somebody will always come along, go and send me a text message or an encouraging word or something that I needed and then if I would shift my thinking to something else and that was easier for me to operate day today.

And then also understanding that, it is a mindset for everything. As I after I got divorced and you start to understand the behaviors of people. So, when you understand the behaviors of people. Like I started to understand and learn more just about human nature and about behaviors. I even did a lot of reading during that time too on infidelity and on forgiveness and on like moving on.

I used a lot of internet resources at that time. Because there were different groups that were going through the same thing that I was going through. And so, that allowed me to understand behavior and change my mindset. And then as I change my mind that then I can you know, come from out of being stuck. Okay, so your experience sounds as though you became empowered. Yes, you do get a sense of empowerment. But at the same time, it is a scary, especially for women if you are financially dependent.

Or just if you trying to step out, you know, you have been under eighteen or more years, and now you are thinking about starting to step out and do it on your own. Like that is really a scary moment. So, you must constantly, I was constantly reassuring myself and reminding myself of who I am and telling myself I could do this, not to do that. So yeah, that. That's where the empowerment came from. It's like you develop that over time. And each day he would get stronger. Okay, thank you.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

Okay. Yeah, so what was most helpful really was getting yourself just reconnected to people. On a positive level, so definitely God first. And then talk to the people and understand that what you went through was traumatic. You know, really starting to analyze things that happens. And really look at. Things that happen and talk about it.

Like I did a lot of talking to a lot to different people and that really That is what really, really helped because prior to that I was very private. So, I did not really talk a whole lot about different things that were going on. But then after that and as things. As we went through like a divorce even after the divorce. Just talking and communicating. and just having different sessions.

I felt that that's what really helped. I think it was a combination of all of that, honestly. You just look at the different behavior. But what I had to do was remember when basically what my spouse told me. He told me that he wanted a divorce and that he did not want to you know to move forward. As I remember just taking my books and taking my Bible and I just went and stayed in the hotel and I just prayed, and I just had to say things out loud.

Like I had to just say like, okay, your spouse is not. Want to engage with you on that level anymore and you need to understand that. So that you can get out of this stuff place. Like I had to talk to myself, and then once I did that. Then I came back home. It is like, okay, we can go ahead and move forward. It was done. So, once I got to the point where I was done, then it's like the tables turned and he didn't necessarily want to be done. He wants to come back, but. I think once I got to the place where I was done. Then yeah, that was it.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

And that is okay. You know, it does take a team. My support system even played a role honestly in my exes. In his recovery too to understand like who he is in. They helped him be a

better man. So, it's like my support system. Check my feelings and keep them in perspective to him so he can understand. And then they did the same with my ex-husband. So, yeah, they helped me, and they helped him. So, we do have a good relationship. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

My family, Church family and close friends were there throughout this process. To have confidants, spiritual and natural family were great sources of support. This support helped with my spiritual, social, and emotional wellness. The entire process was tough, but without the above-referenced sources it would have been tougher.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

It helped me a lot and what kept me from not actually committing suicide and just not really, really, snapping off. Because you know, when you are angry, and you are going through all these emotions. It is really got that helps you bring yourself into God who brings you back in and just keep you like in this box. So that you do not snap and just be completely out of control. So, it is extremely instrumental. So yeah, it helped me.

I will say too though, there was a period however that, like with that fluctuation. So, there is a period where I think maybe for so long it for years I could come. To charge you not to put on this now. And not to hide or disguise everything that I was really going through. And then it came to a point too where I went through that down dark time where I could not really do anything. The only thing I could do was just exist and just serve. But then after I was able to transition out of that. Then I can really refocus on the thing that I need to do.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I have grown both naturally and spiritually and my relationship with God helped. I was able to seek His guidance through prayer. My family was guiding strength as well. They assisted me in my weakness and told me the truth and supported me with love. Likewise, I have grown and matured by accepting responsibility for my role in our marital discord.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

Yes, so. The counseling, attending it doing our marriage. That really, really helped me. Because the counselor could paint the picture and be neutral, for both perspectives and it really helped. Each of us sees because the other's perspective because the counselors give very specific instructions. So, it requires a level of accountability, and then when you are in counseling. And you know you are working on like that accountability part, whether they have you working on, you know, a date night or doing something together.

