THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF WOMEN'S
EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS

by

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Abstract

A qualitative phenomenological paradigm was used to explore the phenomenon of clandestine heterosexual extramarital affairs for women in long-term relationships. Five women were recruited from two cities on Vancouver Island, B.C. During individual, in-depth, audiotaped, personal interviews, the women retrospectively described their experience of an extramarital affair (or affairs). Five common themes were extrapolated from the data using the seven-step model of data analysis outlined by Colaizzi (1978).

The results indicated that in their long-term relationships, the women felt powerless, invalidated, and disconnected. They perceived themselves as having a sense of control and as feeling validated and connected in their affairs. The women felt shame and self-blame for having sexual and emotional needs. They felt guilty for engaging in an affair to fulfill these needs, for breaking a traditional code of behavior, and for the pleasure they experienced in their affairs. They experienced a sexual reawakening in their affairs which brought with it a clarity about themselves and their needs. The experience was felt to be healing and was also a catalyst for positive change for all of the women, although for some this positive change signaled the ending of their marital relationships.
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Dedication

This work is lovingly dedicated to:

My mother:
Paula Marguerite Thurston
who has always encouraged my academic endeavours
and whose loving and adventurous spirit
continues to inspire me,

AND

The memory of my father:
Charles William (Bill) Evans Locke
whose belief in me has always been
life-affirming and who always encouraged me
to take advantage of every opportunity
to learn something new.

AND

To my beloved children:
Carys Judith Welby Evans
Christian Richard Welby Evans
Tegan Marguerite Welby Evans
whose love and unconditional acceptance of
their student/mom has sustained me
for the past eight years.
Chapter One - Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of traditional moral codes prohibiting adultery as well as laws of relative severity designed to control it, extramarital sexual activity, on the part of both wife and husband, has been observed for as long as the institution of marriage has existed (Katchadourian, 1989; Lawson, 1988). However, cross-cultural attitudes towards extramarital sex strongly reflect a double standard (Lips, 1988). Extramarital sex, when engaged in by the husband, is tolerated, if not approved, whereas extramarital sexual activity on the part of the wife, is strongly censured. In a survey of world cultures, Broude (1980) found that 63 percent of societies approve of extramarital sex for the husband, 13 percent approve of it for the wife and 23 percent disapprove of it for both.

Many researchers in the area of extramarital relations report great puzzlement regarding the incongruence between North American attitudes and beliefs towards extramarital affairs and the reports of incidence rates of extramarital behavior (Thompson, 1983). Attitudes are overwhelmingly disapproving of extramarital behavior (Glenn & Weaver, 1979), yet reports of extramarital behavior estimate that at least 50 per cent of males and approaching 50 per cent of females engage in at least one affair by the age of 40 (Atwater, 1982; Hite, 1989; Hunt, 1974; McGinnis, 1981; Ramey, 1977).

In their attempts to solve what appears to be a large discrepancy between belief and behavior, researchers have attempted to isolate antecedents and etiological factors in an effort to predict who is likely to become involved in extramarital affairs and who is not (Bell, Turner & Rosen, 1975; Edwards, 1973; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Pestrak, Martin & Martin, 1985; Thompson, 1983). Other researchers have concentrated on the impact or consequences of extramarital affairs (Beach, Jouriles & O'Leary, 1985; Spanier & Margolis, 1983). Most of these writers and researchers are
therapists working with couples and individuals in the aftermath of the discovery of an affair (Elbaum, 1981; Humphrey, 1982; Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Pittman, 1989; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983). Finally, other researchers have attempted to uncover the motives behind extramarital involvement (Greene, Lee & Lustig, 1974; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Walster, Traupman & Walster, 1978).

Very little attention has been paid to the actual lived experience of men or women who have engaged in an extramarital affair (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992). This complex and socially constructed experience is only partially captured in a discussion of incidence rates (Buunk, 1980; Hunt, 1970; Thompson, 1983), etiological factors, and reports of motivations and consequences (Pestrak et al., 1985; Thompson, 1983). Additionally, an important aspect of the experience of any lived phenomenon is the pervasive impact of the social context (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992; Lawson, 1988). This perspective is completely lacking in most research investigating women's extramarital affairs. Descriptions of women's lived experience of extramarital affairs and the meaning attached to this experience are rare in the empirical or clinical literature (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992). Although Atwater and Heyn explored the experience and meaning of women's extramarital relationships, they did not use a phenomenological approach to their investigation, instead relying on scheduled questions to guide their investigations. This approach may have biased the findings in the direction of the selected questions (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985).

The Context

Various factors contribute to current attitudes regarding the double standard of sexual behavior. These factors include cultural and religious mythology, the patrilineal descent system in rural Western Europe, and more recently, evolutionary theories such as sociobiology, which seek to explain the differences between male and female sexual behavior in evolutionary terms.

Western culture and Judeo-Christian religion have defined women's sexuality in
terms of two extremes which are diametrically opposed to each other: good and bad, sacred and profane (Janeway, 1980). In the Christian legend these opposites are represented by Mary, virgin and mother, and by Eve, temptress and betrayer of man. These models of female sexuality have become part of our culture's values and belief system and so have been absorbed into women's and men's views of women and of female sexuality, desire and sexual behavior. These images of female sexuality do not appear to be based on women's lived experience of themselves but rather may reflect male beliefs and attitudes towards female sexuality which have dominated our patriarchal society for centuries (Janeway, 1980).

An example of how this social process has revealed itself is apparent in Victorian England around the turn of the century, where middle class women were upheld as the 'angel in the house'. Women's proposed purity and moral superiority purportedly acted to strengthen a husband's attempts to overcome his "baser" instincts (Filene, 1975; Janeway, 1980). Prostitution at this time was considered a serious social problem and the role of the wife--the better half--was to help the husband master the "destructive urges" inside himself (Filene, 1975, p. 70). The role of the angel in the house was to "accept and sublimate the male sex drive by transforming it into procreation" (Janeway, 1980, p. 8). Around the same time, as more women joined the Protestant church congregations, moral authority was increasingly assigned to women (Filene, 1975; Janeway, 1980). This moral superiority on the part of women was supported by the increasing view of female sexuality as modest, virtuous and passionless (Janeway, 1980). Female sexuality was thus defined in response to male desire and male fears of loss of control. Men's fears of female sexuality appeared to be reflected in the inability or unwillingness of men to accept women as sexual equals.

The male-dominated culture of this time cast female sexuality in terms of two opposing images, with one being revered and one being debased: madonna or whore (Ussher, 1989).
Another factor which contributed to the differential view of male and female sexuality was the social customs governing the inheritance of property. Chastity before marriage, and fidelity after, became important only when society became concerned about legitimate male descent which was linked to the ownership of individual property, inheritance of property or status, or rights to both (Janeway, 1980; Lawson, 1988). Since men could never be sure of their paternity in the same way that women could know their maternity, the chastity of the wife-mother thus became a prerequisite to the maintenance of social order in a patrilineal descent system (Janeway, 1980; Lawson, 1988).

The function of chastity in our contemporary economic system has lost its importance, historically speaking, since most people possess the ability to support themselves in a cash economy and do not have to rely on the inheritance of lands, rights or status for survival (Janeway, 1980). However, the expectation of greater fidelity in marriage on the part of females persists to this day and is reflected in differential incidence rates of male and female extramarital involvement and in the tolerance of these affairs for men: men are more likely to become involved in extramarital affairs than women and are more likely to have more extramarital affair partners than women (Lawson & Samson, 1988).

Donald Symons (1979), a Darwinian psychologist, has attempted to explain the "genetic inevitability of the sexual double standard" (Keen, 1981, p. 52) using the premises of sociobiology. Espousing a theory that is based on inference rather than hard data, sociobiology "tries to explain social behavior as an outgrowth of the genetic heritage bequeathed to us from natural selection" (Keen, 1981, p. 53). Males are, according to this theory, genetically predisposed to impregnate many females and to make a minimal investment in raising the resultant offspring. Women, in this view, long to be implanted with the best seed but are then content to brood for nine months, devoting years to nurturing the young life to full maturity. The female selects the
fittest of males, knowing that she will not reproduce more often than once every three to four years. Therefore, females are not believed to be distracted by the desire for many men (Keen, 1981).

Symons (1979) postulates that natural selection favoured those tendencies that promoted reproductive success in the environment of the Pleistocene age, the age of hunters and gatherers. A male's reproductive success was potentially a direct function of the number of women he copulated with. Conversely, a female's reproductive success was most probably limited to one child every three or four years, whether she copulated with one man or a thousand. From this perspective, an autonomous desire for variety-seeking would appear to be dysfunctional for women. Such desire would require that time and energy be taken away from other reproductively useful things, such as gathering food and caring for one's children (Keen, 1981). Thus the rationale for a sexual double standard on genetic grounds is argued.

The above cultural, social and biological perspectives have served to influence attitudes and beliefs about male and female sexuality for centuries. These attitudes and beliefs are embedded in our cultural and religious heritage as well as in our social and economic institutions. Large-scale social movements such as the women's liberation movement, the gay rights movement and the sexual revolution of the past thirty years, are reported to have had a somewhat liberalizing effect on normative attitudes towards premarital sex but restrictive attitudes towards homosexual and extramarital relationships remain, especially for women (Glenn & Weaver, 1979).

Along with these restrictive attitudes, the belief in the greater sexual desire and drive in males as opposed to females remains firmly entrenched in our culture's view of male and female sexuality, with female sexuality apparently being characterized by restraint (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebbhard, 1953; Lawson & Samson, 1988; Weis & Slosnerick, 1981).
Definitions

The following definitions were used in this research:

Extramarital Affair

There are a confusing number of terms used by researchers in the field of extramarital relationships. Often the specific nature of the sexual behavior in the extramarital relationship as well as in the marital or cohabiting dyad is not described. Specific descriptions of the marital/cohabitant unit are also not provided nor is it usually stated whether the outside relationship occurred with or without the spouse's consent. Thompson (1984b) defines extramarital sex as "genital sexual involvement outside the marriage (or cohabitant relationship) without express knowledge or consent of one's partner" (p. 240).

In this study, the definition of extramarital affair was: sexual involvement outside the marriage (or cohabiting unit) without the consent of the spouse. This definition excluded marital/cohabitant relationships which were homosexual as well as extramarital affairs which were homosexual. This criterion was based on research that suggests that a homosexual affair may create a different dynamic in the perceived potential and actual consequences of an extramarital affair on significant others (Humphrey, 1982). Engagement in a homosexual affair may also include dramatic redefinitions of the sexual self in the participating spouse (Sophe, 1982).

Sexually open marriages were also excluded from this research since there would appear to be a different set of antecedents and consequences inherent in this kind of marital arrangement. In open marriages, affairs are conducted openly, with a minimum of secrecy, and usually involve both spouses. Problems are encountered when one of the partners no longer accepts the consensual agreement and wants to return to sexual exclusivity or when conflicts emerge, such as jealousy, over the outside partner (Buunk, 1982; Humphrey, 1982).

In this study, one-night stands were included in the definition of extramarital
affairs. Given the sanctions against women's extramarital involvement, even a one-night stand may significantly impact on a woman's sense of herself.

Extramarital affairs which are characterized as emotional only and which do not include sexual behavior will also be excluded from this research. It appears that a wide range of non-sexual extramarital behaviors are acceptable to a majority of people, while a majority of people appear to be opposed to extramarital sexual involvement (Weis & Slosnerick, 1981). These attitudes appear to be based on differential perceptions of extramarital behaviors which are associated with different beliefs and consequences. Humphrey (1982) notes that sexual behavior is symbolic behavior that is endowed with a wide variety of meanings in our culture: love-hate, intimacy-distance, acceptance-rejection and as such, appears to symbolize strong emotional meanings to both the participating and non-participating spouses.

Other terms such as infidelity, adultery, extramarital coitus, extramarital involvement, and extramarital relationship are often utilized in the literature on extramarital affairs. For the purposes of this study, these terms were used interchangeably, unless otherwise specified. The term extramarital sex is used predominantly in the research literature, reflecting the emphasis which researchers have placed on the sexual aspects of extramarital relationships (Atwater, 1982). The term extramarital affair, used in this study, seems more appropriate for a phenomenological investigation since it appears to refer to the broader picture of extramarital involvement, including the sexual, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of this experience, among other aspects as yet to be identified.

Clandestine Affair

This term was used in this study to denote affairs which occur without the explicit or implicit consent of the non-participating spouse. The term non-consensual affair is used widely in the extramarital research literature (Thompson, 1983, 1984b) to describe extramarital affairs which occur without the explicit or implicit consent of the
spouse. *Non-consensual* is also a term used in the sexual assault literature implying forced sexual contact with an unconsenting subject (Brownmiller, 1975), and is thus confusing in the context of extramarital affairs. The term "clandestine" appears to more accurately describe an affair which occurs in secrecy, without the knowledge of the non-participating spouse.

**Participating Spouse**

This term was used in the study to refer to the person engaging in the extramarital affair.

**Non-participating Spouse**

This term was used to refer exclusively to the married/cohabitant partner of the participating spouse.

**Affair Partner**

This term referred to the partner outside the marriage or cohabiting relationship with whom the participant has had a clandestine relationship.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the subjective experience of women's clandestine extramarital affairs as they are lived and experienced by women in long-term married or cohabiting relationships. A phenomenological perspective (Colaizzi, 1978) informs this retrospective analysis of women's attempts to meaningful construct their extramarital experiences. Participants, by sharing the personal meaning of their experiences, provide valuable insights into the unique dynamics of extramarital affairs.

Research was conducted with women who had experienced an extramarital affair (or affairs) which has been terminated. The research question asked was: "What is the meaning of women's lived experience of extramarital affairs?" The purpose of the investigation was to explore this phenomenon in order to discover the nature of extramarital affairs for women and to provide descriptions of the nature and meaning of
the phenomenon of extramarital affairs for women in long-term relationships. It was hoped that this research would sensitize other researchers and practitioners to the nature and meaning of women's extramarital affairs and that the findings might serve as a foundation for the development of theory in the area (Giorgi, 1985).

This research may be of interest to counsellors and therapists working with individuals, couples, and families in which there has been an extramarital affair. This study may also contribute to a better understanding of female sexuality and experience in the context of extramarital affairs. The findings of this study might be useful to women contemplating extramarital involvement by providing descriptions of the experience from the perspective of the five women in this study and the meaning the participants attached to their experiences. Husbands, whose wives have had an extramarital affair, might also gain an understanding of the experience and meaning of his wife's extramarital affair (or affairs).

A feminist perspective guided this research. Feminist research defines what is in need of explanation from the perspective of women's needs and women's experiences (Harding, 1987). This perspective recognizes that women's experiences are valid resources for social analysis and that women's experiences at present are either distorted or partially represented in our patriarchal culture (Harding, 1987; Wine, 1985). The investigator is placed on the same critical plane as the participant, who is involved as much as possible in the research process. The investigator is acknowledged as a real individual with beliefs and interests as well as biases, which are acknowledged to have an impact on the process of investigation and analysis (Colaizzi, 1978, Giorgi, 1985; Harding, 1987).
Chapter Two - Review of the Literature

This chapter summarizes empirical research, articles written by clinicians, and philosophical commentaries describing the multiple factors which have interested researchers in the area of extramarital relationships. A review of the published studies and research into extramarital relationships reveals a set of categories into which most of these publications fall (Thompson, 1983). These categories can be best described as the following: incidence of extramarital affairs; the meaning of extramarital affairs; extramarital sexual permissiveness; types of extramarital affairs, antecedents or causes of extramarital affairs; motivational factors in extramarital affairs; consequences/impact of extramarital affairs; and theories of extramarital affairs. Each of these categories will be discussed briefly with particular reference to studies which provide empirical evidence of women's experience of, and participation in, extramarital affairs.

Empirical Research into Human Sexual Behavior

In the past forty-five years, researchers in the field of human sexuality have brought to light many fallacies and much mis-information about male and female sexuality and have provided new information about the sexual functioning and behavior of men and women. Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) surveyed 2000 married women and 3000 married men about their sexual activities and found that premarital intercourse, masturbation, and extramarital intercourse were much more common among women than previously thought.

Masters & Johnson (1966, 1970) observed both males and females in clinical settings and concluded that the male and female sexual response cycles were very similar and that females were physiologically capable of extensive bodily sensuality and possessed the capacity for multiple orgasm. This ability was not found to exist in males, given the necessity of a refractory period (Masters & Johnson, 1966).

Hite's (1976, 1989) findings support the above research and provide evidence that our perceptions of the nature of female sexuality are socially constructed and are
defined mainly in terms of male sexuality. She found evidence of the great extent and variety of sexual and sensual expression among the 1000 women who responded to her questionnaire, as well as evidence that demonstrated the autonomy of the female sexual response.

The research findings of Masters and Johnson (1966) and Hite (1976, 1989) were in stark conflict with the Victorian image of female sexuality as passive, restricted, disinterested and dependent on male sexuality (Janeway, 1980). Not only this, but these findings would seem to dispel beliefs that females might possess a less potent sexual desire and capacity than males. Research into female sexuality thus became a valid topic of interest. This paved the way for research into female extramarital behavior which had, up to this point, been non-existent or had trailed research interest in the male experience of extramarital behavior.

Empirical Research into Extramarital Sex

Until the late 1940's, there was a dearth of scientific research into human sexual behavior largely due to religious and social sanctions (Katchadourian, 1989; Lampe, 1987). Within this field of study, research into extramarital sex was even slower to emerge. Until the mid-1970's, extramarital sexual behavior was usually investigated as a small part of a larger survey on sexual behavior in general and was not considered to be important or significant enough as a subject of investigation on its own (Lampe, 1987). Discomfort on the part of social scientists contributed to the neglect of this area of study (Lampe, 1987). Reluctance to investigate extramarital sex also reflected a lack of acknowledgment of this type of behavior, especially when the member of the marital dyad involved in the affair was the female.

Since the 1970's there has been a trend toward more research into extramarital sexual behavior as a separate and significant aspect of marriage (Lampe, 1987). This may be due in part to significant social, economic, and political changes in the past three decades in North America, such as the women's liberation movement, the sexual
revolution and the gay rights movement. These large-scale influences, in particular the so-called sexual revolution, are reported to have had, amongst other effects, a liberalizing influence on people's sexual attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Janeway, 1980; Lawson & Samson, 1988). Women were largely freed from the fears and restrictions of unwanted pregnancies as a result of the contraceptive pill and were engaging in paid employment outside the home in large numbers. They had gained control of significant aspects of their lives through reproductive technology and alternative lifestyles which did not necessarily include marriage or children. However, along with this new sexual freedom came the expectation that women would want to be the sexual equals of men (Lawson & Samson, 1988).

This expectation gave rise to a host of sex manuals (Comfort, 1972; Reuben, 1969) which focused on sexual fulfillment as a goal to achieve and as a performance to deliver (LoPiccolo & LoPiccolo, 1978; Zilbergeld, 1978). These publications appeared to be aimed at encouraging women to seek the same sexual goals as men (Janeway, 1980). Feminist writers have recognized this process as an intensification of women's oppression in the interest of male defined sexuality and male desire (Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs, 1986; Wine, 1985).

During the late 1960's and 70's, there was also a great deal of curiosity about open marriage (O'Neill & O'Neill, 1972) and studies of extramarital sex focused mainly on co-marital or consensual sex, or swinging as it was commonly referred to (Ramey, 1975; Ziskin & Ziskin, 1975). This behavior appeared to be a logical progression from sex as performance: a demonstration of uninhibited sexuality for both genders. Gradually, researchers began to focus on the broader picture of extramarital relationships which was beginning to emerge from data on the incidence of extramarital involvement. Incidence data indicated that 50 per cent of married men and 26 per cent of married women engaged in extramarital sex by the age of 40 (Hunt, 1974; Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953). Publications of research studies and clinical observations in the
field of extramarital sex have subsequently mushroomed since the 1970's.

**Definitional Problems**

As researchers continue to investigate and document the phenomenon of extramarital relationships, the problem of definition becomes important in making any generalizations about extramarital behaviors across the many studies documenting the incidence of extramarital sex and its correlates (Thompson, 1983). Researchers and writers in this area have often failed to provide specific descriptions of the dimensions of the extramarital involvement being examined: whether the extramarital activity occurred with or without the consent of the non-participating spouse; whether the dyad was marital or cohabitant in nature; the sexual orientation of both the marital/cohabiting dyad and the extradyadic relationship; and a specific description of the kind of extradyadic behavior being investigated (Thompson, 1983).

This lack of consistency in definitions and descriptions across empirical studies makes it difficult to generalize with any degree of accuracy or to make any overall sense of the findings from the growing numbers of empirical studies conducted in this area. When more rigorous attention is given to identifying and specifying the salient dimensions of extramarital affairs under examination, the present conflicting findings may contribute to a clearer picture of extramarital affairs and may add to our present limited understanding of the phenomenon of extramarital affairs in all its diverse forms.

**Incidence of Extramarital Affairs**

Ever since Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) began collecting information about extramarital intercourse as part of a general survey on sexual behaviour, there has been a proliferation of surveys which have attempted to document the extramarital behavior of both men and women. Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) found that 50 percent of married men and 26 percent of married women admitted to having extramarital sex.

In a survey of selected studies, Thompson (1983) found that incidence rates of extramarital affairs reported for men varied between 20 to 66 percent and for women
between 10 to 69 percent. Some caution about the accuracy of these reports should be observed since respondents may not have been honest about their participation in extramarital sex. Greene, Lee, and Lustig (1974) found that of 750 case histories they examined, only 30 percent of subjects initially reported unfaithfulness, but during intensive therapy an additional 30% revealed secret affairs, no doubt a reflection of the social stigma attached to participation in an extramarital affair.

Social desirability, or the tendency to present oneself in a positive light (Anastasi, 1988), may also influence some respondents to withhold or omit information about their extramarital involvements, given the generally disapproving attitudes of most people towards extramarital involvement (Glenn & Weaver, 1979). Though the attitudes of some groups of individuals may be more or less permissive about extramarital involvement, normative attitudes in the general population are distinctly restrictive regarding extramarital relations (Glenn & Weaver, 1979). The implications for research are such that reports of incidence data for extramarital sex must be considered to be conservative estimates of the actual rates of participation in extramarital relationships (Thompson, 1983).

Reported incidence figures for extramarital sex may also be underestimated due to the fact that these rates do not reflect lifetime accumulative incidence rates (Thompson, 1983). Young non-extramaritally involved respondents in surveys of extramarital sex still have the potential to become involved extramaritally as they grow older. Longitudinal methods would help to determine incidence rates more accurately (Thompson, 1983).

What stands out in studies of the incidence of extramarital sex is that the reported rate of extramarital sex for men appears to be much greater than the reported rate for women (Bell et al., 1975; Buunk, 1980; Hunt, 1974; Johnson 1970; Kinsey et al. 1948, 1953; Maykovich, 1976; Yablonsky, 1979). Incidence data from most of these studies suggests that men are twice as likely to become involved extramaritally
than women.

More recent studies have reported even higher incidence rates for both males and females. Hite (1981) reported a rate of 66 percent for males who were described as representative of the male population of the United States, while Wolfe (1980), in a survey of Cosmopolitan readers, reported that 69 percent of married females, aged 35 and older were extramaritally involved. In a later survey of Cosmopolitan readers, Creaturo (1982) found that 50 percent of married women under age 35 reported having participated in an affair, while 69 percent of those over 35 reported having an affair. Blotnick (1985) reported that 37 percent of the executive women who responded to a survey about sex and work had at least one affair. Among a comparable sample of men, 46 percent admitted at least one affair. Hite (1989) reported a rate of 70 percent for the married women in her sample. What appears to be clear about these surveys is that the data are based on non-random samples and may therefore not reflect actual incidence rates.

Some researchers have attempted to estimate current actual incidence or to project future incidence of extramarital sexual involvement, based on survey figures of current incidence rates for both men and women. Nass, Libby and Fisher (1981) estimated that 50 to 65 percent of married men and 45 to 55 percent of married women will engage in extramarital sex by age 40. Hunt (1974) projected that within the next 20 years, the female incidence of extramarital affairs will be more or less at the same 50 percent level as that of males. Based on current trends and social changes which place more women in the work force, Ramey's (1977) guestimates are similar to Hunt's while McGinnis (1981) predicted that by 1990 approximately 75 percent of males and 65 percent of females will engage in extramarital sex. Other researchers dispute these estimates and suggest that the AIDS crisis, plus the new celibacy of the moral majority, will decrease extramarital involvement in the future (Lampe, 1987; Pittman, 1989).

The wide variation in incidence rates of extramarital sex reported in present
empirical survey data, in addition to the difficulties of obtaining an accurate rate of participation by both men and women, suggest that little is really known about the actual rate of extramarital involvement for women. A summary of the surveys, estimates and projections of the incidence of extramarital sex for married men, suggests an incidence rate of between 50 and 60 percent. The data for married women suggests an incidence rate of 45 to 55 percent. There is a lack of specific data from a representative sample which would clarify actual incidence rates more accurately.

