Contradictory Heterosexuality:

The Construction of

Extra-relational Sexual Involvement

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The Construction of

Extra-relational Sexual Involvement

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Abstract

The behaviour generally referred to as 'infidelity' seems to occupy a contradictory site within current Western culture – it is both widespread, yet seen as unacceptable. The un/acceptability of this act, and its social and cultural repercussions, are typically linked to dominant constructions of what constitutes appropriate relational practices and male and female heterosexuality. This behaviour has largely been argued to have adverse outcomes, such as embarrassment, emotional trauma, relationship dissolution, moral outrage, as well as jealousy related violence and homicide. Despite common acknowledgement that 'infidelity' can have a life changing impact, the experiences of those who have engaged in this behaviour have rarely been examined in great depth. Most research has approached the issue in reductionist and/or problematic ways that depict the repercussions as inevitable and 'natural'. The current study is located within the critical sexualities and critical social psychology fields, and aimed to examine such extra-relational sexual involvements (ERSI) in much greater depth.

This project reports on an in-depth, qualitative, exploratory, and discursive analysis of ERSI amongst heterosexuals in New Zealand. In the first study, heterosexual men's (10 respondents) and women's (24 respondents) experiences of engaging in ERSI was examined, via qualitative questionnaires online. The second study aimed to explore the wider social constructions of ERSI, as a broader and contextualised analysis of such practices is also greatly lacking. In order to do so, four focus group discussions were employed, consisting of two men's (eight participants) and two women's groups (nine participants). All of the data was analysed using a Foucauldian mode of discourse analysis, as outlined by Willig (2013) for the discipline of psychology.

The discourses identified in Study One were categorised into acceptability and problematising discourses. The "acceptability" discourses included: irresistible attraction, sexual experimentation, and hierarchy of ERSI. The problematising discourses involved: moral transgression – the contradictory experience of ERSI, and ERSI as catastrophic. The social discourses outlined in Study Two included: fragility of contemporary relationships, the friend threat, norms of relationships, relationships as investments, and relationships as work.

The analysis demonstrated how participants portrayed ERSI in contradictory, contested, gendered and highly moralising ways. The discourses of ERSI were heavily intertwined with heteronormative understandings of relationality and reinforced a mononormative structure as the ideal and most 'normal' way to engage in love/sex relationships. The men's and women's talk also drew on traditional gender identity norms while marginalising singlehood, as well as non-monogamies. These results have implications for constructions of masculinity, femininity, monogamy, sexuality and power relations within heterosexuality.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Shahin Payam

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Ethics Approval

The Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved this research on the 16 October 2014 for a period of three years. AUTEC Reference number: 14/311.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Engaging in sexual contact with someone other than one's exclusive romantic partner while in a committed relationship is typically referred to as 'infidelity', 'cheating', an 'affair', 'adultery' or 'unfaithfulness' (e.g., Blow & Hartnett, 2005a; Luo, Cartun, & Snider, 2010; Whisman & Wagers, 2005). This behaviour appears to occupy a contradictory site within current Western culture – it is both seemingly widespread, yet seen as highly unacceptable (e.g., Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016). Although most individuals (90%) claim that extramarital sex is wrong (Smith, 1994), prevalence rates of reported extradyadic activities over one's lifetime are estimated to be as high as 75% for men and 68% for women in the U.S.A. (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999).

The practice of infidelity is something that both fascinates the general populous, as well as producing moral outrage (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a). The media is filled with numerous high profile leaders, celebrities, or sports figures who have been exposed for 'cheating'. One of the most high profile cases was the "Sexgate" scandal in 1998, involving U.S. President Bill Clinton and his intern Monica Lewinsky. At the time Bill Clinton denied any allegations of having "sexual relations" with Monica Lewinsky, though it was later revealed that he did receive oral sex from her on several occasions (Kramer & Olson, 2002)[1]. Consequently, Bill Clinton was fined US$90,000 for contempt of court and had his license to practice law suspended for five years. Despite some serious legal repercussions, Bill Clinton has remained a respected public figure, often portrayed as supporting his wife, Hillary, in becoming Secretary of State from 2009 – 2013 and running for Presidency in 2016. Although the juridical consequences were less severe for Monica Lewinsky (she had to remain legally silent about the

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[1] This triggered discussions around the coital imperative (McPhillips, Braun, & Gavey, 2001) in academia and of what really "counts as sex" in the media (Medley-Rath, 2007).

experience in return for transactional immunity), her reputation was tarnished as a result of the affair, as she was branded with being a "slut", "tramp", or "that woman" (Lewinsky, 2015).

In another high profile case, world champion golfer Tiger Woods was revealed to have several mistresses through various media outlets in 2013. When his wife Elin Nordegren learned of his affairs, she reportedly physically attacked and injured him, and chased him out of the house with a golf club (Callahan, 2013). Not only did his marriage dissolve, but Woods lost a number of sponsors as a consequence of his actions, which were covered for several weeks in the media (e.g., BBC, 2010). Tiger Woods subsequently took a break from golf and entered rehab for "sex addiction", but to date his career has not fully recovered.

Turning to New Zealand, former Auckland Mayor Len Brown was reported to have had an ongoing affair with a member of the Auckland Council advisory board in 2013 (a younger woman named Bevan Chuang) (Mason, 2013). Although he remained in office, stating that his affair did not affect his performance as Mayor, he did not contest the 2016 election. Len Brown was portrayed in the media as a family man trying to 'work through' the issue with his family, and asked if he needed 'some time off' (Stuff.co.nz, 2013). In a remorseful statement, Len Brown declared: "I've cost my wife and children harm and shame and humiliation.". Bevan Chuang, in contrast, was depicted as having ulterior motives regarding potential gains from the affair (e.g., monetary). Similar cases can be observed in many countries around the world (e.g., Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, French President Nicolas Sarkozy) and it is typically men in powerful positions who are 'caught out' for having affairs with younger women (Lammers & Maner, 2016).

Although most high profile cases are men, the prevalence rates outlined previously seem to suggest that men and women are more similar than different (e.g., Brand, Markey, Mills, & Hodges, 2007; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007; Whisman & Snyder, 2007; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Celebrity cases aside, the topic of infidelity is often seen as private and regarded as the business of the couple (Jackson & Scott, 2004b; M. L. Parker, Berger, & Campbell, 2010; Tawfik & Cotts Watkins, 2007). The process and outcomes for men and women, whether public or private, however, seem to be quite different.

1.1 A Gendered Issue

Despite the increasing gender similarities regarding rates of infidelity in the West (especially among younger people), men and women who cheat are often regarded and treated differently (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). This is illustrated in the cases outlined earlier. While the men who have cheated on their wives have largely been 'forgiven' for their actions, as best exemplified in the case of Bill Clinton, the single women they cheated with, have been depicted as the 'homewrecker', ostracised and "slut-shamed" (e.g., Lewinsky, 2015).

The differential depictions of men and women are also represented in Hollywood films. The men in these movies are typically depicted as uncontrollably 'falling for' women, who manipulate them into having an affair with them (e.g., 'Derailed'). The women, in contrast, whether in the position of 'cheater' or 'homewrecker', are often portrayed as being manipulative and having ulterior motives, such as wanting to get their husband killed by their 'lover' (e.g., 'Fatal Attraction', 'The Last Seduction', 'To Die For'). The consequences for these women are also illustrated as more severe and involve getting killed (e.g., 'Secret Window', 'What Lies Beneath').

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These discourses, such as 'slut bashing', are located within traditional gender norms (Bamberg, 2004; Farvid, Braun, & Rowney, 2016) that justify/reward men's sexual behaviours, yet tend to denigrate women for the same behaviour (Farvid & Braun, 2016; Farvid et al., 2016). It is therefore important to gain an understanding into the underlying assumptions of such sexual practices that have informed constructions of masculinity and femininity based on a sexual double standard.

1.2 Problems with Current Definitions

Extradyadic encounters where one or both parties are already in a committed relationship are usually negatively labelled as 'adultery', 'infidelity', 'cheating', 'unfaithfulness', or 'extramarital sex'. Taking up these terms can have repercussions for all parties involved. For instance, classifying this act as 'cheating' does not only label the person engaging in this behaviour as a 'cheater', potentially stigmatising the individual and possibly having legal ramifications (Bird, Butler, & Fife, 2007), as seen in the case of Bill Clinton. Such a term also positions the person that has been 'cheated on' as a victim, which can evoke traumatic emotions, including feelings of shame and depression (Bird et al., 2007; Cano & O'Leary, 2000; K. C. Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2004; Whisman & Wagers, 2005). The usage of these negative words has been taken for granted. The psychotherapeutic literature generally reflects such assumptions as it depicts this behaviour typically in a negative fashion and as having adverse outcomes for all the parties involved, including children (Bird et al., 2007; Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler, & Miller, 2002; Thorson, 2014; Walters & Burger, 2013; Whisman & Wagers, 2005).

The behavioural definition of these terms tends to be vague among individuals and researchers, and often excludes particular populations (e.g., unmarried couples), as well as sexual acts that do not involve intercourse (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a). Some

researchers, especially from an evolutionary perspective, have also made distinctions between sexual and emotional infidelity to outline gender differences. The usefulness of such an approach appears debatable (e.g., Harris, 2003b), as engaging in this behaviour is typically not an either/or matter. In order to step away from presumed negative connotations associated with engaging in sex with someone other than one's exclusive partner, the current project sought to create a neutral phrase that is inclusive of a wider range of behaviours. It also sought to move beyond dichotomies and presumed categories, such as sexual *or* emotional infidelity. As such it aimed to make the private and the normative visible by refraining from stigmatising terms and classifications that create a false duality (Finn, 2012b). This approach allowed those who may feel judged by certain terminology or do not identify their behaviour as an act of cheating for instance (e.g., Moller & Vossler, 2015), to come forward and disclose their experiences.

To follow this undertaking, the term extra-relational sexual involvement (ERSI) was created for the purpose of this study, with the intention of avoiding a vocabulary that carries negative connotations. This has been a major pitfall of previous studies that have largely employed existing (often moralising) terminology to investigate this behaviour (Luo et al., 2010; Tiefer, 1995). As such, the research aimed to take a step back and approach the issue in a less culturally loaded manner. It was anticipated that this approach would aid in the recruitment and openness of participants (Farvid, 2010).

The definition of ERSI specifically included vaginal, oral and anal sex with someone other than one's exclusive partner, as these are reportedly most commonly seen as an act of cheating (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Randall & Byers, 2003). Such an inclusion criteria is in line with that provided by Vail-Smith, Whetstone, and Knox (2010), but does not rule out any emotional components. It is thereby about the sexual act, as well as the complexities of emotions. Furthermore, ERSI is not commonly used

to imply blame, utilises more neutral terms, and aims to avoid stigmatisation. Additionally, it would help to create a novel and less biased approach to the issue.

1.3 Current Project

The current project sought to make sense of heterosexual ERSI by taking an in-depth and contextualised approach. In order to do this, qualitative methodology from a social constructionist epistemology was employed (see Chapter Four). Social constructionism views knowledge as constructed through language. From this perspective, language functions to make sense of individuals' experiences and creates people's perception of their social world. The social constructionist lens sees words as co-constitutive of realities and regards them as contestable and contextual. Talk from this stance is seen as a form of action, rather than a neutral form of mere communication, as it is linked to other types of representational activities and affects the (re)construction of social life (Burr, 1995; Edley, 2001; Gergen, 1985; Schwandt, 2000; Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

Power is one of the main concerns of social constructionist psychology, dealing with issues of oppression and accountability (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Power also plays a major role within heterosexual relationship dynamics. Several mechanisms linked to and including ERSI (e.g., Mint, 2004) have been argued to contribute to the varying power dynamics within relationships, such as jealousy (e.g., Kipnis, 2003; Mint, 2010), domestic violence (e.g., Connell, 2001; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Jackson & Scott, 1996; Klesse, 2010; Lieberman, 1999; Vandello & Cohen, 2003; Weeks, 2010), honour killings (e.g., Patel & Gadit, 2008), and stigmatisation (especially of women, such as 'slut bashing') (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005; Penn, Hernandez, & Bermudez, 1997).

I sought to address how ERSI plays out in relation to heterosexual norms and how it is situated in relation to dominant discourses. More specifically, I explored how ERSI was said to impact on the individual, (future) relationship(s) and others, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of these phenomena. Next, I outlined how it is broadly constructed in the Western cultural context and the implications of this for constructions of masculinity, femininity, monogamy, sexuality and power relations within heterosexuality. This is not an attempt to dismiss monogamy per se, but rather to offer a challenge to naturalistic assumptions of categorisation, order, and (inevitable) adverse consequences in order to promote (gender as well as relationship) equality and conscious choice.

1.4 Research Questions to be Investigated

In accordance with the issues outlined above, this project sought to critically examine constructions of masculinity, femininity, sexuality and relationships, as related to ERSI. In particular, the following research questions are explored:

Q1: What are the experiences of heterosexual men and women who have engaged in ERSI?

Q2: What are the dominant discourses related to ERSI in a Western cultural context?

Q3: What are the implications of these constructions for male sexuality, female sexuality, heterosexuality, heteronormativity, heterogender, heterosex and power dynamics within heterosexuality?

1.5 Thesis Outline

In the following chapter, **Chapter Two,** I outline the theoretical background related to ERSI, including theories discussing notions of heterosexuality, gender and

monogamy. The aim is to give the reader an understanding of the normative structures and mechanisms that comprise ERSI. In **Chapter Three**, I address the research conducted on ERSI to demonstrate the understanding of this practice to date and outline the gaps in the literature. In particular, this chapter seeks to highlight the problematic nature of much of the mainstream literature concerning this particular topic. Generally, when possible the term ERSI is used throughout the thesis. However, for the purpose of clarity, the terms used by the researchers or commonly employed in the particular area/for a certain behaviour, are utilised.

Chapter Four covers all aspects related to the method, including epistemology, methodology, method of data collection and data analysis. **Chapters Five** and **Six** (the first two analytic chapters) represent the data and analysis related to the first study, examining individual written narratives. **Chapter Seven** (the third analytic chapter) addresses the second study, outlining the wider social construction of ERSI as represented in group discussions. The findings of both studies in relation to one another and the wider implications of these are discussed in **Chapter Eight**.

Chapter 2: Theorising Heterosexuality

This chapter is the first literature review chapter of two and gives an overview of heterosexuality and relationships, as theorised from a social constructionist perspective. The aim is to provide an in-depth and contextualised understanding of heterosexuality that takes a social, cultural and historic perspective. Furthermore, this chapter addresses how ERSI has been argued to be a normative part of current relationship models. As such, critical theories on sexuality, gender and relationships are discussed to gain an understanding of how these systems operate within contemporary Western society.

Heterosexuality is largely "defined as a sexual or relational identity (belonging to individuals or groups) and also as a social institution (which structures daily life)" (Farvid, 2015, p. 92). Heterosexual relationships are typically characterised in the Western context as a lifelong monogamous arrangement that involves cohabitation, marriage and children (VanEvery, 1996). Though some of these characteristics are being challenged (e.g., dropping of marriage rates, couples having fewer children), these depictions of heterosexual relationships remain prevalent, as they are (legally) reinforced by the State, church, and the marginalisation of other types of relationships. These relations have been argued to make various identities available to individuals, for instance women as wives or daughters, and thereby influence how heterosexuality as an institution and practice is experienced (Jackson, 1996, 2005). The subject positions offered within such relationships may be essential to the oppression of women, as they may limit their economic opportunities and autonomy (Jackson, 1999; VanEvery, 1996). The normative sexual, relational and gender practices that characterise heterosexuality are known as heteronormativity (a term coined by Warner, 1991).

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A social constructionist approach to study ERSI regards sexuality (which includes sexual identities) as constructed through language and discourse, rather than as a 'natural' or biological drive (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). Early theorising can be found in Gagnon and Simon's (1973) sexual script theory. This was developed in an attempt to move away from deterministic biological explanations of sexuality as an internal bodily state, as well as from early sociological theories that viewed sexuality as serving static social or cultural purposes (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). According to this theory, *cultural scenarios*, which are subject to historical and social shifts, guide people's conduct and define what we consider sexual (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Through interactions with others, the actors may improvise their behaviour in particular situations, creating *interpersonal scripts*. The development of such scripts requires the individual to 'rehearse' the scenarios internally. Known as *intrapsychic scripting*, this process involves the creation of sexual fantasies and multi-layered wishes about sexual practices. Early versions of sexual script theory were embedded within a social learning tradition, but have evolved to a social constructionist position by conceptualising a more active subject and through post-structuralists' influences, such as Foucault (Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

Foucault's (1978, 1985, 1986) three volume work "the history of sexuality" illustrated sexuality as a cultural and social construct that is socially and historically situated (Carabine, 2001). In that sense, he challenged biological discourses of sexuality as a reaction to Freud. More specifically, a variation of sexuality across history and culture may challenge claims of biological determinism, and support sexuality as socially constructed (Jackson, 1996). Biological notions of sex tend to be body-centred and have deemed certain acts, such as vaginal intercourse, as 'natural' and therefore acceptable (Hawkes, 1998; Seidman, 1989). Other sexual acts, such as anal sex, have thereby been rendered unacceptable and unhealthy, subsequently excluding other

sexualities. Such notions are illustrative of the normative moralistic assumptions attributed to sexuality. Instead of taking these assumptions for granted, a social constructionist approach to sexuality attempts to challenge such a moral order.

Drawing on the works of Foucault, as well as Gagnon and Simon, Tiefer (1995) adopted a social constructionist perspective to challenge discourses of sex as a 'natural' act promoted through scholars in the medical and psychological fields. In particular, she addressed how discourses around normalcy and abnormality in regards to sexuality create anxieties in the population when it comes to maintaining relationships, managing expectations and how to have sex. According to Tiefer, sexual functioning has subsequently become a central part of relationships with people increasingly turning to experts for advice on issues, such as what is 'normal' (meaning socially acceptable) and 'pleasurable'. The definition of acceptable sexuality has been dominated by a limited biomedical model in psychology in terms of health and illness, as well as eliminating deviant behaviour. Such behaviour, however, may merely be regarded as deviant in some cultures, but not in others, and might thereby be attributed to cultural, social or legal standards, for example men kissing in public. Tiefer highlighted the need for sexualities research in psychology to adopt a social constructionist perspective and how such a framework can be applied. In particular, she outlined that this research should pay attention to "dominant" forms of sexuality, such as heterosexuality, in order to challenge the medicalisation in definitions and naturalisation of certain acts. The current project intended to do so, by drawing particularly on Foucault's and Tiefer's approach to sexuality.

Sexuality as a social construct has potential for alteration, which gives rise to the possibility of counter-discourses that offer alternative constructions and therefore different ways of organising and regulating social life (Jackson, 1996; Willig, 2013). S.

Hall (2001) proposed that subjects cannot be beyond these discourses, instead arguing that they produce and are produced within discourse. The available discourses of a particular time and culture may limit conduct, what can be said, and accomplished. For instance the category of 'in-law' is not readily available to homosexuals where same-sex marriage is not permitted, creating interactional hurdles and indicating their exclusion from equal rights (C. Kitzinger, 2005).

2.1 Heteronormativity

Heterosexual relations have been construed as the foundation of social functioning by depicting them as stable, universal, necessary and natural (D. Richardson, 1996). Such a construction promotes the impression that heterosexuality offers the blueprint for interpersonal relations, thereby positioning heterosexual relationships as normative. Heteronormativity and mononormativity (the requirement to be monogamous) may reinforce and produce heterosexuality as natural and privileged over other types of relationships that rank below romantic love in significance, such as friendships (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Carabine, 1996; Jackson & Scott, 2004a; D. Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson, 2010). According to Jackson and Scott (2004a), what renders a monogamous relationship exclusive and distinguishes it from friendship is sex. This demonstrates the value given to sex, which is viewed as a bond holding the couple together, who otherwise could break apart, as in the case of ERSI. Jackson and Scott proposed that one needs to question the significance of sex and inspect why the (constructed) emotions involved are so complex and different from other relationships and activities people engage in.

The notion of privacy surrounding romantic relationships has rendered love and sex exclusive to the heterosexual couple, characterised by adopting a romanticised view of marriage (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Finn, 2012b; Jackson & Scott, 2004a). As

such, a liberalist notion of freedom-of-contract was deployed, whereby personal choice and autonomy are managed through contracts and moral/social responsibilities (Finn, 2010). This meant that people were given the freedom, rather than the obligation, to obey the rules. The options provided, seemingly limited such freedom by linking exclusive heterosexual romantic relationships to health (especially when HIV/AIDS emerged (Weeks, 2010)) and happiness (e.g., Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013), continuously reinforcing these relationships through psychological inquiry (Finn, 2012a). Hence, mononormativity within heterosexual relationships has been produced in society as 'essential' and 'morally correct', promising relationship success, stability and life happiness. Subsequently, engaging in sex with someone other than one's committed partner is commonly depicted as threatening the exclusive relationship and the health of everyone involved, including children (e.g., Negash & Morgan, 2016).

2.1.1 Research on heteronormativity

According to Farvid (2015), psychological theory has generally ignored heterosexuality as a topic of investigation, taking it as a 'given' or the 'norm', thereby setting the perimeters of adequate and admissible sexuality. By focusing instead on sexualities that do not constitute the norm (such as homosexuality), these 'other' sexualities have been pathologised, while heterosexuality has been further normalised. More specifically, certain 'truths' about sexuality were created in the 19th century through scientific inquiry that described people's inner beings, rather than particular acts (e.g., by developing terms such as nymphomania or homosexuality). These were based on medical assumptions, such as what is 'natural' or 'unnatural', and to portray sex as the most spontaneous thing about us (Gavey, 2005; Jackson & Scott, 1996; Tiefer, 1995; Weeks, 2010). For instance, 'promiscuity' is still linked to Borderline Personality Disorder (e.g., Sansone & Wiederman, 2009), as well as other syndromes cited in the DSM IV-TR and ICD-10 (Richards, 2010).

2.2 Heterosexual Sexuality

Hollway (1989, 2001) demonstrated how gendered subjectivities are produced by heteronormative discourses. These discourses commonly assume a natural, uncontrollable male sexual drive, whereas women's sexuality (depending on the culture) may be seen as 'lacking' (e.g., post-Victorian northern Europe) or dangerous and enduring (Mediterranean cultures), requiring male control (such as jealousy) to maintain the family honour.

According to Hollway (1989, 2001), a male sex drive is argued to serve reproduction and to guarantee species survival. The taken for granted notion of sex as a 'natural force' has positioned men as 'entitled' to sex throughout their lifespan (Carabine, 1996; Jackson & Scott, 1996; Weeks, 2010). By depicting such a drive as 'uncontrollable', male acts of violence and rape are ostensibly justified, which may consequently degrade female sexual independence.

Hollway (1989, 2001) further outlined that through a have/hold discourse, women have traditionally been depicted as sexual gatekeepers, who enter into a relationship for different reasons than men. A commonly depicted reason is seeking to fulfil a desire to have a family. More specifically, such a discourse depicts women as less likely to enjoy sex for purely sex's sake and as drawn to the intimacy or romantic part of sex, as illustrated in critical theories, experimental studies and qualitative research (Carabine, 1996; Emmers-Sommer, Warber, & Halford, 2010; Kipnis, 2003; Patterson, 1990; Rudman, Fetterolf, & Sanchez, 2013; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007; Sprecher, McKinney, & Orbuch, 1987; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013).

A more permissive discourse, which applies the notion of a sexual drive to both men and women, however, does not automatically eliminate this double standard (Farvid et al., 2016; Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar,

2005). Instead, this discourse can give greater sexual access for men and discard women's right to object to a sexual act (Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005). As such, it might potentially increase men's powers by giving them the 'right' to engage in heterosexual practices without emotional commitments, and may correspondingly hide men's desire for intimacy. Highlighting men's desire for affection is seen to inversely give women more power. This notion exemplifies that the diverse subject and object positions are not equally accessible by both men and women (Hollway, 1989, 2001). The gendered identities have been argued to be enacted within scripts of heterosexual sex.

2.3 Heterosex

Men and women have been argued to follow particular heterosexual scripts for engaging in sex that are regarded as normative and acceptable in society (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003). These scripts appear to be gendered, as they position men as initiators of sex and women as boundary setters, who delay their engagement in this act until intimacy has been established (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Tiefer, 1995). The acceptable scripts in Western society have been outlined to consist of engaging in heterosexual sex once intimacy has been established, within a monogamous relationship, in private, and as involving intercourse. In particular, the sexual act has been argued to typically comprise successive stages that involve foreplay, coitus and orgasm (Jackson & Scott, 1997). The meanings of sex, however, have been proposed to be multiple and to have varied across history and cultures (Hawkes, 1996), with a greater emphasis in contemporary Western society on biological notions.

Sex has largely been defined in research and the general population from a biological and psychological viewpoint in terms of orgasms and reproduction (Tiefer, 2002a, 2002b). The defining feature of heterosexuals engaging in sex, has been argued

to be vaginal intercourse (McPhillips et al., 2001; D. Richardson, 1996). This understanding is proposed to have derived from the morphological view of gendered bodies as naturally complementing each other like 'a lock and key' system for the penis and vagina (D. Richardson, 1996). Such a notion reinforces penis-vagina penetration as necessary to feel sexual arousal and pleasure. Desire is thereby positioned as exclusive to the heterosexual couple based on the presupposition of gender difference as a necessity to experience sexual pleasure (Jackson, 1996; D. Richardson, 1996). The construction of men's and women's anatomical difference as socially and erotically significant, may create a gender hierarchy that gives rise to differential power dynamics within heterosex (Jackson, 1996). It has been contended, though, that the privileging of penetrative sex is not based on intrinsic anatomical differences between men and women, but is rather a product of social relations where their bodies encounter each other. For instance, each individual differs from another, yet there are some differences that are drawn out as socially significant, while others are not. A gendered power hierarchy is thereby not derived from the differential biological setup, but from the meaning of penetrative sex as a symbol of male dominance. The meaning of penetration as a representation of patriarchal power and female subordination, however, may not be a singular one and is potentially contestable. Challenging these meanings opens up the possibility of penetrative sex as enjoyable for women (Jackson, 1996), though it has been argued that enjoyment of heterosexual desire may in fact derive from the differential power relations (Jeffreys, 1996).

The taken-for-granted assumption of heterosex involving (vaginal) intercourse, is known as the coital imperative (McPhillips et al., 2001). This notion of heterosexual sex excludes the anus as a site from which sexual pleasure is derived for heterosexuals, and in particular for women (D. Richardson, 1996). Instead, anal sex is positioned as a heterosexualised version of homosexual men's penetrative sex, rendering women's anal

sex invisible. Resisting the coital imperative and imagining other ways of sex may be difficult, due to the centrality of penis-vagina penetration within heterosex (McPhillips et al., 2001). Jackson (1999) argued for a redefinition of penetration meaning active male/passive female, and acknowledging a wider range of practices that can be comprised in the definition of heterosex. Challenging the coital imperative would open up multiple discursive possibilities that shift away from penetration as the only or main way to engage in sex (McPhillips et al., 2001). As such, it may open up space for negotiation and safer sex practices, particularly for women.

2.3.1 Talking about sex

Jackson and Scott (2004b) pointed out that personal sex life is often not talked about, as it can be a source of embarrassment and repulsion. They argued that sex is regarded as a special activity that is spontaneous, passionate, and separate from everyday routine. Mundane sex may henceforth be seen as 'boring' or 'bad' sex. This was further supported in a qualitative study that included 30 interviews with men and women on casual sex, where relationship sex was constructed as more satisfying than casual sex, but risked becoming 'boring' (Farvid & Braun, 2016). It can thereby be inferred that sex may become a routine activity within a relationship, and might therefore be removed of its definition of 'exciting' sex (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007). ERSI may subsequently become a 'good' sex (private context), but morally 'bad' activity (socially situated as influenced by science and religion).

Rather than employing the word sex, the term sexuality may constitute a more fluid term that takes the sex act, as well as the feelings, relationships and the way we define others and ourselves into account. It involves a multitude of meanings, referring to values, behaviour and emotions, as well as recognising a more complex interpretation of sex that includes pleasure and desire, thereby also accounting for female sexuality. It

has been argued that the meanings and understandings of sex are constructed through language, and communicated through laws, theories, media and common sense suppositions (Jackson & Scott, 1996; Weeks, 2010). Sex is thereby proposed to be not commensurate with reproduction. Jackson and Scott (1996), however, cautioned not to create a dichotomy between essentialism and constructionism, which could potentially view sexuality as disembodied. Rather, they put forward that a theory needs to take account of the body as both socially constructed and physically present. Since it cannot be conceptualised outside of language, the body/sex may be a social product, rather than an innate mechanism. As these meanings have moulded our imaginations, beliefs, and desires, it is difficult to think of sex in other ways than in patriarchal terms. A social constructionist approach to sexuality challenges evolutionary psychology explanations and questions their value for cultural change, as evolutionary theories merely accept the status quo (Gavey, 2005). According to Weeks (2010), biology provides the potential of what is possible, but the meaning is constructed through social relationships.

2.4 Heterogender

Through heteronormative assumptions, specific discourses around sexual/gender identity are promoted, constructing positions of masculinity (e.g., as agentic) and femininity (e.g., as passive) (Bamberg, 2004; Farvid & Braun, 2016). That is, gender itself may be a construct based on heterosexual assumptions around 'normalcy' (Pringle, 2008). Pringle (2008) argued that masculinity and femininity are interdependent categories that reflect the biological notion of 'sex' inherent in a dualistic conceptualisation of gender (as linked to biological sex). The dual categories of male/female created through such notions may appear invisible, depicted by common-sense views of what constitutes either masculine or feminine behaviours. The meanings and divisions inherent in the term 'gender' may manifest themselves as a product of heterosexuality (Pringle, 2008; D. Richardson, 1996). The normative notions

around heterosexuality may thereby disguise the male/female dichotomy implied in this construction (Pringle, 2008). As such, it has been proposed that the term 'heterogender' may more appropriately reflect the heteronormative foundation of the concept. Gender may then not be something that simply exists and happens, but that is 'done' and 'accomplished' (Nielsen, Walden, & Kunkel, 2000; Pringle, 2008).

2.4.1 Policing heterogender

It has been argued that the institution of heterosexuality is actively upheld through the requirement or enticement to enact specific gendered identities, for example women doing housework or men supporting their families financially (Nielsen et al., 2000). These norms may work to maintain the social and economic privileges that such a construct entails for men and women (Nielsen et al., 2000; D. Richardson, 1996). For instance, men may engage in the traditionally male territory of ERSI to induce sovereignty, freedom and social order (Connell, 2005). Disrupting one's gender identity by violating its related behavioural norm, might almost automatically lead to an association with 'the other' gender (Nielsen et al., 2000). A woman's engagement in ERSI could then cause confusion and resistance (Connell, 2005). Nielsen et al. (2000) argued that gendered identities are not only enacted within heterosexual relationships, but are visible in everyday conduct. For example, a man painting his finger nails or doing grocery shopping may be regarded as 'feminine' and subsequently classified as 'less of a man'. This illustrates the differential access to these practices for men and women, limiting their options and guiding them to act in prescribed ways. Social inequality may thereby be derived from the differential cultural meanings and evaluations ascribed to particular gender norms (Nielsen et al., 2000).

2.4.2 Hegemonic masculinities

By identifying certain behaviours as masculine or feminine, Connell (2001) proposed that it is people's conducts that create masculinities, rather than pre-existing

personalities, social behaviours or viewing gender in terms of performance and shifting positions. Thus, ERSI may be used to construct particular masculinities, for instance. However, Connell further suggested that these masculinities can be deconstructed, challenged and substituted and are therefore subject to change, sometimes on a small level, at other times on a global scale, also depending on the resistance to change of a particular masculinity. The meanings of masculinity/femininity may be embedded within the practices and notions ascribed to heterosex (Jackson, 1996, 1999).

2.5 Politics of Heterosexuality

Based on the notion of traditional approaches to gender and sexuality, engaging in heterosex has often been a *social* exchange between men and women (Rudman et al., 2013). That is, men are supposed to receive sex in exchange for providing financially for their partner. More specifically, men's long-established status as the 'breadwinner' (Connell, 2005) manifested in monogamous heterosexual relationships, may have tied women to men in order to limit their economic opportunities and control their fertility (Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005). Heterosexual relations have in that sense given men access to women's (unpaid) labour and their sexual bodies through the prioritisation of male desire and women's subordination to men's pleasure (Jackson, 1996, 1999).

A natural male sex drive and patriarchal social order have been argued to be a central point of masculinity (Rudman et al., 2013), and men may thereby be expected to have sex and/or multiple sexual partners (Smiler, 2013). Thus men may 'conquer' women to enhance their reputation and affirm their virile sexuality (Farvid & Braun, 2016; Rudman et al., 2013). Furthermore, due to the construction of ERSI around cultural definitions of masculinity, men may engage in this behaviour if they feel that their masculinity is threatened by their partner, particularly as women are becoming

increasingly present in the workforce and independent (Connell, 2005; Munsch, 2010, as cited in Munsch, 2012; Munsch, 2015). The authors supported their claims through longitudinal surveys, as well as critical reviews on the state of research and politics in the fields of ERSI and gender, respectively.

2.5.1 Sexual double standard

Engaging in a sexual behaviour that is classified as masculine, may disrupt certain gendered practices and position women as 'undesirable' to men (Farvid et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2000). Women who might engage in ERSI are less likely to have the cultural justifications often available to men, (e.g., 'high sex drive', 'mid-life crises') and are judged more harshly for such actions (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006). Women thereby carry a greater stigma, are seen to have more intention and responsibility for the act, and are expected to have greater feelings of remorse (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994). Traditional definitions of sex have 'entitled' men to sexual freedom and depicted women as either a respectable 'virgin' or repugnant 'whore' (Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005), legitimising male violence as understandable (Klesse, 2010; Mint, 2010). Sexuality therefore may be directly linked to power and follows wider societal interests (Gavey, 2005). This is reflected in Lieberman's (1999) analysis of 'adultery' in 19th century France, where such an act was not only seen as a crime against the family, but as violence against men. Such a stance made power, rather than love, the driving dynamic behind extramarital sex, essentially rendering a woman's infidelity as dangerous. Accordingly, a husband killing his wife as a consequence of her actions in their home was exonerated. Lieberman's analysis exemplifies the variation in meanings of an ERSI act over time.

Power can subsequently be regarded to play a major role within relationship dynamics. Women's engagement in ERSI may then not necessarily indicate a step towards gender equality, but might be demonstrative of the continued imbalance within heterosexual relationships. More specifically, it has been proposed that due to the association of femininity and relationships in society, women have more pressure to endure and less power to exit an unsatisfactory relationship (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). ERSI may subsequently act as a strategy for women to leave an unwanted relationship. Simply engaging in ERSI then, may not disrupt the power structures and indicate greater gender equality, but instead manifest men's power within heterosexual relationships further. Achieving a more gender equal approach to relationships may therefore be contingent upon the ways we construct a behaviour, rather than the conduct itself.

2.5.2 Gendered outcomes of ERSI

Several mechanisms linked to and including ERSI (e.g., Mint, 2004) have contributed to the varying power dynamics within relationships, such as domestic violence (e.g., Connell, 2001; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Jackson & Scott, 1996; Klesse, 2010; Lieberman, 1999; Vandello & Cohen, 2003; Weeks, 2010), honour killings (e.g., Patel & Gadit, 2008), and stigmatisation (especially of women) (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005; Penn et al., 1997) in order to maintain an easily governable monogamous coupledom (e.g., Finn, 2010). As such, men have been more likely to engage in ERSI as they have held greater power, control and options within heterosexual relationships (Farvid & Braun, 2016; Munsch, 2012). The consequences of ERSI therefore seem to be more severe for women than men. The violent acts may be used to restore masculinity (Patel & Gadit, 2008) and as a controlling behaviour by intimate partners according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The study outlined that in over half the investigated countries over 50% of the

women interviewed expressed that a woman's infidelity was a justification for wife beating (although almost all women in New Zealand, regardless of ethnicity, disapproved of domestic violence) (Fanslow, Robinson, Crengle, & Perese, 2010; García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). The United Nations as well as the WHO estimate that one in three women will be raped or beaten in her lifetime as a result of intimate partner violence (García-Moreno et al., 2005).

In New Zealand, over 101,000 domestic violence cases have been recorded in 2014, with an average of 35 cases resulting in death per annum between 2009 and 2012, which accounts for over half of murders according to New Zealand Police Statistics (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2014). In light of the high rates, the gendered perception of infidelity and its resulting consequences (Clayton & Trafimow, 2007; Scheinkman, 2005; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013), such as jealousy related violence, need to be addressed and challenged. These problems might often be silenced and ignored in society, as it is still labelled 'domestic' violence, indicating a 'private' matter. The victims of such violent acts may be too afraid to come forward due to the social ostracism they may have to face, with laws in many countries following the footsteps of widespread moralistic assumptions (e.g., Patel & Gadit, 2008), emphasising the need to enhance our understanding of the issue. The fears of the consequences are exemplified by Tiger Woods, who initially denied having been attacked by his wife, to avoid the matter becoming public. This demonstrates that men can be affected, too, by partner violence, though to a lesser extent (García-Moreno et al., 2005). Tiger Wood's worries seemed warranted considering the heavy financial losses he suffered as a result of his actions. Women, in contrast, may fear more for their lives, as they are more likely to be murdered by their partner than men (García-Moreno et al., 2005). The varying consequences demonstrate the diverse experiences and impacts this sexual practice has on men and women.

Although it may be argued that it is disadvantageous for men to pursue equality for women, they can just as well gain from it. Violence, for instance, is seen as a male domain to inflict power and dominance, but men are also more often the victims of such action (or may be disadvantaged if they do not respond with the culturally reinforced and expected violence (Vandello & Cohen, 2003)), and may therefore follow the same interests as women (Connell, 2005). Gender equality may further decrease the humiliation and shame men have to face for their partner's ERSI (Jankowiak, Nell, & Buckmaster, 2002; Vandello & Cohen, 2003). However, one barrier in the acquirement of gender equality is posed by conservative men, who are in control of authorities, and religious groups, which promote heteronormative relationships and condemn ERSI (Connell, 2005; Harris, 2003b). Conservative and religious groups have maintained that traditional gender norms are necessary to avoid adverse outcomes for children and women. These groups frequently use examples of divorce rates, child abuse, STIs and extramarital sex to justify their concerns and promote monogamous coupledom (McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005).

2.6 Mononormativity

The meanings of love, sex and relationships are argued to have changed over time (e.g., sex as sacred, recreational etc.) (Frank & DeLamater, 2010). For instance, it has been reported that it was acceptable for men to have a mistress in the past (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Passionate sex was seen as inacceptable within marriage, while ERSI was generally tolerated as a means to engage in erotic behaviour for men. The responsibilities and restrictions that come with marriage seemed to be separated from the love affair. The matrimonial arrangement appeared to be unaffected by emotions, taking its course as an economic partnership, thereby providing stability to both relationships. This example demonstrates a multitude of possibilities of doing

monogamy that do not necessarily reflect the heteronormative assumptions dictating current definitions of relationships.

With the demise of religion and economic changes that have led to greater individualisation and gender equality, people may be seeking a return to traditional constraints, in order to create a sense of stability (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; M. P. Levine & Troiden, 1988). Despite the increasing dismissal of marriage, a monogamous arrangement with love at its core may have replaced religion in providing security and meaning in an increasingly less stable world (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). As such, love, sex and relationships have been clustered together, based on the assumption that romantic relationships and emotions are synonymous with one another (Kipnis, 2003). Subsequently the standards and demands of a relationship may have increased with the emergence of the industrial revolution with people seeking fulfilment in their relationships and marrying for emotional rather than economic reasons. Within a romantic relationship, people are now expected to be a husband, a friend, a companion and a lover. Coupledom is then supposed to bring happiness and may act as an escape from everyday life. As meanings of gender, love and relationships are constantly transitioning in a modern world, creating a stability that separates itself from an ever-changing environment seems to be a challenging task (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Life and relationships have seemingly become more diverse and contradictory.

Bauman (2013) drew a comparison of security as a profit based on the investments made into a relationship, such as time, money and children; a concept he likened to the stock exchange. He described how contemporary consumerist notions are reflected in the way people pursue love and relationships to satisfy their desires and wishes. In particular, he argued that in a modern world, these wishes and desires must be born and satisfied immediately, rather than having the time to develop, echoing

shoppers' behaviours in shopping malls. That is, when two individuals, who are attracted towards each other unexpectedly meet, they aim to consume their partnership instantly, acting on a fast arousal of wishes. Like other commodities, the (particularly short-term) relationship thereby becomes an average consumer good that can be improved upon with 'newer' or 'better versions', especially when the investments do not yield the desired returns, and disposed of, if unsatisfactory.

The transition from religious to romantic notions of relationships has been argued to have left people unguided by a higher institution and in charge of making their own rules and negotiating them. Being 'faithful' to one's partner is often taken for granted, though (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Frank & DeLamater, 2010; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). As the term implies, a sexual or emotional transgression would break the 'faith' one has in love. The choice between being (desirably) faithful and (undesirably) unfaithful may function to disguise the interdependence of monogamous relationships and ERSI as part of the same theoretical premise (Mint, 2004). Such a dichotomous notion creates a false duality that comprises similar power dynamics as race or gender.

2.6.1 Contradictions within monogamous relationships

The contradictions in contemporary relationships seem apparent in people's expectations of marriage, which nowadays is supposed to combine the domestic with the erotic (Kipnis, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). According to Mitchell (2003), individuals desire spontaneity, while on the other hand they wish for predictability and fear the continuous transitions individuals and relationships may undergo. In other words, mononormative relationships may be an institution to control human changes (e.g., emotions) as these are in constant flux. The ability to cope with this pull in opposite directions, he argued, is hard to handle and fragile. Feelings of anxiety about changes

may lead to the formation of duties and expectations imposed on oneself and one's partner, which can make a relationship seem like a 'prison'. Unpremeditated sex can subsequently turn into an escape mechanism, and as such the paradoxes can generate ideal settings for ERSI (Scheinkman, 2005). However, Mitchell's assumptions tend to associate desire with novelty and spontaneity, contrasting these with habit and regularity. He thereby neglects the possibility of the intimate and familiar increasing desire, rather than having these pull in opposite directions. Emotions and desires might not necessarily stand in opposition to each other (Heckert, 2010).

The rates of ERSI appear symptomatic of the contradictions evident in relationships, suggesting that it constitutes the most common form of non-monogamy, though being a non-consensual form of non-monogamy (Rambukkana, 2010). This might be beneficial for a capitalist society that promotes this sexual practice in an 'adultery industry' filled with guides and websites (e.g., Ashley Madison). As such, society acknowledges ERSI as part of a normal sexuality, and continues to endorse a heteronormative individualism, which functions to make the quest to find 'the one' more desirable (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Rambukkana, 2010). ERSI thereby occupies a privileged public space, which works to situate consensual forms of non-monogamy in a position of exclusion (Rambukkana, 2010). In that sense "cheaters" may essentially "cheat" the system, as they engage in ERSI, but at the same time gain the privileges and rights that monogamous relationships include (Mint, 2004). By maintaining the façade of monogamy, society seemingly pressures us into a marriage system where one size fits all. Rather than providing alternative relationship models, couples experiencing ERSI are offered counselling to deal with their issues. As such, couples' therapy upholds the existing conditions and views 'promiscuous' behaviour as symptomatic of a problem (Kipnis, 2003; Richards, 2010; Samuels, 2010).

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2.6.2 Media and the promotion of mononormativity

The hunt for the meaning of life sought in relationships (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) is often seen in media portrayals (e.g., romantic movies that depict a perfect connection with 'the one'). These may arguably reinforce serial monogamy (e.g., Kipnis, 2003; Mint, 2004). The media provides us with guidelines on how to engage in ERSI, while society denounces such an act, regarding the person who engages in ERSI as morally weak (Mint, 2004). This is illustrative of the ambiguities inherent in everyday life in regards to ERSI. The media, as well as the rapid spread of information of someone's ERSI within social groups, constantly reminds individuals what they are not supposed to do and how they are supposed to react. Thus it is a barometer to measure one's own morals against and demonise the person by naming him/her as the "cheater" for example. These representations may work to underpin a monogamous system without explicitly stating the normative behaviour, pushing people to conform to it.

In order to avoid any possible rumours, individuals in a monogamous relationship might need to be careful not to attract attention through behaviour that carries a sexual subtext, such as spending too much time with an opposite-sex member. Mint (2004) noted that in this manner, monogamy leaves the private sphere of social control and manifests itself into day-to-day activities that symbolise the prospect of sexual encounters. This mechanism then, may be complementary to jealousy in the facilitation of monogamy, but at the same time might work to undermine other kinds of relationships, such as (potential) friendships (e.g., Jackson & Scott, 2004a).

2.6.3 Commitment and trust in relationships

It has been argued that mononormativity is upheld through various mechanisms, such as commitment, trust and jealousy (Finn, 2010, 2012b; Mint, 2004). By depicting these factors as measureable, observable (e.g., by resisting sexual relations with others)

and central to constituting relationship success, a mononormative notion of an inclination for exclusivity in heterosexual relationships might be maintained. Such a conceptualisation presumes to echo an individual freedom of choice, thereby ignoring moral and cultural principles.

According to a critical review of psychological theory on heteronormative coupledom, commitment is identified as a mechanism to combat any outside influences that could disturb the relationship (Finn, 2012b). The couple is in that way commissioned with the task of balancing an individual autonomy with dependency on another person, indicating the existence of contradictory discourses and requirements. Similarly, trust has been promoted as an imperative component in meeting commitment requirements through the predictability of and dependability on a partner, but more importantly by the prevention of alternative partners (Finn, 2012b). As such, trust may produce maximum security through eradications and the policing of ERSI behaviours to reduce unpredictability and surprise. ERSI, therefore, may be a breach of trust that could result in insecurity and deceit, which works to justify people's agitated reactions as 'natural' and 'proper'. Finn (2012b) further stated that "…in the constitutive allegiances of couple commitment and trust we are not led towards a place of certain security so much as directed towards regulatory states of dyadic balance, non-disturbance, and disciplinary truth." (p. 614).

The discussion on measurable factors, such as commitment, demonstrated that mainstream psychology assumes it is a naturally coveted practice (Finn, 2010). Psychology thereby posits a stable coupledom and individual that is not merely about one's actions, but what and who one is (Finn, 2012b; Jackson & Scott, 1996). This notion is reflected in theories of intimacy that assume a real, static self, which can be revealed to one's partner (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Such assumptions,

however, are not congruent with notions of constructed subjectivities, especially since people as well as their relationships may change over time (Finn, 2010). Nonetheless, psychological theories and self-help books tend to promote a self-monitoring individual, who is compelled to transform him/herself into a certain subject that desires and is examined by the other person. This policing is supposed to prevent any slip-ups, such as ERSI, which could create chaos and personal uncertainty (Finn, 2012b).

2.6.4 The role of jealousy in ERSI

A central argument taken up in support of monogamy by scholars (especially from an evolutionary psychology discourse), are the jealous reactions to an ERSI. The definitions of jealousy have largely remained unclear as to whether it is a set of complex emotions (e.g., Green & Sabini, 2006; Sabini & Green, 2004), such as 'distress' or 'upset', or a unique experience (e.g., Becker, Sagarin, Guadagno, Millevoi, & Nicastle, 2004; Easton, 2010; Schützwohl, 2008). Much of the literature has assumed such emotions to be universal and based them on the English language/Western conceptualisations that ignore variances across cultures (Edwards, 1997; Wetherell, 2012, 2014). Ignoring this ambiguity questions not only the approach taken in those studies, but also the tools taken up to assess people's accounts. As Edwards (1997) outlined, the emotions vocabulary rigidly employed by research may not necessarily represent 'actual' feelings in an accurate manner, but may merely be idealisations of what they entail and undermine their flexibility.