It is like you are consciously making an effort to remind yourself, okay, I am working on this. I cannot respond like this because I am working on this. So, it does help with that accountability piece in perspective. So that works being Mary and after as well. Yes, remembering what you are working on and what you are being told you need to be more accountable for. So that piece is very instrumental and then it helps you work through those emotions.

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

Yes, self-esteem is definitely, very, very important in your cellphone. Confidence because if you are experiencing a level of infidelity you do start to question especially women. You question everything about yourself. Whether or not you're good enough and you look good enough and you drink like this or just like that. So, it is a battle in your mind. So, you must just understand just who you are. And that, understand your value. And your value has nothing to do

with how somebody treats you. So, if there is infidelity going on, it is not because you are a bad person or you're not an attractive person or anything like that.

It is not your issue to take on. So, your issue, you must just remember your value and who you are and who got creating you to be and just embrace that. So yeah, and over time I just had to learn that as well. I suggest it embrace who you are as an individual. So, are you saying that you began to internalize the affair? In your mind, you know, like with the mindset that would know what's wrong with me, is there something wrong with me? I am not pretty enough. Am I not good enough? What am I doing? Why is my husband behaving the way that he is behaving? And I think that you will question your value.

As a woman and when things like that happen, I think sometimes it is just natural. So, women to Just look at themselves or question those different things about yourself. But yeah, you do have to take a step back, which is what I did and just remind Yourself of who you are and your value and what you deserve. So yeah, you must, and I think when you do that, it must be purposeful. Because you can get sucked into a low self-esteem mindset or I am not good enough for I am not pretty.

So, you must be purposeful and understand who you are and your value because you have got to be purposeful too, when you are healing. You have got to be purposeful in going like as thought you will get there. Oh, I do not feel like it, but you know, you just got to be purposeful. You must do it. You must just make yourself do it.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play?

Oh yeah, that was it was a very big role. Because that emotional support does give you that strength to move forward. Cause sometimes you might possibly need those reminders to keep pushing. Or somebody telling you constantly you can do it. So those are very, very vital.

Cause it's never at the time to just be. You know, secluded and by yourself and allowing your mind to just to. You need that outside personal support for your growth and for your development. Because it helps you to put things into perspective like I have stated. And then it helps you too with that accountability machine.

Do you think forgiveness played a role in your recovery, yes, absolutely? Yes, it was. All right. And what was that forgiveness like for you, was it a process? Was it quickly or, you know, how long did it take you to work through? You're heard in pain and to begin to grow. So, I am still growing up like, I think I had to understand forgiveness first. I had to understand that for giving somebody does not like the pain or how you feel emotionally as far as being hurt. Because I think I struggle with thinking that, well, if I forgive them, then I should feel this way or feel that way or be talking about it or anything like that.

That is not like forgiveness. Because it's okay to say forgive somebody. And you still are hurt from what they did. You must talk through that. And so that was hard for me. That part to be the longest. To understand what forgiveness is and to understand that it is just a process. So, I had to understand that first and then as I understood that. And then I started to just understand the different behaviors of people and that helped me to forgive but it still took me a long time I would say I always said that I forgave. Working through the emotions is what took me the longest. And that took over a year. What role did the affair play in your trust in another relationship.

And moving forward if you decided to get married or date again or did that affect you trusting others? Of the opposite sex, yeah, it does affect you. And I think a lot of times you do not understand how much the trauma affected you or how much your trust was affected. Until you try to try something then you take your like, oh, way of thinking. So yeah, it did. It did affect

you because you're guarding. You know, you don't want to be hurt again. So, you trust very slowly because you do not want to experience that pain. So, I think that the struggle for me with trust is just because I don't want to experience that kind of thing.