It appears from the more recent studies that there may be a trend in the direction of more participation in extramarital affairs by women. However, survey investigations in this area will not contribute any further useful data until more precise and specifically defined questions about extramarital behavior are formulated on the basis of theoretical and empirical advances (Thompson, 1983).

It is also clear that only a very limited amount of information regarding women's experience of extramarital affairs can be obtained from survey data. As such, a phenomenological examination of women's lived experience of extramarital affairs may help to uncover important themes and insights. This is more likely to contribute additional meaningful information to an understanding of the current incidence and experience of extramarital affairs for women.

The Meaning of Extramarital Affairs

None of the researchers reviewed in this chapter have explored the meaning which subjects attach to their extramarital affairs, with the exception of Atwater (1982), Lawson (1988), Heyn (1992), Brown (1991), and Riessman (1989). The focus of most of the empirical research referred to in this present study has been the quantification of variables associated with extramarital affairs, variables which were judged to be significant by the researchers. Atwater (1982), Heyn (1992), and Riessman (1989), however, used interviewing techniques exclusively in their investigations of the meaning of extramarital affairs. Lawson (1988) used interviewing
techniques combined with quantitative data collecting. Riessman (1989) explored the meaning of extramarital infidelity from the perspective of the non-participating spouse.

Lawson (1988) interviewed a small subset of individuals from the total sample of 547 males and females who had responded to her questionnaire. The main focus of the Lawson (1988) study was a statistical exploration of the attitudes and beliefs of participants towards maintaining the sexual exclusivity rule of marriage. The study was also extended to an exploration of extramarital affairs in which the subjects had engaged. She explored in part, the sociological and psychological significance of two myths which she found to be operating in the attitudes and beliefs of the sample of 218 males and 329 females in her study, predominantly from the British white middle class. These myths were identified as the "Myth of Me," or the search for self-fulfillment (p. 435) and the "Myth of Romantic Marriage," or the search for an in-love relationship (p. 435). Lawson (1988) concluded that the meaning of extramarital affairs for many of her sample was directly related to these myths: when their marital relationships did not appear to offer them the opportunity to find self-fulfillment and when romantic love within the marriage waned, many individuals sought the dream of finding self-fulfillment and romantic love with individuals outside their marriages.

Riessman (1989) interviewed two males and one female, all non-participating spouses, using narrative techniques to analyze how they made sense of their partner's infidelity and their subsequent divorce. The female participant understood her husband's infidelity as betrayal. One of the male participants made sense of the meaning of his wife's infidelity in the context of his own degenerative disease, while, for the other male, the meaning of his wife's infidelity was embedded in his own violence toward his wife regarding her affair. The results of this study, which explored the meaning of infidelity and divorce in the lives of three non-participating spouses, highlight how the same life event was understood differently by the three interviewees. This contrasts sharply with the assumption of cause and effect which some researchers
(Lawson & Samson, 1988; Spanier & Margolis, 1983) and some clinicians (Humphrey, 1982; Marlowe, 1991) have made between infidelity and divorce. These quantitative researchers and clinicians appear to have made assumptions that it is the infidelity itself that is primarily destructive and which most often leads to divorce, when there may be other mediating factors.

The findings in Riessman (1989) demonstrate the importance of an exploration of the differential circumstances in which individuals find themselves as well as the importance of exploring the meaning which the non-participating spouses attached to their experiences of their spouse's extramarital affair.

Atwater's (1982) study, as well as Heyn's (1992) recent study, stand out as exceptions in the research on women's extramarital affairs in several ways. Both Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992) employed an exclusively qualitative approach, in contrast to all of the above studies excepting Riessman (1989) and as such, their studies are reviewed here in some detail.

Atwater's (1982) purpose was "to report on and discuss extramarital behavior as it is occurring today," (p. 22) with the intention of furthering our understanding of this phenomenon. She interpreted the results of her study from a sociological perspective in order to clarify and expose the meanings of social reality, relative to women's experience, which she believes are normally hidden from our everyday consciousness. Atwater used in-depth interviewing techniques in order to access information which would contribute to an understanding of the meaning of her subjects' extramarital affairs.

Atwater (1982) interviewed 50 female volunteer participants all of whom had extramarital experiences. The participants lived in the US and Canada and were interviewed for approximately three hours each. Follow-up interviews were conducted as well. She did not report how she analyzed her data. She appears to have used quotations from the participants' interviews to illustrate important themes.
Atwater's (1982) sample consisted of women who were mostly well-educated, middle to upper-middle class women, one-third of whom were employed in secretarial/clerical work, one-third of whom were in managerial/professional positions, and one-third of whom were homemakers. The women in her study consisted of individuals who were involved in extramarital affairs which occurred with and without the consent of their spouses and also included women who had experienced affairs with other women. She did not discuss her findings in terms of these differential dimensions. Her goal was to gain in-depth information of the sexual and emotional aspects of extramarital relationships by asking questions which had seldom or never been documented before. Atwater's focus was on the individual woman, not the marital unit.

Atwater (1982) reported that the dominant meanings of extramarital intimacy for the women in her study were: relating to others and learning about the self through outside relationships. The women emphasized the mutuality of expressiveness in their extramarital relationships: they wanted to get back as much as they put in. Atwater used the term expressiveness to describe the emotional, humanistic-communicative aspects of relationships. She reported that participants in the study demonstrated an evolving script of female-centered sexuality by trying out new behaviors, sexual as well as emotional, with their extramarital partners. This new script of female-centered sexuality included enjoyment for oneself which, Atwater comments, contrasts sharply with women's traditional script and its assumptions of passivity, lack of autonomy, and family-oriented expressions of sexuality as service to others. Extramarital affairs for these women led to new discoveries about their sexual selves and often resulted in changes in definitions of their sexual selves. Participants felt freer to explore their sexual response in their extramarital relationships, than they did in their marriages, where the patterns of interaction may have become entrenched and difficult to change over the years of marriage. In exploring their sexual response in a new relationship,
they experienced a greater sense of autonomy, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Extramarital sexuality constructed by these women, was female pleasure-oriented with elements of both physical and emotional satisfaction. The emotional satisfaction of extramarital sex was not reportedly derived from traditional romantic (in-love) feelings, but rather from the expressive/emotional aspects of the relationships.

Atwater (1982) reported that the women in this study felt unusually free to establish the kind of sexual patterns they preferred since extramarital relationships do not appear to be governed by the social rules and inherited patterns that have long dominated marital and premarital interaction. The purpose of extramarital affairs for these women was primarily pleasure.

Heyn (1992) interviewed an unspecified number of women ranging in age from early twenties to late sixties, using a flexible structure of questions to guide her inquiry. Women who had homosexual extramarital relationships and whose marriages were open were excluded from the study. Heyn's focus was the women and their emotional state as a result of their affair or affairs, not their marriages or their families.

Heyn (1992) noted the "extraordinary power of transgression" (p. 31) for women who broke the sexual exclusivity rule of marriage, describing it as "the single most emphatic form of transgression available against a historical framework that has defined and confined women, and still does." (p. 31). Heyn, reported the motivation for this transgression to be a sense of loss of their sexual and authentic selves. This loss appeared to have begun sometime in the beginning of the women's marriages and their subsequent transformation into the role of the virtuous and selfless wife they had been trained to become. Heyn's subjects spoke of the loss of vital and passionate parts of their identity which was accompanied by a sense of longing and sadness. Her subjects used language which described physical discomfort, alienation, and fragmentation suggesting a sense of disconnection and detachment from their physical bodies. Heyn interpreted these expressions as grief over their missing sexual selves.
Consistent with Atwater's (1982) observations, Heyn (1992) proposed that in extramarital affairs, women have no prescribed role, and are therefore free to create a relationship with their affair partners based on mutual needs, day by day. The goal of this relationship is "mutual pleasure, without which it has no reason for being" (p. 162). Her subjects reported finding relationships in which they felt "powerful, equal and freed from having to be pleasing" (p. 162). She observed that pleasure and power are not what women are encouraged to seek in conventional marriage.

Once the women in Heyn's (1992) study had experienced an affair, they reported that their sexuality began to "come alive" as they themselves did. And once the women had begun to regain a sense of what she calls their former "authentic selves," they were very reluctant to give up these newly rediscovered aspects of themselves. "Whatever the cost, they would no longer lose connection with themselves for the sake of being in a marriage that forced disconnection on them" (p. 250). The extramarital experience gave them a clarity and recognition of their passionate, vital, and authentic selves which had been lost.

Heyn (1992) stated that her subjects did not feel "torn apart by" their affairs, nor did they "perceive themselves as either blameless or guilty" (p. 249). These women appeared to have been unwilling to idealize their affairs or themselves, nor were they willing to engage in self-punishment for their actions. They appeared content to experience the ambiguity of circumstances as yet unfinished and incomplete. Some told their husbands and some did not. Some husbands could forgive them and some could not. Some of the marriages were strengthened by the affair and others were destroyed. Heyn stated: "Extramarital sex can ruin the best marriages--and it can improve the worst ones. And vice versa" (p. 259).

Despite the negative consequences and potential risks which Heyn's (1992) subjects perceived, they also stated that they "had been forever altered by the experience and were without regret for having it" (p. 262). Their extramarital affairs
had "released" (p. 263) them from the silence and "goodness" (p. 79) imposed upon them in their roles as wives. Heyn though, was careful to state that it was not marriage per se that restricted and confined women, but the role model of wife, more specifically, "The Perfect Wife" (p. 79): the embodiment of stifling virtue and goodness. Once the women were able to shatter this conventional model of selflessness, they reportedly emerged not only as sexually joyous women, but with an acceptance of themselves as imperfect and congruent women in unidealized relationships.

The above three qualitative studies share some similar findings, but also diverge in significant ways. The dominant meaning of learning about the self through outside relationships, reported by the women in Atwater's (1982) study, converges with a main theme reported by Heyn (1992). Heyn reported that the women in her study perceived that they had rediscovered their joyous sexual selves in their affairs.

Heyn (1992) and Atwater (1982) both discussed the reported equalization of power in the extramarital relationships of their participants, as opposed to the unequal balance of power which the women experienced within the framework of traditional marriage. Atwater and Heyn also both reported the primary theme of mutual pleasure in the extramarital experience for the women in their studies.

Though both Atwater (1982) and Lawson (1988) have uncovered important meanings of extramarital sex in their samples through individual interviewing techniques, their data is confounded along the dimension of extramarital sex occurring with and without the consent of the spouse. When the extramarital affair occurs with consent in a marriage, secrecy is not an issue. In many cases, the spouse may also be engaging in an extramarital affair as well, and male/female power relations may possibly be more equalized than in a secret extramarital affair (Elbaum, 1981; Humphrey, 1982). Heyn's (1992) study specified clearly that the affairs her participants engaged in were conducted without the consent of the spouse.
Both the Atwater (1982) and Lawson (1988) studies included individuals who were engaging in homosexual as well as heterosexual extramarital affairs. The dynamics of a homosexual affair have purportedly more devastating effects on the non-participating spouse and the marriage than a heterosexual affair (Humphrey, 1982), and may include dramatic re-definitions of the sexual self in the participating spouse (Sophe, 1982).

Although both Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992) used interviewing techniques to uncover the meaning of women's extramarital affairs, Atwater relied on a set of predetermined questions which she posed to each of her 50 participants. Heyn appears to have based her inquiry on a set of unspecified questions. This would appear to bias the data in the direction of the investigator's personal biases and assumptions, rather than allowing the data to emerge in a manner consistent with the participant's initial descriptions of her experience (Colaizzi, 1978). Neither Atwater nor Heyn reported analyzing the verbal data in any systematic manner to discover the major themes in the meaning of their participants' extramarital affairs. They appear to have used portions of individual interviews to shape their commentaries and interpretation. Atwater approached her data mainly from a sociological perspective and concentrated less on the psychological perspective of the individual within the sociological context. Heyn, an experienced journalist, explored the emotional significance of the affairs for her subjects. More research is required therefore, to determine the psychological meanings of extramarital affairs for women in a manner that allows the meanings of affairs to emerge from the women's unrestricted narratives.

**Extramarital Sexual Permissiveness**

Many researchers have focused upon attitudes toward extramarital involvement rather than investigating extramarital behavior itself in an attempt to predict who is most likely to engage in extramarital sex. The degree of approval of extramarital sex is usually referred to in the scientific literature as extramarital sexual permissiveness.
(Singh, Walton, & Williams, 1976). The premise upon which these studies are based is that the greater the degree of approval of extramarital sex, the greater the likelihood of extramarital sexual involvement (Edwards, 1973; Saunders & Edwards, 1984; Singh et al., 1976).

Research into extramarital sexual permissiveness suggests premarital sexual permissiveness to be the most significant correlate contributing to extramarital sexual permissiveness (Bukstel, Roeder, Kilmann, Laughlin & Sotile, 1978; Edwards, 1973; Singh et al., 1976). However, this is significant only in a statistical sense, since premarital sexual permissiveness only accounts for 18 percent of the variance for extramarital sexual permissiveness (Singh et al., 1976). Though researchers have attempted to find a correlation between extramarital sexual permissiveness and extramarital involvement, little support for this relationship appears to exist (Thompson, 1983).

In general, the majority of people appear to disapprove of extramarital sexual behavior (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Hartnett & Secord, 1983; Hartnett & Wollman, 1979; Maykovich, 1976; Weis & Felton, 1987; Weis & Slosnerick, 1981). Despite these disapproving and restrictive attitudes, over 50 percent of married men and approaching 50 percent of married women are reported or are projected to engage in extramarital sex (Atwater, 1982; Bell et al., 1975; Buunk, 1980; Hite, 1989; Hunt, 1974; Johnson 1970; Kinsey et al. 1948, 1953; Lampe, 1987; Maykovich, 1976; Yablonsky, 1979). These findings would appear to reflect an enormous incongruence between what most people reportedly believe about extramarital sex and what most people actually do in their extramarital lives.

Maykovich (1976) surveyed 100 American and 100 Japanese middle-aged, middle-class women regarding their attitudes toward and behavior in extramarital sexual relations and found considerable attitude/behavior discrepancy. Even though the American women were more approving of extramarital sex, in the presence of an
opportunity, their commitment to action appeared to be weak. The Japanese women were less approving of extramarital sex, but once exposed to an opportunity, they were inclined to become emotionally involved. It is not stated explicitly if this also means sexually involved. In this study Maykovich (1976) investigated attitude and behavior retrospectively in reference to extramarital sex for women who had reached middle-age. She did not identify whether the attitudes of these women were consistent throughout their lifespan or whether these changed over time (Lawson, 1988).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) addressed the problems of attitude research and identified the difference between personal attitudes (an individual's evaluation of personally performing a behavior), and normative attitudes (an individual's perception of the social norm pertaining to the behavior). Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) proposed that behavioral intention depends upon the relative importance of personal and normative attitudes. When the differences between personal attitudes and normative attitudes are clarified, discrepancies between belief and behavior tend to disappear.

Lawson (1988) collected data from 218 men and 329 women from a British white middle class sample and found that 94 percent of the women in this study and 84 percent of the men believed, when first married, in the sexual exclusivity rule of marriage, as it pertained to themselves. Of the 150 subjects who were married only once and were still together at the time of the study, only 52 percent of women and 54 percent of men still believed in fidelity for themselves. This shows a marked decrease in belief in fidelity over time. Lawson (1988) comments that those who have stayed married are either faithful or they have redesigned their marriages, altering the rules of conduct and/or stressing other aspects of their relationship.

In a sub-set of 81 remarried men and women, Lawson (1988) reported that 88 percent of remarried women but only 69 percent of remarried men believed in fidelity for themselves. The negative financial and emotional experience of divorce for women
appeared to be the strongest contributor to attitudes towards fidelity in this group. Lawson (1988) stated that belief and behavior were closely related in this study, once factors such as participation in at least one liaison and the experience of divorce were specifically identified and accounted for.

However, discrepancies in attitudes towards extramarital affairs appear to exist, based on the gender of the individual involved. Evidence of a more disapproving attitude towards female than male involvement in extramarital sex was found in a number of studies. In an article reviewing research on love affairs, Goldstein (1988) noted that in Chinese societies it is accepted that husbands will have extramarital relationships outside the marriage but that infidelity of wives is sternly censured. Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953), in his survey of 5000 married men and women, reported that wives, at every social level, were more accepting of adulterous husbands than were husbands of adulterous wives. In Lawson's (1988) sample, women overall had fewer affairs and less affair partners than the men. In the group of men and women who had remarried, 88 percent of women but only 69 percent of men thought they themselves, should be sexually faithful at the time of their remarriage. These findings appear to support the existence of a double standard of attitude and behavior between men and women.

However, some studies do not support the existence of a double standard. Taylor (1986) conducted two experiments involving 630 men and women who responded to various scenarios about a married couple either with or without extramarital involvement and found no evidence of a differential evaluation of husbands' and wives' involvement in extramarital affairs. She interpreted this as a "distinctly modern belief" (p. 294) wherein marital fidelity is expected of both spouses for as long as the marriage remains fulfilling.

A reversal of the traditional double standard in both attitude and behavior appears evident in the youngest cohort of women in Lawson's (1988) sample, who
waited the least time following marriage for a first extramarital liaison and who had more liaisons than their male counterparts. Lawson suggested that this behavior on the part of this cohort may reflect a more permissive attitude towards engaging in extramarital affairs, especially when their expectations of finding fulfillment of the "Myth of Romantic Marriage" (Lawson & Samson, 1988, p. 435) were not met.

In summary, it appears that extramarital sexual permissiveness is not a useful predictor of extramarital sexual involvement. It also appears that researchers have failed to distinguish personal attitudes from normative attitudes and from actual behavior, as well as changes in attitudes over time and the underlying motivations for these changes. Failure to identify these factors may have contributed to the perception of discrepancies between attitudes and behaviors in regard to extramarital affairs, when there may be no such discrepancy.

A majority of studies found more disapproval of female extramarital involvement than male (Heyn, 1992; Kinsey et al., 1953; Lawson, 1988), but two recent studies showed in one case, a trend towards equalization (Taylor, 1986), and in another, a reversal in attitudes and behavior between males and females in the youngest cohort, 35 years and younger (Lawson, 1988). It would appear that since the majority of studies found more disapproval for women to become involved in extramarital affairs, and that this normative attitude is pervasive in our culture, the decision to become involved in an extramarital affair might be quite different for women than for men, with the costs being potentially higher.

A final problem with all of the above research is that most researchers did not specify whether the extramarital affair occurred without the consent of the non-participating spouse. Failure to identify this important dimension of extramarital affairs is crucial since obviously, approval or at least consent from the non-participating spouse to become engaged in an extramarital affair would appear to create quite a different set of conditions and consequences than would be the case when the
involvement is clandestine.

Types of Extramarital Affairs

A survey of most of the studies researching extramarital affairs would appear to convey an assumption that all extramarital affairs are alike in most respects, since most researchers do not distinguish among types of affairs (Brown, 1991). This contributes to a further lack of clarity and understanding of extramarital affairs, as well as to problems of generalizability.

Research in the area of male/female relationships generally supports the assumption that males and females perceive sexual behavior and relationships quite differently. Sex is reportedly perceived as more important to men than to women while the communicative and emotional aspects of relationships are perceived as more important to women than to men (Chodorow, 1978; Miller, 1976; Rubin, 1983). It therefore becomes important to identify gender differences in types of extramarital affairs in order to determine if these differences in types of extramarital involvement do exist in extramarital affairs, as well as in marital relationships and if so, what the meaning and impact of these differences might be.

Most researchers do not specify what kind of extramarital affairs they are investigating (Thompson, 1983). Atwater (1982) identified degrees of extramarital involvement along a continuum: dreams/ fantasies/ thoughts/ conversations/ emotions/ simple touching/ kissing/ petting/ oral and genital sex. Most researchers appear to assume that an extramarital affair includes a sexual relationship, though many researchers do not explicitly state this (Thompson, 1983). Other researchers and clinicians working in the field are specific in their insistence that an "affair of the heart" does not constitute an extramarital affair, as they define it, but is an affair in the making (Brown, 1991; Moultrup, 1990), with emotional involvement being a prelude to sexual involvement. Until these important aspects of extramarital affairs are explicitly clarified by researchers working in the field, divergence of findings will
Another omission in the description of extramarital affairs occurs along the dimension of the length of the affair. It would seem likely that an extramarital affair described as a one night stand would be perceived quite differently by the non-participating spouse, as well as the participating spouse, and may have quite different consequences than a long-term committed affair. The extent and nature of the involvement would also affect outcome. The failure of researchers to specify the type and length of the extramarital involvement they are investigating contributes to a further confounding of the empirical findings and places a great limitation on the generalizability of the results of empirical research in this area (Thompson, 1983).

Some researchers have attempted to classify extramarital affairs into types or kinds in order to identify important variables embedded in this multi-faceted phenomenon and to discover any cause-and-effect links among the different types of extramarital affairs including differences between genders (Brown, 1991; Pittman, 1989; Thompson, 1984a). However, many of the studies investigating types of extramarital affairs do not make a distinction between men's and women's extramarital affairs nor do they identify whether one gender is likely to engage in one type of extramarital affair over another (Lawson, 1988; Strean, 1976).

Other researchers have investigated gender differences in types of extramarital affairs. Pittman (1989) describes four types of extramarital relationships, based on a nonrandom sample of 100 men and women who were individual clients in his psychiatric practice. He identifies gender differences in two of his four categories: (a) accidental infidelity is unplanned and situational, typified by the one night stand, (b) philandering is habitual infidelity, usually engaged in by men, (c) romantic affairs or falling in love is characterized by an intense passion which is more characteristic of females than males, and (d) marital arrangements which is typified by open marriage where infidelity occurs with the consent of both spouses. Other than identifying
philanderers as predominantly male, and romantics as slightly more likely to be female, Pittman does not mention other gender differences.

Thompson (1984a) investigated three types of extramarital relationships: (a) emotional (in-love) but not sexual (intercourse), (b) sexual but not emotional, and (c) emotional and sexual. His categories were based on data from a nonrandom sample of 378 Australian men and women who were either married or in committed cohabiting Relationships, or who had previously been in such a relationship. Thompson (1984a) reported that 43 per cent of the sample indicated that they had been involved in one of the defined extradyadic relationships. Females were more disapproving, showed less intention of becoming involved, and perceived more detractive consequences of extramarital affairs defined as sexual only than males. Females also indicated that they perceived sexual only involvements as more prevalent among males, and the males appeared to share this perception. The incidence data in this study supported this view.

Atwater (1982) interviewed 50 purposefully selected North American women, who were involved or had been involved in extramarital affairs, and found that most of the women in her study experienced a relationship she described as humanistic-expressive, in which "sexuality is embedded in expressiveness and friendship" (p. 196). The women in this study derived emotional satisfaction not from traditional romantic (in-love) feelings, but rather from the expressive aspects of the relationship, with an emphasis on communicating emotions, feelings and reactions.

Glass and Wright (1985) investigated both emotional and sexual extramarital involvements using the responses of 300 purposively selected white middle-class men and women and found that the men's extramarital relationships were reportedly more sexual and the women's more emotional. Unfortunately, the researchers in this study did not define what they meant by sexual or emotional either in the study or in the questionnaire given to respondents.

In her study on women's extramarital affairs, Heyn (1992) made no attempt to
classify her subjects' affairs and reports that the women in her study defined their extramarital relationships as "ordinary, flawed, unidealized friendships" (p. 191). These relationships, she stated, were valued by the women in her study as a place where their authentic selves were welcomed. In these relationships, the women in her study reported that they felt free to express feelings of sadness, anger, or misery and to voice their opinions. These were relationships in which "conflict was as present as the playfulness and sex and conversation that had brought them and their lovers together" (p. 191). Heyn did not define these relationships along the emotional/sexual continuum but did refer to the existence of both of these aspects in her subjects' affairs.

Based on clinical practice, Brown (1991) has identified five types of extramarital affairs and their treatment in her well-documented and comprehensive presentation of both male and female affairs, Patterns of Infidelity and their Treatment. Brown's definition of an affair excluded affairs arising from a sexually open marriage/common-law relationship, but included gay and lesbian relationships. She described the five types of affairs based on the following motivational and purposeful categories: 1) conflict avoidance, 2) intimacy avoidance, 3) sexual addiction, 4) empty nest, and 5) out the door.

