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RELATIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: HOW  
INDIVIDUALS NEGOTIATE THE REVELATION AND CONCEALMENT OF  
TRANSGRESSION INFORMATION WITHIN THE SOCIAL NETWORK

By

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BA, Winona State University, Winona, MN, 2005

Thesis

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Relational Transgressions in Romantic Relationships

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This study examined how individuals negotiate the revelation and concealment of information following an act of infidelity within the social network. Research has shown that individuals experience a tension when deciding to reveal and/or conceal information regarding a relational transgression (Baxter, 1994, Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007). Drawing on dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1990), relational transgressions (Roloff & Cloven, 1994), and support networks (Cutrona and Suhr, 1992; Klein & Milardo, 2000), this project posed a number of research questions. Interviews were conducted with 22 participants regarding their communication following the discovery of an act of infidelity. Participants were asked to discuss who they did or did not tell about the infidelity, why they did or did not tell those individuals, and how they told them about the infidelity.

Data from these interviews revealed participants view individuals who are sympathetic, trustworthy, and calm as supportive, and individuals who blame or pass judgment as critical. Participants also reported that revealing information to gain support, primarily informational and emotional support, was the most common motive for revealing, while concealing information to avoid evaluation was the most common reason for concealing. Individuals who were revealed to were considered both supportive and unsupportive when they provided advice to the participant. However, when network members failed to provide support to a participant, or tried to minimize the situation, they were seen as unsupportive. Participants experienced a number of tensions when deciding to reveal or conceal, including a desire to conceal the information but an expectation to reveal it due to the nature of the relationship. Participants used a few strategies to negotiate these tensions, including cyclic alternation, segmentation, and selection. These findings may have theoretical implications for dialectical tension research, particularly in the area of praxis patterns. Furthermore, they may be important in helping network members with future communication with individuals seeking support.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Relational transgressions occur in all types of personal relationships. Relational transgressions are violations of co-constructed relational rules and expectancies (Rolloff & Cloven, 1994). For example, a couple in a romantic relationship may create a relational rule that both partners must be monogamous. In this case, a relational transgression occurs when one partner commits an act of infidelity. When an act of infidelity is committed against an individual in a romantic relationship, he/she must decide what information to reveal to and/or conceal from his/her social network, and who information should be revealed to/concealed from. The tension of whether to reveal or conceal information is referred to as a dialectical tension. A dialectical tension is the contradiction that “is present whenever two tendencies or forces are interdependent (the dialectical principle of unity) yet mutually negate one another (the dialectical principle of negation)” (Baxter, 1990, p.70). There are many reasons individuals may choose to reveal or conceal information regarding the relational transgression to/from their social network (Baxter, 1994; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007) which are discussed in this paper.

The purpose of this project is to examine how individuals who have experienced an act of infidelity in romantic relationships negotiate the revelation and concealment of transgression information to their social network. When individuals experience relational distress, they may look to their social network for support or advice (Rolloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001). “Social support is viewed by family practitioners as one of the potential keys to well-being for those experiencing major life transitions and crises” (McCubbin & Boss, 1980, p. 2), and networks can have a great deal of influence on romantic relationships (Julien & Markman, 1991). Because social network support has such an influence on individuals and romantic relationships, it is important to examine how individuals decide when to seek support and who to seek support from. This paper will begin with a review of the theoretical and empirical research concerned with dialectical tensions, infidelity, and support networks, followed by a proposed methodology.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Dialectical Tensions

We are often faced with forces that pull us in different directions in our relationships. These forces are called dialectical tensions or contradictions. When two forces are interdependent, yet are in opposition of one another, there is a contradiction (Baxter, 1990). Baxter (1994) discusses three primary dialectical tensions, including integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-privacy. The integration-separation dialectic refers to a need for both social integration and social division. An illustration of this is found in Baxter's (1990) study:

I wasn't really sure which way I wanted to go. There were a lot of things that were real attractive about being in a partnership with [partner]. But I was still trying to figure out exactly who I was, as well.... I guess I was sort of worried that I would lose some of my self-identity, especially with my group that I hang out with. There were some things that I didn't want to give up, and I was afraid I would have to (p.77).

The stability-change dialectic refers to need for continuity and discontinuity. For example:

It was all kind of novel. In that first stage you shouldn't have to depend on somebody to be there at fixed times and places. If a first stage is predicable, the relationship dies off real fast....But it's really bad when you wait on Friday night and don't go out with your friends because you want him to come over, only he doesn't show up. In a relationship, I want someone I can depend on and that will be predictable and there when I need him Baxter, 1990, p. 78).

Finally, the expression-privacy dialectic refers to the tension of sharing or not sharing information. The following example from Baxter (1990) is particularly interesting as it demonstrates the interdependence between autonomy-connection and openness-closedness:

I needed my space and one of the ways to get that space was to keep things that I was thinking to myself. But again, to try to have the relationship and have the relationship go strongly you have to communicate openly... (p. 77).  
Not all tensions are dialectical.

According to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), in order to be considered dialectical, tensions must include three defining concepts, including contradiction, totality and process, and praxis. Contradiction, the most defining concept, refers to the coexistence of interdependent opposites. Rather than conflicts or differences,

contradictions in dialectics are tensions which “are dependent on each other for their very definition” (Miller, 2002, p. 185). That is, how we define and experience each force of the contradiction is largely based on our experience of the other force. For example, an individual may crave novelty in a relationship because a previous relationship had been very habitual. Likewise, an individual may crave predictability in a relationship because a previous relationship had been very impulsive. Baxter and Montgomery have clearly outlined what constitutes a dialectical tension using several criteria (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Miller, 2002).

The first criterion has to do with contradiction. The two contradicting forces must be logical (negative) or functional (positive) opposites. A logical opposite takes the form of “X and not X”. For example, happy vs. not happy and productive vs. not productive are logical opposites, as the opposition is evidenced by one feature and its absence. A functional opposite, on the other hand, takes the form of “X and Y”, “where both “X” and “Y” are distinct features that function in incompatible ways such that each negates the other” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 626). An example of a functional opposite would be happy vs. sad or autonomous vs. connected.

The second criterion deals with interdependence and totality. The two opposing forces must be interdependent and unified; that is, to be considered a dialectical tension, one force is dependent on the existence of the other for its very meaning. This can occur when the two forces of the tension are part of a larger whole. For example, individuals’ needs to reveal information about themselves to their relational partners and their need to keep information private are both important to developing and maintaining a romantic relationship. This is what Baxter & Montgomery (1996) refer to as “both/and” quality of contradictions. Totality is the idea that “contradictions in a relationship are part of a unified whole and cannot be understood in isolation” (Miller, 2002, p.185). That is, the contradiction can only exist if there are two forces present. The concept of process suggests that these tensions can exist at different levels of relationships, including within individual interactions, within a relationship, and across relationships over time. For example, individuals may manage revelation and concealment during a certain instance, throughout a relationship, or throughout many relationships over time.

The final criterion considers dynamism and change. According to this condition, the contradiction must be dynamic rather than static. This is the primary difference

between a dialectical and dualistic perspective. From a dualistic perspective, opposites are considered to be static and isolated phenomena, while the dialectical perspective is dependent on the ongoing and ever-changing interaction between the opposites. The dialectical perspective focuses on the continual management and interplay of the tensions throughout a relationship. Finally, the concept of praxis is based on the idea that life goes on in light of these contradictions. That is, “the dialectical tensions that define relationships are created and re-created through the active participation and interaction of social actors” (Miller, 2002, p. 186). Individuals function both proactively and reactively. “People function proactively by making communicative choices. Simultaneously, however, they are reactive, because their actions become reified in a variety of normative and institutionalized practices that establish the boundaries of subsequent communicative choices” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 329). Thus, praxis considers the choices individuals make when managing dialectical tensions and how those choices and actions create, re-create, and change the nature of the dialectical contradictions. Social units experiencing these contradictions find ways of managing the tensions. The strategies used to manage the tensions are called praxis patterns. These will be discussed in detail later.

The three dialectical tensions can be manifested both internally and externally (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Baxter, 1994, 1990; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2007) “Internal contradictions are constituted within the social unit under study, whereas external contradictions are constituted between the social unit and the larger system within which the unit is embedded” (Baxter, 1994, p.240). That is, contradictions are internally managed between members of the couple. Contradictions are managed externally between the members of the couple and the social network. Within the integration-separation dialectic, individuals must internally manage the need to identify with the couple without becoming so involved that they lose their own identities. This is referred to as connection-autonomy. Externally, the individuals must manage the need to do things as an individual or couple and the need to do things with a larger group, which is referred to as inclusion-seclusion. Within the stability-change dialectic, individuals must internally manage the need for predictability and certainty with the need for newness and spontaneity in their interactions, referred to as predictability-novelty. Externally, individuals must negotiate the need to maintain their own identity with the need to

conform to the expectations of a larger social system. This tension is referred to as conventionality-uniqueness. Finally, “the dialectic of expression-privacy in its internal manifestation, the openness-closedness contradiction, captures the dilemma of candor and discretion faced by the relationship parties in their interactions with one another. In its external manifestation, the revelation-concealment contradiction, the parties face the dilemma of what to make known about their relationship to outside third parties versus what to keep private between just the two relationship partners” (Baxter, 1994, p. 240). This paper examines the external manifestation of revelation-concealment, focusing on how individuals whose partners have committed an act of sexual infidelity manage revelation and concealment within their social network.

