Posttraumatic Growth: Hope and Healing for Women Who Have Been Relationally Betrayed

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Preface

Passion for my master’s project was birthed many years ago. When I married my high school sweetheart and envisioned a life of working in ministry together, I never imagined that one day I might be speaking, teaching, counseling, and supporting women who have been relationally betrayed. And yet today, that is exactly where my own life experiences have taken me.

Fifteen years into my marriage to Mark, his secret life of betraying me sexually and emotionally was uncovered by colleagues. I share my story today because after intensive healing for himself, Mark has been courageous enough to share his story from his books, pulpits, classrooms, training venues, and workshops (Laaser, 2004, 2002). He has led the way in offering help to other men struggling with sexual and emotional infidelity issues in their lives so that they might find the healing and sobriety he did.

Mark’s transparency was a wonderful gift to me as I was then more available to help other women who struggled with relational betrayal. I found that the wives of those men that Mark was working with were also desperate to find solutions to manage their pain of having been betrayed. My own journey of recovery from the trauma of being betrayed provided me with greater personal strength, richer relationships, and a deeper spiritual journey. Women were noticing that, and they came to me in hopes that I could help them find the same healing and transformation.

In the late 1980s, when betrayal was uncovered in my life, there were not many available resources. Books were sparse and therapists and clergy were not trained to deal with betrayal. Support groups for women dealing with relational betrayal were not very available. Women were often encouraged to either minimize or deny infidelity issues, to be better wives so their
husbands would not ‘stray’, to tolerate what was going on, or to leave. While I didn’t know it at the time, the counseling, community, and wisdom that I received in those early months and years of this traumatic life event, led me to a different path of posttraumatic growth. I worked with a gifted counselor and participated in groups that guided me to practical tools to make wise and empowered decisions, emotional tools to develop greater intimacy in my relationships, and spiritual tools to transform my suffering.

My passion continues to grow to help other women who are traumatized by relational betrayal find purpose in their suffering--posttraumatic growth--a new life that wouldn’t have been available to them otherwise. I am disappointed when I hear professionals tell hurting women that they are to blame for their spouse’s choices to betray, or they might as well leave their relationship because “he will never change”, or that betrayal trauma will leave them emotionally and physically “scarred” their whole life. I know that there are other choices, and with helpful resources, women can grow from trauma and choose a life of greater strength, intimacy with others, and significance.
Abstract

Relational betrayal—either emotionally betrayal, sexually betrayal, or both—is an increasing problem in committed relationships today. Research has found that relational betrayal creates many symptoms of posttraumatic stress which need to be acknowledged and treated. Studies in the last fifteen years, however, have also found that there is great potential for growth following a traumatic life event. Posttraumatic growth can be experienced as greater personal strength, more intimate interpersonal relationships, and deeper spiritual growth. This study will look at the potential for posttraumatic growth in women who have been victimized by relational betrayal and the resources that are helpful to promote growth and meaning in suffering.
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Relational betrayal is an increasing problem within marriages today. While betrayal is not gender-specific, this project will focus on the research that would direct a woman to the help she needs to heal, grow, and find purpose in the pain of betrayal. This study hypothesizes that when helpful resources are provided to help women heal from sexual betrayal, personal growth and meaning can replace becoming a powerless victim of betrayal.

When life becomes difficult, it is easy to become a victim of circumstances. Symptoms of traumatic life events are real and they are painful. Women who have been relationally betrayed have been found to experience many physical and psychological symptoms from relational betrayal. Without resources and choices to manage and assimilate the pain of betrayal, these women are bound to lead desperate lives of tolerating or escaping betrayal symptoms rather than embracing the choices of healing and growing.

Research suggesting that growth is birthed from traumatic life events is prolific. Growth is a very possible outcome of traumatic life events. Since early religious and psychological writings, suffering has always accompanied greater wisdom and growth in individuals. Research has studied many different kinds of life crises to validate that suffering produces personal growth; however, relational betrayal has not been studied in this light. This study will begin the exploration of posttraumatic growth that may be available to women who have been relationally betrayed.
Definition of Terms

**Online Sexual Activity:** the use of the Internet for any activity that involves sexual activity (e.g., text, audio, or graphics), includes such behaviors as sharing images, purchasing materials, downloading erotica, sexually-explicit discussions, and searching for sexual partners (Dew, Brubaker, & Hays, 2006, p. 195).

**Posttraumatic Growth:** Posttraumatic growth is the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of highly challenging life crises (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999, 2001).

**Relational Betrayal (Infidelity):** violations of expectations for emotional and physical exclusivity with one’s partner (Whisman & Wagers, 2005).

**Traumatic Life Event, Crisis, Highly Stressful Event** (terms used interchangeably): a set of circumstances that represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual, and that represent significant challenges to individuals’ ways of understanding the world and their place in it (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

**Literature Review of Relational Betrayal**

“Relational” betrayal is an increasing phenomenon in our culture today. The definition of “relational” betrayal (infidelity) has grown to include both physical and emotional factors. Any violation of an expectation for emotional and/or physical exclusivity with one’s partner is called a “relational” betrayal (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). With a broader definition of infidelity and an increase in the choices in our culture to connect with others, the “prevalence of this problem for couples is increasing rapidly” (Hertlein & Piercy, 2008, p. 481).

The focus of this study is to look at whether women who have been in committed relationships and have been “relationally” betrayed can experience growth from their betrayal experience. While either men or women in a committed relationship may experience “relational”
betrayal, this review focuses on women who are in committed relationships who have been “relationally” betrayed by their male partners.

The literature review will look at the prevalence of betrayal, the impact of being betrayed, and the extent of trauma, if any, that is incurred. It will also consider the possibility of experiencing posttraumatic growth in the form of personal growth, relational growth, and spiritual growth as a result of the pain of the trauma. It is hypothesized that posttraumatic growth is possible when beneficial resources are available to the betrayed woman and she is willing to enter into a healing process. This research will also explore the types of resources that have proven to be helpful for posttraumatic growth personality characteristics, counseling to reframe cognitive beliefs, the creation of supportive community, disclosure, and spiritual direction to find meaning in the pain.

**The Impact of Relational Betrayal**

Relational betrayal has been identified as a traumatic experience that is impacting many women in their exclusive and committed relationships (Steffens and Rennie, 2006). To understand this phenomenon, this section will first identify the concept of relational betrayal, followed by a discussion of the prevalence of relational betrayal. Finally, the consequences that are experienced by a betrayed partner will be reviewed.

**Relationship betrayal.** People involved in committed relationships most often expect to have certain needs met exclusively by their partner. A violation of an expectation for emotional and/or physical exclusivity with one’s partner is called a relationship betrayal (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). In a research study to determine what constituted infidelity both online and offline, Whitty (2003) analyzed the responses of 1,117 participants, identifying three components of infidelity: sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, and pornography.
Within Whitty’s study (2003) is cited the research of Yarab et al. (1998) who argued that “mental exclusivity” might be considered as important as “sexual exclusivity” in a committed relationship. Whitty (2003) suggests that people at least perceive online acts of infidelity as authentic and as real as offline acts because it represents a partner’s desire for another person and a seeking out another partner for a sexual encounter. Schneider (2003) found in her study of 91 women and three men that “partners overwhelmingly felt that cyber affairs were as emotionally painful to them as live or offline affairs and that virtual affairs were just as much adultery or ‘cheating’ as live affairs” (p.329).

