Extra-dyadic emotional closeness as a third type of ‘infidelity’: Expectations, emotional responses and individual differences.

Tracey Mills

This thesis fulfils, in part, the requirements of a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology within the department of Psychology, Faculty of Human Sciences, at Macquarie University

September, 2010
This piece of research has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Tracey Mills

September, 2010
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Associate Professor Julie Fitness for her excellent supervision, and for her encouragement and enthusiasm throughout this project. I would also like to thank Dr Alan Taylor for his expert guidance on the statistical analysis.

I also appreciate the time and effort contributed by all the research respondents, as well as the friends and colleagues who helped me to recruit two community samples.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband and daughter for their support and understanding over the time it has taken to complete this and the other aspects of my degree.
ABSTRACT

When relationship partners act in ways that violate our expectations and trust, we can feel betrayed and experience intense emotional distress and confusion. In two studies, drawing on both undergraduate student and community samples and using anonymous self-report questionnaires, this thesis explored beliefs about what constitutes infidelity, one of the most common and psychologically damaging forms of romantic betrayal. In Study One \( (N = 272) \) respondents were asked to specify which extra-dyadic behaviours would breach romantic relationship trust. Findings confirmed the idiosyncratic nature of expectations for romantic exclusivity, and suggested that for many individuals relationship trust would be damaged if a partner engaged in emotionally close interactions such as confiding, sharing time and seeking another for emotional support.

Based on evolutionary research into the emotion of jealousy, Study Two \( (N = 226) \) investigated a three component model of extra-dyadic partner involvement: sexual, emotionally close, or love. Overall, both males and females reported that emotionally close extra-dyadic involvements had the potential to elicit distress, although this distress was generally expected to be less than that caused by extra-dyadic sex or love involvements. In its investigation of emotionally close extra-dyadic partner involvements as a third type of ‘infidelity’, these two studies have made some progress in mapping the territory of distress represented by different types of extra-dyadic intimacy. These initial findings suggest that being female, young, or having an anxious attachment style, and/or high levels of trait jealousy may increase the risk of emotional distress in response to partner extra-dyadic emotional closeness with another, while high levels of relationship commitment may be a protective factor. These individual characteristics may be important aspects of both clinical assessment and treatment in therapy for couples trying to mend relationships after events construed as betrayals.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
ABSTRACT

CHAPTER 1 .......................................................................................................................................................... 1
INFIDELITY AS A ROMANTIC BETRAYAL ......................................................................................................... 1
  THE NATURE OF INFIDELITY .......................................................................................................................... 2
  HOW COMMON IS INFIDELITY? ..................................................................................................................... 4
  ATTITUDES TO INFIDELITY .......................................................................................................................... 5
  INFIDELITY OUTCOMES ............................................................................................................................... 8
    Non-involved partner outcomes .................................................................................................................. 8
    Primary relationship outcomes .................................................................................................................. 10
    Involved partner outcomes ....................................................................................................................... 11
  EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO INFIDELITY ..................................................................................................... 12
    The role of appraisal .................................................................................................................................. 13
    Specific emotions ........................................................................................................................................ 15
  THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES TO INFIDELITY .............. 17
  EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY ...................................................................................................................... 18
    Sex similarities and differences ............................................................................................................... 19
    Evolutionary theory and infidelity ............................................................................................................ 21
    Infidelity responses: Romantic jealousy ................................................................................................... 22
    Other responses to infidelity ....................................................................................................................... 25
  ATTACHMENT THEORY ............................................................................................................................... 27
    Adult attachment styles ............................................................................................................................ 28
    Adult attachment and infidelity ................................................................................................................ 30
  INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY ..................................................................................................................... 31
    Relationship commitment and interdependence theory ......................................................................... 31
    Interdependence theory and infidelity ........................................................................................................ 33
  THE CURRENT RESEARCH ........................................................................................................................... 35

CHAPTER 2 ........................................................................................................................................................ 38
EXPLORING EXPECTATIONS FOR ROMANTIC EXCLUSIVITY ........................................................................... 38
  AIMS OF THE CURRENT STUDY .................................................................................................................... 40
  EXPLORING VARIABLES THAT POTENTIALLY INFLUENCE EXPECTATIONS ABOUT ROMANTIC EXCLUSIVITY . 41
    Participant’s sex ......................................................................................................................................... 41
    Attachment style ....................................................................................................................................... 43
    Attitudes toward sex ................................................................................................................................. 45
    Relationship commitment ......................................................................................................................... 46
    Other individual characteristics ............................................................................................................... 47
  AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY ..................................................................................................................... 49

CHAPTER 3 .......................................................................................................................................................... 51
STUDY ONE: METHOD ....................................................................................................................................... 51
  RESPONDENTS ................................................................................................................................................. 51
  MATERIALS AND MEASURES ........................................................................................................................ 51
    Information sheet and questionnaire ......................................................................................................... 51
    Breach of romantic relationship trust ....................................................................................................... 52
    The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale .......................................................................................... 54
    The Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale ............................................................................................................... 55
    The Investment Model Scale ...................................................................................................................... 56
    The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire- Short Form ................................................... 57
  PROCEDURE .................................................................................................................................................. 57

