

The impact of an extramarital affair on a partner in a long term relationship – A phenomenological study

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Abstract

The aim of the project is to explore the impact on and lived experience of a husband, when his wife of more than thirty years admitted to him that she had been having an extra marital relationship with her cousin.

The methodology used was that of conducting an unstructured face to face interview with the husband. The interview was then transcribed and following this analysed using a phenomenological approach. The names of the individuals involved have been changed.

The main findings were:

- The research backs up two previous studies that put forward a three stage process that takes place when an infidelity is made know to the other partner in the relationship.
- A toing and frowning between the three stages may take place.
- Movement through the stages may take place over several years and completion of stage three - Moving on/Re-engagement, may take even longer and may not be guaranteed.

Introduction & literary Review

The topic for this research project came about when a long term friend of mine who was aware that I needed to conduct a piece of research for my training course, offered to be my co-researcher. I have been good friends with both him and his wife for more than a decade and during this time, support in many formats has been given and received by all three of us. When first approached with the offer from Paul, I did consider whether or not it would be appropriate to explore such a traumatic experience which involves people who I care a great deal about. However, given the level of emotional literacy and adult capacity that the persons concerned have and also being aware that to tell one's story can aid the healing process, I felt that the arising of the opportunity was serendipitous and so took up his kind offer.

As a result of my literature review search, I have found two pieces of research which have a connectedness with the area of research that I have conducted. The first being:

'Emotional Processes following disclosure of an extramarital affair' (1)

The research for this project consisted of in-depth interviews being carried out with individuals who had experienced marital infidelity. The research revealed a three-stage process following disclosure of an affair:

- Roller Coaster
- Moratorium
- Trust-Building

Roller Coaster

The initial response when a partner is told of an infidelity is a period of intense wide ranging emotions. This can range for example from periods of anger and self-blame to periods of introspection and appreciation for the relationship that they have with their spouse.

Moratorium

This is the next stage and is a period characterized by less emotional reactivity and intensity. In this stage, the offended spouse attempts to make sense of the infidelity that has taken place. There is also often an obsession about the details of the incident and a physical and emotional withdrawal from the spousal relationship occurs.

Trust-Building

A greater openness in the relationship is crucial in the process of re-engagement. This greater honesty can sometimes lead to the other person being hurt during this time as a result of this honesty. It is also important that the injured party experiences remorse from the offending partner throughout the healing process. This will include words of apology and acceptance of responsibility for what has happened. The study also indicated that the injured party seeing evidence of a greater commitment to the relationship from their spouse aids the reconnection. In addition, a return of loving behaviours that were evident early in the relationship also assists the healing process. The trust-building process also benefits from increased communication and a sharing of feelings between each partner.

The second piece of literature that I found was the following book:

[Helping Couples Get Past the Affair: A Clinician's Guide \(2\)](#)

This book presents a three-stage therapy approach for clinicians working with couples struggling in the aftermath of infidelity. For each stage it details relational characteristics and also suggestions for the therapeutic direction. The three stages cited are:

- Impact
- Meaning
- Moving On

Impact

At this first stage, the couple are trying to understand what has happened. A wide range of overwhelming emotions usually arise which include fear, hurt and anger. The emotions may alternate with periods of disbelief and numbness. Bonds of trust and emotional security are shattered. The injured partner will often retreat within the relationship.

Meaning

In order to begin to heal and move on from the trauma of the event, being able to gain an understanding as to why the incident arose can help. Indeed, the book says that if the injured party can give meaning as to why their spouse had the affair, they may start to feel some empathy and compassion for their partner. In cases where it can be seen that past events have played a part in what has happened, this can be particularly so. At this stage, issues of trust and safety need to be re-established, otherwise a reconnection of the relationship will not fully arise and the past will continue to affect the present and future of the relationship.

Moving On

In this stage, the couple learn to let go of what has happened in the past and as a result the infidelity is no longer the main event. To move forwards, forgiveness will play a role and the understanding gained during stage two can aid this process. The book goes on to say that in order to move forward in the relationship, the couple need to achieve three goals:

- Develop a realistic and balanced view of the relationship.
- Experience a release of being dominated by negative emotion about the event, with the injured party voluntarily relinquishing the right to punish the participating partner.
- Evaluate the relationship carefully and make healthy decisions about its continuation.