People choose to reveal or conceal information to/from their support network for several reasons (Baxter, 1994). First, individuals (or couples) may reveal to gain support from their network. For the same reason, individuals may choose not to reveal information because of anticipated nonsupport (Baxter, 1994; Canary & Stafford, 1994). For example, an individual may choose to conceal information from a network member regarding her husband’s extra-relational sex, anticipating that the network member would blame the transgressor for his/her transgression. An individual may also wish to conceal information if he/she perceives the support provider will look negatively on the partner (Afifi, 2003). For example, if an individual has chosen to remain with the transgressor, he or she may fear that the support provider will condemn his/her partner and encourage him/her to break up with the transgressing partner. However, Roloff, Soule and Carey (2001) found that the decision can depend on an individual’s reason for remaining in the relationship. The authors studied reasons for remaining in relationships following relational transgressions as reported by 119 college-aged participants in dating relationships. Reports of remaining with a transgressor due to fear of losing the transgressor were positively associated with seeking out friends to talk to and being encouraged to break up with the transgressor. Reports of remaining with a transgressor due to emotional involvement were negatively related to being encouraged to leave, and was negatively, but insignificantly, related to seeking out friends.

Individuals may also choose to share information for catharsis or enjoyment of sharing (Canary & Stafford, 1994), yet they may also fear losing control over the information if it is shared. The fear that the information could turn into gossip among the

social network drives individuals to conceal the information. Information may also be revealed because the disclosure is seen as expected or beneficial to the relationship with the recipient. Conversely, information that could be seen as inappropriate or hurtful to the recipient or relationship is often concealed (Afifi & Olson, 2005). Finally, individuals may be motivated to make their relationship public because doing so is seen as expected of the relationship with their partner, yet parties are hesitant because revealing the information may breach the confidentiality established in the relationship (Baxter, 1994).

Afifi and Olson (2005) conducted a study of 112 families, in which participants responded to a survey about information they were concealing from a network member. The survey investigated power in the relationship, continued concealment of the information, severity of the concealment, closeness with the network member, commitment to the relationship, and conformity and conversation orientations of the relationship. The results suggest that elements such as whether sharing the information will contribute to or detract from group cohesiveness, or whether there is a threat of physical, verbal, or emotional aggression, may also influence the negotiation of revelation and concealment of information. Furthermore, the authors posit that individuals especially consider whether the information is positive or negative when negotiating what information to reveal or conceal.

Individuals are more likely to reveal positively-valenced information and more likely to conceal negatively-valenced information from their social network (Baxter, 1988; Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001). Negatively-valenced information can include a range of disclosures, such as losing a job, receiving a poor grade, or committing a relational transgression. Therefore, individuals will be more selective about revealing and concealing information regarding relational transgressions (Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001).

When individuals are faced with negotiating a dialectical tension such as revelation and concealment, there are different strategies they may use. These are referred to as praxis patterns (Baxter, 1988). Baxter (1988) discusses four primary strategies. The first strategy an individual may utilize is selection. When using the selection strategy, an individual will repeatedly take action consistent with one side of the contradiction. A second strategy, temporal/spatial separation, takes two forms. Cyclic

alternation posits that an individual will “respond to each polarity of a given contradiction at separate points in time” (Baxter, 1988, p.260). That is, in the openness-closedness contradiction, an individual will alternate between high disclosure and high privacy through time. Segmentation is used when an individual deems certain topics as either appropriate or inappropriate for disclosure, or appropriate or inappropriate for disclosure to certain individuals. Integration is the final strategy type, and includes three subcategories of strategies. When individuals use messages that are neutral to either element of the contradiction, they are employing the integrative moderation strategy. An example of this would be engaging in small talk to avoid the topic. Integrative disqualification is characterized by using indirect, ambiguous talk that avoids either extremity of the contradiction. Finally, integrative reframing is seen when an individual redefines the extremities of the contradiction so that the two opposing forces are no longer seen as oppositional. An individual will utilize one or more of these strategies when negotiating what information to share with his/her network. While all of these patterns are relevant to each of the three primary dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1988), some may be used more or less frequently, depending on the contradiction. There is little research examining which praxis patterns individuals use to manage dialectical tensions. In one study, Baxter (1990) conducted 106 interviews with undergraduates about relationship development. In the expression-privacy contradiction, individuals reported segmentation as the most dominant strategy used, followed by integrative moderation and selection. Within the reports of segmentation, topics were either considered appropriate for disclosure or “taboo.” Integrative moderation consisted of modest disclosure with moderate discretion, and selection most often took the form of complete disclosure. Despite these findings, there is a lack of research on why we choose different praxis patterns at different times and the consequences of those decisions have.

While revelation-concealment is the most researched contradiction (Baxter, 1994), the content this research encompasses has been very limited. Previous research on revelation-concealment has mostly examined dating relationships (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter and Widenmann, 1993), and very little has examined marriages (Erbert, 2000). Furthermore, previous research on revelation and concealment has been limited to managing revelation and/or concealment of relationship status with network members (Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Widenmann, 1993). For example, Baxter and

Widenmann (1993) interviewed 101 individuals with an average age of 19 years to examine reasons for revealing or concealing relational status information from the social network and what network members were most likely to be revealed to/concealed from. Examining revelation-concealment in the context of relational transgressions is a novel situation for study.

### Relational Transgressions

Infidelity is a relational transgression that violates the relational rule of monogamy. It is important to examine relational transgressions, such as infidelity, due to the negative effect the transgressions can have on a romantic relationship (Roloff & Cloven, 1994), including the possibility that the relationship might end. In their research on undergraduate students in romantic relationships, Roscoe, Cavanaugh, and Kennedy (1988) reported that 44% of individuals would terminate a relationship upon discovery of an infidelity, while only 14% said that they would do nothing or immediately forgive their partner. While relational transgressions can lead to relationship dissolution (Baxter, 1986; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Spanier & Margolis, 1983), “it does not automatically follow that a single violation is sufficient to end a relationship” (Roloff & Cloven, 1994, p. 26). While the term “relational transgression” covers a number of behaviors, transgression research most often references extra-relational transgressions, with sexual affairs being the typical example used (Metts, 1994). Furthermore, “the literature is consistent in identifying infidelity and unfaithfulness as the most frequently reported relational transgressions in close, romantic relationships” (Emmers-Sommer, 2003, p.193). Based on the previous findings, it is important to study infidelity in romantic relationships because of the negative influence it can have on the relationship.

### Social Network

An individual’s social network plays a role in relational success and satisfaction in times of relational distress (Julien & Markman, 1991) and couple conflict, in which the network members assume a role of supporter or critic (Klein & Milardo, 2000). Social support has been shown to influence relational satisfaction and relational stability (Cramer, 2004; Felmlee, 2001; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992). For example, in a longitudinal study of 101 dating couples, Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) found that perceived approval from a social network was positively associated with satisfaction and commitment. Social network approval of a romantic relationship has also been positively

associated with stability of intimate relationships (Felmlee, 2001). Cramer (2004), from a sample of 111 individuals in dating relationships, also found a positive association between support satisfaction and relational satisfaction. Because of the influence a social network can have on a relationship and a person experiencing a stressful situation, it is important to examine the role of the social network during a relational transgression.

Individuals will look to their network for comfort and support when they experience relational distress (Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001). Previous research has identified a number of types of support individuals seek from their social network. Cutrona and Suhr (1992) have identified two broad categories of support: action-facilitating support and nurturant support. Action-facilitating support is defined as support “intended to assist the stressed individual to solve or eliminate the problem that is causing his or her distress” (p. 155). Action-facilitating support includes informational and tangible support. Informational support is support which provides advice, facts, or feedback to the individual in need. Network members provide tangible support by providing needed goods and services. Nurturant support is intended “to comfort or console, without direct efforts to solve the problem causing the stress” (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992, p. 155). Nurturant support includes emotional, network, and esteem support. Emotional support is communicated through expressions of caring, concern, empathy, and sympathy, while network support can be communicated through providing an individual with a sense of belonging among people with similar interests and concerns. Finally esteem support “refers to expressions of regard for one’s skills, abilities, and intrinsic value” (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992, p. 155). Cutrona & Suhr (1992) conducted experiments on 30 couples in which one member of the couple was a stress discloser and one was the support provider. The stress discloser was told to discuss the stressful situation with the spouse, and the support provider was told to respond as he/she normally would. Following the experiment, participants responded to satisfaction questionnaires. Support providers most often provided informational support, followed by emotional support. Results of the satisfaction survey showed that stress disclosers were most satisfied when provided with informational and emotional support. While this research helps us understand which support is most often provided and which is most

satisfactory during times of stress, it fails to explain which types of support individuals look for when they experience a stressful situation.

As stated earlier, individuals will choose to reveal or conceal information based on the anticipated support or nonsupport from that network member (Baxter, 1994; Canary & Stafford, 1994). Therefore, it would seem that individuals may choose who to reveal information to or conceal information from, based on his/her perception of a network member as a supporter or critic. However, an individual's need for support could outweigh the anticipated criticism (Baxter, 1994). Klein and Milardo (2000) examined 98 couples to determine who relational partners perceived to be supporters or critics within both their individual and joint networks. Supporters were identified as individuals who agreed with an individual's position in an episode of couple conflict, while critics were identified as individuals who did not agree with an individual's position during an episode of couple conflict. The authors found that individuals report more same-sex supporters and more opposite-sex critics. Furthermore, they found that individuals reported the most significant amount of supporters as friends, rather than family or other network members, although there were more supporters than critics in all of those groups. However, it remains unclear how an individual determines whether a potential support provider is a supporter or critic. Based on this information, it appears important to examine the following research questions:

RQ1: What communicates being a supporter?

RQ2: What communicates being a critic?

