

# **After the Affair Study Guide**

**After the Affair by Janis Abrahms Spring**

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# Plot Summary

The text explores the methodology used to rebuild the trust and heal the pain within a post-affair relationship. A basic assumption of the book is that a relationship exists where a known and significant breach of trust has occurred and yet both partners desire to rebuild and rehabilitate the relationship. The text does not deliberately limit the affair or the relationship but does assume that the affair probably involved extramarital sexual intercourse, remained secret for some period, and was subsequently discovered by the hurt partner. The text addresses the various stages of recovery and therefore infers that the discovery of the affair was at least some few weeks in the past and that the affair is probably not ongoing.

The text is organized in an intuitive and straightforward manner, which aids materially in comprehension and informs the overall recovery and rebuilding process. The first major segment of the text deals with the emotional firestorm which surrounds the discovery of an affair. It is presented in two chapters—one describing the effects upon the hurt partner, and one describing the effects upon the unfaithful partner. The development of this section is remarkably unbiased and presents one of the strongest aspects of the text.

The second major segment of the text deals with the interaction between the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner in the immediate aftermath of discovery. In essence, the second segment attempts to assist the reader to determine whether they should remain in the relationship; even so, a basic premise of the text is that the reader has likely already determined to attempt to retain the relationship. The segment is divided into two chapters—one describing common ideas about love and relationships, and one offering advice and tools to those who must confront their personal doubts and fears about remaining in the damaged relationship.

The third major segment of the text is the largest portion of the book and deals with the actual recovery process. The section assumes the affair has been discovered and discontinued and that both partners have recommitted to the damaged relationship. The segment is developed through five chapters, each a topical treatment of issues likely to occur in a post-affair relationship. The first lengthy chapter explains how partners can learn from each other and their recent experiences. Other chapters offer suggestions for restoring trust, methods to discuss the affair, and, in the longest chapter of the book, strategies for approaching sex once again. The segment concludes with a small chapter offering suggestions about how to forgive the other partner. The text ends with a notable amount of supplementary material including, in some editions, an epilogue, extensive notes, a bibliography, and an index.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary and Analysis

The brief introduction establishes the themes of the text and provides guidelines for the author's definitions of numerous emotionally charged words and phrases. The introduction states the purpose of the text as attempting to help a couple survive infidelity provided both partners are seriously committed to preserving the relationship. The situation that has occurred and has been discovered is referred to throughout as an affair. The text defines an affair as a serious breach of trust that results in intense feelings of betrayal; an affair thus may encompass intimate behavior involving a non-marital partner but not involving sexual intercourse. The text does not offer a blanket judgment about whether affairs are good or bad. The text does not categorize individuals as victims, victimizers, betrayed, or betrayers—instead, the text refers to the marital partners as the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner. The extra-marital individual involved is referred to as the lover. These phrases are intended deliberately to eliminate the emotionally charged labels often used to describe extramarital affairs. The text does not suggest that marital partners should always remain married or always divorce—this decision must be made by the individuals involved.

The book's stated intended audience includes any two people who want to rebuild their relationship after one of them has been unfaithful. The book's secondary audiences include anyone whose relationship has ended as a result of infidelity, people who want to better understand their parent's past infidelity or professional and spiritual leaders dealing with infidelity among others. It also addresses individuals contemplating an extra-marital affair, individuals contemplating admitting to an affair, individuals who suspect their partner is engaging in an extramarital affair, and couples who are struggling with marital problems or trust issues which do not necessarily involve an extramarital affair.

Post-affair healing is divided into three broad stages. These three stages are presented at great length in the remainder of the text—in fact, their presentation consumes the majority of the book. The first stage involves an emotional whirlwind being managed and controlled until feelings can stabilize and normalize. The second stage involves making the decision whether to recommit or separate. The third and most-developed stage involves reconstructing a relationship after an affair. The chapter concludes by noting that an affair should be understood because although it may trigger recommitment, it may also be the death-knell of a relationship.



# Chapter 1 - The Hurt Partner's Response: Buried in an Avalanche of Losses

## Chapter 1 - The Hurt Partner's Response: Buried in an Avalanche of Losses Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1 begins the first of three major divisions within the text: Stage 1 - Reacting to the Affair: "Is What I'm Feeling Normal?" The two chapters in the first stage involve, respectively, the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner. Both chapters are average in length for the text. There is some overlap between the chapters but this is thematically necessary, intelligible, and minor.

Discovering a partner's unfaithfulness is a devastating experience; some hurt partners compare the emotional toll as being worse than that caused by being victimized by rape. Beyond emotional and intellectual upheaval, affairs may cause devastating physiological impacts, which persist through the short term. Once physiological effects subside, a host of psychological impacts become prominent. The text identifies nine psychological effects, lists them, and then considers them individually. The first is a loss of personal identity. Much of a hurt partner's identity has been invested in their intimate relationship and is thus partially formed and perhaps even partially defined by the unfaithful partner. When the affair is discovered these aspects of the hurt partner's identity are thrown into chaos. The second psychological effect is a loss of the sense of being special. The hurt partner's self worth and conviction is thrown into doubt by the unfaithful partner's actions. The hurt partner may feel as if they were disposable.

The third psychological effect involves a loss of self-respect when the hurt partner attempts to win back the unfaithful partner. To regain the relationship the hurt partner feels they are debasing themselves by wooing back the unfaithful partner. The fourth psychological effect is closely related—the loss of self-respect suffered by the hurt partner for failing to discover or acknowledge the unfaithful partner's actions. That is, the hurt partner often ignores clear signals of an affair—once the affair is known, the hurt partner reviews the previous signs and thereby suffers a loss of self-respect.

The fifth psychological effect involves the loss of control over mind and body suffered by the hurt partner. Most hurt partners suffer from negative, destructive, and obsessive thoughts and feel unable to halt the process. Many hurt partners repetitively imagine violent revenge against the unfaithful partner and the lover. Dealing with obsessive and disruptive thoughts is further considered in Chapter 8. Additionally, many hurt partners engage in obsession physical behavior such as binge dieting, excessive exercise, smoking, drinking, shopping, or eating—all attempts to dull the pain or reduce anxiety.



The sixth psychological effect involves the loss of the hurt partner's fundamental sense of order and justice. Most people feel that 'good things happen to good people' yet hurt partners must cope with catastrophic events often caused by no apparent deficit. The text lists five commonly shattered fundamental beliefs which hurt partners are forced to abandon. The seventh psychological effect is closely related and involves the loss of religious faith. Hurt partners often blame God for their suffering; others feel God has abandoned them or has judged them as worthless. The resulting loss of faith occurs at a time when religious faith could be comforting.

The eighth psychological effect involves feeling the inability to connect with others. Whether friends or family are supportive or not, the hurt partner is often unable to feel connected with them. Even if family members are supportive, the chaotic emotions surrounding the hurt partner's experiences may make reliance on such supportive relationships painful or untenable. The result is that many hurt partners feel rejected by everyone, not just the unfaithful partner. The text urges hurt partners to seek solace from family, friends, children, parents, and even professional therapists. The ninth and final psychological effect considered involves the loss of a sense of purpose. Stripped of their relationship and rejected by the unfaithful partner, the hurt partner often feels at a loss to explain the rationale behind daily living. Suicidal thoughts may become common and self-destructive behavior might be exhibited.

