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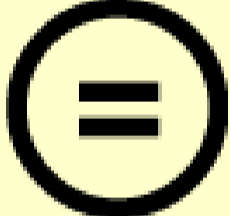
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The Compleat Infidel

by

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The Compleat Infidel

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ABSTRACT

The Compleat Infidel is a study in discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Its topic is defensive practice in the discourse of marital and para-marital infidelity. The objectives were threefold: to document and explicate the discursive terrain; to demonstrate an application of the principles of discursive psychology; to develop a critique of selected areas of social science generally and social psychology in particular. A database of more than 230 samples of discourse drawn from heterogeneous sources including newspaper reports, works of popular psychology and original research interviews was amassed and subjected to discourse analysis according to the methods described by Edwards, Potter and Wetherell. The findings are that in contemporary, Anglo-American discourse five discrete types of construction are routinely produced to defend infidels and infidelity: (1) non-events; (2) isolated episodes; (3) special categories of self; (4) specific reasons; (5) generic rationales. The variability within and between these constructions reflects their orientation to differing aspects of the interactional context and their different functions therein. Relevant aspects of context include: interviews and other question-and-answer sessions; silent, anonymous and sympathetic recipients; tabloid and broadsheet news; contexts of argument and debate. The range of defensive functions being performed includes: (1) exoneration; (2) appeal to mitigating circumstances; (3) appeal to diminished capacity or diminished responsibility; (4) defence of provocation; (5) justification. The conclusions are that social scientific investigations of infidelity, adultery, cheating, extramarital sex and similar phenomena must acknowledge that discourse is action orientated if a complete and coherent analysis is to be achieved. This conclusion is shown to be relevant to endeavours in sociology, evolutionary psychology, social cognition, the psychology of individual differences, psychopathology and applications of psychology in public health surveys and couples therapy, as well as studies of discourse that are informed by feminist and other varieties of social constructionism. The contribution of *The Compleat Infidel* to the accounts literature and to action orientated approaches to discourse such as discursive psychology is discussed and directions for further research are recommended.

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Introducing The Compleat Infidel

Overview

The Compleat Infidel is a study that explores the discursive construction of marital and para-marital infidelity and develops a theoretical account of the means by which infidelity and infidels are defended. This is accomplished through practical analysis of a wide range of discursive materials including talk and texts.

In the few years since this study was originally conceived it has sometimes seemed that, in one form or another, infidelity has hardly been out of the headlines. Two stories in particular dominated the mass media, one on each side of the Atlantic. In November 1995, Diana, Princess of Wales, made history with her television interview for the BBC's *Panorama* in which she admitted her adultery with Captain James Hewitt. "Were you unfaithful?" probed interviewer Martin Bashir and Diana replied, "Yes, I adored him. Yes, I was in love with him. But I was very let down." In January 1998, the Zippergate scandal broke and news circulated of Linda Tripp's tape-recorded telephone conversations with Monica Lewinsky in which Lewinsky spoke of her affair with President Bill Clinton. Within days Clinton had organised a press conference at the White House and issued his famous denial: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman."

Away from the spotlight of the mass media, in the most ordinary situations where no-one happens to be a princess or a president, infidelity remains a conspicuously accountable matter. Where there is infidelity, there is occasion for justifications and excuses; denials and concessions; appeals to mitigating circumstances, provocation and diminished responsibility. This accounting for infidelity is a form of behaviour that has gone virtually unstudied by social scientists. *The Compleat Infidel* is about to plug the gap. In the process, some traditional social scientific concepts and perspectives on what sort of phenomenon infidelity might be will be challenged and reconceptualised.

This first chapter supplies a review of previous sociological and psychological work that has taken infidelity as all or part of its object of study. The idea is to set the stage for the analytic questions addressed in *The Compleat*

Infidel and also to introduce the traditional or mainstream social scientific themes and concepts that will be picked up one by one and re-worked in the course of performing the analysis. The main criticism in this review will be that previous social scientific investigations of infidelity have paid little attention to the immediate constructive effects and interactional consequences of infidelity talk. Thus, they have revealed little about the nuts and bolts of discursive (defensive) practice. Chapter 1 ends by detailing and clarifying the research problem with which *The Compleat Infidel* is principally concerned. For now, let me summarise it thus. The task will be to: (a) discover what kinds of defences for infidelity and infidels are being articulated, taking note of any systematic variations, (b) scrutinise the construction of these defensive arguments to find out how they work in situ and eventually, (c) arrive at a satisfactory explanation for the aforementioned variability.

The Compleat Infidel belongs to the methodological tradition of discursive psychology. Chapter 2 explains what discursive psychology is and locates it on the theoretical map with regard to some neighbouring approaches such as rhetorical analysis, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. I then go on to describe the collection of discursive materials that forms the data-base for this research. I discuss the sources of these data (they include original research interviews, participants' contributions to previous research projects on infidelity, newspaper and television news reports and public internet discussions, to name but a few) and consider some of the ethical and practical questions that thereby arise. The final part of Chapter 2 marries together the method and the data, producing an account of the analytic procedure that underpins the work to be undertaken in the following five chapters. Thus, by the end of Chapter 2 we will be equipped with a set of specific analytic questions and a practical method of finding out the answers.

Chapters 3-7 are referred to at various points as the analytic chapters of this document. In these I conduct an empirical analysis of the data described in Chapter 2. Each analytic chapter takes up a prominent style of defence or line of argument and examines its construction and practical application. Chapter 3 examines people's reports of their behavioural history and experiences and also their reports of their attitudes, opinions, beliefs and views about infidelity. In these reports we will see infidelity constructed as a type of event, defined by the performance of certain acts in certain circumstances or conditions. Chapter 4 looks at how speakers and writers describe the settings and circumstances in which individual episodes of infidelity sometimes happen. Chapter 5 considers the use of personality and psychopathology in accounts of infidelity. Chapter 6

analyses the construction of reasons and motives for infidelitous behaviour in reports of unreasonable spouses, unsatisfactory dyadic relationships and irresistible third parties. Chapter 7 then turns to infidelity discourse in which people put together accounts of human nature, modern society and its division into social groups. Collectively, the study of these five topics will constitute a review of the major strategies and practices of defending infidelity and infidels that are available to users of contemporary, Anglo-American discourse.

However, the purpose of *The Compleat Infidel* is not solely to document and explicate the discursive defence of infidelity and infidels. As an exercise in discursive psychology it is additionally designed to serve a purpose of critique. The analytic chapters relate the discursive practices identified therein to certain theoretical arguments and issues that are raised by attempts to make a social scientific study of infidelity. In some cases there will be an overlap to be pointed out between the discursive practices of research participants and the social scientists who study them.

Chapter 3 develops a discursive psychological account of practices such as making evaluations, expressing ambivalence and being vague. This account will be developed in rhetorical contrast to social scientific studies of infidelity that try to gather the simple facts about people's attitudes to infidelity and their actual behaviour by means of questionnaires, surveys and polls. Similarly, Chapter 6 builds a critique of social psychological studies that solicit and speculate on people's reasons and motives for being unfaithful. In contrast to those studies I will develop a discursive psychological account of the practice of constructing infidelity as reasoned, motivated action.

In Chapter 4, while considering how to construct an isolated episode of infidelity, I will have some comments to make about the relationship between lay discourse, professional journalism of the human interest variety and also psychological studies that investigate infidelity as a matter for causal inference and attribution. Similarly, in Chapter 5 there will be occasion to discuss the appearance of personality theory and the psychology of individual differences in lay people's accounts of infidelity. I shall draw attention to the overlap between these accounts, confessional accounts of the sort that constitute news in certain tabloid newspapers and accounts that are produced by and for professional counsellors and psychologists. Later, in Chapter 7, I will look at some discourse of research participants in which they tackle big questions to do with the human condition and modern society. We will see that these accounts bear a marked resemblance to the more formal, academic sort of natural and social theory.

Overall, in Chapters 3-7 I will try to show that a discursive psychological analysis of infidelity discourse does more than provide for discoveries about the discursive behaviour of those non-professionals who kindly agree to participate in programmes of social scientific research or who make their discourse available for the general purpose of public consumption. A discursive psychological approach also has something to say about research itself and the discursive behaviour of the researchers. Ultimately I want to develop an account of infidelity discourse that is capable of explaining *The Compleat Infidel* as a discursive phenomenon in its own right as well as rival analyses and all the heterogeneous bits and pieces of discursive material that are presented herein under the heading of data.

The Compleat Infidel ends with Chapter 8 in which I draw together the discoveries of the five analytic chapters and propose an answer to the primary research question that was specified at the close of Chapter 1. Specifically, this is the point at which we will be in a position to explain the particular range and nature of the defences that we have considered. I shall then indicate what has been contributed by *The Compleat Infidel* with regard to two distinct spheres of academic endeavour. The first is the sphere of traditional or mainstream social scientific studies of infidelity and I shall conclude that there is strong evidence in support of the argument for foregrounding the local, situated action orientation of discourse if a coherent analysis of infidelity as a social and psychological phenomenon is to be accomplished. The second is the sphere of studies of discourse and in this part of Chapter 8 I will show how *The Compleat Infidel* builds on previous discourse-analytic work and thus makes a useful contribution not just to studies of infidelity discourse but to the general endeavour of discursive psychology. Finally, I shall take the findings reported in these pages as a starting point from which to propose some directions for future research.

Some Social Scientific Approaches to Infidelity

In this section I shall conduct a brief review of some previous social scientific investigations of infidelity. My objectives here are as follows. Principally, I hope that a concise but critical review of the social scientific literature on infidelity will help begin to clarify and characterise what will be going on methodologically in *The Compleat Infidel* that is different to what has gone before. Particularly, I want

to set the stage for a discursive approach to infidelity by reviewing some other, more traditional approaches. Relatedly, each one of the analytic chapters of this document (that is, Chapters 3-7) will take up topics and themes that intersect with issues in conventional sociological and psychological research into infidelity. Thus, it will be useful at this early stage to take in a broad overview of these research endeavours, forming an idea of how infidelity has been conceptualised, the sorts of questions that have been asked and the types of answers and conclusions that have been attempted.

Studies of human nature and society

One way to conceptualise infidelity is as a form of behaviour that is manifest in large populations (up to and including the entire human species). This overall approach characterises both of the following distinct strands of theory and research.

Firstly, there is the strand based on evolutionary theory, including the relatively new discipline of evolutionary psychology. In this line of research infidelity is usually taken to be a sexual activity to which the human species as a whole is naturally inclined. People may form ostensibly monogamous emotional and domestic partnerships in pairs but when it comes to sex they are apparently universally prone to covertly engaging in extra-pair copulation or double mating. Fairly typical are these remarks made by well known behavioural ecologist Helen Fisher (e.g., see Fisher, 1992) in an interview for the periodical *Urban Desires*: "I've looked at adultery in 42 cultures and, even in societies where you can have your head chopped off for philandering, men and women cheat. [] Monogamy has never meant fidelity. It's a parenting strategy. [W]e were built to do two separate things - to pair up and to cheat" (Quan, 1996, untrue.html).

Researchers seek to explicate the evolutionary foundations of this phenomenon and their findings are promoted as adding to the existing body of scientific and medical knowledge about human life and behaviour, especially sexuality, reproduction and mating behaviour. A good example is the study reported by Baker and Bellis (1995; also see Baker and Bellis, 1993; Bellis and Baker, 1990). A nationwide survey of 3,679 British women requested select items of information about their sexual habits and histories. Variables of special interest to the researchers included sexual experience (operationalised as the total lifetime number of copulations so far), the average amount of time spent in the company of a regular male partner (including time spent sleeping) and the time intervals

between copulations with two different males. The collected data were used by Baker and Bellis to support their version of sperm competition theory, which argues for the reproductive utility of extra-pair sexual congress. The authors include among their findings such discoveries as: "in humans, the less time that a male spends with his female partner between copulations, the more likely her last copulation is to have been with another male" (Baker and Bellis, 1995, p. 21). The essence of their conclusions is that "in Britain in the late 1980s, about 4% [and possibly as many as 12%] of children were conceived via sperm competition (i.e., were conceived while their mother contained within her reproductive tract competitive sperm from two or more different males)" (p. xiii). Other notable examples of work that investigates the evolutionary foundations of infidelity include: Ast and Gross (1995); Buss (1994, 1999); Buss and Schmitt (1993); Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, Choe, Hasegawa, Hasegawa and Bennett (in press); Kirkpatrick and Buss (1996); and Shackelford and Buss (1995, 1997).

Secondly, there is the strand of work that studies human societies rather than the human species. Extramarital sex and extradyadic sexual relationships - categories of activity that are assumed to be roughly equivalent to the activities denoted by the more explicitly morally-charged terms infidelity and unfaithfulness - are investigated as a common form of sexual behaviour and also an object of societal evaluation. Attitudes to extramarital sex can be sampled and taken to indicate something about the prevailing moral climate in a given population. An example is *Sexual Behaviour in Britain: The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* (Wellings, Field, Johnson and Wadsworth, 1994). The impetus and rationale for this government-funded survey was a concern about HIV. Reliable quantitative data about sexual behaviour were needed to "predict the likely extent and pattern of the spread of HIV" (p. 1). Data about attitudes were treated as a supplement to behavioural data, revealing something about the preferences, beliefs and views of the national psyche that would assist in endeavours such as mounting effective public health education campaigns. Aggregation of the data and generalisation from the individual respondent to British society were made possible by giving the questionnaire items one or another forced-response format, including Likert scales on which participants could indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with various attitudinal statements. The authors include among their findings the discovery that "only one respondent in fifty believes extramarital sex to be not at all wrong, and some four out of five people [] are of the opinion that it is always or mostly wrong" (p. 249). Their inquiries about sexual behaviour did not include specific questions such as "have you engaged in extramarital sex?" but the authors infer a

certain amount of such activity by cross-referencing answers to questions about the number of heterosexual partners in the last year with answers to questions about marital status. For instance, "4.5% of men and 1.9% of women who are married reported more than 1 heterosexual partner in the last year, and a tiny fraction (1.2% of married men and 0.2% of married women) reported more than two partners in the last year" (p. 104). Finally, by assuming that this sex with more than one heterosexual partner was equivalent to extramarital sex (i.e., assuming that respondents had not been married less than one year and also assuming that they were not in group marriages, open marriages or whatever), Wellings *et al.* were able to observe a certain concordance between attitudes and behaviour such that "a tendency towards greater lenience can be seen among those with some experience of the behaviours they were judging" (p. 259).

Other examples of this kind of work include Airey (1984), Glenn and Weaver (1979), Harding (1988), Hunt (1974), Janus and Janus (1993), Michael, Gagnon, Laumann and Kolata (1994), Quilliam (1994), Smith (1990, 1992), Tavis and Sadd (1977), Wiederman (1997) and Wolfe (1982). These studies characterise themselves as basically fact finding exercises: Quilliam (1994, p. 1) describes her report on her questionnaire survey of 200 women as "not a philosophical treatise, or a sociological thesis, but a direct statement of the way women see sex today." Other investigations of infidelity as a societal phenomenon are more explicitly informed by social theory such as those of Hite (1976, 1989, 1991, 1993) and Lawson (1988) and are correspondingly more likely to embellish and enrich a quantitative analysis with illustrations from interview material and other qualitative data.

This kind of investigation of infidelity implies a certain ontology and concomitantly a certain method of analysing discourse. The aim is to describe the properties of some large, composite entity such as the human race or modern society and so research participants are treated not as individuals but as representatives of that larger body. If they are differentiated, it tends to be in terms of demographic characteristics: researcher-defined categories of nationality (e.g., Maykovich, 1976), gender (Baker and Bellis, 1995), age (Roscoe, Cavanaugh and Kennedy, 1988), social class (Wellings *et al.*, 1994), urban/rural community of residence (Wilson, 1995) and so on. Because of this homogenisation there is relatively little consideration of what individual respondents must make of the business of data collection as a social situation.

Certainly, the subject matter of these investigations is acknowledged to be sensitive. The concern here is that people may be reluctant to honestly

disclose the facts about their sexuality. The nature of this problem as it is conceptualised in evolutionary and sociometric investigations of infidelity is indicated by the sorts of solutions that are applied. At the outset of *Sex in America: A Definitive Survey*, the authors confidently announce: "Like studies of less emotionally charged subjects, studies of sex can succeed if respondents are convinced that there is a legitimate reason for doing the research, that their answers will be treated nonjudgmentally, and that their confidentiality will be protected" (Michael *et al.*, 1994, p. 25). Similarly, Wellings *et al.* are sure that

A guarantee of confidentiality can do much to ensure veracity of response. Reassuring respondents of the confidentiality of the survey was of greatest importance in relation to the self-completion booklet which contained the more intimate and personal questions. A non-judgemental approach on the part of the interviewer and a guarantee of confidentiality were also essential. A firm understanding on the part of the respondent of the urgent need for the data and the credentials and integrity of the originators also does much to overcome this problem. In this respect the introduction was made easier by a reference to health and AIDS and the need for the information.

(Wellings *et al.*, 1994, p. 20)

With the right kind of reassurance, then, participants can be expected to overcome any initial reticence and revert to a mode of behaviour that seems to be the default response to inquiries of a less sensitive flavour: delivering the information as requested; straightforwardly supplying the facts that constitute the answers to the researcher's questions. After the initial hesitancy, and aside from any nagging suspicions that men routinely over-report while women under-report their sexual activity (e.g., Wheeler, 1993), the discourse that research participants produce is treated as simply reflecting reality.

This is a treatment of research participants and their discourse with which I shall take issue in the following chapters, especially in chapters 3 and 7. For one thing, accounts of human nature and human behaviour and evolution are just that: accounts. They are discursive products and deserve to be recognised as such, with no inherent differences distinguishing the accounts of evolutionary psychologists from those of their research participants. The same point can be made regarding accounts of modern society, sexual behaviour in Britain, sex in America and so on. Moreover, the forthcoming examination of discursive practice will make it clear that expressions such as extra-pair copulation, adultery, philandering, cheating, infidelity, extramarital sex and extradyadic sexual relationships ought not to be treated as more or less interchangeable signs or tokens for what is fundamentally the same underlying behaviour or piece of reality. As we will see, the selection and situated deployment of these and other terms reveals them to be interactionally consequential. That is, when respondents

are given a free rein in the matter of how to describe legitimate and illegitimate sexual practices, they choose terms that shape, organise and actively construct reality according to the interactional situation in which they find themselves.

These insights contra-indicate the treatment of research participants as though they were all doing the same thing, responding to the same stimulus and speaking as representatives of the same population. Researchers' decisions that the defining characteristics of their groups of subjects have to do with age, gender or whatever do not guarantee that these are the membership categories that participants themselves are treating as relevant concerns when they formulate their replies. Similarly, displays of non-judgemental integrity on the part of the researchers and assurances of confidentiality do not automatically de-gauss the research situation, cleansing it of messy social and interactional variables that might otherwise interfere with respondents' ability or inclination to reveal the essential facts and bits of social truth which they possess. In the following chapters of *The Compleat Infidel* we will examine accounts of personal behaviour, expressions of attitudes and impromptu bits of natural and social theory which show that membership categories, ideas of identity and anonymity and displays of non-judgemental integrity are discursive resources which belong quite as much to research participants as to the social scientists who study them.

Studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships

A contrasting approach to infidelity is to focus on it as the behaviour of an individual who acts and reacts with respect to his or her immediate network of personal relationships. This approach characterises both of the following strands of research and writing.

Firstly, there is the study of social cognition and close relationships, a distinct area of social psychology. The main concern is to explicate the cognitive processes underlying people's behaviour in marital and para-marital relationships and research is often conducted with a view to practical application of the findings in the context of delivering the cognitive-behavioural variety of marital and family therapy. Some social cognition research concentrates on identifying the beliefs, expectancies and patterns of attribution that seem to be associated with marital discord, the idea being that faulty or maladaptive cognitions can then be restructured. Here, infidelity can become relevant as a known source of marital conflict, a common but upsetting relational transgression that expectably triggers cognitions to do with inferring cause and making attributions of

responsibility and blame (e.g., Beach, Jouriles and O'Leary, 1985; Buunk, 1984; Fincham, Beach and Nelson, 1987; Fincham and Bradbury, 1987). Researchers use a variety of tools and techniques such as inventories and questionnaires (e.g., the Marital Attributional Style Questionnaire of Fincham *et al.*, 1987), vignettes and scenarios (e.g., Boon and Sulsky, 1997; Mongeau, Hale and Alles, 1994) and formally coded clinical observations (e.g., Bradbury and Fincham, 1993) to generate quantitative data that can be correlated together, subjected to regression analyses and so on. For instance, upon examination of their Relationship Attribution Measure, Fincham and Bradbury (1992) were gratified to discover that married people's responsibility attributions (i.e., ratings of the extent to which a badly behaved spouse was acting intentionally and deserves blame) were positively correlated with the amount of anger reported by respondents and also with the extent to which participating couples were observed to "whine" during a problem solving exercise.

Other social cognition research concentrates on developing one of a range of social exchange theories of close relationships, such as interdependence theory (e.g., Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau and Peterson, 1983; Kelley and Thibaut, 1978) and equity theory (e.g., Hatfield and Traupmann, 1981; Walster, Walster and Berscheid, 1978). Social exchange theories incorporate behaviourist principles of reinforcement and proceed on the assumption that people in couple relationships are subject to experience various rewards and costs as a consequence of their involvement. The outcomes for an individual (rewards minus costs) are conceptualised in such terms as satisfaction, dependence and commitment; psychological states that have a practical significance in the sense that they are thought to influence behaviours such as staying in the relationship or alternatively leaving (a dichotomy close to the heart of the therapeutic endeavour). Here, infidelity or a strong interest in it may be treated either as an indicator of causal psychological processes (e.g., Forste and Tanfer, 1996; Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Rusbult, Johnson and Morrow, 1986) or as an aspect of their practical effect (e.g., Buunk, 1987; Hatfield, Traupmann and Walster, 1978). Again, research is geared to generating quantitative data that can be subjected to inferential statistical tests. For example, the Hatfield Global Measure of Equity-Inequity (Hatfield *et al.*, 1978) is a scale that attempts to transform individuals' feelings about the equity of their relationships into simple numerical values. Respondents who report feeling that their relationship is equitable - that they get as much from their partner and relationship as they give in return - are assigned a scale value of zero. Those who feel over-benefited - getting more than they give

- may be assigned a score of up to three. Accordingly, those who feel under-benefited - giving more than they get - may be awarded a score as low as minus three. This quantification made possible the discovery of Hatfield *et al.* (ibid.) that of 2000 married respondents, those who felt under-benefited had significantly more extramarital affairs (and sooner into their marriage) than those who felt either over-benefited or equitably treated.

Secondly, there is a body of literature on affairs, their causes and relational consequences, that is published for the consumption of the general public. This self help literature usually arises from more or less clinical experience in a range of therapeutic settings. One example is Litvinoff's (1998) *Guide to Better Relationships*, which imparts the collective wisdom of Relate, a British relationship counselling organisation. Another is *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* (Pittman, 1989), the reflections of a psychiatrist. Other texts in this genre include Cauthery, Stanway and Stanway (1983), Pittman (1993), Reibstein and Richards (1992), Schneider (1988), Tysoe (1997) and West-Meads (1997). As with the social cognition account, this body of writing conceives of infidelity and affairs as a common but distressing category of relational event (perhaps even a crisis) that matters because it is a known antecedent of divorce and other kinds of relationship break-up. To take an example, Litvinoff introduces her discussion of affairs as follows:

An affair is what most people think of as *the crisis* in a relationship. For many the idea of their partners becoming involved with someone else is their greatest fear. [] By affair we mean any relationship with a third person that threatens the existing relationship between a couple. [] Later we will look in detail at what characterises the relationships that stay together rather than split up.

(Litvinoff, 1998, pp. 160-161; emphasis in original)

The causes of infidelity are located within the individual and the couple relationship. For instance, Litvinoff includes in her list of causes the factor of insecurity:

If a partner feels rejected for some reason (as a man might if he loses the main focus of his partner's attention during pregnancy, or while she is caring for young children, or a woman might do if the man is wrapped up in his work) he or she might look for attention or closeness from someone else. So might someone who is feeling vulnerable about his or her age or waning sexual attractiveness: only the excitement of a new relationship and the admiration in the eyes of someone new can seem like proof that all is still well.

(Litvinoff, 1998, p. 163)

In social cognition research, the task of the scientist is to distil formal explanatory models and theories from the observable test performances and other behaviours

of specific research participants. Contrastingly, in the self help and public education literature the task of the writer is to communicate theory in an accessible way. The abstract laws and general principles that constitute the wisdom of the experienced counsellor or clinician are re-particularised through case studies and emblematic instances, translated back into the realm of empirical experience for the benefit of the lay reader.

Compared to studies of human nature and society, studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships adopt a more nuanced approach to infidelity discourse. There is somewhat more recognition that data collection happens in a social situation, a more localised appreciation of why people say the things they do and a more contingent, relativised concept of the business being reported. Studies of human nature and society treat respondents as basically honest souls (cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987) whose preferred or default *modus operandi* is to truthfully and accurately describe their experiences and views. Studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships admit that the truth about infidelity is not so easy to get at. It is recognised that dyadic partners may produce very different histories of the same relationship and its difficulties and that there is not necessarily much to be gained from a therapeutic point of view by trying to get to the bottom of the matter, sorting out which among competing versions or accounts is correct. On the contrary, a more usual concern is that the therapist or counsellor should appear impartial, which entails being seen to be not taking sides with respect to the matter of what really happened (e.g., see Potter, 1996a). Moreover, it is accepted that individual respondents are more complex psychological entities than is implied by studies of human nature and society. Their expressions of their views, opinions, points of view and so on may be affected by more than a modest hesitancy about discussing sensitive issues. For instance, they might be speaking as someone who is insecure or suffering from low self-esteem or even as someone who is in denial. These possibilities will be the subject of further comment in the following chapters, especially Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

In his discussion of psychological investigations of close relationships, Antaki (1994, p. 93) notices that their treatment of participants' discourse is "rather equivocal." On the one hand, it is recognised that accounts are contingent and *not* straightforwardly reflections of some real-world, historical sequence of events or set of objective facts. On the other hand, accounts are treated as arising from and representing reality insofar as they are scientifically demonstrated to correlate with other indices of mental life; measures of dyadic (mal)adjustment,

for instance, or commitment or self-esteem or whatever. This equivocation is, Antaki suggests, disappointing for relativist critics because it fences off participants' accounts in such a way that they can only be approached through the researcher's own interpretative framework. Participants' versions are treated as eligible for examination but the kind of analysis that can be performed is restricted because the professional's own discourse of infidelity as having to do with marital distress, crises, threats, staying together and splitting up is allowed to remain exempt from scrutiny.

In the therapeutically-orientated literature that I have been discussing here, one of the effects of this equivocation is the maintenance of a heavy emphasis on the victims of infidelity. Throughout, extramarital and extradyadic relationships are predefined as a problem and of course this problematisation sets limits on the range and nature of conclusions that are reached at the stage of disseminating professional knowledge and publishing findings. As Kipnis (1998) observes, the therapeutic idiom is one that excludes any analyses of the phenomenon of adultery that reach beyond a small network of interpersonal relationships with the nuclear family at its centre. Investigations of this ilk may improve upon studies of human nature and society insofar as they attend more to local relational issues but they do so at the expense of recognising the possibility of ideological and political critiques: "You can be fairly certain it's not going to be the social order that's organized pathologically, it's you" (Kipnis, 1998, p. 304).

I do not propose to choose between studies of human nature and society and studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships. It is not my intention to suggest that one of these is the superior means of investigating infidelity. The point is that neither of these broad approaches pays great attention to the discursive nature of the material from which infidelity is constituted. In both cases, infidelity is externalised; abstracted and exiled from the flow of discursive exchange in which researchers and participants, writers and readers make it available to each other in the first place. As an object of study infidelity becomes part of a selectively reified world: an aspect of human mating behaviour or sex in America, a marital crisis or a single individual's attempt to restore their own private sense of equity. There is a segregation of the thing being studied from the scholar's own activity.

Clearly, the extent to which this needs to be regarded as a problem depends on one's priorities and methodological perspective. Similarly, there are variations in the extent to which a relativistic, discursively focused approach to research can be regarded as a solution. For instance, the over-riding concern of the researcher may be to produce evidence about human nature and/or the

state of modern society in order to bring about some large-scale change in social policy. This could be a simple response to the requirements of the funding body, as with government-commissioned surveys or it could be a form of independent political activism. Some researchers choose their area of work according to highly personal criteria and a conventional methodology may be underpinned by a radical agenda. To take an alternative example, a project may proceed pragmatically from the observation that when people encounter problems in their relationships, they expect that psychotherapists will be available and able to help; ergo, research may be demanded so as to design and deliver therapy that ultimately seems to generate the highest possible ratings on some measure of efficacy, be it customer satisfaction or whatever. In cases such as these, the sorts of epistemological tensions and limitations of scope that I have described above may not be regarded as fatal to the enterprise and a more thoroughly discursive perspective on the research activity may not be recognised as doing much to help researchers satisfy the requirements of their particular objectives and circumstances. However, *The Compleat Infidel* is a study of language and the immediate interactional dynamics of defensive discursive behaviour. As such, issues to do with the reification of infidelity and its abstraction as a topic from the researcher's own discursive practice must be taken seriously. Accordingly, in this document I shall try to ensure that my own commentary is recognised as very much part of the phenomenon being studied and is not granted diplomatic immunity from analysis. Overall, I shall aim for what Antaki (1994, p. 93.) calls a "really committed relativism." What this entails will become more and more clear as we progress through the latter part of Chapter 1.

Some Unsatisfactory Treatments of Infidelity Discourse

In recent years a very few pieces of research have appeared that take infidelity discourse as the object of study. Consequently, from the methodological standpoint of *The Compleat Infidel*, they represent an advance on the more traditional social scientific investigations discussed above. However, they also feature one or two lingering problems and areas of tension that make them not entirely satisfactory. In the following paragraphs I shall briefly review these studies and indicate where they and *The Compleat Infidel* finally part company. Three of the key studies to which I refer are those of Burns and Griffin (1996), Dryden (1999)

and Kitzinger and Powell (1995). All of the authors are social psychologists and they share a feminist perspective on the social construction of infidelity.

The analytic materials used by Dryden (1999) in her exploration of discourse in and about marriage are research interviews with seventeen couples. The interviews were, Dryden reports, "loosely structured (around topics such as family, friends, children, daily life etc.)" (p. 13). Predictably, at least some of the conversations turned to matters of (in)fidelity. From the outset of her book Dryden makes it clear that she is not trying to examine marriage in any stark, objectivist sense but rather that she is interested in how the reality of marriage is ongoingly constructed by her research participants, through their meaning-making activities with discourse. "The emphasis throughout this book," she states firmly, "is on the active and constructive nature of talk" (p. 15). However, Dryden has misgivings about constructionist and discursive analyses that focus on the "human being as textual product" (p. 20) to the total exclusion of individuals' actual, lived experience. In contrast, she is concerned with constructions and versions of reality and also with the "material and emotional consequences" (ibid.) that these constructions bring about for the people who build them.

How does the theory convert into analytic practice? Dryden's discussion of (in)fidelity centres on a longish extract of interview transcript (pp. 138-140). The interviewees are a couple named Gillian and Patrick Henderson. The conversation is not proceeding smoothly. For instance, Patrick remarks that married people are "expected to remain faithful but er [pause] I don't think it's a very sort of natural thing to do" and a note in Dryden's transcript records that "[At this point Gillian looks as though she might burst into tears.]" (p. 140). Now, this stretch of data is used by Dryden to show that this unremarkable married man is adept at constructing versions of reality and accounts of marriage that seem "destined to make his wife feel insecure" (p. 141). Indeed, Dryden adds "Given that Gillian was highly economically dependent on her husband with three young children to care for [] her position was insecure" (ibid.: emphasis in original). Moving from the particular to the general, Dryden's conclusion is that men commonly produce discursive constructions that create emotional insecurity in their partners and this is likely because it provides them with "an effective way of keeping control over the marital agenda" (ibid.).

The analysis of Burns and Griffin (1996) is also based on semi-structured research interviews, this time with individuals instead of couples. The overall topic was love and intimate relationships. Burns, the interviewer, found that participants "often talked about infidelities, their partners' and their own, and all of them said something about their ideas about infidelity if not their experiences of it." In the

ensuing report Burns characterises her research method unambiguously as discourse analysis. She explains that discourse analysis "is not concerned with allocating descriptions to pre-agreed conceptual categories, but with exploring how conceptual categories are constructed through talk" (emphasis in original). That is, "the focus is on the talk" and not on some extra-discursive notion of infidelity that is presumed to underlie or precede it. Specifically, the research questions about infidelity discourse are as follows. Firstly, Burns wants to look at the overall shape of constructions of infidelity and identify the "common themes" that emerge in the talk. Secondly, she intends to explore constructions of gender within these accounts and discover whether "double standards are [] constructed in talk about infidelity."

As it turns out, by the end of the report these modest objectives are exceeded. Like Dryden, Burns is additionally (if not more) interested in the material and emotional consequences of infidelity talk. For instance, her concluding remarks prominently include the following.

The gendered positions offered by the discourse of infidelity used by the women makes [sic] it easier for men to be unfaithful to women than for women to be unfaithful to men, because it is male infidelity that is constructed as expected. This may be translated into women's insecurity in heterosexual relationships for which they may blame themselves. By blaming themselves for being insecure, they need not leave the relationship. This seems similar to women who stay in violent relationships, blaming themselves for his violence.

(Burns and Griffin, 1996)

Both Dryden and Burns explicitly bracket their work with the investigation of infidelity discourse of Kitzinger and Powell (1995). In this study over one hundred students were given a story completion task. The cue story featured either a male or female protagonist (John or Claire) who realises that their (heterosexual) partner has been "seeing someone else ..." (p. 352). The students' completed stories were subjected to "thematic content analysis" (ibid.). Kitzinger's and Powell's report of their findings shows that the analysis was particularly geared to discovering how constructions of infidelity varied according to the gender of the research participants. For instance, "male and female subjects painted utterly contrasting pictures of a heterosexual relationship of one year's standing. Women tended to romanticize and men to sexualize the relationship" (p. 355). Moreover,

one of the most striking differences between stories written by male and female subjects was in the number and nature of words describing emotions. More than twice as many men as women wrote stories which contain no emotion words at all: only 12 percent of the stories written by women contain no emotion words, compared with over a quarter (26 percent) of the stories written by men.

(Kitzinger and Powell, 1995, p. 359)

Finally, Kitzinger and Powell draw out interpretations or "readings" of these findings from two theoretical perspectives, which they term "essentialist" and "social constructionist." Thus, "from an essentialist perspective, these stories could be read as uncovering sex differences in 'understandings', 'beliefs', 'personal needs' or 'underlying motives' with respect to heterosexual relationships" (p. 365). That is, "from an essentialist perspective, [] our findings can be read as claims about *psychological* differences between young men and young women" (p. 366; emphasis added). In contrast, a social constructionist reading (implicitly the preferred option) could

relate the stories told here to the various narrative genres with which student subjects are likely to be familiar: pornography, romantic fiction, stories in women's magazines and soap operas, the agony columns and the Oprah Winfrey Show. Given that male students are much more likely to be familiar with the pornographic genre and female students with the romantic genre (Wilson, 1983), it is perhaps not surprising to find that their stories draw on and reproduce these different genres

(Kitzinger and Powell, 1995, p. 366)

All three of these studies are to be commended for their explicit, resolute and largely consistent attention to infidelity as a discursive phenomenon. There is a concerted effort (on the one hand) to avoid treating participants' accounts as a mere conduit for information about infidelity as a pre-existing feature of the "real" natural or social world and (on the other hand) to avoid treating accounts as symptomatic of hidden psychological structures and processes. Overall, these researchers exercise considerable caution about claiming any causes for their participants' constructions that are located in the obviously extra-discursive realms of mind and behaviour. However, when it comes to identifying the *effects* of infidelity discourse, the same restrictions do not apply. This is no accident. The studies discussed here represent (various kinds of) feminist approaches to discourse and as such they belong to an even broader church of "critical" approaches that is unified and distinguished by its primary political objective. In the words of Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995, p. 59), this objective is one of "emancipating ordinary individuals, especially those subordinated through membership of social categories which render them powerless: 'ethnic minorities', 'women', 'the working class' and so on." The basic premise is that discourse matters because it is *through* discourse that hegemonic and oppressive power relations are maintained and their technologies implemented. In this respect, the reports of Burns and Griffin (1996), Dryden (1999) and Kitzinger and Powell (1995) are allied with the well known, more explicitly Foucaultian, feminist discourse

analyses of Gavey (1989, 1993) and Hollway (1984, 1989), which identify discrete and (for women) malevolent "discourses" of sexuality. They also have something in common with the more Marxist enterprises of "critical discourse analysis" and "critical psychology" described by Parker and his associates (e.g., Burman and Parker, 1993; Parker, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1999; Willig, 1998).

Thus, from the standpoint of *The Compleat Infidel* there is a problematic aspect to the three key studies of Burns and Griffin, Dryden and Kitzinger and Powell. The long range experiential and ideological effects of discourse are given centrality at the expense of analytic comment on the more immediate social practices that arise in contextualised discursive interaction (except where they can be "made to yield political conclusions;" Widdicombe, 1995, p. 108). A detailed account of this problem is worked out by Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) and I shall not attempt to duplicate it here. Instead, let me proceed by means of an illustrative example. Recall Patrick Henderson's remark about fidelity that I quoted in the discussion of Dryden's study, above.

Dryden is primarily interested in long range issues to do with social power and gender relations and this priority informs her analysis of the interview transcripts that are her data. Thus, Patrick's talk is treated as reducible to the gist that there is something objectionably unnatural about "remaining faithful" and is taken by Dryden as evidencing men's "separation behaviour" in (discursively constructing) marriage (Dryden, 1999, p. 119). The significance of this separation behaviour is that it causes women (in general, not just Gillian Henderson) to feel insecure. From this insecurity, men (in general, but including Patrick) reap the benefits of increased relational power and control.

The problem with this reading is that it leaves the analyst with no principled way to account for the finer details of Patrick's talk and their role in the immediate context of the interview. For instance, there is no way to explain why Patrick should have picked on the particular topic of the unnaturalness of fidelity as the platform for his separation behaviour, out of all the myriad possibilities. There is no basis but intuition for making sense of the many hesitations and disclaimers that accompany his delivery (e.g., compare it to the much more blunt, uncompromising presentation of this same argument by Helen Fisher in the section on studies of human nature and society, above). There is nothing to be said about whether and how his discursive behaviour is geared to the specific and perhaps rather unusual circumstances of being professionally interviewed by Dr Dryden.

These unanswered questions about the pragmatics of infidelity discourse are just the kind that will be addressed in *The Compleat Infidel*. This is the first

study to examine the active and constructive nature of infidelity discourse that does not at some point "step away from language," as advised by Parker (1992, p. xi; emphasis added) in order to produce political conclusions. I do not mean to suggest that *The Compleat Infidel* is a document sealed into an air lock of political neutrality: far from it. I do mean to suggest that political import will not be attempted by imposing on the research a framework that treats discourses as discrete causal agents (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 90) and thereby neglects to comment "on discourse as social practice, on the context of use and thus on the act of discursive instantiation" (ibid.).

In the next part of this chapter I shall say more about what sort of document *The Compleat Infidel* is, the readers who might be expected to find in it something of utility and the rhetorical dilemmas and debates in which it participates. After that I shall end this chapter by delineating the exact questions that collectively constitute the research problem.

Defensive Practice:

The Dual Identity of The Compleat Infidel

Infidelity discourse is a massive terrain that cannot be exhaustively explored within the pages of the single volume you are reading now. It is therefore a practical necessity to home in on some area of the discourse in order to do it justice. In this section I shall specify the area I am going to focus on and explain my choice.

Since its inception I have thought of *The Compleat Infidel* as a document with a dual identity. First and foremost, it is a research report; an exercise in discursive psychology, about which I shall have a good deal to say in the next chapter. It presents an extensive yet fine-grained study of the discursive construction of infidelity, focussing on constructions that account for infidelity and explain the behaviour of infidels. However, *The Compleat Infidel* is also a political paper: a manifesto and a technical handbook for unrepentant infidels who are interested in developing the rhetorical skills that their occupation demands. Each of its five analytic chapters describes a distinct set of arguments and discursive manoeuvres which collectively amount to a practical guide to conducting one's own defence. This dual identity is no accident but arises from two related considerations.

Reflexivity

In the following examination of defensive practice in infidelity discourse we shall encounter a number of interesting phenomena. For instance, we shall look at the ways in which accounts are made to appear factual and convincing through linguistic devices such as vivid description, empiricist accounting, consensus and corroboration and the rhetoric of argument, to name but four. Now these fact-constructive devices are not exclusive to the infidelity discourse that we shall scrutinise later on as data. They are common to all reports that present themselves as somehow factual, including social scientific reports on infidelity (discourse), including the very one you are reading now.

Research reports are supposed to convince readers by presenting units of knowledge which are true by virtue of having been more or less objectively discovered, they are supposed to support their theoretical claims by showing a concordance with discoveries and arguments that have been developed previously by researchers in the same methodological field and they are supposed to identify and display an improvement upon flaws and inadequacies in previous research on the same topic. That is, research reports (like other kinds of reports, accounts, descriptions and so on) "are not just *about* something but they are also *doing* something; [] they are not merely *representing* some facet of the world, they are also *involved* in that world in some practical way" (Potter, 1996a, p. 47; emphasis in original). For instance, they are not just about infidelity discourse but they also contribute to a world of scientific knowledge and academic debate. The word for this feature of discourse is *reflexivity* (ibid.; also see Ashmore, 1989; Ashmore, Myers and Potter, 1995).

Not all of the reflexive actions and functions of research reports are as obvious and explicit as the examples I have cited above. For instance, as a whole the body of mainstream social scientific literature on infidelity is rhetorically designed so as to participate in making a case or presenting one side of a moral argument about sex, marriage, heterosexual relationships and so on. To take a very simple example, the position is adopted in much of the literature of sexology, the psychology of interpersonal relationships and so on that trust is naturally a good thing, while secrecy, lying and illicit sexual relationships are all bad things.

Now, the problem I want to identify with these mainstream approaches to infidelity is not so much that their side of the moral argument in which they reflexively participate is simply wrong but rather that these texts do not recognise themselves as being reflexive in the first place. They do not acknowledge the

debate in which they are participating and taking up an argumentative position. This is a mistake which I shall try to avoid and one way to do that is through constructing a dual identity for *The Compleat Infidel*. Calling this document a manifesto and a handbook for unrepentant infidels is a way of deliberately exposing its inescapably rhetorical character and visibly taking a side that responds to the side that is being occupied more quietly and implicitly by most of the rest of the social scientific literature on infidelity.

Analytic interest in difficult interactional manoeuvres

I hope that it is already becoming clear that discursive psychology involves not only an interest in how objects such as infidelity are constructed but also in what those constructions can be seen to accomplish interactionally. Of course, some interactional manoeuvres are much easier to accomplish than others. It would be easy and arguably somewhat redundant to produce a piece of analysis that effectively showed how to assign blame, issue accusations and generally hold infidels and infidelity accountable, especially in the wake of a prosperous tradition of social scientific writing that has overwhelmingly attended to the pain and jealousy of the cuckolded partners and the disruption to marital or primary relationships. In deliberate contrast this study attends to the interactional tasks and problems faced by infidels themselves, the occupants of a rhetorical position in which they are required to justify the seemingly unjustifiable and defend the apparently indefensible. Too often presumed guilty of material "homewrecking" and emotional "devastation" for the sake of a meaningless sexual thrill, infidels face enormous strategic disadvantage in discussing their own infidelities, requiring the agile moral relativism of the convicted burglar or murderer. It is the available methods of coping with this strategic disadvantage that will be treated here as analytically interesting. We will return to this topic for a more theoretically nuanced discussion of the interactional challenges faced by compleat infidels in the section on analytic procedure at the end of Chapter 2.

The discourse analyst's dilemma:

A note about the language of agency, strategy and design

As Potter (1996a, p. 65) points out, when writing about stretches of discursive (oral or written) interaction and finding metaphors to convey what is being accomplished, the discourse analyst is often faced with a difficult choice between two kinds of language.

On the one hand there is an agentic lexicon of strategy and design. The drawback here is that the analyst may appear to be suggesting that a good deal of inner cognitive planning and decision making must go on behind the scenes in the production of discourse. Without getting into a debate about how far this is actually the case (Potter, 1996a, 1999, remains agnostic, after Sacks, 1992; interested readers may also refer to Heritage, 1990/91; Pomerantz, 1990/91), such suggestions would seem to be inharmonious with discursive psychology, an approach that tries to focus maximally on language and as little as possible on psychological, social or material worlds that are somehow extra- or supra-discursive.

On the other hand there is a mechanistic, deterministic lexicon that avoids being mistaken for cognitive psychology but is proportionally more likely to be mistaken for behaviourism, although behaviourism is an etic approach that tries to describe the objects and events of social life from the outside in objective, neutral terms while discursive psychology is an emic approach that takes as its starting point the sense made of social life by participants themselves, within their own culturally and temporally specific interactions: see Edwards (1997); Edwards and Potter (1992).

On balance, the language of agency is often marginally the better choice. Most people are so practised at ordinary conversation and other kinds of discursive interaction that they at least give the impression of knowing what they are doing, most of the time. To borrow an example from Potter (1996a, p. 46) most people appear quite proficient at ending telephone conversations, though these have been shown by conversation analysts to involve quite complicated structures and sets of conventions. However, it is possible to notice that appearance of procedural knowledge without necessarily assuming that (or how) speakers are cognitively busy, "plotting how to end [the] phone conversation, or how to stop [it] ending" (ibid.).

Moreover, though I shall use both the strategic and the mechanistic sets of metaphors, the former particularly suits the dual identity and purpose of *The*

Compleat Infidel. There is not really any pure behaviourist theory of infidelity currently existing in social science. However, cognitivist approaches are common. Consider the studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships that I reviewed earlier in this chapter. Even the social exchange theories, which incorporate some behaviourist principles, rely heavily on notions of inner psychological states such as commitment and processes such as decision making to describe the significant outcomes of interpersonal relations. This is the literature I referred to in the above section on reflexivity, which makes a quiet, even implicit judgement about the moral responsibility of infidels and the morality of infidelity. Consequently I shall give preference to the strategic metaphor in this text because it suits the reflexive purposes of *The Compleat Infidel* to challenge the rhetorical position of the mainstream social scientific literature by matching it and thereby exposing and ironising it. Where the strategic metaphor is used in this document I hope that this reflexive note will help to set reasonable limits on what it may be taken to imply about the mental life of the speakers.

The Research Problem

In earlier parts of this chapter I have identified what can now be summarised as two distinct sets of problems with previous research in the general area of infidelity. As we saw in the section headed "Some Social Scientific Approaches To Infidelity," much of this research presumes to abstract infidelity from discourse and make that abstraction the principal object of study. As a result, the discursive nature of the materials that researchers have to work with is necessarily downplayed and ultimately shunned. In the following section I discussed some research that begins to improve matters by acknowledging the discursive form in which infidelity is available as a topic for investigation. The findings of these projects concern the long range effects of discourse on psychological and societal entities that populate an extra-discursive world. There is arguably nothing wrong with this if the researcher's agenda is explicitly one of social reform. However, if one sets out to make a study of infidelity as a *discursive phenomenon*, surely it ought to be possible to end up with findings that concern exactly that, being located firmly within the realm of the discursive. The present study is an analysis of passages of discourse in which infidelity and infidels are defended. In this section I want to specify the questions that are to be asked of these data so

that we might leave *The Compleat Infidel* knowing something more about the discourse than when we arrived.

The question of mapping the discursive terrain.