The mainstream literature, especially evolutionary psychology, has constructed jealousy as problematic, in biologically innate terms, and thus as an unavoidable and uncontrollable response (Mint, 2010). Such a notion assumes that the reaction can therefore not be an artificial or calculated one and requires the partner to feel jealous and betrayed (Mint, 2004, 2010). This functions to reduce the accountability of the

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person and holds the partner's actions liable instead. The partner is then supposed to adjust his/her behaviour in order to fix the problem. Someone not showing the anticipated response to a partner's involvement with a romantic rival, is subsequently positioned as 'abnormal' (while the sexual behaviour may still be depicted as "cheating", regardless of the parties involved). This control mechanism gives the jealous party power over their partner, as it justifies otherwise denounced behaviours, such as (male) domestic violence, which may still be regarded as irrational, but also as understandable (Klesse, 2010; Mint, 2010).

The power dynamics may be reversed, for instance if the partner accuses the jealous individual to be unreasonable, though there is no clarification concerning what exactly constitutes the difference between the plausibility of the response (Mint, 2010). The notion of emotions being impulsive, can thus be employed to pathologise a behaviour when it is described as irrational (Edwards, 1997). By indicting the jealous party, the partner may resist the direct mechanism of the emotion. Such relationship dynamics do not only affect the couple, as implied by psychological research and treatment that focus on the couple, but also those outside of the relationship (Mint, 2010).

The polyamory literature, in contrast, regards jealousy as constructed and a burden in non-monogamous relationships. An example of the construction of emotional reactions may be the lack of jealousy when starting an affair with someone in an already established relationship, as this is a known condition of the arrangement (Jackson & Scott, 2004a). Hence sharing the person may not be the issue at hand, but rather the risk of losing them to another person, which may be greater within a monogamous system.

2.7 Alternative Relationship Systems

In light of the trouble in negotiations within traditional relationships and the negative effects, for example on physical and psychological well-being, due to the secrecy surrounding ERSI, more attention is paid to consensual non-monogamy, such as polyamory, swinging or gay open relationships (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). Polyamory attempts to undermine the romantic rivalry, for instance by reconstructing a three-way interaction as durable and safe. Challenging the prevalent monogamous framework is not merely about sex(ual relationships), but how we relate to each other in general. For instance, as the importance and privileging of sexual relations decrease, friendships may gain relevance (Jackson & Scott, 2004a).

Despite the growing literature and community, non-monogamy is still marginalised, stigmatised (e.g., Conley et al., 2013; Moors, Conley, Edelstein, & Chopik, 2015; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013) and pathologised, especially through a discourse on ERSI. More specifically, a non-monogamous arrangement may be regarded as standing in contrast to the assumption that individuals only love and have sex with 'the one' (Mint, 2004). Such assumptions tend to ignore previous encounters people may have had, perceiving them as invalid. Non-monogamy may therefore struggle to acquire legal rights of protection and recognition (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Mint, 2004; Richards, 2010). As such, non-monogamy has been argued to have become a political position - a neoliberalist notion of freedom-from-contract - against a mononormativity that advocates moralistic assumptions, as well as societal inequalities. Non-monogamy may then be seen as especially beneficial for women, whose sexual autonomy tends to dispute hegemonic gender relations (Finn, 2010; Klesse, 2010; Wilkinson, 2010). As the personal and social are connected, standing against mononormativity intends to change political and legal structures that affect everyone in order to help us in imagining different and better ways of living

(Samuels, 2010; Wilkinson, 2010). The transgender population provides an example of how one can think outside of categories like male or female, hetero-, homo-, or bisexual (Richards, 2010), thus stepping towards greater fluidity.

2.7.1 Criticisms of polyamory

Polyamory has been criticised for a number of reasons. Rather than deconstructing mononormativity, the polyamory literature often depicts polyamorous behaviour as natural and therefore superior, for instance by emphasising the rarity of monogamy amongst animals (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). By employing essentialist assumptions regarding sexuality, arguments around normalcy are subsequently left unchallenged. Furthermore, polyamory continues to regard love as a central aspect of a relationship and copies many aspects of monogamous principles, such as the liberalist values of commitment, predictability and security. As such, it places the importance given to sex and romance above all other types of relationships, with love being the centre of attention (Finn, 2010; Jackson & Scott, 2004a; Wilkinson, 2010). The similarities between monogamy and non-monogamy in categorisation of relationships and focus on relationship rules, may call into question the usefulness of distinguishing between the two (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). Non-monogamous relationships may as such not necessarily offer the solution to the issue, but involve another set of conditions (Finn, 2010). The construction of relationships may therefore be questioned as an institution that constitutes and involves 'love'.

It has been argued that using mononormative relationships as a blueprint may be due to the lack of scripts for non-monogamous relationships (Richards, 2010). This works to disguise the differential power dynamics between (bi) men and women in such relationships. These scripts also discriminate against those whose sexual practices may be considered monogamous, but who live an alternative lifestyle (e.g., communal

housing). They further single out those who do not fall within any of the dyadic categories and will not label their relationship, since it may change as a result of individual and circumstantial alterations (Frank & DeLamater, 2010; Klesse, 2010; Wilkinson, 2010). It is not clear at this stage what alternatives can look like, but challenging the rigid institutional order of relationships may advance possibilities that have been unimaginable (Finn, 2010).

2.7.2 The fluidity of relationships

Despite the varying and unstable definitions of relationships (e.g., for some it might constitute holding hands, whereas for others it must involve intercourse and a certain timeframe), a taken-for-granted approach seems apparent with static and rigid rules being applied. These notions are also visible in everyday life with people and websites asking about 'relationship status', which is often not clear cut. Social network websites like Facebook have started to recognise these variations, as they provide the option of "it's complicated" for users, indicating that individuals themselves may have trouble in classifying the type of relationship they have with someone else. It questions the usefulness of such predetermined categories, as these may ultimately pressurise individuals into choosing a (favoured) romantic relationship status (and therefore entering a romantic, largely monogamous coupledom). Since romantic relationships may be viewed as superior to other types of relationships, like friendships for instance (e.g., Jackson & Scott, 2004a), people are not given the space to negotiate their arrangement with all its possibilities (e.g., Finn, 2012b).

Although people tend to develop categories to create an understanding in the world, it is important not to create dualities and overcode things, which construct moral mores and guidelines on how one should live (Heckert, 2010; Richards, 2010). Subsequently, Heckert (2010), drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987),

argued for a more fluid framework. He suggested that rather than applying 'borders', devoid of emotions and yearnings (e.g., the law), we should think in terms of 'boundaries'. Heckert proposed that these are flexible regarding circumstances at particular time points. Boundaries are depicted as places where one can go, but does not have to; they are flexible, hence can overcome clear-cut distinctions between (non-) monogamy and therefore leave any superiority claims redundant. Opening up the possibilities for alternatives, whether taken up or not, may provide people with a sense of empowerment. As such, when entering into any kind of relationship, the expectations should be clear (ERSI might be the 'right' thing for some people, in certain life stages or situations). The freedom to make a decision, however, should be based on flexible choice without the judgement or stigmatisation of others dictating it, which by definition diminishes the free will to make up one's mind (e.g., Kipnis, 2003).

Heckert (2010) takes the ever-changing nature of any relationship type into account and acknowledges them as a process - alive, growing and decaying. By doing so, he considers the complexity of relationships as well as the emotions involved. Rather than viewing happiness and sorrow as counterparts, though, he depicts them as complementary, since it may be the human dilemma (e.g., ERSI) that makes us feel alive and destroys the boredom of a relationship (Heckert, 2010; Scheinkman, 2005). This is evident in the ambiguous effects ERSI can have, such as being destructive for a relationship, but at the same time enhancing a person's sense of autonomy and friendship bonds (Scheinkman, 2005). In that sense, Heckert allows for an infinite number of emotions, appraising the meaning of the experience instead of its negative impact. He thereby allows space for ERSI to be considered in terms of motives, cultural as well as contextual mechanisms, as it is seldom about betrayal being the principal incentive (Scheinkman, 2005). As Scheinkman (2005) pointed out, other cultures in Latin America or India for instance, view love triangles as a hurtful experience, but

recognise them as part of the human condition, rather than medicalising, psychologising or moralising them.

In a similar vein, Finn's (2012b) notion of a transformative stability argued for an inclusion of chaos theory when inspecting relationships. Chaos theory challenges the notion of life as static and relationships as merely following universal laws, but posits the world as unpredictable, filled with opportunities. This theory believes that through these fluctuations existence is created, rather than these fluxes being a destructive dynamism. Assuming a stable coupledom may disguise the complexity with which emotions, energies and forces come into being and affect people. Chaos can lead to an infinite number of possibilities based on irrevocability and tumult creating a transformative order that is the essence of life. On the other hand, Finn argued, inflicting stabilising rules, as evident by heteronormative relationships may paradoxically cause chaos and pandemonium that cannot be absorbed by such a system. This notion suggests that factors, such as commitment, cannot be outlined as predictors, since they include manifold possibilities, depending on every choice made, hence constituting a relative state of impact.

2.8 Chapter Summary

As outlined in this chapter, gender and sexuality are socially constructed performances that can be contested, rather than seeing them as natural and stable categories (Jackson, 1996, 1999; Nielsen et al., 2000; Pringle, 2008; D. Richardson, 1996). Since the practices provided within these classifications encompass and are enacted within everyday life, they are embedded within the social, rather than a detached private sphere. Relationships (romantic, monogamous etc.) may then be a social site where gender and sexual norms are practiced and extend into daily life. These relationships are in constant flux (Barker, 2009; cited in Barker & Langdridge, 2010;

Finn, 2012b; Mitchell, 2003) and as such the inherent emotions, meanings and definitions can be seen as fluid. Moreover, ERSI as an entity can only exist within a mononormative relationship, yet the meaning, definition and emotions of ERSI may also be fluid and not necessarily bound to the emotions and meanings of coupledom (e.g., sex outside of a casual arrangement might be seen as a betrayal, too, depending on the circumstances and timing). They may instead be always in exchange with the relationship and dependent on it. So if ERSI is deconstructed and understood as relative (including the emotions involved), guilt, hurt and the negative consequences associated with ERSI can potentially be reduced, the motives can be reframed, and new meanings can be applied to the practice. However, continuing to view ERSI as 'bad' and accepting the status quo, may also mean the acceptance of gender inequality, due to the differing outcomes for men and women.

Chapter 3: Research on ERSI

In this chapter the psychological research on ERSI to date is outlined. The aim is to address the various areas of ERSI research, as well as the theoretical explanations provided. This review seeks to provide an understanding of the type of research conducted, main theories, methods and the possible problems inherent in all of the areas. The goal is here to report the main aspects, results and limitations, like the emphasis on finding gender differences. This will clarify the gaps and limitations in research, and the need for a different approach to the subject matter.

The literature review was done in a scoping fashion (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Davis, Drey, & Gould, 2009) due to the exploratory nature of the project. In particular, this involved using various databases, including PsycINFO, ProQuest (Sociological Abstracts), EBSCO, and Google Scholar, as well as identifying related references from relevant articles/papers (non-peer reviewed theses were excluded). The search terms used included infidelity, affair, extramarital, extradyadic, cheating (in conjunction with relationship or sex), betrayal, and unfaithful. Where applicable these were narrowed down by adding the terms sexual or emotional and using more specific dates to include more up to date articles and books. Additionally, experts in their respective fields were approached and asked about significant papers.

The topic of ERSI has been studied widely across disciplines, such as psychology, biology, history, anthropology, and culture studies. Traditionally, these studies have been conducted in the U.S.A., and focused on married couples (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a), illustrating the heteronormative assumptions inherent in the practice of ERSI. More recently, however, younger and dating populations have been included (mainly student samples), though often in order to predict later ERSI behaviours within

marriage (e.g., Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999; Martins et al., 2015). The majority of these studies have employed quantitative methods to investigate the factors, consequences, rates and possible explanations of ERSI. The most popular explanations of ERSI come from an evolutionary psychology point of view (Harris, 2000, 2003a), which relate this act, as well as its reactions to it (i.e., jealousy), to natural, innate mechanisms of species survival (e.g., Brase, Adair, & Monk, 2014; Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss et al., 1999; Fernandez, Vera-Villarroel, Sierra, & Zubeidat, 2007). Another theory that favours a more social, rather than biological focus, is the double-shot hypothesis (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996). This theory argues against naturally evolved reactions to ERSI, but rather states that these responses demand social explanations. Before looking into these theories in more detail, definitional issues of ERSI are discussed.

3.1 Issues related to Definitions

A fundamental issue when dealing with the topic of ERSI, is how it has been defined in research. The definition and terms used tend to differ, not only among the general population, but also amongst researchers (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a). A number of terms have been used, including: infidelity, having an affair, cheating, extramarital sex, extramarital relationships, extradyadic behaviour, being unfaithful, betrayal, and extra relationship involvement. This makes a comparison of studies difficult (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a), as a term like extramarital sex may not apply to cohabiting couples for instance (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). Generally, the practice of ERSI has been defined as 'having sex' (largely described to consist of penis-vagina penetration) with someone other than one's exclusive, committed partner in a secretive fashion. Within each of the terms describing ERSI, definitions vary as to what type of behaviour specifically these should or should not include (e.g., kissing), leading to inconsistent and sometimes uninterpretable findings (Luo et al., 2010; Moller & Vossler, 2015). For example,

illustrative of the coital imperative they draw on (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003),

several studies did not include oral or anal sex in their definitions, as these were not

regarded as reproductive acts (Gavey, 2005), though they may largely be seen as an

ERSI (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). These exclusions are demonstrative of the

religious influences on what type of sexual conduct denotes a 'natural act' (Tiefer,

1995). Furthermore, a layperson's definition of these words may differ from that of

researchers (Weiser, Lalasz, Weigel, & Evans, 2014). Definitions of ERSI may not only

vary between individuals (Munsch, 2012; Walters & Burger, 2013), but also between

relationships (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a), depending on the person's experience. What

constitutes ERSI for one partner, may not be the same for another (Blow & Hartnett,

2005a; Moller & Vossler, 2015), such as having sexual fantasies of someone other than

one's partner (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007).

More recently definitions have broadened. Some studies that come from an

evolutionary point of view have turned some attention to oral sex, but merely as a tool

for detecting ERSI (e.g., Pham & Shackelford, 2013), and internet infidelity (e.g.,

Guadagno & Sagarin, 2010), while others are looking more into non-sexual extra-

relational involvements, such as emotional infidelity.

Emotional infidelity has been defined as an emotional intimacy and connection

that is shared by two parties, but excludes their partner (Drigotas et al., 1999). This

concept also appears to be vaguely defined, because it is not necessarily something that

can be seen or measured, though attempts at measuring it using physiological data or

questionnaires have been made (e.g., Buss et al., 1992). The inclusion of emotional

infidelity might signal a change in the double standard, since traditional definitions,

which may have come about as a result of men's oppressive power over women, merely

included sexual intercourse. Subsequently an extramarital affair was regarded as more

acceptable for men, established in the belief that men have stronger sex drives (Atwood & Seifer, 1997; Smiler, 2013; Zola, 2007). In that sense, it was apparently not only more tolerated for men, but was, and often still is, constructed as an expectation. In contrast, the development of wider criteria can also promote stigmatisation of a behaviour that was previously excluded, hence their inclusion may serve to cover the grey areas and shed a negative light on these behaviours.

Referring to a behaviour as sexual infidelity and/or emotional infidelity creates a dichotomy and thereby a clearer distinction between emotions and behaviour, disguising the complexity of relationships. It also seems to be a contradictory approach, considering the connection made between sex and emotions, which have been clustered together in modern romantic notions of relationships (Kipnis, 2003; Seidman, 1989). The emotions and behaviours in a relationship are not an either/or matter, but might be more complex and may change in a fluid manner (e.g., Scheinkman, 2005; Wetherell, 2012). Hence, as argued in Chapter Two, it is essential to have a more flexible definition in research than what has been outlined to date.

3.1.1 Religious influences in scientific frameworks

According to Blow and Hartnett (2005a), most studies and couples prefer a heterosexual, extramarital definition of ERSI. By ignoring other sexual orientations and identities, such as transvestites (Weeks, 2010), this definition depicts a notion of ERSI that is based on religious tradition regarding relationships. Such a representation may reinforce a monogamous, heterosexual model of marriage, and implies that other types of sexuality and relationships do not constitute the 'norm' or are not 'natural'. The definition of ERSI thereby becomes exclusive to marriage, which in turn promotes heteronormativity within this construct through ignoring other sexualities. Since extramarital sex or adultery has been and is still often regarded as a sin (Jackson &

Scott, 2004b), other forms of sexuality (e.g., polyamory) are by definition excluded and viewed as unacceptable and sinful by themselves. More recently, a scientific framework has taken over religion in Western society in the definition of ERSI, emphasising biological 'facts', such as the maximisation of genetic transmission.

The shift from religion to science as a means to inflict control over people's behaviour (Jackson & Scott, 2004b; M. L. Parker et al., 2010; Tiefer, 1995) is depicted by the terminology used, as 'fidelity' and 'faithfulness' have become the norm. The vocabulary taken up may imply that relationships are about loyalty and good character, demonstrating the moral criteria by which the academic literature has assessed individuals (Tiefer, 1995). As such, sought after experts may inadvertently reinforce monogamy and unfavourably label individuals engaging in ERSI, by taking up terms like infidelity or being unfaithful (Luo et al., 2010; Tiefer, 1995).

3.1.2 General implications of definitional issues

The usage of the terms outlined above, may also have psychological and legal implications, for instance by employing them in court to depict the partner as a perpetrator in a divorce case (e.g., the court case against U.S. President Bill Clinton). People might subsequently refrain from participating in research that uses these terms and may evoke traumatic experiences and emotions (Bird et al., 2007; Cano & O'Leary, 2000; K. C. Gordon et al., 2004; Whisman & Wagers, 2005), possibly impacting on research reports of ERSI. Not only is it risky to be categorised as a 'cheater', but it can also be problematic for those classified as the 'victim'. Being victimised includes feelings of helplessness, shame, self-blame, or depression (Bird et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the issues with definitions of ERSI make an evaluation for the reader, and consequently policy makers, challenging, as they may find decision making difficult in light of the discordance on basic questions between scholars. This highlights

the importance of developing a more neutral and behavioural definition of this practice, such as ERSI, which is more universally applicable than terms like extramarital sex. Next, the research conducted to date is outlined.

3.2 Rates and Attitudes towards ERSI

Partly due to the definitional issues outlined earlier, an estimation of ERSI rates is difficult to obtain. The estimates depend on the sample as well as cultural characteristics, type of relationship, inclusion criteria for ERSI, the time of the study, and meaning of ERSI (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a). Different groups of the population have been sampled, such as University students, married, and cohabiting couples. The majority of these studies have been conducted in the U.S.A., with one study conducted in Portugal (i.e., Martins et al., 2015), and have typically employed quantitative questionnaires to collect their data. I cover these studies below, starting with the student samples.

3.2.1 Students

The total rates of ERSI in student samples have been reported to lie between 31% and 58% (Boekhout, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2003; Sheppard, Nelson, & Andreoli-Mathie, 1995), depending on definitions and types of ERSI (higher rates for emotional unfaithfulness). More specifically, estimates for men engaging in this type of behaviour have been outlined to be between 23.4% and 75%, and for women to lie between 15.5% and 68% (Brand et al., 2007; Hansen, 1987; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999). Though generally reporting higher rates for men, Brand et al. (2007) found a role reversal, with 50.6% of the women in their sample reported having cheated, compared to 39.3% of the men. No gender differences were outlined regarding the prevalence of sexual infidelity, in line with other results yielding no gender differences in infidelity behaviours (Martins et al., 2015; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007). Brand et al. (2007) suggested that possibly because of the illustrations of women's sexuality in popular culture, they may

feel more freedom to engage in sexual encounters. Considering that this is a relatively young sample (Wiederman & Hurd, 1999) and incidence rates increase over a lifetime (Blow & Hartnett, 2005b), these prevalence rates appear rather high.

3.2.2 Married couples

Research on married couples indicated reported rates of ERSI to be around 13% overall (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Treas & Giesen, 2000), between 22.7% - 25% for men (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Wiederman, 1997), and 4% to 15% for women[2] (Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Laumann et al., 1994; Wiederman, 1997). Allen et al. (2005) suggested that these numbers probably underestimate the rates of extramarital involvement, as individuals may refuse to disclose the matter, due to its sensitive nature. On the other hand, nearly 90% of respondents in Vail-Smith, Whetstone, and Knox' (2010) study pointed out that they would want to know if their partner engaged in ERSI.

The rates between men and women in this population seem to differ from one another, since men appear to be more likely to engage in ERSI. It has been argued, however, that men seem to over report their sexual encounters, while women tend to underreport them (Treas & Giesen, 2000). This phenomenon has been suggested to be due to the influence of conventional gender norms that depict women as being more committed, sensitive and intimate, while men are regarded as independent and self-sufficient beings (Schmookler & Bursik, 2007). Furthermore, several studies outlined no gender differences or role reversals in younger populations (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Laumann et al., 1994; Wiederman, 1997). According to Atkins et al. (2001) the similar patterns in younger people may be illustrative of cultural changes. As women

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[2] The numbers were noticeably higher for dating and cohabiting women (18% and 20%, respectively) (Forste & Tanfer, 1996), possibly due to differences in commitment, though expectations of sexual exclusivity between cohabiting and married individuals differed only slightly (94% and 99% respectively) (Treas & Giesen, 2000).

are more present in the workforce, the possibility of engaging in ERSI is opened up (both financially and opportunistically), depicting the change in views of relationships from romantic to economic terms (Finn, 2012b). Generally speaking, the higher reported rates seem to indicate a reflection of actual rates with men and women being more similar than different (Schmookler & Bursik, 2007; Whisman & Snyder, 2007).

3.2.3 Gendered engagements in ERSI

Despite the gender similarities in rates of ERSI, research has noted that there are some gender differences with regards to the type of an infidelity. Sheppard et al. (1995) demonstrated that more women than men became emotionally involved with another individual. It has been argued that this could be due to differences in socialisation between men and women. Their findings generally seem to support the deficit model (which suggests that people engage in ERSI due to relationship conflicts), rather than the personal growth model (which contends that individuals engage in ERSI to enhance their sense of self, not because they are dissatisfied with their relationship). Challenging this model, Banfield and McCabe (2001) argued that women's intentions to engage in an ERSI do not depend on deficits in their relationships, but rather on the quality of alternative partners, low investments in a relationship, and other people's approval, instead of their own attitudes towards ERSI. They thereby emphasise the importance of social influences and the environmental context when investigating this type of behaviour (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Jackman, 2015; Yeniçeri & Kökdemir, 2006).

3.2.4 Attitudes towards ERSI

Although a considerable number of individuals seem to have engaged in ERSI, the attitudes towards this type of behaviour seem to stand in contrast with it. More

specifically, an international study conducted in 24 countries[3] outlined that across all countries, only 4% reported extramarital sex to be 'not wrong at all', with an average of 66% depicting this act as always wrong (Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 1998). The central European countries generally seemed more permissive, while the U.S.A., Poland and Ireland were classified as 'sexual conservatives'. Although New Zealand was classified as having moderate sexual attitudes (clustered together with Great Britain and Australia), their stance towards extramarital sex seemed to reflect the more conservative notions, as 75% described this behaviour as 'always wrong', thereby being above the average. The reported results demonstrate a possible discrepancy between New Zealand's more permissive sexual attitudes in this study, especially regarding homosexual sex, and the conservative ones when it comes to extramarital sex. It should be noted, however, that the survey only asked about those attitudes within a marriage, rather than a cohabiting or dating relationship and thus may not be representative of different sexualities/lifestyles or a younger cohort. ERSI in a committed relationship, for instance, may be more acceptable than in marriage (Sheppard et al., 1995). In spite of this seemingly widespread disapproval, Boekhout et al. (2003) found that many participants in their study reported wanting to engage in ERSI (49%). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that these individuals will participate in this activity (Greeley, 1994).

It has been argued that individuals with ERSI experience have higher permissive attitudes and are more likely to (repeatedly) engage in this kind of behaviour (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Jackman, 2015; Martins et al., 2015; Sharpe, Walters, & Goren, 2013; Solstad & Mucic, 1999). For instance, 90% of husbands and wives engaging in extramarital sexual intercourse thought there were conditions under which this act was

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[3] The countries included Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany (East), Germany (West), Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, U.S.A..

justified, compared to 53% of husbands and 21% of wives who had not previously

engaged in extramarital sex (Johnson, 1970). However, the direction of this relationship

remains unclear. The attitude change could come about as a result of the individual's

behaviour, rather than vice versa, to reduce cognitive dissonance (Hurlbert, 1992).

Approval of a sexual or emotional 'betrayal' behaviour has further been argued to

depend on the context in which it occurs, such as being in a 'bad relationship', or

having a 'magnetic attraction' to someone (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). More

specifically, a planned or manipulative act, typically depicted as a sexual involvement,

were reportedly the least acceptable reasons. The more acceptable reasons, however,

may serve to trivialise the matter and overcome cognitive dissonance, in order to reduce

the guilt that those engaging in this type of behaviour are often described to experience,

though dissonance might also aid in the decision to end an ERSI (Allen et al., 2005;

Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Foster & Misra, 2013).

3.2.5 Gender differences in attitudes towards ERSI

Men have been outlined to report more approving attitudes towards ERSI than

women (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Jackman, 2015; Sheppard et al., 1995), though

both men and women reported less approval of women's ERSI (Clayton & Trafimow,

2007). It has been suggested that the gender differences in attitudes, but not actual

behaviour, are a result of the changes in attitudes, beliefs and ideology occurring more

slowly than behaviour (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). Partner and peer pressure,

opportunities, and media portrayals of ERSI may all impact on a behaviour that is

inconsistent with one's attitude towards it. Furthermore, the negative attribution towards

women's engagement in this behaviour may reflect more general attitudes towards

women's ERSI in society (Clayton & Trafimow, 2007).

Wilkins and Dalessandro (2013) argued that such explanations are an oversimplification of men's and women's sexuality, essentially neglecting the gendered ways in which men and women relate to each other and construct their sexual experiences. They supported their claim in a study, which included in-depth interviews of 40 women and 17 men at a college in the U.S.A. on the topic of infidelity. Although depicting a sexually agentic position by ascribing their "cheating" to an age-related experimental stage, the women's accounts often conveyed remorse and made this space available in light of an unsatisfactory or less committed relationship to justify their act. The prejudice towards ERSI with its cultural ramifications, as well as its understanding as a common occurrence at college thereby aided the women to end a relationship. It should be noted, though, that Wilkins and Dalessandro's study did not specifically focus on those engaging in ERSI, but on any student, with particular attention paid to women. Furthermore, it was specific to the college population in the U.S.A. with its particular class system (as addressed by the authors), was conducted by students, rather than the researchers, and employed value-laden terms, such as 'infidelity' to describe the act. The current project sought to address these pitfalls in previous research.

3.2.6 General patterns and limitations

As the majority of studies have been conducted in the U.S.A., they may not be comparable to other countries, due to the reportedly conservative attitudes towards relationships. Nonetheless, the above literature demonstrates a pattern observed in most countries, namely that ERSI is still largely disapproved and regarded as a major violation of relationship expectations. The discrepancies in rates and attitudes towards ERSI are illustrative of the contrasting meanings inherent in modern romantic relationships. The disapproval and negative reactions to ERSI have largely been explained from an evolutionary psychology perspective.

3.3 Evolutionary Social Psychological Explanations of Jealousy

A considerable amount of research has looked at how people may react to or personally try to prevent their partners' transgression, by adopting an evolutionary perspective (Harris, 2003b). The negative reactions to a partner's interactions with the desired gender are referred to as jealousy. This has been defined as a perceived threat to a valued relationship, and in that sense the partner's behaviour (actual or imagined) must contradict the person's definition of what the relationship entails and where the boundaries lie (Hansen, 1985). As such it does not need to be of a sexual nature, and is often considered to consist of a variety of emotions. As most of the research has used an evolutionary account to explain jealousy, and research in this area has been claimed to be the showcase example of evolutionary psychology, the focus is on this theory, before turning to criticisms and alternative accounts. It should be noted, though, that referring to this theory simply as "evolutionary psychology" seems inaccurate, as there are alternative evolutionary explanations. The debate in this area is not about the theory of evolution by natural selection, but rather about whether men and women have domain specific mechanisms that trigger their jealous responses. The more precise term taken up is the hypothesis of jealousy as a specific innate module (JSIM) (Harris, 2000, 2003a).

3.3.1 Jealousy as a specific innate module

The JSIM hypothesis posits that men and women faced different adaptive problems, and therefore developed different reactions to a 'mate's infidelity' (Buss et al., 1992). More specifically men are said to have faced paternity uncertainty, and, because humans show more paternal investment than any other species, had to develop strategies to overcome this issue in order to avoid raising another man's child. Thus jealousy is argued to have evolved as a solution to this uncertainty. It further states that since each copulation could result in a child, men preferred short-term sexual strategies

and therefore can have sex without any emotional attachments, but may enter into a relationship to help nurture the child. Women in contrast are said to have faced a different problem, as they could only have a child every nine months, and required the mate's willingness to invest in their offspring in order to assure their survival. It has been suggested that men should consequently demonstrate stronger reactions to sexual infidelity and women to emotional infidelity (Brase et al., 2014; Buss et al., 1992; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss et al., 1999; Fernandez et al., 2007).

The assumption posited by the JSIM hypothesis was supported by a widely cited study by Buss et al. (1992) in the U.S.A., who found the described sex differences when asking participants which scenario would upset them more (sexual versus emotional – known as the forced-choice format). In a short article outlining three studies, which employed hypothetical infidelity scenarios, the authors investigated students' replies to the forced-choice questions, their physiological responses and the impact of their previous experiences with ERSI. Despite yielding some within sex differences that indicate results contrary to their predictions (e.g., fewer men reported greater distress to sexual than emotional infidelity in study three), the authors highlight 'naturally evolved' gender differences in accordance with the JSIM hypothesis. The findings from the forced-choice format have been replicated a number of times and in various countries, such as Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Korea, Japan and Spain (Bendixen, Kennair, & Buss, 2015; Brase et al., 2014; Buss et al., 1999; Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid, & Buss, 1996; Cramer, Todd, Johnson, & Manning-Ryan, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2007).

One study attempted to outline the underlying assumptions, meanings and explanations for choosing a particular answer by employing a qualitative methodology (Fussell & Stollery, 2012). It was concluded that men were more distressed and more

likely than women to terminate a relationship. The purpose of a qualitative study, however, is not to assess the likelihood of an occurrence. Their analysis seems confusing and biased in that respect, as they were testing the evolutionary account in search of support for it. The justification for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) also appears unclear. More specifically, they argued that the aim was to take the context into account, though IPA tends to focus on the individual experience. Simply using a qualitative approach to solve the issues surrounding the JSIM account is not necessarily the best way, particularly if the method does not match the aim of the research.

3.3.2 Criticisms of the JSIM hypothesis

Although JSIM supporters frequently cite cross-cultural studies replicating the findings as evidence for a universal mechanism (Buss et al., 1999; Buunk et al., 1996; Fernandez et al., 2007), other studies have failed to reproduce those results (Goldenberg et al., 2003; Voracek, 2001), and appeared contrary to predictions in some countries (Harris, 2003b). Support for the JSIM hypothesis could not be found in representative populations (a major pitfall for a universal mechanism), but has only been reported in non-random (student) samples, and men with relationship, as well as infidelity experience (e.g., Bendixen et al., 2015; Brase et al., 2014; Buss et al., 1992; Carpenter, 2012; Edlund & Sagarin, 2009; Green & Sabini, 2006; Leeker & Carlozzi, 2014; Murphy, Vallacher, Shackelford, Bjorklund, & Yunger, 2006; Sagarin et al., 2012; Voracek, 2001). It has been argued that the findings in support of the JSIM hypothesis have also been fragile (particularly the participants' physiological responses have been criticised for low power), inconclusive, and possibly misinterpreted (Harris, 2000, 2003b). Other findings have reportedly stood in opposition to the JSIM hypothesis, especially when using more specific (Burriss & Little, 2006; Cann & Baucom, 2004; Kato, 2014; O'Connor, Re, & Feinberg, 2011; Sabini & Silver, 2005) or actual infidelity

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scenarios (Berman & Frazier, 2005; Harris, 2003a). These results have been argued to be a major setback for the JSIM hypothesis, as an evolved innate reaction to jealousy should be more readily detectable in an actual infidelity scenario, since it would pose a greater threat of resource loss and cuckoldry (Berman & Frazier, 2005).

3.3.3 The double-shot hypothesis

A main criticism of the JSIM supporting research concerns the forced-choice format used in those studies, as they may overlook individuals that potentially find both forms of infidelity equally distressing and therefore respond in a random manner (Lishner 2008). When given a third option, most participants reportedly answered that they would find both types of infidelity equally upsetting. It has further been argued that men and women might think that each form of infidelity implies the other. That is, women think men can have sex without being emotionally involved, but will have sex in an emotional infidelity scenario, while men think the reverse about women. Consequently, it has been argued that women should be bothered more by emotional infidelity, as it involves a sexual component as well. Men will be more concerned about their partner's sexual infidelity, since this implies an emotional involvement, too (Harris & Christenfeld, 1996a). This has become known as the double-shot hypothesis (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996). Supporting this model, various investigations have ruled out possible ceiling effects of continuous measures (Carpenter, 2012; DeSteno, Bartlett, Braverman, & Salovey, 2002; Landolfi, Geher, & Andrews, 2007) and have subsequently outlined no gender differences in large studies (Becker et al., 2004; Zengel, Edlund, & Sagarin, 2013).

3.3.4 Mate retention tactics / partner directed violence

In order to prevent a partner being unfaithful, the evolutionary account suggests that men and women use 'mate retention tactics'. These have been outlined as giving promises, wedding rings, cunnilingus, concealing or derogating a partner, and sexual

coercion (Goetz & Shackelford, 2009; Goetz et al., 2005; Kaighobadi & Shackelford, 2008; Pham & Shackelford, 2013; Starratt, Popp, & Shackelford, 2008). Sexual coercion has been argued to range from physical violence to psychological pressure in order to inseminate their partner's reproductive tract when suspicions of infidelity arise. This theory has described physical violence as an output of male sexual jealousy, used to force women to have sex or restrict their behaviour (Goetz, Shackelford, Romero, Kaighobadi, & Miner, 2008). The use of partner directed violence has been argued to depend on a number of factors, such as men's personality, length of relationship, gender, proprietariness, commitment, non-violent mate retention behaviours, and suspicions of infidelity (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007; Kaighobadi & Shackelford, 2009; Kaighobadi et al., 2009; Kaighobadi, Starratt, Shackelford, & Popp, 2008).

Research on this issue has been outlined to be mainly male oriented, arguably due to the higher rates of women getting injured by men, and women not facing the same issues regarding cuckoldry (Cousins & Gangestad, 2007; Goetz et al., 2008). Women instead have been suggested to employ other tactics, such as emotional withdrawal or turn to the public for assistance (Jankowiak et al., 2002). Evolutionary theorists thereby argue that physical violence as well as rape is due to sperm competition, referring to its prevalence among non-human species, and reports that sexual jealousy is the leading cause for domestic violence and homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Goetz et al., 2008). Such an explanation, however, may work to justify physical and sexual assault, and absolve violent criminals (especially men) of their responsibility for these actions. Furthermore, Harris (2003b) contends that men outnumber women on all forms of violent crime, arguing for a comparison of the proportions of violent crime committed due to jealousy for each gender, rather than the rates. Support for her claim has been outlined by a New Zealand study that found equivalent rates among men and women regarding their experiences of being attacked

by their partner (Mullen & Martin, 1994). Moreover, Harris (2003b) proposed that a theory about species-typical characteristics should not be based on population extremes, and would need to provide an explanation as to why the supposedly built-in properties are clearly visible in disordered individuals only. It has been argued that the evolutionary account thereby centres around a pathological framework that focuses on the individual, while the abusive event is removed from the sociocultural context (Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Even within an evolutionary framework, the homicide argument has been questioned, proposing that in such a case killing a mate would have compromised the inclusive fitness by damaging the survival of an offspring, as well as the possibility for any future reproduction with that mate (White & Mullen, 1989).

3.3.5 Critique of evolutionary psychology explanations

Generally evolutionary psychologists proposed that their theories are compatible with proximate accounts, but provide the ultimate explanation (Goetz et al., 2008). In contrast, Harris and Christenfeld (1996b) argued that by following such a logic, one might as well study subatomic particles. The usefulness of such an approach has been questioned, instead suggesting that it is important as researchers to study phenomena at the level that provides the most insightful explanations. The JSIM account has been argued to have failed to incorporate rational thought, which, when considered, appears to favour the domain-general mechanisms. As Harris (2003b) suggested, finding gender differences does not automatically provide evidence for an innate mechanism.

All of the above studies adopted a dichotomous framework. Infidelity and jealousy, even as refined concepts, were merely divided into sexual and emotional components, without providing an explanation for such a division. The debate in this area has shifted from trying to comprehend infidelity and the emotions involved, to a dispute over whether innate gender differences in reactions exist, and if so, under which

conditions, although the proposed variances appear minimal. Subsequently, the relevance and focus of these studies remain nebulous. In other words, research in this area appears to be stuck in limbo, and detached from everyday life. The biological arguments drawn upon by proponents of evolutionary explanations of ERSI are representative of the heteronormative assumptions inherent in ERSI research. These deterministic accounts depict heterosexuality and the gender binary within this construct as natural and reduce it to reproduction, rather than viewing sexuality and gender as social phenomena (Jackson, 2005). A common-sense view of gender duality is also illustrated in research that has portrayed gender as a possible factor in the prediction of ERSI.

3.4 Factors / Predictors of ERSI

As outlined previously, attitudes may not necessarily translate into behaviour when it comes to ERSI (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Solstad & Mucic, 1999). Research has subsequently sought to address what factors are possible influences on the probability of an ERSI occurrence. These studies have addressed various variables, such as gender, age, relationship status, level of commitment and personality traits as possible predictors of ERSI. The findings and explanations of these studies have been diverse and are covered within this section, starting with demographic factors, before moving on to relationship and personality variables, as well as addressing reported gender differences.

3.4.1 Demographic factors

A number of factors have been outlined to be increasing the likelihood of an ERSI. These include positive correlations with age (especially being under the age of 30), race (particularly for Black and Hispanic women in the U.S.A.), number of sex partners, a higher (relative) income, higher power, having more permissive sexual values, and living in a central city, cohabitation (including prior to marriage),

problematic communication prior to marriage, having engaged in or experienced an ERSI by a partner, history of divorce, as well as higher or lower education levels (e.g., Allen et al., 2008; Atkins et al., 2001; Kruger & Fisher, 2008; Lammers & Maner, 2016; Maddox Shaw, Rhoades, Allen, Stanley, & Markman, 2013; Martins et al., 2015; Treas & Giesen, 2000). The reports for religiosity's impact have been contradictory (e.g., Greeley, 1994; Maddox Shaw et al., 2013; Whisman, Gordon, & Chatav, 2007; Whisman & Snyder, 2007).

The findings for education at the extreme ends of the distribution (Treas & Giesen, 2000), but particularly for high education/income individuals (Atkins et al., 2001; Forste & Tanfer, 1996; Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollmann, & Stapel, 2011; Munsch, 2015), have been attributed to relationship power as a conceivable factor. More specifically, Atkins et al. (2001) outlined in their study, which included structured interviews with a large random sample of 4118 married individuals, that the greatest effect was found for those participants who worked, but whose partner did not. It has been proposed, though, that this does not automatically mean that the working/better educated partner has generally more power. Instead they may have the greater financial resources to be able to afford such an involvement, reflective of a greater possibility of power differentials within the relationship (e.g., a lower dependency on the partner) (Atkins et al., 2001; Forste & Tanfer, 1996). Alternatively, they could have a higher status, argued to make him/her more desirable to alternative partners, and thereby creating more opportunities (Allen et al., 2005).

The concept of opportunity has been questioned, arguing that it remains unclear as to whether it represents something that objectively exists or merely reflects a subjective reality (e.g., wishful thinking) and whether these opportunities are actively created or passively experienced (Johnson, 1970). Those inclined to engage in ERSI

may for instance be more likely to notice such opportunities, conceptualised in a questionnaire study of 2598 participants as religious attendance, early sexual experience and work requirements (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Atkins et al. (2001) criticised this "either-or" concept of opportunity for not taking the degree of opportunity into account, proposing that it may not be something that is either existent or absent. As such, the operationalisation of the construct has been criticised for being too vague and varied, making comparisons with other studies using this term difficult. The authors subsequently proposed a clearer conceptualisation of opportunity through the identification of a set of variables that may facilitate ERSI. However, recognising the limitations of their study, Atkins et al. (2001) note that there is a lack of distinction between participants based on their level of involvement with another person. Also, those in committed (i.e., unmarried) and same-sex relationships have been excluded, the meaning given to sex is unclear and it remains uncertain whether or not the ERSI occurred in their marriage or another relationship.

3.4.2 Relationship satisfaction and commitment factors

In addition to the largely demographic factors, some studies have focused on relationship variables to address their impact on engaging in ERSI. For instance, relational satisfaction has been reported to have such an effect (Allen et al., 2008; Atkins et al., 2001; Martins et al., 2015; Whisman et al., 2007). More specifically, respondents who were unsatisfied with their relationship reportedly showed a greater probability to engage in ERSI (almost four times more likely), as well as those who answered that they were "pretty happy" as opposed to "very happy" (twice as likely to engage in ERSI) (Atkins et al., 2001). Atkins et al. (2001) suggested that the link between relationship satisfaction and ERSI lies on a continuum. Hence, many couples experiencing ERSI may not show any signs of distress, but could often appear well adjusted and disapproving of such an act according to Allen et al. (2008) (see also

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Jeanfreau, Jurich, & Mong, 2014a, for a qualitative account on this matter). This satisfaction has been linked to having a moody partner, a lack of love and affection and dissatisfaction with marital sex (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Despite the various findings seemingly supporting the impact of satisfaction, the conceptualisation of this construct appears largely broad, vague and lacks explanations as to what it entails or why people are dissatisfied. As a response, Lewandowski and Ackerman (2006) proposed more specifically that need-fulfilment (consisting of companionship, intimacy, emotional involvement, sex, and security), as well as self-expansion and inclusion of the other in the self should be regarded as components of satisfaction. In their questionnaire study of 109 students in dating relationships, they described a negative correlation for all of them with susceptibility to ERSI. However, taking this research area's common issue of social desirability bias into account, the results may not necessarily translate to actual behaviour. Also, the convenience sample employed might not be representative of the general population.

Since both happy and unhappy individuals seem to engage in ERSI, it has been proposed that in addition to satisfaction, commitment may predict the engagement in an ERSI (Drigotas et al., 1999; Martins et al., 2015). This concept attempts to explain why sometimes satisfied people enter into an ERSI and unsatisfied individuals refrain from it. Drigotas et al. (1999) argued that highly committed partners may think more about the long-term consequences, rather than the short-term benefits of a brief sexual encounter. The notion of commitment, however, appears vague. A more specific concept of what it should entail has subsequently been put forward by Emmers-Sommer et al. (2010). They suggested that the level of investment (e.g., energy, time, emotion) and satisfaction, as well as alternatives (not merely other possible partners, but also the economic, familial and social consequences) should be combined to offer an estimation of relational commitment. Quality of alternatives has been argued to be a more decisive

factor than commitment and intentions, which may only be influential if an alternative partner with whom an emotional connection has been established is present (Banfield & McCabe, 2001). Others, however, contend that quality of alternatives may be a subjective perception (influenced by pornography exposure according to Gwinn, Lambert, Fincham, & Maner, 2013) that is susceptible to change as a result of the state of a relationship or a partner's commitment (Allen et al., 2005).

According to Allen et al. (2008), it should be borne in mind that static factors such as age at marriage, prior cohabitation, or race may be relatively easy to isolate as predictors of ERSI. They argued that variables, which are prone to change, such as religiosity, or relationship functioning, are rather difficult to establish, as these may be impacted on by the experience of ERSI. Consequently, the direction of the relationship may be unclear. Nevertheless, stable factors, such as marriage or race, may also indicate other flexible underlying variables, like attitudes (which are prone to change) or economic disadvantage, to be mediating the effects (Whisman & Snyder, 2007).

3.4.3 Personality factors linked to ERSI

Apart from relationship and demographic variables, personality factors have been suggested to play a role in the susceptibility to ERSI, including Narcissism, Conscientiousness and Psychoticism (linked to the common component of impulsivity) (Buss & Shackelford, 1997), manipulativeness, high psychopathy and low agreeableness (Egan & Angus, 2004), as well as borderline personality symptomatology (Sansone & Wiederman, 2009). However, Buss and Shackelford (1997) for instance, merely asked respondents to rate their future probability of engaging in ERSI, rather than reporting actual cases, thereby giving a highly speculative account (Atkins et al., 2001). A report by Greeley (1994), in contrast, outlined that men and employed women consulting mental health services in the previous year were more likely to describe an

extramarital involvement. These rates, though, might infer biases in reporting such incidences, as these individuals may have already disclosed their ERSI or regard it as part of their mental health issues. Insinuating that ERSI is linked to certain, usually problematic, personality types or genetic factors (e.g., Cherkas, Oelsner, Mak, Valdes, & Spector, 2004), works to pathologise a common behaviour and to shed a negative light on those who have received such diagnoses, but refrain from any kind of ERSI.

3.4.4 Gender differences regarding predictors of ERSI

Some of the factors outlined have been reported to apply specifically to women, such as higher education/status (Choi, Catania, & Dolcini, 1994; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2008; Forste & Tanfer, 1996), quality of alternative partners (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Martins et al., 2015), higher sexual satisfaction (Allen et al., 2008), or having been sexually abused as a child (Frías, Brassard, & Shaver, 2014; Whisman & Snyder, 2007). The association with childhood abuse has been attributed to trust issues, the sexualisation of all relationships, problems in the regulation of emotions and with relationships in general (Whisman & Snyder, 2007). Such notions tend to problematise ERSI by placing it within a pathological framework. It has been suggested, though, that many of the outlined variables may ultimately reflect differences in commitment (Forste & Tanfer, 1996).

Walsh (1991) reported self-esteem to positively impact on the number of sex partners for men – an indication for the pursuit of an ERSI – but not for women. It has been argued, though, that the direction of this relationship might not be clear, as those with a higher self-esteem may be searching out more potential partners, or as higher rates of rejection could cause self-esteem to be compromised. The described results also hint towards a differential construction of masculinity and femininity, as men's, but not women's self-esteem was outlined to be related to the number of sex partners. It has

been argued that women's self-esteem may rather be based on the emotional attachments they form, or on how others view them. A greater number of sexual partners then may place them in a negative light, as it could imply that they have sex without being in love – an assumption that is under greater moral scrutiny for women (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Goldenberg et al., 2003; Harris, 2003b).

Other studies have linked alcohol and drug use to ERSI for men, but not women. They ascribe these results to their disinhibiting effects when it comes to risk behaviour, arguing that this could cause men to feel safe from catching sexually transmitted diseases, getting caught and/or into relationship problems (Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & Christensen, 2005; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011; Vail-Smith et al., 2010). The reasons behind a discrepancy between men and women, however, remain elusive, and imply the presence of (unexplained) underlying natural or physiological differences.

3.4.5 Limitations in research predicting ERSI

Overall, the studies appear to suggest that sexual personality characteristics and, particularly for women, relationship factors are more predictive of ERSI (Mark et al., 2011), yet none of the studies were able to outline a comprehensive model, demonstrating the complex nature of the issue (for instance Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010, outlined around 500 reasons to remain faithful and 1000 reasons to engage in infidelity). This is largely due to inconsistencies in research in respect to definitions, methods, and sampling – the majority of these studies have relied on married or student populations – making any possible predictions difficult. Despite the correlational design in the majority of studies in this area, many researchers confer static factors, such as history of ERSI, as set criteria and assess other variables like marital satisfaction, as if

variation in these features changes the likelihood of ERSI, implying causation (Allen et al., 2005). Furthermore, the transitional stages leading up to an ERSI have not been well researched to date, illustrating how ERSI as a contextual practice has been neglected in such research. The aim of predicting ERSI has further been associated with its prevention (e.g., Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006), inferring more restrictions instead of trying to gain a better understanding of this behaviour. The rationale for trying to prevent ERSI is largely ascribed to its reported repercussions.