There are a number of reasons individuals would choose to reveal or conceal information, including anticipated support or anticipated non-support. Individuals may choose to conceal information if he/she fears that the network member will condemn the transgressor and convince the transgressed to leave that individual. If the transgressed has decided to remain with the transgressor, he/she may conceal information from network members that he/she will perceive as condemning (Roloff, Soule & Carey, 2001). Based on the previous literature, it is important to examine an individual's reasons for revealing or concealing information about the infidelity. Therefore, the following are asked:

RQ3: What are the reasons for revealing information to social network members?

RQ4: What are the reasons for concealing information from social network members?

Because individuals may choose to reveal or conceal information due to anticipated support or nonsupport from network members, it is important to look at responses to the revelation of transgression information to determine what responses were seen as supportive or unsupportive.

RQ5: What responses to revelation of transgression information are seen as supportive?

RQ6: What responses to revelation of transgression information are seen as unsupportive?

Furthermore, it is important to understand what dialectics individuals are negotiating when deciding to reveal or conceal information to a network member; therefore, the following is asked:

RQ7: What tensions are individuals negotiating when they decide to reveal or conceal information to/from their social network?

As stated earlier, there are a number of strategies, or praxis patterns, that individuals use to negotiate dialectical tensions. Because little research has examined which patterns individuals use to negotiate the dialectical tension of revelation-concealment, the following research question is asked:

RQ8: What praxis patterns do individuals use when negotiating revelation and/or concealment of transgression information?

The following section proposes a methodology for data collection based on the above hypothesis and research questions.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Participants

Relational transgressions are controversial topics, and as such, some unique difficulties had to be considered in recruiting participants. A non-random sample was conducted by recruiting volunteers via a purposive sampling procedure. The sample included seven males and fifteen females and participants from ages 18 to 65. All 22 participants were Caucasian. Participants were required to meet a set of criteria developed by the researcher. Participants must have had experienced a relational transgression with their romantic partner and must have been the individual transgressed against. The transgression committed must have been extra-relational sex, based on earlier information that shows the negative effect infidelity can have on both marriage and dating relationships (Baxter, 1986; Kitson & Sussman, 1982; Spanier & Margolis, 1983). This research examined individuals who had been in the romantic relationship for at least four months at the time of the transgression. This requirement allowed the relationship to be longstanding enough to have established relationship rules like monogamy. The participant may or may not have still been in the relationship at the time of the interview. At the time of the transgression, three participants had been married for five to thirty years. Eight participants were in dating relationships post high school, and eleven participants were in dating relationships in high school. Dating relationships ranged from four months to four years.

The researcher used her own network to aid in finding qualified participants. The researcher requested that individuals within her network coordinate an initial conversation between herself and the potential participant. The network utilized included students enrolled Communication Studies courses at a western university. This network acted as a starting point from which individuals referred others or determined if they fit the criteria themselves. While using a non-random sampling technique may have affected the generalizability of the results, this method worked best to combat the sensitivity of the topic and participant's unwillingness to take part in the research.

Due to the sensitive material covered in the interview and privacy and confidentiality issues, the researcher did not know the transgressor prior to the interview. This procedure was employed as a way to protect the transgressor's privacy and relationships, as well as the researcher's own relationships. By interviewing an

individual currently or previously in a relationship familiar to the researcher, that relationship could have become very complicated when information was revealed and could have had a negative effect on a number of relationships, including the relationships between the researcher and the transgressor, the researcher and the transgressed, and the transgressed and transgressor.

### Procedure

Participants took part in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private, neutral location negotiated by the participant and interviewer. This ensured that the interview was conducted in a place the participant viewed as safe and comfortable. The interview was conducted using an interview guide (Appendix A) to provide a framework for discussion.

The interviewer began by asking the participant to read and sign a consent form. The consent form included a brief explanation of the study. The consent form also informed the participant about the risks and benefits of participating in the study. The interviewer then requested permission to use an audio recording device to record the interview for future transcription and analysis. The interviews gave the participants a chance to discuss, process, and possibly come to terms with the relational transgression. Therefore, participating in the interview may have been cathartic for the participant (Varallo, Ray & Ellis, 1998). However, talking about the relational transgression may have also caused stress to the participant. Emotional hardship may have been one risk the participants faced because of the sensitivity of the information. In the event that this were to happen, the consent form provided the participants with information for counseling or other professional services the individuals could seek to help them cope with the thoughts and feelings that emerged during the interview.

Upon obtaining consent, the researcher began the interview. The interview began with the researcher asking the participant to create a list. Of the people he/she talks to or thinks about talking to when something important happens in his/her life. Based on the list of network members the individual created, he/she was asked who he/she told when the infidelity was discovered. For the network members who he/she told, the interviewee was asked to talk about why he/she chose to tell those individuals. The participant was then asked to tell the story of how he/she told each individual. Finally, the participant

was asked which network members he/she didn't tell about the infidelity and why he/she chose not to tell those individuals.

Again, because relational transgressions are a difficult topic to consider and discuss, participants were provided with information about professional help (e.g. counseling services) they could seek in the event that they experienced negative effects as a result of the interview.

### Analysis

To begin analysis, the interviews were first transcribed by the researcher. Due to the nature of the research, transcriptions were done according to content and did not include notations for vocal pauses and inflection. Four transcripts were then compared to the audio recordings for accuracy. Following transcription and quality control, coding was conducted and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data.

Qualitative methods were used for all research questions using a modified grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which begins by “coding as many categories as possible” (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). Qualitative analysis was conducted inductively, with concepts and commonalities being derived from a set of data (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). To begin the data analysis process, all transcripts were uploaded into Atlas.ti, a software program designed for qualitative analysis. This software was used to sort and categorize data throughout the coding process. A process of coding procedures was used to analyze data for qualitative analysis. The formal analysis of the data began by open coding data (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995) where the data was coded based on “chunks of meaning” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); that is, quotations were coded where a category of meaning emerged. Open coding continued until themes became repetitious and coding had reached saturation, meaning no additional themes were emerging from the data. Using constant comparison (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) during open coding, significant data was unitized and categorized, creating an initial coding scheme derived from emerging themes and sensitizing concepts from previous literature including the negotiation of revelation and concealment (i.e. reasons for revelation and concealment) and outcomes of the revelation and/or concealment. Focused coding (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002) was then conducted using the initial coding scheme (Appendix B) to analyze the data. Finally, axial coding (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995) was conducted. Transcripts

were analyzed using the coding scheme and emerging codes were compared to existing codes and added if novel. Axial coding was used to “make connections between categories and thus result in the creation of either new categories or a theme that spans many categories (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002, p. 220). Axial coding was conducted both by using Cutrona and Suhr’s (1992) model of support types and also by sorting and synthesizing common themes throughout the data.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Communicating Support & Criticism

The first two research questions asked what communicates being a supporter and what communicates being a critic. During analysis, eight themes emerged which were indicative of communicating support while one theme emerged which was indicative of communicating criticism (See Appendix B for a full list of categories). Participants reported that most common ways of communicating support were to be sympathetic, trustworthy, and calm. When asked why her mother was supportive, Linda said, “She would have just taken it all in and just been sorry for me.” Kelly said, “I knew she’d be sympathetic” when asked why she would tell her friend Lindsay about the transgression. Trust was also a salient theme. Christina said of her friend Liz, “I trust her with everything I say...she would never go tell other people about it.” Participants also reported people who were calm as supportive. Linda sees her friend as very level-headed: “...she’s very calm; she’s the one like, ‘okay, let’s really look at this’...”

Finally, though not as common as other responses, participants consider individuals who are comforting (“...he just always has something comforting to say to me...”), honest (“...Leslie’s always been the kind of person that gives me the absolute truth of the situation”), nonjudgmental (“I felt comfortable, like she wouldn’t judge me”), positive-thinking (“...she always has a positive outlook on things, like ‘maybe it’s a good thing this is happening’”), and good listeners (“She does a lot of just listening ...”) supportive.

While a few individuals indicated that network members who were nonjudgmental were supportive, most participants reported that network members who would judge or blame them would be considered critics. For example, Nicole said, “I think that when something like that happens to you, you feel like it’s your fault and you don’t want people to judge you for it.” Linda felt that a lot of people “would have blamed [her] for being an idiot.” Kelly indicated that she thought a friend would judge her when she said, “I did kind of expect her to judge me for it.”

### Reasons for Revelation

The third research question asked about the reasons individuals have for revealing transgression information. As seen earlier, individuals will choose to reveal or conceal information based on the anticipated support or nonsupport from a network member

(Baxter, 1994; Canary & Stafford, 1994). When deciding to reveal or conceal information, individuals are more likely to reveal positively-valenced information and more likely to conceal negatively-valenced information from their social network (Baxter, 1988; Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001). Because information regarding a relational transgression is negatively valenced, individuals tend to be more selective about revealing and concealing that information (Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001), and when they do reveal the information it is for a reason. An overwhelming number of participants reported revealing information to gain support. Information was also revealed to seek revenge on the transgressor and/or transgression partner, to protect a network member, to explain a major life decision, and because it was expected due to the nature of the relationship (Appendix B).

#### Reveal to Gain Support

The most common motive for revealing transgression information was to gain needed support from the social network. The support types participants sought were classified using Cutrona and Suhr's (1992) classifications. Participants reported seeking informational, tangible, emotional, network, and esteem support from network members.

Informational support. Informational support was one of the most common types of support sought by participants. The informational support that seemed to be most desired was advice. Participants seeking advice were looking for coping advice and instrumental advice. Coping advice included advice for coming to terms with the situation and moving forward. For example, Carmen's sister gave her advice for avoiding the transgressor while she coped with the situation: "She told me to try to avoid the certain high school halls that we used to hang out in, 'try not to run into him, you might need time to get over him before you see him next.'" Instrumental advice included advice on things that needed to be done to end the relationship. Beth conveys this in her testimony on the advice she received from a friend: "She's always full of advice, you know, 'you need to change your locks, you need to dump him out of your bank accounts as fast as you can,' you know, advice about attorneys, advice about how to deal with my son."