The data examined in this study, while being drawn from a wide range of sources, are all examples of contemporary, Anglo-American discourse. Among users of this discourse there is recognisably a broad, tacit agreement about what sorts of things may and may not be intelligibly and plausibly produced to account for infidelity. For instance, I have yet to encounter the claim that there is any link between infidelity and vegetarianism. Neither is there any evidence that it is presently acceptable practice to account for infidelity by appeal to the waxing and waning of the moon. However, there is abundant evidence of people introducing such themes as boredom and true love into their accounts and of other parties to the conversation treating these themes as relevant to the topic of infidelity and worthy of debate. This being the case, a primary goal of this research must be to chart the prominent features of the discursive landscape.

The question of construction.

Having taken in an aerial view, it will be appropriate to examine the data at close range. That is, individual conversations and texts can be scrutinised for the local details of their construction. To put a very simple gloss on what that might involve, it is partly about content: identifying what discursive resources and materials have been used in building a case for the defence. It is also about design: noticing how the various constituent parts of the account are organised and arranged.

Earlier in this chapter I observed that defending infidels and infidelity is not the most usual or the most popular of discursive projects. Those who attempt it can not afford the luxury of assuming that their efforts will be warmly received. In building such a case, then, it is more than usually necessary that the resulting structure should appear factual and convincing. How this factuality is accomplished is one of the puzzles to be addressed in the construction strand of this research.

The question of function.

This question is closely related to the previous two. From the aerial view, one may wonder how a person wishing to defend infidelity could make a choice from among the available range of explanatory themes. Why should an instance of defensive accounting come to depend on such-and-such a line of argument rather than one of the others? From the close up view, one may wonder how a

person accounting for infidelity comes to produce and arrange the details of an apparently factual construction in this particular configuration in preference to any other.

There is no doubt that defensive accounts for infidels and infidelity are not produced in a vacuum. Rather, they appear in some distinctive discursive context. Sensitivity to this context entails more than making a general display of factuality and plausibility. It also involves attention to local issues to do with personal accountability and blame. Thus, the question of function with regard to some discursively contextualised instance of defensive accounting is likely to concern what is accomplished for its producer. What, in discursive terms, might be gained?

2

Methodological Issues

Methodological Overview

The accounts literature

As I observed in Chapter 1, this study is not an attempt to analyse the entire terrain of speech and writing about infidelity. In order to accomplish more than a sweeping overview it is necessary to home in on a specific area of the discourse. In this case, the area of interest is defensive practice. In this section I want to emphasise my overall preference for the term defensive practice rather than defences and likewise for accounting over accounts. This will be accomplished through comment on how *The Compleat Infidel* is positioned relative to what has become known as the accounts literature (e.g., Antaki, 1994, p. 44; Buttny, 1993, p. 13).

In everyday discourse infidelity is a topic characterised by interpersonal conflict. It is the basis for launching personal accusations and ascribing personal blame. It is characteristically construed not as a sociological phenomenon or a philosophic puzzle but as an individual's action; one that matters because it inflicts pain and injury on another individual. From this perspective infidelity seems to belong in the same bracket of behaviours as insults, threats, physical assaults and other crimes against the person. One might say that all these behaviours are interpersonal offences for which accused and suspected individuals are obliged to produce an account. This notion is a defining one in an important early chapter of the accounts literature: Scott's and Lyman's *Accounts* (1968). An account, Scott and Lyman proposed, is a linguistic form that is offered for "untoward action" (p. 47). Indeed, extramarital sex is one of the examples supplied by Scott and Lyman as an action that calls for an account.

Scott's and Lyman's project, along with those reviewed and refined by Semin and Manstead (1983) and Nichols (1990), involved developing a taxonomy

of accounts, identifying various types and subtypes of excuse and justification. In the data to be examined in the analytic chapters of this document we will see some discursive constructions that look as though they could be easily classifiable in this way: denials in one chapter, provocation defences in another, appeals to diminished capacity in yet another and so on. On this basis it might then be possible to speculate about the effectiveness of different types of account or defence, in the style of Felson and Ribner (1981) or Cody and McLaughlin (1985, 1988). However, such a classificatory system is not used to divide up the subject matter in *The Compleat Infidel*. Three related problems arise from this approach to accounting that *The Compleat Infidel* seeks to avoid.

Firstly, to impose a predetermined typology of accounts or defences on the data would draw the researcher's attention towards abstracted, idealised discursive forms and away from people's actual, contextualised discursive behaviour (Antaki, 1994; Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996a; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). For example, intoxication might be presumed to be the basis for a classic diminished capacity defence. However, collecting together examples of diminished capacity defences by the simple criterion of appeals to drunkenness would overlook the differences in my data between, on the one hand, accounts where a person's drunkenness is tied to the reporting of some single, particular celebratory event that also involved time spent away from home, reunion with old friends and former sweethearts and so on and, on the other hand, accounts where the person is constructed as an habitual alcoholic (cf. Edwards and Potter, 1992, pp. 98-99). It would also overlook the insight of Atkinson's and Drew's (1979) study of courtroom interaction that a simple reference to drunkenness might not, in fact, be performing as any kind of account and that identifying what counts as an account can depend on its orientation to something accusatory within a sequentially organised discursive sequence or conversational exchange.

Secondly, taxonomic approaches tend to promote a view of accounting as the production of *the* account, a momentary, definitive, on-the-record speech act (Antaki, 1994; Buttny, 1993). This is exemplified by Scott's and Lyman's definition and operationalisation of an account as a discrete, linguistic manoeuvre that repairs a social breach. The problem here is that more subtle, diffuse styles of accounting are in danger of being ignored. For instance, Conley's and O'Barr's (1990) study of defensive practices in a small-claims court warrants a move away from the isolated speech-act view of accounts by displaying the long range differences in accounting practice between "rule oriented" and "relation oriented" forms of discourse. In the former plaintiffs and defendants take up the

preferred language of the law, supply precise facts, maintain a tone of objectivity or neutrality and stick to information that is "relevant to the narrow principles of contract law" (ibid., p. 63). In the latter they speak a more vernacular language, supply descriptions that rely on the inferential work of the listener, maintain an emphasis on social and interpersonal morality and include information that is relevant to building a convincing narrative. Similarly, my data show that there is more to accounting for infidelity than announcing *the* defence in a single move. For example, speakers sometimes sideline the issue of accounting for their own infidelities and avoid addressing the injurious consequences of that behaviour by focussing on infidelity as a generic human practice that is explicable in terms of various positive benefits and advantages. Depending on the discursive context, this may be necessarily achieved cumulatively, over several conversation turns.

Thirdly, taxonomies of accounts tend to imply some discrete, definitive offence or breach to which the account pertains. Granted, an espoused interest in the defensive practices surrounding infidelity presupposes that speakers and writers have something to defend. However, it is hardly the case that accounting for infidelity is confined to courtroom-type situations where people are obliged to answer for specific crimes, elsewhere remaining silent. My data include accounts produced in research interviews, on public internet bulletin boards and in response to surveys, to name but three alternative circumstances. Often it is not clear what particular occasion of infidelity a speaker is accounting for or even whether they have ever committed such a specific behavioural offence. Typically in these data the recipient for whom the account is produced is not straightforwardly the victim of the speaker's infidelitous actions. Nonetheless, in these situations too, speakers have interactional interests to protect. For example, consider the research interview. Interviewees may have any number of possible reasons for participating in an interview about infidelity; thinking the subject an interesting topic for discussion, a desire to help with the researcher's project or whatever. Despite this, simply occupying the position of someone who knows about infidelity and is authorised to speak on the subject can be an accountable matter (cf. Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's approach of potential interviewees in public places on the strength of their "looking like" rockers and punks: Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). What interviewees have to say may thus be defensively designed with respect to guarding against unfavourable inferences about their personal codes of behaviour or moral character without a specific accusation of infidelity or a voluntary confession ever having to arise. It is in this ongoing, situated sense that I use the notions of accounting and defensive practice in *The Compleat Infidel*. The topic of speakers' accountability, as distinct

from the accountability of the events reported in their speech, will be the subject of further comment in the next section.

Action orientated approaches to discourse

In this section I want to indicate where *The Compleat Infidel* is located on the conceptual map relative to neighbouring action orientated approaches to discourse. In Chapter 1 I characterised unsatisfactory treatments of infidelity discourse as those that start out discursive but end up somewhere else; projects that locate their conclusions about the discourse they study in a realm *beyond* the discursive (e.g., in the individual psyche or in the machinations of society). In contrast, in this section I will highlight some approaches to discourse that start out discursive and stay that way. Studying accounts, narratives, arguments and other discursive data and then locating one's conclusions *within* the realm of the discursive necessarily entails noticing that discourse acts on itself in a very immediate way. That is, what people say builds on what has been said before, anticipates what will be said next, shapes the discursive context in which they are speaking and so on. Approaches that attend to the local, situated action of discourse on discourse and that are close neighbours of the approach taken in *The Compleat Infidel* are the subject matter of this section. They will be considered in two sub-sections, beginning with rhetorical analysis and following with ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA).

The study of rhetoric has enjoyed something of a renaissance since the mid-1970s (Potter, 1996b) and the analysis of scientific rhetoric now boasts a diverse body of literature Soyland (1994, p. 24). Of particular relevance to *The Compleat Infidel* are the studies of scientific disagreement and debate of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and Mulkay (1985a) and (of particular importance to discursive psychology) the critique of cognitive and social psychology developed by Mick Billig (1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992; Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley, 1988). This kind of rhetorical analysis is concerned with how discourse is structured argumentatively, to be persuasive and undermine alternative positions. It employs a wide range of discursive materials including interviews, spontaneously occurring talk and a variety of written texts to display the rhetorical devices used in making a case and the broad social or ideological character of personal and interpersonal dilemmas.

The Compleat Infidel is not solely a rhetorical analysis. It incorporates analytic insights and resources from other disciplines, notably CA, in the project of

investigating the defensive practices of infidelity discourse. As remarked by Potter (1996b, p. 134), "conversation analysis and rhetorical analysis emphasize two different orders of relationship: CA stresses sequential organization across turns; rhetorical analysis stresses the relationship between opposing argumentative positions. The latter may themselves be sequentially organized, but this is not necessarily so." Having said that, rhetorical analysis is an important aspect of this project. Particularly, rhetorical analysis helps in identifying the argumentative orientation of some of the less obviously conversational texts in the data-base and attention is paid to the appearance in the data of various rhetorical devices such as logical argument forms (Billig, 1987) and speakers' espousal of strong views (Billig, 1989).

The sociological movement of ethnomethodology was founded in the mid-1950s by Harold Garfinkel. As an area of study it investigates how ordinary members of society make sense of and accountably act on their social world (Heritage, 1984). It stresses the central role of discourse in conducting this normative social business. Conversation analysis was principally founded by Harvey Sacks in the 1960s and is now a prominent form of ethnomethodological work that homes in on the specifics of conversational interaction, especially the mundane and the everyday. The objective of CA is to discover how participants in ordinary conversation "understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus being on how sequences of actions are generated" (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p. 14; emphasis in original). Research in CA has been responsible for the discovery of a host of conversational devices through which speakers orientate to and accomplish their interactional business. Classic examples of such discoveries include adjacency pairs (Sacks, 1992, vol. 2, pp. 521-570), dispreference markers (Pomerantz, 1984) and pre-sequences (Schegloff, 1979, 1980).

The Compleat Infidel is not principally an exercise in conversation analysis although it does take an action orientated, situated approach to its materials. It incorporates data that are by no means naturally occurring conversations. It introduces analytic insights and resources from other disciplines (notably rhetorical analysis) in the project of investigating the defensive practices of infidelity discourse and its focus is not coterminous with the sequential organisation of talk. However, CA makes a substantial contribution to this project. Certainly, there is much of relevance to *The Compleat Infidel* to be gleaned from CA studies of interaction in institutional, especially judicial, settings. It is impossible and perhaps inappropriate to cite a complete bibliography here, but to provide a taste of things to come, there is the analysis of action sequences associated with

accusations, justifications and excuses in the work of Drew (1978, 1992) and Atkinson and Drew (1979); the analysis of litigants' use of descriptions in the work of Pomerantz (1987); the "practical epistemology" uncovered by Whalen and Zimmerman (1990) in people's reports of trouble to the police. Moreover, as is amply suggested by the works of Wetherell and Potter (1989, 1992), Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) and Antaki and Widdicombe (1998), conversation-analytic discoveries about such matters as category membership (Sacks, 1979) and "doing being ordinary" (Sacks, 1984) can helpfully provide an analytic handle on how speakers manage to produce believable trait-laden identities and defensible role-based behaviours in the course of accounting for infidelity.

Discursive psychology

The Compleat Infidel is a study in discursive psychology or DP (Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996a). In other incarnations this approach is known as discursive social psychology (Potter, 1998) and discourse analysis (e.g., see Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards, 1990), where the latter term refers to a distinctive form of analysis cultivated in social psychology by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and before that in the sociology of scientific knowledge by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984). The disciplines of CA and rhetorical analysis have been two of the most important attendant influences on the development of this new analytic programme (Potter, 1998, 1999; Potter and Wetherell, 1994). In the incarnation invoked here, discursive psychology is both an action orientated methodological approach to the study of *discourse* and a radical critique and respecification of traditional concepts and topics in *psychology* (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1998). Discursive psychology is underpinned by the discursive action model, or DAM (Edwards and Potter, 1992, 1993), a "conceptual scheme that captures some of the features of participants' discursive practices [] and illustrates some of the relationships between them" (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p. 154); a set of "principles that orientate any psychologist to important features of everyday reports and explanations" (p. 155). In this section I will make a sketch of DAM and begin to show how its principles apply in *The Compleat Infidel*. The specificities of application will be illustrated more fully later in this chapter, in the section on analytic procedure.

The discursive action model is built in three sections, headed "action," "fact and interest" and "accountability." The first section, "action," articulates the focus of DP on "*people's practices: communication, interaction, argument; and the*

organisation of those practices in different kinds of settings" (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p. 156; emphasis added). The outward-bound term "action" stands in deliberate contrast to "cognition" and that term's reference to inner psychological states and mental life. Edwards and Potter (*passim*) show that traditionally cognitivist concepts such as "remembering" can be recast discursively as "reporting," "attitudes" can be recast as "evaluations" and so forth. This shift of emphasis from thought to action reminds us that people's reports about their memories, attitudes and so on are not produced in a discursive vacuum. Rather, these discursive behaviours always take part in some *activity sequence* in which discourse users handle bits of interpersonal business; importantly including attributional business such as establishing responsibility and allocating blame.

The second section, "fact and interest," remarks that people conventionally treat each other as having various motivations, loyalties and prejudices that give them a *stake* in the things they say. Reports, accounts, descriptions and versions of the world run the risk of being undermined by appeal to the speaker's personal stake in producing that version and not some other one. To take a topical example, consider Kenneth Starr's prosecution of Bill Clinton over the latter's relationship with Monica Lewinsky. What Starr presented as simple pursuit of the truth, Hillary Clinton set out to undermine, famously redescribing Starr's motives in terms of a "vast right-wing conspiracy" (*The Guardian*, 28 January 1998). Stake is an attended-to, orientated-to issue in everyday discourse. Because of this, speakers are faced with a "dilemma": "how to produce accounts which attend to interests without being undermined as interested" (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p. 158). This can be accomplished through a range of discursive techniques for fact construction, including a range of externalising devices, many of which we will meet in action later on. Moreover, because the issue of stake is such a pervasive one, bearing on conversations far less obviously controversial than Clinton versus Starr, accounts can be seen to be rhetorically organised so as to promote and bolster one version of the world while contraindicating and undermining others.

The third section, "accountability," identifies two levels at which "speakers routinely deal with issues of agency and responsibility when they offer reports of events" (*ibid.*, p. 165). Traditional psychological research on attribution has always acknowledged that participants who are presented with hypothetical examples or vignettes of accountable events are capable of talking in such a way as to assign responsibility to the different characters involved and to different aspects of the situation in which the event occurs. Discursive psychology acknowledges that reports *also* orientate to the accountability of the *speaker*, the person doing

the reporting. Furthermore, these two levels of accountability are interrelated such that each may serve the purposes of the other.

On the one hand, as Edwards and Potter (*ibid.*) remark, in many situations the accountability of the speaker is the primary concern. Again, consider the Lewinsky investigation and Clinton's reports and testimonies therein. The investigation threatened to impeach Clinton, questioning his fitness to be President and taking him to be principally concerned with defending his own moral character. Many of the objects and events described in his testimonies are thus produced by Clinton himself as bits of evidence; selected, exemplary items that matter because of the bearing they have on the principal concern about his accountable status as an honest man or a liar.

On the other hand, in other situations, the main concern is treated by participants as accounting for the object of reports, while the personal accountability of speakers is constructed as a more secondary consideration. In later chapters of *The Compleat Infidel* we will see some internet and interview data that foreground the business of accounting for infidelity as a problematic phenomenon. This is not to say that speakers' accountability stops being an issue. However, speakers may make a point of treating their position or *footing* (Goffman, 1981; Levinson, 1988; and see Edwards and Potter, 1992, pp. 38, 168), the basis on which they offer their account (be it personal experience or disinterested observation), as one of a range of possible positions; one that matters insofar as it bears on their claims about the accountable nature and status of infidelity.

The discursive action model and the studies of discourse and rhetoric from which DAM emerges provide a means of getting to grips with defensive practices in infidelity discourse; a practical *modus operandi* for investigating the different ways in which these accounts are *constructed* and the various discursive activities and *functions* that are thereby accomplished.

Participants and Materials

Data sources

The data-base from which this analysis of discourse is developed consists of more than 230 pieces of talk and text in which infidelity and infidels are defended. Of that number, more than 30 are either briefly quoted or reproduced in full in the pages of this document. My interest is in the defensive resources and practices that are used in contemporary, Anglo-American discourse. That is a broad remit and so I attempted to *not* restrict the range of potential data sources unnecessarily. Rather, I took an inclusive approach to data collection and gathered material from a deliberately eclectic mix of sources and media. For the immediate purpose of concisely describing this extensive data-base, it is possible to impose upon the data a simple classificatory system that divides materials according to the format in which they arrived on my desk.

Print media.

Hard copy, printed documents that yielded defensive accounts of and for infidelity included British national newspapers (both broadsheet and tabloid) and the British editions of various glossy "lifestyle" magazines (titles for male audiences as well as those addressed to female readers). Another rich source in the print media format was published work in the social sciences, both the formal academic variety and the more popular genres that are addressed to mass audiences of lay readers. The social scientific texts were fruitful not least because of the common practice of block-quoting research participants; their interview talk, written responses to survey questions and so on. Some of the print media data that we will examine later in the analytic chapters of *The Compleat Infidel* derive from the following sources. Newspapers include *The Guardian* and the *Sunday People*. Lifestyle magazines include *Marie Claire*, *New Woman* and *Arena*. The more formal sort of social science texts include Atwater (1979) and Lawson (1988). The more informal social science texts include Quilliam (1994) and Wolfe (1982). Of particular interest were the data and accompanying analyses of discursive psychologist Derek Edwards (e.g., Edwards, 1995, 1997). In the course of his own research Edwards transcribed the talk of unhappy couples in session at a British relationship counselling facility. He has published lengthy extracts from these conversations, some of which contain defensive talk about infidelity.

New digital media.

Documents in plain text, hypertext mark-up language and other formats can be downloaded from the World Wide Web. The internet is an immeasurably capacious resource that was useful in collecting the data for this study in four ways. Firstly, it provides access in digital format to newspapers and periodicals that might otherwise be difficult to obtain. For instance, my data-base includes cuttings from the *Boston Globe* and *The Detroit News*. Secondly, it is a means by which documents that are of public interest and in popular demand are published and circulated. Examples include transcripts of the interview given by the late Princess of Wales to the BBC's *Panorama* and President Clinton's grand jury testimony. Thirdly, searches can be undertaken for information about particular organisations and highly specialised topics. For instance, at various times during the data collection process I gathered information about such organisations as the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Fourthly, more open-ended searches can be serendipitous in turning up swathes and samples of lay people's discourse. Let me illustrate this last point with an example that anticipates some of the data analysis that we will be doing later on.

In Chapter 6 we will look at messages that were posted by English-speaking, lay people to an online debate that bore the title "The Other Side of an Affair" (henceforth OSA). OSA is one discussion thread of several that were running concurrently on the same public-access bulletin board in 1997. The other threads also dealt with relationship issues; their titles included "marriage sex is not the same," "Cheating - Those who will not forgive" and "Husband Using Internet for Sexual Gratification." Discussants contribute under an assumed name and there is evidence that many of them were participating in more than one thread at a time. The host for these discussion threads - that is, the provider of the bulletin board facility - is the HomeArts Network Forum at www.homearts.com, itself a division of the Hearst Corporation. Hearst is the American publisher of women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook* and *Good Housekeeping*, a fact reflected in the HomeArts website which is aimed at women with an interest in topics such as "health," "recipes," "home" and "family." However, there is no reason to assume that the contributors to OSA arrived via the front door of www.homearts.com, only then to discover the bulletin boards. An unspecified number (perhaps a majority) will have arrived by more direct methods, for example, as I did, by typing words such as "infidelity" into a search engine and finding that individual pages from OSA were listed among the many resulting hits. OSA was a conversation that lasted over several months and more than a

thousand messages or posts. It particularly attracted my attention because of a heated argument that broke out between two factions: on the one hand, those who were or had been illicitly involved with persons who were already married or similarly committed to someone else; on the other hand, those who had been deceived and betrayed by unfaithful partners and spouses.

Spoken word.

Some data took the form of tape-recorded speech that had to be transcribed before any analysis could proceed. For example, a few cases were recordings of radio broadcasts, notably the sort of programme that invites members of the public to telephone with their opinions on various momentarily significant topics. However, the bulk of the spoken word data came from recordings of 14 original interviews on the subject of infidelity that I conducted for the specific purpose of this research.

The participants were six women and eight men in their twenties and thirties who very kindly volunteered for interview when they became aware of my research. Twelve were previously known to me as colleagues and/or personal friends. Of these 12, three had participated in a study of mine on the subject of marriage a few years earlier (see Lawes, 1999) and were enthusiastic about getting involved in this second wave of research. Alongside these 12, two respondents were students who offered to participate after hearing me talk about my research in a seminar. By the time of their interviews, all participants were well informed about the topic that I wanted to discuss: infidelity, in general, and methods of defending it, in particular. The interviews took place in their homes or mine or at some other quiet and mutually congenial venue.

Clearly, I was *not* trying to assemble a random sample of interviewees. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that extracts from the spoken word category of data were not intended to constitute the entirety of *The Compleat Infidel's* data-base and in fact amount to approximately one third. As an exercise in discursive psychology this study belongs to a methodological tradition in which the point is not to generalise from a sample of individuals to a population but from specific instantiations of talk and text to culturally sustained conventions of discursive practice. That being the case there were good reasons for doing some interviews, which I shall adumbrate here.

Informal, open-ended interviews with fourteen participants provided me with considerable opportunities to think out loud about the conventional logic of defending infidelity, to explore and re-explore questions with participants and - most importantly - to record the development of these discursive activities in the

slowly unfolding interactional context of a ninety-minute, private conversation. Without restricting ourselves to a formal interview schedule, each participant and I discussed questions such as the following. What does the word "infidelity" mean? Is infidelity a basis for concluding that something is malfunctioning in a couple's relationship? If most people agree that infidelity is wrong, why should it seem to be highly prevalent? Additionally, I welcomed and collected narratives about distinctive, infidelity-related experiences such as "being confronted by other people's angry partners" or (to put it another way) "being accused of homewrecking."

As articulated by Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1995; Potter, 1996b, 1997; Wetherell and Potter, 1992), a discourse-analytic approach to research necessarily treats interviews as dialogic interactions in their own right and not just a one-sided string of answers to various decontextualised questions. The interviewer's contributions are just as eligible for analysis as those of the interviewee. Accordingly, any policy of remaining or attempting to remain conspicuously neutral and uninvolved with the respondent's discourse is inappropriate. It is far more analytically fruitful if the interviewer takes a fully active role in the conversation, expressing views and opinions and even arguing with participants. Indeed, the participants in this study responded in kind to my characteristically animated, conversational style of interviewing. Between us we generated discursive material that describes a diverse range of resources and practices in everyday reasoning about the defensibility of infidels and infidelity.

Ethical considerations

Other than the fourteen research interviews on infidelity, all of the data used in this study were freely available for anyone to examine, through publication or broadcast in the public domain. This includes the internet discussions such as OSA, an important point to mention because of the personal minutiae and passionate arguments that these kinds of data not uncharacteristically contain. Two routine interactional rules circumscribe the revelations and accusatory displays of discussants at these online bulletin boards and similar fora. Firstly, individuals' contributions are not marked by any identifying information such as the string of digits that constitutes their personal ISP (internet service provider's) address. Contributors are expected to use a pseudonym if they wish to sign their contributions, for example, for the purposes of debate. Occasionally, depending on the format of the board or forum, people are invited to indicate what part of

the world they are from. This is always optional and the usual protocol is to indicate a state if one is in North America or a nation for people outside the US. Secondly, the organisation that hosts the bulletin board or similar facility - in the case of OSA this is ultimately the Hearst Corporation - displays on site an announcement that it automatically assumes the copyright to all messages and other materials that are posted therein. My own research interviews are thus unique among the data that form the raw material of *The Compleat Infidel*. As such they are accompanied by various ethical considerations that merit discussion in the immediately following paragraphs.

Firstly, there is the issue of informed consent. All those who volunteered to be interviewed for this study had a *minimum* of one preliminary conversation with me in which they were encouraged to ask questions while I supplied information about the research itself and the process of participation, based on my anticipation of what they ought to know in order to give informed consent and on my reading around ethical issues (e.g., Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1994; Foddy, 1993; Lee, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander, 1990). This included information about the overall nature and purpose of the research; information about the mechanics of participation (for instance, that the interview would expectably take about ninety minutes and that it would be tape-recorded and later transcribed); and information relevant to the period after being interviewed (for instance, that interviewees retain the right to withdraw from participation and information about how to contact me after the interview, for that purpose or any other). Clearly, there was no reason to withhold information or deceive participants about any aspect of *The Compleat Infidel*; indeed, as colleagues, friends and students these fourteen individuals had listened to me expound at length on the project (many of them on more than one occasion) and it is arguably the case that the risk of under-information was exceeded by the risk of overloading participants with more detail about the topic, and my take on it as a researcher, than they could have possibly required. There was no offer of any kind of reward for participation and certainly no occasion for inducement. I would like to reiterate that interviewees volunteered their services rather than being recruited and that three participants from a previous, similar study were evidently happy enough with that experience to put themselves forward for involvement in this subsequent chapter of research. Moreover, it is worth noting that more people from among my network of contacts volunteered for participation than I was practically able to accommodate; I interviewed the first fourteen who happened to be available from a given date (7 April, 1998) and ceased interviewing one calendar month

later because of the constraints on my time rather than because I had exhausted the available supply of willing interviewees.

Secondly, there is the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. In the interview extracts that appear in Chapters 3-7 of this document, participants' names and all other information from which they could potentially be identified have been fictionalised. Indeed, I used pseudonyms rather than participants' own names from the very earliest stages of transcribing the recorded interviews. While the fictionalised interview extracts that were eventually included in the 230-piece data-base that underpins this project could, if necessary, be made available for inspection without compromising the anonymity of participants, the original tapes, the unabridged interview transcripts and the various hand-written notes and computer files relating to those transcripts enjoy complete confidentiality and remain accessible to no-one but myself. As research materials go, infidelity talk is a form of co-operatively generated data that participants might expectably have a particular interest in keeping private and confidential. I would like to say that as a co-conversationalist I did not shy away from sharing my own experiences and thoughts about infidelity, even where unflattering conclusions about my failure to live up to the moral standards that are conventionally implied by involvement in dyadic relationships became inferentially available. I think there is reasonable evidence that participants understood from this that, compared to a self-constructedly distant, "objective" and "neutral" researcher, I had more than the usual amount of stake in ensuring that the privacy and confidentiality of our conversations would be respected.

Thirdly, there is the issue of protection of participants. From the outset of the interviews, participants were made aware that at any time they could ask for the interview to be paused and/or the tape recorder to be switched off; one or two of them availed themselves of the chance to initiate a short break. It is beyond doubt that participants understood that they were not obliged to answer individual questions: we will see later that one of the features that especially distinguishes my research interviews from some of the other data in this study is the speakers' exercise of opportunities to negotiate and transform the meaning of a question or line of questioning such that potentially unflattering inferences about themselves as moral characters could be effectively avoided.

Banister *et al.* (1994, p. 154) remark that "disclosure often invites reciprocation" and caution that the more involved, active kind of researcher so often associated with qualitative research makes necessary a special attention to participants' grasp of the principle that they are not compelled to disclose information that is uncomfortable for them. While taking full account of the

wisdom of that caution, I believe that the ethical and practical implications of "disclosure invites reciprocation" also work the other way. That is, collecting research data from participants via interviews, surveys and similar methods invariably makes disclosure a feature of participants' performance. In "normal" circumstances such as everyday conversation, disclosure brings with it for these speakers the right to expect that their recipient will respond in kind and not award themselves the privilege of remaining disproportionately secretive about their own disclosable opinions and activities. Indeed, formal, institutionalised exchanges that are pointedly *not* "everyday conversations" such as police interviews and courtroom cross-examinations constitute themselves as such precisely through practices such as soliciting disclosures from one party, the witness, while privileging the other party, the questioner, with exemption from any normative reciprocation. Thus, it could be argued that the detached, neutralised type of interview and survey research that follows this institutionalised model is the more ethically questionable. In contrast, the involved, active, disclosing interviewer takes steps to honour the norm of reciprocity and speakers' reasonable expectations no less adequately in the research situation than participants would enjoy on any other occasion as part of their normal lifestyles.

Practical considerations

Some practical questions that might arise with regard to the heterogeneous database of *The Compleat Infidel* concern whether and how to define and characterise different kinds of data. In the earlier section on data sources I made a provisional distinction between printed copy, digital media and the spoken word for the purpose of inclusively describing the range of materials that I have collected. Some readers may wonder whether that system of classification has practical consequences for the business of data analysis. Moreover, there may be additional questions about how analysis may be affected. For instance, is it necessary to set down in advance the characteristics of the archetypal research interview, as distinct from other dialogues (newspaper and television interviews, for instance)? What are the crucial differences between works of academic and popular psychology? Is there a basis for distinguishing between different types of journalism?

In this early chapter of *The Compleat Infidel*, prior to the unfolding of the analytic chapters, the stance I am going to take is that any such categorisation must be approached with extreme caution. I propose that classificatory systems

ought not to be imposed *a priori* on the data, according to the analyst's background knowledge or assumptions about the distinguishing characteristics of research, the machinations of different branches of the publishing industry and so on. One of the most fundamental principles in conversation analysis or CA is the *next-turn proof procedure* (e.g., Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) which recommends that the background knowledge of analysts takes second place as an analytic resource to *participants'* orientations to their talk as orderly and constitutive of one or another genre or discursive occasion. Thus, I am going to refrain from passing judgement on the matter of how best to group and define different categories of data. If one category of discourse or discursive context is importantly different from another, that will be revealed in speakers' and writers' behaviours that mark the categories as being different. These differences will properly become a concern for us as analysts at the stage of drawing *conclusions* about the various discursive practices we have witnessed. For now, we have yet to see any evidence from discourse users about whether and how categories need to be treated as *not* substantially the same.

That said, there are two avenues for doubt about how to analyse discourse that deserve a mention here. One concerns the possible differences for analysts between, on the one hand, transcripts of what was formerly live talk and, on the other hand, materials that have only ever existed as written text. The second, related avenue has to do with analysing dialogues and monologues. The question common to both arises from conversation analysis and it asks whether the insights and analytic tools of CA can be productively applied to materials that do not resemble the conversation analysts' usual fare, either because they are textual or because they are monologic.

In his analysis of orally produced but monologic accounts of psychic and paranormal experiences, Robin Wooffitt (1992) asks whether the principles of CA can be legitimately said to have been applied, given that the all-important next-turn proof procedure seems to depend rather heavily on the availability of a second speaker to supply the next turn. He concludes that analysing talk that is not constituted through a turn-taking system may present problems but not intractable ones. Firstly, it is true that CA traditionally treats ordinary conversational interaction as having a foundational or bedrock status (*ibid.*). Far from excluding other kinds of talk from analysis, that treatment has provided a basis for saying how forms of talk other than ordinary conversation acquire a distinctive character. For instance, formalised, institutionalised modes of talk (saliently including divorce mediation sessions: Greatbatch and Dingwall; 1997, 1998) can be theorised according to their adaptation and manipulation of the

conventional procedures for "doing conversation." Secondly, Wooffitt observes that the producers of his monologues about the paranormal did not do so in an interactional vacuum. They told their tales in the presence of, and for the benefit of, Wooffitt-the-researcher. Moreover, the discursive resources on which all speakers necessarily draw are "sensitive to specifically moral and inferential activities negotiated through talk" (Wooffitt, 1992, p. 69). Thus, however passive the recipient, the descriptions put together by these particular speakers could not do otherwise than display their attention to, and interpretation of, the interactional impact of their talk.

What of written texts? Alec McHoul (1987) remarks that conversation analysts have not ignored such materials. Newspaper narratives and more or less scientific texts have been especially attended to. For instance, Mulkay (1985b, 1986) uses conversation analyst Pomerantz's findings about (dis)agreements in conversation (Pomerantz, 1984) and responses to compliments (Pomerantz, 1978) to make sense of epistolary exchanges among biochemists and also the written proceedings of Nobel Prize ceremonies. What Mulkay finds is that both sets of written texts exhibit organisational features that are known to characterise conversational discourse. McHoul himself goes further and argues that this style of analysis should not be confined to obviously non-fictional texts. He undermines the distinction between fictional and non-fictional conversations on epistemological grounds, citing both as instances of Derridean iterability. That is, he argues that speakers and writers draw on shared resources - lexical and compositional conventions - that render discourse meaningful insofar as they are iterable or repeatable. For instance, as McHoul points out, transcripts of "actual" conversation and dramatic texts such as play scripts share a number of devices for indicating things like interruptions, silences and special stress or emphasis on selected bits of speech. It is because of their iteration that devices such as dashes, ellipses and underlining are able to function as devices in which recipients can find intelligible instructions about how to read the surrounding text or speech. This being the case, McHoul argues against treating fictional and non-fictional conversations as inherently different and especially warns against assuming that one is imitative of, or parasitic upon, the other. He then dismantles a short extract of conversation from a novel, *Mr Pye* (Peake, 1972). He discovers that this ostensibly fictional exchange is littered with the "investigables" (McHoul, 1987, p. 100) of orthodox conversation analysis such as blame negotiations, corrections and membership categorisation devices, to name but three.

The overall conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is that whatever the classificatory systems and categorical differences that could be imposed *a priori* on my data (oral/textual; formal/informal; public/private; professional/amateur and so on), it is not necessary to do so for analysis to proceed. The conversation-analytic "proof procedure" can be applied, if not to the letter of the "next turn" then certainly in spirit, as a means of validating analytic claims independently of the analyst's background knowledge or assumptions about how abstracted, idealised categories of discourse (ought to) differ. The point is that if an account of infidelity is at all intelligible, then it is intelligible through its use of iterable, conventional devices and discursive practices. These iterata, their selection and configuration, will unavoidably reveal whatever, in particular, is being treated in that given account as blame-implicative and requiring some defence. If, as you may suspect, the variable *content* of defences turns out to be a function of the varying discursive contexts in which they are produced then the distinguishing features of those contexts will be revealed through the varying discursive practices in which speakers and writers orientate to each context as in some respects distinctive, if not original or unique.

Analytic Procedure

In this section I want to elucidate the range of ways in which the principles of discursive psychology can be brought to bear on the data-base of *The Compleat Infidel*. How is a discursive psychological analysis of these data practically accomplished? With two exceptions, to be addressed at the end of this chapter, my aim here is not that of providing a retrospective account of "what was done" behind the scenes, before the eventual announcement in this document of "the results." One of the particular merits of this form of research (Potter, 1996b; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1995) is the live performance of practical analysis entailed in any presentation of the research findings. In Chapters 3-7 a series of analytic projects awaits us so that readers can witness and indeed become involved in the processes and procedures of research. In each chapter several illustrative "target" pieces of discourse will be examined and dissected, often with the help of supplementary pieces of data. What they reveal about defensive practice will be explicated and displayed. Readers will be able to assess specific interpretations of the data for themselves and reach an informed decision overall

about whether they are leaving *The Compleat Infidel* knowing more about the defensive practices of infidelity discourse than when they arrived. Consequently, this section need not be used to convince readers that the chosen method was adequate to a task long since completed. Rather, the aim is to help readers organise a rudimentary methodological toolkit in preparation for the various analytic projects to follow.

While setting out the three questions that capture the research problem in Chapter 1, I rhetorically constructed a fairly sharp, graphic difference between analysis that takes an aerial view of the data (particularly "mapping the discursive terrain") and analysis that is performed on data in situ, at short range. Here, at the close of Chapter 2, we will benefit from turning down the contrast. Potter (1997, p. 150) adumbrates a more subtle difference, "between a focus on *the kinds of resources drawn on* in discourse and the *practices* in which those resources are used" (emphasis added). Analysis is not a two-stage operation that dispenses with the aerial view before beginning the ground-level work. Rather, different points of analytic focus are ongoing, simultaneous concerns. The focus is necessarily simultaneous and the difference between points is necessarily subtle because, as Ashmore, Myers and Potter wittily point out, studies of discourse and rhetoric have broken down easy distinctions between form and content: "It is not just a matter of how *it* is put; the *it* is mixed up with the *putting*" (1995, p. 322; emphasis in original). This is important because I am about to follow the scheme used by Potter and Wetherell (1994) in proposing five practical activities for the analysis of discourse. They are not linked in any special procedural sequence; the distinctions between them are not sharp or clear-cut. With that caveat, here are five of the things that we will be doing in the analytic chapters of *The Compleat Infidel*.

Using variation as a lever.

In the section on the research problem at the end of Chapter 1, I observed that there is a broad, tacit agreement among users of contemporary, Anglo-American discourse about what sorts of resources may be drawn on to account for infidelity. There is a certain co-operatively maintained consistency of content among defensive accounts. However, there is also a good deal of *variation*, between accounts and within them. Variation is important to notice and investigate when doing analysis because it helps the researcher to get a handle on how the substantive content of a defence translates into actual defensive practice. Accounts for the same phenomenon vary insofar as they are routinely needed by discourse users to do different interactional (or intertextual) things.

Patterns of consistency and variation on the surface of the data can be observed in a fairly organised way. It can be helpful to think in terms of explanatory themes and lines of argument that thread through the whole database but it is also possible to look quite specifically for tropes, popular metaphors, idiomatic expressions and clichés, appeals to items of common knowledge and common sense and so on. For example, one way to defend allegedly infidelitous behaviour is by appeal to an argument that certain behaviours "don't count" as actually being unfaithful. This is the subject of Chapter 3, "Construct a Non-Event." Alternatively, a defence may be founded on the metaphor of addiction as an explanation for sexual behaviour, as we will see in Chapter 5, "Construct a Special Category of Self." To the extent that these specific discursive items cluster together in actual use, the discourse analyst is able to identify distinctive "interpretative repertoires" (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). These repertoires are sets of discursive resources from which speakers and writers shape what I earlier characterised as the prominent features of the discursive landscape.

Variation is also key to identifying points of disparity and disagreement in a given area of discourse. By this I mean to suggest more than that different repertoires are often treated as mutually exclusive and even opposing when speakers are engaged in hot debate. Again, variation often can be observed quite specifically, within small samples of discourse. For example, consider the sentence, "I don't think people who have strong, loving relationships would jeopardize that for a roll in the hay." Here we see an explicit variation between two kinds of description: the rather weighty, worthy, morally-charged formulation "strong, loving relationships" is switched for the light, harmless-sounding "roll in the hay." This is an actual quote from a contribution to a public internet discussion about adultery; the author is defending infidels (including himself) by claiming that many are provoked to infidelity by the very commitments and social arrangements they are accused of having betrayed. The juxtaposition of these formulations evokes a category of relationship that "people in general" accountably *would* risk for a mere roll in the hay: one that is sanctionably "weak" and "loveless" (an idea that the author goes on to develop and make explicit). The contrasting formulations are of analytic interest not because the entities they describe necessarily differ but because of what they reveal about the author's contextualised, interactional concerns.

Looking for rhetorical organisation.

As Potter and Wetherell (1994) remark, there is significant overlap between a concern with rhetoric and the previous concern with variation. The point here is that while discourse users develop arguments by constructing contingent versions of the world, they are simultaneously constructing *against* arguments developed from alternative, competing versions (cf. Billig, 1987, 1991). Again, consider the author of, "I don't think people who have strong, loving relationships would jeopardize that for a roll in the hay." His overall claim that many infidels are provoked into action is not being made out of the blue, à propos of nothing. The author is making his case in the context of a multi-party debate where all participants have been orientating (some very forcefully) to the competing idea that at least as many infidels are sanctionably guilty of wilful damage to their primary relationships. He has a clear rhetorical position: he is arguing *against* that competing version and, *through* that, achieving his own defence. It is useful for analysts of discourse to be able to recognise the features of rhetorical design in people's speech and writing because rhetoric and argumentation are such pervasive features of discourse. They are not limited to face-to-face, obviously confrontational situations (Edwards and Potter, 1992), but can be identified wherever there is controversy, including newspaper reports (ibid.) and internet discussions where participants have the option of signing in under any pseudonym they choose and there is not so much as an email address to tell readers who they really are.

There is a range of features of rhetorical organisation that may be available in a piece of discourse for detection by analysts. One example would be the moulding of an argument around some *logical form*. Some arguments are syllogistic, methodically setting up two premises and drawing a conclusion. This can be a handy strategy for discourse users in a range of rhetorical contexts, such as when making a claim that is likely to be attacked on the grounds that it runs counter to common sense or common knowledge. To take another example, some accounts prepare the ground for their preferred version of the world by *critically pointing out inconsistencies* in, and thus undermining, a relevant alternative version. A third example would be speakers' expression of some reflexively self-characterised *strong view* (Billig, 1989): "the person with strong views is elaborating views in relation to other views, which are being denied and criticised, whether implicitly or explicitly" (p. 211).

Reading the detail.

The details at issue in this strand of analysis are the kind prioritised by conversation analysts, following Sacks's argument that "all the details in a stretch of discourse - the pauses, repairs, word choice and so on - are potentially there for a purpose; they are potentially part of the performance of some act or are consequential in some way for the outcome of the interaction" (Potter and Wetherell, 1994, p. 58). For instance, the dilemma of stake to which I referred in the "fact and interest" part of the discursive action model may oblige discourse users to construct accounts that are more or less factual and convincing. This is especially the case when people are taking on the relatively difficult and controversial task of defending infidelity. The versions of the world produced in such defences need to be able to withstand attack and attempts at undermining from other people's counter-arguments. Analysis of discourse, then, involves examining how robust, apparently disinterested versions are constructed. It involves attention to what Potter (1996a; after Woolgar, 1988) calls the *externalising devices* through which people play down their own constructive activity as speakers and play up the objective, independent reality of the worlds they describe.

How are these manifested in infidelity discourse? Let's consider another quote, again an example from a public internet debate about infidelity. The author, "Meghan," is a woman speaking at length over several turns about her relationship with a married man. At one point in narrating her story, she observes "You can't turn love on and off." We could pick out at least four interesting features of this sentence alone. Firstly, the object being described and commented on is "love." Love is *reified*: it is not presented as an effect or consequence of human behaviour but is introduced as an actual player in the social world where it *does things*, like refusing to be turned off. Secondly, the grammatical subject of the sentence is "you." Not "I" (not Meghan in particular) but an indefinite "you" that is akin to "one" or "people in general." Thirdly, "can't" is in the present tense. The resistance of love to being turned off is spoken of as temporally continuous and ongoing, reaching beyond the specific occasion of Meghan's encounter with it. Finally, the whole sentence is pithy and to the point. The claim about love is presented as something that does not need elaboration or modification with great numbers of clauses. It has a proverbial format that helps to bolster it against undermining (I will make a further discussion of such constructions later, with reference to the analysis of idiomatic expressions of Drew and Holt, 1989). These structural details work together to externalise the power of love, drawing attention away from Meghan's own agentic behaviour in her infidelitous relationship and from Meghan herself as the author of her report.

The sentence "You can't turn love on and off" is, of course, the tiniest fragment of discourse. Were we to analyse it in the context of its surrounding discourse (as will be the practice in the following chapters), there would be much more to be observed about how it contributes to Meghan's construction of a factual-sounding retrospective and prospective account of her relationship. Practices of defensive accounting that rely heavily on drawing attention away from the nature and identity of the person producing the account will be our particular concern in Chapter 7: "Construct a Generic Rationale."

Looking for accountability.

In previous sections of this document I have suggested that there is more to the details of discourse than a visible effort to build factual-looking constructions. More than this, constructions are sensitive to their context in the sense that they display speakers' orientation to their own, accountable status. They display participants' concern with local, situated issues of managing personal accountability and ascribing blame. In this strand of analysis, the sorts of things analysts need to look for importantly include participants' footing and their use of categories, especially to construct various social identities, because of the inferences that are thus made available for recipients of an account about who is to blame and for what. This provision for selected inferences is crucial to the business of defensive practice.

Let me quickly present three simple (indeed, simplified) examples. Firstly, speakers and writers who are recounting their own experiences of being unfaithful sometimes display very explicit attention to the unfavourable inferences about themselves that can potentially be reached by participants from what they are admitting. Interview participants interrupt their own reminiscences to insert formulations such as "this makes me sound really bad doesn't it" and "I know it sounds a bit tacky." Participants in internet discussions, who have just a few lines to introduce themselves and establish the basis of knowledge and experience from which they speak, often begin with such announcements as:

Hello all, I am what you would refer to as the other man. I've read through all the posts and I found that almost all of your views have basis and valid reasoning behind them. Everything I am about to say is said with caring and interest and no hostility is meant or desired...

(Hearst Communications Inc., 1997,
<http://www.homearts.com/cgi-bin/WebX33.htm>)

Secondly, as we will see in Chapter 5, dividing up the world's population into different categories or types of people can be a method of sympathetically

accounting for infidelity. Rhetorical contrasts may be drawn between people who "are and are not capable of" fidelity; people who are dispositionally inclined to being "cheats" and "cowards" versus the rest of the population; "sex addicts" versus "normal" people, to mention but a few. In this way the inference is provided for that selected individuals (often including the person producing the account, not surprisingly) are distinctively *vulnerable* to the temptations of infidelity. By these accounts, not everyone is equally responsible for their actions.

Thirdly, as we will see in Chapter 4, accounting for infidelity can involve the categorisation of various events and objects rather than people. Particular cases of infidelity can be discursively produced as instances of some general category such as "a one night fling" or "a drunken, immature grope." The great advantage of this is that it helps speakers and writers to *resist* possible inferences by recipients that they are, in fact, members of sanctionable categories such as deliberate "cheaters," "philanderers" or generally "that sort of person" who makes a habit of "this sort of thing."

Cross-referring discourse studies.

Finally, analysis always involves cross-referencing to other studies of discourse. Of special relevance to *The Compleat Infidel* are studies where speakers and writers account for (what they treat as) some controversial or even sanctionable aspect of their own lives, experiences, tastes, habits and so on. Similarly relevant are studies where participants speak defensively in situations where their co-participants are (treated as) sceptical or even openly hostile. I will mention just a few of the most salient examples here.

Wooffitt (1992) analyses accounts of paranormal experiences: clairvoyance, contact with ghosts and spirits and so forth. Wooffitt observes that "there is a powerful cultural scepticism about people who claim to have encountered paranormal phenomena" (p. 1); "people who claim such experiences place themselves in an inauspicious position. The mere act of claiming such an experience can lead to assumptions of, at best, crankiness, or worse, some form of psychological deficiency" (p. 2). Accordingly, speakers pay particular attention to the task of convincing recipients that the described experiences *actually* happened. Wooffitt identifies devices such as the standardised format "I was just doing X ... when Y" through which speakers bolster their veracity and reliability. The inauspicious position of defending infidelity may be subtly different to that of claiming encounters with the paranormal. However, there is a common risk of not being believed to which speakers in both positions can be expected to orientate.

Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995; Widdicombe 1993, 1995, 1998) interviewed "punks," "goths" and members of similar "youth subcultures." Their analysis of discourse shows how speakers accomplish such tasks as accounting for "becoming punks," resisting membership of the category "punks," complaining about unfair treatment by non-members of the category and so on. Throughout the discourse participants display concern with a distinctive collection of negative stereotypes and assumptions that are (they claim) routinely applied to people who adopt punk's distinctive appearance. Their strategies for dealing with this problem of negative inference prominently include "doing being ordinary": constructing the identity of an ordinary person. As we will see, this is a strategy also used by defenders of infidelity, who orientate to the ongoing possibility that their behaviours will be interpreted according to a body of highly negative common knowledge about infidels and infidelity.

The data of Atkinson and Drew (1979; Drew, 1978) are transcripts of tribunal hearings in which, for example, police officers are cross-examined about events in which they were involved, especially about their failure to take various sorts of action. The police do not suffer the same problems of identity as Wooffitt's and Widdicombe's participants. However, they are liable to be accused and they are shown to anticipate attempts by co-participants to attribute fault or blame to their behaviour. Atkinson's and Drew's analysis of interactional sequences between witness and counsel pairs reveals a number of fascinating organisational features of the talk. For instance, Atkinson and Drew highlight a strong mutual expectation among participants that the recipient of an accusation should produce some sort of denial in preference to accepting the blame. They also show how defendants construct sets of circumstances that rendered them powerless to act; how defensive use can be made of description rather than providing bald reasons for (in)action; how failure to act can be rhetorically contrasted against failure to take some *other* (even more necessary) action and so on. Though the speakers and writers in the data-base of *The Compleat Infidel* do not, on the whole, find themselves in the situation of being formally cross-examined before a tribunal, they exhibit many of the same discursive behaviours as Atkinson's and Drew's police officers as part of their own defensive practice.

How were the data extracts selected?

Given the size of the data-base from which this study was developed, it would have been possible to include within the chapters of *The Compleat Infidel* a much greater number of extracts of data than the thirty or so which actually appear. Indeed, at one stage in the development of this document, I considered presenting it as two volumes, one devoted entirely to raw data and the other containing the theoretical work and analytic comment. However, it is arguably the case that that mode of presentation would have been unnecessarily cumbersome and certainly it would have made additional demands at the point of reading, since both volumes would have had to be read side by side for the analysis to make sense. Ultimately, even had I adopted this strategy there still would have been decisions to make about where to stop and what to leave out. Take the fourteen research interviews, for instance; there was little in those interviews that was decidedly *not* relevant to some aspect of the analysis, or some theoretical point raised within the pages you are reading now. However, had I reproduced them in full, apart from raising ethical questions about compromising the anonymity of participants, those data alone would have amounted to several hundred pages of text. Add to that the other transcripts of spoken word data and the data originating in print and new digital media and the result would have been impossibly unwieldy. Thus, decisions about what to include and what to leave to one side proved unavoidable.

The decisions were finally made as follows. Firstly, I argue in Chapter 8 that the defensive practices discussed in each of the analytic chapters are characteristically constitutive of certain discursive environments; that is, certain kinds of situations and occasions, some being noticeable as conventionally oral or textual and others not. For instance, one feature of the defensive practice that we shall examine in Chapter 4 is that it has the capacity to function as a *confession* of the type that invites the recipient to view the recounted events from the confessor's point of view, thereby soliciting a response of sympathy or even empathy rather than condemnation, say, or amazement. This explains why it is highly prevalent in texts of a variety that is often called human interest journalism (in contrast to forms of journalism such as "serious news" or "celebrity gossip"). Thus, one criterion for selection was that the extracts appearing here should not be misleadingly *unrepresentative* of the sorts of discursive environments in which the described defensive practices commonly flourish.

Secondly, there was a criterion of economy. For instance, Extract 3.01, the first extract in Chapter 3, is a written response to a survey conducted by one

Susan Quilliam, who went on to publish a report of her findings. The extract takes quite a bit of introducing; it includes mention of who Quilliam is, comments on the nature and design of her study, and features an ancillary extract of data that shows the questions that her participants were responding to. Extract 3.02, the second of four data extracts in the opening analytic section of Chapter 3, illustrates the same discursive practice (a practice which I have called "not commissioning the act") and could have been any one of a large number of possible slices of data. For instance, for the sake of variety, Extracts 3.03 and 3.04 show versions of Not Commissioning the Act being constructed in Bill Clinton's grand jury testimony of September 1998 and in one of my own research interviews respectively. However, the piece of data that I chose to use for Extract 3.02 was generated by another respondent of Quilliam's. As such, it needs no separate introduction and the column inches thereby saved become available for the more important business of doing analysis.

Thirdly, data extracts were selected when it was possible that they could serve to illustrate some analytic point not only in and of themselves but also because of their relationship to data extracts in other chapters or in other parts of the same chapter. For instance, extracts from my interviews with participants Kyle and Emma appear in Chapter 5 and also in Chapter 7. This is because the extracts in question are in themselves examples of discursive constructions such as "poor general aptitude" and "public morality, mainstream society". It is also because, being drawn from the same interviews, they demonstrate that the discursive practices described in Chapters 5 and 7 ("Construct a Special Category of Self" and "Construct a Generic Rationale") are treated by speakers as having a special relationship, such that they convert easily from one to the other and back again as the situation demands. This is not true of all the discursive practices described in the following analytic chapters, but I argue that it is the case with those described in Chapters 5 and 7, and the re-appearance of Kyle and Emma in Chapter 7 supplies the evidence in support of that argument which would otherwise have to be taken on trust.

Overall, the data extracts selected to appear in this document have been chosen in order to make the reader's task of understanding the analytic points and arguments which they support as easily and quickly accomplished as possible. I have made an effort to choose extracts from across the range of sources and media represented in the original data-base, for the sake of interest and variety and to convey an impression of the heterogeneity of that database. On the other hand, that effort has been counterbalanced with an attempt to choose extracts which are not actively unrepresentative of the discursive

environments described in my conclusions, which obviate uneconomical introductory exposition and which are capable of demonstrating more than one discursive practice at a time.

The origin of the five categories of defensive practice

In order for the analysis in the following five chapters to proceed in an organised manner it has been necessary to pick out ahead of time five categories of defensive practice which can now be systematically addressed one by one. It therefore behoves me to say something about how those categories were arrived at. In particular, readers may be wondering whether they were reached by a process of induction from the data set or whether they were more the result of the application of a common-sense, logical or otherwise conceptual analysis of possible defensive behaviours.

I have previously argued against the application to discursive materials of predetermined, conceptual classificatory systems of justifications and excuses. The process of arriving at the five sets of defensive practices discussed in this document has very much been a case of induction from the data. In the classic texts of discursive psychology, the usual method of explaining how this kind of work is done is through reference to the notion of interpretative repertoires, an idea I introduced earlier in this chapter, in the section entitled "using variation as a lever." Each of the five kinds of construction to be discussed in the following chapters can be regarded as the product of a distinct interpretative repertoire. The business of identifying interpretative repertoires is discussed and developed in texts such as that of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1995), Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) and Wetherell and Potter (1992).

In the time and space available here I will not attempt to reiterate all of these authors' work. Suffice to say that the approach to identifying repertoires of Potter *et al.* is noticeably developed in contrast to the method of identifying discourses that is described and applied by Ian Parker and colleagues in the tradition of critical discourse analysis (a topic of discussion in the previous chapter). Put very simply, Parker's approach (e.g., Parker, 1990a) involves using resources that prominently include the analyst's own common sense understandings of what constitutes a topic to group together sets of propositional statements as "a discourse." Thus, one might proceed with an analysis by looking at a range of texts and intuitively grouping together sets of propositions which collectively amount to a family discourse, a Christian discourse, a scientific

discourse and so on. The approach described by Potter *et al.* (*ibid.*) differs in two important respects. Firstly, identifying repertoires relies less on common sense and analysis that is "purely conceptual," and more on examining the rhetorical organisation of particular instances of discourse and the deployment of language therein "as a constitutive part of social practices situated in *specific contexts*" (*ibid.*, p.209; emphasis in original). Secondly, induction from examination of contextualised discursive practice holds open the possibility that institutions such as the family, Christianity and science are constructed and sustained by *multiple* discourses or repertoires which are treated by speakers as distinct and even in conflict with each other.

Let me clarify matters with an example that is foundational to discursive psychology. While Parker's approach permits a largely conceptual identification of a unified scientific discourse, the well-known study of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) looked at the practical business of how scientists described their work and explained their findings, in contexts that included formal, published papers and informal, oral interviews. The results that emerged from this examination of scientists' actual discursive practice were that two distinct interpretative repertoires were in use. On the one hand there was an empiricist repertoire that is characterised by an objective, impersonal vocabulary and grammatical style, assertions that research proceeds according to scientific method, untainted by human factors, and a commitment to the notion that facts speak for themselves, independently of human agency. On the other hand there was a contingent repertoire in which scientific practice and scientific findings were portrayed as much more dependent on speculation and subjective and individualised human qualities such as personality and membership of certain social groups. In this repertoire a more flexible and diverse range of linguistic resources was used and the distinction between hard data and human factors was allowed to blur. Importantly, Gilbert and Mulkay did not stop at remarking the existence of these two repertoires but went on to identify their various uses and functions, which included resolving scientific disagreement and accounting for contradictory findings. Similarly, in *The Compleat Infidel* I have concentrated on concrete, practical examples of infidelity and infidels being defended. From these data I have derived five categories of defensive practice which are not just sets of propositions but which are uniquely characterised by a combination of linguistic resources such as vocabulary and grammatical composition, the substantive content of an argument, and the contextualised use or purpose that each is made to serve.

A related question now arises: to what extent do these five categories of defensive practice form a comprehensive set of the range of possibilities for defence types? There is no doubt that the functional differences between these categories of defensive practice, which are discussed as part of the findings in Chapter 8, emerge so as to display the categories as an orderly system, this giving an impression of completeness as a range of possible defences. The findings are in line with Atkinson's and Drew's (1979) discovery of an orderly system of justifications and excuses in the talk of police officers on the witness stand. Moreover, they are concordant with Wetherell's and Potter's (1992) remarks about the range of responses produced by participants in their research among Pakeha New Zealanders when questioned on the topic of prejudice:

During the course of the interview, most of our sample were asked the following question or some variant of it: do you think Pakeha New Zealanders are prejudiced? Is there much discrimination against Maori people? Our introduction of the topic and typical question format presented an accounting problem for our respondents. Given the negative identity attributed to prejudice, it sets up a certain kind of accusation, or was interpreted in this way. We could thus treat responses to this question as a set which oriented to a commonly occurring discursive situation: dealing with an unwelcome evaluation.

What are the standard discursive moves for coping with a negative evaluation?
(Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 212)

Wetherell and Potter answer their own question as follows. Firstly, they notice that it is possible either to deny an offence outright or admit it in its entirety. Added to that, the standard moves are to "admit the offence but offer mitigations or excuses" (cf. constructing an isolated episode or a special category of self: Chapters 4 and 5 of this document), "claim that one is wrongly accused" (cf. constructing a version of "not prohibited": Chapter 3), "undermine the accusation itself by renegotiating the nature of the offence, recategorizing it as something less negative and more excusable" (cf. constructing a version of "not commissioning the act": Chapter 3, and the generic rationales of Chapter 7), and finally "redirect the accusation to another group of people" (cf. constructing a specific reason for infidelity: Chapter 6).

The concordance of the findings of *The Compleat Infidel* with these other discursively orientated studies is a reasonable basis for confidence that the range of defensive practices described in this document is indeed a complete collection of what Wetherell and Potter call the "standard discursive moves." It is no accident that the system described here resembles those discovered by other discursively orientated researchers, nor that it resembles the orderly systems found in other forms of discourse such as legal classifications of justifications and excuses (the defensive practice of "not commissioning the act" in Chapter 3 is titled by

way of allusion to that legal discourse). It is also not the case that the present system has had to be invented afresh, devised through logical or conceptual reasoning, or borrowed from elsewhere prior to examining the data. The point is that when speakers are obliged to defend themselves, directly or through the defence of various kinds of behaviour, they routinely behave *as though* there is a set of standard moves available to them. They *orientate* to a limited set of possibilities which include renegotiating the nature of the offence, appealing to mitigating circumstances and diminished capacity, passing the blame by producing a specific reason for the contested actions, and so on. This orientation is noticeable in the discursive materials analysed by Atkinson and Drew (1979) and Wetherell and Potter (1992). It is noticeable in the meta-discourse of lawyers and the authors of the accounts literature such as Scott and Lyman (1968). It would be surprising, then, if it were not also noticeable in the discursive materials that form the data-base of *The Compleat Infidel*. There may be variations in the detail of the ways that these standard discursive moves are executed; that is, the details of the constructions through which this range of defensive functions is performed may vary. However, the range of defensive functions itself is hearably a finite one and as such it has been possible to describe and document it in the chapters that follow.

3

Construct a Non-Event

Introduction

Welcome to Chapter 3, the first of the analytic chapters of *The Compleat Infidel*. In this chapter we shall look at the first of five prominent features of the landscape of infidelity discourse: the non-event. Let me begin by explaining what will be going on in this chapter and how it is organised.

As a preliminary measure I shall describe the gross structural characteristics of the non-event as a discursive phenomenon, our object of study. Recall that in Chapter 2 I introduced the idea of *interpretative repertoires* (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Interpretative repertoires are "broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images. [] They are available resources for making evaluations, constructing factual versions and performing particular actions" (Potter and Wetherell, 1995, p. 89; Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 90). At this stage, non-events can be usefully considered as the product of an interpretative repertoire. Speakers and writers who construct a non-event draw on a distinctive set of discursive resources and that is what I shall try to sketch in this section by way of an introduction to the subject matter of Chapter 3.

The middle section of this chapter, "Data Analysis," is where the real work begins. Some extracts of raw data will be presented and readers are invited to join in with their analysis. We shall continue to look at discursive resources but this time in closer detail, searching out and examining specific discursive devices and mechanisms. By "reading the detail," looking for accountability, cross-referring with other discourse studies in rhetoric, conversation analysis and so on, the *construction* and *design* of the unique non-events we are about to examine will reveal something about the interactional *functions* that they are required to serve.

In the final section of this chapter, "Critique and Conclusions," we shall return to the aerial view of the data and draw some conclusions about the overall

function of constructing a non-event as a defensive practice. Moreover, the evidence that the discursive business of constructing a non-event is action orientated will be used to fulfil the critical function of discursive psychology by reconsidering and reworking some salient notions and concepts from selected areas of traditional or mainstream social science.

What is a non-event? The data to be examined in this chapter are all accounts in which infidelity is presented as a singular type of event, defined by the performance of a certain act, in certain circumstances and conditions. Or, to put it more accurately, infidelity is treated as a label, definition or category term that is *precluded* by the *non-performance* of some act, and/or the *non-applicability* of some circumstances and conditions. Recall Bill Clinton's famous statement about Monica Lewinsky: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." Later in this chapter we shall examine an extract from Clinton's testimony at the grand jury hearing of September 1998 in which he carefully constructs a difference between the category of activities denoted by "sexual relations" and a second, remarkably similar category that he terms "inappropriate contact." This construction of *difference* is central to the business of building a non-event.

The dimensions along which the distinction is made are limited in number but nonetheless quite varied. Sometimes the dimension is one of physical activity, as with Clinton's sexual relations/inappropriate contact dichotomy. Similar non-events can be constructed by drawing attention to the difference between "sex" versus "just a case of getting off with one of my friends," "if you actually fuck somebody" versus "having a bit of a fumble," and "doing a whole lot of stuff" versus "having intercourse," to take just a few examples from my data-base. Sometimes the dimension provides for comparison of physical activity with something more cognitive, as in "physical infidelity" versus "mental infidelity," "sex" versus "emotions," "shagging" versus "making love" and so on. Alternatively, the difference between fidelity and infidelity (or the difference between "being faithful" and "being unfaithful," or whatever the category term to be contradicted happens to be on that particular occasion) may depend on a dimension of types or states of relationships, whereby "open relationships" are distinguished from "closed relationships," "just dating" is not the same as "married" and being "together" is crucially different from being "broken up." Accordingly, in the data analysis part of this chapter we shall tackle two varieties of non-event. I have called the first one "not commissioning the act" and it incorporates the distinctions between different kinds of sexual and romantic activities, as

exemplified above. The second variety is called "not prohibited" and it covers the construction of distinctions between different types of relationships.

It is interesting to note that distinctions between categories are usually constructed in pairs (of activities or types of relationship) but this is not inevitably the case. I have a few examples in my data-base of differences between categories being constructed in sets of three. One of my research participants, Johnny, made the following remark in the context of a discussion about what "counts" as being unfaithful: "I think there's three levels, I think there's three levels of (.) looking (.) then there's snogging and then there's intercourse (.) on the highest (branch)." Another interviewee, Emma, speculated that: "if it's not sex but everything but, I don't really consider that (.) um (.) being unfaithful (.) um (.) I think you know sex starts to be (.) bottom line (.) and emotions (.) definitely, I think (.) are unfaithful but then you can't stop yourself feeling emotions." However, the overwhelming majority of distinctions seem to be constructed in twos and these are the kind we will be looking at in the samples of data to follow. Non-events are constructed by dyad-bound infidels and also by third-party infidels, though some of the other defences to be considered later are noticeably preferred by speakers cast in either one role or the other.

As I observed in Chapter 1, the non-events that are the focus of this chapter are produced in the context of people's reports about their own behavioural history and experiences and also their reports of their own attitudes, opinions, beliefs and views about infidelity. For the purpose of comparison let me point out that later chapters in *The Compleat Infidel* will attend to some different kinds of discursive material. For instance, in Chapters 4 and 7 we will encounter some discussions of infidelity in which the authors seem to go out of their way to anonymise their talk, sticking to de-personalised, general theory. In Chapters 5 and 6 our investigations will lead us to some examples of discourse that take the form of reports on the behaviour and cognitions of specific individuals other than the present speaker or writer. I also observed in Chapter 1 that the self-reports to be considered here in Chapter 3 are pieces of discourse in which the speakers and writers characteristically engage in heterogeneous and fairly subtle activities such as making evaluations, expressing ambivalence and being vague. These two observations are not unrelated. I shall discuss the connection between the two in the final part of this chapter and develop my account in contrast to social scientific studies of infidelity that try to distil the simple facts about attitudes and behaviour from just these kinds of self-reports.

It is now time to move on the data analysis part of this chapter and look at some actual instances of non-events, in the twin forms of "not commissioning the

act" and "not prohibited." The objective in this section will be to analyse these non-events and the fairly easy-to-observe similarities and differences of their content in a way that will avoid the mistakes of the approaches that I earlier described as unsatisfactory treatments of infidelity discourse. The aim is to discover something about the effects of constructing a non-event that remains within the arena of contextualised interaction and situated discursive practice. Specifically, we should be able to answer the question of how constructing a non-event actually works as a defence by the end of Chapter 3. Ultimately, this will prepare the way for us to draw conclusions about the variability of the five major defences for infidels and infidelity when we reach the final chapter of *The Compleat Infidel*.

Data Analysis

Not Commissioning the Act

Let us begin without further preamble by looking at some data. Extracts 3.01 and 3.02 appear in a book entitled *Women on Sex* by popular psychologist Susan Quilliam (Quilliam, 1994). *Women on Sex* reports on Quilliam's questionnaire survey of 200 British women on a range of topics to do with sex and sexuality, such as "Dating," "First Experience of Intercourse," "Masturbation" and "Unfaithfulness/Affairs." The questions in the Unfaithfulness/Affairs part of the survey begin as follows (in total, there are eleven questions on unfaithfulness, lettered A-K).

23. UNFAITHFULNESS/AFFAIRS

23A. What do you consider is meant by the word 'unfaithful'?

23B. How important is it for you or your partner to be faithful to one another?
Essential, extremely important, fairly important, not important?

23C. Have you ever been unfaithful to a partner?

23D. How did you feel after the first time you were unfaithful? Was it with someone you knew or a casual acquaintance? How old were you? Did this situation develop into an affair or was it a one-off? Did you tell your partner? If so, how honest were you? How did this affect your relationship? How did this sex compare with that of your relationship?

(Quilliam, 1994, p. 251)

Extracts 3.01 and 3.02 are presented in the "Being Faithful" chapter of *Women on Sex* as examples of participants' original, written survey responses to these questions.

Extract 3.01

01 I had an affair with someone I met at a conference. After the first time, I
02 felt confident, happy, thought everything would work out. We hadn't had
03 penetrative but just oral sex, so I didn't really feel I'd been unfaithful. I told
04 my partner exactly what had happened, very honestly.

(Quilliam, 1994, p. 215)

Extract 3.02

01 Being unfaithful is falling in love with a person other than your partner. I
02 don't consider that having sex with someone other than your partner can
03 always be considered unfaithful; love and sex are not the same thing, and
04 it's the love that counts.

(Quilliam, 1994, p. 206)

These two short extracts are a good place to begin because they exemplify the constructions of difference to which I referred in the introduction to this chapter. Extract 3.01 constructs a difference between "penetrative sex" and "oral sex." Extract 3.02 constructs a difference between "having sex" and "falling in love." Notice that in both extracts the category at issue is that of "being unfaithful" (and not adultery, for example, or infidelity, the category term used most often in the document you are reading now).

These pairs of items (penetrative/oral sex; sex/love) are not merely constructed as two classes of things but as two opposing or mutually exclusive classes of things (cf. Edwards, 1997, p. 237). In technical terms, the pairs of opposing items each form a *contrast structure*, a device that scholars of discourse and conversation have identified in a variety of contexts and occasions. These include political speeches (Atkinson, 1984; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986), market trading (Pinch and Clark, 1986) and accounts of the decline into mental illness of a young woman, "K" (Smith, 1978). It was Smith who originally coined the term "contrast structure." She noticed that when K's friends wanted to present instances of K's behaviour as pathological or anomalous, the description of the behaviour was immediately preceded by a statement that contained instructions about how to see that behaviour as anomalous. For instance: "She would take baths religiously every night and pin up her hair, but she would leave the bath dirty" (ibid., p. 39). As Edwards (1997, p. 237) observes, the pathologising work is done by presenting instances of K's behaviour contrastively against an implied norm. The first part of the contrast provides for certain inferences about the

relative normality, desirability or general accountability of the subsequent, opposing part or parts.

We can see something similar going on in the two data extracts above. In Extract 3.01, "we hadn't had penetrative [sex]" sets up penetrative sex as the normal, defining characteristic of being unfaithful. The subsequent part, "[we had] just oral sex" is displayed as something less than penetrative sex (note the "just") and the inference is made available that what "we" actually "had" fails to correspond to or meet the requirements of that normal, defining criterion. In short, a warrant is provided for the author's rather controversial conclusion that "I didn't really feel I'd been unfaithful."

In Extract 3.02 the author's contrast structure begins with the assertive statement that "being unfaithful is falling in love with a person other than your partner." This provides the defining criterion, the norm against which the alternative behaviour, "having sex," can be contrastively displayed. That is, "having sex" is displayed as *not* being unfaithful. Notice the relative tentativeness of the second part of the structure ("I don't consider that ... can always be considered ..."), a signal that the author anticipates that what she is saying at this point is liable to be challenged or to provoke argument (cf. Hewitt and Stokes, 1975, on disclaimers). Moreover, though she does not make an explicit admission, it would clearly be possible for a recipient to infer from this that "having sex with someone other than your partner" is exactly what the author herself has been up to. Thus, rather than end on that relatively weak note, she rounds off her argument with a robust formulation or summary of her case: "love and sex are not the same thing, and it's the love that counts." This is an *idiomatic* expression (cf. the popular maxim "it's the thought that counts") so it is difficult to rebut (Drew and Holt, 1989).

Extracts 3.01 and 3.02 are fairly simple pieces in which contrast structures are used by Quilliam's respondents to redeem their own admitted or inferable behaviours and recover them from the category of "being unfaithful." Now let's take a look at some data that are slightly more complicated.

Extract 3.03 is an extract from Bill Clinton's videotaped testimony on the Monica Lewinsky debacle to the grand jury hearing of September 1998. Sol Wisenberg, questioning Clinton in this extract, is a representative of the Office of Independent Counsel. The jury is investigating whether Lewinsky or others obstructed justice, intimidated witnesses or committed other crimes related to the sexual harassment case of Jones versus Clinton.

In a deposition about the Paula Jones case in January 1998 Clinton had denied having engaged in sexual relations with Ms Lewinsky. Now, in September, Sol Wisenberg's argument is that Clinton lied about the status of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky that January and also that he was instrumental in the affidavit that Lewinsky filed at the time, saying that she had had "no sex of any kind" with the President. Clinton continues to deny having had sexual relations with Monica. However, in a prepared statement to the jury he *has* acknowledged "conduct that was wrong" and admitted to "inappropriate contact."

Extract 3.03

05	Wisenberg:	Mr. President, these next series of questions are from the grand jurors. And let me you tell you that the grand jurors want you to be more specific about the inappropriate conduct. The first question was – one of the grand jurors has said that you referred to what you did with Ms. Lewinsky as inappropriate contact. What do you mean by that?
10	Clinton:	I mean just what I said. But I'd like to ask the grand jury, because I think I have been quite specific and I think I've been willing to answer some specific questions that I haven't been asked yet, but I do not want to discuss something that is intensely painful to me. This has been tough enough already on me and on my family, although I take responsibility for it. I have no one to blame but myself. What I meant was, and what they can infer that I meant was, that I did things that were -- when I was alone with her that were inappropriate and wrong, but that they did not include any activity that I -- that was within the definition of sexual relations that I was given by Judge Wright in the deposition. I said that I did not do those things that were in that -- within that definition and I testified truthfully to that. And that's all I can say about it. Now, you know, if there's any doubt on the part of the grand jurors about whether I believe some kind of activity falls within that definition or outside that definition, I'd be happy to try to answer that.
15		
20		
25	Wisenberg:	Well, I have a question regarding your definition. And my question is, is oral sex performed on you within that definition as you understood it?
30	Clinton:	As I understood it, it was not, no.

(reproduced from the transcript at <http://www.press-enterprise.com/specialreport/starr/transcriptindex.html>)

At the point of this extract Clinton is trying to maintain at least two things as true: (1) his January claim not to have engaged in sexual relations; (2) his September acknowledgement of inappropriate contact. This discursive endeavour depends on some very fine contrasts and distinctions. There is a serious risk that it will be dismissed as an endeavour of fact construction: its claim to reflect the simple (or complicated) truth of the matter could be undermined by appeal to the

President's expectable motivations and his personal stake in the ultimate outcome of the jury's investigation. However, it is not a project entirely without hope. Amongst other things, Clinton's account is peppered with externalising devices (Woolgar, 1988) and a range of other devices and procedures for constructing versions as external, real and disinterested. Of these, one of the most prominent in this extract is *systematic vagueness* (Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Edwards and Potter (and Potter, 1996a) observe that including a lot of *detail* in an account, perhaps through vivid description, can be a way of bolstering its factuality. It may promote an impression of authentic memory on the part of the speaker or hint at their superior powers of observation as a witness to the described events. However, detail is a double-edged sword. It can easily become fodder for a hostile recipient to ridicule, expose as inconsistent or otherwise undermine. Vague generalisations and clichés are a lot more robust in that respect.

Wisenberg, on behalf of the jury, asks Clinton what he meant by "inappropriate contact." However, Clinton does not answer the question. Instead, he provides an account for *not* answering. First, he suggests that no further explication or clarification is (or should be) necessary: "I mean just what I said," line 8. Then he describes the costs that would be incurred if he were to answer, to himself ("I do not want to discuss something that is intensely painful to me," lines 11-12) and to others ("this has been tough enough already on me and my family," lines 12-13). Eventually he commits himself to the vaguest possible definition of inappropriate contact through his construction of a contrast pair, in lines 15-22. His practical definition of inappropriate contact is so broad and non-specific that it amounts to no more than a residual category for things that don't meet the criteria for "sexual relations."

It is not surprising that Clinton wants to avoid answering Wisenberg's question. Volunteering detailed examples of his and Monica's inappropriate contact cannot help his claim that they did *not* engage in sexual relations. To maintain his self-characterisation as a truth teller (in direct opposition to the prosecution's counter-claim that he is a liar), Clinton needs to avoid getting into an argument about semantics and the positive definition of inappropriate contact. He particularly needs to avoid encouraging the jurors to reach their own, independent decision about inappropriate contact and its inherent difference (or lack thereof) from sexual relations. From his point of view it is infinitely preferable to concentrate on the truthfulness of his claim *not* to have engaged in sexual relations, letting "inappropriate contact" soak up everything that can possibly be excluded from that category of activities. Indeed, this is

what he does. Clinton is not *only* systematically vague about what inappropriate contact might involve. More than this, he actively refocuses the conversation and redirects Wisenberg's attention towards (what he constructs as) the far more relevant category of sexual relations, emphasising in lines 20-26 his positive willingness to answer questions about that category.

There is a technical name for what Clinton is doing here. Building on the work of Woolgar and Pawluch (1985), Potter (1996a) has developed the concept of *ontological gerrymandering*. Potter observes that, "one of the aspects of making any description is that it will pick out a particular range of phenomena as relevant and ignore other potential ones. [O]ne realm of entities is constituted in the description while another is avoided" (1996a, p. 184). This selective categorisation of the relevant and the not-relevant is informed by the speaker's orientation to specific interactional or inferential tasks. Let me clarify the idea with a quick example from another discursive analysis, for the purposes of comparison. The following exchange comes from the Scarman tribunal hearings into violence and civil disorder in Northern Ireland in 1969. A senior police officer, a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, is being cross-examined about his actions (and failures to take action) with respect to a particular occasion and set of events.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Counsel: | So when you baton charged the Catholic crowd for the second time you knew, because of your previous experience, that the Protestant crowd were liable to follow you? |
| Witness: | I did. |
| Counsel: | How far did you drive the Catholic crowd at that time? |
| Witness: | I stopped in Dover Street and nobody went very far past me and no-one went on Divis Street from the Protestant crowd. |
| Counsel: | No-one went very far past you, you say? |
| Witness: | No-one got more than a few yards past me. |
| Counsel: | So some people did go past you? |
- (Atkinson and Drew, 1979, p. 157)

The point made by Atkinson and Drew is that the witness provides a *description* of how far past him some Protestants went: "nobody went very far past me," "no-one went on Divis Street" and so on. Now, that is a mitigating description that attends to potentially blameable failures such as the failure to take action against the Protestant crowd at that point, perhaps driving them back in the direction from whence they came. However, it conspicuously avoids discussing the witness's "failure to prevent Protestant crowds following the police and getting past them in the first place. And there is good sequential evidence that the counsel is treating *that* as the blameable failure" (*ibid.*; emphasis in original). In other words, the police officer's description selects one set or category of phenomena (the extent

to which Protestants got past him) as the ground to be defended, while diverting attention away from another (how they came to be in a position to attempt it).

That is ontological gerrymandering. In Extract 3.03, Clinton describes his relationship with Monica Lewinsky, albeit vaguely. The description picks out one realm of entities to discuss and defend (the extent to which their activities did *not* amount to sexual relations) while ignoring another realm of entities and thus steering away from another potentially blameable issue (exactly what activities Clinton and Lewinsky *did* participate in). As we can see from Wisenberg's contributions in Extract 3.03, *that* realm of entities is the one that the grand jury would like to hear more about.

There is much more that could be said about the design and construction of the Clinton extract. However, it is not practically possible in the eight chapters of *The Compleat Infidel* to analyse as great a number of data extracts as I would like, so I propose to complete this discussion of not commissioning the act with a look at something new. Readers will be able to spot contrast structures, systematic vagueness and ontological gerrymandering in the text and the analytic arguments developed above will continue to apply.

Extract 3.04 is drawn from one of my own research interviews. Lizzy, the participant, is a single woman in her late twenties. The following extract occurs quite early on in the interview (page 8 of the transcript). At the very beginning of our conversation Lizzy offered an interesting monologue on the nature of infidelity. She then wandered round a few related issues such as "how to tell when your partner's making a fool of you" and the subject of Tory wives who publicly "stand by" their unfaithful man. Eventually the talk lapses and Lizzy says "where were we?" Of course, in interactional terms this is not a question in the sense of being a request for information but a cue for us to pull the conversation back on topic. That is where Extract 3.04 commences.

Extract 3.04

- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| | Rachel: | you've raised loads of interesting points there, what I originally wanted to know [was] you said something |
| | Lizzy: | [mm] |
| | Rachel: | about your own sort of track record in being [faithful] |
| 05 | Lizzy: | [mm] |
| | Rachel: | to people [and] I was wondering (.) and I, <u>obviously</u> , |
| | Lizzy: | [yeah] |
| | Rachel: | when somebody says something like that you, the <u>immediate</u> response is to think can I say that? have I ever |
| 10 | | been faithful to anybody? and I wasn't sure what, what I wanted to know was what you meant [by] being |
| | Lizzy: | [mm] |

- 15 Rachel: completely faithful, because I want, I can't answer that question about myself until I know what, what standard we're applying. what being completely faithful to somebody would (.) constitute.
- Lizzy: but I think, as I say I think it's er it's very much an individual thing =
- 20 Rachel: = well right, but I want to know what you meant when you [said] I think you said you hadn't been faithful to anybody [me]
- Lizzy: applying [it] in the strictest [sense] and I'm wondering [um] [right]
- Rachel: what, if you can give me a cl-, mo:re (.) more of a definition of that.
- 25 Lizzy: ri:ght, well basically how I define that in my head (.) in these situations is that I've (.) been going out with someone, obviously sleeping with them and then something else has happened where I've ended up (.) not (.) I've never, I don't think I've ever slept with anybody else other than my boyfriend or whatever
- 30 Rachel: mm
- Lizzy: well (.) once, yeah [laughs]
- Rachel: [laughs]
- 35 Lizzy: bu:t you know (.) ordinarily, it's always been a case of I've got off with someone
- Rachel: mm
- Lizzy: and it's not ended up in sex but you [know] I've been in [yeah]
- 40 Lizzy: bed with someone.=
- Rachel: = ri:ght
- Lizzy: but (.) despite that I do see how it could eas- one thing easily leads to another, just cus I haven't actually physically done it myself while I've been (.) going out with someone (.) um (.) doesn't mean that I couldn't accept it if it did happen.
- 45 Rachel: mm
- Lizzy: but (.) from my own point of view, so far (.) an occasion's never arisen whe:re (.) it's resulted in that anyway.
- 50 Rachel: mm =
- Lizzy: = so (.) I can't really say, I mean I can sa:y, you know (.) what I've done is (.) not probably that bad to most [people] but it's happened, it's been with someone else [mm]
- 55 Rachel: when I'm supposedly seeing one person. (.) and although I haven't had sex with them I can see that it could have easily led to me having [sex] and [therefore] you, you [right] [yeah]
- Rachel: know, it's a very fine line between you know (.)
- 60 Rachel: mm =
- Lizzy: = a sixty nine and a shag! [laughs]

This stretch of data begins with the interviewer (to whom I shall refer in the third person as "Rachel," for the sake of clarity) harking back to a question already asked: "what I originally wanted to know was ..." (lines 1-2). Returning to the question makes available the inference that Lizzy has failed to provide a satisfactory answer the first time round; that she is not performing adequately as an interviewee. Rachel orientates to and works to counteract this possible inference by offering an explanatory account for her enquiry, flagged up by the

"because" in line 13. Indeed, the preparation for this account begins as early as line 6. "Obviously" in line 6 and "immediate" in line 9 are *extreme case formulations* (Pomerantz, 1986) and as such they are members of the category externalising devices that I mentioned above. They help to naturalise and reify Rachel's curiosity to "answer that question about myself" (lines 13-14) which she presents as the account and the explanation for asking the question about "what you meant by being completely faithful" (lines 11-13) a second time.

Now look at Lizzy's reply of lines 17-18. She does not immediately answer Rachel's question in the sense of supplying the requested information. Instead, she offers an account for not answering it, signalled by the "but" in line 17. In Lizzy's account we can see what she takes to be the significant features of the previous conversation turn. "It's very much an individual thing" is an account that explains that she is not able to answer the question (in contrast to not being willing to answer it, for example) and orientates to that question as an invitation to commit herself to formulating an objective, universally applicable standard or definition of fidelity; one that would thereby be applicable to Rachel as well as Lizzy herself. If you are wondering why Lizzy would decline that invitation, in both earlier and later parts of the interview she indicates that she is aware that Rachel has unconventional ideas about infidelity and its (in)significance, which she is very careful to avoid denigrating when she has occasion to disagree. Moreover, the pair orientate to each other as interviewer and interviewee and for Lizzy this partly involves constructing Rachel as someone who knows about infidelity and constructing herself as a lay person who is not to be held accountable for not having thought about it in any great detail. Thus, it is possible that the interactional point for Lizzy of re-emphasising ("as I say," line 16) that "it's very much an individual thing" is that she will not have to get into a confrontation or argument with Rachel about what (or whose) is the correct or the best definition. However, she is willing to talk about infidelity as it exists for "me" (line 21) personally, and elaborate on "how I define that in my head" (line 26). On this "subjective" topic she may become responsible for providing further explication but it would be difficult for Rachel to argue that Lizzy is somehow wrong about such a personal matter (cf. Potter, 1998).

The overall point I want to make here is that, like the speakers and writers considered previously, Lizzy takes an active role in constructing the nature of the questions she is being asked and therefore the range and nature of appropriate and acceptable replies. Compare her discourse in the early part of Extract 3.04 with that of Clinton in Extract 3.03. Clinton's interactional project is to display himself as scrupulously truthful in dealing with the grand jury's questions. Despite -

or because of - the rather contrived and tenuous difference between inappropriate contact and sexual relations, Clinton treats the jury's questions as relevantly requiring simple facts about specific items of his behaviour (as opposed to his personal musings and thoughts about abstract systems of categorisation). This orientation provides for the use of various fact-constructive and externalising devices that draw attention away from his own stake or interestedness in the proceedings. In particular, recall that he attributes the crucial version of "sexual relations" that underpins his January statement to one Judge Wright rather than claiming authorship himself. That is, he refers to an authority figure's official definition of sexual relations and thereby displays himself as not self-interestedly "making it up." In a parallel manoeuvre, Lizzy (a valued, veteran research participant who is not on trial for corruption and not accused of mendacity) is busy with the simpler interactional task of not being drawn into a dispute with Rachel over the true and universal facts about infidelity. Thus, in the answers she supplies in Extract 3.04 (from line 26 onwards), she actively orientates to Rachel's questions as relevantly requiring her individuated, personal views, thoughts, experiences, feelings, attitudes and opinions on the topic at hand.

Lizzy is left with one remaining problem that "not commissioning the act" works to address. We have seen that she resisted and rejected one version of Rachel's question, a version that solicited a generalisable and potentially disputable statement of fact about what (in)fidelity is. She subsequently accepts an alternative version of the question, a version that asks for elaboration on a remark about her own experience that she made earlier in the interview. In Extract 3.04 Rachel initially characterises this as "you said something about your own sort of track record in being faithful" (lines 2-4), which doesn't specify anything about how good or bad that record might be. However, when Lizzy seems to decline to answer in lines 17-18, Rachel interrupts and re-presents her question and this time she formulates Lizzy's remark much more specifically: "you said you hadn't been faithful to anybody applying it in the strictest sense and I'm wondering [] if you can give me [] more of a definition of that" (lines 20-25). What this means is that in accepting the more personal, individuated version of Rachel's question, Lizzy now has to contend with a construction of herself as somebody who, reportedly by their own admission, is chronically unfaithful.

Even at this early stage in the interview Lizzy has expressed considerable personal attachment to the idea of fidelity. As in Extract 3.04, she has carefully displayed a tolerance for the views of other individuals and couples who might not take (in)fidelity very seriously. However, she has also indicated that she herself hopes for fidelity from her partners and generally thinks it valuable and important.

In her answer of lines 26-61, she is visibly concerned to reconcile (what she treats as) these rather conflicting facts: on the one hand, desiring an exclusive relationship; on the other hand, her own persistent failure to be "completely faithful." In a nutshell, her problem is that the unflattering inference becomes available that she demands more from her partners than she herself is able or seriously willing to supply. In everyday terms, this is not fair. Some might even call it hypocrisy.

Lizzy redeems herself by constructing a version of not commissioning the act. Notice the contrast pairs, "I don't think I've ever *slept with anybody else*" versus "ordinarily it's always been a case of I've *got off with someone*" (lines 30-36) and "sex" versus "in bed with someone" (lines 38-40). This is a construction of a classic non-event that provides for her bold claim of lines 33-34: "I haven't actually physically done it myself." Moreover, through this claim, Lizzy's fairness and non-hypocrisy is revealed to generously extend to activities by a partner that are not just equal to but actually slightly greater than she herself is guilty of. "It's a very fine line between [] a sixty nine and a shag" (lines 59-61) is the culminating moment of Lizzy's display of non-hypocrisy. The brilliant thing is, of course, that even making the distinction in the first place (however fine the line) is isolating and distinguishing two crimes of different magnitude and making sure that Lizzy is safely positioned on the *less culpable* side of the fence.

Not Prohibited

As before, the best introduction to this line of defence is to look at some data in which we can witness it being constructed. Extract 3.05 is another extract from the interview with Lizzy, this time taken from much later on in our conversation (page 50 of the transcript). The story that Lizzy recounts in this extract is quite long but it is a fascinating piece of discourse so I have reproduced it here in full. Just to briefly introduce the main characters, Doug is a married man with whom Lizzy had an affair. Kim is his wife. Earlier references to Doug and Kim in this interview indicate that they had an "open" (i.e., sexually non-exclusive) relationship around the time that Doug and Lizzy were involved, although this is about to become rather an issue in the lines that follow.

Extract 3.05

Rachel: have you ever been um (.) told off by an angry (.) wife or girlfriend?

- Lizzy: yea:h oh god yes I have, yeah
- 05 Rachel: [smiling voice] te:ll me, [tell me about it] and then I'll tell
Lizzy: [oh, you know]
- Rachel: you one of mine
- Lizzy: [smiling voice] all right then, I think, I think you know about
this one anyway it's basically when um (.) that dreadful
night of Doug's birthday
- 10 Rachel: oh tell me that story, I love that story
- Lizzy: [laughs]
- Rachel: go on [laughs] I really want you to
- Lizzy: all right, I haven't told this for a:ges actually so you'll have
to bear with me, no, we all went to Doug's birthday do,
15 Doug had decided to invite the whole of C- [their home
town] to his [laughs] birthday do at the Slug and Lettuce
[a large pub] and was consequently very disappointed
when only thirty people turned up [laughing]
- Rachel: right
- 20 Lizzy: [laughing] and I know the feeling after the other
weekend [laughing] but anyway that's another story (.)
- Rachel: [laughing]
- Lizzy and um (.) we all went along you know, everyone was
determined to make (.) the most of it (.) and um (.) no, I
25 don't want, I'm off cigarettes [actually]
- Rachel: [are you]
- Lizzy: yeah, thanks anyway (.) and (.) we went along to the
Slug (.) and I hadn't really made much of an effort I just
sort of thought, we'd all gone alo:ng and sort of thought
30 make the most of it for Dou:g and then um (.) Kim turned
up [and she'd ob-]
- Rachel: [what, what was] their marital status at this stage?
were they separated or married [or (xxx)]
- Lizzy: [they were living in the
35 same house] they were living in the same house and I
think still sleeping in the same bed
- Rachel: did she know about you?
- Lizzy: yeah, he'd mentioned me, he'd mentioned me, but
bearing in mind by the time we went to this do I'd already
40 finished with Doug because I'd [decided] I was going to
[ri::ght]
- Rachel: try to make a bit of a [play for Jack] so I'd already
- Lizzy: [okay, right]
- Rachel: decided to sever the ties at this point
- 45 Lizzy: okay, good
- Rachel: so we'd broken up, we'd gone out and (.) Kim turned up,
she'd obviously really made an effort with her (.)
appearance [laughing] and so on, and Lina turned to me
and said (.) put it this way Lizzy, if this was the Eurovision
50 Song Contest, she'd be Switzerland and she'd have nil
points [laughs]
- Rachel: [laughs]
- Lizzy: well, she was wearing a ra ra skirt, so [laughing] very sort
of European er [dress sense] but anyway I digress and
- 55 Rachel: [mm]
- Lizzy: [laughs] anyway I thought well I'll gauge how Kim is with
me: as to how I behave [so] (.) Kim was very frosty
- Rachel: [yeah]
- Lizzy: whenever I met her and I thought right fine I'll keep out of
60 your way, so that's what I did and then at the end of the
night Doug had already arranged to go to Peacock's [a
nightclub] with a load of people and we wanted to go to
Rush [another club] (.) and cus he wanted to spend his
birthday with me =
- 65 Rachel: = mm =

- Lizzy: = he was in a real dilemma so he ended up dragging half of his party along to Rush and Kim was doing the real dutiful wife bit at this point =
- 70 Rachel: = mm =
Lizzy: = a:ll over him for my [benefit] and then as soon as we
Rachel: [yeah]
Lizzy: got into the club she copped off with another bloke
Rachel: really
Lizzy: [laughing] yeah and then (.) Lina and I were just having a nice girly time on our own and Doug kept tagging along and really getting on our nerves and er it just
75 degenerated into (.) Dou:g (.) telling Tony to fuck off [laughs] because he was presuming to know more about Kim than he did and then he punched up Tom Snelling
80 Rachel: [laughing] [that was] that must have been the high point
Lizzy: [laughing] [er]
Rachel: of the evening, [I'm sure] [laughing]
Lizzy: [oh yeah] [laughing] I missed that bit though, I only heard him (.) cus he told me [about it]
85 Rachel: [good for
Doug,] most sensible move on his part, probably the only one all night = [laughing]
Lizzy: [laughing] = yes (.) and then he told me to fuck off because I'd never loved him and how dare I say I love him cus I never did blah blah blah and so I just walked off and left him [laughs]
90 Rachel: mm
Lizzy: and like the five of us were waiting for a ca:b and Doug comes running up and says (.) I've done it and I said oh what's that and he said you know I, I've left Kim for you, I wanna move in with you and I'm like what [laughs]
95 Rachel: [laughs]
Lizzy: and he was like I want an answer now, what do you want, I said Dou:g, no way and he was like why not why not and I was like (.) no no I said it wouldn't last together for fi:ve minutes and he got in a real mood and stropped off and then Kim turns up arm in arm with this guy [laughs] saying where's Dou:g and we were like (.) [shrugging] she says oh fine fucking friend you turned out to be (.) and Lina was like well you're the one who took the marriage vows dear [laughing] like this, so she went off with her boyfriend and then a bit later on her and Doug were in the queue together, Doug came down and then proceeded to have a go at Anne because he'd asked for her advice about the situation and Anne quite sort of re:asonably had said (.) well if you'd have been prepared to offer Lizzy a bit more maybe she'd think more seriously about a lo:ng term relationship and so on (.) so he'd done this great sort of (.) grand gesture on [her advice] and he
100 Rachel: [mm]
Lizzy: was out for revenge so he was having a real go at her, about look where it's [got me] [laughing] you're going to
Rachel: [right]
Lizzy: suffer for this (.) Anne was reduced to a sort of quivering mass [laughing]
105 Rachel: yeah =
Lizzy: = so she was crying Mac was comforting her [I went over]
Rachel: [oh god]
Lizzy: to see if she was all right, bearing in mind there was about a hundred people in this [laughing] taxi queue
110 Rachel: yea:h
Lizzy: and um (.) I went over to see if she was okay, next thing I knew I had this screa:ming harridan [laughing] lurching

- 130 herself at me shouting (.) you know, you, you're playing so
hi:gh and mighty and all this time you've been SHAGGING
MY HUSBAND like this [laughing] [and I'm like o:h] and she
Rachel: [oh my g:od]
Lizzy: said and he said and he said you were crap and I just
turned round and said oh that's not what he's told me
135 and the next thing [laughing] like this cat fight was
breaking out [laughing] and she had her hands round my
throat and she was choking me and you know when
somebody really, you know
- Rachel: mm
140 Lizzy: my space gets violated when someone strange sits next
to me on the bus you know, and you've got somebody
with their hands round your throat and you're just thinking
(.) I don't wanna be here, you know, I don't, you know,
dignified [laughing] [aloof]
145 Rachel: [yea:h]
Lizzy: you know and there was her behaving like a complete
fishwife [laughing] and er (.) you know Lina apparently
had to drag me away from her cus I was gonna go after
her at one point [laughing] you know when you get really
150 a:ngry [and you just] forget everything, you just think oh I
Rachel: [yeah]
Lizzy: oh I can take on, you know (.) Mike Tyson [[laughing]] the
Rachel: [yeah]
Lizzy: the way I feel at the moment so: (.) it was just a bit
155 horrendous really but that's, and the:n (.) when I got back
he:re I was completely numb by this time anyway and
then er (.) Doug phoned up and he was like (.) I've lost my
wife, I've lost my house, I've lost my child (.) what are you
gonna do about it and I'm like [laughing] I'm sorry Doug,
160 but you brought this on yourself, I said I finished with you
about a month ago, [you know] this has nothing to do
Rachel: [yeah]
Lizzy: with me and (.) he just started re::ally sort of (.) having a
dig and just really reduced me to you know, reduced me
165 to tears and he was being really [awful] oh he was
Rachel: [go:d]
Lizzy: oh he was horrible, you know
Rachel: mm
Lizzy: really scre:wed up and u:m (.) so that's how it all ended
170 but my experience of (.) you know an ex wife, a wife, has
been (.) most unpleasant I have to say, I wouldn't
recommend it to anybody, [it was er] quite distressing at
Rachel: [yea:h]
Lizzy: the time, I remember being scared to even (.) stay here
175 by myself, on the Saturday Anne and Mac went out and I
went round to see Pete and Jenny because I knew (.) he
wouldn't know where they lived [and I thought] (.) cus
Rachel: [mm]
Lizzy: he's so (.) unpredictable, I mean he came round on the
180 Saturday (.) to deliver all his presents that [laughing]
everyone had bought him cus he didn't want to accept
gifts from all these [horrible people]
Rachel: [[tuts] oh my god] how dramatic
Lizzy: I kno:w, well you know, I was quite pleased actually, but
185 [general laughter]
Lizzy: they were really good presents that I bought him so you
know I, I did quite well out of it to be quite honest
Rachel: [laughs]
Lizzy: but um (.) I was sat up in my room just shaking, waiting for
190 him to go cus I thought [I just don't] wanna see [him]
Rachel: [mm] [yeah]

- 195 Lizzy: I just don't think I could handle it you know, but (.) I think part of it was because I didn't see why I should have to go through all that hassle over a relationship that I knew was transient anyway [and yet] she was getting completely
- Rachel: [mm]
- Lizzy: up in arms, arms about it, supposedly having advocated this open relationship in the [first place] and I thought well
- Rachel: [mm]
- 200 Lizzy: if you can't stand the heat da:rling [laughing] you know get out the kitchen

As with versions of "not commissioning the act," versions of "not prohibited" are built on the foundations of a contrast structure. In this case the mutually exclusive categories are not types of sexual and/or romantic activity but types or states of relationships. Following Extracts 3.01 and 3.02 I noted that contrast structures tend to be designed so that one part provides instructions about how recipients should understand the normality, desirability or general accountability of the counterpart(s). Thus, in the case of constructing a version of not commissioning the act, "penetrative sex" or "falling in love" might be presented as the normal, defining criterion for "being unfaithful," making available for recipients the inference that "oral sex" and just "having sex" are accountably and legitimately to be excluded from that troublesome category of activities. "Not prohibited" works in a similar way. The interesting thing about the contrasting types or states of relationships that are brought together in constructions of "not prohibited" is that typically one is presented as the normal or default condition for a relationship to be in while the other is displayed as an anomaly or unusual exception to that general rule.

