

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS

5.1. Introduction.

When analysing the data obtained from the five participants, I as the researcher, was in the unique position of learning and becoming involved in their experience of betrayal in an intimate relationship, being mainly guided by a respectful concern for the phenomenon. At the time of the interviews, I had no background of the participants, their histories or similar experiences that they may have had, which may have contributed to the reduction of researcher bias. As the researcher, I also needed to rely and draw on my skills as a psychotherapist in establishing a containing climate in a short space of time, which could facilitate the sharing of sensitive information in as detailed a manner as possible.

In reflecting on the data during the analytic process, I was constantly reminded of the sensitivity of the topic under investigation. In particular during the coding process, I recalled what may be described with some reservation as “humorous” aspects of the participants’ rich narratives in places, which they generously and voluntarily provided. During the course of the interviews, I as the researcher was under the impression that I did not have a preconceived idea of the manner in which the information would be shared. However, the introduction of humour in some places during the course of the interviews, particularly the initial interview, was something that I had not anticipated. Consequently, I realised that as impartial as what I had tried to be, I did have a preconception of the seriousness and possible emotional climate which I would have expected to follow during the course of the narratives of the lived experiences of betrayal. However, for most of the interviews, the participants communicated the intense pain of their experience of infidelity. The aspect of humour however, is significant in the current context and is noted as an entry in my researcher’s journal.

All the participants in the study chose to relate their narratives in Afrikaans being their first language. However, as English was the main choice of communication for this thesis, vignettes of

the data where applicable were translated and are presented in English. In this regard, Strauss and Corbin (1990/1998) suggest that some translation is relevant in instances where the majority of persons who will have access to the research results fall in a different first language group to the participants in the study. Within the South African context therefore, English as the medium of communication, either as first or second language would allow most readers who do not have a command of the Afrikaans language, some degree of insight into the narratives of the participants in the study, specifically in terms of their thoughts, behaviours and emotions as a result of the experience of betrayal.

In addition, readers could also gain some sense of what the coding process entailed. Hoffman (1989) reiterates the challenges of accurate translation and suggests that meanings may become lost in translation. During the course of the interviews however, I asked the participants for clarification of words or descriptions of incidents, which were unclear. Furthermore, when analysing the data, I paid careful attention to translating the meaning units as accurately as possible before moving on to the conceptualisation of the data. In instances where I was not persuaded that the original transcriptions entertained other nuances, additional sources such as dictionaries were consulted. In addition, the translated key passages were also discussed and debriefed with peers. Lastly, the participants during the course of member checking were also asked to pay specific attention to words or phrases which may have been overlooked during the course of their interviews and which required accurate clarification before conceptualisation.

In this chapter of the thesis, the investigation and findings of the participants' experience of infidelity is presented. **Firstly**, we turn our attention to **the main research question: "What is the experience of betrayal in an intimate relationship?"**. We also consider the two additional questions which were formulated in the event of the information not being spontaneously revealed in the participants' interviews. **Next**, the **participants' conceptualisation of the meaning of betrayal** is presented, **followed by** an explanation of the **data analysis process**. **An overview of the findings derived from axial coding is the next section** discussed, using the grounded theoretical framework as an organisational scheme. **Diagrams are also included** which portray the various components of the framework which emerged from the findings in this study. A **schematic summary** of the framework is provided **prior to the concluding comments** of this chapter. The **first component of the framework** which is considered is that of **"conditions"**. The conditions which have emerged in this study are **contextual, intervening** and **causal** conditions.

The **second component** which is discussed is the **action and/or interactions** and the **third component** which is presented is **consequences**. **Subsequent** to the overview of the findings derived from axial coding, the grounded theory framework is used as a guide to the **detailed analysis of the data**. In this section, the **conditions, actions and/or interactions** and **consequences** that emerged from this study, are **discussed in greater detail**. Lastly **conclusions regarding the fundamental process** associated with the experience of betrayal namely, **a sense of alienation**, are presented.

At this point we turn our attention to the main research question.

5.2. The Research Question.

The main research question of the present study is: **“What is the experience of betrayal in an intimate relationship?”** In order to obtain relevant data, which will illuminate the experience as it manifests in the lived world of individuals, the following opening statement was posed:

“You were betrayed by your partner whilst in an intimate relationship with him or her. Please would you describe as accurately and as in as much detail as possible, your unique experience of betrayal, what it was like for you - specifically your thoughts, feelings and behaviour.”

Subsequent to this statement, two additional questions were included in the event of the information not being spontaneously revealed during the course of the participants’ individual narratives:

- 1. “What was your experience of yourself before, during and after this process?”**
- 2. “What was the outcome of your relationship with the other party?”**


5.3. The Research Participants.

In the following section, any information, which may compromise the ethical obligation of myself as the researcher to protect the identity of the participants, as agreed during the initial stage of the


research process, has been excluded from the transcription of each of the interviews. Consequently the participants are represented alphabetically in order of the date of their interview.

The participants in this study, two males and three females were between 23 and 42 years old, and have completed tertiary education. They were divorced or unmarried at the time of the interviews and none of the participants had children. In addition, they came from South African family backgrounds consisting of both dual parent and reconstituted parental structures and they were culturally similar. Afrikaans was spoken as their first language and English as the second language of choice, and they would often move automatically between the two. As indicated in the previous chapter of this thesis, Table 4.1 represents a summary of the participants' contextual data.

The initial question to the participants was: **“What is your understanding of the meaning of ‘betrayal’?”** Although each of the participants when indicating their willingness to participate in the study had met the research requirements of having experienced infidelity in an intimate relationship, it was necessary to gain some insight into their understanding of the concept of betrayal and in so doing, create a context for further narrative and to inform and enhance interpretation. After posing the initial question, some of the participants suggested that the emotional component of their experience was greater than verbalising their experience of betrayal, as illustrated in the following vignettes:


¹ ²“It is more the emotion that is evoked when thinking about it than having the words to describe it.”

Participant B, 16 February 2005.

 “Betrayal affects your entire being...every cell and the core of your being...when that gets betrayed...then...there are practically no words to describe those emotions.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

However, their conceptualisation of the construct indicated:

 “Betrayal is an absolute violation of your trust of some-one very close to you, in a very mean and dishonest way.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

☞ “Briefly, I would say that betrayal is when some-one takes your entire being and everything you have been taught from childhood and that which you stand for... and trust, especially your family, your wife...and desecrates it.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005.

☞ “Treachery, dishonesty, unreliability, basically...breaking of trust.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

☞ “A total breach of trust... words like “cheat”.. those are such superficial words..”

Participant D. 16 April 2005.

☞ “A total destruction of trust in such a deceitful way by a person whom you thought really cared for you and loved you...followed by such intense, emotional pain.. .you wish you could rather die.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005.

The following section introduces the reader to the lived experience of the act of betrayal in the lives of five participants. Descriptions have been constructed as narratives using data as well as additional illustrative material in the form of journal entries made by myself as the researcher. This has been done to invite the reader to participate in the research process rather than experience a sense of alienation.

As the findings in this chapter indicate, the fundamental process associated with the experience of betrayal is **a sense of alienation** or “not belonging” The evidence for this fundamental proposition will be presented here and the grounded theory that has emerged from the analysis is described in detail. In addition, this chapter provides a platform for exploring the process leading up to **a sense of alienation** as experienced by the participants, in the next chapter. We turn firstly to the first stage of the analysis of data, obtained during the process of open coding.

¹. The symbol ☞ is used to indicate an audiotaped interview.

². Illustrative vignettes from the data are indicated in a smaller font and indented in the text. In addition, the data has been translated from Afrikaans into English to maintain continuity of language in the thesis. The interviews that were transcribed verbatim were in each instance conducted in Afrikaans and verified by each of the participants. The interviews are included as Appendices C-G.

5.4 Analysis of data.

5.4.1. First stage – Open coding.

Each transcribed interview was coded using coding techniques of the grounded theory approach. Data was deconstructed into discrete units, closely examined line by line and comparatively analysed for similarities and differences by means of open coding. The units of meaning and corresponding concepts were then grouped into core- and sub-categories that reflected their properties and dimensions.

The identified concepts derived from the participants' interviews are presented in Table 4.2 in chapter four of this thesis. These concepts have been grouped into categories that emerged during this phase of data analysis. At this stage of the data analysis process, it is valuable to identify as many phenomena and concepts as possible because such a strategy facilitates entry into the field of inquiry.

5.4.2. Second stage – Axial coding

During the second phase of the analysis of data, it was necessary to uncover relationships among categories obtained during open coding. In this way, the phenomenon of **a sense of alienation** could be located within a conditional structure that in turn could be related to process. Conditions or structure create the circumstances in which problems, issues, happenings, or events relevant to a phenomenon are located or arise. On the other hand, process indicates the action or interaction of persons, organisations and communities over time, in response to certain problems and issues. Therefore, combining structure with process enables the researcher to access some of the complexities of life. For a detailed description of axial coding refer to 4.4.2.

The organizational scheme used to sort and organize the emerging connections was Strauss and Corbin's (1990/1998) framework (see 4.4.2.1). This framework was used to guide the analysis and to establish the relationships between the core categories obtained from the data. The basic components of the framework namely, **conditions, actions and interactions** and **consequences** were applied to the experience of betrayal in intimate relationships. Figure 5.1. portrays the basic

components of Strauss and Corbin's (1990/1998) framework. Furthermore, figure 5.2 provides a detailed representation of the conditions of the framework, which includes their properties and dimensions. The actions and/or interactions are represented in figure 5.3 and the consequences are represented in figure 5.4. In addition, the introduction of the **conditional matrix** as an analytic tool (see 4.4.4.) also suggests that as the researcher, I note the various levels of conditions in the social setting which influence the phenomenon of betrayal. By implication, this means careful observation of the context in which the study occurs.

At this point, a brief overview of the findings using the framework as an organisational scheme, is provided. A detailed discussion of these findings derived from axial coding follows the overview and figure 5.5 represents a summary of the findings using the framework.

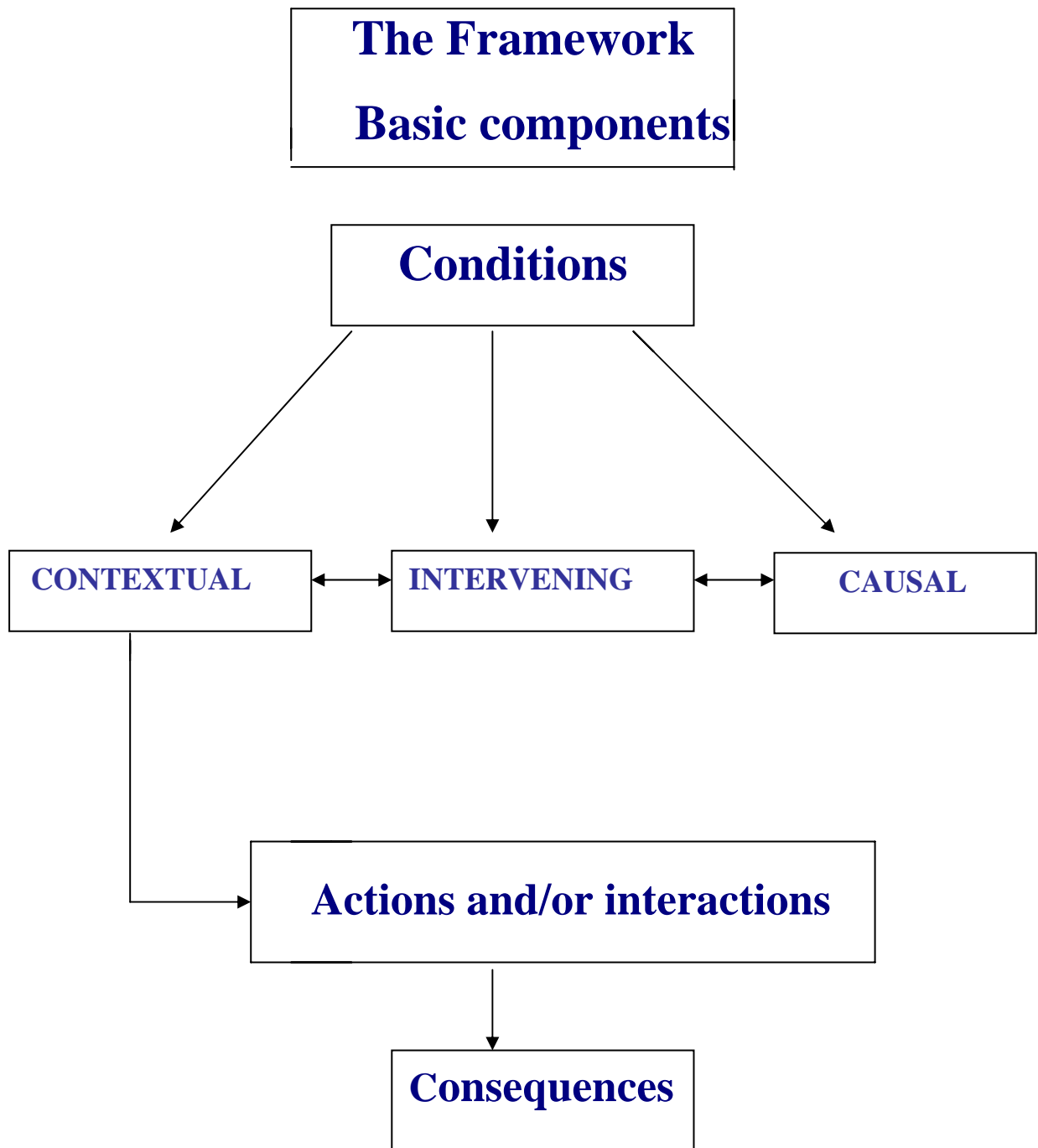


Figure 5.1. Basic components of the framework.

5.5. An overview of the findings derived from axial coding, using the framework as an organisational scheme.

The first component of the framework that we consider in this overview, is **conditions**. Conditions have emerged in this study as **contextual, intervening** and **causal** conditions.

5.5.1. Conditions.

5.5.1.1. Contextual conditions.

Contextual conditions are those conditions that influence the very context in which the actions or interactions occur. The set of conditions that emerge closest to the phenomenon of “**a sense of alienation**” is the **context of the intimate relationship**. The central question, which emerged from the data was: “**Why do individuals experience infidelity as an act of betrayal within an intimate relationship?**” From this question the **participants’ expectations of the intimate relationship**, the **participants’ characteristics** and their **expectations of their partners**, were identified.

❖ The participants’ expectations of the intimate relationship.

The participants’ expectations of the intimate relationship have emerged as contextual conditions to the phenomenon of **a sense of alienation**. Emerging contextual properties of an intimate dyad are: 1) increasing intimacy resulting in a sense of belonging and connectedness; 2) a sense of connectedness to the partners; friendship and family circles; 3) temporality; and 4) fixed boundaries regarding mutually exclusive sexual behaviour of the couple.

❖ Characteristics of the participants.

The emergent contextual characteristics of the participants are: 1) an informed readiness and willingness to trust the significant other, 2) moral and religious orientation and 3) a sense of an integrated self.

❖ Expectations of the significant other.

Respect for the participant as a valued other and commitment to the relationship are the specific characteristics, which the participants expect of their partner in the intimate relationship. They remain consistent for the duration of the relationship.

5.5.1.2. Intervening conditions.

Intervening conditions are those that promote or hinder the action or interaction routine and strategies of the participants and included factors such as time, culture, personality, as derived from the data. Intervening conditions contribute to a sense of alienation within the context of the intimate dyad. Two major categories emerged from the data namely, memory and the absence of the partner.

❖ Memory.

The participants attempt to remember something in their relationship that relates to or explains their partners' act of betrayal. In particular, they make use of retrospection to trace the present back to the past and introspection to examine themselves in the search for clues of incidents or actions that may have contributed to their partners' infidelity.

❖ Absence of the partner.

This second category, which emerges as a major intervening condition, is the absence of the partner. Specifically the physical absence of the partner brings home to the participants the reality of their abandonment in what at the time appears to be a somewhat unreal and fragmented experience. In addition the absence of the partner, implies the absence of mutual friends and the partners' family members. A further significant aspect of the physical absence of the partner emerges from the data. The participants' inability to reach closure is exacerbated as they are initially unable to understand or determine why their partners have abruptly abandoned the relationship. Furthermore, the physical absence of the other influences the disconnectedness which the participants have with regard to relationships and to themselves and also influences their perception of the relationship as having been genuine or fake.

5.5.1.3. Causal conditions.

The third set of conditions we consider in this discussion on the framework are **causal conditions**. Causal conditions refer to the incidents or events that lead to the occurrence or actual development of a phenomenon. Analysis of the data reveals that **disclosure of infidelity** and the **manner in which infidelity is orchestrated** are the two central conditions that cause participants to experience a sense of alienation.

❖ Disclosure of infidelity

The disclosure of infidelity focuses on knowledge that is provided to the participants by external sources such as friends or colleagues. This new knowledge is information that the participants did not consciously entertain prior to their partners' act of infidelity being exposed. In addition, analysis of the data indicates that disclosure of infidelity implies "knowing", as opposed to "not knowing". Three central questions guide our understanding of these two aspects of infidelity: 1) **What elicits the awareness of "knowing" or "not knowing?"**; 2) **How do participants respond to this awareness?**; 3) **How are "knowing" or "not knowing" causal conditions in the experience of a sense of alienation?**

❖ The manner in which infidelity is orchestrated.

When having to deliberately consider their partners' act of betrayal, the participants become aware of a single event or incident which they perceive as being associated with the process of their partners' infidelity. This awareness occurs spontaneously during the period of retrospection. Furthermore, the participants experience the manner in which their partners orchestrated the act of betrayal as of greater significance than the actual loss of the partner and the abandonment of the relationship.

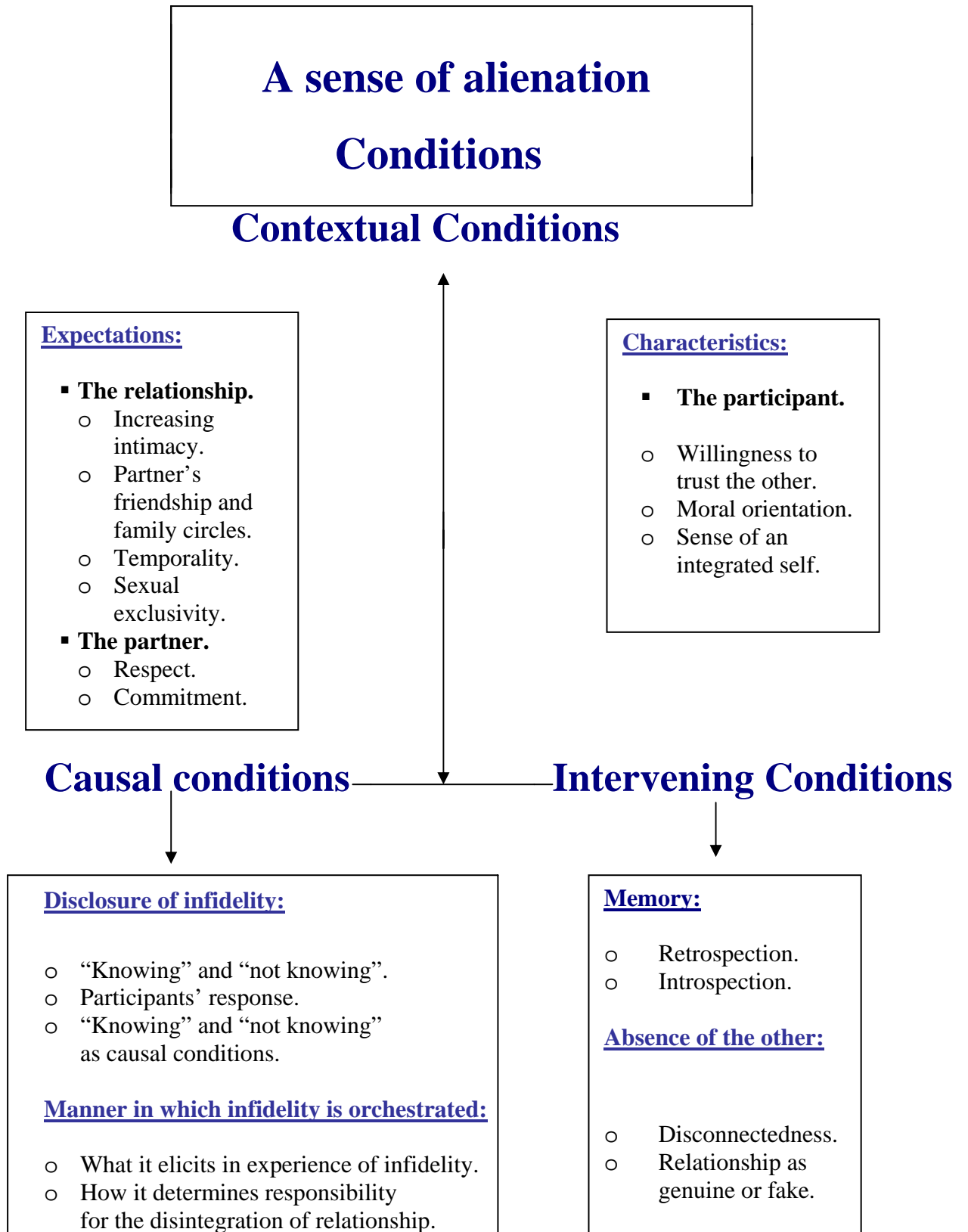


Figure 5.2. Conditions of the framework.

The data also indicate that as a causal condition, the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated, influences the participants' actions and interactions and contributes to a sense of alienation. This condition is tapped by the following questions: **1) What does the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated, elicit in the participants experience of betrayal? 2) How does this awareness influence their perception of assuming mutual responsibility for the disintegration of the relationship?**

Next, the **action and/or interactions** which the participants employ and which contribute to a **sense of alienation**, are mentioned.

5.5.2. Actions and/or interactions.

Routines are actions or interactions, which are familiar ways of responding to events in everyday life. **Strategic actions or interactions** on the other hand are purposeful acts, which the participants take in an attempt to manage their experience of betrayal by their partners and contribute to shaping the phenomenon of a sense of alienation. Four action and interaction routines and strategies emerged from the data: **1) confronting the partner, physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control.**

❖ Confronting the partner.

Participants confront their partners either telephonically or face-to-face, after the relationship is abruptly terminated. Their need for confrontation is fuelled by their anger at perceiving the abandonment of the relationship as unfair. At this stage the participants are unaware of their partners' act of infidelity as the motivation for the abandonment of the relationship.

❖ Physical and emotional withdrawal.

Due to the unexpected abandonment of the relationship by their partners, the participants are catapulted into being single again. Their feelings of humiliation and rejection at their abandonment as well as the later knowledge of the partners' betrayal escalate and they experience difficulties in interacting meaningfully with others. Consequently, they withdraw both physically and

emotionally from others to the safety of a private environment such as their homes, as they attempt to assimilate their experience of betrayal.

❖ Maintaining a façade.

As figure 5.3. indicates, this mode of engaging with others is characterised by a conscious protection of a vulnerable and painfully raw self. It is important for the participants to “pretend” to others that they are doing well in the face of rejection and humiliation. One reason in particular is that they do not want to be pitied by others.

Also the participants feel quite helpless and inadequate in being able to sustain a relationship, which creates within them an existential crisis. Particularly when considering their social skills and ability to engage in relationships, the participants perceive these as ineffective, as they attempt to determine what went wrong in their relationship.

❖ Regaining control.

This is an important aspect in the participants’ experience of betrayal. At this time, the participants rely on the structure and predictability provided by their work environments. This aspect lends a degree of stability and security to their sense of alienation and disconnectedness. Furthermore, regaining control allows the participants to gain some perspective regarding the quality of relationship with their partners, in particular the awareness that their partners were controlling for the duration of the relationship.

The perception of their partners as being controlling during the relationship does not end as the participants experience their partners as controlling even once the relationship has ended as the partners attempt to maintain some contact with the participants either directly or indirectly through mutual acquaintances, friends or family members.

The last component of the framework, which we briefly mention, is **consequences**.

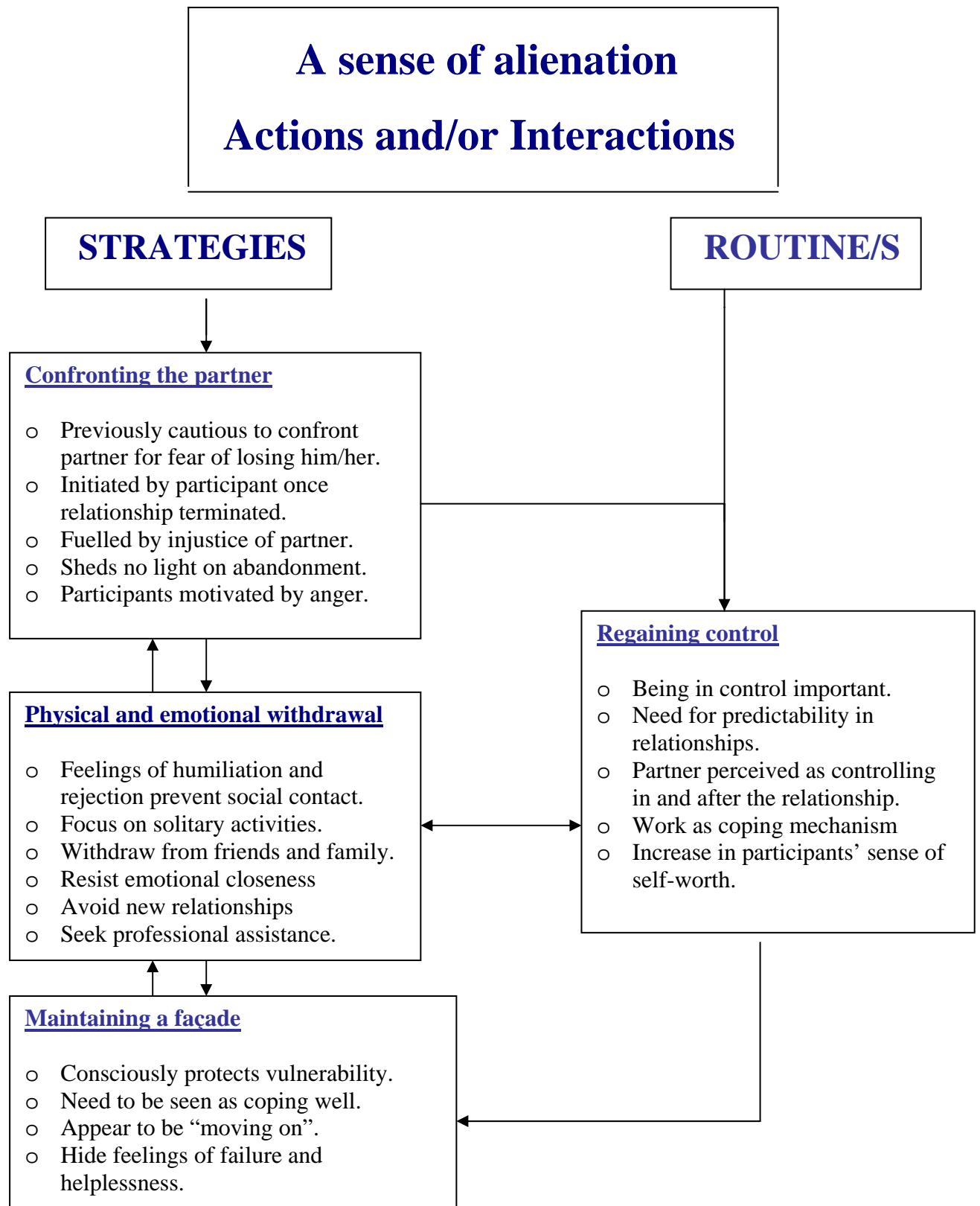


Figure 5.3. Actions and/or interactions of the framework.

5.5.3. Consequences.

Consequences are the results or outcome of actions or interactions taken or not taken and they may be deliberate or spontaneous. In this study, the participants' actions and interactions or deliberate lack of interactions have multiple and varied consequences. In addition, although reversible over time, they are unpredictable which increases their range on impact on the inner- and outer worlds of the participants and compounds the context of the experience. These consequences are categorised into emotional-, behavioural-, cognitive- and intrapsychic consequences and diagrammatically presented in figure 5.4. It is significant to add that these categories of consequences are not seen to progress linearly through the stages of actions and interactions that the participants employ. Rather they suggest interactive and fluid movement between these stages.

❖ Emotional consequences.

Analysis of the data reveals that the participants experience a wide range of emotions as a result of their partners' infidelity. Furthermore, **anger** emerges as the most prevalent emotion and is present in various degrees throughout the participants' assimilation of the experience of infidelity. Further emotions include: 1) **incessant crying**, 2) **fear and anxiety**, 3) **disillusionment**, 4) **depletion of emotional resources**, 5) **mourning**, 6) **feelings of depression**, 7) **loneliness and longing**, 8) **loss**, 9) **relief**, 10) **resurrected resilience**.

❖ Behavioural consequences.

The data reveal that there are considerably less behavioural consequences than emotional consequences. The actions or interactions which the participants take once the relationship has been abandoned have been indicated in the preceding paragraphs. These actions and/or interactions carry similar behavioural consequences and are referred to in further detail in this section. The first behavioural consequence results from the participants' **confrontation with their partner**. Further behavioural consequences result from the participants' **physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade** and **regaining control**. The data reveals that particularly when maintaining a façade, the participants experience **heightened vigilance**, which also influences their sense of regaining control as they feel better equipped to manage their environment.

❖ Cognitive consequences.

Initially the participants engage in little reflective thinking regarding their experience of betrayal. However, they increasingly engage in reflective thinking and enter a stage marked by continual thoughts of betrayal and of relationships in general. Furthermore, the participants are pursued by thoughts of their partner both prior to and subsequent to his or her act of betrayal.

Cognitive patterns are persistent and recurring as the participants continue to search for closure. They are largely debilitating and destructive in nature and have a negative effect on most friendships or relationships the participants have, as well as their relationship with themselves. Cognitive consequences emerging from the data are: 1) **self-punitive ideation**, 2) **paranoid ideation**, 3) **doubt**, 4) **persistent thoughts about the partners' betrayal**, 5) **holding on to the relationship**, 6) **comparison to the known or unknown other in their partners' lives**.

❖ Intrapsychic consequences.

These consequences are facilitated by interactions between internal, covert factors as in the case of intrapsychic conflicts. Intrapsychic consequences are considered to occur in the mind of the individual and result from the actions or interactions, which the participants take, in their experience of betrayal. What emerges from the data is that 1) **denial**, 2) **dissociation**, 3) **ambivalence and idealisation of the partner** and 5) **suppressed anger** are the most prevalent intrapsychic consequences in the participants' experience of betrayal.

At this point we turn to a detailed discussion of the framework as an organisational scheme used in the analysis of the data.

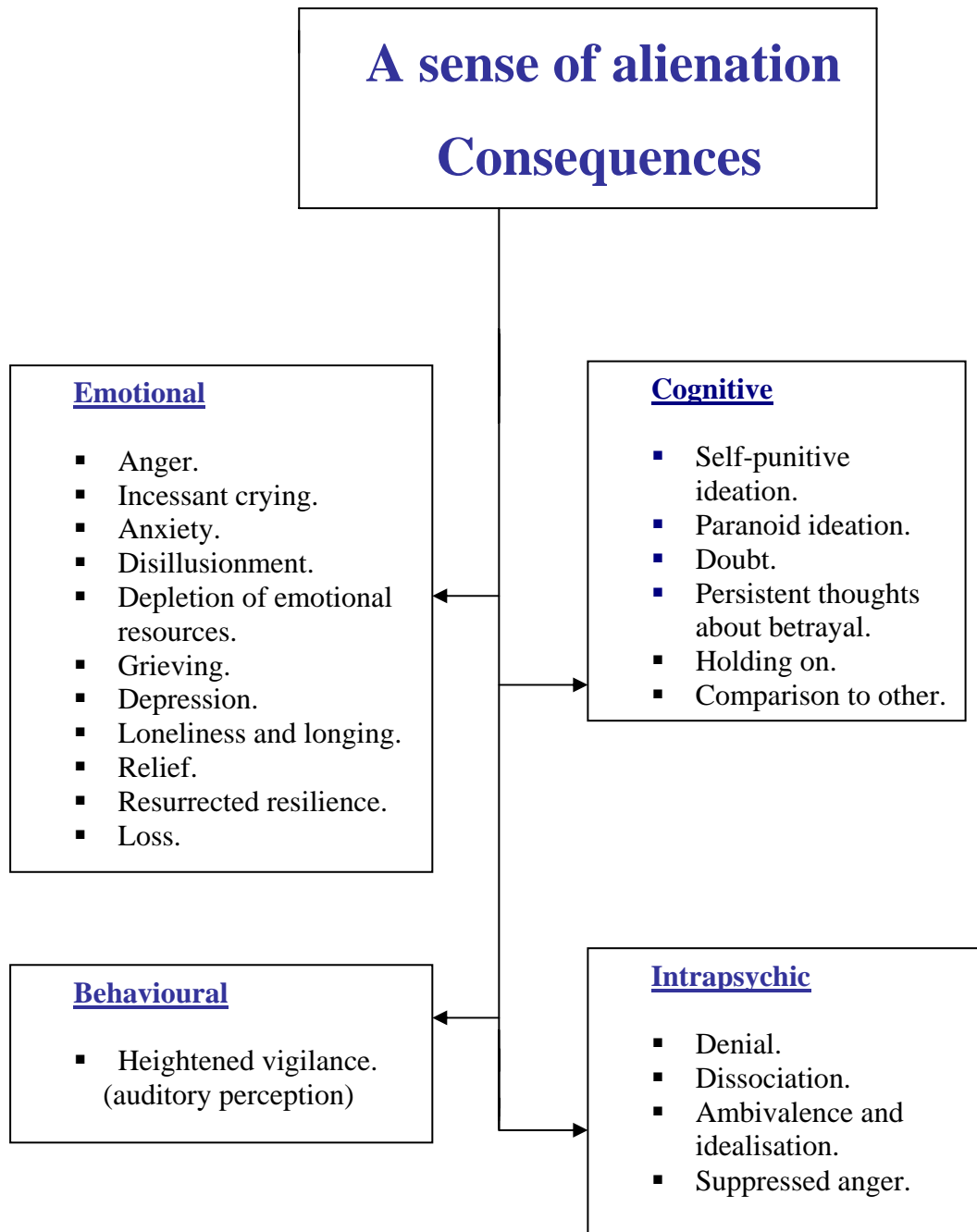


Figure 5.4. Consequences in the framework.