Participants were also looking for help with making sense of what had happened. Participants often sought out supporters to gain perspective on the situation, or as John states, "just an understanding of what happened and my feelings toward it; just to get a

perspective.” Nicole echoed this sentiment: “There’s a lot of people I just wanted to tell the story to and just see what they thought, ‘cause I felt like I couldn’t get a good perspective on it ‘cause I was so emotional about it.”

Finally, participants were also looking for information about the transgression in an attempt to find out what had actually happened. When asked why she talked to her friend John about the transgression, Nicole replied,

I guess I needed someone ‘cause I couldn’t make up my mind and I didn’t trust my boyfriend, and he was the person I felt I could get actual facts from and like the truth and he was the person that I could get the truth from.

Whitney mirrored Nicole’s comments when explaining why she confided in her friend Seagan: “I kind of talked to him about it ‘cause I was just going for more information...just kind of asking what happened, like did you know that this was gonna happen, but he was just more information.”

Tangible support. There was one reported instance in which a participant sought tangible support. Again, Cutrona & Suhr (1992) define tangible support as providing a needed good or service. One participant admitted that she had a need for psychological help so she could work through her feelings about the situation. She revealed the information to her mother to find the help that she needed. Here Madonna described her symptoms of depression:

This is so embarrassing, but I laid on a couch for a week straight and didn’t eat and drank water like just when I had to, at other people’s urging...I was completely devastated...I didn’t do anything...I didn’t think I’d ever bounce back...I wasn’t suicidal, but I was like, I was like what’s the point of even finishing the semester...you know what I mean? It was terrible.

When she realized she was having these emotional problems, she revealed the cause of her stress to her mother:

When I started having psychological issues, that was when I talked to my mom. My mom was just, I think she was really freaked out, and like more than willing to get me with a psychologist, get me with a doctor, whatever we needed to do to make me okay.

Madonna revealed to her mother to seek help in finding psychological help. Her mother helped her find a counselor and helped her get to her appointments. By doing so, her mother was providing her with a service, therefore providing tangible support.

Emotional support. Like informational support, emotional support was highly sought by participants. Participants frequently expressed a need to find comfort, sympathy and empathy. Participants expressed that they wanted people to understand their hurt feelings and feel bad for them. This is obvious in Nicole's account when she stated, "I guess I wanted more people I felt were going to give me a hug and sit there, and I don't know, either sympathize with me, or talk, or get angry with me over the situation." Nicole was looking for someone to express sympathy for her situation or empathize by also getting angry over the situation. When asked what she was looking for, Linda replied, "I probably wouldn't have gone to anybody that would have not comforted me, and so somewhere in there I'm sure I was looking for comfort."

Network support. Nearly every testimony stated a desire or an appreciation for network support. Participants indicated that it was very helpful to know that they were "not alone." For example, Amanda's statement used earlier indicated that, "it was just kind of reassuring; you know you're not the only one this has happened to before." Michael stated that his sister was "trying to relate because she'd had it happen before, too, so she was just trying to help [him] out." Participants expressed that knowing you were not the only one, and that others had similar feelings to their own, was very supportive.

Esteem support. Another type of support participants sought when revealing transgression information was esteem support. Participants were particularly looking for network members to acknowledge their abilities for making good decisions and reassure them of their intrinsic value. Madonna indicated that she was looking for esteem support when she stated, "I needed someone to tell me that what I wanted to do was the right thing and that I was better than him." Participants wanted to feel that they were making the right decisions. For example, Jenna stated, "I was hoping that they could tell me that I did a really good job in handling the situation." When Carmen was cheated on, she started questioning her own value: "Obviously I was having issues, like 'is she better than me, is she prettier than me?' and then Sean would always be like, 'no, she's not prettier than you.'"

#### Reveal to Seek Revenge

One participant indicated a need to seek revenge, both on the transgressor or the transgression partner. Brad was very embarrassed when he found out that his girlfriend

had engaged in sexual activity with his best friend. Because he was embarrassed, Brad felt a need to seek revenge. Brad felt that telling network members about the infidelity would turn those members against the transgressor and transgression partner. For example, when asked why he told his other friends about the infidelity, Brad replied,

Because in my head I thought it might be a way to turn everyone against Zach at the time for sure, like I was like, I remember thinking if I can get everyone against Zach, that'll be perfect. I just wanted everyone to hate them.

#### Reveal to Protect Network Member

Another reason participants reported for revealing information was to protect members of their networks. Jenna articulated this reason in her interview. First, Jenna reported a need to protect network members from being deceived by the transgressor. Jenna and her ex-boyfriend were friends with a couple who strongly disapproved of infidelity. When asked why she revealed the transgression to the couple, Jenna replied,

'Cause they thought he was wonderful, and I hated that people thought that about him when I knew differently. We had had conversations about infidelity in relationships before and they absolutely disgusted by it, and I just wanted them to know.

In another instance, Jenna told the story of how a mutual friend had recommended her ex-boyfriend for a job at the company where he worked. Jenna was concerned about protecting the friend's reputation with his company:

He was really pushing his character in order to get him the job, and I know they knew him personally, but he didn't know the truth. I didn't want him to get the job and then walk all over him. I didn't want him to have that advantage of hurting them like he had hurt me.

#### Reveal to Explain Major Life Decision

Another reason one participant gave for revealing transgression information was to explain a major life decision he had made. When Allen discovered his wife's infidelity, he decided to remain in the relationship for his children. However, his wife provided him with an ultimatum: the children or his lucrative law practice. When Allen dissolved his partnership in the law firm, his friends and associates were very confused. Allen chose to reveal the transgression information to explain his decision:

I had to let them know why I was doing what I was doing, what was going on, because what I was doing seemed really stupid at the time. I had essentially handed over the golden goose and the golden egg of a law practice to a couple of

guys and just said, “Adios, farewell, take it all I’m gone,” and nobody could understand. “What happened to this guy, is he really that daft?” I had a very, very, very lucrative practice as a sole practitioner, very lucrative. I was a pretty good attorney and pretty good litigator, so I had a very lucrative practice, and I walked away from it because what happened.

### Nature of Relationship

A final reason participants articulated for revealing information was because it was expected of the relationship. As stated in the review of literature, information may also be revealed because the disclosure is seen as expected or beneficial to the relationship with the recipient. Many participants expressed that they “needed” to tell a particular individual because it was expected. For example, Lexie stated, “She’s my mom, and that she needs to know what’s going on in my life.” Linda reinforced this when she explained, “I thought, ‘these are the people in my life that should know what is going on with me.’”

### Reasons for Concealment

The fourth research question asked about what reasons individuals have for concealing transgression information. Previous research has shown that when faced with the choice of revelation or concealment, individuals are more likely to conceal negatively-valenced information, such as information regarding a relational transgression (Baxter, 1988; Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001). Upon analysis of the data, four categories of reasons for concealing information were found (Appendix B), including concealing to avoid evaluation, conceal to protect others and relationships, conceal to control the information, and conceal due to the nature of the information.

### Conceal to Avoid Evaluation

It has been shown that individuals will choose to reveal or conceal information based on a perception of support or nonsupport from a network member (Baxter, 1994; Canary & Stafford, 1994). A number of participants concealed information because they anticipated that a network member would blame them for the situation. For example, Beth revealed why she didn’t confide in her mother: “I just didn’t know how she would react, and emotionally if she was gonna be a wreck or somehow yell at me or find fault with me. I wasn’t ready to deal with it at that point.” Nicole stated, “I think that when something like that happens to you, you feel like it’s your fault and you don’t want people to judge you for it.” Other participants concealed information because they

thought a network member would have a smug reaction (e.g. “I told you so,” “I knew that was going to happen”). Nicole illustrated this when she explained why she concealed information from her friends: “I think there were a lot of people who were my good friends that I did not want to tell about it because I think they would be just like, ‘how did you not see that coming when you first got together with him?.’” Kandace wished she had concealed information when her friend Andy replied, “What did I tell you?”

Participants also chose to conceal information when they expected network members to be unsupportive of their decisions. Having chosen to remain in the relationship with the transgressor, Nicole said, “I think the people that I felt were giving me input that I shouldn’t be in the relationship, I definitely didn’t want to talk to them about it.”

#### Conceal to Protect Others and Relationships

A very salient reason for concealing information was to protect the people and relationships involved in the situation. Participants chose to conceal transgression information when revealing the information could hurt the transgressor. This occurred when participants felt that they were partially to blame for the transgression, or if they still had an amicable relationship with the transgressor. Travis explained,

All of my friends actually liked her, and I still hang out with her when I go home ‘cause we’re still friends. She’s a decent person. I’m pretty happy that no one knows about it, ‘cause it’s like, Daniel and Kevin are really good friends with her, too, and they would have been like well, “[expletive] her,” and they’d shun her now.

Participants also chose to conceal information in order to protect network member’s relationships with the transgressor and the transgression partner. Christina, in an effort to maintain a positive relationship between her mother and her boyfriend (the transgressor), chose to conceal the information from her mother. When asked why, she stated, “I wouldn’t tell her about this because she wouldn’t give him a chance in the world if she knew.” Travis, who also concealed information to protect the transgressor, said, “Our families have known each other for so long, and I just don’t want them to hate her.” Because Brad’s girlfriend had cheated on him with his best friend, he felt it was important to protect his best friend’s relationship with his mother, who had previously had a good relationship. He explained,

My mom and I usually talk about everything, and the problem is that if I told her that story she wouldn't have been level-headed enough to take it like I did. I knew if I had told her that she would take a personal grudge against Zach, and Zach spends a lot of time at my house and stuff, and I didn't want that (the grudge) to happen.