Neither of the above pieces of literature appear to make any specific statement with regards to an infidelity which involves a relative of one of the partners.

As stated previously, the topic for this research project arose unexpectedly and as such, I did not have any prior personal reasons or propensity to choose the area of infidelity as the subject matter. The aim of this piece of work is to explore one person's (Paul's) lived experience of being told by their wife of an extramarital affair involving one of her relatives and the journey that they have undergone since this event was disclosed to them.

Paul's Story

Findings – the journey leading up to the event and initial impact

After listening to the interview several times, three themes initially bubbled up from the narrative into my awareness, forming like the primary colours on an artist's palette for my co-researcher's telling of their story. These three theme headings are spontaneous pieces of dialogue spoken by my co-researcher during the interview and appeared to me to be like nuggets of understanding that arose for him during the journey that he had travelled. The themes are as follows:

- We're family
- Nobody owns another person
- Beware Greeks bearing gifts.

We're family

The event that took place involved my co researcher's wife and a male relation of hers. The event impacted greatly on Paul, not just in terms of the impact that it had on the relationship between him and his wife, but also the affect that it had on him as a result of the relationship that he had developed with his wife's relation and their family.

Paul recounted his relationship with his own family members as he was growing up which, in his view were sadly not what he had wanted.

The impact of the affair on both relationship strands were no doubt as a result of Paul's experience and sense of what being part of a family was, as he was growing up:

"My own family has been so poor. My relationship with mi brother and mi sister were very very perfunctionary there was no evidence of us loving each other."

"....you know I didn't grieve when my Mother and Father died.....so my own concept of family was really poor."

Meeting the family of his wife to be was a very different experience than that with his own family:

"Now when I started going out with Sarah, her family seemed wonderful.....they were so accepting of me being just as I am."

This feeling of acceptance as part of a family was experienced again some thirty years later when Paul's wife's relative and their family came back onto the scene:

“And meeting another person, like Andy was her cousin and getting to know his wife and he had two children seemed like an answer to me personally, that I had actually got a family. Who totally accepted me you know...”

The feeling of belonging increased as Paul spent more and more time with his wife’s relatives:

“We went to Tenerife and had a fantastic holiday. Loved every second of it coz we got on so well.”

(CH) “Yeah you felt like you belonged.”

“Yeah, well it was family and he used to say ‘well we’re family you know’...that went on for two and a half years. (fortnightly stays at each other’s homes). I think I can say it was the happiest part of my life because I had a family.”

Paul had a very clear memory of the moment when his wife told him about the affair, of where she was in relation to him in the room and also what was said. His initial reaction on being told was total disbelief. He had never suspected that anything untoward had been going on other than a brother and sister type relationship between his wife and her cousin.

The affect of being told of the affair by his wife wasn’t anger towards her, but a “complete broken heartedness” of being aware that he would not see his wife’s relatives again. He was surprised at having this reaction.

Paul felt so upset about the end of the relationship between the two families. He was prepared to do whatever was necessary to try to keep the relationships going:

“..I was bending over backwards to offer you know coz I didn’t want to lose, I didn’t want to lose what I had got. It was worse than a funeral.”

He then tried to gain an understanding as to why the affair had happened.

Nobody owns another person

In seeking to understand the reasons for his wife’s affair, Paul recounted a previous relationship that he had had. He had really loved this person who he believes was the only person that he had fallen in love with, but the relationship had ended he said, because of the way he had acted. Some years after this relationship had ended and about twenty years ago, Paul met someone who was able to provide the address for this girl’s parents. Paul had written to the girl’s mother asking her to pass a letter on to her daughter. He had felt guilty about the way the relationship had ended and wanted to tell the ex girlfriend that he respected her and that she was a great woman. The letter resulted in him speaking with the girl’s mother who told him that her daughter was

very touched by the letter, but did not want to get back in contact with him. Paul understood this and that was the end of the matter for him.