CHAPTER 4 .......................................................................................................................................................... 59
STUDY ONE: RESULTS ....................................................................................................................................... 59
  DATA ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................................. 59
  DATA DESCRIPTION ...................................................................................................................................... 59
    Adult attachment style: Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR-R) ........................................................ 59
HYPOTHESIS TESTING ................................................................................................................................ 118

Associations between gender and greater distress for ‘emotional’ vs. ‘sexual’ infidelities............. 118
Distress for ‘sexual’ vs. ‘love’ and ‘emotionally close’ extra-dyadic partner involvements........... 120
Distress for ‘love’ vs. ‘emotionally close’ extra-dyadic partner involvements ................................ 122
Emotion intensity for different types of extra-dyadic partner involvements................................ 124
Gender differences in emotion intensity ratings ........................................................................ 125
Gender differences in jealousy intensity ratings ........................................................................ 127
Anger, sadness and anxiety intensity for different extra-dyadic partner involvements .......... 128
Associations between individual difference variables and emotion intensity ratings .............. 130
Relationship commitment .......................................................................................................... 131
Attachment style ....................................................................................................................... 132
Trait jealousy ............................................................................................................................ 133

RESEARCH QUESTIONS .................................................................................................................. 134

Types of extra-dyadic partner involvements that breach trust: Component analysis ............... 134
Agreements and expectations about romantic relationship exclusivity ...................................... 137

CHAPTER 9 .................................................................................................................................................. 140

DISCUSSION: STUDY TWO .................................................................................................................. 140

REVIEW OF FINDINGS ...................................................................................................................... 140

Participant’s sex and relative ‘distress’ for different partner extra-dyadic involvements .......... 140
The territory of ‘distress’ for emotionally close extra-dyadic partner involvements .................... 143
Extra-dyadic sex with an emotional attachment as distressing as extra-dyadic love............... 144
The potential for ambiguity in emotionally close extra-dyadic relationships............................ 145
Women report more intense emotional responses for extra-dyadic partner involvements ........... 146
Compared to men, women report more intense jealousy for extra-dyadic love ....................... 147
The importance of sadness in response to each type of extra-dyadic partner involvement ....... 148
Associations between relationship commitment and distress or emotion intensity ................. 150
Associations between trait jealousy and attachment style and distress or emotion intensity ....... 151
Explicit and implicit expectations for romantic exclusivity ...................................................... 153

RESEARCH STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS ..................................................................................... 154

CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................................................................................ 156

CHAPTER 10 ............................................................................................................................................. 158

SUMMARY AND CLINICAL RELEVANCE .......................................................................................... 158

CLINICAL RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS .................................................................................... 159
Assessing and negotiating expectations for romantic exclusivity ........................................... 160
The treatment of romantic jealousy and other distressing emotions ....................................... 161
Betrayal is a trauma that may be implicated in other psychological problems ....................... 164

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................................... 167

APPENDIX 1: Materials for Study One.

APPENDIX 2: Materials for Study Two.

APPENDIX 3: Descriptive Data for Study Two.
TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Anxious and Avoidant Attachment .......... 60
Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale ............ 60
Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for the Investment Model Scale .................. 61
Table 4: Frequencies for Eight Relationship Trust Categories .................................... 62
Table 5: Pattern Matrix for Principal Component Analysis of Betrayal Ratings ............ 64
Table 6: Correlation Matrix for Mean Type of Betrayal Component Scores .................. 65
Table 7: Correlation Matrix for Type of Betrayal Scores and BSAS Subscales ............. 73
Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations for the Multi-dimensional Jealousy Scale and the Attachment Style Questionnaire ............................................................. 118
Table 9: Total, Female and Male Distress Choices ...................................................... 119
Table 10: Mean Emotion Intensity for Six Types of Extra-dyadic Partner Involvement .. 125
Table 11: Pearson Correlations for Independent Variables and Emotion Intensity Ratings for Sexual, Emotionally Close and Love Extra-dyadic Partner Involvements .... 131
Table 12: Pattern Matrix for Principal Component Analysis on Specific Betrayal Items in Study Two ........................................................................................................ 135
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Percentage of total, males and females who reported each breach of relationship trust category...........................................................................................................................................................................66

Figure 2: Mean male and female betrayal ratings for three types of betrayal ..................68

Figure 3: The proportion of males and females more distressed by ‘emotionally close’ and ‘love’ extra-dyadic partner involvements when compared to extra-dyadic sex .......121

Figure 4: The proportion of males and females more distressed by ‘emotionally close’ extra-dyadic partner involvements when compared to extra-dyadic love. ................123

Figure 5: Estimated marginal means for the intensity of; 1) anger, 2) sadness, 3) anxiety, and 4) jealousy in response to extra-dyadic partner confiding, sex, romantic interest, enjoying each others’ company and love, for males and females. .................................126

Figure 6: Mean jealousy intensity ratings reported by males and females for extra-dyadic partner involvements that are sexual, emotionally close or involve romantic love...128

Figure 7: Average intensity ratings for anger, sadness and anxiety in response to extra-dyadic partner involvements that are sexual, emotionally close or involve love. .....129

Figure 8: Mean betrayal scores for type of betrayal components, Emotional Intimacy, Sexual Intimacy and Love, for males and females. .................................................................137

Figure 9: Proportion of males and females endorsing each of the six categories of romantic relationship exclusivity expectations. .............................................................................139