5.6. The framework as a guide to analysis of the data.

As indicated in 4.4.2.1, the framework consists of conditions, actions or interactions and consequences. Conditions in this study have emerged as contextual, intervening and causal are discussed below. The discussion on conditions is followed by actions and interactions and consequences.

5.6.1. Conditions.

5.6.1.1. Contextual conditions.

The contextual conditions influence the actual context of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the actions relating to the phenomenon (**a sense of alienation**) are influenced in particular ways by these conditions. Considering the interpersonal context of an act of betrayal such as infidelity, the set of conditions that seem to be nearest to the phenomenon of **a sense of alienation** is the context of the intimate dyad relationship namely, *the participant* and *the significant other (partner)*.

In considering the context of betrayal in this setting, it may be argued that the contextual conditions are much broader. Such conditions as the war against global espionage, treason at national level and cultural diversity might appear to represent a greater significant context of this phenomenon. In addition, the disciplines of theology and philosophy may contend that the nature of betrayal has its roots in the absence of moral structures within a societal context. The psychological perspective might contend that specific personality traits of the participants and gender are a central factor in their predisposition towards an act of betrayal such as infidelity and may also emphasise treatment models to buffer the effects associated with an act of betrayal. In this study however, betrayal as a unique, lived experience in the lives of the participants in an intimate relationship is a central factor. Consequently, less emphasis has been placed on variables such as the personality traits of the participants and their partners as well as gender within the context of betrayal. Rather factors related to the experience of the participant in relation to the intimate relationship have been emphasised.

The question that directed theoretical sampling was the main research questions and remained: **“What is the experience of betrayal in an intimate relationship?”** The data generated by the interviews however, indicated: **“What happens in the life of an individual when he or she is betrayed in an intimate relationship?”** The core methods of data gathering were audiotaped interviews and member checking (see 4.5.1.2). Theoretical sampling facilitated the emergence of the central themes defining the context of the phenomenon as being the **nature of the intimate dyadic relationship**. This awareness enabled the researcher to recognise a significant question that had emerged from initial analysis: **“Why do individuals experience infidelity as an act of betrayal within an intimate relationship?”** In turn, this led to identifying three main aspects namely, participants’ expectations of the intimate relationship, the characteristics of the participants and their expectations of their partners as the significant other. The contextual conditions that emerged were consequently called **“expectations of the intimate relationship”**, **“characteristics of the self” (participant)** and **“expectations of the significant other”**.

The expectations of the intimate dyad, the characteristics of the participants as well as their expectations of the partner as significant other, were not subjected to quantifiable measurement. Therefore these are regarded as representing the unique expectations of the participants themselves. Expectations which emerged as contextual conditions relating to the intimate dyad were twofold: Firstly, whether consensual engagement in the dyad promised a context of growing intimacy resulting in a sense of connectedness and secondly, whether there were set boundaries in terms of mutual sexual exclusivity between the couple.

Contextual conditions that emerged in relation to the self were trust in the significant other and the participants allowing themselves to become emotionally and physical vulnerable to the significant other. In addition further characteristics that the participants bring to the context of the intimate dyad relate to moral and religious background. The expectations that the participants have of the significant other emerged as contextual and are related to the conditions, which attract the participant to his or her partner. These also include those factors which the participants may find unattractive or cause them to avoid engagement in the relationship.

After much consideration and returning to the data on many occasions, the expectations of the intimate dyad, the characteristics of the participants themselves and their expectations of their

partner as significant other are presented as the context for the phenomenon of **“a sense of alienation”** within the context of infidelity. These conditions meet the criteria set by Strauss and Corbin (1990/1998) whereby a context is a particular set of conditions within which the action or interaction strategies are taken to manage, handle, carry out and respond to a specific phenomenon.

The conditions or expectations of the intimate dyad would remain consistent for entry into the relationship. Furthermore, it is expected that the intimate relationship should create a context in which a sense of belonging and connectedness may be experienced and secondly, one which has mutually, sexually exclusive boundaries. Therefore under these conditions, the participants felt secure in placing their trust in the relationship and the significant other and invested him- or herself at an emotional and physical level in the relationship. These expectations which the participants have of their partner remain consistent for the duration of the relationship and are not usually changed by other conditions, either causal or intervening. Therefore they are contextual for **“a sense of alienation”**.

However when infidelity occurs in an intimate relationship, the consequences of that experience, may affect an individual’s willingness to enter into a subsequent relationship. This means that a negative experience within an intimate relationship may deter an individual from readily engaging in a relationship and withdrawing trust and the willingness to become emotionally and physically vulnerable to a significant other. Should a subsequent relationship be considered however, the new context is established once again and remains consistent for that relationship.

The contextual conditions presented here are therefore those surrounding the participant and the intimate relationship in which he or she engages. In this section the participants’ expectations of the intimate dyad will be presented first. Subsequently, characteristics of the self as perceived by the participants and their expectations of the significant other are presented.

❖ **The participant’s expectations of the intimate dyad.**


The participants’ expectations of the intimate dyad have emerged as contextual to the phenomenon

of “*a sense of alienation*” within the context of betrayal. The emergent contextual properties of an intimate dyad are the following:

- Increasing intimacy, which creates a context for belonging and a sense of connectedness.
- A sense of connectedness to members of the significant others’ friendship and family circles.
- Temporality.
- Set boundaries regarding a mutually sexually exclusive relationship.

◆ Increasing intimacy in the dyadic relationship.

This first property refers to the participant’s experience of growing intimacy and a sense of shared belonging with the significant other. As intimacy grows over time, the level of connectedness between the couple deepens and there is a growing awareness of exclusivity in terms of “us” and “them” (see 2.4.4.1.). The following vignette illustrates the sense of connectedness in the intimate dyad:

 “I realised at that stage, I loved him, I was not just in love with him.... We could spend hours chatting and eventually go out and get take-outs and maybe go to movies...just be in each others’ company for days.....we spent all our free time together, shared everything, became a part of each others’ lives.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

In this manner it is evident that although remaining unique and individual, the self and identity becomes interwoven in the growing intimacy of the dyad. Increased responsiveness to the significant other is also characteristic of this stage, paralleled by a deepening attraction to the partner. During the course of growing intimacy, a partner’s habits which may be contradictory to the conducive nature of the relationship with the significant other, are also accommodated. Consequently the intimate dyad becomes a place of safety, validation and comfort rather than a threat to the well being of the individual.

- ◆ A sense of connectedness in the extended environment of the partner.

Due to the nature of the intimate dyad, the participants also engage in relationships with friends and family members of their partners. In some instances, the participants may initially find it difficult to gain entry into these circles but validation of themselves as consistent and reliable partners within the intimate dyad, facilitate acceptance by others. Participant C relates her experience in the following manner:

☞ “His father is ...you know...the ideal father and the first day I met him, he told me I could have many things but not his son and he changed, you know? I really grew to love his family and everyone that knew him”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

As will become evident from the data analysis provided in the rest of this chapter, the data show that by becoming a constant part of family and friendships circles, an expectation of being the “favoured one” is communicated to the participant by their partner. It also generates a feeling of continuity within the intimate relationship and the participants feel secure in assuming and expecting that their position is one of increasing permanence.

- ◆ Temporality.

The third characteristic that emerges from the data within the intimate dyad, is time. Time proves to be a significant feature in terms of the personal investment made by the participants. In order to experience growing intimacy, it is necessary for the participants to make themselves accessible and available to spending time with the significant other or spending time in the service and support of the intimate dyad. In particular, time is structured around the intimate dyad and the significant other with a strong emphasis on the present. However in the light of the continuous and permanent nature of the relationship, time is also invested in fantasies, hopes and plans for the future. Furthermore in view of the conditions of trust, loyalty and honesty, in determining the continuity of the intimate dyad, these aspects can only be integrated within the dyad over time.

◆ Mutual sexual exclusivity as boundary.

The participants expect that within the context of an intimate dyad, the boundary of mutual sexual exclusivity is an inherent contextual condition of their relationship. This contextual condition holds true for both male and female participants and serves to clearly demarcate the relational context. In addition, the boundary serves to distinguish between outsiders and individuals within the dyad (see 2.4.4.). Maintaining the boundary of mutual sexual exclusivity contributes to a sense of connectedness and also sustains the growing intimacy between the couple.

On the other hand, a violation of the sexually exclusive boundary by one of the members is likely to compromise the continuity of the intimate dyad and destroys the sense of connectedness and intimacy. The expectation of a contextual boundary of mutual sexual exclusivity clearly emerges from the data in all instances. Furthermore the contextual boundary of mutual sexual exclusivity is also a condition for inclusion in the study, which was confirmed prior to the data collection period.

❖ **The characteristics of the self (participant).**

The characteristics of the self, which the participants bring to the context of the relationship, have emerged as contextual to the phenomenon of “**a sense of alienation**” within the context of betrayal. The emergent contextual characteristics of the participants are:

- An informed readiness and willingness to trust the significant other.
- Moral orientation.
- Sense of an integrated self.

◆ An informed readiness and willingness to trust the significant other.

Before engaging in the relationship, there is an understanding that the participant and the significant other enter into an agreement where the well being of the parties is upheld rather than compromised. Analysis of the data indicates that the personal qualities of initial caution, uncertainty and inexperience are replaced by a readiness to engage in the relationship and to trust themselves to a significant other as well as place their trust in a significant other:

☞ “I was very careful before getting involvedHe tried for six months before I finally gave in and told him we could give it a chance [and] he knew where he stood from the beginning...The fact that he persevered for those six months before getting to that stage... I thought that was a good sign.”

Participant C.16 February 2005

In addition, Participant C describes her trust born out of a coerced dependency on her partner in this way:

☞ “I felt very comfortable with him and could talk to him about anything. For three months after my car accident he looked after me...my two arms were broken and I could do nothing for myself. He had to bath me and dress me and wash my hair and face and put cream on my toes and feed me and change the bandages.”

Participant C.16 February 2005.

Participant D reiterates the readiness and willingness to trust the significant other:

☞ “This was my first relationship after coming to terms with my homosexuality and I really trusted him, I had no reason not to. He told me he would be faithful to me and that he didn’t want anyone but me....and I really believed him and relied on everything he said.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005

A further related aspect is the participants’ emotional vulnerabilities, which they expose whilst in the relationship, trusting they will not be humiliated or rejected. Participant A explains:

☞ “I told him I loved him and why I felt that way and that I felt he was the person with whom I wanted to share my life.”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

In addition, the participants make themselves physically vulnerable to their partners:

☞ “The first time we were physically intimate...was just before I left to go overseas ...and I think that was a turning point for me because....that was the first time I had ever been physically intimate with ...anyone for that matter and it was an unbelievably intense experience”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

◆ Moral and religious orientation.

The participants also bring their moral and religious orientation acquired during the process of socialisation, to the intimate relationships. In particular the participants’ expectations of sexual exclusivity in intimate relationships is clearly defined.

Furthermore, the data indicate that their partners’ religious orientation, does not significantly influence the participants’ decision to engage in an intimate relationship. Therefore, their perception of the partner as religiously compatible or incompatible, is accommodated and this perception does not determine the continuity of the intimate dyad. It is notable in this study however, that three of the five participants engaged in relationships with persons of a similar religious orientation, namely Christianity.

Alternatively, analysis of the data indicate that a variable which emerged as a definite deterrent to the engagement of the participant in an intimate dyad, was the wish or need for a casual sexual relationship by a prospective partner, in contrast to a committed, mutually sexually exclusive relationship. The following serves as illustration:

☞ “After dinner ..we were chatting on the sofa and he told me he is madly attracted to me and he asked whether I was seeing anyone at the moment or was anyone pursuing me and I said no, not at that stage. We carried on chatting and then he asked how do I feel about casual sex? I told him it is not even an option, I am not interested, it is not part of my character...of who I am.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005

In all instances, the participants' moral orientation toward sexual behaviour in intimate relationships creates a significant context for the phenomenon of “**a sense of alienation**”. This important finding is explored in detail in the discussion in the following chapter.

◆ Sense of an integrated self.

The participants' sense of an integrated self when they enter and engage in the intimate dyad is the next contextual condition for “**a sense of alienation.**”

Analysis of the data reveals that participants initially engage in the intimate relationship with a sense of an integrated self and a positive attitude towards the idea of relationship with a significant other. Bearing prior negative experiences in mind, the participants feel they are taking an informed and calculated risk with the view to a long-term commitment. They bring amongst others, independence, confidence, and their sexuality to the relationship. In addition, they have a need to give caring and nurturing to their partner and a need to receive similar caring and nurturing from them. Their overall experience of themselves is one of being in touch with their fears of rejection, abandonment and failure as well as optimism and hope for love and happiness within the intimate dyad. In bringing their integrated self they also bring their identity- what they subscribe to and uphold as individuals - essentially, their entire being to the intimate dyad. As illustration, Participant D explains:

☞ “When I am in a relationship, I invest **everything** in that relationship... **everything**... my self, my time, money,. my entire world... I don't hold back.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

Their sense of an integrated self is strengthened or challenged by their partner's interaction with themselves as well as their interaction with family members, friends and colleagues. The participants express feelings of satisfaction regarding their uniqueness as individuals and being accepted by others. Within the intimate dyad, the participants experience themselves as connected and bound to the significant other at various levels. In this manner, they experience an integrated self and identity as meaningfully and purposefully invested in the relational context of the intimate dyad.

Furthermore, as part of an integrated self, the participants bring internal and external resources to the intimate dyad. The data suggest that they bring **internal resources** such as resilience, motivation, hope, optimism, physical and emotional well being and spirituality when first engaging in the intimate relationship. It is evident that as participants prepare to engage in an intimate dyad, they also bring previous experience and knowledge of an intimate dyad to their relationship. They share their knowledge and previous negative experiences with their partners in the hope and with the expectation that a similar experience will not recur in their current relationship:

☞ “Before we become involved...I told him.....I don’t want to hurt him and be unfair to him but because of my previous negative experience...I was paranoid about the same thing [infidelity] happening again. And he said he understood and that it was ok, it wouldn’t happen.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

In addition, data that emerge from the analysis indicate **external resources** such as the love, support and encouragement of family and friends. Some are geographically more distant than others, which implies less contact between individuals. However, the participants describe rewarding relationships with sources of external support, which include acceptance and caring.

Evidence in the data suggests that the participants’ sense of an integrated self and their perceptions of their resources as being abundant and accessible, occur prior to engagement in an intimate dyad. Therefore, it follows that if a participant initially perceives him or herself as lacking in resources or feels vulnerable and unsupported, he or she is less likely to engage in an intimate relationship and consequently, is less likely to experience a sense of belonging and intimacy. Under these circumstances therefore, they are less likely to allow themselves to become vulnerable to an act of infidelity by their partners. The participants’ perception of abundant and accessible internal and external resources therefore creates an important context for the phenomenon of “**a sense of alienation.**” This finding is explored in greater detail in the discussion in the following chapter of this thesis.

❖ **Expectations of the significant other.**

The participants’ expectation of the significant other in the intimate dyad is the next contextual condition for a “**sense of alienation**”.

Analysis of the data indicates that there are specific characteristics that the participants expect of the significant other in the intimate relationship. These characteristics of the partner should remain constant for the duration of the relationship. Furthermore, these expectations of the significant other remain constant for every intimate dyad. These are:

- Respect for the participant's being.
- Commitment to the relationship.

◆ Respect for the participants' being.

The data indicate that although the expectation of respect for the participants' being is a significant aspect brought to the context of the intimate dyad, this expectation is not necessarily overtly communicated to the significant other prior to their engagement in the intimate dyad. Analysis of the data shows that the participants do not consciously consider or question whether their partners will respect their being, within the intimate context of the dyad. Rather, the participants' expectation that their partners will respect them as individuals, is an assumed, fundamental premise of their intimate relationships.

Furthermore, during the course of the relationship, the absence or lack of this contextual condition of the intimate dyad is not consciously considered. Only once the act of infidelity has been disclosed or exposed, do the participants consciously experience their partners as lacking respect for their being: As illustration, Participant A reflects:

☞ “I never thought I would expose my feelings the way I did in the letter...but I think it was a case of...now I'm giving everything, it's the last I have to give and then whatever happens must happen. I would have stayed for much longer if I hadn't done that and he treated it with such little respect... I think that's what changed my feeling towards him. I have no time for such a person, not even as a friend.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

As a result, an interesting aspect of the intimate relational context emerges from the data and points to both conscious and unconscious communication between the couple. At this stage

however, further discussion and interpretation of the findings will be conducted in the following chapter of this thesis.

◆ Commitment to the relationship.

The second property of expectations that the participants have of their partner is their commitment to the relationship. Analysis of the data indicates that the participants expect commitment by their partners to the relationship, which is perceived in the quality of their **behaviour and responsibility towards the participant and the relationship** as well as the **time** spent with the participant. These expectations are interestingly consistent and are sustained over time.

☞ “I found it difficult to understand.....at first because although he didn’t actually voice his commitment to me, his behaviour was that of a committed partner and I think I began to experience it as commitment from him. He spent all his time with me, took me to family functions and to his mother...those type of things.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

What also clearly emerges from the data is that the participants perceive commitment of their partners to the relationship in their **discussions and plans for a shared future**.

☞ “His main reason for leaving the relationship he said was that he battles with commitment and the responsibilities associated with a committed relationship. He doesn’t want to have to come home every night. I don’t buy that for one minute because in six years after planning to get engaged as well, this was the first time he ever spoke of not wanting the responsibility of commitment.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Exclusive sexual intimacy and faithfulness between the couple was a further signal of commitment to the relationship. Boundaries were firmly set around sexual exclusivity within the context of the intimate dyad and the data yielded that social occasions which excluded the participant yet included members of the opposite gender were non-threatening if enjoyed within a group setting, as opposed to a one-on-one interaction with their partner. The expectation of faithfulness as a sign of commitment in some instances was voiced prior to engagement in the relationship:

☞ “I was still thinking about getting involved with him and I told him, I expected him to be honest, reliable and faithful, so he knew...and he still carried on dating me which I thought was a good sign.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

All the participants and their partners shared the expectation and understanding that faithfulness was inherent to the relationship and indicated commitment. However, Participant A’s expectation of faithfulness and sexual exclusivity was not verbally confirmed or rejected by her partner. She experienced him as uncomfortable with emotional aspects of their relationship and vague responses were integrated into their interaction for fear of losing him:

☞ “More than once I confronted him with which way our relationship was heading and he either didn’t answer me or gave me a vague response such as ‘but you are in my life, what more do you want’? The fact that I loved him and there wasn’t any negative feedback...that was enough to keep me there.”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

A further aspect that is perceived as commitment to the relationship is the **dependability or trustworthiness of the partner over time**. For example, can they be trusted to promote rather than threaten the relationship? Can they be trusted to protect the participants’ vulnerabilities? When engaging in the relationship, the partner as trustworthy appears to have been validated. The data suggest that this property of the intimate dyad has one very clear dimension associated with the trustworthiness of the significant other:

Always → Never

A recurrent theme in the data regarding the trustworthiness of the partner is that if there is any doubt in the participants’ experience and perception that their partner is undependable or can not be trusted, there is little reason to become involved in a potential relationship or further the existing relationship. Trustworthiness is perceived as the behaviour of the partner that indicates his or her intention to promote rather than harm the relationship. In this manner, the participants consider the degree of commitment of their partner to the relationship along the following dimension namely:

Large → Small

In order to gain the trust of the participant, a related central theme that emerges in the data is that of the perceived **honesty** of the significant other. Honesty is regarded as one of the most important characteristics which the partner brings to the relationship and which engenders trust in the participant. The participants' expectation of honesty of the significant other remains for the duration of the relationship and increases over time. In addition, the expectation of trustworthiness and honesty of the significant other plays a key role in the phenomenon of **“a sense of alienation”**.

Analysis of the data reveals that the participants' expectations of their partners are measured against their own. They clearly expect to receive what they feel they are able to bring to the relationship. Consequently, they experience their standard and level of expectations of respect for the other, trustworthiness and honesty as reasonable and fair. What remains apparent from the data however is that the participants do not necessarily always communicate their expectations of the significant other clearly. This does not appear to be an oversight but rather appeals to general unspoken “rules” of relationships between individuals of similar moral orientations and cultures. These “rules” are acquired during the socialisation process and enable them to accomplish desirable outcomes within the context of intimate dyads. The second set of conditions in the framework we now focus our attention on is intervening conditions.

5.6.1.2. Intervening conditions.

Intervening conditions are those conditions, which basically facilitate or hinder the relational process and lead to a **“sense of alienation”**. The previous section described the participant and the significant other as the foundation of the context of the relational process. The conditions that emerge from the analysis as the intervening conditions are those, which lead to a **“sense of alienation”** within the context of the intimate dyad. The two major categories refined as intervening conditions are *memory* and *absence of the other*. These two conditions influence the fundamental relational process at various stages as described in the following paragraphs.

❖ **Memory.**

Memories of their partners' behaviour occurs once the act of infidelity has been exposed or disclosed within the intimate dyad. The participants try to think about something in their relationship which could be related to and explain the act of betrayal. This often happens in the context of uncertainty. By remembering, the participants attempt to gain an understanding, insight and re-evaluation of their truth about the past. Therefore, memory is the condition describing how participants consider and access their own previous life experiences. Memory may inform an action or allow a conclusion to be drawn, which effects the participant's experience of **a sense of alienation**. The aspects of memory that are most relevant to the participants' experience are **retrospection** and **introspection**. These are verified in what they remember or access as they consider their experience.

◆ **Retrospection.**

The characteristic of needing to make sense of a situation frequently prompts memory. A prompt could be an incident or merely something someone had said. **Retrospection** allows the participant to put pieces of a puzzle together by tracing the present back to the past, considering incidents or the verbal and non-verbal actions of the significant other. Previous experiences of infidelity in intimate relationships are also accessed in this manner:

☞ “She asked me to take her back after our divorce but we ended up fighting and making up all the time. Then I found out that she was having an affair with someone at work, which had already started before our attempt at reconciliation. And you know, funny enough, it was as if the past replayed itself. I experienced exactly the same things then which I experienced the first time she had an affair.”

Participant B.16 February 2005

Participants gradually trace their steps back through the relationship looking for possible clues, which facilitate their **sense of alienation**. Interestingly enough in all instances, the data reveals that participants find it particularly difficult to remember a moment or time in their relationship when the infidelity may have occurred. Rather, in all instances retrospection leads to speculation

regarding the most likely moment during which infidelity may have occurred, but none of the participants are able to confirm or validate their suspicions as their partners are not willing to engage in dialogue regarding the betrayal. Furthermore, although the participants have credible sources that informed them of their partners' infidelity, the partners deny this information:

☞ “I walked...into the restaurant where he was sitting at a table for two and asked him what was going on. He had said he was having dinner with a group of friends but there were no friends. I pleaded with him to be honest with me and then.... his date came back to the table.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

Analysis of the data reveals that the participants who had recently experienced their partner's infidelity were less likely to retrospectively access as much detail of their experience as those who had been betrayed at least a year previously. Specific aspects of the experience of betrayal therefore may facilitate or suppress the participants' memory. Greater attention will be paid to this aspect of the participants' experience in the discussion of betrayal presented in the following chapter. The descriptions and conclusions in this section are consequently founded purely on evidence in the data that indicates the participants' use of this cognitive process.

In their narratives, participants at times retrospectively identified a memory prompt regarding a salient aspect of their relationship, suddenly and consciously. Participant E reflects on some of the initial events prior to becoming involved with her partner:

☞ “Thinking back about it now, to the time before our relationship started ...he asked me to ‘phone him when I got back from my trip to let him know how it went which I did....but I actually had no reason to do so, I need not have started something.”


Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Memory may also be prompted by a subconscious awareness. Participant A, whose partner betrayed her two years previously, becomes aware in talking about the experience how unexciting and mundane her life had become after their relationship ended:

☞ “I have never really thought about it in that way before but I miss the feeling of being “high” which I had when he was around...things have become more interesting now but they were so **exciting** when he was around.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

Participants were willing to share their retrospective experience in as much detail as they possibly could remember. However, the strain associated with having to remember what was evidently an intensely painful and in some instances recent experience, was clearly etched on their faces and their bearing at the end of each of the interviews. This led to the following comments in my researcher's journal:


³  "I have just completed my third interview and the narratives of suffering have made a great impact on my understanding of the participants' experience of betrayal. They seemed cautious in the beginning, one did not arrive until contacted by my colleague again and even when he did arrive, he appeared hesitant and very nervous with a detailed explanation of why he had arrived an hour later. At the end of his interview he spontaneously commented that his lengthy explanation for being late had been fabricated and he had actually got "cold feet". When asked what made him decide to keep the appointment he said he didn't want to let my colleague and myself down because he knew his contribution was important.

What struck me most about each of the participants as they related their narratives was the noticeable resilience and courage in coping with a pain, which in some instances had no words. Yet, irregardless of the time lapse since infidelity had occurred, they still seemed so fragile and there were many new tears and emotions. What was also evident was that their loss was genuine and profound. Even the humour about suicide ideation, the matter-of-fact and distant narratives, which seemed to be told about another and the bravado - couldn't hide the fragility of their beings. They communicated a loss of connectedness, loss of belonging and a reverberating longing. The pain in describing these losses seemed so great, it almost felt tangible."

Researcher Journal. 16 February 2005.


When participants found that accessing certain memories about their partners' infidelity became too painful, they would stop their narrative and wait for further prompting from myself. In addition, at times, the participants preferred not to remember, but their memories became more accessible in the light of their narratives, which also served as a stimulus. In some instances, participants had also been betrayed by a partner in a subsequent relationship. Memories regarding these experiences also became an influencing factor in the experience of **a sense of alienation.**


In order to make sense and track the experience of infidelity, the participants compared existing knowledge regarding their partners' behaviour to the information of betrayal and drew new conclusions. As Participant D states:

 “He pushed all the right buttons and knew exactly what to say. I think he summed me up immediately, where I came from, the things that interested me and makes life interesting...and he did it so well, exceptionally well....He was definitely unstable and he played with me. Thinking back about him now ...he has no-one and he is actually quite a sad case...but there is justice and what will be will be.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005

Furthermore, in instances where accessing memories about their partners' infidelity became too painful, the participants attempted to deal with their pain in the form of humour. Humour was introduced by the participants possibly to hide their vulnerability and ease the tension, which was evident at the beginning of the interviews. Humour frequently laced the interviews during the course of the data gathering process. The following entry in my researcher's journal illustrates this aspect:

 “At the start of each of the interviews, the relationship between myself as the researcher and each participant was somewhat tense. However, the participants cracked jokes or made humorous comments possibly to break some of the tension created by the research situation. Although the participants had been briefed as to the procedure to be followed prior to the actual interview taking place and I had tried to put the participants at ease before the start of their individual interviews, it was only during the course of the interviews that the participants appeared more relaxed and confident about the procedure. Their verbalisation of the fatigue they felt at the end of their interviews was also witness to their courage in providing generous and rich descriptions of their experience of betrayal.

³. The symbol  is used to indicate the researcher's journal

The introduction of humour by each of the participants about what appears to be such an intense, painful experience and in some instances multiple experiences, possibly enables the participants to perceive their lived experience of betrayal as “manageable”. Therefore, use of humour deflects from the intensity of the emotional pain they would need to revisit during the course of the interviews. For example, participant C, who had had the longest relationship and the most recent betrayal, in seriously contemplating whether to commit suicide after finding out that her partner had betrayed her, laughed and joked about her preference for photographs under benign circumstances but that she wouldn’t want her photograph to be taken once she had committed suicide-it wouldn’t be flattering. Considering the pain of the experience she was in essence sharing, her comment was most likely introduced to detract from the intense emotional pain she had experience as a result of her partners’ betrayal.

As the participant observer, I felt I needed to respectfully respond to the humour introduced into the interviews by the participant as a way of joining with them yet being careful not to miss-communicate my understanding of the impact of their experience of betrayal. At no stage during the interviews or the research process however, did I initiate humour or escalate further humour from the descriptions, which the participants provided. I attempted to remain acutely aware throughout our interaction of the profoundness and intensity of the pain which they were communicating.”

Researcher Journal. 18 April 2005.

As indicated in the initial paragraph of this section, the central aspects of memory in this study are **retrospection** and **introspection**. Retrospection has been discussed and our attention now turns to introspection in the experience of infidelity.

◆ Introspection.

The second aspect of memory that emerges from the data is that of introspection. Introspection appears to be closely associated with the need for understanding and reaching closure in the experience of betrayal. Here participants look to themselves and consciously search for clues of incidents or actions which may have contributed to their partner’s infidelity. Data suggest that in the absence of a viable explanation for the cause of infidelity, the participants find introspection to be a painful exercise. Furthermore, the lack of insight gained is fuelled by ambiguity due to the

partners abandoning the relationship or contradicting their act or acts of infidelity with positive verbal affirmations of the participants' self and identity.

Introspection and the absence of new, meaningful knowledge with regard to the reasons for betrayal, lead to the participants experiencing self-blame and anger: As Participant A describes:

☞ “I think what angers me the most is that I told him I loved him and he still carried on with the relationship even though he knew he wasn't planning on letting it develop into a future. Then I ask myself, should I not have ended our relationship then, when I didn't get the reaction I wanted? I blamed myself for being stupid because I am usually a very good judge of character and the questions I asked myself were things like, how did he manage to fool you and for so long? I still don't know but why did I not leave when I wasn't getting any response to my questions about where our relationship was heading?”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

Furthermore, introspection increases the participants' insecurity in the face of the experience of betrayal. Their inability to understand the reasons for the act of infidelity also has direct implications for their perception of themselves and for future relationships. In addition, introspection elicits feelings of worthlessness, a decrease in self-confidence and a perception of themselves as victims. Questions regarding why infidelity should happen to them when they are basically “good” people, undeserving of the trauma and not knowing what they did that was unacceptable, remain unanswered and result in a cycle of relentless thought processes which continue to culminate in an never-ending, unanswered “Why?” In particular, the participants perceive the act of infidelity as a rejection and abandonment of themselves but are powerless to alter or integrate the communicated adverse parts of their personalities because these parts are not known to them at a conscious level. Therefore they find it difficult to determine which negative aspects of the self need to be changed and then integrated.

During the process of rationalisation and justification, the data reveal that responsibility for the betrayal under these circumstances is externalised and placed with their partners. Being unable to own and change or improve parts of their self and identity which are perceived as being unacceptable to a significant other in an intimate relationship, results in the participants feeling fragmented and insecure with little optimism for subsequent meaningful and lasting relationships.

In the light of absent rational and logical reasons for the partner's infidelity, introspection leads the participants to draw conclusions which are coerced rather than validated in order to put an end to their uncertainty regarding their partners' behaviour:

☞ “I used to wonder about why he did what he did and what was wrong with me. Not anymore....I think there is something radically wrong with him, to be able to keep up the “game” for so long, so I’m actually very fortunate we didn’t end up together...and he obviously doesn’t have a ounce of backbone. I think about him as dangerous, a hunter looking for prey, who will hurt....and abuse.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005.

However, instead of gaining closure, further uncertainty is created as the participants remain unaware of their personal limitations or their shortcomings in the relationship, which may have contributed to their partner's betrayal.