Brown (1991) identified typical characteristics of these affairs including the theme of the affair, probable length of the affair, and the gender of the infidel (participating spouse) most likely to participate in this kind of affair. Brown reported that sexual addiction and empty nest affairs are most often engaged in by men while either the husband or the wife can be the infidel in the other three types of affairs. She states: "Affairs have little to do with sex. They are about fear and disappointment, anger and emptiness. They are also about the hope for love and acceptance" (p. 13). The context in which Brown examined affairs is the infidel's family--both the current family and the family of origin. It is from this perspective, a systemic approach, that the themes of the affairs emerge.
In all of the above studies, extramarital affairs are defined as sexual (or philandering), emotional (or romantic), or sexual and emotional with the exception of Atwater (1982), Brown (1991), and Heyn (1992). It would appear that defining extramarital affairs using only these two seemingly dichotomous categories, or a combination of both, is somewhat limiting, considering the apparent complexity of this lived phenomenon. Atwater (1982) claims that there is an overemphasis in current empirical research on the sexual aspects of extramarital relationships to the neglect of social aspects such as mutuality, equality, verbal expressiveness, and self-fulfillment, aspects which were identified by the women in her study as important themes in their extramarital relationships.

Yet another important aspect of extramarital affairs and their impact on the participating spouse, the non-participating spouse as well as the family system, is the length of the marriage at the time of the affair. It would seem likely that the impact on a short-term relationship might be different than the impact on a long-term committed relationship where there would be more likelihood of long-term financial and emotional investments in the relationship as well as the possible existence of children. Only Brown (1991) differentiated according to type of affair as to the length of the marriage or committed relationship at the time of the affair. She found that conflict avoidance affairs were embedded in marriages of less than 12 years, intimacy avoidance affairs occurred in marriages of less than 6 years, sexual addiction affairs occurred the entire length of the marriage, empty nest affairs were embedded in marriages of 20 or more years, and out the door affairs were found in marriages of less than 15 years.

In summary, when researchers define the types of extramarital relationships they are investigating and when sex differences are identified, it appears that women are more likely to have extramarital relationships that are characterized as more emotional than sexual and men are more likely to have extramarital relationships that are characterized as more sexual than emotional. The attempt to categorize or type
extramarital relationships, while useful for the purposes of generalizing across studies, tends to limit our understanding and restrict our knowledge of the range and quality of this experience, including the motivations, costs, rewards, thoughts, feelings, fears and impact on the self and significant others of the experience of extramarital affairs.

**Antecedents of Extramarital Sex**

The majority of studies of extramarital sex focus on potential antecedents or variables which are likely to predict extramarital sexual involvement (Thompson, 1983). The factors most likely to be measured in these studies are social background characteristics, characteristics of the marriage, personal readiness characteristics and sex and gender differences.

**Social Background Characteristics**

The investigation of social background characteristics as predictors of extramarital sexual engagement has occupied many researchers in this area. These measures seem to be predominantly indices of early socialization factors plus demographic variables. Variables usually investigated are political orientation, geographic location, religiosity, occupation, educational achievement, ethnicity, age, general liberality, and premarital sexual experience (Thompson, 1983).

Andrus, Redfering, and Oglesby (1977) conducted a study measuring desire for, frequency of, and attitudes towards extramarital involvement in a sample of 100 male and female college subjects, ranging in age from 19 to 55. Information was gathered on age, sex, occupation, college major, current and past marital status and number of children, frequency of extramarital sexual involvement and level of desire for extramarital sexual involvement. There were significant correlations among desire, frequency and attitude towards extramarital sex, but few of the measured subject characteristics related to the respondents' attitudes towards, frequency of, and desire for an extramarital affair.

Other variables which have been found to correlate positively with extramarital
involvement include demographic variables such as employment of women and geographic location. Lawson (1988) found that in her sample of 218 males and 329 females predominantly from the British white middle class, the employment of women outside the home was a significant factor in extramarital involvement. Bell et al. (1975) analyzed the responses of 2,262 married women who were recruited through professionals in the family field of study and who were identified by the researchers as having a higher level of education than average and who were working women willing to answer the questionnaire. Bell et al. (1975) reported that women who were politically conservative and who lived in mountain and prairie regions were less likely to engage in extramarital affairs.

There appears to be no significant convergence of findings in regard to social background characteristics as predictors of women's extramarital involvement. It would appear that there is no particular composite of women who engage in extramarital sex. This suggests that the meaning of women's extramarital affairs may not be found by examining social background characteristics but may be explained by other factors, though these may play a mediating role. It appears that a priori determination of variables predictive of extramarital involvement may not be a useful method of inquiry, as evidenced by the findings of these studies. A phenomenological approach to this problem may help to uncover potentially important factors in women's experience of extramarital affairs.

Marital Characteristics

Although the findings of the following studies are not consistent, the variable most predictive of extramarital sex has been found to be marital characteristics (Bell et al., 1975; Brown, 1991; Edwards, 1973; Elbaum, 1981; Glass & Wright, 1985; Greene et al., 1974; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Thompson, 1983; Walster et al., 1978).

In a study of 148 men and 153 women who completed questionnaires, Glass and
Wright (1985) found that women involved in extramarital sex reported greater marital dissatisfaction than their male counterparts. However, for both sexes, those with combined sexual and emotional extramarital involvement reported the greatest marital dissatisfaction. Pestrak et al. (1985), in their review of the empirical studies of extramarital sex, found that males engaged in extramarital sex even though they were quite satisfied with their marital relationship whereas women were less likely to engage in extramarital sex unless disaffected from their husbands.

In a unique study exploring contractual relationships, such as marriage, and the equitable nature of such relationships, Walster et al., (1978) explored the effects of imbalances in marital relationships using equity theory. Using data gathered from a large-scale Psychology Today questionnaire, they found that men and women in inequitable/underbenefited relationships had more extramarital affairs and began their extramarital activities earlier than did men and women in equitable and inequitable/overbenefited relationships. The researchers in this study suggested that extramarital sex may be viewed as an equity restoration mechanism in that; 1) it may be used by the deprived partner to achieve actual equity, 2) it may indicate a partner's readiness to leave the relationship because he/she feels he/she can "do better," or 3) it may represent a desire to achieve equity in an alternative relationship(s) when inequity pervades the primary one. Interestingly, the researchers of this study did not report any sex differences in time between time of marriage and first affair, as well as in number of extramarital partners. An examination of the results revealed that the men, in every category, waited the least time after marriage before engaging in an affair than the women, and had more extramarital partners than the women. This finding is consistent with the cohort aged 35 and younger in Lawson's study (1988).

Contrary to the findings reporting dissatisfaction with the marriage as a motivating factor in the occurrence of extramarital affairs for women, Bell et al. (1975) found that 20 percent of the 2262 married women surveyed in their study rated their
marriages as very good. Bell et al. found that 55 percent of the women in this study who had engaged in extramarital affairs rated their marriages poorly. Bell et al. (1975) suggested that "for many women, extramarital coitus is influenced by a number of personal or social values that go beyond how they evaluate their marriage" (p. 383). A range of personal and social variables were investigated and significant correlations were found between the occurrence of extramarital coitus and the presence of liberal sexual attitudes, as well as the initiation of sexual behavior by women in their marriages. This study, although ambitious in its scope and illuminating in relation to its predictive value for women's extramarital involvement, does not state if the extramarital involvement occurred without the consent of the spouse, a factor that may have influenced the rating of the marriages.

Atwater (1982) found that only half of her sample of 50 middle-class women, all of whom were involved in extramarital affairs, were dissatisfied with their marriages. Most of the women in this study reported that they were "searching to fulfill their expanding potential for personal growth" (p. 57), and appeared to view an extramarital affair as an opportunity to experience something different. Atwater's sample included affairs which occurred both with and without the spouse's consent.

An example of a team of researchers who has attempted to discover other factors beyond marital characteristics in the decision to become involved in extramarital affairs is a study by Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986). Situational determinants, motives and restraints affecting extramarital decision-making were investigated based on a nonrandom sample of 108 men and 146 women from a college, a hospital and a manufacturing centre. Attitudes about extramarital sex were measured and responses to a scenario involving a person who is happily married and is exposed to an opportunity for extramarital sex were elicited. Men were more strongly influenced by perceived payoffs and more likely to respond to what they regarded as justifications for their behavior. They were more likely to think they could
psychologically separate relationships and enhance their identities through experiences and roles which they viewed as supplementary. Women were more responsive to potential risks. Problems were seen to be more likely to occur, to be more destructive, and to have a greater influence on the women's decision-making. Avoiding hurt for themselves and others was also an important consideration. This study highlights the importance of exploring the context of the extramarital affair and of identifying, in depth, the motivations and process of decision-making, which appear to be different for women and men.

In summary, though marital characteristics appear to be an important dimension of extramarital involvement, the results of the research are not convergent. Conflicting results will most likely continue to be reported in the findings of research on marital characteristics and extramarital affairs as long as researchers do not investigate underlying factors such as the motivation to become involved in extramarital sex and the meaning of extramarital affairs for men and women. With the exception of Atwater (1982) and Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) none of the above studies examined these factors.

**Personal Readiness Characteristics**

Personal readiness characteristics encompass personality variables as well as opportunity factors. Researchers have attempted to discover significant correlations between these variables and participation in extramarital sex.

Atwater's (1982) subjects, who all had extramarital sexual experience, were mostly well-educated, middle to upper-middle class women and were described by Atwater as "more likely to be in the vanguard of social change." (p. 27). It would appear that these women, two-thirds of whom were employed, had high mobility and therefore greater opportunity to meet other men. Lawson and Samson (1988) also found that the return of women to paid employment outside the home, which would provide opportunities for contact with other men, altered the experience, belief and
practices of women more than men in their study in regard to extramarital sex.

Personal growth and self-fulfillment were important aspects of the meaning of extramarital sex for most of the women in Atwater's (1982) study, 50 percent of whom rated their marriages as satisfactory. This suggests that these women may have perceived their extramarital experiences as opportunities to learn more about themselves, and in fact, many of the women in the study reported that this was so, rather than a means of coping with a poor marriage. Bell et al. (1975) found that 20 percent of those women who rated their marriages as good or very good had at least one extramarital experience compared to 55 percent of women who rated their marriages as fair to very poor. These findings suggest that Atwater's (1982) sample of women differed from the Bell et al. (1975) sample in some personality characteristics. It would appear that the women in Atwater's study may have been more adventurous and less conservative in their attempts to find opportunities for personal growth than the women in Bell et al. (1975) sample.

Atwater (1982) also found that knowing someone who has engaged in extramarital sex, talking to someone who has engaged in extramarital sex, and thinking about becoming involved for an extended period of time were significant factors related to personal readiness preceding the decisions of the women in her study to become involved in extramarital sex. This suggests a socialization process during which women actively participate in moving from a self-concept of not participating in extramarital sex to a self-concept that includes extramarital sexual involvement (Atwater, 1982).

Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) asked 108 males and 146 females to respond to a scenario of an individual who was happily married and who was presented with an opportunity to become involved in an extramarital affair. Two preconditions to sanctioning extramarital involvement found in this study were a permissive attitudinal orientation and opportunity. Opportunity for extramarital sex was also a significant
finding in Maykovich (1976).

In summary, it appears that personality and opportunity factors have yielded some information about women's extramarital affairs which suggests that women who become involved in extramarital affairs may differ in significant ways in personality from women who do not become involved. Research in this area also suggests that the return to work of large numbers of women in the past 30 years may have provided women with more mobility and opportunity for contact with other men. However, with the exception of descriptions Atwater's (1982) subjects, who represent only one segment of the general population, we still do not have a clear profile of the women who are most likely to engage in extramarital affairs.

Thompson (1983) commented that research strategies need to focus upon how people become involved in extramarital sex rather than why, if we are to gain an understanding of extramarital relationships beyond the identification of significant correlates. A phenomenological approach to women's extramarital affairs is more likely to uncover such patterns of behavior describing how women understand the process of becoming involved in extramarital affairs.

Sex and Gender Differences

Sex and gender differences are consistently found in studies of extramarital involvement and appear most saliently in studies investigating types of extramarital relationships, perceptions of sexual and emotional behavior, as well as in differential attitudes towards male and female participation in extramarital relationships.

These studies show some convergence of findings. Females are reported to have extramarital affairs that are more emotional than sexual, whereas males are reported to have extramarital affairs that are more sexual than emotional (Glass & Wright, 1985; Pestrak et al., 1985; Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Thompson 1984a). Some studies have found that males have extramarital affairs even though they report being satisfied with their marriages (Yablonsky, 1979), but that females have
extramarital affairs primarily when dissatisfied with their marriages (Glass & Wright, 1985; Pestrak et al., 1985; Thompson, 1983). Other studies have found normative attitudes which are more disapproving of female extramarital affairs than male extramarital affairs (Broude, 1980; Goldstein, 1988; Kinsey et al. 1948, 1953;)

However, other studies investigating sex differences in extramarital relationships reported findings which conflict with these results. Many women who reported being satisfied with their marriages, still became involved in extramarital affairs (Atwater, 1982; Bell et al., 1975; Heyn, 1992). Some women reported having types of extramarital affairs which could be characterized more by descriptions of friendship and feelings of equality than emotional or in-love characteristics (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992). One recent study investigating attitudes towards male and female participation in extramarital affairs found no difference in attitudes, based on gender (Taylor, 1986).

There appears to be little overall convergence of findings on this issue. Thompson (1983) noted that sex and gender differences may qualify and moderate other empirical relationships. Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) reported sex differences in the process of their participants making a decision of whether or not to engage in extramarital affairs and in perception of potential risks to respondents' marriages and significant others. More consistent results might emerge if, for example, the investigators in this study had identified which subjects adhered to constructs such as rights and justice or caring and responsibility as delineated in the work of Gilligan (1982), rather than focusing on gender differences.

In summary, there appears to be little convergence of findings regarding the role of gender differences in terms of participation in extramarital sex. Other underlying constructs may interact with gender differences (Thompson, 1983).

To summarize the findings of research investigating the antecedents to extramarital involvement, it appears that none of the characteristics identified as potential antecedents can completely account for and/or predict extramarital
involvement for men or women. It appears that participation in extramarital affairs is a complex phenomenon, which may not be able to be predicted by the identification of one or a combination of antecedents.

**Motivational Factors in Extramarital Affairs**

The investigation of individuals' motivations for engaging in extramarital sex has occupied some researchers, though there is a paucity of research in this area. The identification of antecedents or causes of extramarital sex suggests a direct and linear relationship between identified variables and the occurrence of extramarital sex, which may in fact not exist (Humphrey, 1982). Identifying the underlying motive or motives for becoming involved in extramarital sex for both men and women would appear to be an important aspect in understanding the occurrence of extramarital affairs.

Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) observe that motives are hard to identify since "it is often difficult to separate what motivates an individual at the moment the decision is made from later rationalizations of that behavior" (p. 120). Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) also point out that motives tend to be complex and that their multiplicity may not even be well understood by the individuals themselves. Despite the potential of biased retrospection and the influence of social desirability factors, discovering significant differences between male and female motivations may contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon.

In their study on decision-making and extramarital relationships, Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) suggested four categories of motives for extramarital affairs: (a) deficiency motivation, wherein the extramarital affair is perceived to be an opportunity to make up for a deficiency of some sort in the marriage; (b) hostility motivation, wherein the extramarital affair is perceived to be an opportunity to get even with the spouse; (c) variation motivation, wherein the extramarital affair is perceived to be an opportunity to get something different; and (d) enhancement motivation, wherein the extramarital affair is perceived to be an opportunity to get more of a good thing.
These categories seem useful in understanding the findings of the studies which identified motivations for extramarital affairs.

In the Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) study, 108 males and 146 females were asked to respond to a scenario of an individual who was happily married and who was subsequently presented with an opportunity to become involved in an extramarital affair. The findings suggested that men were more likely than women to view deficiencies in the marriage or the variety provided by the new relationship as motivations for becoming involved in extramarital affairs. Women were more likely than men to project that the marriage would be adversely affected and that the extramarital affair would be destructive to the marriage if the spouse became aware of it. Women appeared to be motivated not to participate for fear of destructive consequences to the marriage.

Humphrey (1982), a clinical therapist working with couples, observed that certain reasons for extramarital sex were cited by individuals who sought marital therapy as a result of an extramarital affair. These themes or reasons were reported to include: sexual conflicts in the marriage, falling in love with the extramarital partner, lifestyles which created separations in the marital relationship with closeness to others outside the home setting, marital conflict, consensual extramarital sex, intrapsychic conflicts and insecurities, other reasons such as the influence of drugs and alcohol, and in some cases homosexuality. Humphrey did not identify any sex differences in his observations and did not rate the prevalence of the motivations cited by the individuals in his clinical practice.

Greene et al. (1974) found three unconscious and five conscious motives for extramarital involvement in their examination of the case histories of 750 patients in their psychiatric practice. Sexual frustration was named by 70 percent of the participating spouses as the primary reason for their infidelity. This answer was given twice as often by men as by women. Curiosity was given as a motivating factor by 50
percent of the respondents, in the ratio of three males to every two females. Motivations involving feelings of revenge were reported by 40 percent of the spouses and boredom by 30 percent, with a need for acceptance and recognition falling into fifth place with 20 percent reporting this as a reason for their extramarital involvement. Some respondents gave more than one motive for their infidelity. Greene et al. (1974) also postulated three unconscious motives for engaging in extramarital sex. The unconscious motives were divided into three major groups and were identified as motives involving (a) severe psychiatric disturbances, (b) immature personality, and (c) neurotic conflicts.

Some clinicians have identified underlying motivations of extramarital affairs in their marital counselling practice. Feldman (1981) reported that couples who could not deal directly with conflict in their marriages, resorted to extramarital affairs to express their hostility towards their spouses. This observation appears to converge with the conflict avoidance type of affair identified by Brown (1991) and also with the findings of Greene et al. (1974).

In Atwater's (1982) sample of 50 purposively selected female volunteers, many of the participants reported that they were not motivated primarily by sexual needs but by a search for intellectual, emotional and social connections in an extramarital relationship. Only one woman gave her motivation for involvement in purely sexual terms, while one quarter of the total sample placed an emphasis on the sexual dimensions of the extramarital relationship with emotional, friendship and communication aspects of the extramarital relationship also being important. Other common motivations were the pleasures of relating interpersonally to a variety of people, with an emphasis on the mutuality of the relationship and the motivation of self-fulfillment.

Heyn (1992) reported that the women in her sample were motivated by a sense of a loss of connection to parts of themselves which she described as their sexuality.
She stated that the women in her study sought extramarital relationships with men in which mutual pleasure and mutual power were the goals.

The above findings suggest that women tend to be motivated by a complexity of relationship factors to become engaged in extramarital affairs (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992). Women also appear to be motivated by concern for their primary relationships, a factor which may act to inhibit them from engaging in extramarital affairs (Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986). Men appear to be motivated by sexual curiosity (Greene et al., 1974) and a drive to achieve (Atwater, 1992), rather than emotional or communicative aspects of the relationship, and do not appear to be influenced by the potential risks. The marital relationship described in the scenario in the Meyering and Epling-McWherter (1986) study identified the marital relationship as happy and also added that the respondent valued this relationship and did not want to jeopardize it. Despite this description of the marriage scenario, the men in this sample did not predict any potential risks of an affair for their marital relationship.

Problems in generalizing the results of these diverse studies regarding the motivations for affairs include the absence of information regarding the rating of the marital relationships, whether the extramarital relationships occurred without the consent of the non-participating spouse and whether there were gender differences. It would seem likely that the motivations of the participating spouse would be quite different if the non-participating spouse had knowledge of an affair and had given his/her consent. Thus, the findings are confounded by the lack of specific definitions regarding the secret nature of the extramarital affair, how the respondents rated their marriages and whether there were any gender differences in motivations. A phenomenological investigation of women's extramarital affairs, utilizing an unstructured approach to interviewing, may be more likely to uncover as yet unidentified motivational factors, than would be gained by further quantitative data gathering.
Consequences/Impact of Extramarital Affairs

In contrast to the numerous studies which attempt to predict extramarital involvement, there are fewer studies which examine the consequences of extramarital affairs. This is no doubt due in part to the difficulty of obtaining empirical data in an area of human behavior which is emotionally highly charged, of which most people disapprove, and where distortions and rationalizations may interfere with unbiased retrospection (Pestrak et al., 1985). Researchers may also find it more disturbing to investigate the consequences of extramarital affairs, given the likelihood of countertransference issues (Elbaum, 1981; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983). It may also be less disturbing for researchers and others working in the area of extramarital affairs to focus on antecedents in an attempt to predict and control the occurrence of extramarital affairs, rather than to explore the consequences, which are believed by many to be mostly negative (Humphrey, 1982; Pittman, 1989).

Historically, the consequences of extramarital affairs for women in a patriarchal society have been far harsher than for men, ranging from death, to divorce, banishment and beatings (Lampe, 1987; Heyn, 1992; Lawson and Samson, 1988). Today, it is not known just how much domestic violence directed at women may be the result of extramarital activity engaged in by women, nor is it known what the impact of engaging in extramarital affairs is on women's social networks, relationships with significant others, and physiological and psychological health. Certainly, subsequent divorce is a reality for many women who have engaged in extramarital affairs (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992; Lawson & Samson, 1988). Differential attitudes are still present in our North American society with respect to participation in extramarital affairs, with females being viewed more harshly and more disapprovingly than males.

Clinical therapists (Elbaum, 1981; Humphrey, 1982; Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Pittman, 1989; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983) report mostly negative consequences of extramarital affairs for the marital dyad though a few identify
extramarital affairs as an opportunity for change and growth (Brown, 1991; Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Pittman, 1989; Rhodes, 1984). Therapists working with couples in the aftermath of the disclosure of an affair may have a biased perspective of the consequences of extramarital affairs. Couples having problems resolving their extramarital dilemmas are more likely to seek professional help than those who are able to resolve their differences or who separate and divorce (Elbaum, 1981). It is not known how many participating spouses end their affairs in order to preserve their marriages, how many couples resolve their extramarital crises without therapeutic help, nor how many affairs continue along with the marriage.

Controlled studies investigating the impact of extramarital sex on couples and individuals are very few (Beach, Jouriles, and O'Leary, 1985). Other studies have employed survey methods (Spanier & Margolis, 1983), or have identified the prevalence of themes in projected extramarital sexual involvement (Thompson 1984b). Most of the articles dealing with the impact of extramarital sex have been written by marital therapists who have devised strategies for working with couples where extramarital sex is the presenting problem (Brown, 1991; Elbaum, 1981; Humphrey, 1982; Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Pittman, 1989; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983). The consequences of extramarital affairs are not explicitly identified in most of these articles, though the treatment strategies which are described appear to be based on the impact of the extramarital affair on the marital relationship and on the individuals involved.

Some of the negative consequences of extramarital affairs are reported to be depression and lower levels of commitment to marriage and divorce. In their study of 120 couples presenting for marital therapy, Beach et al. (1985) reported significantly higher rates of depression and significantly lower levels of commitment to their marriages for couples presenting extramarital sex as an issue in counselling, in comparison to other couples presenting for other reasons. Humphrey (1982) estimates
that one third of all cases of extramarital sex will end in divorce, one third will continue along with the marriage and one third will end while the marriage continues. These estimates are based on outcome data from clinical therapists who are members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (Humphrey & Strong, 1976).

Other researchers challenge the attitude that extramarital affairs are harmful or that they impact negatively on individuals. Goldstein (1988) commented that sexual activity between normal consenting adults is not intrinsically harmful. In his view, it was the breaking of the rules governing sexual expression and the resultant shame and guilt which was harmful to individuals engaging in extramarital sex. Pestrak et al. (1985) and Humphrey (1982) also commented that it is the perceptions of what extramarital sex signifies that created the discord, which may lead to apathy in continuing marriages or divorce, more so than the extramarital activity itself. While there is evidence that a negatively rated marriage is often associated with extramarital sex (Whitehurst, 1983), it should not be assumed that the extramarital sex is the cause of a negatively rated marriage (Atwater, 1982; Bell et al., 1975; Brown, 1991; Heyn, 1992; Lawson & Samson, 1988).

Pittman (1989), who assigned the responsibility for the affair almost exclusively to the participating partner, distinguished between the effects of participating in sex outside a monogamous marriage, which was perceived as betrayal of the marriage contract, as separate from the confusing and disorienting effects of the secrecy and lies inherent in an extramarital affair. The secrecy and lies, he believes, were more likely to destroy the marriage than the extramarital affair itself. Pittman commented: "The conspiracy and adventure and tricks produce an alliance in the affair, while the lies and deceit increase the discomfort at home" (p. 48).

Therapists working with couples where an extramarital affair has precipitated a crisis, identified a variety of emotional responses to the discovery of an extramarital
affair in the marital or cohabitant unit. Rhodes (1984) identified grief reactions in the non-participating spouse including feelings of anger and loss: loss of self-esteem, loss of the marriage as it was, loss of confidence and loss of trust. These feelings of loss were often accompanied by feelings of betrayal. The participating spouse often reacted with feelings of relief and/or guilt and shame.