This incident helped Paul to understand the reasons for his wife's affair:

"So what I did I identified with Sarah's position. That she had been in love with Andy apparently before she met me, that they never actually went out with each other because they were family and it was frowned upon. Now after thirty years and getting to know them again, that feeling that they had for each other blossomed, which was unfortunate for me err but I could understand."

Paul realized that had this ex girlfriend agreed to meet up with him, he probably would have gone and met her and he was aware that this could have led to other issues developing. As a result, he empathized with his wife's situation.

Four weeks after being told of the affair, Paul sent an email to his wife's cousin. In it Paul talks about "the bombshell" of being told of the affair and the massive impact that this had had:

"...we have had a very mixed time here, sometimes ecstatic, sometimes despairing. I have denied it all to myself and also faced it full on."

Paul also expressed in the email the see-saw affect on his inner world of being told of the affair. On the one hand:

"....Sarah has told me how much she loved you and it hurts like hell to accept it."

On the other:

"... But want can be so wrong in loving someone I say to myself. It is really a beautiful thing. Society makes the rules and we can buy into them or not, it is our choice. Nobody owns another person."

In the email Paul again also expressed the great impact that the incident has had on the relationship that he has had with his wife's relatives and how important this has been to him:

"Had I known that she had felt about you in the past, I would have been more cautious in allowing the relationship to develop between us all. In a way, that is the cruelest part of the whole episode. "

In addition to understanding what had happened, Paul also expressed a desire to work through what had taken place and says that he still loved all of the people involved.

Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts

A few weeks later when Paul sent a second email, the tone is very different from the earlier one. He has felt anger for the first time toward his wife's relative. He can't believe how someone could have an affair with his wife whilst at the same time developing a very close friendship with him. The empathizing that had taken place before has gone to be replaced with a sense of an injustice against him. He also realizes that the clock cannot be turned back and:

"...that things can never be the same again."

The time that has passed has brought Paul to a new place of understanding about all that has happened:

"What have I learned out of this experience with you? Beware of Greeks bearing gifts."

Findings – the journey to the present day

This part of Paul's journey involves the events that took place following the initial impact of being told by his wife of the affair. It details the journey undertaken up to the present day including the continuing impact. The themes that run through this part of his story are as follows:

- A change in the relationship
- Needs and wants

A change in the relationship

Paul doesn't have any contact with his wife's cousin's family anymore. He now wonders if the relationship with Sarah's relatives was illusionary. He also doesn't think that his wife totally understands how he felt about the loss of the relationship that he had with her relatives.

Paul's relationship with his wife has changed a great deal following the affair being announced. When she tells him that she loves him, he is unable to tell her that he loves her. He feels guilty and uncomfortable not being able to tell her he loves her. He thinks that he does love her and says, "I can't do without her."

Paul feels that his wife was unfaithful to him again when after the affair stopped, she joined an organization that involves itself in the pursuit of personal growth:

"I don't feel anger towards her, I feel hurt. I think had she not gone to the ABC it would have been different, but it's almost like her being unfaithful again."

For Paul, a reconnection between him and his wife had taken place when the affair ended, but he feels that this connection was again broken when she joined this organization. For him, even after several years, the reconnection still has not taken place and this bothers him.

He is very sensitive to the interactions between him and his wife and wonders if he is not seeing things in a balanced way. He wonders about what causes this:

“Well I’m just trying to make allowances for me being over reactive to her anger or my perceiving her being angry when she says she is not angry. You know, just the way she says things that makes feel me unhappy listening to her say things sometimes.”

He has become more paranoid and felt more vulnerable since the affair happened and that even after six years has passed, he hasn’t gotten over it and doesn’t know how to. He is looking for answers, many of which remain unanswered. He is also aware that his wife is trying to help, but he struggles to love her. This has impacted greatly on their physical relationship:

“I can hardly touch her.”

In trying to find answers Paul went to see a psychologist, but this didn’t work out:

“She was just the wrong person.”

To try to improve matters he went back to a holiday resort where in the past he and his wife had spent many holidays:

“But it didn’t do anything to heal me inside I don’t think.”