The chapter concludes with a consideration of the different reactions that hurt partners may experience depending upon their gender. The text notes that gender-typical reactions are simply a broad and general division and frequently do not apply to specific individuals. Nevertheless, they are generally accurate and therefore often useful as a starting point. The text offers four general distinctions between how men and women react as the hurt partner. In general, then, women usually attempt to retain their relationship with the unfaithful partner whereas men usually disengage themselves from an adulterous marriage. Women hurt partners usually become depressed and men hurt partners usually become angry. Women hurt partners usually feel inadequate as companions and friends; men hurt partners usually feel inadequate as sexual lovers. Finally, faced with an unfaithful partner, women usually obsess over the failing relationship whereas men usually attempt to distract themselves by focusing on often-trivial external events.



# Chapter 2 - The Unfaithful Partner's Response: Lost in a Labyrinth of Choices

## Chapter 2 - The Unfaithful Partner's Response: Lost in a Labyrinth of Choices Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 concludes the first of three major divisions within the text: Stage 1 - Reacting to the Affair: "Is What I'm Feeling Normal?" The two chapters in the first stage involve, respectively, the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner. Both chapters are average in length for the text. There is some overlap between the chapters but this is thematically necessary, intelligible, and minor. The text suggests that the fundamental difference in reaction to the affair between the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner stems from the fact that the unfaithful partner's sense of self has not been assaulted; in fact, it may have benefited.

Most unfaithful partners prosecute their extramarital affair with stealth, weaving a web of deceit to prevent the discovery of the affair. Once the affair is recognized, the unfaithful partner typically feels a great sense of emotional relief as they are freed from the self-imposed necessity of deception. The chapter, similar in construction to chapter 1, lists ten psychological reactions experienced by the unfaithful partner once their affair has been discovered. First, tired of lying, the unfaithful partner usually feels emotional relief that their self-imposed deceitful practices can henceforth be abandoned. Second, the unfaithful partner is often ready and in fact impatient to move forward in the marriage relationship. The unfaithful partner often wants to reconnect and wants to stop feeling guilty. Third, unfaithful partners often manage their own anxiety by becoming involved in a wide range of activities—some purposeful, many meaningless. These activities provide a temporary fix or distraction from deeper issues, which must, ultimately, be addressed.

The fourth psychological aspect considered in the text is the often-encountered situation of an unfaithful partner feeling an absolute lack of guilt about their actions. The text suggests this can result from one of five reasons. The unfaithful partner has already written off the marriage; the unfaithful partner has a serious character disorder; the unfaithful partner is angry at the hurt partner; the unfaithful partner is euphoric and committed to their lover; or, finally, the unfaithful partner holds assumptions about infidelity that justify the affair. The first two reasons listed are beyond the scope of the text. Anger at the hurt partner may be valid and stem from many reasons. However, it is usually unsustainable. Euphoria over the affair is a common occurrence but is frequently short-lived. Many people hold core assumptions about infidelity that, right or wrong, cause them to feel justified in pursuing extramarital affairs. The text offers a bulleted list of seventeen items, which are belief systems, or rationalizations that justify



affairs. The text then challenges unfaithful partners to examine rationalizations or assumptions for validity and suggests that, most frequently, they are not logical.

Fifth, unfaithful partners who terminate their affair with their lover often grieve over the loss of their illicit relationship. Needless to say, this grieving is particularly offensive to the hurt partner but is a normal response to ending any meaningful relationship. Sixth, unfaithful partners are often distraught over the example they are setting for their children. Children probably will not understand the unfaithful partner's rationale for pursuing an affair and will often angrily reject the unfaithful parent. Seventh, once the affair is terminated and the hurt partner withdraws, the unfaithful partner often feels isolate. Friends, family members, parents, and children very often reject the unfaithful partner's company. Infidelity is socially unacceptable and is not likely to win support among a broad base of friends. The text suggests that in such instances professional therapists may form a temporary substitute while family relationships are normalized.

Eighth, the unfaithful partner returning to a damaged relationship often feels hopeless. The hurt partner is distant, angry, and unforgiving and the natural inclination of many unfaithful partners is to conclude that the damaged marriage is beyond salvage. Closely related, the ninth psychological reaction considered is mental paralysis—the unfaithful partner feels ambivalent and confused. Often selecting between the hurt partner and the lover is difficult, particularly given that the illicit affair was most likely sensuous and exciting. Trapped in ambivalence, unfaithful partners often begin to doubt their feelings and their own normalcy. The final psychological reaction considered is self-disgust. Unfaithful partners frequently feel sleazy and disgusted with their own actions—feelings which are frequently amplified by the negative reactions of others. The text notes that guilt can be a healthy reminder that the unfaithful partner has been untrue to themselves as well as the hurt partner.

Similar to chapter 1, the chapter concludes with a consideration of the different reactions that unfaithful partners may experience depending upon their gender. The text notes that gender-typical reactions are simply a broad and general division and frequently do not apply to specific individuals. Nevertheless, they are generally accurate and therefore often useful as a starting point. The text offers three general distinctions between how men and women who have been unfaithful react. First, when searching for a suitable lover, men seek playmates and women seek soul mates. Men's idealized lovers are not emotionally attached and are fun-spirited and sexual; women's idealized lovers are emotionally dependent and intimate. This bears out through homosexual couples also. Second and closely related, women believe their affair is justified by love whereas men believe their affair is justified by the lack of love. Finally, women usually anguish over their affairs whereas men enjoy their affairs. Women's view their affairs as complicating and difficult but men view their affairs as fun and distracting.





# Chapter 3 - Exploring Your Ideas About Love

## Chapter 3 - Exploring Your Ideas About Love Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3 begins the second of three major divisions within the text: Stage 2 - Reviewing Your Options: "Should I Stay or Leave?" The two chapters in the second stage involve, respective, making the decision to remain in the damaged relationship and then determining how this recommitment can be possible. Chapter 3 is the second shortest chapter in the text; this is reflection of the basic premise of the text that readers will have already made the determination to remain in the damaged relationship. The chapter urges an inventory of personal desires and beliefs with a focus on identifying and abandoning irrational or erroneous beliefs. The chapter features, early on, a brief statement which condemns virtually all extramarital affairs as damaging—this is the most judgmental statement in the text. The chapter then bluntly states that affairs present two choices: dissolution of the relationship or a recommitment to the relationship.

Many hurt partners choose to remain with unfaithful partners for erroneous reasons. One of the principle reasons they remain is termed 'unrequited love'. In unrequited love, the hurt partner has an intense attachment to the relationship regardless of how dysfunctional it has become. Often these relationships are depriving or abusive but the unrequited love of the hurt partner overrides reason, and demands an irrational dogged determination to remain with the unfaithful partner. The text urges hurt partners to examine their feelings of attachment and determine whether they are valid or based on unrequited love.

Many unfaithful partners choose to abandon their hurt partners in favor of the lover for erroneous reasons. One of the principle reasons they leave is termed 'romantic love'. In romantic love, the unfaithful partner has an intense attachment to the lover regardless of the reality of the circumstances. Often these relationships are based upon newness and irrational expectations. New relationships often also elicit short-term chemical changes in the brain, which leads to a state of artificial and temporary euphoria. Thus, romantic love features emotional changes, cognitive changes, and chemical changes. Often, all of these changes are short-lived and they are usually based upon misconception.

Both unrequited love and romantic love are examples of unrealistic expectations of love and marriage. The text presents bulleted lists of unrealistic expectations, which are based on irrational beliefs. For example, one unrealistic expectation is that a relationship will somehow continue to be passionate and passionately sexual forever, without fail. These unrealistic expectations must be challenged and abandoned or modified, or else they are likely to lead to a dysfunctional relationship.



Many—perhaps most—relationships begin with romantic love. Such emotions are not durable, however, and all relationships eventually move past romantic love to a stage of mature love. The text suggests that the decline of romantic love often leads to a phase of disenchantment. That is, the partners in the relationship begin to discover that their initial unrealistic expectations are no longer being met. Disenchantment is normal and, when appropriately managed, is temporary. When inappropriately managed, disenchantment can lead to extramarital affairs and the end of the relationship. The chapter concludes by urging readers to examine the origin of their unrealistic notions about love and marriage. Such unrealistic ideas often stem from childhood experiences, particularly experiences that occurred in the childhood home between parents.