But as time went on, I just kind of was like, well, you know, if I do day or decide to, engage with somebody else. I just must just allow them to be a chance to be who they are, like not judge them based on what somebody else did. Like you must just let a person be who they are or grow in where they need to grow and not make the comparison.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

Well, I think you asked. A lot of questions that hit on every aspect. I was saying it feels very hard if you are going through that situation. The meaning of divorce. I looked it up one time, and it means death. And it does feel like. It feels like you could be dying. But at the same time. After death, we know that I feel like life occurs after as well. Whenever there is death, something must die to breed new life.

So, remember that there is light, and then there's life. Like something is going to be birthed out of that trauma. It's usually going to be a new beginning. It felt like a new beginning, a new you, a new attitude. Just newness, a new way of thinking, a new way to embrace yourself and life. So, hang on. Get involved with support groups. Talk it out, talk it through, and you will make it. You will make it.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

Okay, my experience has shaped my worldview by helping me understand people the way they are. And behaviors mean there is a story behind everyone's actions, whether their personal beliefs or upbringing. Whom they surround themselves by so their surroundings. It's helped me

to understand that to love and forgive people genuinely. You need to understand God's love and forgiveness toward yourself, and it's helped my view as well to be neutral and not judgmental of others behaving or of their actions or situation. And then it's also helped me to just not take things for granted, especially family. And don't be undermined. To people and just look for ways to make individuals feel validated. And that's where it stops.

Appendix R

Interview Transcript: Taya

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.

I am 52 years old and a mother of three with six grandchildren. I enjoy cooking, gardening, and spending time with my family. I have had guardianship of my grandchildren for over a year. My mother currently lives with me because she has the onset of dementia. I am twice divorced and have begun to find myself.

2. What have you experienced regarding infidelity betrayal (share with me about the affair)?

I have been married twice and then both relationships I have experienced betrayal in both marriages and the first one was very open. It was not anything that the person tried to conceal it. Then, and it was several different individuals and not just one. So that really affected me, and it took some time.

I was also in an abusive relationship. So that marriage was abusive. I think it allowed me to accept things more because of what would happen if I tried to do anything about it. Once divorced and remarried, I never thought that that would be my experience again. Unfortunately, I experienced infidelity in the second marriage.

And I think that hurt me more because it was so unexpected, and I thought I did everything possible to make my marriage work and I have feelings that there was something wrong with me. And I will just say this one of the things that I asked. My spouse. Why and the person told me that it was presented to them, and I think that hurt me more because that showed the lack of value that that person had for me, and that was concerning.

The first one my mother discovered it. My mother saw him kissing someone and he tried to cover it up. And say it was not true, but then what really happened is every time I would get

pregnant, someone else got pregnant. Therefore, that let us know that it was true that the person was cheating. One day, I was not feeling well, and my body was not feeling well like it normally does. I asked him if he were cheating, and he looked down, tears and eyes and never said yes. But I knew it was a yes. So yeah, but it was it was honestly discovered because of me not feeling well and there was obviously something going on, so I went to the doctor thank God it was not anything like serious.

I do not know if it was like a urinary tract infection or something, but I had not had any issues. So, it was scary. In my forties. And not knowing what could possibly be going on with me was very scary. So, I have no idea at what point it started and when it ended. I do not know anything. He never discussed because the person was not open to discussing.

There was no closure in that area. I will say that I was married for 17 years and. I have no idea. How long the person was not faithful. I think that probably hurts me more than anything because I still wonder who. You know, I can see so many different areas of it could have been this person because of this. It could have been that person because of that but I never knew and so I usually walk around considering. Was it you? I think that was probably more impactful to me than me knowing who it was, and I am like, okay, let me move on. But to me that was something.

3. How have you been influenced or affected by your spouse's betrayal (e.g., affair and feelings), and what feelings do you remember?

I think that I'm still affected in some way even in new relationships. I think that it puts me in suspense sometimes or suspecting people to do things that. You know, it is harder to trust people. I think that I probably have created a wall and not as opening. I think. I think I carry

some baggage. But understanding that everyone, not everybody's different, but I think that it puts me on. Probably alert more.

I do not get too close, and I am like, I am never doing this again because honestly, I keep saying I am never getting married again. And I think that that is because of my experiences. I have been in a relationship with someone for like six years, but I do not. I think I want to go any further. I think.