**Prevalence of betrayal in marriages.** A study of 884 married men and 1,288 married women conducted by Wiederman (1997) analyzed the prevalence of extramarital sex. The study found that 22.7% of men and 11.6% of women reported ever having experienced extramarital sex. With the birth of the Internet only a decade earlier, there was no mention of online verses offline activity, nor was there any definition given for the parameters that determined ‘extramarital sex’. There was no use of the terms ‘infidelity’ or ‘affair’ or ‘betrayal’ in their study of extramarital sex, therefore, it might be assumed that additional behaviors that included emotional betrayal, either online or offline, would have been excluded from these statistics.

In an overview of infidelity, Hertlein, Wetchler, & Piercy (2005) provided statistics from numerous studies of people engaging in infidelity (Hite, 1987; Johnson, 1972; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953; Wyatt, Peters, & Guthrie, 1988), estimating percentages of people engaging in infidelity anywhere from 15% to 70%. It is of interest that even though their overview was written in 2005, no studies after 1990 were mentioned (the decade that the Internet became popularized) that would clarify the prevalence of Internet infidelity. Hertlein et al. (2005) did suggest that current definitions of infidelity for some
would “include behaviors such as cybersex, viewing pornography…and even emotional intimacy with another person to the detriment of the primary relationship” (p. 6). Thus statistics suggested by this overview might have excluded a broader range of betrayal behaviors available through the Internet.

Dew, Brubaker, and Hays (2006) conducted a study of 508 heterosexually-married men, ranging in age from 19 to 83: 88% were White, 63% had been married over 10 years, over 50% received a bachelor’s degree, lived in a suburban area and had an income greater than $60,000. The results of their study confirmed that the Internet is a growing venue in which individuals are soliciting sexual partners and that the average age of the typical married male user is between 35 and 54. “Nearly 78% of participants self-reported having at least one face-to-face sexual encounter in the past 12 months with a partner obtained from Internet chat room activity” (p. 199). Accessibility, anonymity, and affordability of the Internet (Triple-A-Engine) allow for rapid exchange of photographs, instant messaging, and email, serving as a vehicle to connect people quickly and exacerbate the problem of relational betrayals (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000).

**Impact on the betrayed female partner.** Research by Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, Kilmer, Gil-Rivas, Vishnevsky, and Danhauer (2010) referred to the work of Janoff-Bulman and her book, *Shattered Assumptions* (1992). They found that when people were victimized by a traumatic event, it was the shattering of their cognitive beliefs about themselves and their world that created posttraumatic stress. Emotional distress was created when a victim’s memory continued to process the trauma in an effort to reappraise the cognitive shattering. Other studies confirm that the disruption of one’s assumptive world creates the distress of a traumatic event. “A trauma is an event that profoundly challenges an individual’s fundamental schemas, beliefs,
goals, as well as the ability to manage emotional distress, and profoundly affects that individual’s life narrative” (Sheikh, 2008, p. 87).

Steffens and Rennie (2006) suggest that trauma responses or symptoms similar to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are commonly seen in women who have been relationally betrayed. The betrayal of a female spouse impacts emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual well-being. Whisman & Wager (2005) stated that “women who had experienced either their husbands’ infidelity or threats of marital dissolution were six times more likely to be diagnosed with a major depressive episode… and were also more likely to report elevated symptoms of nonspecific depression and anxiety” (p. 1,389). It was also noted that the trauma of betrayal is similar to individuals struggling with posttraumatic symptoms. They may have difficulties with sleep disturbances, irritability or anger outbursts, trouble concentrating, hypervigilence, exaggerated startle response, and obsessive-compulsive thoughts of the betrayal (Whisman & Wager, 2005).

Schneider (2003) found in her study of 91 women and 3 men that over 60% of the respondents were partners of cybersex users that did not include offline sex. Open-ended questions revealed that participants experienced “strong feelings of hurt, betrayal, rejection, abandonment, devastation, loneliness, shame, isolations, humiliation, jealousy, and anger…as well as loss of self-esteem…being lied to repeatedly was a major cause of distress” (p. 353).

In a report of the responses of 100 women who were spouses, fiancées, and/or girlfriends of men who were using non-interactive forms of pornography, Bergner & Bridges (2002) found that discovering a partner’s pornographic use was traumatic in that it devastated her world view of her own worth and desirability, her view of the character and worth of her partner, and her belief about their relationship. In regard to the view of herself, Bergner & Bridges (2003) stated
that in her perception, his involvement implied that “I have lost someone whom I thought was
my best friend...he now has a whole secret life from which I am completely excluded… (I am)
sexually undesirable...(I am) worthless…(I) must be a weak and stupid person (for not taking a
strong stand against the pornography use)” (p.197-198). A revised view of her partner’s
character after discovering pornography use included thoughts that he is not the person she
thought she had met: he is less respectful, he objectifies women, he is an untrustworthy liar, he is
an inadequate father and husband, and he is a mentally disturbed or bad person (Bergner &
Bridges, 2002). In regard to the impact of the pornography on the relationship, many of the
“women used words such as ‘betrayal’, ‘cheating’, and ‘affair’, to describe the significance that
their partner’s involvement in pornography had for them… (and they) clearly viewed the
pornography activities as a form of infidelity” (p.196).

Bridges & Bergner (2003) conducted a further study of the reactions of female partners of
men who were using non-interactive pornographic materials. They devised a Pornographic
Distress Scale (PDS) in which they were able to poll the extent of negative responses to non-
interactive pornography use. Of 140 women who agreed to participate, 100 met the criteria
(involved currently or previously with a man who used non-interactive pornography exclusively
and was 18 years of age or older) and were included in the study. While Bergner & Bridges’
previous study (2002) revealed that there were recurring themes of distress (worldview of self,
partner, and relationship were dramatically changed), data from Bridges & Bergner’s current
study (2003) suggested that those themes of distress were not representative of women in
general. Two variables emerged as important in determining the level of distress experienced by
a relationally betrayed woman--the level of commitment in the relationship and the frequency
and duration of (pornography) use. Their new study found that the level of distress was associated with the presence of these two variables, not just the trauma itself.

Another impact of relational betrayal was the possibility of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Schneider, Corley, & Irons, 1998). Betrayed spouses were reminded that the risk of acquiring potentially fatal or incurable diseases (HIV, herpes) and other infections was a very real consequence of a partner who had unprotected sex with another (Schneider et al., 1998).

The growth of the Internet as a vehicle to access sexual and emotional partners has introduced controversy in the perceived harm from online activity. Whitty and Quigley (2008) argued that cyberspace is regularly perceived as part fantasy and part reality. Therefore, the hurt or harm that is experienced from online sexual and/or emotional relationships may not be as great as the hurt or harm experienced in offline relationships.

**Summary.** Relational betrayal or relational infidelity has been identified more specifically today as including both physical and/or emotional dimensions. In a committed relationship, there is an expectation that one’s partner will exclusively meet certain needs of one’s partner. When there is a violation of this expectation, a relational betrayal has occurred (Whisman & Wagers, 2005).