He believed that going back there with his wife would help them get back to how things used to be. The holiday didn’t give him an answer, but it gave him greater understanding:

“Well I thought that being there and us being there together we could go back to how we used to be there together. But no, I have got this thing, the but thing.....Well the but thing is that ‘but you have been unfaithful to me for two and a half years’.”

He is more confused about the relationship with his wife than ever. He wonders if he over reacts to her sometimes. She tells him that he is misinterpreting what he sees as criticisms. He is not sure as to whether this is true or if it is because he challenges her behaviour towards him more. He questions what his relationship within himself in the marriage relationship is:

“Well I don’t understand where I stand, where me stands in my own relationship with her. Not her, but myself with her. There is another me inside me as well.”

The lack of closeness in the relationship worries him greatly. He is unable to comprehend what it is that is preventing him from pursuing the closeness, the lack of which concerns him. It's like a kind of impotency of control. He thinks that he should be able to put his arms around his wife and love her, but something out of his control prevents him from doing this. When his wife makes physical contact with him in an affectionate way, he responds to it, but the response is he sees as being like a compliant child, doing something when you don't really want to. He responds because he doesn't want to cause his wife upset and yet, at the same time, he is aware that it is him that has been badly upset by what has happened.

Needs and wants

Through the retelling of this as yet unfinished journey, Paul made known several needs and wants. He also voiced what was given but not needed:

“Really I don't see why I needed to have known that Sarah had an affair. She could have just kept it to herself and just gradually we didn't get on or see Andy as much, or they could have stopped having the affair. I don't know if that is possible or not. I don't know. Her unloading her guilt on me didn't help the situation at all. In fact, it has fucked me up ever since.”

Initially Paul had wanted the relationship with all of the individuals involved to carry on, but as time went by he realised that part of things never being the same again, meant that he would never see his wife's cousin again. He also didn't want his wife to join the ABC, not just because of his own aversion to such groups because it reminded him of his own Evangelical upbringing, but a far more personal need:

“Well I just wanted her to be with me. I wanted loving I think and er she was doing all this work on herself.”

He hated the fact that his wife continued to attend group meetings. This left him feeling alone. Whilst at the same time he carries the belief that he doesn't own his wife.

Paul doesn't feel appreciated by his wife, nor does he feel that she truly acknowledges the roller coaster ride that being told of the affair has had on him:

“...when she does say sorry I think oh well I am glad that you have said that, but in a way I need to hear that every day for a while. It's how it's affecting me that I want her to acknowledge not that she is sorry that she has done it. Yeah of course you are sorry that you have done it.”

This need to be acknowledged is still very important for Paul. He feels that his wife could help him by giving validation to what he has gone through. Retelling his story has given some comfort to him and he wishes that his wife would give comfort to him by

acknowledging his journey. He also wants back the wife he knew when they first met and an authentic and spontaneous relationship. Paul also wants a better relationship with himself to allow him to be able to nurture his hurt inner child.

Discussion

The research journey that Paul and I undertook is concerned with exploring the lived experience of someone whose spouse in a long term marital relationship has admitted to having an infidelity with a relative. Although the literature review did not unearth study's looking specifically at infidelities involving relatives of one of the marriage partners, similarities in events arising for those affected in such situations were evident.

Review 1 - 'Emotional Processes following disclosure of an extramarital affair' (1)

This piece of research found evidence of a three stage process following the infidelity being made known – Roller Coaster; Moratorium; Trust Building.

Whilst the study revealed anger as a major emotion felt by the participants, after the initial disbelief at hearing of the affair, Paul felt hurt and sadness. During the retelling of his story, Paul revealed that whilst growing up, he was not allowed to express anger externally towards his parents and as a result he internalizes anger onto himself. It is very likely that this impacted upon the emotions he felt during the early stages of the journey following his wife's infidelity. The emotions that he did experience early on, were felt intensely and left Paul feeling broken hearted. The phrase 'Roller Coaster' used in the Study to describe the first stage, aptly describes Paul's experience in the initial stages following the disclosure. In the first email sent to his wife's relative, Paul expresses the intensity of the impact on his being and the acuteness of the earthquake-like shaking of his inner world:

“Dear Andy, it's four weeks since the bombshell exploded. We have had a very mixed time here, sometimes ecstatic, sometimes despairing. I have denied it all to myself and also faced it full on.”