Taibbi (1983) also identified grief reactions following the discovery of marital infidelity including the fear of the emotional loss of the spouse, as well as the loss of the idealized vision of the self and the marriage. He identified further stages of the grief process: denial, depression, and anger. Similar affective states were reported by Marlowe (1991) as a response to extramarital affairs: denial, anger, guilt, and sadness. These were not perceived as sequential or mutually exclusive. Elbaum (1981) identified guilt, anger, jealousy, and confusion as the stresses and dynamics of infidelity and commented that the burden of deception is extremely stressful for many people, presumably for the participating spouse and anyone else involved in the conspiracy to keep the affair hidden.

The impact of an extramarital affair on the non-participating partner appears to be reported as negative by most researchers. Thompson (1984b) identified six common issues reported by 200 male and female subjects who were asked what their response would be upon discovering that their partner was involved with another person. Seventy-three percent of the subjects reported issues of cognitive and emotional turmoil, 54 per cent reported needing to make decisions about the future of the relationship, 43 per cent reported unresolved relationship issues, 38 per cent reported engaging in a search for an interpretive framework, 15 per cent reported pressures related to the extramarital partner(s), and 5 percent reported feelings of defensiveness.

Individual responses to extramarital affairs are widely varied and appear to be dependent on a large number of factors including the rating of the marriage and the motivations for engaging in extramarital affairs (Atwater, 1982; Brown, 1991;
Thompson (1983). Beach et al. (1985) examined the effects of extramarital sex on depression and commitment in 120 couples seeking marital therapy. Couples presenting extramarital sex as an issue reported that it was the participating spouse who displayed higher levels of depression and lower levels of commitment to the marriage. The researchers attributed this to the ambivalence of the participating spouse towards the marriage. The non-participating spouses in this study did not show significantly elevated rates of depression or significantly lower levels of commitment relative to same sex persons presenting for marital therapy for other reasons. It appears from this study that it is the non-participating spouse who remains most committed to the marriage.

Beach et al. (1985) also found that when the participating spouse was female, there was more likelihood that one of the spouses would present depression which was elevated into the clinically depressed range. This would seem to indicate that a wife's engagement in an extramarital affair was perceived by both spouses as a more serious threat to the marriage than if the husband were the participating spouse.

Some marital therapists perceived the extramarital crisis as an opportunity for positive change, growth and increased intimacy in the marital relationship, once they could assist couples to move from blame/defensiveness game-playing to sharing the responsibility for the crisis in their marriage (Brown, 1991; Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Pittman, 1989; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983). This approach meets with varying success depending on a variety of complex factors. Atwater (1982) commented that the effect of extramarital involvement on a particular marriage is "a complex issue, depending at least on the quality of the marriage, the quality of the extramarital interaction, and how a woman (or man) perceives, interprets and values the rewards coming from each relationship" (p. 77).

Some researchers reported healthy or positive effects of extramarital sex. Based on clinical experience, Elbaum (1981) reported pleasurable effects of extramarital
affairs for the participating spouse: secrecy and sexual variety with the lover provides stimulating experiences. Feeling desired by another also enhanced self-esteem and created excitement and revitalization. Elbaum also reported evidence of alternative marriage models that included extramarital relationships which had positive effects on adjustment levels of parents and marital partners. Elbaum reported that it appears that people who have successful extramarital experiences are able to deal with guilt and parental disapproval. He commented that individuals engaging in extramarital sex successfully were able to compartmentalize their relationships and separate the sexual and emotional components so the experience is satisfying. Within marital relationships where the individuals were able to separate love, sex, their marriages, and their affairs, becoming emotionally involved with the affair partner was then seen by both spouses as destructive. However, these alternative marriages were consensual in nature.

Weil (1975) reported that extramarital affairs may not always disturb marital interaction, but on the contrary, may provide more permanence because many individuals found an answer to unmet needs in such a relationship. She stated that in our society an extramarital affair is rarely perceived as an enjoyable experience for the individual, in and of itself. This perception appears to reflect a cultural attitude that people engaging in extramarital affairs should not find enjoyment in an activity which is held to be taboo and which is generally disapproved of (Glenn & Weaver, 1979).

Atwater (1982) reported that the effects of extramarital involvement on the 50 women in her study varied on a continuum from mostly positive, to decidedly negative, to no effects at all, which she contended, contrasts with the traditional and simplistic belief that extramarital activity is always injurious to a marriage. Rewards which extramarital affairs reportedly afforded the women in her study included the discovery of important differences in sexual experience with outside partners, the opportunity to explore and redefine the sexual self, as well as the fostering of self-growth in the interaction with other significant people. Other positive effects were an increase in
self-confidence, feelings of being more independent, forceful, self-reliant and resourceful, as well as gaining a sense of personhood, rather than feeling like "just a wife" (p. 146).

Atwater's (1982) study was a sociologically based study of women's extramarital affairs and as such explored the patterns of social change in the phenomenon of women's extramarital affairs. She commented that her sample was an example of women "forging their own individual answers in the absence of social solutions to the current disequilibrium in male-female relationships" (p. 66). Atwater postulated that extramarital behavior may be an area in which women now feel unusually free to establish the kind of sexual patterns they prefer. This may be possible because the extramarital area is not governed by "the social rules and inherited patterns that have long dominated marital and premarital interaction" (p. 190). Since men have traditionally held the balance of power in marriage, women who go outside the marital relationship and successfully find others who can fill their emotional needs may feel an increased sense of power.

Atwater (1982) also suggested that the potential of women to empower themselves through the positive experience of engaging in extramarital sex may have the effect of possibly reversing or at least equalizing the traditional power inequity between males and females in traditional marriage. However, she did not explore in any depth the impact of this dynamic on significant others in her subjects' lives. The impact of an increased sense of autonomy as a result of engaging in an extramarital affair within a marriage where the husband has traditionally held most of the power, may create significant effects for the woman and the marital relationship.

Atwater's study included extramarital affairs which occurred both with and without the consent of the non-participating partner, as well as lesbian affairs. This may have confounded the findings of the perceived impact of extramarital affairs on self and others in this study in regards to women's experience.
Heyn (1992) cautioned North American women who engage in extramarital affairs to never forget that they are perceived as "outlaws" (p. 259) today, as much as they were 150 years ago. Heyn took it upon herself to warn the female outlaw who dares to leave the confines of goodness, however temporarily, citing divorce, social stigma, financial loss, institutional power and jealous men as punishing factors for women who have affairs.

Some therapists working in clinical settings (Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983) did not distinguish among types of affairs in their studies/publications. Treatment strategies described in these studies (Marlowe, 1991; Peck, 1975; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983) were not reported according to who presents for therapy (couple, participating spouse or non-participating spouse) or when they presented for therapy (before disclosure or after). Brown's (1991) treatment strategies are designed according to type of affair, who presents for therapy, and at what stage in the affair help is sought. Issues such as revealing the affair, managing the crisis, and rebuilding strategies for each type of affair are addressed. Brown (1991) identified best and worst possible outcomes for each affair and predicted the probability of divorce for each type of affair. None of the above researchers have described an approach to the treatment of affairs in such detail according to type of affair. This would appear to be a practical and illuminating approach to the treatment of extramarital affairs. Although Brown identified the gender most likely to participate in each affair, she did not appear to distinguish between the male and female experience of extramarital affairs per se.

The findings of empirical research and therapeutic practice regarding the impact of extramarital affairs suggest that the consequences of extramarital affairs are widely varied, including positive, negative and neutral effects on the marital unit as well as on the participating and non-participating spouse. The impact also appears to depend on how the marriage, as well as the extramarital affair, are valued by the participating as well as non-participating spouse. The consequences of extramarital affairs for the
marital dyad, as well as for the individuals in the dyad, appear to be related to the emotional and/or sexual nature of the extramarital affair (Glass & Wright, 1985; Humphrey, 1982; Thompson, 1984a) as well as to the meaning of the affair to the participating and non-participating spouse (Atwater, 1982; Brown, 1991, Heyn, 1992).

The consequences of extramarital affairs also appear to vary according to the consensual nature of the extramarital affair (Elbaum, 1981) and also according to whether the effects of the extramarital affair were measured before or after the extramarital affair is discovered by the non-participating spouse (Pittman, 1989). None of the above clinical commentaries identified differential consequences of female extramarital affairs as opposed to male extramarital affairs with the exception of Beach et al. (1985), who found that when the participating spouse was female, there was more likelihood that one of the spouses would present depression which was elevated into the clinically depressed range.

Given the greater disapproval of women's extramarital affairs in our society, it seems plausible that women engaging in extramarital affairs may experience more negative consequences in terms of negative self-image, self-esteem, and self-acceptance as well as more negative consequences in their significant relationships, than has been reported. Heyn (1992) identified economic and social consequences for women who have had affairs, but she did not describe any individually felt negative consequences of the lived experience of an affair for the women in her study, preferring to concentrate on the positive aspects of the experience. More research is required to more clearly determine the consequences and nature of extramarital involvement for women.

Finally, some empirical studies and research articles investigating the consequences or impact of extramarital relationships failed to specifically identify whether the unit being effected is the participating spouse, the non-participating spouse or the marital/cohabitant dyad, (Elbaum, 1981; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Thompson, 1984a). Many researchers have also failed to identify whether the affair
occurred without the consent of the non-participating spouse (Beach et al., 1985; Buunk, 1982, 1987; Elbaum, 1981; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Spanier & Margolis, 1983). It appears to be assumed by these researchers (Beach et al., 1985; Buunk, 1982, 1987; Elbaum, 1981; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Spanier & Margolis, 1983) that the affair was unknown to the non-participating spouse when this may not be the case. Another factor which was usually assumed by these same researchers, but which was not explicitly stated, was whether the consequences being investigated were the result of an affair which was still unknown to the non-participating spouse as opposed to the consequences of an affair in the aftermath of the discovery of a clandestine affair (or affairs) by the non-participating spouse. This lack of specificity has contributed to divergent findings and makes generalizations across studies difficult.

**Theories of Extramarital Involvement**

Though several researchers have advanced theories of extramarital sexual permissiveness (Reiss, Anderson, & Sponaugle, 1980; Saunders & Edwards, 1984; Singh et al., 1976), only two researchers have taken tentative steps towards formulating a theory or model of extramarital involvement (Edwards, 1973; Moultrup, 1990).

Based on an examination of the empirical research into the antecedents most likely to predict extramarital involvement, Edwards (1973) has proposed that extramarital involvement is more likely when (1) the level of sexual permissiveness prevailing within a group or collectivity is high, (2) a person's heterosexual involvement is high, and (3) the discrepancy between the personal relational satisfaction a person desires and receives from marriage is great. However, Edwards (1973) admitted that the predictive power of these propositions may be questionable since it would be debatable that a complex phenomenon such as extramarital involvement might be explained by only three propositions.

A much more ambitious and comprehensive model of extramarital affairs was
proposed by Moultrup (1990) who recognized the complexity of the phenomenon of extramarital affairs by describing four different systems operating within this phenomenon. The model was designed to highlight the dynamic dimensions of the emotional system which are interconnected and which are understood to be different dimensions of the same experience. The four systems Moultrup described are reported to usually interact simultaneously, some being more pertinent than others at any given moment. The four different systems in Moultrup's (1990) model were described as:

(a) self and the family--differentiation, structure, power, communication, and behavior; 
(b) time and the family--nuclear family life cycle and multigenerational patterns; 
(c) individual dynamics; 
(d) social context. 

Moultrup suggested that this model is an integration of psychotherapeutic models and as such, represented one point in an evolutionary progression. Moultrup's model of extramarital affairs does not differentiate between women's and men's affairs, homosexual and heterosexual affairs, nor whether the affairs occurred with or without the consent of the spouse.

Although other researchers have attempted to identify significant antecedents to extramarital involvement in women (Bell et al., 1975), the findings are conflicting. Until more data is documented from women's lived experience of extramarital affairs, theoretical formulations will not find support in the empirical research.

Family therapy literature is "embarrassingly sparse" (Pittman, 1986, p. 69) in regard to theories of extramarital affairs with the noted exception of Moultrup (1990), who combines family systems theory with individual psychodynamics against the backdrop of the social context. Brown (1991) has proposed a model of treatment for five different patterns of extramarital affairs which she has identified in clinical practice. The theoretical perspective from which Brown views extramarital affairs is identified as family systems theory. This perspective illuminates the role of extramarital affairs in the family system.

The qualitative studies conducted by Atwater (1982), Heyn (1992) and Lawson
(1988) have contributed valuable descriptions of the lived experience of extramarital affairs from the perspective of the female participant, but these may be biased in the direction of the assumptions underlying the specific questions asked by each of these researchers. More research into the lived phenomenon of women's extramarital affairs is needed to discover as yet unidentified aspects of this phenomenon. As these aspects are identified and described, a theory of women's extramarital involvement will emerge from convergent findings.

**Conclusion**

The quantitative research studies referred to in this review report some valuable information regarding women's extramarital affairs, although most of this information is confounded due to definitional obscurity. The profile of the woman who engages in extramarital affairs which emerges from this data is not illuminating of women's lived experience of extramarital affairs. It is also not clear from this data just what the motivations, consequences, costs, benefits, fears, and hopes are for women who engage in extramarital affairs.

The above-mentioned quantitative studies are also biased in the direction of the investigated variables. It is possible that investigator bias has resulted in an omission of important themes or variables describing women's lived experience of extramarital affairs. A phenomenological approach employing unstructured interviewing techniques allows as yet unidentified themes to emerge from the data. These themes may help to present a more complete and congruent description of women's extramarital affairs and may help to illuminate more conclusively the meaning of this lived experience.

Both Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992) contributed valuable themes and descriptions of women's extramarital affairs in their qualitative studies. These two studies converge regarding the reported primary motivation of the women for extramarital affairs: pleasure. Neither of these two studies investigated women's extramarital affairs which are exclusively embedded in a long-term committed primary
relationship. Neither of these researchers reported a systematic analysis of the data. They appear to have been guided by a predetermined set of questions and therefore may have influenced the data in the direction of the questions they posed.

Women's experience of clandestine extramarital affairs appears to be a complex and controversial phenomenon. It is still not known how negative social sanctions and beliefs regarding women's extramarital affairs impact women who engage in affairs, nor how the extramarital experience impacts women's relationships with self and with significant others. Participants in the present study, by sharing the personal meaning of their experiences, may help to provide valuable insights into the unique dynamics of clandestine extramarital affairs for women. A phenomenological approach to data gathering ensures that the subjective experience of the participant emerges as fully as it was lived (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985).
Chapter Three - Methodology

Research Design

The investigator in the phenomenological paradigm strives to return to the everyday experience of the subject in order to achieve an objectivity that is faithful to the phenomena (Colaizzi, 1978). It is a "refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is, but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself" (p. 52). The phenomenologist attempts to describe the complexity of the phenomenon in a holistic and integrated manner, in order to capture the felt experience of the participant and to understand the meaning of the participant's experience as it is lived (Colaizzi).

Meanings are organized into a dramatic structure, into a story with overlapping and interwoven beginnings, middles and ends (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). Meanings are illuminated by how the participants construct the events of their complete stories and how they make sense of the events of their subjective experience.

A phenomenological approach to research is a particularly valuable method of inquiry when little is known about a phenomenon or when perceived biases or omissions in existing knowledge abound in the literature (Sandelowski, Davis & Harris, 1989). As noted in Chapters One and Two, some quantitative empirical survey data on the incidence (Bell et al, 1975; Hite, 1989; Hunt, 1974, Kinsey et al., 1953; Maykovich, 1976), antecedents (Andrus et al., 1977; Bell et al., 1975; Glass & Wright, 1985; Thompson, 1983), and impact (Beach et al., 1985; Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Thompson 1984b) of extramarital behavior for females have been documented. However, holistic descriptions of the experience and the meaning attached to these experiences, from the female participant's perspective, are lacking in the scientific literature. The study of women's extramarital relationships therefore lends itself well to the use of qualitative methods.

Investigators using a phenomenological approach subscribe to the following basic assumptions: (1) they agree that reality is complex, constructed and ultimately
subjective; (2) they identify, observe and describe a complex phenomenon as it is experienced by the participant in her/his natural environment and subsequently explore the meaning of the experience for the participant; (3) they refrain from a priori theorizing about the phenomenon being investigated and acknowledge and examine personal assumptions and biases about the phenomenon (bracketing) in order to be sensitive to unanticipated discoveries and insights; (4) they interact with the participant and strive to be fully present to the experience of the participant in a completely involved manner; and (5) they acknowledge that in interacting with the participant during the investigation, they personally influence the outcome to some degree (Colaizzi, 1978).

Consistent with a phenomenological paradigm, the women in this study were asked to talk about their experience of extramarital affairs and to explore in-depth what meaning this experience had for them. This method is consistent with feminist research principles which proposes that women's experiences are valid resources for social analysis and that a female perspective of women's needs and experiences is currently lacking or is distorted in our patriarchal culture (Harding, 1987).

This research was concerned with finding commonalities among the experiences of the participants as well as discovering individual differences. The investigator documented common themes that emerged from the data which illuminated the phenomenon of extramarital affairs for women in long-term committed relationships.

**Personal Assumptions**

Consistent with the phenomenological paradigm of investigation, it is acknowledged that the investigator brought to this study many personal beliefs and assumptions which may have influenced the outcome of the investigation. These were reflected in the formulation of the question, the determination of what the data were, the collection of the data and their interpretation (Osbourne, 1990). Through a process of bracketing (rigourous self-reflection), it is necessary for the investigator to examine
her personal biases and beliefs and provide the reader with her orientation to the phenomenon. In this way, the reader is alerted to contextual issues and is oriented to the perspective of the researcher.

I became interested in female sexuality in a general way some years ago out of personal curiosity which then led to an opportunity to explore this subject during a graduate studies term paper. There appeared to be a lack of empirical research in the area of female sexuality, particularly research informed by a feminist perspective. I co-led a group experience focused on female sexuality during my university practicum, and this experience cemented my commitment to explore this area and to gain a greater understanding of the nature and experience of female sexuality, for my own personal enlightenment and for the benefit of my clients.

I eventually recognized that female sexuality was too broad a field to investigate without some further narrowing of the topic. Personal interest together with my own lived experience drew me to the topic of women's extramarital affairs. I observed the lack of information about the experience and meaning of this phenomenon. The sanctions against this behavior in our culture, especially for females, and the perceived stigma attached to women who have affairs, piqued my curiosity even more. I also wanted to come to a better understanding of the meaning of my own personal experience of extramarital affairs. I believed that I would benefit personally from an exploration of this topic.

When I first became interested in the phenomenon of women's extramarital affairs, I had a lot of questions in mind. As I oriented myself to the research question, which changed many times, I began with one particular question which interested me most: what would drive a woman in a long-term relationship to engage in an affair when the potential risks and consequences could be devastating? The potential consequences of the discovery of an affair might include loss of the long-term relationship, loss of the family unit, disruption of children's lives, social stigma,
financial deprivation, and emotional turmoil and pain. Other questions I had included: what decision-making process did a woman go through as she first decided whether to become involved in an affair or not, or did she even struggle with such a decision? What did she think and feel about herself, her long-term relationship, her long-term partner, her affair, her affair partner(s), and her other significant relationships? Did she consider the costs as well as the rewards of this behavior? How would a woman describe her extramarital experience? How did she make sense of this experience in the overall picture of her life? And finally, what meaning did she attach to the experience of her affair (or affairs)?

This last question seemed most important to pursue, and became the research question that guided this enquiry: "What is the meaning of women's lived experience of extramarital affairs?" I wanted to know what personal meaning women attached to their affairs and how these were reflected in the scientific literature. I wanted to know if there were aspects of this experience which are either not reported in the literature or are under-reported.

Throughout this investigation I remained vigilant to my own biases and beliefs regarding the phenomenon of women's extramarital affairs. I was aware that the formulation of the question, the collection of the data, the determination of what the data were, and the analysis of the data were all filtered through my own lived experience of extramarital affairs. However, I remained open to discovering aspects of this phenomenon which might not be part of my own experience or which were not documented in the existing research on women's extramarital affairs. I suspected that there might be very valid motives behind a woman's decision to engage in an affair, and that these might relate to dissatisfactions with the long-term relationship. Based on a review of the literature though, I remained open to the possibility that some women might engage in extramarital affairs while reporting satisfaction with their long-term relationships (Atwater, 1982; Bell et al, 1975; Heyn, 1992).
Other areas I speculated about revolved around the nature of a women's emotional and sexual relationship with her long-term partner and the impact of unmet sexual and emotional needs on the decision to engage in an affair. I also wondered how women who had affairs would justify their affairs, especially given the potential risks and losses if their affairs were discovered or disclosed. As well, I wondered if a marriage could benefit from the discovery of an affair or whether it would be destroyed.

My values and beliefs about extramarital sexual behavior arise from basic assumptions I hold about human behavior which include: that individuals usually act in ways to protect themselves in situations where they cannot thrive, and that what individuals do to survive needs to be honoured. I also believe that individuals act in ways to foster their own personal growth. I do not attach blame or moralistic judgments to individuals who engage in extramarital sexual behavior.

Participants

The first five women who met the following selection criteria were selected from those who volunteered to participate in the study. Although five is not a large sample, the participants' stories encompassed a large variance of experiences of extramarital affairs. Five participants is a sufficient number to ensure that the common themes did not occur by chance (Colaizzi, 1978).

Participant-volunteers were purposively selected on the premise that they had experience with the investigated phenomenon and could articulate this experience sufficiently for the investigator's purposes (Colaizzi, 1978; Sandelowski et al., 1989). Participants were included in the study also on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Participants displayed a willingness and comfort in talking about their extramarital relationships and were be able to articulate their experiences sufficiently to enable an in-depth exploration of the meanings attached to these experiences by the participants.
2. Participants had been married or cohabited for a minimum of 7 years at the time of their extramarital affair, or if presently separated or divorced, were able to discuss an extramarital affair which occurred after a minimum of 7 years of marriage or cohabitation. Research into female developmental psychology suggests that women's identity is defined in part through relationships with significant others (Kaplan, 1991; Miller, 1976; Rubin, 1983), that women are more likely to make decisions based on an ethic of responsibility and care (Gilligan, 1982), and that women act to protect themselves to prevent any disconnection from their significant relationships (Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986). A sufficiently long relationship with a spouse or partner increased the likelihood that this relationship was a significant one to the participant and one which she would not lightly jeopardize.

3. Both the married or cohabiting, as well as the extramarital relationship were heterosexual. Extramarital affairs which are homosexual may have a different effect on the non-participating partner's sexual and personal security: not only is there a loss of trust about non-monogamous sex, there is the presumption that the spouse's sexual orientation must be impaired if he chooses a bisexual partner (Humphrey, 1982). A homosexual affair may create a different dynamic in the perceived potential and actual consequences of an extramarital affair on significant others. Engagement in a homosexual affair may also include dramatic re-definitions of the sexual self in the participating spouse (Sophe, 1982).

4. The extramarital relationships engaged in were clandestine affairs. At the time she began the extramarital affair, each participant believed that she did not have her husband's consent to do so, either explicitly or implicitly. This criterion was based on research which suggests differential decision-making dynamics and outcome based on affairs which are conducted with consent (Buunk, 1982; Elbaum, 1981).

5. The participants had terminated the extramarital affair within the past two to five years. A longer time than this might have interfered with the participant's ability
to recall thoughts, feelings and events about the relationships which may have been significant to her understanding of the experience. A shorter time may not have provided enough distance from the experience to enable the participant to formulate significant insights.

Procedure

Recruitment

Participants were recruited in two cities in B.C.: 1) via word-of-mouth, 2) through advertisements posted in centres which serve women's needs as well as in recreation and community centres (see Appendix A), and 3) through ads placed in the personal column in several issues of three different newspapers, one of which was located in a large urban centre (see Appendix B). All of the women in the study contacted the investigator as a result of the ads in the personal columns in the three newspapers.

A total of 26 inquiries were received by the investigator. Of these, one woman booked an interview, but did not show up, two booked an interview and phoned later to cancel it. Five men phoned, most of whom wanted to inquire whether the investigator was also researching men's affairs. Ten women met the selection criteria of the 21 women who contacted the researcher. Of these 26 inquiries, 2 were veiled invitations to the researcher to personally participate in an affair, one from a male and the other from a female caller.

During the initial contact with each respondent, the researcher briefly described the nature of the study, discussed issues of confidentiality, which were very salient for all of the participants, and explained the time commitment involved. Five participants were selected on the basis of the selection criteria. However, during the initial data analysis, in consultation with the thesis advisor, it was decided to drop one interview. Although this respondent met the selection criteria, in the course of the interview it became apparent that her experience was significantly different from that of the other...
participants. This respondent had previously known her affair partner before she married and had given birth to a child, fathered by him. The baby was given up for adoption, with the encouragement of the father. These experiences describing the trauma and loss of her infant daughter and not becoming this man's long-term partner, were the focus of this interview.

This participant's experience was deemed to be sufficiently different from the experiences of the other women, with the initial data analysis indicating a different focus and meaning to her experience. A sixth interview was conducted to replace this one from two additional inquiries from women who met the selection criteria and who gave their permission for the researcher to contact them, if they were needed.