The prevalence of relational betrayal has not been clearly identified. The introduction of cybersex, the various dimensions of physical betrayal, emotional betrayal, offline betrayal, and online betrayal perhaps make it difficult to survey. The statistics quoted were quite varied and not clearly studied with the latest research dated in the year 2006. There were very few studies that produced statistics of sexual betrayal, emotional betrayal, or relational betrayal. Primarily, non-peer reviewed reports from popular magazines or Internet sites were the sources of
published statistical information about betrayal. There is a great need for further research to study the prevalence of relational betrayal.

The majority of research would suggest that relational betrayal is extremely traumatic, producing many symptoms similar to those of PTSD (Steffens & Rennie, 2006; Whisman & Wager, 2005; Schneider, 2003). There were minimal findings that relational betrayal caused by Internet activity was partially just fantasy and, therefore, did not create as great harm to a committed partner (Whitty & Quigley, 2008).

**Posttraumatic Growth Following Relational Betrayal**

In the following section, current research will be reviewed suggesting that growth is possible after experiencing a traumatic life event. Contrary to the historical focus on the pathological symptoms that were likely to persist after trauma, this literature review will present more hopeful outcomes, such as personal, relational, and spiritual growth. The question of whether distress and growth are mutually exclusive will also be addressed.

**What is posttraumatic growth?** Posttraumatic growth is the positive personal change that is possible after experiencing a very traumatic and challenging event in one’s life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Historically, there has been a greater emphasis on the loss and suffering of traumatic events and less focus on the possibility of growth. While it is true that trauma survivors experience loss and suffering in the initial phase of a traumatic incident, current research has found that solely concentrating on the distress of trauma eliminates the potential for personal growth (Vis & Boynton, 2008). Sheikh (2008) stated that there has been a shift in focus to the positive outcomes that are birthed out of trauma.

Sheikh (2008) summarized various studies with terms supporting the idea of growth emerging from traumatic life events. Whether growth is referred to as benefit-finding (Affleck &
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Tennen, 1996), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), adversarial growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004), flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 1998), thriving (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995), or posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), Sheikh found that the common theme of all these studies is that “there is profound personal value (that) can arise out of profound personal tragedy” (p. 86).

Major traumatic life events create major psychological crisis in the assumptive world of an individual which creates significant levels of psychological distress. Beliefs about benevolence, predictability, and controllability of one’s world are shattered (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Linley and Joseph (2004) concurred that, “It is through this process of struggling with adversity that changes may arise that propel the individual to a higher level of functioning than that which existed prior to the event” (p. 11).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) noted that there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that hardship in the form of physical and psychological symptoms accompany traumatic events. They continued by stating that new studies are finding that even the most traumatic life events are producing positive outcomes: e.g. rape (Burt & Katz, 1987), bereavement (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1989-90), cancer (Collins, Taylor, & Skokan, 1990), heart attacks (Affleck, Tennen, & Croog, 1987), disasters (Thompson, 1985), and combat (Sledge, Boydstun, & Rabe, 1980).

The literature does not solely support that traumatic life events produces positive outcomes. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) states that by definition in the DSM-IV, traumatic events produce intense fear, helplessness, or horror and become risk factors for many physical problems and mental health problems—especially posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms such as intrusive memories, nightmares, decreased interest in pleasurable activities, insomnia, and inability to concentrate can result from PTSD, and even for 30% of cases, do not
remit even after many years (Kessler et al., 1995, within Kubany, Haynes, Leisen, Owens, Kaplan, Watson, & Burns, 2000).

**Growth after a traumatic life event.** Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) found that posttraumatic growth is manifested in several ways, including greater appreciation for life, closer and more meaningful interpersonal relationships, increased personal strength, changed priorities through awareness of new possibilities, and spiritual change. The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) was designed by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) to measure domains of growth which were categorized into three overarching areas: increased personal growth, enriched relationship growth, and change in philosophy of life or spiritual growth.

Stressful or traumatic events can lead to more meaningful interpersonal relationships. One begins to know what family and friends are going to stay connected in times of adversity and who will be safe to be with when life becomes difficult. Experiencing pain also creates empathy for others who have experienced similar situations (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Another domain of posttraumatic growth is an awareness of increased personal strength. In their study with over 1,700 participants exploring the association of benefits following a threatening experience, Peterson, Park, Pole, D’Andrea and Seligman (2008) noted that posttraumatic growth can occur following a traumatic event and include increased strengths of character. When a person has survived a traumatic event, there is a feeling of capability for handling future struggles or suffering. “If I can handle this, then I can handle just about anything” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 6). Also, when a person has survived a traumatic life event, new opportunities often become available to serve others out of one’s pain (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).
Spiritual growth is another area of posttraumatic growth. Traumatic events are reminders of human mortality and vulnerability. “These reminders spark questions and searching for one’s purpose in life” (Vis & Boynton, 2008, p. 78). A traumatic life event can create a changed sense of what is important. Finding joy in even the smallest of experiences is common as is the effort shown to reorganize priorities in one’s life. A greater appreciation of life recognizes those things that were formerly taken for granted (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Accepting that one would never have survived this stressful event alone can lead to spiritual growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Distress symptoms and psychological well-being. Weinrib, Rothrock, Johnsen, and Lutgendorf (2006) found that posttraumatic growth was not associated with negative emotions, and that the two factors—distress and growth—were independent of one another. “Reports of growth are not simply indications of the absence of distress” (p. 857). Weinrib et al. (2006) summarized the paradox of relating two very different factors, growth and distress:

Clinicians often focus on stressors as a point of vulnerability to negative mental health outcomes (e.g., Caspi et al., 2003). It is important to keep in mind that stressful life events are quite common (Goldberg & Comstock, 1980), and a certain amount of distress is an essential part of being engaged in living (Hayes, Wilson, Gifford, Follette, & Strosahl, 1996; Linehan, 1993). (p. 857)

Trauma may remain a distressing event while still offering individuals an opportunity to consciously and systematically learn and grow from it. Studies have suggested an understanding of how distress and growth can coexist. Even though the traumatic event is not considered desirable, the growth that emerges from the event can be (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). “Posttraumatic growth is most likely a consequence of attempts at psychological survival, and it
can coexist with the residual distress of the trauma” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 5). Joseph and Linley (2005) also found that the symptoms of posttraumatic stress could very well be associated with the unfinished processing of emotions.

There seem to be different findings regarding the relationship between distress and growth, but according to Weinrib et al. (2006), the current evidence suggests that the presence of growth following a traumatic life event does not imply that there will be no further distress.

**Summary.** Posttraumatic growth is a relatively new concept (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), but the concept of the potential for transcending suffering, (and) transforming it into a resource for growth and meaning is based on ancient wisdom gleamed from religious and philosophical thoughts from the Hebrews, Greeks, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims as well as later psychologists Viktor Frankl and Carl Rogers (Sheikh, 2008). While historically research focused on the symptoms and distress of traumatic or stressful life events, more current research is finding the potential for significant growth from these events.

The question remains: If trauma creates distress, and trauma creates growth, how can we integrate the two? According to Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004), one does not negate the other; both can co-occur. They suggested that ongoing growth may require painful reminders of the trauma of a life event, but paradoxically, also grateful reminders of what has been gained. In the original validation study of the PTGI, Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996), found that persons who did not experience any trauma also reported growth, although at lower levels than trauma survivors.