Finally, participants wanted to conceal information to protect network members. Two testimonies reported concealing information to protect the health of an individual. Because of her age, Beth worried that revealing the information would "give her a heart attack." Christina chose to conceal the information regarding her situation out of consideration for her father's stress-induced health condition. She stated, "I don't tell him things 'cause I don't want him to be stressed out. I'd put him back in the hospital if I told him."

#### Conceal to Control Information

The final theme that emerged as a reason for concealment was the need to control transgression information. Participants expressed that it was important to conceal the information for three reasons: to prevent the information from being used against the participant, to prevent the information from turning into gossip, and to protect their self image. Analysis of the data revealed that participants had an overwhelming fear that the information would be used against them. Carmen was the most vocal about this: "I didn't really talk to that many people. I was really, like, [selective] with who I talked to 'cause I didn't want people to use it against me." Carmen was particularly careful not to reveal the information to a friend who she had been competitive in school with, stating, "I was just afraid that if we got into a fight that she would use it against me." Whitney also felt compelled to conceal the information from a long-time friend she had begun to grow apart from. She said she concealed because "when you have that valuable information like that, if something happens, you could blackmail someone with it." Other participants were concerned that if the information were revealed it would hurt their self image. John did not want to reveal information to his parents because he "liked looking shining and prestigious" to his parents. He felt that revealing he had dated an unfaithful woman would reflect badly on him. John also did not want to reveal information to others as well. He stated,

It was kind of an embarrassing subject. You kind of lose a lot of respect, or people lose respect for you if you're cheated on, in the sense that you didn't have

good judgment, you're not doing something right in your relationship, that person (the transgressor) is unhappy, especially if you stay with the person who cheated on you. Then you just look kind of like a weak person, which is an embarrassing thing to go through.

Linda expressed a similar sentiment when she said, "You don't want to tell a lot of people. As a matter of fact, you hope that a lot of other people don't find out because it makes you look like you're less desirable, or a bad wife."

#### Conceal Due to Nature of Information

Many participants discussed concealing information due to its nature. Participants often expressed that "sex" was something they didn't want to talk about or couldn't talk about with particular individuals, because it is seen as a taboo topic. They also expressed that they would be uncomfortable discussing it with particular individuals. This was a common reason stated among the younger participants, especially in deciding to conceal the information from their parents and grandparents. For example, Nicole felt uncomfortable talking to her mom about her physical relationships. She stated, "I didn't want to talk to her about him having sex with other people, me having had sex with him, like that sort of thing, 'cause she's not, like we've never had those kind of conversations." Veronica also felt uncomfortable having that conversation with her grandmother: "My grandma was around and I'd talk to her sometimes, not really in depth, because I did feel uncomfortable talking to her about the whole sexual type of a thing."

#### Responses to Revelation

When individuals chose to reveal transgression information, they experienced a wide range of responses from network members. Participants reported overwhelmingly supportive responses from network members upon revelation which resulted in 10 themes. However, there were also three themes of unsupportive responses (Appendix E).

The most common supportive responses were information and emotional support. The most common type of informational support provided was advice. Participants were most commonly encouraged to "move on" from the situation. Most participants found advice to move on helpful. Amanda felt it was helpful when her friend said, "move on, it's something you have to get over and try not to think about." However, while a number of participants found advice to move on helpful, a few also found the advice

unsupportive. For example, Kelly found her coworker's advice very unsupportive: "...we kinda looked at each other and like she knew what was going on and she looks at me and she goes, 'Just get over it, okay?'" It seems that some participants were ready to move forward and appreciated advice encouraging them to do so. At the same time, other participants possibly hadn't worked through their feelings and needed more time, therefore viewing advice to move on as unsupportive.

Participants also viewed advice to end the relationship as supportive and unsupportive. Linda said, "My entire staff wanted me to leave him...they all hated him, and that made me feel supported." Linda chose to remain with her husband following his, but she felt that by encouraging her to leave, her staff was reassuring her that she deserved better. On the other hand, Nicole thought her friend was unsupportive because she wasn't supportive of Nicole's decision to continue her relationship. Nicole said, "I don't think she wanted to hear like how much I cared about him, and I don't know, she kind of wanted us to go our separate ways."

In one instance, a participant reported that advice to remain in the relationship was unsupportive. Amanda's family wanted her to see things through with the transgressor, but Amanda had decided to end the relationship. She stated, "My whole family wants me to get back together with him, just to talk to him, and I'm like, 'No!'"

Participants reported several instances in which network members responded supportively by providing emotional support. The most common type of emotional support reported was concern ("She was more concerned about me", "She was worried about my mental health"). Participants also viewed responses as supportive when network members expressed sympathy ("I'm sorry, that must be really hard for you") or comfort ("he just always had something comforting to say to me, like 'It will be okay'").

Network support and esteem support were also among reports of supportive responses. A number of participants reported responses of shared experience as being supportive. For example, Lexie thought her sister was helpful: "She's also had some of the same experiences, too, so it was just like someone who can understand and relate." Participants also found that support for their decisions ("She still stood with me, stood by me, through everything, like every decision") or validation of their value ("She was just very supportive and just tried to build me up") was also supportive.

While many participants reported receiving helpful support messages from network members, a few participants, upon revealing transgression information, encountered a disregard from network members. This lack of support was seen as unsupportive. Christina experienced this when she told her friend what happened. She stated: "...she was just like, 'That happened such a long time ago, who cares now,' and she didn't really have much to say about it...I remember that cause I was really pissed off that she didn't help me at all..."

There were a number of other responses that participants found supportive. Some participants found it helpful when network members used humor. Jenna said of her brother, "I knew I would laugh at what he had to say, and so it put me in a better mood about what was going on." Whitney also received a supportive response from her brother when he became protective. She reported, "...he did the protective little brother thing, like 'I'm gonna go kick his ass.'" There were a number of participants who found protective network members helpful. Participants also found network members supportive when they criticized the transgressor ("I did want to hear people say that he was a [expletive] because he was and it felt good to hear people say that") or listened to the participant ("...he'd just ask about it and he's really easy to talk to...just kind of a sounding board, just to get stuff out").

Engaging in shared activity was also viewed as supportive. Michael said of his sister, "...she was just trying to help me out and then she took me out that night and we went out and had fun..." Brian also found shared activity with his friends helpful. He said, "...we could go out and occupy our time, and I wouldn't think about it so much." Participants also found network members supportive when they expressed shared anger over the situation. Linda stated, "I guess I wanted more people I felt were going to...like get angry with me over the situation." Beth echoed this response when detailing her conversation with a friend: "...he was clearly pissed, [and] it made me feel supported, like they're gonna be with me through this so I can count on them." Participants wanted network members to "be angry with" them. However, some network members minimized the situation. By doing so, they failed to validate the participant's feelings on the issue, and were therefore viewed as unsupportive. Lexie was very frustrated when her friends "tried to make it look like [the transgressor] didn't do anything wrong."

When she told another friend about the transgression her friend replied, “Is it really that big of a deal; you know, you guys can be together...”

### Tensions

The sixth and seventh research questions asked about the tensions that are negotiated when individuals try to decide to reveal or conceal transgression information within their social network, and what praxis patterns individuals use when negotiating revelation and/or concealment of transgression information. Five tensions emerged from the data. Participants managed these tensions either by completely revealing or concealing the information (selection), revealing or concealing information at different points in time (cyclic alternation), or revealing selected parts of the information (segmentation). The emerging tensions are defined and illustrated below, along with the outcomes of negotiating those tensions.

#### Nature of Relationship versus Desire to Conceal

Many of the tensions found in the interviews seemed to involve negotiating an expectation to tell a network member with some other force. This expectation to tell seems to be a result of the nature of the relationship. For example, based on the relationship a participant had with a network member prior to the transgression, the participant felt a need or obligation to tell that network member about things of this nature.

Some participants felt a pull between the nature of their relationship with a network member and their desire to conceal the transgression information. This tension was the most reported among participants. For example, Kandace felt an obligation to tell her friend about the transgression while at the same time her friend’s negative attitude caused her to want to conceal information. There was also a chance that her friend could hear about the transgression through word of mouth. Because Kandace had an obligation to reveal the information to her friend, she decided that telling her friend would be in the best interest of the relationship: “I knew she was gonna hear anyways, and we were such good friends and we still are, but it’s like, if she hears through the grapevine it’s gonna be, ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’ and I didn’t want to deal with that. So I knew she had to hear it from me.” Michael also experienced this tension. Michael needed to negotiate the expectation to reveal the information to his parents with his desire to deal with the

situation on his own. He chose to reveal the information to his parents, and remarked on the tension:

I've always kinda dealt with stuff on my own...um, but obviously when my girlfriend of 2 years stops coming over and stops hanging out, stops calling and stuff like that, I kinda have to explain what's going on, and my family has always been real supportive so, you know, I figured I'd be honest with 'em instead of just saying 'we broke up, no big deal.' I wanted to be honest with them and tell them what was going on.

In both examples, the praxis pattern of selection was used. Both participants decided to completely reveal the transgression information when it was perceived as expected of the relationship, even if they did want to keep the information private. This was indicative of all of the situations in which these particular tensions were negotiated; that is, in every instance that this tension was reported, participants selected to fully reveal the information to the network member.