3.5 Consequences of ERSI

As implied by the usage of negative terms like 'affair', ERSI is largely associated with having negative outcomes by both, the public and scientific community. The psychotherapeutic literature generally reflects the moralistic assumptions implicit in such words, as it depicts this behaviour typically in a negative fashion (Walters & Burger, 2013). For instance, infidelity or affairs are largely talked about as possibly leading to marriage or relationship breakdown (Olson et al., 2002), having negative impacts on any children involved (Thorson, 2014), and causing emotional and psychological pain, including symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for the partners of those having an affair (Bird et al., 2007; Whisman & Wagers, 2005). As such, it has been argued that an ERSI experience may compromise future capabilities of intimacy and trust (Stebleton & Rothenberger, 1993). A considerable amount of work in this area has thereby focused on how ERSI can be dealt with and how those who have experienced ERSI can be treated.

3.5.1 Sexually transmitted infections

A common concern associated with ERSI is sexually transmitted infections (STI), such as HIV. It has been outlined that the majority of those engaging in an ERSI reported never using a condom with their primary or secondary partner, putting them at high risk for transmitting STIs (Choi et al., 1994; Vail-Smith et al., 2010). The risk of

transmitting STIs has been argued to be exacerbated by the fact that only a minority of those engaging in ERSI disclosed it to their partner (Vail-Smith et al., 2010). Low disclosure rates have been attributed to the stigma surrounding this behaviour and the subsequent fear of the consequences (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). Furthermore, condom use may be associated with a lack of trust in the partner, as well as a lack of commitment (Bertens, Krumeich, & Schaalma, 2008; Vail-Smith et al., 2010). More specifically, following 28 in-depth interviews and eight focus group discussions with Dutch Antillean and Afro-Surinamese women in the Netherlands, it has been suggested that insisting on condom use within a relationship may be regarded as an allegation of ERSI, and could subsequently lead to a relationship break-up (Bertens et al., 2008). Negotiating safe sex practices has been outlined to be particularly challenging for women, who have been depicted as powerless and passionless in such research (Tawfik & Cotts Watkins, 2007). These studies have been argued to be focusing on what women are incapable of doing. Instead, addressing what women believe they are able to do to avoid sexually transmitted infections, has been posited as a more beneficial path.

3.5.2 Affective responses

Extramarital affairs have been cited as the main or one of the principal causes for divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006). Some of the reported distress include PTSD symptomatology and major depressive episodes (Bird et al., 2007; Cano & O'Leary, 2000; K. C. Gordon et al., 2004; Whisman, 2015; Whisman & Wagers, 2005). In addition to these, some positive emotional reactions have been outlined, including happiness or relief, which may be responses to finding a way out of an unpleasant relationship (Shackelford, LeBlanc, & Drass, 2000). Those blaming the relationship itself, have been reported to experience the least distress, possibly because they regard the incompatibility with their partner to be inevitably causing the breakup, and therefore have fewer regrets regarding their own or partner's actions (Amato &

Previti, 2003). In contrast, individuals blaming their partner or external factors, such as work schedules, have been argued to feel greater anger and remorse, respectively, and may thereby find it harder to achieve a sense of closure.

Research has further illustrated that people's motivations for engaging in ERSI are often unclear (Foster & Misra, 2013; K. C. Gordon et al., 2004), which may have emotional and cognitive ramifications for those individuals. One way these people may overcome the cognitive dissonance deriving from disparities between their behaviour and self-concepts, has been argued to be the use of trivialisation, though no impact on affect of those engaging in ERSI was reported in an experimental study of 72 students that manipulated their infidelity perceptions (Foster & Misra, 2013). These results have been attributed to the negative emotions emanating from their partner's reactions, who may continue to be upset. In particular, trivialising the matter was outlined to have possible adverse effects on the relationship, as it might be regarded as a lack of appreciation for the 'severity of the offense'. Although Foster and Misra (2013) proposed that trivialisation of ERSI may increase the likelihood of engaging in it, they also put forward that in order to reduce cognitive dissonance, individuals may act in ways that are more congruent with their self-concept, and thereupon avoid this behaviour in the future.

Emotional reactions have not only been reported with regards to ERSI disclosure, but also when concealing this behaviour. Hiding the ERSI encounter has been argued to cause distress for the person, who needs to actively keep it a secret, subsequently infiltrating and impairing the relationship (Afifi, Falato, & Weiner, 2001). It has been reported that cognitive dissonance may therefore lead some individuals to change their attitude or confide their sexual act (Afifi et al., 2001; Allen et al., 2005; Feldman & Cauffman, 1999; Foster & Misra, 2013). Concealing an ERSI has been

further linked to emotional difficulties (e.g., anxiety) and struggle to progress in therapy (K. C. Gordon et al., 2004), higher withdrawal behaviours by men, and greater demand behaviours by women (but also under disclosed circumstances, possibly as a means to regain power by blaming the partner and demand change) (Balderrama-Durbin, Allen, & Rhoades, 2012). Women were said to be more likely to unveil their ERSI, perhaps as a means to end the relationship (Brand et al., 2007), and to be more likely to form a new relationship as a result of their ERSI (Sprecher, Regan, & McKinney, 1998). Starting a committed relationship with their ERSI partner has been argued to be due to the perception that women make a heavier love-sex connection (Sprecher et al., 1998).

3.5.3 Forgiveness

In order to investigate how negative reactions to an ERSI can be overcome, the notion of forgiveness has been examined in relation to this behaviour. Forgiveness has been defined as "a deliberate and active change in attitude motivated by a desire to heal" (Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008, p. 2). It is not equivalent to reconciliation with the partner, but rather a shift from detrimental to constructive behaviour (Afifi et al., 2001; J. H. Hall & Fincham, 2006) with a focus on empathy, commitment, humility and apology (Fife, Weeks, & Stellberg-Filbert, 2013). K. C. Gordon et al. (2004) regard forgiveness as a better comprehension of oneself, each other, as well as the relationship in order to overcome any destructive thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. As such, forgiveness might have a positive impact on emotional and physical health (J. H. Hall & Fincham, 2006).

It has been argued that forgiveness may depend on relational satisfaction, commitment, the frequency of an ERSI (which may indicate a greater emotional attachment to the third party), as well as the way such an act is discovered (Afifi et al., 2001; Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008). For instance, disclosure of an ERSI through a

partner without being questioned has been reported to be more likely to be forgiven in a "cheating" survey at a U.S. university, which addressed relational outcome, forgiveness and relational quality change (Afifi et al., 2001). Such a scenario has been argued to give the confessing partner the chance to explain and select what to unveil (thereby increasing understanding of the issue) and to apologise, which may eventually lead to closure for both partners (Afifi et al., 2001; Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008). This strategy was reported to be more efficient in reducing adverse outcomes in comparison to finding out through information-seeking, catching the partner in the act, and through third parties, respectively (Afifi et al., 2001). Preparations to disclose the information have thereby been proposed to be vital in reducing adverse outcomes. However, one third of those finding out through a third party reportedly remained in the relationship, while more people broke up when catching the partner inflagranti or discovering it through information-seeking (17% and 14% stayed in the relationship, respectively). Despite taking context into account, the studies make a clear cut distinction of how an ERSI is found out, though for instance a combination of the above possibilities could have led to the disclosure.

3.5.4 Psychotherapeutic treatment of ERSI

In order to resolve the issues that may arise as a result of ERSI, couples may seek therapy. Although affairs have been outlined to be the second most damaging issue and the third most difficult to treat (depending on how many other stressors were present at the time of the affair), this area has received little attention in terms of empirical research (Blow & Hartnett, 2005a; K. C. Gordon et al., 2004; Olson et al., 2002; Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997). Some have proposed that due to the symptomatology, affairs should be treated like PTSD (K. C. Gordon et al., 2004), though others have reported that the criteria for such a diagnosis were not met (Olson et al., 2002). As affairs do not qualify for a psychopathology, such an approach has been

argued to be too problem centred and pathologise the involved party, who would be put on the same level as a criminal, positioning the 'victim' as a trauma survivor (S. B. Levine, 1998; Zola, 2007). Normalising the behaviour may thereby constitute a more helpful alternative (Bird et al., 2007).

The sharing of details in therapy has been cautioned against, though, as it may have irrevocable consequences that include humiliation, physical harm or punishment of the partner, and may retraumatise the non-involved individual (Scheinkman, 2005; Zola, 2007). Scheinkman (2005) exemplifies other cultures (e.g., Africa, Europe or Latin America), where secrecy has been reframed as a positive mechanism to protect the relationship and those involved from any adverse outcomes of an ERSI. Following this notion, the person involved in an ERSI could subsequently be deprived of possibly the only platform where they are given a voice to open up, and may be left to deal with it by themselves. Support for this claim comes from a study by L. Richardson (1988), which included interviews of 65 single women who had a long-term ERSI with a married man. The secrecy surrounding their relational involvement meant a possible withdrawal from social networks and a lack of emotional support when this arrangement ended. This clandestineness then disempowered the women, unlike a separation from a partner that can be openly talked about, socially validated and supported. However, as L. Richardson noted, these results cannot be generalised to men, those who have short-term (e.g., one-time) encounters, and those in relationships, as there may be different power-(im)balances at play. In sum, although there seems to be a valid point regarding the pathologisation of the issue, these accounts continue to depict ERSI as having inevitably a negative impact and thereby problematise it themselves.

It has been argued that it is important to address power differences in therapy, because ERSIs are gendered (Burns, 1999; Leslie & Southard, 2009; Scheinkman,

2005; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013). More specifically, it is posited that men may engage in an ERSI due to a sense of entitlement to 'conquer' women. Women, in contrast, may be regarded as being responsible for the state of a relationship, which carries implicit messages that hold women to some extent accountable for their partner's engagement in such an act. Williams and Knudson-Martin (2013) analysed 29 scholarly publications on 'infidelity treatment', putting forward that most of the literature applies a victim/perpetrator framework and fails to take these gender constructions into account. They suggest that women may engage in ERSI in order to combat power inequalities, hence clinical work needs to hold those in powerful positions accountable. However, although power may play an important role, it might not always be the central aspect. This notion endorses a victimisation/blame framework that paradoxically promotes power differentials, since it positions women (the 'victim') as passive. Whether in an active or passive situation, women are stripped of agency, by being depicted as driven or oppressed by power inequalities. Furthermore, it may encourage women to a sense of entitlement, thus reinforcing revenge and blame (they refer to it as 'relational justice'), purposefully ignoring the similar occurrence rates and adverse outcomes for both men and women. Framing ERSI as a weapon to be used in a 'war between the sexes', functions to bolster inequality and may not contribute to an understanding of the matter.

Most of the literature on the psychological impact of ERSI is based on clinical experience and very few have investigated the aftereffects of ERSI empirically, or taken the cultural context following the disclosure into account (Olson et al., 2002). The therapy literature has mainly focused on those who have disclosed it and decided to enter therapy. These individuals may have certain issues that need to be dealt with, which may not be representative of the general population, who may experience ERSI very differently and merely see it as misconduct (Atwood & Seifer, 1997).

3.6 Chapter Summary

The majority of psychological research in this area has focused on the factors involved in ERSI and approached the practice and its accompanying emotions in a simplistic and rigid fashion. Apart from methodological and explanatory flaws in many of these studies, their approach to ERSI largely seems to be based on preconceived assumptions from the onset, as reflected in the terminology used, the focus on negative implications of the practice, and causal inferences made from correlational designs. The critical literature in contrast mainly addressed ERSI through the lens of non-monogamist systems, which tend to mirror mononormative relationship practices (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Finn, 2010; Wilkinson, 2010). More specifically these approaches fail to understand current constructions of monogamy, the emotions involved and think outside of classifications that create a false duality (Finn, 2012b). In order to do so, it is necessary to investigate ERSI in particular within heterosexual relationships through the application and employment of a social constructionist framework. As such, the current research intends to address the definitional issues by employing a more neutral, behavioural definition, and outlining the ways respondents define this behaviour. Furthermore, by individually targeting those who have engaged in ERSI, their viewpoints are given a space outside of a (possibly judgemental) clinical context, permitting them to express themselves freely. This approach gives access to the discourses, contexts and norms within which this act is allowed to occur.

Chapter 4: Research Method

This chapter outlines all aspects of the project method. That is, the epistemological approach, methodology and method used to investigate ERSI. First, the social constructionist epistemology, the lens through which the topic was explored, is explained. Next, the methodology is described and addresses the issues of power that social constructionist psychology is concerned with. Once the project has been positioned, the specific methods to conduct and analyse the data for each study is outlined.

4.1 Epistemology

Epistemology is defined in numerous ways (e.g., Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), though it is generally referred to the nature of knowledge and knowledge production. This means that epistemology concerns itself with how and what we know, for instance whether there is a direct relationship between the world and how we understand it (positivism), or if a phenomenon can be described and perceived in various ways, neither of which are ultimate truths (constructionism) (Willig, 2013). While a positivist stance aims to produce objective 'facts' and a single 'truth' about any given phenomena, a social constructionist approach targets the various ways social reality can be constituted through language and their implications for individual experiences and practices. Hence, social constructionism rejects the idea of essentialism, for example that our gender and sexuality are biologically determined, but rather views them as flexible categories that can be understood and performed in various ways (T. O. Gordon, 2007; Willig, 2013). According to T. O. Gordon (2007), these constructs merely appear rigid due to the formation of our perceptions at an early age, which become 'common sense'.

4.1.1 A social constructionist approach

This project takes a social constructionist epistemological approach to knowledge production and sexuality (e.g., Farvid, 2010; Farvid & Braun, 2016; Seidman, 1989; Tiefer, 1995; Weeks, 2010). Social constructionism is a postmodern approach that can work as a critique of mainstream psychology, locating this research within a critical psychology tradition (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism views knowledge, which involves ideologies and values, as constructed through language. More specifically, the theoretical framework used, informs evaluations and explanations. As such, research cannot be objective or free from bias, but rather works to create particular realities. For instance, a researcher may choose to depict a glass of water as 'half full', rather than 'half empty', illustrating his/her influence on the construction of knowledge. From this perspective, language functions to make sense of individuals' experiences and creates people's perception of their social world.

Social constructionism regards talk as a form of action, rather than a neutral form of mere communication. In this sense, talk is linked to other types of representational activities and affects the (re)construction of social life (Burr, 1995; Edley, 2001; Gergen, 1985; Schwandt, 2000; Wiggins & Potter, 2008; Willig, 2013). A constructionist approach challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions inherent in everyday life, as well as research. These commonly accepted notions include widely accepted categories of people or daily life and the functions of language in those contexts (Gergen, 1985; T. O. Gordon, 2007; Hibberd, 2005).

4.1.2 The production of knowledge

The statements people draw on to construct an object or subject are known as discourses (I. Parker, 1994). Language contains multiple available discourses that have evolved in meaning and availability throughout history (Willig, 2013). It has been argued that the diverse meanings and ways of constructing an object are not only

derived from a historical context (Wetherell, 1998), but provide people with a range of available options (Edley, 2001). As such, the speaker has to make a choice regarding which constructions to draw on. The person is seen as active in the use of language, one that produces, and is produced through discourse. The constructions provided, however, may not be equally available. Some may have become more 'natural' or 'normal' ways of depicting an object or event, and have thereby become hegemonic (Edley, 2001; Willig, 2013). The dominance of these discourses may be reflected in their taken-for-granted notions of 'truths' and 'facts', and may have varying connotations and implications. For instance, the popular term 'cheating' may be more readily drawn on in regards to an ERSI than 'extradyadic sex' to describe the same behaviour. These formulations can have different outcomes for the formation of identities (e.g., 'cheater'), which according to Edley (2001) remain fluid.

What is regarded as acceptable sexual practices is currently reinforced through the media and 'scientific reasoning' (Lock & Strong, 2010). According to Gergen (1985), what is often depicted as 'truth' in science, may be a form of acquiring social control by correcting people's behaviours through privileged knowledge, ignoring the modifications in definitions of moral mores and the impact of social norms. By adopting a deterministic evolutionary model of what constitutes a 'normal population', psychology has made such truth claims to control any variation in the populous (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Similarly, Potter (1992) argued that 'truth' is merely a rhetorical element employed in realist discourses. For example, an analysis is always conducted from a particular viewpoint within another discourse (Lock & Strong, 2010). More specifically, 'truth' and 'facts' may serve to exert power by validating one's own claims and discounting any challenging positions (Gergen, 1985). The aim of the current study is not to produce 'truths' about subjects and objects, but to provide

interpretations about ERSI that are methodologically, empirically and theoretically credible (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

4.1.3 The formation of identities

According to Burr (1995), language can be used in interpersonal as well as societal contexts. From this perspective, the person is argued to be located in society within systems that offer differential power positions, which can be imposed on or taken up by the person. The individual's multiple and fluctuating identities are thereby located outside, rather than within, the human being. These identities can be negotiated, practiced (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and accessed in different contexts, for instance at home with the family versus at work with friends. This approach separates itself from positivist traditions predominating social psychological theories of the self. Such theories assume the self as a single identity at the centre of experience as well as an entity that lies within the individual. Thus, identity is difficult to study due to its complex nature, subsequently turning it into a myth (Gergen, 1985). According to Gergen (1985), this infers that all psychological speculations reflect the researcher's internal state, rather than the participant's, and therefore becomes problematic.

Rather than addressing an entity residing within one's head, social constructionism seeks to investigate human behaviour by focusing on the relationships people have with each other (Gergen, 1985). These relationships are regarded as the site where knowledge and identities are created through discourses and social interaction with others. Subjectivity is therefore asserted as a dynamic and unfolding process which can take different positions at different points in the discussion (Gergen, 1985; I. Parker, 1994). However, this notion does not seek to create a dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, social constructionism distances itself from such dualism and critiques 'rational' explanations claimed by science, which are seen as the outcome of

negotiations based on historically and culturally situated linguistic formations. Hence, social constructionism evaluates practices and theories in terms of the benefits and harm they produce, thus condemning any passive assertions that simply view consequences as the 'logical' outcome of 'facts' (Gergen, 1985).

4.2 Methodology

The epistemological approach employed, informs the method used to investigate a topic and the research questions asked (Willig, 2013). For instance, a social constructionist methodology would refrain from measuring psychological variables and their validity, but rather considers these constructs as creating particular realities. As such, social constructionism concerns itself with the meanings and experiences that these constructions produce, instead of their predictive value. Qualitative methods are thereby the preferred option to gain an understanding into people's own sense-making of events and how they manage particular situations.

Social constructionism has been criticised for its focus on qualitative methods and the construction of microstructures (T. O. Gordon, 2007). This approach has hence been argued to be neglecting mixed method approaches, as well as the external validity of its findings. However, qualitative methods allow the researcher to study people within their natural environment, thereby taking the context, as well as the processes of change and meaning making into account (Willig, 2013). Furthermore, thinking about gender, sex, and relationships as socially constructed institutional practices, opens up the possibility of reconstruction and change towards a more egalitarian society. As such, social constructionism challenges the status quo assumed and promoted through positivist notions.

4.2.1 Power dynamics

Power is one the main concerns of social constructionist psychology, dealing with issues of oppression and accountability (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), so for instance the ways and extent to which language shapes our thoughts and talks in particular, hegemonic ways (Lock & Strong, 2010). Power can be examined in a number of ways. The micro social constructionist approach of discourse analysis outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggests that the individual is an active user of language and practises it in a multifaceted way. The user is seen as strategic, employing it in a skilled manner to achieve particular goals through the use of a number of rhetorical features, linguistic resources and styles. The three key features of talk include variability (same object can be referred to in several, sometimes conflicting ways), construction (language actively creates reality) and function (strategies used to present an account that carries an importance for us, i.e., persuading someone). Hence language is seen as performative, rather than a means to access inner cognitions, constructing the psychological state of a person.

I. Parker (1994) put forward the macro social constructionist approach, based on Foucauldian theorising, that includes different key features. The key features comprise contradiction, emphasising political struggle and conflict, constitution, which suggests that individuals are structured by discourses, as well as power, which implies that talk includes the reproduction and resistance of dominant discourses. The macro approach thereby focuses more on the political and social structures within which discourses are located.

The two versions of discourse analysis address different research questions (Willig, 2013). While the micro approach focuses on people's interactions and how they use language to achieve something, the macro approach aims to explore the discursive

resources people draw on and their implications for constructions of selfhood, subjectivity and power relations. Both approaches have their strengths in how they examine language use, but they also have their weaknesses. While the micro form of constructionism tends to ignore the power structures inherent in discourse, the macro form has an inclination to neglect the action orientation of people's talk (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2003). The two approaches do not necessarily contradict each other. They can be employed together in order to examine both the discursive resources, such as taking up particular repertoires, as well as the discursive practices, like the construction and negotiation of meaning (Burr, 2003; Wetherell, 1998; Willig, 2003), depending on the objectives of the study.

4.2.2 Selecting the approach to explore ERSI

Within a social constructionist framework there are various ways the topic of ERSI can be approached, as it is a social, psychological, political and emotive topic. This does not mean that any of these areas are necessarily excluded, but rather that one may be emphasised more than another, depending on the aims and practicalities of the study. For instance, a micro discourse analytic approach (possibly in combination with a macro form) could demonstrate how people actively construct their identities in collaboration with others within such a controversial issue. However, this would require direct interactions, which is not in line with the method adopted for ethical reasons in Study One. Furthermore, a micro approach (i.e., discursive psychology), does not address issues in relation to subjectivity and tends to neglect the social and material context of a conversation (Willig, 2013). Hence, this study employs a macro approach, guided by Willig's (2013) Foucauldian understanding of discourse analysis, to investigate the topic of ERSI.

4.2.3 A Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis

Willig (2013) has drawn from Foucault in order to provide a mode of analysis that can specifically be applied to psychological research. From Foucault's perspective, language makes available discourses that construct certain kinds of objects and subjects, which offer particular ways-of-being (Willig, 2013). In Foucauldian terms, knowledge entails meanings, and as such it is discourse which produces meaningful knowledge that shapes our conduct (S. Hall, 2001). Hence, rather than regarding ERSI, for instance, as a 'natural' reaction driven by an uncontrollable sexual drive, a social constructionist framework depicts it as a performance that derives its meanings from the social and cultural context surrounding relationships and sexuality. Therefore, the expressions and reactions are contingent on contextual understandings that are exposed to historical changes, instead of being static, biologically innate mechanisms or traits (Gergen, 1985; Jackson & Scott, 1996). Foucault proposed that any era supplies "the cultural understandings and sexual ways of being that people normatively would take up as 'theirs'" (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 254).

Foucault's account is heavily influenced by the work of Nietzsche, who depicted history not as a progressively unfolding development, but rather as an utilisation of power of varying groups (Lock & Strong, 2010). According to Foucauldian discourse analysis, power is not always constraining, but is also productive (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; S. Hall, 2001). From this perspective, power produces knowledge, individuals and discourses by circulating and operating within all aspects of social life. As such, we may all be part of its circulation (S. Hall, 2001). Knowledge for instance can be taken up to restrain, regulate and control practices. A biomedical discourse, for instance, may situate someone experiencing sickness in the passive position of 'the patient', who has to receive expert care in order to get better (Willig, 2013). Some of these discourses are more effective, as they are well established and thus have more

authority, forming what is regarded as 'common sense' or 'truth' at certain times (Carabine, 2001; S. Hall, 2001; Willig, 2013). This makes them more readily available and serves particular interests (Edley, 2001), though counter-discourses that have the potential to challenge the existing power relations tend to emerge over time (Willig, 2013).

The readily available terms associated with the practice of ERSI, like 'infidelity' or 'cheating', may exemplify the presumed moralistic discourses that draw on a specific mode of relational standards inherent in such talk. These do not only operate on a private level, but infiltrate social structures, institutions and experiences through heteronormative assumptions, as reflected in the institutionalisation of relationships (e.g., marriage). The normative moralistic notions and adverse outcomes of ERSI indicate a problematisation of this act, which is of particular interest to FDA (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Instead of taking ERSI's consequences for granted, FDA seeks to make the ways in which such problematisations are formed and contested visible. FDA thereby aims to think differently about these constructions by stepping outside of our regimes of truth, and to identify how subjects position themselves in relation to a particular moral order.

4.2.4 Objectives of the study

Located within the critical sexualities field, the present study's objectives are to critically investigate how the self is understood in relation to (the moralistic notion of) ERSI (the object), how power is exercised by producing certain 'truths', the counter-discourses taken up, and how individuals locate themselves and act in accordance to a specific moral order (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). In line with these goals, a Foucauldian mode of discourse analysis as developed by Willig (2013) for the discipline of psychology has been utilised. Willig suggested that FDA addresses the

social structures and institutions that are related to particular discourses, and provides guidelines for a Foucauldian analysis that fits psychological research. This is not a FDA in the traditional sense, particularly as it does not include a full genealogical analysis. More specifically, and in accordance with the objectives, FDA inspects the kind of objects and subjects constructed within discourses and people's subsequent ways-of-being. Although some may find other aspects of the research more interesting or would turn their attention elsewhere, this approach arguably fits best with the aims of the study.

4.3 Methods for Study One and Two

The current project consisted of two stages. Study One involved administering an open-ended questionnaire to obtain individual accounts regarding the subjective experience of ERSI. Study Two examined the sociocultural constructions of ERSI by conducting focus group discussions among heterosexual men and women. The data was analysed employing a Foucauldian mode of discourse analysis as described by Willig (2013) for psychology, to address the social constructions of individual experiences, as well as the power relations linked to the wider social discourses and institutionalised practices. Ethical approval for both studies was obtained from Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on the 16 October 2014 (AUTEC reference number 14/311).

4.3.1 Study One

The initial phase of the study examined participants' first-hand accounts of their ERSI experiences. This study addressed the first and third research questions (i.e., What are the experiences of heterosexual men and women who have engaged in ERSI? What are the implications of these constructions for male sexuality, female sexuality, heterosexuality, heteronormativity, heterogender, heterosex and power dynamics within heterosexuality?). In particular, the aim was here to gain an understanding into the way

ERSI was constructed from the viewpoint of those engaging in this often controversial practice and how they positioned themselves in relation to it (i.e., the subject positions offered by the construct). Furthermore, this phase sought to outline the implications of these discourses for subjectivity and experience, for example what it is like to be positioned or take up the position as someone who engages in ERSI. Lastly, the goal was to address the possible gendered discourses in relation to ERSI, the diverse ways respondents constructed their relationships and sexual practices, and the normative assumptions associated with such constructions.

4.3.2 Participants Study One

This phase of the project involved administering an open-ended questionnaire (available online and in hard copy) to heterosexual men and women aged 20+ years, who had engaged in ERSI when in an exclusive romantic relationship (Appendix 1). No age limit was given, as it was exploratory and therefore needed to be kept as broad as possible. Recruitment was done via advertising (e.g., around universities in Auckland and Dunedin, newsletters, work places, apartment buildings etc.) (Appendix 2), social media (i.e., Facebook), and word of mouth. After piloting the questionnaire (using five participants), a total of 34 participants (10 men and 24 women) were sought to fill out the questionnaire (Table 1). The men's age ranged from 21-74 years, while the women were aged 21-60 years. 85.3% of the participants identified themselves as Caucasian, with the remainder outlining a Māori or mixed Caucasian/Māori background (one participant did not state her ethnicity). Most were either students or professionals (e.g., lawyers, lecturers, psychologists), with two participants not outlining their occupational status.

Table 1: Participant Demographics Study One

Gender	Age (years)	Number of participants	Ethnicity
Male	20-74	10	Caucasian = 10
Female	21-60	24	Caucasian = 19; Māori = 2; Caucasian/Māori = 2; Undisclosed = 1

4.3.3 Data Collection Study One

A self-administered open-ended questionnaire was the preferred option, since participants may not be willing to share their experiences (directly) with another person as would be the case in an interview situation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, as questionnaires are a relatively fast and economical way to collect data from a higher number of participants, they allow obtaining data from a wider range of viewpoints, which is particularly advantageous in exploratory research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). For these reasons, they provide the opportunity to gain insight into often unheard and ignored experiences, giving those silenced individuals a voice. Utilising the questionnaire proved useful in that respect, as some participants described never having talked about their experiences to anyone before, and preferred to maintain their anonymity.

Unlike other commonly used qualitative methods, such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires remain focused on the inquiry question. That is, the questions asked and subsequently the responses given are standardised, though respondents still use their own words (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). As the data is neither a product of a direct interaction with the researcher, nor with other participants being present, the usage of identical terminology in the respondents' answers indicates a collective understanding of the

research topic (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). In this particular case, it allows investigating how participants may take up culturally dominant discourses on ERSI, in order to construct their experiences.

The questionnaire was administered to participants, who needed to have engaged in at least one instance of ERSI. In accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2013) guidelines, an Information Sheet with the criteria, instructions, including how much time they should spend on average for each question, and purpose of the study, as well as the researcher's and supervisors' contact details, was given at the beginning of the survey (Appendix 3).

The questionnaire originally consisted of 24 - 42 questions, depending on the number of occurrences participants wished to reveal. These addressed an instance of ERSI in respect to the constructions of the experiences, motives, emotions, outcomes and consequences of the event, especially focusing on a personal level. The questions were slightly adjusted, for example "Any additional comments?" was added at the end of the questionnaire, and reduced (i.e., the third instance questions were deleted) to 24 – 34 questions after the first 15 replies. This was done in order to enhance the quality and quantity of answers given and have fewer respondents skipping the last part of the questionnaire (the last 6 questions in particular) due to the length of survey (see Braun & Clarke, 2013), which was initially the case. These questions were divided into three sections – the first two sections referring to each of the occurrences and the final one addressing the more general thoughts on the topic. Unlike Braun and Clarke's (2013) suggestion to collect demographic data to get an idea of who participated at the end of the survey, as personal information may be threatening at the beginning, the current study collected those details at the start. In light of the emotive and sensitive questions asked, this was done in order for participants to 'ease into' the questionnaire.

Considering that some participants did not finish the questionnaire, which would have meant a loss of demographic information, and most answered those questions, this seems to have been an effective strategy.

As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013) the questions asked were kept simple and made as clear as possible, with examples provided if some ambiguity was present, although this could not be completely ruled out. For instance, sexual relations were defined as oral, vaginal, and anal sex, but this definition and the topic at large still leave room for interpretation. This appears to be especially the case, since questions had to be asked without using the established moralising terminology, in order to avoid prompting participants in a particular direction. The questions were worded carefully to refrain from problematic presumptions suggesting that people know the answer, as is indicated by 'why' questions, but rather addressed their experiences (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). When enquiring about motives, participants were instead asked what they thought their reason was. Exceptions were made when asking about a particular decision they made that did not directly address ERSI (i.e., "Please explain why you chose to talk/not talk about your experience to anyone") or when examining a closed question further (i.e., "Did you enjoy this encounter? Why/why not?"), as questionnaires lack flexibility to otherwise extend on answers given (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The initial questions about ERSI focused on the individual experience and thoughts at the time, moving to the present and more general views to establish a chronological flow. The space left after each question indicated the amount of detail wanted for a particular question. At the end of the questionnaire a thank you message appeared and participants were given a link to an email address, if they wished to partake in a draw to win an incentive.

The questionnaire was administered online using the survey software SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, 2017) – though hard copies were also available, but were not picked up - and included instructions to fill it out in as much detail as possible, spending around 20 – 40 minutes to do so. The anonymous approach allowed individuals to have privacy when filling out the questionnaire in the comfort of an environment of their choice. Ultimately the number of collected questionnaires depended on saturation levels, that is, until no new information was gained (Holloway, 1997). The data was stored on the researcher's personal drive at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), which is password protected.

4.3.4 Study Two

This phase of the study explored the broader social constructions of ERSI to identify the dominant discourses taken up when discussing such practices in general terms. As such, the aim was to outline the general impressions in relation to ERSI, rather than people's talk of their own behaviour. In this study, key questions two and three were addressed, including: What are the dominant discourses related to ERSI in a Western cultural context? What are the implications of these constructions for male sexuality, female sexuality, heterosexuality, heteronormativity, heterogender, heterosex and power dynamics within heterosexuality? More specifically, the goal was to identify the way(s) ERSI was constructed more generally and the assumptions associated with this behaviour. Moreover, this phase sought to outline the negotiations in the (co-) constructions of ERSI, relationships, sex and subject positions. The study also aimed to identify the gendered and normative ways these constructs were talked about.

4.3.5 Participants Study Two

This study involved recruiting heterosexual men and women, aged 20+ years for focus group discussions (FGD). Having engaged in ERSI was not a criteria at this stage, as the emphasis was on how ERSI is generally talked about by small heterosexual

groups of men and women. The groups were thereby kept fairly heterogeneous, though identifying as heterosexual was a criteria due to the focus of the study on the construction of heterosexual ERSI. As in Study One, recruitment was done via advertising around universities in Auckland, newsletters, work places, apartment buildings etc., social media (i.e., Facebook), emailing, and word of mouth. The poster (Appendix 4) stated in a general manner "Let's talk about heterosexual relationships" to attract a wide range of people without having any preconceived notions of the particular focus of the study (Farvid, 2010). The participants initially contacted the researcher via email, though a phone number was also provided as an alternative, to show their interest in partaking in the study. They were then emailed the Information Sheet (Appendix 5) with further details of the study. Once they agreed, they were invited to come to a university's meeting room at an arranged date/time. Alternatively, when groups of individuals contacted the researcher (i.e., friends, colleagues), they were given the option to select an environment of their own choice for the discussion to take place. Two of the focus groups (FG #2 and FG #3) involved a group of friends/colleagues and were conducted in their place of work.

FGDs can be conducted with groups of friends, acquaintances, or strangers, though the former and the latter have been argued to generate more lively discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Acquaintances, in contrast, may be unsure how much they can share with other group members without crossing personal boundaries, particularly as they may continue to meet after the study through shared networks. The current study had a combination of participants who were friends, knew each other, or were strangers, sometimes in the same group. Overall, the participants appeared to be comfortable speaking in a group, regardless of their familiarity with each other.

After conducting a mock FGD (mixed gender group with five participants largely known to each other), eight men and nine women were recruited for four focus groups. The groups were divided into two men's and two women's groups, conducted by myself (SP) and my primary supervisor Panteá Farvid (PF), respectively, in order to gender match the moderator and participants. The purpose was to create a more homogenous and safe space for men and women to share their views, rather than focusing on group gender dynamics. This step was necessary to account for power differences between men and women in regards to sex and relationships. Traditionally, men have been in a position where they police women's (sexual) behaviour (Bamberg, 2004), contributing to the oppression and silencing of women's sexuality. It was hoped that dividing the groups would allow men and women to speak with more ease and comfort within their respective FGDs. Initially a female research assistant was considered. However, due to the specific approach taken, this would have required extensive explanations and work into the subject matter to become more familiar with the topic and methodology. Furthermore, since it is a sensitive topic, an experienced research assistant would have been necessary. As such, PF was decided to be the optimal option.

The participants' age ranged from 22-63 years, most of them were professionals from a diverse range of occupations, and largely identified themselves as Caucasian. Three participants outlined having engaged in an ERSI. The individual group sizes and demographics are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Participant Demographics Study Two

FG #	Gender	No. of Participants	Age (years)	Ethnicity
1	Male	4	27-50	Caucasian = 2; Asian = 1; Indian = 1
2	Female	3	40+-63	Caucasian = 2; Māori = 1
3	Male	4	22-23	Caucasian = 4
4	Female	6	23-49	Caucasian = 5; Missing = 1

4.3.6 Data Collection Study Two

Focus groups offer a relatively unstructured, but guided way of collecting data from several participants at the same time (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher takes on the role of the moderator, whose task is to introduce the group members, topic, and guide the discussion, thus taking on an active role in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2013; J. Kitzinger, 1994). As such, the aim is to facilitate a more naturalistic discussion among the group members as they would outside of a research context, rather than interview them. FGDs thereby prioritise the participants' ways of talking about an object and prevent the researcher from blocking the multitude of meanings by imposing his/her own understanding onto the interview process (J. Kitzinger, 1994). In that sense, FGDs tend to generate more conventional conversations by reducing the artificiality produced by other (qualitative) research techniques, offering a possibly higher ecological validity (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These discussions can give insight into the ways people construct an object, and justify or resist a particular subject position. As such, FGDs focus on the interaction between group members as research data (J. Kitzinger, 1994). The more 'genuine' conversations between participants can provide detailed insight into sensitive and under-researched topics (since prior empirical

knowledge is not a necessity), as well as the more commonly used terms taken up in their talks with one another (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A sensitive topic like ERSI lends itself to focus group research, as people tend to feel more comfortable discussing delicate issues in a group setting, than being inquired about it directly in a face-to-face interview. While interviews are more appropriate to ask about personal experiences, FGDs are suitable to generate insight into the collective understanding of a subject matter.

Once the groups were arranged and participants arrived, they were given a Consent Form (Appendix 6). In order to have a discussion covering various topics and give every participant enough time to state their opinions within the planned time frame (1.5 – 2 hours), the appropriate group size was deemed to be no smaller than three, and no larger than six participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). Smaller groups tend to be more manageable, give a voice to every participant, and have been deemed to be more appropriate for sensitive topics, which carry a potential risk of generating distress (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The risk was accounted for, as participants were informed that they could leave the group at any time, withdraw their data, approach the moderator (both psychologists), and offered up to three counselling sessions with the AUT Health and Counselling Service. If a participant appeared to be dominating the discussion, those who were quieter were addressed directly by name when asking a question, in order to give everyone the chance to voice their opinion. One of the participants was particularly dominant in FG #3. Other participants were subsequently addressed by name. Although there was a slightly heated discussion within the same group, no participant appeared to be upset, as it was a group of friends who seemed to feel comfortable disagreeing with each other. Also, the moderator intervened by changing the topic in that case.

Before the FGDs, the participants were asked if they had read and understood the information given to them and were given the chance to ask any questions for clarification. In order to maintain confidentiality, the participants were invited to choose a pseudonym for themselves that was to be used during the discussions and for the transcripts. Instructions were given regarding the conduct of the FGDs, including confidentiality (e.g., not sharing anything discussed in the group outside of the FGD), the right to withdraw at any time, speaking loud and clear, and treating each other in a respectful manner. It was also clarified to them that they are not obliged to disclose any personal information, but are merely supposed to discuss the topic in general terms. Participants were offered snacks (e.g., pizza, cheese platter) and refreshments (e.g., juice) during the discussion.

The focus group moderating questions (Appendix 7) built upon Study One and derived from the findings in that stage of the study. These questions acted as a prompt to stimulate a discussion with regards to particular topics, rather than as a strict interview guide (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The initial questions were kept general and asked participants about the type of relationships they can think of to ease them into the discussion, before specific questions regarding ERSI were addressed. The subsequent questions focused on the acceptability of ERSI, specifying certain ERSI scenarios (e.g., one night stands, 'soulmates') by focusing on boundaries, commitment, and exclusivity. The latter part also asked about gender issues, seeking the groups' perspectives to outline whether men's and women's ERSI was talked about differently. Thus, this stage was further used to clarify and highlight some of the matters raised in Study One, such as the gendered discourses of sex.

The questions were slightly adjusted and refined after each FGD in order to accommodate for relevant topics raised that were not initially covered in the set of

questions (i.e., "What would be worse, if it was a one-off encounter or a special connection and they couldn't do anything about it? Would you tell a friend if a partner was having an "affair" (use participants' term)? If a friend's partner hit on you, would you tell them? What if you were the third person, would you engage with someone who is in a relationship? Is it easier for men/women to engage in ERSI?"). Working on the questions after each discussion to improve upon them, was a useful process to obtain richer data and get clarification for previously not acknowledged issues. Upon completion of the discussion, the participants were given a Demographic Information Sheet (Appendix 8) asking them background information, such as age and gender, as well as their personal experience of ERSI (they were given the option of withholding their real name). One participant in FG #4 did not fill out the Demographic Information Sheet. Finally they were thanked for their participation in the study, and as a token of thanking them, a cinema voucher (as advertised) was gifted to them after the FGD.

4.3.7 Analytic stages

Study One was transcribed verbatim, although minor mistakes were corrected. Male participants were referred to in the analytic chapters as "PM", while the women were outlined as "PW", followed by the questionnaire response number, to maintain their anonymity. The data in Study Two was transcribed by two hired transcribers, who signed a Confidentiality Agreement (Appendix 9). Where participants' talk overlapped, this was indicated by three dots at the beginning or end of a sentence, omitted text sections in the analytic chapter were signalled through placing three dots in parentheses (e.g., […]), and three dots within a sentence illustrated a short pause in the talk. If passages were unclear, explanations were put in parentheses within the text. After examining and correcting the transcripts, the data was analysed using a Foucauldian mode of discourse analysis (FDA), as outlined by Willig (2013). The analysis concerned itself with the kinds of objects and subjects that the discourses constructed,

taking into account the physical, social and psychological outcomes of discourse (Willig, 2013). FDA was employed to look at the dominant discourses participants drew on to construct an account. More specifically the analysis focused on Willig's (2013) six stages of Foucauldian discourse analysis, including the *discursive constructions* of the object (e.g., ERSI), the broader *discourses* drawn on and resisted in talk, the *action orientation* of and *subject positions* offered by these constructs, as well as their possibilities for *practice* and *subjectivity*. As such, the analysis addressed how respondents constructed their non-monogamous experience within a mononormative system.

The *discursive constructions* stage focuses on identifying the ways the discursive object (i.e., ERSI) is talked about (Willig, 2013). This does not only include explicitly stated keywords (e.g., 'infidelity') that describe the discursive object, but also implicit references to it (e.g., 'it'). The discursive object can be constructed in various ways.

The second stage seeks to locate these different constructions within wider *discourses*. For instance, ERSI may be located within a pathological or permissive discourse. These discourses relate to other constructions within the text and have different functions, known as the *action orientation* of talk. As such, stage three aims to identify for instance, what a pathological discourse of ERSI attempts to achieve (e.g., reduce responsibility for the act).

The different constructions offer *subject positions* within discourse, which are identified in stage four. Subjects can take up these discourses to speak and act from. By doing so, they can implicitly or explicitly locate others within these discourses. For example, a romantic discourse can open up the subject position of someone who is a faithful partner. Stage five focuses on the ways discourses enable and limit action. A

moralising discourse on ERSI, for instance, allows the subject to be monogamous, constructing it as a legitimate *practice*. Within this discourse, the subject is allowed to remain with one person, but not to engage in an intimate relationship with someone other than one's partner. These discourses can work in a circular fashion. For instance, by constructing monogamy as legitimate, a moralising discourse on ERSI is reproduced. These possibilities and limitations do not only apply to behaviour, but can be assigned to the feelings, experiences, and thoughts produced by particular subject positions. As such, stage six of the analysis deals with the *subjectivities* that are constructed through particular discourses, for example being caring.

In particular, the questions asked of the data involved how ERSI, relationships (romantic and non-romantic), sex, masculinity and femininity were constructed. Next, the discourses where these constructions were located were identified, such as biological or romantic discourses. The following analytical step sought to outline what is achieved by a pathological, biological, romantic, or moralistic discourse, and how participants positioned themselves, the involved parties and any outsiders within these discourses. As these discourses enable and limit practices and subjectivities, the subsequent questions asked what constitutes (un)acceptable relationality and emotions related to the practice of ERSI and relationships, and what subjectivities does each discourse offer its subject positions.

4.3.8 Data analysis process

The process of analysis involved repeated reading of the data in order to familiarise oneself with the content, writing down initial ideas that come to mind and looking for discourses in an active way. Once this had been accomplished, any features that appeared to be related to ERSI and were repeated, were coded in a systematic manner, starting off with a large number of patterns and subsequently narrowing this

down. These codes were comprehensively organised in order to see how they could be combined to form categories, guided by the research question (Taylor, 2001; Willig, 2003). The kinds of subjects and objects within such discourses were identified, as well as the broader discourses related to these (Willig, 2013).

Both studies asked the same questions of the data. However, the focus in Study Two shifted to investigating the general ways ERSI is talked about as an object and form of practice more broadly, rather than seeking to examine people's first-hand experiences. Although a few people offered up information regarding their own ERSI experiences, more attention was paid to how ERSI was (co-)constructed in interaction between the participants (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). The second study thus complemented Study One by adding the general perspectives on ERSI to the personal accounts of those who engaged in the practice, and by helping to clarify the questions raised in the first study. For instance Study Two addressed how commitment, attraction, relationship boundaries, friendships, and having a 'special connection' were constructed and positioned, adding depth and explanations to Study One. As such, both studies can be seen as a whole, following an overall narrative.

It should be noted that the analysis is an active process, involving the researcher's decisions, and hence the discourses did not simply emerge or were discovered (Willig, 2003). The active role of the researcher is indispensable in the analytic process in order to inflict order upon the information. The next step involved writing up the analysis by providing sample extracts and presenting an argument. More specifically, this involved telling an analytic, coherent story of the data that moves beyond a mere description of what was said (i.e., what is explicit and implicit in the data), which may prompt new insights. The process is not a linear, but an iterative one, where the researcher can move continuously between the stages (Taylor, 2001).

The data analysis did not require a computer software (e.g., NVivo), as the data set had a manageable size. Furthermore, computer software may not be appropriate for a discursive analysis (Willig, 2013). These software tend to focus on coding and retrieving particular terms, but the aim of a discourse analysis is to outline the various meanings. The same word can differ in meaning depending on its context, or meanings may be negotiated in the absence of certain terms. These can easily be overlooked when using computer software to aid in the analysis.

4.3.9 Rigour

A major advantage of Willig's mode of Foucauldian discourse analysis is that it allows the researcher to be flexible in their analysis and take the fluidity and variability of talk into account (Willig, 2003). Such an approach allows a better understanding of people's perspectives and can produce new insights (Willig, 2013). The researcher's influence in these processes is recognised as part of the research. FDA thereby refrains from viewing the researcher as objective, and from making causal inferences that can be generalised.

However, in order to make sure that the analysis is not guided by personal motives, such as a vendetta against those who engage in ERSI, there are various steps that can be taken to account for rigour (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2013). Firstly, FDA recognises that multiple interpretations of the same data are possible (Crowe, 2005; Willig, 2013). In order to confirm the researcher's interpretation, the data can also be analysed by others and compared in order to include only the commonly identified discourses. This step was taken in conjunction with my supervisors. Moreover, the epistemological stance, data collection method and analytic process need to be clearly described and be congruent with the research question (Crowe, 2005). I have addressed these aspects of rigour in this chapter by identifying social constructionism as the

overarching epistemology for my study and being explicit about each step of my research methods. It has been argued that for a constructionist discourse analysis, the links between discourse and interpretation need to be supported by sufficient evidence and described in a plausible manner, as well as connecting these findings to existing knowledge. I have done this in my three findings chapters through the use of excerpts and references to previous research. Furthermore, rigour can be evaluated by the potential of the research to challenge and change existing structures and misconceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I have addressed this in the first, second, and discussion chapters, highlighting the rationale, possibilities for change, and future implications of the research. Another commonly employed technique that addresses the researcher's influence on the research process is reflexivity (Willig, 2013).

4.3.10 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to an active and critical engagement with the influence of the researcher on the design, process and outcomes of the research (Willig, 2013). Finlay (2002) suggested that reflexivity is a way of transforming subjectivity from a 'problem of', to an opportunity in research. In the evaluation of qualitative research, the influence of the researcher as well as intersubjective elements on the investigation are acknowledged as significant contributions to the research process and outcomes, due to the subjective nature of the methodology. In other words, it is "an awareness of our own contribution to the construction of meanings and the impossibility of conducting research whilst remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter" (Willig, 1999, p. 161). Other authors (Barry, Britten, Barber, Bradley, & Stevenson, 1999; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Finlay, 2003; Willig, 2013) more specifically proposed that data collection, selection and interpretation are attributable to the researcher. The researcher therefore represents an influential figure in generating data and outcomes, rather than occupying an objective and independent position as assumed by positivist notions

(Willig, 2013). Hence, reflexivity addresses the issues regarding the lack of objectivity and neutrality in qualitative research (although even in mainstream psychology one cannot be entirely objective, since the researcher influences design as well as method chosen to analyse the data). This is not regarded as a disadvantage, but rather as an opportunity, since the scholar may be seen as a resource, through the use of critical self-reflections (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

Personal reflexivity deals with the ways our experiences, values, motives, and beliefs shape the research process (Willig, 2013). For me personally, this was a difficult step, as I am generally not keen on 'sharing' my private stories. However, such a challenge makes this step in the research process even more valuable, as research from a constructionist viewpoint is not merely about invoking social change, but also about possible personal changes that can result from this process (Willig, 2013).