The second or Moratorium stage coming out of the Study, is characterized by less emotional reactivity and attempts to make meaning of the infidelity. It is clear from Paul's journey that he came to one understanding as to how his Wife's infidelity had come about. However, for him, this understanding took place at a very early point following the disclosure of the affair to him. In addition, Paul's second email, which he wrote several weeks after disclosure, makes known the anger that Paul is now feeling towards his Wife's relative. As such, it would appear that in Paul's case, there is the possibility of a toing and froving between the first and second stages that the Study cites. This appears to be indicated by the revelation of another understanding that is revealed in his second email:

“I don’t know why it has taken so long for me to see the injustice done to me by you but I have seen the light. You were never prepared to leave Becky and Sarah treated me like shit because she couldn’t cope with the guilt of having an affair with you. The guilt became so intense that she finished the relationship. You would have gone on deceiving me for as long as Sarah was prepared to go along with you. You were in control of our, all four situations until Sarah stopped it. What does that say about you?”

The final stage revealed by the study is that of trust building, where the process of re-engagement between the couple occurs. In this stage, the Study went on to say that total honesty in the relationship is required which may result in the other party feeling hurt as a result. For the strengthening of the relationship and healing to begin, the injured party needs to see remorse from their partner about what has happened. In addition, if the injured party experiences their partner as acting in ways that evidence a commitment to the relationship, this will have a beneficial impact on the healing process. A return to loving behaviours that took place early in the relationship is also a sign that the relationship is strengthening.

There are several instances where the characteristics of this stage of the Study can be compared with Paul’s experiences:

Paul mentions on a number of occasions that he and his wife have talked a great deal about what has happened. He has also been very honest and told her that she has been totally selfish. However, in other ways he has been less open with regards to his wants and needs. For example, he says that he has adapted to his wife’s dislike at having to watch the news on television rather than doing what he wants to do and he has not told her that he doesn’t feel acknowledged for what he has been through as a result of her infidelity.

In addition, soon after the infidelity ended, his wife joined an organization that sets itself up as one that helps one’s personal growth. Paul saw this as another betrayal in that instead of his wife spending time with him after the affair with her cousin, she spent time involved with the organization.

Paul doesn’t believe that his wife has shown sufficient remorse about what she has done:

“...when she does say she is sorry I think oh well I am glad that you have said that, but in a way I need to hear that every day (laughs) for a while. It’s how it is affecting me that I want her to acknowledge not that she is sorry that she has done it, yeah course you are sorry that you have done it. “

Comparing the Study with what has happened in Paul’s marriage, it could be suggested that Stage Three has not been concluded and that for true healing of the relationship to take place, several issues put forward by the Study need to be enacted. One further

such example, is when Paul and his Wife revisited a holiday location that they had visited many times during their marriage. Paul reported that the revisit did not bring any healing for him. This would suggest a search for and absence of loving behaviours from earlier in the relationship. In view of all of the above, it is likely that until Phil's relationship with his wife mirrors more closely the elements of Stage Three suggested by the Study, re-engagement will not take place.

Review 2 - Helping Couples Get Past the Affair: A Clinician's Guide (2)

This second review also proposes a three stage process, albeit in connection with the steps a clinician can take to assist in the healing process- Impact; Meaning; Moving On.

Paul's story would appear to support the description in the book of the Impact stage in that he experienced wide ranging emotions and also a wanting to understand of what had taken place. In addition, at times he felt total disbelief and also experienced denial about the whole situation.