Introspection by the participants leads to a recognition of negative aspects of themselves influenced by the context of the intimate dyad. These aspects are regarded as “out of character” behaviour, brought about by the context of the intimate dyad. Jealousy, spying and protecting the partner's reputation even if it means being dishonest, are some of the aspects, which the participants identified as parts of themselves, which they usually control or suppress. Participant A describes how she experienced jealousy, which was not a personality trait she initially brought to the intimate dyad:

☞ “I wanted to talk about our relationship and where it was heading but he wouldn't give me an answer, so I left it because I decided it was more important for me to have him in my life so we just carried on. But our relationship was riddled with conflict because I became verbally aggressive towards him and what was interesting.....I became terribly possessive over him especially with regard to other women. I don't regard myself as a possessive person in general, I have never been and it was never an issue in our relationship before. But I became jealous and petty and although I tried hard not to shown it, he saw it in my attitude.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

In addition, Participant B remembers how he started spying on his ex-wife during the time they were trying to reconcile:

☞ “I really tried to forgive her but it is true what they say, a person never forgets. It became a part of my life because I kept wondering and she never admitted to the affair. In the time we were trying to reconcile, she suddenly couldn’t tell me she loved me any longer. This happened previously so I started spying on her during the day. I didn’t want to and I really tried to divert my attention to my work. I tried to force myself not to go past the house but the hurt and the pain of how it [infidelity] felt before....I just had to go past and see for myself.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

After much introspection, Participant D came to the realisation that his relationship had turned him into a liar in order to protect his partner’s reputation and interests. Here introspection was also causal in reinstating his perception of himself as an upright and honest individual:

☞ “I had to become a liar....to function in the world out there....I had to tell people I was having dinner with a best friend....I couldn’t tell them who I was really having dinner with. I used all my good friends as alibis at that stage and where I find myself now....it’s terrible to think that I could ever have done such a thing. When we broke up, I had more control and I was unbelievably honest with everyone around me...it just happened that way. I didn’t have any more energy to pretend ...or to carry people along with me, who weren’t honest. My parents my friends, everyone, absolutely everyone knew about us. There was total honesty and transparency in all my relationships.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005

❖ **Absence of the significant other**

This is the second category that has emerged as a major intervening condition for participants as they experience a sense of alienation from a significant other. In the context of an intimate dyad, the absence of the significant other is a key intervening condition. In particular, the physical absence of the significant other brings home to the participants the reality of the experience of betrayal in what appears to be a somewhat unreal and fragmented experience. Physical absence is

emphasised here because the partners have a very strong conscious presence as the participants hold the experience and their partners very vividly in mind particularly once the relationship has been abandoned. This finding will be discussed at greater length during the course of the next chapter.

The absence of the partner may also emphasise the absence of mutual friends and family members. However, lack of physical proximity shifts their influence mainly to the category of memory. A significant distinction between a sense of connectedness in an intimate dyad (see 5.5.1.2.) and a sense of connectedness to friends and family members is evident here.

As participants describe the physical absence of the other in their experience of infidelity they indicate that:

- By being physically absent, the partner remains oblivious to the extent of the damage he or she has caused the participant.
- The awareness of the deceitfulness and dishonesty of the partner in committing the act of infidelity is more painful than his or her physical absence.
- They experience a renewed sense of loneliness and longing, which they had prior to being in a relationship.


What is it about the physical absence of the other that is significant in this experience? Data reveal that the physical absence of the other increases the participants' inability to reach closure with regard to abandonment by their partner. Abandonment speaks to the withdrawal of support and unexplained rejection by the partner of the participant. Therefore, this has major implications for the way they think about themselves and about relationships, past, present and future. The perceptions formed in these relationships are not limited to intimate relationships but are also generalised to other relationships. Although the experience of infidelity draws attention to the current relationship, the physical absence of the other influences the *loss of belonging* and *disconnectedness* which the participants have with regard to relationships and to themselves and also influences their perception of *the relationship as having been genuine or fake*.

◆ Disconnectedness in relationships.

The first property of the physical absence of the significant other is that the participants experience disconnectedness in relationships. This includes both the intimate dyad as well as relationships with others. As they try and make sense of the seemingly irrational act of infidelity, they repeatedly search for answers to the question, “Why?” After exploring many avenues of reasoning and thought, their thinking remains inconclusive and unconfirmed as a result of the physical absence of the other. In the light of this, they are unable to entertain or anticipate future relationships or to reach closure regarding the recent relationship. Failure, uncertainty, rejection, humiliation and feigned acceptance by their partners if confronted, add to their sense of disconnectedness in relationships.

Furthermore, the participants experience a sense of disconnectedness from themselves. Whilst in the relationship, they regard themselves as integrated and connected to their perception of themselves. Only once their partners’ infidelity has been exposed or disclosed, do they experience feelings of disintegration and disconnectedness as well as concern for their true identity. Furthermore, two tendencies in the participants’ behaviour emerge from the data.

Firstly, in the majority of instances, the participants have no intention or desire to become involved in a subsequent intimate relationship after betrayal has occurred. However, a second tendency emerged which indicated that Participant B attempted to reconcile himself to the emotional aspect of intimacy in a relationship through temporary sexual promiscuity:

 “I am not embarrassed to tell you that when my ex-wife and I finally stopped trying to reconcile....I slept with many women....and it wasn’t so much the sex I wanted but rather the feeling of being emotionally close to another person.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

However, they do attempt to reconnect to themselves in various ways, one of which is becoming absorbed in their work and by attempting to do things, which previously confirmed their perception of their own competence.

Furthermore, the participants' sense of disconnectedness is exacerbated by the experience of being alone and the absence of sharing. What clearly emerges from the data however is that the participants do not long for or miss the absent partner *per se*. Rather, they long for the physical and emotional presence and closeness of a significant other in a mutually rewarding, intimate dyad. The presence of the significant other lends reassurance to daily living and although the participants are independent individuals, they experience a feeling of support, belonging and connection to another within the context of the intimate dyad. Participant A describes her experience of being alone:

☞ “I think I miss him sometimes because I am alone and he was good company. We had fun together and we were always together...**that** I miss....but if you asked me whether I missed him as person.... and that is the main reason for not being able to carry on...no, that's not true”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

Participant C and D respectively emphasise the aspect of support which they experienced in the intimate dyad and which they miss at present:

☞ “ What do I miss about the relationship? I think the fact that I am alone now....I miss being in a relationship. I never had a problem with being alone before but I realise now that the relationship has ended, that I am alone and I don't like it. There was always someone one could do things with....there was support. It's not a case of **having** someone.”

Participant C.16 February 2005

☞ “I left [to go overseas]....on a pink cloud...it was wonderful that this had happened to me. I had felt so lonely and now there was someone, it was fantastic.....After the relationship crumbled....I realised....now I have to get out there on my own....and it was such a weird idea because I had felt so safe [in the relationship].”

Participant D. 6 April 2005

Being alone and feeling unsupported is an important influencing factor in the participants' experience of infidelity. In this instance, the participant no longer perceives himself or herself to be worthy in a relationship and the message he or she receives is “ I am unacceptable”. Being rejected or abandoned therefore is easily interpreted as “I am not worthy to be in an intimate

relationship.” Not knowing why they have been rejected and abandoned however, facilitates the property of disconnectedness. The property of disconnectedness not only immediately after betrayal, but also as the participants anticipate future relationships remains a key intervening condition in the physical absence of the other. Furthermore, disconnectedness from others and from themselves is also central to facilitating the experience of a sense of alienation.

◆ The relationship as genuine or fake.

The second property of the *absence of the other* is the uncertainty the participants experience with regard to the authenticity of the relationship as well the implication this has for their experience of reality in the relationship. When examining the relationship retrospectively, the data reveal that participants question aspects of the relationship, which they previously believed were genuine. This line of questioning leads to unsatisfactory conclusions and an increase in their ambiguity. Furthermore, the participants have significant difficulty integrating new knowledge gained as a result of the act of infidelity, with the memory of their experience in the relationship at that time. For example, Participant C found it difficult to distinguish between what was genuine and fake in the relationship after being informed of her partner’s betrayal. This was causal in generating a repetitive cycle of retrospection and questions regarding her perception of her partner’s motives for “pretending to care” in the relationship. In addition, the participants’ perception of their emotions as valued gifts, which they brought to the relationship, are questioned subsequent to betrayal and concluded as being worthless and unacceptable. These perceptions held by the participants are causal in intensifying the humiliation, which they feel as a result of their increased vulnerability in the intimate dyad.

The inability to gain closure or enter into satisfactory dialogue with their partner about their ambiguity escalates their insecurity and constrains their ability to integrate the experience. What also clearly emerges from the data is that even though some of the participants are able to enter into dialogue with their partners, they remain uncertain regarding what was genuine and false in the relationship because their partners deny the fact that they have committed infidelity. Furthermore, they maintain that the participants are still the “favoured one” whilst abandoning the relationship. Placing the participants in this double bind is central to the communication from the partner in all instances as they abandon the relationship. As the following vignette illustrates:

☞ “When I saw him again, I confronted him and specifically asked him whether there was something I should have done differently, for future reference and he said no, I was fine just as I was. Then I asked him, did I do something wrong and again he said no, I didn’t do anything wrong..... he just wasn’t able to commit. This after we had been together for six years. Then he said if he ever got married it would be to someone just like me because I am so easy to get along with ”

Participant C.16 February 2005

Analysis of the data also reveals that by ignoring the act or acts of infidelity and attempting to continue the relationship where they left off, their partners contribute to the participants’ uncertainty regarding the authenticity of their experience in the relationship. Participant A describes this experience as follows:

☞ “After a year and two months he just called me one day and chatted as if nothing had ever happened. I was stunned and so overwhelmed, I automatically just chatted. Then he said we should go away for a weekend, which we did, to the mountains and it was as if nothing had changed. My first reaction was, nothing ever happened and it was really a very strange feeling.....it felt as if I was in another time and another place, it was very strange.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

She added that attempting to make sense of the experience of betrayal and integrating it into her reality, is one of the most difficult aspects:

☞ “It is very difficult to understand that.... that which I experienced and that which I now believe really happened are poles apart and I battle with that. It feels as if my experience is so far removed from the truth. I don’t feel I can trust my own judgement in matters any longer because I was so totally, totally convinced that everything that happened was genuine and it wasn’t. The question I can’t stop asking myself is: ‘At what stage did he decide to betray me, at what stage did our relationship become a lie?’ If he had apologised and meant it I could have read something genuine in the relationship but nothing supports the fact that there was ever anything real about our relationship”

Participant A.15 February 2005

The data reveal that validation of the participant's experience of rejection and abandonment prior to finalising the relationship is important in bringing a sense of reality to the experience of betrayal. As Participant A indicates in the vignette described above, an apology from her partner would have validated her experience of reality and helped her to integrate his infidelity. In a similar vein, Participant E mentions that she intuitively felt that her partner was abandoning the relationship but she needed him to validate her experience by admitting to the fact that he was leaving her.

The experience of disconnectedness and fragmentation, which the participants experience with regard to themselves and their relationships, is confounded by the lack of validation regarding their experience of betrayal. In addition, the property of ambiguity regarding the authenticity of the relationship remains a key intervening condition in facilitating *a sense of alienation*. We turn now to the next section of this chapter, which describes the causal conditions that emerge from data in the study.

5.6.1.3. Causal conditions.

Causal conditions represent sets of events or happenings that influence the experience of betrayal and lead to **a sense of alienation**. Analysis of the data reveals that there are two central conditions, which cause participants to experience **a sense of alienation** as a result of their partner's infidelity. The first condition is **the disclosure of infidelity** and the second condition is the **manner in which infidelity is orchestrated**.

❖ **The disclosure of infidelity.**

The first causal condition for **a sense of alienation**, which emerges from analysis of the data, is the disclosure of infidelity. The word "disclosure" in this context refers to either a confession by the partner to the act of infidelity, or exposure of the act of infidelity by an external source. In this study, the act of infidelity was disclosed by an external source known to the participants and their partners in all instances. I acknowledge that within the broader context of betrayal, the disclosure or exposure of infidelity may have numerous diverse forms. For the purpose of this discussion, however, disclosure of infidelity is directed by the findings generated from the data in this study, which focuses on externally derived knowledge.

Disclosure of infidelity by implication results in “**knowing**”. “Knowing” occurs once the participant is informed about his or her partner’s infidelity. This new knowledge is information, which the participants did not conceive of prior to the act of infidelity being exposed or disclosed as they did not consciously entertain the possibility of their partner committing infidelity. Therefore disclosure of the act of betrayal facilitated unforeseen and new information in each instance.

The occurrence of “knowing” in an act of infidelity also needs to be understood in the context of its opposite namely, “**not knowing**”. There are certain questions that may guide our understanding of “knowing” and “not knowing” as it has emerged from the data. These are:

- What elicits the awareness of “knowing” and “not knowing”?
- How do participants respond to “knowing” and “not knowing”?
- How are “knowing” and “not knowing” causal conditions in the experience of a sense of alienation?

◆ What elicits the awareness of “knowing” or not “knowing?”

This question may be considered from both a **conscious** and an **unconscious** perspective. Firstly, at a **conscious** level the participant is given new information by a friend or colleague, which challenges and distorts his or her perception of reality and emphasises the extent to which the participant “*did not know*”. He or she therefore becomes aware, that what they thought they knew or believed to be the “truth” with regard to their partners’ fidelity, was in effect a distortion of the “truth”. As Participants B and D respectively indicate:

☞ “Suddenly she withdrew, she didn’t talk much and she refused to have sex with me. She also couldn’t tell me she loved me and before then she always could and she did ...and then one day...a woman whom I know well ‘phoned me and said she had seen a letter which my wife had written to a colleague of ours, telling him she loves him and can’t live without him.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005.

☞ “My first week away he would call three times a day, we would text twice or more a day and he had given me 45 chocolates, one for each day I would be away. We would e-mail and then...the calls started becoming irregular and then he missed a day, which freaked me out. When I eventually got hold of him he said he had fallen asleep in front of the television. His e-mails also stopped. When I got back,.... we had dinner and he told me he couldn’t handle the emotional intensity of our relationship any longer and we would also have to stop being intimate...we could be friends.I was so confused. A month later a colleague of his told me that there had been many others all along in the time we were together.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

“Knowing” or new knowledge is provided consciously by another person, external to the relationship. In significant contrast to “knowing” is the awareness of the participant when he or she realises that they “**did not know**”. At a **conscious** level then, the contrast between “**knowing**” and “**not knowing**” focuses on new information, which is acquired by the participant as opposed to the lack of the new information, which is withheld by a person outside the intimate dyad. A further aspect of “not knowing” or conscious lack of knowledge is that the participant has no means of predicting that infidelity will occur and he or she is therefore unprepared for the significant ramifications of the experience:

☞ “A friend of mine phoned and asked whether I was aware of the fact that he was also seeing someone else. They had been seeing one another from the time we had met and started going out..... She lived in [another town] so the chances of ever bumping into them or knowing about them were very slim.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

Furthermore, “**knowing**” in general terms refers to the advantage an individual has in being able to predict or manage a situation effectively by drawing on the necessary acquired skills and resources. However, in the context of infidelity or an act of betrayal, skills and resources become stunted and inaccessible. The trauma associated with “**not knowing**”, impairs the participants’ immediate ability to function effectively once their partners’ betrayal has been disclosed or exposed.

After learning of her partner's betrayal, Participant A recalls:

☞ “I couldn't believe that a person would do that to another person. It felt so unreal, the feeling that it must be impossible... it can't be happening.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

Participants B, C, and D respectively describe their reactions to “knowing”:

☞ “Do you know what it is like to feel “blank”? You walk into the kitchen, pour yourself a glass of water and you ask yourself a million times “what is going on here?” without being able to find any answers.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005.

☞ “I was very shocked....it feels.. as if your whole life...your world has collapsed. I am a very independent person but at that stage I wanted someone to tell me where to go or what to do and I didn't want to be alone, I had to be with somebody.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

☞ “ I remember... I sat inside and couldn't stop shaking. I think that was the closest I had ever come to a psychosis. It felt like a complete breakdown.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

Lastly, Participant E describes her reaction when learning of her partner's betrayal:

☞ “I have never felt like that before....it was such an empty feeling...my legs wouldn't move and my ears felt as if they were buzzing...I couldn't feel, I couldn't think, I felt immobilized....and I saw nothing around me.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

The impact of an act of infidelity therefore also lies in its unpredictability and unexpectedness. The findings in this study indicate that all the participants were caught unaware which increased their vulnerability and compromised their ability to cope with the consequences associated with the experience. These consequences are discussed in greater detail in 5.6.1.5.

An important related aspect of “**not knowing**” or lack of knowledge, which prevents closure for the participants is the real reason for their partners’ infidelity. The relationship is abandoned and they are left with a legacy of ignorance regarding what really went wrong in the intimacy of a connectedness that spoke of a shared future. Furthermore, the participants who had experienced betrayal at least a year prior to their interviews still question what went wrong in the intimate dyad and are unable to reach closure specifically regarding their role in the abandoned relationship.

Furthermore “not knowing” how to manage and integrate their partners’ infidelity into their experience and future perspectives regarding relationships is a further related aspect. Resilience, coping skills and emotional resources seem limited at this stage as Participant C indicates:

☞” I have many questions but I don’t see my way clear to make myself more vulnerable at this stage...it is too painful. So, I’m just plodding along. I have to believe in the possibility of a happy relationship but how it is going to happen and how I will manage it I don’t know. At this stage I don’t know whether a good man existsI don’t know, I just don’t know.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

It is only once their partners’ infidelity has been exposed or disclosed that the participants become aware that their “not knowing” as opposed to “knowing” is wider than they had anticipated. It is this awareness that is more likely to elicit further indications of “not knowing”. The intervening conditions of *retrospection (memory)* and *absence of the significant other* (see 5.5.1.2.) contribute to the causal condition of knowing.

In addition, what clearly emerges from the data regarding “not knowing” is the aspect of the length of the relationship. Participants who had been in shorter-term relationships had forged fewer relational bonds with extended family and friends of the partner that prevented them from further humiliation. However, those in extended relationships, which included family members, colleagues and friends and which had continued over a longer period of time, were more susceptible to experiencing increased humiliation.

“Knowing” in terms of knowledge, which the participants bring to relationships, is that which they derive from previous experiences. Once the effects and consequences of failed relationships have

been integrated either effectively or ineffectively into the participants' experience, they inevitably have to risk being hurt or rejected again in a future relationship, or face imminent loneliness.

What also emerges from the data is that knowledge gained from a previous experience of a partner's infidelity does not necessarily protect the participant from a similar experience in an existing- or a future relationship. Rather, it may exacerbate the new experience, particularly if the partner was aware at the time of engaging in the relationship, of the participant's increased vulnerability and willingness to risk and trust a partner again. Participant B, talking to his new partner, describes this aspect of trust in a relationship as follows :

☞ "You knew from the beginning what I went through in my marriage. You even told me you felt really sorry for me and that you were sorry that it had to happen to me because what type of woman does that to her partner? And then? Then you went and did exactly the same."

Participant B. 16 February 2005.

At an **unconscious** level, communication occurs in the interaction of the intimate dyad. When the participants are informed and therefore "**know**" that his or her partner has committed an act of infidelity, he or she has already experienced some sense of disconnectedness in their relationship as a result of their partners' emotional withdrawal. Consequently, once the betrayal has been disclosed or exposed, "**knowing**" may facilitate an awareness of incidents or clues, which were communicated unconsciously to the participant by the partner. These clues were not entertained in the conscious minds of the participants for the duration of the relationship but were deferred and accommodated unconsciously resulting in a lived reality of "**not knowing**":

☞ " I wrote him a letter a told him everything I wanted him to know, how I felt... everything and he said he would comment on the content which I appreciated because it was very important to me. He took the letter and left and for one year and two months I never heard from him or saw him again. He came back, still said nothing about the letter and we carried on as if nothing had ever happened, as if the gap of one year and two months never existed."

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

The aspect of "not knowing" or "not wanting to know" as indicated in Participant A's narrative may be preferred due to the significant threat which "knowing" could pose to the relationship. Her

partner's silence, disappearance and return one year and two months later to resume and continue in the relationship as if nothing had changed also emphasises the process of choosing not to know and consequently, "not knowing". A question which could be raised from the above comments is: "In what way does the unconscious "collude" with the phenomenon of betrayal so that the participant is "lured" into experiencing the significant consequences associated with the experience of infidelity?". Further consideration of this question and the aspect of unconscious communication in the intimate dyad will be given in a detailed discussion of the findings of the study, presented in chapter six of this thesis.

◆ How do participants respond to "knowing" and "not knowing"?

When the participants are informed and therefore "**know**" that their partner has committed an act of infidelity, they appear to have already experienced some sense of disconnectedness in their relationship. Either their partner had become emotionally withdrawn as in Participant B's experience or emotionally abandoned the relationship as in the other participants' experience. In addition, what emerges clearly from the data are two main responses to "**knowing**".

Firstly, the participants maintain that at no stage during the period of disconnectedness between themselves and their partner did they consciously consider that their partner was having a relationship with a third party. Secondly, interestingly enough, the data also indicate that the participants did not question the credibility of the information provided by the sources which facilitated their "knowing" but accepted the information as "truth". In addition, the credibility of the sources is increased as the partners either deny their own acts of infidelity or avoid further dialogue and confrontation with the participant, prior to abandoning the relationship.

Therefore the findings indicate, that a sense of disconnectedness between the couple, plays a role in alerting the participant to the potential abandonment of the relationship by the partner. This increases the fear of rejection and overrides the perceived degree of commitment and trust instilled in the partner. At this point, no further exploration of this finding will be conducted as it is discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

Once the participants have been informed and consequently “know” about their partners’ infidelity, after the shock, their initial response is one of anger:

☞ “I was unbelievably angry with him and I couldn’t stop crying...After a while I ‘phoned him, something I would never have done under these circumstances before and I told him.....I wanted nothing more to do with him.....I never wanted to see him or hear from him ever again.”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

However as Participant B indicates below, anger is not necessarily directed at the partner:

☞ “I was angry with her but I really loved her so...I confronted our colleague instead. The following day I went to him and told him about the information I had received [about his alleged relationship with my wife] and I demanded to know whether it was true or not because our work ethic is... you don’t mess around with a colleague’s wife. I thought about hitting him but I knew...I had no chance...he was a professional boxer.”

Participant B.16 February 2005.

In the light of her partners’ abandonment of their relationship, Participant E, directed her anger towards herself:

☞ “I hated myself...I couldn’t stand myself and ...and I was angry that I had been so stupid.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Furthermore, the participants’ immediate anger towards their partner as a result of being informed and therefore, “**knowing**”, is reactive and uncontained. Also, it recurs intermittently during the process of attempting to gain closure. However, due to the partner having abandoned the relationship, the participants need to contain and manage their anger as they are unable to work through their feelings with their partner. This has further implications and consequences (see 5.6.1.5.) for their immediate and future functioning.

When considering the participants’ responses to “**knowing**”, what also clearly emerges from the data is their **experience of humiliation**. The degree of humiliation is clearly very profound and

carries further consequences, which contribute to a **sense of alienation**. Humiliation is one of the most difficult aspects of the experience of betrayal, which the participants have to confront. It is not restricted to their experience of themselves within the intimate dyad but also to their experience of themselves in relationships outside the intimate dyad:

☞ “After my friend informed me he had been seeing someone else all along....it was very important for me to maintain my pose. I didn’t want to humiliate myself and become emotional because everyone that knows me, knows how I felt about him. I couldn’t face any further humiliation.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

☞ “I’m a proud person and I isolated myself after I heard about his affair. It was easy to talk to the therapist because he doesn’t know me but it was too difficult to talk to my friends and family because at this stage I think I mostly feel humiliated ..I don’t want other people to see me cry. ”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

When considering the aspect of “**not knowing**”, analysis of the data reveals that “**not knowing**” exacerbates the degree of humiliation experienced by the participant as at least one other person knew all along. This knowledge which the participant gains once the act of infidelity has been exposed, as well as the experience of humiliation facilitates further anger towards those who were “**in the know**” all along:

☞ “He had an affair with my best friend’s sister. We work together and I see her everyday. Another very good friend of mine whom I have known for ten years also knew of their relationship. I see this in a very negative light and I’m very angry with them because I feel, if one is really friends with someone you should warn them that something might be amiss [with their partner’s behaviour].”

Participant C.16 February 2005.

- ◆ How then is “knowing” and “not knowing” a causal condition which contributes to “a sense of alienation”?

When considering the aspect of “**knowing**” as knowledge brought to the relationship from experiences in previous relationships, the participants unsuccessfully attempt to understand what

caused the betrayal and the abandonment of the relationship. Knowledge they have about themselves and of relationships is inadequate and renders them helpless in “knowing” what they should bring to future relationships. The participants are left with a sense of “not knowing” what is expected of them in a future relationship leading to a loss of connectedness with a significant other. They also question their knowledge of engaging in relationships and wonder if they have contributed in any way by “doing something wrong”.

In addition, the aspect of knowing in relationships takes on a further quality, namely “knowing how to connect”. Due to their inability to gain closure regarding the reasons for the failed relationship, the participants have little confidence in using known ways of connecting with a significant other in a future intimate relationship. Familiar and apparently reliable ways of connecting with a significant other appears to be ineffective resulting in few alternatives to connection. Consequently, “knowing” how to connect with a significant other in an intimate relationship becomes an unfamiliar and “unknown” aspect in the lives of the participants contributing to “**a sense of alienation**”. This perception of a lack of knowledge, influences how they will act the next time they risk engaging in an intimate relationship.

Furthermore, “**knowing**” about the act of infidelity once it has been exposed or disclosed causes the participant further confusion resulting in an escalated sense of “**not knowing**” (lack of knowledge) as they attempt to understand the rationale behind their partners’ infidelity from their perspective. Participant C explains her frustration in trying to understand her partner’s reasoning in committing an act of infidelity:

☞ “I find it very difficult to understand how people can do such wrong things and work it out in their minds so that it makes perfect sense. If I think about how I would have behaved... anybody would have seen written all over my face...there is just no way that I could be in a relationship with someone for six years and they would miss it. How is it possible that people can live like that? Now I am with this one and then I’m quickly with that one. I don’t know...I just don’t understand how he could have worked all that out in his mind.”


Participant C.16 February 2005.

In the above illustration, Participant C questions her partner's thinking in terms of how she would have reacted in a similar situation. However, when she becomes aware (knows) that his thinking and resultant behaviour is contrary to what she had expected and grown accustomed to during their six year relationship, she is left with a feeling of “not knowing” (lack of knowledge) which contributes to her experience of a **“sense of alienation.”**

There is a further aspect of **“knowing”** which clearly emerges from the data and which is a causative factor in participants experiencing a **sense of alienation**. This aspect of “knowing” is causal in the participants' degree of desire for future connection with a significant other in the context of a new relationship. The degree of desire for future connection is one of the most complex aspects for the participants to consider and it is complicated by another kind of **“knowing”**: namely, **“knowing”** loneliness. Loneliness as an alternative to connectedness is one of the consequences of an act of infidelity. And therefore this phenomenon is addressed in further detail in the discussion of consequences in 5.6.1.5 of this chapter.

It is evident that **“knowing”** (having knowledge) about their partners' betrayal does not necessarily assist the participant in knowing how “to be” or how to respond in future relationships. However, the theme of **hope** emerged significantly in the initial analysis as a condition of knowing when I asked the participants whether they could conceive of engaging in an intimate relationship in the future.

Attesting to the manifestation of hope, one of the participants had already risked engaging in a subsequent relationship but was experiencing difficulty with his partner at the time of the interview. Furthermore, he remained uncertain as to whether his new relationship would be a long-term association. Two of the other participants had had brief encounters in relationships, which held little attraction for them and had been terminated. In addition, what appeared to be difficult for the participants to conceptualise was the possibility of a successful and rewarding *long-term* future relationship. Participant A explains this aspect:

 “It is difficult for me to think I can have another relationship with someone that is compatible with me. Maybe now I associate love and intensity and attraction with pain...it didn't work

previously so why would it work in future? So maybe at this stage I'm battling to see the possibility of a relationship working out for me."

Participant A.15 February 2005.


The element of hope is also recognised as something which the participants knew in their previous experiences of relationships and which they brought to their recent intimate relationship and extended relationships. At this point a comment regarding "hope" as it emerges in the condition of knowing is relevant. In their current circumstances, the participants *need* to have hope which exceeds their clear conviction that there *is* hope for the possibility of a future intimate relationship which will be successful and rewarding. Consequently, their experience and knowledge of hope in previous relationships is a causal condition for engaging in future relationships.

"Knowing" about their partners' infidelity demands a response from the participants in terms of their thinking and resourcefulness, which causes different actions. "Knowing" therefore causes them to act in response as they become aware of what they did "not know". Actions and/or interactions of the participants are addressed in 5.5.2 of this chapter.

The second condition we turn to now which emerges as a causal condition in participants experiencing **a sense of alienation**, is their perception of the way in which their partners orchestrated the act of infidelity.

❖ **The way in which infidelity is orchestrated.**

This causal condition that emerges from the analysis of the data, is one of the most significant aspects in the experience of betrayal and contributes to **a sense of alienation**. Once their partners' infidelity has been disclosed or exposed, participants attempt to trace situations, events and incidents which are likely to have occurred within the context of infidelity:

 "When I read the letter and looked around me I realised that he had taken most of his things. So he had obviously done a lot of planning....I mean, the woman he was having the affair with stays three blocks away from us and she must have helped him plan and carry out the move while I was away."

Participant C.16 February 2005.

Further analysis of the data indicates that when purposefully considering their partners' behaviour, there appears to be at least a single event or incident that the participants recognise as being associated with the process of infidelity. Further reflection leads them to consider the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated. This awareness occurs spontaneously during the period of retrospection (see 5.6.1.2). In addition, when reflecting on their partners' infidelity, the participants experience the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated, as having greater significance than the actual loss of the partner or the subsequent abandonment of the relationship. Participant A describes this aspect as follows:

☞ “His infidelity rattled me, not the loss of someone I loved. That I think a person comes to terms with in a different way. It is heartbreaking and very painful but...if he had looked me straight in the eye and said he didn't feel anything for me any longer...I could have lived with that. It would have been terrible but I could have lived with that, absolutely. But the manner in which he planned it [infidelity] and his behaviour at that time...that was what caused the damage, not the fact that I lost him.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

The behaviour of their partner prior to the abandonment of themselves and the relationship causes ongoing conflict and stress and the participants experience relief once he or she finally leaves. Unbeknown to them at that stage, the apparent internal conflict which the partner experiences and projects into the intimate relationship, is also created by his or her act/s or infidelity. Participant E recalls:

☞ “I must say at that stage I wasn't sure what to think but I started feeling relieved because I intuitively knew he was going to leave. I didn't know why then but his behaviour, his sudden restlessness, all those things told me something was going on...but I still wanted him to be honest with me and tell me what was happening.”

Participant E2. 31 March 2005.

The manner in which infidelity is orchestrated as a causal condition influences the participants' actions and interactions and contributes to **a sense of alienation**. This condition may be tapped by the following questions:

- What does the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated elicit in the participants' experience of betrayal?
 - How does this awareness influence their perception of assuming mutual responsibility for the disintegration of the relationship?
- ◆ What does the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated, elicit in the participants' experience of betrayal?

What clearly emerges from the data is that the manner in which infidelity is orchestrated elicits an awareness in the participant of a **manifestation of their partners' potential to engage in deceitful and damaging behaviour** in the intimate relationship. The potential of the partner to betray the participant or damage the relationship is not consciously considered on a daily basis and is therefore repressed and accommodated. Consequently when the act of infidelity is exposed, the unexpectedness and unpredictability of the act has far-reaching consequences for the participant in numerous facets of his or her life (see 5.6.1.5).

Secondly, the participants become aware that their belief in the **integrity** of their partner and their confidence in being able to rely on his or her fundamental goodness proves to be misplaced. Participant A comments:

☞ “I won't ever be able to look at him the same way again. His lack of integrity and disloyalty...those are things I don't like in people, it puts me off them”.

Participant A.15 February 2005.

The lack of integrity, which the participants perceive as a result of their partners infidelity, questions their perception of the partner as a whole and stable person. Wholeness refers to “soundness” in various dimensions of the partner's life, including relational, physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions. The partner's integrity is understood to be about him or her exhibiting ego-strength and ego-integration or being “together”. Participant D describes his perception of his partner's lack of ego-integration in the following manner:

☞ “The fact that at 40, he could fall head over heels with me and pursue me made me feel it’s fine, he’s sorted himself out. But then to turn around the next week and say no he doesn’t want a relationship...**that** scares me of people. I would expect that men of that age would be mature, more “together” and highly functioning but my experience is no!...that’s not the case. I would have thought at 23, **my** behaviour can be impulsive ...but I had to bring stability to the relationships not them.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

On the other hand, a lack of integrity elicits a perception of deceitfulness and deviance. In addition, the participants are convinced that there is something wrong with their partners’ personality. Participant E shares her perception of her partner’s destructive behaviour in the relationship:

☞ “At times I think about him and still wonder why he behaved the way he did and the only conclusion I can draw is that there must be something radically wrong with him. I experience him now as dangerous.”

Participant E2. 31 March 2005.

At this point it is relevant to dwell briefly on the participants’ description of their partners’ infidelity as an act of deviance. An interesting aspect, which emerges from the data, is that in all instances, the participants use words in their narratives of their experience of infidelity such as “victim”(the participant), “perpetrator”, (the partner), “predator”(the partner), “*modus operandi*” (of the partner) “impostor” (the partner) and “con man” (the partner). Although no discussions were entered into or narratives provided as to whether the participants regard betrayal as an act of deviance, their narratives of infidelity appeal to acts of a “criminal” and therefore, punishable nature.

The implication of betrayal as a “crime” also suggests an emphasis on the societal context in which it occurs. The following entry made in my journal as the researcher, reflects some thoughts in this regard:

📖 A striking aspect in the participants’ narratives is their language of betrayal. Partners who they were attracted to and loved to the exclusion of others and whom they shared the most intimate

relationship with are currently experienced as the “perpetrator” or the “predator”. What about the experience of betrayal, independent of the length of time of the relationship changes the first perception into the second after an act of infidelity? Does it revert back to trust in relationships? Would it indicate that an unspoken contract of goodwill or benevolence in an intimate relationship is more significant than a spoken guarantee?

Furthermore, what also struck me was that crime is considered to be a product of people in society. The participants in describing their sole and unique experience of betrayal are therefore compelled to include a reality not only of their own construction but as constructed within an interpersonal and therefore societal context. As such, infidelity can only be experienced within a relational context. What the experience elicits within each of the participants however, suggests an intrapsychic context. Therefore, are these two contexts not possibly inextricably interwoven, especially when choosing to live in an external world, which promotes a shared reality?