Appointments for in-depth personal interviews were made for those women who were willing to participate and who met the selection criteria.

It was decided to include the data from the interview of one participant even though she had terminated her affair the very morning of the interview. This participant also discussed other affairs which had terminated within the previous two years. The criteria of a two-year interval between the termination of the affair and the interview was based on an assumption that the participant would not be able to make sense of her experience immediately following the affair. The researcher, in consultation with the thesis advisor, judged that given the continuing nature of this participant's extramarital conduct, and based on information that this participant had terminated several affairs in the past, she would most likely be able make sense and articulate the personal meaning of this and other affairs she had engaged in.

The Interview

The data were collected during in-depth, unstructured tape-recorded interviews conducted by the researcher. The interviews ranged from one hour and twenty minutes to three and a half hours. Additional interviews were not needed for the initial in-depth data gathering.
Three interviews were conducted in the researcher's home at the request of the participants. One interview took place in the home of the participant, while the fifth was conducted out of town, in an office rented by the researcher. In all of these locations, privacy was ensured and distractions were kept to a minimum.

At the beginning of each interview, time was allowed for the participant to orient herself to the location and to engage in casual conversation with the researcher, so that some degree of comfort and rapport could develop. The investigator reviewed and clarified the purpose of the study and the expectations she had of the participant. The participant was encouraged to ask any questions and was asked to read and sign two copies of an ethical consent form (see Appendix C).

After the consent forms were signed, the participant was given a general orienting statement/question (see Appendix D) as a stimulus for a retrospective analysis of the participant's extramarital experiences. The participants were reassured by the investigator, that neither she nor her actions would be judged by the researcher, given the taboo nature of the investigated phenomenon and social sanctions against participation in extramarital affairs, especially for women. The participants were visibly relieved to hear this and expressed enthusiasm at the researcher's willingness to share her own story at the end of the interview, if requested by the participant. The interviews were audiotaped from this point on and were transcribed at a later date.

During the initial part of the interview, the investigator encouraged the participant to tell the story of her experience of an extramarital affair (or affairs) and in this manner, elicited descriptions of the participant's experience. The investigator attempted to be fully present to the experience of the participant by attending physically and psychologically to the participant's verbal and non-verbal behavior, by actively listening to the participant as she related her story, by responding with empathic reflection, and by not imposing her own agenda or interpretation. The investigator also demonstrated respect by refraining from interrupting the participant and allowing the
participant to tell her story without interfering with the natural flow of the narrative. The investigator did not rely on a priori hypotheses to guide her investigation and instead allowed concepts to emerge from the data, as presented by the participant.

The researcher used mainly reflection to encourage the participant to describe her experiences and interrupted the flow of her story only when necessary. Silence was employed to allow the participants full expression before probes were used. Probing was used to elicit more detailed information about significant aspects of the participant's experiences. During this part of the interview, the skills of attending, empathy, focusing, paraphrasing and clarifying were used to help elicit further relevant information about the participant's experiences. Questions were used to further explore significant material/issues when they were raised by the participants (see Appendix E).

Once the results were analyzed and described, the researcher contacted each participant to make arrangements to deliver the results to her. After the participant had read the results, as well as the brief individual biographical sketch, an interview to discuss the results was arranged. At the request of the participants, three validation interviews were held in restaurants, one took place in a city park, and one was held in the investigator's home. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour and a half in length.

During the validation interviews, themes were clarified and refined further for the purposes of: (1) involving the participants in the verification of the findings, and (2) providing a measure of internal validity of the extracted meaning and themes with participants' reported experiences of the phenomenon of extramarital affairs. The verification interview process ensures that the final research product represents, as closely as is possible, the experiences of the women (Colaizzi, 1978).

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data interpretation was confined to a construction of what the participants presented as their experiences. The seven-step
model of data analysis as proposed by Colaizzi (1978) was followed. This method, briefly summarized, involved: (a) reading the descriptions and acquiring a general feeling for them; (b) extracting significant statements from each protocol that directly pertained to the investigated phenomenon; (c) formulating meanings of each significant statement by the process of creative insight; (d) organizing meanings into clusters of themes that provided a structure of the data while remaining true to each participant's experience; (e) integrating the results into an exhaustive description of the investigated topic; (f) formulating this description into a statement of the participants' experience; (g) returning to each participant, and validating that the researcher's descriptive results compared with her experience. Themes were further refined based on feedback from the participants during these validation interviews, thereby ensuring that the thematic descriptions more accurately reflected the experiences of the women.

The process of data analysis engaged in by the researcher was not briefly or summarily accomplished. Once the researcher had extracted the significant statements from the five protocols, she was faced with a stack of approximately eight hundred index cards of five different colours, one colour for each participant. The researcher sorted these into categories which matched some of the categories detailed in the Literature Review. This led to frustration and a dead end. Assistance was sought from experienced researchers who had been through this process. This helped the researcher to take a different perspective towards the significant statements by re-framing each statement in terms of the experience of the participant. The formulation of meanings through the process of creative insight then proceeded more smoothly.

Sorting the formulated meanings into clusters of themes initially resulted in 18-20 themes. Identifying and categorizing the formulated meanings was experienced as alternately frustrating and exhilarating. This process was suggestive of attempts to focus a high-powered telescope on a distant beach. At times, when the focus was too narrow and too close, the only objects that were identifiable were the individual grains
of sand on the beach, for example, when the investigator did not know how to
categorize a statement such as "I mean, I didn't chase him, he chased me." At other
times, when the focus was too distant and too broad (e.g. when a category of
"dissatisfaction with the marriage" was so broad as to be meaningless), the beach
disappeared from sight.

During the process of analysis, as the themes were refined and regrouped, it
often seemed that an identified theme which initially seemed independent, finally
emerged as part of another theme. An example of this was the theme of the search by
the women for a father-figure in affair partners which the researcher thought might be
an independent theme. This theme was not supported by all five protocols. It was
reformulated into a part of the experience of emotional disconnection as a longing for
nurturing and connection.

The process of analysis also included a growing awareness, on the part of the
researcher, that some of the initially identified themes were juxtaposed to each other.
These themes seemed to be descriptive of experiences at opposite ends of a continuum.
An example of this was the women's feelings of invalidation in their marriages
juxtaposed to feelings of validation in their affairs. It appeared that the women, who
were participating in two relationships (and sometimes more) on a regular basis,
experienced themselves quite differently in their affairs, than they did in their
marriages. This resulted in a pairing of three themes reflecting the conflicting
experiences the women perceived as they attempted to make sense of their experiences
in their marriages and their affairs.

A process of moving back and forth between too close a focus or too broad
together with continually refining and reducing the themes moved the process of
analysis forward. Through a process of creative insight, imaginative description
supported by the words of the women, and persistence on the part of the researcher,
five common themes were ultimately identified. The themes were validated, with very
few changes, by the five women in the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Participants were asked to suggest a pseudonym for themselves and their husbands to be used in the transcripts and in the final published text. Affair partners were represented by an arbitrarily chosen uppercase initial. Any other identifying information was eliminated or changed to ensure confidentiality.

Written consent was also solicited from the participants during the initial interview (see Appendix C). Participants were advised at the beginning of the first interview that agreeing to participate in a personal exploration of their experiences of extramarital affairs during the interviews, might stimulate beneficial insights as well as potentially painful memories. The investigator was sensitive to the potential for painful or disruptive feelings on the part of the participant, as a result of recalling past experiences, and was ready to provide support for the participants throughout their involvement in the research. The investigator was ready to offer a referral to mental health services, in the event that the participants might require further assistance. None of the participants required a referral for this purpose.

Throughout the data collection process and analysis, participants were informed of their role and of the expectations of the investigator. Participants were encouraged to ask questions at any time about the procedures and were involved as much as possible in the process. Participants were advised that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Limitations of the Study**

The focus of this study was limited to an exploration of the participants' experiences of extramarital affairs within the limits of a 2 1/2 to 3-hour interview, with a follow-up validation interview. A more complete exploration of the participants' experiences of extramarital affairs could be accomplished with additional interviews over a longer time period, but limitations of time and resources made this unfeasible.
This research also made no attempt to examine the experience of husbands or children involved in the participants' family systems. The study was limited to the experience of extramarital affairs from the perspective of the woman. In-depth interviews were the primary source of data collected.

This research was based upon self-report and was therefore dependent on what the participants reported, as well as their level of self-awareness. Accuracy of the participants' reports is not an important issue in phenomenology, since meaning making emerges from the salience of the experience from the perspective of the participant (Van Manen, 1990). What the participant chooses to present, the primacy, and the affect she chooses to give it, constitute the meaning of the experience to her.

Social desirability may also have influenced the participant's choice of what to disclose to the researcher. Factors such as embarrassment, self-deception, denial, shame and guilt may have effected reporting, especially given the socially taboo nature of the investigated phenomenon. The phenomenological paradigm acknowledges that the content of the participant's story as well as how she processes her experiences, are contextually embedded and are therefore shaped by cultural influences (Colaizzi, 1978; Van Manen, 1990).

Other limitations of this study are those common to phenomenological research in general and pertain to the lack of generalizability of the findings to other populations or other settings (Borg & Gall, 1989). With only five participants, these results cannot be generalized to all women who have experienced clandestine extramarital affairs. Generalizability is not achieved by one study, but by on-going dialogue as other women tell their stories and researchers check, dispute, sharpen and challenge the themes to more faithfully reflect the experience (Colaizzi, 1978). The findings of this study can however, be compared to theory and can also shape the direction of future research.

In the phenomenological paradigm, replication of procedures and settings becomes problematic since the unique situations being investigated cannot be replicated
precisely. Reliability therefore depends on the rigor with which the investigator describes the procedures and settings (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982); rigor that was a goal of this investigation.

**Conclusion**

A phenomenological paradigm was employed to investigate the experience of women's clandestine extramarital affairs in an attempt to capture the lived experience of this complex, socially constructed, and subjective phenomenon. By respectfully listening to the narratives of the five participants in the study, the investigator was able to identify the meanings of this lived experience. Meanings emerged from the women's own words and were also illuminated by the manner in which the women told their stories. Five common themes were extracted from the five protocols during an in-depth analysis by the investigator. The accuracy of the descriptions of the phenomenon of extramarital affairs and the extracted common themes were validated by the five women who reported that the themes captured the essence of their experiences.
Chapter Four - Results

In this chapter the common themes or similarities of experiences as reported by the five participants who were interviewed for the study are presented. Although each of the women's extramarital affairs differed in many aspects, salient similarities in how they experienced their extramarital affairs emerged from the interviews. The common themes, as identified by the women, also include how they experienced their husbands and their marriages, as well as how they experienced themselves in the context of both their affairs and their marriages.

Prior to a detailed description and elaboration of the common themes, a brief synopsis of each woman's story is presented so that the significant aspects of each story might provide the context for the discussion of the common themes. The main focus of each biography is the history of the women's affairs, but also includes a brief background of her family of origin and a history of her marriage and present family structure and situation.

None of the actual names of the participants have been used in this study. Pseudonyms are also employed for the husbands. Affair partners will be referred to by an arbitrarily chosen uppercase initial.

The Women's Stories

Lilias

Lilias, 51, is married to Bill, 48, and they are the parents of a daughter, 20 and son, 18. Their marriage is in its 22nd year. Lilias is a full-time homemaker and has remained at home since the birth of her children, occasionally taking on part-time jobs.

Before she was married, Lilias trained and worked in the health profession and in the restaurant business in Great Britain. She emigrated to Canada and married Bill, a farmer on the prairies. She lived on a farm for most of her married life until she and her family moved to a city in B.C. four years ago.

Lilias is the youngest of five children. She has two step-sisters from her
mother's first marriage and two older brothers from her parents' marriage. Her parents were older and Lilias describes them as "Victorian." Lilias portrays her mother as a gay, young and beautiful widow. Her mother's first husband died, leaving her very well off as long as she remained unmarried. After giving birth to Lilias' two brothers illegitimately, she married Lilias' father, who had attended a Canadian university and who Lilias describes as "a dilettante about town." His parents did not expect him to earn an income and so the family existed on the small pension left to her mother from her first marriage. Although Lilias believed her family life was aesthetically and culturally rich, she thought they should have been better off financially.

Lilias engaged in several premarital affairs before marrying Bill. She remarked that she was always attracted to lovers from different cultures. She had a four month affair with "M," a Turk who was married but who was estranged from his wife. She fell in love with him and reports that he was the greatest love and most important part of her life. She emigrated to Canada after realizing that "M" might never be free to engage fully in this relationship with her. Lilias corresponded with "M" for 17 years until he died of cancer. She reports that she still feels strongly bonded to him.

Lilias believed that she was in love with her husband when she married him, but realizes now that she was not. She was 30 when she married and was attracted to Bill's stability and kindness.

When Lilias had been married 10 years, she began a long-term affair with "A," an Arab, who she met on a flight back to Canada from a visit to Great Britain. At this time, Lilias reports that she was bored with married life and felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities of being a parent and a farm wife. She and "A" met about once a year. This affair lasted about 9 years with a break of a few years in the middle. Lilias ended this affair two years ago when "A" made what Lilias perceived to be cruel remarks to her about her physical appearance. They continue to keep in touch by phone from time to time.
At about the same time that this affair began, she began a long-term affair with "B," a man 28 years her senior, who she had known in her childhood, also seeing him only about once a year. This affair lasted 8 years and came to an end when "B's" wife became terminally ill and he decided to nurse her himself. Lilias also had a very casual 7-year affair with her brother-in-law, meeting him about once every 3 months. This ended when Lilias and her family moved to B.C. During this period of her life, Lilias attempted suicide on two occasions. After one attempt, she was admitted to hospital and subsequently had several sessions with a psychologist to deal with the trauma she was experiencing in her life.

As well as these long-term affairs, Lilias had several short term affairs and one night stands with men she met in a variety of social settings. Three years ago, after a major operation, Lilias returned to school for a refresher course in the health profession but she perceived a lack of support at home and her physically weakened condition as contributing to a decision to discontinue this course after three weeks. Lilias subsequently placed an ad in the personal column of the newspaper, advertising for a discrete relationship. Lilias received several dozen replies, some of which she followed up. Very few of these relationships included a sexual relationship, a deliberate choice on Lilias' part.

Lilias attempted to leave her husband two years ago, but returned home from Great Britain after two months when she was unable to secure a job that was acceptable to her. She and her husband have not had a sexual relationship for many years. Although Bill is aware of her friendships with some of her affair partners, he assumes that they are not sexual relationships. Lilias deliberately leads him to believe that these men are only friends. Lilias and her husband "get long all right" as friends, living in the same house.

Lilias is not involved in an affair at the present time even though she still has the opportunity to meet men. She states that she feels more self-secure and doesn't
need a "string of men" the way she did in the past. She values the security and stability of her home situation and is actively cultivating an accepting attitude towards herself and her life.

Cheryl

Cheryl, 44, is the mother of two daughters, 8 and 12 years old and one son, aged 15. Her marriage to 46 year old Jack is in its 22nd year. She graduated with an M.A. in the humanities before she was married and worked in the field of education in the first several years of her marriage. When her children were born, Cheryl directed all of her energies towards raising them and did not work outside the home. Two years ago, Cheryl completed a two year re-training period and now works part-time in the education field. She and Jack live in a large urban centre.

Cheryl is the youngest of three children. She remembers her father as someone who "came and went, came and went." Cheryl recalls sitting in his lap many times trying to get an affectionate response from him, and perceives that she was ignored and then unceremoniously dumped onto the floor as he stood up. He left permanently when Cheryl was 15. She discovered years later that he was a convicted pedophile. Cheryl believes that he did not sexually abuse any of his own children. Cheryl's mother, who worked hard at a low-paying job so that Cheryl could go to university, shared a home with Cheryl in what Cheryl describes as a close mother/daughter relationship until she completed her M.A. Shortly after Cheryl was married, her mother was diagnosed with cancer and died.

Cheryl and Jack had very little sexual experience before their marriage and neither had experienced sexual intercourse. Cheryl recalls their first sexual attempts as being "awful" and not improving much. She reports that Jack has found the adjustment to having children very difficult. Cheryl believes that her husband is longing for the day when they will be free of children and things between them will be just as they were in the early years.
Cheryl had her first affair after 7 years of marriage. She states that from the first three weeks of her marriage, she has had a "roving eye" and that she believes that marrying without any sexual experience was a mistake. Her affair partner, who was 30 years older than Cheryl, was the husband of her employer. They met once a week and the affair ended after five months when her employer discovered her husband's love letters to Cheryl.

When her children were very young, Cheryl became very active in school and community events and remained at home with her children until the youngest began school full-time. She did not have any affairs while she was at home full-time with her children.

Two years ago, when Cheryl returned to campus for her retraining course, she was surprised to discover many mature students in her programme. For several weeks, she reportedly pursued "D," a 52 year old married man until he consented to have an affair with her. They met once a week and this affair lasted seven months when, upon the completion of his course, "D's" wife joined him from another city. Cheryl reports that she was heart-broken at the loss of this relationship.

Since the ending of this affair a year ago, Cheryl has replied to many ads in the personal columns. At the time of the interview, she had participated in 14 short-term affairs within the past year. She had sex with five men in one day, just to explore what this would be like. Usually, she ends the affairs after about five encounters, believing she has "experienced what they are like" in this time.

The affair which Cheryl perceives had the greatest impact on her lasted two months and ended the morning of the interview. She replied to an ad for a "dominatrix" in the personal columns, only to discover later that the advertiser "F," 48, wanted her to participate with him in an experience of bondage. He had been unable to persuade his long-term partner to take on this role. When she discovered what this would entail, and that she always had a choice to say no to anything, she
decided to go ahead with it, regarding it as another new experience. She ended this affair when "F" refused to allow her more of a role in his life than just sexual.

Cheryl reports that she has asked for changes in her relationship with her husband over the years. She believes she has given Jack very specific feedback about what she likes and doesn't like in their sexual relationship, but she reports that he pays no attention to this information. Jack attended one counselling session and he reported to Cheryl that it made him feel worse. Cheryl has attended many individual counselling sessions and group experiences in the past few years, but she believes that nothing has changed for her in her marriage or in her need for affairs.

At the time of our interview, Cheryl was reassessing the experience of her year-long "sexual odyssey," as she calls it, and though she has plans to do some things differently, she has no plans to discontinue having affairs. Her husband has not discovered any of her affairs and Cheryl has no plans to inform him of them. She says that she wants to leave her husband and plans to do so when her youngest is finished high school.

Vicki

Vicki, 40, is the mother of two daughters, 17 and 12 years old and one son, 15 years of age. After 16 years of marriage, she left her husband Ken, 42, for "G" in the Spring of 1989. "G" was her first affair partner and they had been meeting secretly for three months at the time of her separation. Vicki and Ken were divorced in the Fall of 1990. A year before the first interview, in the Fall of 1991, Ken rejoined Vicki and the children in the house Vicki bought following their separation.

Vicki has two sisters and a brother and is the third youngest in the family. Her father was an alcoholic and Vicki recalls that he was verbally and emotionally abusive to his children, destructive to the family property, and verbally and physically abusive to Vicki's mother. Vicki describes this experience as similar to living with an elephant in their living room, around which everybody tiptoed and no one acknowledged. She
says that her mother still lives in denial and insists on believing that she had a wonderful marital relationship. Her father died several years ago.

Vicki fell in love with her husband and left college to marry him at the age of 20. Vicki remembers how much she wanted a better life for herself in her marriage and strived to create a "perfect family" with her husband. She worked in secretarial/clerical jobs until the birth of her first child. When her third child entered kindergarten, she returned to work part-time. She was very active in her children's lives, in their schools and in the community.

Vicki became clinically depressed in the 15th year of her marriage. She says she begged her husband to go to counselling with her, but he refused. She remained depressed for two years, during which time she perceived that her sense of feeling disconnected from her husband did not change.

Vicki met "G," three years her senior, at work six months before the end of her marriage. Their brief conversations during their business transactions became longer and longer. Eventually, Vicki agreed to have an affair with "G." After three months, Vicki told her husband about it. She reports that Ken "freaked," and went into a flurry of activity, planning trips and holidays, sending flowers and making counselling appointments. According to Vicki, it was too late. Vicki asked Ken to leave. Ken refused, so she moved out of her home and in with "G." The children remained with their father.

Vicki immediately sought help from a counsellor after she left her husband to deal with her feelings regarding her marriage and her choice to have an affair. Vicki left "G" after nine months because he could not cope with her children's visits and Vicki wanted more contact with them.

Ken's family were outraged by Vicki's affair and departure. She reports that Ken's father swore that she would never set foot in their home again. Vicki's mother and two close friends never wavered in their support of Vicki though they stated that
they did not always agree with her decisions.

Vicki moved into larger and larger apartments as her children rejoined her one by one. She changed jobs several times to increase her income. She eventually bought an old house and made renovations to it herself. Vicki believes that the purchase of this house was the most empowering experience that she had ever had. Vicki then began a relationship with H, who was three years younger than she was. This lasted one year. Vicki broke it off due to her perception of "H's" difficulties in accepting her children as part of their relationship and also in order to re-establish a relationship with Ken, her then ex-husband.

One year after their divorce had been granted, Vicki asked Ken to move in with her and the children in an attempt to rebuild their relationship and to give it another chance without the influence of an affair. Vicki had some resistance to referring to Ken as her husband, but said she did so for lack of a more suitable term. They were still legally divorced, though cohabiting. Vicki reported that she did not have another affair once her ex-husband rejoined the family.

At the time of the first interview, a year into their attempts to rebuild their relationship, Vicki reported that Ken was unable to achieve an erection and their sexual relationship had been non-existent for about four months. Many of the same problems which existed before Vicki’s affair had re-emerged and Vicki was once more encouraging Ken to attend relationship counselling sessions with her. She gave him the responsibility of setting up relationship counselling this time around since he refused to go in the past.

During the final interview, Vicki reported that she and Ken attended one session of counselling which was reportedly not useful. They have since separated for a second time, but this time she reports that both are committed to maintaining a friendly relationship. Vicki says that she feels a need for continued connection with Ken, but in a completely different form. She perceives that this is working out well for both of
them and for the children.

Vicki has made a firm decision that she will never have another extramarital affair. She would leave the relationship first.

Alison

Alison, 47, is married to Doug, 49. Their marriage is in its 32nd year and they have two daughters aged 26 and 30. Alison is currently the manager of a small business in a city in B.C.

Alison's mother left her husband when Alison was 5, lived with another man, who Alison did not like, and left him when Alison was 10. She raised Alison on her own from this point on, in economically very disadvantaged conditions. Alison married Doug at the age of 16. He was the only boyfriend she had ever had and Doug had also not dated anyone seriously before marrying Alison. They had both been propelled into an early marriage by unhappy situations at home. Neither had experienced sexual intercourse with anyone else before they were engaged. Alison fell in love with her husband when she was a teenager and says that she has always loved him.

After the birth of her two daughters early on in their marriage, Alison returned to work, doing mostly secretarial/clerical jobs. At this time, she experienced a startling difference in the way she was perceived by the men she met through her work and the way she felt her husband related to her as a partner. Her female working companions also described vital relationships with their husbands which led Alison to believe that she had a husband who was "weird" and "not normal." The central difference Alison perceived between their marriages and hers was that most wives had to frequently fend off their husbands' sexual advances and demonstrations of affection and desire.

Alison continued to hear many positive comments directed to her from the men with whom she came into contact, regarding her attractiveness and desirability. She spoke to her husband several times in the course of their marriage about her
dissatisfaction with their relationship and asked for changes. Alison reported that Doug sometimes made weak attempts to change, but these never appeared to last.

When Alison had been married about 13 years, she began a weekly routine of going out every Friday night with her closest girlfriend. They frequented private clubs and sports centres and it was in this kind of setting that Alison began to have what she describes as friendly, casual affairs with men she would meet. Some of these affair partners she met through work, some at the clubs. These affairs never lasted longer than six months and she usually met with them once or twice a week. She and her girlfriend continued these evenings out for several years, until Doug decided that they should leave Great Britain and emigrate to Canada. Doug never confronted Alison about her evenings out with her girlfriend, though Alison thinks that he suspected something. She believes that he just "buried his head in the sand" and hoped it would pass. Alison did not volunteer any information about her affairs to her husband.

Alison and Doug settled in a city in B.C. and Alison threw herself passionately into her work as the manager of a small business in an effort to cope with the loss of her friendship with her girlfriend as well as the lost opportunities to meet affair partners. She works with mainly female employees and believes that Canadian attitudes regarding infidelity, as she encounters them, are much more disapproving than in Great Britain.

Alison did not have any affairs after her arrival in Canada for about 10 years, when an opportunity presented itself with "J," 34, in the course of a social outing. She met with "J" two to three times a week. This affair lasted two months. Doug discovered evidence of the affair, confronted Alison about it, at which time Alison ended the affair.