Characteristics of the Meaning Stage can also be found taking place in Paul's story. However, an understanding as to why the affair took place came to him very soon after his wife told him about it and as such, appears to have taken place in the Impact stage. This understanding clearly led him to have some empathy as can be seen from an excerpt from his first email:

"You may find it hard to believe, but I can completely understand how it all developed. Friends Reunited has claimed some more victims. Sarah has now told me how much she loved you and it hurts like hell to accept it. But what can be so wrong in loving someone I say to myself. It is really a beautiful thing. Society makes the rules and we can buy into them or not, it is our choice. Nobody owns another person. So in a way I am still lucky to have her and I realise how much I love her and the thought of her leaving me doesn't bear thinking about. I think that Sarah had to experience the consummation of her love for you because it was unfulfilled from her past. Reconnecting with you thirty years on triggered off the old feelings."

The book then goes on to say that trust and safety issues need to be re-established in this stage otherwise a reconnection will not take place. This view appears to be a valid one, as later in his story Paul blames the lack of reconnection that has taken place as being due to Sarah joining the ABC organization and his viewing this act as another betrayal:

"I think had she not gone to the ABC it would have been different, but it's almost like her being unfaithful again."

Comparison of Paul's story with the Moving On stage would appear to indicate that this stage has not as yet been completed. To support this view, it is worthwhile examining

each of the three goals which the book says is necessary for moving forward in the relationship:

Develop a realistic and balanced view of the relationship

On several occasions, Paul has revealed where he is currently at in the way he interacts with and responds to his wife, each of which would suggest that this goal has not yet been reached:

“I mean I have become so sensitive to, I mean I probably haven’t got over what has happened and I think I have, I may be seeing things out of proportion.”

“Well I’m just trying to make allowances for me being over reactive to her anger or my perceiving her being angry when she says she is not angry.”

“I’ve got worse in my not okness errrr. I think I have become more paranoid or whatever the word, more vulnerable since that time...”

“I think that we seem to be more confused than ever in that I sort of over react to her or she says that I over react to her...”

Experience a release of being dominated by negative emotion about the event, with the injured party voluntarily relinquishing the right to punish the participating partner.

It is clear from Paul’s story, that he is aware that the infidelity and his wife’s decision to join the ABC organization are still having a negative impact on him and as such, this second goal has not yet been met with regards to a release from being dominated by negative emotions.

“I need to be able to just totally forgive and forget. Cos there is only me suffering here isn’t there?”

“Oh yeah, I’m not healed at all and I don’t know what to do about it.”

“I just can’t get over what she has done.”

Whether or not Paul has a want to punish in some way his wife for what she has done to him did not appear to be part of his journey and therefore not a factor affecting the possibility of moving forwards in the relationship.

Evaluate the relationship carefully and make healthy decisions about its continuation.

It can be seen from the story that Paul has told, that he has contemplated (and continues to do so), his marital relationship in great depth. He does want the relationship to continue and the fact that the relationship is continuing several years after he was made aware of the infidelity is a testament to this. Paul is still struggling to come to terms with what has happened and this journey has led to a great deal of suffering for both his mind and heart. His attempts to move forward and reconnect emphasize the value he places on his marriage. His adult capacity and high level of awareness of his inner and outer worlds indicate to me that the decision to continue with the relationship comes from a healthy place.

In summary of the literature review, it can be said that the characteristics of Paul's journey supports the staged process indicated by the previous researchers. An important characteristic I would add however, is that Paul's story reveals that a going and coming can take place between the stages contained in the models that the previous researchers have suggested.

In several instances during the interview, Paul talks about his experiences through a Transactional Analysis lens perspective:

Child ego state-

"I suppose if my child has been hurt so badly reconnecting I could be hurt again. Perhaps I am protecting my child."

"Perhaps it's a child thing of just being hurt and I'm sulking."

“And yet there is me being the compliant child and kissing her back coz I don’t want to upset her, but it’s me that has been completely upset.”

Parent ego state-

“But she is in her parent which makes me feel not ok.”

“I seem to have a very big problem with my own parent in me isn’t a nurturing parent for me, but I a very good nurturing parent for other people. (Laughs) but my own parent is a very strict parent. I don’t know why.”