In Extract 3.05 the anomalous state is that of being in an "open relationship," as we can see from lines 192-201 in which Lizzy finishes off with a punchy summary and upshot; a *formulation* of her case (e.g., Heritage and Watson, 1979, 1980). In their analysis of news interviews, Heritage and Watson found that formulations allow speakers to package and thereby re-constitute the character of the immediately preceding talk. That is, just in case there is room for any confusion on Rachel's part about who is really in the right in the story about the dispute between Lizzy and Kim, or perhaps any doubt about which of the various disputes in this story is the important one, Lizzy's formulation clears the matter up. "She" - Kim - was "up in arms" *despite* "supposedly having advocated this open relationship in the first place" and it is principally the open state of the relationship that makes Kim's anger appear unwarranted and unjustified, leading Lizzy to a conclusion which has the considerable fact-constructive force of a well chosen idiom (Drew and Holt, 1989): "if you can't stand the heat [] get out the kitchen."

Notice that while the unusual or anomalous condition of an open relationship is explicitly formulated and highlighted in line 198, the contrasting state of a closed (i.e., sexually exclusive) relationship is taken for granted in Lizzy's story and is not treated as needing an explicit mention or reference to mark it off as the preferred, normal state. I want to expand on this point with reference to Heritage's thoughts on *double constitution and the logic of normative accountability* (Heritage, 1984, p. 115; and see Heritage, 1988; Potter, 1996a). What does it mean to say that this unmarked state of sexual exclusivity is normal?

To begin with, it does not mean that people in exclusive relationships are simply acting out of obedience to governing social rules, while infidels and people in open relationships are breaking them. Rather, people's conduct in and treatment of these kinds of situations is normatively organised. When a couple is (represented as) "in a relationship," there is an expectation that things like sexual exclusivity will naturally obtain or at least be relevant. There is no necessary causal determinism; evidently at least some people succeed in not being sexually exclusive with their partners. What is more, the absence of exclusivity (e.g., an open relationship) is not an exception that undermines the expectation of exclusivity. Encountering (a report of) such a relationship is not an occasion to conclude that actually there is no expectation of exclusivity attached to relationships in general. Rather, phenomena such as open relationships are treated by ordinary discourse users as affording a range of contingency accounts and inferences. For instance, "the couple must be mutually unsatisfied or perhaps sexually incompatible," "they must be a bit kinky and perverted" and so on. Lizzy hints at a further possibility regarding the relationship of Doug and Kim. With the heavily ironised "supposedly" of line 197, Lizzy anticipates that Kim's attempt to strangle her could be explained in terms of Kim not having agreed to an open relationship at all. Certainly, this is strongly implied by Kim's, "you've been SHAGGING MY HUSBAND" in lines 130-131. Through "supposedly," Lizzy is able to acknowledge the existence of this possibility while also emphasising that as far as she knew, an "open relationship" was indeed the current state of play.

The thing to notice about the norm of exclusivity is that it is available for use as an interpretative framework for a relationship, whether the relationship is in fact closed or open. Thus, witnesses do not only construct and maintain the more usual, closed sort of relationship as "normal" by treating it in accordance with the norm of exclusivity. They also use the same norm to notice and comment on relationships that deviate from it. In Heritage's terms, then, "the norm [of exclusivity] is *doubly constitutive* of the circumstances it organises" (Heritage, 1984, p. 108; emphasis in original). "It provides both for the intelligibility and

accountability of 'continuing and developing the scene as normal' and for the visibility of other, alternative courses of action" (ibid.).

One point arising from this is that norms such as norms to do with sexual exclusivity do not exert an effect on pre-defined objects and circumstances. Rather, they are *reflexively* constitutive of the objects and circumstances to which they are applied. The "open relationship" that Lizzy says Kim agreed to is only an intelligible object because of the reflexive application of the norm of exclusivity. One might say that such norms are interactional, discursive resources through which the reflexive construction of "couple relationships" and other objects and events in the social world becomes possible.

A second point is related to the above observation that phenomena such as open relationships which deviate from the norm are liable to be noticed and explained by a range of contingency accounts. It is the *deviation* that is treated as in need of explanation and so the normality of (for instance) closed, sexually exclusive relationships is provided for even though it only becomes visible "in the breach" (Heritage, 1984, p. 116). There are no explanations for "normally" exclusive relationships unless one cites the norm of exclusivity itself. In contrast, breaches of the norm are equipped with a range of explanatory accounts. Thus, normative accountability is not a free-standing rule that individuals and couples may choose (or be reported as choosing) to comply with or break. Rather, normative accountability is the framework against which whatever is done and whatever kind of relationship seems to have been organised will be viewed and assessed.

Let me bring this possibly rather abstract discussion back to the data in Extract 3.05. Two fairly simple points remain. Firstly, we can see that Lizzy uses a version of "not prohibited" based on the dichotomy of open and closed relationships to shore up her moral position by the end of her report. This is not an easy task, given Rachel's initial question of lines 1-2. Users of "not prohibited" talk about times when they were or could have been unfairly accused of infidelity by other people. Their problem is to construct a scenario that plausibly provides for: (a) the speaker being correct about the state or status of the relationship, and (b) another involved party firmly subscribing to a different version. Thus, if Lizzy is to fulfil Rachel's request and come up with a self-report (certainly the normatively accountable or preferred option, given her role as interviewee), the next immediately foreseeable interactional concern for her is that if she fails to tell the story "right" it might sound as though Kim actually had something to be legitimately angry about. Having accepted the invitation to supply a personal report that meets the requirements of the question, Lizzy needs to tell a plausible

story about how she was angrily "told off" without appearing to have deserved it. If she makes Kim's position seem too unreasonable (for instance, by claiming that no relationship had ever existed between herself and Doug), there is the risk that she will be heard as "making it up" because of her personal stake in the business being reported, perhaps making crucial omissions in her account of her own behaviour that would otherwise make sense of Kim's complaint.

How, then, does Lizzy account for Kim's being "completely up in arms" (lines 195-197)? I have already mentioned the ironised "supposedly" that acknowledges that Lizzy may have been given wrong information about what Kim had agreed to, although Lizzy herself acted in good faith. However, if Kim did in fact advocate this open relationship then she was wrong to do so, being clearly of the wrong temperament, as indicated by Lizzy's "if you can't stand the heat [] get out the kitchen" (lines 200-201). That is, Kim becomes accountable for being in the kitchen in the first place. Moreover, notice that Kim suddenly turns into a "screaming harridan" in line 128. We have only just seen Kim being reasonably civil to Lizzy as she saunters along arm in arm with her boyfriend in line 102. Kim's behaviour is made to look like a sudden fit of jealousy or a tantrum. She is presented as erratic and perhaps irrational. One minute she's holding Lizzy accountable for not knowing where Doug is ("fine fucking friend," line 104), the next she's initiating a "cat fight" (line 135).

Secondly and finally, remember that in this story Lizzy is a third-party infidel. I have already referred to the norm of exclusivity that is available for reflexively constituting dyadic infidelity as a bad thing. In Extract 3.05 the defensive practice of constructing a version of "not prohibited" also constitutes third-party infidelity as a form of behaviour that is in need of an account. Lizzy's point seems to be that (as far as she knew) Doug and Kim were in an open relationship and because of that she was legitimately entitled to some sort of otherwise infidelitous relationship with Doug, at least "transiently" (cf. line 195). In other words, had they not been in an open relationship (or had Lizzy been informed that they were not) then her own relationship with Doug would have been a blameable matter.

Again, there is a doubly constitutive norm at work here. In this case it is a norm that can be characterised as "do not have sexual relationships with married men" (cf. "you've been SHAGGING MY HUSBAND," lines 130-131). That this has been the nature of her relationship with Doug, Lizzy does not deny (consider line 134: "oh that's not what he's told me"). However, she does treat it as in need of an account, namely that it was not prohibited by virtue of being an open relationship. This is normatively organised discursive behaviour; "not prohibited" successfully manages this particular speaker's accountability but reflexively

constitutes the general category of third-party infidelity as a bad thing. It is interesting because, on first approaching data in which infidels take the opportunity to defend themselves, we might have expected their talk to soften or mitigate the "badness" of the category but there is definitely a sense in which it keeps the badness in play. This is a topic to which we shall return in the next chapter.

Critique and Conclusions

We have now come to the final part of Chapter 3 and so I would like to return to an aerial view of the data and draw some conclusions about the overall defensive practice of constructing a non-event. In the data analysis section of this chapter we have examined two varieties of non-event: "not commissioning the act" and "not prohibited." At the outset, I characterised the differences between these two versions of constructing a non-event in terms of their gross *content*. Not prohibited refers to a category of accounts that build a contrast between different types and states of relationships. Not commissioning the act describes accounts that build a contrast between different types of romantic and sexual activities. Subsequent to analysing the data, I suggest that these methods of constructing a non-event vary meaningfully, in their *design* and their *interactional effect*.

Versions of "not prohibited" are produced as narratives of personal experience in which speakers describe occasions when they were or could have been wrongly accused of (third-party or dyadic) infidelity. However, versions of "not commissioning the act" tend to be produced in more abstracted, temporally non-specific terms. Moreover, versions of "not commissioning the act" are more abundant than versions of "not prohibited" in my data-base.

Look again at Quilliam's survey questions at the start of the section on not commissioning the act, just above Extract 3.01. Question 23A asks "What do you consider is meant by the word 'unfaithful'?" and this is just the sort of question that versions of not commissioning the act are suited to answer. It solicits a subjective view, opinion or perspective on a conceptual category. Question 23C asks "Have you ever been unfaithful to a partner?" This is a different sort of question that solicits a report about a temporally specific, personal experience. Clearly, questions such as the latter which deal with instances of personal behaviour have

more potential to incriminate the respondent and provide for unflattering inferences about their character than questions which solicit points of view on matters of public debate.

In providing their written replies to section 23, Quilliam's respondents have some opportunity to choose which questions to focus on, and their constructions of versions of not commissioning the act show that they prefer to concentrate on the temporally non-specific, conceptual category type of question. Answering one question can be a way of not answering another. That is, speakers produce versions of "not commissioning the act" rather than versions of "not prohibited" because they *may*; because the discursive situation in which they find themselves permits it. In contrast, when speakers produce versions of "not prohibited" it tends to be in response to situations that more directly imply the respondent's personal experience of infidelity (or at least accusations thereof) as a relevant feature of their category membership as a research participant: a good example is Rachel's question to Lizzy at the opening of Extract 3.05. Moreover, it should be noted that "not prohibited," a collection of accounts of "open" and terminated relationships, has the distinctive feature of co-implicating the *victim* of infidelity in their own downfall. This may lend "not prohibited" some extra rhetorical force. However, it also makes "not prohibited" a more controversial, inflammatory kind of account and so it may be the case that versions of "not prohibited" are characteristically restricted to situations such as Rachel's highly sympathetic interview with Lizzy, where criticising the victim of infidelity is a permissible course of action.

At the beginning of this chapter, as well as constructing differences between "not commissioning the act" and "not prohibited," I constructed certain similarities. That is, I was able to provide an overall description of a non-event in terms of its gross content. The data examined here are accounts in which people use constructions of difference between one thing and another in order to preclude the application of labels and category terms such as infidelity and being unfaithful to one of the items that they mention. We can now understand the non-event in terms of its interactional function.

The point of constructing a non-event is that it *exonerates* the speaker. In later chapters we will meet some defences that share with the non-event the feature of high *distinctiveness*. This term is one I have borrowed from attribution theory (e.g., Brown, 1986) and it captures the idea that inferences about the cause of some particular infidelity become available through comparisons against whatever is known about the infidel's usual or normal behaviour. Infidels who use defences of high distinctiveness construct versions of themselves in which

they are presented and displayed as *not* habitually or characteristically unfaithful, thus providing for recipients' inference that if they were unfaithful on some particular occasion, the cause must have been something in the external world rather than something interior to the individual such as their own private, deliberate motives and decisions (this constructive complementarity of the internal and the external will become relevant again in later discussions when I shall refer to the work of Edwards and Potter, 1992, on world- and self-making). Within defences of high distinctiveness, some admit high consistency of the particular infidelitous relationship at hand (that is, they admit it is presently continuing and perhaps has a future) while some mitigate their offence by claiming low consistency (i.e., they claim that the particular infidelity at issue was a brief one-off and is now over). However, the speaker or writer who constructs a non-event effectively claims zero consistency; they claim that the infidelity of which they are, were or might be accused simply never happened. They clear themselves; that is what I mean by exoneration.

In the above discussion of Extract 3.03 (and in the final section of Chapter 2) I mentioned Atkinson's and Drew's (1979) discursive study of the Scarman tribunal hearings. Their analysis of the interactional sequences between witness and counsel pairs culminates in the discovery of three major types of defensive practice: a justificatory defensive practice and two types of excuses. The practice of constructing a non-event bears a marked resemblance to Atkinson's and Drew's justificatory defence type (*ibid.*, pp. 155-160). Most importantly, the type 1 (justificatory) defence occurs *prior* to counsel's specific noticings of the witness's failure to take action. It is volunteered by the witness as soon as the threat of an accusation of failure to act starts to loom and thus the witness is able to "choose which out of a possible set of projected failures to mitigate, thus selecting the grounds for his defence" (Atkinson and Drew, 1979, p. 157). As we have seen, speakers and writers who construct a non-event also anticipate trouble ahead of any direct accusation or questioner's confirmation of themselves as blameable infidels. They volunteer their non-events when unfavourable inferences about themselves begin to threaten and, like Atkinson's and Drew's participants, clear themselves with devices and techniques such as ontological gerrymandering.

This chapter has focused on the categorisations and the evaluative discursive practices involved in constructing a non-event. We have examined these practices as defensive manoeuvres that are sensitive to speakers' and writers' local, situated concerns with managing accountability. I hope I have made it

clear that people's self-reports of their attitudes and behaviour are action orientated and indeed *constitutive* of the things they describe, not merely reflecting a world that existed before the report.

Chapter 3 has thus followed up some theoretical points that were initially raised in Chapter 1. I have said that I will develop my account of the action orientation of this discourse in contrast to social scientific studies which try to glean the truth about people's attitudes to infidelity and their actual behaviour from self-reports, by means of questionnaires, surveys and polls. At first glance, evaluative statements about "how I define infidelity in my head" and categorisations of events and behaviour that distinguish sex from love and open from closed relationships often appear to be reasonably direct and transparent pieces of reportage. Some social scientists, too - in Chapter 1 I listed Wellings *et al.* (1994) and Michael *et al.* (1994) and many others alongside Quilliam (1994) - have taken insufficient notice of the reflexive, normatively organised and interactionally functional nature of these kinds of discursive practices. It is now easier to see why that should be regarded as a problem. The survey approach to studying human societies (e.g., the "sexual attitudes and lifestyles" of the British nation) runs into difficulties in at least two areas.

Firstly, this sociometric approach *idealises* the object of reports and *translates* participants' responses into analysts' own categories (cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987). For instance, Quilliam's question 23A ("What do you consider is meant by the word 'unfaithful'?") seems to acknowledge that "unfaithful" potentially means different things to different people. However, in her write-up of her findings (Quilliam, 1994) she seems bent on drawing conclusions that depend on treating the category of "being unfaithful" as a pre-discursive, real-world activity, instances of which can be aggregated across a whole sample of research participants' reports (cf. questions 23B and 23C). For example, in her chapter on "being faithful" Quilliam announces that, "As many as 69 per cent of women have, at some time or another, been unfaithful to a partner. Just under a third, only, have stayed faithful to their partners throughout their lives" (Quilliam, 1994, p. 212). A few pages later she continues, "Up to 59.5 per cent of women have at some point had an affair with a married man" (p. 217). These kinds of statistical calculations are only possible because of the practices of idealisation and translation. Let me supply a couple of quick examples of those practices to clarify matters.

Quilliam's analytic version of "unfaithful" is idealised compared with its manifestations in the language of her participants. That is to say, individual mentions of "being unfaithful" are likely to have been regularised, meaning that

Quilliam will have ignored or tidied away any crossings-out and other such evidence of participants' various momentary hesitations and repairs. Furthermore, individual references to being unfaithful will necessarily have been decontextualised, excised from the text in which they were originally, specifically produced in order to make a contribution to a quantitative summary. Rather than attending to the subtleties and specificities of discursive practice, statements such as "69 per cent of women have been unfaithful" depend on a researcher's idealisation of "being unfaithful," a kind of philosophical stipulation of a category that precedes and is superordinate to specific cases and occasions of its application (Edwards, 1997).

Translation comes in when the researcher makes independent decisions about what kind of activity participants are involved in when they produce responses to questions such as 23A, B and C. The aim of Quilliam's survey is not to discover how capable people are at filling in questionnaires (cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987) but to identify "the way women see sex today" (Quilliam, 1994, p. 1) and of course to discover something about those women's actual sexual histories and practices. The unspoken assumption is that the survey respondents are unanimously engaged in expressing their enduring attitudes and views and reporting items of knowledge about their experiences. Participants' responses are thus translated into the researcher's unacknowledged, underlying categories to do with cognition and behaviour.

Now recall the data that Quilliam had to work with, for instance, Extract 3.01. Here, in what is apparently a piece of continuous prose, the respondent admits, "I had an affair" but also remarks, "I didn't really feel I'd been unfaithful." From Quilliam's point of view, is this respondent one of the 69% who have been unfaithful to their partners? The status of the superordinate, analytic category scheme of "being unfaithful" becomes questionable when applied to this actual discursive material because clearly there is no objective way to decide whether the respondent has been unfaithful or not. To the extent that Quilliam must have made that decision about this and other pieces of discourse in order to reach her figure of 69%, the rules for correct and appropriate application of the analytic category of being unfaithful have depended on unarticulated theories of sexual relationships and behaviour. Moreover, as we can gather from the data analysis performed earlier, the author of Extract 3.01 makes use of various known discursive devices and techniques which show that her words are attuned to specific contextual, interactional issues to do with managing credibility and accountability. For instance, she uses rhetorically potent contrast structures and, at specific junctures, inserts various externalising devices such as extreme case

formulations. Indeed, this is what we would expect and there is every reason to suppose that every one of Quilliam's research participants produced material that exhibited some kinds of sequential, organisational features in a manner concordant with their authors' particular concerns. Once the existence of these features has been noticed, a sociometric approach to analysis that translates unique and interactionally sensitive discursive constructions into neutral, homogenised "answers" or transparent reports is revealed as not wholly adequate for coping with the data.

The second area where the sociometric approach encounters problems is that of *variability*. In order for aggregate findings to be compiled on matters such as how women see infidelity, women's attitudes to infidelity and so on, variability in the discourse of individual respondents has to be ignored or actively suppressed. Let me pick out a couple of instances of the sorts of variability I have in mind.

In Extract 3.02 we saw one of Quilliam's respondents express the view that "being unfaithful is falling in love with a person other than your partner." However, this was hardly an unqualified attitudinal statement. A disclaimer immediately followed in the second part of a contrast pair, which served to acknowledge the availability and relevance of an opposing point of view, namely that being unfaithful is principally defined by "having sex with someone other than your partner." In other words, there is a built-in ambiguity here in which the respondent recognises another, very different "attitude" to infidelity even as she confirms her commitment to the first one mentioned. A very similar practice is engaged in by Lizzy in Extract 3.04, lines 48-61, where she makes quite a point of recognising both sides of a debate about whether "a sixty nine" is an infidelity of the same order or magnitude as "a shag." Quilliam's participant and Lizzy are not quite replying "don't know" to the question of what defines infidelity but they come close.

As Potter (1998 and *passim*.) has remarked, "don't knows" are usually treated as uninteresting by attitude researchers and their ilk. Indeed, as I observed of *The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles* (Wellings *et al.*, 1994) in Chapter 1, instruments such as questionnaire items with a forced-response format are commonly employed to render the data generalisable. Put another way, these instruments serve to screen out variability - and we can now see why this is necessary. Quilliam's research clustered questions together and allowed participants the opportunity to write their answers in complete sentences rather than ticking boxes or marking points on a scale. The result was that respondents produced material of the sort exemplified in Extract 3.02 where one viewpoint or expression of opinion is counterpoised with quite another. However, an approach to research that requires participants to express attitudes at the rate of one per

person cannot readily deal with discursive materials of ambivalence and ambiguity.

Another kind of variability that is manifest in the data we have examined is where respondents seem to move between expressions of private, subjective attitudes or beliefs and statements of behavioural or experiential fact. This was particularly evident in Extracts 3.03 and 3.04. Again, this kind of variability would normally be screened out by more sociometrically-inclined studies of infidelity. As well as using devices such as forced-response options, survey and questionnaire items tend to solicit either an attitudinal statement or a behavioural report but not both in the same breath. A study that is designed to make generalised claims about the attitudes and/or lifestyles of a population can only be hindered if respondents are permitted to flit from one to the other in their answers to a given question. Again, Quilliam's study is unusual here because hers is clearly the sociometric ambition of reporting the facts about the attitudes and behaviours of a population of British women and yet the design of her survey (as question 23: Unfaithfulness/Affairs illustrates) allows participants to supply an answer that focuses on one, or the other, or both.

In contrast to what I have characterised here as the "sociometric" approach to the study of infidelity, discursive psychology is not vulnerable to the analytic difficulties that I have described above. In this chapter we have not become bogged down with trying to develop a neutral, idealised definition of infidelity that encompasses all of the context-specific meanings given to that term (and others like it). Ideas of "what is infidelity" and "what is being unfaithful" have become the *topic* for analysis instead of being treated as an analytic *resource*. We have allowed our assessment of what speakers and writers are doing to be guided by evidence from the organisation, arrangement and participants' orientations *within their talk* rather than "translating" or deciding *a priori* that what they will be doing is disclosing their privately held attitudes and issuing factual, behavioural reports. We have not been methodologically inconvenienced by expressions of a certain ambivalence and ambiguity: rather, we have worked *with* these structural features and allowed them to reveal something about what the discourse has been designed to accomplish. Finally, we have recognised that the action orientation of discourse makes sense of otherwise confusing alternations in respondents' text and talk between the realms of fact and opinion. These alternations have been treated as functionally meaningful shifts between the complementary discursive practices of, on the one hand, externalisation and doing impersonal fact construction through categorisation, and, on the other hand, the business of individuation and doing subjective evaluation. As we have

seen, these are forms of talk through which speakers and writers manifest themselves not as interchangeable representatives of analyst-defined populations such as "British women" (or whatever) but as people who are attentive to their own relevant category memberships and jealous of the inferences about their identities that become possible when they are required to discuss matters of infidelity in the form of a self-report.

Construct an Isolated Episode

Introduction

In this, the second analytic chapter of *The Compleat Infidel*, we turn to a new feature of the discursive landscape: the isolated episode of infidelity. Following a format similar to that of Chapter 3, this chapter will begin by describing the gross structural characteristics of isolated episodes of infidelity. The largest, middle part of the chapter is the data analysis section where we shall look at several different accounts of isolated episodes of infidelity and explore their use of various known conversational and discursive devices and mechanisms. Finally, the chapter ends with a section in which we shall draw some overall conclusions about the function of constructing an isolated episode as a form of defensive practice, as well as taking a critical approach to a relevant aspect of mainstream social science.

In this case, the object of our critique will be psychological studies of attribution and those based on attribution theory; recall the section on studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships that appeared in Chapter 1. We shall rework some traditional ideas about how to study attribution and indeed develop a fresh account of what kind of activity attribution might be, while expanding upon the notions of distinctiveness and consistency that I introduced at the end of Chapter 3.

The analytic concepts that were employed in the previous chapter, including externalising devices, ontological gerrymandering and double constitution and the logic of normative accountability, will be ongoingly relevant and useful in this chapter and the subsequent ones. The five analytic projects of *The Compleat Infidel* are not unrelated to each other but should be regarded as the pieces of a jigsaw, finally building up an overall picture of defensive practice in infidelity discourse.

The data to be examined in this chapter are accounts that construct some case or cases of infidelity as momentary aberrations or anomalies, the product of temporally situated circumstances. To this end, the accounts importantly include

details about the times, places and other aspects of the various settings in which individual episodes of infidelity sometimes occur. Sometimes accounts focus on one particular feature of the occasion or setting but perhaps more often they are composite constructions that bring lots of details together. To assist with the job of analysis, the middle part of this chapter is divided into four superficially discrete sections but the often composite nature of constructions of isolated episodes of infidelity is reflected in the data so that features and details discussed in one section will often be identifiable in the data extracts that come up for examination in other sections. The four parts to our analysis are entitled, "First/Only Offence," "Intoxication," "Holiday Flings" and "Mistake of Fact."

The classic isolated episode is a one night stand or a very short affair that is now over, represented as being firmly in the past. Viewed retrospectively, it is constructed as an historical event. The kinds of details that are introduced are details that help to explain "what happened," that is, how the described infidelity came to pass. In the data to follow we will see a few relatively telegraphic references to isolated episodes of infidelity but also a number of extended narratives that supply all sorts of details about the occasion (e.g., some sort of special occasion as opposed to an ordinary working day), the location (e.g., some place of temporary residence that is different from one's usual place of home or work), the previous relationship between the infidel and the third party (or lack thereof), the temporally specific knowledge state of each of the participants (i.e., the facts that happened to be in their possession at the time) and so on.

Whatever the individual circumstances, the isolated episode is presented as a member of a familiar category or class of events. The recipient of such an account, the reader or hearer, need not have experienced a brief holiday fling, for example, or a bout of drunkenness, to recognise that such phenomena exist and are commonly encountered by other people. There is usually an emphasis in accounts of isolated episodes that infidels are not a special, deviant group of people. Rather, the point seems to be that at least some varieties of infidelity can happen to anyone if they are unfortunate enough to fall prey to the type of circumstantial hazards being described. In interesting contrast, in Chapter 5 we will look at a form of defensive practice which makes precisely the opposite case: that there is indeed a special identity or membership category to which the infidel belongs.

In Chapter 3 we looked at claims that (some kind of) infidelity has not taken place, either because some crucial act had not been commissioned or because the acts in question were not prohibited. Of course, we did not take

those claims at face value, accepting the truth and factuality of their status as non-events as a given or pre-requisite for some subsequent data analysis. Instead, our analytic focus was precisely on how non-events come to be constructed as such in the first place. The same rule will apply here in Chapter 4. We are not going to accept from the outset the one-off, individual nature of the infidelities described in the forthcoming data. Rather, we shall make a point of discovering how infidelities become constructed as isolated episodes and not, for example, as enduring, ongoing affairs.

Non-events are mainly constructed in the course of people's self-reports about their views and opinions, experiences and behaviour. One interesting feature of isolated episodes is that they are constructed in a wider and more diverse range of discursive contexts and materials. As we shall see, isolated episodes do appear in infidels' own self-reports but they are also to be found in the discourse of professional commentators on infidelity of one sort and another, including psychiatrists, psychologists, agony aunts and popular journalists. We shall explore the implications of this diversity in due course. First, though, let us take a look at some examples of isolated episodes as they appear in the form of raw data.

Data Analysis

First/Only Offence

One of the most common elements of accounts that defend (actual or potential) infidels by constructing an isolated episode is a claim that the infidelity in question is the first or only event of its kind in the infidel's behavioural history. The data in my collection show that a first/only offence may often be presented as an *accident*. For example, consider Extract 4.01. It comes from a "relationships" website called *Friends and Lovers* that features an advice column, feature articles, fiction, poetry, reader discussion boards and so on. One part of the *Friends and Lovers* website solicits readers' responses to the following invitation.

Why do lovers cheat?

He cheated and broke your heart.

Or maybe you're the one who cheated and broke his.
 WHY do lovers cheat?
 Why not end the relationship cleanly before dating others?
 Have you cheated?
 Are you cheating now?
 Have you been cheated on?

We're asking our readers for the answer. If you've cheated, or if you've been cheated upon, we'd like you to tell us about it.

(Home & Leisure Publishing Inc., 1998,
http://cyberspud.com/friends_lovers/question.html)

Extract 4.01 is a reader's contribution, reproduced here in full. The author identifies him/herself as "penne from albany, new york."

Extract 4.01

01 i think that cheating more than once is stupid.. one time like an accident
 02 or something is not ok but is forgivable... more than once is bad because if
 03 you really have an ongoing cheating relationship then there is obviously
 04 something wrong with your current relationship..

(Home & Leisure Publishing Inc., 1998,
http://cyberspud.com/friends_lovers/read11.htm)

Notice the contrast pair in which "one time" (line 1) is differentiated from "an ongoing cheating relationship" (line 3). Also notice that the moral status or value of "not ok but [] forgivable" (line 2) that is assigned to one-time cheating (in contrast to the status or value "bad") is warranted by reference to the notion of accident. That is, "an accident or something" is cited as an explanatory account and an example of how a one-time infidelity can come to pass, in such a way as to render the offence distinct from other kinds of infidelities and therefore "forgivable." There are lots of examples of this kind of discursive practice in my data-base; for now I shall cite just one more, this time from a very different source. Frank Pittman, M.D., is a psychiatrist. His 1989 book *Private Lies* presents his reflections on infidelity and clinical experiences with infidels for the benefit of a mass audience of lay readers.

Extract 4.02

People don't really go looking for infidelity, at least not the first time. They stumble upon it. It is nearly always entered into by accident.

(Pittman, 1989, p. 135)

Again, notice that "the first time" is rhetorically distinguished from subsequent occasions of infidelity and that an account for this distinction is presented through explicit reference to an accident. There are two analytic points to be made at this juncture. Firstly, to describe some happening or event as "an accident" is to

invoke a familiar set or category of phenomena. This is a form of ontological gerrymandering through which the infidelity is *normalised*. "Accident" provides a partial description of an event in terms of its cause rather than (for instance) its effects. Moreover, according to the conventionally organised "folk logic" of accidents (to borrow an expression from Buttny, 1993), the causes of accidents are things like environmental hazards that occasionally escape or exceed human control. That is, accidents are to some extent a natural feature of the world, hence idiomatic expressions such as "accidents will happen."

Secondly, "accident" is a description that is properly or normatively applied retrospectively. It is not usual practice to claim that one is currently having an accident. This is possibly because accidents are accountably supposed to be unforeseen and sudden and the observation that one is presently in the midst of an accident would imply time for reflection in which one might be expected to take the opportunity to act on the situation and stop the accident from developing and proceeding even if it had not been possible to prevent it occurring in the first place. Thus, because "accident" is normatively a retrospective description, calling some infidelity an accident is a very effective way of bolstering the claim that the infidelitous event is now over, finished with and temporally isolated in the past.

I would now like to return to the idea of "distinctiveness" that I introduced in the last chapter. Like constructing a non-event, constructing an isolated episode is a defence of high distinctiveness, meaning that the infidel is presented as *not* characteristically engaging in this type of behaviour. Clearly, making a claim of first/only offence is a fairly explicit way of drawing attention to a contrast between *this* piece of behaviour and the otherwise unbroken background of the actor's usual mode of behaviour. As before, description of the incident at hand as an accident can have a useful bolstering effect in this regard. As observed by Scott and Lyman in their exploratory work on accounts (1968), "The excuse of accident is acceptable precisely because of the irregularity and infrequency of accidents occurring to any single actor. Thus while hazards are numerous and ubiquitous, a particular person is not expected ordinarily to experience the same accident often" (pp. 47-48). That is, because of this expectation or conventional property of accidents, describing some infidelity as an accident can be a means of calling attention to the infrequency with which similar misfortunes have befallen the actor on previous occasions.

As they are used in studies based on attribution theory, notions such as distinctiveness assume a perceptual dichotomy between the actor and the situation in which they are encountered. Attribution is taken to be a cognitive

activity and experimental studies such as those I reviewed in Chapter 1 attempt either to affect actor/situation attributions by manipulating the distinctiveness of laboratory-manufactured stimulus materials or else to measure and describe individuals' attributional patterns and "styles" in response to specified, naturally occurring events such as marital infidelity. For instance, consider the work of Fincham, Beach, Nelson, Bradbury and colleagues; scholars of social cognition who were responsible for the development of such instruments as the Marital Attribution Style Questionnaire (Fincham, Beach and Nelson, 1987). In this line of research the stimuli are often discrete "marital behaviours" that unhappily married participants are known to have identified as sore points or "marital disagreement areas." In the view of Fincham *et al.*, such stimuli trigger cognitive attributions that can be relevantly measured by asking participants to indicate their perception of (for example) the "locus of cause" of the problem event or behaviour. The "cause" is presumed to have one of basically two possible loci: something "internal" in (the psyche of) the spouse or something "external" in the situation.

The sense in which notions such as distinctiveness and locus of cause are deployed here in *The Compleat Infidel* is somewhat different. After Edwards and Potter (1992, 1993), the position I am taking is that attributions of internal and external cause are *discursive* (not cognitive) behaviours and, moreover, that such attributions do not occur automatically in response to artificially engineered stimuli or according to individual cognitive style but are embedded in discursively constituted descriptions such as descriptions of "accidental infidelity." In their analysis of materials relating to the 1989 resignation of British former Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, Edwards and Potter (1992) observe that sceptical audiences will not readily accept accounts that appeal solely to either an internal cause (such as the actor's personality or ulterior motives) or an external one (such as the circumstantial demands of their employment). Rather, a rhetorically robust account will play off each against the other so that versions of the actor's inner self are shown to warrant versions of his or her external world and vice versa. We have seen this principle exemplified in the data above which do not only claim high distinctiveness in the sense of constructing a/the infidelitous encounter as a one-off, singular behavioural blip but additionally warrant this construction of the actor's normal, characteristic behaviour with a description of circumstantial or situational causes, by reference to environmental hazards that an actor may "stumble upon" (Extract 4.02); "an accident or something" (Extract 4.01).

Let me round off this discussion of first/only offence with a quick look at one last piece of data. Extract 4.03 comes from an article in the glossy women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* (UK edition). The author, Irma Kurtz, usually functions as

the magazine's agony aunt but this particular extract comes from a feature article entitled "Is it ever okay to be unfaithful?" Predictably, Kurtz's overall view is that it is certainly *not* "okay."

Extract 4.03

05 Of course, many infidelities are one-night stands, like as not under the influence of drink, in which case the best thing the perpetrator can do is thank his lucky stars if no STD occurs, and then promise, not his partner but *himself* or *herself*, it will never happen again, and in due course forgive himself or herself, and keep his or her trap firmly shut.

10 However, infidelity can also be knowingly undertaken as - I hesitate to use the hackneyed phrase - "a cry for help", especially as an act of infidelity is more like a shrill and childish shriek that says, "Me! Me! Me! Me!" When a beautiful piece of machinery stops working, a petulant brat will smash it to bits instead of trying to find out what's wrong and fix it, and that is exactly what the consciously unfaithful partner is doing to a damaged relationship.

(Kurtz, 1991, p. 240)

There is a lot that could be said about this extract but, to sum up the previous analysis, the points I want to raise are limited to the following. The idiomatic expression "one-night stands" (line 1) invokes a familiar set or category of phenomena to which a first/only offence might belong. The temporal specification "one night" emphasises that such phenomena are isolated episodes and these are rhetorically contrasted against longer-term, more ongoing kinds of infidelity. Notice the formulation "consciously unfaithful partner" (line 11) which says something about that type of partner's self or internal mental state and thus implies that the perpetrator of the one night stand is typically "unconsciously" or unintentionally unfaithful. Finally, this representation of the one-night infidel's innocent, inner self is warranted with an account that refers to an implicitly causal feature of the actor's situation or external world. In this case the causal circumstance does not take the form of a generic "accident" but points more specifically to an alternative: the "influence of drink" (line 2). This is a topic to be explored further in the next section.

Intoxication

The emphasis on normalisation in constructions of isolated episodes of infidelity brings with it certain rhetorical weak points or areas of vulnerability to being undermined. Unlike some of the constructions we will see in the next chapter, it is not the case that tales of isolated episodes of infidelity are so outlandish as to risk

being disbelieved. Rather, a heavy emphasis on the mundanity and ordinariness of phenomena such as accidents may become the victim of its own success in the sense that the idioms begin to sound like clichés; trite over-generalisations that are criticisably non-specific or vague. Thus, the credibility of accounts of isolated episodes is often enhanced by the addition of much more detail than we saw in the first two extracts of data. The sorts of details that are routinely invoked to do this fact-constructive work prominently include intoxication, by alcohol or (occasionally) drugs.

Irma Kurtz, the author of Extract 4.03, makes a cursory reference to "the influence of drink" by way of offering one possible explanation for the occurrence of "unconscious" or unintentional one night stands. This is the type of discursive practice described in the analysis of Scott and Lyman (1968) in which it is acknowledged that intoxication can be the basis for a claim that the infidel's free will or control over his or her own behaviour may have been temporarily impaired at the time of commissioning the offence. However, Kurtz is (apparently) not defending her own infidelitous behaviour in this article. Indeed, she is not defending infidelity at all. The seemingly liberal normalisation of drunken "one-night stands" turns out to be merely the first part of a contrast pair, against which knowing or conscious (i.e., deliberate) infidelity can be all the more forcefully condemned. When the data to be examined are isolated episodes constructed by people with more of a personal stake in the proceedings (e.g., when the infidelity being described is their own), it becomes apparent that Scott and Lyman have captured only some of the rhetorical potential of intoxication. In fact, intoxication will provide for a range of phenomena that help to attenuate the infidel's personal culpability. One example that occurs rather frequently in my data is the claim that intoxication distorts sensory perception such that a sudden, illusory attractiveness is bestowed upon people whom the speaker would usually find entirely uninteresting. Another example is the claim that intoxication blunted the speaker's ability to engage in moral reasoning of the sort that would normally keep him or her from straying into infidelity. A third example is embedded in Extract 4.04, below.

Extract 4.04 is a complete posting to one discussion thread of several in a public internet forum that has the overall theme of romantic and marital relationships. The thread is titled "Cheating - Those who will not forgive" and it was begun in February 1997 by a contributor who announced that she would never forgive her fiancé if he "cheated" and wondered if any other readers felt the same way. Extract 4.04 appeared 147 posts later, in October of the same year.

Extract 4.04

I would like some feedback on my situation... I cheated on my fiance' and regret it more than you will ever know. I love him more than life and this "other" guy is a mutual friend of ours. This guy and I have always had a connection & have wondered what it would be like for us to be together.

05 I have known him for years. Well not to long ago I got really drunk and it happened. It was only once and i can't even remember. (i was really trashed) I wish it was a nightmare and i could wake up at anytime thanking God it was a nightmare, but i dont' think thats going to happen. Since that night we haven't spoken about it, and don't plan on it. We are

10 friends and i know now that that is all i will ever want with him. In the meantime i feel terrible about what i have done, and debating on whether or not i should be honest with my fiance' or just put it behind me and try to forget! HELP!!

(Hearst Communications Inc., 1997,
www.homearts.com/cgi-bin/WebX?14@^13069@.ee88b8e/0)

We can see from this extract that the author, who calls herself "Skye," uses Intoxication not only to provide an account of how "it happened" (lines 5-6) but also to discursively erase memories of matters on which she might otherwise be questioned (line 6). That is, "I got really drunk" (line 5) and "i was really trashed" (lines 6-7) is made to serve as a complete and free standing explanation for what went on between Skye and her friend, while "I can't even remember" (line 6) acts as a kind of discursive insurance against requests for any further explanation or information about how the situation developed, exactly what she got up to with this man, what conversation took place between them, whether thoughts of her fiancé at any time crossed her mind and so on. Moreover, claiming that "i can't even remember. (i was really trashed)," just like the accident claims that we examined earlier, helps to temporally isolate the problematic incident as an incident (i.e., not an ongoing process) and locate it firmly in the past. Firstly, constructing something as a matter for memory and recall is a way of constructing a rhetorical difference between (what happened) "then" and (what I can remember) "now." Secondly, "getting drunk" or "getting trashed" is accountably an activity or experience that lasts for a fixed amount of time, usually a few hours - in contrast to "being an alcoholic," say, which could be made to imply a much more enduring, open ended and personal relationship with the intoxicating substance.

The treatment of intoxication in Extracts 4.03 and 4.04 reinforces the point I made earlier about locus of cause and how it is discursively managed. From the point of view of the social cognition researchers and writers such as Scott and Lyman, who are interested in establishing a synthetic typology of accounts and causal explanations, intoxication is usually taken to be a reliably "internal" factor. Scott and Lyman describe intoxication as an impairment of an actor's "will and knowledge" (1968, p. 48) which in turn are described as "components of the

mental element" that "all actions [by widespread agreement] contain." Similarly, in their discursive critique of attribution theory, Edwards and Potter (1992, p. 98) quote a few revealing lines from the social psychology textbook of Brown (1986, p. 133) in which attribution theory's fundamental distinction between internal and external causes is exemplified with the words, "Causes internal to the actors would include alcohol, drugs, a disposition to violence, and so on. Causes external ... include everything in the situation where and when they acted." Certainly, the discursive construction of intoxication as an internal state is a possible manoeuvre, as Brown and Scott and Lyman themselves demonstrate in their own texts. However, in Extract 4.04 we can see Skye constructing complementary versions of herself and her world such that intoxication or "getting really trashed" becomes a description of the situation in which she found herself, bolstering and helping to warrant a portrait of her own self as someone who loves her fiancé "more than life" (line 2), "regrets it" (line 2) and in fact feels "terrible about what i have done" (line 11); a person for whom "cheating" is a behaviour of high distinctiveness.

Skye's isolated episode of infidelity of Extract 4.04 takes the form of a personal narrative and is richer in detail than the extracts we have examined previously. However, most narratives in this style are richer still. While explaining that one was "really drunk" or "really trashed" may be a more satisfyingly complete account for infidelity than just saying "it was an accident," it is still vulnerable to attack on the grounds that this is a vague generalisation and that important information is being left out. For instance, many authors of isolated episodes like to provide a more explicit warrant or reason for getting drunk in the first place, orientating to that in itself as an accountable matter. An example is Extract 4.05, the last piece of data in this section.

Extract 4.05

01 what began as a few enjoyable lunches ended up in bed. Karen and I
 02 had been to a training conference together in Leicester, and although
 03 we resisted temptation for the first few days, on the last night we both got
 04 drunk and ended up having sex.

(Campbell, 1993, p. 31)

Extract 4.05 comes from a collection of (what appear to be) married men's "true confessions" about their infidelities, published in the women's magazine *Marie Claire* (UK edition). This speaker, identified as "Lawrence," explains that he had had "a few enjoyable lunches" (line 1) with Karen, a work colleague, in much the same way that Skye explains that her third-party infidel was a "mutual friend" (line 3) to her and her fiancé and that they had known each other "for years" (line 5). However, Lawrence does not jump from a description of this relatively innocuous

relationship to an account of intoxication, as though he and Karen had suddenly got "really trashed" together for no discernible reason other than lust. Rather, he builds in a temporal and spatial context that provides a legitimate occasion for their being drunk together: the last night of a training conference. We shall investigate some more contexts of this type in the following section.

Holiday Flings

Extract 4.06 is from a feature article in another British, women's magazine, *New Woman*. The title of the piece is (rather contentiously) "No-Guilt Affairs" and it collects together a handful of what are seemingly women readers' "true experiences" of infidelity. Extract 4.06 is taken from the very beginning of a story attributed to "Claire" who has a long term boyfriend named "Pete."

Extract 4.06

I guess you'd have to call it a holiday bonk really, as there's no point in glamorising it. It was the classic holiday situation. I was away alone and I felt that anything I did would be wiped from the slate when I returned home.

05 His name was Mack and I met him on the beach. I don't even know his last name - in fact you could say I didn't know his name at all, as Mack was a nickname. It was pure lust - I'm sure that if we'd spent more than a few hours in each other's company we would have found nothing in common. He wasn't much of a talker but, to be honest, it wasn't a good chat I was

10 after. That sounds crass, I know. I wasn't consciously looking for anything, but I must have been open to offers in a way that I'm not at home.

(Holder, 1992, p. 42)

For our immediate purposes, the important thing to notice about Extract 4.06 is the pair of expressions "holiday bonk" (line 1) and "the classic holiday situation" (line 2) that Claire introduces at the outset of her account. Like the accidents and one night stands encountered earlier, these expressions normalise the described events by invoking a familiar category of phenomena to which they belong. Derek Edwards (1995, 1997), in his analysis of "event descriptions in couples' talk about relationship troubles" (1995, p. 319), has observed that such events tend to be constructed with attention to their status as exceptional or routine; anomalies or instances of a pattern. Moreover, "one notable feature of everyday event descriptions is how they make inferentially available particular dispositional states of the actors; their moral character, personality, state of mind or whatever" (1995, p. 320).