Since the discovery of her affair two years ago and her openness with her husband about why it happened, Alison perceives that Doug has changed in very dramatic ways towards her and has become much more affectionate and demonstrative.
She reports that their sexual relationship has improved. These changes have persisted and Alison reports that Doug regrets that it has taken so long to achieve the present level of happiness in their marriage. At the time the affair was discovered, Doug did not question Alison about her outings with her girlfriend in Great Britain years previously, and Alison did not offer any information about this time in her life.

Alison has not had another affair since the positive changes in her relationship with her husband have transpired.

During the final interview, Alison reported that the positive changes in her relationship have continued, have spilled over into all her relationships, and have also resulted in a significant change in lifestyle for both her and Doug. She reported that she and Doug will be retiring to a remote island location in about a year, something she would never have agreed to three years ago. Alison insisted that she believes she and Doug would not be together today, had it not been for the catalytic effects of the discovery of her affair.

**Stella**

Stella, 45, is single and has a son, 25, and a daughter 20. She has been married and divorced twice. Her son is from her first marriage which ended after four years when Stella discovered that her first husband was having an affair. Her second marriage to Andy, two years younger than Stella, lasted 16 years. Stella ended it four years ago. Her daughter is from this marriage. Stella was trained as a health professional, but is now a federal government worker and lives with two female roommates in a city in B.C.

Stella was the older of two girls in her family of origin. Her mother was an alcoholic. When Stella was 7 or 8, while her father was at work and her mother was at the beer parlour, a male friend of the family came into their home and sexually abused both Stella and her sister. The offender, a physician, was identified by Stella, the police were involved, but charges were never laid. Stella and her sister were allowed
to miss one day of school and then the incident was never referred to again. During her second marriage, Stella sought help with her sexual abuse experience and with over-eating.

Stella and Andy attended marriage enrichment counselling sessions intermittently since the third year of their marriage. These sessions were offered through their church, conducted by a Roman Catholic priest, but Stella did not feel that her feelings were ever validated. As well, she reports that Andy never followed through on compromises which were agreed to by both partners during these sessions. At several points in their marriage, Stella reports that she talked to her husband about her feelings and asked for changes which would make the marriage more equal and mutual. Andy would listen, but according to Stella, nothing changed. In retrospect, Stella says that she blamed herself for the problems in their marriage and continued to believe that her husband and her family were perfect.

When Stella had been married to Andy for about 11 years, she had a one-night stand with "K," a man she met during a business trip. Stella says it "just happened" and it was overwhelming. The fact that it had occurred at all, forced Stella to examine herself and her life more closely. She refers to this experience as a catalyst for her, one which resulted in Stella taking a more realistic view of her marriage and family life. She had not been involved with anyone before this nor did she have any other affairs during the rest of her marriage.

During the course of their 16 year marriage, Stella and the children had followed Andy all over B.C. as he moved from one job to another. Stella and the children always stayed behind, sometimes for several months, to sell the house and wind things up. Stella reports that there were many times in their marriage that she perceived Andy's behaviour towards her as unsupportive, rejecting, critical and humiliating. Stella eventually gave Andy an ultimatum. She gave him a year to show that he cared about her and their relationship, and was willing to put his energy into
changing some of the things that she could not accept. She says she believes he made some attempts at first, and then gave up. They decided to divorce. This was achieved fairly amicably.

During the last year of her marriage, Stella met once more with "K," her one-night stand affair partner. She had remained in contact with "K," even though he had married during the intervening years. This night of "unbridled sex," as she describes it, was the culmination of her fantasies and closed the affair for her. She and "K" remain in intermittent contact with one another as friends.

Stella is again attending therapy sessions to cope with over-eating, a recurring problem, and to deal with sexual abuse issues which have surfaced recently. Though Stella has been exploring relationships with other men, she believes that in the past she has chosen male partners unwisely. She says that she is committed to increasing her awareness of how she chooses men who she perceives are not nurturing or accepting of her. In the meantime, she perceives herself to be tentative about relationships with men.

Overview of the Women's Stories

As each woman told the story of her extramarital experience, she referred at times to her family of origin and to her childhood experiences. The descriptions of the families of origin were not solicited by the investigator but arose, it appears, in the women's attempts to describe their concept of themselves and to acknowledge the impact which their family environment had on them during their early childhood and adolescent years.

The women's descriptions suggest that they felt the families in which they grew up did not provide the kind of nurturing, emotional support, and unconditional acceptance which would have contributed to greater psychological health. The women reported a lack of emotional connection and validation, particularly from their fathers, which they felt would have helped them to achieve a greater sense of security, self-
acceptance, and self-confidence as girls and as young women. Most of the women in the study reported that their relationships with their fathers were either non-existent or distant. Alison reported that she was raised without a father from the age of 5, while Cheryl said that her father spent long periods away from home during her childhood and then finally left when she was 15. Lilias reported that she did not feel close to her father who she saw as rigidly protective of her. She reported that she did not respect him due to his inability to provide a better lifestyle for his family. These three women, all of whom had several extramarital affairs, wondered if their multiple affairs were an attempt to find acceptance, attention, and nurturance from a male person or father figure. In attempting to understand their affairs, they questioned whether their affairs were an attempt to search for the loving fathers they longed for and never had. Cheryl and Lilias both noted that they had affairs with men who were 30 years older than they were.

Cheryl, Lilias and Alison are still married to their long-term partners. Alison reports that her relationship with her husband, as a result of his discovery of her last affair, has blossomed and grown into a new opportunity for intimacy. Lilias says that she has resigned herself to staying with her husband and two adult children, who are not yet independent, and to being a support for them. But she is very clear about the importance of her own needs and pursues her life in ways that are satisfying for her. For now, this does not include having more affairs. Cheryl reported that she will stay with her young family and husband until her children are launched, while continuing to have many affairs for the fun, the excitement, and the pleasure which they provide.

Stella and Vicki had only one affair each and are now both divorced. Both Stella and Vicki grew up in alcoholic homes. Stella reported that her mother was an alcoholic. She said that her father became emotionally distant to her after she was sexually abused at the age of 7 or 8. Vicki reported that her father was an alcoholic who was physically abusive to her mother and to the family property and verbally
abusive to his children when he was drunk. At other times, he was loving and fun. Neither of these women made any connection between their affairs and their emotionally unavailable fathers. Stella has remained single for four years and Vicki wonders if she will ever find a partner who can offer her the close emotional connection she longs for in a relationship.

It appears that the women in the study shared some common conditions in their families of origin, but they differed in their understanding of how this related to their affairs. There also appears to be some commonalities in experience and outcome among the three women who had several affairs in contrast to the two women who had only one affair. The three women who had many affairs appear to have formulated a concept of self which included involvement in extramarital affairs, into their identities as individuals and as married women. These three women are presently still married to their spouses. Two report being presently not involved in affairs, while one woman reports that she continues to engage in affairs.

The two women who had only one affair, are presently both divorced and single. It appears that their experience of their only affairs did not result in a reorganization of their identities to include involvement in extramarital relationships. Their experience of their affairs appears to be related to an increase in awareness of the depth of their dissatisfaction with their marriages as well as a reassessment of their commitment to remain in their long-term relationships.

**Common Themes**

The process of data analysis revealed five common themes which emerged from the women’s in-depth interviews and the subsequent validation interviews. Each of the identified themes reflects the experience of all of the women. The words of the women have been selected for their ability to illustrate and exemplify the experiences of all of the participants.

Three of the following themes are presented in pairs, each pair representing the
dichotomous facets of the same experience. They are juxtaposed to represent the conflicting experiences of the participants as they interacted and related with their husbands and affair partners in their everyday lives. The data analysis appeared to present a triangular image of husband/participant/affair partner, with the participant perceiving conflicting reflections of herself in her relationship with her husband juxtaposed to her relationship with her affair partner. One of the participants, Alison, captured this experience in these words: "And so I was fed all this information on one side, from everybody [other men], and then fed a different message from him [her husband]. And that sows the seeds of resentment right there." The two remaining themes do not represent a dichotomous experience and thus stand on their own.

The five common themes are presented below. The first three themes represent the participants' experiences as they engaged in their affairs while simultaneously maintaining their relationships with their husbands. The last two themes are related to the participants' experiences resulting from the consequences of their affairs. Some themes may have been experienced more intensely at certain times in the experience than at other times for each of the women in the study.

The five themes are as follows:

1. The experience of powerlessness in the marriage/power in the affair.
2. The experience of invalidation in the marriage/validation in the affair.
3. The experience of disconnection in the marriage/connection in the affair.
5. The experience of sexual reawakening/pleasure.

The Experience of Powerlessness in the Marriage/Power in the Affair

The Marriage. The theme of feeling powerless to change things for themselves in their marriages was an experience which was shared by all five participants in the study. Some of the women reported that they felt they had an equal say in the everyday practical decisions of their relationship and families, but experienced
powerlessness in getting their personal needs met in the relationship. The women felt "helpless," "powerless," "bogged under," "not strong enough," trapped and immobilized in their attempts to change their relationships with their husbands and/or their situations within their marriages, and to transform them into something more personally meaningful.

All five participants reported feeling powerless in their relationships with their husbands, although this was expressed in different ways. They experienced an imbalance of power in their marital relationships. They failed in their efforts to change the balance of power to be more equitable. They reported feeling frustrated by their husbands' apparent indifference or lack of cooperation. They described how their requests to engage their husbands in a dialogue about their dissatisfactions and discontentment in their marriages or to seek professional help for their marriages, were met with denial, indifference or silence.

This experience of powerlessness is reflected in the words of Stella, as she recalls the inequity in her marital relationship even when seeking professional help. In reflecting on this experience Stella said:

It seemed every time I went for marriage counselling, I felt beaten afterwards...but I thought, okay, we're going to work at this. We're going to compromise, he's going to get some things he wants and I'm going to get some things that I want. It's going to work. And it was always his turn and it was never my turn.

Vicki also demonstrated the experience of powerlessness as she reflected on her perceived lack of efficacy to have any effect on improving her situation in her marriage. Vicki perceived herself as extremely powerless at this stage in her relationship with Ken. Towards the end of a two-year depression Vicki reported a lack of interest in everything and everyone around her. Recalling the time just before she decided to engage in her affair, she reflected on her desperation:
Like, an analogy would be just that snowball, going down the hill and I was
going faster and faster and I was losing it. I thought I was going crazy. I just
couldn't do anything. I was totally helpless, totally powerless. I just had to get
out.

For each of the women in the study, the experience of powerlessness in their marriages
was viewed as a motivating factor in engaging in their extramarital relationships.

Part of the experience of powerlessness was reported by the women as a sense
of feeling "overwhelmed" as well as constrained in their roles as homemakers and
mothers. This was experienced in different ways by each of the women. Lilias
provided an example of this experience. She reported feeling overwhelmed, "stuck,"
trapped and isolated in her marriage when her children were young and she lived on a
farm on the prairies. Her sense of despair and helplessness are apparent in the
following passage as she describes her feelings a few years before her first affair:

I was just bogged, bogged under with these kids to look after, in very poor
physical health and living on this dreary farm with the snow in the winter and it
was just desolate.... And I was desolate too. I was very desolate.... And so
twice in [province] I tried to kill myself. Um, I think it was, as they say, a cry
for help.

The women's stories contained the shared experience of powerlessness. Each of
the five women reflected on their experience of feeling a lack of power and efficacy to
change things in their marriages and to engage their husbands in a dialogue about their
concerns and dissatisfactions. They sought cooperation from their husbands and they
longed to have equal power in their relationships with them, but perceived that despite
their considerable efforts, nothing changed for them.

The Affair(s). In their affairs, however, the five women experienced a much
greater sense of control over themselves and experienced themselves as having choices
which they made within the context of their affairs and with their affair partners. They
experienced themselves as having the power to attract a man, to keep him interested, and to have a fair and equal say in how the relationship was to be. Most importantly, they perceived themselves as having the power to begin an affair as well as having the power to end the affair at any time and for any reason without the same consequences or far-reaching effects as ending a long-term marriage. This appeared to be a large part of the appeal and attraction of the affairs for the five women.

The five women experienced a great sense of control with their affair partners in having what they perceived to be an equal say in how the relationship was to be lived out. The details of the affairs, such as where the encounter would take place, how often they would see each other, and what the purpose of the affair was to be, were perceived by the women in the study to be equally shared decisions with their affair partners. An example of this experience is reflected in Alison's words, as she recounts how her affair partner attempted to pressure her into making their relationship more than an affair: "I told him I didn't think we had a basis for that strong a relationship, and there were things that we probably wouldn't get along, some space we wouldn't get along in and it definitely wasn't practical." Each of the women recalled similar incidents with their affair partners that demonstrated their ability to control the direction and quality of their affairs.

For all of the participants, the actual decision to have an affair, whether consciously planned or not, appeared to give the women a sense of control in their lives in a way that they had not experienced in their marriages. For example, Vicki reported that she was depressed for two years before her affair and despaired of ever persuading her husband to join her in making changes in their marriage. She perceived the act of having the affair as a powerful act of survival at a time when she "felt like [she] was dying." She came to believe that choosing to have an affair was an affirmation of self: "I saw myself on the brink of losing myself.... It was a survival thing. No, my kids weren't important at all....I just had to get out. I had to get out to save myself." All
five women experienced themselves as being in control of their lives through choosing to have an affair. The women reported that the sense of having greater control was a large factor in their motivation for becoming involved in extramarital affairs.

The five participants not only felt powerful to control the direction and purpose of their affairs, they also felt empowered by the perceived effect of their physical appearance and personality on their affair partners. An example of this is reflected in Cheryl's words as she recalls the "stunned" response she still experiences from meeting new affair partners for the first time. In the following passage Cheryl captures the feelings of power that were part of each of the women's experiences: "And I get great-actually, it's power, isn't it, I guess too? I get tremendous power out of that!"

The women's need to have control in their lives, especially when they felt powerless in their marriages, translated into a lack of willingness to stay in an affair when this need was challenged by their affair partners in any way. This experience of feeling in complete control of themselves with their affair partners is reflected in the comments of Lilias who experienced each of her many affair partners as eventually becoming "controlling" and "manipulative." Whenever Lilias felt that her opinions and decisions were disregarded by her affairs partners or she felt disrespected by them, she said it was "time to rebel." She reported feeling "manipulated" by one affair partner: "I found him trying to impose his thoughts and beliefs on me and trying to control me, which I resented." As a result of this experience, she ended this affair shortly thereafter. None of the women in the study were willing to tolerate any challenge to their right to maintain control of the extent of their involvement in their extramarital relationships.

In summary, an analysis of the five women's narratives revealed that all of the participants experienced a great sense of efficacy and control in their affairs. The decision to engage in an affair, the experience of having a voice in the direction and purpose of their affairs and the experience of feeling attractive and desirable to their
affair partners all contributed to a great sense of control and empowerment by all five women.

The Experience of Invalidation in the Marriage/Validation in the Affair

The Marriage. An examination of the women's stories revealed the shared experience of feeling invalidated in their marriages. This was experienced in many different ways for each of the participants. They felt "cheated" and betrayed when their expressed needs were ignored or not met. They felt overruled or shut-out by their husbands. They felt "exhausted," "ill," and "overworked" by the demands of motherhood and family life. They felt "unhappy," "sad," "depressed," "disappointed in life." They had "no enjoyment" in their marriages. They felt "real bad" and "awful" in their marriages. They felt "unappreciated," "undesirable," "rejected," "abandoned," "bored," "angry," "lonely," unacknowledged and unrecognized.

All of the women in the study felt invalidated by their husbands. They reported that they approached their husbands about concerns they had about their marital relationships, only to feel invalidated by their husbands' responses. An example of this experience is reflected in the words of Stella as she recalls her feelings early on in her second marriage. She and her husband Andy attended marriage encounter sessions through their church to improve their marriage and to learn to compromise. Stella's experiences in these counselling sessions only reinforced her feelings of invalidation in her marriage and also highlighted the pervasive influence of the social/political context of married women in our patriarchal culture. She recalled how invalidated and angry she felt at a time when she expected to have her feelings validated:

And every counsellor that we ever went to was a man and I always felt like I was this bad little girl sitting there, when there were these men telling--almost telling me that I didn't have a right to feel the way that I felt. And it really made me angry, because dammit, that's how I was feeling! And I always left feeling like Andy had won and I had lost.
Each of the women in the study experienced similar feelings of invalidation in their marriages.

Another way in which the women experienced invalidation was in the betrayal of their expressed needs in the marriage relationship. These needs were different for each of the women. An example of one way in which this was experienced was reported by Lilias. She felt a profound sense of invalidation, disappointment and betrayal of her personal goals as she struggled with returning to school after many years of being at home raising her children and at a time when she was physically weakened by a major operation. She reflected on her sense of betrayal and disappointment in the following passage:

And so I would come home from college and there'd be a sink full of dishes and dinner to get ready and no one would help me. So after three weeks, I just gave up. So that was a big disappointment.

Each of the women in the study recalled similar incidents which reflected their feelings of betrayal by their partners in their refusal to acknowledge the women's needs.

In summary, all of the women in the study experienced a profound sense of invalidation of themselves, of their feelings, and of their needs in their marriages. Although they made many attempts to renegotiate aspects of their relationships with their partners to reflect recognition and support for their needs and feelings, the women did not achieve their objectives.

The Affair(s). In contrast to their marital relationship, all of the women in the study experienced validation of their feelings and needs in their affairs and with their affair partners. They felt "lovable," "good," "wonderful," "appreciated," "secure," and "flattered" by the attention. They felt acknowledged and affirmed. They felt "feminine" and "beautiful." They felt visible and experienced their voices as being heard. Their sense of self-esteem increased significantly as they felt "worthy" and "appreciated."
They felt validated by their affair partners who were "easy to get along with," "seductive," "intellectually stimulating," "articulate," "fun," "enjoyable" and who shared ordinary pleasures with them such as dinner invitations, dancing in public places, engaging in significant conversations, walking together out-of-doors or making love in the moonlight. Their affairs were a "romantic interlude," a "mental release," a welcomed "escape" from the "boredom" and "hum drum" of their everyday lives and the demands of their roles as wives and mothers.

For each of the women, this sense of validation was experienced in ways that demonstrated to them that their affair partners accepted them unconditionally, at least for the duration of the affair. For example, Lilias recounted a time when she felt embarrassed about her body. When she mentioned this to her lover, "B," she felt that his response was very validating to her: "He made me feel very special. He always made me feel wonderful.... He just loves me the way I am." All of the women in the study recounted similar incidents of feeling physically and emotionally accepted and validated in their affairs.

In stark contrast to their marriages, all of the women received validation from the fact that their affair partners were very responsive to their expressed needs in the relationship. An example of this is reflected in Cheryl's words in the following passage, recalling an incident early in her relationship with "F." As their sexual explorations unfolded, she felt affirmed and validated by his response to her needs in the sexual relationship, an experience she had sought after and discussed in her sexual relationship with her husband, without success:

He clued in right away that I like to [be touched] not only firm, but a bit rough. And so he just satisfied that right away! He was rough and it was great! You know, beating him off and that kind of thing. I loved it!

In their affairs, all of the women felt nurtured and cared for, appreciated and valued for themselves. This was experienced as very life-affirming. An example of
this experience is reflected in Vicki's words as she recalled a time when she felt depressed and numbed by her inability to get her needs met in her marriage. She felt overwhelmed by the demands of her three children, the unresponsiveness of her husband and the endless household responsibilities. "G" invited her to come out to his home. There she felt nurtured, appreciated and valued for herself, an experience which was life-affirming to her:

He had a place [that was] very peaceful. He didn't have anybody around. He has no children. Very large spot, view of the mountains, very peaceful. He'd put on music and it was almost like, it was like I was coming alive again.

All of the women in the study experienced a profound sense of validation in their affairs. They experienced validation of themselves as sexual beings, as "feminine" and "beautiful," as "worthy" and "lovable." They experienced their expressed needs being met and their feelings being accepted and honoured.

The Experience of Disconnection in the Marriage/ Connection in the Affair

The Marriage. All five women in the study felt disconnected in their relationships with their husbands. They experienced this disconnection in many different ways. They felt emotionally detached, "isolated," "empty," "desolate," "on different paths," "starved for emotional support," "deprived of affection," disengaged from, and distant from their husbands. The experience of emotional disconnection also included a lack of intimacy; intimacy being defined by the women as the willingness to mutually self-disclose as well as the willingness to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings with their partners. The five participants described their marital relationships as reaching a point where they were "just living in the same house" and as "empty." They experienced "loneliness" in the marriage and feelings of abandonment.

The experience of disconnection also included a "yearning for something missing," an "emptiness," a feeling that there was a "deep abyss inside me." The sense of longing for something which all of the women had trouble identifying, appears to
relate to an earlier memory when they once felt connected. This connection was experienced by all of the women in the study at a previous time with either a lover before marriage or with their husbands in the early years of their marriages. An example of how this was experienced is reflected in Vicki's words as she recalled a time very early in her marriage when she did feel connected to her husband:

I'm unhappy and I don't know why. In hindsight, the reason is because I'm lonely. I don't have that relationship with my husband anymore that he's my soulmate. We were just a man and a woman living together raising children.

All of the women recalled experiences with their husbands which reflected a sense of loss—loss of a closeness and intimacy which they had once shared in the early years of the marital relationship.

All of the women in the study reported that they experienced important changes in their personal lives, which impacted on their marital relationships. Some of these changes occurred as a result of a commitment to personal growth. This appears to have created a sense of disconnection between themselves and their husbands, especially when their husbands did not want to join them in this kind of growth. An example of this is reflected in Cheryl's words as she recounts her view of her relationship with her husband: "I feel as though we're on different paths now and unless something unbelievable happens, I can't see us converging again." Cheryl's words describe a kind of parallel and disconnected relationship which was reported by all the women in the study.

Some of the women in the study reported that their experiences in their affairs heightened their perceptions of their marital relationships. An example of this is reflected in Alison's words, as she attempted to make sense of the lack of intimacy in her marriage: "And something that always puzzles me is, I'm always able to be more open with another person [affair partner] than with my husband and I don't know why that is?" It is in the context of her affairs that Alison became aware that it was not only
her husband who erected barriers to intimacy, but that she herself had an active part in fostering distance in her marital relationship. Without her experience of a different kind of relationship in her affairs, she may never have gained this insight. Many of the women became aware of the disconnection between themselves and their husbands from the experience of their affairs.

This sense of disconnection that the women experienced in their marital relationships appeared to be an important motivating factor in the women's affairs. The five women seemed to have eventually reached a point of acceptance of, or resignation to, the disconnectedness in their marriages. They appeared unwilling to disrupt the family unit and their children's lives by leaving their husbands, until they perceived there was no further hope for a better relationship. For the three women who were not divorced, most often, concerns about the children's welfare stopped them from leaving, as well as a sense of insecurity in launching out into the world alone. For all of the women, whether they worked full-time or part-time, financial dependency on their husbands was a factor in keeping them in their marriage or delaying their departure.

In summary, all of the women in the study experienced a great degree of disconnection in their marital relationships. They experienced a lack of intimacy with their husbands and described marital relationships that were "empty," "lonely," and "deprived." The five women experienced a relationship that, in Vicki's words, was paradoxically characterized as "this living together loneliness."

The Affair(s). In contrast to their marriages, the five women experienced connectedness in their affairs and with their affair partners. They reported feeling "connected," "emotionally connected," "attached to," "touched by" the men with whom they shared their time, their bodies and their hearts. The three participants who had more than one affair in the course of their marriages, reported that they did not have the experience of connectedness with all of their affair partners, but that they had
experienced it with at least one affair partner. The experience of connectedness also included a perception of feeling nurtured and cared for, of "just being together," of relating to someone who had "a sympathetic ear," who was "giving you comfort," and who "maybe listened to you."

The five women experienced an emotional connection with their affair partners in ways that suggested that intimacy and relating on a meaningful level were important aspects of this experience. This connection was experienced by each of the women in different ways. For example, to Vicki, the need to feel connected to a husband/partner is "the most important part." In reflecting on her affair experience, she spoke of the fundamental importance to her of feeling connected to a male partner: "I'd rather live in poverty with a man who's my soulmate than live in a castle with a man that I don't feel connected to." Vicki was very articulate about the importance of "being connected" in a relationship. She reported that her two-year depression was a direct result of not being able to regain this kind of intimacy with her husband from an earlier time in their marital relationship. When she realized there was no hope left to recover this with her husband, she felt as if her life were ending: "I'm going to die. I felt like I was dying." Each of the five women spoke passionately about the importance of feeling connected in a relationship.