I have even said let us just be friends because I do not want that hurt again. And I think I put up a wall. Again, and to love again and to have this lasting relationship, that is a possibility because everyone is not the same, but I know trust is the same, and the wall is protecting you because if you don't let anybody in, they can't hurt you. Yeah, that is about how it goes my friend would say that I'm sabotaging.

The relationship and I'm always saying look let's just be friends and so the person probably gets disturbed by my behavior because anytime there' is like conflict that I even think that's coming up. I am like right I'm ready to say goodbye because I don't want to go through any more hurt. So, if I can control how that situation goes, I do not. I kind of feel like I am protecting you, you are protecting you. Yes, and you are. Okay, and we will probably have a little bit not because this is of course not counseling but, have a little bit into some more.

4. How did the infidelity impact your emotional and physical health (e.g., drugs, alcohol, eating-related problems, depression, anxiety, acute stress, PTSD).

I think mentally it I know I don't even know how to express this. It made me feel like I lost certain controls and I say that because of some things that I do like I do not particularly appreciate sleeping in my bed by myself, so I won't sleep in a bit. I will sleep on the couch, the chair because I just refuse to go to bed in an actual bed because I do not like sleeping alone. So,

that is kind one of the things I feel like I need to find a way to control certain things for example, I continue to change my living room around almost every other week. Because I feel like I need to be in control. I know that's kind of crazy, but. And the marriage ended. That is what I did before he left.

I mean, that was not anything that I did, and I slept in my bed, but it just seems like there was a void that needs to be filled. And so sometimes, I find myself doing things to fill the void mentally that was where I am at. Physically, I think the only thing I became less alert is when it comes to watching where I am going. Doing things that I should probably pay attention to.

So right after my husband left, which was in 2014, I started to fall and break things as far as physical body parts and for a course of at least almost two years I broke so many bones in my body from falling or just doing things that make me harm myself. I was trying to harm myself is just like clumsiness would be the word I guess I just became not as focused and very clumsy.

I think I, well actually I lost weight because I started exercising and focusing on my outward appearance once he left. So that was something I started doing. I started focusing on taking care of me more. I started exercising and I lost weight. So, I think I focused more on the outward appearance once he left versus eating. Like I said, trying to gain a sense of control.

I think a couple of times I would well sometimes I would hear his words. From the past about certain ways, I looked; he would make a statement like you lucky that I am still even attracted to you. I would think well, what's wrong with me? But once he left, then I started focusing on it, let me just make sure that I looked okay.

So, I think it was a little thing that was said that had me feeling insecure about the way I look. Because of it and then just wanting to take that sense of control. I think that is why I did

not have control over the divorce. I did not have control over anything, and I was almost like a pawn or piece in the puzzle, but I did not get to make any decisions.

5. Share with me when you felt stuck and unable to function as usual.

One of the things I think is helpful is that I was able to forgive, and we became friends again. That was helpful because now I am not harboring any bitterness or anger or resentment, which allowed me to move forward. I think that there are some scars that are there. These scars are affecting me in a sense.

I am aware of what is there and that is why I think that I am kind of at a standstill because to be honest I could have got married and moved on with life. However, I do not think fully healed in a sense to be ready to be married; I do not want to take that baggage into a new relationship.

6. What was most helpful as you began the healing process?

Counseling was how do I move forward without him because I kind of built my life in a way where everything was surrounded by him. One of the things I think is helpful is that I was able to forgive and then we were able to be friends again. That was helpful because now I am not harboring any bitterness or anger or resentment and that allows me to continue to move forward.

I think that there are some scars that are there. But I am aware of what is there and that is why I think that I am kind of at a standstill because to be honest I could have married and moved on with life. However, I do not think that I have fully healed in a sense to be ready to be married. Furthermore, I do not want to take that baggage into a new relationship. So, I think waiting is what is best for me. But I feel like part of healing is that first step of forgiveness.