In Edwards's terms, "holiday bonk" and (especially) "the classic holiday situation" are *episodic, script-instantiating formulations*. These expressions idiomatically formulate and thus construct Claire's infidelity as an episode in a culturally recognisable collection of like episodes, an instance of a general sequential pattern or script. They emphasise the generalisable, even routine nature of the situation or circumstances to which Claire fell prey and thus they are also disposition-implicative: they warrant Claire's later depiction of her-self (the "inner person," if you will) as someone who is law-abidingly faithful in the normal run of things when discrete sets of circumstances such as "the classic holiday situation" are not exerting their causal influence. These formulations bolster her claim of lines 10-11 that "I wasn't consciously looking for anything, but I must have been open to offers in a way that I'm not at home." Her acknowledgement of the "holiday bonk" is a way of helping to construct her usual or characteristic behaviour as essentially good, making that claim difficult to undermine merely by appeal to this particular indiscretion.

As a narrative device, the setting of "the classic holiday situation" is packed with implicative potential. Like the "training conference" of Extract 4.05, it provides for all manner of mitigating inferences to be drawn about what sort of behaviour Claire was engaging in and why; for example, it makes a reasonable possibility of the condition of being unconsciously "open to offers." As discursive constructions, holidays are defined by anomaly or brevity; whatever else they might be, they are definitively unusual, not at-home, not part of the domestic round of work and family life (Lawes, 1998). Indeed, Claire explicitly contrasts her holiday with "at home" in line 11. She is, then, temporally and spatially displaced from the circumstances that describe her usual "home" life. Moreover, holidays, like "the last night" of training conferences, tend to be celebratory occasions that provide for intoxication (an accounting device in itself as we saw in the last section). Additionally, notice that Claire specifies that it was a "beach" holiday (line 5). This is a commonly used detail in tales of holiday flings (Lawes, 1998) and it provides for the use of the extra mitigating factor of an unfamiliarly hot climate which, rhetorically speaking, can serve many of the same functions as intoxication when it comes to explaining unusual behaviour.

What we see in Extract 4.06 that is different to the previous extracts is an increasingly detailed narrative account of the isolated episode being developed, with the details being used cumulatively and in concert with each other to create an interactionally well defended, robust and believable world. As Potter (1996a) remarks, items of information such as Claire's about the situation being a holiday and especially the details about being "away alone" (line 2), the beach and so

on lend a *narrative structure* to an account (Potter, 1996a, p. 118) and "narrative organization can be used to increase the plausibility of a particular description by embedding it in a sequence where what is described becomes expected or even necessary" (ibid.). While it would perhaps be putting it too strongly to say that Claire succeeds in making her infidelity appear necessary, her narrative (of which Extract 4.06 is only the beginning) certainly displays it as something routine and predictable *under the circumstances*. In particular, it provides for her very minimising, almost casual, description of the infidelity as a mere "bonk" (line 1).

Let us pursue this line of analysis with a look at some more data. Extract 4.07 comes from Mental Health Net (www.cmhc.com), a "fun & friendly [web] site [that] covers information on disorders such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, chronic fatigue syndrome and substance abuse, to professional resources in psychology, psychiatry and social work, journals and self-help magazines" (www_cmhc_com.html). Its regular "Question of the Month" discussion forum encourages the participation of both lay people and mental health professionals. Each question is immediately followed by readers' (mostly short) responses on the same page. Responses are listed chronologically, in the order they were submitted. Many contributions can be seen to refer directly to the immediately preceding entry, in the manner of a conversation.

Extract 4.07

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

05 This forum is devoted to hearing other people's answers to some difficult moral and ethical questions that society is grappling with today. There are no 'right' answers and all viewpoints are welcomed. You may be as anonymous as you'd like when responding.

A QUESTION OF INFIDELITY

10 One night while visiting with your old friends for a school reunion in a far-away city, you find that you had a little too much to drink. After being propositioned by one of these friends whom you find attractive, you agree to have sex. While the sex was good, you both agree that your respective lives and relationships are too important to each of you for anything more
15 to come of that one night. As you are on a plane back to your home and spouse the next day, knowing you will never see or hear from the old friend again, you have a decision to make.

20 Do you tell your spouse of your one-night fling? Why or why not?

If you know in advance that if your spouse discovers that you have been unfaithful, he or she will leave you and file for a divorce with no chance of reconciliation, would this influence your decision? In what way??

(Mental Health Net & CMHC Systems, 1996,
www.cmhc.com/ques96-5.html)

As in the previous extract, here in Extract 4.07 we see a minimising, script-instantiating formulation of a case of infidelity: it was merely a "one-night fling" (line 19). Once again, narrative details about a celebratory occasion (that of a "school reunion," line 10), a distant location ("a far-away city," lines 10-11; a long journey home by plane, line 15), alcoholic intoxication (line 11) and so on provide an interpretative framework from which the protagonist emerges as an essentially or dispositionally faithful person who happened across an isolated episode of infidelity - in this case, the point being to open up the debatable possibility that it might be reasonable to *not* perform the ritual of confessing to the cheated-upon spouse about what has gone on. That is, the new and interesting feature of Extract 4.07 is the construction of the text with regard to its anticipated reader. The story unfolds in the present tense and the second person, with "you" as the leading character. The audience that "Question of the Month" addresses is any and every English-speaking netizen. This is a huge body of potential recipients, temporally and geographically dispersed, and the infidelity story itself (lines 10-17) is produced as an open ended piece of narrative that anyone should be able to understand and get involved with.

As such, it bears a striking resemblance to the vignettes that are often used in studies of attribution. A good example is the study by Mongeau, Hale and Alles (1994) which investigated "accounts and attributions produced following a relational transgression, specifically, sexual infidelity" (p. 326). Mongeau *et al.* required their research participants to read one of a handful of scenarios.

All scenarios described a heterosexual dating relationship where one partner (the transgressor) goes to a bar, meets a friend of the opposite sex, talks and drinks with the friend, goes to the friend's apartment to watch a movie, and ends up having sexual intercourse with him/her. [] After reading the scenario, participants were asked to put themselves in the transgressor's place and respond to a series of attribution measures.

(Mongeau, Hale and Alles, 1994, p. 334)

The sorts of variables being manipulated by Mongeau and colleagues were narrative details concerning (for example) the "intent" of the transgressor, operationalised by describing the transgressor as meeting his/her friend by chance (the low intent condition) or, alternatively, going to the bar in the hope of meeting the friend (the high intent condition). In the case of Extract 4.07 and also the case of Mongeau's scenarios, vignettes are presented that define a kind of reality and ask readers to engage in debate or do attributional work in the course of making their response. In both cases the reality being presented is an infidelity of very low consistency, to use the language of attribution theory (although, again, the sense in which it is used here is discursive rather than cognitive).

Something blameable is claimed to have happened but it is discursively confined to the limits of a "one-night fling" or a single occasion of "having sexual intercourse." I shall have more to say about the relationship of vignettes such as Mongeau's to narrative exercises such as that of Extract 4.07 at the end of this chapter. Before that, however, there is another aspect of the isolated episode of infidelity that merits a little data analysis. This additional element is "mistake of fact."

Mistake of Fact

Mistake of fact is a variety of isolated episode that is constructed exclusively by or with regard to third-party infidels. Accounts of mistake of fact report incidents where people engage in sexual encounters or embark upon relationships, only to discover afterwards that their partner was already committed to someone else. The dyad-bound infidel is blamed for having deceived the third-party infidel as well as the victim, allowing the third-party infidel to claim that they would not knowingly have got involved with someone who was already attached. The stronger versions align the third-party infidel with the victim, claiming that they have incurred essentially the same injury. Discursively speaking, mistakes of fact are a lot like the accidents we saw being constructed earlier. They are only identifiable as such retrospectively and they combine an element of unintentionality with temporal isolation of the key events.

Let's take a look at an example of mistake of fact in action. Extract 4.08 comes from one of my own research interviews. The interviewee, Earl, is a single man aged about thirty. The extract below occurs roughly mid way through the interview (page 20 of the transcript). It is quite a long stretch of data and we shall not attempt an exhaustive analysis here. Instead we shall concentrate on the areas and features of the data that are most relevant to the superordinate analytic task of understanding the construction of isolated episodes of infidelity.

Extract 4.08

	<i>Rachel:</i>	have you ever been <u>confronted</u> by an angry partner
	<i>Earl:</i>	[laughs]
	<i>Rachel:</i>	[like you've] been shagging my (.) par- my boyfriend stroke girlfriend kind of angle?
05	<i>Earl:</i>	er yeah I have =
	<i>Rachel:</i>	= have you
	<i>Earl:</i>	[laughing] [yeah]
	<i>Rachel:</i>	[[laughing]] ah tell me about that, go on
	<i>Earl:</i>	(okay) um (.) I got into a situation where it was like um (.)

- 10 Rachel: I'd been away from D- [his home town] for like some time.
 Earl: mhm
 Earl: and er (.) and then when I came back to D- er a friend who or someone who I used to class as a friend
- 15 Rachel: mhm
 Earl: who um (.) then like we became distant
 Rachel: mhm
 Earl: um (.) we got distanced from each other and I came back to D- and er (.) I ended up um eventually meeting her
- 20 Rachel: mhm
 Earl: and and (.) we ended up going out for a while, [just] like
 Rachel: [right]
 Earl: going out and having a drink for like a while or going out and, and er (.) she was always like putting it over as if to say oh she wasn't with him any more, [that type] of thing
- 25 Rachel: [right]
 Earl: d'mean =
 Rachel: = did you believe this or was it =
 Earl: = u:m
 Rachel: didn't it matter
 Earl: I think I did believe it. I think I did believe it but there was like a certain amount of er [I was] getting a certain
- 30 Rachel: [mm]
 Earl: amount of fun anyway
 Rachel: yeah
 Earl: d'mean, I was quite young at the time
 Rachel: mhm
 Earl: and u:m (.) in the end it obviously like (.) cus we were going out as well, it got out that like (.) we, we were going out (.) and then like I ended up meeting this guy
- 40 Rachel: yeah
 Earl: and like (.) we didn't end up talking (.) d'mean, we didn't talk at all
 Rachel: mhm
 Earl: and um (.) I re- obviously I realised at that point, do you get what I mean
- 45 Rachel: mm
 Earl: so er (.) I ended up going and [laughing] going and confronting him
 Rachel: you confronted him?
 Earl: yeah [laughing] [I confronted him]
 Rachel: [oh my go:d] [laughing] what did you say? (.) shit, that was so bra:ve [laughing] go on, what did you say
- 50 Earl: [laughing] like um I suppose like you just use um (.) use attack as defence don't you [sometimes] and it was like
 Rachel: [mm]
 Earl: er (.) what you giving me the (.) (like it was like) [laughing] I put it over like as a mad thing really like, (xxx what you giving the xxx) against me for? (.) and then from the:re like, the argument started, do you know what I mean
- 60 Rachel: mhm
 Earl: and it was even dragged up to her house [laughing]
 Rachel: [laughing]
 Earl: d'mean
 Rachel: o:h shit
 Earl: and um (.) it just fizzled out, I mean he's gone his way, I've gone mine and like whenever we see each other now we got nothing to say to each other, but other situations have come up, have have like come up like since then
- 70 Rachel: mhm

- Earl: d'mean where (.) where um (.) we're probably like I'm warring, warring enemies now really [laughing]
- Rachel: mm
- 75 Earl: do you get what I mean (.) but like (.) I'm friends with his brothers but like I- I- like er I don't talk to him [so we'll be]
- Rachel: [mm]
- Earl: out sometimes and I'll be out with his brothers d'mean but I won't talk to him, ridiculous really
- 80 Rachel: mm mm
- Earl: so you know
[10 lines omitted]
- Rachel: so when, when this argument, argument was developing between you and [this bloke] what happened, did he
- 85 Earl: [yeah]
- Rachel: accuse you and then you went yeah (.) that's right
- Earl: um (.) well er I admitted (.) I admitted but like er (.) I suppose like to some extent, because I'd been away from D- and I didn't know what was happening (.) I was to some extent naïve. [I was taken in] by this story (.) it was
- 90 Rachel: [yea:h]
- Earl: like (.) I didn't know
- Rachel: oh you said, you said like (I've be-) I didn't know
- Earl: I didn't know
- 95 Rachel: ri:ght ri:ght
- Earl: I didn't know, d'mean and like nothing (.) in that way happened [anyway (.) d'mean] so there was no [yeah yeah (.) yeah yeah]
- Rachel: like (.) as such
- 100 Earl: like (.) as such
- Rachel: yeah
- Earl: do you get what I [mean] but that's like, still to him, that's
- Rachel: [mm]
- Earl: debatable
- Rachel: right =
- 105 Earl: = that would be [debatable] to him. it would be to [me]
- Rachel: [yeah] [mm]
- Earl: and it, and probably would be to you
- Rachel: mm
- Earl: there's al-, there would always be that doubt =
- 110 Rachel: = it's quite, it's a (.) cast iron excuse though isn't it, oh I didn't know (.) cus nobody can prove that you did no
- Earl: no
- Rachel: but then it's not al-, you were fortunate to have that excuse available, cus often it's (.) [laughing] bloody obvious [that you knew]
- 115 Earl: [bloody obvious] yeah
[general laughter]

In the technical language that I have employed in various parts of this document, Earl is a third-party infidel. His partner-in-crime, the nameless "her" and "she" of lines 19, 24, 25 and 63, is the dyad-bound infidel. Earl's friend of lines 12-13 is her dyadic partner, the "victim." Earl's story about his mistake of fact bears all the hallmarks of an isolated episode of infidelity. His relationship with the dyad-bound infidel is temporally circumscribed: they were "going out" not for very long but only "for a while" (line 21). It is constructed as a relationship of low consistency: although Earl does not explicitly claim that he broke it off as soon as he "realised at that point" (line 45) that the woman was already involved with his friend, he

certainly provides for that inference to be drawn by Rachel, the recipient of the tale. The narrative details he provides about having been away from his home town (lines 10-12, 88-89) and about the information he was given regarding the dyadic relationship (lines 24-25, 89-90) are designed to explain how this brief infidelity came to pass; how Earl "got into a situation" (line 9). Earl presents himself as someone for whom third-party infidelity is a behaviour of high distinctiveness - particularly note the disclaimer "I was quite young at the time" of line 36 which emphasises that this is not representative of his behaviour now, as a fully mature adult. The central argument with which Earl defends himself is the claim that circumstances conspired to keep him in ignorance about the true state of the dyadic relationship, displaying his infidelitous activities as unintentional: he had "been away from" home (line 88) and was "taken in by this story" (line 90). He repeatedly stresses on lines 89, 92, 94 and 96 that "I didn't know" and it is interesting to note that this is conveyed with increasing force and directness each time.

An especially revealing feature of Extract 4.08 is Earl's use of the expressions "ended up" (lines 18, 21, 40, 48), "in the end" (line 38) and "end up" (line 42). These expressions cluster around certain events in the narrative, from Earl's initially meeting the woman on line 18 to his confrontation of her partner on lines 48-49. The use of "in the end" components is a fairly common practice in constructions of isolated episodes of infidelity and in fact we have already seen another example in Extract 4.05. That extract was taken from near the beginning of Lawrence's narrative and we can see that he packages the infidelity in terms of how it "ended up" (line 1), accompanied by an explanatory account of how things "ended up" that way.

Pioneering conversation analyst Harvey Sacks has commented on the use of *tense* and *temporal indicators* in defensively designed stories (e.g., Sacks, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 515-522; Sacks, 1992, vol. 2, p. 453-457). One of the most important observations about Extract 4.08 that arises from Sacks's analysis is that it would have been perfectly possible for Earl to tell his story without the use of these "in the end" components. For example, he could have constructed his report entirely in the present tense, saying something like, "so I come back to D- and this woman and I go out together and she's putting it over as if to say oh I'm not with him any more." He also could have told a story that concentrated more on how it all began: "we started going out," "this guy and I started not talking," "straight away I confronted him" and so on. Also consider that, as Edwards (1997, p. 277) observes, "a basic issue in telling a story of events in your life is where to begin[.] Where to start a story is a major, and rhetorically potent, way of managing

causality and accountability." Of course, the same principle applies to the question of where the story ends. Earl need not have begun with "I'd been away from D- for some time" (line 10) and completed the narrative with "I ended up eventually meeting her" (lines 18-19) and "I ended up going and confronting him" (lines 48-49). For instance, an alternative would have been to begin with the confrontation and finish the story somewhere else, perhaps displaying the confrontation with the woman's partner as a reason for subsequently developing a relationship with her (we will see some accounts that follow this format in Chapter 6).

Earl's packaging his story in terms of how certain events finally "ended up" is, then, just one possibility, selected from among a range of alternatives. The question for the discourse or conversation analyst is what that selection or that particular discursive organisation manages to do: what it accomplishes for this speaker interactionally. The answer is two-fold. Firstly, the business about how it all ended up is a very passive set of formulations that plays down Earl's own agency and decision making. He describes not so much what he did but rather what happened to him. This is anticipated in lines 15 ("we became distant") and 17 ("we got *distanced* from each other") and the "ended ups" with which Earl then peppers his narrative are equivalent to describing "how it turned out" or "how the cookie crumbled," as though there were precious little he could have done to alter the unfolding of history one way or the other.

Secondly and relatedly, Earl provides a description of his position and circumstances ("I'd been away from D- for some time ... then when I came back to D-") that hearably preceded the numerous events that are compressed into the "ended up" portion of the story. Interactionally speaking, the inference provided for by this narrative arrangement is not merely that the "end" part of the story happened by chance alone to follow on chronologically from the "beginning" part but that the events "in the end" were results that were caused by the things described as "the beginning." That is, the relevance of "I'd been away from D- for some time ... then I came back to D-" is that it contains instructions for the recipient about how to interpret what follows, namely that it provides a framework for understanding how things came to end up as they did. It is the nature of the particular beginning that Earl provides (the passive descriptions of "I'd been away" and "when I came back") that anticipates and supplies a warrant for his final plea: "i didn't know."

I shall resist the temptation to develop any further analysis of Extract 4.08, interesting though it is. The main point to bring away from this section is that mistake of fact may be unique in the sense that it is the exclusive preserve of third-

party infidels but in every other respect it is as much a member of the family of isolated episodes of infidelity as accounts of first offences, intoxication and holiday flings. Across the board, discursive practices of ontological gerrymandering, script instantiation and narrative organisation are employed to isolate a singular case or occasion of infidelity, assign it a normalised, situational cause ("accidents will happen") and correspondingly display the infidel as someone free of malicious or wilful intent ("anyone can make a mistake").

Critique and Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined several aspects of the practice of constructing an isolated episode of infidelity. I would now like to say a few words about that overall defensive practice before moving on to the critical implications of our data analysis.

Functionally speaking, the point of constructing an isolated episode is that, while not attempting to negate the infidelity (or whatever the blameable behaviour happens to be constructed as), it invokes certain *mitigating circumstances* which show that the acts in question were not entirely or at all within the infidel's personal control. This is a defensive practice that combines claims of high distinctiveness (i.e., that this is unusual behaviour for the individual who is, by implication, not dispositionally inclined to this sort of thing) with claims of low consistency (i.e., that the infidelitous sequence of events is now finished with and in the past). We have seen that a key element of constructing an isolated episode of infidelity is an effort of normalisation, not only of the infidel as a person but also of the event itself and the causal factors that are picked out in the infidel's account. Thus, reports of isolated episodes are studded with idiomatic, script-instantiating formulations such as "accidents," "one-night stands," "the classic holiday situation," "under the influence of drink" and so on. An effect of this normalisation and invocation of familiar and recognisable categories is that the recipient of the tale is encouraged to look at things from the infidel's point of view. This can be useful in a variety of social situations, as we can see from the diverse range of sources and media in which isolated episodes appear.

In the concluding section of the previous chapter I made a comparison between constructing a non-event and Atkinson's and Drew's type 1 (justificatory) defence that they discovered being used by police witnesses in the Scarman

tribunal hearings (Atkinson and Drew, 1979). Thus, at the present juncture it is worth remarking that there is a striking resemblance between the defensive practice of constructing an isolated episode of infidelity and another discovery of Atkinson's and Drew's: a form of excuse that I shall refer to here as type 1(a) because Atkinson and Drew describe it as intermediate between their two other identified defences. Here is an extract from Atkinson's and Drew's data that follows immediately from the sample that we looked at in Chapter 3. Recall that the speaker is a senior police officer giving evidence about incidents of civil unrest. In this extract he is being cross-examined about his actions (and failures to take action) with respect to the activities and movements of a "Protestant crowd."

Counsel:	No-one went very far past you, you say?
Witness:	No-one got more than a few yards past me.
Counsel:	So some people did go past you?
Witness:	I was hit in the leg by a stone and went down and that is when they went past me.

(Atkinson and Drew, 1979, p. 171)

The excuse component appears in the witness's second turn: "I was hit in the leg by a stone and went down and that is when they went past me." Atkinson and Drew observe that the unique feature of such excuses is that they are constructed in the form of a narrative which conveys how the blameable incident (people getting past the police) could have happened. This is different from Atkinson's and Drew's type 1 defence which (like constructing a non-event) tries to clear the speaker by showing that no action or alternative action was necessary. It is also different from their type 2 excuse which (similarly to the constructions we will see in Chapter 6) provides a reason for the blameable behaviour. As Atkinson and Drew put it, the type of excuse we see illustrated in the extract above is distinguished by "putting the descriptions of the witness's position in first position in the turn (e.g., "I was hit in the leg by a stone and went down ...") so that the other party's action, reported in a subsequent position ("and that is when they went past me"), is formulated as having resulted from the witness's inability to stop them at that point" (Atkinson and Drew, 1979, p. 172; emphasis added). Like the type 1 justificatory defence, this type of defence is produced prior to specific accusations of witness's failures to take action and thus "seeks to forestall the issue of [] failure" (ibid., p. 173). That is, the witness takes the opportunity to construct his preferred version of events rather than wait for the blameable aspect of his behaviour to be pointed out by Counsel.

This chapter has focused on the descriptive and narrative practices involved in constructing an isolated episode of infidelity. I have shown that isolated episodes are constructed in such a way as to attend to issues of blame and accountability by providing certain information or providing for certain inferences to be drawn about the distinctiveness of the infidelity (i.e., that it was highly distinctive behaviour) and its consistency (i.e., that the consistency - the longevity and ongoingness - of the infidelitous relationship was low). The data we have examined show that accounts of isolated episodes of infidelity are actively constitutive of those episodes as such, not merely existing as neutral and transparent reports.

Subsequent to the above analysis, we are in a position to re-address some of the concerns about psychological studies based on attribution theory that I raised earlier. Let's begin with the questionnaire approach of Fincham, Beach, Nelson and colleagues, which aims to discover and measure individuals' cognitive attributional style. Research participants are typically provided with Likert-style five- or seven-point scales on which to make "ratings" about the cause of marital disagreement areas and undesirable spouse behaviours, according to researcher-defined categories or dimensions of cause such as internal/external locus. These ratings are treated as expressions of underlying cognitions and collectively they are taken to describe an individual's overall cognitive style or characteristic mental state. As I observed in Chapter 1, this composite quantification of cognitive style may then be correlated with other measures such as expressions of anger and indices of marital satisfaction (e.g., Fincham and Bradbury, 1987, 1992). The stance taken by these researchers is that marital (and para-marital) relationships are not only social, interpersonal interactions but very importantly include intrapersonal "covert processes" (Bradbury and Fincham, 1990, p. 3) so that a satisfactory analysis of marriage must attend to the cognitive at least as much as the outwardly behavioural.

From a discursive-psychological point of view, a major problem with this kind of approach is that the portrait of the individual respondent is achieved at the expense of an analysis of what or who they are responding to and how that contributes to and shapes the response. Clearly, any questionnaire, interview schedule or other instrument that is designed to describe the assignment of responsibility and blame for phenomena such as infidelity in terms of an individualised cognitive style is itself offering a causal explanation and thereby doing some attributional work. For instance, if marital (dis)satisfaction is presumed to exist in some sort of causal relationship with individual attributional style then that is distinct from explanations for marital dissatisfaction which prefer to locate

the cause in the demographic characteristics of the partners, or the institutionalised nature of the relationship or whatever.

Devising questionnaire items about the internal and external causes of relational events and developing theoretical accounts of things like marital dissatisfaction, maladjustment and unrealistic expectations of marriage are discursive, interactional behaviours. However, these are excluded from the analysis of Fincham *et al.* and are treated as superordinate to the utterances and writings of participants as they obligingly mark off points on Likert scales, answer interview questions, take part in laboratory problem solving tasks and so on. These activities are taken to be the product and the natural expression of the individual's underlying mental state and so we are discouraged from asking how they might have been affected if the researchers' discursive behaviour had been different; if they had asked alternative types of questions, used other language or chosen a contrasting environment in which to conduct the business of data collection.

We have looked at several different kinds of data in this chapter and it is not difficult to see that they draw upon some shared discursive resources. For instance, the notion that internal versus external causes and causes that exist in the actor versus the situation can be played off against each other in a zero-sum game whereby more of one implies less of the other is evident in the discourse of psychiatrist Frank Pittman (Extract 4.02), agony aunt Irma Kurtz (Extract 4.03), internet discussant Skye (Extract 4.04) and research participant Earl (Extract 4.08). It is also manifest in the questionnaires and reports of social cognition researchers such as Fincham and of course in my own discursive-psychological commentary on the subject. The crucial difference between the cognitive and the discursive approaches is that the discursive approach recognises its own commentary as part of the phenomenon it is studying, while the cognitive approach accounts for the discursive behaviour of participants but is unable (or perhaps simply unwilling) to account for itself.

Now let us turn to the experimental studies which use scenarios and vignettes, such as that of Mongeau, Hale and Alles. This kind of research presents participants with the stimulus material of a ready-made narrative about the topic at hand and requires them to make causal and responsibility attributions by way of a response. As it happens, in the 1994 study of Mongeau *et al.*, the researchers wanted to investigate both "attributions" (which were taken to be private cognitions) and "accounts" (which were taken to be public reports). Earlier in this chapter, in the section on holiday flings, I quoted the researchers' description of the scenarios that participants were given to read. Now I shall briefly explain

what participants were obliged to do in formulating their response. As an index of their private attributions, participants used five-point Likert scales to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with a collection of statements such as "J's actions were intentional," "I would expect J to feel responsible for his/her actions" and "I would expect that J feels guilty for his/her actions," where J stood for either John or Jane depending on the sex of the infidel in the story. After that, participants were asked to provide an account. In the words of Mongeau *et al.* (p. 334), "instructions indicated that one week following the transgression, their partner discovers the transgression through a mutual friend. Respondents were told 'if you were (transgressor's name), what would you say to (partner's name) in an attempt to explain your behaviour?'" The resulting accounts were then coded as belonging to one of five categories in a predetermined hierarchy of excuses and justifications. Broadly speaking, the experimental hypothesis was that the manipulation of variables such as the high or low "intent" of the transgressor to meet their friend on the night of the infidelity would exert an effect on the types of attributions and accounts produced by participants.

The approach taken by Mongeau and colleagues embodies the assumption that the researcher's vignette is a description that exists separately from and prior to attributional and accounting work of the kind that is to be undertaken by participants. It treats the researchers' and the participants' discursive work as two fundamentally different categories of activity. However, the discursive psychological analysis of attribution of Edwards and Potter (1992, 1993) exposes two important shortcomings of this approach.

The first point relates to the above criticism of questionnaire-based studies of cognitive attributional style. There is an under-acknowledgement in studies such as Mongeau's of the researcher's vignette as itself a discursive phenomenon, just like the research participant's response. In fact, studies based on attribution theory are characteristically based on the premise that causal attributions are reactions to a *perceived event*, not a verbal *description* of an event such as Mongeau's description of the sexual adventures of John/Jane. Thus, there is not much room in cognitive attributional studies for a discussion of the action performed by the speaker or writer in putting together their description. The business of reporting or describing remains under-theorised and is allowed to blur into the events being described so that there is a confusion between the descriptive and the ontological.

This under-acknowledgement is consequential because, as we have seen, descriptions do not merely reflect the world but actively construct and constitute it in the course of attending to various interactional concerns. The data we have

considered in this chapter show that even in the least confrontational of social situations, descriptions are attributionally loaded, constructing certain versions of the world and providing for certain inferences to be drawn about issues of personal accountability and blame. For instance, recall Extract 4.07, Mental Health Net's "Question of the Month." Of all the data extracts in this chapter, Extract 4.07 is probably the most similar to the vignette presented to Mongeau's research participants. The scenario is hypothetical, the recipients are invited to respond but not to expect a direct reply and so on. Nonetheless, even in Extract 4.07 we can see that some attention is being paid to the interactional accountability of the narrator of the tale. The narrator provides an account for what s/he is doing in the description of what "you" did that could otherwise sound like some kind of accusation: specifically, the "Question of Infidelity" is announced and presented as just another example of "some difficult moral and ethical questions that society is grappling with today" (lines 3-4). This much accomplished, an isolated episode of infidelity is constructed that admits the fact of someone having "been unfaithful" (lines 21-22) while at the same time heavily mitigating it so as to create the opportunity for some doubt and debate on the part of recipients about whether or not it is really necessary to "tell your spouse" (line 19) about what went on. Indeed, the equivocation between positive assertion and guilty denial and the normalising techniques that characterise isolated episodes of infidelity make them ideal for these kinds of reasoning exercises in a way that more uncompromising defences (such as constructing a generic rationale) and more controversial ones (such as constructing a special category of self) cannot hope to be.

In short, vignettes such as Mongeau's are a long way from being discursively or interactionally neutral. Despite their neglect in cognitive approaches to attribution, such vignettes, like that of Extract 4.07 and alongside the other tales of isolated episodes that we have looked at in this chapter, are attributionally busy and constructive. They deploy a collection of rhetorical devices and techniques including episodic, script-instantiating formulations and techniques of sequential narrative organisation to create scenarios that not only provide for inferences of a situational cause but are understandable by recipients as relevantly performing a range of interactional functions. Isolated episodes of infidelity can serve as the topic for a reasoning game of the sort devised by Mongeau and colleagues or for a debate in a public forum (as in Extracts 4.01, 4.04 and 4.07). They can serve as an interesting and relatively sympathetic confession that fulfils the requirements of a research interview (as in Extract 4.08) or the "reader's true experience" section of a glossy magazine (as in Extracts 4.05

and 4.06). They are an available resource for writers who address mass audiences in the pop psychology and self help genres (as in Extracts 4.02 and 4.03). The business of attribution does not follow as a recipient's cognitive reaction to the discourse but is very much a part of what the discourse itself is doing.

The second shortcoming of the approach taken by Mongeau and company is that it tends to ignore the fact that research participants are capable of more than producing codeable, quantifiable answers to questions about what caused the behaviour of fictional characters in hypothetical situations. It is an approach that screens out all but a thin slice of participants' attributional discursive activity. That people are able to make sense of tightly constrained, laboratory-designed attributional tasks and produce intelligible responses using instruments such as Likert scales is arguably the least interesting aspect of their capacity to "do attribution" through discourse and certainly not very representative of anyone's ordinary, day-to-day discursive behaviour. As Antaki (1994), after Edwards and Potter (1992) has remarked, participants in these kinds of studies are "committed, by experimenter-subject protocol, to make up some answer to the explicitly stated or covertly implied question 'why did this happen?' whether an answer [is] necessary or not." Recipients of experimental vignettes are discouraged from trying to enter into negotiation with the experimenter over the meaning of the discourse they encounter and they are prevented from taking issue with the need for an explanation of the described events in the first place. There is little opportunity to argue about the wording or the style of description: participants have to accept the vignette as it is given. Moreover, the nature of the experiment as a social situation is such that participants are presented with descriptions of characters and events which they know to be fictional, contrived exclusively to suit the purpose and design of the research and in which, therefore, they cannot be expected to have any real interest or personal stake. This might not matter so much if the *raison d'être* of a vignette is merely an attempt to inform or entertain, but the social cognition researchers have the grander ambition of discovering something about attributional processes as an important and pervasive element of social life. It is a pity, then, that their preferred research methods leave so many of people's wide ranging attributional activities untouched.

In gathering the data for *The Compleat Infidel* I deliberately collected defences of infidels and infidelity from an eclectic mix of sources and media, including live talk, print media and new digital media. Sometimes the speakers and writers who produced the discourse can be seen supplying an answer to some direct question with a limited range of expected responses; sometimes they

reminisce and speculate in long, loosely structured monologues. Sometimes they engage in face-to-face conversation with the recipient of their accounts and sometimes they are found to be addressing a largely unknown and anonymous audience from a distance, across divides of time and space. This inclusive policy means that within the pages you are reading now it has been possible to survey a wider variety of attributional and otherwise action orientated discursive forms than would have been available to Mongeau, Hale and Alles from their collection of quantitative or quantifiable responses to the Jane/John story. Notably, a glance back over the accounts of isolated episodes of infidelity that appear in this chapter confirms that social cognition researchers do not have a monopoly on constructing vignettes. Given the opportunity, research participants use just the same rhetorical devices and techniques, as do internet surfers, human interest journalists, popular psychologists *et al.*. Constructing self-contained stories - episodic narratives, if you will - that describe the circumstances surrounding contested events and thereby accomplish specific kinds of attributional work is a form of discursive behaviour which social cognition researchers such as Mongeau practice themselves but fail to notice as relevant or interesting when it is displayed by their participants.

From the standpoint of discursive psychology, attributions of cause and responsibility are not passive reactions to perceived reality, happening somewhere deep inside the skulls of individual subjects. Rather, they are artefacts of talk and text, accomplished at the level of social interaction. They are provided, and provided for, in contextually specific and socially meaningful exchanges where issues of personal accountability arise and are settled among co-participants. This need not imply face-to-face conversation; the action orientation of discourse is evident even in unsigned public documents such as Mental Health Net's "Question of the Month" with its reflexive self-characterisation as one among several "moral and ethical questions that society is grappling with today." Indeed, it is evident in the routinely impersonal, generalisable vignettes that are got up for experimental purposes, since that idiomatic, script-instantiating narrative style is itself a form of talk, used outside the laboratory as well as inside, as and when it is needed to achieve a particular rhetorical effect.

5

Construct a Special Category of Self

Introduction

From time to time, the defensive practices of infidelity discourse involve an appeal to some special group or membership category to which the infidel belongs. Such appeals are the subject matter of Chapter 5. I shall begin by supplying an overview of that feature of the discursive landscape which I have called "construct a special category of self." As in the previous two chapters, the approach taken at this stage is to view the construction of a special category of self as drawing on a particular interpretative repertoire so I shall briefly indicate some of the themes, images and other discursive resources from which this defence is characteristically built up.

After that, it will be time to move on to the data analysis part of the chapter where we shall look at a generous handful of extracts of data that show special categories of self being constructed in situ. We shall retain a focus on discursive resources but zoom in so that it is possible to identify some of the more detailed features of construction and design in these accounts and thereby discover something about their interactional functions.

Finally, in the critique and conclusions part of the chapter we will step back and consider the broader functions of constructing a special category of self. This section will also include a discussion of the critical implications of our findings for a named area of social science. In previous chapters we have looked at the implications of *The Compleat Infidel* for sociometric studies of (attitudes to) infidelity and also for studies based on attribution theory. In the present chapter the object of our attention will be that body of literature which tries to explain infidelity using theories of personality and psychopathology, often to a mass audience of lay readers.

The insights of the earlier analytic chapters will continue to apply in the chapter you are reading now. In particular, it will be useful to recall the mutual

co-constitution of the self and the world or the actor and the situation which we discussed in Chapter 4. When isolated episodes of infidelity are discursively constructed, recipients are invited to see that the cause of the troublesome behaviour was something in the protagonist's local environment. In contrast, the special categories of self that we will see constructed in this chapter encourage recipients to understand that the cause of the infidelity was or is something located within the individual themselves.

The common theme among all the accounts to be examined in this chapter is that they construct some infidel or infidels as members of a special category of people who are especially prone or vulnerable to being unfaithful. There are, in fact, several categories that can be appealed to in this way and there will not be room to look at absolutely all of them within the few pages available here. For instance, my data base shows that some appeals rest on the idea that certain groups of people receive a disproportionate number of romantic and/or sexual offers that eventually tempt them into infidelity. These groups include: very attractive people; celebrities and people with high profile occupations; people with occupations that thrust them into sexually charged situations (working in nightclubs being one example). The categories that we will be looking at in this chapter are as follows. Firstly we will consider appeals to "poor general aptitude" which invokes a category of people who are simply inherently "bad at" sustained fidelity. Lastly we will examine appeals of "verified and treatable disorder" in which people invoke confirmed psychological illnesses such as addiction as an explanation for their infidelitous behaviour. As an intermediate step we will also investigate some accounts of "unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance" in which speakers explore multiple possibilities, wavering between the mental illness type of explanation and other, more situational types of account.

In this chapter we shall make heavy use of the idea of *membership categories* so I shall take the opportunity to clarify that expression now before we get underway with the data analysis. The originator of the term was conversation analyst Harvey Sacks (e.g., Sacks, 1992). Membership categories are discursive resources for identifying and describing people; speakers use membership categories to refer to others and also to themselves. So far in *The Compleat Infidel* I have invoked quite a number of membership categories including the following: men; women; single people; married people; third-party infidels; dyad-bound infidels; victims of infidelity; social scientists; lay people; research participants and so on.

The thing to notice about membership categories is that they are more than just "convenient labels," in the words of Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998, p. 214) and Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995, p. 69): they are also inferentially rich. They provide a means of interpreting and making sense of behaviour because category memberships are conventionally associated with certain *category bound activities*. Let's take an example that is relevant to the content of this chapter. "Addict" is a membership category that does more than describe a person and distinguish them from a population of non-addicts. It makes relevant a set of conventional propositions to do with free will, compulsion and need that can be invoked to explain the behaviour of the person so described. That is, describing someone as an addict in the context of discussing their sexual behaviour makes available the inference that the behaviour is not of their own conscious volition; that they engage in it automatically and perhaps unwillingly in order to fill some psychological void or compensate for some deficit. Moreover, since "addict" is a term with a clinical etymology, it makes relevant the expectation that the addicted individual has been and/or should be in receipt of professional, clinical attention. Clearly, this is different from describing a person as being naturally or dispositionally talentless at curbing their sexual behaviour. Invoking a membership category of "people who are just not very good at fidelity" is a less medicalised option. As such, it lacks the credibility of official, professional endorsement implied by "addiction." However, it is also free of the normative expectation that persons with a clinical condition ought to seek treatment and be motivated to achieve an eventual cure.

With these points in mind, let us move on to the first of our special categories of self: people who suffer from a poor general aptitude for fidelity.

Data Analysis

Poor General Aptitude

Constructions of poor general aptitude deploy a trait-based theory of the self, in contrast to the role-based theory implied by, for example, accounts which excuse infidels by appeal to their occupational circumstances. Of course, within the formal academic enterprise of psychology it is a familiar and well rehearsed idea

that people possess personalities which are composed of a number of relatively fixed traits, possibly including various natural abilities. A classic example of this kind of thinking can be found in the work of Raymond Cattell (e.g., Cattell, 1950, 1957). In Cattell's view, traits can be inferred from behaviour; they are underlying mental structures that predispose individuals to act consistently from one occasion or situation to the next. Some traits are "ability traits" which importantly include "intelligence." Other traits serve a more motivational function and these include things like curiosity and gregariousness. In the data extracts to follow we will see speakers engaged in much the same reasoning as Cattell's. They give the impression in their discourse of observing their own behaviour and inferring something from that about what sort of person they must be. As we will see, the traits and abilities that they notice in themselves are functional in explaining and defending both third-party and dyad-bound infidelity.

Let's take a look at an example of poor general aptitude in action. Extract 5.01 is drawn from one of my own research interviews, about three quarters of the way through the conversation. The interviewee, Kyle, is a man aged about thirty. He describes himself as single although he reports extensive experience of upsetting women who expected him to be faithful and is seemingly a recidivist third-party infidel. With regard to the following extract, Rachel has earlier referred to the experience of "being accused of homewrecking" and asks Kyle, "have you been confronted in that way?" At first Kyle says that he has not but then he appears to remember differently.

Extract 5.01

- Kyle: oh I have been (.) I have been once
 Rachel: have you
 Kyle: I have experienced it once (.) and um (.) again, it put me
 05 in good stead, because it, I, I, I went somewhere (.) in a
sense (.) with the other person (.) an I went somewhere
 where (.) in a moral sense, I shouldna went
 Rachel: mm
 Kyle: and I did (.) and it coulda been very very tricky (.) for me
 10 (.) socially and personally (.) but (.) but it smoo:thed itself
 out (.) but it's still a (.) a u:m (.) tricky (.) situation, yeah?
 u:m (.) and that and that was sleeping with my brother's
 girl
 Rachel: ri:ght (.) yeah yeah yeah (.) I can imagine how pissed
 15 off he was about that! [laughing] (.) did you have words
 on the subject?
 Kyle: [nodding]
 Rachel: [laughing] [did you]
 Kyle: [mm]
 Rachel: oh I guess I shouldn't be laughing, you look serious, it just
 20 [strikes me as funny though [laughing]]
 Kyle: [well no no no I'm thinking about it, I'm thinking] about it,
 [laughing] it's rude, you know what I mean, it's rude

25

Rachel:

that's why like, that's why I look at myself (.) and I say well kid (.) you know (.) you know, if it's there you'll have it and that's fucking obviously so.

see, I'm with you about realism on this one, I do think of it like that, it's like you've got to be realistic about what you are and are not capable of.

Kyle presents the events he recounts as a learning experience: "again, it put me in good stead" (lines 3-4); "that's why I look at myself and say ..." (line 23).

Throughout the interview he is a keen promoter of the virtues of self-knowledge and self-awareness and, as we will see from his contributions to Chapter 7, this is partly because it supports his favoured defensive practice of constructing a generic rationale for infidelity. However, generic rationales tend to be vague and/or dismissive about any offence or distress caused by infidelity to individual victims and concentrate mainly on the broad sociological and political aspects of fidelity as a means of constraining human behaviour. As one result they are less useful for addressing requests that solicit stories about particular, individual transgressions such as the request issued by Rachel immediately prior to Extract 5.01. As we have seen from some of the interview extracts in previous chapters, it is possible to answer questions such as Rachel's with such rhetorical structures as "not prohibited" (Chapter 3) and "mistake of fact" (Chapter 4). However, these are measures that present the protagonist as basically law-abiding. Kyle has not developed that kind of self-representation and happily admits to a variety of past and potential infidelitous adventures. Thus, his construction in this extract of a version of a special category of self is a logical choice because it reconciles the overall fact of his self-identified sexual career with the immediate requirements of the interviewer's question, namely that he should produce an account of and for some particular wrong-doing.

What we see in Extract 5.01 is actually a fairly simple, straightforward example of a construction of poor general aptitude. Kyle's account is not one that makes especially subtle provision for the recipient to draw an inference of a dispositional inclination to infidelity. Rather, he clearly spells it out. He acknowledges, however minimally, the cost of his behaviour on this occasion to the victim ("it's rude, you know what I mean, it's rude": line 22) and then takes that unfortunate effect of rudeness as a warrant for inferring something about his own personality, his own dispositional tendency to follow up all kinds of romantic and sexual opportunities: "that's why I look at myself (.) and I say well kid [] if it's there you'll have it and that's fucking obviously so" (lines 23-25). As we can see, Rachel then builds upon and allies herself with this defence, refining Kyle's general trait-

based account with a more specific reference to the notion of individual ability: "what you are and are not capable of" (lines 27-28).

Notice that in Kyle's crucial final turn in this extract (lines 21-25) he uses various externalising devices to bolster his case and again this is something Rachel co-operates with in her references to "realism" (line 26) and being "realistic" (line 27). Kyle's fact-constructive endeavours include the generalisable, idiomatic formulation "if it's there you'll have it" (line 24) and the very emphatic extreme case formulation "fucking obviously so" (line 25). Moreover, in his account of how he "looks at himself" (line 23) and even addresses himself in the third person as "kid" (line 24), he distances himself from his own observable behaviour and inferable personality traits, displaying himself simultaneously as a helpless miscreant and a rational commentator on that miscreancy. This is a strategy that we will see repeated throughout the present chapter and about which I shall shortly have more to say. In the meantime, let us take a look at another stretch of data.

Extract 5.02 comes from a glossy, British, men's, lifestyle magazine called *Arena*. The particular article from which Extract 5.02 is taken is called "What Men Want" and it purports to be a transcript of a group discussion about men's sexual lives and personal relationships. The facilitator's questions appear in italics. There are four participants: Bruce, Chris, Ian and Tony, who seem to have been selected for their ordinariness or representativeness of what *Arena* takes to be "men in general." Chris is introduced with the words, "Chris, 30, was in a four-and-a-half year relationship until he met another woman 18 months ago. They are to marry next summer." For our present purposes I am especially interested in the quotes attributed to Ian who is introduced as follows: "Ian, 29, has had a string of relationships, mostly long-distance, and is currently seeing a woman who lives in Italy." The two questions that are reproduced below are presented in the *Arena* article as though they are the first two questions to be tackled by the discussants.

Extract 5.02

Is there anything wrong with having an affair?

Ian: Strictly speaking it is wrong, but I must admit I've only ever been faithful to one girl in my life and then she was unfaithful to me. So there was a kind of hidden lesson for me that infidelity pays, somehow.

05 [Bruce's and Tony's turns omitted.]

Chris: The relationship I'm in now is the first where I've been faithful. Previously I've always been unfaithful and never really cared about it very much. I had got to a point where I couldn't see a scenario in which I was ever going to be able to be monogamous. And then it happened.

10 Without wanting to sound smug, it's a fucking great relief when you just think "Brilliant! This is what you're supposed to get!" And you don't think you're going to get it, and you do, and I'm really happy and I'm going to get married in the summer next year.

- 15 *It's weird isn't it? Because what's the reality? Is the reality the you who's playing around, or is the reality the you who goes back to this other person? Which is real and which is front?*
 Ian: Sleeping around's the deal. Because that's what you do, and if you do it serially, then that, sadly, is the real you. In every relationship I have
- 20 had there's always been a barrier, and that barrier has been my infidelity and the lies that are inside me; because I've never been totally open with anyone. I'm a cheat and I'm a coward: I will sleep around but I don't want to face the consequences.

(Eshun, 1997, p. 78)

Ian's turn of lines 18-23 is not just a reply to the facilitator's question. It is also a reaction to Chris's turn of lines 6-13. Notice Chris's disclaimer about not wanting to sound "smug" (line 10), a clear indication that that is precisely how he risks being heard. He risks sounding smug because he is constructing a then/now distinction (a technique also used in constructing isolated episodes of infidelity, as we saw in Chapter 4) and attaching that to his present monogamy and forthcoming marriage, the latter being a category bound activity associated with the membership category of "mature adults." This could be construed as a critical comment on Ian's habitual infidelity, an implication that Ian is comparatively immature and has yet to grow out of his bad behaviour.

Now, Ian's first turn of lines 2-4 looks as though it could have been headed for a generic rationale, perhaps hinging on the idea that "everyone does it even though most people won't admit it." However, by the time Ian's second turn comes round, this kind of argument is no longer sustainable without sounding as though Ian is calling Chris a liar. Thus, Ian is now landed with constructing a special category of self; a form of defence that will consistently support his earlier description of his own routine infidelity without aggressively co-opting the other parties to the discussion. Having said that, Ian's second turn is orientated to resisting the more "smug" aspects of Chris's account and this helps to explain why Ian constructs a version of poor general aptitude in contrast to one of the "illness" defences that we will examine later in this chapter. Interactionally speaking, for Ian there is not much to be gained by admitting the possibility of change because of Chris's story of early degeneracy and sudden reform into responsible adulthood - and illness is a discursive form that holds open the possibility of change through the notion of recovery. However, poor general aptitude admits no possibility of change; if that is your personality then you are stuck with it.