# Chapter 4 - Confronting Your Doubts and Fears

## Chapter 4 - Confronting Your Doubts and Fears Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 concludes the second of three major divisions within the text: Stage 2 - Reviewing Your Options: "Should I Stay or Leave?" The two chapters in the second stage involve, respective, making the decision to remain in the damaged relationship and then determining how this recommitment can be possible. Chapter 4 is of average length and addresses the most fundamental situation faced by any post-affair marriage—how the partners can once again trust each other. The chapter begins by considering several typical concerns of partners who have determined to work through an affair. Often, one or both partners assume that so much damage has been done to the relationship that recovery is literally impossible, regardless of commitment or dedication. This conception prevents progress and should be examined and then discarded—relationships are based on common goals and desires, and however damaged can be repaired as long as both partners are willing to perform the work.

The second concern is unique to the hurt partner—they are apt to wonder if they can ever again trust the unfaithful partner. This concern is real and central to many damaged relationships. Without fully analyzing the reasons and root causes for the affair, the unfaithful partner is likely to once again engage in an affair. Thus, in order to rebuild trust the relationship must be understood and the root causes of the affair must be eliminated. Unfaithful partners often exhibit indicators of whether they are likely to pursue future affairs; warning signs include unrealistic or hostile attitude, a history of deception, an inability or unwillingness to communicate, an inability or unwillingness to empathize with the hurt partner, and an inability or unwillingness to understand the causes of the affair.

The third concern enumerated is the often-held idea that a couple suffering from an affair is simply incompatible—the partners are too dissimilar to successfully pursue a relationship. While this is possible, it is unlikely. Several bulleted lists offer suggestions on how to analyze this aspect of a relationship. Generally, perceived incompatibility results from a failure to adequately communicate needs and desires, not from some underlying profound difference. Additional enumerated concerns include fear that one's partner is changing only temporarily and only for show; that one's appeal to one's partner is based more on belongings and circumstance than individuality; and that any reason for staying together are silly or insufficient. The text argues that the rationale for remaining in the relationship can be successfully analyzed by considering economic and social consequences of divorce, facing any religious implications of divorce, and understanding that divorce though difficult is possible.



Couples with children have additional concerns—dealing with the emotional effects on children should be considered in any decision affecting the relationship. Additional concerns examined in the chapter include feelings of despair, feelings of guilt for remaining involved with someone who has proved unfaithful, and feelings of guilt for abandoning the lover. The text, aside from enumerating these ten named concerns, supplies a descriptive paragraph about each concern and, if appropriate, addresses the concern from both the hurt partner's and also the unfaithful partner's point of view. Some concerns are predominantly the concern of one partner or another, but most concerns are shared. Once the decision has been made to remain together and rebuild the relationship, the decision should be formally announced—the author suggests making a formal pledge—so that intentions can be clarified and new boundaries established. Both partners should agree upon milestones and basic goals. The author suggests using mental time projection to look forward six months, one year, and five years to envision where the relationship will be. The forward-looking sentiment will help focus exertion on the rebuilding process and divert attention from the recriminating accusations, which might otherwise destroy the relationship. Finally, the author counsels both partners to learn to be non-reactive listeners.



# Chapter 5 - Learning From the Affair

## Chapter 5 - Learning From the Affair Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 begins the last of three major divisions within the text: Stage 3 - Recovering from the Affair: "How Do We Rebuild Our Life Together?" The five chapters in the second stage present strategies for understanding the affair and recovering from it. Chapter 5 is the second-longest chapter in the text and addresses an often-overlooked topic. An affair is a damaging and tumultuous period in any relationship; an event probably caused by a multiplicity of underlying causes which are often poorly understood. Committing to remain together without analyzing and correcting deficiencies is likely to lead to future heartache and probably additional future affairs. However, not all aspects of surviving an affair need be negative—if examined and understood, an affair can act as an unfortunate but powerful springboard for partners to recommit and rebuild their relationship and their own selves. Thus, a post-affair marriage eventually may become stronger than ever. Instead of blaming one's partner for all the ills of a relationship, each partner must examine the relationship and its faults and take responsibility for their portion of the shortcomings of the relationship. The text does make clear, however, that the lion's share of the blame for any affair lies with the unfaithful partner.

Both partners should examine themselves by exploring how their early life experiences were less than optimal. Often, relationship problems can be better understood and ultimately corrected through an understanding of beliefs and behaviors rooted in childhood experiences. The text identifies and explores seven essential childhood experiences and terms them 'critical growth experiences'. Each experience is considered from the unique perspective of the unfaithful partner and the hurt partner. When the critical growth experience is missing, a person compensates by negative behavior in an identifiable pattern, which the text refers to as 'schema'.

First, children need to feel safe and secure. Those who grow up without this experience were in general abandoned or abused. Unfaithful partners with this schema seek to distance themselves from their partners because they are unable to commit. Hurt partners are generally overly accommodating and passive. Second, children need to be allowed to function independently. Those who grow up without this experience are unable to perform autonomously. Unfaithful partners with this schema use an affair as an act of rebellion or as a way to declare independent. Hurt partners are generally over-dependent. Third, children need to connect emotionally to others. Those who grow up without this experience find it difficult or impossible to form durable bonds with others. Unfaithful partners with this schema explore serial affairs to escape their sense of inner barrenness. Hurt partners either withhold love or demand more than anyone can reasonably give.



Fourth, children need to be able to value themselves. Those who grow up without this experience were often over-criticized and made to feel that they didn't measure up to parental expectation. Unfaithful partners with this schema have personal adequacy issues and pursue affairs as a way to bolster self-confidence. Hurt partners find it impossible to participate in an intimate and full relationship. Fifth, children need to express themselves. Those who grow up without this experience were in general always silenced by their parents. Unfaithful partners with this schema build up tremendous silent resentment and then pursue an affair to putatively have their needs met. Hurt partners silence their needs until they erupt with unpredictable hostility.

Sixth, children need to periodically be able to let go and have fun. Those who grow up without this experience shoulder too much responsibility and lack spontaneity. Unfaithful partners with this schema seek an affair as a form of reawakening. Feeling they have been robbed of their childhood, they seek out new and exciting experiences. Hurt partners feel tethered to unrelenting standards and exhibit compulsive habits that destroy playfulness, romance, and creativity. Seventh, children need to have realistic boundaries emplaced. Those who grow up without realistic limits lack self-discipline and too easily take offense at others. Unfaithful partners with this schema struggle to cope with their overblown sense of self worth and seek affairs for personal aggrandizement. Hurt partners feel entitled to be taken care of and are unable to return such sentiments in kind. The segment concludes by proposing a series of mental and emotional exercises to help individuals identify any negative schemas within which they operate.

The next segment of the chapter considers the trans-generational effects of infidelity. Often, unfaithful partners come from homes where one or both parents were unfaithful. Instead of doing everything possible to avoid the pain experienced during their own childhood, unfaithful partners resort to similar behavior, because it seems normal or acceptable. On the other hand, hurt partners often seek out individuals with whom to form relationships because they have similar traits to their own parents. Thus, hurt partners are often drawn to unfaithful partners because their behavior patterns are familiar and comfortable. The result of this is a 'history repeated' type of trans-generational effect. The segment concludes by proposing an exercise to help individuals attempt to escape such effects.