In addition, when thinking about the term “predator”, an image of the animal kingdom is conjured up. The beloved, future husband becomes the lurking danger, which the vulnerable “prey” has to flee from? A highly evolved relationship between two people suggesting belonging, connectedness and exclusivity, becomes threatening and primitive as a result of betrayal. Betrayal seems so powerful, but where does its real power lie, within the individual or external to the individual?

Researcher Journal. 4 April 2005.

The participants also provide further descriptions of their partners’ behaviour in orchestrating the act of infidelity, using words such as “cunning”, “callous” and “vicious”. The unexpectedness of their partner’s infidelity and the participants’ powerlessness to defend themselves against the unpredictable occurrence or impact of betrayal, give rise to a perception of having being exploited and manipulated as well as being preyed upon. In addition, the need for justice to be served which emerges as additional data in the participants’ narratives, reflects their desire for “punishment” of their partner at some stage, indicating once again their perception of betrayal as having a “criminal” connotation. Justice may be associated with the theme of revenge, which is indicated by the data. However, the theme of revenge will be addressed as a consequence which contributes to **a sense of alienation** in 5.6.1.5 of this chapter. In addition the need for justice to be served as well as their considerations regarding revenge, will be explored in further detail in the discussion of the findings of the study which is presented in chapter six of this thesis.

Furthermore, the lack of acknowledgement of any pain inflicted on the participant as well as a lack of remorse shown by their partners give rise to the awareness that he or she can behave in a highly damaging and destructive way. As illustration, Participant A explains:

☞ “I wanted him to apologise, irregardless of whether the relationship could have been saved or not. That was not the point. But the idea that it [the abandonment of the relationship] was done in such a callous way and then pretending as if nothing ever happened, that just made the betrayal so much worse. It felt as if he didn’t acknowledge for one moment that I had been even remotely hurt and if I had been.... so what!”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

This is in sharp contrast to Participant A’s experience of the way in which her partner treated her whilst they were in the relationship:

☞ “He always treated me respectfully...the person he was and his behaviour made it easy to stay in the relationship for so long. I always felt positive about myself because he seemed to enjoy being with me. He used to phone me afterwards... and tell me again how much he had enjoyed being with me.”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

- ◆ How does this awareness influence their perception of assuming mutual responsibility for the disintegration of the relationship?

According to the participants, their partners’ infidelity places the responsibility for the disintegration of the relationship heavily with the partners. In addition, due to the lack of closure in understanding the rationale for their partners’ infidelity, responsibility for the disintegration of the relationship remains that of the partner over time. The options which the partners are perceived to have had available to them and which they could have exercised if they experienced the relationship as problematic prior to engaging in the act of infidelity, free the participants from assuming responsibility for the disintegration of the relationship.

Furthermore, their perception of themselves as “victims”, not being able to predict the occurrence of infidelity, robs them of their ability to feel in control in the relationship. Participants who

generally regard themselves as independent, proactive and motivated, experience infidelity as something that was “done to them” and therefore feel as if they are subjected to factors beyond their control, experiencing a sense of **powerlessness**. From this perspective, the participants are unwilling to bear the burden for the disintegration of the relationship and therefore conclude that his or her partner is responsible.

As we conclude this discussion of the two conditions that cause participants to experience **a sense of alienation**, namely, *the disclosure of infidelity* and *the manner in which the act of infidelity is orchestrated*, it is important to emphasise that these conditions are not anticipated and can therefore not be controlled. The feeling of being unable to exercise control over their lives and experience a secure sense of knowing which is evident in an element of predictability, causes feelings of alienation and exclusion resulting in **a sense of alienation**.

In the following section, the actions and interactions which the participants employ and which also exacerbate **a sense of alienation** will be addressed.

5.6.1.4. Actions and/or interactions.

This section bring us to the strategic or routine tactics that the participants use in managing the act or acts of infidelity of their partners as well as the termination of the relationship. **Strategic actions or interactions** are purposeful acts taken which attempt to manage infidelity and loss of relationship and therefore contribute to shaping the phenomenon of “**a sense of alienation**”. **Routines** indicate actions or interactions, which are familiar ways of responding to occurrences in daily life. The data indicated less emphasis on routines, which the participants followed in their experience of infidelity whereas strategies emerged as critical in order to be able to manage the experience of infidelity and the resulting loss of relationship. The three action and interaction strategies and routine action that emerged from the data analysis are **confronting their partner, physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade** and **regaining control**.

The emerging strategies and routine of acting and interacting in this study were not found to occur sequentially in the process of managing infidelity but are interwoven. In addition **confronting the partner** is the earliest strategic interaction that participants employ once the relationship has been terminated even though infidelity may not have been exposed as yet. The other action and


interaction strategies occur to a greater or lesser degree at various stages during the process of coming to terms with their partners' infidelity. Although *work* is a routine action, which is in place prior to infidelity being disclosed, the participants use this area of their lives as a means of stability, numbing their pain and regaining control. Furthermore, in this manner they also attempt to re-affirm their sense of identity.

It is important to point out that I do not suggest that the first action or interaction is any less appropriate or the last any more sophisticated. The actions and interactions are presented here as the strategies and routines participants use in the process of managing infidelity. In presenting these strategies and routines, I am reminded that my purpose was to gain a greater understanding of the participants' unique experience of betrayal and to present these findings with integrity and impartiality. We turn now to the first of the action and interaction strategies namely **confronting their partner**.

❖ **Confronting their partner.**

The participants initiate a confrontation with their partners once the relationship deteriorates and is abruptly terminated. They confront their partners either telephonically or insist on meeting with them. Their need to confront their partner is fuelled by their perception of having been treated unfairly and the confrontations are initially heated. However these confrontations do not shed further light on their partners' behaviour, as they do not cite their interest in another party as the reason for the termination of the relationship. Therefore the participants remain confused as to why they are being abandoned.

Confrontation regarding the future of the relationship in particular, is a sensitive aspect whilst the participants are involved with their partners. Instead of risking conflict and confrontation around such issues in the relationship, they choose to avoid confrontation for fear of losing their partners and the relationship:

 "I confronted him about where our relationship was headed...and then he did what he always did when he become uncomfortable in a situation...he just disappeared for a week. So on the one hand I had this anger towards him because he wouldn't talk about our relationship and us but at the

same time I was also afraid that I might lose him if I insisted that we discuss the matter. At that stage, the fear was much stronger so I backed down.”

Participant A.15 February 2005.

Participant C echoes the fear of losing her partner as a result of confrontation as follows:

☞ “I thought at one stage that I could have confronted him [about certain issues I was concerned about in our relationship] if I had really wanted to, but perhaps I might have lost him, so I didn’t.... he doesn’t like confrontation.”

Participant C.16 February 2005.

However, once the relationship has been abandoned, the participants no longer display caution and concern but are motivated by anger when confronting their partners:

☞ “I was indescribably angry...**furious**...and I contacted him and insisted that we talk because it is ridiculous to end a relationship of six years with just a letter..... When I confronted him I told him he could lie to me and to his father and even to himself if he wanted to, but he couldn’t lie to God. And the wheel turns...good or bad...it always turns. I also told him it would have been far better if he had died instead of ending the relationship.”

Participant C.16 February 2005.

The next strategic action or (lack of) interaction, which the participants employ once their partners’ infidelity has been exposed, is that of physical and emotional withdrawal.

❖ **Physical and emotional withdrawal.**

A key feature of physical and emotional withdrawal, is that once the partner has abandoned the participant and his or her infidelity has been exposed, the participant is on his or her own again. Therefore, the participants’ experience rejection and humiliation and they find it difficult to interact meaningfully with others. They initially withdraw both physically and emotionally from interactions with others as they attempt to come to terms with the experience and humiliation of being betrayed. Consequently, participants avoid social events and concentrate on solitary activities within the safety of a familiar and private environment such as their home:

☞ “I didn’t want to go out at all because I was very emotional and everything upset me. I didn’t want to feel like that and I just couldn’t face people. I didn’t want to be in company or near people at all and I couldn’t tell them how I felt. And the whole time I had the fear that I would bump into him again. It was the worst feeling I had ever experienced. At that stage, his mother still lived here so he was here quite often and that scared me...to bump into him, which was quite possible in a small town. Added to that was not just the fear of seeing him again but seeing him **and** the girlfriend...that made it so much worse.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

As such this *deliberate action or interaction (or lack thereof)* places the participant in isolation that is compounded by a sense of being alone and which contributes to **“a sense of alienation.”**

Analysis of the data reveals that participants look to friends for immediate but limited help once the betrayal has been disclosed or exposed. However, once the initial shock of their partners’ infidelity has been absorbed and they have reacted to the disclosure of infidelity (see 5.5.1.3), the participants withdraw from acquaintances, friends and family members as they do not want to expose themselves to further emotional trauma by being placed in a situation where the conversation may turn to the abandoned relationship, their partners’ infidelity or their partner. In addition, emotional closeness that was previously enjoyed with others is resisted and sharing their pain of infidelity is evaded. By withdrawing into their pain, the participants paradoxically find solace, comfort and safety. In particular, participants initially withdraw from mutual friends and acquaintances for similar reasons:

☞ “I told our mutual friends I didn’t expect them to choose between him and I – I would rather walk away from our friendship in order to give them the chance to remain friends with him. Many of them were angry with me and I don’t want to try and sound like the victim but that was my decision. So I broke off our friendship and we don’t socialise at all anymore. They are also my colleagues so I see them at work and that’s enough.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

Relationships with colleagues continue with firm boundaries in place regarding questions surrounding their newly acquired “single status” or are strained due to a colleague being the third party in their partner’s act of infidelity. Participant B describes his feelings for a colleague who was the third party in his wife’s act of infidelity as follows:

☞ “I didn’t hate him to the extent where I wanted to shoot him or anything like that. Yes, I did think I would enjoy breaking his windows, quite honestly. He has died in the meanwhile and I won’t say I’m glad his is dead because I don’t think I am that cruel but...I don’t feel a thing when it comes to him... I just don’t care. He knew we were married but that didn’t stop him, he couldn’t care less. What type of person does that to someone else? It’s inhuman.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005.

Furthermore, initiating contact in new relationships is not considered and expressions of interest from external parties are not pursued. Knowledge gained from previous experiences in a similar situation is not constructively applied to their current relationship. This occurs as the participants are unable to consciously access resources and skills to understand their partner’s infidelity amidst the turbulence and instability that follows the abandonment of the relationship. Therefore, sources such as medical doctors and psychotherapists are approached for professional assistance:

☞ “I am not such a self-indulgent type of person who enjoys wallowing in a pit of negative emotion but I just couldn’t help myself. That was the reality of where I was. I was so shattered, I became quite frightened when I realised what was happening to me. It was terrible. I started seeing my therapist and shortly after that I asked her to refer me to a doctor because I felt I wasn’t coping and I thought I was depressed. I believed I needed an anti-depressant.”

Participant D. 6 April 2005.

Also evident from the data is that the participants focus solely on the pain of their abandoned relationship and their partners’ infidelity without comparing it to persons who have undergone a similar experience, or to infidelity in general. This aspect of infidelity brings about an acute sense of being alone in their pain as well as a sense of being disconnected from others, which contributes to **a sense of alienation**:

☞ “I think what was one of the worst things of this experience was the fact that I felt and I believed [as a result of everything that had happened]...that the world had also turned against me, not just the fact that he left me...it seemed as if there was just nobody who would understand and I felt so alone...that was bad, very bad and it hurt the most.”

Participant E.2. 8 April 2005.

In conclusion, physical and emotional disengagement or withdrawal from others occurs when the participant is overwhelmed by the context of infidelity and is unable to gain access to his or her internal resources. Furthermore the participants experience their internal and external worlds as being out of control and attempt to create some order out of the chaos by retreating and isolating themselves from others. Regaining control as a strategic action is discussed in greater detail in the ensuing section regarding the maintenance of a façade.

❖ **Maintaining a façade.**

Maintaining a façade is a mode of engaging with others characterised by a conscious protection of the vulnerable and painfully raw self. As the participant re-connects with acquaintances, colleagues, friends and family members, it is important that he or she is regarded as functioning effectively and coping well with the loss of the relationship. One reason this façade is maintained is in order to avoid others pitying them or sympathising with them. As Participant C suggests:

☞ “ The friend whose sister had the affair with him, came to me afterwards and said she was so sad for me, her heart was breaking for me... and that was terrible. I didn’t want that at all. I told her I didn’t want her or anyone else to feel sorry for me or to mollycoddle me...I was doing just fine on my own.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

Furthermore, the participants remain aware of the unresolved inner pain, which they conceal when continuing with daily routine activities, specifically their occupations. Their actions are directed at getting through the demands of a day and keeping themselves busy to the point of exhaustion so that they have little time or energy to think about their loss and being alone again. As they decisively continue to pretend that they are coping with their situation, to the outside world the participants appear to be “moving on” with their lives. Therefore, the façade emerges to conceal the truth. Behaviour is not genuine but socially determined with a deceptive belief about their personal competency and stability. True emotions and thoughts are contained, concealed, protected and prohibited from surfacing and being exposed. The evident ability to behave “maturely” and “move on” reinforces their persistence in the deception as they are forced to deal with the reality of the present. Essentially therefore, the participants protect and carry their intense pain of rejection and abandonment as they face life on their own again.

A further reason why the participants maintain a façade is to hide their feelings of **helplessness** in exercising some influence over the continuity of their relationships. The unpredictability and unexpectedness of their partners' infidelity is in direct contrast to their perception and expectation of the continuity of connectedness, which creates within the participants an existential crisis. Their previously familiar lives and existence are turned upside down and the mechanisms and social skills used to engage in relationships take on a foreign and ineffective quality.

What is particularly evident about the unexpectedness of their partners' infidelity is that the participants are powerless in maintaining the continuity of the relationship. This is apparent for three main reasons. Firstly, any opportunity that may have existed for discussing and restoring areas of the relationship that could have been problematic for their partners is lost by the abrupt termination of the relationship. Secondly, a sense of injustice reinforces the participants' powerlessness as they consider their partners' infidelity to be an inappropriate manner in which to terminate the relationship. Thirdly, the partners terminate and abandon the relationship whilst communicating their acceptance of the participant and denying their act or acts of infidelity.

The double-bind communication from the partner contributes to the participants' helplessness in trying to establish the authentic and rational reasons for the abandonment of themselves and the relationship as well as what action they could take in future to ensure that a similar situation does not recur. The communication processes between the participants and their partners will be addressed in the following chapter of this thesis.

❖ **Regaining control.**

Maintaining a façade also serves as a function to hide the participants' concerted efforts to **regain control** of their lives once the relationship has been terminated. What is evident in the data is that the participants indicate that exercising some measure of control of situations in their lives is an important aspect of their daily functioning. Consequently, feeling out of control and unable to attach some degree of predictability to the outcome of their relationships as well as any other incident perceived as controllable in their lives, has significant consequences for these participants' functioning. These consequences are discussed in further detail in 5.6.1.5.

Regaining control of their lives and themselves is a positive aspect for the participants once the relationship has been terminated as they come to realise in retrospect that they perceived their partners as being in control of the relationship. In their efforts to regain control, the participants realise that they have sacrificed and compromised their autonomy to a large degree in the service of the relationship. Previously independent and confident individuals experienced themselves as being manipulated and controlled by their partners

In reflecting on the relationship, the participants remember that at times their partners made them feel as if they lacked self-control, which was not actually the case. Participant A comments on the perception of her partner being in control as follows:

☞ “I saw him again at a mutual friend’s party some months after our relationship had ended. I knew he would be there but he didn’t expect to see me there and he was blown away. He turned snow white and I could see he was terribly rattled and he really battled to get through the evening. For the first time since our relationship ended I felt in control of the situation. I always used to feel **he** was in control, I felt... I was this emotional wreck...who couldn’t control her emotions...lagging one step behind, walking in his shadow...that’s how I used to feel or how he made me feel and that was never the case, I wasn’t a hysterical fish-wife. His non-responsiveness to my crying and confrontations with him made me feel I was out of control and losing it...that feeling of ‘there’s something wrong with you’”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

In addition, by determining how and when the relationship should end, the partners confirm the participants’ perception that they were in control of the relationship all along, leaving the participants feeling helpless in preventing the unexpected termination of the relationship and abandonment by their partners. Having the freedom to choose to be in the relationship starts off as a mutual decision and behaviour is consistent with the decision but it is not necessarily pertinently discussed prior to engaging in the relationship. Consequently, the lack of freedom the participants can exercise in being given a choice as to if and when they decide to terminate the relationship is in direct contrast to their initial voluntary engagement in the relationship. The termination of the relationship is an involuntary option unknowingly exercised by their partners which emphasises their perception that their partners take and maintain control of the relationship for its duration.

A further interesting finding emerges from the data, which indicates that the participants' perception of their partners as controlling does not end with the termination of the relationship. Even once the relationship has been abandoned, the partners are perceived as controlling as they initially initiate and attempt to maintain contact through mutual friends or directly with the participants regardless of whether the partners have engaged in subsequent relationships. These continued attempts at contact are unwelcome and the participants find their partners' behaviour intrusive and manipulative:

☞ “About two weeks after he had left, I started getting “missed” calls from him. He would let the phone ring only once so that the number would register but there was no way I could answer the call in time. I wouldn't have, I never wanted to talk to him again but what really upset me was that I felt he was being invasive and now when it suited him, he would contact me, if and when he wanted to. I felt he was playing with me, he was in control and I found that very upsetting. I also felt helpless, I didn't know how to stop it and that felt really bad”

Participant E. 2. 8 April 2005

A routine action which the participants pursue and which elicits their sense of regaining control is the security and stability provided by **work**. Work serves as a means of escape and distraction at a time when the participants experience emotional chaos in the aftermath of their partners' infidelity:

☞ “I realised I had to start picking up the pieces again once he had left but I didn't know how or where to start. Fortunately at that time, things were hectic at work so my attention was diverted and I could keep myself really busy.”

Participant E2. 8 April 2005.

In addition, work as a routine action within a structured and familiar environment also serves as a coping mechanism, which the participants employ. By introducing some form of structure to their daily routine, work provides the participants with stability in the midst of a highly confusing and intensely painful experience:

☞ “When I was told my wife was having an affair, I didn't want to believe it and she denied it, she still does. That confused me terribly, I couldn't think straight, so I threw myself into my work. I

was permanently at work, day and night, and I tried to cope by blocking everything and everyone out.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005.

Furthermore, at a time when their sense of self is compromised as a result of their partners’ infidelity, the participants immerse themselves in their work, which enables them to re-affirm their self-worth and feelings of adequacy and competency. The participants also have to face specific challenges regarding their overall sense of self-worth, which includes their sense of accomplishment and competency as independent individuals. Challenges to the participants’ sense of self-worth are addressed in further detail in 5.6.1.5.

At present all the participants are involved in occupations that are emotionally demanding and which require regular in-depth contact with people. What is evident from the data is that when the relationships are terminated and their partners’ infidelity is exposed, participants focus their attention on aspects of their work environment, which include less in-depth contact with people in an attempt to shelter and preserve their depleted emotional resources. Depleted emotional resources become evident once the relationship is abandoned as the participants come to realise that they have invested a substantial amount of emotional energy in their relationship. This aspect will be addressed in further detail in 5.6.1.5 as one of the consequences of the experience of infidelity. Therefore, within the working environment, participants initially prefer routine activities that serve administrative and operational functions in particular:

☞ “I’m keeping myself busy with things I enjoy doing....like training and development [of personnel]. I am also very busy getting things sorted out for the financial year end and that takes a lot of planning.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

As we conclude this discussion of the strategic actions and interactions which contribute to the experience of **a sense of alienation namely, confronting their partner, physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control**, it is important to emphasise that these actions and (deliberate lack of) interactions do not pass through in rigid succession but fluctuate between cycles of actions and interactions. At times these cycles of actions and interactions regress and at other times they recur during the course of the participant’s journey towards healing.

What is evident from the data however, is that the first interaction is fixed namely, confronting the partner as it occurs earliest in the cycle of actions and interactions that the participants employ. This initial interaction with their partners, reflects the participants' immediate reaction to the premature loss of relationship both prior to the knowledge of their partners' infidelity or loss of the relationship as a result of their partners' infidelity being exposed.

During the course of this section on strategic and routine actions and interactions, we have been given a glimpse of some of the consequences of infidelity, which are discussed in greater detail in the following section (see 5.6.1.5). As described in the next section, the fluctuating cycles of actions and interactions, which the participants employ, are significantly influenced by the consequences of infidelity. Therefore the participants are coerced, as a result of their partners' infidelity and loss of relationship to take actions and interactions which are purposefully supportive and protective towards themselves but which paradoxically lead to feelings of disconnectedness and exclusion from others. These strategic actions and interactions contribute to **a sense of alienation**. In the following section, the consequences of the participants' strategic actions and interactions within the context of the experience of infidelity will be addressed.

5.6.1.5. Consequences.

The participants' actions and interactions or deliberate lack of interactions, described in 5.5.2 have different consequences. As indicated in the previous section, the actions and interactions which the participants employ in response to infidelity and which contribute to **a sense of alienation** are **confronting their partner, physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control**.

What is evident from the data is that the consequences which result from these actions and interactions are multiple and of varied duration. They are visible to both the participants and others and they have a wide impact on the experience of infidelity, compounding the context of the experience. Furthermore, these consequences are reversible over time but are unforeseen, thereby increasing their range and impact on both the inner and outer worlds of the participants. The consequences, which are discussed in this chapter, are broadly categorised into emotional-, behavioural-, cognitive and intrapsychic consequences as a result of the actions and interactions of

the participants as described in 5.6.1.5. Fig. 5.4. provides a summary of these consequences. We turn now to the first of the categories mentioned above namely emotional consequences.

❖ **Emotional consequences.**

Participants experience a wide range of emotions as a result of their partners' infidelity, which is evident in the strategic actions, and interactions, which they employ. As indicated in 5.5.2 the first action or interaction the participants take once the relationship has been terminated is to confront their partner. Analysis of the data reveals that the most prevalent emotion in this category is **anger**. However, the data also indicate that various degrees of anger are present *throughout* the participants' assimilation of the experience of infidelity. Therefore anger is evident in the participants' **physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade**, as well as in **regaining control**.

Further emotional consequences evident in the data are **incessant crying, fear and anxiety, disillusionment, depletion of emotional resources, mourning, feelings of depression, loneliness and longing, relief, resurrected resilience, and loss**. Each of these emotional consequences is relevant to at least one or more of the abovementioned categories and will be discussed in the ensuing section. The first emotional consequence to be discussed is **anger**.

➤ Anger

The participants express their anger, towards their partner, which is initially reactive in nature, when **confronting them**. Their anger however offers little cathartic opportunity for the participants as their partners' response and lack of remorse are unsatisfactory and serve to infuse their anger even further. Anger is initially motivated by feelings of disbelief, humiliation, emotional pain, injustice, increased vulnerability and feelings of helplessness as well as a sense of loss of control in their lives as a result of their abandonment. Once the confrontation has occurred, the participants' residual anger, which is sustained by their partners' reaction, *does not* diminish but fluctuates as they attempt to make sense of what has happened to them in the absence of closure.

Of particular significance, is that the participants feel a need to enter into further confrontation with their partner as they continue to carry the burden of many unanswered questions. However, little opportunity for further confrontation is provided and the participants are compelled to internalise and contain the unresolved anger they have towards their partners:

☞ “I’m a person who needs things to be finalised although I don’t know if any further confrontation will help me gain closure. But it is still inside of me...the anger and...the need to confront him again and tell him if he only tells the truth once in his life, to tell the truth then and get it over and done with. I don’t see my way clear to do it now though, it’s too soon to expose myself...it has only been four months [since he left].”

Participant C. 16 February 2005.

In addition, anger is also evident in a further action (or lack of interaction) taken by the participants, namely **physical and emotional withdrawal**. As a result of their increased vulnerability and rejection once the partners’ act of infidelity has been disclosed (see 5.5.1.3), the participants withdraw physically and emotionally. During their solitude, they continue assimilating their abandonment and as they reflect on and evaluate their past relationship, they experience renewed anger towards their partner which periodically escalates and abates as they engage in the processes of retrospection and introspection (see 5.6.1.2.). The participants’ anger is also fuelled by a sense of having been treated unjustly. In addition, they experience a sense of injustice as they perceive their partners to have fulfilling and rewarding new relationships whereas they remain behind, alone and in intense emotional pain, as well as having to face the task of rebuilding their lives:

☞ “What really made me angry and upset me was...he caused me so much unhappiness and deliberately hurt me so deeply ...he knew what he was doing all along but he’s the one that’s getting married, he’s the one that ends up being happy. That I can’t accept and it makes me angry. I’m alone and unhappy and he has someone who wants to be with him. I find that hard to handle, it’s unfair. **He** should be unhappy now, after everything that’s happened, that would be fair..but he isn’t... and I have to cope with that...with the injustice of it all.

Participant A. 15 February 2005

In addition, the participants are angry and berate themselves for being poor judges of character by allowing their partners to fool them into believing they cared for them:

☞ “I blamed myself ..not because I thought I was such a terrible person but I couldn’t stop feeling that I had been very foolish and I should have known better. How could he have pulled the wool over my eyes for so long...how did he manage it? To this day I don’t have the answer but I was really angry with myself.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

In reflecting on this aspect of the experience of infidelity, Participant D describes his feelings in a similar way as follows:

☞ “Looking back now and becoming aware of who he really is and what he did...it’s quite horrible. I was the fool....and I ask myself how could it have happened to me...of all people? But....it’s done and there is **nothing** a person can do to change it”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Therefore, the participants experience feelings of rebelliousness as they believe that in all fairness, their partners should be the ones to suffer as a result of their perceived lack of morality, rather than they themselves. The participants also experience anger during this stage as they realise that their partners’ infidelity has not only damaged facets of shared intimacy in the dyad but has also permeated and damaged facets of friendship in the relationship. Participant A explains:

☞ “I feel he betrayed me as a friend as well because he knew how I felt about him and that makes me furious. He should have taken my feelings into account and stopped the relationship from developing any further, or not let it carry on for so long.... especially because he obviously didn’t feel the same way”.

Participant A. 15 February 2005

As a result of the termination of the relationship, limited contact if any, with their partners’ family members is maintained. The impact of their partners’ infidelity invokes anger in the participants as they become aware that their experience is not confined to loss of the dyad but also results in loss of significant relationships with their partners’ family members:

☞ “I don’t think he realises just how much I lost when he abandoned the relationship. I lost a whole family and extended family, a mother and father, a sister, uncles and aunts, everyone who knew him and whom I had grown to love over the past six years.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Further anger is elicited as the participants reflect on their relationship and experience a growing awareness that they have been cheated out of hopes, dreams and expectations:

☞ “I always had this romantic expectation of somewhere out there, there is a knight in shining armour but...I don’t have that any longer and that makes me angry. I’m angry at myself and at him because that’s gone. Instead I have developed a totally cynical attitude towards relationships now and towards men in general, specifically regarding their motives.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant B’s hopes for a happy and stable marriage that held the promise of children were also dashed as a result of his wife’s infidelity:

☞ “I don’t **ever** want to and I **will** never go through what I went through with my wife. I couldn’t believe that it could happen to me. I think it has a lot to do with my father and mother’s marriage. I always used to tell my wife that I never want our marriage to be like theirs. I want to be happy and have children and then.....surprise!!! It turned out quite differently.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

During the course of **maintaining a façade**, the participants’ anger fluctuates in their attempts to focus their energies on coping with the experience of infidelity. Although their anger is not as reactive as in the first and second categories mentioned above, suppressed anger is veiled in the participants’ short-temperedness and irritability with others:

☞ “I have changed as a result of the experience. I’m very intolerant at present and I become irritated by things very quickly. Also I’m moody and it takes very little to make me furious. It’s not who I know myself to be and it makes me very unhappy, so I’m really trying to control my temper.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Furthermore, anger provokes the participants into gloating about misfortunes that their partners encounter in their subsequent relationships. Gloating is a private emotion that is a manifestation of one of the individual thought processes and thought patterns expressed by the participants at this time. In addition, the participants do not wish to be seen as cantankerous and needy of their partners, therefore they gloat in secret and do not share these feelings with others. In this manner, the participants continue to maintain their façade:

☞ “Shortly after our relationship ended, his relationship with the girl he had been seeing while we were together ended. He started dating many girls one after the other, relationships which lasted maybe a month or less and every time I heard via the grapevine that they had failed again... it was almost like getting my own back and I used to think to myself: ‘Good! I hope you **suffer** and I hope you **never** meet anyone. I hope you will **never** be happy.’...But I never actually phoned him and said ‘Good! I think it was a very big issue for me to maintain my pose. I didn’t want to humiliate myself any further or become emotional.’”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

In like manner, after Participant B’s wife left him for one of their colleagues, he learned that they were experiencing problems in the relationship and that she had been told to stay away from him by the colleague’s parents because in essence, she was still a married woman. Participant B’s emotional reaction reflects his underlying anger towards the couple and their colleague in particular:

☞ “When I heard about their problems I really relished the idea of everything that had happened to them [since she left]. He landed in hospital as a result of an inoperable brain tumour, terminally ill –

I had been told exactly what had been going on between them, everything was working to my advantage...and his parents did not approve of their relationship.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Anger as a result of their partners’ infidelity elicits repetitive fantasies and thoughts of revenge towards their partners and/or to the third parties involved which are not acted out. These fantasies are discussed in further detail later under the heading of intrapsychic consequences in this chapter.

In the process of **regaining control**, the participants attempt to create some order out of their inner emotional turmoil and of their feelings of helplessness. They experience anger however when their attempts are interrupted by behaviour from their partners which is seen as intrusive and manipulative. Participant D explains:

☞ “The fact that he tries to contact me doesn’t mean he is necessarily thinking about me or missing me. **Not at all!** It is **totally** egocentric and manipulative on his part. He sends these **sappy** text messages....about Autumn and **whatever** and there are at least three other people who also get them.. that’s for sure. I’m on his list and he plays with us all, throwing out the bait each time. If I don’t respond, or take too long to reply, he just moves on to the next one on the list.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

The participants find their partners’ invasive behaviour debilitating as they attempt to regain control of their emotions and lives. Furthermore, they feel helpless in putting a stop to the behaviour for two main reasons. Firstly, they would rather avoid contact with their partner and secondly, should they contact their partner, they perceive that their requests to stop such behaviour will have little impact on their intrusiveness. Consequently, each time they perceive their partners’ behaviour as intrusive either directly when contacted by them or indirectly when being told that their partner has inquired about their whereabouts or well-being, they experience renewed anger:

☞ “He often asked mutual acquaintances or friends how I was and I didn’t like that one bit. I thought it very invasive. There was just no way I wanted him part of my life any longer and I had told him that directly when I confronted himso that made me angry, the invasiveness because I felt..he had betrayed me on so many levels but he still has the audacity to ask about me and he wants to know where I live and what I am doing”

Participant A. 15 February 2005.

The participants’ anger is motivated by their perception of how egocentric their partner in reality is with little respect for the boundaries which the participants have set once their partners abandon the relationship. Participant E describes her feelings towards her partner:

☞ “I felt as if he had broken down the boundaries which I put in place, just trampled over them with no respect for my feelings at all and I was very angry with him. I thought he was sadistic and cruel and he should rather have stuck his head somewhere in a very deep hole and never surfaced again after everything he had done but no! He walks around with his head held high and just carries on with his life without a care in the world.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

➤ Incessant crying

After the participants have been informed of their partners' infidelity, they confront them (see 5.5.2). Incessant crying follows as they attempt to assimilate the experience of infidelity. Many emotions which are mentioned earlier in this chapter contribute to the participants incessant crying namely, shock, disbelief, humiliation, disappointment, heartache, anger, rejection, anxiety, a sense of loss, feelings of abandonment, fear, helplessness, depletion of emotional resources and relief. Participant B explains his emotions which led to incessant crying the afternoon he discovered his wife was having an affair:

☞ “I can still remember that day very clearly. I decided I was done with her when she told me she wanted to be with him and I felt I wanted to leave the house as soon as possible. But first I felt I needed to take a shower, just to cool off. I don't know how it happened but after a while I found myself sitting on the shower floor crying uncontrollably. I just couldn't stop crying. It was such a terrible feeling. I was absolutely heartbroken and so disappointed because then it slowly started sinking in, exactly what had been going on behind my back all the time and I only realised it once it had already happened.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Participant E describes how her incessant crying was also a form of relief after the tension of numerous months in the relationship with her partner:

☞ “After he finally left, I was genuinely relieved. I think I was probably also in shock to think that he had actually abandoned the relationship after the plans we had made for our future together. But to think that I wouldn't have the tension and the incredible conflict we had had the past few months

was welcoming. I wasn't sure how or what I was going to do but I knew I would have to pick up the pieces again and I was motivated to start. However, for two solid days after he had gone, I cried and cried...I couldn't stop, day and night. I was exhausted after that but I think it helped me get rid of some of the pent-up emotions I couldn't express while we were together."

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

When Participant B's partner informed her via a letter that he was ending their six-year relationship due to his inability to commit to her, intense heartache was the main cause for her incessant crying. She explains:

☞ "I couldn't go back to our flat that same afternoon, so I stayed with a friend and went back the following day. After that I couldn't stop crying..... for weeks on end I just cried."