The potential for growth has been founded in numerous studies of survivors of stressful life events. Growth has been reported in increased personal strength, greater meaning in interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth. (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).
The preponderance of studies would suggest the association of stressful life events leading to posttraumatic growth. However, Johnson, Hobfoll, Hall, Canetti-Nisim, Galea and Palmieri (2007) suggest that posttraumatic growth does not always lead to a ‘gain of resources’, such as time for adequate sleep and more free time. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2007) clarified their findings from the PTGI that growth by their definition went well beyond improving comforts in one’s life and/or feeling better. Posttraumatic growth referred to changes such as greater compassion for others and a more meaningful spiritual life.

**Components of Posttraumatic Growth**

There are many factors that have been studied and found to promote posttraumatic growth. In this next section, we review studies that promote growth from the general adversity experienced in numerous traumatic life events. There are also suggestions found specific to women who have been relationally betrayed.

Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) propose a model for posttraumatic growth that includes exploring individual characteristics, support, disclosure, and most importantly, exploring cognitive structures that were threatened or nullified by the traumatic event. They also maintain that posttraumatic growth is not a static outcome, but an ongoing process impacting personal wisdom and one’s life narrative. “We believe that it is not the trauma itself that is responsible for growth as much as what happens in the aftermath of trauma” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 7).

Experiencing growth after a traumatic event is not presented in the literature as an automatic or a simplistic outcome. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) found that posttraumatic growth was unrelated to the relapse of time, suggesting that factors such as personal characteristics and recovery opportunities were more important to creating positive growth than the passage of time. Fazio and Fazio (2005) also stated that while many will say “time heals all
wounds”, they believed that time itself is not what creates healing—but using resources such as social support, optimism, resilience and hardiness, and a sense of humor will all help to heal wounds.

**Personality characteristics.** Even when comparing similar traumatic events, experiences of survivors varied extensively. Personality characteristics were explored to account for some of the differences in outcomes. The characteristics of optimism/hope (having a “lens” to see the positive in adversity), a sense of humor (a skill to relieve the tension of trauma), and emotional intelligence (an ability to identify and express one’s feelings as well as recognize them in others) were found to promote growth after a traumatic event. Additionally, resilience (finding protective ways to face trauma), spirituality (connecting with others), and self-confidence (the belief that one has the ability to face loss and grow) were cited as important traits for a person to grow after traumatic life events (Fazio & Fazio, 2005).

In their research based on two studies of over 3,500 participants who had been exposed to war and terror, Levin, Laufer, Stein, Hamama-Raz and Solomon (2009) found that growth following a traumatic event and resilience were inversely related. Characteristics of resilience that contribute to the management of stress symptoms include “hardiness, optimism, self-enhancement, repressive coping, positive affect, and a sense of coherence” (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005, within Levin, et al., p. 285). If posttraumatic growth represents a positive change following a traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), this study would support the theory that characteristics of resilience may block the distress that is necessary following adversity that allows a survivor to reframe cognitive beliefs and to make meaning of the tragedy (Levine et al., 2009).
No studies were found that linked these personality characteristics to experiences of relationally betrayed women. Additional research is warranted to identify whether any pre-trauma personality traits are helpful in promoting posttraumatic growth for betrayed women.

**Reframing core beliefs (assumptive worldviews).** “Researchers have theorized that ‘the essence of trauma is the abrupt disintegration of one’s inner world. ‘’Overwhelming experiences…shatter…fundamental assumptions’” (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, within Cann et al., 2010, p. 19). Stressful events disrupt the assumptive world (the core beliefs) of a victim—what one believes about oneself, about others, and about the world—and create distressful symptoms. Assessing these “core beliefs” and assisting a victim to accommodate new core beliefs from the stressful event can lead to posttraumatic growth (Cann et al., 2010). “It is not necessarily the inherent stressfulness of the event itself that is critical in fostering growth, but rather the challenge to one’s world assumptions and the cognitive work entailed in reestablishing a functional set of assumptions” (Cann et al., 2010, p. 20). Weinrib et al. (2006) also found that cognitive processing either on one’s own or in a therapeutic setting was associated with posttraumatic growth.

Joseph and Linley (2005) stated that “essentially all trauma theorists are in agreement that recovery involves some form of cognitive restructuring” (p. 276). They suggested that there are three cognitive outcomes that can result from a traumatic event: First, the experience can be assimilated and the victim returns to pre-trauma cognitions (equivalent to ‘forgetting and moving on’); second, the experience can be accommodated in a negative direction creating negative cognitions of self and pathology (e.g. “I am the reason he has chosen to betray me.”); and, third, experiences can be accommodated in a positive direction creating new cognitions of self and/or the world and birthing growth (e.g. “He is betraying me out of some deep pain in himself;
although I did not cause him to betray me, I want to learn to become more emotionally present in my marriage.”). Joseph and Linley summarized this theory saying, “People are intrinsically motivated toward rebuilding their assumptive world in a direction consistent with their innate tendency toward actualization (positive accommodation). When the social environment is facilitative of this actualizing tendency, growth inevitably results” (p. 276).

Vis and Boynton (2008) stated that many researchers in the field of posttraumatic growth agree that trauma survivors who experience positive outcomes have gone through a season of re-interpreting and re-framing of their cognitive beliefs about themselves and the world to arrive at new worldviews. “How one views the world following a traumatic event is vastly different than how one may have viewed it prior to the trauma” (p. 72). With help to restructure core beliefs, a betrayed spouse can become more of an observer and less of a reactive responder, accepting that someone else’s behavior is really not about her. This, too, builds acceptance and empathy for another person’s situation (Bergner & Bridges, 2002).

Community/social support. There is growing research that would advocate for social support for a victim of a traumatic event. Manning and Watson (2008) found that connection was an important factor for supporting a woman who was sexually betrayed. Social connection alleviated isolation and not feeling all alone. Community could also provide validation of the victim’s feelings and experiences and help her identify her needs and direction. Sheikh (2008) found that positive support was important for the development of posttraumatic growth in that it provided encouragement and acceptance for an individual to express ongoing cognitive processing essential to trauma recovery.

Another form of social support for individuals healing from traumatic life events is a group setting or group therapy. Manning and Watson (2008) found that group therapy was the
most popular format for therapeutic support of betrayed women. This format supported their need for community to relieve isolation and to promote learning. Sheikh (2008) also noted that in group settings, members can help each other by labeling positive changes in one another. They can also share their personal experiences of positive changes that may provide inspiration to other members.

Schneider et al. (1998) suggested in her study of 82 sex addicts and their spouses that one of the most helpful ways to acknowledge the sexual infidelity problems in the marriage is in “meeting others who have had similar experiences, hearing their stories, obtaining support, learning what has worked for others, and observing that other couples have been able to restore their relationship” (p. 215). This is a description of safe community and what authentic social support would be for both the betrayer and the hurting spouse of relational betrayal.

**Disclosure.** Since traumatic events destroy the cognitive beliefs about oneself, about others, and about the world, survivors tend to seek information (disclosure) so as to assimilate the traumatic experience (Joseph and Linley, 2005). Understanding information about a trauma becomes important to begin a reappraisal of core beliefs. Merely assimilating the new trauma information leads one to return to pre-trauma schema (or core beliefs) and vulnerable to further traumatization. Accommodating new information can lead to positive growth when cognitions incorporate significance to the trauma (Joseph and Linley, 2005). Disclosure of trauma information is an important factor in promoting growth.