Now look at how Ian's version of poor general aptitude is put together. He does not simply announce "well, that's just me and I know what I'm like." Rather, he picks up on the notion articulated in the facilitator's question that there is potentially a difference between "the real you" and "the front" and he builds on it. Like Kyle in Extract 5.01, Ian selectively attends to the contested behaviour - in this

case "sleeping around" (line 18) - and treats it as empirical evidence from which reliable inferences may be drawn about the actor's personal, inner psychology or "the real you" as it is characterised in this extract (line 19). Again, like Kyle, Ian uses a generalisable, idiomatic formulation to advance his argument, paraphraseable as "if that's what you do then that's the real you" (lines 18-19). This is not just an externalising device in the sense that it boosts the factual status of Ian's proposition, distancing him from his claim by commenting upon himself as an object. More than that, its generalisability cites the phenomenon Ian describes as an example of some larger category of cases. The net effect is to counter and resist Chris's developmental account of (in)fidelity (rather than having "grown out of it," the inference becomes available that Chris has simply failed to recognise the real him that is evidenced by his track record) without directly attacking or confronting him. Contrastingly, Ian is presented as someone who at least possesses the virtue of knowing his own failings, however "sadly" (line 19). His category memberships are invoked in the formulation "I'm a cheat and I'm a coward" (line 22), much as Kyle in Extract 5.01 observes of himself that "if it's there you'll have it."

Let's end this section with Ian's parting shot: "I will sleep around but I don't want to face the consequences" (lines 22-23). There is a future tense as well as a present tense built into this formulation which thereby prospectively accounts for Ian's infidelities as well as the ones he has already committed. What is more, his construction of a version of poor general aptitude and his concomitant presentation of himself as someone who is naturally and dispositionally given to lying, cheating and cowardice does not just admit that future lapses into infidelity are possible but in fact renders them inevitable, given the fixed and stable nature of "personality" as a phenomenon. Thus, Ian's account, like other examples of poor general aptitude, is uncompromising and in fact quite unapologetic, despite the "sadly" of line 19 (akin to Kyle's cursory acknowledgement of rudeness in Extract 5.01). In the remaining sections of this chapter we will look at some methods of constructing a special category of self that are slightly less blunt and make more of a feature of ambiguity regarding the future of the serial infidel.

Unidentified or Suspected Psychological Disturbance

In Chapter 1, in the section on studies of individuals and interpersonal relationships, I commented on and quoted from self help texts such as the *Relate Guide to Better Relationships* (Litvinoff, 1998) that identify the causes of infidelity in

terms which are not just individualised and psychological but broadly psychopathological, a common example being the catch-all term "insecurity." Now, insecurity may not be a formalised mental illness but, on the other hand, it is hardly an indicator of mental health and stability. In fact, it is the abnormalised part of a contrast pair, the other, more normalised, half obviously being "security." Moreover, insecurity is not necessarily treated in this literature as an innate and permanent personality trait. More usually, it is linked to individually variable life experiences; something that might result from an early experience of betrayal by someone close or from a mid life sense of declining sexual attractiveness or whatever. Thus, insecurity and related psychological conditions are constructed as internal to the self in the sense that a person whose behaviour is driven by insecurity one day will be similarly motivated the next but they are also constructed as characteristics which are acquired and learned and therefore have the potential to be un-acquired and un-learned. This renders insecure individuals and their troubled relationships at least potentially amenable to change through therapy which is of course what the writers of self help books on infidelity are in the business of selling.

Speakers and writers who defend themselves with a version of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance draw on much the same discursive techniques and resources as Litvinoff and colleagues. On the occasions when they give a discrete label to their psychological condition (and this is not an inevitable manoeuvre), they choose broad, moderately abnormalised terms such as insecurity. Otherwise, they, like the self help authors, put together vaguely suggestive character sketches about "not being very confident," "not feeling attractive" and so on, which provide a psychologised explanation for past and prospective serial infidelities and which hold open the possibility of eventual psychological change without actually demanding it (as might normatively be the case with a more formal, clinical-sounding description).

Let's take a look at some data. Extract 5.03 is the simplest example of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance in my database so it will serve well as a place to start before moving on to something more complicated. It is a contribution to the Friends and Lovers website, described earlier in connection with Extract 4.01 in the previous chapter. To briefly recap, contributors are netizens who have responded to an open invitation to answer the broad question of "why do lovers cheat?" This particular contributor identifies himself as "3RD EYE from THA BURY."

Extract 5.03

01 I JUST CAN'T STOP CHEATING. MY FEELINGS WON'T ALLOW ME TO BE
 02 FAITHFUL. I AM IN LOVE WIT THREE GIRLS. I DON'T WANT TO LOSE ANY OF
 03 THEM, I THINK I NEED HELP. I WANT TO GET MARRIED ONE DAY SO I CAN
 04 HAVE REAL LOVE WITH NO WORRY.

(Home & Leisure Publishing Inc., 1998,
http://cyberspud.com/friends_lovers/read10.htm)

3rd Eye provides a very concise, punchy account of his predicament.

Nevertheless, from a discourse-analytic point of view there is quite a lot in here to be unpacked. To begin with, this account has several elements in common with the previous material in the section on poor general aptitude. Take the first line: "I just can't stop cheating." This is clearly a generalised activity description, much like those produced by Kyle and Ian, which provides for an inference about 3rd Eye's disposition and warrants the following claim that "my feelings won't allow me to be faithful." However, there is an increased emphasis in 3rd Eye's account on the possibility of psychopathology as the relevant dispositional ingredient, in contrast to Kyle's and Ian's descriptions of their moral failings. Kyle talks about how he "went somewhere where (.) in a moral sense, I shouldna went" (Extract 5.01, lines 5-6), while Ian talks about "the lies that are inside me" (Extract 5.02, line 21) and refers to himself as "a cheat" and "a coward" (line 22) which are hearably moral character flaws rather than problems of psychological health. But 3rd Eye explicitly articulates a *problem* of being *prevented* from controlling or modifying his behaviour.

In Chapter 3 I mentioned Derek Edwards's commentary on Dorothy Smith's *K is mentally ill* (Edwards, 1997; Smith, 1978), in which Smith analyses descriptions by K's friends of her decline into mental illness. One bit of Smith's data that Edwards particularly notices runs as follows: "K was *unable* to put on a teapot cover correctly, she would not reverse its position to make it fit, but would simply keep slamming it down on the pot" (Smith, 1978, p. 46; emphasis added). Edwards remarks that "the specification of K as 'unable' provides a dispositional basis for a series of actions," "the use of *keep* reinforces the repetitive nature of the action and, together with *simply*, helps build a picture" (Edwards, 1997, p. 150; emphasis in original), a picture of compulsion and also of irrationality. As Edwards concludes, "it is through these kinds of linguistic details that links are produced between a specified set of recurrent actions and the status of these patterns as documenting the actor's inner disposition (pathological, in K's case) to act in those ways" (ibid.). In 3rd Eye's account the pathologised character portrait builds up to the formulation "I think I need help" (line 3) which encapsulates nicely the spirit of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance.

What we are seeing here, as in the last chapter, is more evidence that the self and the world are mutually co-constituted (Edwards and Potter, 1992). When isolated episodes of infidelity are constructed, events and circumstances are characterised as episodes and packaged in script-instantiating formulations so as to display the speaker themselves as the sort of person who is law-abidingly faithful and sexually continent in the normal run of things. When special categories of self are constructed, the speaker's observable actions and social behaviours are presented in episodic, script-instantiating formulations which are designed to show that this is infidelity of low distinctiveness; they display the speaker as the sort of person who is dispositionally infidelitous. Thus, whether the discursive output of a speaker or writer is interactionally geared to an "external" locus of cause or an "internal" one, the discursive resources being used are basically the same. As Edwards (1997, p. 152) sums it up, dispositions (of whichever variety) "are built from and warranted by generalized action formulations, and from norm-exceptions."

Now let's move on to a slightly richer, more complex example of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance. Extract 5.04 is a stretch of data from one of my own research interviews. The extract occurs about one third of the way through the interview (page 16 of the transcript). The interviewee, Emma, is a student aged about twenty. During term time she lives with her boyfriend, Ben, who is a similar age and to whom she is frequently unfaithful. In particular, unbeknownst to Ben, she has regular meetings with an older man named Brad who lives nearby.

Extract 5.04

- | | | |
|----|----------------|---|
| 05 | <i>Emma:</i> | I'm playing a <u>really</u> dangerous game because I <u>live</u> with this guy (.) um (.) and I'll be living with him for another (.) month and a half [until the end of the academic year] and if he finds out then you can imagine the rows in the house, I live with <u>all</u> his friends in (.) the house |
| | <i>Rachel:</i> | yeah |
| | <i>Emma:</i> | <u>next</u> year (.) he's on a year out (.) which is quite good for me |
| 10 | <i>Rachel:</i> | [mhm [laughing]] |
| | <i>Emma:</i> | [he's on a year out] but (.) I'm (.) moving into a house with <u>another</u> group of his friends |
| | <i>Rachel:</i> | ri:ght |
| 15 | <i>Emma:</i> | cus we all know each other (.) so: if <u>ever</u> it came out that I was cheating on him, not only would it hurt <u>him</u> and there'd be rows between <u>me</u> and him but then (.) <u>all</u> his friends would be very down on me as <u>well</u> (.) so I'm playing a dangerous game, but I <u>can't</u> stop. |
| | <i>Rachel:</i> | [[laughing]] |
| | <i>Emma:</i> | [I can <u>not</u> stop.] (.) and I <u>know</u> that if there was an |

- 20 opportunity for me to sleep with (.) Brad today
 Rachel: yeah
 Emma: um cus you see we can't ever do it at my house cus
 Rachel: [yeah yeah]
 Emma: [(xxx) lives there] but if there was an opportunity for me to
 25 sleep with Brad today then I would
 Rachel: yeah yeah
 Emma: because (.) it's a huge turn on.
 Rachel: yeah. I know what you're saying.
 [about 20 lines omitted]
- 30 Emma: I don't know, I mean I, I've got this (.) very (.) two way
 bizarre moralistic system because (.) if anybody did it to
 me I'd be pissed off, I'd expect my friends to be pissed off
 with the bloke (.) um (.) I can also understand why his
 friends would be pissed off but at the same time (.) I still
 35 go ahead and do it and it makes me feel good.
 Rachel: mm (.) yeah
 Emma: [laughing] so I don't know quite (.) and then I think (.) um
 both my sisters are married um (.) my family's a very
 christian family, um (.) both my sisters were engaged at
 40 twenty one, married by twenty two (.) one of my sisters got
 married a couple of weeks ago, in fact (.) um (.) and I: (.) I
 have been (.) in long term relationships since a very early
 age, about (.) fourtee:n (.) sort of at fourteen I was seeing
 45 a guy that was ten years older than me (.) and I had, went
 out with him for two years and then (.) I seem to have very
 long term relationships with guys (.) that I'm unfaithful to all
 of them
 Rachel: mm
 Emma: during the long term relationships um (.) and I just can't
 50 imagine myself um (.) ever being totally faithful to
 somebody =
 Rachel: = mm
 Emma: and then I think about ooh dear you know am I ever
 gonna be able to get married or whatever (.) um (.) and
 55 then I've got this whole big (.) yeah but when you're
 married to a guy (.) then you're with them because (.)
 you've had this big service and certificate and stuff
 whereas if you live with a guy then you're there because
 (.) um (.) they want to be there and there's more
 60 opportunity for them to [leave] if they want [to leave]
 Rachel: [mm] [mm mm]
 Emma: um (.) but then I think if I've met the right person I will be
 faithful
 Rachel: mm =
 65 Emma: = which is, and because I believe that, because I've
twisted myself into believing [this] then I think (.) with
 Rachel: [mm]
 Emma: anybody that I'm with that I'm unfaithful to (.) then it's not
 the right person
 70 Rachel: mm: mm
 Emma: [laughing] see how confused and mixed up I am?

In this extract, compared to the last, we can see more of the display of doubt and ambiguity about the health or sickness of one's own psyche which is the hallmark of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance. Early in her account, Emma uses the same language as 3rd Eye in Extract 5.03 to problematise her infidelitous behaviour: "I can't stop" (line 17), "I can not stop" (line 19). She emphasises her lack of control over her own behaviour by pointing out

that it has a cost not only to her victim, Ben, but also to herself: "I'm playing a really dangerous game" (lines 1, 17); "and then I think about ooh dear you know am I ever gonna be able to get married or whatever" (lines 53-54). This is paralleled in Extract 5.03 by 3rd Eye's plaintive call, "I want to get married one day so I can have real love with no worry" (lines 3-4). Constructing a personal cost incurred by one's own infidelity is a practice that increases in frequency and intensity as speakers move up the scale of pathologisation from poor general aptitude to verified and treatable disorder. In the case of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance, the cost to the infidel of their behaviour provides a basis for speculation about the status of their psychological condition; for example, in Extract 5.04 it provides for Emma to wonder out loud what could be causing her to act in this counter-intuitive way.

In lines 30-35 Emma reiterates the problem, proposing that the moral reasoning implied by her behaviour is "bizarre" and contrasting her ability to understand that what she is doing is wrong with the observation that, nonetheless, "I still go ahead and do it" and, even more puzzlingly, "it makes me feel good." She is then in a position to talk in some detail about the possible implications of this puzzle. We saw in Chapter 3 some examples of speakers demonstrating their ability to see more than one side of an argument, using a proleptic "on the one hand ... on the other hand" technique, for example when Lizzy pondered the (dis)similarity between "a sixty nine and a shag" in Extract 3.04. In Extract 5.04 Emma engages in a similar practice. She first proposes that there is something anomalous or abnormal about *herself* as an individual by introducing evidence that contrasts an extrematised description of her own sexual history with the conspicuously normalised and conventional biographies of her sisters (lines 38-54). Then, in lines 55-60 she explores the possibility that her *family's* approach to these matters might not, after all, be the obvious model to aspire to; perhaps marriage is only a system for enforcing fidelity and commitment rather a natural and desirable result of it. In line 62 another disjunctive "but then" appears and Emma tries out the possibility that she simply has not yet met the right person; that is, she experimentally locates the cause of the problem in her *partners*. To date all members of the category "the wrong person." In line 66 she is quick to ironise that hypothesis - "I've twisted myself into believing this" - and thereby highlights once again a discrepancy or dissonance in her thinking: she can see that thinking that anyone she's unfaithful to is the wrong person is "twisted" but she thinks it anyway. All this debating and discursive to-ing and fro-ing is eventually wrapped up and reformulated as evidence for Emma's final statement about the doubt and

ambiguity that characterises her present position: the delightfully reflexive rhetorical question "see how confu:sed and mixed up I am?" (line 71).

What we have seen in this section on unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance are examples of discourse users de-naturalising their serial infidelities. The misbehaviour they describe is not presented as the result of a natural and stable, if unfortunate, character flaw like being "a cheat and a coward" (cf. Ian) or being inclined to "have it" if "it" is there (cf. Kyle). Rather, it is presented as at least suggestive of a potentially soluble psychological problem. Clearly, this is a more pathologising defensive practice than "poor general aptitude." Nonetheless, builders of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance like to keep their options open. The infidelity is suggestive of psychopathology but this is never formalised and confirmed. 3rd Eye only *thinks* he needs help; Emma toys with hypotheses about marriage and her partners to date which preserve the possibility that her rationality and mental health actually remain intact. In the next section we will look at some special categories of self that brook no doubt that something is definitely wrong.

Verified and Treatable Disorder

Constructions of verified and treatable disorder identify individuals' recidivist infidelity as the symptom of a discrete, nameable psychological illness; something more formal than generalised, catch-all categories such as insecurity, not feeling attractive and low self esteem which are the type to be invoked in constructions of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance. Of course, there are not many discrete mental illnesses that can perform this function. Terms such as satyriasis and nymphomania dropped out of use a long time ago. Psychiatrist Frank Pittman in his book on infidelity, *Private Lies*, (1989) makes a medicalised mental condition out of the term "philandering" but he is almost unique in this respect and most people would recognise philandering as a description of a form of behaviour rather than a psychological state. However, since the mid 1980s a new disease category has begun to emerge, especially in the United States: this is "sex addiction," sometimes with "love addiction" tacked on as a companion disorder (e.g., Carnes, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1994; Earle and Crow, 1989; Earle and Earle, 1995; Kasl, 1989; Lauser, 1992; Schaeffer, 1987; Schneider, 1988, 1991; Schneider, Corley and Irons, 1998; Schneider and Irons, 1996; Schneider and Schneider, 1990, 1996). While sex addiction is undoubtedly still a highly controversial notion and most clinicians are deeply sceptical about its existence,

it is not completely without professional support. The US now boasts a National Council for Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity, a consortium of professional treatment providers. Some of its members, like Jennifer Schneider, are equipped with medical degrees. Others boast respectable career histories in psychology and psychotherapy: Ralph Earle is a former president of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, for instance.

Lay speakers and writers who construct versions of verified and treatable disorder use the same discursive resources as Schneider, Earle and company. They appear keen to exploit the explanatory power of "addiction" with its well established clinical history (e.g., through the notions of alcoholism and drug addiction), familiar set of behavioural symptoms and accepted prescriptions for treatment (ranging from professional cognitive-behavioural therapy to informal twelve-step groups like Alcoholics Anonymous). As I observed in the introduction to this chapter, compared to the alternative special categories of self, constructing a verified and treatable disorder emerges as a way of buying some official, professional endorsement for one's alleged disposition or psychological state. However, such endorsement is accompanied by the normative expectation that sufferers of known "conditions" ought to at least attempt some kind of treatment. Moreover, being mentally ill is rather a stigmatised type of category membership (e.g., Potter, 1996a, p. 127) and addiction especially so (e.g., Sedgwick, 1992). Volunteers for membership of the category "addicts" become accountable not only for seeking treatment but also for having fallen sick in the first place.

It is surely time to anchor this discussion to some data. Extract 5.05 is drawn from a volume of interviews published under the title *Affairs of the Heart: Men & Women Reveal the Truth about Extramarital Affairs* (Lee, 1993). Virginia Lee is an American journalist. The interviewee in this extract is a man called Philip and he is introduced as follows: "Philip was married twice, and both his marriages were disrupted because of affairs with other women. To him, sex was a drug, a high he lived for. In order to heal his sex addiction, Philip embarked on a path of personal therapy and conscious abstinence" (ibid., p. 39).

Extract 5.05

Do you think people use sex as a drug?

05 Sex has served as a drug for me. It has helped me numb my feelings of deep loneliness and deep hurt, feelings left over from childhood. Just as you need to continue using a drug, I needed to keep consuming women. There were never enough. And sex was never really satisfying - I always hungered for more.

[1 paragraph omitted]

- 10 *Did you feel that having affairs was wrong?*
 Because of the numbness, it was difficult for my inner soul to have much influence whatsoever. I knew that what I was doing was inappropriate, especially if both of us were married to other people. When a secret rendezvous became necessary, I knew it was wrong, but there was excitement and suspense in it. Sometimes, one of our spouses would even be in the same house, and we would sneak off to a private place. The feeling of fear, of being discovered, was always there.

[2 pages omitted]

- 20 *How have you dealt with your sex addiction in this [second] marriage?*
 Sex and love addiction is more than just having intercourse. It is an attitude called "being on the make." Any woman you see is someone you may potentially seduce, even though you may choose not to seduce her. It's an element that involves eye contact, flirting and being physically close. I was still doing those things but thought I had it under control since I wasn't taking it all the way. Sometimes a man will go to an event with his wife, but not really be with her. He will be with every other woman in the room. I thought my sex addiction had been broken, but it wasn't true. On a subtle level, it was still going on. Finally, I can have eye contact with a woman without that scary feeling that it's going to lead to an affair. I can fantasize, but I don't take it any further. I know my boundaries now, whereas I didn't know them before. My mother didn't know them. I think my sex addiction grew out of being sexually violated by my mother as a child.

[3 pages omitted]

- 40 *Has that hunger in you finally been satisfied? Do you think you are cured of your sex addiction?*
 Yes. I would like to think so. One therapist explained that once you have an addiction, it is always part of you. You just learn how to manage it so it doesn't control your life. You may always be an alcoholic, but it doesn't mean you have to drink.

(Lee, 1993, pp. 39, 42-43, 46)

This extract and Lee's introduction to it which I quoted above show both Lee and Philip making the connection between sex addiction, drug addiction (lines 1-6) and alcoholism (lines 43-44). Indeed, the rather leading question "Do you think people use sex as a drug?" is presented in Lee's book as the very first question of the interview, although what conversation analysts have discovered about the dynamics of conversation suggests that this is extremely unlikely to have been the case on the actual day. Nonetheless, for our purposes the point is that the reader's attention is drawn to the similarity of these conditions straight away. As a first priority, the controversial and relatively unfamiliar disorder of sex addiction is externalised and reified through association with these more well established disease categories.

In lines 2-3 we can see that Philip no sooner affirms the drug-addiction-like nature of his problem than he provides an account for having developed such a condition. It is not just that he liked sex and irresponsibly over-indulged to the

point where addiction set in. Rather, he refers to deep-seated and long-standing "loneliness" and "hurt," "feelings left over from childhood" with respect to which the sex served as an analgesic. This is an account full of emotional appeal and is thereby quite rhetorically robust; a sceptical recipient who wished to challenge the truth of Philip's claim would themselves become accountable for being insensitive and unsympathetic to someone who was injured at a young and tender age. For good measure, Philip elaborates on the nature of this injury in lines 33-35. He was, he claims, "sexually violated" by his mother. By contemporary standards - that is, according to the set of normative expectations that currently adhere to the experience denoted "child abuse" (prominently including the principle that children reporting abuse should never, ever be disbelieved) - this claim is nearly impossible to contest.

In lines 26-33 Philip orientates to the need to provide an account of the steps he has taken to treat his addiction. In fact, he attends to this issue at numerous points throughout his interview (e.g., notice the construction "one therapist" in line 41 which makes available the inference that he has been concerned and vigilant enough to consult more than one and possibly several over an extended period of time) but his efforts in lines 26-33 are particularly interesting. Specifically, he recalls an occasion when he tried to treat the problem unaided and failed: "I thought I had it under control"; "I thought my sex addiction had been broken, but it wasn't true." That he recognised this failure and went on to seek professional assistance displays him as someone who is mindful of and responsibly attending to his psychological ill health.

Let us continue our examination of verified and treatable disorder with a new piece of data, this time from a British source. Extract 5.06 is a story that appeared in the *Sunday People*, a tabloid newspaper. It is reproduced here in full. The subject of the report, Jim Davidson, is a minor celebrity and television "personality."

Extract 5.06

TV JIM: I'M SEX ADDICT

Amazing confession of anguished comic

- 05 Comedian Jim Davidson confesses today: "I am a sex addict."
The four-times-married star tells the *Sunday People* in the most frank interview he has ever given that he regularly cheated on ALL of his wives. Jim, 44, says: "I wanted to have sex with every woman I saw."
He insists he has been faithful to his current lover Debbie Corrigan, 26 -
10 despite their constant public bust-ups.

- But the Generation Game host says: "The world already knows I am an alcoholic. Being an alcoholic means I have an addictive personality which means I can get addicted to everything. It's fair to say I am also a sex addict.
- 15 "There used to be a time when I couldn't do without the casual sex. I liked having sex and then just being able to walk away. I loved the chase, getting the girl and the sex - sex with a stranger and no ties, then moving on.
- "I got grumpy when I saw beautiful women I couldn't have.
- 20 "*It's so hard to say no when you know it's available, so difficult to stop wanting someone you haven't got.*
- "But not so much now - hopefully like the drink it is under control."
- Jim admits it wasn't simply because he was the happy-go-lucky, jack-the-lad the world knows him as - it was a driving emotional need to find love.
- 25 With obvious pain he confesses that he particularly cheated during his last marriage to beautiful Tracy Hilton, the mother to three of his five children. It was the start of his affair with Debbie two years ago that finally destroyed his 10-year marriage to former Page 3 girl Tracy.
- Jim confesses: "I really wish it hadn't happened. I really wish it could have worked out for us as a family.
- 30 "But I never felt loved enough by her. So I found comfort elsewhere.
- "Not affairs, just one-night stands. There were so many - yet, ironically, I think I rather hoped she'd realise and find out. Then at least I'd know if she really cared."
- 35 But his cheating ways have left current lover Debbie consumed with jealousy and suspicion about other women, leading to savage bust-ups. Jim began to face up to his sex addiction when he began treatment for the alcoholism.
- He decided to go public about his drink problem as part of combating it.
- 40 Until now, however, he's never talked about being hooked on sex.
- He said: "You can't be addicted to one thing and not another.
- "Some people say I'm even addicted to wedding cake!
- "I can't control my life. Business I can control, but life, I haven't got a clue.
- "*I just say I'm going down the river, if round the next bend there lies wife*
- 45 *No. 5 - well, we're all in trouble.*"

(Wallis, 1999, pp. 1, 4)

Like Philip, Davidson and his self-appointed spokesman, the journalist Wallis, make a point of accomplishing three things. Firstly, they reify the contentious notion of sex addiction by attaching it to the more rhetorically robust category of alcoholism (lines 11-14, 22, 38-41). Secondly, they provide an account for Davidson having developed an addiction, especially one that manifested itself in the form of excessive sexual behaviour rather than some other activity. It is not only that Jim has "an addictive personality" (line 12) and "Jim admits it wasn't simply because he was the happy-go-lucky, jack-the-lad the world knows him as - it was a driving emotional need to find love" (lines 23-24). Thirdly, they orientate to the normative requirement to explain what action Davidson has taken to address his problem. In lines 37-40 this action is worked up as "going public" and by analogy with his alcoholism the inference is made available that going public is a sign that Davidson is at least attempting to "combat" his sex addiction and may even have begun treatment for it.

The new analytic points that I want to raise are as follows. Firstly, Extract 5.06 shows that, compared to poor general aptitude and unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance, constructions of verified and treatable disorder place greater emphasis on recognising the cost to others of the infidel's behaviour. Kyle, in Extract 5.01, admits only to rudeness. Emma, in Extract 5.04, acknowledges not that her boyfriend *has* been hurt but only that he *would* be hurt if he found out what she had been up to. However, Davidson's account of Extract 5.06 is presented as an "anguished confession" (line 3), delivered "with obvious pain" (line 25). A well chosen selection of categories and category memberships are invoked to indicate that he recognises the extent of the damage that his behaviour has caused: he particularly injured a woman who is not only "beautiful" but "mother to three of his five children" (line 26); the relationship he destroyed was not some brief fling but a "10-year marriage" (line 28); things did not only fail to work out for him but "for us as a family" (line 30). That is, constructions of verified and treatable disorder make comparatively more effort to be heard as *not* attempting justification.

Secondly, it is significant that Wallis does more than simply report that Davidson is getting treatment for his sex addiction: the reader is explicitly invited to notice Davidson's going public as a relevant action. This is a discursive manoeuvre which alludes to the twelve-step tradition of treating alcoholism. In the rhetoric of Alcoholics Anonymous and groups which follow that model, admitting and thus responsibly taking "ownership" of the problem of addiction is the crucial first step of the recovery process. A rhetorical effect of this practice is that even a discursive event such as Davidson's "amazing confession" to the readers of the *Sunday People* can be claimed to be legitimately and creditably a part of the therapeutic endeavour, not just a pre-cursor to it - although the victims of infidelity and other critics might well argue that merely agreeing that you have behaved badly (especially in the context of a rather salacious story in a tabloid newspaper) is not synonymous with making reparation for your behaviour or redressing the balance.

Thirdly and finally, it is important to note that although defences of verified and treatable disorder are accompanied by a normative requirement to seek or attempt treatment, being treated is not the same thing as being cured. In common with the other special categories of self, this is a defensive practice which makes provision for repeated and future episodes of infidelity to occur, no matter how convincing the infidel's present display of "anguish" and remorse. The structure of addiction rhetoric is such that although it appears to be eminently treatable with a range of measures and methods, some as simple as confession, it

is nevertheless a chronic and ultimately incurable condition. This point is made in both Extracts 5.05 and 5.06. In Extract 5.05 (lines 41-44) Philip explains that one cannot extinguish addiction but only learn how to manage it, which provides for all sorts of future instances and episodes where the problem temporarily escapes the grip of management. In Extract 5.06 Davidson is reported as only "hopeful" and not certain that his problem is under control (line 22). Furthermore, at the end of Wallis's story, Davidson's lack of control is converted from a future possibility to a present reality ("I can't control my life," line 43; emphasis added), that which resists control is dramatically expanded from "sex" to "my life" (ibid.) and thus Wallis is reasonably able to finish with a promissory note, not just that one day Jim might titillatingly lapse into another bout of "casual sex" (line 15) but, more newsworthily, that another "destroyed" marriage and "wife No. 5" (line 45) could suddenly appear from just around "the next bend."

Critique and Conclusions

The final part of this chapter is divided into roughly three sections. To begin with I shall round up the insights of the above data analysis and draw some overall conclusions about the functions of constructing a special category of self as a defensive practice. The next stage will be to discuss the critical implications of what we have seen in these examples of lay people's discursive practice for our understanding of the discursive output of certain professional counsellors and psychotherapists. Finally, I will briefly sum up what it means to take a discursive, interactionally sensitive approach to explanations for infidelity which use notions of personality and psychopathology and illustrate the advantages of that approach.

In this chapter we have looked at three methods of constructing a special category of self: "poor general aptitude," "unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance" and "verified and treatable disorder." These three do not only vary in terms of their gross content; they also vary according to the functions that they are able to perform. Versions of poor general aptitude explain individuals' infidelity in terms of fixed personality traits or character flaws. The unique interactional advantage of poor general aptitude is its compatibility with constructing a justificatory rationale for infidelity, which we will discuss in Chapter

7. The minority category of self-identified cheats and people who know that "if it's there, you'll have it" can be transformed into an elite; a group of individuals who possess the rare virtues of realism, insight and self-awareness. Versions of verified and treatable disorder invoke a discrete psychological illness such as addiction to account for infidelity. The special utility of this method of constructing a special category of self is that it permits an elaborate display of guilt, repentance and remedial action in the form of "getting treatment." Constructing a version of unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance strikes a balance between these two. Speakers are conspicuously undecided about whether or not their inferable dispositional inclination to infidelity represents a psychological problem that is really serious enough to amount to "needing help." This enables them to display reasonable concern and perhaps regret about their behaviour without rendering them accountable for not having already sought assistance with changing it.

Across the board, constructing a special category of self is a defensive practice that claims *diminished capacity* for the habitual infidel. It represents them as a person who has less than the normal capacity to keep within the boundaries of morally correct behaviour. Like the generic rationales of Chapter 7, this is a defence of low distinctiveness; that is, it admits that acts of infidelity are not unusual for this individual. However, the generic rationales tend to involve claims of high consensus, by which I mean that speakers argue that "everyone else" behaves just like them and/or they want to and/or they have a right to. Contrastingly, "special category of self" is a defence of low consensus, by which I mean that speakers acknowledge that everyone else does not behave like them, nor should they.

In previous chapters I have referred to Atkinson's and Drew's (1979) study of the Scarman tribunal hearings. In particular, recall that in Chapter 4 I noticed that constructing an isolated episode of infidelity is a defensive practice that bears a marked resemblance to Atkinson's and Drew's type 1(a) excuse. Interestingly, the same is true of constructing a special category of self. The infidels in this chapter do not try to claim that no alternative mode of behaviour was or is *necessary*. Neither do they come up with a convincing reason or decision that is presented as the *motive* for their behaviour. Rather, they engage in a form of description that shows *how* the contested behaviour came to pass. In the case of constructing an isolated episode of infidelity, speakers describe situations, events and circumstances that conspired to bring about a holiday fling or a drunken one night stand or whatever. In the case of constructing a special category of self, speakers describe their own patterns of behaviour and their

inferable psychological profile that makes them prone or vulnerable to cheating even though they can see that it incurs a cost to other people and indeed to themselves. Though personality traits and other psychological characteristics are what the attribution theorists conventionally call an *internal* locus of cause, from a discursive point of view there is clearly a sense in which these individual quirks are *externalised* such that they can be described, analysed and commented on by their owner. As Edwards and Potter (1992, p. 99) remark, "Even stable personality dispositions [] can be 'externalized' for blame reduction, as happens most dramatically in insanity pleas, but also in more mundane contexts, where trait attributions may be constructed as dispositions that can force themselves upon, and override an actor's best intentions."

While speakers constructing isolated episodes of infidelity produce narratives describing settings, circumstances and sequences of events that hearably exert a causal effect on behaviour, those constructing special categories of self produce character portraits. Principally they do this by making use of membership categories: "I'm a cheat and a coward," "I'm a sex addict" and so on. They also provide for causal inferences about their disposition or internal psychological make-up by constructing descriptions of their own behaviour that incorporate episodes, instances and script formulations (Edwards, 1995, 1997). Thus, as I observed in the above section on unidentified or suspected psychological disturbance, whether speakers and writers are trying to construct an internal or an external locus of cause for their infidelities, the discursive resources that they deploy are much the same.

Now, in the conclusions to Chapter 4 I criticised some of the studies based on attribution theory that use vignettes as stimulus material for participants. My criticisms were twofold. Firstly, I suggested that there is an under-acknowledgement in those studies of the researcher's vignette as itself a discursive phenomenon. Secondly, I noticed that research participants and other lay people are more than capable of producing vignettes - self-contained narratives that describe the circumstances surrounding contested events and thereby provide for and accomplish specific kinds of attributional work. This is a form of discursive behaviour which social cognition researchers practice themselves but fail to notice as relevant or interesting when it is displayed by their participants. An analogous situation exists in the professional discourse which deploys notions of individual psychology as a means of accounting for infidelity. The case study is a discursive form that is regularly found in the three strands of professional psychological discourse which I have highlighted in this chapter:

personality theory, self help texts on how to have better relationships and writing about sex addiction. This is particularly manifest in writing which is aimed at the general public but it also appears in writing that is aimed at a readership of other professionals. Let's take a quick example, a case study that first appeared in an article by Schneider (1991) and has since appeared elsewhere in the sex addiction literature.

CASE 3: A 32-year-old woman from a rigidly religious family married an alcoholic. After 2 years of marriage, she became involved in what was to be the first of many extramarital affairs. To prevent detection by her husband, she withdrew from him emotionally and neglected the marital relationship. She recognized that she was not spending enough time with her children. Despite feelings of guilt, she did not seek help until she cheated on her new lover.

(Schneider, 1991, p. 172)

Like the array of research interviews, internet postings and journalists' reports that we have examined in this chapter, Schneider's case study uses membership categories and other discursive devices such as activity generalisers to warrant her claim that the woman's infidelitous behaviour was symptomatic of an individualised, psychological problem rather than attributable to the sorts of situational causes which we explored in the last chapter. The article in which this case study first appeared is entitled "How to recognize the signs of sexual addiction" and it is aimed at "physicians" (Schneider's term) who may not know "how to spot addicts and coaddicts among your patients" (ibid.: 171). This particular case study is one of four presented by Schneider as illustrating certain "characteristic findings of any addictive disorder," namely compulsivity, continuation of the behaviour despite adverse consequences and obsession with the activity. Lest it is not immediately apparent how much this case study has in common with the character portraits produced in the above extracts of non-clinical data, let me touch upon one or two key elements.

Firstly, this is clearly intended to be a version of verified and treatable disorder and, just like Lee/Philip in Extract 5.05 and Wallis/Davidson in Extract 5.06, Schneider builds in an account for the woman having become "addicted" to sex in the first place. It is not just that she recklessly over-indulged (in which case Schneider might be heard as passing a pejorative moral judgement rather than caringly diagnosing a sickness); rather, she came from "a rigidly religious family" and (consequently) married "an alcoholic." The most important part of this construction is "rigidly," an emphatically abnormalised term that makes available the inference that being subjected to such rigidity in the formative years of childhood could reasonably have resulted in the sort of addiction-fuelling emotional impairment described by Philip and Davidson.

Secondly, recall that in Extracts 5.03 (3rd Eye) and 5.04 (Emma) in particular, we have seen the category bound activities of marriage and getting married invoked as fundamentally and accountably incompatible with serial infidelity. In those accounts marriage has been produced as the normalised part of a rhetorically organised contrast pair which helps to display the activity of repeatedly being unfaithful as a problem. Similarly, in this case study Schneider uses marriage as an abnormalising contrastive device. The woman did not just neglect her relationship but neglected "the marital relationship." Moreover, notice the quantification rhetoric of "2 years of marriage." The category term of marriage is one that invokes certain normative expectations about the length of such a relationship. That is, if the woman had merely been dating her partner, two years might seem like quite a long time. However, marriages are normatively expected to last considerably longer than two years and so the specific formulation "after 2 years of marriage" (in contrast to "after 2 years," say) provides for readers to understand that it was noticeably early on in the relationship that the woman's infidelities or "extramarital affairs" began. Indeed, as Edwards (1998) observes of his counselling data, references to length of marriage can serve as a basis for narrating particular kinds of relational difficulties. For instance, had Schneider substituted the formulation "after 7 years" or "after 15 years" or some such period of time, that might hearably provide for a story about how the married couple's sexual relationship had gone off the boil, tempting one or both partners to look elsewhere. However, after only "2 years" that kind of explanation is not so available and instead the reader is invited to understand that the woman's problems predated her marriage rather than directly arising from it.

Case studies such as Schneider's are reflexively produced as emblematic instances, as illustrative examples whose point is to translate abstract theory (about addiction or whatever the case may be) back into the realm of particularised, recognisable experience for the purpose of enlightening readers who might otherwise find such concepts difficult to grasp. They are not quite in the same league as the attribution theorists' vignettes which are treated as being somehow pre-discursive and prior-to-attribution events that can be relied on as such in scientific investigations of participants' cognitive attributional processes. That is, the illustrative rather than investigative use made of case studies renders them slightly less vulnerable to criticism along the lines that the authors have confused the descriptive with the ontological, thinking that their recipients are cognitively responding to an actual event, not discursively responding to a discursively constructed description of an event. If challenged, Schneider might quite reasonably argue that she is aware that she is presenting readers with a

description of a patient rather than the patient themselves and that that does not detract from the illustrative purpose for which the case study is being used.

Nevertheless, workers in the three strands of professional psychological activity that I have identified in this chapter characteristically do not take account of their human subjects as discursive beings. No theory that reduces infidelity to the behavioural manifestation of underlying personality traits, generalised psychological disturbance or specified mental illness is paying adequate attention to the discourse through which infidelity is constituted, and especially not to discursive constructions of infidelity that in every respect are designed exactly like case studies so as to provide for the recipient's inference of underlying, psychological cause. This is regrettable because, as *The Compleat Infidel* evidences, lay people's individually psychologised (self-)reports of infidelity are not only discursive constructions that have a great deal in common with the discursive output of the professionals, but they are just one type of construction among many. A comparison of the accounts we have examined here with those in the other chapters reveals that discursive constructions of infidelity are variable, and that variability is meaningful to the extent that different explanations and accounts will be produced in different types of contexts and on different occasions, according to the unique interactional functions that they are required to perform.

In light of the above observations, let me end this chapter by synoptically formulating the overall position or stance of discursive psychology regarding explanations for infidelity which use notions of individual personality and psychopathology. The most fundamental principle is that accounts like the ones we have seen in this chapter should not be taken at face value. The point is not to treat these accounts as more or less true descriptions of an actor's disposition, personality or mental state, be it healthy or disturbed. Rather, the primary question is how accounts are organised so as to display actors as having one or another kind of individual psychology (Edwards, 1997, p. 144; Potter, Stringer and Wetherell, 1984, p. 89). Secondly, the discursive psychologist will want to know what interactional functions are served through that display; how it productively attends to interactional issues to do with responsibility, blame and the management of accountability.

When examining these accounts, it becomes apparent that there is a significant overlap in the discourse of ordinary lay people, psychologists and other kinds of professional writers such as journalists and novelists. The overlap is not surprising because any discourse user wanting to articulate some version of the

individual, inner self will necessarily draw upon the shared linguistic or discursive resources that are culturally available at the time (Potter, Stringer and Wetherell, 1984, p. 140; Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 95; Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 150). This is true of the most basic accounts of personality which find a formalised expression in the psychological tradition of trait theory whereby people helplessly act according to their dispositions and also of the perhaps more sophisticated kind of accounts where selves become sick (as in Philip's report in Extract 5.05 of being "sexually violated" by his mother) and yet the owner of the self is able to recognise and comment on that sickness and take steps to remedy it. As observed by Potter, Stringer and Wetherell (1984, p. 158) and Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 106), the individual speaker's ability to divide themselves into an objective, studyable "me" and a reflective, commenting "I" arises because of the provision for that kind of self-division in everyday language; its syntactic arrangement and the conventional discursive methods of explaining and justifying action. It need not be presumed to arise from the essential facts about inner human experience.

The discursive psychological enterprise, then, is a theoretical one of exposing constructions of the individual self as discursive but it is also an investigative, empirical matter of discovering how various constructions of the self are used and what is thereby achieved for speakers in their particular interactional contexts. In recent years the body of practical research in this area has rapidly expanded. It prominently includes: Potter's and Wetherell's investigation of self-discourse in accounts of violent police behaviour during the South African Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981 (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1989); Wetherell's and Potter's examination of accounts of racial identity and prejudiced individuals in the talk of Pākehā New Zealanders (Wetherell and Potter, 1992); Edwards's and Potter's analysis of self-discourse in materials pertaining to the resignation of former British Chancellor Nigel Lawson (Edwards and Potter, 1992); Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's investigation of how members of various youth subcultures warrant their identity not only as authentic punks, gothics and rockers but also as ordinary people (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995); Edwards's influential studies of scripts and dispositions in counselling talk (Edwards, 1995, 1997); and Antaki's and Widdicombe's edited collection of ethnomethodological and conversation-analytic studies of identity talk in a range of interactional settings (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998), to name but a few.

For the purposes of *The Compleat Infidel*, the important findings to emerge from these studies are as follows. Discourse users draw upon different models of

the self in order to blame and accuse some parties while excusing and justifying the actions of others (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 111). In particular, notions of personality and psychopathology are used in a form of *error accounting* (cf. Edwards and Potter, 1992; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter, 1984), being invoked to explain away some potentially blameable (in)actions and (non-)events as caused by individual quirks or by a minority of individuals who are distinguishable either from the speaker themselves or from people in general. Let me quickly highlight a couple of examples.

In Potter's and Wetherell's study of accounts of disruption surrounding the South African rugby tour (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1989), the protestors who ran into trouble with the police were discursively split into two sub-groups. According to Potter's and Wetherell's interviewees, as many as 90% of the protestors were "genuinely" anti-apartheid and therefore present at the demonstrations for "the right reasons." However, the remaining minority were described as "trouble-makers" who were there for no better reason than because they enjoyed violence and fancied an opportunity to smash up property and attack the police. The discursive isolation of these naturally trouble-making types allowed speakers to explain and excuse violent behaviour on the part of the police (now characterisable as merely a response to the non-genuine protestors) without appearing to condemn the anti-apartheid demonstrations outright.

In Edwards's studies of counselling talk (Edwards, 1995, 1997), there prominently features a couple named Connie and Jimmy who are experiencing difficulties in their marriage. One of the most interesting aspects of their talk is Jimmy's description of himself as dispositionally jealous. This is more or less consistent with Connie's account of Jimmy's nature, though she often chooses a comparatively more pathologising mode of description which of course makes it more incumbent upon Jimmy to make an effort to change. The point is that in his talk Jimmy recognises that not everyone is as jealous as himself; he highlights it as a noticeable aspect of his personality which thereby makes a special case of him, putting him in something of a minority category. This is invoked during the counselling sessions to explain and account for the sorts of behaviours that Connie is complaining about: losing his temper in front of their friends when it seems to him that she has been flirting and so on. Indeed, as Edwards observes, it even provides for Jimmy to claim that Connie ought to take special account of his constitutional jealousy and go out of her way not to aggravate him by flirting with other men (Edwards, 1997, p. 157).

In this chapter we have added something to the body of discursive psychological research on constructions of the inner, individual self. We have

seen speakers and writers of various kinds put together accounts of the self which assign individuals to special minority categories according to their personality traits, (dis)abilities and psychological disturbances and sicknesses. We have also witnessed discourse users construct a divided self such that individuals are apparently able to analyse and comment on the peculiarities of their mental state, even as they are suffering from and trying to deal with those peculiarities. It has become clear that lay people, journalists and other non-members of the category "clinicians" or "mental health professionals" are capable of using a clinical or otherwise formalised kind of vocabulary to build their accounts, and this was especially the case in the examples of addiction talk in the final analytic section. Moreover, a brief review of the discursive phenomenon of the case study showed that mental health professionals, in their turn, are capable of using category memberships, activity generalisers and other everyday discursive techniques to provide for and warrant causal inferences of the dispositional rather than the situational variety. Given this broad equivalence of resources and practices, it has not been our policy in this chapter to privilege the accounts of the professional psychologists over anyone else's. As a result, it has been possible to avoid a literal reading of the data and instead to examine the functions served by these psychologised accounts in the interactional business of defending infidels and infidelity. What we have discovered, namely that constructing a special category of self can be a means of claiming diminished capacity for the serial infidel, is not limited in its relevance and usefulness to the specific investigative project of *The Compleat Infidel* but is confirmed by, and confirming of, the larger discursive psychological endeavour of mapping the language of individual psychology.

6

Construct a Specific Reason

Introduction

In the previous chapters of *The Compleat Infidel* we have looked at claims that "nothing happened" (constructing a non-event; Chapter 3) and at accounts that describe how infidelity comes about, by appeal to various causes, whether external to the infidel (such as the drunken holiday flings in Chapter 4) or internal (such as the psychological problems in Chapter 5). What we have not yet considered are accounts in which infidels say *why* they have behaved in such a way; accounts that feature some kind of motive or reason for the blameable behaviour. Constructing a specific reason for infidelity is one of the most common forms of defensive practice and there is no shortage of data to examine. Without further ado, then, here is the plan of action for Chapter 6.

I shall begin by presenting an overview of the specific reason for infidelity as a discursive phenomenon and a feature of the discursive landscape. The aim of this introductory section will be to familiarise readers with the subject matter of this chapter and to set out the analytic project that lies ahead of us. Following the introduction we shall move to the data analysis part of the chapter. There we shall look at extracts of raw data that show three varieties of specific reason being constructed in situ. The insights of previous research in discourse, rhetoric and conversation analysis will be brought to bear on this material so that we can identify the particular devices and techniques being used to construct specific reasons for infidelity and thereby discover something about the unique interactional functions that these specific reasons are designed to serve. Lastly, in the "critique and conclusions" part of the chapter we shall return to an aerial view of the data. The objective at that stage will be to round up the findings of the data analysis section and reach some conclusions about the overall functional capacity of the specific reason as a defensive practice. Moreover, the evidence that we have amassed that accounts of specific reasons for infidelity are *constitutive* and not merely *reflective* will be used as the basis for a critique of a relevant area of traditional psychological research.

The data to be examined in this chapter are accounts in which people explain infidelity by pointing to some unusual feature of the infidel's immediate social network. The object of their attention may be either a relationship or an individual person other than the infidel themselves. For instance, the first section of the following data analysis is entitled "unreasonable behaviour." The data to be examined in that section describe the victim of infidelity, the dyadic partner, as having launched some offensive initiative prior to the infidel's own blameable action. The following section is entitled "being short changed." There we will see some accounts that avoid direct victim-blaming and instead uncover a problem in the dyadic relationship such that the infidel can be characterised as not enjoying the full range of benefits from that relationship that one would normally and legitimately expect. The third and final section is entitled "true love and factors of the third party." The accounts represented in that section are less hearable as complaint and focus on some aspect of the third party or the extradyadic relationship which is especially alluring or compelling. Specific reasons for infidelity are constructed by both dyad-bound and third-party infidels although, as we will see, the speaker's dyadic status can have a bearing on which of the three varieties of specific reason is produced on any given occasion.

Specific reasons are invoked to account for singular, discrete cases of infidelity as opposed to a whole career of infidelitous behaviour or infidelity in general. In this respect the defensive practice of constructing a specific reason has something in common with constructing an isolated episode. However, the sorts of causal circumstances that are invoked in tales of isolated episodes of infidelity are limited in the amount of time which they can reasonably account for. A holiday or a bout of drunkenness can only be discursively spun out for so long. Thus, while isolated episodes of infidelity invariably put the events in question in the past it is also usually the case that they describe the infidelity as being of brief duration. In contrast, specific reasons account for longer relationships ("affairs" rather than "flings") including ones that are ongoing at the time of the defence.