4.3.11 Researcher reflections

My background is Persian/Azerbaijani, though I was born and raised in Germany before moving to the UK to study Psychology, and currently live in New Zealand. I had a liberal upbringing in countries that are considered to be open-minded with regards to sex and relationships. Nonetheless, these societies tend to view ERSI negatively, which has influenced my moral compass, as well. As such, I identify myself as a heterosexual male, who is in a monogamous relationship (though I was single at the start and throughout the majority of this project). This positions me as someone who has certain moralistic assumptions of ERSI and is reflected in the way I used to react to people's ERSI behaviour. When friends engaged in ERSI, I usually told them what they were doing was 'wrong' and asked them to disclose it to their partner and provide reasons for their behaviour, as I could not understand them. I was usually left puzzled, though, as those who engaged in the practice themselves could not provide a reason for

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their behaviour and largely avoided any attempts at explaining. Considering society's unfavourable views on ERSI, it is arguably a difficult act to account for.

Regardless of my attempts to stop someone from engaging in ERSI and help the couple to deal with the aftermath of such an encounter, the outcomes were often dire. Not only did long-term, seemingly stable and loving relationships dissolve as a result of an ERSI, but there were wider implications for those close to the couple. Friendships and families of the couple broke apart, as people were choosing sides and inflicting blame. Subsequently, I lost friends, not as I chose to side with one party, but particularly because I did not choose sides, and decided to remain neutral. Bearing in mind the strong moralistic views on ERSI, my position as someone who did not approve of it, but took an impartial stance towards the couple, was not well received (by either party). I maintained such a position, as I did not regard either party as a 'bad' human being, whose intention was to hurt someone, but because I thought that there was indeed a reason that cannot be explained in a simple black and white manner (i.e., possibly one that lies beyond the individual). These were often friends, who condemned ERSI themselves and wanted to be in a monogamous relationship with a particular person. The questions that came to mind was why they would hurt the person they claimed they loved? Why they would (want to) remain in a monogamous relationship, and why they would engage in an act they disapproved of? More specifically, I asked myself what the processes involved were that led to an act, which is common, yet disapproved of, and the kind of experiences associated with it. Though I did not approve of people's ERSI myself, my views may not be as strong as someone, who has personally experienced such an act, since I have not engaged in any behaviour resembling ERSI or have been in a serious relationship with someone who did.

The simplistic explanations offered by the academic literature that I engaged with during my studies, did not seem to provide me with a satisfactory answer to my questions. Instead they appeared to focus on the individual and ignore the social context, which seemed to be of importance within these interactions. I felt that an in-depth and contextual analysis was missing, especially one without preconceived notions about ERSI. I made an initial attempt at approaching the topic in a more nuanced manner when working on my Bachelor's dissertation, but the scope of my aims went beyond that of an undergraduate study. As such, I was brought back to it when developing my doctoral thesis, which provided me with the platform to pursue an undertaking of this scale and gain a better understanding. In order to make sure that my personal motives did not guide the research process in a judgemental way, I constantly exchanged ideas and thoughts on the project with my supervisors.

4.3.12 Reflections on the research process

As is common with most research, this project encountered some obstacles and questions in the process. Being a heterosexual and (at the time) single man, I was firstly asked about my motives for researching ERSI. This was particularly of concern to my supervisors, who were female researchers, taking a critical and feminist perspective in their field. As such, they wanted to make sure that power and relationships were dealt with adequately and ethically in the research. After some discussion, it became clear that we shared the same concern, especially as I am coming from a social justice perspective. In other words, one of my main motives was to promote gender equality within heterosexual relationships. This is not to say that I am merely pushing for women's rights, but rather that I am advocating for both men and women.

Collecting data was not always a smooth process. The simple task of putting up flyers to advertise for the study could be challenging, too, as some places did not think

it would be appropriate to promote a sexualities study (this included a sex shop). The

conservative attitudes towards sexualities research became also apparent when

presenting the study to audiences, as some marched out in anger or verbally expressed

their disapproval, for instance because I tried to move away from victim/perpetrator

categories. This attitude was also reflected by participants in the focus group discussion,

who seemed to feel that the perpetrator needs to be clearly named (e.g., "cheater"). On

the other hand, some respondents found particularly this aspect of the research

intriguing and went on to promote the project to their networks. I did not take the anger

expressed by some individuals personally, but rather as an indication that I was

breaking the normative boundaries in service of making progress.

Although having initial difficulties in promoting the study and obtaining the

required number of participants, the questionnaire proved useful in saving time to

transcribe the data, since the accounts were written down. Furthermore, the online

accessibility of the questionnaire permitted the acquirement of data from around the

country, which would not have been possible with face-to-face interviews due to time

and resource constraints. As such, the questionnaire provided a wider range of

viewpoints, useful in exploratory research such as the current one (Braun & Clarke,

2013; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). Moreover, the standardised questions made

comparisons between participants, and therefore coding the data simpler and more

organised.

The FGDs appeared to trigger more interest than the questionnaire study, as

potential participants continued to contact me, but had to be turned down once sufficient

data had been obtained. The FGDs complemented the questionnaire well, in that they

illustrated the moralising social context that respondents in Study One often depicted.

As such, Study Two helped to provide further explanations to the questionnaire respondents' ERSI accounts and gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic.

Having separate gender groups seemed to make it easier for respondents in the focus groups (especially women) to give their thoughts on the matter, and at times speak about their own experiences with ERSI. A mixed group may have played out differently. Only one mixed gender FGD was conducted as a pilot, which was not included in the analysis. Although no conclusion can be reached here, from initial analyses it appeared that the talks in that group were somewhat different from those in the separate gender groups. That is, in the mixed gender FGD, there appeared to be gendered discussions about ERSI, whereby the women often disagreed with the man in that group. Having mixed FGDs in future research regarding ERSI, may be an interesting venue to pursue.

4.4 Chapter Summary

Investigating ERSI through a social constructionist lens, opened up the possibility of approaching this topic in novel ways and to challenge any preconceived notions associated with this practice. Since it is a sensitive terrain, the methods employed needed to be adjusted accordingly. Underused qualitative methods, like open-ended questionnaires, offered a pathway to approach such a topic in an ethical manner. Furthermore, rather than focusing merely on the individual, as psychological research on ERSI has mainly done, research needs to address both, the individual and the social discourses to obtain a more holistic account of ERSI. As such, FGDs were conducted in addition to the individual accounts given in Study One. The aim to challenge any preconceptions was not only a matter of using the adequate method, but involved questioning and reflecting on my own motives, as I am not free from such biases and subsequently influence the research process. Having positioned this research within

social constructionism and fully described the research process, the findings from the qualitative questionnaires are presented next.

Chapter 5: The "Acceptability" of ERSI

This first analytic chapter focuses on the discourses of ERSI as relayed by those who responded to the questionnaire. It covers one major framing, namely the acceptability of ERSI, which refers to the context given by participants, in which this act was allowed to occur. The discourses identified and discussed in this chapter are: irresistible attraction, sexual experimentation, as well as the hierarchy of ERSI. These discourses always entailed a moralistic aspect to them, regardless of whether the experience was constructed as positive or negative. I discuss here the various and often contradictory ways ERSI was constructed by the respondents, and how they managed to maintain a morally sound subject position through justifying their act. These accounts were depicted in a number of ways, framed as guilt ridden, distant or mundane. The discourses taken up by the participants to describe their experiences, generally reflected the negative connotations and stigma culturally associated with ERSI, indicated by the pejorative terms, such as "cheating" or "affair". Such descriptions were suggestive of the contradictory aspects of ERSI – respondents often appeared torn between the positive (which tended to encapsulate the private) and negative (which tended to encapsulate the social) experience.

When describing the private experience of ERSI, emotions were often positively depicted, including excitement. The described emotions were frequently linked to individualistic romantic notions or descriptions of what constitutes "good sex", such as intimacy. These depictions seemed to contrast with constructions of the social experience, which was related to maintaining a good moral character. Having a morally sound character was associated with mononormativity and involved socially expected/required feelings of guilt or regret (discussed further in Chapter Six). However, this is not to create a dichotomy between the social and personal –

individualistic romantic notions are also socially encouraged through the media, such as Hollywood movies in which the bride runs off with her best friend instead of marrying the less attractive groom (Walters & Burger, 2013). These notions commonly assign a purpose to ERSI (e.g., finding 'the one') that participants drew on to position their experience accordingly, for instance as an exceptional circumstance. Agency appeared to have to be carefully managed to maintain a credible position when defending their behaviour, as well as avoiding blame and stigma. For instance, they described being active in ending the ERSI or relationship, yet non-agentic in the initiation of ERSI, as outlined next.

5.1 Irresistible Attraction

Respondents often outlined the reasons for engaging in ERSI as a temptation that was just too difficult to resist. They described being 'magnetically pulled' towards the ERSI partner, especially when spending time in close proximity, on a daily basis. Participants portrayed their encounters as spontaneous, and as though they were overpowered by an animalistic force of chemistry and attraction. The participants thus positioned themselves as attempting to resist this attraction and restrain themselves sexually, but as eventually being taken over by some irresistible "natural"/internal drive.

5.1.1 Power of desire

Attraction between two people who eventually engaged in ERSI was talked about by the respondents as a force that built up over time and could only be resisted for a limited period of time. In these instances, there was difficulty in avoiding each other at work or school for example, positioning the respondent as not having a choice in circumventing the situation. Such attraction was depicted as mutual and directed towards a specific person. In such instances, sex was sometimes described as an unavoidable consequence of long-term desire:

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Q: What do you think was the reason for engaging in this sexual relation?

PM24: I wanted her for a long time. To be blunt, she was more attractive than the girl I was seeing, and having sex with her was like being in some kind of pornography and really was something new. (26 years)

The respondent compares the attractiveness of his ERSI partner to his girlfriend. The reason to pursue her is depicted as his sexual desire for her, based on her physical attractiveness. Portraying his ERSI partner as a conquest, the participant also objectifies her, as well as her sexual abilities, by describing them as pornographic. The sex is then described as different, heightened, and as ostensibly better than the sex with his primary partner. One participant described how such a desire may increase by going through various stages:

Q: What do you think was the reason for engaging in this sexual relation?

PW30: We had been very attracted to one-another for about 1 year and had a very close relationship, physically and emotionally. It was like making it erotic was the next stage and it had been building up. Also, we'd been drinking and were all alone on holiday so were likely pretty disinhibited and relaxed. (38 years)

Although identifying as heterosexual, the respondent depicts her ERSI encounter with a close female friend. The ability to hold back over a longer period is described in terms of her capability to control and restrain herself sexually. Subsequently, the ERSI encounter is positioned as occurring in a specific context (holiday), circumstance (alone together) and reduced inhibition (drinking), thus decreasing responsibility for the act. Such 'disinhibiting' contextual factors were often relayed by participants and worked to position certain ERSI encounters as more situational and opportunistic than personally driven. Furthermore, sexual contact is portrayed as the ultimate way to connect with one another and as the next stage from the already established physical and emotional bond the women had.

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When describing ERSI, attraction was largely conceptualised by participants as a powerful force controlling the actions of the individual, regardless of any given social norms. Respondents described being torn between this force and the moral codes and thus positioned themselves as trying to navigate desires versus norms. Due to desire being positioned as internal and biological, strong and unavoidable, it was depicted as winning over any social restrictions:

> Q: How did the sexual relations come about?
>
> PM34: Over the time prior to the first sexual encounter, there was an increasing 'romantic' tension between us. The first physical contact came naturally. (50 years)

The participant describes the physical attraction between him and his ERSI partner as 'romantic tension', which was followed by 'inevitable' sexual contact. In this way an attraction imperative (Farvid & Braun, 2013) operated within the accounts, whereby once two people shared an attraction towards one another, it culminated in sex. Some participants described how such desire took over their thoughts and feelings:

> Q: What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?
>
> PW30: At the time my thoughts and feelings were basically of preoccupation with being really aroused and feeling desired so it was a form of intense sensual ecstasy. (38 years)

This respondent talks about her ERSI as all consuming, but also pleasurable in its potency of feeling desired. Feeling attracted towards the other person is thereby depicted as derived from being positioned as the object of male desire. In her account, the participant obtains the enjoyment of her ERSI from the circumstances surrounding this behaviour, rather than the sexual act itself. As such, the participant draws in her account on gendered norms whereby women draw the positive aspects of (casual) sexual encounters from being attractive to men (Farvid & Braun, 2016). In another

account, one woman described the intensity in which she desired more contact with her ERSI partner after the first time:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW10: A lot of grief, as I was missing it, I became a bit obsessed as I was really craving for having sex with him again. (45 years)

The participant's use of the word "crave", describes her desire in terms of an addiction discourse. She also identifies a longing to and an obsession she had for having sex with a particular man. Her desire is depicted not only as having a physical, but also an emotional impact, positioning herself as grieving when away from the object of her passion.

5.1.2 Desire to fulfil needs

Respondents often discussed the desire and attraction towards the other person as a result of unfulfilled needs in the primary relationship. These desires were at times portrayed as an emotional, in other instances as a physical need. PW10 elaborated on the reasons for her seeking sex with her ERSI partner:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible another time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?
>
> PW10: It [ERSI] happened 4-5 times with the same guy, [when I was] having the same "exclusive relationship", it was going on for approximately 4 years. I needed them both. But it never happened again, not because it was not good or pleasurable, I never needed it again. Now I have a partner who provides me more than enough pleasure and fulfils all my attachment needs, and obviously my sexual drive is lower than it was when I was in my twenties. So I don't need it anymore, but no regrets. (45 years)

In the extract above, the participant is reflecting on an ERSI from her twenties, when she was in a long-term relationship of four years. That particular relationship is depicted as lacking in some way, hence necessitating a need to seek out an ERSI with

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someone else, in order for her to feel fulfilled. As such, the respondent subtly portrays the source of her 'straying'/ERSI as based on a deficient committed relationship that was not meeting her sexual needs. There is an underlying element of ERSI being justified, if someone is in an unfulfilling relationship. This works to position herself as entitled to be completely fulfilled, particularly as no sign of remorse is noted.

The participants often did not speak of guilt in these accounts, but of ERSI as a past practice that was acceptable in that it merely fulfilled the needs that arose at the time. As these urges are illustrated to have decreased over time, PW10 suggests that she has become monogamous and feels fulfilled by her current partner meeting both her sexual and attachment needs. Not only does this work to position the respondent as essentially monogamous (present self), but justifies her ERSI as a practice that occurred in the past for a reason specific to those circumstances. In this way she distances herself from her past act of ERSI. In a similar fashion, PW14 outlined the uncontrollability of her desire for engaging in an ERSI, albeit giving a more remorseful and conflicted account:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible the first time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner?"
>
> PW14: We had nearly had an affair 3 years into my marriage. We both decided to remain out of contact (he was married also) as we were too tempting to the other, and wanted to protect our respective marriages. 3 years ago (12 years into my marriage) we broke the contact drought and had lunch. We decided to meet for lunch once again. Unbeknownst to me, he had booked a room right next to where we were having lunch. Upon learning this, I felt really conflicted... even though I went to the lunch knowing that I would like to sleep with him again, there was no definite decision about it. I was very sad and uncomfortable about the deception, but I did have feelings for and huge attraction to this man (and had done so for a very long time). I was also feeling very unhappy in my marriage. I did not want to break the family up. (45 years)

The respondent depicts the attraction between her and her ERSI partner as a strong force they tried to contain by keeping their distance. The main motive behind this is ascribed to protecting their families and keeping them intact, despite portraying her marriage as unfulfilling. As such, the decision to meet up with her ERSI partner is attributed to her problematic marriage. Often the reason to engage in ERSI given by participants was unhappiness or dissatisfaction in their long-term relationship, suggesting "affairs" to be symptomatic of these, thereby drawing on common cultural justifications for their ERSI. This participant portrays much more conflict than the previous respondent, though, particularly by depicting her identity as a 'faithful' wife and mother as an obligation. Her identity as a responsible wife and mother is contrasted with her personal needs and desires. Her situation is thereby described in dichotomous terms with no middle ground, where she can either make herself or her family happy.

Although being "turned-off" by the man's assumptions about having sex, she describes how this contradicted the attraction she felt towards him, which eventually took over the situation. The respondent subsequently depicts realising the lack in her marriage by her desire to engage in and continue her ERSI:

> PW14: So, the first time, I recall knowing that I had broken something in my relationship to my husband. That what we had was fundamentally changed from this day on. I felt sad about that. I felt sad about the deception. It's not who I wanted to be, and yet here I was doing it. Yes, the clandestine nature was exciting, but as with all of our choices this comes at a cost. It's hard to keep things positive and connected in the bedroom in a long-term partnership... well it was hard for my husband and I anyway. The first time felt quite mechanical. We'd been lovers before and it had been a while, and I think for us some of the slight awkwardness of this time was knowing that we were igniting something once again. I think we both felt a little nervous about it... knowing that it was going to be difficult to not keep going...not keep on seeing each other. So if this was true, and I was going keep on seeing him, then what the hell did that say about my marriage?? It raised a lot of uncomfortable thoughts.
>
> And god it was great! (45 years)

Despite being unhappy in her marriage, the respondent repeatedly outlines feelings of sadness about the deception, thereby constructing herself as a caring wife. This sadness, though, is said to be not about the sexual act per se, which is described as enjoyable. Consequently the moral impasse is ascribed to the secretive nature of ERSI, rather than the act itself (e.g., Moller & Vossler, 2015). The sexual act is instead constructed as functioning to fulfil her sexual needs, which are portrayed as not being met in her marriage. Such a lack in marriage was positioned as a common problem in long-term relationships, ascribing the reasons of her marriage problems to the nature of relationships, rather than (her) individual shortcomings. PW14 depicts a loss of control over her desire once unleashed, fuelling the conflicted nature of her situation. This positions attraction as an enticing and powerful force that is difficult to resist. Unlike some of the previous examples, this extract demonstrates a planned sexual encounter, whereby the sexual act is described as "mechanical", rather than passionate. Hence, passion is depicted as necessarily consisting of spontaneity. She appears disappointed, as the reality of the ERSI did not meet her (high) expectations. By depicting ERSI as a planned and deliberate act, as well as being reflective by weighing up the consequences of her actions, the respondent takes up a rational subject position. However, the last sentence indicates a turn, portraying the encounter as being physical and immensely satisfying. Other participants also emphasised the importance of spontaneity in the enjoyment of ERSI, as outlined next.

5.1.3 Spontaneous, passionate sex

Although participants described attraction as building up over a period of time, the first ERSI encounter in particular was often depicted as spontaneous (i.e., once a strong desire is identified and built up, there was no stopping it). The sexual encounter was portrayed as animalistic, non-restrictive and spontaneous.

Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible another time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?

PM17: She acted flirtatious towards me and we shared some drinks before leaving the festival we were at and heading back to the friend's house where I was staying for the week. I found that the doors were locked and so we simply started having sex on his front lawn. We were concealed from the road by a wall of shrubs and this went on for maybe 20 minutes. When I heard someone coming home we left before we were discovered and continued to have sex for maybe another half hour in the bushes near a local school. (21 years)

The respondent depicts a scripted sequence of events leading up to having sex, which included flirtatious behaviour by the woman and having alcoholic drinks together before heading home. Once they had reached home, the sexual encounter is described as unstoppable by the circumstances (e.g., a locked house). The sexual act is constructed as animalistic, taking place in various natural settings. It is this spontaneity that was illustrated as making the experience enjoyable, while planning sex was said to be less so.

Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible the first time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner?

PM31: Enjoyed a mutual attraction to someone I worked with…kissed and fondled each other for a couple of weeks then hot-blooded passion kicked in and we consummated our relationship on a desk at work one evening - sound familiar? Made love at work several times over the following month then I changed jobs and the relationship ended (57 years)

The respondent outlines an ERSI at work with a colleague, which started with some erotic actions, building up towards a lustful sexual exchange. The particular scenario is positioned as common[4], which works to locate ERSI as an ordinary act, thereby downplaying the severity of his actions. The participant describes the first

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[4] The respondent may also be referring to an incident covered heavily in the New Zealand media at the time, which included two office workers having sex on a desk and being filmed by pub patrons across the road (e.g., Bayer, 2015).

encounter as unleashing some kind of sexual drive that could not be stopped and led to subsequent sexual exchanges. The mutual attraction described here is positioned as controlling the actions of the individuals involved. These spontaneous encounters were largely depicted as physical, rather than emotional. The unexpectedness made ERSI more exciting, as outlined by PM12:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible another time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?
>
> PM12: Meet a girl in the bus going to a squat party [a free party with secret indoor location], partied at the party…drunk alcohol took drugs etc.…eventually her and I went out the back somewhere and started kissing, touching, feeling etc.…she pulled down her pants and turned around against the wall gesturing for me to fuck her.. I licked her pussy for a while and then fucked her…we returned to the party and she put my arms around her…I felt uncomfortable with that and told her I was going to go get some more drinks for us. In actual reality I ran off and went home. (29 years)

The sexual act is portrayed in detail and as spontaneous. Alcohol and drugs, as well as a specific casual context (party) are outlined as part of the ERSI experience. This act is characterised by the absence of emotion and an intimate gesture following sex is subsequently illustrated to be unwelcomed for him. What is interesting in such acts is the varying meaning of intimacy. Although the participant had just engaged in penis-vagina penetration and oral sex – acts that are at least regarded as very (physically) intimate – the woman's attempt to engage in non-sexual intimate contact (putting her arm around him) is depicted as crossing some kind of intimacy 'boundary' for him. This is argued to have resulted in him reportedly feeling so uncomfortable that he escaped the situation.

In a similar manner, many participants subtly differentiated between "intimacy" (an indicator of feelings, romance or closeness), and a physical sexual act. The latter was not always depicted as intimate in the same way, but rather based on a physical

attraction that built up towards the ERSI. As such, participants conveyed that it was an underlying force that was gaining strength and eventually took over their actions.

The respondents often drew on an attraction imperative (Farvid & Braun, 2013), whereby a mutual attraction culminated in sex, positioning the sexual act as a "natural" and almost unavoidable consequence of desire. In order to emphasise this point, the participants depicted attempts to restrain themselves sexually and resist their desires, but as unable to, due to the surrounding circumstances, which placed them in close proximity of their ERSI partner (e.g., at work). Despite illustrating the attraction as building up in those circumstances and as following common dating patterns (e.g., flirting, alcohol), the ERSI act itself was portrayed as spontaneous and contextual. These illustrations tie in with reports that a less planned act, such as a 'magnetic attraction', may generally be regarded as more acceptable (Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). The context was not only described as specific to their ERSI partner/act, but as generally characteristic of ERSI. For instance, young age was associated with having a powerful sexual drive that required satisfying. By depicting a currently monogamous subject position, the participants managed to distance themselves from the non-monogamous act and construct monogamy as a mature practice. As such, ERSI was constructed as a 'normal', developmental and spontaneous behaviour. Portraying attraction and desire as bodily needs worked to reduce agency for engaging in ERSI and construct it as a natural practice, ultimately making it acceptable. Rather than being generally attracted to anyone, though, the attraction was said to be directed towards a specific individual that could offer what the primary relationship (partner) was lacking. As such, ERSI was placed within the context of deficient relationships, serving the purpose of filling a 'gap' (e.g., sexual needs). ERSI was thereby not actively sought due to personal shortcomings, but attributed to problematic relationships that failed to fulfil

all (emotional and bodily) needs. ERSI thereby served a purpose, which is explored

further in the next discourse.

5.2 Sexual Experimentation

The discourse of sexual experimentation relates to the way participants talked

about their ERSI as enacting a fantasy and as exploring their sexuality. ERSI was

occasionally constructed as a means to enact a sexual fantasy, which was described as a

sexual encounter that was different from the usual mode of sex for the participants. The

novelty of the experience functioned to depict the sexual act in positive terms. When

constructing ERSI as a form of sexual experimentation, the respondents' accounts

appeared to have a lack of romantic feelings or intimacy, normally described in

discourses about 'meaningful sex' (Farvid & Braun, 2013) and focused instead on the

newness of the practice. Nevertheless, these discourses assigned a purpose to ERSI,

namely exploring one's sexuality. PW30 describes how ERSI was a chance to explore

her sexual attraction to more than one gender:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for
> you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW30: It was interesting because after that my friend (who I had the
> sexual encounter with) decided to come out as lesbian which was
> excellent and she was much happier for it, and I decided that I did not
> want to identify with one particular sexuality but rather, that I was
> attracted to people on a case-by-case basis regardless of their gender.
> We are still great friends but I know she was initially hurt and angry
> that I didn't want to break off with my boyfriend and start a
> relationship with her. I now find that I am heterosexual but am glad
> that I've had a sexual encounter with a woman so I know what it can
> be like. (38 years)

Reflecting on her experience, this respondent portrays her ERSI as a way to

explore her sexuality in a way that was not possible with her boyfriend at the time (now

often referred to as pansexual). She thereby depicts her ERSI as an age-related

experimentation, which is clarified elsewhere (e.g., "…we were 19 and experimenting

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with all sorts of things…"), and often referred to by researchers in a similar fashion (e.g., Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). This exploration allowed her to identify with a fluid sexual orientation as opposed to a specific category, such as heterosexual or lesbian. The ERSI is argued to not only have served a purpose for her, but also her friend, who as a result decided to "come out", though she would have liked to get into a relationship with the respondent. The respondent, however, was only interested in clarifying her preferences, which are said to have changed over time. As such, exploring her sexuality is constructed as part of a developmental journey to discovering her sexual identity. The respondent thereby sets up the stage for now claiming a heterosexual identity, positioning her ERSI as necessary for being able to arrive at this conclusion (i.e., as though having tried out sexual relations with another woman, she is able to make an 'informed' decision).

In another account, one man described organising and enacting very specific sexual acts to take place in an ERSI encounter:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible a third time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?
>
> PM12: Met a girl off the Internet. We organised it very specifically. I was gonna go on over to her house, the door would be unlocked, I would walk in, she would be in her bed, in her room…I would come in, we would say nothing and kiss…then I would show her a dildo up my ass and she could watch me push it in and pull it out etc..
>
> That is exactly what happened. Then she sucked my dick and licked my ass and we kissed a bit and we did all that a few times…we were also sniffing amyl [a medically prescribed inhalant, which has psychoactive effects] which heightened things... then eventually I sat on her face and she licked my ass and I jerked off to cum.. I sucked her tits a bit then came all over her tits and stomach.
>
> As per usual, after cumming I wish I was just out of there asap…we hung out a bit, but then I left. (29 years)

Generally, PM12 talks about his ERSI encounters in the survey as "kinky", "perverted" and novel (i.e., he describes another encounter as his first with a "black girl"). In this extract he illustrates how the encounter started through discussing specific sexual scenarios with another person. These ideas were carried out as planned, rather than spontaneous. While in previously outlined accounts participants depicted this spontaneity as exciting, this respondent outlines the usage of drugs to heighten the experience. The encounter is depicted in a matter-of-fact description, rather than being emotive, perhaps as a result of typing the experience. Just as his previous encounter at a party outlined above, after reaching orgasm he wanted to leave immediately (and go back to his girlfriend) and regretted his actions (e.g., "The build-up and the excitement of cheating etc. is fun only until I cum…then it's pretty much just regret."). The interesting difference is that for this encounter he actively sought, elaborately planned and set up the ERSI. As such, he portrays not merely seeking to satisfy general sexual needs, but pursuing specific and novel sexual experiences that are possibly lacking and/or inaccessible in his primary relationship. The respondent draws on two different discourses here, including a discourse on monogamy and one on the ideal relationship (as fulfilling all sexual needs). As these discourses may compete with each other, they seem to produce tension in this account, illustrated in the last sentence.

The participant provides a detailed depiction of the sexual acts, which do not appear to entail any vaginal penetration, similar to the account given by PW30. The sexual acts described by PM12 were rather different to the conventional heterosexual scenarios familiar to us when it comes to heterosex (e.g., the man using the dildo, the non-coital nature) (McPhillips et al., 2001; D. Richardson, 1996). Such practices are often excluded in mainstream infidelity research, due to a coital imperative in our culture in regards to heterosexual sex (McPhillips et al., 2001). These accounts reflect that it was not only coitus or anal penetration that were regarded as sex. The diverse and

plural acts outlined by the participants indicate that these are seen as significant experiences for them as well, and indeed later described by PM12 as "cheating". Nonetheless, the participant's account depicts his orgasm as significant to the sexual experience. The centrality of (male) orgasm is demonstrative of common biological and psychological notions inherent in definitions of sex (Tiefer, 2002a, 2002b) that prioritise men's sexual pleasure (Jackson, 1996, 1999).

The accounts given by participants writing about ERSI in terms of sexual experimentation often emphasised the novelty and sexual diversity of the encounter that their primary partners were not able to provide. The focus here was on the physical nature of the act. The respondents clarified that they did not seek emotional intimacy or a new relationship. They thus managed to create a dichotomy between a physical and an emotional involvement, with the latter positioned as part of their primary relationship. Reducing ERSI to a mere physical act and portraying it as a sexual exploration worked to position ERSI as a mundane practice that was assigned the purpose of fulfilling a sexual fantasy or curiosity. However, greater disappointment was expressed when the reality did not match the fantasy of the encounter, as discussed next.

5.2.1 ERSI as flawed

Unlike the positive ERSIs outlined above, the ERSIs that were depicted as negative, did not seem to fulfil a sexual fantasy. Instead of talking about the sexual act as diverse and exploratory, the participants portrayed it in more prosaic and disappointing ways. An unpleasant ERSI was frequently outlined as not having met the sexual expectations of the individual. PW15 illustrates a one-time encounter with a colleague that she had fantasised about, but failed to meet her expectations:

Q: What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?
PW15: I was besotted with his charm and looks but the reality was yuk. (49 years)

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The respondent provides little detail of the sexual act itself, which was characteristic of participants' responses to a disappointing ERSI. She depicts her physical attraction towards him as overpowering any rational thought, positioning herself as pursuing a sexual fantasy. This fantasy is depicted as the opposite to the reality of her experience, which is regarded in disgust, though not further explained. Being attracted towards someone is illustrated as not necessarily translating into a pleasant sexual encounter for a variety of reasons. This is similarly depicted and expanded on by PW14:

> Q: What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?
>
> PW14: I tried to be in the moment. I was aware of comparing my lovers 'not knowing' of how my body worked compared to my husband's familiarity with my body. I was aware of feeling shy to ask for what I wanted and needed. This was supposed to be 'hot sex' wasn't it? Isn't that what we are here for?? It was OK sex. The vibe of guilt was there... but not huge. The fact that I was not supposed to be there, that was I being 'bad' definitely added to feeling turned on. (45 years)

The respondent demarcates how her idea of ERSI as consisting of "hot sex" and superior to her usual sexual encounters, was not met, thereby depicting the sexual act as an average experience. She appears to depict an expectation of passionate sex as happening in a non-verbal way. In that sense, her expectations of the encounter are portrayed as not matching the reality of her experience. She portrays feeling uncomfortable to communicate her wishes to her ERSI partner. PW14 compares her ERSI partner to her husband, describing the former's lack of knowledge of how her body functions sexually in contrast to her husband's familiarity with it. The body is objectified as something that required the acquisition of knowledge and instructions to receive pleasure. However, she points out her inability to relay this information to her ERSI partner. As such, she outlines a lack of confidence to communicate her needs with

her ERSI partner. Heterosexual sex can be rather non-communicative, especially early on with a new partner (Montemurro, Bartasavich, & Wintermute, 2015; Roberts, Kippax, Waldby, & Crawford, 1995). The participant goes on to illustrate the transgressive nature of ERSI by talking about feelings of guilt. Nonetheless, she also argues that breaking the rules aroused her. This works to underline the complexity of her experience, which is neither described as 'good' or 'bad', nor as mundane.

The participants often construed expectations of ERSI as consisting of sexual practices that were supposed to differ from the typical experiences they had with sex. ERSI was expected to be an extraordinary occurrence, based on a fantasy of how it should happen. Expectations in regards to ERSI may be derived from media portrayals of ERSI that provide guidelines for such an act (Mint, 2004). When the encounters did not meet the respondents' fantasy, they expressed great disappointment, by depicting their ERSI as unpleasant or mediocre. More specifically, the participants described an inability to communicate their wishes and needs with their ERSI partner, as they seemed to lack trust or intimacy with that particular person. The absence of familiarity with a person can make talking about sex difficult, as it is considered a source of embarrassment (Jackson & Scott, 2004b). These encounters appeared to add to the regret expressed by participants.

5.2.2 Regret

An ERSI that did not fulfil any fantasies or lacked intimacy was described in more regretful terms than a positive encounter. These accounts were largely filled with expressions of guilt, with no positive feelings noted. Such an involvement was largely described as a mistake, short lived (i.e., a one-time encounter), and lacking satisfaction. This is demonstrated by PM4, who previously talked about some enjoyable (long-term)

"affairs", before outlining a brief one-time ERSI with a younger woman (about half his age):

> Q: Did you enjoy this encounter? Why/why not?
> PM4: No, not really. I was embarrassed and somewhat ashamed at the way things happened. It was not satisfying or particularly affirming. We never tried it again. (62 years)

The respondent refers to a brief sexual encounter he had with a woman he knew from work. He talks about the encounter as disappointing, constructing it as an unsatisfactory experience for him. PM4 draws on a gendered discourse, whereby men engage in heterosex to "affirm" their virile sexuality (Farvid & Braun, 2016; Rudman et al., 2013), which in this ERSI narrative is portrayed to have failed. Elsewhere he described being unhappy in his primary relationship, possibly seeking to fill this gap by engaging in ERSI. Unlike his other, more positively depicted encounters with women his age, this ERSI account is characterised by an absence of intimacy and sharing commonalities. A positively experienced ERSI is thereby positioned as comprising not only a physical attraction towards the other person, but also as consisting of a shared (non-physical) intimacy with that person and an affirmation of one's masculinity. The encounter depicted above appears to lack such intimacies. Interestingly, despite locating his account within traditional discourses of heterosexuality, the notion of intimacy is usually associated with femininity discourses of heterosex (Carabine, 1996; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Kipnis, 2003; Patterson, 1990; Rudman et al., 2013; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007; Sprecher et al., 1987; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013).

Rather than describing feelings of shame about the encounter per se, he expresses such feelings about the manner in which the ERSI came about, though it remains unclear what he means. The let-down of the encounter is subsequently said to have brought about negative feelings about himself:

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Q: What were your thoughts and feelings after the encounter?

PM4: I had intense feelings of self-doubt and was unhappy with my decision-making. (62 years)

The ERSI seemed to have had the opposite outcome of what the respondent expected. Choosing to engage in ERSI in terms of seeking personal satisfaction, constructs ERSI as disappointing when this goal was not met. Instead it leads to troubled feelings. The participant emphasises *his* decision-making, rather than the social context in which the encounter came about or the mutuality of the (decision to engage in) ERSI. As such, he positions himself as active and rational in the processes surrounding ERSI, depicting long-established gendered subject positions that locate men as active and women as passive in the pursuance of sex (Farvid et al., 2016; Hollway, 1989, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005; Rudman et al., 2013; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Tiefer, 1995).

PW43 gives a different account of regret in a long-term ERSI with a married colleague that led to the end of her marriage (but not his):

Q: How do you feel about it now?

PW43: I regret it and feel a lot of guilt about it. I wish I hadn't been so stupid yet I worry that I might not be strong enough to avoid it in future. (36 years)

The regret addressed by the respondent does not refer to disappointing sex in this case, but relates to the long-term involvement she had. She had hoped to continue with the person and depicts becoming emotionally attached to him, without these feelings being reciprocated. Her expectations of ERSI in this case seem to be representative of notions of romantic relationships as meaningful (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). The mismatch of her reality and romantic expectations are described to produce feelings of remorse and guilt. Despite the desire to avoid him, the participant

suggests that she may not be "strong enough" to resist such a situation between her and this man. She thereby emphasises the pull of her emotions towards him.

Overall the participants drew on notions of diverse and novel sex that their primary partners were not able to provide, in order to explore their sexuality. They portrayed the main reason for engaging in ERSI as seeking sexual satisfaction and excitement that was missing in their primary relationship. Such accounts framed ERSI as a physical act that sought to fulfil sexual needs and desires. These encounters did not necessarily follow a coital imperative commonly associated with ERSI, but the non-coital acts were nonetheless construed as significant occurrences by the participants, in accordance with findings elsewhere (e.g., Moller & Vossler, 2015). Greater regret and disappointment than positively depicted encounters were expressed when the respondents' expectations did not match the reality of their experience. These expectations largely referred to what they considered to be "hot sex" or in some cases a more romantic involvement. Whether participants talked about their experiences in more positive or negative terms was not solely based on their expectations, but - as hinted at before - also on their emotional involvement with their ERSI partner. The level of emotional involvement that was part of any ERSI, worked to position these cases differently, as discussed next.

5.3 Hierarchy of ERSI

The quality of respondents' experiences was largely described as not only dependent on whether expectations of passionate sex were met as outlined previously, but also on the level of emotional involvement they felt with their ERSI partner. Being emotionally involved provided a motive for the respondents' engagement in ERSI (i.e., they were following their 'heart' to 'find' happiness). Some of these motives were ascribed greater significance than others and worked to justify the reasons for engaging

in ERSI. As such, participants built a hierarchy based on the level of intimacy/'connection' they have/had in their encounter (see Farvid & Braun, 2013, for a similar emotional intimacy based hierarchical order in relation to casual sex). PM4 illustrates a distinction between his ERSI encounters, based on the level of emotional connection he had with his ERSI partners:

> Q: How do you feel about it now?
> PM4: I am not relaxed about the first two but am much happier with the current long-term affair. (62 years)

The participant distinguishes between two of his previous ERSI encounters and the current one. While the other encounters are described as casual sexual acts that were short lived, this "affair" is described as a relationship that has "deepened" (outlined in response to another question). As such, he makes a distinction between a purely physical sexual encounter, and a more emotional involvement, with the latter depicted in a more positive manner. More specifically, the respondent categorises his described encounters, with the continuing and most intimate ERSI depicted as pleasurable, the "infrequent" ERSI as less "enjoyable" than the current one, and the one-off encounter as the most regretful sexual engagement.

The hierarchical order had several layers, with a 'special connection' on top (e.g., having a strong emotional and sexual bond), continuing with long-term "affairs", then friends, colleagues, and one-off encounters (often strangers). One participant also noted "sexting" as being less impactful than physical sexual encounters. Although making a distinction between a physical and virtual ERSI, PW32 still outlined the latter as having significantly affected her relationship (e.g., "My husband found out and was devastated. He wanted a divorce.").

Creating a hierarchy of acceptable reasons to engage in ERSI (as opposed to a continuum) was used by participants for distinguishing the various motives in the negotiation of the diverse subject positions identified (e.g., as committed, as a good friend, as remorseful and considerate). For instance, positioning themselves as a good friend indicated that they cared about all of their relationships to the point of breaking the rules, rather than being an insensitive partner who merely sought sexual satisfaction. Taking up these subject positions worked to construct themselves as responsible and caring, while upholding the status quo of ERSI as a transgression.

5.3.1 Special connection / "the one"

A positive encounter was characterised as involving a 'special connection' and 'deep feelings', usually continuing over a longer period, rather than a brief sexual encounter. In other words, when an ERSI encounter developed into a romantic relationship, it became more satisfying and was described less in relation to regret. Such accounts depicted ERSI in romantic terms, as a 'connection' unlike any other relationship that needed to be pursued to be happy. This is in line with Western ideals of searching for 'the one' as a romantic partner to seek happiness (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Their ERSI encounter was thereby not merely portrayed as a (regretful) 'slip up', but served a purpose and was therefore seen as more acceptable, as it represented 'special' or exceptional circumstances:

> Q: Do you think there is a difference between men and women engaging in sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner? Please explain.
>
> PW25: No I don't as for me it was not just the fantastic sex it was also the partnership that we shared together. I learned so much from that experience and about myself and would not have changed anything from this situation. And I know from him that he loved me very much and felt the exact same. It's very exciting when you meet someone like this and it's everything you ever wanted even though I had a dull and boring boyfriend back in New Zealand. I think eventually I would have left my New Zealand boyfriend if it was not for this experience. (41 years)

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Although the participant does not seem to directly answer the question asked, she goes on to outline a personal experience with a particularly meaningful ERSI. She positions the narrative as though she is responding to a question about regret. Earlier, she described this ERSI and committed relationship in detail, noting that her "one-off" ERSI developed into a full, primary relationship guided by romantic feelings. As though arguing against (expected) feelings of regret, the respondent clarifies that she "would not have changed anything from this situation". She depicts the experience as a learning curve that enabled her to "discover herself".

Love and reciprocity are emphasised in this extract, highlighting great sex coupled with a partnership beyond sex. This account works to describe the ideal romantic relationship as a mutual commitment, involving sex and feelings. PW25 contrasts her ERSI with her "dull and boring boyfriend" at home, whom she clarifies she would have left regardless of her ERSI, as she stated elsewhere: "I had wanted to break up with [my boyfriend] as we had grown apart". Comparing the two relationships functions to underline the specialness of her ERSI encounter based on heterosexual romantic ideals of finding a partner that fulfils the person in a variety of ways encompassing sex, intimacy, and partnership. Rather than regret then, the respondent portrays a positive experience entailing a myriad of meanings for her. The participant depicts finding a 'special connection' as a priority in the interest of happiness. The opportunity to engage with someone in such a romantic manner was depicted as rare, fulfilling the main life aspiration of finding 'the one' (Farvid & Braun, 2013). The following extract by PW36 depicts how such a connection with someone became established, describing an ERSI with a colleague that eventually led her to leave her partner to be with this man (though he stayed with his wife):

Q: How did the sexual relations come about?

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PW36: Sort of answered above. It was his suggestion. He felt that he was "ready" [to become physically intimate]. I was not, but agreed. I guess I was a bit nervous and inhibited. The second time was even more connecting and loving. Subsequently the experiences we share together are the most loving, tender, and, connecting I have ever experienced. (46 years)

The respondent outlines her initial hesitation of engaging in sex with her ERSI partner. Sex is portrayed as a means to connect and love someone, and thereby given importance to establish a special connection. This connection is constructed as something that does not merely appear, but as developing over time with each sexual act. This works to construe sex not only as a way to gain physical satisfaction, but as an act to achieve intimacy.

Regardless of the outcome of their ERSI (some participants reported staying together with their ERSI partner, others ended their relationship), the respondents largely talked about their experiences in positive terms, if their encounters were depicted as intimate, emotional, as well as involving great sex, and reciprocal feelings. Sex was portrayed as an important tool to cement and develop their emotional involvement. As such, these ERSIs were not merely about physical satisfaction, but about intimacy that was more intense and fulfilling than their committed relationships. Outlining their ERSIs as differing from common relationships, worked to emphasise the specialness of and exceptional circumstances surrounding these involvements. The following section discusses how sex was also referred to as a way to develop a connection on a friendship basis.

5.3.2 Friends with benefits

Long-term affairs among friends involving both, a sexual and emotional component, were generally talked about in more positive terms (though not as enthusiastically as the accounts about 'loving' someone). Such acts sometimes involved

common relationship goals, such as 'intimacy' (e.g., PM34: "…I felt I had achieved a deep level of intimacy with her." (50 years)). In other cases, an absence of intimacy or romantic involvement was noted, describing such encounters as "friendships" (i.e., friends with benefits), which focused on the physical aspects of the ERSI. As such, these accounts depicted the ERSI partner as partly fulfilling, rather than completely fulfilling all of their needs. These instances included good communication between the participants and the ERSI partner (e.g., over dinner or at work), and were usually described to last for a shorter period, with the friendship aspect being highlighted:

> Q: What were your thoughts and feelings after the encounter?
> PW18: I had the same thoughts and feelings after the encounter as I did during the encounter [enjoyment, fun, thrill]. But afterwards I thought about how happy I was I met this new guy and how I have made a new good friend. But I did not want to continue anything romantic with him. (21 years)

PW18 describes an encounter with a man she met while travelling abroad. The encounter is depicted in positive terms overall. Instead of establishing a romantic connection with her ERSI partner through sex as outlined in the previous section, the respondent here depicts the sexual encounter as resulting in a friendship. The respondent notes a reluctance to get romantically involved with her ERSI partner, thereby establishing her encounter as a physical involvement. Romantic feelings were emphasised throughout the survey to be only part of her relationship with her primary partner. The respondent clarified that she remained 'faithful', as she discussed her experience openly with her boyfriend – an emphasis on open-communication being key to a good relationship. This works to distinguish between a romantic relationship and a friendship, positioning her boyfriend as the one she is emotionally attached to and the ERSI partner as the one she was merely physically involved with. Although portraying the ERSI as enjoyable, it is positioned as less meaningful than a romantic involvement.

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PW18 explicitly emphasises that a romantic pursuit was not intended, reflecting more common assumptions of sex as a 'romantic' or 'intimate' act.

Similarly, PM38 placed sex within the context of friendships, rather than romantic encounters:

> Q: Did you enjoy this encounter? Why/why not?
> PM38: Yes, always nice to get attention from a friend, and sexual attention signalled a very good friendship. (74 years)

Sex is outlined by the respondent not within a romantic imperative, but as a sign that the friendship is a close one. It is thus denoted as something casual and rather ordinary (e.g., "…always nice to get attention…"). Sex is not portrayed as an intimate practice, but rather one that manifests a friendship. This is an uncommon narrative and distinguishes itself from the accounts given earlier, which depict sex as a way to establish a 'special connection'. The portrayed casualness of ERSI works to position this encounter as a mundane act.

The respondents depicted ERSI with friends as enjoyable, yet not as meaningful as a romantic involvement with someone who fulfilled more than just the physical needs. As such, sex was portrayed as separable from emotions, with the level of emotional involvement seemingly determining the significance and status of a relationship (Farvid & Braun, 2013). The ERSI encounters with colleagues were described in a similar fashion, though usually less positive than with friends or long-term affairs (e.g., PM4: "It was enjoyable but nothing like the previous relationship as described above." (62 years)). Although the respondents did not describe the friendship and colleague encounters in romantic terms, sex still seemed to be about connecting with the other person, though not romantically. The purpose to 'connect' with another

person appeared to be absent when participants referred to one-off encounters with strangers, as outlined next.

5.3.3 One-off encounters

The most remorseful ERSI encounters were depicted as those that involved one off-encounters (especially with strangers). Such encounters were portrayed as lacking emotional connection and did not fit in with the construct of the ideal ERSI as enjoyable sex. In these instances, ERSI did not meet its intended purpose to satisfy needs and expectations. Hence these 'slip ups' were depicted as regrettable. Put differently, these ERSIs lacked the desirable reasons and outcomes described above, such as learning something new or establishing a connection. The following extract illustrates an ERSI encounter with someone the respondent met online:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible the first time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner?
>
> PM12: While on her drive way, she put her hand down my pants. She noticed I had no public hair. From then on the rest is a bit vague…but I also remember her being in doggy and fucking her from behind. After cumming I left out her window (maybe her parents came home? Not sure). We didn't meet again. She called a number of times but I brushed it off.
>
> Q: What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?
>
> PM12: I can hardly remember… Except one thing, she had bad breath, and I was like ewwwwwww! (29 years)

The respondent depicts his ERSI with someone he met once, as a forgettable experience. There is no mentioning of anything positive in regards to this ERSI, as indicated by his unwillingness to meet her again. Instead, he outlines that the only thing he remembers is one of her unattractive physical attributes (i.e., "bad breath"), which works to portray the experience as negative. He emphasises this positioning, as he continues:

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Q: What were your thoughts and feelings after the encounter?