In her study, Schneider et al. (1998) quotes Pittman (1998) as saying that “dishonesty may be a greater violation of the rules than the affair (or misconduct) and acknowledged that more marriages end as a result of maintaining the secret than do in the wake of telling” (p.191). Disclosure, therefore, has become an important part of healing infidelity. Disclosure involves
sharing all infidelity behaviors over the course of the relationship with the betrayed spouse, including specific times, places, monies spent, persons involved, and whether sexual intercourse was protected or not. Schneider et al. (1998) found that 96% of the men who had betrayed their wives and 93% of the wives all came to believe that disclosure had been helpful to their healing process. They also stated that since honesty is paramount to creating deeper emotional intimacy, disclosure provided couples with the opportunity to get to deeper levels of communication and higher levels of relationship with each other.

**Spirituality/hope.** Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, yoga, music, and art can create a calming influence and a detachment from the difficult emotions of trauma (Vis & Boynton, 2008). “We believe that spirituality is an extension of worldview, coping, and meaning making, and is an essential component in healthy posttraumatic processing” (p. 70).

Shaw, Joseph, & Linley (2005) reviewed all of the studies that linked religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth. They found that religion and spirituality were usually, but not always, helpful to individuals experiencing traumatic events. They also found that traumatic events can lead to a deepening of spirituality. Finally, they discovered that “positive religious coping, religious openness, readiness to face existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness are typically associated with posttraumatic growth” (p. 1).

Again, there was no specific research that was found to validate that spiritual components were helpful to posttraumatic growth for women who had been relationally betrayed. More research is necessary to confirm that spirituality is not only a proven positive factor for growth in many traumatic life events, but also for relationally betrayed women.

**Summary.** Growth after a traumatic event was unrelated to the passage of time, suggesting that characteristics of the survivors and the resources they had when they were
recovery were more important in determining posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Among those factors cited as most helpful to promoting posttraumatic growth were personality traits of optimism, a sense of humor, emotional intelligence, resilience, spirituality, and self-confidence (Fazio & Fazio, 2005). Views of resilience as being unhelpful to posttraumatic growth were proposed by Levin et al. (2009), suggesting that resilience often includes masking truthful feelings, finding unhealthy ways of coping, and avoiding social support in an effort to ‘move on’ from the adversity.

Additional factors were found to contribute to growth after a traumatic event, including processing and reappraisal of core beliefs about self, others, and the world that pertain to the stressful event. Most researchers were in agreement that this is one of the most important factors in growth—a new understanding and acceptance of how trauma and pain can also produce purpose and growth (Cann et al., 2010, Weinrib et al., 2006, Joseph & Linley, 2005, Vis & Boynton, 2008).

Social support was seen as important to processing cognitive beliefs and reducing feelings of being all alone. Disclosure—knowing information about the traumatic event—was also recognized as an element that allowed a victim to work on accommodating cognitive beliefs about the event. Finally, spirituality was an important factor, providing comfort and calm in the midst of trauma as well as meaning in the pain.

Schneider et al. (1998) created a list of “Most Helpful Recovery Tools for Partners” from her study of 88 sex addicts and their spouses. From most helpful to least helpful were these tools: therapy/counseling, 12-step meetings/groups, spirituality/religion, (safe) friends, books/tapes, having a “program” of recovery, and relationship with partner (p. 208).
Summarizing Thoughts

In my review of the literature, it was evident that relational betrayal—shattering expectations of either emotional and/or physical commitments to be exclusively faithful to one’s partner or spouse—is a growing phenomenon in our culture today (Whisman & Wagers, 2005). With the birth of the Internet, the accessibility, anonymity, and affordability to connect with others have increased relational betrayal (Cooper et al., 2000). Women who have been betrayed by their male partners have experienced stress and trauma in their lives, creating multiple emotional, physical, and spiritual symptoms, including the disintegration of many core beliefs about themselves, others, and the world (Steffens & Rennie, 2006; Sheikh, 2008).

Previous studies on victims who have experienced a traumatic event have focused on the negative impact of that event and the pathology that is sure to follow. However, research since 1996 has found positive outcomes that are available to victims of stressful or traumatic events, naming this phenomenon, posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). With the creation of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, several domains of growth were identified: closer and more meaningful interpersonal relationships, increased personal strength, and spiritual growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Integrating studies of trauma historically and those of the present would suggest that distress and growth are not independent of one another, but in fact, coexist (Weinrib et al., 2006). Those who have experienced posttraumatic growth do not deny that a traumatic event was painful and has, perhaps, continued to carry distress in some form. Instead, victims of trauma recognize that the trauma has pushed them through to greater personal growth despite the pain, leaving them with a richer life because of it.
Studies have also confirmed that growth is not an automatic outcome of trauma. “Growth does not occur as a direct result of trauma. It is the individual’s struggle with the new reality in the aftermath of trauma that is crucial in determining the extent to which posttraumatic growth occurs” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, p. 5). There are personality traits and factors of process that have been found to support posttraumatic growth: optimism, a sense of humor, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, social support, disclosure, cognitive restructuring, and spirituality that lay the foundation for posttraumatic growth.

Research indicated that there were more personal changes (posttraumatic growth) for those who had experienced greater trauma as compared to those who had either not experienced severe trauma or had experienced very minimal trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Women who have been relationally betrayed have experienced an extremely traumatic life event. As clinicians, we need to be aware of the potential for posttraumatic growth for these clients, and provide them with the hope and the tools to pursue positive outcomes from such tragedy in their lives.
Women who have been betrayed have not historically had resources to support them in their pain. In the late 1980’s, Jennifer Schneider (1988) wrote the first book supporting women who were in relationship with a sex addict—one who had betrayed her continually by out-of-control sexuality used to medicate his own emotional pain. Several other significant books followed in support of relationally betrayed spouses, and here, the author of this study has reviewed the books in an effort to determine how helpful they might have been in promoting posttraumatic growth.

**Back from Betrayal**

Dr. Jennifer Schneider’s book, *Back from Betrayal*, was a secular book and the first to address sexual addiction (relational betrayal). As a physician and researcher, she brought helpful and specific information about the problem itself, the diagnosis, treatment and case studies to support her points. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of her book for wives addressing the newness of their pain is that this book dives quickly into labeling wives as co-dependents and co-addicts, proclaiming that they share many core beliefs that are similar to their spouses who betrayed them (Schneider, 1988). When wives have not been heard about their pain and suffering from the trauma of having been betrayed, it could be difficult for them to hear the truths in this book. The stance that *Back from Betrayal* takes is that the betrayed wife has chosen her husband because of unhealthy mental issues of her own. While those were the wrong reasons to marry, she can work on her emotional health to experience posttraumatic growth from betrayal and to eventually establish a marriage built on healthy behaviors and choices.
An Affair of the Mind

Laurie Hall (1996) describes in length the details of her life with Jack, her husband who has used pornography compulsively for years. Her story covers years of trying to find peace with this problem and make changes in their marriage. For the most part, it is about how he needs to change and about how she will cope until he does. The book focuses on being a victim. The trauma she experiences continues throughout the book, with no known solution or help from professionals. Today Laurie’s story has ended in divorce. She wrote a chapter in a later book, confessing to having lost everything—her marriage, her family, her house, her money. She continues to write as a victim.