Participant B. 16 February 2005

➤ Fear and anxiety

The data indicate that the participants experience fear of being abandoned by their partner while they are still in their relationship with their partners. Specifically their fear of losing their partner raises their stress levels and elicits feelings of **anxiety** during the relationship. In addition once the relationship is abandoned, the participants experience increased levels of anxiety particularly as a result of the trauma and insecurity of not knowing why they are being abandoned. After Participant A's partner of two years unexpectedly leaves her she describes her increased levels of anxiety as follows:

☞ "It was a very painful place to be, especially those first few months. I also became tremendously anxious because I couldn't help thinking....will he be back or won't he...will he contact me again or won't he? It took me a long time to realise he wasn't going to and that was very difficult."

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Furthermore, anxiety levels are raised when considering future relationships. Participants are particularly fearful that a similar experience will recur in their next relationship as they have little confidence in their ability to exercise their powers of judgement when choosing a partner:

☞ “Somewhere there is something radically wrong with my perception which makes me question and trust my ability as a good judge of character. I could always rely on my powers of judgement but not anymore. Plus, I have this terrible fear and anxiety that a similar situation will repeat itself if I am in a relationship with someone whom I really care for and whom I love. I don’t commit easily, it is really a big thing for me and that is what scares me most. The fear that it will happen again.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Subsequent to the abandonment of the relationship and the knowledge of their partners’ infidelity, the participants have encountered their partners unexpectedly. These unexpected encounters increase their anxiety levels as they are afraid that they will lose control of their emotions:

☞ “When I run into him now at times I’m afraid, even anxious. My anxiety I think is generated more as a result of not knowing what my reaction will be towards him at that time. Why I know this is that after I’ve seen him I’m really relieved that I managed to stay calm and I’m grateful then that the encounter went off smoothly. At one stage I used to think I must just not burst into tears if I ever bump into him.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant C experiences her anxiety at losing control of her emotions in a similar way:

☞ “I bumped into him in town when he was visiting his mother one weekend and I couldn’t stop shaking. He makes me very anxious... I think I am still very vulnerable. I don’t want to lose control of my emotions. If I don’t see him or hear from him, I carry on with my life and I’m fine, but there are still times when I think about our relationship and then I can’t stop shaking inside.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

When Participant E’s partner unexpectedly scales her garden wall and appears in her house she has mixed reactions but also attempts to control her anxiety at losing control:

☞ “He just walked into my house after scaling the wall one morning after he had left and I tried to stay very cool and calm but I had mixed feelings. Firstly, I was angry because I felt he was invading my privacy and I was also very surprised that he had come to see me. But I also felt

relieved. I suppose...it was because I realised that he hadn't just thrown me away, but I couldn't stop shaking or stop my heart beating in my throat. I was anxious that I would lose control of my emotions so I really battled to keep a tight rein on them. I didn't want him to see how his presence was affecting me."

Participant E1 31 March 2005

Furthermore, the data indicate that the participants do not only become anxious when encountering their partners unexpectedly, but anxiety is also elicited and increased when the participants fantasise about their partners arriving on their doorstep, specifically with the purpose of wanting to resume the relationship and they succumb to the invitation. Their helplessness in the face of their vulnerability makes the participants feel as if their partners have a powerful hold over them which they are unable to break and which will take them down a similar path of pain and suffering should they not be able to resist them:

☞ "I didn't want to have a relationship with him again but there was a stage about a month or two after he had left when I thought that if he walked through my door and asked if we could try again I would give in and take him back...and I can't let that happen...many things in his nature would have to change first. But in the meantime, I don't want to allow him to have that power over me."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Similarly Participant E indicates:

☞ "For some time after he finally left, I was afraid that I would take him back if he came to my house. I was really afraid I would. It felt as if my gates and walls were not high enough to keep him out. What scared me most was that I knew that if I did take him back, all the same problems would start all over again."

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Further discussion of the participants' fantasies as a result of their experience of infidelity is addressed in the section on intrapsychic consequences.

➤ Disillusionment.

Disillusionment is an emotion that the participants experience once they come to the realisation that everything they cherish, hold sacred and would give of themselves in a relationship is rejected and discarded by their partners. Participant D describes his disillusionment at having given “beautiful emotions” which initially appeared to be accepted but ultimately rejected by his partner as follows:

☞ “What hurt the most was my emotions were intense and unspoilt. At that stage I thought, the reason why I can share my emotions with him is because it is quite safe, because he seemed to reciprocate them quite voluntarily. But it was a two-way street and the disillusionment that followed the betrayal... I was left with...what about my emotionsshould I never have shared them at all?

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Furthermore, disillusionment is evident as participants describe their current perception of fulfilling relationships. Cynicism replaces their earlier perceptions of happy and successful relationships.

☞ “I think most relationships are unsuccessful or people are trapped in relationships in which they are desperately unhappy. I have become very cynical now, but that is my experience. Previously I thought everyone was happy and in love but not any more. It [disillusionment] is like losing your virginity, you know? It will just never be the same again. That’s where I am with relationships at the moment.....My bubble burst and now I find it very difficult to believe that I can be in a relationship that is fulfilling.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Therefore, disillusionment encompasses feelings of lost hope for a future fulfilling relationship as well as difficulty in considering being in a relationship with any one other than their partner regardless of the conflict, tension or anxiety whilst in the relationship. At this stage however, the participants have no desire to engage in a relationship with their partner again. Further emotions that contribute to disillusionment is the loss of trust in the fundamental goodness of the significant

other. Participant D when being informed of his partner's infidelity describes his disillusionment as follows:

☞ “I wrote him a letter and told him that the memories we made while we were together were like the most beautiful antique vase which I locked away in a 18th Century antique cupboard. I could unlock the cupboard now and again and take the vase out and admire it, dust it off and then return it to its prized place in the cupboard. That's how I felt. But when I was told about his infidelity, that vase broke and I could never put it back in the cupboard again - it ended right there. I don't keep broken things.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

What makes it increasingly difficult for the participants to move beyond feelings of disillusionment is that they cannot envisage a similar level of connectivity that they shared with their partner, in a future relationship. Furthermore, they had felt secure enough in the relationship to expose their emotional vulnerabilities in particular. Consequently, when comparing their recent relationship to previous relationships the participants perceive it to have a profoundness, which is unlikely to recur in future relationships.

In addition, the fulfilment, which they perceive they experienced with their partners, increases their cynicism and insecurity regarding a future relationship, which could offer similar or improved fulfilment:

☞ “I think if I hadn't had so many negative experiences and seen betrayal in other people's relationships I may think differently about the possibility of a fulfilling relationship in future. However, I have never felt like this about anyone before or really loved anyone like this ever before. Its almost as if I believe that I will never have that again, never feel that way about anyone ever again and that scares me.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

➤ Depletion of emotional resources.

Once the participants withdraw physically and emotionally into the safety of their personal space, the tension and strain they were under whilst in the relationship becomes evident and takes its toll

on them. In addition, the knowledge of their partners' infidelity and subsequent abandonment is a further contributing factor that leaves the participants feeling "hollow" with few reserves. Their emotional resources in particular are significantly taxed and they feel emotionally vulnerable and helpless. Participant D describes factors that contribute to his emotional hollowness when his partner tells him he is terminating their relationship:

☞ "When he told me we can remain friends but he no longer wants a relationship, I just sat there and stared, I was so shocked. It was last thing I had expected. I had been away for six weeks, pursuing my dream and I felt hollow inside, there was just nothing left. The fact that I hadn't been accepted to study overseas....I mean... everything I had worked for, for the past five years hadn't paid off and now this...I can't describe the degree of emotional emptiness I experienced, there was nothing left to give. I was emotionally battered."

Participant D. 06 April 2005

When learning of her partner's infidelity, Participant E experiences both physical and emotional fatigue and emptiness:

☞ "I have never felt like that before...it was such an empty feeling. I couldn't talk and I felt physically exhausted. When I woke up the next morning, I still felt empty, hollow inside."

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Furthermore, their feelings of emotional depletion and exhaustion become a playground for the fears the participants harbour with regard to the prospect of future relationships. Participant A explains:

☞ "It's been two years now since he left and I haven't had another relationship. It's difficult because on the one hand I would like to be involved with someone again, but I don't see my way clear to have another relationship. I can't face being hurt again. It also feels as if it is going to be hard work and I don't think I have the emotional resources at this stage."


Participant A. 15 February 2005

➤ Mourning.

The data indicate that during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants


experience intense grief and mourn the loss of the relationship. In particular, their loneliness and longing for connectedness is evident as their lives are filled with a void that only a significant other can fill in an intimate relationship. The process of grieving is not limited to this stage of withdrawal but is also evident in the anger which the participants express when initially confronting their partners, while they maintain a façade and in attempting to regain control of their lives.

Furthermore, the participants have no wish to be in an intimate relationship with their partner again as they feel that trust and vulnerability can no longer be accommodated in their relationship. The participants experience sporadic bursts of anger towards their partner when considering their acts of infidelity and express dislike for their cowardliness and lack of integrity, which they have come to know. However, in relating the history of their relationships, the participants are able to access loving memories of their partners and their relationships, regardless of their acts of infidelity:

 “In the beginning I felt really nurtured ... and his pattern was predictable....I need that in a relationship....a steady rhythm...and that was wonderful...it gave me a sense of security and calm. He made me feel grounded and that is so important to me”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

When describing their loss, the participants mourn specific characteristics of their partners which were most appealing to them and which they perceive as unique to the partner. Participant A found the intensity and passion with which her partner approached life very exciting:

 “He was very intense and passionate about everything....and it has made a great impact on my life and the way I look at things nowit’s really difficult....I can’t seem to forget the intensity in our relationship. At times I wish the idea of who he was would just disappear, along with my feelings for him. If I had never met him, I wouldn’t have to experience this loss....At the moment, I compare the way he was, his ability to be so passionate about everything, to every other man I meet because they just don’t have the same effect on me. It’s probably unfair because along with the intensity was the pain and maybe...in future.... I may not have the intensity but I may have a much happier relationship. I realise that but...I think ..the intensity...it’s addictive.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

During the course of the mourning process, similar stages as those experienced in reaction to the death of a loved one or divorce, are evident. However, the stage of acceptance remains elusive. Even in instances where participants have had considerable time to work through their experience of infidelity for example, two- and three years, finding acceptance and inner peace remains problematic and they are unable to reach closure regarding their experience as unanswered questions persist:

☞ “I started going to a therapist recently, I’m still with him and he told me my emotions are basically similar to those of someone who is going through a divorce and...six years is a long time...it was a committed relationship...we had a commitment. The big ‘why’ [this happened], I still don’t understand...but hopefully I will in time.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Participant B relates his experience of the mourning process as follows:

☞ “There are stages which one unfortunately just has to go through, irrespective of who you are...those stages are inescapable...up until the stage of acceptance. It sounds as if I have read the books [on grief and loss]...Yes, I have read some of the books but it made me realise...I was there...I could identify with being in those stages whether I wanted to or not. The acceptance stage is still difficult...I can accept that we are divorced and she is with someone else but I can’t accept the **reason** for our divorce...I thought we were good together. She is still the only one I can talk to about certain things and she feels the same.....no-one else seems to understand.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

➤ Feelings of depression.

Participants experience a period of depression as they mourn the loss of the relationship during the stages of physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control.

Furthermore, they need to turn to outside sources such as psychotherapists and medical doctors to obtain relief from the symptoms as they have few emotional and physical resources left.

Participant E describes her feelings of depression as follows:

☞ “Once the worst anger towards him and the others subsided, I became terribly depressed. I was suicidal and I felt it was getting quite serious, so I went onto anti-depressants. Shortly after that I

started seeing a psychotherapist as well for a number of months after the relationship ended.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Feelings of depression are a culmination of emotional and physical fatigue, a sense of loss, longing and loneliness as the participants need to rely heavily on themselves to continue with the act of living. These feelings of depression have far reaching implications for the way they perceive themselves.

In particular, motivation is a significant challenge and participants experience themselves as automatically being *in* the world but not necessarily *part of* the world as they protect their inner selves from further vulnerability and pain. As mentioned earlier in the section on regaining control, the participants also lean heavily on their occupations to keep themselves from thinking about their loss and use their hectic schedules as attempts to silence the persistent unanswered questions which rage in their minds:

☞ “If I find myself thinking about the relationship and all the questions I still have, I become very negative and depressed. I don’t want to go onto any medication but I am seeing a therapist because I don’t feel good about myself as a whole...I am just not very positive at the moment.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

In addition, should depressive episodes be evident while the participants are still in the relationship with their partners, feelings of depression worsen and emotional resources become increasingly depleted once the relationship has been abandoned. Consequently, the participants have few resources to draw on as they start over again. Participant A relates her feelings of depression while in the relationship with her partner:

☞ “At one stage in our relationship I decided so far and no further. I couldn’t stand his non-committal attitude and the mixed signals any longer. I had become so depressed, cried my life away and when I wasn’t depressed I was aggressive and tense, particularly tense. I realised I couldn’t live like that any more. What it did to me emotionally was just not worth it so I wrote him the letter and after I had given it to him ...I didn’t see or hear from him for a year and two months.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

However, once the relationship is abandoned Participant A's feelings of depression increase and are compounded by feelings of negativity towards people and her world in general:

☞ “There is a continual, depressive side to my personality now which I never experienced previously. I have felt depressed before but it used to pass.....and now...it's almost as if I am a more vulnerable when I'm depressed that what I was before. I think over these past months, I have become a lot more negative in general about everything,.. people in particular.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Feelings of depression, have further implications for the way participants perceive their future. As the participants become aware of their depression, they also become increasingly aware of their loneliness into which they were coerced when their partners abandoned them. In addition, the participants experience a profound longing for connectedness. Loneliness and longing is discussed in further detail in the following paragraphs.

➤ Loneliness and longing.

When their partners abandon the relationship a void is created in the lives of the participants which gives rise to an intense awareness of being separated from others. These feelings of separateness are unwelcome and stressful as opposed to the deliberate choice of separating themselves from others during the stage of physical and emotional withdrawal. Once this stage of physical and emotional withdrawal has been integrated into the participants' experience of infidelity, being alone and lonely rather than belonging takes on a painful quality which is exacerbated by a profound sense of longing for connectedness with a significant other in an intimate relationship. The sense of separateness and the aloneness which the participants experience, give rise to feelings of humiliation and rejection. Participant D explains:

☞ “It felt as if I were out in the cold... I also needed to integrate the fact that I had exposed a very painful part of who I am as an individual... and I had to confront that painful part from the beginning again. I don't think anything will **ever** come close to that... degree of pain again....the humiliation, the lies, the betrayal.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Similarly, Participant E illustrates her feelings of alienation in describing a scene from a film she had seen some time previously:

☞ “After my intense fury, I was heartbroken and I felt deeply betrayed. It felt like a scene I saw in such a sad movie a few years ago. It was a story about five friends who were holidaying on an island and someone had planted hashish in a dustbin near their bungalow. The police raided the area and found the drugs. One of the guys came out to see why the police were there and they immediately arrested him for drug trafficking. The others were still in the bungalow and when they saw what was happening they ran away, cut their holiday short and flew back home... left him to go to jail. He had hell but they just abandoned him to pay the price even though he was innocent. I felt like that...abandoned...and there was no-one to turn to...it was a very lonely place.”

Participant E2 08 April 2005

Furthermore, there is a preoccupation with the self, more so than previously as the participants struggle to find answers to the question: “Why me?” Participant B shares his feelings around this question:

☞ “Initially I thought...but why.....why me? Why should this have happened to me? Did I do something wrong ...am I unattractive?”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

In addition, linked to the question “Why me”? is a sense of injustice. The sense of injustice, which the participants experience, fuels their preoccupation with themselves as they search their innermost feelings and thoughts regarding their partners’ act/s of infidelity:

☞ “I’m still stunned [about his infidelity] and...I ask myself over and over again...how is it possible that this could have happened to me? Why me? I’m kind and I’m a good person. This is not how it is meant to happen...it’s not something I deserve.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

The participants initially feel alone in the experience of infidelity and have few physical and emotional resources resulting in little concern for, and sensitivity to, the needs of others. Therefore the focus remains on themselves and on their intense emotional pain and abandonment.

Furthermore, the absence of the significant other (see 5.5.1.2.) sharpens the participants' awareness of being alone which is unsettling and gives rise to feelings of insecurity regarding their future in relationships. Separation from their partners also gives rise to increased longing for relationship as the participants experience a sense of detachment, lack of sharing and lack of connectedness. Whereas, the familiarity and security of an intimate relationship provides stability and balance in the lives of the participants their sense of aloneness and isolation results in feelings of imbalance and loss.

The participants perceive their aloneness and longing for a relationship as eliciting their greatest feelings of vulnerability. These feelings, in conjunction with the power they perceive their partners having over them, makes them feel defenceless regarding attempts which their partner may make in resuming the relationship. Participant B was approached by his wife some months after their divorce had been finalised. In the interim, their colleague whom she had had an affair with died and she felt she wanted to resume a relationship with Participant B. He describes his vulnerability, longing and loneliness as the main reasons for resuming a relationship with her. However, their relationship lead to subsequent acts of infidelity by his former wife and resulted in renewed and intense emotional pain for Participant B:

☞ “About two months after we were divorced...she went her way and I went mine and then I started becoming lonely. Rage, resentment...all those feelings I had initially when I heard about their affair had subsided and I started missing her, being with her...and **that** was the biggest mistake. It shouldn't have happened but I couldn't help it....loneliness is a terrible beast and when the other person isn't there for a while...that's what makes it so difficult. I couldn't handle that feeling of loneliness.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Further analysis of the data reveals that a sense of alienation or aloneness is not only relevant to the participants' relationships with their partners and significant others. The participants also experience a sense of aloneness in the way they perceive and know themselves to be and the way they periodically were while in the relationship with their partners. This sense of alienation from their known selves, does not refer to incidents of dissociation that the participants experience as a result of their partners' infidelity.

Rather, the participants' sense of aloneness appears to be a sense of alienation from themselves that they experience as a result of emotions, which are usually foreign to their personalities and are elicited during the course of their relationship. Emotions such as jealousy, possessiveness, fear, insecurity as well as loss of self-control, became evident in their relationship. Behaviour resulting from these emotions are referred to as "out of character" behaviour which increases the participants' experience of a sense of alienation from themselves. Participants D and E respectively explain:

☞ "This relationship....my experience and how it actually **felt** later on....robbed me of my true character, of who I know myself to be... It was terrible....I firmly believe and I **know**, I wasn't myself. "

Participant D. 6 April 2005

☞ "My behaviour to start with was so out of character....it's definitely not who I am and that's really scary...the fact that I even got involved with him. After he had left I think the worst was I felt lost....not because of him not being there but so... out of control. I didn't know the person who had just been through that experience. It was me... but I couldn't fathom how I could have allowed myself knowingly and willingly...to go through such an experience....I felt like a stranger to myself."

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

➤ Relief .

Although the participants experience intense emotional turmoil and pain as their partners leave the relationship they also experience a sense of relief that the tension which their fears and insecurities elicited during the course of the relationship, has subsided. The termination of the relationship therefore offers a bittersweet promise of both longing and relief as the participants come to terms with being alone again.

In addition, relief is experienced once the participants know about their partners' infidelity and consequently they have a reason although not clearly understood, as to why they are being abandoned. Although it does not help them in their efforts to gain closure, the new information brings rationality to a world that seems to the participants to have gone horribly wrong:

☞ “I would have preferred it if the person who told me about his affair had ‘phoned me when it happened rather than waiting almost six weeks for me to get back after my training course....but, when she did tell me....at least there was an answer to his sudden, seemingly irrational termination of our relationship. I would have eventually found out why he broke it off in any case, but it was a relief to have something concrete to hang onto at that time.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Furthermore, during the latter stages of physical and emotional withdrawal, the participants become increasingly relieved as they start feeling more in control of their emotions and this sense of relief enables them to experience greater empowerment when regaining control of their lives. Participants experience a sense of relief as genuinely advantageous particularly to their emotional well-being, and therefore they do not present this aspect of their experience of betrayal in their next interaction, namely maintaining a façade.

What the data also indicate, is the participants experience a sense of relief during the stage of regaining control when they hear that their partners are in subsequent or previous, committed relationships. This knowledge enables them to set definite and fixed personal boundaries regarding future interaction with them. Participant E explains:

☞ “At last, after all the indecisiveness regarding whether he wanted to be with me or go back to her, he left to go back to her and I only found that out later. Then it was terrible... now it is such a relief because there’s nothing left to salvage after that... it’s over. Nothing he could do or say now, would ever make me change my mind. Previously yes,...but...not any more. Now I don’t even like him as a human being.”

Participant E2.08 April 2005

In addition, the knowledge that their partners are involved in other relationships decreases the participants’ vulnerability and fear of lack of control should they be confronted with seeing them again, as they regard their partner as no longer physically and/or emotionally available to them.

Furthermore, the knowledge that the partner is in a subsequent, committed relationship, relinquishes the hold that the participants perceive their partners as having had over them. This

knowledge brings relief to the participants and empowers them as they attempt to carry on with their lives. Also, as the participants regain control, they experience a sense of relief as they are no longer associated with the “abominable” person they now perceive their partner to have become as a result of his or her act of infidelity:

☞ “I heard recently he was going to get married... and I must say..... I’m quite relieved and grateful that he is out of my life forever. I **know** there was no way that I would ever take him back after what he did...my decision was made, I don’t like him, not even as a friend... but I wasn’t sure what my reaction would be if he just pitched up at my house one day and that.. scared me. Now...the fact that he is getting married.....in a way...it helps me to finalise a chapter. He’s not this single guy any longer, wielding a sword over my head, as it were. He’s going to be a married man who has to lead his own life and therefore there is no longer any place for him in mine. The fact....that he is out of my life for ever ...that doesn’t upset me any more... it’s quite a relief.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

➤ Resurrected resilience.

Resurrected resilience as evident in the data, refers to the tendency that the participants display towards buoyancy once their partners have abandoned the relationship. In other words, resilience in this instance, is the ability to bounce back from a debilitating experience to resume the act of daily living. I use the word “resurrected” to describe the participants’ ability to access their resilience, as they generally perceive themselves to be resilient, resourceful and optimistic individuals. After their experience of infidelity however, they are preoccupied with managing their situational crisis and intense emotional trauma and therefore find difficulty in gaining immediate access to their resilient natures.

Specifically, resurrected resilience is evident in the manner in which participants attempt to manage as well as integrate their experience of betrayal. The devastating emotional impact, which their partners’ infidelity has on the participants’ lives, does not seduce them into acquiring a destructive and harmful dependency on substances (alcohol or drugs) or suicide attempts. In addition, excessive, habitual use of freely available “quick-fix” medication for periods of escapism, is also averted. Participant B describes his experience:

☞ “My former wife had to be hospitalised when she realised I had moved on with my life and was involved with someone else. When she phoned me after she had been discharged and I heard how the medication had affected her speech...that was a **big** eye-opener for me. No! I have **never** used any medication of any sort and I’m very proud of the fact. I also didn’t run to the bottle..... I’m think I’m really fortunate that I had the strength to cope without relying on either alcohol or any form of medication.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

During the initial stages of confronting their partner and physical and emotional withdrawal from others, the participants also demonstrate resilience as they attempt to regain control of their lives. Although the participants unavoidably have to confront loneliness and loss, they are able to rise above their emotional turmoil. In later stages such as maintaining a façade, and regaining control, the participants show increased displays of resilience as they continue to manage and integrate the experience of infidelity:

☞ “I think some people are more resilient than others. People who aren’t resilient, who are weaker will probably never reach the phase of acceptance, but they will go through the other stages of anger and so on. Some people have the strength to rise above the experience but others won’t make it, they are just not strong enough. I was fortunate, I could start managing and working through the experience of my wife’s affairs.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Closely linked to resurrected resilience is the expectation of hope. Although the participants experience periods of depression prior to seeking medical and/or psychotherapeutic assistance, they still retain hope throughout the experience. Hope is a key element of resilience and enables the participants to focus on the future irrespective of how bleak it may be at the time of their experience of betrayal. Of significance is that the participants are weary and pessimistic about the prospect of engaging in a fulfilling relationship in future, but they are able to retain the hope that the possibility for such a relationship does exist. In addition, they endeavour to remain hopeful that in time, the opportunity for such a relationship does exist:

☞ “As a rule...I am a person that believes in the possibility of a fulfilling relationship. Yes...I do believe and I am hopeful that it can happen for me too in spite of the terrible experience I have had

and in spite of who my previous partners were...as people....not only the last one, but the whole lot of them.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

This belief is also based on the fulfilling relationships of friends and/or family members:

☞ “I need to believe there are fulfilling relationships and I do...and..I believe I can be in one as well. Where it will happen and how I will manage it when it happens...I have no idea at this stage...it’s too soon to think about it now. My friends show me it is quite possible to have a fulfilling relationship. There’s a friend of mine who has been through really good and bad times and she gives me hope...to see that notwithstanding all the adversity...they started with absolutely nothing yet, they have done well and they are really happy...sure, they have problems too but nothing which threatens their relationship. Yes, my sister as well, she has a very happy relationship, and they have been through difficult times. That also gives me hope... that a fulfilling relationship **can** and **does** exist.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

However, after the experience of their partners’ infidelity, the participants are more sceptical regarding the vision of a fulfilling relationship:

☞ “I think it is quite possible to engage in a relationship that is mutually fulfilling for both parties...my parents have such a relationship...but since my experience, I believe such relationships are very few and far between. Now I think finding that partner and becoming involved in a rewarding relationship is like finding a needle in a haystack. Previously, I thought **most** people were in relationships that were mutually fulfilling”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

➤ Loss.

The data indicate that an important consequence in the experience of infidelity is that of **loss**. As discussed previously the participants’ initial sense of loss occurs once he or she becomes aware of his or her partners’ infidelity and the relationship has been abandoned. However, as will be described in greater detail in the following chapter, a sense of loss is not limited to this aspect of

their experience of infidelity but permeates many facets of the participants' world. Although the intensity of the emotional impact subsides over time, a sense of loss continues to linger in the lives of the participants throughout and well beyond the experience of infidelity, as they attempt to reconstruct their relationships with others and with their estranged selves.

A sense of loss is emphasised by the actions and/or interactions, which the participants take in managing their experience of infidelity (see 5.5.2). When **confronting their partner** the participants' anger also portrays their feelings of helplessness as they become aware of having being robbed of what they considered to be a rewarding belonging in a relationship with a significant other. Furthermore, the participants are angry at the loss of rewarding relationships with friends and family members of the intimate dyad once the relationship has been abandoned.

The notion of having being "robbed of" or "having been stolen from", in other words, "unlawfully taking that which belongs to another" is a significant finding in the data and intensifies the emotional pain of the participants as a result of their partners' infidelity. In addition, "robbed" and "stolen" in this context does not refer to material and tangible objects but rather intangible aspects such as trust in others, time, the capacity to love, intimacy and a sense of belonging in a relationship with a significant other. Material investments such as shared homes, household and other consumable expenses are also facets of the relationship, which indicate permanent loss within the relational context. Such losses are experienced as more tangible and are more easily integrated into the participants' experience than those that are intangible.

In the context of an intimate relationship therefore, participants allow themselves to become physical and emotionally vulnerable to their partners and trust them to protect and promote, rather than harm the interests of the relationship. Therefore, they willingly and freely give of themselves to the relationship, trusting that their investment of themselves as individuals, will be protected. However in the light of their partners' infidelity, the participants experience that the investment of themselves is no longer protected but exploited. In feeling exploited, the participants experience feelings of disempowerment that occur when an individual is robbed of that which belongs to them (tangible or intangible). This escalates the participants' sense of loss.

Furthermore, as the participants choose not to reconcile their relationships once they have been terminated, the sense of loss is intensified in the absence of a sense of restoration or "*getting back*

that which has been stolen from me". Therefore, what makes the participants' loss increasingly profound, is that there are very few dimensions in their experience of infidelity, which can be restored or replaced. Dimensions such as **time, emotional- and physical energy, material investment, vulnerability, trust** (see 2.8) **autonomy, ideals, expectations and prospects of shared and planned futures** are permanently lost as the relationship is abandoned. Loss of trust, time and energy, material investment and identity will be discussed in greater detail in the ensuing paragraphs.

During the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants become increasingly aware of the lost parts of themselves in the context of the lost relationship, as they attempt to assimilate their partners' infidelity. They also begin to mourn their loss of relationship and belonging as well as for the lost parts of themselves that they gave to the relationship. Furthermore, the participants try and hide the impact that the lost parts of themselves and the relationship has on their lives during the stage of **maintaining a façade**. In **regaining control**, the participants consider confronting their loss and attempt to integrate it into their daily experience. However with the imminent onset of loneliness and longing, their sense of loss is constantly revisited and renewed.

◆ Loss of trust in others.

Loss of trust is one of the consequences of betrayal that the participants experience when becoming aware of their partners' infidelity. The participants specifically express their loss of trust in individuals both within current and future intimate relationships as well as friendships and other interpersonal associations. Consequently, **loss of trust** has far-reaching implications for current and future relationships of both an intimate and platonic nature.

Furthermore, analysis of data reveals that trust is a significantly fragile component of human relationships and one of the most difficult to restore once betrayed (see 2.8). Loss of trust is manifested during the stage of physical and emotional withdrawal, once the participants have been informed of their partners' infidelity. Once the participants have started assimilating their partners' betrayal, they are able to engage at a superficial level in relationships and friendships but carry the burden of not being able to trust others to the extent that they were able to in the past.

Loss of trust in the fundamental goodness of the other is a prominent aspect of the depletion of emotional resources, which the participants experience, and is one of the losses the participants suffer as a result of their partners' infidelity. Participants have few emotional resources to invest in a future relationship, one of which is trust. In addition, they have little physical energy to invest in a future relationship. The participants need to shelter their vulnerable selves and build their emotional resources, therefore they do not expose themselves to relationships, which require in-depth emotional investment or unconditional and extensive trust.

Due to its fragile nature, should trust be damaged, it takes the longest to heal in the participants' experience of infidelity. Consequently, they grapple with issues of trusting a partner in a future relationship again. At the time of the interviews, Participant B had engaged in a subsequent relationship after his divorce but continued to wrestle with the issue of being able to trust his new girlfriend:

☞ “I can't trust anyone anymore and I wish I wasn't like this. I'm afraid it will also mean the end of this relationship because I can't be sure that I will be able to see it through, not because it is her, but with any woman. That's what my wife's affairs did to me. The fear, the insecurity of not really knowing whether they are telling the truth. I'm really trying but I'm not sure I can trust my girlfriend and I can't help it, it's like a reflex muscle, it's just there.... out of the blue...the mistrust.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

In addition, the ability and willingness to trust others is not specific to a partner in an intimate relationship but affects other relationships, which the participants have engaged in, or future relationships. As a result of her partner's infidelity, Participant A experiences difficulty not only in trusting a significant other in an intimate relationship but also in trusting her friends:

☞ “What if it happens again? What if I trust someone again and they betray my trust? Also, the fear and anxiety I have about trusting someone...it doesn't just apply to an intimate relationship, it affects my friendships as well. I don't trust as easily and I'm really cautious. It is as if I am much more aware now of what people say and do, which I wasn't in the past.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Trusting others also requires that the participants become emotionally vulnerable and consequently, should their trust be betrayed, intense emotional pain is inflicted. Furthermore, the intensity of the emotional pain increases because the participants perceive themselves as generous in their readiness to trust others:

☞ “I trust very easily. I think that’s because I can trust myself and because I am an honest person, I don’t feel that I have to distrust others, it’s not in my nature. And...if I can’t trust my partner, what does it all boil down to then? It wasn’t even an option not to trust him because I had given too much of myself in the relationship. I gave everything, every core of my being, my world,everything I was and had....and that made it so difficult, such a long process to come back from. It was almost like trying to clean a shrapnel wound.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Participant E emphasises how her readiness to trust men in particular has taken on a new quality after her experience of her partner’s infidelity:

☞ “In general, I am still very cautious when it comes to menespecially men. I listen to them more closely than before. Previously I was much more accepting and trusting. I’m not any longer,

I’m much more sceptical now. Men have to prove themselves to me and I think it probably shows in my attitude but I can’t help it. I don’t give them the benefit of the doubt any longer.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Loss of trust due to their partners’ infidelity results in relationships and friendships which gain a *conscious, conditional facet* and which result in the participants having higher expectations of their current and future relationships and friendships. The data indicate that participants previously perceived their relationships and friendships as less conditional and relatively free of scrutiny and criticism, with fewer expectations on their part. Presently however, current relationships and friendships are evaluated and subjected to scrutiny and criticism. Participant C describes this aspect of her functioning with regard to her relationships and friendships in the following manner:

☞ “I am a lot more critical now. Friendship was always unconditional as far as I was concerned but when I think of my friends and our friendships now, I am a lot more critical and friendships are

conditional now. Other relationships as well...the person first has to prove him- or herself to be trustworthy...I think many people don't see their way clear to prove themselves...and I realise it's very unfair towards them but that's the way I feel at the moment."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

A further aspect that results from loss of trust is that participants set firmer boundaries with regard to relationships. Participant E describes this aspect when discussing the loss of trust as a result of her partner's infidelity:

☞ "Trust is definitely a problem for me at the moment. I haven't had another relationship...I can't, even though it has been two years...I still feel too vulnerable and I just don't have the energy or the emotional resources for another relationship. My boundaries are much firmer now too. I would say I'm a lot more assertive and less accommodating when it comes to dealing with men in particular. I'm not a "man-eater" but I'm not a "walkover" either. Even when I take my car to the garage to put in petrol, I get out and check to see the attendant is doing...I never used to...I just accepted that it was fine...not anymore."