PM12: I just wanted to run away and go back and see my girlfriend if anything - cos being with her was many times better in every way. (29 years)

The participant depicts how his ERSI failed to meet expectations of fulfilling at least a part of his needs, by highlighting that his primary partner was "better in every way". As such, there appeared to be no reason for him to engage in a sexual act with this particular person, portraying this encounter as disappointing. More specifically, the respondent construes ERSI as having the purpose of being equivalent to or better than the primary relationship in some aspects (e.g., physically).

Overall, as demonstrated above, one-off ERSIs were portrayed as the least pleasant and most regrettable by the respondents, positioning these encounters as the least desirable form to have sex, supporting similar findings from constructions of casual sex (Farvid & Braun, 2013). The participants emphasised the lack of enjoyment that characterised their encounters. The common reasons provided earlier to justify ERSI, such as building a (emotional) connection or engaging in exceptional and diverse sexual practices, were not drawn on in these instances. These reasons, however, were depicted as not equally applicable justifications for the respondents' primary partner, as outlined below.

5.3.4 Reversal of the hierarchy for partner

Although viewed as least "enjoyable" and most "regretful" experiences by those who engaged in ERSI, one-off encounters were conveyed as most acceptable when it came to their partner – when the respondents shifted their position from that of the 'cheater' to the 'cheated on'. This was suggestive of ERSI being more tolerable as long as the partner involved does not enjoy their encounter, rather than merely displaying anxiety about the partner's sexual involvement with someone else. An enjoyable, and

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possibly romantic ERSI was thus positioned as a threat to the primary relationship. PW30 depicts her worries and the importance of open communication:

> Q: Please explain how you would feel if your partner engaged in sexual relations with someone other than you.
>
> PW30: It would depend on how it was done. If he came to me and said he was interested in changing the terms of our relationship, such as wanting to be polyamorous, and was discreet about it then it might feel OK. But it's one thing to approach the idea at an intellectual, abstract level and another to have it really happen. It's pretty difficult to know how I would feel in reality. I'm not sure if I would want to know about it at all. It would probably be more tolerable if it was a one off encounter with someone I don't know and ideally, less attractive than me. Also, it would be OK if he still treated me in the same way he does now and was still really devoted, adoring and into me. (38 years)

A distinction is made in the extract above, between approaching a consensual non-monogamous relationship at a cognitive and an affective level, essentially constructing emotions as irrational and unpredictable. Even in this context, as the subject who is 'being cheated on', ERSI is not described as acceptable, but merely "tolerable", if it is with someone unknown (i.e., distant) and less attractive. Intimacy as well as a person's physical appearance are thus depicted as a possible threat to the relationship (rather than the person's personality), drawing on gendered constructs of men being drawn to more physically attractive women. Rather than sex, it is affection that is positioned as an exclusive component of the primary relationship (e.g., "…devoted, adoring, and into me."). This extract exemplifies that when participants were asked to imagine a contrasting scenario (see Appendix 1, question 32), the hierarchy of ERSI's acceptability was outlined in reverse order. Such discourses drew on romantic notions of emotional exclusivity that characterise modern relationships, that is, the partner is not supposed to enjoy the encounters (too much) and has to remain 'emotionally faithful' in order to stay within their current relationship. The extract below by PW10 demonstrates such a hierarchical order:

> PW10: Tricky question as I can only say what I imagine I would feel.
> If it would be pure sexual experience (having sex with someone else
> as a one off), I would not mind if he would use appropriate protection.
> I would be very angry if he would risk his or my life/health getting
> infected with HIV or Hepatitis, but it is quite easy to avoid it
> nowadays. I would be more worried if it was an emotional bonding
> (like dating, flowers, etc.) as it would give me the feedback that there
> is something wrong in our relationship. That would make me anxious.
> (45 years)

The emotional aspect is highlighted by the respondent above in relation to ERSI. The distinction between a physical and emotional involvement is made by outlining symbolic gestures like "dating" or "flowers" as indicating the presence of emotions (and thus a long-term involvement with the person), rather than ways of seeking a one-night-stand. Consequently, such a division shuts down possible pathways for her partner to pursue someone else (i.e., problematising social interaction with the 'other' partner), even as a one-off encounter.

ERSI is constructed both as a health risk practice and as symptomatic of a problematic relationship. The former draws on health risk discourses in circulation regarding non-monogamy (Weeks, 2010). The response demonstrates a hierarchical order of ERSI's acceptability and desirability, with the presence of an emotional component being depicted as more distressing than the sexual component; not as it may imply that her partner may also be satisfied with the other person, but because it signals that their relationship may be emotionally deficient. The participant thereby depicts a notion of emotions and sex as detachable from each other (Farvid & Braun, 2013). Hence, she outlined that although the 'body' may be shared with another person, feelings of emotional connectedness can/may not. These feelings are thus characterised as exclusive and limited in availability to one person only and as more distressing if shared. The primacy of emotional over sexual involvements is thus reinforced through discourses about emotional exclusivity as characteristic of the ideal relationship, and

sex as a possible indication of such feelings being present. In order to render a partner's ERSI as problematic without compromising their moral stance based on their own actions, participants located their ERSI as firmly in the past:

> Q: Please explain how you would feel if your partner engaged in sexual relations with someone other than you.
>
> PM31: My present partner?? Deeply, deeply hurt - we have an attachment unlike any other relationship that either of us have been in. My previous partners? Well I suspect that both played around just a little and that never really phased me. (57 years)

The current relationship here, is depicted as 'special' and deeply connected, characterised by the exceptional emotional attachment the respondent described having with his partner. It is in this context that ERSI becomes unimaginable and thought of as deeply painful. The same act is constructed as a 'playful' and less serious act within less meaningful relationships. Drawing a contrast between his past and current relationship in terms of emotional involvement and suggesting that his previous partners may have engaged in ERSI as well, works to avoid any allegations of being hypocritical/using double standards. As Terry and Braun (2009) suggested, such an account works to confirm his masculinity (i.e., sexually experienced), yet avoid any criticism as it is located in the past and therefore not part of his present self. Subsequently he constructs himself and his current relationship as more mature, committed, and wiser, suggesting that ERSI is indicative of a sexual developmental phase, as seen earlier, and lacking relationships (e.g., less emotionally attached and dedicated to the relationship).

The acceptability of ERSI that respondents applied to themselves was seen as reversed when it came to their partner's potential ERSI. A contradiction was at work, whereby a greater emotional involvement indicated a more admissible encounter for themselves, but was less tolerable when it came to their partner. Having an emotional connection was depicted as exclusive to one (primary) partner, with ERSI representing a

potential threat to coupledom, if emotional intimacy was involved in such an encounter. More specifically, respondents described that an emotional romance can be utilised to create a bond with another person and threaten their current relationship. Subsequently, a physical and emotional division was portrayed as needing careful management to protect the relationship. In particular, the participants argued that unlike emotions, the body can be 'shared', though engagement in a sexual act may imply that the latter is present as well. That is, a sexual relationship that involved a physical *and* emotional component was constructed as a more ideal relationship than a purely sexual one (Farvid & Braun, 2013). The partner's engagement in this kind of ERSI may then be indicative of a potential lack in the current (fulfilling) relationship.

5.4 Chapter Summary

Overall, in order to counteract accusations of callousness and deter remorse, ERSI was constructed as serving a purpose, whether it involved exploring one's sexuality when younger or pursuing romantic notions of finding 'the one'. Instead these discourses worked to position the respondents as caring, committed and mature partners, thus allowing them to take a moral stance, thereby continuing to place ERSI within a transgression framework. As such, ERSI was located within discourses of deficient relationships and as fulfilling specific needs and desires. Hence, respondents created a hierarchy regarding an ERSI's acceptability based on its purpose, as indicated by the level of emotional involvement with their relationship as well as the 'other' partner. These discourses worked to position sexual relationships that involve emotional intimacy as a more ideal and acceptable way to have sex/engage in ERSI. The acceptability of ERSI was reversed, however, when respondents talked about their partner's potential engagement in this act. More specifically, the depiction of emotions as limited and exclusive, rendered an emotionally intimate ERSI a potential threat to the primary relationship.

In cases where expectations regarding their ERSI encounter (e.g., "hot sex") were not met according to the respondents' experiences, the accounts were largely described in regretful ways. Such accounts depicted ERSI as failing to fulfil its purpose and in more problematic terms. The following chapter addresses instances of ERSI that were depicted in less ideal/romantic ways, but more in morally transgressive and pathological terms.

Chapter 6: Problematising ERSI

While Chapter Five focused on the respondents' talk of ERSI in terms of its acceptability, this chapter outlines how ERSI was problematised by talking about it as a transgression. The main discourses identified here were moral transgression, as well as ERSI as catastrophic. This chapter does not stand in contrast to the acceptability discourse discussed previously. Instead it demonstrates how regardless of whether the encounter was talked about positively or negatively, the ERSI experiences were always depicted as a transgression (i.e., an act that required justification). As such, the data set seemed to illustrate the prevailing stigma of ERSI within broader social discourses. Managing an acceptability and problematising discourse of ERSI led to a complex negotiation between the participants' reported experiences and socially endorsed relational standards. This chapter outlines the largely contradictory accounts produced by the participants in talks of ERSI. The subject positions invoked were also often conflicted and troubled. These positions were reflected in respondents' answers that depicted emotional, psychological and social repercussions as a result of their ERSIs.

6.1 Moral Transgression – The Contradictory Experience of ERSI

ERSI was generally positioned as a socially transgressive act, which produced a moral dilemma that required management or justification by the participants in their accounts. Respondents frequently worked hard to justify or defend their ERSI behaviour, and position themselves as good people with normal ethical standards, like any other 'good' person. An interesting tension was identified in these accounts, since it was indeed the transgressive nature of ERSI that was described as being the source of pleasure (i.e., doing something forbidden). This is exemplified by PW9:

> Q: Did you enjoy this encounter? Why/why not?

PW9: Yes. It was fun, it was exciting, it was taboo. I had lost control and I didn't care. I didn't feel in the least bit guilty, my relationship with my exclusive partner at the time had only just begun and I assuaged any potential guilt by reassuring myself it wouldn't happen again (it did). (35 years)

The respondent states that she enjoyed the encounter because of its forbidden nature. Her depiction of ERSI as exciting, fun and taboo positions the act as transgressive, yet positive. A loss of control is rather unusually also described positively, possibly as a sense of freedom, ostensibly from a mononormative relationship and its rules (Farvid & Braun, 2016). By explicating that she did not feel guilty, the participant inadvertently makes such emotions relevant, indicating that people are typically meant to deal with guilt in some way when there is an ERSI. She explains her lack of guilt by portraying her relationship as less committed (i.e., as new), thereby downplaying the seriousness of the relationship and the transgression. Respondents stating that they felt or did not feel guilty was an unprompted response given in many accounts, highlighting guilt as a commonly expected response after engaging in ERSI. In other words, guilt was positioned as a socially appropriate reaction to ERSI, functioning to construct such encounters as a transgression. PW9 further outlines that she shut down any possibility of feeling guilty by telling herself that she would avoid an ERSI in the future, which however was said not to be the case. This paints her ERSI behaviour almost as a driving force.

Similar to the account given above, PM24 states how the short duration of his committed relationship offered the possibility for him to engage in ERSI:

Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible the first time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner?

PM24: I was at art school at the time, and having success with women for the first time in my life. Part of this was a girl who was possibly the most attractive I've ever seen, and I spent over a year trying to get her affection. Finally we got a flirt going, but she left for three months

to go to Sweden to see her family; her grandfather was passing away. So I thought I could wait for her, but of course I couldn't. She also had a boyfriend at the time and it seemed that even if she was interested in me she would not cheat on her boyfriend to sleep with me. Over the next three months I met another girl, and we started seeing each other. Within a very short time we became quite committed and intimate. Then, the girl from Sweden came back. And she broke up with her boyfriend. I was excited - this was my chance!! Soon, I was invited to a party at her house, and I ended up staying three days at hers. On the second day, we flirted and talked and she even said "it feels like we're naughty kids who shouldn't be getting caught - and it's actually kind of fun!" I confessed I'd met someone but since we had only really been "in a relationship" for roughly three weeks, I didn't think it would hurt to do something exciting, especially with someone I had wanted for over a year.

It ended up being the best sex I've had in my life - not only was this girl gorgeous but she was talented in bed! (26 years)

The respondent depicts a heightened and enjoyable experience, characterised by excitement, fun and good sex. He emphasises particularly the attractiveness of his ERSI partner, thereby highlighting the opportunity as a rare chance that was difficult to pass up, as he had been infatuated with her for a long time. Within this account, attraction and desire are construed as building up over time with his ERSI partner. PM24 contrasts the long-time desire for his ERSI partner with the short time taken to become intimate with his girlfriend. He outlines that the freshness of his primary relationship made it easier to engage in ERSI. The respondent describes it as a way of downplaying any possible repercussions (i.e., hurt) this encounter may have had, positioning his actions as a less serious misconduct. The two women are construed as competing in terms of physical attraction, with the ERSI partner positioned as superior in that respect. This notion renders the women's physical attributes a more significant aspect of a sexual relationship than intimacy or commitment.

The enjoyment of the act is also said to have derived from ERSI's forbiddance, and in so doing, constructs the encounter as a transgression. By explicating the newness of his relationship that seemed indicative of a lack of commitment, and stressing the

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exceptional chance to have sex with someone highly attractive, the participant sets up a story whereby ERSI becomes a viable option. The following extract also describes a positive ERSI, but places it in contrast to the transgressive nature of the encounter:

> Q: What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?
> PW26: How can the worst thing I have ever done feel like and end up being the best thing I have ever done. My ex was a great husband and father and we had been married for 10 years (59 years)

The respondent previously described how her ERSI encounter became her now husband ("…have now been very happily married for 14 years…") after the break-up of their respective marriages/families and feelings of guilt. Despite the positive outcome of her ERSI, PW26 expresses that it was also the worst thing she had ever done, implying the repercussions for their former relationships and a moral judgement in regards to the practice. The transgressive nature of the act is underscored by pointing out the duration of her marriage at the time, as well as depicting her husband in a positive fashion. This is contrasted with her ERSI partner and now husband, described as the "best thing". As such, the respondent presents a conflicted account, where the morally transgressive nature of the encounter is pitted against its positive conclusion. More specifically, the socially ascribed characteristics of ERSI (depicted as immoral) are contrasted with the private experience (painted as the pinnacle of her life experience). What is highlighted here, is the transformative nature of ERSI, which although portrayed in a simplistic black and white manner, appears to occupy more of a middle ground, adjustable to the required demands of the individual/situation.

The accounts given of ERSI, always presented these encounters as some kind of a transgression, regardless of whether the experience was framed as positive or negative. However, this was not done by simply classifying ERSI as unacceptable or drawing on clear victim/perpetrator identities. It involved more careful management of

their subject positions to maintain a morally credible stance within a mononormative

system that condemns such a behaviour. Demonstrative of the complex negotiations

between the private experiences and the socially prevailing norms, respondents

regularly painted a contradictory picture of ERSI. In particular, often the very nature of

the transgression was depicted in a positive manner, for instance as "exciting". Rather

than the sexual act itself, it was the setting that prompted such responses (i.e., the

enjoyment seemed to derive from breaking society's rules (Farvid & Braun, 2016)).

ERSI was then construed as a flexible entity that can be adjusted to the demands of the

individuals involved. These accounts frequently involved tensions, as participants

seemingly struggled to make sense of their experiences by describing them as both

'good' and 'bad'. Put differently, respondents appeared torn between their positively

depicted (private) experiences and the socially appropriate reactions to ERSI (e.g.,

guilt). What became transparent in such accounts, were the prevailing moral codes that

shaped the participants' reactions regarding how they ought to act and feel when

engaging in ERSI. The moral codes dictating appropriate relationality thereby generated

individuals to take up/neglect (un)acceptable emotions in specific contexts. The

outcomes of engaging in this transgressive practice, though, were at times outlined to be

different for men and women, as discussed next.

6.1.1 Gendering ERSI

In order to investigate gender differences regarding ERSI, participants were

asked broadly whether they thought there was a difference between men and women,

who engage in such practices. The responses were varied, ranging from gender neutral

claims to making clear differentiations between men and women. Nevertheless, ERSI

was constructed as a gendered practice. The following extract shows how PW43 argued

for personality, rather than gender, to be constituting the difference in motives for

engaging in ERSI:

Q: Do you think there is a difference between men and women engaging in sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner? Please explain.

PW43: I don't think there is a difference in terms of whether it is right or wrong. It's the same either way. I do think the person who is in a relationship is at fault, more than an unattached partner. (In our case both of us). At the time, I thought he felt the same way I did as we were together so long (about 18 months). Looking back, I realise now that it was probably just sexual to him even though it was love to me. That's part of why I can't bear to be around him. But I've known male friends who've been through it and they were emotionally attached to the person and still are, despite it being over, so I'm not sure. Maybe it depends more on your personality than your sex. (36 years)

Initially the respondent makes a clear declaration regarding the equal judgement that men and women should be exposed to, emphasising ERSI as a transgression regardless of the subject's gender. This is pitted against her personal experience, which exemplifies a gendered situation, whereby her ERSI partner (the man) was reportedly drawn to the 'sexual' part of their encounter, while she (the woman) was emotionally involved. As such, she draws on gender typical discourses that traditionally conflate sex with emotions (e.g., love) for women, but not men (Crawford & Popp, 2003). The respondent subsequently speaks of the possibility of getting hurt by ERSI, if the people involved have different desires. As her opening statement regarding the equal measures for men and women stands in contrast to reports of her personal experience, the respondent refers to her male friends' relationships to provide another supporting account of her initial claim. Contrasting her own experience with those of male friends, the participant relays that motives for engaging in ERSI are situational and based on personality, rather than gender. This positions ERSI as potentially indicative of a flawed or vulnerable personality, depending on the motives (i.e., sexual versus emotional attachment), similarly outlined elsewhere (e.g., Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013).

In contrast, some respondents referred to biological differences between men and women, positioning them as having different motivations for engaging in ERSI. PM1's account is illustrative of such notions:

> Q: Do you think there is a difference between men and women engaging in sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner? Please explain.
>
> PM1: Biologically I think we do it for different reasons, but the underlying drive is there. Genetic diversity of our offspring. Women need a nest, and the cheating therefore needs to be far more discrete, so they are wired to be that way. Therefore not as often, or as likely. But still the desire to.
>
> Men, less to lose (historically speaking), and still the need to spread genes. Also, men have the ability to support more than 1 female, so even if society doesn't allow it, our biological drive does. I often feel a fondness and desire to support more than 1 partner, emotionally and financially. (41 years)

The respondent draws on well-established, but controversial evolutionary discourses that depict men and women in biologically reductionist terms (Tiefer, 1995). He argues that an innate sexual drive exists in both men and women, but relays that this manifests itself differently for ERSI. A distinction is made in terms of men's and women's motives for engaging in this act, which are stated to have unequivocally a biological basis. In that context, women are portrayed as 'naturally dependent' on men and as therefore required to remain silent about their ERSI encounters in order to secure their "nest". Subsequently, men are described as having particular abilities (which are lacking in women), such as 'supporting' more than one partner emotionally, which are portrayed as beneficial to women. He depicts these abilities as possibly condemned in society, but needed in biological terms, drawing on a popular male sex drive discourse (Hollway, 1989, 2001). This account works to position men's ERSI as more acceptable, since it is then not merely about sexual needs, but about doing a good deed for women needing men's support (hence serving a positive purpose). Subsequently, the man (including the respondent) becomes the hero in this story where ERSI is used to

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"support" dependent women, while the woman is described as needing rescuing on a psychological (emotional) and social (financial) level. A woman's ERSI is rendered to an emotional act, excluding any other reasons (e.g., sexual) as acceptable claims for engaging in such practices, and occupying these as a male domain. Engaging in ERSI is thereby depicted as a social exchange between men and women (Rudman et al., 2013). The participant's account here is representative of how long-established gender identities were framed as natural and biological evidence provided by popular evolutionary discourses that are deemed as 'fact' (Tiefer, 1995).

The individual experience of these gendered notions of sexuality is explicitly depicted by PW10, who provides an account of how powerful and emotionally disturbing such assumptions can be:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible the first time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner?
>
> PW10: We had sex. I'd rather not go into details. It was about having sex. I kind of tried to convince myself that I am in love but that was pure sexual arousal. I think this "being in love" was more to fulfil the expectations of society. If a male tells his friends that I had a "fling" with a hot girl, then he gets patted on the shoulder. If a female tells the same story, then she is a whore. So I convinced even myself that I love this guy. I would not call it love now. I desired this guy, he was quite hot and also popular, and I usually get what I want. So I got him. I did not want to leave my partner as he also provided a lot of pleasure for me, plus he was a caring and reliable person. This other guy was hot but a charmer. Promiscuous, trying to have sex with nearly every good looking female. (45 years)

The respondent outlines a sexual double standard with regards to ERSI operating at a societal level and how this shaped her own experience. Men are depicted as praised if they engage in ERSI, while women are portrayed as "whores". In an interesting inversion of a Madonna/whore binary (Ussher, 1994) applied to men, the participant distinguishes between the "reliable" man and the "promiscuous, charming" man in her personal account. Her boyfriend is in this sense positioned as a monogamous individual,

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suitable for a relationship, whereas the ERSI partner is depicted as attractive and willing to take on many partners, making him suitable for a "fling". The men in her account are subsequently portrayed as each providing different qualities, but also as lacking what the other has to offer to fulfil her desires and needs. A woman's ERSI on the other hand is again argued to be only possible within an emotional context. The respondent demonstrates a critical awareness of a sexual double standard, but also conducts herself in a manner to escape its repercussions. This demonstrates the enduring influence of the have/hold discourse (Braun et al., 2003), to an extent where she describes trying to persuade herself of having feelings in order to avoid the stigma of being labelled a "whore" for having such desires. Traditional notions of female sexuality have positioned women as 'emotional', and occupying the (male) domain of a 'sexual being' would represent a breach of society's gender identity expectations of women as sexual gatekeepers (e.g., Farvid et al., 2016; Hollway, 1989, 2001; Kipnis, 2003; Rudman et al., 2013; Sprecher et al., 1987). Conventional gender identities depicting women as passive are partly challenged by claiming an agentic selfhood as a determined decision maker that needs to 'have it all', construing the man as a conquest. However, the unacceptability in society of a woman taking on a sexually desiring subject position is conveyed, describing how she drew on a more acceptable 'cover story' of being in love. Taking on a sexually desiring selfhood may have adverse outcomes for women, as argued by PW14:

> Q: Do you think there is a difference between men and women engaging in sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner? Please explain.
>
> PW14: My experience is that as a woman I have been shamed to pieces for being someone who had an affair. More so than if I had been a man? Yes I think so. I was supposed to 'stand by my man'… and do you know what? I did stand by my man in a myriad of really important ways. And some were really, really difficult. But I did not stand by my man sexually. But I was made to feel like this was the only way to stand by him that counted. My affair seemed to obliterate

everything else. My worth as a wife was now measured only by this action. Fuck! I hated that so much. (45 years)

PW14 talks about the different judgement of men and women who engage in ERSI, portraying the outcomes of her encounter as devastating for her. She depicts her frustration and anger with being judged by such standards, which are outlined to have annihilated all her supportive actions as a wife outside of sex. ERSI is then constructed as a transgression that potentially undermines any (positive) aspect of a relationship, particularly for women, suggesting that a wife is supposed to be first and foremost sexually faithful. A relationship is thereby depicted as being more than merely about sex, but a woman's ERSI is here functioning (at a societal level) to reduce it to her sexual devotion to her primary partner. Men are positioned in this account as being more easily forgiven for their sexual transgression, while women are portrayed as getting judged more harshly for such actions (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006) and more responsible for the state of the relationship (Burns, 1999; Scheinkman, 2005; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013).

The accounts given by participants, whether claiming gender neutrality or not, largely outlined the differential judgement of men's and women's ERSI. A woman's encounter was depicted as more acceptable when following an emotional path. A man's ERSI, in contrast, was mostly illustrated in sexual terms, often drawing on biological and reductionist evolutionary notions of sexuality (e.g., Tiefer, 1995). The gendered notions of socially acceptable reasons to engage in ERSI, made it difficult for the participants to occupy a position outside of their respective gender norms. Particularly the women in this study depicted their frustration with and how powerful these assumptions can be, reflecting a fear of stigma. A woman's engagement in an ERSI, for instance, was frequently portrayed as having more severe consequences in terms of being judged and socially ostracised. These repercussions were outlined to be job loss,

shaming, and loss of contact with friends and family, which were mostly absent in men's accounts of their ERSI. Nevertheless, regardless of gender, ERSI was always depicted as a transgression and hence had expected emotional reactions attached to it, which is outlined below.

6.1.2 Guilt and ERSI

As ERSI was described as a transgression that could hurt the primary partner, the main (expected) feeling was outlined to be guilt, which worked to demonstrate an awareness of 'wrongdoing'. This moralistic discourse ties into what is considered appropriate relationality (i.e., being in a faithful, committed and dyadic relationship). Feelings of guilt in response to ERSI were talked about by participants, regardless of whether they claimed or denied having experienced these emotions. Put differently, guilt was often discussed, even if participants claimed not having felt this way. As such, guilt appeared to be part of an ERSI discourse, as it was largely made relevant when discussing this sexual act. The apparent obligation to address guilt as a response to ERSI, worked to further underpin ERSI as a moral transgression by highlighting such feelings as a socially expected reaction. In the following extract PW42 depicts her emotional reaction to her ERSI and how it affected her decision making in the process:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW42: The fling and I told each other we wouldn't do anything further but I know we both wanted to, and we met for coffee 'to talk about it' and then had sex, and continued for some months. We both felt really guilty but I guess because we'd already committed the sin stopping it didn't have a lot of appeal. We then ended it (maybe the excitement diminished to be less than the guilt and the difficulty hiding it, I'm unsure exactly why), and I also ended my relationship with my bf [boyfriend] - this had been coming for some time anyway - not sure if the fling solidified my choice or made it any more urgent, or whether it all would have ended then anyway. My bf never became aware of the fling (to my knowledge). (31 years)

The respondent describes a difference between her intentions (refraining from continued engagements in ERSI) and what reportedly happened (additional encounters), though talking about a willingness to have sex with her ERSI partner. The discourse here is similar to those outlined in the previous chapter, where participants portrayed their desires for ERSI as hard to control. Guilt in relation to the practice is depicted to be part of her and her ERSI partner's experience, but as possibly being overshadowed by the excitement the encounter offered. This excitement is, however, described as fading over time. As such, the participant recounts grappling with her contradictory emotions, which are depicted as changing over time. By calling ERSI a "sin", the respondent draws on a moral/religious discourse that underpins the practice's transgressive nature and its accompanying emotional reaction (i.e., guilt). Although keeping her ERSI a secret in this example and ending the relationship with her boyfriend, the respondent reported in another instance how a heightened sense of guilt led her to confess to her partner:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW42: I told my partner after a week, as I couldn't keep it secret, as I felt so guilty and I didn't feel I could be genuinely in the relationship with this big lie. He was hugely upset and hurt, and took it quite personally I think. We were uncertain for a week but he agreed to continue our relationship. We continued our relationship for about a year, but I don't think he ever felt the same about it. I don't think I had ever felt he was the right partner for me anyway so I don't think it affected how I felt about him. He asked me 'why?' repeatedly though, and by finally figuring out the answer to that (for attention) I realised something about myself that I eventually learned from with my current partner (31 years)

Guilt is depicted as a strong emotion, which required a confession by the participant in order to relieve such feelings. The respondent describes engaging in ERSI, as she reportedly desired getting some kind of attention that was absent from her partner or in general. She thereby portrays a 'lack' in her personality and depicts the act

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as symptomatic of a problematic behaviour. By describing her partner as 'not the right one', the relationship is positioned as not ideal and the transgressive nature of her ERSI is minimised. An ERSI is thereby portrayed as a more likely occurrence when the relationship is not fully satisfying, tying in with common notions about ERSI as way to fulfil a lack in the primary relationship (e.g., Jeanfreau, Jurich, & Mong, 2014b; Pittman & Wagers, 2005). The situation is contrasted with her current one, whereby she has reportedly rectified the issues in her personality through a more satisfying relationship and therefore does not need the attention from an ERSI.

Guilt was the most prominent emotion outlined by respondents in the study when discussing ERSI. This emotion was always made relevant, either to illustrate having felt this way or having escaped it. By doing so, both men and women positioned guilt as the most relevant response to an ERSI, regardless of positive or negative outcomes. These descriptions were key in establishing ERSI as a transgression, depicting the stigma attached to the practice (e.g., "a sin") that resonate with Judeo-Christian values (M. P. Levine & Troiden, 1988). The respondents thereby drew on normative discourses of heterosexual relationships that render sex exclusive to the monogamous couple, with each partner having a moral/social responsibility to adhere to these norms (Finn, 2010, 2012b; Jackson & Scott, 2004a). These discourses worked to set up appropriate relationality as faithful, dyadic and committed. Participants often relayed their ERSI accounts in a way that diminished their responsibility or agency for the 'transgression'. This can be interpreted as linked to a problematic personality, a lack in the relationship or control of the situation, and is examined closer next.

6.1.3 Going along with sex

Some participants provided accounts where they reported taking on a very passive part in the ERSI, and where the sexual act was initiated by the ERSI partner.

The following example shows how PW42 changed her mind about the opportunity to have an ERSI, yet engaged in it unwillingly:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible another time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?
>
> PW42: At a party, drunk, again a friend I enjoyed attention from, but didn't have any intention of doing anything with (until that night). I got drunk (he was very drunk), and flirted with him (making eyes, hanging around him etc.), I think to get his attention. It worked, and I remember being really excited when he led me to his room, then as soon as we were in his room my stomach sunk. It was like I wanted his attention, but not actually to do anything - I didn't want to cheat and I didn't really want the sex - I got sex with my boyfriend. But I felt I'd put myself in that situation so I went through with it - it was kind of enjoyable physically but my heart wasn't in it - I felt guilty.
> (31 years)

The respondent describes how flirting with a friend got out of control, leading to her ERSI. She depicts a temporary state of poor judgement ability on her and her ERSI partner's behalf by stating that they were drunk. PW42 depicts the situation as being about the chase and conquering the ERSI partner's attention, but notes a sudden change of interest when it came to the sexual exchange. The excitement of ERSI seemed to be about the lead up to it, rather than the sexual act itself, which in this case is reported in less enjoyable terms than the context surrounding the sexual encounter. The enjoyment of ERSI then did not seem to derive from the typically portrayed coital act within heterosex (Jackson, 1996; McPhillips et al., 2001; D. Richardson, 1996). Instead, the pleasure of her engagement is depicted as being about the non-physical aspects of the ERSI, and therefore as lying beyond sex, similarly reported in accounts of casual sex (Farvid & Braun, 2016). The respondent notes that her flirting appeared to be about self-affirmation of her desirability, rather than seeking sexual satisfaction/pleasure. PW42 describes realising her mistake at a stage where she felt obliged to provide sex, as she reportedly felt responsible for being in the situation. By outlining a struggle to

withdraw herself from that situation, a sexual coercion discourse is drawn on (Gavey, 2005), characterised by self-blame. That is, the respondent appears to follow specific heterosexual gender practices that typically position women as boundary setters and culminate in a sexual act (Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Tiefer, 1995). Subsequently, declining sex at such an advanced stage after having signalled sexual interest, would disrupt the normative heterosexual performances, which she initiated by flirting. The respondent's account functions to position her as agentic in the signalling of interest in the ERSI partner (setting up the self-blame discourse), but as passive regarding the engagement in and declination of the sexual act. This echoes traditionally feminine approaches in relation to the commencement and negotiation of casual sexual encounters (Beres & Farvid, 2010; Farvid & Braun, 2016). In a similar vein, PM38 describes how he passively went along with sex in an ERSI encounter:

> Q: Could you please describe in as much detail as possible another time you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?
>
> PM38: Defacto then married for a second time. Six years after being together things were getting somewhat strained in our marriage. Invited to the home of a single friend/colleague place (I had known her through work for over ten years) while my partner was out of town on work related business.
>
> She cooked a nice dinner for us, we drank some wine, she suggested it was late so why not stay over, I did so, we cuddled on the settee, she said there is a second bedroom but you are invited into my bed, and I graciously accepted. (74 years)

The extract here exemplifies another process and context typical of ERSI, which resembles a conventional date scenario, though it was here with a friend/colleague. The respondent provides an account where he lets the situation unfold, while depicting the ERSI partner as active in the instigation of the sexual encounter (e.g., cooking dinner, drinking wine, making suggestions). He thereby positions himself as non-agentic in the initiation of the encounter, albeit giving a less passive account than PW42, as he

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describes his awareness and specific decisions during the process leading up to the ERSI.

The participants often depicted themselves as lacking agency in the instigation of their ERSI. The lack of agency portrayed by respondents worked to diminish responsibility for the act. ERSI was thereby positioned as unplanned and unexpected, functioning to demonstrate an absence of ulterior motives for their actions. ERSI was set up as a contextual practice, whereby a succession of non-physical events led up to the sexual encounter. The ERSI partner was often positioned as agentic in the initiation of the encounter, which also worked to sometimes divert blame for the transgression. This is discussed below.

6.1.4 Blame

Constructing ERSI as a transgression opened up the possibility for particular, regretful reactions by those engaging in the act, typically ascribed to breaking the rules. These included expectations of certain emotions, such as feeling guilty. As seen above, negative emotions, like guilt, normally had to be accounted for and a fear of stigma ascribed to engaging in ERSI was described by some respondents (particularly women) in the study. Some respondents resisted the socially expected feelings of guilt and being stigmatised in their accounts of ERSI (i.e., for having a corrupt moral code and being characteristically flawed), so as to position themselves as morally sound. Their resistance was often characterised by diverting responsibility, in order for others to be held accountable for 'breaking the rules'. PW27 makes this explicit:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW27: I ended up telling my then husband and breaking up with him. I then went back to him, broke it off with the other guy and then 4 months later my husband left me for someone else. So, he shouldn't have taken me back because he was in fact no longer in love with me

which is why he'd been so unpleasant to me which led me to have the affair. (39 years)

PW27 outlines an ERSI encounter with a work colleague, which she describes elsewhere as planning and initiating it herself. The respondent describes above, telling her husband about her ERSI and initially ending the relationship. Indicating that her husband similarly engaged in such a practice, she differentiates between her and her husband's ERSI. The participant depicts the husband's actions as deceptive and calculated (for taking her back despite his lack of feelings for her and finding someone else in the meantime), while hers are described as a result of his hostility (i.e., he ostensibly pushed her towards engaging in ERSI). Her ERSI is thereby positioned as a result of an unhappy marriage. This unhappiness is portrayed as stemming from her unpleasant husband, who, despite supposedly not having romantic feelings for her, did not end the relationship. As such, she depicts the husband as responsible for the state of the relationship. This state is described as creating the context that made ERSI possible in the first place, as this act only became understandable and a viable option within a problematic relationship. Portraying her husband's unkind behaviour works to diminish the participant's responsibility in the matter, by diverting it to him. As such, it is not her or the relationship that is described as lacking, but her husband's flawed persona. The reason and purpose behind PW27's ERSI is outlined in her next response:

Q: How do you feel about it now?
PW27: I feel it was something that almost had to happen, just part of the course of the ending of my marriage. I wish my now ex-husband had the balls to end our relationship when he no longer loved me. (39 years)

The respondent outlines how ERSI was nearly unavoidable, playing a key part in the ending of the relationship. Instead of talking to her husband about her unhappiness in the marriage, she takes up ERSI as a tool to end the relationship. The participant's

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ERSI is thereby ascribed a functional role in a non-communicative relationship. PW27's account ties in with proposed power imbalances in heterosexual relationships, whereby women may have less power to end, and are under greater pressure to tolerate an unhappy relationship (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). As such, ERSI may have been taken up to combat these power differentials within the respondent's relationship. In line with such a power imbalance, PW27 portrays her husband as liable for ending the marriage and the occurrences that reportedly resulted from his indecisiveness.

Generally there appeared to be a greater fear of repercussions in the responses given by female participants, made explicit by PW43:

> Q: Please explain why you chose to talk / not talk about your experience to anyone?
>
> PW43: I was also aware that being a woman in my line of work, I would be destroyed. I nearly have been anyway by my divorce and the stories told about me. I knew too that everybody would see it as my fault. That's very hard to swallow because he actually pursued me, forcefully, for about three months. I asked not to be on trips with him when I realised there was a connection, and he told me later he had insisted to my boss that he should be there. (36 years)

The respondent outlines her ERSI with a colleague from her work as an educator. She describes thinking that she would be blamed for the ERSI, and was as such not merely passive in the events leading up to the ERSI, but agentic in the attempt to avoid the situation. Her attempts are, however, portrayed as redundant in this case, as the ERSI partner is described as planning the ERSI without her knowledge. More specifically, the ERSI partner is described as continuously trying for three months to engage in an ERSI with her (he was married as well), to the extent of intentionally setting up the context for such an act behind her back. The participant thus positions her ERSI partner as convincing and calculated, planning the encounter for a longer period of time, which functions to hold him accountable for the ERSI. PW43 discusses a sexual double standard in relation to ERSI that assigns greater responsibility to a

woman's engagement in such an act (Mongeau et al., 1994). Such an assumption may subsequently not allow for alternative explanations that hold men more responsible for ERSI, regardless of the circumstances. The respondent outlines the gendered nature of ERSI to be informing her decision to keep the encounter a secret, highlighted by a portrayed fear of repercussions.

Since the socially imposed expectations of ERSI in regards to emotions often contrasted the private understanding, as seen earlier, these accounts depicted a contradiction between the personal (e.g., excitement) and social experience (e.g., regret) of ERSI. Some of the respondents' narratives illustrated a resistance to such socially expected feelings, by diverting agency and accountability to their primary or ERSI partner. The transgression narratives given by the participants were often gendered and a heightened sense of fear of being stigmatised was expressed by the women in this study. This corresponds with Mongeau et al.'s (1994) suggestion that society may view women's sexual acts as more calculated. Subsequently, the women in this study often drew on traditional female characterisations within heterosexuality, which positioned them as passive in creating the context that allowed for an ERSI to occur (e.g., unhappy relationship). Not only was ERSI taken up within such a context to counteract this power imbalance and end the primary relationship (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013), but further allowed the women to resist being held responsible for their ERSI in these accounts. The traditionally active identities ascribed to men, also positioned them as accountable for the occurrence of an ERSI. Such discourses worked to divert blame and retain a morally sound subject position. Being held responsible for ERSI was repeatedly depicted as having severe repercussions, as discussed next.

6.2 ERSI as Catastrophic

Thus far the complex negotiation of subject positions and emotions in regards to ERSI has been discussed, which often appeared contradictory, especially in light of the differential personal and social experience of these actions. The last section outlined how passive and active subject positions were taken up to resist and divert guilt and blame. Here, the possible repercussions of ERSI are addressed in more detail to understand the reasons and outcomes of the negotiations of these subject positions. These positions were depicted as changing in relation to the object over time and according to circumstances (e.g., from agentic to a passive victim). For instance, a positively portrayed ERSI can turn into a negative experience, an ideal relationship may become a terrible one and so forth, showcasing the transformative nature of their meaning. Hence, emotions, identities and psychologies may vary accordingly and portray the subjects as confused and tormented. The following extract depicts how the respondent's refusal to be shamed for her otherwise positively depicted ERSI, and show guilt, was punished by the people in PW14's environment, turning her encounter into a negative experience:

> Q: Does anyone know about this/these event(s)/encounter(s)? If so, how did they react?
>
> PW14: Only one friend.
>
> But then my husband discovered the affair.
>
> I was intending to tell him (truly!)…but was waiting for the school hols to end, to give us some space during the day from the kids…and then he discovered an email I had sent to my friend about it.
>
> It was emotional Armageddon. I was very frightened of him, his anger was huge and scary.
>
> He told a lot of people. Announced it on Facebook (ugh)... took the post down after my urging after about 12 hours, seen by many.
>
> Told many people in our local community and then tongues got wagging!
>
> My mother in law has never spoken to me again, same goes for my brothers in law. It's been 18 months now since the affair was discovered, and for some people 'forgiveness' seems an impossibility.

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> I made a very strong stand and refused to be shamed for it, and whilst not denying my wrong doing, tried to place it in the context of a problematic relationship. There was huge resistance to this... from my husband and from all the people who judged me for it, who, as I said earlier, could only place this happening at the very top of the hierarchy of hurts in a relationship. For them all, it did not matter what may have happened. It was bad, I was bad and that was all there was to it. Of those who felt judgemental and angry, no-one sought to find out about my perspective. (45 years)

The respondent describes the consequences of her ERSI as catastrophic and chaotic. She explains that she wanted to wait for the 'right time' to reveal her ERSI to her husband, in order to avoid getting her children involved. This places her as a rational and caring mother, who kept her ERSI a secret for the protection of her children. The reported emotions following the discovery are described in catastrophic terms. These are drawn on to position her husband as a vengeful, intemperate individual, who refused to understand her and instead tried to punish her by revealing her ERSI to others. Since ERSI is depicted as being seen by others as the worst thing someone can do in a relationship, PW14 describes being ostracised for her ERSI, which works to position her as a victim in the circumstances. The husband's reported reaction sets up the case for her argument that the ERSI encounter was symptomatic of a problematic relationship and may have been taken up as a way out of her marriage. The respondent thereby portrays an unwillingness to take full responsibility for the situation, within which ERSI was given space to occur. Despite acknowledging her transgression, the account illustrates her refusal (especially as a woman) to 'play along' (i.e., take full responsibility and show guilt) and be shamed for her actions. People's judgement of her behaviour are described as one-sided and simplistic (e.g., public shaming through Facebook), based on explanations that hold her as a woman accountable for the act. As such, the respondent depicts how gendered notions of ERSI that ascribe greater responsibility for the act to women (Mongeau et al., 1994), may result in harsher judgement of their ERSI (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006). Alternative explanations, such as

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an unsatisfactory relationship, are depicted as resisted by others. Thus, the people's reported reaction may be illustrative of heterosexual notions that women are supposed to endure an unhappy relationship (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013).

The extract above is representative of the often chaotic circumstances following an ERSI described by participants in other accounts, too. These responses depicted the negative emotions they had to suffer, as well as unpredictable reactions from people in their environment, underpinning their fear of stigma. In other words, the participants illustrated traumatic situations, as discussed below.

6.2.1 The cause of pain

ERSI was often depicted as a difficult experience for the participants, who engaged in it, leading to vulnerability and isolation. PW14 provides an account whereby her life circumstances surrounding her engagement in the ERSI are talked about in ways that depict them as exhausting and compromising her social life:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW14: I kept the encounter hidden from everyone, except one friend who lived out of Auckland.
>
> Once we were seeing each other semi regularly (once a month) and I felt like I was leading a double life... there was a part of me that I could not share with my friends. I could not share the deception. I closed a part of me off, like shutting an internal door. I have often wondered what impact that had on me. The energy it took to keep that door shut. The energy it took to maintain the secrets.
>
> It felt exciting on one hand, and yet there was a very draining aspect to it also.
>
> One of the biggest impacts was that I would lie about who I was with, and then I would be unable to go see that person... because I had "seen them the week before"…when I was with him. Toward the end of the affair, we were seeing each other once sometimes twice a week. It was very hard and very stressful to come up with alibis for my nights out. My social life began to shut down, as all my socialising started to be with him. So I turned away from my friendships as the affair grew in its intensity. (45 years)

The respondent describes the difficulty in managing her ERSI. This act is depicted as requiring effort to create believable "alibis" and hide parts of her selfhood from friends, leading her to a sense of having a "double life". The respondent describes how her actions impacted not only on her social environment, but also how it affected her personally. The impact of the participant's deception is reported in contradictory ways, portraying it as exciting and draining for her. Balancing her social (e.g., with friends) and private identities is depicted as taking a toll on her, both physically and emotionally. Not only did participants depict ERSI as taking a toll on them during the involvement, but also as having continued aftereffects, as explicated by PW43:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW43: The person and I continued our sexual relationship for some time after this first encounter. The result was the separation of my marriage (my own choice when I realised my feelings), and some difficulties in his.
>
> I did not tell anybody so it didn't affect my friendships except through my spending a lot of time with him.
>
> The outcome for me was terrible. I wanted to be more with this person as it went on. During the time we were seeing each other, and later when he ended it to keep his marriage together, I became very depressed and anxious. I could not talk to anyone about it because I knew I would be blamed for it. I didn't trust anyone else. I suffered depression and anxiety for at least 4 years afterwards, being treated medically for these. I could not and cannot be around this person due to this history, even though he continues to invite me to go places with him. A decade on, I can't bear the thought of being alone with him in even the most innocuous situations so I refuse. I don't trust many men not to hurt me. I feel manipulated. I have learned not to put others on a pedestal and give all to them. I've learned that it's not worth getting too emotionally involved with anyone – by the time it ended I was completely in love with him. I avoid that now. I've discovered it's easier to let someone else love me and create our path together, or to be single, than to risk going after somebody I really want to be with because of the consequences.
>
> I've learned never to do it again because of the harm it did to me. I was completely devastated and had nowhere to turn for help. I'm not sure I could go through that again.
>
> I have recently remarried to someone who I know does love me completely and who has also been through something similar. We do love each other but I think it's more that we are comfortable with each

other and care about each other, rather than being desperately and passionately in love. It feels safer than the passionate heady rush that comes with the other option. Maybe we've settled a bit, but it feels ok. (36 years)

The participant reports her ERSI experience as traumatising for her and irrevocably changing her. More specifically, she describes feeling increasingly drawn towards her ERSI partner as they continued seeing each other to the point where she ended her marriage. Her feelings towards her ERSI partner are reported to have been not reciprocated and as subsequently leading to difficulties with depression and anxiety. The respondent draws on psychological discourses of ERSI that commonly associate the practice with the symptoms reported by PW43, though normally ascribed to those, whose partner engaged in it (e.g., Bird et al., 2007; Cano & O'Leary, 2000; K. C. Gordon et al., 2004; Whisman, 2015; Whisman & Wagers, 2005). Keeping her ERSI a secret due to a fear of being blamed and stigmatised, is depicted by the respondent to have left her isolated, helpless and traumatised. Such a disempowerment was also reported in L. Richardson's (1988) study. The medical account given works to accentuate her position as manipulated and traumatised, as well as the seriousness of ERSI's aftermath. The emotional and psychological consequences of ERSI are depicted by PW43 as resulting in an ongoing and serious distrust of men. Thus, she reportedly avoids opening herself up to another person. Trust and communication (often described to be characteristic of having a 'special connection') are thereby construed as risky practices. The "safer" option is portrayed to be "settling" for a less passionate relationship, like her current one. As such, the respondent makes a distinction between passionate love and companionate love (Sternberg, 1997). Although the different kinds of love have been argued to overlap, the respondent makes a qualitative distinction, whereby an absence of passion is noted with regards to her current relationship. In that

sense, the respondent highlights still being "scarred", as she reports approaching relationships and men differently.

The (largely female) participants in this study talked about a fear of serious social repercussions that could have potentially devastating ramifications for them, if their ERSI was disclosed. Similar findings regarding women's silencing of their sexual experiences in order to avoid being labelled have been reported elsewhere (e.g., Farvid et al., 2016). The respondents described keeping their encounters hidden by creating a split between their social and private self, which reportedly had a negative impact on them, as it produced tension and isolation. Their decision to keep ERSI a secret was often portrayed to have inadvertently led to emotional and physical repercussions for them. Illustrating the psychological distress they experienced, positioned the respondents as traumatised. As such, the participants' accounts functioned to demonstrate their character as damaged, which is outlined next.