The stance for the betrayed woman in An Affair of the Mind is that he is the problem, and she merely needs to learn how to tolerate life and the choices he makes about his problem. The primary focus of this book is to validate the victimization of relational trauma. There is no particular focus on how a woman who has been relationally betrayed by ongoing use of pornography might experience posttraumatic growth, despite what her partner/husband’s choices are to stop behaviors or get help for himself.

Living with Your Husband’s Secret Wars

Means’ (1999) book is full of practical observations about women living with husbands who kept sexual secrets. She admits that although she is married to a sex addict, they married after he was in recovery—a second marriage for both of them. The fact she has not personally lived through betrayal with him is perhaps why the ‘energy’ of the book seems flat and matter-of-fact. She quotes many authors as well as scripture, and at times her approach to healing from betrayal is behaviorally focused—many suggestions of things one should or should not do. I
think there is helpful information here, but perhaps it is too shallow or undeveloped for healing and growth. Today Means is divorced after her husband relapsed and betrayed her.

From the perspective of posttraumatic growth, I believe Means’ provides tools for developing personal strength—one of the three dimensions of posttraumatic growth. However, knowing that it is difficult to ‘take someone to a place you have not been’ as a therapist/author, I do not sense that her readers are able to accommodate the other two dimensions of posttraumatic growth: interpersonal growth and spiritual growth.

**Every Heart Restored**

In this book, Arteburn, Stoeker & Stoeker (2004) state that a wife is responsible for helping her husband stop his sexual sin and that she is also responsible for driving him to it in the first place. A wife’s behaviors, according to the authors, will determine whether her husband can feel respect and self-esteem, and it is her duty to develop those in him. Scripture is used heavily throughout the book, and in my opinion, it is used out of context. If there is healing and growth that is promoted here, it would be in denying one’s own needs for fidelity, and instead, accepting the responsibility of building her partner’s self-esteem and submitting to all of his sexual needs.

I do not believe that any of the ‘tools’ suggested here for healing a broken heart would be recognized as growth by the posttraumatic growth model. Losing one’s self to focus on pleasing another is not gaining personal strength. Submitting to one’s spouse is not creating interpersonal intimacy. Spiritual growth may be experienced in the context of one’s individual spiritual beliefs about personal sacrifice, submission, and responsibility in serving God.

**Shattered Vows**

The author of this study, Laaser (2008), also authored this book for women who have been relationally betrayed. The personal journey of healing from betrayal led Laaser to therapy,
counseling groups, support groups, disclosure with her husband, couples’ counseling, education of betrayal, and spiritual transformation. She explored when and why she coped, what core beliefs needed reframing, how social support could provide a safe haven for getting needs met when it wasn’t possible in her marriage. She learned through her journey how to surrender, forgive, and transform her own life—becoming a stronger individual with richer relationships and deeper faith. She ‘holds the hope’ for other betrayed women to be able to do the same and proclaims the purpose in the pain of betrayal—posttraumatic growth.

It is my belief that *Shattered Vows* represents the model of posttraumatic growth for traumatized women: greater personal strength, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth.

**Deceived**

Claudia Black (2009) clearly defines partners who have been sexually betrayed as codependents, co-addicts, and cosas (co-addicts of sex addicts) throughout her book. She intermixes compassion for the pain and difficulty of discovering betrayal and identifying partners of sexual betayers as “often raised in addictive, abusive, or otherwise impaired family systems” (p. 9). She describes betrayed women as having much in common with the men who have betrayed them, such as minimizing, rationalizing, or denying the problem of betrayal. Black says that these defensive behaviors are about protection of the core beliefs that will be shattered if the truth is accepted. She continues by stating that it was no accident that a woman marries a man that betrays her, as her many faults and dysfunction led them to be perfect partners.

There is helpful and specific information given about disclosure, separation, talking to your kids about the betrayal, deciding to stay in the relationship, accessing one’s feelings, and accepting powerlessness of their betraying spouse. There are also practical guidelines for establishing healthy boundaries, healthy sexuality in the relationship, and working on spiritual
growth. The many stories of women in Black’s counseling group who shared their journeys validate posttraumatic growth for themselves when they have worked a ‘solid’ recovery program for themselves. If a hurting woman can get through the first chapters of being identified with her many ‘problems’ and labels, this book offers many practical resources for experiencing the posttraumatic growth that is outlined in the PTGI.

**Your Sexually Addicted Spouse**

Steffens and Means (2009) coauthored this book to encourage betrayed women and professionals treating them to validate the pain of betrayal from a ‘trauma-based model’. Research is quoted extensively to explain symptoms of trauma and long-term effects on a woman’s psychological and physical health. From their vantage point, all trauma and pain is caused from the current situation only. No suggestion is made that at some point in time, private logic, historical trauma, lifestyle, or any other contributing factors be explored. Emphasis is given to the debilitating nature of being relationally betrayed, with little discussion of anything learned, changed, or transformed by the trauma. Suggestions are made to create boundaries for future protection and for empowering a betrayed woman so she does not feel victimized. No mention is made of all the latest research of posttraumatic growth benefits available from traumatic life events.

By reading *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse*, a betrayed wife may feel heard and understood about the painful symptoms created from a traumatic life event—a necessary first step to healing from trauma. She may also gain strength through the tools presented to create safe boundaries and learn healthy ‘self-care’. No encouragement, however, is given to look at mistaken core beliefs or to accept that she could learn from the pain and grow because of it. The opportunity to grow in all three categories of posttraumatic growth is not evident.
My Personal Journey through Relational Betrayal

As I referred to in the preface, I, too, have experienced relational betrayal in my marriage. At the time, the discovery of my husband’s secret life of sexual acting out and betraying me was the most traumatic experience of my life. We had been married for 15 years and dated four years prior to being married. I assumed that I knew Mark well. The truth was that there was so much about my life that was great—three wonderful children, budding careers, community and church involvement, good friends, family support—that it was incomprehensible that Mark was also hiding and lying about his unfaithfulness to me. As Adler suggested, “everything can also be different” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). It was a “both/and” situation—both were true, the good parts and the hiding.

Fortunately, Mark was embraced by a physician who was a recovering alcoholic, and he extended a hand of grace in the intervention that followed discovery: “Your behaviors with sex seem like mine with alcohol. You’re out of control. Why don’t you let me find you some help” (Laaser, 1992, p. 14). Mark was led to a treatment program that provided the many resources for his healing process. At the same time, I was also encouraged to engage in my own process of healing. In the beginning, I did not see a need for my connecting to resources. I thought that if Mark were ‘well’, then we would not have any problems any more. Others convinced me otherwise.

As I found a gifted counselor, several groups of safe women, books to grow my knowledge, and a new dependence on God, my life began to slowly change. I was challenged to look at my private logic and to reframe mistaken beliefs. I learned about the many safeguarding behaviors I used to cope with unexpressed feelings and needs. I saw that my significance, belonging, and safety were very attached to Mark’s life, and I needed guidance and practice to find these life’s priorities for myself.
The beauty of my process was that I began to see that I was becoming a new person—I felt stronger and more authentic, I had richer relationships, and my spirituality was deepening. In this place of transformation, other women began looking to me for guidance and hope for their betrayal traumas. I agreed to be available, to give back. At first my availability was determined by my family responsibilities and my own career. Eventually, I felt God’s ‘call’ to devote my life to helping other women (and couples) who sought to find meaning out of the great trauma of relational betrayal. I saw women individually, facilitated groups for women, and met with couples with my husband. Women and their spouses were growing, thriving, and finding meaningful transformation in great tragedy. They were experiencing posttraumatic growth.