The next segment of the chapter considers what the author terms the 'flip-flop factor'; that is, for every trait a partner possesses which is viewed as predominantly negative, a positive correlation can be established. For example, a partner who lacks spontaneity, constantly seeks approval, and is self-absorbed can simultaneously be defined as a partner who is reliable, attentive, and creative. Several examples are given, and the segment concludes with an exercise to help individuals redefine their partners by utilizing the 'flip-flop factor' of understanding.

The final segment of the chapter considers the impact of critical events as a root cause of the affair. This segment seeks to examine not the 'why' of an affair, but more the 'when' of an affair. In general, the segment suggests that a timeline plot of critical life events, including of course the affair, can often shed illumination on some of the causes and mitigating factors of any affair. The text enumerates critical life events as illness,



accident, death, being uprooted, a shift in status, personal failure, a life transition, and substance abuse. As many of these are subjective in criticality, the text suggests that individual partners are the best judge of the importance of any given event. An example timeline is offered. The segment concludes by proposing a shared exercise to help couples plot timelines and examine the impact of critical life events. Several concise case summaries are offered; one examines the triggering event, two pinpoint the conflict, and three case studies resolve the conflict.



# Chapter 6 - Restoring Trust

## Chapter 6 - Restoring Trust Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 is of average length and focuses primarily on individual behavior. As an individual cannot control another, the only way to restore trust is change personal behavior in order to demonstrate personal trustworthiness. The text suggests that if an individual behaves in a trustworthy manner, eventually trust will be restored. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first focuses on methods to change behavior, and the second focuses on overcoming resistance to personal change. Logically, the chapter focuses on the behavior of the unfaithful partner but does note that the hurt partner should also participate.

Behavioral change is critical for successfully rehabilitating a post-affair relationship. Obviously, trust has been destroyed and doubt is prevalent in any such situation. Individual behaviors which detract from trust must be eliminated, and more importantly, individual behaviors which create trust must be adopted. Most trust-building behaviors can be roughly divided into the categories of low-cost behaviors and high-cost behaviors. Low-cost behaviors are those, which are can immediately performed with relatively no cost to the individual. Such behaviors include, for example, always providing accurate travel itineraries, daily telephone calls, and timely return from work. A graph is provided where couples can chart selected low-cost behaviors and graph progress. A numbered series of suggestions for forming lists is provided, and bulleted lists are provided as examples.

High-cost behaviors are those either which take a considerable amount of time to perform or which extract a considerable toll from the individual. Such behaviors include, for example: transferring assets into the hurt partner's name; transferring the home title to the hurt partner's name; seriously pursuing therapy; moving to another locale; or submitting to intimate inspection of bank statements, credit card statements, and telephone bills. A few examples of high cost behaviors are presented along with a brief discussion of what to do when couples stalemate over proposed high-cost behaviors.

The second part of the chapter focuses on overcoming resistance to change. Individuals usually behave in comfortable ways within a restrictive zone. Changing behavior is uncomfortable and the text presents a numbered list of rationales commonly utilized by those who desire to avoid change. Avoiding change in general results from cognitive blocks, or the inability to understand why change must occur. Often, cognitive blocks are elaborate rationalizations that are false. The cognitive blocks considered are, first that hurt partners may feel they do not have the right to demand the unfaithful partner to change. Second, partners may feel that demanding change will spark further controversy and thus seek to maintain the current situation to avoid confrontation. Third, individuals may erroneously feel that their partner should somehow be able to sense needs. Fourth, individuals may feel that directly asking for love is unacceptable. Fifth, individuals may feel that if their partner does what they ask it will only be because they





have been asked, and not because they genuinely want to perform service. Sixth, hurt partners may believe the unfaithful partner is changing only for appearances and to intentionally deceive. Seventh, some individuals apparently refuse to acknowledge their partner's sincere progress toward change. Eighth, hurt partners mistakenly believe that the unfaithful partner must do all of the changing, and must do it first. Ninth, some individuals refuse to change because they are angry or hurt. After examining each of these cognitive blocks, the chapter concludes with a few paragraphs encouraging individuals to look ahead to a successful future of trust.



# Chapter 7 - How to Talk About What Happened

## Chapter 7 - How to Talk About What Happened Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 is of average length and offers tools that can be used by couples to allow them to talk about the affair, its aftermath, and its root causes. As a failure to communicate is often the seminal cause of marital dysfunction, the chapter provides a crucial skill to those attempting to rehabilitate a post-affair relationship. The chapter is divided into two major parts—the first focuses on methods for intimate talk, and the second focuses on methods for intimate listening.

Intimate talk about the affair is crucial to resolving differences, exploring and learning from the affair, and moving forward in the relationship. Two dysfunctional ways of attempting intimate talk are silence and storm. Silence is a refusal on the part of one or both partners to discuss the affair or aspects of the affair. It is based upon one or more false assumptions, including the belief that intimate talk will cause further and deeper rifts or that intimate talk will be too revealing of facts that will later be used inappropriately. Both partners must realize that intimate talk is a required component of recovery. Storm is the process of assaulting another with verbal abuse. Like silence, it is based upon one or more false assumptions. For example, individuals might rage and storm because they feel they must unburden themselves of negative feelings, because they feel that without rage and shouting their partner will not give credence talk, or because raging and storming is transiently emotionally satisfying. Some individuals mistakenly believe that storming is simply a component of their personality that must be accepted. Both partners must realize that stormy talk is damaging and not constructive. Two case studies are presented to illustrate intimate talk behaviors, which are often adopted during childhood. The section on intimate talk concludes by noting that the unfaithful partner must unequivocally say goodbye to the lover and the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner must engage in intimate talk about the affair.

Intimate listening is the skill of hearing what your partner is trying to tell you. The crossover technique can be successfully used. In this technique, the listener repeats back to the speaker the ideas conveyed. The speaker then accepts the listener's stated understanding or clarifies the meaning in an additional round of talk. Instead of arguing, listeners should attempt to disarm the discussion by listening instead of responding. Some individuals may not want to listen because they mistakenly assume that: listening validates the speaker's statements; that listening to complaints equates to forgiveness; or that listening gives the speaker license to rage. These assumptions are not valid. As with speaking, childhood events may define the way individuals listen.

The chapter offers a consideration of gender response to talking and listening. In general: men give advice while women desire emotional support; men feel foolish or

fake when empathizing while women understand the value of empathizing; men become physiologically overwhelmed during emotional confrontation, while women feel closer while sharing their feelings. The chapter then concludes with a lengthy series of bulleted lists, which serve as suggestions to keep in mind while communicating.



# Chapter 8 - Sex Again

## Chapter 8 - Sex Again Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8 is the longest chapter in the text, nearing twice the average length, and focuses on helping "...you to pull your parents and the lover out from under the covers, warm up the space between you, and get sexually intimate again" (p. 192). Note that the chapter contains frequent and frank discussions about sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviors, and several of the biographies presented—particularly those with quotations—feature strong language. The chapter is curiously constructed by presenting a series of nineteen assumptions about sexual intercourse or sexual intimacy. Three of the assumptions are unique to the hurt partner, two of the assumptions are unique to the unfaithful partner, and fourteen of the assumptions are likely to be shared by both partners. Each assumption is presented as a concise summary and then explored in analytic text. Each assumption also presents a biographical anecdote illuminating the assumptions, and in general, each assumption concludes with a suggestion for how to eliminate the assumption or to move beyond it.

Hurt partners may assume that if the unfaithful partner is not interested in sex or is unable to stay aroused it is because they do not find the hurt partner desirable. A list of suggestions and a list of other explanations are provided. Alternately, hurt partners may assume that if the unfaithful partner is not interested in sex it is because they are continuing the affair. A fairly well developed case study is presented and analyzed, and methods for dealing with these thought processes are discussed. Finally, hurt partners may assume they will never be able to satisfy the unfaithful partner to the degree the lover has. The text points out that most unfaithful partners relate that sex with the lover was awkward or unsatisfying and then offers suggestions for dealing with the probably incorrect assumption.