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Similarly, Participant D describes how he perceives setting firmer boundaries in his future relationships as paramount to his physical and emotional survival:

☞ "I don't think I will ever, or can ever go through what I went through with him. Boundaries which were very important needed to be put in place and they are there now. Those boundaries protect one's core. I think if **that** part of a person.... the very essence of one's being... gets hurt... **so** hurt.... ...I think one **knows** then.... that one will never be able to survive that again".

Participant D. 06 April 2005

◆ Loss of time and energy.

The data indicate that the participants' experience of betrayal also involves the dimension of **time**. This is evident as they experience a break in time as opposed to the shared continuity of relationship and a sense of belonging with their partner. Furthermore, due to the participants not

being able to reach closure with regard to their partners' infidelity, the past constantly impinges on the present and raises barriers for future relationships.

Closely linked to the dimension of time is that of **physical and emotional energy**. As the participants invest their time and physical and emotional energy in the relationship with their partners, they gain a sense of continuity and belonging. The short-term rewards of their time and energy, support their sense of continuity in the relationship. This in turn leads to greater levels of energy being invested in the relationship over time. However, once the relationship is terminated, the participants regard the length of their time and energy spent in the relationship as lost. Participant E spent two years in a turbulent relationship, which ended when her partner betrayed her with his former wife. She describes her loss of time and energy invested in the relationship as follows:

☞ “I often think about it and wonder....what was it all about?. All that time and energy spent being there for him, waiting, planning for a future and putting up with the stress and tension and the pain...and he just...brushes it off and... goes back to her.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Further analysis of the data reveals however, that the level of commitment and sense of connectedness in the intimate relationships are not directly related to the length of time or energy spent in the relationship with their partner.

In addition, participants experience a sense of loss of time invested in relationships with friends and family members of their former partners due to their commitment to their relationship and their sense of belonging and connectedness. However, as these relationships are sacrificed due to the abandonment of the intimate dyad, the participants mourn the loss of people they have grown to love over time. Participant C, for example, who had been in a six year relationship, feels that even if her relationship had only lasted a few months, it would not have detracted from her intense emotional pain as a result of her partner's infidelity or the pain of losing his family and friends:

☞ “I am quite an emotional person but I don't get involved in relationships impulsively, so even if the relationship had only lasted for....six months, the experience would have been just as painful.

The big difference I think...would have been that I wouldn't have grown so close to his family and friends if it had only lasted six months.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Similarly, Participant D experiences his brief relationship of a few months as markedly intense, on both emotional and physical levels but he feels he would have invested a similar amount of time and energy in the relationship irrespective of how long it had lasted:

☞ “I will **always** give everything I have to give.....of myself, my time, energy....in a relationship...I haven't changed because of this experience. Should I have given less because it only lasted a few months? I can't! That's who I am.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005.

◆ Loss of material investment.

Material investment refers to the **financial contribution** that the participants make to the relationship over time. This form of investment is largely comprised of consumables such as household expenses (groceries, water and lights) or maintenance requirements (repairs and petrol) as well as gifts, entertainment and vacations. Bond and rental repayments on accommodation and mutual acquisition of both large and small household appliances are further financial investments that are made in an intimate relationship. Particularly, during the stage of physical and emotional withdrawal, the participants reflect on their relationship and become aware of their loss of material investment, as this is one of the foremost tangible losses in the relationship.

Participant B for example, experienced great financial loss and financial readjustment as a result of the costs and logistics surrounding his divorce after his wife's infidelity. On the other hand, Participant D who was involved in a brief relationship, also experienced financial loss due to his generosity in lavishing expensive gifts on his partner and making a financial contribution to their entertainment and other expenses. He explains:

☞ “ I would have thought that in giving so much... of myself , my energy...gifts... that.. that would secure the relationship. I mean... if I had to give every *rouble* that I ever owned to

the relationship, I would have. And I made sure that I spent everything on him... I gave him the most wonderful gifts...I was left with basically nothing, not two cents to my name. I am generous, a very giving person...and I believe it is one of my most wonderful characteristics. It's something I gladly do and have done... especially for people close to me, friends and special people in my life.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

The material investment that the participants make in their relationships increases over time and concomitantly results in greater financial loss. Of significance however, is that once the relationship has been abandoned, the participants are less pre-occupied with their financial loss as their sense of alienation and loss of their relationship is paramount in their experience of infidelity.

◆ Loss of a familiar sense of identity.

Once their relationships have been abandoned, the participants reflect on their experience of their partners' infidelity and they become aware of the loss of a **familiar sense of identity**. Questions persist regarding their characteristics, beliefs, values, their physical attractiveness to others - everything they stand for, as well as their achievements and areas of strengths and development. As a result, conflict arises between negative and positive perceptions that the participants have of themselves and leads to further deterioration of a fragile self-image.

The conflict between negative aspects of themselves raise questions such as: “Am I nice after all?” or “Is there something wrong with me?” and positive aspects of themselves such as “I'm an attractive person” continually looms as the participants' perceptions of themselves are challenged by their partners' infidelity. Consequently, they precariously hold on to their perception of themselves as “attractive” and “good” while attempting to make sense of their partners' abrupt abandonment of them.

In addition, they become aware that they are faced with carrying the burden of a negative self-image into their current and future relationships as a result of their partners' infidelity. This leads to a greater sense of alienation from themselves. The participants are also confronted with having to integrate “negative” aspects of their emotions and resulting behaviour into their personalities which was not necessary in their previous relationships:

☞ “I had to integrate aspects into my personality which never presented themselves as problems before, negative aspects, nothing positive. Things like.... ‘I can’t trust my judgement any longer, I can’t sum people up accurately, I am a pushover’ and...the fact that he never really loved me....that was the most difficult to try and integrate.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Whilst in the relationship however, the participants are unaware of the insidious, unforeseen processes within the relationship which taxed their sense of identity and their initial, positive self-image. The participants’ perceptions of themselves and their relationships as a result of their partners’ infidelity is discussed in greater detail under cognitive consequences.

As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the participants experience their loss as untimely and coerced upon them. Consequently, in losing the relationship, they are robbed of parts of themselves such as their familiar sense of identity and their integrated self-image:

☞ ”This relationship robbed me of my identity, of who I am....I don’t think there is a greater impact on a person’s life...one loses one’s whole identity...I am a successful person but after that I didn’t know who or what I was... on level ...It is only in these past few months that it [my identity]has started coming back again.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Consequently, the participants experience an estrangement of self and loss of equilibrium. “Disequilibrium”, “discontentment with self,” “rejection of self”, the realization that they had “the potential to dissociate” (see intrapsychic consequences) which frightens them, describe the participants’ perception of themselves. They are initially overwhelmed by negative feelings within and towards themselves, which make them feel helpless, and immobilized as they feel disconnected from their familiar selves. Consequently they need to look outside themselves and beyond their immediate external relationships for medical and psychotherapeutic assistance.

One consequence of a loss of a familiar sense of identity is that the participants are unable to relate with more connectedness to themselves and others. In addition, they also feel divorced from the

familiarity of their previously known world. Past and present relationships are transformed from a sense of continuity, support and integration to ones where fear, shame, guilt, self-blame, humiliation, desolation, anxiety, mistrust, paranoia, depression, suicide ideation and loneliness and longing are experienced.

At the same time as feeling disconnected from self and the world, the experience of betrayal results in a sense of renewed dependency on others and loss of confidence in themselves as unique individuals. In addition, the participants experience and increase in their feelings of insecurity with regard to future relationships. Lack of closure with regard to their partners' infidelity as well as having to depend on others for possible cues as to the causes of his or her infidelity, create insecurity in the participants themselves.

Furthermore, they are given the added burden of finding out what is good and acceptable about themselves in the midst of dark and intense emotional pain. Inner turmoil reigns as they attempt to reconcile their current sense of identity with the people they perceive themselves to be:

☞ "If you told me four years ago that a relationship with someone would influence me to the extent it has... I would have said there is just **no way!** It is literally a life-changing experience, the betrayal. It has made me question and doubt everything I am, my values, what I believe in... and that is so difficult to change back to the way it was. I lost the person I knew for thirty-three years as a result of this experience."

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Further turmoil centres on their sense of identity while in the relationship in the light of their partners' acceptance and appreciation of them. Their confusion escalates as their partners maintain that the participants are acceptable, yet reject them and abandon them for other partners.

Prior to the experience of betrayal, the participants perceive themselves as separate and individual within the welcome and secure constraints of a dyad. However, only once the relationship has disintegrated, the full realisation of the binding nature of a shared sense of belonging becomes evident as the participants perceive themselves and their identity as being interwoven in the dynamics of the relationship. If the relationship is stable and satisfying, the participants feel

positive about themselves. On the other hand, if the relationship is unstable and rife with conflict, the participants feel negative about themselves. Participant A explains:

☞ ”It was as if my identity...who I was...and my self-image were linked to the relationship. The relationship seemed to determine whether I would experience myself negatively or positively. When things were going well, I felt really good about myself and when they were going badly, I had a very negative self-image. I found that to be a scary experience that my self-image should fluctuate like that. Rather, I have always considered my self-image to be separate from my experiences. I have always been confident about myself and I couldn’t believe that this relationship could change that.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Furthermore, the participants’ perception of a whole, true self is shattered and they are unable to conceive of an image of an integrated, whole self. Consequently, a sense of harmony within their inner and outer worlds remains elusive. One of the ways in which wholeness and integration of self can be attained over time is in a psychotherapeutic relationship with another who will objectively affirm, contain and validate the participants within the context of their experience of infidelity. The process towards wholeness and validation as well as a restored sense of identity has begun to occur within the psychotherapeutic relationships which were in place at the time of this study.

Now we turn to the second category of consequences in this section, namely behavioural consequences. This is followed by cognitive- and intrapsychic consequences.

❖ **Behavioural consequences.**

The participants employ strategic actions and interactions as a result of their partners’ infidelity, which in turn, carry behavioural consequences. As indicated in 5.5.2 the first action or interaction the participants take once the relationship has been terminated is to **confront their partner**, followed by **physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control**. What also emerges from the data is that there are considerably less behavioural consequences than emotional consequences discussed in the preceding section.

The action of **confronting their partner** is initially motivated by anger and a sense of injustice. The participants find themselves in a position where they have nothing left to lose as the relationship and their partner is already lost to them. Consequently, they are more assertive in their behaviour towards their partner and they no longer tiptoe around subjects such as confrontation that were generally avoided while they were in the relationship. Their assertive behaviour empowers the participants to display a primitive authenticity of their feelings during these confrontations and firm boundaries are set in place with regard to future interaction between the parties. Although their assertive behaviour is a source of empowerment for the participants as they begin to manage the experience of infidelity, it also contributes to a sense of alienation and ultimately, a sense of longing and aloneness.

Once the participants **withdraw physically and emotionally**, a behavioural consequence that results from this action (or deliberate lack of interaction) is **physical avoidance** of others. In other words, the participants initially become more passive in their behaviour as they focus on themselves as a protective measure in their attempts to preserve their depleted physical and emotional resources. This is in stark contrast to their usual higher levels of activity, which include higher levels of externally focused activity, involving others. Consequently, the participants limit their physical activity as they continue to process and integrate the knowledge that their partners have been unfaithful and have abandoned the relationship.

When **maintaining a façade**, the participants become aware that a central behavioural consequence of this stage is that their **vigilance** has noticeably heightened. Heightened vigilance is not limited to this stage but also influences the participants' sense of **regaining control** as they feel better equipped to manage their environment. This aspect of the participants' behaviour is described in the following paragraphs.

➤ Heightened vigilance.

Heightened vigilance refers to the participants' awareness that their perceptual faculties have become more acutely attuned to their environment. In particular, their heightened vigilance

influences the participants' behaviour within their home, social and occupational environments. The participants are currently all engaged in occupations, which require in-depth people contact, and their heightened vigilance is beneficial to their efficiency. Furthermore, the participants' heightened vigilance has direct implications for their ability to trust people as they become increasingly suspicious of others' motives, as a result of their experience of infidelity:

☞ ”In my line of work...I think it is possibly one of the best things that could have happened to me. I don't want to sound arrogant but I have always been very good at what I do but now....I'm even better at what I do than before. I'm acutely attuned to what is going on around me, **hyper-alert!** To what people say and do....I suppose.... because I'm not sure I can trust what they say.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

An interesting finding which is evident in the data indicates that the participants specifically become aware that their auditory perceptions have sharpened. They listen more closely to what people say when asking for advice but still decide whether any suggestions arising from such information may be implemented. An awareness of sharpened auditory perceptions does not result from ignorance or a lack of skills and knowledge but rather from a lack of trust in the information obtained. In addition, when interacting socially with others, the participants listen closely and draw their own conclusions as to whether they perceive the information given by others as having any credibility:

☞ ”When I'm with friends and someone starts relating an incident or sometimes...just in general conversation...I listen very carefully now and sometimes I find myself thinkingNo!, that doesn't make sense or it doesn't “jell” with what he or she said earlier. I do this with both men and women. I think I'm probably a lot more aware now that someone can take me for a ride.....and what their motives could be. What they say or even do has to make sense ...I don't want to wonder about it, but I find myself looking for verification the whole time...wondering whether what they are saying is true or not.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

❖ **Cognitive consequences.**

A significant feature of the participants' cognitive patterns as a result of their partners' betrayal, is that these patterns are relentless and the participants have little control over their recurrence. Furthermore, as in emotional- and behavioural consequences, cognitive consequences are evident in the action and interaction strategies, which the participants employ. In addition, they do not progress linearly through the stages indicated in figure 5.3. Rather, as in the case of the emotional consequences and behavioural consequences, the participants' cognitive patterns are fluid in their movement between these stages.

What emerges from the data is that the participants initially engage in little reflective thinking during the stage of **confronting their partner**. However, during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants increasingly engage in reflective thinking as this period is marked by continual thoughts of betrayal and relationships in general. Furthermore, the participants are pursued by continuous thoughts of their partners both prior to and after the betrayal. The cycle of thinking elicited during this stage, translates into persistent cognitive patterns, which recur during the phases of **maintaining a façade** as well as **regaining control**.

Although the participants re-engage in social activities and honour their work commitments, they largely remain prisoners of their thoughts during the process of healing as they tirelessly search for closure. Furthermore, unlike certain emotional- and behavioural consequences such as experiencing a sense of relief and increased assertiveness respectively, which may empower the participants, cognitive consequences of the participants' action and interaction strategies are largely debilitating and destructive in nature. This aspect of the participants' experience of betrayal, has a negative effect on many friendships or relationships the participants have as well as their relationship with themselves. Ultimately, this leads to a profound sense of alienation and disconnectedness from self and others. The cognitive consequences which emerge from the data are: **self-punitive ideation, paranoid ideation, doubt, persistent thoughts about the partners' betrayal, holding on to the relationship** and **comparing themselves to the known or unknown other in their partners' lives**. Each of these consequences is described in the ensuing paragraphs.

➤ Self-punitive ideation.

A tendency towards self-punitive ideation is evident in the data as the participants initially deduce that they are unacceptable and unable to maintain an intimate relationship. They become self-critical and self-blaming and cultivate feelings of ambivalence and insecurity in themselves.

Participant C explains:

☞ ”There are many negative aspects of my personality which I dislike at this stage....I often ask myself: ‘What did I do wrong? Was there something I should have done differently? Should I have been more or less friendly, or....more or less loving orprettier or uglier....I don’t know.’”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

In addition the participants berate themselves for being “so stupid” and foolish as to have been easily tricked in the relationship and ultimately, humiliated:

☞ ”He asked me whether I would be there if he gave up his vocation, his family, everything, in fact.... his life as he knew it and I said yes and..... I committed to that.....but I was the stupid fool. He **never** intended leaving all that behind ...committing to a future with me...and only he knew that...I, on the other hand believed him...that we would have a future together.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Similarly, Participant D berates himself for “losing” his usual perceptiveness of people and his environment and for being foolish enough to have missed the “obvious”:

☞ ”One of my....strong characteristics is my perceptiveness... my ability to know exactly what is going on around me...that sense of awareness ... Since I can remember, it’s always been there...and it always worked for me before....so what happened this time? I’m angry at myself for being so foolish...what did I miss?...and how could I have missed it? If it was so obvious then...why? Maybe, because I chose to miss it and really wanted to miss it. But I could have saved myself so much pain.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Even when fantasizing about further contact with their partner after their betrayal, the participants include a reference in their internal dialogue to their “stupidity” for allowing themselves to have become involved with their partner. Participant A describes her feelings in the following manner:

☞ ”My feeling now is...I don’t even **like** him. I don’t even want him for a friend, I mean what will I gain from a friendship. If I ever spoke to him again and he suggested it, I would say **forget** it...it’s past, you aren’t loyal....you aren’t faithful. I don’t trust you in the least, not even as a friend. You are totally unreliable and every time I see you I will think...I can’t believe I was so **stupid** to allow myself to have become involved with you. There is nothing left to build on....not even for a friendship.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

➤ Paranoid ideation.

Paranoid ideation is a consequence evident in the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control**. This form of ideation does not necessarily occur linearly in succession from the former to the latter stages mentioned above, but may occur sporadically as the stages are repetitively revisited during the process of healing. Also it is important to note, that the term “paranoid ideation” which the participants experience is used in this study for descriptive purposes only and does not imply that any of the participants meet the criteria for a clinical diagnosis of paranoia. The term “paranoid ideation” used in this context, refers to a pattern of thinking characterized mainly by doubt and wariness, which originates from an intense fear of engaging in a future intimate relationship, only to be hurt again.

As the participants reflect on their partners’ infidelity and their abandonment, they become aware specifically that they doubt their partners’ motives for having been in the relationship in the first place. They perceive their partners as having tricked them into loving them and allowing them to experience a sense of connectedness and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, they are convinced that their partners intended to betray them at some stage during the course of the relationship.


Participant A describes her experience as follows:

☞ ”The idea that it [the betrayal] was planned in such a callous way makes the betrayal so much worse because one doesn’t expect it – **at all!!** On the other hand, if someone apologises for having

an affair because they couldn't help themselves or because they were stupid or whatever their excuse may be...there is some way of making peace with the betrayal. At least then I can believe that it was not just this **scheme** to hurt me and to use me. In retrospect, I believe he was in the relationship for other reasons. There was betrayal from the word go. I think that for three years his game was: 'let's hang around until someone else comes along'. And I think that worries me most about our relationship...I wonder at what stage did he start planning to betray me.....to carry out the betrayal?"


Participant A. 15 February 2005

When retrospectively reflecting on his experience of betrayal, participant D expressed his doubt of the intentions of his partner. He suggested that his partner had ulterior motives for being in the relationship and tricked him into believing that he cared rather than genuinely wanting to engage in an intimate relationship:

 "He pressed all the right buttons...he knew **exactly** what to say. I think he summed me up immediately, where I came from, the things that interest me and...he played the game very well, **exceptionally** well..... I asked him a lot of questions about himself and about us...where we were headed.....those type of questions...and his answers were so clever, they always sounded totally appropriate and reassuring....but he was lying....all along he lied....he kept me there under false pretences."

Participant D. 06 April 2005

In addition, the participants display intermittent paranoid behaviour which is of a negligible nature and which does not impair their daily functioning. Their behaviour serves to underscore their attempts to regain control of their lives as they take precautionary measures to minimize the risk of being caught unaware again. These precautionary measures enable the participants to set boundaries with regard to the contact they have with their former partners and consequently, affirm the participants' sense of regaining control of their lives after their betrayal. Participant E illustrates this aspect of her functioning:

 "He stopped calling my cell phone because his number would come up on the screen and he didn't want to risk that because my friend had threatened to tell his wife that he was still calling me if he didn't stop. I didn't believe he would stop, so as a precautionary measure after he had left, I

bought an Identi-call ...I still have it....maybe subconsciously it's a boundary I put in place.... I don't know. Anyway I connected it up to my home phone. It sounds paranoid but at least then if he did call, I would be prepared and I could avoid his calls. It worked well because at times I would see the Durban and Port Elizabeth numbers on the Identi-call and I knew it was him. His family live in Port Elizabeth so I knew it could only be him. It made such a difference having that little mechanism attached to the telephone I had some form of control over him contacting me and therefore I wouldn't be caught by surprise.”

Participant E1.31 March 2005

Furthermore, Participant B believes that as a result of his wife's betrayal, his thinking regarding betrayals by future partners has been influenced. Previously, he did not consciously consider the possibility of being betrayed by a partner. However, the fact that he has experienced betrayal consciously makes him aware that such a possibility exists and can occur again. He suggests one should guard against complacency in relationships and be wary of being caught by surprise. Consequently as a precautionary measure, he advises against letting one's guard down:

☞ ”I say **‘Be careful!’** don't become complacent. Just because one thinks one survives such an experience one may think one is able to cope with a similar situation after that. I thought about it and at first ...I believed this experience really made me a lot stronger...I felt practically “untouchable” because....I thought...if **this** didn't kill me, nothing ever would.... but that's not true. I realise now I have to be so **careful** because every situation is different. I don't want to be unprepared...**ever**.... I never want any nasty surprises ever again. So one cannot let one's guard down...the minute one lowers one's guard... one becomes rusty...and...out of practice.....too complacent.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

In addition, in the light of their partners' betrayal, the participants become wary of men and/or women's motives outside the dyad:

☞ ”Any man that wants to get close to me or ...even thinks about having a relationship with me.....it is not an option at this stage. I have become very cynical about them now and I question their motives for wanting to be with me.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant E, who was asked to resign from her spiritual home after 25 years' membership as a result of her relationship with a married member of the church, is wary of the motives of the church leader and elders for wanting her to come "home" once her relationship had been terminated. She indicates:

☞ "Now...two years later the church leaders have asked my parents to tell me they want me to come "home". "**Home**" of all places...that is no longer my spiritual home....do they think I'm stupid? I don't believe it's about making me feel part of the community again...not for one minute. The same people who caused me so much pain and ostracised me...they are all still there. So...what do they really want me to come back for...for more punishment? I think it's to appease their consciences...it's not about me **at all!** They still feel very guilty about the way they handled the situation when they insisted I leave the church and tender my resignation on the spot. The church leader phoned me twice because I hadn't faxed my resignation through to his office quickly enough. He even offered to send me an example because I was 'obviously' battling to write the letter. Of course I wasI just couldn't write it. It seemed so.... final and I was shaking so much.....I couldn't think straight at the time."

Participant E1.31 March 2005

Paranoid ideation also influences the participants' perception of future, intimate relationships and in addition, influences their perception of relationships with acquaintances and friends. Participant A emphasises her concern about being paranoid in future relationships:

☞ "I've become very cautious...almost paranoid as a result of the experience...not only with regard to relationships but also with new acquaintances and friendships. If someone wants to be friends with me now...I wonder why? What are their motives for wanting to be friends?... I never used to do that before. ...so I think my relationships have been influenced very negatively ...very!.. Yes...over this past year, I have become very negative about things and about people in general.

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant C shares a similar concern:

☞ "I'm afraid that I will be overly possessive and totally paranoid in a new relationship. I would

really like that person to know I trust him implicitly.... but I think.....at this stage... I would be paranoid and it will make me ill.....**mentally** ill. The energy that goes into being paranoid...I think it is so draining and I can't see myself becoming involved in a relationship where I can't trust the other person. It will tire me and... the relationship will be a total disaster from the beginning.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

➤ Persistent thoughts about the partners' betrayal.

The participants are frequently plagued by thoughts of their partners' betrayal as they begin to assimilate their experience. The persistence of their thoughts increases as the participants have more time to physically and emotionally withdraw and reflect on the relationship. However, the data also suggest that these thoughts persist throughout the stages indicated in 5.5.2. although their intensity decreases over time:

☞ ”There was a stage when I thought about him and everything that happened on a daily basis...not any more. Now, weeks will go by and I don't think of him. I'm not even sad...nothing like that... but it is definitely there... and it doesn't take much to open up the wound again....it's still very close to the surface.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005


Persistent thoughts about their partners' betrayal relies heavily on vivid images of their partner betraying them. Participant B explains this aspect of his experience of his wife's betrayal and believes that persistent images which he entertained were a contributing factor to their failed attempt at reconciliation:

☞ “I was crazy about her....and we tried to reconcile after she had left ...but for some or other reason I just couldn't get the image of her being sexually intimate with him out of my mind.... So...I was constantly aware of questions that raced through my head when I was with her. When I kissed her for instance or.... when we were sexually intimate...I asked myself....'Who was she **really** seeing when she closed her eyes'?...'Who was giving her pleasure? Was I giving her pleasure or was she fantasizing about him?' And that was very, very difficult for me to try and

come to terms with...very traumatic. I think it contributed to the fact that we couldn't reconcile...I was too insecure and I kept asking for reassurance that it wouldn't happen again. But... I had reason to feel that way because I found out later that she was having another affair during our attempted reconciliation."


Participant B. 16 February 2005

Participant C indicates that during the stages of physical and emotional withdrawal she reflected on her partners' betrayal and wondered about practical issues such as where he would have found the time and venue for an affair. Furthermore, as these thoughts lead to speculation and unanswered questions, she experiences them as persistent:

 "I kept wondering...where did he find the time to have an affair? But I suppose a person makes time and creates opportunities for this type of thing. It was probably between 18:00 and 20:30..when he went to play squash. He used to play every evening and there was plenty of opportunity then. He also kept his flat when he moved in with me, so he had a place he could use as well. Thinking back, it must have been during those times."


Participant C. 16 February 2005

Persistent thoughts shortly after their partner's betrayal are translated into fantasies of revenge as the participants reel from the shock of their abandonment. Participant A indicates:

 "I had a very strong need to take revenge...for a long time after he had left, but it seems to have subsided to some degree. He is fortunate that I am too scared ..unlike many other women in my situation to boil the rabbit [referring to a scene from the film *Fatal Attraction*], or to phone him continuously or to terrorise him. I think the thought of being humiliated even further stops me from taking any revenge. I don't want people to see how needy I am of him."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Similarly, Participant E describes her persistent thoughts and fantasies of revenge shortly after her partner's betrayal:

 "I battled to get rid of thoughts of revenge towards everyone who was involved in the process leading up to his betrayal. I had fantasies and visions of how I would belittle them and really hurt

them physically, emotionally and financially if I could. When I found myself planning in the finest detail how I would carry out my revenge, I realised I was heading for trouble and I would end up hurting and humiliating myself even further....so I stopped. I never realised I had that in me...it was a side of my personality I didn't know and it really scared me.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

➤ Holding on to the relationship.

A further cognitive consequence of the stages of action and interaction which the participants engage in is **holding on to the relationship**. Holding on to the relationship has various facets that are relevant to the discussion. Firstly, stimulated by fear of losing their partner (see emotional consequences), the participants **hold on to the relationship** prior to abandonment. However in retrospect they realise that it would have been more beneficial to them and could have saved them intense pain, if they had let go when they felt the relationship to be unrewarding. Specifically during the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants become aware of many instances when they could have let go of a relationship that had started offering them ‘crumbs’. Participant D explains this aspect of his experience:

☞ ”When I was overseas...I intuitively started to feel that something was changing in our relationship. Suddenly, there were less phone calls and text messages and the inconsistency rattled me. I didn't know it at the time but that was when he had started seeing someone else. So....I could feel the change and it freaked me out. I also knew it wasn't good enough....and I needed more. I can't be satisfied with crumbs...it is too painful...I am generally not. But instead of leaving, I became jealous....even though I am not a jealous person ...and it was so humiliating. I was reduced to a role where....I had become the beggar....waiting with cupped hands for the crumbs he would give me.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

In addition, he continues to explain why he held on to the relationship even though it had become a source of emotional depletion and posed a threat to his emotional well being:

☞ ”At one stage things had become so difficult and strained between us that I couldn't even get up in the mornings...but he was still in my life and I continued to cling to this man. I kept

thinking....it can't be true....it can't possibly be happening [the increasing emotional distance] so I absolutely refused to let him go. He didn't want me there...it was so obvious but I needed the continuity so I decided to carry on with the relationship...even if it was on his terms.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

In like manner, when Participant E reflects on her feelings of humiliation and a negative self-image which were amongst the consequences as a result of her partners' betrayal, she continues the line of thinking which indicates a theme of being satisfied with “crumbs” even though she realised that her needs were not being met in the relationship:

☞ ”He contacted me and..... I can't believe I am telling you this but....fool that I was...I went back for more... crumbs....it is so humiliating thinking about it now and that cycle continued...for more than a year...I kept going back....I don't know what hold he had over me....I can remember telling him once: 'You are breaking my heart...you just keep breaking my heart.' And his reply was “Yes”, but he would explain. He was hurting me....and I allowed it to happen. Instead of just telling him to buzz off, I gave him the benefit of the doubt **again** and listened to his explanation.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Secondly, the fact that the relationships have been abandoned, involuntarily brings about separation and the need to let go. However, the participants have difficulty in letting go of the relationship on a cognitive and emotional level because logic regarding their partners' abandonment as well as closure remains elusive. Furthermore, the participants engage in the processes of mourning (see emotional consequences) and they attempt to come to terms with concomitant losses. However, these processes are initially sporadic and fragmented as the participants continue to experience difficulty in assimilating their sense of alienation, given the short period after their abandonment. In particular, the participants are not ready to let go as healing requires **time**. They suggest that “in time” or “only time” would be a major contributing factor in their striving for a renewed sense of self- acceptance and wholeness. Participant B explains:

☞ ”I'm quite surprised at how much information I have been able to give you. I thought I would have forgotten much of it by now...but when I started talking....I could see some of the scenarios

in my mind's eye....quite vividly. It just goes to show....when all has been said and done...its only time that can heal the wounds and the scars, but I believe one never really forgets what happened.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Thirdly, an interesting finding which emerges from the data is that not only do the participants hold on to the relationship both whilst in the relationship and once they have been abandoned by their partners, but the data provided by the participants indicate that their **partners also hold on** to the relationship. They do this by attempting to contact or see the participants after the relationship has been abandoned. At this point it would be speculative to give reasons for the partners holding on to the relationship as none of them were interviewed due to the scope of this study. However, the participants are of the opinion that the partners' attempts at contacting them are in all likelihood manipulative as they are devoid of remorse. In addition, the partners negate the possibility of having had an affair and do not consider this the reason for the termination of the relationship. Participant A describes her experience of her partner contacting her fourteen months after he unexpectedly disappeared and abandoned the relationship:

☞ ”I still have so many questions, especially talking about the relationship again. Why? Why did he contact me again? Why couldn't he just have left it? He had been gone for a year and two months in any case.....I was coming to terms with it to a certain degree and we would most probably never have bumped into one another again....maybe on the very odd occasion, once a year if that and we could have been polite and go our separate ways as we do now when we see one another, but the fact of the matter is...it wasn't necessary for him to call me. It was as if he couldn't let go. This was the pattern throughout our relationship, throughout the whole process. Every time I wanted to leave, he tried to convince me to stay but not because he cared and wanted me. He got something else out of it....maybe a kick out of it that someone could love him so deeply. It must have felt good.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Lastly, the data also indicate that by cognitively holding on to the relationship, the participants attempt to defer the unfamiliar and impending **changes** in their lives. One specific change is the change back to being alone which speaks of failure and regression. The term “regression” used in this instance is not used in psychological terms. Rather the term “regression” in the context of this

study suggests misfortune and deterioration as opposed to success and continuity in their ability to engage in and sustain intimate relationships.


Therefore, the participants are constantly faced with the struggle to move beyond the past and confront the reality of their aloneness in the present. By holding on, the participants attempt to retain a sense of continuity in relationships and groundedness by remaining cognitively and emotionally attached to the familiar sense of belonging. This gives them a sense of security and stability even though it may be unrewarding and is also an attempt at relieving their emerging anxiety as they have to make the transition back to being single again.

Furthermore, significant attachments are initially held onto which include significant others such as friends, memories, values, beliefs and inanimate objects, whatever will provide mitigation against the pain, confusion and the fear of entering the unknown. These are presented in the verbatim transcripts of the participants' interviews (see Appendices C-G).

➤ Comparison to the other.

The data indicate that a further cognitive consequence, which the participants experience as a result of their partners' betrayal, is that of comparison to the other. Comparison to the other refers to the person with whom the partner had the affair, at the time of his or her relationship with the respective participant.

Comparison or comparative thinking is a consequence that is most prominent during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal** but continues to remain an integral part of the participants' perception of his or her self-worth as he or she progresses towards regaining control after their experience of betrayal. This aspect of the experience of betrayal was evident in both male and female participants. In addition, this form of thinking centres on what the participants are able to bring to a relationship. This includes the participants' perception of their attractiveness as a potential partner, compared to their perception of what the person with whom their partner has had an affair, can offer:

 "I saw him and his girlfriend a few months ago. It upset me more than I had hoped but on the other hand, it was a form of healing because I could stop wondering what she looked like. He

seemed to treat her the same...as he had treated me...little show of physical affection in public, but I could see she was crazy about him. It stood out a mile and I thought to myself....he is going to marry her. She seemed like his ideal woman, very beautiful, young, thin, a model type of look and long blonde hair. However, everyone feels it their duty to tell me what a horrible and unintelligent person she is. But that doesn't make it any better. In fact it makes it worse to think that I wasn't good enough but this absolute... bitch is better than I am. He would rather choose her above me, notwithstanding how unpleasant or unpopular she is. Interestingly enough, two weeks ago I heard they are getting married in September."