A publisher eventually encouraged me to write a book for women who had been betrayed. *Shattered Vows* was published in 2008, and is, in my opinion, the only resource that provides hope for posttraumatic growth for relationally betrayed women in all three areas that Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) describe in their PTGI: greater personal strength, increased interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth.
Developing a Program to Promote Posttraumatic Growth for Women

Growth after a traumatic event was unrelated to the passage of time, suggesting that characteristics of the survivors and the resources they had when they were recovering were more important in determining posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Additional factors were found to contribute to growth after a traumatic event, including processing and reappraisal of core beliefs about self, others, and the world that pertain to the stressful event. Most researchers were in agreement that this is one of the most important factors in growth—a new understanding and acceptance of how trauma and pain can also produce purpose and growth (Cann et al., 2010, Weinrib et al., 2006, Joseph & Linley, 2005, Vis & Boynton, 2008).

Social support was seen as important to processing cognitive beliefs and reducing feelings of being all alone. Disclosure—knowing information about the traumatic event—was also recognized as an element that allowed a victim to work on accommodating cognitive beliefs about the event. Finally, spirituality was an important factor, providing comfort and calm in the midst of trauma as well as meaning in the pain.

Schneider et al. (1998) created a list of “Most Helpful Recovery Tools for Partners” from her study of 88 sex addicts and their spouses. From most helpful to least helpful were these tools: therapy/counseling, 12-step meetings/groups, spirituality/religion, (safe) friends, books/tapes, having a “program” of recovery, and relationship with partner (p. 208).

I have designed a three-day workshop for relationally betrayed women, incorporating resources that have been clinically researched and deemed helpful to the healing process. In summary, counseling, exploration of core beliefs, safe women with whom a betrayed woman can feel included and understood, group experiences, education of the problem, hope, spiritual direction and comfort, disclosure, and practical steps to create a ‘program’ are resources that have proven to produce posttraumatic growth in time. My workshop, entitled “A Woman’s
Journey” includes exercises and teachings that address all of these components. Additionally, all leaders of the workshop are female counselors who have lived through betrayal themselves and are willing to share general information about their hope and healing throughout the workshop. The following is a summary of the agenda:
A Woman's Journey...

Workbook

Faithful & True Ministries

15798 Venture Lane, Eden Prairie, MN 55344... www.faithfulandtrueministries.com
A Women’s Journey—An Intensive Workshop

THURSDAY

9—10:30 am  Welcome to Center
   Confidentiality/Reporting—sign form
   Introductions: Participants pair up and introduce each other to group
   Leader #1 shares story of relational betrayal
   1st spiritual question: How do you find purpose in your pain?

BREAK: 10:30—10:45

10:45—12:15  Leader #2 and #3 share stories (15 min)
   Go to small group to share story

LUNCH: 12:30—1:30

1:30—3:15  Teaching: Grieving losses
   Complete sheet on loss & grief—individually—then process in big group
   Discussion of what makes people safe
   Feelings
   Introduce the concept of ‘AND’

BREAK: 3:15—3:30

3:30—5:15  Identify individual ‘survival’ or coping & relationship coping stances
   The Three Chairs: God-Child Chair; Survivor Chair; Wise Woman Chair

DINNER: 5:15—6:30

6:30—8:00  Family systems info: open/closed systems, triangles, rigid or loose
   boundaries; rules; roles;
   Life Egg assignment—looking at family and cultural of origin—core
   beliefs, birth order, strengths and weaknesses, etc.
**FRIDAY**

9—noon  2nd spiritual question: How do you get well?

    Process 2 Life Eggs

LUNCH: noon—1:00

1:00—3:00  Process 2 Life Eggs

BREAK: 3:00—3:15

3:15—5:00  Process 1 Life Egg

    Process Eggs in big group—begin journaling about ‘themes in your life’

DINNER: 5:15—6:15

6:15—8:00  Lecture and Q & A:

    Relational Betrayal—a problem, a compulsion, or an addiction?

    Brain Chemistry: components of betrayal

**SATURDAY**

8:30—9:00  3rd spiritual question: Who/how do you trust?

9:00—10:30  How do we build trust? Panel discussion and Q & A with leaders

BREAK: 10:30—10:45

10:45—12:15  Hoops Exercise: relationship development

    The Three Circles—practical steps for working a recovery program

LUNCH: 12:15—12:45  (catered)

12:45—1:15  Resources—books, additional workshops, 1:1 counseling, groups,

1:15—1:45  Poster board Exercise: Where were you? Where are you now?

1:45—3:30  Small group—write out and discuss:

    Commitments: what do you commit to do when you leave?

3:30—4:00  “Truths about Me” Exercise/Share posters
Interventions are used at the workshop to support all of the resources that have been shown to increase posttraumatic growth. Here is a review of the major categories of resources and the workshop components that promote each one.

- **Therapy or counseling to reframe core/cognitive beliefs**: Life Eggs, The Three Chairs, Grieving exercise, Coping exercise
- **Safe community/social support**: The workshop itself promotes community for women—they are not alone in their trauma as they meet others with similar experiences; Safe People exercise; hearing stories; learning what has worked for others; commitment plans/accountability
- **Disclosure**: Introductions; exercise about what they know
- **Spirituality/Hope**: Leaders have experience with betrayal; spiritual ‘lessons’ each day; panel discussion about trust-building; Poster board exercise; “Truths about Me” exercise
- **Psychoeducation**: Teachings on relational betrayal, brain chemistry, feelings, the concept of ‘AND’, and personal responsibility; suggested reading, family/culture-of-origin issues; Hoops exercise

Of course no workshop or one-time exposure to a resource will ever be enough to create posttraumatic growth from a traumatic life event such as relational betrayal. Research has suggested, however, that these ongoing resources can provide the tools for finding meaning in the suffering. More research is needed to understand the scope and length of time resources are needed to establish growth and significance from trauma. Studies that follow betrayed women
and what resources are being used, for how long, and with what results will help determine more specifically how we can build helpful programs of recovery.

**Women Speak Out about Personal Growth after Relational Betrayal**

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) is an instrument that assesses growth in victims of traumatic life events. Three areas of growth are specified: increased personal strength, more intimate interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

According to Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996), if a woman were to experience increased personal strength, she would claim some or all of these components of change:

- I developed new interests
- I have a greater feeling of self-reliance
- I established a new path for my life
- I am more willing to express my emotions
- I know better that I can handle difficulties
- I am able to do better things with my life
- New opportunities are available which wouldn’t have been otherwise
- I am more likely to try to change things which need changing
- I discovered that I’m stronger than I thought I was

If a woman were to experience more intimacy in interpersonal relationships, she would claim some or all of these components of change:

- I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble
- I have a greater sense of closeness with others
- I have more compassion for others
• I put more effort into my relationships
• I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are
• I better accept needing others
• I have greater emotional intimacy with my spouse/partner

If a woman were to experience spiritual growth, she would claim some or all of these components of change:

• I changed my priorities about what is important in life
• I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life
• I have a better understanding of spiritual matters
• I am better able to accept the way things work out
• I can better appreciate each day
• I have a stronger religious faith

Following are voluntary testimonials from women who have participated in a program of healing at Faithful and True Ministries in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, after discovering relational betrayal in their lives. Each of them speaks to one or more of the three areas of posttraumatic growth that Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) refer to in their inventory.