6.2.2 Damaged persona

The aftermath of ERSI was sometimes described to be severely damaging to the participant's character, though in other instances respondents depicted ERSI to be a result of a damaged persona. PW43 portrays how her ERSI caused permanent damage, changing the way she approaches men in general:

> Q: How do you think this experience has affected you and your relationships (and possibly friendships)?
>
> PW43: I suffered awful depression and anxiety. I don't trust many men not to hurt me.
>
> I won't give myself over to another person completely anymore, too vulnerable. I won't go after men I like even when single as I figure they will eventually reject me. This means to an extent, I settle for those who care for me and learn to like them as they are without the fireworks. (36 years)

In her account, the respondent constructs men as hurtful and as therefore having to protect herself from them by keeping her emotional distance and reducing her investment into a relationship. Thus, she portrays herself as a traumatised and damaged individual that has become more cautious and sceptical of love and relationships, due to the repercussions of her ERSI. The extract demonstrates how approaching relationships in a more guarded manner allows her to be in control of her emotions and hence be in a more powerful position, though at the expense of sacrificing love.

The following account illustrates how ERSI was taken up as a result of traumatising events by PM12:

> Q: What do you think was the reason for engaging in this sexual relation?
>
> PM12: When I was 13 I had a girlfriend who I loved so much, we were only together for maybe a few weeks but she dumped me in quite a harsh way… It was a similar situation with my second girlfriend who I was with for about three or four weeks when I was 14 who also dumped me in quite a harsh way. I was so hurt both times and I think I kind of said to myself that the next girlfriend I get I'm going to cheat on her so if she ever dumps me I can always feel like 'ha well I tricked you anyway bitch!'... I guess in some ways I used it as a means to save myself from getting as hurt again. (29 years)

Unlike the previous participant, PM12 talks about how he approaches his scepticism of relationships not through avoiding an ERSI partner, but by intentionally pursuing other sexual partners. ERSI is reportedly taken up as a coping mechanism to avoid getting too (emotionally) involved with his partner(s) and thereby avoid getting possibly hurt again in the future. This coping mechanism is described as a result of previously hurtful experiences in his relationships, and may therefore constitute a form of revenge. The type of revenge depicted here, does not stand in direct relation to a bad relationship, but seems to be a form of pre-revenge in case his partner exits the relationship. As such, the respondent appears to depict a fear of commitment and vulnerability based on his previous relationship experiences, whereby ERSI may be

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employed to overcome his fear of entering into a relationship. More specifically, the ability to cause the same hurt for his primary partner by taking up an ERSI is portrayed as an advantage over the partner, turning ERSI into a tool of power and subordination. The respondent may then feel more powerful when entering and exiting a relationship.

Some participants further described their feelings of carelessness for their partner when engaging in ERSI:

> Q: What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?
>
> PW9: You'd have to ask my vagina! My thoughts/feelings were self-centred - I didn't give a shit about my exclusive partner nor did I care about my friend's whereabouts (she had wandered off with some random guy as well). (35 years)

The respondent writes about an ERSI with a man she met at a bar when partying with a friend. By referring to her vagina, the participant highlights the physical, rather than the emotional aspect of the encounter. She describes feelings of selfishness and a lack of care for others, including her partner. PW9 went on to describe the reason for feeling this way and engaging in ERSI as a result of past trauma:

> Q: What do you think was the reason for engaging in this sexual relation?
>
> PW9: I doubt anyone can give a reason that would satisfy a hurt partner, and rightly so, for me it has been something I have struggled to control for a long time, with varying degrees of failure and success. I had had many negative sexual experiences as a child and not long before my first experience cheating I had been violently raped. Relationships were a joke, I felt detached from people, and my body wasn't my own. Sometimes there is nothing more gratifying than losing control, it can be exciting and freeing. (35 years)

The extract here frames ERSI as a symptom of previously traumatic experiences, including rape and child sexual abuse. The respondent depicts a struggle to control herself and refrain from engaging in ERSI, as she reportedly felt disconnected from her relationship, people and her body. In this case, ERSI is taken up to overcome her

struggle with her body and negative experiences, as such an encounter is reported to yield positive feelings through a loss of control. PW9 draws in her account on a psychological discourse of ERSI that places such an act as resulting from past traumatic experiences. In particular, such notions depict women's ERSI in terms of problematic attachments and sexual behaviour (e.g., Frías et al., 2014; Whisman & Snyder, 2007). Although child sexual abuse may serve as a 'master narrative' for the formation of psychological problems, such a dichotomy undermines women's complex sexual capacities and reduces them to a (traditionally) passive victim (Haaken, 1999).

In a similar vein, the following extract depicts how ERSI was constructed as pathological:

> Q: What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)
>
> PW9: I cheated on him again and again and I became less and less subtle about it. He would listen to my lies, I ruined his friendships, manipulated him and mocked him. I began to resent him for his weakness, for forgiving me. My partner at the time was younger than me and I felt more like a parent. I was emotionally abusive and eventually he pulled himself together and broke up with me. However, not long after that he wanted to give me another chance but I respected his initial instinct and it was a relief to end the charade. Most of my friendships at the time were fairly superficial and we all moved on over time. A couple of his friends attempted to pursue me afterwards but I had moved on and wasn't interested in them once my relationship ended (I had flirted with them copiously while my ex-partner and I had been together). (35 years)

The respondent describes her behaviour as pathological and destructive, indicated by the damage she caused. Her previously outlined damaged persona is here depicted to manifest itself in a harming manner, involving dishonesty, simulation and schemes. ERSI is portrayed as part of this type of behaviour, essentially taken up to 'push' her 'weak' partner to break up with her. In particular, her partner's forgiveness is described as a sign of weakness (rather than love, for instance), functioning to assign him the responsibility to end an unsatisfactory relationship. The respondent's account

works to position her within the framework of differing power dynamics for men and women within heterosexual relationships that would not allow her to leave her partner according to her own decision. This position, however, allows her to employ ERSI as a means to exit an unpleasant relationship by 'convincing' her partner to leave her. In her last sentence there is a clarification that her ERSI and related behaviours were not about sex, but rather served as a tool to exercise power. As such, ERSI may be taken up to counteract gendered power differences within heterosexual relationships, in line with reports by Wilkins and Dalessandro (2013). However, the respondent further explains that ERSI may not only be destructive to a relationship, but also to herself:

> Q: How do you think this experience has affected you and your relationships (and possibly friendships)?
>
> PW9: It has been difficult to build meaningful relationships (both romantic relationships and friendships). For a long time I thought I was damaged, broken and beyond repair. But I love the person I am and I'm working hard on those self-destructive tendencies. (35 years)

The respondent outlines how her behaviour (i.e., ERSI) had not only been damaging to her relationships, but also to friendships and herself, signifying ERSI as having a more universal impact. She describes how she is "working" on 'fixing' her behaviour to become a committed and monogamous individual. By positioning ERSI as destructive, the account essentially functions to position monogamy within a 'healthy' behaviour narrative. In another excerpt, PW32 makes similar claims and also outlines the wider impact of her ERSI:

> Q: Please explain why you chose to talk / not talk about your experience to anyone?
>
> PW32: Because I was going through a manic episode, I told a friend because it was such an exciting experience.
>
> Although I was still concerned about hurting my husband, I didn't seem to be aware of the hurt I was causing everyone else around me with my behaviour. (42 years)

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The respondent's ERSI is constructed as a temporary psychological problem and hence described as uncharacteristic of her. Pathologising ERSI in this way works to establish a monogamous selfhood that was temporarily compromised, and demonstrate an awareness of 'wrongdoing'. The reportedly temporary state of her transgressive behaviour sets her up as a 'normally' caring partner, as depicted by the concern for her husband. Similar to previous accounts, the respondent in this extract depicts a (temporary) carelessness for others, ascribed to psychological problems, whereby ERSI manifests itself as a symptom of such issues.

Some participants did not only problematise ERSI under negative circumstances or depict it as a temporary issue, but also within an on-going, positively experienced encounter, as outlined by PM4:

> Q: Please explain why you chose to talk / not talk about your experience to anyone?
>
> PM4: The more people who know, the greater likelihood of being discovered. I sometimes wonder if I should talk to a counsellor about this aspect of my behaviour. (62 years)

The respondent suggests refraining from telling anyone about his "affair" to keep it a secret and thereby avoid any potential repercussions that may arise as a result. The second sentence problematises the participant's ERSI by constructing this act as a pathological behaviour that requires treatment. What is interesting in PM4's account, is that he describes his ERSI in positive terms throughout the questionnaire and states that he is happy with it (i.e., "…but am much happier with the current long-term affair"). As such, ERSI was not only depicted as problematic when having a negative impact on people, but may be more widely pathologised in society.

The ERSI experience was often described to have led to or be caused by a damaged persona related to past trauma. These accounts served to demonstrate the

torment participants reportedly faced. The extracts often illustrated a suppression of feelings, with an emotional involvement portrayed as risky. In some of these cases, participants reported taking ERSI up as a coping mechanism to overcome a fear of commitment and future emotional damage. As such, rather than accepting a relationship as emotionally risky, some respondents seemed to employ ERSI as a tool to avoid becoming too attached to their partner and/or free themselves from the obligations of a relationship. The traumatic subject positions allowed participants to employ ERSI as an empowering tool to resist their fears of getting hurt. Furthermore, women in particular reportedly used ERSI to counteract gendered power dynamics within their committed, heterosexual relationships that would otherwise not allow them to leave their partner. Although the respondents depicted themselves sometimes as selfish when engaging in ERSI, their supposed (temporary) carelessness was not ascribed to a general flaw in their personality, but to a result of past experiences caused by others. In order to highlight their selfishness as temporary, the participants drew on a pathological narrative of ERSI that depicted them as having a damaged persona. These accounts sometimes produced the respondents as suffering emotionally from their behaviour. Such a discourse worked to position monogamy and commitment within a healthy behaviour framework, while setting up ERSI as a psychological issue. ERSI was thereby constructed as 'treatable' and 'fixable', laying the groundwork for participants to draw on redemption narratives. How betterment was talked about, is discussed next.

6.2.3 Redemption

As outlined previously, some respondents depicted their potentially damaging ERSI behaviour as a temporary problem. They situated ERSI in the past (i.e., as a closed event), which worked to distance their present self from this act with its implications for the character of a person. In order to demonstrate improvement and re-obtain their position as committed, monogamous individuals, participants drew on

redemption discourses (rather than merely acknowledging their 'mistakes'), exemplifying that they have 'changed'. In the following extract, PW9 describes her former self and acknowledges her 'wrongdoing':

> Q: How do you feel about it now?
>
> PW9: It has taken me a long time to move beyond arrogance and despair, to faith in myself and others. I regret being callous with people's hearts but I don't necessarily regret the experiences I have had any more than I can change it. (35 years)

By describing her former self as arrogant and miserable, PW9 not only depicts an 'improvement' in her character, but also a disapproval of her past behaviour. Stating that she regrets how she treated people, the respondent 'accepts' her mistakes (drawing on forgiveness discourses), though emphasising that these cannot be changed in hindsight. This sets up the contrasting scenario for the present and future to provide 'evidence' for her progress:

> Q: Does anyone know about this/these event(s)/encounter(s)? If so, how did they react?
>
> PW9: My current partner and I first began a sexual relationship when he was married, he divorced her not long after, but we've always been cagey about telling people the details of our relationship. It has not been the most stable ground to build a relationship on but we genuinely care and want it to work. This relationship has been oddly restorative in that we have seen the worst and best of each other and still believe in one another. (35 years)

The present relationship is said to have started as an ERSI on her partner's side, which they try to keep secret. The respondent thereby depicts an awareness of this behaviour as a transgressive, and potentially stigmatised practice. A successful relationship is depicted here as requiring steadiness and following clear guidelines in how it is established. Coupledom is thus portrayed as needing work, principally illustrating their efforts to become monogamous. The characteristics of this 'good' relationship are described in terms of openness, honesty towards each other, and the

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prospect of improvement of oneself based on trust. The respondent thereby seems to draw on therapeutic attributions. Depicting the relationship in such a manner, essentially constructs committed, monogamous relationships (based on honesty), as remedial and therefore healthy, while ERSI becomes further entrenched as pathological. In her account here and earlier, the respondent illustrates moving on from her previously damaged persona, to an identity formation that includes determination (for atonement), understanding, and compassion. In order to emphasise her and her partner's sincere strive for change, she notes that they "genuinely care". Although distancing herself from the past, it is this contrasting act that works to construct her present identity as different. Her past behaviour thus lays the foundation for establishing her current self.

In her account, PW9 moves away from firm personality characteristics (that are beyond the individual's control) to factors that can be worked on, such as commitment, positioning these as central to relationship success (Finn, 2010, 2012b). In this manner, the participant demonstrates the possibility and her efforts for redemption to become a considerate, recovered and committed partner. Furthermore, previously pathologising ERSI, now works to highlight the beneficial and healthy (e.g., therapeutic) attributes of a monogamous relationship. Positioning monogamy in this manner produces mononormativity as essential to health (Weeks, 2010), while marginalising non-monogamy (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Conley et al., 2013; Mint, 2004; Moors et al., 2015; Moors et al., 2013; Richards, 2010). The individual consequently depicts herself as (psychologically) healthier and stable. PM12 similarly states:

> Q: How do you feel about it now?
>
> PM12: I regret cheating on my girlfriends. I wish I didn't. Especially my first girlfriend, she was the most amazing person I've ever met in my life, and even though I knew how amazing it was with her at the time, I had just established this blind pattern of secret sex which I rationalised in various ways e.g. - I'm young, I will regret it later if I don't have as much sex as possible etc.

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> I have, however, moved beyond cheating now. After realising how my cheating came about, how it affected my relationships (whether they found out will not), and how much I really appreciate honesty and authenticity these days, I know that cycle is come to an end. (29 years)

The respondent describes how he moved on from his supposedly pathological ERSI behaviour. The reasons for his engagement in ERSI are assigned to typical notions of masculinity that expect men to have multiple sexual partners (Smiler, 2013). The respondent positions his ERSI as having derived from traumatising experiences and facilitated through his misconceived notions of masculinity. PM12 depicts how giving in to these assumptions has produced feelings of remorse for him, highlighting how much he enjoyed being with his first girlfriend, despite "cheating". He thereby outlines a previously damaged persona, which he has overcome through "realising" his behaviour as problematic and becoming a 'better' person that values honesty. Although distancing his current self in this account from the demands of masculinity, he essentially re-affirms his virility by referring to them and positioning himself as sexually experienced (e.g., Terry & Braun, 2009).

Honesty and authenticity are framed in this account as part of healthy, monogamous relationships, which works to depict these relationships as morally correct (e.g., Finn, 2012b), while ERSI is positioned as morally transgressive. By emphasising the value he reportedly places on the attributes of monogamous relationships, the respondent construes his (current) self as an essentially caring, monogamous and committed partner. ERSI is ultimately depicted as a dishonest practice that requires distancing from.

By drawing on ERSI as a pathological act, respondents created a scenario whereby 'recovery' constituted a possibility. In order to demonstrate their 'redemption', the participants' accounts depicted having gained an understanding into their

'unhealthy' behavioural patterns and reported feelings of regret in regards to their experiences. In some cases, a stable, monogamous relationship they were currently in was outlined as a means to contrast it with their previous behaviour and illustrate a healthier approach to relationships. As such, monogamy and commitment were situated as healthy and therefore acceptable ways of relating. By locating their ERSI behaviour in the past, respondents undertook identity work that distinguished between their past and current self, as examined next.

6.2.4 Naïve versus mature self

As seen above, the respondents' discourses of redemption functioned to demonstrate that they had gained a monogamous identity. This was done by pitting their current self – constructed as mature – against their former naïve self. Doing so, worked to distance oneself from past mistakes and avoided being stigmatised as having a generally immoral character. PW30 makes this explicit about her former and current self:

> Q: How do you feel about it now?
>
> PW30: I feel slightly bad that I cheated on my boyfriend but also know that we were 19 and experimenting with all sorts of things (philosophically, relationships, politically, substances). Also, he later told me that he had had a fling with his flatmate (who was a guy) which I had no problem with at the time because it fitted in with our ideologies at the time. Now I feel OK about it. I see it as part of growing up. Since I've been with my current partner I would not like to have a fling with anyone and know that I have changed a lot since I was 19. (38 years)

The respondent describes her ERSI as a past experience and creates a context, whereby such a conduct was acceptable and commonly practised (e.g., her boyfriend has reportedly done the same). In this space, ERSI is placed as part of a larger ideology and of being at a certain, young age. ERSI is thereby situated within experimental, age-related relationship practices and depicted as a component of a 'normal' developmental

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process (e.g., "part of growing up"), similarly reported by Wilkins and Dalessandro (2013). This ideology is positioned in the past and distanced from, which works to portray herself as a more mature, knowledgeable and monogamous partner. The desire to engage in ERSI is portrayed as occupying the individual at a particular age and needs to be dealt with, further clarified in the following extract:

> Q: How do you think this experience has affected you and your relationships (and possibly friendships)?
>
> PW30: Initially there was a lot of distance between my best friend which was sad, but that faded and we've became close again (not as close though) over the years. It has affected me in terms of feeling enriched by the understandings (and unknowns) I have about desire, sexuality and monogamy. I also feel very content in my relationship now and committed. It's almost like I've got that curiosity out of my system. (38 years)

PW30 depicts her desire as an entity that resided within her in the past. ERSI is subsequently portrayed as a means to dispose of her curiosity and gain knowledge about her desires, which culminated in a monogamous and committed relationship, representative of a good moral character. By constructing ERSI as a way to overcome transgressive sexual desires along the path to monogamy, PW30 creates a context whereby her encounter is ascribed a functional role. Engaging in this behaviour is therefore described as permissible under specific circumstances, rather than constituting the norm (which is still depicted in terms of monogamous relationships), in order to *achieve* monogamy as the desired goal. Such a discourse normalises ERSI as a developmental process towards commitment and monogamy, yet problematises it in the general context of an established, monogamous relationship, by depicting it as an immature practice. Her ERSI is thereby positioned as a minor transgression attributed to an age-related process, rather than a major misdemeanour. The respondent's previous self is in this context depicted as adventurous, sexual and naïve, while her current identity is portrayed as wiser and mature, illustrated by her reportedly fulfilling,

monogamous relationship that she is presently in. As such, she manages to detach her current, mature self from past transgressions and avoid any grave criticism, yet construct herself as more sexually knowledgeable (Farvid & Braun, 2014).

Sexual experience is typically claimed by men to affirm their masculinity (Terry & Braun, 2009). The respondent's account here does not disrupt such gendered norms, as she does not seem to be describing her ERSI to seek affirmation for her sexuality. Instead, the account works to positions her sexual encounters as part of a 'phase' to contrast them with and verify her (preferred) monogamous self. ERSI is thereby positioned as an acceptable practice only during a developmental phase. The discourse here may imply that a woman's sexuality becomes present (rather than lacking (e.g., Hollway, 2001)) in the form of a temporarily residing entity that needs to be discarded. Depicting a (mature) coyness as the favoured position (for redemption) to be contrasted with a sexually curious self, may represent notions characteristic of a traditional sexual double standard (e.g., Farvid et al., 2016; Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005).

Participants often contrasted their 'two selves' (past and present), in order to demonstrate that they had 'learned' from their experiences. In these accounts, they constructed their current self as more knowledgeable and mature. This juxtaposition did not undermine the experience, but rather placed it in a different context – one that may ultimately assist in the construction of their current identity through contrasting work. Respondents' depictions of their past behaviour functioned to demonstrate redemption in the present and elevate the value of their existing, committed relationship. The accounts thereby seemed to illustrate a dependent connection between the past and present – their inseparability representing their experiential continuity (Reavey & Brown, 2006).

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6.3 Chapter Summary

Participants in this study largely depicted ERSI as a transgression, regardless of whether they framed their encounters as positive or negative. The transgressive nature of this act was depicted as deriving from traditional assumptions about heterosexual relationships as monogamous. The moral and social responsibility to adhere to these norms, seemingly required respondents to feel guilty when engaging in ERSI and to provide adequate reasons for their transgression. The justifications for breaking the moral code of conduct, however, did not appear to be equally accessible by both, men and women. For instance, a woman's ERSI was rendered more acceptable if it involved emotions, rather than a purely physical encounter. These assumptions were based on biological notions of gender differences that attributed men's ERSI to a male sex drive and women's encounters to romantic needs (Carabine, 1996; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Kipnis, 2003; Patterson, 1990; Rudman et al., 2013; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007; Sprecher et al., 1987; Tiefer, 1995; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). As such, ERSIs were often ascribed to physically or emotionally lacking relationships. In these cases traditional gender norms seemed to be drawn on, whereby women were required to endure an unsatisfactory relationship, rather than communicate their issues or break up with their partner (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). In these accounts, ERSI was by some participants reportedly taken up as a tool to avoid becoming attached to, and inflict control over their primary partner. Stigmatisation appeared to constitute a countermeasure (especially against women) to such power dynamics within relationships, demonstrating the link between sexuality and power (Gavey, 2005). The repercussions of ERSI were subsequently reported to be more severe for women, including social ostracism and job loss.

ERSI was often depicted as catastrophic and damaging to the relationship, family, friends and the respondents themselves. The participants often located their

destructive, out of control behaviour in the past, as part of a damaged persona. Positioning their engagement in ERSI in the past, served to detach themselves from this (problematic) practice, while simultaneously showcasing a current (healthy) monogamous relationship (to construct themselves as more mature and knowledgeable). The respondents drew on these discourses to (re)negotiate their position in order to (re)gain their stance as autonomous individuals, yet demonstrate their socially sanctioned values to remain a part of society, rather than being ostracised and punished. Their current identity construction may have been the preferable position, since it potentially entitles them to the benefits attributed to monogamous heterosexual relationships (e.g., Mint, 2004; VanEvery, 1996), instead of getting punished as an 'impaired' outcast. In Fairbairn's (1943) words, "…it is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to live in a world ruled by the Devil." (p. 331). The following chapter addresses the relational standards of heterosexuality in more depth and how these are talked about in a more naturalistic setting to examine ERSI's position within heterosexual relationships.

Chapter 7: Social Discourses of ERSI

This final analytic chapter presents data on how ERSI was talked about in a focus group setting with the aim of examining the wider social discourses of ERSI. While Chapters Five and Six focused on individual narratives of ERSI, this chapter sought to outline the general ways ERSI is talked about as an object and form of practice more broadly. Focus groups were chosen to facilitate access to more everyday conversational talk regarding ERSI – that is, how people talked about it with friends, colleagues etc. in a more natural setting. The questions asked of participants did not only target ERSI, but heterosexual relationships more generally. More specifically, the questions encompassed topics of commitment, attraction, relationship boundaries, exclusivity and friendships to add context and depth to Study One. Participants talked about what constitutes a good relationship as fulfilling, loving and requiring work. ERSI was described as a constant risk that can and needs to be contained in an ideal, committed relationship. The discourses identified in this chapter were: fragility of contemporary relationships, the friend threat, norms of relationships, relationships as investments, and relationships as work.

7.1 Fragility of Contemporary Relationships

Idealised contemporary romantic relationships within Western society are often predicated on finding "the one" – a person who will fulfil a wide range of performances and functions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Kipnis, 2003; Mitchell, 2003). These include one's sexual and emotional needs, happiness, and desires. Such an ideal may create high expectations of relationships in regards to finding a perfectly matching partner, who will meet these anticipations for years (decades) to come. In addition to the high criteria set for partners, interferences from life circumstances (e.g., male-female work interactions) were portrayed in this study as potentially disruptive and destructive

to the highly sensitive functionality of the private sphere. The ever-present risk of these relationship and life-changing circumstances (e.g., ERSI) depicted by participants, worked to construe contemporary romantic relationships as fragile. The risk of ERSI was described in particularly acute terms when respondents talked about people's pleasure-seeking behaviour:

> Dane: If you're happy in a relationship, if you're getting everything you need out of a relationship, why would you then go out of your way and potentially cause more trouble?
>
> Sonny: And make yourself unhappy?
>
> Jack: Maybe because it's, people can be hedonistic, you know, people can be happy but they still want more...more, more, more, more, so you…
>
> Dane: Ah, get greedy I guess.
>
> Jack: …yeah exactly so you can be super happy, but you still want just that little something more, so I think that people, not just men, women can...
>
> Dane: ...but I can't remember ever hearing about a happy couple that then ummm being associated with, you know like ERSI behaviour.
>
> Jack: I can.
>
> Dane: More often than not, well especially in the media you always...if you ever hear about so and so cheating on so and so all these events lead to it, like unhappy relationships blah blah blah. You don't really ever hear in the media this incredibly happy couple is now...it's come to light that they've been cheating on each other.
>
> Jack: Or one of them has been cheating.
>
> Dane: Yeah or one of them…
>
> Jack: I think some people can be happy cheating, they can have as I said before they can have the relationship and then have something extra on the side, those types of people.
>
> Dane: Yeah, but that's one person being happy.
>
> Jack: Well, they can still be happy in a relationship, but still be having something else. (FG #3)

This extract comes from a focus group that consisted of four men in their early 20s. Within the talk, the tension that was apparent between Dane and Jack throughout the discussion in regards to what constitutes an acceptable ERSI, is shown. Elsewhere Dane makes his frustration in a disagreement with Jack explicit ("…typical [Jack]"). In

this account, Jack contradicts Dane's questioning of the idea of pursuing ERSI when someone is in a happy relationship. Instead Jack depicts the possibility of people's focus on pleasure-seeking, despite such happiness. This is described by Dane as someone wanting and taking more than their 'fair share'. The interaction demonstrates the negotiation between Jack and Dane in sketching the image of a particularly selfish person ("greedy", "hedonistic") who would seek ERSI, even in a happy relationship. Although acknowledging Jack's statement, Dane tries to oppose Jack's viewpoint by providing 'evidence' (e.g., "in the media") to illustrate the norm that ERSI only occurs in an unhappy relationship. He subsequently approaches Jack's position (who firmly holds onto it by reiterating his statement), by clarifying that his view of happiness was based on both partners being happy, rather than just one, thereby drawing on notions of reciprocity. By talking about the possibility of ERSI in a happy relationship as almost unimaginable, an ERSI is depicted as typically symptomatic of a lacking relationship. The respondents thereby draw a picture of an ideal relationship as monogamous and based on mutuality. ERSI is construed here as understandable and commonplace in an 'unhappy' relationship, while positioned as a self-centred practice when in a happy one. However, what makes a relationship "happy" or how this is judged, is not discussed, though it has been linked to love, affection, sexual satisfaction and partner's mood (e.g., Buss & Shackelford, 1997).

Generally, though, when the ERSI was described to be 'caused' by something (for instance a sick partner, who is unable to fulfil one's physical needs), it was represented as potentially more acceptable. The importance of having a 'real excuse' was also depicted in another focus group discussion that consisted of three older women aged 40-63 years:

JJ: A friend that I was with for five years, I was innocent but he wasn't...he had a partner, but she suffered from or suffers from MS and was debilitated, yeah.

LB: Yeah, and that...and that's a really interesting one...yeah.

JJ: And so I can sort of understand his needs, but he was the most wonderful person to me other than the sexual needs, too...yeah.

LB: And you wouldn't wanna be open with your wife who has MS because that would do them...I've got an exact same friendship in the exact same position and my friend is just bedridden now and he's got to have that life outside of it. So, yeah, I would agree with that too.

Lady Gaga: So in that situation then do you agree that if the needs aren't being met...

LB: I....it's very...it's an interesting one cause I feel that someone is giving so much that they actually need to receive and he's not getting that from his kids, so where do you get it? And I don't think he's doing it to (outbreath) to be disrespectful to her but just, you know.

PF: What's the needs there? What are the needs that you're...talking about?

LB: Umm just that desire to feel loved and that...that...to be held to be nurtured...

Lady Gaga: ...a physical intimacy.

LB: A physical intimacy, yeah, because when you're giving so much of yourself...I mean it's a bit like this job where you give so much of yourself every day, you go home and you really do need to dig deep to give to your family and ummm yeah that's a really good one.

JJ: And you know if I was in his partner's position, I mean he's still nursing her now and I mean this is eight years down the track and umm you couldn't wish for anyone better to be looking after you as well, he's very, very good to her, too and yeah. (FG #2)

JJ outlines here her sexual relations with a married man, whom she describes as a "friend". She opens by positioning herself as "innocent" (as she was single at the time) – a term that invokes a legal and moralistic discourse, referring to the transgressive nature of ERSI, thereby construing her sexual partner as 'guilty' (of ERSI). The responsibility for an ERSI is in that sense depicted as entirely lying with the person who is in the committed relationship. The participant's narrative ties into a larger discursive picture where people have a moral/social responsibility to remain sexually exclusive with their primary partner (Finn, 2010).

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Nonetheless, there are some (unusual) circumstances where ERSI is understandable according to the participants. These are stated to consist of the wife's illness and the man's devotion to taking care of her. The discourses here appear to centre around the principle of reciprocity, whereby the man is portrayed as "giving", without "receiving" anything in return. As LB puts it, the "need to receive" (sexually, as implied by stating that his children could not provide it) is built up from his dedication to support his wife, without her being able to offer anything in return. LB's statement works to construct the man's physical 'needs' as a product of his altruistic behaviour. Sexual intimacy is thereby seen as an important part of a reciprocal relationship. As such, relationships are construed as transactional and ostensibly equal. This works to position him as a selfless individual, allowing him to engage in ERSI for the purpose of having his physical "needs" met, due to his wife's inability to fulfil those. Relationships are thereby depicted as having to meet certain functional requirements, and if failing to do so, it may be reasonable to seek fulfilment elsewhere. A distinction is then portrayed in this account between an acceptable encounter and an unacceptable ERSI, whereby the selfless individual is contrasted with a selfish subject position. Some of the requirements of a relationship are outlined to be nurture and physical intimacy, which are constructed in 'natural' terms (i.e., "needs") that are supposed to be part of a romantic relationship. More specifically, the man is depicted as ostensibly entitled to ERSI, since he is fulfilling more than his duties as a husband, without having his own needs met by his wife in return.

However, the participants did not portray the engagement in ERSI as necessarily driven by needs, but depicted such cases as exceptions, contrasting them against more common assumptions about ERSI as individualistic. The 'cheater' was then largely characterised as making a decision, rather than passively going along with the situation:

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PF: So do you think that there's a difference between people who cheat and people who don't cheat…?

Anna: I don't think there's an intrinsic difference. I mean maybe some people have it conditioned into them young that monogamy is not an important part of a relationship and I guess they were open with their partner about that and their partner is fine with it, that'll be fine. But I think no, if people try and say 'oh there are born cheaters' they're just making excuses. Everyone can make that choice. People can overcome, you know, conditioning...

PF: What do you people think about that?

[…]

Emily: I don't think it makes any difference. Everybody is capable of cheating, everybody is capable of doing anything. It's just whether…

Emma: Whether you choose to or not.

Emily: Yeah, so it's a choice and maybe situational as well. Maybe you don't put yourself in that situation, so you never have to make that choice.

Amelia: Yeah, 'cause you could apply the same principles to talk about murder, couldn't you, really? Everybody's got the potential to murder.

Emily: I know, I was thinking that, then I was like everybody murders and then I was like don't, you're freaking out everybody. (FG #4)

This group consisted of six women, mainly in their 20s, with one older woman aged 49 years (Louise). In this extract, Anna emphasises that for her, ERSI is not driven by an intrinsic biological drive or certain types of inborn personalities, but a conscious individual decision. She downplays the impact of the environment ("conditioning"), by highlighting that anyone can stay monogamous if they "choose" to do so, regardless of their upbringing. As such, she portrays the rational person as able to exercise control over their 'physical' needs and capable of transforming themselves (into a monogamous individual). The others provide support for Anna's statement. Emily in particular acknowledges ERSI as a contextual practice, but depicts getting into a potential ERSI situation as a rational decision, as well, elevating the notion of personal choice and control. The subject is portrayed as being able to weigh up the potential benefits and consequences of their actions. This positions the 'cheater' as fully accountable for

his/her encounters. The respondents depict here a neoliberal personhood by constructing the individual as a self-regulating, calculating and agentic subject that is free to determine the course of their actions and selfhood (Gill, 2008). This stands in contrast to the personal accounts given in the first study, where respondents depicted themselves as not actively choosing to engage in ERSI, but driven by their biological drives, desires, and needs. As such, the participants in Study One described an external attribution in regards to their own ERSI, whereas the respondents in Study Two drew on an internal attribution style in respect to other people's sexual encounters. The accounts thereby reflected social psychological notions of an internal and external locus of control (Rotter, 1990) with regards to ERSI.

The capacity to engage in ERSI is depicted as present in all individuals and compared by Amelia and Emily to the capacity of anyone to commit murder. This was a comparison that was made in other groups, too, and emphasises the transgressive nature of ERSI as probably the worst thing that can be done in a relationship. Although the arguments given by the respondents here were in accordance with each other, in this focus group disagreements started to appear when asked about a more specific ERSI scenario that involved alcohol:

> PF: What if, like ummm…there was like drinking, drugs or something involved? Does that sort of make it better or worse that someone had a one off?
>
> Emma: I feel like that's almost not as bad, because you do lose control. I mean obviously you wouldn't want people to, and I don't know that I'd be able to forgive it anyway. But I feel like that's not as bad as like knowingly you know, being in the right frame of mind and making a decision to do that versus just like losing a bit of control.
>
> Louise: But then they made a choice to drink and lose control or take drugs and lose control…
>
> Emma: That's true.
>
> Louise: …knowing that could lead to them doing something out of their control. So how is that not (unclear) equally…
>
> […]

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Emma: Yeah, but I guess, you know, everyone gets drunk.

Anna: But how out of control do people get? I've never been so drunk that I would....

Louise: I mean you don't just trip and fall on a penis.

Anna: …yeah, exactly!

(Laughter)

Louise: At least I've never done it. I've made a choice if I'm drunk to bang some guy and I'm always aware of the decision I've made.

Emma: Yes that's true. I do so....

Elizabeth: And if you're not, it's kinda rape.

Amelia: Yeah.

[…]

Louise: I personally don't put the alcohol and drug thing in there. That's just a weak excuse. Personally.

Emma: I don't think I'd excuse it.

Amelia: I think it's just seen as something that's not as bad, but it's just as bad because they made that choice to lose control in the first place.

Louise: I think that everyone knows that there's an increased likelihood with that and so that seems easier to justify the (unclear)

Amelia: If I'm drunk I'm more likely to be like "It's all good. He'll never find out". Not that I've ever done that, but you know. I've thought it, just not followed through, because even drunk, I have control.

Anna: I could see, you know, kissing someone because you've sort of lost inhibitions, but…

Amelia: 'Oh shit what did I just do?'

Emma: (unclear) That is quite different, yeah.

Amelia: It takes a while like you know, I got drunk, but then I had to leave the club. We had to get a taxi. We had to do that half an hour ride way home and then we had to find a condom that took 20 minutes, because I was too drunk to walk in a straight line. By that time you've had enough time to think about consequences and you touched that wanker that I said before.

Anna: Yeah, that's very true (FG #4)

Emma's response to ERSI being more understandable if alcohol is involved, is opposed by Louise's depiction of losing control as a choice, positioning the subject as calculating in their decision to get into such a state with its possible consequences. ERSI is then depicted as more understandable when control over one's body is compromised.

Despite initially agreeing with Louise's comment regarding the decision to drink, Emma attempts to undermine Louise's notion of having an individual choice, by drawing on a discourse of conformity that pertains to the drinking culture. In particular, Emma argues that the individual is ostensibly not given a choice of whether they want to get drunk or not, which may result in an ERSI. None of the other group members, however, agree with this point, but depict the subject as fully capable of making the decision to have sex, even when drunk. The subject is depicted as able to govern their body, fully aware of the effects and outcomes, and active in the initiation of not only the sexual act, but the entire situation. ERSI is thereby positioned as a planned and calculated activity, involving a number of rational decisions over a prolonged time. As such, the respondents portray the individual as fully responsible for their ERSI, rather than the context, which contrasts with the findings in Study One. A subject who is incapable of making a rational decision due to drunkenness is subsequently described by Elizabeth as a victim of rape, rather than someone who pursued ERSI for enjoyment. The 'cheater' is thereby removed of the possibility to take up a less agentic position to justify their ERSI, unless they classify the act as "rape".

The extract above focused on the autonomous part of the "cheater" in the decision to engage in ERSI. When discussing the part of being the third person (e.g., "the mistress"), participants noted that they would not be interested in having sex with someone who is in a relationship:

> Emma: Maybe it's just me, but I don't like sharing. I have no interest in sleeping with someone who was also sleeping with somebody else and that applies whether I'm in the relationship with them or whether they're in a relationship with someone else. But I'm like 'nope, while they are with me, they are only with me'. Obviously it's different, if it's like a one night stand, but then again I don't think I would want to sleep with someone who was in a relationship.
>
> Amelia 'I'm sorry I'm not interested in your gonorrhoea'.
>
> Emma: Yeah, basically. Yeah, yeah.

PF: What is it about the concept of sharing that's such a turn off?

Emma: I don't know, I like things to be mine.

(Laughter)

Amelia: I think, it…it feels cleaner, than if it has just been in another woman.

(Laughter)

Emma: That's true. It's like even if you know they slept with like 10, 20 women before you, once they're with…if you know that they're like clean when they start being with you, then they're gonna continue being totally clean.

(Laughter)

Amelia: And I mean, you can only wash so much and feel clean, if it's been used in somebody else's urine. (FG #4)

In the above extract, participants discussed the concept of sharing a partner by drawing on a discourse of exclusivity and ownership (e.g., "I like things to be mine"), as well as physical risk. They justify such notions by placing an emphasis on sexually transmitted infections and sanitation. More specifically, the respondents depict sharing a sexual partner as a possibly dangerous and unsavoury practice, positioning such sexual practices as a risky activity. As such, they highlight more broadly the importance of monogamy, by construing it as a sexually safer practice. Monogamous relationships are positioned as a measure to avoid STIs, based on mutual trust. This may not necessarily be the case, however, as the majority of those who engage in ERSI, reportedly never use a condom with their primary or secondary partner (Choi et al., 1994; Conley et al., 2013; Vail-Smith et al., 2010). The autonomy of the individual in a relationship who can make the choice to engage in ERSI is thereby depicted as managed through and limited by a social responsibility to remain monogamous (Finn, 2010) for the purpose of their sexual partner's health. In that sense, the standing of monogamy was manifested through discourses that focused on sexual health (e.g., Conley et al., 2013) and hygiene.

The participants in this study generally highlighted the functionality of relationships. The requirements were depicted in terms of fulfilling certain needs, such

as love, physical intimacy and nurture. Based on notions of getting the optimum out of a relationship for oneself, participants often drew on neoliberalist notions of subjectivity (Gill, 2008) that included rational decisions (e.g., in regards to engaging in ERSI), self-regulating their sexual encounters, and calculating in finding the best partner possible, for instance by taking up ERSI (to be further discussed later). Relationships were thereby depicted as a means to fulfil an array of emotional, sexual, social and financial functions, desires and needs. These were relayed as having to be met by and to the satisfaction of both partners, representative of the principle of reciprocity. This notion worked to position the person's engagement in ERSI as more acceptable, if their partner did not meet their needs. Relationships were thereby construed as a potentially fragile premise, based on a system whereby each party ostensibly pursues his/her own objectives (such as finding a better/the perfect partner). Following a self-interest based agenda created a context of pressure that positioned relationships and subsequently the parties involved as unstable and vulnerable, respectively. Consequently, the notion of reciprocity became one of obligation (e.g., Braun et al., 2003). However, if the requirements were met, an individual's ERSI was depicted in hedonistic terms. The subject was here constructed as an active agent in the initiation of ERSI, and in control of their body, as well as the situation, holding them fully accountable for their actions. The autonomy to engage in ERSI was portrayed as managed through a social responsibility to remain monogamous for reasons of sexual health and hygiene (Conley et al., 2013; Finn, 2010). The fragility of relationships was not only highlighted through the principles of reciprocity and "greed", but also through people's ease of access to sex in contemporary Western society, as outlined next.

7.1.1 Access to sexual partners

ERSI was depicted as more easily accessible in present day society due to the commercialisation of sex. The economic system was thereby depicted as creating a

constant risk of ERSI, positioning relationships as increasingly unstable in contemporary times. The respondents portrayed a consumerist mentality with regards to sex and relationships, whereby people focus on what they can gain from a relationship and anything can be acquired if the means are present. As such, they positioned the individual as a consumerist, pleasure-seeking subject. The following extract demonstrates how Chris talked about the purchase of sex in a casual manner:

> SP: Right. So you think there are other things that are more important than the attraction to the...?
>
> Chris: I've seen people going to ummm going to hookers to sit down and have a chat with them and have you know to touch them not...not only to have sex with them but to spend one hour, one and a half hours with them to chat with them, to say something that they are not able to say openly to their wife. Not their personal stuff like certain kind of language that you do not use with your wife.
>
> John: Understandable ummm…
>
> Chris: It's not that you're...that your wife is not fulfilling but you might have some undesirable desires umm… (laughs)
>
> […]
>
> Chris: Aaah, I would say that...my personal opinion is that I'm happy with the relationship ummm and I think that I'm sensible enough to categorise an emotional relationship separately with a sexual one, separately with a commitment, so I can put them in separate boxes
>
> SP: Yeah.
>
> […]
>
> Chris: I think that I am happy with the relationship but okay one day I thought I want to have a Biryani [Indian dish], I'll go and have a Biryani.
>
> (Laughter)
>
> SP: Right (laughs).
>
> John: Umm I think you can be happy in a relationship and you go and have an affair, but I think you have to question whether you are actually in love with the person you are in a relationship with.
>
> SP: Right.
>
> John: I mean is...two different things is being happy and whether they're in love, you know (pause)...because if...I would say if you're not fully in love with a person the affair is to try ummm try and, and fill a void. (FG #1)

This focus group consisted of four men aged 27-50 years, with mixed ethnicities. Here, Chris depicts purchasing sex from a prostitute in a casual way, comparing it to buying food (the Indian dish Biryani). This works to clarify that there is no emotional bond or relationship dissatisfaction associated with an ERSI, but downplays it to trying different 'flavours'. Although representative of the hedonistic persona that just wants "more", Chris outlines that this may not be the case. Instead, the reason for pursuing such an activity is stated to be certain (sexual) practices that cannot be conducted with their wife, as they could be regarded as 'unnatural' ("undesirable desires"). This positions ERSI as not necessarily destabilising, but possibly adding to the stability of the marriage by helping to overcome particular longings that the primary partner cannot meet. He draws on a notion of a Madonna/whore complex (Ussher, 1994), to emphasise that there are two types of women who satisfy different desires that one person cannot possibly fulfil. The discourse drawn on by Chris is representative of traditional notions of marriage, whereby passionate sex was regarded as unacceptable with the wife and acceptable with a mistress (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). By separating emotions from sex and distinguishing the sexual experience with a prostitute from that in a relationship, Chris manages to position himself as a committed individual, who is "happy" with his marriage. Chris' notion is contested by John, though, who moves away from the notion of seeking complete fulfilment, to questioning the feelings of those engaging in ERSI. More specifically, a committed relationship is portrayed by John as being about "love", rather than Chris' concept of happiness, implicating a dearth of feelings and therefore commitment on Chris' side. Chris' approach towards acquiring sex is as such construed as a compensation behaviour.

Those with money, however, were not only talked about as being able to buy sex, but also as more attractive to potential ERSI partners. In particular the opportunities

provided in the contemporary economy (e.g., at work) were often outlined as enabling

people to readily access sexual partners. In FG #2 such a discussion was evident:

> PF: Can you tell me a little bit more? Do you mean the…who is the person with more money and power?
>
> Lady Gaga: Yeah.
>
> PF: How does that affect an ERSI relationship situation?
>
> Lady Gaga: Well, normally with money and power there's more exposure, so they're normally travelling and have a lot more opportunity ummm will be able to ummm house her ummm the other gives them gifts ummm bond that relationship. Whereas if you don't have that financial means, you are not as attractive ummm (clicks tongue) and will not be able to provide umm those opportunities. So for me if you don't have that abundance of power or wealth or money…
>
> PF: …and who tends to be more in that situation?
>
> Lady Gaga: …it depends ummm historically it's been men, so I would think that historically it's been men that would transgress more. But with women now having umm more financial means and the opportunity, the exposure to a lot more people, so the interaction with a lot more people, which ummm create opportunities for this.
>
> JJ: Mmmm. Very good. It's true though, you see it.
>
> Lady Gaga: You do ummm…
>
> JJ: Totally here in the business world, the sporting world, politicians. (FG #2)

In this extract Lady Gaga depicts money and power as creating status, making

the individual more desirable to others, and thereby generating opportunity for the

subject to access an ERSI. Sex is not depicted as directly purchased, but through gifts

and financial support. The 'cheater' is as such positioned as an active agent in the

initiation of ERSI, while the ERSI partner is portrayed as a consumerist subject, who

will offer a relationship/sex in exchange for goods. The respondents draw on long-

established understandings of gendered practices within heterosex, whereby men

receive sex in exchange for providing financially for their partner (Rudman et al., 2013).

In particular, a gendered notion of status is depicted, whereby men are described as

traditionally more likely to pursue an ERSI. Gender equality in economic terms is

construed as generating a greater risk of ERSI by creating more "opportunity" for both men and women. This subsequently positions monogamous, heterosexual relationships as having the potential to be increasingly unstable within the current economic system. The participants then went on to elaborate how a shift in culture within the current economy has led to a more consumerist mentality:

> LB: What I dislike about all of that is that our language seems to be okay with all of that and…that's when I feel old, because I think I haven't been raised with that sort of language that you see on TV and social media.
>
> PF: What sort of language do you mean?
>
> LB: Well, it's just sort of ummm…I don't know…it's almost just saying…what is…oh I don't even watch sitcoms anymore, but these people are having affairs left, right and centre and I think kids today, because they're seeing…so many parents have split because of affairs…that they're now seeing that's what you do.
>
> JJ: That's acceptable, mmm.
>
> LB: You…and their whole mentality of "oh my job's not giving me what I want I'll just go somewhere else" and it's this sort of…they don't seem to value relationships. Ummm there's nothing invested in it anymore, I think we've lost a lot. Yeah.
>
> Lady Gaga: I think the other factors that have come in as well is ummm the changing of society with ummm (clicks tongue) a lot more consumerism and regardless….I think it's like a throwaway society now and it…
>
> LB: …yeah it is that…
>
> Lady Gaga: …that throw away mentality so it's like "okay you no longer fit me you gone".
>
> LB: Yeah.
>
> Lady Gaga: So…and "I'm always looking for the next best thing".
>
> LB: The newer model mmm.
>
> Lady Gaga: The newer model…ummm "I wanna upgrade" (laughs).
>
> PF: (laughs) Like you upgrade your I-phone every six months, so…
>
> LB: Yeah.
>
> Lady Gaga: It is. And that must have influence…that must have influence. (FG #2)

Here the respondents talk about the change in society that they perceive is contributing to the fragility of contemporary relationships. They depict the laissez-faire

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portrayal of ERSI in the media and society as contributing to the demise of stable

coupledom. The group conveys that relationships have instead become disposable (e.g.,

Bauman, 2013) with the rise of consumerism. As such, a generational rift is illustrated,

with a more consumerist mentality ascribed to millennials, who are depicted negatively.

This generation is described as having a sense of entitlement to having their needs

fulfilled in the best possible fashion and as trying to improve upon the partner they are

with, much like an electronic device. Partners are thereby positioned as a consumerist

good for the younger generation, who in turn are construed as individualistic subjects,

preoccupied with focusing on their own needs. The participants then illustrate a lack of

investment by the younger generation, which is described as a devaluing of

relationships. They continue to elaborate on the selfish subject position and how to

counteract such consumption patterns:

> PF: Mmmm. Can we talk about that a little bit more? What do you guys think? Sort of what do you feel like is happening in the contemporary cultural context with regards to relationships and committed relationships (laughs)?
>
> JJ: Going... the next generation down... in my opinion and the ones that I see...and I hope yours aren't like that...ummm the...not enough...you know, they have children they tend to just split. They're not getting married, they're entering a relationship just like that and living together and that sort of thing, you know? So discourage all that sort of thing.
>
> LB: Yeah, it's almost like there's a sense of "what can I get from this relationship"...like you see it in jobs "what can I get from this job", you know, "what are you going to give me" and when those needs aren't met, you know, I think a woman looks over the fence for a man and goes "ah what...where can I get my next"...
>
> PF: Right, right, so almost like describing a sense of kind of selfishness or self-focus or self-interest and inward.
>
> LB: ...yeah.
>
> JJ: ...definitely. (FG #2)

The individualistic subject is depicted as having less to lose, positioning an

ERSI as more affordable, common and symptomatic of a loss of values in regards to

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relationships. JJ draws here on a religious discourse in her suggestion to counteract the demise of committed relationships by highlighting the importance of marriage as an indicator of commitment and investment (e.g., Feldman & Cauffman, 1999). More specifically, she argues for a regulatory state to reinforce what she considers morally reprehensible relationality.