Unfaithful partners may assume that if their sexual performance is not repetitively remarkable, the hurt partner will conclude they are uninteresting or that the affair is continuing. Several suggestions are offered to counter this assumption and a case study is developed. Unfaithful partners who did experience magnificent sex with the lover may conclude that if sex with the hurt partner is unspectacular, the problem must be the hurt partner. This assumption is considered at some length and several suggestions are offered.

Couples share fourteen enumerated assumptions and these form the remainder of the chapter. Couples may assume that sexual intimacy should come naturally and easily. Following an affair this is probably not the case and the text states "To get closer, you have to begin touching again" (p. 207). Suggestions for initiating and developing intimacy are offered. Couples may assume that tentative initial intimate steps must necessarily lead to intercourse; this is not the case. Sexual intercourse may be months away, but small intimate touches can begin immediately. Couples may assume that individual masturbation indicates further marital trouble. The text cites various studies



about masturbation and concludes that it is a normal behavior that is not indicative of marital distress or dissatisfaction. Couples may assume that sex should always be passionate. This idea is discussed and dismissed and suggestions for developing more realistic expectations about sex are offered. Couples may assume that each partner should intuitively know what is sexually pleasing to the other—this is incorrect and individuals should communicate their sexual preferences. Couples may assume that any change to their established sexual practices will create hurt feelings. The text explains that desires change and established practices can be enhanced. This assumption includes a lengthy suggestion for discussing sexual preferences and includes a two-page checklist of requested changes.

Several assumptions are then treated as a unit. Couples may assume that simultaneous orgasm is a requirement of satisfactory sex. Couples may assume they should be having multiple orgasms. Couples may assume that orgasm should be reached solely through intercourse. Couples may assume that each partner must achieve orgasm each time they have sex. These various assumptions are treated together in a concise analysis, which references studies and offers a brief case study. A few suggestions are offered. The remaining assumptions considered in the chapter are enumerated separately.

Couples may assume that partners should desire sex with the same frequency and at the same time. A well-developed case study is presented which indicates that even partners with well-developed sex drives will usually not want sex at exactly the same frequency or time of day. A rather lengthy section of suggestions is presented. Couples may assume that were their sexual desires healthy they would not want to use fantasy or sex tools. The text discusses pornographic movies and sexual toys and concludes that if they are acceptable to both partners they can be a healthy part of a couple's sexuality. As usual, suggestions are offered. Couples may assume that post-affair testing for AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases is too inflammatory to discuss. This is emphatically false and in fact, both partners should be so tested. Finally, couples may assume that they will never be able to overcome the shame about their bodies or lovemaking. A list of areas that people are commonly ashamed about is presented and discussed.

The chapter concludes with a revised discussion about fear of intimacy or fear of sexual change in a post-affair relationship. I hope that freed of erroneous and damaging assumptions, couples can return to intimate sexual behavior as part of their recovery and rebuilding process, as sexual intimacy is inseparable from emotional intimacy.



# Chapter 9 - Learning to Forgive

## Chapter 9 - Learning to Forgive Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 is the shortest chapter in the text, approximately half the average length. The chapter examines commonly held perceptions about the process of forgiveness and challenges them with updated understanding. Many individuals are prevented from forgiving because they hold inflated or erroneous ideas about forgiveness. In fact, forgiveness is a process, which involves mental development and occurs over time. Forgiveness does not imply that negative feelings are replaced by positive feelings. Forgiveness does not indicate acceptance of destructive behaviors and does not condone the negative behavior of others. Forgiveness is not necessarily a one-way process; it is acceptable to make requests or demands upon which forgiveness is predicated. Forgiving does not necessarily infer forgetting personal injury.

The author argues that forgiveness should not be freely and unconditionally offered but that it should be offered only after considering the probable outcome. Studies indicate that, contrary to conventional wisdom, forgiveness is not always good for the individual. Forgiving too easily and too quickly might damage self-esteem. Forgiveness does not indicate a person's quality and, finally, forgiveness does not eliminate conflict. The text notes that in addition to forgiving one's partner, individuals must forgive themselves. Bulleted lists are provided for aspects unique to the hurt partner and to the unfaithful partner. For example, unfaithful partners should forgive themselves for developing attitudes, which justified their prior deception. The brief chapter concludes with a sample 'covenant of promises'; that is, a document with blanks for names, etc., that can be completed and signed by both partners as a physical agreement to look toward the future and rebuild the trust and intimacy of the damaged relationship.



# Epilogue - Revealing the Secret: Truth and Consequences

## Epilogue - Revealing the Secret: Truth and Consequences Summary and Analysis

The epilogue is not present in all editions of the text; it is a brief section, about the same length as chapter 9, and investigates the single question often contemplated by an unfaithful partner—should a hidden affair be revealed to the ignorant hurt partner? The epilogue lists a few disadvantages in purposefully exposing the affair—the reality may irremediably crush the hurt partner's spirit or may create an obsessional focus on the affair, which excludes future partnership development. With very limited exceptions, however, the text argues that full disclosure is a mandatory requirement of meaningful partnership in a continuing marriage. Four advantages to purposeful disclosure are noted: telling the truth is better than accidental discovery; telling the truth may increase the chances of staying faithful in the future; telling the truth may awaken the hurt partner to the need to address problems in the relationship; and telling the truth may reestablish the significance of the relationship with the hurt partner. The text concludes by stating, "Several infidelity specialists maintain that confessing the secret is a nonnegotiable first step toward restoring trust" (p. 257). The epilogue is followed by endnotes, a lengthy bibliography, and an index. In editions without the epilogue, the end matter follows chapter 9.



## **Characters**

**Janis Abrahms Spring, PhD**

**Michael Spring**

**Rachel, her husband, and the rabbi**

**Paula, her husband and kids, and Sybil**

**Joe, Susan, and Meg**

**Gail and Craig**

**Jay and Joan**

**Sheila and Sam**

**Curtis and Alice**

**Jerry, Ann, and Sally**

**Jane and Larry**





# Objects/Places

## Affair

A marital affair is typically defined as sexual intercourse between a spouse and a non-marital partner. The text suggests that this definition, while usually correct, is not broad enough to include all aspects of all affairs. The text instead defines an affair as a serious breach of trust that results in intense feelings of betrayal. For example, an affair thus may encompass intimate behavior not involving sexual intercourse.

## Hurt Partner

The text uses the term 'hurt partner' to describe the person in the primary relationship whose assumption of monogamy has been violated. The label selected is specifically intended to remove the emotionally charged feelings surrounding other more-common labels such as victim or betrayed.

## Unfaithful Partner

The text uses the term 'unfaithful partner' to describe the person in the primary relationship who has engaged in an extramarital affair. The label selected is specifically intended to remove the emotionally charged feelings surrounding other more-common labels such as victimizer or betrayer.

## Lover

The text uses the term 'lover' to describe the person not involved in the primary relationship; the lover has engaged in an affair with the unfaithful partner. The label selected is specifically intended to remove the emotionally charged feelings surrounding other more-common labels.

## Gender Response

The text proposes that in the broadest of terms women react to extramarital affairs differently than men. While noting that the differences are not specific to individuals, the text convincingly argues that most women will react in certain ways that differ in the ways in which most men will react. Chapter 1 concludes with a consideration of gender responses of hurt partners and chapter 2 concludes with a consideration of gender responses of unfaithful partners. Other sections throughout the text, though more concise, also consider general gender response differences.