“God is so good; he is doing things in my life that I could never do! My husband now is living with such a humble heart. He recently asked me to marry me again!”

“I found my ‘voice’ in so many ways….I am doing things today that I never imagined.”

“God is so faithful to always provide what I need when I need it!”

“I have learned so much from being in my safe group of women. I have learned about being congruent, looking at core beliefs, and understanding what meaning I put to different
things…I have learned how to have other women hold the hope for me when I didn’t have any for myself.”

“I am so thankful for all the support I have received. I am learning about myself every day. I know I still have a ways to go with the pain I have inside and dealing with it properly. I’m now realizing my relationship with my husband doesn’t just happen—we work on it on a daily basis.”

“I am thankful to have another chance to not only be reconciled to God, but also to myself and my husband.”

“I have experienced what it is like to have someone ‘hold the hope’ for me and to walk alongside me on this journey.”

“I am so thankful God knew what I needed in this journey…he has been working out details all along the way…my life is completely different than just a couple of years ago. That is God’s faithfulness to me.”

“Having women in group who were walking the journey ahead of me was so helpful.”

“The conversation my husband and I had today IS THE INTIMACY that people look for in marriage!!! No wonder it doesn’t happen for many people, it is too easy to give up too soon and not keep doing the hard work of healing.”

“I have learned so much about courage on this journey of recovery. It feels so good to grow up and grow into the woman I have always wanted to be…I never knew I could go through all this and not only survive but thrive and become happier than I ever thought possible.”
“How interesting/eye-opening/happy/sad it was to work on myself and find out who I am after 55+ years…my heart wants our marriage to survive this trauma. Time and much hard work lies ahead.”

“This trigger of mine, ‘I don’t matter’, is huge for me. I plummet when that one is set off. It helps to name…awareness is powerful. I know I matter to the Lord. I need to take my expectations off my husband and fully trust the Lord to meet my needs….surrender.”

“I feel so connected to my husband in a whole new way.”

“Have you ever hit rock bottom? That’s where I was last year. Thankfully, I’ve spent the last two years in ‘recovery’, going to counseling, healing, and getting completely renewed. This last year has truly been a miracle and I’m excited for my new outlook on marriage and life…”

“I feel like I have been given a new life.”

“I am able to baby step my way through the crazy fear, and still do daily. It is an amazing journey, and a very difficult one. We sold our home and are on our new adventure together. I am now fully engaged with my new company…It is so amazing how God is connecting and leading our lives (I wonder if it is because I finally let go and let him lead!).”

Words like these from betrayed women surely suggest that growth has happened in their lives, despite the very traumatic experience of having been betrayed. Many also mention the ‘difficult road’ or the length of time that it has taken to witness change. Posttraumatic growth in these testimonials has not been easy or fast—but it is still easily recognized when a woman has had resources to work through the pain of trauma.

These comments were unsolicited, and there is some assumption that only those who experienced positive results from their recovery work would choose to write a ‘testimonial’. It
may be very true that many other women who sought help and used resources after their trauma were unable find comfort or significant growth. Further research surveying women in many other venues will help to denote specific statistics about these results.

**Significance of This Work**

If research can determine the resources that will promote healing of relational betrayal, those who have been betrayed may choose to work through the pain of betrayal to be healthier, more connected to others, and directed by a purpose-filled life. Considering that many divorces are caused by betrayal issues, these findings could also contribute to reducing the divorce rate. Keeping more families together and supporting personal growth in marriages would contribute to greater personal and marital satisfaction.

According to the current research on posttraumatic growth, anyone can choose to focus on their suffering to eventually turn their pain into purpose, leading to greater personal strength, richer relationships, and deeper spiritual wisdom. All of these components are considered essential for mental health. With the prevalence of relational betrayal, it is significant to know that a betrayed woman has choices for her future.

**Limitations of This Project**

The initial plan for this project was to include a survey of relationally betrayed women to gather information about their healing journeys and outcomes. Because the nature of betrayal is sensitive, a questionnaire that was originally designed was not used. Instead, voluntary correspondence from women who have participated in therapy and support communities has been used with permission. This correspondence was unsolicited and related some of the outcomes of women’s lives that had been shattered by relational betrayal.
Further research will be planned through an association with a graduate school and the IRB (International Review Board) so that more information may be gathered from relationally betrayed women and their experiences of posttraumatic growth. Two assessment tools that will be incorporated into further research may be found in the Appendices.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Posttraumatic growth has been a consideration of many studies in the last two decades (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004; Vis & Boynton, 2008; Sheikh, 2008). There have been many traumatic life events that have been studied in relation to the experiences of growing through the trauma: incest, rape, bereavement, cancer, heart attacks, natural disasters, and combat. In this literature review, no studies were found specific to relational betrayal. Professionals would benefit from research that determines the potential for posttraumatic growth so that they can cast a vision for hope and growth when working with clients who have been relationally betrayed.
References


Appendix A

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

(To be included in further studies with relationally betrayed women--used with permission from the author, Richard Tedeschi)

Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of your crisis, using the following scale:

0 = I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.
1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis.
2 = I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis.
3 = I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis.
4 = I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis.
5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis.

Questions:

1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life.
2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.
3. I developed new interests.
4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.
5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.
6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.
7. I established a new path for my life.
8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others.
9. I am more willing to express my emotions.
10. I know better that I can handle difficulties.
11. I am able to do better things with my life.
12. I am better able to accept the way things work out.

13. I can better appreciate each day.

14. New opportunities are available which wouldn’t have been otherwise.

15. I have more compassion for others.

16. I put more effort into my relationships.

17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.

18. I have a stronger religious faith.

19. I discovered that I’m stronger than I thought I was.

20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.

21. I better accept needing others.
Appendix B

Core Beliefs Inventory

(To be included in further studies with relationally betrayed women--used with permission from the author, Arnie Cann)

Some events that people experience are so powerful that they ‘shake their world’ and lead them to seriously examine core beliefs about the world, other people, themselves, and their future.

Please reflect upon the event about which you are reporting and indicate the extent to which it led you to seriously examine each of the following core beliefs.

Responses are on a six-point scale (0 – 5):

0 = not at all
1 = to a very small degree
2 = to a small degree
3 = to a moderate degree
4 = to a great degree
5 = to a very degree

1. Because of the event, I seriously examined the degree to which I believe things that happen to people are fair.

2. Because of the event, I seriously examined the degree to which I believe things that happen to people are controllable.

3. Because of the event, I seriously examined my assumptions concerning why other people think and behave the way that they do.
4. Because of the event, I seriously examined my beliefs about my relationships with other people.

5. Because of the event, I seriously examined my beliefs about my own abilities, strengths and weaknesses.

6. Because of the event, I seriously examined my beliefs about my expectations for my future.

7. Because of the event, I seriously examined my beliefs about the meaning of my life.

8. Because of the event, I seriously examined my spiritual or religious beliefs.

9. Because of the event, I seriously examined my beliefs about my own value or worth as a person.