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant B became involved in a new relationship after his divorce from his wife as a result of her numerous infidelities. Subsequently however, his new girlfriend betrays him with her former boyfriend. His perception of her former boyfriend is as follows:

☞ "He is such a miserly person and I'm not saying this just because she slept with him again...Everyone says so. Plus, he is an unbelievably manipulative little twit....that's my experience of him and that's how he got her into bed again. You should see the looks I get in town or when he drives past our house. I know there is a major difference between him and me...I'm streets above him....he's a spoilt brat.....never worked a day in his life because his father gives him a fat allowance out of the business....he's quite useless."

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Furthermore, when comparing themselves to the person their partner had an affair with, the participants also consider the value system the person has besides his or her attractiveness and contribution he or she could make to the relationship:

☞ "Everyone tells me he had an affair with a woman of integrity. That's **impossible** and not excusable because in my eyes she has **no** integrity. I feel he was wrong **but** she was also wrong. If she had any integrity she wouldn't have become involved with him in the first place. She is my best friends' sister.... so she knew exactly what she was doing **and**.... that he and I were involved."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

The participants also engage in comparative thinking during the stage of **maintaining a façade** as a means of attempting to dispel the debilitating thoughts they entertain regarding a deteriorated

sense of attractiveness and self-worth, as a result of their partners' betrayal and clear preference for another person. When relating his experience of betrayal during the interview, Participant D became emotional but tried to remain in control. He explains:

”When I confronted him in the restaurant...the other person [I later learnt it was the person he was having an affair with], hadn't joined him as yet. When he eventually arrived... I immediately recognised him...he is also a musician....so you can imagine how I felt. Just for the record.... he is not as good-looking as I am or as competent as I am either. After that I realised I just can't carry on like that....I was physically and emotionally exhausted. He was causing me such intense emotional pain in the relationship by distancing himself.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

We have come to the final section of this chapter now, which deals with the intrapsychic consequences, which the participants experience as a result of their partners' infidelity. The discussion of the intrapsychic consequences will be followed by concluding comments regarding the consequences of the participants' experience of betrayal.

❖ **Intrapsychic consequences.**

Intrapsychic consequences refer to any interactions between internal, covert factors for example, intrapsychic conflicts, which suggest conflicts between beliefs, needs or desires. Therefore, intrapsychic consequences are generally considered to arise or take place within the mind of an individual. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that intrapsychic interactions in an individual are a central aspect of the Kleinian framework chosen for this study and will therefore be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter of this thesis. At this stage the focus will rest on the intrapsychic consequences, which result from the actions and/or interactions the participants take in their experience of betrayal (see 5.5.2).

In retrospect, what is evident from the data is that intrapsychic consequences play a significant role in the experience of infidelity. Furthermore, as these consequences have their roots in the unconscious realm of an individual's being, they are insidious and unforeseen. This increases the

impact they have on the *inner* world of the participants. In addition, when the participants consciously examine the intrapsychic consequences of their partners' infidelity during the process of retrospection (see 5.6.1.2), they are deemed to have a significant impact on their *external* world, specifically as they pose challenges to the participants' experience of reality.

Analysis of the data reveals that the intrapsychic consequences most prevalent in the participants' experience of infidelity are **denial, dissociation, ambivalence and idealisation of the partner** and **suppressed anger**. The realisation of these consequences is not limited to but occurs during the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal** and **maintaining a façade**. As mentioned in the preceding section, these stages do not follow in linear succession but are interactive and suggest fluidity of movement between them. The intrapsychic consequences are discussed in the following section.

➤ Denial

Denial is a defence mechanism that the participants employ which allows them to negate thoughts, feelings, wishes or needs that cause anxiety. As an intrapsychic mechanism, denial prevents the participants from consciously having to deal with anxiety-provoking interactions and stimuli. Particularly in instances of conflict and perceived threat to the continuity of the relationship, the participants deny any verbal- and non-verbal communication from their partners that would provoke anxiety.

As illustration, Participant A's partner used to withdraw both physically and emotionally during times of conflict and although he always returned to her, his interactional style marked by silence and a temporary abandonment of her, caused her much anxiety:

☞ “When I had given him the letter I had written to him [explaining how I felt about him] and he left, I never expected in my wildest dreams that he would just...disappear for that length of time. [At the time of writing the letter]..I had thought ok, maybe he would tell me he didn't feel the same way but...I couldn't believe he would just remain silent and not respond...only about six months

later I realised ‘**wake up!**’...there is **not** going to be any reaction this time. I think it took so long for me to realise that he wasn’t going to respond or disappear because it was easier to believe he would be back. That was the way he always behaved towards me in the relationship....when he was uncomfortable he would just leave for a few days and then come back....he **always** came back.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Although denial is a key occurrence in each of the participants’ relationships, it is only identified and acknowledged in retrospect when the participants are obliged to consider the history and possible reasons for their failed relationships. Specifically during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants become aware that while they were in the relationship, they unconsciously sacrificed parts of themselves and their needs for the relationship. Furthermore, they realise that this occurred to ensure continuity of the relationship and to allow them to experience a sense of belonging and connectedness to a significant other. Participant C was warned by a friend that her partner was having an affair but she denied this possibility and declined to confront either him or the third party involved:

☞ “In the six years we were together... I had **never** received any phone calls or warnings that he was having affairs. So....when a friend told me some time ago that he was having a relationship with my best friend’s sister, I wouldn’t believe her because she couldn’t give me any facts about where she had seen them. I insisted it must be a rumour and I don’t take rumours seriously. Also, I asked her ... if it were true...what did she expect me to do...and she suggested I confront the woman he was having the affair with. I didn’t.. because I felt she would deny it in any case...so what would I gain?”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

A further aspect of denial is that the participants’ retrospective perceptions concerning the positive and negative aspects of their partners’ behaviour in the relationship, are compromised. Also their reality testing at the time of the relationship is influenced by their denial. They only become aware of their confusion during the stages of physical and emotional withdrawal as they reflect back on their relationship. Participant A explains this aspect of her experience:

☞ “Thinking about it now...it is difficult to determine what was real and not real. His behaviour had become more distant after I had confronted him about where our relationship was headed, but

there were just too many other things which I focussed on which gave me hope. However, he must have sent out negative signals that I more than likely saw and felt, but I wouldn't believe them. If I really went all out to prove that he wasn't committed, I would have found ample evidence to support my feelings but...I chose rather to focus and look for the positive aspects of our relationships...the things about him and his behaviour in the relationship that reassured me and showed me..we were ok.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant C shares a similar experience of her partner's behaviour:

☞ “It is very difficult for me to determine at this stage what about his behaviour was genuinely positive. I think.....no, I'm not sure.....but I think... the good that he brought to the relationship, he really meant that....it was genuine.. But then again...I didn't go looking for anything in his behaviour that would mean the relationship wasn't working...maybe that was a mistake, but I think a person should focus on the positive aspects, rather than on the negative aspects.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Denial is also evident during the stage of **maintaining a façade** (see 5.5.2) as the participants deny that their partners' infidelity and subsequent abandonment of them has left them emotionally shattered. Their denial is manifested in behaviour which suggests that they are coping well and not as humiliated and lost as what they really feel. The participants attempt to put on a brave front as a means of self-preservation when interacting with others and they deny the impact and the intensity of their pain of having been abandoned. However, the participants eventually realise after attempting to cope on their own that they require either medication or psychotherapy and consequently seek professional assistance.

➤ Dissociation.

The data indicate that a further intrapsychic consequence that the participants experience within the context of infidelity is a *single, brief* but *severe* incident of dissociation. As described in the previous sections on consequences, this incident is not specific to any particular stage and is independent of the length of time since the partners abandoned the relationships. Rather, what is

significant from the data is that the participants' *unique* intrapsychic functioning influences when and how a form of dissociation occurs. Furthermore, it is important to clarify that the form of dissociation, which the participants experience, is not in response to the knowledge that their partner has betrayed them, as this knowledge may be, only be gained *after* the partner has abandoned the relationship. Rather the participants experience a form of dissociation *in response to the trauma* associated with their perception of *their partners' abandonment* of them, which exacerbates their **sense of alienation**. Furthermore, the term "dissociation" serves to describe the participants' experience within the context of betrayal and does not suggest a clinically diagnosed, dissociative disorder.

The various forms of dissociation, which the data indicate in the participants' experience of abandonment, are **depersonalisation and de-realisation** and **psychogenic amnesia**.

Depersonalisation refers to the sense that one has lost contact with one's own personal reality, accompanied by feelings of strangeness. In severe instances, parts of one's body feel alien and one may have the experience of perceiving oneself from a distance (Reber, 1985). De-realisation is a component of depersonalisation and refers to a change in the perception of the environment with the sense that one has lost contact with external reality. Participant A indicates her experience of *depersonalisation and de-realization* after her former partner contacted her again, fourteen months after abandoning the relationship:

☞ "A year and two months later....just out of the blue... I got a call from him and he spoke to me as if nothing had ever happened. I was so completely taken aback that I automatically had a conversation with him as if he had never left. It was as if **nothing** had happened and that was scary....**very**.....totally unreal. My first reaction was 'nothing ever happened' and it was as if... I was watching myself have this conversation...almost like an out-of- body experience. Almost as if I was in a different time...a different place...it was incredibly weird."

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Similarly, Participant E describes her brief but severe experience of *depersonalisation* and *de-realisation* after she arrives home and becomes aware that her partner has taken his belongings and abandoned their relationship:

☞ “It was the strangest experience I have ever had...it felt totally unreal...and it made me petrified ...I could see my legs moving as I walked around...but I couldn’t feel a thing. It felt as if I was outside my body, not part of it....not *in* it...if that makes any sense? I thought at that moment I had lost it completely...lost touch with reality.”

Participant E1.31 March 2005

Psychogenic amnesia on the other hand, refers to a “hole” in one’s memory indicating loss of information for isolated events or episodes (Reber, 1985). This term is used in this context in preference to the term “**post-traumatic amnesia**” although dissociation may occur as a result of a traumatic event such as abandonment. The reason for this is that although the latter term may be used to describe both physical injury and a disturbing psychological experience, the more commonly intended connotation of the term is organic (Reber, 1985). In Participant B’s experience, he is unable to recall to date (two years later) where he slept or where he went the day his wife abandoned their marriage in favour of a colleague. He indicates his experience of psychogenic amnesia as follows:

☞ “She came back to fetch a few things and while she was packing, she told me ...her eyes had finally opened... and she wanted to be with him...he was the man for her and then... she left. I packed some of my things and also left....but.. I can’t tell you where I went or where I slept that night or.... if I went to see any of my friends.... I still can’t remember... I don’t know.”

Participant B.16 February 2005

➤ Ambivalence and idealisation of the partner.

Analysis of the data reveals that once the participants initially express some of their anger during the stage of **confronting their partners** (see 5.5.2.) as well as suppress their anger (see “suppressed anger” below), they begin to experience **ambivalence** with regard to their *recently acquired negative perception* of their partners and their negative feelings towards them. This also occurs during the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, and **maintaining a façade**. Feelings of ambivalence elicit anxiety in the participants as they perceive themselves to be emotionally and physically powerless in the face of alluring and repetitive fantasies which suggest their partners’ return and a subsequent re-engagement in an intensely, emotionally painful relationship.

Furthermore, due to the participants' feelings of ambivalence towards their partners which fluctuate greatly between positive (good) and negative (bad) poles during the stages mentioned earlier in this paragraph, the risk of becoming involved with their partners again when their feelings of ambivalence lean strongly toward a positive perception of their partner is high, should their partners contact them during this time.

A further interesting finding occurs in the data, which reflects the participants' feelings of ambivalence towards their partners. They indicate that even though they experience their partners' infidelity as "emotionally shattering", "devastating" and the consequences of their act as a "life-changing event" amongst others, there are times when they focus so strongly on their partners positive aspects that they are unable to find fault them within the context of infidelity. In this manner, the participants intermittently idealise their partners during their periods of ambivalence, which results in further feelings of disconnectedness and a sense of alienation.

Idealisation is a term familiar to psychoanalytic theory and is also discussed within a Kleinian framework (see chapter three). At this stage, no detailed discussion of this aspect of the participants' intrapsychic functioning will be provided as it is presented in greater detail in the following chapter of this thesis. For the purpose of clarification however it is important to note that the process of idealisation results from a defensive exaggeration of a libidinally invested object's goodness once splitting occurs. As a defence mechanism, it is an attempt to safeguard the individual against the disappointing and persecutory aspects of the libidinally invested object (Likierman, 2001). Participant C illustrates this aspect of her experience of betrayal:

☞ “After I confronted him about the reason for abandoning the relationship....I went through a stage immediately after that for quite a while where I couldn't say anything bad about him....not at all. Many of my friends picked it up when we spoke [about him] and they told me they couldn't understand what was going on...**they** realised what he did was wrong.....why couldn't I see it?...but I couldn't at that time....I could only focus on all his positive characteristics for quite a while. In fact...I felt that if he had walked through my door at that stage and asked me to give him another chance.....I would have taken him back.”

Participant C.16 February 2005

A further illustration of idealisation of the partner is evident in Participant E's experience of betrayal. After her partner has abandoned the relationship, she sporadically experiences difficulty in integrating the awareness that her partner has hurt her intensely:

☞ “The funny thing wasat the time this all happened...and for quite a few months after that... I couldn't hold on to an image of him as the “bad guy” and of how badly he has hurt me... I tried ...but I kept finding something good and beautiful about our relationship, making excuses for his behaviour...so I couldn't stay angry with him for long or harbour any feelings of hatred or revenge towards him.....I... loved him. I could feel hurt and resentment and anger towards the others involved in the situation and I wanted to hurt them as much as they had hurt me.... but I couldn't feel that way towards him then. Only many, many months later....could I begin to realise he is really just bad news.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Although the two illustrations in the above paragraphs refer to the participants' idealisation of their partner once they have been abandoned, the data indicate that idealisation can also occur whilst the participants are still engaged in the relationship:

☞ “Before I knew it.....we started seeing more of one another and when we became physically intimate...I had the experience that I was very attracted to him and I became totally crazy about him. Despite our differences...I thought he was the best thing that had ever happened to me. But there were certain things about him that niggled me...like his verbally aggressive manner towards others...especially those close to him. However, I never experienced that...on the contrary, I think he treated me exceptionally well....more so than he did any other person..... he is a tremendously exciting.... and.... interesting man.”

Participant A.15 February 2005

The last intrapsychic consequence that emerges from the data is that of suppressed anger. This brief description of suppressed anger is followed by concluding comments regarding the participants' experience of betrayal in an intimate relationship and their resulting sense of alienation.

➤ Suppressed anger.

The participants have to suppress their anger towards their partner while in the relationships as they come to learn that their relationships cannot accommodate much confrontation. As also discussed in 5.6.1.4, confrontation of their partner, poses definite threats to the existence and continuity of their relationship. Consequently, suppression of anger results in intense sadness and depressive episodes as the participants attempt to quieten their unmet needs and expectations. In addition, suppression of anger is not restricted to any of the specific stages mentioned in 5.5.2 but is part of the legacy of betrayal.

A further interesting finding in the data is that the participants carry the burden of what I have termed, *residual (leftover) anger* which they are also obliged to suppress for an indefinite length of time and which they progressively need to integrate into their experience of betrayal. *Residual anger* is anger that cannot be expressed due to lack of opportunity and the absence of the partner and is fuelled by the initial unsatisfactory confrontation with their partner, once the relationship has been abandoned. Therefore, the participants have no alternative but to *consciously* exclude their impulse to vent their residual anger on their partners in the light of their abandonment.

➤ Heightened vigilance.

Heightened vigilance refers to the participants' awareness that their perceptual faculties have become more acutely attuned to their environment. In particular, their heightened vigilance influences the participants' behaviour within their home, social and occupational environments. The participants are currently all engaged in occupations, which require in-depth people contact, and their heightened vigilance is beneficial to their efficiency. Furthermore, the participants' heightened vigilance has direct implications for their ability to trust people as they become increasingly suspicious of others' motives, as a result of their experience of infidelity:

☞ "In my line of work...I think it is possibly one of the best things that could have happened to me. I don't want to sound arrogant but I have always been very good at what I do but now....I'm even better at what I do than before. I'm acutely attuned to what is going on around me, **hyper-alert!** To what people say and do....I suppose.... because I'm not sure I can trust what they say."

Participant B. 16 February 2005

An interesting finding which is evident in the data indicates that the participants specifically become aware that their auditory perceptions have sharpened. They listen more closely to what people say when asking for advice but still decide whether any suggestions arising from such information may be implemented. An awareness of sharpened auditory perceptions does not result from ignorance or a lack of skills and knowledge but rather from a lack of trust in the information obtained. In addition, when interacting socially with others, the participants listen closely and draw their own conclusions as to whether they perceive the information given by others as having any credibility:

☞ ”When I’m with friends and someone starts relating an incident or sometimes...just in general conversation...I listen very carefully now and sometimes I find myself thinkingNo!, that doesn’t make sense or it doesn’t “jell” with what he or she said earlier. I do this with both men and women. I think I’m probably a lot more aware now that someone can take me for a ride.....and what their motives could be. What they say or even do has to make sense ...I don’t want to wonder about it, but I find myself looking for verification the whole time...wondering whether what they are saying is true or not.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

❖ **Cognitive consequences.**

A significant feature of the participants’ cognitive patterns as a result of their partners’ betrayal, is that these patterns are relentless and the participants have little control over their recurrence. Furthermore, as in emotional- and behavioural consequences, cognitive consequences are evident in the action and interaction strategies, which the participants employ. In addition, they do not progress linearly through the stages indicated in figure 5.3. Rather, as in the case of the emotional consequences and behavioural consequences, the participants’ cognitive patterns are fluid in their movement between these stages.

What emerges from the data is that the participants initially engage in little reflective thinking during the stage of **confronting their partner**. However, during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants increasingly engage in reflective thinking as this period is marked by continual thoughts of betrayal and relationships in general. Furthermore, the participants are pursued by continuous thoughts of their partners both prior to and after the

betrayal. The cycle of thinking elicited during this stage, translates into persistent cognitive patterns, which recur during the phases of **maintaining a façade** as well as **regaining control**. Although the participants re-engage in social activities and honour their work commitments, they largely remain prisoners of their thoughts during the process of healing as they tirelessly search for closure. Furthermore, unlike certain emotional- and behavioural consequences such as experiencing a sense of relief and increased assertiveness respectively, which may empower the participants, cognitive consequences of the participants' action and interaction strategies are largely debilitating and destructive in nature. This aspect of the participants' experience of betrayal, has a negative effect on many friendships or relationships the participants have as well as their relationship with themselves. Ultimately, this leads to a profound sense of alienation and disconnectedness from self and others. The cognitive consequences which emerge from the data are: **self-punitive ideation, paranoid ideation, doubt, persistent thoughts about the partners' betrayal, holding on to the relationship and comparing themselves to the known or unknown other in their partners' lives**. Each of these consequences is described in the ensuing paragraphs.

➤ Self-punitive ideation.

A tendency towards self-punitive ideation is evident in the data as the participants initially deduce that they are unacceptable and unable to maintain an intimate relationship. They become self-critical and self-blaming and cultivate feelings of ambivalence and insecurity in themselves.

Participant C explains:

☞ "There are many negative aspects of my personality which I dislike at this stage....I often ask myself: 'What did I do wrong? Was there something I should have done differently? Should I have been more or less friendly, or....more or less loving orprettier or uglier.....I don't know."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

In addition the participants berate themselves for being "so stupid" and foolish as to have been easily tricked in the relationship and ultimately, humiliated:

☞ "He asked me whether I would be there if he gave up his vocation, his family, everything, in fact.... his life as he knew it and I said yes and..... I committed to that.....but I was the stupid fool.

He **never** intended leaving all that behind ...committing to a future with me...and only he knew that...I, on the other hand believed him...that we would have a future together.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Similarly, Participant D berates himself for “losing” his usual perceptiveness of people and his environment and for being foolish enough to have missed the “obvious”:

☞ ”One of my....strong characteristics is my perceptiveness... my ability to know exactly what is going on around me...that sense of awareness ... Since I can remember, it’s always been there...and it always worked for me before....so what happened this time? I’m angry at myself for being so foolish...what did I miss?...and how could I have missed it? If it was so obvious then...why? Maybe, because I chose to miss it and really wanted to miss it. But I could have saved myself so much pain.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

Even when fantasizing about further contact with their partner after their betrayal, the participants include a reference in their internal dialogue to their “stupidity” for allowing themselves to have become involved with their partner. Participant A describes her feelings in the following manner:

☞ ”My feeling now is...I don’t even **like** him. I don’t even want him for a friend, I mean what will I gain from a friendship. If I ever spoke to him again and he suggested it, I would say **forget** it....it’s past, you aren’t loyal....you aren’t faithful. I don’t trust you in the least, not even as a friend. You are totally unreliable and every time I see you I will think...I can’t believe I was so **stupid** to allow myself to have become involved with you. There is nothing left to build on....not even for a friendship.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

➤ Paranoid ideation.

Paranoid ideation is a consequence evident in the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control**. This form of ideation does not necessarily occur linearly in succession from the former to the latter stages mentioned above, but may occur sporadically as the stages are repetitively revisited during the process of healing. Also it is

important to note, that the term “paranoid ideation” which the participants experience is used in this study for descriptive purposes only and does not imply that any of the participants meet the criteria for a clinical diagnosis of paranoia. The term “paranoid ideation” used in this context, refers to a pattern of thinking characterized mainly by doubt and wariness, which originates from an intense fear of engaging in a future intimate relationship, only to be hurt again.

As the participants reflect on their partners’ infidelity and their abandonment, they become aware specifically that they doubt their partners’ motives for having been in the relationship in the first place. They perceive their partners as having tricked them into loving them and allowing them to experience a sense of connectedness and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, they are convinced that their partners intended to betray them at some stage during the course of the relationship. Participant A describes her experience as follows:

☞ ”The idea that it [the betrayal] was planned in such a callous way makes the betrayal so much worse because one doesn’t expect it – **at all!!** On the other hand, if someone apologises for having an affair because they couldn’t help themselves or because they were stupid or whatever their excuse may be...there is some way of making peace with the betrayal. At least then I can believe that it was not just this **scheme** to hurt me and to use me. In retrospect, I believe he was in the relationship for other reasons. There was betrayal from the word go. I think that for three years his game was: ‘let’s hang around until someone else comes along’. And I think that worries me most about our relationship...I wonder at what stage did he start planning to betray me.....to carry out the betrayal?”

Participant A. 15 February 2005


When retrospectively reflecting on his experience of betrayal, participant D expressed his doubt of the intentions of his partner. He suggested that his partner had ulterior motives for being in the relationship and tricked him into believing that he cared rather than genuinely wanting to engage in an intimate relationship:

☞ ”He pressed all the right buttons...he knew **exactly** what to say. I think he summed me up immediately, where I came from, the things that interest me and...he played the game very well, **exceptionally** well..... I asked him a lot of questions about himself and about us...where we were

headed.....those type of questions...and his answers were so clever, they always sounded totally appropriate and reassuring....but he was lying....all along he lied....he kept me there under false pretences.”


Participant D. 06 April 2005

In addition, the participants display intermittent paranoid behaviour which is of a negligible nature and which does not impair their daily functioning. Their behaviour serves to underscore their attempts to regain control of their lives as they take precautionary measures to minimize the risk of being caught unaware again. These precautionary measures enable the participants to set boundaries with regard to the contact they have with their former partners and consequently, affirm the participants’ sense of regaining control of their lives after their betrayal. Participant E illustrates this aspect of her functioning:

 ”He stopped calling my cell phone because his number would come up on the screen and he didn’t want to risk that because my friend had threatened to tell his wife that he was still calling me if he didn’t stop. I didn’t believe he would stop, so as a precautionary measure after he had left, I bought an Identi-call ...I still have it....maybe subconsciously it’s a boundary I put in place.... I don’t know. Anyway I connected it up to my home phone. It sounds paranoid but at least then if he did call, I would be prepared and I could avoid his calls. It worked well because at times I would see the Durban and Port Elizabeth numbers on the Identi-call and I knew it was him. His family live in Port Elizabeth so I knew it could only be him. It made such a difference having that little mechanism attached to the telephone I had some form of control over him contacting me and therefore I wouldn’t be caught by surprise.”

Participant E1.31 March 2005


Furthermore, Participant B believes that as a result of his wife’s betrayal, his thinking regarding betrayals by future partners has been influenced. Previously, he did not consciously consider the possibility of being betrayed by a partner. However, the fact that he has experienced betrayal consciously makes him aware that such a possibility exists and can occur again. He suggests one should guard against complacency in relationships and be weary of being caught by surprise. Consequently as a precautionary measure, he advises against letting one’s guard down:

 ”I say **‘Be careful!’** don’t become complacent. Just because one thinks one survives such an experience one may think one is able to cope with a similar situation after that. I thought about it

and at first ...I believed this experience really made me a lot stronger...I felt practically “untouchable” because....I thought...if **this** didn’t kill me, nothing ever would.... but that’s not true. I realise now I have to be so **careful** because every situation is different. I don’t want to be unprepared...**ever**.... I never want any nasty surprises ever again. So one cannot let one’s guard down...the minute one lowers one’s guard... one becomes rusty...and...out of practice.....too complacent.”


Participant B. 16 February 2005

In addition, in the light of their partners’ betrayal, the participants become wary of men and/or women’s motives outside the dyad:

 ”Any man that wants to get close to me or ...even thinks about having a relationship with me.....it is not an option at this stage. I have become very cynical about them now and I question their motives for wanting to be with me.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant E, who was asked to resign from her spiritual home after 25 years’ membership as a result of her relationship with a married member of the church, is wary of the motives of the church leader and elders for wanting her to come “home” once her relationship had been terminated. She indicates:

 ”Now...two years later the church leaders have asked my parents to tell me they want me to come “home”. “**Home**” of all places...that is no longer my spiritual home....do they think I’m stupid? I don’t believe it’s about making me feel part of the community again...not for one minute. The same people who caused me so much pain and ostracised me...they are all still there. So....what do they really want me to come back for...for more punishment? I think it’s to appease their consciences...it’s not about me **at all!** They still feel very guilty about the way they handled the situation when they insisted I leave the church and tender my resignation on the spot. The church leader phoned me twice because I hadn’t faxed my resignation through to his office quickly enough. He even offered to send me an example because I was ‘obviously’ battling to write the letter. Of course I wasI just couldn’t write it. It seemed so.... final and I was shaking so much.....I couldn’t think straight at the time.”

Participant E1.31 March 2005

Paranoid ideation also influences the participants' perception of future, intimate relationships and in addition, influences their perception of relationships with acquaintances and friends. Participant A emphasises her concern about being paranoid in future relationships:

☞ "I've become very cautious...almost paranoid as a result of the experience...not only with regard to relationships but also with new acquaintances and friendships. If someone wants to be friends with me now...I wonder why? What are their motives for wanting to be friends?... I never used to do that before. ...so I think my relationships have been influenced very negatively ...very!.. Yes...over this past year, I have become very negative about things and about people in general.

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant C shares a similar concern:

☞ "I'm afraid that I will be overly possessive and totally paranoid in a new relationship. I would really like that person to know I trust him implicitly.... but I think.....at this stage... I would be paranoid and it will make me ill.....**mentally** ill. The energy that goes into being paranoid...I think it is so draining and I can't see myself becoming involved in a relationship where I can't trust the other person. It will tire me and... the relationship will be a total disaster from the beginning."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

➤ Persistent thoughts about the partners' betrayal.

The participants are frequently plagued by thoughts of their partners' betrayal as they begin to assimilate their experience. The persistence of their thoughts increases as the participants have more time to physically and emotionally withdraw and reflect on the relationship. However, the data also suggest that these thoughts persist throughout the stages indicated in 5.5.2. although their intensity decreases over time:

☞ "There was a stage when I thought about him and everything that happened on a daily basis...not any more. Now, weeks will go by and I don't think of him. I'm not even sad...nothing like that... but it is definitely there... and it doesn't take much to open up the wound again....it's still very close to the surface."

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Persistent thoughts about their partners' betrayal relies heavily on vivid images of their partner betraying them. Participant B explains this aspect of his experience of his wife's betrayal and believes that persistent images which he entertained were a contributing factor to their failed attempt at reconciliation:

☞ "I was crazy about her....and we tried to reconcile after she had left ...but for some or other reason I just couldn't get the image of her being sexually intimate with him out of my mind.... So...I was constantly aware of questions that raced through my head when I was with her. When I kissed her for instance or.... when we were sexually intimate...I asked myself...'Who was she **really** seeing when she closed her eyes'?... 'Who was giving her pleasure? Was I giving her pleasure or was she fantasizing about him?' And that was very, very difficult for me to try and come to terms with....very traumatic. I think it contributed to the fact that we couldn't reconcile...I was too insecure and I kept asking for reassurance that it wouldn't happen again. But... I had reason to feel that way because I found out later that she was having another affair during our attempted reconciliation."

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Participant C indicates that during the stages of physical and emotional withdrawal she reflected on her partners' betrayal and wondered about practical issues such as where he would have found the time and venue for an affair. Furthermore, as these thoughts lead to speculation and unanswered questions, she experiences them as persistent:

☞ "I kept wondering...where did he find the time to have an affair? But I suppose a person makes time and creates opportunities for this type of thing. It was probably between 18:00 and 20:30..when he went to play squash. He used to play every evening and there was plenty of opportunity then. He also kept his flat when he moved in with me, so he had a place he could use as well. Thinking back, it must have been during those times."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Persistent thoughts shortly after their partner's betrayal are translated into fantasies of revenge as the participants reel from the shock of their abandonment. Participant A indicates:

☞ "I had a very strong need to take revenge...for a long time after he had left, but it seems to have subsided to some degree. He is fortunate that I am too scared ..unlike many other women in my

situation to boil the rabbit [referring to a scene from the film *Fatal Attraction*], or to phone him continuously or to terrorise him. I think the thought of being humiliated even further stops me from taking any revenge. I don't want people to see how needy I am of him."

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Similarly, Participant E describes her persistent thoughts and fantasies of revenge shortly after her partner's betrayal:

☞ "I battled to get rid of thoughts of revenge towards everyone who was involved in the process leading up to his betrayal. I had fantasies and visions of how I would belittle them and really hurt them physically, emotionally and financially if I could. When I found myself planning in the finest detail how I would carry out my revenge, I realised I was heading for trouble and I would end up hurting and humiliating myself even further....so I stopped. I never realised I had that in me...it was a side of my personality I didn't know and it really scared me."

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

➤ Holding on to the relationship.

A further cognitive consequence of the stages of action and interaction which the participants engage in is **holding on to the relationship**. Holding on to the relationship has various facets that are relevant to the discussion. Firstly, stimulated by fear of losing their partner (see emotional consequences), the participants **hold on to the relationship** prior to abandonment. However in retrospect they realise that it would have been more beneficial to them and could have saved them intense pain, if they had let go when they felt the relationship to be unrewarding. Specifically during the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants become aware of many instances when they could have let go of a relationship that had started offering them 'crumbs'. Participant D explains this aspect of his experience:

☞ "When I was overseas...I intuitively started to feel that something was changing in our relationship. Suddenly, there were less phone calls and text messages and the inconsistency rattled me. I didn't know it at the time but that was when he had started seeing someone else. So....I could feel the change and it freaked me out. I also knew it wasn't good enough....and I needed

more. I can't be satisfied with crumbs...it is too painful...I am generally not. But instead of leaving, I became jealous....even though I am not a jealous person ...and it was so humiliating. I was reduced to a role where.....I had become the beggar....waiting with cupped hands for the crumbs he would give me.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

In addition, he continues to explain why he held on to the relationship even though it had become a source of emotional depletion and posed a threat to his emotional well being:

☞ ”At one stage things had become so difficult and strained between us that I couldn't even get up in the mornings...but he was still in my life and I continued to cling to this man. I kept thinking....it can't be true...it can't possibly be happening [the increasing emotional distance] so I absolutely refused to let him go. He didn't want me there...it was so obvious but I needed the continuity so I decided to carry on with the relationship...even if it was on his terms.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

In like manner, when Participant E reflects on her feelings of humiliation and a negative self-image which were amongst the consequences as a result of her partners' betrayal, she continues the line of thinking which indicates a theme of being satisfied with “crumbs” even though she realised that her needs were not being met in the relationship:

☞ ”He contacted me and..... I can't believe I am telling you this but....fool that I was...I went back for more... crumbs....it is so humiliating thinking about it now and that cycle continued...for more than a year...I kept going back....I don't know what hold he had over me....I can remember telling him once: 'You are breaking my heart...you just keep breaking my heart.' And his reply was “Yes”, but he would explain. He was hurting me....and I allowed it to happen. Instead of just telling him to buzz off, I gave him the benefit of the doubt **again** and listened to his explanation.”

Participant E1. 31 March 2005

Secondly, the fact that the relationships have been abandoned, involuntarily brings about separation and the need to let go. However, the participants have difficulty in letting go of the relationship on a cognitive and emotional level because logic regarding their partners' abandonment as well as closure remains elusive. Furthermore, the participants engage in the

processes of mourning (see emotional consequences) and they attempt to come to terms with concomitant losses. However, these processes are initially sporadic and fragmented as the participants continue to experience difficulty in assimilating their sense of alienation, given the short period after their abandonment. In particular, the participants are not ready to let go as healing requires **time**. They suggest that “in time” or “only time” would be a major contributing factor in their striving for a renewed sense of self- acceptance and wholeness. Participant B explains:

☞ ”I’m quite surprised at how much information I have been able to give you. I thought I would have forgotten much of it by now...but when I started talking....I could see some of the scenarios in my mind’s eye....quite vividly. It just goes to show....when all has been said and done...its only time that can heal the wounds and the scars, but I believe one never really forgets what happened.”