#### Nature of Relationship versus Anticipated Nonsupport

The next most common tension participants reported was the tension between an expectation to tell and anticipated nonsupport from a network member. Kelly experienced this when negotiating an expectation to reveal with anticipated judgment and backstabbing from her long-time friend. Kelly negotiated this tension by initially concealing the information from her friend while she sought and received the support she needed from other network members. After a week, Kelly revealed the information to her friend. She stated,

We've been best friends since the first day of kindergarten, so you know, pretty much my whole life that I can really remember, but I did kind of expect her to judge me for it. I expected like, because she's not really honest, she'd be like, "oh wow, I'm sorry he did this to you," and then turn around and be like, "oh Kelly did this and this, and of course that would happen to her." I feel like, kind of backstabbing, I don't know. So, I was kind of nervous to tell her, but, actually, I think I told her, like a week after it happened, I didn't feel like telling someone I couldn't totally trust yet, so I waited a little bit and then confessed what happened to her, cause I was shutting her out for awhile, cause I needed people that weren't gonna put me down.

Beth used the same technique to manage this tension. Beth felt that she was expected to tell her mother about the transgression, but she was unsure if her mother would blame her for it. She stated, "I just didn't know how she would react, and emotionally if she was gonna be a wreck or somehow yell at me or find fault with me. I wasn't ready to deal

with it at that point.” In both of these situations, participants used cyclic alternation, or alternating between revelation and concealment over time, when negotiating the tension. Again, cyclic alternation was the only strategy reported for negotiating this tension.

#### Desire to Conceal versus Need to Explain Major Life Decision

In one particular interview, a participant articulated a tension between his desire to conceal the transgression information with a need to explain a decision he was making. When Allen decided to dissolve his partnership in a lucrative law firm, he had to negotiate between his desire to conceal the information to maintain control of it and his need to explain a major life decision. Allen initially concealed the information from his partners. He subsequently revealed the information to them when he decided to dissolve the partnership and physically leave the geographical region. On his decision to disclose the information, Allen stated,

I had to let them know why I was doing what I was doing, what was going on, because what I was doing seemed really stupid at the time. I had essentially handed over the golden goose and the golden egg of a law practice to a couple of guys and just said, “Adios, farewell, take it all I’m gone,” and nobody could understand.

By choosing to first reveal and later conceal the transgression information, Allen was using the cyclic alternation praxis pattern to negotiate the tension.

#### Own Needs versus Network Relationship with Transgressor/Transgression Partner

Some participants reported a tension between revealing for their own needs and concealing to protect the network member’s relationship with the transgressor or transgression partner. For example, Brad had to negotiate the tension between his own needs and his mother’s relationship with the transgression partner. In his case, the transgression partner was his best friend, and he wanted to continue the relationship after the transgression occurred. He explained,

My mom and I usually talk about everything, and the problem is that if I told her that story she wouldn’t have been level-headed enough to take it like I did. I knew if I had told her that she would take a personal grudge against Zach, and Zach spends a lot of time eat my house and stuff, and I didn’t want that (the grudge) to happen.

In order to protect the relationship between his friend and his mother, Brad decided to conceal the information about the transgression. This is an example of the selection praxis pattern. Selection was the praxis pattern most commonly used to negotiate this

tension. However, there was one instance in which a participant used cyclic alternation. Beth experienced a unique tension when she had to negotiate her need for support with the relationship between her friends and the transgressor. Beth disclosed all of the information initially, but when she realized the effect her revelation was having on her friends due to their relationship with the transgressor, she discontinued all disclosure. She said, "They would just listen to me talk for awhile, but then, I got the clear sense that, I needed to just stop talking about what a jerk Peter was because it put them in the middle, and I didn't want to do that." By first revealing and later concealing transgression information, Beth was utilizing the cyclic alternation praxis pattern.

#### Own needs versus Nature of Information

It appears that due to the age of the sample, a number of participants experienced a tension between their own needs for support and their desire to conceal the information because it was uncomfortable to talk about, or "taboo." When Nicole experienced this tension, she chose to conceal the sexual information from her mother, but revealed information about the breakup. She stated, "I didn't want to talk to her about him having sex with other people, me having had sex with him, like that sort of thing, 'cause she's not, like we've never had those kind of conversations." By revealing some information and concealing other information because it was inappropriate for disclosure, Nicole was using the segmentation praxis pattern. Veronica also used segmentation when she talked to her grandmother about the breakup, but not the physical cheating. She said, "My grandma was around and I'd talk to her sometimes, not really in depth, because I did feel uncomfortable talking to her about the whole sexual type of a thing."

#### Own needs versus Protecting Network Member

Finally, in one specific case, a participant had to negotiate between her own needs and the safety of a network member. When Christina discovered her boyfriend's infidelity, she was pulled between her need for support and her concern for her father's physical health. Because stress could negatively affect her father's health, Christina decided to use the selection praxis pattern and concealed all transgression information from her father. She said, "I don't tell him things 'cause I don't want him to be stressed out. I'd put him back in the hospital if I told him."

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study examined how individuals manage the revelation and concealment of transgression information following an act of infidelity. A number of findings surfaced from the data, both supporting and adding to future literature in this area. In the following section, key findings will be discussed, along with the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

### Communicating Support and Criticism

Previous research has examined support and criticism by considering who is considered a supporter or a critic based on whether or not a network member agrees or disagrees with an individual's position on an issue (Klein & Milardo, 2000). However, despite this research, it was still unclear what communicates being a supporter or critic other than agreeing or disagreeing with an individual's position. Participants in this study most often reported that network members communicate support through being sympathetic, trustworthy, and calm. Supportive network members were also described as comforting, honest, nonjudgmental, and good listeners. Individuals possessing these characteristics could be considered supporters, and as such, they may be able to provide emotional support, a safe place for individuals to talk through their feelings, and validation of those feelings. Participants also reported that network members communicate criticism through blame and judgment. These findings help to understand what it is about network members that make them individuals who are revealed to or concealed from. Practically, this research is important in helping network members understand how their reactions are perceived as supportive or critical when they are told about transgression information. Furthermore, this research identified a number of characteristics participants associate with a supportive individual. Knowing which kinds of communication are seen as supportive is important in helping individuals understand why they have been chosen as confidants. It seems that an individual's communication about the transgression and his/her everyday communication are important to being considered a good confidant. Network members can use this information to become better supporters in future interactions. While these findings have been important in identifying what communicates support and criticism, it will be important for future research to examine which types of supportive communication are most helpful to individuals, and which types of critical communication are most unhelpful or damaging.

### Reasons for Revealing/Concealing

As previous research has shown, there are a number of reasons that individuals reveal or conceal information, and they are particularly selective when the information is negatively-valenced (Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001), as is the case with relational transgressions. However, based on the findings of this study, individuals were more likely to reveal information than conceal it. Participants reported revealing the information to one to sixteen network members, with the average being closer to sixteen. This finding could potentially be due to the age of the participants, as younger participants were more likely to reveal to a larger number of network members than older participants. This finding could also be due to the variety of life experiences and relationships in the sample. Most participants had experienced an act of infidelity while in high school. These participants tended to have shorter relationships with smaller investments than the few participants who were married. It is possible that the lack of investment in the relationship made individuals more likely to reveal the information.

Previous research has shown why individuals reveal or conceal information in a number of contexts, but why individuals who have experienced a relational transgression reveal or conceal information remained unanswered. Participants reported the need to seek support, primarily informational or emotional support, and the expectation to reveal due to the relationship as two common reasons for revealing information, supporting previous research (Afifi & Olson, 2005; Baxter, 1994). However, this study added to the previous research by identifying the need to seek revenge, the need to protect a network member, and the need to explain a major life decision as additional reasons for revealing information. Reasons for concealing information also supported previous research. Participants wanted to conceal information to avoid evaluation (Afifi, 2003), to protect others (Afifi & Olson, 2005), and to control information (Canary & Stafford, 1994). Younger participants also desired to conceal information due to the nature of the information and the anticipated discomfort of having the conversation, particularly with their parents and grandparents. This is an important finding because it helps network members understand the importance of emphasizing open communication with younger individuals so that they may feel more comfortable with disclosing the information.

### Supportive/Unsupportive Responses

This study also examined network members' responses to the revelation of transgression information, in the context of supportive and unsupportive responses. Participants most often reported informational support, specifically advice, and emotional support as supportive responses. Participants found it both supportive and unsupportive when network members gave them advice to move on from the transgression. It appears that whether or not this advice was seen as supportive or unsupportive depended upon a participant's decision to remain in the relationship. However, in one case a participant chose to stay with the transgressor, but still found it supportive when network members encouraged her to leave the relationship. She felt that they were validating her feelings on the issue and knew she deserved to be treated better. Participants also viewed shared experience, shared activity, and shared anger as supportive responses. Participants viewed responses that lacked support or minimized the situation as unsupportive. These responses failed to validate the participant's feelings or his/her need for support. These findings are important because they shed light on how network members' responses to the revelation of transgression information can affect the individuals revealing the information. When network members provided supportive responses, participants felt validated, supported, and they felt like they were not alone. When network members provided unsupportive responses, participants were hurt and angry that their feelings were not validated and their needs were minimized. It is important for network members to understand the implications of their responses when transgression information is revealed to them.