Lengthy and ongoing infidelities can be difficult to account for when the speaker is not willing to admit low distinctiveness (i.e., that this is the sort of thing they get up to all the time). For speakers who prefer to claim high distinctiveness but are willing to admit that something infidelitous has gone on, enduring affairs can present a problem because it is not possible to write them off as accidents or spur-of-the-moment behavioural blips. The longer a relationship lasts and especially if it is presently continuing, the more the infidel will be presumed to know what they are doing and to be in control of their behaviour such that they

could, if they chose, behave otherwise. By choosing a reason or motivating factor that is located somewhere within the classic triangle formed by the dyad-bound infidel, the third-party infidel and the victim, speakers can provide for as protracted an affair as is necessary. For instance, if the specific reason is some deficiency in the dyadic relationship, an affair can accountably last for as long as the deficiency is held to persist.

People who accept responsibility for their infidelitous behaviour can be held to account for not behaving otherwise. Dyad-bound infidels are held to account for not remaining faithful to their regular partners. Third-party infidels are held to account for not avoiding a relationship with someone who was or is already paired off. Moreover, when the affair is ongoing or of noticeable duration, blame may be attached to more than one stage of the relationship. The infidel may be held to account for having got into the extradyadic relationship in the first place and/or for continuing with it even though it should have been terminated. One way for infidels to deal with the actual or potential accusation that they have failed to behave "properly" is to claim that the normatively preferred action was precluded by the desirability or necessity of doing something else. For instance, a dyad-bound infidel who has an affair with a work colleague and is then held accountable for not having terminated the relationship as soon as the first inklings of a mutual attraction emerged may claim that that action was precluded by the necessity of continuing to go into work every day and behaving in a way that is not abnormally unfriendly towards other employees. The essence of such claims is that it is not possible to do both things at once. Alternatively, infidels may work *with* the idea that they chose to act infidelitously by arguing that in fact they chose the lesser of two evils. Their present situation is contrasted with an even worse scenario which (the speaker claims) would have resulted if they had not acted as they did. For instance, a dyad-bound infidel who claims that they are somehow deprived at home may additionally claim that having an affair is a source of nourishment which gives them the strength and patience to soldier on in their marriage. This admittedly less than perfect situation is favourably contrasted with an alternative scenario such as abandoning the marriage and getting a divorce.

Of course, *The Compleat Infidel* is far from the first piece of research to address the topic of reasons and motives for infidelity. That has always been a focal point in the studies based on various social exchange theories of personal relationships that I highlighted in Chapter 1. In contrast to those studies I shall not make it my business to discover the truth about why people are unfaithful to and sometimes leave their dyadic partners, deploying concepts such as marital

dissatisfaction and comparisons between one's existing partner and a possible alternative. Rather, when we reach the end of this chapter I shall make the case that such studies fail to recognise that speakers and writers construct their infidelities precisely as motivated, in contrast to other possible constructions and in order to fulfil various interactional functions. In the meantime, we will do well to examine some specific reasons for infidelity being put into action.

Data Analysis

Unreasonable Behaviour

Versions of unreasonable behaviour construct a motive or reason for infidelity through descriptions of the individual who would normally be thought of as the victim, the innocent party in the triangle. That person is described in such a way as to transfer the blame to them from the (dyad-bound or third-party) infidel. They are alleged to have behaved with an offensiveness that is equal to or greater than the offensive behaviour of the infidel and their actions are described as preceding the infidel's actions.

Extract 6.01 shows a version of unreasonable behaviour being constructed by a dyad-bound infidel. It is one woman's response to a sex survey that was run by the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* (US edition) in 1980, the results being published in book form in 1982. The survey questions were multiple choice with forced response options (e.g., "If married, have you had an affair outside marriage? Yes/No") but lots of respondents also sent in open ended comments and letters to supplement their questionnaire responses, of which Extract 6.01 would seem to be an instance.

Extract 6.01

05 I have been having an affair for five years, ever since learning my husband had had one. Call it revenge if you wish. I guess it was. I had been raised strictly and had accepted the beliefs of my parents and my church. I would not have strayed except that my husband did. It was only when I found out about his infidelity that I decided to forget about the faithfulness routine and enjoy some of the temptations which are constantly available to me. As an executive, I have steady contacts with hundreds of men. So I pulled out all the stops and began to weed out the field. But believe me, there are very few really interesting men in the 45-55 age bracket. They

10 are generally overweight, bald, slovenly, just plain dumb or real phoneyes. It took me a while to zero in on a man; but I did, and we have been lovers now - behind my husband's back - for five years. I've never let my husband know. He hasn't been hurt, the way he hurt me.

(Wolfe, 1982, p. 269)

As an anonymous survey respondent, this woman is at liberty to construct a version of unreasonable behaviour without risking a critical or undermining response from her recipient. Nevertheless, this does not mean that she is inattentive to issues of personal accountability in her story. Indeed, the fact that she constructs a specific reason of any description is itself evidence that she is attending to the likely assumption by recipients that there is an alternative set of reasons and motives underpinning her behaviour. These alternatives include the possibility that she is just "that sort of person" and/or that she failed to recognise the importance of fidelity in marriage. We can infer this much because these are the alternatives that the woman is discursively orientating to in constructing her own version of events. She emphasises that she was formerly capable of taking fidelity seriously, before her husband took the scales from her eyes. It was not just that she was formerly faithful as a kind of default state, an unthinking absence of infidelity, but that she had been "raised strictly" and recognised the moral authority of her parents and church (lines 2-3). Also notice her choice of the word "strayed" (line 4) which recognises infidelity as a moral failing and a way of trespassing outside the boundaries of a couple relationship, in contrast to some of the more light-hearted, recreational descriptions she could have chosen. It was, she claims, only when she became aware of her husband's behaviour that the practice of faithfulness was exposed and revealed to her as merely a "routine" (line 6). Moreover, she represents herself as a person who is not dispositionally given to infidelity and who is not insensitive to other people's feelings. That is, it is not just that she produces the disposition-implicative formulation "I would not have strayed except that my husband did" (lines 3-4). More than this, she invites her recipient to notice that she was thoughtful and discriminating in finding a lover (lines 8-11) and that although her behaviour is construable as revenge (line 2) she has taken care *not* to add insult to injury by burdening her husband with the painful facts about what she is doing (lines 12-13).

I shall suspend further analytic comment until we have looked at a version of unreasonable behaviour being constructed by a third-party infidel. Clearly, third-party infidels are liable to be held accountable and to have their accounts undermined in a slightly different way than dyad-bound infidels. They both have the same victim and a third-party infidel can be called to account for having injured that innocent party by interfering in their dyadic relationship. However,

the culpability of the third-party infidel is attenuated by the fact that they, unlike the dyad-bound infidel, have made no special promises to the victim of the sort that are implied by coupledness. Having said that, third-party infidels who claim a relationship of any significance with their dyad-bound accomplice are vulnerable to another sort of criticism. They may be confronted with the suggestion that they are being cynically exploited by the dyad-bound infidel, that they are gullible if they believe that the dyad-bound person will ever leave their partner or will ever think of them as more than a source of casual sex and so on. Describing unreasonable behaviour on the part of the victim can be a way of addressing those concerns.

Extract 6.02 is a message that was posted in a public internet discussion forum. The title of this particular conversation, or "thread" in internet parlance, is "The Other Side of an Affair" (henceforth OSA). Background information about the accessibility and context of OSA was supplied in the data sources section of Chapter 2. Skatterkat, the author of the following message, is a third-party infidel who at the time of writing had succeeded in securing an exclusive, full time relationship with her formerly dyad-bound accomplice, Mark. Des M, whom Skatterkat addresses in the second paragraph, is a married woman who suspected that her husband was making her a victim of infidelity and who had harsh words for the third-party infidels of OSA.

Extract 6.02

SKATTERKAT - 11:52am Jul 31, 1997 EDT (#60 of 1336)

05 Alright. I was going to refrain from posting in this forum, because I am not married, but I think that this is going a little too far. I sincerely doubt that many of you ladies are going to like what I have to say, or appreciate it, but it still needs to be said.

10 Des, I've been following your posts all over the place.....especially the ones in the "Adultery, Can we Survive?". Your husband has got real problems, and he has been running roughshod over you. But these last two posts have been poisonous and uncalled-for. I know you're bitter. I know you have every right to be. But Cindie is NOT, I repeat, NOT the bimbo your husband was sleeping with and may be sleeping with now. She is a different person, and at least they had the decency to break it off in their "legitimate" relationships very soon after the affair began. It sounds to me a lot like my life, actually.

15 I'm probably asking to get bashed with this one, but I simply do not care anymore. I want all the hurt women in here to understand this before I begin my story: I have the utmost respect for you, and for your struggles to deal with your partner's infidelity and put your relationships with them back together. You seem to be very smart, loving, giving women who deserved far better than what you got when you married. There are exceptions, however.

20 I knew Mark for 2 years before he met Kelly. We were close friends, had been through a lot together. We'd never dated, never really considered it, even. Eventually he got engaged to her and they moved in together. At first, everyone was happy for them. She was a small, pixie-like girl; quiet,

30 mostly. Then, things started going wrong. She was suspicious of his every move, manipulative. She'd threaten suicide if he did something she didn't like. She'd made him her whole life, dropping all of her friends and expected him to do the same.

35 This was not stuff he told us about. In fact, at first, he tried to hide how bad things were. But some stuff couldn't be hidden. She was cold to all of his friends (and don't think it's because we were good-for nothing bums. I make twice the money of both of them put together.) When I called to talk to him, or to ask the both of them if they wanted to go somewhere with me, I'd hear her accusatory screams on the other end...."Why is she calling here?" And I'd hear from mutual friends that she often referred to me as "His other girlfriend." Mark and I were in a band together, and published a local magazine together; so it was natural that we spent time together and talked a lot, besides being very good friends. Sometimes *I* was the one who told him he should spend more time with Kelly. Eventually it came to the point where all of his friends hated her, and weren't bothering to hide it. She wrote me a frantic letter, asking me how she was screwing up and wanting advice. I gave it to her....and she proceeded to ignore it.

45 Eventually, Mark quit trying to hide how bad things had become. He would come over my house. at any time of the day or night, crying, because she'd kicked him out of the apartment, told him never to come back. I watched her mess him up so badly emotionally that for at time, I honestly believed he'd never have a healthy relationship with ANYONE again. She'd call me, after she'd kick him out, looking for him.....then would threaten suicide if he didn't come back immediately.

50 I was the last of his friends to try to be nice to her, to try to accept her. What I got in return was suspicion, accusations behind my back, and the chance to watch, close-up, how she was hurting mark. And watching was ALL I could do.....I'd talked to mark about why he stayed with her. He said he'd made a commitment to her, and he'd stick to it....even though she refused counseling.....even though she refused to even admit she had problems.

60 (bear with me, I'll have to finish this in another post)

(The Hearst Corporation, 1997,
<http://www.homearts.com/cgi-bin/WebX61.htm>)

There is a lot that could be said about this extract; here we shall focus on a few key points. Like the author of Extract 6.01, Skatterkat introduces into the Mark-and-Kelly story the theme of change. In Extract 6.01 the change is the author's shocked discovery that her husband had "strayed." In Extract 6.02 it is the discovery of Skatterkat and indeed "everyone" (line 26) that all was not well between Mark and Kelly. The construction to notice is "at first everyone was happy for them ... then, things started going wrong" (lines 25-27), supplemented by "at first, he tried to hide how bad things were" (lines 31-32), "eventually it came to the point where" (lines 41-42) and "eventually, Mark quit trying" (line 46). Skatterkat is using a device called "*at first I thought ... but then I realized ...*," originally identified by Sacks (1984). The purpose of the device is to display the speaker's first impression of some phenomenon as an innocuous reading, the sort of thing that any normal person would think unless and until the facts revealed otherwise. It displays the innocence and normality of the speaker's reasoning. In Extract 6.02 it displays Skatterkat as not self-interestedly pessimistic about Kelly

from the start (line 26), not the gullible recipient of casual and possibly cynical complaints by Mark (line 31) and so on.

Relatedly, notice Skatterkat's use of membership categories to bolster her case. She does not characterise herself as an actual or aspiring partner of Mark's: "we'd never dated, never really considered it, even." Rather, she constructs herself as his "close friend" (line 23). This not only contraindicates that Skatterkat was or wanted to be more than friends but it provides for her to claim some *consensus and corroboration* (Potter, 1996a, p. 158) in support of her version of events by discursively grouping her with "all of his friends" (e.g., lines 32-33, 42) whenever she is being particularly critical of Kelly. Moreover, she does some interesting work with the membership category "girlfriend." In lines 37-38 we learn that Kelly often referred to Skatterkat as Mark's "other girlfriend." Insofar as this was not a term Kelly used to refer to Mark's other friends Skatterkat has to account for that, which she does by explaining that she and Mark spent a lot of time together and also giving a legitimate reason why (lines 38-40). However, following Wowk's (1984) analysis of membership categories and victim-blaming in a murder interrogation, I would suggest that this report of Kelly's mode of reference to Skatterkat helps to build for recipients a *category puzzle*. Kelly is, or was at that time, Mark's girlfriend. Indeed, she was a bride-to-be (line 25). Referring to Skatterkat as Mark's "other girlfriend," along with "being cold to all his friends" (lines 32-33), "messing him up emotionally" (line 49), "kicking him out" (line 51) and so on are activities which are highly disjunctive or incongruous with those category memberships, especially the latter. The question is raised of what kind of girlfriend or fiancée would behave in such a way. The answer that Skatterkat suggests for recipients is one that is dispositionally destructive and confrontational and in fact "had problems" (lines 58-59), a euphemism for being mentally unhinged. Indeed, what Skatterkat ultimately achieves is a warrant for her argument that there are exceptions to the general rule that faithful but cheated-upon women deserve better than they get (lines 20-22). In this way, she provides a reason or motive for Mark's eventually being unfaithful to Kelly (which diverts attention away from Skatterkat's own reasons and motives for getting romantically involved with him) and at the same time attenuates Skatterkat's personal moral responsibility towards Kelly as someone who, by virtue of being friendly with Mark, should have been - and indeed tried to be - Kelly's friend.

It would be nice to continue with this analysis but there is a final matter that I want to address before we reach the end of this section. Some readers may be familiar with Derek Edwards's analyses of discourse produced in relationship

counselling sessions. In his book *Discourse and Cognition* (1997), in the context of a chapter about narrative and discursive remembering, he comments on a stretch of data produced by a couple called Jeff and Mary. Those who are familiar with the text may by now be wondering whether Mary's construction is a version of unreasonable behaviour. I would like to say a few words about that; I reproduce Edwards's data below.

- 1 Counsellor: P'haps (.) uh in in in your words
 2 or (.) either of your words you better (.)
 3 start from the beginning as to why:, you
 4 went to Relate in the first place, (.)
 5 and then the difference between the [:n and now.
 6 Jeff: [Shall I
 7 () start now or ()? =
 8 Mary: = Uh? (.)
 9 Jeff: 'n you jus (.) keep on going.
 10 (.)
 11 Mary: Yeh. (.) U:m (.) well. What happened,
 12 Jeff started doing some exa:ms (.) which (.)
 13 la:sted about (.) four years. =And before that,
 14 (.) this is when we were living in the
 15 hospital, (.) we was always doing some exa:ms,
 16 (.) since we've me:t (.) at some point, (.)
 17 which has lasted some time.
 18 (.)
 19 Anyway Jeff was doing u:m (.) a degree:, (.) that
 20 (.) la:sted must've bee:n about (.) we were
 21 just coming to the e:nd. (.) Just last summer.
 22 (.)
 23 A:nd during that time I felt that, (.) u:m (.)
 24 he didn't pay any attention to me: that (.) um
 25 (.) although we had a s- we still had a fairly
 26 good relationship. I didn't feel there was
 27 anything wro:ng, but (.) at the time, (.)
 28 I didn't really think anything too much about:
 29 (.) these problems, (.) but (.) it must have
 30 all like come to a head. (.) Then I felt like
 31 he was neglecting me:, he didn't wanna know,
 32 I was working too har:d, u:m, (.) and then
 33 I had the two children I felt I was being left on
 34 my ow:n, (.) uhh (.) an' the:n (.) I started
 35 going round with my friends quite a bit, (.)
 36 u:m, (.) just to get out of the house.
 37 (.)
 38 For some relief.
 39 (.)
 40 And then: I met somebody e:lse, (.) an:d u:m
 41 (.) had (.) an affair
- (Edwards, 1997, pp. 277-278; transcription simplified)

Mary certainly seems to be doing some complaining about Jeff in this extract. Moreover, she describes her infidelitous relationship as "an affair" (line 41) rather than "a one night stand" or "a fling" or whatever. This suggests an infidelity of some consistency, which is consonant with the defensive practices described in this chapter. However, I would argue that what she is producing is not in fact a

version of unreasonable behaviour but an isolated episode, a discursive construction that we discussed in Chapter 4. Firstly, it is apparent from Edwards's discussion that Mary claims that the affair is now over, locating it firmly in the past. Secondly, we can see from this extract that Mary makes a considerable effort to distance herself from her complaints. She does not simply claim that "he didn't pay any attention to me" (line 24) and "he was neglecting me, he didn't wanna know" (line 31). Rather, she begins by describing a set of circumstances, particularly a specific period of time that was marked by Jeff "doing some exams" and was "just coming to the end last summer" (line 21). Mary emphasises that her complaints about Jeff's inattention and neglect were features of her experience *at that time* (lines 23, 27). She stresses that she is describing how she *felt* she was being treated, which is very different from saying that that is what actually happened (lines 23, 26, 30, 33). Additionally, notice "it must have all come to a head" (lines 29-30). Saying that that is what "must have" happened rather than "it all came to a head" discursively highlights a difference between Mary-then and Mary-now, the Mary who is looking back at that time and sequence of events and speculating with the benefit of hindsight about the chains of cause and effect that were in play. Because of what Jeff already knows about her affair, it may not be possible for Mary to claim that hers was a momentary, drunken accident of the sort that epitomises isolated episodes of infidelity. However, she constructs a narrative that displays her affair as very much the product of temporally bounded circumstances: the circumstances of Jeff still doing exams and of her (rightly or wrongly) feeling that he was neglecting her. Her affair was not a matter of consciously "deciding to forget about the faithfulness routine" as was the case for the dyad-bound infidel of Extract 6.01 but is presented as one stage in a chronologically organised series of events: first Jeff was doing some exams, then Mary felt that Jeff was neglecting her "and then" (line 40) she met somebody else and had an affair. It is this narrative arrangement that provides for recipients to understand that the former caused the latter. The affair was a part of "what happened" (line 11), not what Mary voluntarily *did*. The difference between an isolated episode and a specific reason can be subtle but I hope that this brief review of Edwards's data has helped to clarify it.

Being Short Changed

Versions of "being short changed" make a point of describing the failings of the dyadic relationship rather than the victim of infidelity. Again, the entity being

criticised is described in such a way as to transfer blame away from the dyad-bound or third-party infidel and as an important part of this the trouble is described as preceding the infidel's actions which are portrayed as a reasonable reaction or response. We have here an opportunity to follow up the previous discussion of membership categories and activities that are and are not congruous with those categories.

In his analysis of blame-accounts sequences in couples therapy, Buttny (1993) characterises the classic dyadic or couple relationship as itself a membership category with associated category-bound obligations. That is, the normatively accountable couple relationship should display various attributes and perform various functions for the benefit of its members. For instance, as evidenced by Larry and Jenny, the couple whose discourse is Buttny's data, couples should enjoy "good communication" (ibid., p. 71). If they experience an inability to communicate then good communication is noticeably absent from the relationship and that absence becomes a complainable matter. As a defence for dyad-bound or third-party infidelity, complaining of being short changed by one's relationship is perhaps a less inflammatory manoeuvre than trying to pin the blame on one's victim. However, infidels are still liable to be called to account for their actions in the ways that I mentioned in the previous section.

Extract 6.03 shows a dyad-bound infidel constructing a version of being short changed. It is drawn from a story that appeared in the British broadsheet newspaper, *The Guardian*. The article is entitled "How to scratch that itch" and it reports on the emergence of a new kind of dating agency.

Extract 6.03

Arabella and Rich had never met before. They only knew each other by code names: Queenie for her, Titian for him. They were brought together by David Miller, owner of a dating agency exclusively for people who are married or attached, called Loving Links.

05 Miller, a former commercial video producer, started the agency in 1995: this time last year he had 300 people on his books. Now the number has inflated to 700 countrywide and is growing rapidly: he says he gets more than 40 phone calls a day, replying to advertisements placed in national newspapers and glossy lifestyle magazines. His advertisement
10 reads simply: "Attached? Need a friend? Call David at Loving Links".

Most of his customers, he says, are in their 40s and 50s. "I take on people who want a medium-term relationship with someone they're not going to abandon home and move in with. I don't accept people who just want a quick shag and I don't want marriage-breakers."

15 Arabella joined the agency in May this year.

[8 paragraphs omitted]

[L]ike many of David's customers, Arabella knows that whatever

20 closeness existed in her marriage has long evaporated, but isn't willing to cut the ties. "It's not a lack of courage," she says, "it's practicality. A lot of people don't want to lose what they've got at home. A lot of people are in a 'caring but celibate' marriage."

25 Divorce, she says, would be terrible for the kids. But isn't that just an excuse? "We have talked about it. My husband is very concerned about how a divorce would be received by our friends, and he thinks he would be humiliated in the office and in the golf club. And I'm just terrified of taking steps out on my own. I know it's a weakness but how can I start now?"

(Sanai, 1997, p. 9)

Journalist Sanai's report shows both David Miller and Arabella doing some interesting rhetorical work to defend infidelity. Let's begin with Arabella. Like many dyad-bound infidels who defend themselves with a version of being short changed, Arabella is presented as having the sort of relationship problem that is fairly resistant to restorative effort. At the same time, it is not necessarily torturous enough to merit abandoning the relationship altogether. In lines 19-20, Sanai claims on Arabella's behalf that "whatever closeness existed in her marriage has long evaporated." There are a couple of points to be noted about this formulation. Firstly, as is characteristic of accounts of being short changed, it avoids ascribing personal blame. This is accomplished through the use of *empiricist discourse* (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter, 1996a), including passive and impersonal grammar that erases human agency. As if by magic, the closeness evaporated. This is especially apparent when you notice Arabella's alternative formulation of the problem in lines 22-23. In common with lots of other people, she says, her marriage is "caring but celibate." It transpires that "the closeness evaporated" is a rather coy way of saying that Arabella's husband is no longer interested in sex. This is the deficiency for which she compensates by dealing with David Miller. Secondly, notice that Arabella produces an account for not being "willing to cut the ties" (lines 20-21). This is a common practice in versions of being short changed that have been produced by dyad-bound infidels. Put another way, dyad-bound infidels often produce versions of being short changed on occasions when their main objective seems to be to defend their affairs without committing themselves to leaving their dyadic partners.

Now let's take a quick look at the discourse attributed to David Miller. His is an interesting moral position. He is not obviously an infidel himself but he could be roundly condemned for his line of work. In lines 11-14 he anticipates and orientates to recipients' likely criticisms. He does this through judicious use of membership categories to describe his customers and their reasons and motives for doing business with him. Most of his clients, (Sanai says) Miller says, are in their 40s and 50s. In rhetorical contradistinction from customers who are in, say, "their

teens and 20s," this is a mature, responsible and level-headed population. Moreover, he fascinatingly constructs for himself a bit of neutral middle ground between two unacceptable extremes: "I take on people who want a medium-term relationship with someone they're not going to abandon home and move in with. I don't accept people who just want a quick shag and I don't want marriage-breakers." It is far from self-evidently true that desiring a "medium-term" affair is morally any better or worse than hoping for a "quick shag" or seeking to acquire someone else's partner for a full time, permanent relationship. However, Miller manages to construct it as a fact. "Medium" is a conspicuously bland, neutralised description when it is positioned between "a quick shag" (which alludes to the critical view of infidelity as mindless, exploitative sex) and "marriage-breakers" (which invests at least some infidels with the power to undermine an institution beloved of church and state, causing untold injury to dependent category members such as spouses and children in the process). Through this pair of contrasts, Miller constructs his customers (and by extension, himself) as relatively well behaved, morally responsible folk. This is quite an achievement for someone who has a commercial interest in helping people to commit adultery.

Discursively, his position is similar to the radio interviewees studied by McKinlay and Dunnett (1998). These interviewees are gun-toting members of the National Rifle Association of the United States, yet they manage to construct themselves as simultaneously members of the category "normal, average citizens." For instance, they do this by emphasising the tightly restricted circumstances in which they would be prepared to open fire on a human target. In a parallel manoeuvre, Miller emphasises the tightly restricted population for whom he is willing to arrange infidelitous affairs.

Extract 6.04 is another, slightly later contribution to the internet discussion *The Other Side of an Affair* or OSA. The author is Cindie, whom Skatterkat spoke up for in Extract 6.02. Unlike Skatterkat, Cindie has contributed to OSA from the beginning of the discussion. Her previous messages suggest that she is presently cohabiting and in an exclusive relationship with her partner. When their relationship began, Cindie was engaged to another man and her present partner was married. Thus, she was simultaneously a third-party infidel and a dyad-bound infidel. Though she could potentially be blamed on both of these counts, in the context of OSA she has mainly been criticised for the third-party infidelity. In particular, a strong and hostile reaction was elicited when Cindie constructed a version of unreasonable behaviour, claiming that the man who is now her partner had endured 16 years of physical and emotional abuse from his wife before finally

embarking upon their affair. Some participants treated this as equivalent to a generalised claim that all victims of infidelity must have done something to "deserve it."

Extract 6.04

Cindie - 06:29pm Jul 31, 1997 EDT (#68 of 1336)

Skatterkat

05 Thanks for showing your support. I agree with you that Des M is being very unhealthy in her attitude towards my situation and (ha ha) I think you've copped more of a beating in here than I ever did!

10 I don't think any wife who has been cheated on EVER caused their husband to do the unspeakable (as someone suggested I thought in an earlier post!!) - they are both partly responsible for the breakdown of a marriage. As if I would ever want to go through that myself - I think most people certainly don't want to cheat on their partner, most of us have enough brains to know the upheaval it causes in life. If our lives were fulfilled there wouldn't be any reason to stray.

15 I know one couple who have been together for 16 years, married 10 years and the husband in the partnership had been married for 3 years before he met his now second wife. They, like those of us in happy healthy loving partnerships, have 'normal' problems but they have the utmost respect and love for each other and do everything together.

20 I think it is inspiring to see people find a 'suitable' partner eventually because like in every situation, there are just people that, no matter how hard they try, will just never get on. Take families for example - you can love your mother or your father, but you may not like them - you also don't have to live with them for the rest of your life which is what the marriage vows are all about.

25 I'm sorry if I have offended any of the cheated on in this forum. Granted, your situation is totally different to mine, however I think you should refrain from mud-slinging. It gets messy and achieves nothing in the long run.

I don't think it was ever intended to be an all-in brawl in here was it?

(The Hearst Corporation, 1997,

<http://www.homearts.com/cgi-bin/WebX68.htm>)

Speaking as a third-party infidel, Cindie has earlier constructed a version of unreasonable behaviour. That account was designed to defend her partner by displaying his relationship with Cindie as an understandable next step, having "stuck it out" in an abusive marriage for 16 years. It was also designed to defend Cindie herself against accusations of having injured his wife, the "innocent" victim, and against criticisms that she has blindly co-operated with a married man who cynically fancied a change and will sooner or later abandon her, perhaps returning home to his original partner. In this respect, her defensive practice was similar to that of Skatterkat in Extract 6.02. However, following strong objections from Des M and some of the other participants, Cindie finds it necessary in Extract 6.04 to do a little reconstructive work on her account. This work principally consists of volunteering a milder, less blaming explanation for infidelity: a version of being

short changed. Let me highlight a few of the ways in which Cindie goes about recovering the discursively tricky situation in which she finds herself.

To begin with, like Arabella in Extract 6.03, Cindie takes up a relatively disinterested, empiricist form of discourse that avoids assigning blame more to one party than another. While Arabella is portrayed by Sanai as having eliminated blame from the equation altogether (knowing that "the closeness has long evaporated": line 20), Cindie tries to distribute the blame equally among dyad-bound infidels and their dyadic partners ("they are both partly responsible": line 9). In support of this move, notice that the contested actions and events are (re)described as "the breakdown of a marriage" (lines 9-10) in contrast to "infidelity," "leaving your wife for another woman" or some other formulation that is more suggestive of individual human agency. "The breakdown of a marriage" is a passive construction that describes something that marriages do, not something that people do. A bit later, in lines 20-21, Cindie tries out another description of what goes wrong in dyadic relationships: "there are just people that, no matter how hard they try, will just never get on." This is a slightly flawed argument, given that such persons would be normatively held accountable for having got married in the first place but it achieves an explanation for why marriages sometimes end that is effectively blame free.

Cindie bolsters her fact-constructive effort in this extract by introducing emblematic instances (Edwards, 1995, 1997) to illustrate her points (e.g., "take families for example": line 21). Of these, one is the example of a couple that she claims to know personally (line 14). What the couple exemplifies is the principle that second marriages do sometimes succeed. Here Cindie externalises and reifies her preferred version of the world by assuming the authority to provide a true description by virtue of her *category entitlement as a witness* (e.g., Potter, 1996a, p. 165). She also changes footing, playing down her category membership as a third-party infidel and foregrounding her membership of the category dyad-bound infidels (from line 10). This is in line with her preference for explaining phenomena such as "marital breakdown," in contrast to third-party infidelity, "homewrecking" and so on. More consequentially for the interaction in which she participates, it allows her to follow Arabella in claiming some corroboration and consensus for her point of view. It is difficult for third-party infidels to find acceptable reasons and motives for what they have done. Unreasonable behaviour is always an option, especially if the victim can be claimed to have offended the third-party infidel personally. However, being short changed is rarely available as an account for the third-party infidel's own behaviour because it was never their privilege to expect anything from the

dyadic relationship in the first place. Cindie's change of footing allows her to take advantage of being short changed as an explanation for her own behaviour: she now finds herself in a position to invoke groups such as "most people" (lines 11, 12) who can corroborate her arguments, whose experiences and reasoned actions she can claim to share and understand and on behalf of whom she is entitled to speak.

True Love and Factors of the Third Party

Versions of "true love" and "factors of the third party" explain and defend infidelity through descriptions of the third-party infidel as an individual or through descriptions of the extradyadic relationship. This is a defensive practice which can provide for the speaker to make a display of not blaming the victim and/or not disparaging the dyadic relationship, where that is interactionally expedient. It makes particular use of an argumentative structure that I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter: that of defending against actual or potential accusations that one has failed to behave properly by stressing that the normatively preferred course of action was precluded by the desirability or necessity of doing something else. As we will see, the "something else" could be responding to the unique appeal and compatibility of some particular third party or recognising and answering the call of true love, conventionally constructible as a highly powerful and compelling force. It is important to note that despite the rhetoric of compulsion that is so often evident in accounts of true love and factors of the third party, speakers do not attempt to totally discharge responsibility for their actions in the way that is provided for by the more causal explanations that we examined in Chapters 4 and 5. Discourse users constructing a version of true love and factors of the third party do not render themselves helpless in the way that people are helpless when having a circumstantially engineered accident or when in the grip of a disease such as addiction. Rather, they retain the idea that they are basically in control of and responsible for their actions but try to show that the course of action they have taken is understandable and perhaps the only one that makes sense given the unique features of the particular person or relationship that has entered their lives.

Let's take a look at some data. Extract 6.05 is drawn from *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*, a lengthy report of the research activities and findings of sociologist Annette Lawson (Lawson, 1988). Lawson uses quantitative measures to package and present the results of her research but she also

reproduces bits and pieces of interview data to back up her claims. In this extract Lawson discusses the adventures of Dr. Reynolds, a GP and dyad-bound infidel who had an affair with one of his patients and went on to marry her. This patient is Katherine, the "extremely powerful woman" to whom Lawson refers in line 1. The block quotes that Lawson attributes to Reynolds himself appear in italics below.

Extract 6.05

05 On Dr Reynolds's description, she was an extremely powerful woman whose husband would have been foolish, perhaps, to intervene in her private arrangements with her doctor. For example, she "made" Dr Reynolds "dismember" his marriage by setting new targets regularly for him about the extent to which he was to continue to have contact with his wife:

10 *At first, you know, I wasn't to touch her [his first wife]. Then they [Katherine and her husband] came to dinner as a couple. She didn't like me touching my wife. And then she didn't like me to make love to her. And then more and more and more - that I was to tell her ... that I was to tell her that I would never make love to her again. I cannot think now how - but she ... as I say, she's a powerful girl and she has -*

15

He was very near to tears. His sense of shame was profound:

20 *I feel I am partly cold bread pudding and I think to have treated her like that is almost cold-blooded murder ... In church, we vowed.*

20

25 Although he felt so controlled by his second wife, he nevertheless had conducted the affair itself with careful planning and delight in his success. It was only after the anguish of divorce and (so it appeared) the mixed joy of remarriage, that Dr Reynolds reflected, with the advantage of distance, on what it had cost him to gain this fascinating woman and her children who detested him:

30 *No punishment is too great really. I think I should be put in the stocks for what I did. I feel very strongly indeed that what I did is really without any mitigation. Totally wrong. Because, honestly it wasn't a bad marriage. It's just that Katherine was so exceptional in so many ways. It leaves me with an immense conviction really that the case against adultery is immensely strong. My marriage wasn't intolerable, and I really have no grounds on any score.*

(Lawson, 1988, p. 153)

It is evident from Lawson's commentary that she is fairly uncritical of Reynolds's version of events, taking at face value his displays of "shame" (line 16) and suggestions of being or feeling "controlled" (line 21). Her approach to her data is similar to the "life story method" that is criticised by Edwards (1997, pp. 279-280). That is, Lawson treats her participants' personal stories as having some built-in authenticity compared to more impersonal forms of data such as survey responses. She uses extracts from these stories to illustrate her gloss on various adultery-related phenomena - in this case, the business of "debating" whether or not to get into an extramarital affair. Lawson's "authorial voice and interpretative

commentary" (ibid.) tells readers how to understand her participants' reports, while the reports themselves are treated as revealing participants' subjective and individual perspectives on the things they describe. What Lawson does not do is to examine her interviewees' discourse as action orientated, such that authenticity is noticed as part of what is discursively accomplished in the construction of a narrative such as Reynolds's. Fortunately, despite Lawson's interpretative intervention, there is enough of Reynolds's discourse reproduced here for us to see that he is constructing a version of "factors of the third party" to account for his behaviour.

There are two or three key elements that I want to highlight in Reynolds's account. To begin with, it is evident that Reynolds does not merely single out the unique properties of the "exceptional" (line 31) and "powerful" (line 13) Katherine as an explanation for his infidelity but that he does so in contradistinction from blaming either his first wife as a person or their marriage as a relationship. His wife, he takes care to point out, deserved *not* to have been treated "like that" (lines 18-19) and it emphatically *wasn't* "a bad marriage" (lines 30-31). Secondly, notice that although Reynolds's portrait of Katherine as "a powerful girl" in lines 8-14 seems to cast Reynolds himself as someone who was helplessly compelled to withdraw from his marriage - an interpretation to which Lawson subscribes in her formulation "he felt so controlled" (line 21) - he in fact makes a point of accepting full responsibility for his behaviour. His talk of how he has "treated" his first wife (line 18), his mention of the vows that it was his duty not to break (line 19) and of course his voluntary admissions that what "I did" (line 29) was without "any mitigation" (line 30) or any "grounds" (line 34) are all constructions which make a show of *not* trying to claim that he was a hapless victim of circumstance (cf. Chapter 4), at the mercy of mysterious psychological forces (cf. Chapter 5) or simply a puppet whose strings were being operated by somebody else. Thirdly, consider lines 32-33: "it leaves me with an immense conviction really that the case against adultery is immensely strong." Reynolds is pointedly *not* trying to claim that his personal experiences of meeting and marrying Katherine in any way refute or undermine the general principle that marital fidelity is valuable and something to be adhered to. That is, he is pointedly *not* trying to justify his behaviour by arguing that he is entitled to do as he likes (cf. Chapter 7). Nor does he try to exonerate himself with regard to this particular set of activities by arguing that there was no call for him to have behaved any differently (cf. Chapter 3). On the other hand, Reynolds's story is not one that simply fails to offer an account for what he has done. His behaviour may have been wrong but it was not *without* reason: "it's just that Katherine was so exceptional in so many ways" (lines

31-32). Something is being contra-indicated here and that something is the possibility that Reynolds needed no special reason to behave as he did; the possibility that he is without any moral sensibility and cannot see that infidelity is an accountable matter.

By way of a contrast, Extract 6.06 shows a version of true love, constructed by Meghan, a third-party infidel. It is a final extract from the internet discussion thread, "The Other Side of an Affair."

Extract 6.06

Meghan115 - 01:08am Aug 3, 1997 EDT (#93 of 1336)

05 Okay.... I can't believe I even have the guts to step into this situation, but I just cannot resist....so here goes. First of all, I want to offer my opinion on affair types. I really believe that there must be two types of affairs. Affairs that happen because of one spouses' total disregard for marriage vows are usually the type of affairs that are short lived and usually for the sake of sex. The second type of affair happens when the married person meets another person, and there is real, true love between that married person and the "other". Sometimes these affairs lead to something more, such as marriage, but usually they lead to a great amount of pain..for the wife, the husband, the "other" and children too. Before everyone starts attacking me for saying that the "other" person suffers too, I have to first admit that I am the "other". I am not a BIMBO, my reasons for believing this are

10 because I am highly educated, fairly religious, sexually responsible. I volunteer my time to those less fortunate than me, basically..I give a damn about other peoples' feelings. My situation is a strange one. I met a man, (yes, Des..older than me) who I knew was married. I had just come out of a very painful and abusive relationship from which a beautiful daughter was born. My emotional health at that time was very unstable. I felt very distrustful of men (my boyfriend had many affair type #1's) and all I wanted to do was be alone with my daughter and try to gain some self esteem and heal. However, I met this man, whi I knew was married. He doesn't live anywhere near me, so a phone friendship developed. When I first met him, I believed his marriage to be a healthy one. But, as our friendship became closer, I started to conclude that that was definitely not the case. He and I would talk about my prior relationship amd every now and then, he would add his own little horror stories to these conversations. But, the difference was, he wasn't only telling me bad traits of hers, he was also sharing bad traits of his. After a few months of friendship, I became aware that he was actually in a horrible marriage, a disfunctional marriage which he was always quick to take partial blame for. As time went by, and our conversations grew longer and longer and more meaningful: we realized, to our extreme discomfort, that we had started to care very deeply for each other. Now, he had left his wife before, only to come back time and time again because of the exteme guilt he felt over breaking up his family (he has three kids). Soon after grudgingly admitting our feelings for each other, feelings that COULD NOT be suppressed or denied any longer, he left his wife. We were both very honest in the obvious fact that this time was partially due to me. I was not happy with that knowledge and neither was he. But, they had been discussing divorce long before I came along. He is deeply religious, and he comes from an old fashioned family..one that does not condone divorce. Our conversations on the phone after this centered around two subjects

35 mostly...his wife's pain, and his pain over leaving his kids. We laso made plans for me to travel out to see him and finally try to understand these

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intense feelings that matured over the telephone. It's very hard for me to give all the details, but to make a very long story a little shorter...his wife "suddenly" developed emotions that she had never experienced before..and begged him to come back and give her another chance. Now, he had done everything the typical "adulterous married man" isn't supposed to do. He filed for divorce, he put the house up for sale, he moved into his own place. But, his guilt and deep devotion the sanctity of marriage gave him no other choice than to go to counseling (counseling that he had been begging her for for the last ten years) and give his marriage one final shot. So, for the past few months I have been hearing..I don't know what is going to happen...I just can't feel the feelings for h

(The Hearst Corporation, 1997,
<http://www.homearts.com/cgi-bin/WebX94.htm>)

Specific reasons for infidelity, by virtue of their very specificity, hinge on the discursive business of *particularisation*, the rhetorical counterpart of categorisation (Billig, 1987, p. 131). Particular people and relationships are singled out as special cases and therefore not exemplars of some category to which they might have been assumed to belong. The dyadic partner who behaves unreasonably is an exception to the category "undeserving victims." Celibate relationships do not in that respect qualify as the "normal" type of relationship that married persons are entitled to expect. Similarly, as we can see from Extract 6.06, affairs that are motivated and sustained by true love are distinguishable from the majority which are "short lived" and "for the sake of sex" (lines 7-8). It is this particularity that allows Meghan to preface her story with the claim "my situation is a strange one" (line 17), although for the purposes of *The Compleat Infidel* it is much like any other construction of true love. The point, of course, is that categorisation and particularisation are always tailored to the purpose at hand. For Meghan, in the interactional context of OSA, the purpose is to divide up the categorical, unifying description of infidelity produced by Des M and her allies so as to defend her own experiences and actions without denying outright the adequacy of that description for some (or most) other people's, ostensibly similar infidelities.

Meghan's interest in defending her own affair against Des's construction is displayed in the category memberships that she resists for herself and her dyad-bound accomplice. Sue Widdicombe (1998; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995), in her analysis of people's discursive management of their (non-)membership of subcultural groups such as "punks" and "gothics," notices that one of their key methods of resisting category membership is to deny possession of certain criterial features. Her research participants were young people whose physical appearance made reasonable the assumption that they might be members of these groups. However, some of those who preferred to resist such categorisation did so by playing down the importance of appearance, selecting some alternative criterion for membership (e.g., "a certain way of thinking") and then

denying possession of that criterion. That is, they resisted category membership while orientating to the accountable context of looking as though they could be members. An analogous situation exists in Extract 6.06. Meghan resists categorisation of herself as a "bimbo" (line 14) and likewise of her accomplice as a "typical "adulterous married man"" (line 51). She accomplishes this by emphasising her, and his, non-possession of criteria for category membership. Meghan is not a bimbo because "I give a damn about other people's feelings" (lines 16-17). Her partner is not the typical adulterous married man because he has done just what members of that category are crucially required *not* to do, itemised in lines 52-53 in the form of a *three-part list* (Jefferson, 1990) which collectively describes the actions of someone who is serious about ending their marriage. That is, Meghan resists categorisation while acknowledging and orientating to the highly accountable context of being involved with a man who is in fact married, that fact providing a basis for others to assume that she and her man are members of the decried categories.

As for the nature of true love itself, we can see that Meghan externalises and reifies that phenomenon, just as Reynolds (Extract 6.05) reifies the power and other exceptional properties of Katherine, Cindie (Extract 6.04) and Arabella (Extract 6.03) reify certain marital problems and Skatterkat (Extract 6.02) and Wolfe's survey respondent (Extract 6.01) reify the unreasonable behaviour of certain so-called victims of infidelity. In particular, Meghan constructs her own and her man's recognition of their relationship as "real, true love" (line 9) as something that emerged slowly; a gradual but shocking "realization" (line 34) that developed alongside her dawning awareness that his marriage was far from "healthy" (line 25) and in fact was "horrible" (line 31) and "dysfunctional" (sic). Notably, Meghan uses the "at first I thought ... but then I realized" device to display the harmlessness of her original intentions (lines 24-26, 30-31, 32-34) and similarly she adds details such as "he was also sharing bad traits of his" (lines 29-30) which display her lover as innocently acting counter-intuitively for someone who might be suspected of cynically wanting to engineer an affair. Upon these two artless characters, true love eventually imposes itself in the form of "feelings that COULD NOT be suppressed or denied any longer" (lines 38-39) although even then the pair do not let themselves off the moral hook. Like Dr. Reynolds, Meghan makes a point of continuing to accept responsibility for her actions (lines 39-41). The feelings that unite the couple are pointedly not made to excuse or justify what has happened but they are constructed as an explanation and a reason for the blameable activities that Meghan narrates.

Critique and Conclusions

In this chapter we have examined three varieties of specific reason for infidelity: "unreasonable behaviour," "being short changed" and "true love and factors of the third party." I would like to begin this final section of Chapter 6 by saying a few words about how those different sorts of specific reason vary according to their interactional functions, over and above the variations of their gross structure and content. The data extracts that we have looked at under those three headings show that each variety of specific reason can be constructed by both dyad-bound infidels and third-party infidels. However, that is not to say that occupants of these different membership categories favour all varieties of specific reason equally. The dyadic status of a speaker or writer can have practical implications for what kind of specific reason is ultimately produced.

Let's begin with unreasonable behaviour. Dyad-bound infidels whose dyadic relationship is still intact do not generally opt for the practice of direct victim-blaming that is represented by accounts of unreasonable behaviour. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the logic of normative accountability that surrounds couple relationships dictates that "it takes two to tango" (e.g., see Edwards, 1995). That is, there is a strong normative expectation that the person who is somehow dissatisfied in their relationship will accept some responsibility for improving matters, including making a display of sharing the blame for whatever has gone wrong. To do otherwise and produce an account that puts all of the blame on to one's partner is to risk being undermined by appeals to one's stake or interestedness. The account may be criticised as hearably one-sided and self-serving and the "two to tango" principle may be invoked to suggest that the complaining partner is leaving out crucial information about how they themselves have contributed to relational difficulties. Secondly, a person in a presently intact couple relationship who complains too vociferously about their partner may be asked why, if the other person is really so awful, they do not simply get out of the relationship and move on to pastures new. Though there is no reason, in principle, why an answer cannot be found, much of the discourse of dyad-bound infidels visibly orientates to the possibility of being asked such a question with an overall view to avoiding it.

In contrast, unreasonable behaviour is a popular choice with third-party infidels compared to other varieties of specific reason. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that third-party infidels are liable to be held accountable in a slightly different way than dyad-bound infidels. They are relatively less accountable for

injuring the victim because, unlike dyad-bound infidels, they usually have not made any specific promises to that person of the sort that are implied by an exclusive couple relationship. However, third-party infidels do become accountable in an additional way that dyad-bound infidels are not so vulnerable to. That is, third-party infidels may have to contend with criticisms along the lines that they are being taken advantage of by their dyad-bound accomplices, that they can never expect the extradyadic relationship to amount to more than casual sex and that they are naïve and gullible if they imagine otherwise. Describing unreasonable behaviour on the part of the victim addresses these concerns in two ways. Firstly, demonising the victim as someone who acts injuriously towards others helps reduce the moral fault of the third-party infidel who behaves similarly. This is particularly the case if the victim's actions can be claimed to have affected the third-party infidel directly, rather than the third-party infidel having to take offence on behalf of somebody else or otherwise at a remove. Secondly, descriptions of discrete, unreasonable actions and events that could potentially be verified provide for third-party infidels to do witnessing, corroboration and other kinds of externalisation. Such actions and events need not imply a special insight into the dyadic relationship but in fact can be rhetorically enhanced through presentation as phenomena that even someone outside the dyadic relationship is able to see.

When it comes to the kind of specific reason that I have referred to here as being short changed, the patterns of preference are reversed. Dyad-bound infidels are relatively more given than third-party infidels to producing accounts that explain infidelity by appeal to some deficiency or inadequacy in the dyadic relationship. The advantage of this kind of argument for the dyad-bound infidel is that it allows them to make a display of *not* unfairly blaming the victim in their reports of marital dissatisfaction and the ensuing search for compensation. Unlike accounts of unreasonable behaviour, which highlight particular offences on the part of the victim and which consequently give rise to questions about why the dyad-bound infidel does not therefore resign from the relationship, accounts of being short changed can be couched in the most vague and general terms and, moreover, invoke an uncomplaining kind of consensus through instantiation as "the sort of problem that lots of couples have." In Extract 6.03, Arabella's ideas about the prevalence of marriages that are "caring but celibate" are a good example and Sanai's gloss on "the evaporation of closeness" even more so. Other relational problems and deficiencies that are mentioned in the context of being short changed include "growing apart," having "married too young" and finding that misadventures to do with illness or unemployment have made one partner

blamelessly but disproportionately dependent on the other. As for Arabella, these kinds of problems can be constructed as chronic and resistant to change but not necessarily acute in the sense that they demand action more drastic than a palliative affair "on the side." Problems such as these offer little rhetorically to the third-party infidel. The principal drawback is that vague and generalised relationship problems leave third-party infidels wide open to criticisms that they are being duped or spun a line by their dyad-bound accomplices. Similarly, complaints to do with evaporated closeness, having grown apart and so on are diagnoses that suggest quite an intimate knowledge of the dyadic relationship; knowledge that third-party infidels typically cannot claim to have collected for themselves.