The participants in the study often depicted a modern, consumerist society, in which sex was increasingly easier to access, portraying it as a commodity, such as a phone or food. ERSI was thereby illustrated as more readily available, drawing on notions of societal change, economic gender equality, and individualistic needs to demonstrate the lack of investment in relationships. Coupledom was then construed as fragile and indicative of a demise in values. In other words, ERSI was not only depicted as symptomatic of deficient relationships, but as suggestive of a loss of moral standards in society more generally. It was not only the opportunities and affordability of sex that were portrayed as contributing to the instability of relationships, but also the greater choice people are given in contemporary society.

7.1.2 Abundance of choice/options

The participants described having a wide array of choices in their partner selection that tasked them with selecting the best possible option for them, rather than one that is 'good enough' (Schwartz, 2004). More specifically, given various options was depicted as creating greater pressure in selecting the 'right' partner, with the ultimate goal defined as finding one's soulmate. This pressure was portrayed as adding to the fragility of relationships with individuals continuously evaluating their relationships in terms of whether they meet the ideal and looking for a possibly 'better match' (Bauman, 2013). In the following extract the respondents discuss what an ideal partner is:

Marcus: But I got a question and I haven't found the answer yet, like do soulmates really exist out there? I don't know ummm but (pause) I, I (pause) I don't know if you guys have an answer.

John: I do.

Marcus: Okay.

John: With my first wife I thought I was really in love, got married then eventually things fell apart and when I look back at it, you know having experienced what I call my soulmate, I don't think I ever was in love like I am now. There is a difference. Yes, I loved her and I thought I was really deeply, emotionally (pause) everywhere in love type thing I don't know how else to say it ummm, but now I look back and see I connect so fully with my now wife and I don't think I had that with my ex...but I do have this extra special thing with my wife and (pause) we've got a wonderful family and (pause) I wouldn't jeopardise my wife or having my kids with me one second. I wouldn't even think about being with another woman to put that in the, in jeopardy.

Marcus: Were you thinking the same thing when you had your first wife or is it different or…?

John: With my first wife?

Marcus: Like, I mean did you kinda have the same, I don't know, maybe at the beginning?

John: Yeah, well, I thought I had what I have now, but I look back at it, it was never quite as (pause) fulfilling, it was never quite as tangible, it was never quite as (pause) I've got no way of describing love, I've got no ummm (pause) ummm I thought I had it, but now I look back at it... it wasn't quite there.

SP: Right.

John: Ummm (pause) I've only had two relationships, which have been long lasting relationships, you know ummm but I really believe I have what you would call my soulmate, I just do.

SP: So what is the meaning of soulmate for you?

John: Well, somebody that kind of completes me, but I don't have to be with her to feel good.

SP: Right.

John: But when I get to go home and she's there, I feel better, you know, she's just a umm I don't know how to say it ummm....I'm complete without her, but I'm more when I'm with her and she helps me be a better person just by being who she is…

SP: Mmm hmm

John: …ummm there's just a....

Marcus: That's pretty cool.

John: It's just a completion.

Chris: It's like a habit, right?

John: It's more than just habit.

[…]

John: It's actually if you think about it, it's like the Yin and the Yang sign, they're both continuously going around, but both separate, but both part of the same thing.

SP: Mmmm

John: You know, we're both doing our own thing, we both have our own, we both go to our own jobs, we both have our own things that we go to out of work, separate from each other then there are things that we have we do together. (FG #1)

Marcus initially expresses his curiosity and some doubt about the existence of "soulmates". John then makes an attempt to convince Marcus that soulmates are real by depicting his current relationship as "special". Rather than a fulfilment of various needs often depicted by the women in the FGDs, the ideal relationship is depicted in this account as consisting of 'true love', which may work as an assurance against ERSI. A monogamous relationship is as such portrayed as representative of having achieved the ideal. By describing a lack of temptation to engage in ERSI, John highlights the specialness of his relationship. The connection with his current wife is described as lying outside of words; instead he uses metaphors to portray the concept of soulmate, functioning to convince the others of his commitment and having found his soulmate. John's contrasting of his failed marriage with his current relationship, works to illustrate how he came to understand the difference between a 'good' and a 'special' relationship. This understanding is used to support his reported confidence in knowing that he has found his soulmate. John thereby conveys that his initial choice was not the 'right' one and that there is a possibility of finding the ideal partner.

The choice people are given in the selection of their partner, was depicted as creating pressure for the individual to find their soulmate and subsequently left relationships in an unstable state:

Derek: Yeah, it's probably a tricky one, because yeah if you've got the two people in the relationship and there's this third person for one of them to start to get to know the person, but at what point do they realise that "yeah this is the person I should be with"? Is it before they have sex? Is it after? Can they make that call, can they say "this person is actually my soulmate, however before I take anything further, now I'm going to let my partner know" and then obviously as the partner you have a right to ask well "how far has this gone" you know? It would seem like...I'm picturing if I was involved in that situation, it would seem strange for that ummm...to come to my partner to just decide based on just knowing this person without going...to have gotten to that point to say that they've made that decision. To me it almost seems very hard to make that distinction, to make that decision that this is your soulmate without becoming intimate with them.

Dane: Yeah, I mean sex is an integral part of a relationship, so if you were to say to your partner "look I've met someone and I think they're my soulmate" (pause) like if someone were to come to me and say that I would've...I would immediately think they've already slept together. How can you...for me I don't think I could say that without having already had sex with them that's kinda where you're most intimate with and that's where you, that connection is really formed I think. So it's tricky to say...you wouldn't really be able to say to someone "ah they're my soulmate" unless you had, and if you had gone to someone "I think they're my soulmate" and haven't had sex with them then you might leave your current partner, sleep with them and then realise that they're not. (FG #3)

The account seems to revolve around the notion relayed by the men's FGDs that love is integral to a relationship, and in that sense, people may only engage in ERSI with someone who can potentially be their soulmate. More specifically, participants depict that "knowing" a person may not be sufficient to decide whether someone could be their soulmate. Instead, sex is described as the site where a "connection" can be established. Given a choice is then portrayed in these accounts as creating a dilemma for the parties involved: making a decision without finding out if a connection exists (i.e., through sex) may lead to the wrong verdict, while engaging in ERSI may leave them in a morally reprehensible position, potentially jeopardising their relationship. ERSI is thereby construed as a risky means to finding one's soulmate. The account demonstrates the notion of a paradox of choice, whereby aiming for the best option can be daunting for the subject, who is offered a multitude of possibilities (Schwartz, 2004).

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Subsequently, soulmate was described as a dangerous concept that may pose a potential threat to monogamy:

> Derek: Just thinking what these two think about what a soulmate is...I dunno maybe I'm just a bit cynical, but the idea of thinking that there's one person...as soon as you start thinking like that, I think it's very tough, because if you are in a relationship and you do start thinking like that I think that you can question your own commitment to this person, which I think is not a good thing and maybe that whole idea of soulmate is kind of a dangerous thought.
>
> Sonny: Yeah.
>
> SP: Right.
>
> Derek: Because you'll probably never, I mean, it's not...
>
> SP: So you think it might actually stop you from committing fully to that person?
>
> Derek: Yeah, because you could think "well what if I haven't actually chosen the right person" and it's yeah.
>
> Jack: It's really whimsical, I think it's a strange idea.
>
> Dane: I think if you're associating soulmate in a relationship kind of point of view as Jack said before, there's like you know if you had a ladder, you'd have your relationship as one of the top rungs and then soulmate kinda floating above the ladder by itself. Umm but then there are certain situations where you could have people in a relationship and they say they are soulmates then they separate, find other people and they're just as happy.
>
> SP: Mmm hmm.
>
> Dane: So you know, so I think (pause) in certain situations, I think some people might think they're soulmates and they're not. And time and distance and other people that come into your lives, proves that right, but there may be also situations where two people separate and they...regardless of how many other people they have coming into their life, they still kind of miss the other person and still want that connection back. (FG #3)

Derek depicts the social pressure created by the search for their soulmate, which may derive from media portrayals of the search for 'the one' (e.g., Mint, 2004). He outlines that this pressure may ultimately prevent individuals from committing to their partner, as they may constantly question their choice. Arguing that there may not be a "perfect" partner, positions the concept of soulmate as a fruitless hunt and subsequently a possible threat to monogamy. Dane, in contrast, argues for the existence of soulmates

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by emphasising the 'special connection' people may have over time and space. The difference between a soulmate and a conventional partner is depicted as consisting of an ultimate happiness with the former that cannot be achieved with anyone else, distinguishing itself from other relationships one might have. The concept of soulmate is thereby constructed as commensurate with finding and selecting the person with whom the best possible connection has been formed. The account depicts a notion of uncertainty with regards to realising the existence of such a connection with someone. This uncertainty is portrayed as overcome by establishing the connection people have as lasting over time, regardless of entering other relationships. What is also interesting is how the notion of a soulmate is depicted as something that requires consideration – it is a well-known cultural construct which people grapple with – as shown here.

Dane's concept of soulmate seems to contrast with Derek's ideas. They subsequently went on to negotiate a common ground:

> Derek: Like no one is going to be a perfect match for you, but there's always going to be someone who's like a 98%, you're pretty happy with them in all areas.
>
> SP: Okay, so they may be better than your current partner?
>
> Derek: No, I think, like you can be in a relationship with someone, realise they're not like...there's no one that's absolutely perfect, but you like them so much you can't ...I mean there may be that slight doubt at the back of your mind, like are they absolutely perfect? Maybe not, but your…you feel strongly enough and love them enough that you, you're not thinking of other people, I guess.
>
> Sonny: You're not seeing their bad side and other people's good side.
>
> Derek: Yeah.
>
> Dane: Kind of like you're blinded by your feelings, in a way.
>
> Derek: Yeah, I just think...yeah, maybe that is a sign maybe someone isn't a perfect person...they have their flaws, but you accept them. Yeah.
>
> SP: Mmm hmm.
>
> Dane: Yeah, making compromises as well, probably like you accept...you accept that this person has these flaws.
>
> SP: Mmm.

Dane: They...I mean you know they may have these flaws, but they may also have some great attributes that other people are lacking and as a result you resolve to compromise...you know, you take them for their flaws and their good points at the same time.

SP: Mmm.

Derek: That's what makes them who they are by definition a soulmate. (FG #3)

Derek initially argues against the notion of a soulmate as an ultimately happy relationship, which seems to contrast with Dane's previously outlined idea. However, agreeing with Derek's viewpoint that nobody is perfect, Dane provides a different conceptualisation of soulmate, highlighting compromise as a means to relationship success. As such, Dane manages to hold on to his position, without overtly disputing Derek's account. This works to get Derek to agree to the existence of (Dane's version of) soulmate, as any disagreement would contradict his own argument about compromise. The participants emphasise here the strength of feelings as a defining characteristic of a committed relationship, similar to John's notion of love earlier. Looking for a potentially new partner and possibly engaging in ERSI are thereby positioned as indicative of a lack of feelings and commitment. More specifically, ERSI was located in the men's FGDs as symptomatic of a lack of love, rather than a lacking relationship. This notion differs from the women's FGDs where need fulfilment was highlighted in regards to an ideal relationship and an assurance against ERSI.

The male respondents largely talked about the concept of soulmate in ways that portrayed it as vague and thereby as creating difficulties in making the correct decision in respect to partner selection. At times, this notion was contested and described as a myth. As such, it was construed as a dangerous approach to relationships, potentially threatening monogamy by constantly encouraging people to look out for a better match. The participants drew on notions of a paradox of choice (Schwartz, 2004), which encouraged them to find the best partner possible and created a state of uncertainty with

regards to their partner selection. Those searching for 'the one' were thereby positioned as less committed, less willing to compromise (depicted as essential to commitment), and more likely to engage in ERSI. Relationships were thus constructed as fragile, particularly when under the scrutiny of a romantic ideal. The choice people were described to have was further outlined to depend on their other relationships, such as friendships.

7.2 The Friend Threat

Friends were often illustrated as potential sexual and romantic partners. This positioned (opposite sex) friends as possible ERSI partners and thereby a threat to existing romantic relationships. These accounts depicted a lack of distinction between what constitutes a close, platonic friendship and a more emotional, romantic involvement, constructing the risk of an ERSI as often concealed. The following focus group discussed the resemblances between friendships and relationships:

> Dane: Well, yeah I mean it is natural, but by definition...if you say to someone "oh look this is my partner" or "we're in a relationship together" you would immediately think "well these two are sleeping together".
>
> Sonny: Otherwise they'd just be friends.
>
> Dane: Otherwise why go through the trouble of having to put up with all the crap (laughs) in the relationship if you're not...
>
> (Laughing)
>
> Dane: You know what I mean?
>
> Jack: Yeah, no, that's what I meant, you know, as a male, the physical side is assumed, for me it is.
>
> Derek: I mean maybe it's what defines just friends and a partner, like if you're very good friends with someone and your partner, sex is the only jump.
>
> Dane: Well, you could argue that, you know, you could have best...two people that are best friends and two people that are in a relationship together and the only difference between the two relationships is the intimacy side of things.
>
> SP: Mmm hmmm.

> Dane: More often than not you will find a lot of people that are best friends end up going into a relationship together, so yeah, I think basically...the question was what do you expect out of a committed relationship, right? (FG #3)

Sex is here outlined to be a given and a requisite in relationships, portraying it as an incentive for men for "putting up with all the crap". This works to position men as sexually driven beings, whose motivations to be in a relationship are solely of a sexual nature. Women are subsequently depicted as needing 'a lot of work' that men would preferably not have to deal with. This is demonstrative of a have/hold discourse through the notion of reciprocity, whereby men and women get different things out of a relationship (e.g., Braun et al., 2003; Hollway, 1989, 2001). By portraying sex as a "natural" and fixed feature of a relationship (for men), the respondents seem to position men as pursuing a relationship mainly to get sex. Sex is depicted as the central characteristic that makes a distinction between a friendship and a relationship (e.g., Jackson & Scott, 2004a). This subsequently positions the emotions involved as the same for the different types of relationships, convoluting the lines between romance and friendship. Not only does this work to situate physical intimacy as the defining practice that constitutes a romantic relationship, but friends as potential (ERSI) partners, explicitly stated by Dane. It further echoes his point of the ideal relationship as consisting of friendship.

The following extract demonstrates how participants talked about the notion that men and women cannot just be friends, too:

> Emma: Like, I feel emotional [involvement] is worse if there's sex involved, as well. Like if they're in another relationship, or you know, have fallen for another person, then I feel like it's worse, because they should have done something about their initial relationship, if they wanted to be in that, but without the physical stuff, I don't know.
>
> Anna: Cause how do you go from saying we're just good friends, who happen to be a male and female and share a lot, to love? So it's hard to say how that happens in a single relationship, much less outside a

relationship. But you don't want to say you can't have any female friends once you're in a relationship.

Emma: Yeah, exactly.

Louise: Yeah, well, that's the point, I would say it's the physical, definitely.

Emily: When you do meet someone, you do check them out and go like 'dang I'd tap that' or you would…you do!

Elizabeth: Even if you are in a relationship!

(Laughter)

Anna: For me it would be really, really easy, because all of my male friends, like 'no I would never have any interest in sleeping with you' so it wouldn't matter if I was friends with them and still in a relationship with someone else. But I know for other people that's not the same, so, I don't know, where would you define emotional cheating starting? I guess if you have to lie about it, that's not a good sign.

Emma: That's true. (FG #4)

A partner's inappropriate emotional involvement with someone outside their primary relationship is depicted as difficult to spot, but possibly more damaging to a relationship, especially in the absence of sex. This is described as particularly the case for friends who are of different genders (e.g., male-female friendships) and may eventually engage in sexual relations with one another. The respondents thereby highlight heteronormative notions that privilege romantic relationships (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Carabine, 1996; Jackson & Scott, 2004a; D. Richardson, 1996; Wilkinson, 2010) as guiding all kinds of male-female relating. More specifically, Anna depicts the emotional bond in a companionship as potentially leading to 'love', portraying blurred lines between a friendship and a romantic involvement. A connection between friends is thereby construed as a slippery slope that could result in an ERSI, positioning friendships as a risk to romantic relationships. As the notion of an emotional involvement appears vague, Louise portrays a sexual encounter as a better indicator of 'cheating' and hence as 'worse'. In order to emphasise Louise's point, Emily and Elizabeth depict the thought of engaging sexually with someone (outside of a

relationship) as always present, which functions to position such thoughts as commonplace. Only a physical encounter is then portrayed as a clear indication of someone's transgression. The account ties in with evolutionary psychological notions that depict friendships in terms of their reciprocity potential (e.g., Vigil, 2007). That is, a friendship between a man and a woman may be an investment that could be reciprocated in some form in the future, for instance as a sexual or romantic relationship. Friendships between men and women are thereby positioned as risky, especially if the boundaries are not established in advance. Friends who were single were particularly described to be regarded as posing a threat to relationships:

> LB: Actually, an interesting one with being a widow and all of your friends are couples…the women…your close girlfriends look at you differently. They looked at me as a potential umm threat that their partner could sleep with.
>
> Lady Gaga: Dreadful.
>
> PF: Fascinating.
>
> LB: It was really hideous.
>
> JJ: End up split when you're friends with all these couples...I…yeah, I know…
>
> PF: That's fascinating, that's actually what I was going to ask you before, you know, how do you experience being single in a world of couples?
>
> JJ: Yes. They look at you as though you're a threat. You actually eliminating some of them because it's not worth it. (FG #2)

The respondents here talk about the stigma that women without a partner have to face in light of the friendship threat. They report being depicted in a group of friends who are couples as a threat, because they were single. The participants portray gendered notions of male and female sexuality typically reflected in the media, whereby women are not only told that their man is highly likely to 'stray', but that they should work hard to keep him from doing so (Farvid & Braun, 2006). These notions tie into contemporary Western culture, where women are set up to compete with each other for the attention

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and affection of men, and thereby as a potential threat who may 'steal' other women's men (Jackson & Scott, 2004a). Women without a partner are in this regard positioned as a possible ERSI that their partner may engage in, and as such, as a potential 'homewrecker'. JJ illustrates the divide such a stance can cause between singles and couples. Singles may essentially be situated as outcasts among couples, who could disrupt the monogamous arrangement. The account here portrays the social rules of relating, guided by heteronormative gendered representations that in subtle ways portray women as typically disadvantaged by non-monogamy and may privilege heterosexual coupledom (Jackson & Scott, 2004a), as well as ostracise singles. Construing ERSI as a threat posed predominantly by singles to a monogamous order may then work to uphold such a system.

In summary, the accounts regarding the friend threat demonstrated the complex negotiations of what constitutes a friendship and a relationship. The distinction was often depicted in hazy terms, positioning friends as potential sexual partners. Sex was then construed as the main aspect that helps to distinguish between friends and romantic partners, illustrating the value given to sex as the main bond that holds the couple together (Jackson & Scott, 2004a). Particularly single (female) friends were portrayed as being viewed as a threat by couples, illustrating the stigma singles may have to face. Stigmatising singles and construing ERSI as an ever-present danger worked to sustain a mononormative system, and position the female subjects within relationships as concerned about their partner's 'straying'. Drawing on discourses that depicted gendered ways of relating, including within friendships, was representative of the heteronormative assumptions pertaining all types of male-female relationships. How these norms were talked about, is outlined next.

7.3 Norms of Relationships

Considering the various reported threats to romantic relationships, participants described these as a risky premise that required the couple to negotiate rules to protect themselves from getting hurt. Such an agreement was depicted as based on norms and expectations of relationships, which was akin to a contractual agreement between two parties (not more) that both had to abide by. If one of them did not comply, however, the other person was commonly depicted as being in charge of making the decision to end or continue the relationship. The normative nature of some relationship expectations, produced certain conditions as non-negotiable. For instance, monogamy was largely talked about as an assumed condition of a relationship and therefore non-negotiable. Any straying from the arrangement, in particular ERSI, was thereby portrayed as a breach of trust. Being deceived by a partner about any kind of behaviour was outlined to be a clear indicator that a transgression had occurred:

> Amelia: I feel like it's a betrayal if you do anything that, you know, your partner wouldn't agree with without talking to them first. So I don't think it's just physically cheating. If you have to lie about it, then there's something.
>
> Emma: Yes, I totally agree. 'Cause I think that trust is what good relationships are built on, because you can love something, but not trust them. So to have a healthy relationship I think you have to have both.
>
> PF: And sort of that kind of transgression is what you're saying is kind of breaks those two things and that's why it becomes a problem.
>
> Emma: Mhm.
>
> Amelia: I actually think it's the lying that's worse than the cheating. For me lying is one of the worst things in a relationship.
>
> Louise: I think it's your attitude and how you've been conditioned to. You know, like what's your belief system around those things, sort of what's really important to you and the values that you hold.
>
> Anna: There are some things that someone could lie about to me, and yes I wouldn't be impressed. But, I could get past it in the way that I don't think I could get past them cheating.
>
> Emma: I think you also, when you're in a relationship like that, like you're quite vulnerable and you put yourself out there quite a lot. And both physical and emotionally. Like it's part of that intimacy stuff.

> You know like you risk a lot by being in a relationship so for them to go and then do something that you guys do, as it's supposed to be like your sphere, I guess, with someone else, without, you know, your input or anything like that, just seems like, you know, that's kind of almost spitting on the risk and the fact that you are so... (FG #4)

Amelia outlines that the deception in a relationship may be worse than the ERSI itself. As such, honesty is portrayed as one of the most important aspects of a relationship, positioning trust as paramount to coupledom, as highlighted by Emma. There is disagreement from Anna, who depicts ERSI as a worse transgression than lying, one that she may not be able to overcome. The severity of breaching the partner's trust by engaging in ERSI is emphasised by Emma. She draws on heteronormative discourses of relationships that render sex and love exclusive to the couple (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Finn, 2012b; Jackson & Scott, 2004a). In particular, she conveys that expectations of exclusivity may lead the subject to open themselves up to their partner. Becoming intimate might thereby situate the committed individual as vulnerable in light of the possibility of their partner breaking such expectations. As such, Emma construes committed relationships as a considerable emotional and physical risk. Relationships are subsequently depicted as requiring certain conditions, such as being honest and monogamous, to protect the "vulnerable" individual, who has invested a great deal. ERSI is thereby portrayed as a ubiquitous risk factor that necessitates negotiated rules and norms to protect the susceptible individual. The 'cheater' is then positioned as inconsiderate and careless of their partner. The participants went on to discuss how the rules may be negotiated:

> Anna: If someone came to me very openly, maybe at the start of a relationship or maybe a bit later on and said 'look I can't deal with only having sex with one person' I think I could be okay with them having sex with someone else, if it was very open and clear, you know, if they'd talked to me about it and if it was just sex. If they didn't tell me about it then anything beyond a very casual kiss to a friend I would be upset about and not even to the point of penetrative

sex, anything at all, if I didn't know about it, then that would basically be a deal breaker.

Emma: But would you be okay knowing, like, that they've had sex with someone else, 'cause I so would not be okay with that (laughs).

Anna: I think I could get past it, possibly. I don't know. It depends on the rest of our relationship, but…

Amelia: Can I? If it's not a one way street, if…I think if we're both having sex with other people we both know then that's a whole different thing to just them being 'like you're not enough, but I've gotta be enough for you'.

PF: (laughs) Yeah.

Anna: Yeah, that's true.

Amelia: Cause then I'm like 'no'. But if we're both having sex with other people, maybe, maybe it can be an open relationship, if it's been that way from the beginning. I don't think I can get 10 years in, and then they're like 'well actually, I wanna'…

Anna: Oh no.

Emma: No. It's quite different.

Amelia: Like…no.

Louise: I don't think we know what our boundaries are until we're nudged and pushed.

Emily: Yeah.

Emma: That's true.

Louise: See how much we can move.

Emily: I feel like my boundaries are pretty clear. Like if you are lying to me, that's pushing my boundaries. If it's about anything. If you have to lie to me then, not cool. (FG #4)

The participants talk about the formulation of boundaries from the beginning of a relationship, construing a good relationship as communicatively open from the start. The set rules are depicted as inflexible once established and thereby construed similar to a solid contract. Amelia draws on notions of reciprocity (e.g., Braun et al., 2003) to emphasise that every aspect of the agreement applies to both partners. By positioning polyamory as a benefit that both partners should get, being monogamous is depicted as sexually restraining oneself (e.g., making a sacrifice). As such, sexuality is construed as ever-present and requiring control, situating ERSI as a pervasive threat.

Resembling the representations in Study One, an ideal relationship is portrayed as based on honesty, trust and open communication, drawing on psychological notions of coupledom that view these characteristics as essential to wellbeing (Finn, 2012b). The account exemplifies how a 'fair deal' in a relationship may be negotiated. Sexual exclusivity, however, was often talked about as non-negotiable (see Emma), as further illustrated in the following extract from FG #3:

>Jack: It's hard to associate ERSI with not being negative, like just thinking about having sex outside of a committed relationship, especially a marriage or long-term relationship, having sexual activity outside of that automatically is associated with being negative.
>
>Dane: It doesn't matter what relationship it is, what level of relationship, you know, as soon as you say extra relational, you know, the fact that it is outside of a relationship or in addition to a relationship, you know, because we've already got this pre-existing umm emotion attached to a relationship with being an exclusive committed thing.
>
>SP: Mmm hmm.
>
>Dane: As soon as you…you know, you think of your partner being involved with someone else outside of that relationship, it's got negative connotations straight away and you can't...there's no way of shaking that. And that's probably because of the way everyone views relationships.
>
>Jack: Well it's the norm, the way people view relationships is entirely monogamous. That's the standard, that's the social norm. Even if I hear about someone who has a relationship with two people that have consented to each other "yeah we can sleep around" I hear about it, I've heard about it before and I think that's just weird. I think that's just...
>
>Dane: ...what's the point of being in a relationship if you're going to be with other people...
>
>Jack: ...you might as well be single. (FG #3)

Sexual exclusivity is depicted as a given in relationships and constituting a firm norm. In order to highlight the rigidity of this aspect of a relationship, Dane portrays the negative feelings as pre-existing, and thereby as lying outside of the realm of coupledom, but more universally embedded within society. The stigma attached to open-relationships is subsequently justified by outlining the "social norm" to back up

their argument that such an arrangement is abnormal ("weird"). Monogamy is here not only positioned as a normative practice, but further established as the main reason to be in a relationship, highlighting its centrality to romantic relationships (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). This works to manifest monogamous coupledom as the only acceptable way of relating romantically, underpinning the negative connotations associated with ERSI.

In the following extract, Chris tries to resist the above notions of relationships as requiring strict boundaries, by depicting them as restraining:

> SP: So what are your expectations in a committed relationship?
>
> Chris: If you ask me, I think if the marriage or relationship is putting you in chains then why do you get married or get into that relationship, right?
>
> Marcus: Right.
>
> Chris: There should be that independence in the relationship and I expect that from my wife and I give that to her. It is her decision if she is going out drinking, whether she goes out and has a relationship with someone. It's my decision if I am doing it, whether I'm telling her or not telling her. I don't want...my personally, I don't want to put those kind of boundaries with relationships, you know, because what's the use, you know, of having a lifetime friend who's sharing all the good and bad days and all the financial troubles and struggles and finally what you're ending up with is you end up being in a jail or in a bonded situation? I feel like that, you know I feel, think ....I think that marriage should give independence.
>
> John: Well, marriage should give independence and it is each person's personal decision to how they deal with it. But I wouldn't cheat on my wife and I expect the same from her, not to cheat on me. Ummm (pause) to me that's sort of the (pause) it's... we're in a monogamous relationship and that sort of defines it, really umm. (FG #1)

Chris describes the ideal relationship as consisting of independence for the partners, including the liberty to engage in a disclosed or undisclosed ERSI. Relationships are positioned as having strict rules that need softening or negotiating with one's partner. Strictly adhering to relationship rules is depicted as counterproductive in obtaining an individual freedom, comparing a stringently

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monogamous relationship to a "jail". While a restrained sexuality is thereby illustrated as compromising one's freedom, ERSI is construed as representative of individuality and autonomy, as argued by others (e.g., Kipnis, 2003; Scheinkman, 2005). Chris portrays himself as a self-governing individual, who not only claims his 'right' to make an unrestrained decision, but provides his wife with the same freedom. This functions to position him as an understanding and reciprocal partner. As such, Chris resists widespread notions of romantic relationships that conflate commitment with sexual exclusivity (Finn, 2012b), instead outlining that the latter may compromise one's independence. The account depicts traditionally monogamous relationships as too rigid and requiring more room for individualised negotiation to maintain autonomy, for instance through the uptake of ERSI (Scheinkman, 2005). Although John attempts to make a claim to having independence as well, he argues that Chris' call for such autonomy goes against the very definition of a committed relationship. Subsequently, regardless of the effort put into a relationship (as outlined by Chris), a commitment is ultimately construed by John as entailing first and foremost monogamy. He thus draws on mononormative notions of commitment that hold sexual exclusivity at the core of heterosexual relationships (e.g., Jackson & Scott, 2004a).

Overall, coupledom was largely talked about as a mutual agreement and parameters that had to be negotiated from the beginning of a relationship. This arrangement was depicted similar to a firm contract applying to both parties that could not be re-negotiated once the rules were established. Entering into a relationship was thereby portrayed as producing conditions and expectations regarding physical and emotional exclusivity. The possibility of these expectations being violated through an ERSI, was illustrated to leave the individual in a vulnerable state. As such, relationships were construed as risky, and as depending on honesty, openness and communication for the couple's and individual's wellbeing (Finn, 2012b). At the same time, these

relationships were portrayed as manageable, if approached in a business-like fashion. Sexual exclusivity in particular was portrayed as a presumed condition of a romantic relationship (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Frank & DeLamater, 2010; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013), illustrating how monogamy was regarded as synonymous with commitment (e.g., Finn, 2012b). Such discourses did not only work to position open-relationships as problematic and uncommitted, but to underpin the negative connotations associated with ERSI (e.g., as an act of 'carelessness'). A sexual encounter outside of a committed relationship in turn functioned to reinforce a mononormative order through moralising this practice (Mint, 2004). Negotiating not only an agreement, but also the outcomes of an ERSI, depicted relationships as a business model, outlined next.

7.4 Relationships as Investments

Relationships were often talked about as an investment, akin to a business model approach (Bauman, 2013). The resources invested were depicted in terms of time, finances, emotions, physical devotion, and social status. Since these were portrayed as limited, individuals within relationships, especially women, were often portrayed as having to weigh up the benefits and costs of a relationship. They were thus expected to approach their relationship and a possible ERSI in a rational manner, with the aim of benefitting the most from it.

> Louise: Yeah, that's true. But yeah, you also recognise your own (pause) you know, inability to do things and then equally the other person's inability to do things, and so perhaps more accepting of…
>
> Amelia: Each other's faults.
>
> Louise: Yeah, yeah. I think so.
>
> Emma: And I guess also that's why often, when people cheat later in a relationship, the relationship might be more likely to last, because they've invested so much time and energy into this relationship and it's obviously like, that's their life, you know. Their whole life is built around sharing it with that other person, so therefore you're more

likely, I guess, to try to get past it, I think than you are if you're in an early stage relationship.

Emily: By that time I think your whole future is planned with them, from experience the feeling of having to re-plan a whole future is pretty daunting. Like I've done that and it's a readjustment of all of your like, things you gonna do in life.

Emma: Yeah, completely

Emily: And so if I was a long time into a relationship, I might try and work through it more than if I hadn't planned my whole future with them. Because it's not just replanning your life with them it's replanning your whole life.

Emma: That is true.

Elizabeth: And you do hear about that, you know, older couples who are in a relationship where one knows the other one is cheating and they are just not gonna say anything and just is okay with it because...

Emily: Or maybe not okay with it, but just…

Emma: But they put up with it.

Anna: Accept.

Elizabeth: 'I'd rather do that than confront him and leave', you know? (FG #4)

The extract exemplifies the respondents' talk of the outcomes of an ERSI as depending on how much has been invested into a relationship. The account here depicts how such investments are taken as an indication of the effort required to re-plan after a break-up. Such efforts are portrayed in terms of potentially greater losses and reinvestments than staying in a relationship and may therefore not be worthwhile. The subject is here positioned as a conscious and sensible decision maker. Emily illustrates that it might be more beneficial then to invest into the problematic relationship and "work through it". As such, heteronormative ways of relating that expect the couple to fulfil and share all aspects of their lives are depicted as limiting the individual's option to leave (e.g., Finn, 2012b; Kipnis, 2003). More specifically, women were often portrayed as suffering potentially greater losses and as having to approach their relationship like a business.

7.4.1 The business model of relationships

By talking about investments and mutual agreements, the participants set up a platform for relationships to be approached like a business. The consequences of an ERSI were portrayed as dependent on the investments made, as well as the benefits and costs of ending the relationship, drawing on a social exchange theory of relationships (Finn, 2012b). The more someone was reported to have invested into a relationship, the greater his/her losses may be if they left. As such, the subject was expected to make a pragmatic decision following an ERSI, for instance to maintain their living standards. Although ERSI was largely described in destructive terms, the outcomes of it were subsequently illustrated as less clear and judged on a case-by-case basis. The following extract exemplifies how such a decision was arrived at, based on the investments made into the relationship:

> PF: Did they stay together?
>
> JJ: Yeah they did. I mean I just admire her, I know she had lots of counselling and that, but I think it came down to, at their stage in life they were pretty well retired, I think…almost…and splitting everything up, you know?
>
> LB: But at what point when you go through so much in your life together, which is what this couple did…you've…you've created three children you have built this, you know, home and, and this social world…at what point do, you know let that all go? Is the affair something that is a deal breaker? For her it was.
>
> Lady Gaga: That's right, that's what it's all about…deal breaking.
>
> LB: Interesting, aye? When you look at all your assets and what…'cause assets can be you're…you invested children.
>
> JJ: And inheritance, too…in that case it would have been already inherited money, perhaps on both sides and that kind of stuff, you know?
>
> LB: Yeah, yeah.
>
> JJ: I'm just trying to think the other kids…he's in his 20s and their children from their marriage are older than my kids…they're in their 40s. Yeah. (FG #2)

The participants describe the outcomes of an ERSI for one of their acquaintances. Although ERSI is depicted as clearly destructive, its consequences are outlined in more hazy terms. A break-up is discussed as one possibility, rather than a certainty, as it may carry further consequences for the 'victim'. The victim is here portrayed as having to weigh up the benefits and costs of ending the relationship, based on what she may lose. Social standing, children, home, money, time and effort are depicted as assets that have been invested into the relationship and need to be taken into consideration when negotiating the outcomes of an ERSI. ERSI is then described as a potential "deal-breaker", whereby the subject is supposed to pragmatically assess the outcomes of their partner's encounter in terms of what resolution benefits themselves the most. The individual is thereby positioned as a rational subject, who has to approach the relationship like a business. Put differently, the person is construed as capable of sensibly assessing the possible pitfalls of a break-up in order to make a practical decision. The discourses of ERSI as destructive and relationships as a business functioned to portray the subjects within relationships as becoming dependent on their arrangement based on the assets involved. Investing into a relationship was then depicted as limiting the subject's options:

> PF: Mmm. I sort...I'm really interested to sort of again see what you guys think of that scenario where your friend has had an affair, because of not feeling loved in the relationship or whatever it is...and then she's taken that on and they've got back together. What do you think of that?
>
> Lady Gaga: I think...well that's amazing ummm…
>
> PF: (laughs)
>
> Lady Gaga: Because she obviously thought that they could make it.
>
> LB: Do you know why I think...'cause I know this couple very well and she's seen the other breakdowns of, you know, relationships in her immediate friends and okay when that happens you split your whole, you know...you have to sell the house and then you're left to live in a unit or something for the rest of your life and you don't have that stability of that partner. None of her other friends have been able to meet partners. And her husband is larger than life, he enters a room

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and he completely commands the scene socially. Everyone loves him, everyone has forgiven him, except me.

PF: (laughs)

LB: I can't...I can't...

Lady Gaga: ...why's tha...do you think it's fear…do you think it was fear that stopped...

LB: ...what me?

Lady Gaga: No, your friend. Do you think it was the fear of being alone...?

LB: …yes, it totally was. It totally was she cannot trust him to this day. (FG #2)

Ending this relationship as a result of ERSI is depicted as a very difficult option, not only because of the investments made, but also due to the outcomes for the subject, whose partner had engaged in an ERSI. Talk about the potential losses for the individual occurred in the women's, rather than the men's groups. The respondents in these groups drew on traditional gendered understandings of heterosexual relationships that depict men as the 'breadwinner' and women as limited in their (economic) opportunities (Connell, 2005; Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005). More specifically, the consequences in the account above are portrayed in a socioeconomically damaging manner due to the husband's position of power, but also due to having built a life together, which may incur a change in lifestyle. Backing up her argument, LB gives examples of other cases where break-ups have led the subject to live less comfortably, and not only losing their assets, but the "stability of that partner". Giving up the heteronormative goal of stable coupledom is thereby depicted as a difficult task, especially in mid-life. A relationship is in that sense portrayed as beneficial for the individual, but also as creating dependency, particularly for women, ostensibly compromising the subject's autonomy and choice. Coupledom is nonetheless portrayed as the preferred option and aspiration (e.g., "None of her friends have been able to meet partners"), contrasting it with the undesirable status of being single. By

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outlining (particularly older) single women as lonely and undesirable for potential partners, the respondents depict staying with the partner as the only feasible option. Such a notion works to highlight women's financial and social dependency on men.

This account demonstrates the automatic presumption that the decision to remain in the relationship lies entirely with the 'victim', rather than the 'cheater'. Although positioning the victim as agentic in the decision making process, such a position does not provide the subject with power, as they are stripped of a 'real choice' in the matter. As reflected in this extract, it is rather the 'cheater' who holds the (financial) power, illustrative of a gendered discourse.

Despite the risk of ERSI and getting hurt, exclusive romantic relationships were portrayed as the favourable position to being single through discourses of stability, social inclusion and socioeconomic gain, particularly for women. In order to achieve such a status, ideal relationships were depicted as requiring investments that demanded time and effort. These investments, however, were construed as gradually stripping the individual of an autonomy through creating dependency (and this was gendered). Although ostensibly given a choice to leave a relationship as a result of a partner's ERSI, the subject's primary objective was argued to be the protection of their investments. As such, those who had invested a great deal into their relationship (portrayed as a requirement to achieve the ideal, fulfilling relationship), were given only one 'sensible' choice – namely to remain in the relationship (or suffer great losses). These accounts seemed to demonstrate the automatic presumption that the decision to remain in the relationship lies entirely with the 'victim', rather than the 'cheater'. Although positioning the subject as agentic in the decision making process, such a position did not necessarily provide the individual with power, as they were stripped of a 'real choice' in the matter. By situating monogamous romantic relationships as

favourable and creating dependency for women within such a system, notions of an enforced heteronormative order were illustrated. ERSI thereby allows individuals within committed relationships to engage in non-monogamous behaviour, without disrupting the system (e.g., Mint, 2004). The accounts reflected how respondents talked about relationships as hard work to protect their investments, which is examined in more detail next.

7.5 Relationships as Work

The respondents in this study largely talked about a good relationship as consisting of various rules and requiring 'hard work'. Such work was depicted as necessary to preserve a relationship and maintain a secure and predictable future that comprises the benefits outlined previously. The couple was portrayed as having to do hard work to follow the rules, as well as get past any transgressions to uphold the relationship. The following extract illustrates a discussion about the necessity of working on a relationship to avoid getting into a routine:

> PF: It almost sounds like with relationships you can get into a routine or pattern.
>
> Lady Gaga: Automatic, you're on automatic.
>
> PF: Yeah and that sometimes things (pause) don't stay communicative, open, there is no dialogue and things can lead to places like ERSI and that's kind of the trigger or situation that gets people to consider perhaps the patterns or things they've been engaging in.
>
> LB: Which is a cop out.
>
> PF: (laughs)
>
> LB: I mean, you know, because relationships….it is hard work and it is work…I'm not going to say necessarily hard, but it does need…
>
> Lady Gaga: Commitment.
>
> LB: You know, we go away for weekends just together and we do things for each other and that's really important. You know, if I feel like we're not connecting then I immediately say "look we need to go and book somewhere we need some time away".
>
> Lady Gaga: Yeah.

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LB: So you've kinda got to be intuitive about this stuff too, 'cause if you become unconscious in a relationship then that's when it leads to…

PF: I really like that concept, the unconscious in relationships.

LB: Yeah I'll relate it to our jobs, if we're not conscious of what we're saying and communicating then we're just going to get…

JJ: …pushed around…

LB: …into trouble and pushed around ourselves, yeah.

JJ: Yep (in breath) (FG #2)

The respondents talk about a routine as potentially damaging to a relationship. Relationships are portrayed as requiring effort and maintenance to avoid (sexual) boredom (Tunariu & Reavey, 2003). More specifically, the individual in a relationship is depicted as having to constantly work on a relationship and be aware of developing patterns to avoid getting into a routine, which could possibly lead to an ERSI. The participants draw on notions of sex as a special activity that can be taken up to break everyday routine (Jackson & Scott, 2004b). As such, they relay a sense of alertness as necessary to avoid getting into a routine in a relationship and prevent a potential ERSI. Working on a relationship is portrayed as consisting of communication, commitment and breaking everyday patterns, in order to maintain monogamy. These attributes are further ascribed and compared to their professions, constructing committed relationships as work. Engaging in an ERSI was subsequently described as a sign that the person engaging in such an act did not put enough effort into their primary relationship:

LB: Cause I think in society at the moment we get so tired and caught up with our kids and whatever...this is what happened in their [a friend's] family... that yeah, it just...

JJ: ...that goes out the window or can go out the window...

LB ...so that can almost be defined to me in some ways sort of verging on cheating, because he's [a friend's husband] cheated her out of the opportunity to respond to his needs, because he's kept them in, you know, he hasn't expressed himself. So once you close down, I think

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that's warning signs to kind of really....'cause I think from there that would perhaps go somewhere else.

PF: So it's sort of like a form of secrecy being channeling the...

Lady Gaga: …not spending quality time with each other. I think for me that is a...that's definitely a breakdown. So...and it's not good when it gets to that point.

LB: So dishonesty.

Lady Gaga: It's a lot of work to get it back and a lot more... so it's a break of trust; it's a break of that commitment to each other and spending quality time working on the relationship. So for me (in breath) somebody who is in a relationship...a long-term relationship, a committed relationship and then goes and what we say cheats ummm...yeah, it's a transgression from that relationship. So for me it's not good. On many levels. (FG #2)

The participants discuss how the risk of an ERSI occurring is more likely when a routine develops in a relationship. Interestingly, this account seems to stand at odds with common notions of modern romantic relationships being pursued as a means to create stability and predictability (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Mitchell, 2003). Being non-communicative and not spending quality time with each other are depicted as factors that can lead to an ERSI and need to be considered as 'warning signs'. The subject who engages in ERSI is thereby depicted as not working enough on the relationship and violating the other person's trust, commitment, as well as their efforts invested into the relationship. The effort required to regain these attributes following an ERSI are depicted as greater than without this act. Working on a relationship after an ERSI was sometimes depicted as necessary, though, to protect the investments made into the relationship, such as one's lifestyle, as outlined in the previous discourse. In particular, investing efforts into the committed relationship, rather than rebuilding one's life as a single following an ERSI, was often portrayed as the more beneficial and favourable position for the (female) individual from a socioeconomic point of view. Women were thereby especially depicted as being dependent on their relationship and therefore as having a greater need to 'work' on a relationship. Such portrayals may tie in

with notions of a gendered power imbalance within relationships that give men access to ERSI, whereas women are given the task and responsibility to keep their man from 'straying', as well as maintaining the relationship (Leslie & Southard, 2009; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013).

Overall, routine within a relationship was depicted as a risk factor, potentially resulting in an ERSI. The participants often portrayed such an everyday pattern as avoidable, as long as effort in the form of commitment, quality time and open communication was invested into the relationship. The discourse of an ideal relationship as requiring work to avoid an ERSI, was particularly drawn on by the women's groups, while men portrayed love as sufficient in that respect. As such, gendered ways of relating seemed to be depicted in the FGDs, whereby women may be regarded as responsible for the state of a relationship and have to invest effort to avoid their partner's transgression (Burns, 1999; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013). Such notions may work to hold women to some extent responsible for their partner's ERSI, as it may imply a lack of alertness and work put into a relationship.

7.6 Chapter Summary

When presented with an ERSI scenario as a prompt (that purposefully did not use any pejorative terms, such as 'cheating'), participants initially claimed that such a practice was 'wrong', often drawing on judging terminology, like "cheater" or "wanker". However, when delving deeper into the issue and providing participants with more detailed questions, the responses were less definitive. More specifically, respondents had to carefully negotiate the ways in which a romantic ideal was upheld/pursued, without crossing socially dictated boundaries of what constitutes acceptable relationality. For instance, an ideal relationship was largely depicted as being about honesty and open communication to negotiate rules and expectations, yet being

monogamous was often portrayed as non-negotiable and the very definition of a committed relationship. The resulting disagreements created tensions among the participants, illustrated through frustration (expressed in disagreements with each other), silencing, and humour.

The analysis showed how relationships were framed – as highly fragile, requiring work, and drawing on a business discourse. Participants drew on these constructions of romantic relationships, which demonstrated an atmosphere of risk in regards to contemporary romantic relationships. For example, in discussing male-female friendships, participants described evolutionary notions of a reciprocity potential to be dominating norms of male-female relating (e.g., Vigil, 2007). That is, male-female friendships were described to have blurry boundaries and may culminate in a romantic/sexual relationship. Depicting friendships as a potential site for ERSI and romantic relationships, demonstrated the inter-connectedness of the different types of relationships. Friendships thus worked as a constant reminder of the risk of ERSI, which may reinforce couples (and especially women) to invest and work on their romantic relationship to keep their partner from 'straying'.

The outlined discourses illustrated the contradictions inherent in talks of sex and romantic relationships. For instance, they were portrayed as spontaneous and beyond language (especially the emotions involved), yet as requiring rational decisions and work. ERSI was portrayed in these accounts as a means to fulfil various needs and to possibly find a more suitable partner for oneself. These discourses drew on a neoliberal ideology of the individual as a rational, independent, calculating and self-contained actor (Gill, 2008) with regards to sex and relationships, particularly when portraying these as ideal and disposable (e.g., like a phone) (Bauman, 2013). By aiming for the most profitable, practical and idealistic relationship, the subject was given a choice

whom to be with and in what way. As such, the individual was expected to make the most beneficial decision for themselves, with the ultimate goal of improving upon their previous/current partner, if that was considered a 'feasible' option (depending for instance on age, gender, status and finances). Romantic, committed relationships were thereby constructed as an ideal that does not merely happen, but is to be achieved, especially in the women's accounts. The success and failure of a relationship was produced as reflective of the (female) individual's efforts, rather than the circumstances. These accounts demonstrated gendered ways of relating, which construed women as becoming dependent on their partner and being held responsible for the state of a relationship (e.g., Burns, 1999; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013). In particular, coupledom appeared to occupy the more favourable position for them than being single in terms of lifestyle and social inclusion. As such, women were seemingly expected to make a pragmatic decision about leaving or remaining in a relationship following an ERSI. The analysis thereby showed how heteronormativity was reinforced in these accounts through depictions of ERSI as an ever-present risk, traditional gender identity norms, marginalisation of singlehood, and neoliberal notions of profitability and achievement (of a monogamous relationship).