For some of the women, the theme of connection was experienced with their affair partners as a direct result of opening themselves to new possibilities in these sexual and emotional relationships. An example of this is reflected in Cheryl's words as she described the impact her affair partner had on her when she opened herself to learning something new about herself and her sexuality. A close bond between herself and her lover developed from their encounters, in spite of her initial determination not to become attached to him: "I've been kind of overwhelmed with this last one and he probably touched me more than anybody I've ever met in my life in a lot of ways."
was perceived by Cheryl as "empowering." It appears that the mutual openness and honesty with one another, as well as the shared experience of self-discovery, deepened the connection between them, at least from Cheryl's point of view. Though Cheryl perceived that she made attempts to engage her husband in a more connected and meaningful relationship, she reported that he was not open to this kind of experience. Many of the women in the study reported similar experiences of connectedness in their affairs.

Part of the experience of connection for all of the participants appeared to incorporate the "emotional" and "spiritual" aspects of relationships. All of the women reported that though sex was an important part of their affairs, it "was not the most important part." Not all of the women's affairs were described as emotional and spiritual, but all five women had at least one affair which was described in this way. An example of this experience is reflected in Lilias' words as she described her first encounter with one of her affair partners. This encounter appeared to have overtones of a form of spiritual/religious transformation for her in the shared sexual experience with her affair partner:

And I'll never forget that night. I had candles in the bedroom and I brought him up to bed. And he didn't seem to want to have actual sex with me.... I lay in bed and he was kneeling in front of me. It was almost like he was kneeling in front of an altar. And my womanhood was the altar. It was very ritualistic, but it was almost spiritual, religious, because [of] the candle light and we were in the bed and he just knelt in front of me and I guess he touched me. But it was wonderful.

Lilias' experience appeared to have connected her with her own sense of sexual and spiritual potency. Her words reflected a reverence of her own femaleness. Her lover's reported speechlessness and gentle appreciation of her female body served to reinforce this powerfully felt experience and contrasted sharply with her relationship with her
husband. In her marital relationship, she felt repulsed by her husband physically and "could not stand to have him near [her]." All of the women in the study experienced similar kinds of emotional/spiritual connections with at least one of their affair partners.

Another facet to the theme of connectedness which emerged from the women's narratives suggested that when they were with their affair partners, they felt freer to act in ways that were congruent with their feelings. The women's words implied that when their authentic selves were accepted and validated by their affair partners, they experienced a sense of connection. The sense of connection which they described and which they attributed to being with their affair partners, may actually be better described as a reconnection--to aspects of themselves that they had forgotten, lost or suppressed in the years of being in a long-term marital relationship.

To summarize, the five participants experienced intimacy and connectedness in their affairs, which had been lost in their marriages. The experience of feeling connected appeared to be more accurately described as a reconnection to aspects of their sexual and emotional/spiritual selves which they perceived they had once experienced in the past and had subsequently lost.

The Experience of Shame/Self-Blame/Guilt

This theme appears to be related to a perception of a lack of entitlement by the women. All five women in the study expressed the experience of shame/self-blame/guilt in relation to their self-perceptions and in relation to how they perceived their extramarital behavior impacting their marriages and families. The lived experience of this theme was further heightened for the five women by the social/political context. The women in the study perceived that our culture is harshly critical of adulterous women who, for their own needs and pleasure, transgress the religious and political rules of western patriarchy as enshrined in the religious and legal institution of marriage.
In relation to their decision to participate in an affair, the women experienced themselves as "a really horrible person," "a bad woman," "a bad girl" and they sometimes experienced self-hatred. When there were difficulties in their marriages, they blamed themselves: "something wrong with me," "always my fault," something "lacking in me," as "never feeling good enough." They perceived that they lived in nice homes and with husbands who weren't alcoholic, didn't gamble or beat them, and who were responsible providers. They felt guilty about their feelings of being "lonely," "bored," "depressed" and "unfulfilled."

The five women felt "embarrassed" about their sexual needs and "ashamed" of their bodies. They felt the weight of social expectations for women to have sex with men only when they were in love with them. They felt shame and guilt for engaging in "friendly," "casual," "fun" affairs to fulfill unmet needs and for their own pleasure.

The five women felt an overwhelming sense of "guilt," "crushing guilt," not in relation to the affair itself, but for "breaking some code," for daring to transgress the rule of sexual exclusivity in their marriages. They also felt guilty for the deception they perpetrated in order to keep the affair a secret. An example of this experience is captured in Alison's words as she reflected her fear of being judged for her behavior: "Well, obviously, it's cheating. It's lying. It's not playing fair. It's not playing straight." Most of the women expressed their guilt and shame in similar terms.

The five women experienced guilty feelings about their decision to engage in an affair, which they perceived as "self-centered," "selfish," and as benefitting only themselves. Their experience in the affair itself was not what generated their guilty feelings. Their extramarital behavior, set against stereotypical gender expectations of women as giving, nurturing and self-sacrificing, appeared to create a moral dilemma for the women. Each struggled with how they could commit themselves to doing something they found pleasurable, validating, and empowering, when there were potentially very serious consequences for their marriages, for their children and for the
family unit, if their affairs were discovered.

The theme of shame/self-blame/guilt was expressed in many different ways. An example of this experience is reflected in the words of Cheryl, who often spoke of herself in humorous but self-deprecating terms. She minimized her feelings about her marriage and her unmet needs, reflecting a sense of shame or embarrassment in having needs at all:

I'm your basic middle-class, well-fed, bored, unfulfilled housewife and I suppose if we were living in Bosnia, we wouldn't have time to worry about whether our little emotional needs were fulfilled, would we?

Cheryl's words are typical of all of the women in the study. They felt tremendously guilty for having emotional and sexual needs and for choosing to go outside the marital relationship in order to satisfy these needs.

The women in the study felt guilty and they blamed themselves for damaging the family image, whether their affairs were discovered or not. An example of this is reflected in Vicki's words as she described her guilt as "crushing" and "all consuming."

After she told her husband about her affair and then left him and their three children to be with her affair partner, she felt ashamed, guilty and at fault: "I've ruined this perfect family image." She reported that her family and her husband's family were shocked by her behavior and that they demanded a valid reason for her actions:

If I could have picked up the phone and said to my mom, well, he had an affair...is an alcoholic and hits me...has gambled away all our life savings....

They wanted validation. They wanted to know, give me a reason right now.

Give me a reason, one simple reason why this has happened.

Vicki perceived that feeling "lonely," "depressed," and "unhappy" in her marital relationship and "not connected" to her husband were not acceptable reasons for her to have an affair and to leave her marriage. After all, didn't she have all the trappings of what her culture assumed would make her happy: "a beautiful home, three gorgeous
children, a fantastic husband..., income..., security..., everything, everything...."?

All of the women in the study reported similar experiences of shame/self-blame, and guilt.

The five participants in the study experienced tremendous guilt about their choice to participate in an affair. An example of this is reflected in Stella's words as she recalled her one-night stand. She perceived her experience as empowering and validating, reporting that "this was the first time I ever felt really good...and I enjoyed it!" However, her initial enjoyment of her experience in her affair subsequently generated painfully guilty feelings for her, a belief that she was a "real bad woman" and that she had betrayed not only her husband, but her children:

I felt so guilty, like I had done something really wrong and really bad and I had to be a really horrible person because I did this and my husband didn't deserve this. I mean, I had two kids at home and just all these horrible feelings.

The feelings of guilt and shame expressed by Stella appear to centre around her perceptions of having broken the fidelity of her marriage. Her words also reflect her guilt around the potentially negative impact which the discovery of her affair could have on her husband and children.

To summarize, the five women in the study experienced shame/self-blame/guilt in relation to self-perceptions of being at fault in their marriages, for having sexual and emotional needs at all and for choosing to have an affair to meet these needs. One of the husbands discovered evidence of his wife's affair, and a second husband was informed of his wife's affair just before she left the marriage. The remaining three husbands were apparently unaware of their wives' affairs. All of the participants reported feeling shame/self-blame/guilt about themselves, about their choice to engage in an extramarital affair, and about the potentially negative consequences of the affair (or affairs) on their significant others, whether their affairs had been discovered or not.
The Experience of Sexual Reawakening/Pleasure

All five women in the study experienced a sexual and sensual reawakening and felt a sense of great pleasure and enjoyment in their affairs. The experience of reawakening suggested that the women perceived that they had "shut down" sexually in early adulthood or after a period of time in their marriages when their sexual relationships with their husbands had become "empty," "boring," or non-existent. Some of the women perceived that they had a higher sex drive than their husbands and reported that this created difficulties in their relationships, gradually contributing to a decline in sexual activity in the marriage.

All of the women in the study had two or three children and most of them experienced the early parenting years as "overwhelming" and "absorbing all my energies." Three of the participants had full-time or part-time jobs outside the home when their children were young, while the other two remained at home full-time. Some of the women perceived themselves as very involved in their families, as "supermom," "volunteering for everything, running myself so thin" and this appeared to have diverted their energies away from their sexuality and their own pleasure. An example of how draining this time was for the women when their children were young is captured in Vicki's words: "There's only so much of you to go around."

In their affairs, the women perceived themselves as "coming alive again." The experience of being "pursued," of "pursuing," and engaging in "the chase" was perceived by the women as "very exciting," as "living on a top of a volcano." They felt "like a teenager." In the course of this experience of reawakening, the five women experienced pleasurable feelings about themselves and their bodies. The sexual experience with their lovers was described as "wonderful," "awesome," "incredible," "a little scary and it was kind of exciting," "fun," "enjoyable," "therapeutic," "wild and wacky," "all-consuming," "totally obsessed," "unbridled," "gave me a real high."

The experience of pleasure, of sex for "fun" and "enjoyment" appears to be a
major motivational factor for participating in affairs for the women in the study. Their affairs were perceived by the participants to exist almost solely for their own enjoyment and pleasure. The women spoke of their affairs as the one place where they were at the centre of an enjoyable experience, in a mutually pleasurable relationship with their affair partners. This was perceived by all of the women to be in sharp contrast to their experiences in their marriages, where they reported feeling almost solely responsible for the nurturing and care-taking of their families and where they perceived that their needs came last, not first.

Though the women in the study experienced sexual reawakening/pleasure in different ways, this theme was expressed by all of the women. An example of this experience is reflected in Vicki’s words as she experienced her affair partner’s love and attention in the caring and nurturing surroundings of his home. Vicki felt herself "coming alive again [italics added]." In her marriage, she reported that she "felt like [she] was dying." Though she reported that sex with her husband was "satisfactory," she perceived it as "empty." It had not always been that way. In the beginning of their marriage, when she reported she was "in love" with her husband, she recalled that their sexual relationship was "good." It appeared that the loss of what she called "connection" had a significantly negative effect on her sexual relationship with her husband. Vicki’s apparent reawakening of her sexuality in her affair resulted in her becoming less willing to remain in her marital relationship where she perceived that she could not "survive." This experience in her affair became a motivational factor in her departure from her marriage.

When the women in the study became involved with their affair partners sexually and experienced their affairs as pleasurable, they became aware that they had lost touch with the sexually vital and pleasurable facets of themselves. This experience appears to have created a clarity about themselves that they had not experienced before, or had lost, and it also brought with it a sense of urgency to continue to explore what
they had rediscovered. An example of this experience is reflected in Cheryl's words as she attempted to make sense of her reawakening: "So I think I had shut down. It's the whole sexual side of myself and I think in a way, when you get to my age, you start to think, well, if I am going to have a look at this, I'm running out of time." She reported that her sexual desires "increased unbelievably" when all of her children were in school full-time and she returned to university and to the adult world. She began her "sexual odyssey" soon after.

Part of the experience of sexual reawakening/pleasure for the five women included a growing awareness of how boring and unexciting sex had become in their long-term marital relationships. The women appeared to have gained this awareness from the perspective of their affairs, where they rediscovered an enthusiasm for sex and pleasure they thought they had lost. An example of this is reflected in Alison's words as she recalled how knowing her husband for such a long time had dampened their desire for one another: "Maybe the problem was that we were too much like friends instead of lovers." She perceived that their relationship had become more like companionship, had become "boring." She remarked that "...even Mel Gibson's wife was bored." In her affair with "J," she experienced a renewal or reawakening, perceiving that "J was very turned on by me." This experience gave her the pleasure of perceiving herself as still attractive and desirable at a time when she believed that her husband did not feel this way about her. All of the women in the study reported similar experiences of reawakened sexuality and pleasure in their affairs.

In summary, this sense of renewal or reawakening of their sexuality was shared by all of the women in the study though this experience was expressed in different ways. The women appeared to have regained contact with their sexual and sensual selves through their experiences in a mutually pleasurable relationship with their affair partners. This experience appears to have brought with it a joyousness and pleasure in themselves and in their bodies which the women believed they had forgotten or lost.
This experience of reconnecting to the vital and joyous parts of themselves, which were rediscovered in the context of their extramarital affairs, was felt by all of the women to be empowering, validating and pleasurable.
Chapter Five - Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter includes a restatement of the purpose of the study, a synopsis of the women's narratives, and a comparison of the findings with the literature. The chapter concludes with an overview of implications for future research, a discussion of practical implications for counselling, and a brief conclusion.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the subjective experience of women's clandestine heterosexual extramarital affairs as they were lived and experienced by women in long-term married or cohabiting relationships. A phenomenological perspective (Colaizzi, 1978) informed this retrospective view of women's attempts to make meaning out of these experiences. The research question asked was: "What is the meaning of women's lived experience of extramarital affairs(s)?" Meaning is often implied, but rarely investigated (Cochran & Claspell, 1987). The researcher sought to illuminate the meaning of the experience of clandestine extramarital affairs for women, through an analysis of the participants' narratives.

Narrative of the Extramarital Experience

The following synthesized description of the women's experience of extramarital affairs follows a linear structure due to the constraints of language. Although the themes are described as if they were discrete, discontinuous, and sequential, it is important to keep in mind that the phenomenological perspective represents a holistic and integrated view of experience (Colaizzi, 1978, Giorgi, 1985). The themes were not experienced discontinuously in either time or space, but were interwoven and intertwined throughout the women's experiences, as the threads of a tapestry are intermingled to create an integrated and whole portrait. It is also important to remember that the portrait presented here is one which represents a moment in time. The women and their experiences continue in an on-going process of evolution and
transformation.

Prior to engaging in an extramarital affair (or affairs), the women's long-term marriages had become empty or dead. The women did not feel validated, nurtured, valued or accepted as individuals in their relationships. The women felt powerless to influence either their husbands or the circumstances in their marriages to create conditions that were more acceptable to themselves. They perceived that their desires for emotional connection, for intimacy with their spouses, and for a sense of spirituality within their marriages were frustrated by their husbands' apparent indifference or denial. The women did not feel that their expressed needs within their relationships, which for some included professional as well as personal goals, were validated or regarded as important by their husbands or families. The women felt profoundly betrayed by their husbands' apparent invalidation of themselves and their needs.

It appeared to the women that their needs were being denied by their husbands and sometimes their families, reflecting the cultural expectations of women to respond to the needs of others and not to voice their own needs. Yet in their long-term marriages, they felt that they had become responsible for meeting the needs of their husbands, their children and the family as a whole. They felt powerless to change the quality of their long-term relationships and their roles in their families. The women felt not only powerless, but trapped in their marital relationships and roles which had essentially become emotionally, spiritually, and sexually disconnected or dead for them.

As they moved through their everyday lives, sometimes through leaving home temporarily for a holiday or a conference, or in the context of their work or social activities, the women became acquainted with other men who responded to them in ways that contrasted sharply with their experience of their spouses' responses. Whether by design or by coincidence, the women eventually made a decision to engage in an affair as a way to get their needs met, after they perceived that every other conceivable
avenue within their marriages had been explored. At this point, the women did not consider leaving their husbands. They recognized their emotional and financial dependency on their husbands and most of the women cared deeply for their long-term partners. All of the women had children and they felt wholly responsible for keeping the marriage and family intact for the children’s benefit and for the sake of an intact family unit. This acted to inhibit them from leaving their marriages for at least several years, if not forever.

In their extramarital affairs, as the women experienced themselves with a partner who validated, accepted and honoured them, the affairs became the antithesis to their marriages. The women experienced themselves as having power and control in their affairs and as being able to influence the outcome of the interaction with their affair partners. Whatever the women voiced, whether it was their needs, their thoughts or their feelings, these were accepted and validated by their affair partners for at least as long as the affair lasted. There was a new opportunity for openness, honesty and intimacy with their affair partners to which the women opened themselves. Some of the women had recognized that old behaviors in their long-term relationships had become entrenched and were difficult to change. In their affairs, they experimented with new or forgotten behaviors, both emotional and sexual and were rewarded with acceptance, appreciation, and validation by their affair partners.

In their affairs, the women’s experiences reminded them of an earlier time, before marriage or in the early stage of their marriages, when they felt valued, prized, and connected to their partners. In their affairs, they rediscovered vital and exuberant aspects of themselves and their sexuality that had been buried or forgotten. This sexual reawakening and subsequent rediscovery of, and reconnection to parts of themselves, was experienced as validating, empowering and pleasurable to the women. Their affairs were a source of pleasure and excitement for them. They had fun and enjoyed themselves with their affair partners. Their affairs were a welcomed escape from the
constricting and demanding framework of daily marital and familial demands where the
women's own needs were not recognized, much less validated or fulfilled.

Although the women attempted to rationalize and justify their behavior, they felt
guilty for deceiving their husbands by keeping their affairs hidden from them. They
felt very guilty about the potential risks of their behavior to hurt the people they loved
and to disrupt their intact families. The women experienced shame and did not feel
entitled to their attempts to meet their needs. They were particularly ashamed of their
sexual needs and of the pleasure they received from their affairs. They saw themselves
as "bad women" for choosing to have an affair and enjoying it so much. They felt very
critical of themselves for choosing to engage in an affair as a way to get their sexual,
emotional and companionship needs met.

Before and also during their affairs, if anything was wrong in their marriages or
if their spouses were critical of them, they blamed themselves and tried in different
ways to change themselves or the situation. They blamed themselves for ruining the
image of their families as perfect or normal, whether or not their affairs were
discovered by their husbands or were publicly known.

In reviewing their lives and in retrospecting on their experience of affairs, the
women recognized and accepted the painful feelings generated by the shame and guilt
they felt for the potential and actual risks to themselves and to their loved ones. They
expressed their anger, frustration, sadness, and grief in relation to their inability to
transform their now superficial long-term relationships with their spouses into more
meaningful and connected relationships.

What the women gained through their extramarital experience was a clearer
sense of themselves as whole and authentic individuals, as women whose needs were
valid. They regained a sense of themselves as lovable, as worthy and as valued
individuals. Once they had regained this clarity about themselves through the
connection with their affair partners, they were unwilling to relinquish their experience
of empowerment, validation, connection and pleasure. What the women also gained was a knowledge of their own inner strength and courage to find a way that they could not only survive in their long-term relationships, but thrive, even though it meant breaking one of the strongest taboos in our culture.

None of the five women regretted their experiences in their affairs. For one participant, the affair was a catalyst resulting in a transformed and more satisfying marital relationship. For two others, their experience of their only affairs was a catalyst for eventually leaving their long-term relationships. The two remaining women, one of whom continues to engage in affairs, have chosen to remain with their husbands. Despite the costs to themselves, they persist in their marital relationships which continue to meet some of their needs, including financial and emotional security.

Comparison to the Literature

This study investigated the experience of clandestine heterosexual extramarital affairs for women in long-term marital or cohabiting relationships. The growing body of empirical research which has documented extramarital affairs is fraught with definitional problems. In particular, researchers have neglected to describe the specific dimensions of the extramarital affairs they are investigating (Thompson, 1983). Almost all of the researchers, whose work was reviewed in Chapter Two, fail to identify the specific dimensions of the affairs they are investigating. Therefore, definitional and methodological problems in this body of research, make comparisons and generalizations difficult.

In the present study, a qualitative methodology was employed to investigate the phenomenon of women's extramarital affairs. Most results of the studies reviewed in this investigation are based on a quantitative analysis of specific variables and indices of satisfaction. However, a comparison of the findings of this study to existing research findings will be attempted.

All five of the participants in this study had been engaged in relatively
traditional long-term marital relationships. Their affairs were deliberately hidden from their spouses. The women concealed their affairs to avoid negative consequences to themselves, to their spouses, and to their families and children. The women were also motivated to conceal their affairs, due to feelings of shame and guilt regarding their participation in an affair (or affairs). The women's many expressions of shame and guilt may reflect our culture's double standard: women are punished more harshly than men for engaging in extramarital affairs (Lampe, 1987; Lawson, 1988; Heyn, 1992). Thus, the differences between the findings of this present study and those cited in the literature, may be partially attributed to the fact that in this study, affairs which occurred without the consent of the spouse were the specific target of investigation.

Invalidation/Powerlessness

The five women in this study described their marriages as invalidating and as inequitable. For most, this perceived invalidation and feelings of powerlessness to change their marriages, served as a motivating factor in the decision to pursue an extramarital affair. This is consistent with the findings of many researchers and therapists who have attempted to discover antecedents or causes of extramarital affairs, (Bell et al., 1975; Brown, 1991; Edwards, 1973; Glass & Wright, 1985; Lawson, 1988; Pestrak et al., 1985; Rhodes, 1984; Spanier & Margolis, 1983; Thompson, 1983; Walster et al., 1978; Weil, 1975).

Most of the research investigating antecedents to extramarital affairs report that men may engage in extramarital sex even though they rate their marriages as happy or satisfactory (Glass & Wright, 1985; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Pestrak et al., 1985; Yablonsky, 1979), whereas women are reported to engage in extramarital sex more often when they rate their marriages as unhappy or unsatisfactory (Bell et al., 1975; Glass & Wright, 1985; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Pestrak et al., 1985). Women who engage in extramarital affairs report being dissatisfied with the emotional/communicative aspects of their long-term relationships, whereas men
engaging in affairs are reportedly motivated by curiosity, a need for success, sexual variety and excitement (Atwater, 1982). Men also frequently report discrepancy of desire in their sexual relationships with their long-term partners as a motivation for their extramarital sexual behavior (Greene et al., 1974; Meyering & Epling-McWherter, 1986; Pestrak et al., 1985; Yablonsky, 1979).

In contrast, some researchers have documented evidence of women engaging in affairs who reportedly rated their marriages as happy or satisfactory (Atwater, 1982; Bell et al., 1975; Heyn, 1992). However, Atwater (1982) and Bell et al. (1975) included in their studies women whose affairs occurred with the consent of their spouses. It may be that the women from these studies were satisfied with their marriages but had adopted an alternative lifestyle with their partners regarding the sexual exclusivity rule of traditional marriage. Heyn's (1992) study of clandestine affairs is the most recent in the field of women's extramarital affairs and her findings may reflect women's increasing commitment to their own personal growth and pleasure, whether it takes place within a long-term relationship or not.

The results of this present study suggest that the five women were motivated by a number of factors to engage in their clandestine affairs, most of which grew out of their dissatisfaction with their marital relationships. The three dichotomous themes identified by the researcher, which emerged from the women's stories, described marital relationships in which the women felt they had little control or power to effect change, to varying degrees, either for themselves or in their relationships. The women sensed that their needs in their relationships were invalidated by their spouses. The five women also felt emotionally disconnected from their partners and experienced a lack of intimacy in their long-term relationships with their partners. These findings are consistent with the findings reported by Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992). The women in these two studies reported feeling restricted in their roles as wives in traditional long-term relationships. They also perceived a lack of validation of their needs as well as a
lack of intimacy in their long-term relationships.

The women in Heyn's (1992) study reported feelings of invalidation in their marriages. Heyn insists that her subjects did not blame their spouses for not validating their needs or for being unaccepting of them, whereas the women in this study clearly identified their spouses as contributing to their feelings of invalidation. Heyn also was clear in stating that it was not marriage per se that constrained and confined the women in her study, but the expectation of selflessness and goodness embodied in the image of the Perfect Wife. The women in this present study described the constraints and limitations they felt in their long-term relationships, with their expectations of caring and service to others.

It was always an option for the five women to leave their long-term relationships which were reported to be so unhappy and unsatisfactory. The women said that they stayed because they still valued some aspects of their family life, including the financial and emotional security of their long-term relationships. Eventually, two of the women did leave.

Power/Validation

In contrast to their experiences of powerlessness and invalidation in their long-term relationships, the women reported feeling validated and having a sense of control in their affairs. In their affairs, the women had a strong sense of control over their lives and felt that they had an equal say in terms of influencing the direction and quality of the extramarital relationship. They felt validated personally and experienced their expressed needs being met. They felt emotionally connected to their affair partners and experienced an intimate relationship with them, for varying lengths of time. These findings are consistent with the findings of Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992), whose participants reported that learning about themselves through significant relationships with their affair partners contributed to their personal growth.