### Tensions and Praxis Patterns

Previous research has shown that there is a dialectical tension between the forces of revelation and concealment. The tensions found in this study cannot be classified as dialectical tensions as they do not meet the conditions for being dialectical. Rather, it seems that these tensions are parts of the reveal/conceal contradiction. These tensions are neither logical nor functional opposites, nor are the forces in opposition interdependent. That is, each force can be defined on its own without the presence of the other force. Finally, these tensions are more dualistic tensions, as participants were able to solve the tension of whether to reveal or conceal the information. This research has uncovered a number of tensions individuals must manage when revealing or concealing information

regarding a relational transgression. The three main themes in tension with other forces were the nature of relationship (expected to tell due to previous relationship), desire to conceal, and own needs (fulfill own need for support). In order to negotiate these tensions, participants used three praxis patterns (Baxter, 1988). Participants choosing to fully reveal or fully conceal transgression information were using the selection pattern. Participants who chose to alternate revealing and concealing information over periods of time were using the cyclic alternation pattern. Finally, participants who revealed only certain parts of the information were using the segmentation pattern. One of the reasons that only these three praxis patterns emerged could be due to the nature of the questions asked in the interview. The questions during the interviews focused on whether participants revealed or concealed information to a network member and why they chose to do either. The integration praxis patterns allow for broader styles of managing revelation and concealment. By simply asking, “Who did/didn’t you tell?” participants may have felt limited in their responses. Another reason that only three praxis patterns were used may be due to the nature of the relationship. Some relationships carry an expectation to reveal information of this nature. If two individuals have that type of relationship, it could possibly be expected that the benefits of revealing the information may outweigh the risks of doing so. This could be a reason individuals chose to reveal the information. Finally, segmentation may have been used as a strategy due to the age of participants. Many of the younger participants expressed that they could not talk to their parents about sex, therefore deeming “sex” an inappropriate topic for disclosure.

Overall, it appears that participant choices to reveal or conceal were not exactly strategic. Rather, it seems that participants engaged more in retrospective sense-making. That is, instead of spending time strategically thinking about whom to reveal to or conceal from and why, participants depended on past experiences to make the decision to reveal or conceal. Participants made the decision to reveal or conceal based on past interactions with individuals that had been either successful or unsuccessful. This supports the very concept of praxis, as individuals are acting both proactively (by making communicative choices) and reactively (communicative actions establish boundaries for future communicative choices) (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

### Additional Findings

In addition to the research questions, gender differences emerged as a notable theme during analysis for a number of reasons. First, male and female participants differed in the number of network members they chose to reveal transgression information to. Most males reported revealing the information to one to five network members, whereas females reported revealing to six to sixteen, with most being on the high end of the spectrum. Second, males revealed most often to seek informational support, whereas females most often sought emotional support. Likewise, male network members were generally sought for informational support, whereas female network members were sought (or avoided) for emotional support. Julia Wood's (2005) literature on gender supports these findings. Females tend to view communication as a way of establishing and maintaining relationships with others, thereby engaging in more personal talk focused on responsiveness and emotional support. Males, on the other hand, view communication as a means of exerting control and exhibiting knowledge. Males focus on showing knowledge through advice-giving (informational support) and problem-solving (instrumental support).

Individuals also reported similar distributions of males and females as supporters and critics. However, female individuals did report female network members as being more helpful, while males lacked in their reactions. Similarly, males found that information from other males was helpful, whereas women's emotional perspective was unhelpful. These findings support previous research indicating that individuals will report more same-sex supporters (Klein & Milardo, 2000).

### Limitations and Future Discussion

Two limitations emerged from this research, as well as a number of areas for future discussion and research. First, the research did not initially intend to examine gender. However, during data analysis, themes of gender differences did emerge. In this study, male participants made approximately one-third of the sample. Because gender themes were so salient, future research could benefit from examining gender themes in a more balanced sample.

A second limitation was the lack of various life experiences of the sample. Only three participants in the sample were married at the time of the transgression while fourteen were in high school. There appeared to be a small difference in reasons to

reveal and conceal between these age groups, most notably the younger participants concealing a taboo topic. These differences could possibly be a result of the stage of the relationship or the investment in the relationship at the time of the transgression. Future research could benefit from examining a broader sample with more a more even distribution of ages and commitment levels of the relationships.

A third limitation was the lack of a culturally diverse sample. Different cultural groups may experience this process in different ways. These findings are only generalizable to a small, specific cultural group. However, because individuals from different cultures may experience this process differently, future research could look at greater, more diverse group of people.

This research has laid the groundwork for research in this specific area by identifying and describing a number of phenomena. However, there are a number of questions that could be addressed through future research and discussion. First, this research identified a number of behaviors and characteristics that communicate support or criticism. It could be beneficial to network members to know which of these behaviors/characteristics are seen as most helpful and which are most harmful to individuals who have experienced a relational transgression. This would help support providers to provide better, more focused support to individuals in need. Second, this research identified a number of tensions individuals experience when negotiating revelation and concealment of transgression information. Understanding which tensions are most difficult to negotiate could also be of benefit in the future. Finally, while this research examined how an individual negotiated a particular tension, the question still remains as to why individuals choose a particular praxis pattern over another.

The results of this study have shown the importance of examining support and dialectics in the context of relational transgressions. This research revealed useful data about individuals who have experienced a transgression and how they manage the process of finding support following a transgression. However useful, this study has only begun to describe the experience of discovering a relational transgression, and future research in this area could benefit both the individual who was transgressed against, as well as the support network of that individual.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Negotiating reveal/conceal within network following a relational transgression

1. I'd like you to begin by creating a map of sorts. Putting yourself in the middle, draw out who you would talk to or think about talking to if something important happens in your life.
2. Prior to the interview we established that your partner committed infidelity while in a romantic relationship with you. When this happened to you, who did you tell?
  - a. Why did you tell these people?
  - b. How did you tell these people? Tell me the story of how you told them.
3. When the infidelity happened, who didn't you tell about the story?
  - a. Why did you choose not to tell them?

## APPENDIX B: CODING SCHEME

<b>RQ1: Communication Characteristics of Supporters</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Calm</b>	Network member will remain calm	<p>“...he’s another one of those friends that doesn’t get worked up about things.”</p> <p>“...she’s very calm, she’s the one like okay, let’s really look at this...”</p>
<b>Comforting</b>	Network member will comfort participant	<p>“...she can be really comforting to me...”</p> <p>“...he just always has something comforting to say to me, like it will be okay...”</p> <p>“She’s very supportive and she seems to know the right thing to say...”</p>
<b>Honest</b>	Network member will be honest with participant	<p>“...Leslie’s always been the kind of person that gives me the absolute truth of the situation...”</p>
<b>Listens</b>	Network member listened to participant	<p>“...he’s really easy to talk to...just kind of a sounding board, just to get stuff out...”</p> <p>“She’s a very good listener. She’s just gonna listen...”</p> <p>“She does a lot of just listening ...”</p>
<b>Non-Judging</b>	Network member would not pass judgment	<p>“...so I felt comfortable like she wouldn’t judge...”</p> <p>“...[she’s] not very judgmental...”</p> <p>“I knew she would support whatever decision I made...”</p>
<b>Positive Outlook</b>	Network member looks at good in situation	<p>“...she always has a positive outlook on things, like ‘maybe it’s a good thing this is happening...”</p>
<b>Sympathetic</b>	Network member feels sorry for the participant	<p>“...she would have just taken it all in and just been sorry for me”</p> <p>“...I knew she’d be sympathetic.”</p>
<b>Trustworthy</b>	Network member can be trusted with information	<p>“I trust her with everything I say...she would never go tell other people about it...”</p> <p>“I knew she wasn’t going to tell anyone else”</p>

<b>RQ2: Communication Characteristics of Critics</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Blame/ Judgment</b>	Network member will blame or judge participant	<p>“...I knew she would look down on me...”</p> <p>“...they would just be like, ‘How did you not see that coming when you first got together with him?’”</p> <p>“I think that when something like that happens to you, you feel like it’s your fault and you don’t want people to judge you for it...”</p>

### RQ3: Reasons for Revealing Information

### Examples

#### Reveal to Gain Support

Participant was seeking support from network member

“She told me to try to avoid the certain high school halls that we used to hang out in, ‘try not to run into him, you might need time to get over him before you see him next.’”

Informational Support:  
Advice, Feedback,  
Information

“She’s always full of advice, you know, ‘you need to change your locks, you need to dump him out of your bank accounts as fast as you can,’ you know, advice about attorneys, advice about how to deal with my son.”

Tangible Support:  
Providing Goods and  
Services

“When I started having psychological issues, that was when I talked to my mom. My mom was just, I think she was really freaked out, and like more than willing to get me with a psychologist, get me with a doctor, whatever we needed to do to make me okay.”

Emotional Support:  
Sympathy, Empathy,  
Caring, Concern

“I guess I wanted more people I felt were going to give me a hug and sit there, and I don’t know, either sympathize with me, or talk, or get angry with me over the situation.”

“I probably wouldn’t have gone to anybody that would have not comforted me, and so somewhere in there I’m sure I was looking for comfort.”

Network Support:  
Sense of belonging  
among people with  
similar interests and  
concerns

“It was just kind of reassuring; you know you’re not the only one this has happened to before.”

Esteem Support:  
“expressions of regard for  
one’s skills, abilities, and  
intrinsic value”

“I needed someone to tell me that what I wanted to do was the right thing and that I was better than him.”

“I was hoping that they could tell me that I did a really good job in handling the situation.”

<b>RQ3: Reasons for Revealing Information (Cont'd)</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Reveal to Seek Revenge</b>	Participant was seeking revenge on transgressor or transgression partner	“Because in my head I thought it might be a way to turn everyone against Zach at the time for sure, like I was like, I remember thinking if I can get everyone against Zach, that’ll be perfect. I just wanted everyone to hate them.”
<b>Reveal to Protect Network Member</b>	Participant needed to tell the network member to protect him/her from transgressor	“[My friend] was really pushing his character in order to get him the job, and I know they knew him personally, but he didn’t know the truth. I didn’t want him to get the job and then walk all over him. I didn’t want him to have that advantage of hurting them like he had hurt me.”
<b>Reveal to Explain Major Life Decision</b>	Participant needed to reveal information to explain a major life decision	“I had to let them know why I was doing what I was doing, what was going on, because what I was doing seemed really stupid at the time. I had essentially handed over the golden goose and the golden egg of a law practice to a couple of guys and just said, ‘Adios, farewell, take it all I’m gone,’ and nobody could understand. ‘What happened to this guy, is he really that daft?’ I had a very, very, very lucrative practice as a sole practitioner, very lucrative. I was a pretty good attorney and pretty good litigator, so I had a very lucrative practice, and I walked away from it because what happened.”
<b>Reveal due to Nature of Relationship</b>	Participant needed to reveal information because it was expected of the relationship with the network member	“She’s my mom, and that she needs to know what’s going on in my life.”  “I thought, ‘these are the people in my life that should know what is going on with me.’”