As I type these words, I am reminded of my journey thus far in dealing with my own Critical Parent and of protecting my Child. With my own experiences, I am able to empathize with Paul’s situation and the need to provide self- protection after hurts have been felt. The trust and safety issues which both of the previous studies state, are necessary for moving forward and reconnection in the relationship will need to be felt and believed by Paul’s’ Child. It is clear from what he has said, that much needs yet to happen before healing can take place and from this, a move towards a re-integration of the marital relationship.

In finding myself struggling at how to make use and meaning of reflexive analysis to look at my role in the telling of Paul’s story, I see parallels between myself in my relationship with the project and Paul’s relationship with the impact that his wife’s infidelity had on him:

The rollercoaster ride:

- The initial impact of having to conduct the project was fear and anxiety:
- Would I find a satisfactory issue to base the project on?
- Would I be able to carry it out/succeed/pass the course?
- Would I do justice to the story that Paul was prepared to share with me?

At other times, I have felt elation:

- When Paul offered to be my co-researcher.
- Completion of the interview.
- Discovery of the themes that I found running through Paul's story.
- Knowing the next paragraph that I was going to write.

Meaning:

Fear and anxiety would then return at different stages of the write up, to be followed by elation as the changing impacts were conquered. Making meaning of these changing situations brought me relief. Similarly, Paul's making sense of certain parts of his story appeared to act like a soothing ointment for his struggle to move forward.

Moving on:

However, unlike Paul I can see an end to this particular journey, the work completed, submitted and result known. Although not discounting the relationship that I have with this piece of work, I also acknowledge that in the grand scale of a person's life journey, a piece of research forms a far smaller chapter than one relating to a shared journey with a life partner that spans more than forty years.

During the typing up of the transcript phase, I had a dream about my partner. In the dream I saw her acting in a very critical 'pig parent' type way with me. In the dream I felt scared and wanting to get away from the situation. On waking and looking at the dream I saw how it relates to my fear of intimacy and how to be intimate you have to be prepared to be vulnerable in that there is a process of letting the other person see who you are. In reality, my partner is very supportive, loving and nurturing and nothing like the fantasy that I saw in my dream. I believe that listening to Paul's story and walking alongside him as he relived his story fed my own fears of being hurt by those closest to me.

I wonder about the way that the interview went and whether or not I could have done a better job in supporting Paul in his retelling. After revisiting this question several times, I still do not know the answer. I am a person who likes to know the route from A to B, but am also aware that sometimes not knowing how to get to B, or even know where B will end up is what brings magical moments.

As I have said earlier, I have known Paul and his wife for over a decade and consider them very close friends. I think that by knowing both individuals, this has had a different affect on me as researcher than may have been the case if I had not known Paul's wife. I have felt compassion for both of them during the years following the infidelity and my feelings towards them have not, as far as I am aware, been altered by carrying out the research. I wonder if I might have felt critical and judgmental of Paul's wife if I had not known her. This awareness reminds me that when hearing a client's story, to be mindful that I am seeing the world through the client's eyes and that I may form

judgments that are less balanced than would be the case if I also had personal knowledge.

I am very mindful of the fact that the infidelity that took place involved Paul's wife and her cousin and that this acted like a double whammy upon Paul. The first being that his wife had had an affair and the second was that the affair involved someone to whom Paul had developed a very close bond with. I am aware that in this research, I have focused more upon the relationship strand between Paul and his wife and not the strand between Paul and his wife's cousin. I am very aware that both relationships meant a great deal to Paul and by not covering both relationships equally, feel a sense of not honouring fully Paul's journey. However, given the restraints placed upon us as MCPT trainees in relation to the specified conditions governing this research, understand that achieving this would not have been possible.

A future research theme could be to investigate further incidents of infidelity and to compare and contrast incidents where the other party to the affair was not known to the other partner/s, to those incidents where potentially, up to four individuals were all known to each other. This research could then examine all of the affected relationships to see what arose.

I feel honoured and also humbled that Paul allowed me to be a witness to this very personal journey of his. It has made the connection that I have with him more substantial and reminded me how enriched my life has been by having him sharing part of my life journey. I wish both him and his wife all the very best in their future journey together.

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APPENDIX 1 – Interview Transcript