Research specifically directed at investigating issues of power and control in
marital and extramarital relationships is lacking in the research literature with one notable exception. Walster et al. (1978) suggest that extramarital sex may be viewed by some partners as an equity restoration mechanism. The themes of powerlessness and invalidation uncovered in the women's stories in this study reflect examples of many experiences of perceived inequity in their long-term relationships. Not only did they not succeed in changing things for themselves in their long-term relationships, they perceived their needs as being subordinate to their partners' or to their families' needs. When their continued requests for change failed, they felt distressed and unhappy. Eventually they found a way to restore equity in their long-term relationships by engaging in an affair. Here, they found their needs validated and their sense of control restored. The findings of this present study regarding the issues of power and control in the long-term relationship and its effect on the occurrence of extramarital affairs appear somewhat consistent with the results of the Walster et al. (1975) study, in that equity appeared to be temporarily restored for the women, by their involvement in relationships in which they felt personally empowered.

Three qualitative studies, using interviewing techniques, also found that power and control issues were important themes for women engaging in extramarital affairs (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992; Lawson, 1988). Atwater (1982) reported that the women in her study experienced an increased sense of power in their extramarital affairs in the context of what she describes as "the current disequilibrium in traditional male/female relationships" (Atwater, 1982, p. 66). The women in Atwater's study felt controlled and constrained by their roles as wives and mothers. They felt freer to invent new ways of relating, both emotionally and sexually, in their extramarital affairs. The women in the present study also felt empowered in their affairs to explore new emotional and sexual behaviors, while feeling trapped and overwhelmed by their roles as wives and mothers in their long-term relationships.

Heyn (1992) reported that the women in her study felt "powerful and equal and
freed from having to be pleasing--three aspects of relationship historically missing for women in conventional marriage" (p. 175). The women in the present study reported feeling powerful and equal in their affairs, finding their affairs a mutual source of pleasure. In their marriages, they perceived themselves as giving nurturance and pleasure to their spouses and families, while receiving little in return.

It is interesting to note that of the four studies (Atwater 1982; Heyn, 1992; Lawson, 1988; Walster et al., 1978) which documented power/equity issues in extramarital relationships, three were conducted by female researchers examining the experiences of women. Perhaps because men traditionally hold the power in male/female relationships (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992; Wine, 1985), power and inequity may not be as salient a factor in their extramarital experiences. Certainly for the women in Atwater's, Heyn's and Lawson's studies, as well as for the women in the present study, feelings of power and efficacy were very salient factors in their extramarital relationships.

In their affairs, the women in this study reported that they found acceptance and recognition of themselves as they were, not as they were expected to be. An important part of the experience of validation in affairs which was reported by the women was their affair partners' willingness to meet their expressed needs. The mutual and reciprocal nature of their extramarital relationships, was also reported as important for the women in studies by Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992).

Connection/Disconnection

The women in this study reported that they felt emotionally disconnected in their long-term relationships while feeling emotionally connected in their extramarital relationships. The findings of this study are consistent with existing research which indicates that women are more likely to become involved in an extramarital relationship when they feel emotionally disconnected from their spouses (Pestrak et al., 1985; Thompson, 1983). Lack of emotional connection was also reported by Atwater (1982)
and Heyn (1992) to be a motivating factor for becoming involved in an affair for the women in their research.

The kinds of extramarital relationships which the five women in this study described are consistent with the kinds of extramarital relationships reported by the women in the studies by Atwater (1982) and Heyn (1992). These studies described extramarital relationships that were characterized as intimate friendships. They were reported to be flawed and unidealized (Heyn, 1992) as well as nurturing and stimulating. In the present study, the five women reported that their extramarital relationships sometimes included times of conflict, but that they felt emotionally connected to their affair partners despite their differences. Many of the women in this study reported that their extramarital partners remained close friends for years after the sexual aspect of the affair was over, suggesting a level of intimacy, caring, and emotional commitment that is rarely reported in the extramarital relationships of men (Atwater, 1982; Glass & Wright, 1985; Pestrak et al., 1985; Spanier & Margolis, 1983).

Although the five women described their experience of connectedness in the context of their relationships with their affair partners, they also described a sense of reconnection with lost or repressed aspects of themselves which emerged out of their participation in these relationships. Within the context of equitable relationships in which their needs were considered important, the five women experienced growthful change. Within this context each of the women reported experiencing a reconnection to vital aspects of themselves which they had repressed or forgotten over the years of marriage and raising children.

This finding is consistent with the results of the qualitative studies mentioned in this review. Atwater (1982) identified one of the dominant themes for the women in her study as learning about the self through outside relationships. Lawson (1988) and Heyn (1992) also found similar examples of revitalization and regeneration reported by
the women in their research as a result of the positive experiences in their extramarital relationships.

Shame/self-blame/guilt

The women in the study felt shame and guilt and blamed themselves in general, both for having needs at all and in particular for choosing to fulfill those needs in an extramarital affair. This theme is generally supported in the studies conducted by Heyn (1992), Atwater (1982) and Lawson (1988). These three researchers describe in general terms how traditional relationships are constructed to deny women's needs for power, validation, connection, and pleasure in a patriarchal culture which values and protects male power and pleasure at the expense of women. According to these researchers, women in our culture who act in their own interests, especially women who engage in socially taboo behavior for pleasure, tend to perceive their behavior as selfish and egocentric. Feelings of shame and guilt are engendered by these cultural perceptions.

The five women in the study felt guilty not for the experiences in their affairs per se, but for breaking the accepted code of behavior in our culture. This is consistent with Goldstein (1988) who states that the extramarital behavior itself is not what produces shame and guilt; it is the breaking of the moral code that governs the sexual exclusivity rule of marriage that produces shame and guilt. He relates this to attitudes of ownership and possession of sexual property inherent in traditional marriage.

Spanier and Margolis (1983) reported guilt as a significant consequence for both men and women engaging in extramarital affairs, with the men in their study experiencing somewhat less guilt than the women. This differential finding according to gender may be related to the socialization of males and females in our culture which contributes to a different pattern of desire for males and females, one which encourages sexual entitlement in males and sexual accommodation in females (Jordan, 1987). The women in the present study reported feeling very guilty not only about deceiving their
spouses, but also about choosing to fulfill their sexual needs in an affair. Their descriptions of the guilt and shame they experienced appeared to reflect a lack of entitlement to engage in an activity that existed solely for their own sexual and emotional pleasure.

They also felt painfully guilty about the potential and actual destructive consequences to the people they loved and cared about, should their affairs be discovered. Self-in-relation theorists (Jordan, 1987; Kaplan, 1991; Surrey, 1991) propose that women define themselves largely through their connections with significant others. This may help explain the women's feelings of guilt and fear at potentially jeopardizing their marriages and causing pain to their partners and children, based on their own needs and desires for connection and pleasure.

Atwater's (1982) and Heyn's (1992) results, while consistent with the previously discussed findings of this study, do not support this theme of shame/self-blame/guilt. Seventy-five percent of Atwater's subjects reported that they felt justified in engaging in their affairs and reported no guilt. Heyn reports that her subjects were not "torn apart" (p. 249) by their affairs, nor did they feel "blameless or guilty" (p. 249). They appeared to come to rest ambiguously somewhere in the middle of these contradictory feelings. Methodological differences may account for this inconsistency. Atwater followed a structured schedule of questions during her in-depth interviews. Heyn appears to have followed a loosely structured set of questions, which she does not report in her study. This researcher did not question the participants in any structured manner, instead allowing each participant's story to emerge in an uninterrupted and unstructured manner. This may have allowed the theme of shame/self-blame/guilt to emerge from the women's stories, in their own personal attempts to make sense of their extramarital relationship experiences.

It is also important to remember that Atwater (1982) investigated affairs that occurred with the consent of the spouse as well as clandestine affairs. There would be
less likelihood of the women in her study feeling guilty about their affairs if they occurred with the consent of their partners, since shame and guilt is often associated with deceit and betrayal. This does not, however, account for the fact that guilt was not a significant theme for the women in Heyn's (1992) study, who were in closed marriages.

Sexual Reawakening/Pleasure

The women in the study reported substantial pleasure in their extramarital relationships. Their affairs were enjoyable, fun, and generated increased self-esteem and self-confidence. The goal of pleasure as a predominant motivational factor for women engaging in affairs was also reported by the women in Atwater's (1982) and Heyn's (1992) studies.

For the women in Atwater's (1982) study, the main purpose of their affairs was their own personal pleasure. Atwater observed that since there are no institutional patterns that define women's roles in an affair, the women in her study constructed a new sexual script that was female pleasure-oriented, including both physical and emotional pleasure. The women in this study reported that they also felt freer to explore new sexual and emotional behaviors with their affair partners than with their spouses and that these new behaviors were experienced as very pleasurable, revitalizing and empowering.

The theme of sexually joyous women was also reported by Heyn (1992). The women in her study perceived the role of wife as a "pointed renunciation of pleasure" (Heyn, 1992, p. 113). In their extramarital affairs, the women in Heyn's study recovered their capacity for pleasure which they felt had previously been lost to them. The women in the present study also reported their affairs to be a source of empowerment, validation, and emotional connection. Their affair experiences provided the women with a great sense of pleasure, excitement and fun. Not only did they report recovering their ability for enjoyment and pleasure, but through these
relationships they appeared to have reconnected to sensual aspects of themselves that they had forgotten.

There was little support in the existing literature for the sexual reawakening theme described in this study, with the exception of Heyn's (1992) and Atwater's (1982) studies. The women in Atwater's (1982) study reported that their sexual identities were transformed and expanded by the diversity of sexual and emotional experiences which they encountered in their extramarital relationships. Heyn (1992) describes the affair experience as a catalyst which helped the women in her study to rediscover lost aspects of themselves. The five women in this study used terms such as "come alive again" and referred to their teenage years as well as the early years of their marriages, when they had experienced themselves as vital, whole, and congruent. In their affairs, their dormant vital sexual selves were reawakened. Once they had experienced this reawakening, and the pleasure which accompanied it, the women in the study did not want to return to their previous experience of themselves in their marital relationships. In the vital connections to which they opened themselves with their affair partners, they regained a sense of clarity about themselves and their lives. This regained clarity contributed to positive changes for each of the women, albeit, in different ways. Their experiences in their affairs appeared to have initiated a process of healing as the women reintegrated forgotten aspects of their previous selves into their present identities.

Conclusion

Each of the women demonstrated great courage and inner strength in acknowledging the painful consequences of their decisions to become involved in their extramarital affairs. All five women recognized the rewards of their experiences in their affairs despite the outcome of their marital situations. Each of the women reported being enriched in many different ways by their experiences in their affairs.

Stella and Vicki have left their long-term relationships in which they could not
thrive. Alison is engaged in a transformation of a renewed relationship and substantially changed lifestyle with the cooperation and enthusiasm of her husband, as a result of the discovery of her affair. Lilias remains in her marriage and has vowed to lead her life in ways that are positive and nurturing for herself, while still remaining with and supporting the family members she cares about. Cheryl also remains in her marriage which provides a safe base for her as she continues to engage in many affairs. She describes her affairs as fun, exciting and very pleasurable. She reports that some of the positive effects from these experiences have spilled over into her marital relationship, which she says has recently improved. None-the-less, she stated that she plans to eventually leave her husband.

**Implications for Future Research**

The focus of this research has been on the experience of women's clandestine extramarital affairs by heterosexual women in long-term relationships. The lack of definitional clarity pervades the field of extramarital affairs and has resulted in many inconsistencies in the findings of researchers investigating this phenomenon. Future researchers must be vigilant in regards to the specific identification of the various dimensions of extramarital affairs when conducting and describing their investigations. More convergence of definitions and more rigorous attention to methodology than presently exists, will eventually result in a clearer understanding of both men's and women's extramarital affairs, open or clandestine, homosexual or heterosexual, emotional only, sexual only, or both, embedded in short-term or long-term relationships.

Since all of the women in this study were white, middle-class, Canadian/British, heterosexual females, research into the affairs of women from other cultures, socio-economic levels and sexual orientations might provide additional information about women's extramarital affairs. For example, the women in this study felt the impact of religious and social sanctions against infidelity very acutely. An investigation of
women's extramarital affairs with women from other religious groups and different cultures where attitudes towards infidelity may be different from our culture, would offer a comparison to the findings of this study. As well, an investigation of women's extramarital affairs for women from lower socio-economic levels would provide a valuable comparison to the findings of the present study. It is likely that women from lower socio-economic levels may not have the same options to engage in an extramarital affair as women from middle to upper socio-economic levels and may also experience potentially greater financial risks.

Survey data indicated that more women than ever are becoming involved in extramarital affairs (Atwater, 1982, Hite 1989). The findings of this study indicated that issues of powerlessness and lack of control were salient in the women's long-term relationships and in their motivations for having an extramarital affair. Research directed towards investigating the impact of socio-cultural and political changes, such as the women's movement, on male/female relationships might reveal valuable information about the reported increasing incidence rates for women's extramarital affairs and the function of an affair in traditional long-term relationships.

Many practitioners and researchers have noted that affairs are often destructive to long-term relationships. For two of the women in this study, their affairs were reported to be a catalyst for ending their marriages, while for one woman, the discovery of her affair cemented and deepened the relationship with her husband. It would be useful to conduct research comparing couples who have resolved the issues of a past affair and whose relationships have thrived, with couples who were not able to resolve the existence of an affair in their relationship. This would provide valuable information for practitioners working with couples where there has been an affair, to explore the meaning of the affair and to discover more constructive ways of resolving problems in such long-term relationships, whether this meant the dissolution of the long-term relationship or not.
It would also be valuable to conduct research into a comparison of long-term relationships where there are problems, but which do not involve an affair, so that a comparison could be made to problematic long-term relationships where there has been an affair. Information from this kind of research would be very useful to clinicians working with couples where there is/has been an affair.

Given the lack of support for the theme of shame/self-blame/guilt in the existing literature, further research into this aspect of women's extramarital affairs is indicated. Some of the research referred to in this study (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992) indicated that many women do not feel guilt or shame regarding their decisions to become involved in an affair. A comparison of women who do not feel guilt and shame with women who do, regarding their extramarital involvement, would uncover important information regarding this aspect of women's extramarital affairs.

All of the women in this study were in long-term relationships which were described as empty or dead. All of the women acknowledged that they had recovered vital aspects of their sexuality as a result of their affairs. Research comparing sexually vital long-term relationships with relationships which have become empty or dead would reveal valuable information about how women forget, repress or lose touch with the vital and life-affirming aspects of their sexuality in the context of traditional long-term relationships.

Finally, given the lack of phenomenological research into the experience of women's clandestine extramarital affairs and the small size of the sample, limiting its generalizability, replication of this study with a larger sample size may contribute to a greater understanding of the meaning of this phenomenon.

**Implications for Counselling**

Four of the five women who participated in this research project sought counselling of their own accord during stressful times in their marriages, for help in coming to terms with their decisions to engage in an extramarital affair, and for dealing
with the consequences of this decision. Counsellors are therefore potentially important sources of information and support to women and couples who are affected by the experience of an extramarital affair.

Based on survey data, it appears that nearly 50 percent of all married women will eventually engage in an affair at some point in their long-term relationship (Atwater, 1982; Creaturo, 1982; Hite, 1989). All of the women in this study experienced shame, self-blame and guilt regarding their choice to participate in an affair. Some of the women in this study sought help from counsellors regarding these feelings. It is very important for counsellors working with individuals and couples where an extramarital affair is an issue, to be aware of and to monitor her/his own beliefs and values regarding extramarital affairs (Brown, 1991). Countertransference may become an issue for many counsellors who may not be aware of their own unacknowledged feelings of betrayal and deceit, as well as their beliefs and biases regarding individuals who choose to participate in an affair (Brown, 1991; Elbaum, 1981; Rhodes, 1984; Taibbi, 1983).

The five women in the study wanted their spouses to validate their feelings and their needs in their relatively traditional long-term relationships. Part of the motivation for sharing their stories with the investigator was to have their experiences, their feelings, and their choices validated and respected. One of the women in the study reported that she experienced invalidation even when she sought professional help with her husband for their marriage. All of the women perceived that they were constrained by their roles as wives in their long-term relationships. Counsellors must become aware of their own judgments and biases about women's needs to express their feelings about their marriages as well as their dissatisfactions about their traditional roles in their long-term relationships.

Based on the responses of the women in this study, who reported that they had benefited from sharing their stories with the investigator, counsellors are in a unique
position to bear witness to the experiences of extramaritally involved women. Women need someone to hear the stories of their secret extramarital lives without fearing judgment. A judgmental counsellor may contribute to the client's already overwhelming feelings of powerlessness, invalidation, guilt, self-blame and shame, themes which were salient for the women in this study.

The theme of shame/self-blame/guilt suggests that the women in the study did not feel comfortable engaging in an activity that was solely for their own pleasure. An exploration of gender role expectations of women in our culture, with its assumptions of nurturing and caring of others and service to the family, would uncover beliefs and assumptions about women's lack of entitlement to pursue activities which meet their needs: activities which may or may not be socially taboo. A counsellor who approaches counselling from a gender-fair perspective, could help to mitigate the overpowering feelings of shame/self-blame/guilt as expressed by the women in this study regarding their participation in an activity which was pleasurable to themselves.

Counsellors must also become aware of their own beliefs and judgments about women who are contemplating having an affair, who are currently engaged in one, or who are dealing with the aftermath of the termination of an affair and/or long-term relationship. Given the socially taboo nature of extramarital affairs and the double standard in our culture reflecting more disapproval of women's extramarital affairs, as opposed to men's (Atwater, 1982; Heyn, 1992; Lampe, 1987; Lawson, 1988), what the women in the study most needed was an accepting and non-judgmental person who would unconditionally respect them and hear their stories. Some of the women had not shared the story of their extramarital experiences with anyone, reporting fear of judgment as the reason. In a safe and supportive environment, provided by the investigator, the women were able to tell their stories, express their feelings, identify their needs and to explore the personal meaning of their experiences. Counsellors are in a position to create a safe and supportive environment for women who want to make
sense of their extramarital experiences without fear of judgment.

All of the women in the study felt that their feelings and their needs were invalidated in their marriages. They also felt powerless to create change in their marriages: change which may have led to a sense of control in their marriages and which may have resulted in more of their needs being met in their relationships. Counsellors skilled in conflict resolution and in negotiation, could help women who perceive that their needs are being ignored in their long-term relationships, by exploring alternative ways of expressing their needs and negotiating for change. Counsellors could also help women explore their expectations of their spouses, and to identify needs that could be met elsewhere, without jeopardizing the relationship.

All of the women in the study experienced emotional disconnection in their long-term relationships. Many of the women remarked that they found it easier to be open and intimate with their affair partners, both emotionally and sexually, than with their husbands. Counsellors could assist women, who have had or who are presently involved in an affair, to explore barriers to intimacy which exist in their marriages and to discover ways of becoming more open and intimate with their husbands.

There was generally an absence of concern expressed by the five women regarding the health and physical risks of being sexually involved with a person outside their long-term relationships. Only three of the five women in the study expressed any concern about the high risk of their extramarital behavior in terms of their health and the consequences of being exposed to sexually transmitted diseases. It is note-worthy that the three women who had many affairs did express some concern about the health risks of their behavior while the two women who had only one affair each did not express this concern at all. Given the evidence that most sexually-transmitted diseases can be transmitted during a one-time contact (Katchadourian, 1989), these issues would be of primary importance for counsellors to address with women engaging in extramarital sexual behavior.
All of the participants in this research indicated that their involvement in this project helped to clarify the meaning of their experiences. In engaging in a retrospective review of their life experiences, as these related to their marital and extramarital experiences, a deeper and broader understanding was achieved, promoting personal growth. Counsellors can play a similar role in providing a safe, respectful and validating place for women to tell the story of their extramarital affairs and to facilitate an exploration of the personal meaning of these experiences. Growthful change and heightened awareness of the extramarital experience for clients can be facilitated by a counsellor who demonstrates nonjudgmental unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathic understanding of this experience (Rogers, 1961).

Conclusion

For as long as marriage has existed, both men and women have participated in extramarital relationships. Differential attitudes towards men's extramarital affairs as opposed to women's extramarital affairs reflect a double standard with women being perceived more harshly for participating in their affairs than men. Very little is known about the phenomenon of women's extramarital affairs. This study provided an account of the lived experience of women's clandestine extramarital relationships and their personal meaning to heterosexual women in long-term relationships.

The women in the present study described their experience with humour, insight, pain and courage. The results indicated that when the women's long-term relationships had ceased to meet their needs for validation, emotional connection, and control, they sought the fulfillment of these needs in an extramarital relationship. The women felt ashamed and undeserving regarding their unmet needs in their long-term relationships and guilty for choosing to fulfill these needs in an affair. Each woman described the pleasurable and healing effect which the new relationship had on her personally, and sexually. This experience was catalytic in many positive ways for all of the women.
Research and counselling implications were discussed with particular emphasis on the need for women engaging in extramarital affairs to feel validated, accepted and heard in a non-judgmental environment. Practitioners, in facilitating an exploration of the personal meaning of the extramarital experience for women, can support women's attempts to transform their lives in positive ways.
References


Humphrey, F. G., & Strong, L. (1976, May). Treatment of extramarital sexual relationships as reported by clinical members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, Hartford, CO.


Appendix A - Advertisement for the Study

A Study Exploring

Women's Extramarital Affairs

We are members of the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. We are studying women's experience of extramarital affairs and how women make sense of this experience.

You can participate if you...

.....have been in an heterosexual married or common-law relationship for at least 7 years at the time of the affair,
.....have had an heterosexual affair which has been terminated within the past 2 to 5 years.
.....believed, at the time you began the affair, that you did not have your spouse's (partner's) spoken or unspoken consent to engage in this affair.

Participating in this study involves...

.....discussing with a female researcher, your thoughts and feelings regarding your experience of an extramarital affair,
.....exploring how you make sense of your experience,
.....volunteering 4-5 hours of your time.

CONFIDENTIALITY GUARANTEED.

If you would like to participate in this study or would like more information regarding this research, please call the researcher at the following number:

Contact: Nina - XXX-XXXX (Nanaimo).
WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

UBC researcher seeking volunteers for study investigating women's extramarital affairs. You can participate if you have been in a heterosexual married or common-law relationship for at least 7 years at the time of the affair; have had a heterosexual affair which has been terminated within the past 2 to 5 years; believed at the time you began the affair, that you did not have your spouse's consent, either spoken or unspoken, to engage in this affair. Confidentiality guaranteed. Contact female researcher at XXX-XXXX.
Appendix C - Subject Consent Form

Title of Project:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN'S EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS

Principal Investigator: Nina Evans-Locke

In partial requirement for an M. A. degree in Counselling Psychology at UBC, under the supervision of Dr. Judith Daniluk (Ph. XXX-XXXX), I am conducting research into the phenomenon of women's secret extramarital affairs. I will be asking you to describe your experience of your affair and how you now understand that experience.

This investigation into women's secret extramarital affairs is being conducted for the purpose of providing descriptions of this phenomenon and to discover and understand the nature and meaning of this lived experience.

There will be two interviews. The first will last about 2 1/2 hours, with the possibility of a second interview, if required, to enable you to fully tell your story. This interview will be tape-recorded. After the interviews have been transcribed and analyzed, the transcript and a summary statement of your experience will be mailed or delivered to you, or picked-up by you. A validation interview will follow during which you will have the opportunity to make any changes, deletions, or additions to the summary statement. This interview will last about 60 minutes. Total time involvement: 4-5 hours.

If you have any questions regarding the procedures, I will attempt to explain these in as much detail as is necessary or you may contact my thesis supervisor.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participant, the spouse and the affair partner will be maintained by deleting any personal references or identifying information, by not using any surnames and by using pseudonyms in the transcripts and final report (thesis). Once the research is concluded, the taped interviews will be erased.

No one, except for the investigator and Dr. Daniluk will have access to the tapes or transcripts.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE. I CONSENT TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN THIS RESEARCH.

I ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND ALL ATTACHMENTS.

Signature of participant: ________________________________

Researcher: ________________________________ Tel: XXX-XXXX

Date: ________________________________
Appendix D - Orienting Statement

We know very little about women's experience of extramarital affairs. The research literature in the field of women's extramarital affairs is very scant and provides us primarily with information such as how many women engage in extramarital affairs, what kinds of affairs women are most like to have, and who is most likely to become involved.

We know very little about the lived experience of women's extramarital affairs nor the meaning women attach to this experience, about their thoughts and feelings, their motivations, the rewards and costs of an affair, how women make the decision to involve themselves, women's fears and expectations, and the perceived consequences to themselves and to their relationships with others.

I am interested in your experience of your extramarital affair (or affairs), as you lived it and attempt to make sense of it. You may find it helpful to think of your experience and to describe it to me as if it were a story with a beginning, a middle and an end.
Appendix E - Questions to Participants

1. How did it happen that...?
2. How did you feel about...?
3. Please tell me more about...?
4. You mentioned _______________. Could you please say more about that?
5. What do you mean by__________?
6. What did this relationship mean to you?
7. Is there anything more you would like to add about that?