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Thirdly, an interesting finding which emerges from the data is that not only do the participants hold on to the relationship both whilst in the relationship and once they have been abandoned by their partners, but the data provided by the participants indicate that their **partners also hold on** to the relationship. They do this by attempting to contact or see the participants after the relationship has been abandoned. At this point it would be speculative to give reasons for the partners holding on to the relationship as none of them were interviewed due to the scope of this study. However, the participants are of the opinion that the partners’ attempts at contacting them are in all likelihood manipulative as they are devoid of remorse. In addition, the partners negate the possibility of having had an affair and do not consider this the reason for the termination of the relationship. Participant A describes her experience of her partner contacting her fourteen months after he unexpectedly disappeared and abandoned the relationship:

☞ ”I still have so many questions, especially talking about the relationship again. Why? Why did he contact me again? Why couldn’t he just have left it? He had been gone for a year and two months in any case....I was coming to terms with it to a certain degree and we would most probably never have bumped into one another again....maybe on the very odd occasion, once a year if that and we could have been polite and go our separate ways as we do now when we see one another, but the fact of the matter is...it wasn’t necessary for him to call me. It was as if he

couldn't let go. This was the pattern throughout our relationship, throughout the whole process. Every time I wanted to leave, he tried to convince me to stay but not because he cared and wanted me. He got something else out of it....maybe a kick out of it that someone could love him so deeply. It must have felt good.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Lastly, the data also indicate that by cognitively holding on to the relationship, the participants attempt to defer the unfamiliar and impending **changes** in their lives. One specific change is the change back to being alone which speaks of failure and regression. The term “regression” used in this instance is not used in psychological terms. Rather the term “regression” in the context of this study suggests misfortune and deterioration as opposed to success and continuity in their ability to engage in and sustain intimate relationships.

Therefore, the participants are constantly faced with the struggle to move beyond the past and confront the reality of their aloneness in the present. By holding on, the participants attempt to retain a sense of continuity in relationships and groundedness by remaining cognitively and emotionally attached to the familiar sense of belonging. This gives them a sense of security and stability even though it may be unrewarding and is also an attempt at relieving their emerging anxiety as they have to make the transition back to being single again.

Furthermore, significant attachments are initially held onto which include significant others such as friends, memories, values, beliefs and inanimate objects, whatever will provide mitigation against the pain, confusion and the fear of entering the unknown. These are presented in the verbatim transcripts of the participants' interviews (see Appendices C-G).

➤ Comparison to the other.

The data indicate that a further cognitive consequence, which the participants experience as a result of their partners' betrayal, is that of comparison to the other. Comparison to the other refers to the person with whom the partner had the affair, at the time of his or her relationship with the respective participant.

Comparison or comparative thinking is a consequence that is most prominent during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal** but continues to remain an integral part of the participants' perception of his or her self-worth as he or she progresses towards regaining control after their experience of betrayal. This aspect of the experience of betrayal was evident in both male and female participants. In addition, this form of thinking centres on what the participants are able to bring to a relationship. This includes the participants' perception of their attractiveness as a potential partner, compared to their perception of what the person with whom their partner has had an affair, can offer:

☞ "I saw him and his girlfriend a few months ago. It upset me more than I had hoped but on the other hand, it was a form of healing because I could stop wondering what she looked like. He seemed to treat her the same...as he had treated me...little show of physical affection in public, but I could see she was crazy about him. It stood out a mile and I thought to myself....he is going to marry her. She seemed like his ideal woman, very beautiful, young, thin, a model type of look and long blonde hair. However, everyone feels it their duty to tell me what a horrible and unintelligent person she is. But that doesn't make it any better. In fact it makes it worse to think that I wasn't good enough but this absolute... bitch is better than I am. He would rather choose her above me, notwithstanding how unpleasant or unpopular she is. Interestingly enough, two weeks ago I heard they are getting married in September."

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant B became involved in a new relationship after his divorce from his wife as a result of her numerous infidelities. Subsequently however, his new girlfriend betrays him with her former boyfriend. His perception of her former boyfriend is as follows:

☞ "He is such a miserly person and I'm not saying this just because she slept with him again...Everyone says so. Plus, he is an unbelievably manipulative little twit....that's my experience of him and that's how he got her into bed again. You should see the looks I get in town or when he drives past our house. I know there is a major difference between him and me...I'm streets above him....he's a spoilt brat....never worked a day in his life because his father gives him a fat allowance out of the business....he's quite useless."

Participant B. 16 February 2005

Furthermore, when comparing themselves to the person their partner had an affair with, the participants also consider the value system the person has besides his or her attractiveness and contribution he or she could make to the relationship:

☞ ”Everyone tells me he had an affair with a woman of integrity. That’s **impossible** and not excusable because in my eyes she has **no** integrity. I feel he was wrong **but** she was also wrong. If she had any integrity she wouldn’t have become involved with him in the first place. She is my best friends’ sister.... so she knew exactly what she was doing **and**.... that he and I were involved.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

The participants also engage in comparative thinking during the stage of **maintaining a façade** as a means of attempting to dispel the debilitating thoughts they entertain regarding a deteriorated sense of attractiveness and self-worth, as a result of their partners’ betrayal and clear preference for another person. When relating his experience of betrayal during the interview, Participant D became emotional but tried to remain in control. He explains:

☞ ”When I confronted him in the restaurant...the other person [I later learnt it was the person he was having an affair with], hadn’t joined him as yet. When he eventually arrived... I immediately recognised him...he is also a musician....so you can imagine how I felt. Just for the record.... he is not as good-looking as I am or as competent as I am either. After that I realised I just can’t carry on like that....I was physically and emotionally exhausted. He was causing me such intense emotional pain in the relationship by distancing himself.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005

We have come to the final section of this chapter now, which deals with the intrapsychic consequences, which the participants experience as a result of their partners’ infidelity. The discussion of the intrapsychic consequences will be followed by concluding comments regarding the consequences of the participants’ experience of betrayal.

❖ **Intrapsychic consequences.**

Intrapsychic consequences refer to any interactions between internal, covert factors for example, intrapsychic conflicts, which suggest conflicts between beliefs, needs or desires. Therefore,

intrapsychic consequences are generally considered to arise or take place within the mind of an individual. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that intrapsychic interactions in an individual are a central aspect of the Kleinian framework chosen for this study and will therefore be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter of this thesis. At this stage the focus will rest on the intrapsychic consequences, which result from the actions and/or interactions the participants take in their experience of betrayal (see 5.5.2).

In retrospect, what is evident from the data is that intrapsychic consequences play a significant role in the experience of infidelity. Furthermore, as these consequences have their roots in the unconscious realm of an individual's being, they are insidious and unforeseen. This increases the impact they have on the *inner* world of the participants. In addition, when the participants consciously examine the intrapsychic consequences of their partners' infidelity during the process of retrospection (see 5.6.1.2), they are deemed to have a significant impact on their *external* world, specifically as they pose challenges to the participants' experience of reality.

Analysis of the data reveals that the intrapsychic consequences most prevalent in the participants' experience of infidelity are **denial, dissociation, ambivalence and idealisation of the partner** and **suppressed anger**. The realisation of these consequences is not limited to but occurs during the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal** and **maintaining a façade**. As mentioned in the preceding section, these stages do not follow in linear succession but are interactive and suggest fluidity of movement between them. The intrapsychic consequences are discussed in the following section.

➤ Denial

Denial is a defence mechanism that the participants employ which allows them to negate thoughts, feelings, wishes or needs that cause anxiety. As an intrapsychic mechanism, denial prevents the participants from consciously having to deal with anxiety-provoking interactions and stimuli. Particularly in instances of conflict and perceived threat to the continuity of the relationship, the participants deny any verbal- and non-verbal communication from their partners that would provoke anxiety.

As illustration, Participant A's partner used to withdraw both physically and emotionally during times of conflict and although he always returned to her, his interactional style marked by silence and a temporary abandonment of her, caused her much anxiety:

☞ “When I had given him the letter I had written to him [explaining how I felt about him] and he left, I never expected in my wildest dreams that he would just...disappear for that length of time. [At the time of writing the letter]..I had thought ok, maybe he would tell me he didn't feel the same way but...I couldn't believe he would just remain silent and not respond...only about six months later I realised '**wake up!**'...there is **not** going to be any reaction this time. I think it took so long for me to realise that he wasn't going to respond or disappear because it was easier to believe he would be back. That was the way he always behaved towards me in the relationship....when he was uncomfortable he would just leave for a few days and then come back....he **always** came back.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Although denial is a key occurrence in each of the participants' relationships, it is only identified and acknowledged in retrospect when the participants are obliged to consider the history and possible reasons for their failed relationships. Specifically during the stage of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, the participants become aware that while they were in the relationship, they unconsciously sacrificed parts of themselves and their needs for the relationship. Furthermore, they realise that this occurred to ensure continuity of the relationship and to allow them to experience a sense of belonging and connectedness to a significant other. Participant C was warned by a friend that her partner was having an affair but she denied this possibility and declined to confront either him or the third party involved:

☞ “In the six years we were together... I had **never** received any phone calls or warnings that he was having affairs. So....when a friend told me some time ago that he was having a relationship with my best friend's sister, I wouldn't believe her because she couldn't give me any facts about where she had seen them. I insisted it must be a rumour and I don't take rumours seriously. Also, I asked her ... if it were true...what did she expect me to do...and she suggested I confront the woman he was having the affair with. I didn't.. because I felt she would deny it in any case...so what would I gain?”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

A further aspect of denial is that the participants' retrospective perceptions concerning the positive and negative aspects of their partners' behaviour in the relationship, are compromised. Also their reality testing at the time of the relationship is influenced by their denial. They only become aware of their confusion during the stages of physical and emotional withdrawal as they reflect back on their relationship. Participant A explains this aspect of her experience:

☞ “Thinking about it now...it is difficult to determine what was real and not real. His behaviour had become more distant after I had confronted him about where our relationship was headed, but there were just too many other things which I focussed on which gave me hope. However, he must have sent out negative signals that I more than likely saw and felt, but I wouldn't believe them. If I really went all out to prove that he wasn't committed, I would have found ample evidence to support my feelings but...I chose rather to focus and look for the positive aspects of our relationships...the things about him and his behaviour in the relationship that reassured me and showed me..we were ok.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Participant C shares a similar experience of her partner's behaviour:

☞ “It is very difficult for me to determine at this stage what about his behaviour was genuinely positive. I think.....no, I'm not sure.....but I think... the good that he brought to the relationship, he really meant that....it was genuine.. But then again...I didn't go looking for anything in his behaviour that would mean the relationship wasn't working...maybe that was a mistake, but I think a person should focus on the positive aspects, rather than on the negative aspects.”

Participant C. 16 February 2005

Denial is also evident during the stage of **maintaining a façade** (see 5.5.2) as the participants deny that their partners' infidelity and subsequent abandonment of them has left them emotionally shattered. Their denial is manifested in behaviour which suggests that they are coping well and not as humiliated and lost as what they really feel. The participants attempt to put on a brave front as a means of self-preservation when interacting with others and they deny the impact and the intensity of their pain of having been abandoned. However, the participants eventually realise after attempting to cope on their own that they require either medication or psychotherapy and consequently seek professional assistance.

➤ Dissociation.

The data indicate that a further intrapsychic consequence that the participants experience within the context of infidelity is a *single, brief* but *severe* incident of dissociation. As described in the previous sections on consequences, this incident is not specific to any particular stage and is independent of the length of time since the partners abandoned the relationships. Rather, what is significant from the data is that the participants' *unique* intrapsychic functioning influences when and how a form of dissociation occurs.

Furthermore, it is important to clarify that the form of dissociation, which the participants experience, is not in response to the knowledge that their partner has betrayed them, as this knowledge may be, only be gained *after* the partner has abandoned the relationship. Rather the participants experience a form of dissociation *in response to the trauma* associated with their perception of *their partners' abandonment* of them, which exacerbates their **sense of alienation**. Furthermore, the term “dissociation” serves to describe the participants' experience within the context of betrayal and does not suggest a clinically diagnosed, dissociative disorder.

The various forms of dissociation, which the data indicate in the participants' experience of abandonment, are **depersonalisation and de-realisation** and **psychogenic amnesia**.

Depersonalisation refers to the sense that one has lost contact with one's own personal reality, accompanied by feelings of strangeness. In severe instances, parts of one's body feel alien and one may have the experience of perceiving oneself from a distance (Reber, 1985). De-realisation is a component of depersonalisation and refers to a change in the perception of the environment with the sense that one has lost contact with external reality. Participant A indicates her experience of *depersonalisation and de-realization* after her former partner contacted her again, fourteen months after abandoning the relationship:

☞ “A year and two months later....just out of the blue... I got a call from him and he spoke to me as if nothing had ever happened. I was so completely taken aback that I automatically had a conversation with him as if he had never left. It was as if **nothing** had happened and that was scary....**very**.....totally unreal. My first reaction was ‘nothing ever happened’ and it was as if... I

was watching myself have this conversation...almost like an out-of- body experience. Almost as if I was in a different time...a different place...it was incredibly weird.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

Similarly, Participant E describes her brief but severe experience of *depersonalisation* and *de-realisation* after she arrives home and becomes aware that her partner has taken his belongings and abandoned their relationship:

☞ “It was the strangest experience I have ever had...it felt totally unreal...and it made me petrified ...I could see my legs moving as I walked around....but I couldn’t feel a thing. It felt as if I was outside my body, not part of it....not *in* it...if that makes any sense? I thought at that moment I had lost it completely...lost touch with reality.”

Participant E1.31 March 2005

Psychogenic amnesia on the other hand, refers to a “hole” in one’s memory indicating loss of information for isolated events or episodes (Reber, 1985). This term is used in this context in preference to the term “**post-traumatic amnesia**” although dissociation may occur as a result of a traumatic event such as abandonment. The reason for this is that although the latter term may be used to describe both physical injury and a disturbing psychological experience, the more commonly intended connotation of the term is organic (Reber, 1985). In Participant B’s experience, he is unable to recall to date (two years later) where he slept or where he went the day his wife abandoned their marriage in favour of a colleague. He indicates his experience of psychogenic amnesia as follows:

☞ “She came back to fetch a few things and while she was packing, she told me ...her eyes had finally opened... and she wanted to be with him...he was the man for her and then... she left. I packed some of my things and also left....but.. I can’t tell you where I went or where I slept that night or.... if I went to see any of my friends.... I still can’t remember... I don’t know.”

Participant B.16 February 2005

➤ Ambivalence and idealisation of the partner.

Analysis of the data reveals that once the participants initially express some of their anger during

the stage of **confronting their partners** (see 5.5.2.) as well as suppress their anger (see “suppressed anger” below), they begin to experience **ambivalence** with regard to their *recently acquired negative perception* of their partners and their negative feelings towards them. This also occurs during the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal**, and **maintaining a façade**. Feelings of ambivalence elicit anxiety in the participants as they perceive themselves to be emotionally and physically powerless in the face of alluring and repetitive fantasies which suggest their partners’ return and a subsequent re-engagement in an intensely, emotionally painful relationship.

Furthermore, due to the participants’ feelings of ambivalence towards their partners which fluctuate greatly between positive (good) and negative (bad) poles during the stages mentioned earlier in this paragraph, the risk of becoming involved with their partners again when their feelings of ambivalence lean strongly toward a positive perception of their partner is high, should their partners contact them during this time.

A further interesting finding occurs in the data, which reflects the participants’ feelings of ambivalence towards their partners. They indicate that even though they experience their partners’ infidelity as “emotionally shattering”, “devastating” and the consequences of their act as a “life-changing event” amongst others, there are times when they focus so strongly on their partners positive aspects that they are unable to find fault them within the context of infidelity. In this manner, the participants intermittently idealise their partners during their periods of ambivalence, which results in further feelings of disconnectedness and a sense of alienation.

Idealisation is a term familiar to psychoanalytic theory and is also discussed within a Kleinian framework (see chapter three). At this stage, no detailed discussion of this aspect of the participants’ intrapsychic functioning will be provided as it is presented in greater detail in the following chapter of this thesis. For the purpose of clarification however it is important to note that the process of idealisation results from a defensive exaggeration of a libidinally invested object’s goodness once splitting occurs. As a defence mechanism, it is an attempt to safeguard the individual against the disappointing and persecutory aspects of the libidinally invested object (Likierman, 2001). Participant C illustrates this aspect of her experience of betrayal:

☞ “After I confronted him about the reason for abandoning the relationship....I went through a

stage immediately after that for quite a while where I couldn't say anything bad about him....not at all. Many of my friends picked it up when we spoke [about him] and they told me they couldn't understand what was going on...**they** realised what he did was wrong.....why couldn't I see it?...but I couldn't at that time....I could only focus on all his positive characteristics for quite a while. In fact...I felt that if he had walked through my door at that stage and asked me to give him another chance.....I would have taken him back.”

Participant C.16 February 2005

A further illustration of idealisation of the partner is evident in Participant E's experience of betrayal. After her partner has abandoned the relationship, she sporadically experiences difficulty in integrating the awareness that her partner has hurt her intensely:

☞ “The funny thing wasat the time this all happened...and for quite a few months after that... I couldn't hold on to an image of him as the “bad guy” and of how badly he has hurt me... I tried ...but I kept finding something good and beautiful about our relationship, making excuses for his behaviour...so I couldn't stay angry with him for long or harbour any feelings of hatred or revenge towards him.....I... loved him. I could feel hurt and resentment and anger towards the others involved in the situation and I wanted to hurt them as much as they had hurt me.... but I couldn't feel that way towards him then. Only many, many months later....could I begin to realise he is really just bad news.”

Participant E2. 08 April 2005

Although the two illustrations in the above paragraphs refer to the participants' idealisation of their partner once they have been abandoned, the data indicate that idealisation can also occur whilst the participants are still engaged in the relationship:

☞ “Before I knew it.....we started seeing more of one another and when we became physically intimate...I had the experience that I was very attracted to him and I became totally crazy about him. Despite our differences...I thought he was the best thing that had ever happened to me. But there were certain things about him that niggled me...like his verbally aggressive manner towards others...especially those close to him. However, I never experienced that...on the contrary, I think he treated me exceptionally well....more so than he did any other person..... he is a tremendously exciting.... and.... interesting man.”

Participant A.15 February 2005


The last intrapsychic consequence that emerges from the data is that of suppressed anger. This brief description of suppressed anger is followed by concluding comments regarding the participants' experience of betrayal in an intimate relationship and their resulting sense of alienation.

➤ Suppressed anger.

The participants have to suppress their anger towards their partner while in the relationships as they come to learn that their relationships cannot accommodate much confrontation. As also discussed in 5.6.1.4, confrontation of their partner, poses definite threats to the existence and continuity of their relationship. Consequently, suppression of anger results in intense sadness and depressive episodes as the participants attempt to quieten their unmet needs and expectations. In addition, suppression of anger is not restricted to any of the specific stages mentioned in 5.5.2 but is part of the legacy of betrayal.

A further interesting finding in the data is that the participants carry the burden of what I have termed, *residual (leftover) anger* which they are also obliged to suppress for an indefinite length of time and which they progressively need to integrate into their experience of betrayal. *Residual anger* is anger that cannot be expressed due to lack of opportunity and the absence of the partner and is fuelled by the initial unsatisfactory confrontation with their partner, once the relationship has been abandoned. Therefore, the participants have no alternative but to *consciously* exclude their impulse to vent their residual anger on their partners in the light of their abandonment.

Suppression of residual anger occurs during any of the stages of **physical and emotional withdrawal, maintaining a façade and regaining control** and is influenced by the unique nature of the participants' intrapsychic functioning. On an intrapsychic level, suppressed, residual anger can manifest in various forms such as fuelling images of further confrontation and aggression. Participant A describes the manifestation of suppressed anger as follows:

 “We did not discuss the situation which would have been difficult on the one hand but on the other hand, I would have been able to get rid of more of my anger and frustration. I slept very

badly at that time and while I used to lie awake.... I had a very aggressive image of how I would behave towards him in my mind... of how I would belittle him in front of others and tell him how bad and useless he is and...it was as if I could get rid of all my anger in that way, which obviously I never did and... which I never discussed with anyone.”

Participant A. 15 February 2005

In addition, Participant D describes how suppressed anger in his case, manifests in intense sadness and feelings of devastation:

☞ “The problem is.....I very rarely become angry...almost never. Rather I become incredibly sad and ...emotionally shattered. After I had I heard about his affair....there were brief..... very brief moments when I felt angry....but I never acted on them...and the feeling was soon over. Instead....I was left feeling heartbroken and devastated.”

Participant D. 06 April 2005.

A sense of alienation

Summary of the paradigm

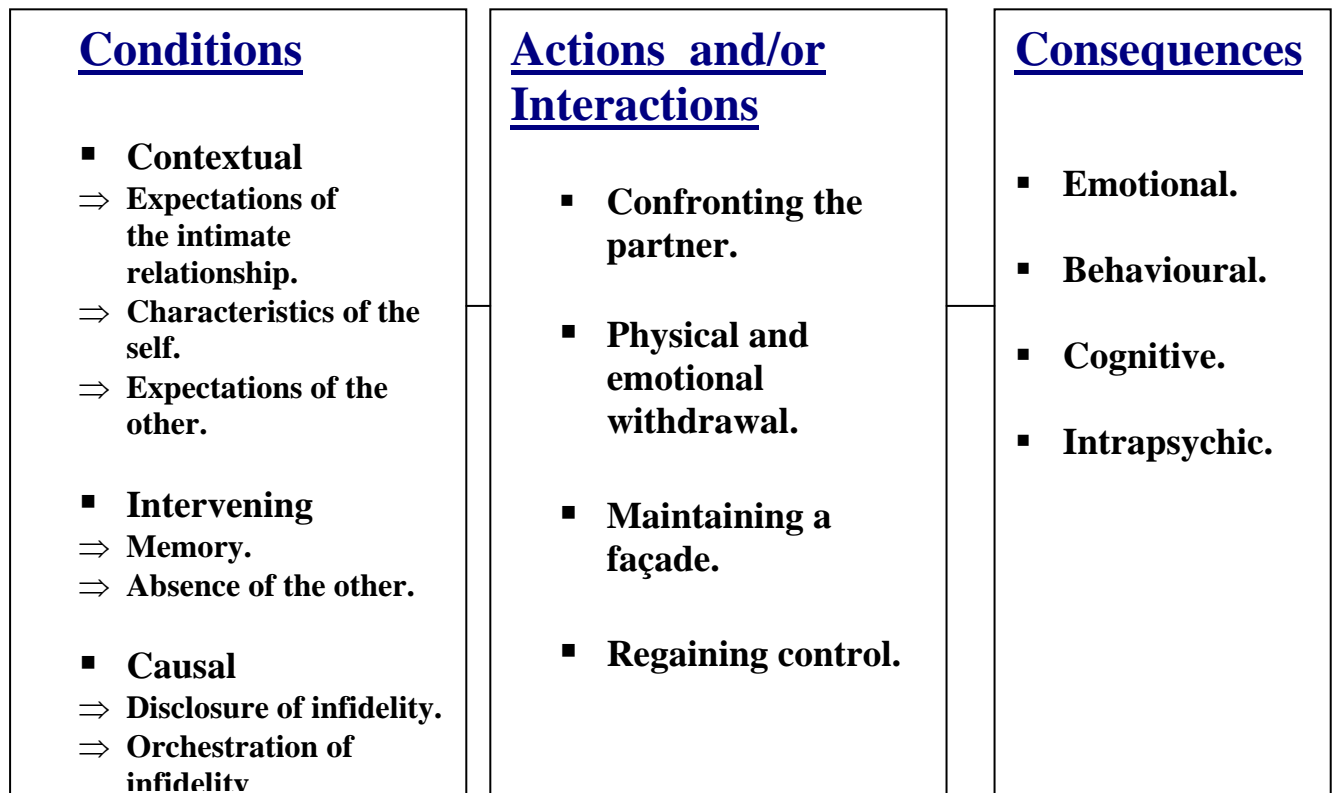


Figure 5.5. Summary of the framework

5.7. Conclusions regarding a sense of alienation.

Initial and consistently recurring data emerge which indicate that the experience of betrayal occurs within a greater context of connectedness and **belonging to a collective**. The members in the collective share a similar **socialisation process** that influences their perceptions and expectations of cultural **norms and morals**. One such expectation centres around the boundaries regarding **sexual exclusivity** in intimate relationships. Therefore, the nature of the socialisation process which each participant upholds, determines the relevance of significant elements of their relationship with a partner prior to infidelity, the interpretation of the occurrence of their partners' act or acts of infidelity during the course of their relationships and their relationships post betrayal.

When engaging in intimate relationships, participants under benign circumstances share the expectation that the dyad will become more **cohesive over time**. Furthermore, individuals in the dyad experience a **sense of connectedness** or belonging during the course of their relationship, which increases amidst nurtured intimacy and continuity. However, in instances of betrayal such as an act of **infidelity**, the sense of belonging is destroyed and the participants experience feelings of disconnectedness and desolation. Specifically, as the participants become aware of their partners' infidelity and of the manner in which the infidelity is orchestrated, they experience a profound **sense of alienation**.

A sense of alienation is the phenomenon that emerges as central to this enquiry and offers some insight into how the participants in this study experience betrayal by their partners. In particular, a sense of alienation is encountered in the overwhelming **sense of desolation** which prevails as the participants experience having been "robbed" of fantasies, dreams, expectations of happy futures, of identities and emotional wholeness, which places them in the category of the "**victim**." This in itself makes the participants feel **anxious, humiliated, powerless and incompetent**. Furthermore, the perception of being a victim, liberates the participants from assuming much responsibility for the disintegration of their relationship. They experience their partners' betrayal as something that was "done to them" which places their partners in the role of perpetrators. Therefore, the participants perceive betrayal within the context of a "punishable" act, committed by the partner.

Further findings indicate that the participants became **introspective** after they are unable to find reasons for their partners' infidelity. **Closure remains elusive** as the participants grapple with

unfathomable questions around what was truly **genuine** and what was **fake** in the relationship. They search for answers and reasons for their **abandonment** but are unable to find rational answers to the seemingly “irrational” behaviour of their partners. Consequently they attempt to integrate their sense of alienation by perceiving their partners’ behaviour as indicative of a disorder in their personality functioning.

In addition, there are clear **actions and interactions** that the participants engage in as a result of their experience of betrayal which also contribute to their sense of alienation. They **confront their partner, withdraw physically and emotionally, maintain a façade** and lastly, **regain control** of their lives again. These stages do not occur in rigid, linear progression but the consequences associated with each of them are interwoven and fluid in their movement between and across the stages. In particular, the uniqueness of each of the participants’ experience of betrayal influences how these stages are approached and managed. The consequences associated with each of these stages and which contribute to the participants’ sense of alienation emerge from the data as **emotional-, behavioural-, cognitive- and intrapsychic** consequences.

Emotional consequences are most prevalent in the participants’ experience of betrayal and exacerbate their sense of alienation. In particular, the phenomenon of **loss** as an emotional consequence influences many facets of the participants’ lives. Specifically, loss of **self-confidence** and **trust** is evident in the participants’ inability to function effectively in both friendships and subsequent relationships and increase their sense of alienation. In addition, loss of **relationship** is encountered when having to separate from individuals outside the dyad whom the participants have grown close to whilst being part of an intimate relationship and this is seen as a prominent aspect of their experience of loss within the context of betrayal.

Also, the phenomenon of trust emerges from the data as a core element in establishing a sense of belonging with their partners, with others and with the participants’ themselves. They emphasise that although learning about their partners’ infidelity is an intensely painful experience, the sense of belonging is severed and the relationship irrevocably damaged as a result of the secrecy and deception of their partners in committing an act or acts of infidelity. Consequently, this results in an irrevocable breach of the participants’ trust as well as their inability to readily engage in future relationships. Analysis of the data confirms and clarifies that a sense of connectedness plays a central role in an intimate relationship and is lost as a result of a **violation of trust** between the

participants and their partners. Furthermore, the participants lack confidence in being able to trust and rely on their **powers of judgement** to make appropriate decisions and choices with regard to friendships, future partners and many aspects of social and occupational functioning.

Turning to **behavioural consequences**, the data indicate that considerably less behavioural than emotional consequences are evident in the participants' experience of betrayal. However, they experience **heightened vigilance**, which influences their home, social and occupational environments. In particular, the data indicate that the participants experience **heightened auditory perception** at this time.

On the other hand, **cognitive consequences** are more prevalent than either the behavioural or intrapsychic consequences in the participants' experience of infidelity. The cognitive consequences are largely debilitating and destructive in nature and they engender **insecurity** and **loneliness** in the participants' experience of betrayal which contributes to a profound sense of alienation. The cognitive consequences which emerge from the data are **self-punitive ideation, paranoid ideation, doubt, persistent thoughts about their partners' betrayal, holding on to the relationship and comparing themselves to the known or unknown other in their partners' lives**.

Specifically, when the participants realise that they allowed themselves to become **vulnerable** in order to engage in a dyadic intimate relationship, they turn on themselves and resort to **self-blame**. Self-blame increases the participants' feelings of disconnectedness from themselves and others and engenders a sense of alienation which leads to profound loneliness. Loneliness soon becomes an unwelcome companion as the participants are seduced by **fantasies of reconciliation** with their former partner. They fearfully anticipate the possibility of their **partners' return** and their partners' invitation to resume their relationship, which they initially feel unable to resist even though they believe it is likely to lead them back into a dark valley of intense pain.

Furthermore, when struggling to integrate the awareness of their sense of alienation, the foundation of the participants' **sense of self** or identity has been shaken and their relationship with themselves is also compromised as they experience a sense of disconnectedness. They question their physical appearance, their morals and their perception of a **self** that has become foreign to them. In

addition, they **compare** themselves to the person their partners had the affair with and they frantically search their own backgrounds, their achievements and the quality of their former relationships for a rational explanation for their abandonment.

Findings that emerge from the data indicate that the **intrapsychic** consequences, which result from the participants' experience of betrayal, are **denial, dissociation, ambivalence and idealisation of the partner** and **suppressed anger**. Although anger towards their partner is an emotional consequence of the experience of betrayal, suppressed anger is particularly relevant to the participants' experience as they have no option but to consciously exclude residual anger invoked by their partners' betrayal due to lack of opportunity to express it, due to the absence of their partner.

When reflecting on the intrapsychic consequences of their experience, the participants realise that an underlying **fear** of losing their partners results in **sacrificing parts of themselves** and their **needs** for the relationship. This knowledge also leads to a sense of alienation from themselves. However, the **need for continuity** is paramount as this allows the participants to experience a sense of belonging and connectedness to a significant other in an intimate relationship. Contained in the need for continuity, are feelings of **ambivalence and idealisation** of the partner. The participants' fear and **anxiety** as a result of their sense of alienation is temporarily warded off by their idealisation of the partner.

In addition, the data indicate that in the participants' experience of their partners' infidelity, **time and the absence of the partner** are important elements that determine the life of this defence mechanism. As the participants regain control of their lives, they become less vulnerable over time to a vivid, idealised image of their absent partner and consequently are less likely to re-engage in a relationship with him or her.

A further intrapsychic consequence experienced within the context of betrayal emerges from the data and causes concern for the participants namely brief, but severe **dissociation**. Dissociation occurs in various forms depending on the unique personality structure of the participant. In addition, it is relevant at this point to clarify that the data indicate that the participants do not experience a form of dissociation in response to the knowledge of their partners' infidelity but

rather as a result of the perceived trauma of abandonment. Therefore this experience exacerbates their sense of alienation from themselves.

What is evident in the data is that the participants' experience of betrayal mainly invites a **negative focus**. However the data also indicate that there are a **few positive consequences** associated with some of the actions and interactions the participants engage in, in their experience of betrayal. When confronting their partners for instance (see 5.6.1.4.), the participants become **constructively assertive** in their behaviour as they have little left to forfeit as the relationship has already been abandoned. Consequently they are able to express their disappointment and their perceptions of their partners' infidelity. Furthermore, they challenge their partners' explanation for the abandonment of the relationship, whereas previously, they avoided discussing it for fear of losing their partner. Although they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the encounter and continue to pursue closure, they feel increasingly **empowered** by the confrontation.

In addition, as the participants are coerced into becoming increasingly introspective particularly during the stage of physical and emotional withdrawal, they gain the awareness that they have renounced many of their needs and expectations to ensure continuity of the relationship. Consequently, they revisit their **personal boundaries** and resolve to protect their vulnerable selves more effectively in future by erecting definite, rather than diffuse boundaries in relationships.

Resurrected resilience is a further positive emotional consequence that is evident in the data. The participants, although reeling from the sense of alienation, are able to access and display their inherent tendency towards buoyancy and do not engage in self-destructive behaviour. Finally, as a result of their heightened perceptions, the participants become increasingly effective in their occupational roles. This aspect of the experience of betrayal is particularly positive for them.

At this point, we turn to the next chapter in this study, which will reflect an integrated discussion of the findings presented in this chapter, from a Kleinian perspective. Where applicable, the discussion will extend and elaborate on existing constructs in Klein's theory. In addition, the discussion will aim at contributing new perspectives to a Kleinian framework, which could be explored in future research.