## **Unrequited Love**

Unrequited love is a powerful but irrational attachment to a partner. Unrequited love makes an individual desire to remain in a relationship even when the relationship is clearly dysfunctional. The text suggests that unrequited love is a major reason why many hurt partners remain with unfaithful partners even when the unfaithful partner's behavior is repetitively abusive and unlikely to change.

## **Romantic Love**

Romantic love is a powerful but irrational attachment to a partner. Romantic love makes an individual desire to remain in a relationship for reasons that are usually irrational and probably ephemeral. The text suggests that romantic love is a major reason why many unfaithful partners choose—at least initially—the lover over the hurt partner even when their prior relationship has been highly satisfying.

## **Doubt and Fear**

Doubt and fear are the two principle emotional responses to confronting an affair. They are experienced by both the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner. They cause intense emotional turmoil for a prolonged period and they are the primary immediate obstacles a couple faces when surviving infidelity. The text suggests various methods for confronting, managing, and ultimately eliminating doubt and fear.

## **Critical Growth Experiences**

The text suggests that seven general experiences are required to produce a functional adult. These experiences are termed 'critical growth' experiences and are enumerated as: being secure; functioning independently; having solid emotional connections with others; being values; being free to express opinions and ideas; being free to have fun; and living with realistic expectations. Much of the lengthy chapter five is devoted to examining each of these critical growth experiences and the problems that are caused in marriages when one or more of the experiences were not met adequately during childhood development.

## **Sexual Assumptions**

Everyone holds numerous assumptions about sex and sexual practices. Many of these assumptions are invalid and damaging. In the longest chapter of the text, the author presents nineteen assumptions about sex, which are particularly damaging to marital relationships and then considers each assumption, offering suggestions to change behavior and belief to more-constructive alternatives.



## Disclosure and Discovery

Most extramarital affairs are, eventually, discovered by the hurt partner. Discovery may be accidental or purposeful after some triggering event heightens the hurt partner's suspicions. Discovery is usually damaging and usually occurs while the affair is ongoing. On the other hand, unfaithful partners who have not been detected will often choose to disclose an affair. Disclosure often occurs only after the affair has ended. Disclosure—telling the truth—though difficult, is considered a nonnegotiable first step to rehabilitating a post-affair relationship.

# Themes

## Reacting to the Affair

The psychological process of reacting to the affair opens the book and is one of the three dominant themes considered. In general, the text examines the reactions of only two of the three individuals involved in the affair—that of the hurt partner and that of the unfaithful partner. As the text assumes that the marital relationship will persist beyond the affair, logically the lover's reactions are not fully examined, as the lover is not a component of the rebuilding process.

The first stage of any post-affair recovery process is the initial reaction to the discovery of the affair, and such reactions are the dominant theme of the first major division of the text as well as being a recurrent theme throughout the remainder of the book. Obviously, the reactions of the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner are generally entirely separate and the text treats them as such. The first chapter, in fact, is entirely devoted to the reactions likely encountered among hurt partners; the second chapter is entirely devoted to the reactions likely encountered among unfaithful partners. Each chapter presents slightly less than a dozen different major types of reactions—individuals will usually experience several, if not all, of the types of reactions enumerated.

The text also develops a minor theme of gender-specific reactions to affairs. The author points out that in the most general terms women tend to react in different ways than men. For example, faced with an unfaithful partner and a shattered relationship women are likely to attempt to repair the relationship whereas men in similar circumstances are likely to abandon the relationship. These gender reactions are of course not uniformly encountered among all individuals but the author convincingly argues that they generally hold true for most individuals.

## Reviewing Options

After the initial devastation of an extramarital affair has been ameliorated through time, emotional states largely normalize. The hurt partner probably recovers from the shock of betrayal, regaining their sense of self; and the unfaithful partner's enthusiasm for the euphoria of the affair probably diminishes. Then the second stage of relationship recovery begins—the process of reviewing options. In its most basic form the process can be summarized as a determination, made by both partners, if the relationship is worth salvaging or if it should be entirely abandoned. Obviously, both the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner must agree to pursue the damaged relationship if there is any chance of success, and the text is directed at couples where both individuals ultimately believe that the damaged relationship can and should be rehabilitated. Thus, reviewing options is the dominant theme of the second major division of the text as well as being a recurrent theme throughout the remainder of the book.



Two major components of this theme are developed in the text. The third chapter of the book provides tools and guidance for both partners to examine their ideas about love, commitment, and relationships. The aim of this segment is to allow the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner to lay a common groundwork for future development within their relationship. Old ideas, which have proved false, must be replaced by new methods of thinking. The fourth chapter of the book examines the role that doubt and fear, natural results of any affair, play during the review process. Obviously, the hurt partner is afraid of being hurt again, whereas the unfaithful partner might be reticent to return to a relationship, which has already proved unsatisfactory in at least some respects. The aim of the chapter is to alleviate these fears and doubts and to provide tools for coping with them as the relationship is repaired.

## **Recovering from the Affair**

Once the partners in a distressed relationship have decided to repair the relationship and recommit to each other they face the daunting task of recovery from the affair. The role the hurt partner plays varies significantly from that of the unfaithful partner, but both partners must work together if the relationship is to survive. The third stage of relationship recovery thus begins—the prolonged process of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Thus, recovering from the affair is not only the dominant theme of the third major division of the text but also the overarching and dominant theme of the entire book.

The theme is fully developed in five chapters. Chapter 5, one of the longest in the text, provides tools and suggests a roadmap to allow both partners to learn from the affair. Rather than moving forward blindly, the partners should examine the prior failure of their relationship with the goal of repairing it. Chapter 6 focuses on the specific task of restoring trust while chapter 7 suggests methods for discussing the affair. Chapter 8, the longest chapter in the text, proposes techniques for moving from distrust to a healthy sexual relationship. Finally, chapter 9, the shortest in chapter in the text, suggests a strategy for learning how to forgive. Taken together, along with the other themes of the book, the major theme of recovery from the affair is fully developed and affects all aspects of the text.

# Style

## Perspective

The primary author, Janis Abrahms Spring, holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and has nearly three decades of experience in private practice specializing in issues of trust, intimacy, and forgiveness. Michael Spring has extensive experience in publishing and holds an M.A. in English literature. Their combined expertise makes them highly qualified to write on the topic at hand. Their stated purpose in offering the book, presented in the Introduction, is to extend their professional expertise beyond the necessary limitations of private practice and offer assistance, hope, and help to a very broad range of potential readers, including those who have been involved in an affair or those who are contemplating becoming so involved.

Although the text does not directly advise against having an affair, it does illustrate the profoundly damaging aspects of affairs and notes the lengthy and often difficult process of recovering from an affair—both for the hurt partner but also for the unfaithful partner. The text's principle function, therefore, is not to prevent affairs but rather to offer tools to those who, having experienced an affair in some way, desire to rebuild their relationship. The text offers advice and tools to both the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner with the realization that rebuilding a damaged relationship takes the total future commitment of two individuals.

## Tone

The text is developed in a professionally neutral voice, which presents theory and fact without any trace of value judgments. Thus, the experiences of hurt partners are treated the same as the experiences of unfaithful partners and the recovery needs of both are considered. This unbiased tone makes clear that the text delivers on the promise of the title; it provides tools and suggests methods to health the pain and rebuild the trust of partnership after an affair. Although every reader will likely identify more with one viewpoint than the other, the tone and presentation of material within the text allows individuals who are ready to move forward the ability to review an affair from their partner's perspective. This vantage point is particularly useful—perhaps critical—to successfully rehabilitating a relationship after an affair.