7. What helped you through this challenging time?

I think prayer and a very good support system. I did take some counseling and it was not so much about getting over the relationship. My ex-spouse made all the decisions and now it is like I must leave and find who I am and so I needed that counseling piece, and I needed a great support system. Those are some of the things that I think really help me through lots of prayer.

8. What role did your support network (e.g., family, friends, religious faith, emotional wellness) play in your recovery?

My family, friends, and religion played a great role. I think that if I did not have that support, I do not know where I would be. I literally had to rely on that support to get up. It was almost like; I needed that encouragement. There were things that I used to do but I felt like I could not do any more. I felt like I was less than a person that I was because this was taken away from me. I felt people looked down on me because I was not that married woman anymore. So, because there is like this negative context I guess when you are single, and then you are older. So, I think those things kind of affected me, but the support system that I had encouraged me.

9. How did your Christian faith affect you during this time?

Well, one of the things that I think my Christian faith continue to believe God and I was not angry with God. I still believed that we would be reconciled. I believed that if I waited then my husband would come back, and if I did the things that I needed to, he would come back. Thus, I continued to pray and to trust God. I think because of my beliefs and thoughts, I accepted some things that I probably should not have. You know, we were going to reconcile but not realizing that you know my belief in my faith was that it was my own and I was hoping for something that did not happen.

10. Share with me if you think you have grown, and if so, what contributed to it?

I believe I have grown in several areas. I think I have grown stronger in (a) being able to have a voice (b) being able to say what I will and will not accept, (c) being able to be vulnerable and (d) stand strongly on what I believe, and not allowing someone to take total control of my life. I really think that I am stronger by my experience in infidelity and in the broken relationship because it helps me to feel strong enough not to have a relationship.

I could choose to be in a relationship where I could choose not to be in a relationship is completely my choice and I like that. I thought beforehand I felt like I had to be with someone, but now I understand that I am okay with me, whether I was with someone or not. Nevertheless, I just believe that this strengthens me to be able to love myself and understand my value.

11. If you attended counseling during this time, share how it affected you.

I believe I have grown in several areas. I think I have grown stronger in being able to have a voice. Being able to say what I want to accept or what I am not going to accept.

12. How were your self-esteem, confidence, and worth a part of your growth?

My overall image, confidence and worth have helped my growth process because I think recognizing it helps me with understanding who I am. This experience allowed me to grow, and to be able to stand up for myself. When we do not value ourselves, then we tend to accept anything. But when I realized who I am; it allowed me to say no to some things. I will just quickly say this my ex-husbands tried to build a relationship after the fact.

In 2021, both reached out to build a relationship with me. However, I realized I do not have to do that again. This is not what I want, I will not accept I only got to that point when my confidence was strengthened. I became stronger when I understood who I was and when my esteem had been elevated.

13. What role did emotional connection and personal strength play in your recovery?

I think that it played a great part because I think having that strength that inner strength allowed me to continue to press forward. I think that there were times where I just wanted to give up because I was tired of what I had been through, and I did not want to go through that again. And I think that when I became strengthened It has helped me to grow and then recognize, yeah, I do not have to go through any of that stuff again. I get to choose what I want. And with a different pair of lenses now, I understand what I need, and I think that is an important piece.

14. What else would you like to share that might provide further insight into your viewpoint that

I have yet to inquire about?

I think that when it comes to individuals who have gone through relationships where there is infidelity. It is hurtful, but I think understanding that it is not your fault that the other person made their choice and decision. When you recognize that it was not you it was their choice and their decision. I think that that is helpful because a lot of times we blame ourselves. So, I think that that is a really important factor, and it helps you to move forward when you recognize that it is not you.

Observation Journal Writing Prompt

How has your experience shaped your worldview?

Okay, I wrote that it has shaped my world view into thinking that all relationships have their ups and downs, but forgiveness is key. I think that anyone has the capability to commit adultery, but it takes a strong will to stay on the right path. I believe that our world is highly sexualized. And we push sex and because some desires are not communicated can cause some individuals to go after what they see, rather than what they already have endowed. My Christian belief is that no one is perfect, and all have sinned. I believe that forgiveness is what is needed to move forward and to heal.