<b>RQ4: Reasons for Concealing Information</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Conceal to Avoid Evaluation</b>	Participant concealed because he/she anticipated network member to judge or blame him/her	<p>“I think that when something like that happens to you, you feel like it’s your fault and you don’t want people to judge you for it.”</p> <p>“I think there were a lot of people who were my good friends that I did not want to tell about it because I think they would be just like, ‘how did you not see that coming when you first got together with him?.’”</p>
<b>Conceal to Protect Others and Relationships</b>	Participant concealed to protect transgressor, transgression partner, and relationships with those individuals	All of my friends actually liked her, and I still hang out with her when I go home ‘cause we’re still friends. She’s a decent person. I’m pretty happy that no one knows about it, ‘cause it’s like, Daniel and Kevin are really good friends with her, too, and they would have been like well, “[expletive] her,” and they’d shun her now.
<b>Conceal to Control Information</b>	Participant concealed to keep information private and prevent it from being used as gossip or from being used against him/her	<p>“I didn’t really talk to that many people. I was really, like, [selective] with who I talked to ‘cause I didn’t want people to use it against me.”</p> <p>“I was just afraid that if we got into a fight that she would use it against me.”</p>
<b>Conceal Due to Nature of Information</b>	Participant concealed because topic was inappropriate for disclosure	“I didn’t want to talk to her about him having sex with other people, me having had sex with him, like that sort of thing, ‘cause she’s not, like we’ve never had those kind of conversations.”

<b>RQ5: Supportive Responses</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Informational Support</b>	Network member gave participant helpful advice, information, or feedback	<p>“My entire staff wanted me to leave him...they all hated him, and that made me feel supported.”</p> <p>“...move on, it’s something you have to get over and try not to think about...”</p> <p>“She just told me that I need to just get him out of my life and just move on...”</p> <p>“She gave me a lot of advice, but she never told me to definitely do one thing or another...”</p> <p>“...like my parents gave me tons of feedback, advice on it, they didn’t just say ‘it happened, you need to move on...’”</p>
<b>Emotional Support</b>	Network member was apologetic, sympathetic, comforting, or concerned about participant	<p>“...I’m sorry, that must be really hard for you...”</p> <p>“...he just always had something comforting to say to me, like it will be okay...”</p> <p>“...he was comforting me...”</p> <p>“...she was more concerned about me...”</p> <p>“...she was worried about my mental health...”</p> <p>“...she’ll always call to check in, see how I’m doing...”</p>
<b>Network Support</b>	Network member offered support through shared experience	<p>“She’s also had some of the same experiences too, so it was just like someone who can understand and relate.”</p> <p>“My father actually cheated on my mom and that’s what ended their marriage, so I knew she had a lot in common with me.”</p>
<b>Esteem Support</b>	Network member expressed regard for participant’s skills, abilities, and intrinsic value	<p>“She was just very supportive and just tried to build me up...”</p> <p>“...but I mean, she still stood with me, stood by me, through everything, like every decision...”</p>

<b>RQ5: Supportive Responses (Cont'd)</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Criticized Transgressor</b>	Network member criticized transgressor	"I mean, I did want to hear people say that he was a fucker because he was and it felt good to hear people say that..."
<b>Humor</b>	Network member used humor to help participant cope	"...I could kind of laugh at her too, like her freaking out about it..."  "I knew I would laugh at what he had to say, and so it put me in a better mood about what was going on..."
<b>Listened</b>	Network member listened to participant	"...he'd just ask about it an he's really easy to talk to...just kind of a sounding board, just to get stuff out..."  "...you know, they would just listen to me talk for awhile..."
<b>Protective</b>	Network member is protective of participant	"...she's really, really protective of me"  "...he did the protective little brother thing, like 'I'm gonna go kick his ass...'"
<b>Shared Activity</b>	Network and Participant engage in shared activity	"...she was just trying to help me out and then she took me out that night and we went out and had fun..."  "...we could go out and occupy our time and I wouldn't think about it so much..."
<b>Shared Anger</b>	Network member mirrored participant's anger	"I guess I wanted more people I felt were going to...like get angry with me over the situation."  "I wanted them to be angry with me."  "...he was clearly pissed...it made me feel supported...like they're gonna be with me through this so I can count on them..."

<b>RQ6: Unsupportive Responses</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Advice</b>	Network member gave participant unhelpful advice to move on, remain with the transgressor, or end the relationship	<p>“...and like the reaction I got was just kind of like, forget about it...”</p> <p>“...we kinda looked at each other and like she knew what was going on and she looks at me and she goes, ‘Just get over it, okay?’”</p> <p>“My whole family wants me to get back together with him, just to talk to him, and I’m like, ‘NO!’”</p> <p>“I did want to get back together and so did he but she didn’t think we belonged together...”</p> <p>“I don’t think she wanted to hear like how much I cared about him, and I don’t know, she kind of wanted us to go our separate ways...”</p>
<b>Disregard</b>	Network member dismisses transgression	<p>“...she was kinda just like, ‘that happened such a long time ago, who cares now,’ and she didn’t really have much to say about it...I remember that cause I was really pissed off that she didn’t help me at all...”</p>
<b>Minimize Situation</b>	Network member minimizes transgression	<p>“...tried to make it look as, like he didn’t do anything wrong...”</p> <p>“...is it really that big of a deal; you know, you guys can be together...”</p>

**RQ7: Tensions**

**Examples**

**Nature of Relationship vs. Desire to Conceal**

Participant experiences need to tell due to relationship but desires to conceal the information.

“I’ve always kinda dealt with stuff on my own...um, but obviously when my girlfriend of 2 years stops coming over and stops hanging out, stops calling and stuff like that, I kinda have to explain what’s going on, and my family has always been real supportive so, you know, I figured I’d be honest with ‘em instead of just saying ‘we broke up, no big deal.’ I wanted to be honest with them and tell them what was going on.”

**Nature of Relationship vs. Anticipated Nonsupport**

Participant experiences need to tell due to relationship but desires to conceal the information.

“We’ve been best friends since the first day of kindergarten, so you know, pretty much my whole life that I can really remember, but I did kind of expect her to judge me for it. I expected like, because she’s not really honest, she’d be like, “oh wow, I’m sorry he did this to you,” and then turn around and be like, “oh Kelly did this and this, and of course that would happen to her.” I feel like, kind of backstabbing, I don’t know. So, I was kind of nervous to tell her, but, actually, I think I told her, like a week after it happened, I didn’t feel like telling someone I couldn’t totally trust yet, so I waited a little bit and then confessed what happened to her, cause I was shutting her out for awhile, cause I needed people that weren’t gonna put me down.”

**Desire to Conceal vs. Need to Explain Major Life Decision**

Participant desires to conceal information but experiences need to reveal to explain a major decision.

“I had to let them know why I was doing what I was doing, what was going on, because what I was doing seemed really stupid at the time. I had essentially handed over the golden goose and the golden egg of a law practice to a couple of guys and just said, “Adios, farewell, take it all I’m gone,” and nobody could understand.”

**RQ7: Tensions (Cont'd)**

**Examples**

**Own Needs versus Network Relationship with Transgressor/Transgression Partner**

Participant experiences need to tell to gain support but experiences need to conceal to protect relationships between network and transgressor/transgression partner.

“They would just listen to me talk for awhile, but then, I got the clear sense that, I needed to just stop talking about what a jerk Peter was because it put them in the middle, and I didn’t want to do that.”

“My mom and I usually talk about everything, and the problem is that if I told her that story she wouldn’t have been level-headed enough to take it like I did. I knew if I had told her that she would take a personal grudge against Zach, and Zach spends a lot of time eat my house and stuff, and I didn’t want that (the grudge) to happen.”

**Own Needs versus Protecting Network Member**

Participant experiences need to tell to gain support but experiences need to conceal to protect network member.

Christina was looking for support, but seeking it could put her father in the hospital. “I don’t tell him things ‘cause I don’t want him to be stressed out. I’d put him back in the hospital if I told him.”

<b>RQ8: Praxis Patterns</b>		<b>Examples</b>
<b>Selection</b>	Participant chose to reveal or conceal information	Kandace did not want to reveal the information, but she knew her friend would find out eventually and be angry with her, so she revealed the information to her friend.
<b>Cyclic Alternation</b>	Participant chose to alternate between reveal/conceal over time	Beth initially revealed the transgression information to her friends, but she eventually got the sense that by doing so, she was putting them in the middle, so she chose to conceal the information from that point.
<b>Segmentation</b>	Participant decides topics are appropriate or inappropriate for disclosure	Madonna wanted to reveal the information to her father for support, but she decided to conceal the information because “sex” is an inappropriate topic to discuss with her father.
<b>Integrative Moderation</b>	Participant engaged in small talk to avoid the topic	Not found in data.
<b>Integrative Disqualification</b>	Participant uses indirect, ambiguous talk that avoids revealing or concealing	Not found in data.
<b>Integrative Reframing</b>	Participant redefines reveal/conceal so they are no longer considered tensions	Not found in data.