This reserved and judgment-neutral tone does not extend to the biographical anecdotes presented. In these concise statements, which are often extended quotations, the emotion, tone, and language vary considerably as would be expected with materials of this type. In these brief segments, the pain of the affair is often specifically called out. Additionally, a small amount of rather blunt profanity is included in some of the quoted anecdotes—given the nature of the text and its intended audience this has no significant effect other than to putatively provide emphasis.

## Structure

The 292-page text is divided into three major named and enumerated sections, referred to as 'stages'. Each of these sections is divided into two to five named and enumerated chapters. The text additionally presents an introduction and epilogue as well as traditional elements such as acknowledgements, notes, a bibliography, and an index. While the text is largely analytical development of topical themes, it does contain numerous brief biographical anecdotes, which illustrate or highlight the topic under consideration. These biographies are very concise and offer a de-identified summarization of salient events; they form a highly interesting and personal element of the text.

Within the body of textual passages, nearly all major ideas or thematic components are highlighted with a boldface headline. Bulleted lists are frequently presented; they serve to outline lengthy following sections. Occasional use of italics draws particular attention to important words or phrases. The net effect of this abundance of structure is a particularly accessible book that is easy to read and navigate; however, it does give the book something of the feel of a textbook.



## Quotes

"Can a couple survive infidelity?"

"As a clinical psychologist who has been treating distressed couples for twenty-one years, I answer yes—provided that each of you is willing to look honestly at yourself and at your partner, and acquire the skills you need to see yourself through this shattering crisis.

"It may help to remind yourself that you're not alone. Statistics vary widely, but according to one of the most recent and reputable studies, as many as 37 percent of married men and 20 percent of married women have been unfaithful. No one knows the exact percentages; I'm sure that someone who lies to a spouse might also lie to a researcher. But even by the most conservative estimate, we can say with some confidence that, in the United States, 1 in every 2.7 couples—some 20 million—is touched by infidelity." (Introduction, p. 1)

"When I was fifteen, I was raped. That was nothing compared to your affair. The rapist was a stranger; you, I thought, were my best friend.'

"When I first uncovered your secret, I stopped feeling special to you. But on a deeper level, I lost trust in the world and in myself.'

"These comments only begin to suggest the profound and sweeping losses you're likely to experience when you first learn that your partner has been unfaithful. There's no way to prepare yourself for this crushing revelation. Your view of your life and the world you live in may be ripped apart. Whatever self-assurance and security you felt in the past may now seem napve or false. 'Where have I been?' you ask yourself. 'Do I live on this planet?'

"Your mind and body are likely to be in shock. Gone is your fundamental sense of order and justice in the world. Gone, too, are your sense of control over your life, your self-respect, your very concept of who you are. You may feel abandoned by everyone—family, friends, God. A stranger to yourself, you may swing wildly from one extreme to another, determined and confident one moment, humiliated and needy the next. Battered by feelings so intense, you may start to wonder, 'Am I going crazy?'

"I want to assure you that you're not—that, in fact, what you're experiencing is a normal and appropriate response to an acutely traumatizing experience. You're reeling not only from the loss of the integrity of your relationship, but also from the loss of an illusion—that you're special to your partner, and that the intimacy you thought you shared with that person would last forever. In the face of such shattering news, it would be strange if you didn't feel lost." (Chapter 1, pp 9-10)

"Some members of the clergy will spoon out the old religious platitudes, telling you, for instance, that if you forgive, you shall be forgiven. Others, concerned about





contributions and church attendance, won't want to take sides. Many will be sensitive and supportive, of course, but, given how wretched you're feeling, it's possible that no one can console you right now.

"Though it was Rachel's husband who had the affair, it was she who felt shunned by her rabbi:

"My religious faith always mattered a great deal to me. I was president of the local Jewish family services when my husband, the great, respected Jewish leader of the community, move in with a non-Jewish girl. I don't know if I went into hiding or if people shied away from me, but I felt rejected by everyone in the community, even the rabbi. Once, when I saw him putting his arm around my husband, I thought, "This is the man who bat-mitzvahed me, married me, and brissed both of my kids. Someday he will bury my parents." Somehow I thought that he, if anyone, would come through for me, but whenever I caught his eye after services, he turned away. When he continued to say nothing—no advice, no words of commiseration—I decided, "This is it; I don't want to be Jewish." To rid myself of my pain, I renounced by religion.

"I needed to separate myself, to find a different identity, even if it was an anti-identity. My husband returned eventually, but it took eight years before I could feel comfortable observing the Jewish rituals again. One day I went to see the rabbi and confronted him with my rage. He seemed to have had no idea, all those years, how hurt and alone I had been. Now that he knew, he told me he felt hurt *I hadn't come to him* earlier for direction.

"There's no way to know for sure, but my guess is that he was too timid, too political, to get involved. My husband, after all, was influential. As far as I was concerned, here was one more man who didn't have the courage or humanity to extend himself beyond his own self-interests and who expected me to make him feel important. Go fuck yourself, is how I felt. I discarded a lot of dead wood in those months and began to find other ways to embrace my spiritual needs." (Chapter 1, pp. 25-26)

"Sometimes there's no justification for the wretched, even diabolical way you treat your partner. 'I can't believe how awful I was to my wife while I was seeing Meg,' Joe, a thirty-two-year-old electrician, admitted:

"I had planned this baseball party for the guys I work with—we were going to hang around, have some beer and pizza, and watch the playoffs on TV. The 'guys' included Meg; it was no secret to them we were more than friends. I knew my wife wanted no part of any of this—she was pregnant, and she hates baseball and drinking—and I was counting on her to do what she's done in the past: get out of the house for the weekend and stay with her sister.

"All I could think of was spending the night with Meg. But right before the party, Susan began to bleed. She called the doctor, and he arranged for her to go to the hospital for a D&C the following day. She didn't want to burden anyone, so she offered to spend the night in a motel so she could get a good night's sleep and I could still have my party. I agreed. I also let her drive herself to the hospital the next day.



"Joe shook his head. 'I know I must look totally detestable to you. There's no excuse for the way I behaved. I abandoned my wife when she needed me most. All I can say is that I got completely swept up in the affair and acted like a selfish idiot. I don't think my behavior is a reflection of my true character. I just think I was lost.'" (Chapter 2, pp. 53-54)

"Once the affair is out in the open, you need to decide whether to work on rebuilding your relationship or end it. Whichever route you choose, I encourage you to choose it deliberately, and not to act on feelings alone. Feelings, no matter how intense, are based on assumptions that are often highly subjective and may prove to be unrealistic, unuseful, or untrue. What feels right to you now you may later regret as an impulsive and unprocessed response that can't be easily reversed.

"Two of your options are dead-end. The first is to stay together and never address why the affair happened or work to assure that it won't happen again. This is a ticket to a life of quiet, or not-so-quiet, desperation. The second is for you to stay together, with at least one of you continuing to be unfaithful, while the other fights back depression or rage. This is no more promising." (Chapter 3, p. 63)

*"Indicator #2: A History of Deception*

"A partner with a history of duplicity is more likely to lie and deceive again than someone who has strayed only once.

"When Marilyn looked back over her twelve years with Marshall, she saw that he had been double-faced from day one. While they were engaged, she had called an unfamiliar number on her phone bill and found herself speaking to a woman he was still dating. Shortly after Marilyn gave birth to their first child, her husband left the hospital for four hours—to bring back pizza, he said. A week later she got a call from a nearby motel, asking if she had left a pair of earrings in their room.

"Marshall's pattern of lying extended beyond his sexual behavior. He told Marilyn that he had gone to college at Amherst (it turned out to be the University of Massachusetts); that he was Spanish (he was Puerto Rican); that his father was a doctor (he was a lab technician). Lying was a way of life for him, a deeply ingrained pattern that defined how he related to others. When Marilyn finally confronted him about his latest affair, he admitted it, but promised that he was a new man and would never stray again. Marilyn looked back over their life together, and told him to pack his bags.