Chapter 8: Discussion

The analyses for the two studies outlined in Chapters Five to Seven, demonstrate the contradictory constructions surrounding ERSI and relationships. Romantic relationships were generally portrayed as an individual need fulfilment, being with 'the one', hard work, difficult to leave (especially for women), and monogamous. Engaging in ERSI was largely depicted as a morally suspect practice and a clear transgression of what constitutes acceptable romantic/sexual relationality. In the first study, the construction of ERSI as a morally suspect transgression seemed to compete with the mainly positive aspects of the experiences described by individuals who had engaged in ERSI. These contradictions did not only create tensions within the accounts of respondents in the questionnaire study, but also between the participants in the focus group discussions. The diverse depictions of the participants' ERSI experiences did not necessarily oppose each other. For instance, it was often the transgressive nature of ERSI that was portrayed as producing not only negative reactions (e.g., guilt), but also positive ones, such as excitement for doing something taboo. Similarly, ERSI could be construed as both, hedonistic and romantic (e.g., potentially sacrificing everything to find 'the one'). The analysis thereby highlighted the co-dependence of the competing discourses and their reliance on each other for meaning. For example, engaging in ERSI was desired *because* it was regarded as wrong. As such, ERSI seemed to occupy a middle ground, whereby the participants carefully navigated the multiple and contradictory discourses of this act. By referring to ERSI in a manner that suggests a clear black and white structure, as largely done in research, the middle ground that these accounts occupied, become obscured.

8.1 Constructions of ERSI

The contrasting constructions of ERSI were reflective of the complex ways participants talked about this act. In particular, respondents in Study One often depicted their experiences as involving both, a highly positive and highly negative aspect. For instance, PW26 described her ERSI experience as the "best" (for her) and "worst" (by societal standards) thing she had done, illustrating the tension and contradictory manner in which ERSI was referred to. The literature, however, has largely portrayed ERSI in a negative fashion (Walters & Burger, 2013), while the media has showcased it in catastrophic terms (Mint, 2004). Such representations tend to brush over the possible positive outcomes, and the experiential flow that may encapsulate ERSI as positive and negative at the same time, or at least mixed. The varied discourses of ERSI may indicate why research that has largely adopted dual concepts of either/or to investigate the act, and approached the issue by making negative inferences, has been rather inconclusive. The negative notions reflected by most ERSI studies were implicated in this research project in the respondents' widespread assumptions regarding this practice. In particular, despite describing some positive experiences/outcomes of ERSI, the participants often outlined regret with respect to their encounter and/or portrayed it as an exceptional transgression that would not occur again. Depictions of socially expected adverse feelings like guilt and regret worked to position ERSI as a moral transgression, regardless of the outcomes.

8.1.1 Public repercussions and private pleasures

The repercussions of ERSI were outlined in relation to breaking up with the partner, job loss, public shaming, and rejection by family and friends. Guilt was a main aspect of ERSI discourses and experiences, often talked about in respect to the repercussions of this act. The transgressive nature of ERSI was portrayed as attributing a moral responsibility to those in a relationship to adhere to normative expectations of

monogamy (Finn, 2010, 2012b; Jackson & Scott, 2004a). Breaking those expectations subsequently required the individual to be aware of their 'wrongdoing' by expressing guilt. The unprompted responses of participants in the first study was illustrative of the socially appropriate reactions to ERSI. Guilt was outlined, regardless of whether participants described such feelings or resisted them in their accounts through portrayals of ERSI as an exceptional case. Although constructing ERSI as a transgression functioned to enforce mononormativity through socially expected adverse feelings, such a portrayal also promoted positive emotions, like excitement (for breaking the rules).

Participants described their experiences of ERSI in positive ways when it fulfilled their expectations (e.g., "hot sex"), as long as it remained a secret and hidden from the scrutiny of others, such as families and colleagues. The transgressive nature and possible repercussions of this act therefore did not appear to simply discourage people from engaging in ERSI. Instead, breaking the boundaries of heteronormativity was depicted as 'exciting'. As such, it was principally the secretive nature of ERSI (i.e., doing something forbidden) where positive emotions were drawn from. This construction may encourage individuals to engage in non-monogamous practices *within* a mononormative order, and as such does not disrupt the monogamous system. The positive private experiences portrayed by the participants were therefore part of the same *socially* reinforced construct, rather than illustrative of a dichotomy between the social and the private. Pleasure and disappointment did not necessarily stand in contrast to one another. An unsatisfactory ERSI was at times also depicted as pleasurable. The enjoyment was relayed as deriving from breaking the code of conduct (see Farvid & Braun, 2016), demonstrating the plural experiences drawn out from the transgressive nature of ERSI. These accounts appear to suggest that the private experience of ERSI is manifested in its cultural understandings, and is as such also a social practice.

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Since the positive aspect of the ERSI experience does not seem to derive from the non-monogamous act itself, but rather from the transgressive nature, it can only exist within a mononormative system. Not only does this demonstrate the interdependence of the contradictory feelings described, but also functions to marginalise consensual forms of non-monogamy, like polygamy. This may further establish non-consensual forms of non-monogamy (e.g., 'infidelity') as the most common type of non-monogamy (e.g., Rambukkana, 2010).

8.1.2 Scripted spontaneity

A pleasurable ERSI was often depicted as a spontaneous act by respondents in the questionnaire study. The unexpected manner in which the ERSI was outlined to have happened, was construed as constituting 'good sex'. This type of sex cannot be pursued with the primary partner, as such an act would be expected from a relationship, demonstrated by participants in Study Two. Not only does this work to construe ERSI as a differing sexual act and subsequently different or novel sex as 'good' sex (e.g., Farvid & Braun, 2016), but it also functions to make a distinction between the sexual practices with the primary and ERSI partner. Sex with the former was often depicted as an intimate act, and thereby as fulfilling *different* desires. The desire to have both, a predictable partner and spontaneous sex with someone new, may produce a paradoxical setting that is ideal for ERSI (e.g., Mitchell, 2003; Scheinkman, 2005).

Although ERSI itself was often described as happening in a spontaneous manner, the built up towards this act was outlined to follow a natural linear progression. More specifically, respondents in Study One illustrated how specific scripted scenarios built up an attraction towards the other person. These included meeting at a party, at work or online, being in close proximity to the other person, drinking alcohol or taking drugs, and flirting. Being attracted to another person and engaging in ERSI was often

ascribed to an inner 'biological' drive, placing ERSI within a permissive discourse (Hollway, 1989, 2001). Such a drive was depicted as characteristic of young age and therefore as part of a 'normal' developmental stage. Referring to attraction and desire as part of bodily needs, positioned the subjects as less agentic. The participants, however, did not describe a general attraction towards anyone, but rather towards a specific other person. This person was positioned as potentially able to fulfil certain needs, which their primary partner could not satisfy, situating ERSI within lacking relationships (e.g., Jeanfreau et al., 2014b; Pittman & Wagers, 2005). The depiction of ERSI as an acceptable exception, however, does not disrupt the moral code of conduct, but rather upholds it by distancing itself from being a regular act. As such, it distinguishes itself from regular acts of non-monogamy, like polygamy, and maintains a mononormative system.

8.1.3 Precursors to ERSI

Participants outlined various precursors to ERSI in order to explain their engagement in this act. For instance, portraying their primary relationship as problematic and deficient, gave them motive and justified their engagement in ERSI. Such depictions positioned ERSI within the framework of unsatisfactory relationships (e.g., Atkins et al., 2001; Jeanfreau et al., 2014b; Pittman & Wagers, 2005). In accordance with other reported findings (e.g., Buss & Shackelford, 1997), the lack of satisfaction in a relationship was attributed to a lack of love, an unpleasant partner, or dissatisfaction with relationship sex.

Not being sexually satisfied with their primary partner was often ascribed to having 'natural needs' that had to be satisfied. Although participants in both studies referred to having 'natural needs' fulfilled as a reason to engage in ERSI, such a position was illustrated as acceptable only under certain conditions. While in Study One

the respondents argued that their 'sexual needs' were present at a particular age (i.e., when they were young), participants in the focus group discussions depicted those desires as a result of an exceptionally deficient relationship (e.g., when the partner had a chronic disease). Both of these reasons seem to suggest that ERSI is more acceptable when it serves a purpose, justifying the individual's actions (e.g., Feldman & Cauffman, 1999).

Without these precursors, an ERSI was largely portrayed as less acceptable. Respondents' apparent struggle to provide a comprehensible account regarding their engagement in the act through the binaries of acceptable and unacceptable, demonstrated the difficulties in applying a dichotomous classification system to the multifaceted experience of the practice. Creating a division whereby sexual practices are classified as either acceptable *or* unacceptable, may strip away choice and undermine the complexity of situations and relationships. The main acceptable choice given here, seemed to be monogamy (i.e., to remain 'faithful' in a relationship), unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g., problematic relationships, biological drive). These accounts thereby illustrated the mononormative assumptions that guide acceptable ways of relating (Finn, 2012a).

8.1.4 Gendered nature of ERSI

The acceptability discourses of ERSI seemed to follow gendered norms and were as such not equally available to both men and women. For instance, men drew on a popular male sex drive discourse (Hollway, 1989, 2001) and reductionist evolutionary notions of a 'natural' drive (e.g., Tiefer, 1995), in order to describe the reasons for their ERSI. By assigning a 'natural' drive to men's sexuality, men were portrayed as more easily forgiven, providing them with an avenue to engage in non-monogamous acts within a monogamous system. A woman's ERSI, in contrast, was outlined to be only

'acceptable' and therefore possible within an emotional context. As such, the enduring influence of depictions of women as sexual gatekeepers (e.g., Kipnis, 2003; Rudman et al., 2013; Sprecher et al., 1987) was demonstrated within these accounts. More specifically, these portrayals illustrated the continuing impact of the have/hold discourse (Braun et al., 2003), which suggests that women are drawn to the romantic part of sex (e.g., Carabine, 1996; Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Kipnis, 2003; Patterson, 1990; Rudman et al., 2013; Schmookler & Bursik, 2007; Sprecher et al., 1987; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). The struggle to defend their ERSI as based on a 'natural' and therefore justifiable need became particularly clear in light of the frustrations and fear of stigma and social repercussions (e.g., job loss) depicted in the women's accounts. The sexual double standard (Farvid et al., 2016; Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005) portrayed by participants may subsequently position women's sexual acts as more deliberate and therefore assign greater responsibility to them (Mongeau et al., 1994). In that sense, the reportedly harsher judgement of women's ERSI (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006) in particular, may contribute to the varying power dynamics within heterosexual relationships (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005; Penn et al., 1997).

Drawing on contemporary romantic ideals of relationships as fulfilling all needs, the gendered discourses of these needs produced different requirements and expectations for men and women within heterosexual relationships. While men outlined love as a sufficient assurance against ERSI, women described an emphasis on working on a relationship to satisfy all needs and avoid routine. Particularly in Study Two, women depicted relationships as consisting of work (e.g., investments in terms of time, effort, and commitment), in order to maintain a monogamous relationship and "work through" their partner's transgressions. From this viewpoint, women may be held to some extent responsible for their partner's 'straying' (Leslie & Southard, 2009;

Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013), similarly reflected in media representations of male and female sexuality (Farvid & Braun, 2006). 'Working through' a partner's ERSI and maintaining a relationship was often portrayed as resulting in greater socioeconomic benefits for women within a committed relationship than being single. Women were thereby positioned as responsible for the state of their relationship, becoming dependent on their partner, and having to endure a partner's ERSI (Burns, 1999; Leslie & Southard, 2009; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013). As such, a gendered power imbalance within heterosexual relationships was illustrated, which may create greater difficulties for women to leave an unsatisfactory relationship (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013), while problematising singlehood. As shown in Study One, such a power imbalance potentially creates a context in which women may find it easier to engage in ERSI, and possibly 'convince' their partner to leave them, than to communicate their dissatisfaction with the relationship. ERSI was thereby ascribed a functional role in these accounts.

In the women's accounts, leaving a relationship was depicted as a less favourable option, the more someone was reported to have invested into an existing relationship and may lose as a result of a break up. These investments were outlined to consist of children, as well as financial, social, emotional, physical, and living arrangements. The person whose partner had engaged in an ERSI was often portrayed as potentially having to suffer further losses in case of a break-up and leaving them in a state of uncertainty and instability. Single women were also described to be regarded by couples as an ERSI threat through gendered ways of relating within male-female friendships. These friendships were framed in terms of their reciprocity potential, such as gaining sexually or romantically from investing in a friendship (e.g., Vigil, 2007). This worked to depict the negative connotations associated with being single, as well as

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situate coupledom as the preferred arrangement, also reported elsewhere (e.g., Farvid & Braun, 2013; Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016; Reynolds, 2008).

Considering the potential pitfalls for single women, they were portrayed as well advised to approach the relationship in a business-like fashion. More specifically, this involved weighing up the benefits and costs of a relationship following a partner's ERSI, to make a sensible decision (e.g., one that the women would most gain from). The subject was thereby construed as a rational and calculating agent in the decision-making process. Such a position, however, did not provide power to the 'victim', as a 'real choice' was not given – the viable option seemed to be to remain in the relationship. Particularly in Study Two, coupled with the idea of a neoliberal personhood, it appeared that for the women, the potential loss of resources, rather than the ERSI act itself, may be the most upsetting aspect. This was underpinned by accounts in Study One, whereby those who had engaged in an ERSI portrayed their encounters and ensuing consequences, including the losses they suffered, as traumatic. The conventionally depicted subjectivities of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' in regards to ERSI encounters thereby become blurred.

8.1.5 Personal accountability versus situational excusability

The two studies demonstrated notions of seeking fulfilment within a romantic relationship (e.g., Kipnis, 2003). More specifically, an ERSI was illustrated as more acceptable, if a partner did not fulfil the subject's happiness and needs. Despite the commonly outlined assumptions of relationships as creating stability (financial, social etc.) (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995), they were, particularly in Study Two, depicted as fragile. This puts the individual in a position where they are expected to constantly deliver and perform within their relationship (e.g., sexually, emotionally, socially, financially), as each party is focused on their own needs. A state of concern

may thus be produced, whereby subjects might worry that their partner may 'stray' if they do not meet all expectations, since a partner's ERSI may indicate that the individual has failed as a romantic partner. As such, romantic relationships appear to be a potential site where neoliberal ideas are produced and enacted through notions of a compulsory reciprocity. The ostensible obligation to reciprocate did not only encompass heterosex (e.g., Braun et al., 2003), but all aspects of a heterosexual relationship. This may provide an explanation as to why some people blame themselves for their partner's ERSI and the possible subsequent break-up. Those who attribute blame for a relationship break-up to themselves, have been argued to find it more difficult to cope with the issue (Amato & Previti, 2003).

By outlining a biological drive to fulfil their needs as a reason to engage in ERSI, participants in Study One depicted an external locus of control (Rotter, 1990) in regards to their encounters. In contrast, respondents in Study Two applied an internal locus of control by portraying ERSI as a personal decision. While the questionnaire respondents' accounts served to reduce agency and accountability for their engagement in ERSI, the focus group respondents painted a picture whereby the subject is fully capable of controlling their needs. This works to depict everyone as having the capacity to engage in ERSI as it is 'natural', but also as able to remain monogamous, illustrating (non-)monogamy as a choice. Rather than attributing ERSI to a 'natural' drive, as in Study One, non-monogamous practices were thereby ascribed to the person's character. The participants thus drew on neoliberalist ideas (Gill, 2008) that individuals can make a rational decision, as well as self-regulate their sexual encounters, and can therefore be held responsible for their actions. It is subsequently not only the act itself that is scrutinised through moralising ERSI, but the subject, as well, who is blamed and stigmatised for engaging in it (e.g., Mint, 2004).

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8.1.6 Privileging monogamy

The contradictory ways ERSI was talked about was indicative of the conflicting constructions of relationships. These discourses represented the contradictions inherent in contemporary Western society: the neoliberal ideology of individual freedom and progress clashing with notions of relationships as stable and reciprocal (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Mitchell, 2003). Rather than following an institutional (e.g., religious) agenda in regards to relationships, romantic ideas of finding 'the one' were frequently outlined by participants in both studies. The concept of finding the 'perfect match' reflected the contradictions brought about by romanticised assumptions of relationships. On one hand these romantic ideals represented lifelong monogamy and stability (the ultimate goal), yet they 'allowed' individuals to engage in ERSI in the pursuit of 'the one' (e.g., to establish a lifelong connection). As such, construing ERSI as following a romantic ideal did not appear to disrupt the structures of relationships that entail mononormative ways of relating. Instead mononormativity seemed to be supported by ERSI through romanticised notions of relationships, providing individuals with an admissible pathway to (non-consensual) non-monogamy. The romantic views of relationships, often seen in media portrayals, such as romantic Hollywood movies, that make the quest to find 'the one' more desirable, thereby acknowledge ERSI as part of a normal sexuality (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Rambukkana, 2010; Walters & Burger, 2013). Since finding the 'perfect' partner was depicted as the main life aspiration, it occupied the top of the hierarchy of 'acceptable' reasons to engage in ERSI in Study One.

In general, the hierarchy of acceptable justifications for ERSI were largely described in terms of emotional involvement with the ERSI partner (e.g., Farvid & Braun, 2013), as well as meeting their expectations of such encounters. The least acceptable ERSI was described as one-off encounters that did not meet either their

emotional or sexual needs. Interestingly, when respondents discussed their partner's potential ERSI in Study One, the hierarchy was talked about as reversed, for instance through a discourse of sexual health risks (Weeks, 2010). As such, the hierarchy of acceptability did not seem to reflect a *generally* more permissible view of ERSI that could potentially provide a pathway towards more approving opinions of non-monogamy. Instead, it appeared to endorse a heteronormative individualism. The hierarchy discourses were thus representative of a more favourable view of monogamous, committed relationships, supporting studies with similar findings (e.g., Farvid & Braun, 2013; Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016). These notions may marginalise consensual non-monogamies and pressurise individuals to adopt a single, mononormative relationship model.

The favourable views of monogamy were further echoed in the accounts given in Study Two, where participants discussed negotiating rules with a partner at the beginning of a relationship. These rules were depicted as inflexible once an agreement was reached to clarify expectations and avoid getting hurt. Sexual exclusivity, however, was largely described as non-negotiable and a given in romantic relationships (e.g., Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Frank & DeLamater, 2010; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). Construing this as the main reason to enter into a relationship may be representative of predominating mononormative assumptions inherent in society that render love and sex exclusive to the heterosexual couple (e.g., Finn, 2012b; Jackson & Scott, 2004a). Monogamous coupledom was thereby not only depicted as the ideal status, but the only acceptable and possible way of heterosexual relating, thus marginalising non-monogamies. As such, despite construing monogamous relationships as risky, coupledom was still portrayed as desirable, since there were no other ideal options available. This demonstrates the notion of an enforced coupledom, marginalising the subjects' option to negotiate their arrangement with all its possibilities

(Finn, 2012b). Consequently, neoliberal ideas of an individual freedom of choice are limited to the socially set boundaries of what constitutes acceptable relationality, namely monogamous relationships. Breaking those rules by engaging in non-monogamous practices may then stigmatise and outcast the individual (Mint, 2004).

In order to achieve the desirable status of a committed relationship, participants in Study Two described investments in terms of time and effort into the relationship as necessary. These depictions of investment have also been outlined by Emmers-Sommer et al. (2010) as part of their commitment model. However, constructing relationships as fragile with an ever-present danger of ERSI, positioned any investments made into a relationship as risky. The available resources to be invested into a relationship were portrayed as limited and exclusive to the couple. As such, they were depicted as representative of a commitment. Despite the possibility of their partner engaging in an ERSI, individuals were still expected to invest into and commit to a romantic relationship, as this was the desired position. The participants illustrated the pressure for individuals to find the 'right' partner, based on the concept of 'soulmate' (an elusive term that depicted having a 'special connection'), to make their investments and weigh up the benefits and costs of a relationship. Drawing on neoliberal notions, the subject was then positioned as a rational and calculating decision maker.

8.1.7 Personal pathologies

Participants in Study One located ERSI as a behaviour of the past in order to distance themselves and illustrate that they have 'changed'. This was not only done to depict this practice as part of a 'normal' development, but at times construed as damaging to everyone involved or coming from a place of distress and past traumatising experiences (e.g., Frías et al., 2014; Whisman & Snyder, 2007). The subjects thus positioned themselves as morally sound individuals who were 'suffering' from a

psychological problem and needed help, thereby portraying themselves as victims. ERSI was talked about as an empowering coping mechanism, employed to avoid commitment and getting hurt by their partner. As such, ERSI may not necessarily be taken up by those in a greater position of power within the relationship, as suggested elsewhere (e.g., Atkins et al., 2001; Forste & Tanfer, 1996). Instead ERSI may be employed to combat a potential power imbalance (Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013), eminent in women's accounts, which drew on discourses of sexual assault to situate themselves as a 'victim'. Such a stance tends to undermine women's sexual capabilities (e.g., Haaken, 1999), possibly reinforcing a sexual double standard (Farvid et al., 2016; Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005).

Participants' construction of their ERSI as part of their journey to achieve monogamy, worked to position this behaviour as 'treatable' and 'fixable'. Respondents demonstrated their 'recovery' through a redemption discourse, whereby they illustrated their current relationship as monogamous, often described in terms of honesty and 'authenticity'. By problematising their past non-monogamous practices as a psychological and damaging issue, monogamy was depicted as mature, healthy and favourable. These discourses portrayed not only ERSI as problematic, but marginalised non-monogamy altogether, since monogamy was relayed as essential to one's health (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Mint, 2004; Richards, 2010; Weeks, 2010). The prevailing heteronormative assumptions present within contemporary romantic relationships were thereby demonstrated in participants' accounts of ERSI.

8.1.8 Section summary

Overall, ERSI was constructed as both, a common practice (e.g., one that is devoid of intimacy; can be performed with colleagues; part of a 'normal' sexual development) and a contextual act (e.g., less agentic; on holiday; within a deficient

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relationship/and or sexuality). These constructions complemented each other in that the participants portrayed their encounters as 'normal' (in society) to undermine, yet maintain its transgressive nature, as well as exceptional in their individual case to highlight their moral standards and position themselves as monogamous ('healthy'). ERSI therefore did not disrupt a mononormative structure, but rather upheld it by providing a justification to engage in non-consensual non-monogamous practices. ERSI thereby becomes a tool that stabilises heteronormativity through gendered notions of sexuality and justification discourses (e.g., biological, developmental, social), marginalising consensual forms of non-monogamy (e.g., Rambukkana, 2010).

8.2 Limitations and Future Implications

As with all research, this project has a number of limitations. Firstly, the findings apply to the way ERSI was constructed in New Zealand by a relatively small sample. As this sample consisted of mainly educated people, such as lawyers and students, it may not capture the view of lower socioeconomic individuals. The results can therefore not be generalised to the wider population or other cultures.

Furthermore, the focus was on heterosexual relationships and the perspective of those identifying with this group. Having a more homogenous population was necessary due to the small sampling within qualitative research in order to be able to accurately capture the voice of particular groups. Focusing on heterosexuals was most appropriate as a first step, considering that they constitute the largest group and are as such often taken as the 'norm' and under-researched in their own right. Moreover, heterosexual, monogamous relationships offer the blueprint for other types of relationships and sexualities (Richards, 2010), reflected in widespread heteronormative assumptions. Rather than taking heterosexual notions for granted, it is therefore important to deconstruct these and elucidate inequalities, as well as gendered ways of relating.

Heterosexual relationships lend themselves to research that attempts to make gendered assumptions visible. Since other sexualities draw on heteronormative notions in their ways of relating as well, it would be interesting to do further research with a particular focus on these populations to highlight the similarities and differences. Studying ERSI from people who identify as homosexual, bisexual etc. in their own right, would more accurately capture the similar and different discourses drawn on, which may otherwise be lost. Other cultures may also construct relationships and their associated norms differently. It could therefore be of interest to look at those cultures in comparison to Western assumptions about relationships.

The analysis should not be regarded as complete or a reflection of the truth (e.g., Gergen, 1985). Instead it should be viewed as an ongoing process – the data can be analysed from various viewpoints and with diverse focuses, assigning it different meaning. The findings therefore merely represent my (and my supervisors') interpretation of the data at the time. Furthermore, I was part of the research process, rather than detached from it, reflected in the questions asked. During the FGDs, the moderators co-constructed the object with the participants and were thereby involved in the constructions of ERSI. The diversity of these portrayals illustrate how the interactions could take different positions in the discussion through a dynamic and unfolding process (Gergen, 1985; I. Parker, 1994). Opinions changed at different points in the conversation as alliances and oppositions were formed, with often polarising views. The moderators were involved in the facilitation of such rapport and as such in the circulation of produced knowledge.

Despite the researchers efforts to refrain from pejorative terminology linked to the practice of ERSI, or perhaps because of it, participants frequently took up judgemental words like "cheating", in accordance with other findings (e.g., Walters &

Burger, 2013). This demonstrates the availability of such terms, establishing the perimeters of admissible sexuality, as monogamy was normalised. By judging people against these standards, power is exercised (Carabine, 2001). Using the more neutral term ERSI did not disrupt such standards or indeed attempt to do so, but rather addressed the non-monogamous behaviour and made the heteronormative discourses visible.

The group dynamics in the FGDs may have further shut down any alternative ways ERSI could have been spoken about. Any alternative constructions of ERSI may have been depicted as not fitting in with normative assumptions about relationships and thereby as 'abnormal' (e.g., Jack in FG #3: "Even if I hear about someone who has a relationship with two people that have consented to each other "yeah we can sleep around" I hear about it, I've heard about it before and I think that's just weird."). By using a neutral term that did not comply with the participants' norms, the moderators may be seen as an active agent in the production of (counter-)discourses that offer certain ways of organising and regulating social life (Willig, 2013).

Despite the attempt to draw out the emotion talk of participants in the studies, I feel that the emotions could not be fully captured. This became particularly apparent in the way some participants spoke to each other, rather than what they said. Their voices seemed to contain frustration, resignation, cynicism, as well as other emotions that were not necessarily reflected in their words. The discursive approach taken, could not fully account for those. More specifically, a problem that arises with the social constructionist methodology is that, despite taking the interaction of social beings and society as a whole into account, it has been critiqued for reducing the individual only to discourse (Burr, 1995). Therefore it has failed to address "itself to the question of the psychology that one must theorise in order to show precisely how subjectivity is

produced" (Burr, 1995, p. 138). In other words, it cannot tell us for instance why a person takes a certain (political) position. In order to address this empty subjectivity and account for the emotions involved in the discourses, Gough (2004) suggested that psychoanalysis may be adopted as an additional tool to analyse the data. However, psychoanalysis fails to explain the particularities of the psychological processes that the unconscious constitutes. Hence a more specific approach regarding affect as a practice would be preferential (Wetherell, 2012, 2013, 2014) in order to find a middle ground between the discursive and the affective. Aspects of affective practice may be useful for future analyses to explain how subjectivity is produced (i.e., why someone may take up a certain position).

The gendered discourses outlined in the current project, illustrate the ongoing inequalities between men and women that need to be addressed. More equal rights for women would be advantageous for men as well, by minimising the pressures created through long-established gendered assumptions, such as hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005). Reducing the stigma attached especially to a woman's ERSI, would also help to diminish expectations regarding men's (violent) response to restore their sense of masculinity (Patel & Gadit, 2008) and open up new avenues through a better understanding of the practice. One step in challenging the different repercussions for men and women, might be to discard victim/perpetrator categories in regards to ERSI that attribute blame and stigma in gendered ways (Leslie & Southard, 2009; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013).

8.2.1 Implications for practitioners

Categorising subjects of an ERSI into clear victim/perpetrator positions (as often inherent in assumptions about ERSI) may facilitate gendered notions of sexuality and undermine the plurality of the experience. Such a division may produce adverse

emotions, such as depression or shame for those classified as the 'victim' (e.g., Bird et al., 2007; Vandello & Cohen, 2003), and pathologise the 'perpetrator' (e.g., S. B. Levine, 1998; Zola, 2007). Male 'victims' have been argued to be expected to inflict power and dominance through culturally reinforced violence, although they are also more often the victim of such actions (e.g., Vandello & Cohen, 2003). Men and women may therefore benefit from reducing the pressure to adhere to traditional gender norms that have repercussions for them (Connell, 2001; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Hollway, 2001; Jackson & Scott, 1996; Klesse, 2010; Lieberman, 1999; McCarthy & Bodnar, 2005; Patel & Gadit, 2008; Vandello & Cohen, 2003; Weeks, 2010). It would therefore make little sense to create such a division, especially for health professionals targeting couples who have experienced an ERSI. Instead, it should be taken into consideration that the experience can be traumatic for both individuals for similar reasons. As such, I think it is essential to move away from a binary framework by gaining an in-depth understanding of the practice, in order to promote gender equal ways of relating that are beneficial for men and women.

The representation of ERSI as fulfilling different desires was not in accordance with the often assumed notion by both, study participants, especially in the FGDs, and research (e.g., Atkins et al., 2001; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Jeanfreau et al., 2014b), that ERSI commonly serves to fill a void in the primary relationship. It is therefore advisable for health professionals, as well as individuals, not to problematise the relationships affected by an ERSI. Such a stance would only further stigmatise the partners of those having engaged in ERSI, who may be put into the position of not having 'provided enough' and hence blame them at least partly for their partner's ERSI.

Notions of responsibility also became more apparent by the contrasting depictions of ERSI in Study Two as a planned and calculated act, positioning the

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subject as agentic and fully accountable for their actions. The individual was here not only portrayed as an active agent in the initiation of ERSI, but also as capable of controlling the situation, regardless of the circumstances (e.g., when drunk). This worked to position those engaging in ERSI as inconsiderate and selfish. Such representations may stigmatise the individual and result in a lower likelihood to disclose his/her ERSI, due to a fear of the consequences (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). Keeping ERSI a secret has been reported in Study One to have led to psychological distress for those engaging in this act. It is therefore advisable for practitioners to take the impact of an undisclosed ERSI on those trying to keep it from their partner into account, rather than discontinue the therapy, as some couples' therapists have proposed (Scheinkman, 2005).

The research demonstrated how individuals constructed morality and normativity and drew on those notions to inflict blame, illustrating the way people talk as a social action (Edwards, 1997). In accordance with Edwards' argument, it was particularly useful to focus on emotion talk, with all its contradictions. This exemplified its flexibility and complexity, which is often lost when the social and biological are separated, as is often the case in psychology (Wetherell, 2012). The emotion talk used by participants in the studies, represented the plurality of the ERSI experience. Reducing ERSI to simplistic biological notions and emotions to simple stimuli, may merely gloss over such complexities and hinder the development of our understanding of the practice. Approaching the topic in reductionist terms might undermine the multiple ways people experience ERSI. It is therefore important for practitioners to take the discursive into account in the development of their interventions, allowing them to inquire curiously, as well as exhibit empathy towards all parties involved. By continuing to use a victim/perpetrator framework and notions of 'infidelity' as meaning sexual intercourse, practitioners may undermine the complexity of the situation and

other sexual activities, respectively (Moller & Vossler, 2015; Scheinkman, 2005; Williams & Knudson-Martin, 2013). For instance, the current project demonstrated that non-coital sexual acts were depicted as meaningful occurrences by both men and women who engaged in ERSI, in accordance with other findings (e.g., Moller & Vossler, 2015). As such, practitioners need to move away from static, narrow and stigmatising terms used to describe ERSI, and acknowledge their role in the co-construction of such definitions (Moller & Vossler, 2015).

8.3 Concluding Remarks

Overall, it became clear in this research that ERSI was depicted as a highly varied experience contingent on our understanding of heterosexual sexuality and relationships. Attempting to categorise the practice may undermine the colourful complexity of such comprehensions. Individuals may subsequently struggle to make sense of their experiences, as only particularly moralising and stigmatising discourses may be available. Fearing the possible, predetermined consequences of their actions that narrow down the various manners in which people may react (dependent on the available discourses), may create power struggles and inequality for everyone involved. Romantic monogamous relationships were thereby in the current research maintained through angst and tension, rather than having an equal choice. The legitimising discourses of ERSI were gendered and only allowed for non-monogamy to happen within a stigmatising (monogamous) framework, functioning to reinforce mononormativity (Mint, 2004). This does not only affect (the enforced) coupledom, but all types of relationships, as such notions (e.g., of sexuality, masculinity etc.) are carried over into everyday life with friends, colleagues, and strangers. A person's capability to uphold a friendship, for example, may be questioned if they fail to uphold a monogamous relationship (Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). In order to move towards more egalitarian and positive ways of relating, we need to break down the boundaries to

make more discourses available and offer alternative options without the fear of adverse outcomes. Diversity in the understanding of relationships and sexuality can therefore promote a more egalitarian heterosexual system, rather than an unequal one based on reductionist assumptions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Open Ended Questionnaire

AUT
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TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

The Fling Experience

Thank you for your time and willingness to take part in our questionnaire.
Below are some questions about your experience(s) of engaging in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive partner while you were in a committed relationship. This research is part of a PhD project examining extra-relational sexual involvement, conducted at the Dept. of Psychology, AUT. Please give as <u>much detail</u> in your answers as you can (spend around 5-10 minutes per question from question 10 onwards). If necessary you can use an extra sheet or the back of the sheet to illustrate your answer further. You do not need to answer any question if you do not wish to do so. All data will be kept confidential. Please return the questionnaire inside the envelope to the Department of Psychology's reception or post it in the envelope provided (postage included). If you have any questions, please email me on shahin.payam@aut.ac.nz. Thanks. Shahin Payam.

1. Please state your gender

2. How old are you?

3. What ethnic identity do you identify with?

4. Where were you born?

5. What is your occupation?

6. Are you currently in a romantic relationships? If so, how long have you been in that relationship?

7. Have you ever had sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive partner?

8. How many times has this occurred?

9. With how many people have you engaged in sexual relations while in an exclusive relationship?

10. How did you meet them?

11. Could you please describe in as much detail as possible the **first time** you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner?

12. What age/gender were they and how old were you?

13. How did the sexual relations come about?

14. Did you enjoy this encounter? Why/why not?

15. What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?

16. What were your thoughts and feelings *after* the encounter?

17. What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)

18. What do you think was the reason for engaging in this sexual relation?

19. Could you please describe in as much detail as possible another time (if applicable, otherwise skip to question 37) you engaged in sexual relations with someone other than your exclusive sexual partner (and different to the person described above)?

20. How did you meet them?

21. What age/gender were they and how old were you?

22. How did the sexual relations come about?

23. Did you enjoy this encounter? Why/why not?

24. What were your thoughts and feelings at the time of the encounter?

25. What were your thoughts and feelings *after* the encounter?

26. What were the outcomes of engaging in this encounter? (e.g., for you, your relationship, your friendships?)

27. What do you think was the reason for engaging in such sexual relations?

28. How do you feel about it now?

29. Does anyone know about this/these event(s)/encounter(s)? If so, how did they react?

30. Please explain why you chose to talk / not talk about your experience to anyone?

31. How do you think this experience has affected you and your relationships (and possibly friendships)?

32. Please explain how you would feel if your partner engaged in sexual relations with someone other than you.

33. Do you think there is a difference between men and women engaging in sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner? Please explain.

34. Any additional comments?

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Have you ever had a 'FLING'?

Please tell us about it!

You just need to fill out one anonymous questionnaire.

(AND you will also go in the draw to win an IPOD NANO or 1 of 2 vouchers!)

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ALL ABOUT?
This is a PhD project investigating people's experiences of having sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner **while in a committed relationship**.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?
You need to be: • 20 years of age or older   • Heterosexual

HOW? You have 3 options:
- Just use the following link: (https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/flingexperience)
- Ask for a paper copy to be sent out to you by email or post (your details will be kept confidential).
- Pick up an anonymous copy sealed in an envelope from the School of Psychology's reception by providing the researcher's name (Shahin Payam)

Researcher: Shahin Payam, shahin.payam@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8211

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 16 October 2014, for a period of three years. AUTEC Reference number 14/311

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RELATIONSHIP STUDY www.surveymonkey.com/s/flingexperience

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RELATIONSHIP STUDY www.surveymonkey.com/s/flingexperience

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RELATIONSHIP STUDY www.surveymonkey.com/s/flingexperience

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

11 September 2014

Project Title

Examining Western constructions of extra-relational sexual involvement

An Invitation

My name is Shahin Payam and I am currently undertaking research at AUT as part of my PhD investigating people's experiences of having sexual relations with someone other than their exclusive partner. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Please remember that:

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary (your choice).

- If you do agree to take part you are free to withdraw at any time, without having to give a reason.

This information sheet will explain the research study. However, if you have any questions about anything then please contact Shahin on 09 921 9999 ext 8211 or email *shahin.payam@aut.ac.nz.*

What is the purpose of this research?

The project seeks to examine the current ways of thinking of having sex with someone other than your partner while being in an exclusive, committed relationship. I am interested in learning about the experiences you have made and their outcomes. This will be part of my PhD thesis and data extracts may be used for the purpose of presentations and any research articles that may be published as a result.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

I am approaching you as a potential research participant, because you have experienced an extra-relational sexual involvement.

In order to participate, you need to:

- have had sex with someone other than your partner at the time while being in an *exclusive, heterosexual* relationship

- be aged 20 or over

- able to write in English

What will happen in this research?

You are required to fill out a questionnaire in as much detail as possible, in your own time and environment of your choice. The data collected will only be used by the researcher as part of the study and no other purposes.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is anticipated that this study should not produce any discomfort. However, you may feel uncomfortable sharing personal information.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You do not have to reveal any information you are unwilling to reveal, answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with and you will not be asked to provide your identity or personally interact with anyone. No-one should be able to identify you from any data extracts.

What are the benefits?

It is hoped that the outcomes will help us to gain a better understanding of gender roles and relationships within the current Western society, in order to take necessary steps towards gender equality for both men and women. It will also contribute towards my PhD qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity will be kept anonymous, unless you choose to participate in the prize draw or ask us to email you a summary of the findings, though in these cases your details will remain confidential. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the data set, which will be stored in computer files with restricted access and/or in a locked filing cabinet at AUT University for six years. After this time they will be destroyed. You will **not** be asked to provide your name or directly interact with anyone.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The main cost will be your time. The questionnaire requires you to provide a detailed account of your experiences. It will take approximately 5-10 minutes per question. You may provide your phone number (or email address) at the end **if** you wish to participate in a draw to win a price (i.e., Ipod Nano, vouchers). The draw will be conducted by University staff unrelated to the study. However, if you have concerns regarding confidentiality, you do not have to provide your details / participate in the draw.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

The questionnaire will be available from the xx/xx/xx up until the xx/xx/xx.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Filling out the questionnaire implies your consent.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you wish to be informed about the results of the study you may provide your email address and I email you an overview of the findings at the end of the study and you may request a copy of any publications. Usually there is a delay between collecting information and letting people know about the results.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Panteà Farvid, *pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7326 or Dr. Deborah Payne, *dpayne@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7112.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 09 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Shahin Payam, *shahin.payam@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 8211

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Panteà Farvid, *pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7326

Dr. Deborah Payne, *dpayne@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7112

Appendix 4: Advertisement Poster Study Two

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

06 November 2015

Project Title

Examining the social construction of extra-relational sexual involvement

An Invitation

My name is Shahin Payam and I am currently undertaking research at AUT as part of my PhD. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Please remember that:

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary (your choice).

- If you do agree to take part you are free to withdraw at any time, without having to give a reason.

This information sheet will explain the research study. However, if you have any questions about anything then please contact Shahin on 09 921 9999 ext 8211 or email shahin.payam@aut.ac.nz.

What is the purpose of this research?

The project seeks to examine what people think of having sexual relations with someone other than one's partner while being in an exclusive, committed relationship. You, yourself, do not need have direct experiences in this matter as I'm interested in how people talk about and make sense of such issues. This will be part of my PhD thesis and (unnamed) parts of the focus groups may be used for the purpose of presentations and any research articles that may be published as a result.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

As you have contacted me, I assume you have read the advertisement or heard about the study through an acquaintance.

In order to participate, you need to be:

- aged 20 or over

- heterosexual

- able to speak English

- willing to talk about relationships, monogamy and sex in a small single-sex group setting of 4-5 participants

If any of these do not apply to you, please let me know.

What will happen in this research?

Focus groups

If you decide to take part in this study, this will involve being part of a focus group either in Central or North Auckland. We plan to hold 5 focus groups in total, with approximately 4–5 participants in each group. The groups are gender specific (i.e., men and women will be interviewed separately) with a gender matched moderator.

You will be asked some questions on the topic to discuss with the group, which is guided by a researcher. Questions asked will refer to:

- Heterosexual sex and relationships

With your permission the discussion will be audio recorded in order to analyse your discourses. After the focus group the audio will be transcribed by a typist who has signed a Confidentiality Form. At all stages of the research, your discussion will be kept confidential. The data collected will only be used by the researcher as part of the study and no other purposes.

Food and drinks will be provided.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There should not be any risk to you from this study. However, as you are taking part in a focus group about a relatively sensitive topic, you might possibly feel uncomfortable (although I hope you find it interesting and rewarding). There is also a possibility that talking about sex and relationships might bring up events that were upsetting to you in the past. Furthermore, sometimes with focus groups there is a risk of 'over sharing' personal information.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You will not be asked any personal questions and do not have to take part in the discussion that you feel uncomfortable with. However, if you become uncomfortable or upset, you may choose to leave the group entirely at this time, or may wish to take a break and return at a later time. You can also request that we remove all or part of your data from the study, up to one month after the focus group has taken place.

If you would like to seek further advice or support regarding your past experiences please let us know so that we are able to refer you to other agencies as appropriate. We will support you in whatever ways we can.

If you become distressed and would like to discuss this with someone, please let us know so that we are able to refer you as appropriate. You may be eligible to access free counselling sessions at the AUT Health & Counselling Service. The free counselling will be provided by professional counsellors for a maximum of **three** sessions and must be in relation to issues arising from your participation in this research project.

- You will need to contact the centres in person, or by phone
  09 921 9992 for City campus (WB219) **and South Campus** (MB reception)
  or **09 921 9998 North Shore Campus** (AS104) to make an appointment.
- You will need to let the receptionist know that you are a research participant.
- You will need to provide our contact details to confirm this.
You can find out more information about the counsellors on the following website:
http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student_services/health_counselling_and_wellbeing

It is also possible that you may become tired during the focus group. We will try to minimise this for you by going at your own pace and giving you the opportunity to take a break at any time if you desire. If you feel unable to continue and would like to stop or have a break, then please let us know.

What are the benefits?

It is hoped that the outcomes will help us to gain a better understanding of gender roles and relationships within the current Western society, in order to take necessary steps towards gender equality for both men and women. It will also contribute towards my PhD qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

You will be asked to give a fictional name that you will be known by during the interview, on the transcripts and in our summary, as well as in any publications or conference presentations that we produce from the study's findings. This way the answers you give will not be able to be tracked back to you.

Only the members of the research team and the transcriber will have access to the focus group interview recordings and transcripts. All copies of these will be stored in computer files with restricted access and/or in a locked filing cabinet at AUT University for six years. After this time they will be destroyed. Any material that may identify you will be deleted from the transcript.

The consent forms will also be kept locked in a filing cabinet at AUT University, separate from the recordings and transcripts. We also ask you to refrain from disclosing the discussion or identity of other participants to anyone.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The main cost will be your time. The focus group discussion will take approximately 1.5 hours altogether. Any parking costs will be fully reimbursed. In addition, each participant will receive a cinema voucher worth $10.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have at least two weeks or more to consider this invitation and to discuss the project with Family/whanau or a friend.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you decide to take part in this research, you can:

- Phone or email Shahin. You will be asked to sign a Consent Form before the focus group begins.

If we haven't heard from you after two weeks of receiving this invitation, Shahin or the research assistant will contact you to find out whether or not you'd like to take part in the study.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

All our participants will receive a summary of the research findings at the end of the study. In addition to this, you will also be able to request a copy of any publications. You will be able to indicate this on the Consent Form (i.e. by providing your email address). Usually there is a delay between collecting information and letting people know about the results.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Panteá Farvid, *pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7326 or Associate Professor Deborah Payne, *dpayne@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7112.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 09 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Shahin Payam, *shahin.payam@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 8211

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Panteá Farvid, *pani.farvid@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7326

Associate Professor Deborah Payne, *dpayne@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext 7112

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee 16 October 2014, for a period of three years. AUTEC Reference number 14/311.

Appendix 6: Consent Form Study Two

Consent Form

Project title: **Examining the social construction of extra-relational sexual involvement**

Project Supervisors: **Dr. Panteá Farvid, Associate Professor Deborah Payne**

Researcher: **Shahin Payam**

O   I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 06 November 2015.

O   I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

O   I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.

O   I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio recorded and transcribed.

O   I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

O   If I withdraw, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, the relevant information about myself including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.

O   I agree to take part in this research.

O   I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): YesO   NoO

Participant's signature: ....

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the 16 October 2014, for a period of three years. AUTEC Reference number 14/311.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix 7: Moderating Questions Study Two

Moderator questions - focus group

- Rules: fictional name, agreement not necessary, everyone should be able to give their opinion without being interrupted, not a therapy session
- Disclaimer/opener

Intro

- What types of heterosexual relationships are there?
- Let's talk about the following scenario: a man and a woman are in an exclusive relationship. One of them engages in a sexual activity, such as vaginal, anal or oral sex, with someone other than their partner. What are your thoughts on such a scenario? *(more information on the rels may be required, i.e. length, age, commitment etc., discuss various possibilities)*
- What is 'cheating' *(use participants' term)* for you?

Acceptability

- What do you think of people who might engage in such a behaviour?
- Do you think there are circumstances that make it more/less acceptable? *(i.e. age, duration of rels, commitment, sexual drive)*
- What are your expectations in a committed relationship?
- Where do you think the boundaries of commitment/exclusivity (e.g. the dos and don'ts, so far and no further) lie in a relationship? What do they depend on?
- What signifies a committed relationship to you? Can you explain / elaborate further? What do you mean by…?
- Is there a difference in acceptability of ERSI/commitment between marriage and cohabiting, dating etc. relationships? Elaborate.
- What if the parties involved in ERSI had a 'special connection'/'soulmate'/'the one'? What is the meaning of 'special connection' *(use participants' term)*?
- What would be worse, if it was a one-off encounter or a special connection and they couldn't do anything about it?
- What role do you think does attraction play?
- Do you think ERSI is the worst offense in a relationship? Why/why not?
- What would you do if you were in a situation like that *(i.e. special connection, attraction, lower commitment)*?
- Would you tell a friend if a partner was having an "affair" *(use participants' term)*?
- If a friend's partner hit on you, would you tell them?
- What if you were the third person, would you engage with someone who is in a relationship?

Gender

- Do you think there is generally a difference between men and women engaging in ERSI?
- How acceptable is ERSI for men and women? Do you think there is a difference? Please explain.
- Is it easier for men / women to engage in ERSI?

Appendix 8: Demographic Information Sheet Study Two

Let's talk about heterosexual relationships

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Could you please provide me with the following demographic information?

NAME (optional):   FICTIONAL NAME:

AGE:

SEX:

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

ETHNICITY:

OCCUPATION:

Are you currently in a committed 'romantic' relationship? Yes   No

If yes, how long have you been in this relationship?

How many long term-relationships have you had?

Have you ever had sex with someone that wasn't your partner while you were in a relationship?

Yes   No

If yes, how many times? _____

Who did you have this/these sexual encounter/s with? (Please circle as many that apply).

    a) friend
    b) co-worker
    c) stranger/recently met
    d) ex-partner
    e) other -- please specify: _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME! ☺

Appendix 9: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement Study Two

Confidentiality Agreement

AUT UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

For someone transcribing data, e.g. audio-tapes of interviews.

Project title: *'Infidelity', 'cheating' or a 'bit on the side'? Examining contemporary Western constructions of extra-relational sexual involvement.*

Project Supervisors: **Dr. Panteá Farvid, Associate Professor Deborah Payne**

Researcher: **Shahin Payam**

○   I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.

○   I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.

○   I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: ....

Transcriber's name: ....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....

....

....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the 16 October 2014, for a period of three years. AUTEC Reference number 14/311.

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form.