"I'm not suggesting that a single affair is more forgivable than seventeen, or that having only one means it won't happen again. However, a partner with a long record of lies and deceptions is more likely to have difficulty breaking this pattern than someone who has strayed only once." (Chapter 4, pp. 84-85)

"Here are a few of the emotions that you may have experienced as a child; try to identify the ones that apply to you, and add your own:



"*Positive feelings*: safe, contented, trusting, attended to, praised, respected, accepted, valued, encouraged to express.

"*Negative feelings*: frightened, inadequate, mistrustful, lonely, jealous, bored, deprived, neglected, pressured, unloved, humiliated, criticized, constrained.

"These and other feelings influence and define your comfort zone as an adult. The people who let you reexperience similar emotions, positive or negative, are those you're likely to seek out and be romantically attracted to today." (Chapter 5, p. 111)

"If you're going to change your behavior toward your partner, you may have to act at times as *if* you feel more loving, secure, or forgiving than you really do. If you wait until your affection returns, you may very well outwait the relationship. Give in to your doubts and fears, and your relationship may die. Change your behavior first—act in a more conscious and positive way—and loving feelings may follow." (Chapter 6, p. 148)

"It's important to let your partner know what you want to hear. Here are some common requests my patients have made; feel free to add your own:

"'Tell me when you need reassurance. Don't threaten divorce as a way of getting my attention.'

"'Tell me when you feel close to me or hopeful about us as a couple.'

"'Tell me when you're upset; don't silence your pain.'

"'Instead of getting mad, tell me calmly and directly what's bothering you or what you want.'

"'Tell me what you're angry or upset about in a respectful way; don't demean me.' (It's better to say, 'By distorting the truth about me to your parents, you're [sic] made it incredibly difficult for me to have a relationship with them,' instead of 'You're a baby who needs your mommy and daddy.')

"'Talk to me about yourself, and us; don't drag in the lover.'

"'Be honest when I ask you about your loved; don't try to protect my feelings.'

"'Tell me how your family talked to you, and how this may affect the way you talk to me today.'

"'Tell me what part of my message you agree with.'

"'Don't assume I want you to solve my problems unless I ask for help.'

"'Apologize openly for how you've hurt me or let me down.'

"'Admit your contribution to our problems.'



"Tell me who knows about the affair, and work out a plan with me for containing and managing the spread of the news.'

"Don't be afraid to let me see you cry. Don't be afraid to let me know the meaning of your tears.'" (Chapter 7, pp. 190-191)

"I can't stress this point strongly enough: To get closer, you have to begin touching again. You might begin by telling each other, face to face or on paper, exactly how you would like to be touched. Your requests are likely to be very idiosyncratic, so don't expect what pleases you necessarily to please your partner. Try to satisfy at least one of your partner's requests every day.

"Common examples include:

"When you come into the house, kiss me on the mouth.'

"Take my hand when we walk.'

"Rub my feet with oil.'

"Give me a massage.'

"Hug me for a few moments.'

"Sleep or lie near me with one arm around me.'

"Run your fingertips gently over my eyelids and eyebrows in bed.'

"Brush my hair.'

"Stay in bed with me for a few minutes after the alarm goes off; lie in my arms with your face close to mine.'

"Touch my shoulder or waist when you walk with me.'" (Chapter 8, pp. 207-208)

"Unearned forgiveness is pseudo forgiveness. It's something you grant, not because your partner deserves it, but because you feel pressured to, either by others or by romantic or moralistic assumptions about what forgiveness means. Given rashly or prematurely, it buries the pain alive, and robs you and your partner of the chance to confront the lessons of the affair and properly redress each other's wounds." (Chapter 9, p. 240)

### *"Disadvantages of Telling*

"From my clinical experience with couples, I've identified four situations in which it may work against you to disclose your affair:

"1. You believe the revelation will crush your partner's spirit irremediably.



"2. You believe the revelation will create an obsessional focus on the affair, and keep the two of you from examining the problems that caused it.

"3. Your partner is physically disabled and unable to provide sexual companionship, and you choose to stay together to provide medical and emotional support to someone you care about.

"4. You believe your partner will physically harm you.

"The last two scenarios are outside the scope of this book. Let's turn to the first two, which have broader application, and see how they apply to you." (Epilogue, pp. 250-251)



## Topics for Discussion

The text uses the terms 'hurt partner', 'unfaithful partner', and 'lover' to refer to the three individuals involved in a typical extramarital affair. Discuss the implications of these terms. Are there other terms with which you are more familiar? Why would these be more or less appropriate terms to use in a text of this sort?

The text does not make any judgments or enforce distinctions between the relative fault of the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner. Discuss how, although this might be galling to some, this approach is fundamentally necessary for a text providing a roadmap to post-affair recovery.

A hurt partner exhibits a range of emotional and psychological responses to the discovery of an affair. Which of these seem strange or unwarranted?

The text suggests that unfaithful partners usually suffer emotional and psychological damage from the affair. Although the effects are different the text suggests they are equal in negative impact to those suffered by the hurt partner. Given this, why do you think the text does not offer an outright censure on extramarital affairs?

Consider a post-affair marriage. Do you think that the hurt partner is ever able to fully trust the unfaithful partner? Why or why not? Did reading this book change your opinion on that matter?

Conventional wisdom suggests that human nature is fairly constant—pundits often offer advice such as "once a cheater always a cheater." Does the text assume that an unfaithful partner will always chose to stray from the marriage in the future?

Chapter 5 focuses on the task of learning from the affair. The text suggests that both partners can learn how to be more successful in their relationships by a thorough analysis of the root causes of infidelity within their marriage. Do you think that understanding one's behavior should allow one to modify their behavior? Why or why not?

Chapter 8 is the longest chapter of the text; it develops strategies for engaging in sexual intercourse in a post-affair relationship. Having read the chapter do you believe that it offers sound suggestions for rebuilding intimacy?

The text seems to largely assume that the affair involved extramarital sexual intercourse and that all partners involved were heterosexual. Discuss how altering these fundamental assumptions could undermine the validity of the text—e.g., what if the relationship was heterosexual but the affair was homosexual? Do you think this would make a difference in the processes used to recover from the affair?



Of all the biographical vignettes provided in the text, which one was your favorite? Why? Was there one event in particular that reminded you of an experience you have had? Discuss.

Did reading the book increase your belief in any religious system? Why or why not?

After reading the book, who do you think generally suffers more because of an affair—the hurt partner, the unfaithful partner, or the lover? Who appears to bear the lion's share of the guilt for an extra-marital affair? Do you think such basic judgments are fair or even useful? Do you think an extra-marital affair is ever 'justified'? Why or why not?

Do you believe that marriage and/or heterosexuality is a fundamental component of maintaining a long-term relationship? Do you think that marriage is primarily a religious artifact of times gone by? Or do you believe that it is a primarily social construct? Does your opinion of marriage inform your interpretation of the text?

Were you surprised at the relative paucity of information regarding children in a relationship suffering from the effects of an affair? Do you think that the absence or presence of children has much of an influence on whether or not a post-affair relationship survives?

The text presents several sections summarizing a general difference in response between the sexes. This gender-response presumably infers that given a similar experience, men will usually react differently than women. Did you find these sections to be useful? Why or why not?

The text offers several suggestions to allow the hurt partner and the unfaithful partner to talk about the affair. The text assumes that such a dialogue is necessary to repair the damage caused by the betrayal of trust. Of the methods suggested, which do you find the most logical? Are there any methods that you find to be controversial or not particularly helpful?