Finally, consider true love and factors of the third party. In principle, dyad-bound infidels may construct either of these but in practice they overwhelmingly prefer to stick with versions of being short changed. One possible reason for this is that any account which hinges on the unique properties of the third-party infidel or the extradyadic relationship again raises the question of why the dyad-bound infidel does not leave their present relationship and start afresh with the person who apparently means so much to them. In contrast, accounts that spread the blame between the dyadic partners or diffuse the problem into the dyadic relationship render the dyad-bound infidel relatively less accountable for not departing. Exceptions occur in cases such as that of Dr. Reynolds who is at liberty to locate the reason for his infidelity in his third-party accomplice because at the time of making his defence he has already taken the plunge and committed to a new, exclusive relationship with that individual. For third-party infidels, there is obviously too much self-congratulation implied in claiming factors of the third party for it to be a viable defensive option although, as we have seen, they do sometimes argue for true love. The special merit of this line of defence for the third-party infidel is that they can avoid sounding self-servingly hostile towards the victim, a hazard that accompanies accounts of unreasonable behaviour. Moreover, true love as a description of the extradyadic relationship refers to an experience that the third-party infidel can claim to share in equally with the dyad-bound infidel. They can claim a certain first-hand knowledge entitlement that may be more difficult to construct when the object of discussion is a relationship to which they personally are not privy. However, because of the conventionally private, unobservable nature of the experience of true love and its confinement within a couple's relationship, it does not offer third-party infidels the same opportunities for externalisation and corroboration as concrete reports of unreasonable behaviour. Moreover, versions of true love do not help third-party

infidels to explain why their dyad-bound accomplices remain dyad-bound where that is indeed the case. Versions of unreasonable behaviour are less susceptible to that problem because they can be built from third-party infidels' first-hand experiences of the victim's behaviour and do not rely on making claims about the dyad-bound infidel's perceptions and personal (dis)satisfaction on their behalf.

As well as identifying the functional variations among specific reasons for infidelity, it is possible to discern something from our analysis about their similarities and about the overall function of constructing a specific reason as a defensive practice. To begin with, specific reasons are characteristically invoked to account for infidelities where the speaker would like to claim high distinctiveness (i.e., they are not dispositionally or habitually unfaithful) but at the same time the infidelity to be explained is one of high consistency - an enduring and perhaps presently continuing affair as opposed to an isolated episode of the type that we saw in Chapter 4. Constructions of specific reasons accomplish this feat by claiming some sort of *provocation* that did not mechanistically determine or cause the speaker's behaviour but which gave them a motive for behaving in a particular way and thus rendered their actions reasonable. Like constructions of isolated episodes of infidelity, specific reasons are manifest in a very wide range of sources and media and this is no doubt an effect of their basically uncontroversial, common-sense appeal. In the world constructed by most contemporary, Anglo-American discourse users, fidelity is predicated on notions of two rational, autonomous persons committing themselves to a bond of romantic and sexual exclusivity with no need for elaborate definitions and provisos about what that entails. It is conventionally taken as read that they do this because they have each discerned something uniquely attractive or satisfying in the other as an individual and/or in their shared relationship. With this epistemologically uncomplicated, liberal humanist fable as a starting point, it does not require any lateral thinking to arrive at an explanation for *infidelity* whereby the individual is spurred into action either as a result of a growing dissatisfaction with the existing relationship or a developing attraction to somebody else.

In previous chapters I have noted similarities between the defensive practices identified in *The Compleat Infidel* and those catalogued by Atkinson and Drew (1979) in their study of police officers' accounts for their failure to take certain normatively expected actions with respect to incidents of civil unrest. The present practice of constructing a specific reason for infidelity is no exception. In this case, the equivalent discovery of Atkinson's and Drew's is their type 2 excuse.

This is a discursive manoeuvre that particularly occurs immediately following counsel's specific noticing of the witness's failure to act. In the interests of continuity, here is a quick example from Atkinson's and Drew's own data.

- Counsel:* In any event, when you mounted that second baton charge you took no steps to prevent the Protestant people following you?
- Witness:* I was not in a position to take any steps. If I had taken any steps to prevent them I would have left more than half my party and the other three or four of us would have had no effect on chasing them from this fire that had been started at the Sarsfield Hall.
(Atkinson and Drew, 1979, p. 166)

Compare this with the data illustrating the type 1(a) excuse that I presented in Chapter 4. Those data showed the witness constructing a narrative that conveyed how the blameable incident (in that case, people getting past the police) could have happened. The blameable incident was displayed as having followed from and indeed having resulted from the narrated events.

Contrastingly, the above data show the witness providing a reason for not acting as Counsel suggests that he ought. He does not dispute the desirability or relevance of that recommended action but indicates that it had to be sacrificed because of the necessity of doing something else (i.e., chasing people from a fire); both actions could not be accomplished at once. Similarly, Reynolds of Extract 6.06 "dismembered" his marriage because Katherine "was so exceptional in so many ways"; Meghan's dyad-bound accomplice of Extract 6.05 left his wife because his feelings for Meghan could no longer be denied; Cindie of Extract 6.04 "strayed" because her life was unfulfilled and so on.

In this chapter we have examined considerable evidence that accounts which present specific reasons and motives for infidelity do not merely reflect the world but are actively constitutive of it. That is, the accounts we have looked at here actively construct infidelity as reasoned and motivated, in contrast to a range of other possible constructions. Skatterkat, Arabella, Reynolds and the others could have defended themselves by arguing that "nothing happened" or that "it was an accident" or that they "just can't stop" being unfaithful - but they did not. In contradistinction to these and other possibilities, they defended their behaviour by giving it a specific reason, located somewhere within their own immediate network of personal relationships. Moreover, within the available range of specific reasons further constructive selections were made. Skatterkat constructed a version of unreasonable behaviour, Arabella went for a version of being short changed and Reynolds, with an unspecified amount of help from Lawson, constructed a version of factors of the third party. In this penultimate

analytic chapter, I hope it is becoming clear that the variations within and between these different kinds of defences of infidels and infidelity are not random, nor are they forced on people's talk by some brute, underlying facts. Rather, the discursive practices vary because people find themselves in situations where their talk (and text) is required to do various kinds of work and attend to various interactional concerns.

The above findings raise certain theoretical problems for the studies based on various social exchange theories of close relationships that I considered in Chapter 1. Recall that those studies count among their practical concerns questions of how to explain and predict people's tendency to remain in their marriages (or similar dyadic relationships) or, alternatively, to leave. Infidelity comes in for some attention in this style of research, not least because it is an empirically observable and reportable form of behaviour that is intuitively at odds with conventional ideas about what happy, durable and otherwise successful relationships are like. Thus, some researchers, such as Forste and Tanfer (1996), find (in)fidelity or sexual (non-)exclusivity to be a convenient means of operationalising hidden psychological variables such as an individual's level of commitment to their dyadic relationship. That operationalisation can then serve as the basis for making claims about the relationship of "commitment" to other variables, such as the statuses of being "married," "cohabiting" or "dating." Without any apparent reserve or hesitation, Forste and Tanfer announce that "we use sexual exclusivity - a behavioral, instead of an attitudinal, measure - as an indicator of commitment. Having a secondary sex partner suggests dissatisfaction with the primary relationship, the availability of desirable alternatives, and reduced investment" (*ibid.*, pp. 33-34) in the introduction to their research, which is informed by Rusbult's and Johnson's investment model (e.g., Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Rusbult, Johnson and Morrow, 1986), itself a development from Thibaut's and Kelley's interdependence theory (e.g., Kelley *et al.*, 1983; Kelley and Thibaut, 1978).

There are, in fact, lots of theoretical problems and criticisms of the social exchange school of research that could be raised from a discursive psychological perspective; here I will limit myself to two or three points that arise fairly directly from the analysis conducted above. Firstly, there are difficulties with the widespread assumption that having a secondary sex partner suggests dissatisfaction with the primary relationship. We have seen in this chapter that dissatisfaction with the primary or dyadic relationship is a particular type of claim among others. Claims of being short changed or of being inadequately rewarded by one's dyadic relationship are produced mainly by dyad-bound

infidels to account for their own behaviour and in situations where their function of dissolving the blame for infidelity into the relational space between two partners usefully avoids the issue of pinning responsibility on either one individual or the other. It is useful in the sense that it allows speakers such as Arabella to explain their infidelities without it becoming incumbent upon them to leave their dyadic partners and start again with someone new. It is therefore not reasonable to assume, even tacitly, that dissatisfaction causes infidelity and may ultimately cause people to leave their dyadic relationships. We have seen evidence in this chapter that dissatisfaction is a way of *accounting* for infidelity and indeed a way of accounting for infidels *not* leaving their primary relationships.

Secondly, there is the worrying assumption in this strand of research that a person's sexual partners are equivalent to one another, in the sense that they are to be regarded as "alternatives." Similarly, it is often claimed or implied that dyad-bound infidels are rational decision makers who weigh up the costs and rewards of different relationships in comparison to each other and choose a course of action (commitment to one or another party or perhaps singledom) on that basis. However, the variability of descriptions and references to third-party infidels and extradyadic relationships shows that again this equivalence is a matter for discursive construction. Whether or not the third-party infidel represents a genuine alternative to the dyadic partner depends on who is telling the story and what sorts of interactional concerns it is designed to address. We have seen that in versions of being short changed, the third-party infidel or extradyadic relationship may be constructed precisely as not an alternative to the dyadic partner or relationship but as a supplement or adjunct to it. Moreover, in versions of true love and factors of the third party, speakers and writers may go out of their way to display that they did not coolly and calculatedly do a cost-benefit analysis on their two (or more) relationships in order to come to a decision in favour of the extradyadic alternative but adhered loyally to their dyadic relationships until "the facts spoke for themselves" so loudly that they could no longer be ignored and the significance of the extradyadic relationship had to be, sometimes reluctantly, acknowledged.

Finally, it is understandable but regrettable that the social exchange theory style of research on infidelity and personal relationships has maintained a selective focus on reasons and motives as supplied by or attributed to the dyad-bound infidel. Research participants are either known to have had that category of experience (like those of Forste and Tanfer) or else they are invited to imagine themselves in that situation (e.g., Johnson and Rusbult, 1989). It is virtually never the case that reason and motive accounts are solicited from third-party infidels.

This is a great pity because third-party infidels are some of the keenest narrators of accounts that feature specific reasons for infidelity. As this chapter has shown, third-party infidels have to deal with their own characteristic sets of interactional concerns including criticisms that they are naïve and being cynically exploited by their dyad-bound accomplices. It is this which explains their penchant for constructing versions of specific reasons for infidelity, particularly versions of unreasonable behaviour, which allow them to produce particular bits of information about the dyadic experience of their dyad-bound accomplices and through the telling of that story defend themselves and their own participation in the contested events. This kind of defensive practice on the part of third-party infidels surely casts a new light on the accounts of specific reasons produced by dyad-bound infidels who can be seen to attend to different yet similar interactional concerns.

Construct a Generic Rationale

Introduction

Some discursively engineered defences of infidelity and infidels centre on constructions of large entities such as human nature, society and social groups. Such defences are the focus of Chapter 7. As in the previous analytic chapters, I shall begin with a sketch that shows the prominent features and characteristics of that part of the discursive landscape which I have called "construct a generic rationale." The objective at this stage will be to supply an overview of the gross content of generic rationales for infidelity and begin to describe the ways in which they use large scale constructions of nature and civilisation to argue their case.

The middle part of the chapter is concerned with data analysis. There we shall look at a selection of extracts of discourse from a variety of sources that all show generic rationales being practically deployed. Each data extract will represent an opportunity to examine more closely the kinds of discursive resources that speakers draw upon in putting generic rationales together and to discover something about how those resources are used to manage the dilemma of stake that faces every defending speaker and writer. Part of the work to be done in the course of analysis will involve "reading the detail" in these accounts and cross-referencing the various bits of discursive and conversational machinery that we find being used in the text with those discovered by other discourse and conversation analysts.

The last part of the chapter is titled "critique and conclusions." There we shall return to the wider view of the subject matter of this chapter and develop an account of the overall function of constructing a generic rationale for infidelity. By that time we shall have amassed considerable evidence that rationalising infidelity by invoking notions of human nature and society is a constitutive as well as a reflective discursive practice. That evidence will be used as the basis for a critique of more formal academic accounts of infidelity - or extradyadic sex, as it

is often known in such accounts - which also use natural and social theories to explanatory effect.

What constitutes a generic rationale for infidelity? As the name suggests, the data to be examined in this chapter are accounts in which speakers and writers find defences that can, if necessary, account not just for their own actual or suspected transgressions but for any and every infidelitous adventure. I use the word adventure advisedly because generic rationales are the least apologetic of all the defensive practices I have described here in *The Compleat Infidel*. In the extracts to follow, self-acknowledged infidels are spoken of not as a disturbed or sick minority (as was the case in Chapter 5) but are potentially constructible as rebels and free spirits who have lifted themselves above the hypocrisy of the moral majority. The strongest, least compromising versions of generic rationales incorporate claims that nobody's private life is morally stainless but most people cannot admit that about themselves and prefer to recover their own moral virginity by condemning others and paying lip service to a standard that they cannot uphold. With this common potential, the data that describe generic rationales for infidelity are nevertheless divisible into three recognisably discrete strands. Accordingly, there are three sections to the forthcoming data analysis. Their names are "the sovereign infidel," "boredom and fun" and "public morality, mainstream society."

In this chapter we will deploy a number of analytic tools and concepts that have already been useful in previous chapters. I especially want to draw attention in advance to the twinned discursive practices of categorisation and differentiation between categories that were a topic of interest in Chapter 3 (construct a non-event). While speakers in that chapter constructed categories so as to exclude their own actual or alleged activities from those which are nameable and blameable as "infidelity," speakers in this chapter regularly construct inclusive, *universalising* categories which ensure that "other people" are no less culpable than the speakers themselves. I would also like to mention Billig's analyses of what he terms *ideological dilemmas* (e.g., Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley, 1988). Ideological dilemmas are contradictory sets of discursive resources; opposing maxims and nuggets of common sense that provide for argument and debate. In this chapter, an ideological dilemma of special interest will be the competition between, on the one hand, individual rights and freedom and, on the other hand, collectivism and the constraints of social obligation and public duty. The strongly individualistic tone adopted in accounts that feature generic rationales for infidelity makes relevant for speakers

and their recipients the opposing discourse of social responsibility. This can represent a problem for speakers but as we will see, attending to that problem can be a way of avoiding discussing more local, specific, interpersonal issues and injuries of the type that cropped up in Chapter 6. Other ideological dilemmas that are prominent in generic rationales for infidelity are those between "nature" and "culture" and notions of what is "public" and "private." Again, these can sometimes seem to present argumentative difficulties for speakers but attending to those difficulties can also be a way of not attending to others. Readers who recall Chapter 3 may anticipate at this point that we are about to witness a certain amount of ontological gerrymandering of the sort that Bill Clinton engaged in Extract 3.03.

We do not want to get ahead of ourselves so perhaps it would be better to postpone further discussion of these issues until we have examined some data. The important thing to bring to the analysis from this introduction is that generic rationales are defences of infidels and infidelity that do not excuse or apologise for the misdemeanours of individuals on a case-by-case basis but are more orientated to defending infidelity as a general practice. The discursive resources used to accomplish this include categories such as human nature, modern society and social groups; categories which are not fixed by any objective, pre-discursive truth but are available to be shaped and manipulated so as to fulfil certain interactional requirements and achieve certain rhetorical effects. Bearing this in mind, we may now proceed to the first kind of generic rationale: accounts of the sovereign infidel.

Data Analysis

The Sovereign Infidel

In Chapter 1 I mentioned studies which take infidelity to be a form of collective human behaviour and a societal phenomenon and which are informed by varying amounts of social theory. One of those studies is *Adultery* by sociologist Annette Lawson (1988). Others which are relevant to this section and that were not mentioned in the introductory chapter are "Women's Transition to First Extramarital Sex" (Atwater, 1979) and *The Erotic Silence of the Married Woman*

(Heyn, 1992). Like Lawson's study, these are broadly sociological accounts that use statistical measures, demographics and other kinds of quantification rhetoric to set out their stall and then illustrate the arguments being advanced with bits of qualitative data, usually interview material. As sociologists or commentators on society, these writers expectably have an interest in identifying social change. One kind of social change that is prominent in studies of infidelity and sexual behaviour generally is a *shift to individualism*. Without going into unnecessary detail (interested readers will find concise accounts supplied by Lawson, 1988: chapter 1, and Swidler, 1980), the premise is that in recent years, in the West, love, marriage and sexual behaviour have become somewhat detached from their traditional anchors of familial duty, procreation and ensuring the rightful inheritance of property, and proportionally more concerned with the expression of personal choice and the fulfilment of individual potential. Such claims are usable as explanations for quantitative observations that rates of infidelity and divorce are rising, especially those infidelities and divorces which are initiated by women. To illustrate this argument, authors such as Atwater and Heyn use quotations from interviews that show lay people reporting on and explaining their behaviour in highly individualistic terms. We will see some examples in the data extracts in this section, in which the speakers particularly emphasise the principle of sovereignty over one's own body, along with the moral virtue of being master or mistress of one's own destiny.

Our first data extract is a quote from Lynn Atwater's study, "Women's Transition to First Extramarital Sex" (Atwater, 1979). It appears about ten pages into Atwater's report. In this particular section she is making the case that "women are changing their lives to place more emphasis on self-determination" and, that being the case, "an "affair" will no longer be something that "just happens" but will become a more consciously planned activity" (p. 47). Atwater's interview participants "did not just drift into "affairs" or enter them spontaneously," she asserts (ibid.); in fact, "three-quarters of the women thought about becoming involved before doing so" (p. 48). The following block quote, with Atwater's comment in brackets at the end, is presented by way of illustration.

Extract 7.01

01 I began to realize that I had made a mistake by not having sex before
 02 marriage. It suddenly hit me that I - who was only 28 - would die having
 03 had sex with only one man! I decided that was not what I wanted to do
 04 with my body, and after that the idea of having sex with another man
 05 became something possible, even desirable. But I had nobody in mind at
 06 the time. (Thinking time about one year)

(Atwater, 1979, p. 48)

In contrast to Atwater's sociological approach, let us take a more discursively orientated view of this woman's report and see what is thereby revealed. Two things can be acknowledged from the outset. Firstly, the woman articulates the individualistic principle of sole ownership of the right to dictate what happens to one's body: "I decided that was not what I wanted to do with my body" (lines 3-4). This is indeed a hearable contrast to the more antiquarian, traditional sorts of arguments that married people "become one flesh" and that marriage rightly and properly sets limits on the couple's behaviour (especially the woman's sexual behaviour). Secondly, Atwater is not mistaken in noticing that the woman saying that she "had nobody in mind at that time" (lines 5-6) is a way of anticipatively countering suggestions that she rushed indiscriminately into the arms of the first man available. She does indeed present her choice of a lover as more thoughtful than that (cf. the studied thoughtfulness of Wolfe's survey respondent in Extract 6.01). However, as an example of a generic rationale from my database, this small piece of discourse displays certain features that Atwater overlooks.

Most importantly, notice the two phrases "I began to realize" (line 1) and "it suddenly hit me" (line 2). This woman may indeed display her search for a lover as a relatively considered and thoughtful process but her representation of how "having sex with another man" initially came to seem like a good idea is quite the opposite. Far from slow and thoughtful, the speaker's "realization" that she has made a mistake is depicted as striking her in a blinding flash. Like some of the constructions of unreasonable behaviour and true love that we examined in the last chapter, this makes use of a version of the "at first I thought ... but then I realized ..." device (Sacks, 1984). In this case, it displays the speaker, a married woman, as *not* premeditating the abandonment of sexual exclusivity in her marriage, *not* having always liked the idea of infidelity and finally electing to put theory into practice. Rather, it displays her as having entered into this conventionally exclusive relationship innocently and in good faith, only later to be "hit" by the sudden realisation that she has neglected to do something important.

This practice is typical of accounts that feature versions of the sovereign infidel and it reveals much about the authors' interactional concerns. Versions of the sovereign infidel are produced by speakers who are or were dyad-bound infidels. As such, they can be held accountable for having got themselves into such a binding relationship in the first place. If they wanted to enjoy a range of sexual partners, a hostile recipient might enquire, why did the speaker bother to get married? Accounts that feature versions of the sovereign infidel address this problem. They do so by making the realisation of sovereignty part of a *transition*

story which explains through narration how the speaker transformed from an initially faithful dyadic partner into a self-acknowledged infidel. The transition is packaged in just the terms we see above, as an unexpected and unsolicited awakening or new awareness.

As a point of interest, transition stories are usually narrated in the past tense, with obvious functional pay-offs for the speaker. Making a temporally compressed, historical event of one's transition from fidelity to infidelity can be a way of avoiding answering awkward, detailed questions about exactly what decision making processes the speaker went through, exactly what degree of moral doubt they might have accountably experienced and so on (compare this to the construction of isolated episodes of infidelity in Chapter 4, especially accounts of intoxication). However, this is not inevitably the case. I have one or two examples in my data-base of speakers claiming that they are in "the transitional stage" now, that they are just now waking up to this or that "fact." Notably, these present tense accounts of transition occur only in very sympathetic contexts such as my own research interviews.

Extract 7.02 is a quote from a research interview that appears in Dalma Heyn's book, *The Erotic Silence of the Married Woman* (Heyn, 1992). Heyn uses it to support the following argument. First, she says that her interviewees did *not* get married with the intention of having an affair. However, being "modern women" they had experienced premarital sex, "so it was monogamy that was new to them, not multiple relationships. This sociological shift characterises research that shows a woman is more likely to have extramarital sex if she has had premarital sex," however much she might consciously and personally intend *not* to commit adultery (p. 49). In a nutshell, Heyn claims that modern, sexually experienced women find the long term sexual exclusivity that comes with marriage more difficult and unnatural than women of previous generations. Nonetheless, their conventional assumption that marriage *ought* to be sexually exclusive makes necessary a certain amount of "emotional repositioning" so that an affair can take place.

Extract 7.02

05 "I can't explain how I was able to drop my long-held beliefs about monogamy and instantly adopt a Go For It! attitude toward sex." June tells me, "but I did. Everything I thought I believed in simply dissolved and I did the quickest turnaround you can imagine. I went to my room the night I met him and thought, 'I want that guy; I'm going to have an affair with him' as if I were a practiced ... adulteress. I was as clear as I'd ever been. I shocked myself, and double-checked my thinking, kind of like, 'Come on

10 now, June, that's not your style, that's the opposite of your style.' 'Are you
 sure?' I kept asking myself. And 'You bet!' was my answer. So much for my
 superego.
 15 "I felt more than tempted to sleep with him, I felt determined to - I was on a
 mission - as if I'd found something I had to have and I'd be damned if I
 wouldn't have it. I felt greedy. Needy. All those words I'd scoffed at,
 words like 'growth' and 'experience' came to me in a rush; I suddenly felt
 20 my own life was a human-potential movement and this was the only way
 to develop my human potential and I'd be throwing away what I knew
 was right for me if I didn't pursue it. I'd be a woman with no life in her, a
 silly, scared wimp. All my 'Grab the Moment' impulses; all my 'Don't Let
 Opportunity Pass You By' feelings came up and squashed my puny little
 25 'Don't Because You're a Married Woman' prohibitions, which suddenly felt
 about as compelling as my 'Don't Eat Sugar' vows. I was surprised by my
 own vehemence, and about the stupidity I was able to ascribe to my own
 prohibitions. It wasn't as if morality didn't exist; it was as if a greater
 morality, one I hadn't yet been aware of, had finally made itself visible to
 me. This must be how people rationalize murder, I thought. They tell
 themselves: It Is Good. God wants it that way. Do it.
 "And so I decided, since I wasn't even on the fence about this, that I
 wouldn't dredge up some fatuous rationale to try to justify it or dissuade
 myself. I'd go with it, and deal with the rest later."

(Heyn, 1992, pp. 37-38)

As before, we can see that this speaker, June, is telling a transition story which
 compresses her recognition of certain facts about her right to do as she pleases
 into a sudden revelation. The key phrases here are "instantly" (line 2), "the quickest
 turnaround you can imagine" (line 4), "came to me in a rush" (line 14) and "I
 suddenly felt" (line 14). This helps to support her self-presentation as someone who
 did not marry in bad faith, with the intention of cheating on her husband:
 particularly notice the mentions that she was *not* at that time "a practised
 adulteress" (line 6) and the reflective remark "that's not your style, that's the
opposite of your style (line 8). Like the speaker in Extract 7.01, she is very clearly
 using the language of individualism to couch her argument. While Atwater's
 participant speaks of "what I wanted to do with my body," June deploys the
 rhetoric of "develop[ing] my human potential" (line 16) and knowing more
 authoritatively than anyone else what is "right for me" (line 17)

Now, here are a couple of new points that need to be made before we
 move on from the sovereign infidel. Firstly, notice the expression "beliefs about
 monogamy" (lines 1-2), followed by references to "prohibitions" (lines 20, 23).
 These are terms which allow June to skirt the issue of any personal injury that she
 might have caused her husband by breaking their relational contract. Consider
 the sorts of terms that she could have chosen but did not; the sorts of terms that
 might be preferred by someone who was keen to criticise her. Such a person
 might say that June did not merely "drop her beliefs," find that her "prohibitions"
 had been "squashed" and revised her ideas about competing but quite abstract
 systems of "morality." Rather, one could say that June committed adultery, broke

her marriage vows, cheated on her husband or whatever. All of these formulations refer specifically to June's marital status, her voluntary and personal promises and commitments, the rightful expectations of her particular partner and so on. Against this foil, it is clear that June has chosen terms that remove her behaviour from the realm of specific occasions, unique people and interpersonal relationships, launching it into a timeless, impersonal discourse of ideology. The same rhetorical move explains her choice of "monogamy" rather than "fidelity" as the category term for what she has rejected or abandoned. Fidelity describes a personal, moral promise exchanged between a couple as part of constituting themselves as such; monogamy describes a social system; a broad and impersonal organisation of relationships so that they are sexually exclusive and not polygamous. The infidelity/monogamy contrast is one that we will meet again in the section called "public morality, mainstream society."

Secondly, look at how June describes her decision about what course of action to take subsequent to her sudden revelation. "I decided, since I wasn't even on the fence about this, that I wouldn't dredge up some fatuous rationale to try to justify it or dissuade myself. I'd go with it, and deal with the rest later" (lines 27-29). It is, of course, interesting that June explicitly refers to *not* "dredging up some fatuous rationale," thereby orientating to the possibility that a "fatuous rationale" is precisely what her account risks being taken for. However, what is perhaps more interesting is the fact that June constructs two possible kinds of fatuous rationale; one that would have persuaded her *into* infidelity and one that would have persuaded her *out* of it. This dual construction provides for her to reject both lines of reasoning and warrants her selection of a third option: not to reason at all, either for or against, and instead simply to "go with it." This unthinking, un-rationalised "going with it" is contrastively presented as more honest, uncontrived and therefore natural, discursively akin to "trusting one's instincts." Through this formulation, June invokes the rhetorical authority of nature and the natural, a defensive manoeuvre that is a recurrent theme in constructions of generic rationales as we will see throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Boredom and Fun

In the variegated discursive fabric of contemporary social science, the strand that makes the heaviest and most explicit use of notions of what is "natural" and what constitutes "human nature" is that based on evolutionary theory, exemplified by evolutionary psychology, previously a topic of discussion in Chapter 1. The stance

of researchers such as Baker and Bellis (1993, 1995) is that instances of what are ostensibly couple or "pair" relationships spilling over into extradyadic sex, extra-pair copulation, non-monogamy and such are so common that humans may be presumed to be universally prone to such behaviours. This initial observation is usually well supported by comparisons with similar findings about the universal non-monogamy of non-human creatures, notably mammals and birds. The task, then, is to explain what evolutionarily adaptive purpose such human behaviour might serve. It is worth noting that many people take evolutionary explanations for human sexual behaviour to be deeply offensive: witness the current media portraits of feminists' and other groups' angry response to Craig Palmer's and Randy Thornhill's forthcoming book on the evolutionary psychology of rape; add to this the searing critique of such approaches published by Lynne Segal (1999, chapter 3; also see Segal, 1997, p. 209). The most common complaint is that such accounts are instrumental in removing personal, moral responsibility from the perpetrators of such despicable actions. If they were not originally conceived as defences they are certainly usable as such (it is argued) which amounts to the same thing. I will return to this note a little later on.

Similar accounts of the nature of human beings, their psychology and natural social arrangements, are evident in defences for infidels and infidelity which feature one or another generic rationale. This is particularly noticeable when the generic rationale in question is a version of boredom and fun. To fully appreciate this aspect of boredom and fun, it is necessary to recall the defences of unreasonable behaviour and being short changed from the previous chapter. Those defensive practices involved constructing accounts of individual victims of infidelity and of particular dyadic relationships as conspicuously and abnormally failing in some way. The crux of those specific reasons for infidelity was that other people's partners and other dyadic relationships are normatively not like this particular example. Some unusual and problematic deficit or excess was found to exist in the partner or the relationship which set them apart from the norm and thereby provided the infidel with a reasoned basis for his or her behaviour. In contrast, versions of boredom and fun construct dissatisfaction and disaffection with one's partner or relationship as a *natural* development. These are accounts not of disease but of natural decay.

Let's look at some data. Extract 7.03 is another netizen's anonymous contribution to the Friends and Lovers online "poll" on the subject of "why do lovers cheat" (I have previously described this website and its format in Chapters 4 and 5). This contributor identifies herself as "Ariel from Alabama."

Extract 7.03

- 01 People cheat because what's new is exciting, and therefore attractive.
 02 Being with the same person day after day soon loses it's novelty and we
 03 begin to look for the excitement elsewhere.

(Home & Leisure Publishing Inc., 1998,
http://cyberspud.com/friends_lovers/read10.htm)

Though this is a very short extract of data there is, as always, plenty to be unpacked. Perhaps the most important thing to notice is the "we" on line 2. The brief appearance of this first-person pronoun highlights the absence of human agency elsewhere in Ariel's account. She reifies and naturalises the phenomena she describes by mainly sticking to a passive, empiricist style of discourse. This is a form of talk that we have noted in earlier chapters, for instance, in the report of how "the closeness evaporated" in Arabella's marriage, in Extract 6.03. Moreover, Ariel's account is in the present tense. This is a device for representing things as continuous and reliable over time, just as the past tense can function to parcel things off as historical episodes, finished with and not part of the normal routine (cf. Chapter 4). Additionally, Billig's work on the structure of argumentation (e.g., Billig, 1987) highlights Ariel's opening statement (line 1) as almost syllogistic in form. What's new is exciting (A equals B); what's exciting is attractive (B equals C); therefore what's new is attractive (A equals C). Ariel does with her syllogism what other examples of boredom and fun in my database show being done with idiomatic expressions (Drew and Holt, 1989), known to be robust in the face of criticism and commonly produced in situations of conflict or at least a lack of support (Potter, 1996a, p. 168). For instance, another netizen in circumstances similar to Ariel remarked of sex in marriage that "the old saw about putting a penny in the jar for every time you do it the 1st year then take one out after that & you'll always have a lot of pennies left is pretty true I think." (This is a nice example because it not only invokes the idiom itself but additionally indexes it as such with the preface "the old saw.") The net effect of these kinds of formulations and of Ariel's account specifically is a heavily fact-constructive argument about why people *in general* observably "cheat."

As anticipated, there is some highly inclusive categorisation going on here. It is not that some relationships lose their novelty, perhaps as a result of the unsatisfactory behaviour of some victims of infidelity. Ariel's is a universalising account, even more inclusive than Arabella's observations in Chapter 6 that "a lot of people" suffer from being in a "caring but celibate" marriage. The "loss of novelty" which explains why people are motivated to seek something new is presented as an unqualified fact and, because of its position in the sentence, is hearably a natural consequence of "being with the same person day after day"

(line 2), that description being a robust and not challengeably incorrect characterisation of a normatively organised dyadic relationship.

The "we" of line 2 is the single reminder in this extract that Ariel may be attending to a more personal stake in her account than is immediately suggested by the logically structured, impersonal facts that dominate her discourse. It calls attention to the ability of these universal facts to account for Ariel's own behaviour as well as that of the rest of the population. That is, it becomes apparent that invoking these generalised principles and observations about the world (like the universalising language of the individual's right to decide what happens to his or her body) is a move that functions to defend Ariel's own actual and/or potential attempts to "look for the excitement elsewhere," irrespective of whether she is additionally argued to have intended it that way. A hostile recipient or argumentative opponent who could claim never to have "cheated" on their partner might expectably make that defensive function and Ariel's inferable stake the basis of their critique. This is comparable to the objections to Palmer's and Thornhill's evolutionary, universalised and naturalised account of rape that I mentioned earlier.

The second piece of data in this section, Extract 7.04, is drawn from one of my own research interviews. We have previously met the respondent, Emma, in Chapter 5 (Extract 5.04). The following stretch of dialogue is taken from near the beginning of our conversation (page 5 of the transcript).

Extract 7.04

- 05 Emma: I live with (.) four lads and one of the lads I live with I'm (.) I'm seeing, I wasn't seeing him when I moved into the house but (.) I moved into the house and then the relationship occurred a:nd (.) we haven't been together that long now, it's about four months
- Rachel: mhm
- Emma: and (.) it's so: comfortable [[laughing]]
- Rachel: [mmm]
- 10 Emma: and it's like (.) I get in, and the first thing I probably do is put my trackie bottoms on (.) a:nd (.) I'll scrape my hair back (.) and he sees me first thing in the morning and you know even after a couple of weeks of seeing each other he was seeing me when I came out the shower (.) walk down the lounge you know (.) panda eyes with mascara down your face, things that you don't (xxx) and it's got to the point now where I have been unfaithful (.) several times, several different people and (.) it's not (.) and I, I, I'm convinced that if we weren't living together then I wouldn't have done but cus we're living together we've got to (.) a comfortable kind of stage where um (.) we don't always make the effort (.) and I just think (.)
- 20 sometimes like you say I just think o:h you know (.) I can

25 get away without making any effort (.) but when um (.)
 there's a couple of blokes that I'm sort of flirting with at the
 moment, interested in, when they ring me up and say do
 you wanna come out for a drink, do you wanna come
 round to mine, do you wanna meet up (.) u:m (.) I
 30 suddenly find the energy, have a shower, wash my hair,
shave my legs, do everything, go out, I'm suddenly Miss
 Charming, Miss you know Flirty and everything like that,
 and I come back into the house a:nd (.) my boyfriend's
 there and I'm just like (.) uh.

Rachel: [(laughing)]
 Emma: [go to bed.]

Emma's is an unusually graphic and detailed version of boredom and fun that is rich in clues about the action orientation of this defensive practice. Before we unpack her claims about how people and relationships work, notice the expression "like you say" on line 22. The universalising aspect of claims about the natural causes of infidelity can potentially present a problem in situations of face-to-face interaction (like Emma's situation and unlike Ariel's). The problem is that a universalising account co-implicates the recipient in whatever is being claimed or described, as well as the speaker and "people in general." There is always the risk that recipients will respond to this co-implication as highly offensive when the topic at hand happens to be something like "routinely cheating on the person you live with." Emma orientates to this risk in "like you say," an expression that works to construct the claims she is making now as in alignment or agreement with things that Rachel has said earlier. It is a kind of insurance against a response of outright rejection or contradiction.

Emma uses a less impersonal, empiricist style of discourse than Ariel in Extract 7.03. She describes incidents in her own relationships to illustrate her case. However, Emma's argument, no less than Ariel's, is constructed so as to be generally applicable and therefore to draw attention away from questions of her unique and private relational contract with her partner, Ben. Following the analysis of Edwards (1994, 1995, 1997), Emma's descriptions of what goes on at home with her boyfriend and contrasting descriptions of what happens when other men ring her up are script formulations that characterise the boredom and fun as not unique to some particular occasion nor even unique to Emma and her consorts but as a generalised pattern.

Ariel used the expression "being with the same person day after day" to refer to the conventional type of couple relationship. That is not a challengeably wrong description but it is a rather unflattering one that prepares the ground for her more controversial claim about the novelty inevitably wearing off. Emma accomplishes something similar with the word "comfortable" (lines 7, 20). In the sort of discourse that positively advocates and promotes exclusive couple

relationships, the truism that people become comfortable in each other's company is taken to be a desirable development, a welcome sequel to an initial period of unfamiliarity and uncertainty in which the couple are still getting to know one another. Emma turns that discursive convention on its head and uses "comfortable" in a critical way. It refers not to a welcome intimacy but to the onset of a chronic failure to "make the effort" (lines 21, 23) and indeed a loss of the necessary "energy" (line 28), where "making the effort" is characterised by: being "charming" and "flirty" (line 30); doing the sort of grooming and preening that is indexed by Emma's three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) of "have a shower, wash my hair, shave my legs" (lines 28-29); and contrastively *not* appearing in utilitarian tracksuit bottoms with scraped-back hair and "mascara down your face" (lines 10-11, 14-15). This not challengeably inaccurate yet rather despondent portrayal of the "comfortable stage" (line 20) that is naturally achieved by coupledness, especially when the couple live together, provides the warrant for the more controversial part of Emma's argument.

Ariel cites "looking for the excitement elsewhere" as the natural human response to the loss of novelty that accompanies stable relationships. Emma uses much the same reasoning but is more forthright in her description of the effects of boredom and over-familiarity: "it's got to the point now where I have been unfaithful (.) several times, several different people" (lines 15-17). The upgraded description of the blameable behaviour and the emphasis on its severity is a means for Emma to present herself as a rational and indeed dismayed observer of her own infidelity, detaching the Emma who speaks now from the Emma who neglects her boyfriend but willingly rushes round after other men. Compare this to Chapter 5, where speakers made a display of observing their own behaviour and inferring something from that about their flawed personalities or dispositions. In this case, of course, the invited inference is not that Emma is dispositionally "that sort of person" but that infidelity is the result of her relationship having first become "comfortable" and inexorably having arrived at that certain point where no-one, however dismayed, would naturally behave any differently.

Public Morality, Mainstream Society

In Chapter 1, under the heading "Some Unsatisfactory Treatments of Infidelity Discourse," I reviewed some feminist, social constructionist approaches to the problem of infidelity. Scholars such as Burns and Griffin (1996), Dryden (1999) and Kitzinger and Powell (1995) recognise (in)fideliy talk as; (a) culturally specific and

(b) actively constructive in the sense that such talk is treated as having various undesirable material and emotional consequences, for social groups such as women and for individual members of those groups. Now, these authors are not just commentators on society but *critics*. As such they are quick to observe that notions such as "monogamy" and "infidelity" are not just social artefacts and therefore liable to change interestingly over time but, moreover, are part of a society-wide moral order that attempts to constrain and direct behaviour with real penalties for those who are identified as somehow failing to conform. Broadly speaking, it is usual for feminist critics to voice considerable anger about the content and application of this public moral code regarding sexual and otherwise intimate behaviour because of the preferential treatment it gives some members of society and the injustices it inflicts upon others.

The research interviewees in the data extracts to follow are not feminists and the orientation of their discourse shows that they are far more concerned with defending themselves and their own behaviour than with emancipating entire social groups. That said, there are remarkable overlaps and similarities in their patterns of talk. My data show that identification of a socially constructed and socially enforced moral regime and a politically flavoured critique of that regime is not the exclusive preserve of academics and professional activists but is also part of a defensive practice adopted by unrepentant infidels. I have called that practice "public morality, mainstream society." As we will see, it is a generic rationale that can accommodate themes and arguments from both the sovereign infidel and boredom and fun.

Extract 7.05 is drawn from my interview with Kyle, an habitual infidel whom we first encountered in Chapter 5 (Extract 5.01). The following exchange occurred very early in our conversation (pages 1-2 of the transcript).

Extract 7.05

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 05 | Kyle: | do you want me to draw on personal um <u>experiences</u> or (.) um (.) what, what I <u>think</u> about the situation |
| 10 | Rachel: | we can, we <u>can</u> do. I'm quite happy either with general theory or sort of personal reminiscences (.) the sorts of ques- let me give you an <u>example</u> , the sorts of <u>issues</u> that interest me are for instance, a favourite topic of mine over the last couple of weeks has been (.) if you find yourself in the situation of being a third party in an affair where you're having a sexual relationship with somebody who's <u>married</u> or primarily attached to someone <u>else</u> , then (.) what might your (.) moral responsibility be, if any, towards um the e:r regular partner of the person that you're having <i>this affair with?</i>
(.) |

- 15 Rachel: that's the sort of thing that concerns me, I'm quite interested in that on an intellectual level and on a more personal level as well so: there's the sorts of questions that I really seek answers to [laughing]
- Kyle: yeah
- 20 Rachel: what do you think about that one, for instance?
Kyle: I think (.) it's about (.) your coping mechanisms and how much you want (.) to get involved in a situation which on the surface is wrong to get involved in (.) but um underneath (.) you can justify it (.) right, and if there's (.) if there's options (.) well not so much options but if (.) yeah, you can justify it. know what I mean, cus it's what you want. more to the point if you can get away with it, and I'm looking more on the idea of (.) infidelity brings (.) you know (.) in a sense a spice of life, to do the things you shouldn't do, in a sense. and to enjoy the things you do do.
- 25 Rachel: yeah
Kyle: and (.) risk (.) comes into play (.) personality, your character (.) drive
- 30 Rachel: when you said, you were saying about justifying it, did you mean justifying it to other people or to yourself or both?=
Kyle: = to yourself
Rachel: to yourself
Kyle: to yourself, because (.) it's not a public act, it's (.) private, so um other people shouldn't really come, other people shouldn't come into the equation. you know its u:m (.) in this society a taboo (.) so you don't really (.) sing out loud your taboos do you, you just, you just keep them like (.) discreet
- 35 Rachel: mm
Kyle: because then you come into the realms of emotions (.) you know (.) and um who's gonna get hurt and (.) um (.) unfortunately in, into the arms of people who are quick to point the finger at you because their lives are so fucking boring
- 40 Rachel: mm
Kyle: know what I mean (.) and they ain't got the bottle
Rachel: yeah
Kyle: to do what you have done (.) you know and um (.) it gives them something, you know (.) you live for them
- 45 Rachel: mm
Kyle: you know, and fuck em.
- 50 Rachel: mm
Kyle: you know, and fuck em.
- 55 Rachel: mm
Kyle: you know, and fuck em.

This very vivid piece of discourse invites two sets of analytic remarks. The first set concerns Kyle's use of various contrasts. The second concerns the relationship of generic rationales to special categories of self (the subject of Chapter 5).

The extract begins with Kyle's construction of a rhetorical opposition between his "personal experiences," on the one hand, and "what I think," on the other (lines 1-2). There is, of course, no natural diktat that people's experiences and thoughts must be treated as mutually exclusive but Kyle constructs them as such and Rachel accommodates and affirms this construction with her contrasts "general theory" versus "personal reminiscences" (lines 3-4) and "on an intellectual level" versus "on a more personal level" (lines 16-17). At the outset, then, Kyle effectively obtains permission to treat these two as independent and separate

categories of talk or available resources that he might "draw on" (line 1) as an interviewee. His subsequent remarks, from line 21, show the utility of this distinction: he opts immediately for the "general theory" sort of talk and in so doing legitimately avoids talking about any specific occasion of finding himself "in the situation of being a third party in an affair," as Rachel constructs it in lines 7-8.

The next contrast he produces distinguishes that which is "on the surface" from that which lies "underneath" (lines 23-24). This distinction exemplifies the *appearance/reality device* identified by Edwards (1997, p. 248). Edwards observes of this device that it is "rhetorically effective in that it recognises the obviousness of appearances and so acknowledges the basis for [an]other person's (defective) understanding. At the same time, it subverts that impression, in favour of a purportedly more insightful and adequate analysis" (ibid.). In this particular case, as we can see, Kyle uses the device to characterise the type of "situation" Rachel has described as only apparently morally "wrong" (line 23) and in reality "justifiable" (lines 24, 26). The question now arises of how third-party infidelity can be defended. We saw in Chapter 5 that one method is to construct oneself as less than averagely capable of resisting the temptation to mess with other people's partners. We saw in Chapter 6 that another method is to accuse a specific victim of unreasonable behaviour or to invest a specific extradyadic relationship with the allure of true love. However, in Extract 7.05 Kyle is defending third-party infidelity as a general practice, a much more difficult task. His success involves the production of another contrast pair.

This third contrast separates the realms of "public" and "private" (line 39). Kyle does not attempt to deny the conventional wisdom that trampling on innocent people's "emotions" (line 46) and causing them to "get hurt" (line 47) is wrong. His point is that the way to avoid that outcome is not necessarily to avoid interfering in their relationships in the first place but to protect them from finding out about it, which he refers to as being "discreet" (line 44). The responsibility of the third-party infidel is to "get away with it" (line 27) and if that much is accomplished, that is, if the "taboos" peculiar to "this society" (lines 42-43) are publicly seen to be respected and observed, then an infidel such as Kyle himself may behave in private exactly as he wishes.

Kyle does not go so far as to claim that everyone else makes the same distinctions and behaves as he does. He allows that he is, in that regard, unusual. However, in lines 48-57 he is unsympathetic in the extreme towards the homogenised mass of "other people" (lines 36, 40) who do not follow his example. While seemingly acknowledging that it would be better if they did not "get hurt," his explanation for their collective failure to enjoy the "spice of life" that infidelity

naturally "brings" (lines 28-29) is not that they have considered reasons for eschewing such behaviour but simply that "they ain't got the bottle to do what you have done" (lines 52-54) and therefore rely on the occasional exposé of activities like Kyle's to alleviate their own "boredom" (line 50) and indeed "give them something to live for" (lines 54-55). Thus, Kyle universalises a private desire for and interest in infidelity but simultaneously particularises himself as somebody rather special: someone who has "got the bottle" to transform fantasy into action. As generic rationales go, this is clearly one that converts very neatly into the "poor general aptitude" type of special category of self in situations such as that of Extract 5.01 where he is required to discuss more specifically an experience of upsetting someone else. The essential skills of the successful infidel, in Kyle's construction of the world, are self-knowledge and realism about one's strengths and weaknesses (Extract 5.01), natural accompaniments of the ability to "keep things discreet" (Extract 7.05, lines 42-44).

If anything, the next interviewee is even less forgiving. Extract 7.06 is drawn from my interview with Doug, whom you may remember from Chapter 3, Extract 3.05, in which Lizzy discussed her affair with him during his marriage to Kim. By the time Doug and I spoke, he had finally separated from Kim and was dating in a new relationship that permitted some extradyadic activity. The following extract is drawn from late on in our conversation (pages 57-9 of the transcript). Doug has just been remarking that with his very first affair came the surprising discovery that the secret, extramarital sex enhanced and indeed rejuvenated the sexual life of his marriage. This, he reminisces, was "a nice excuse to have."

Extract 7.06

- Doug: if I was in the same position again I wouldn't give a fuck about excuses you know [laughing]
- Rachel: no I just felt like it [[laughing]]
- 05 Doug: [yea:h fuck it] I just felt like it (.) fuck o:ff, leave me [alone]
- Rachel: [yeah]
- Doug: don't you ever feel like it? be honest
- Rachel: [laughing]
- 10 Doug: and there's there's there's the crux of it isn't it, you know (.) how many people could honestly say (.) they've never even thought about it
- Rachel: mm
- Doug: you know they've never wrestled with it for a moment you know
- 15 Rachel: yea:h
- Doug: I think it's such a (.) I think the reason that (.) infidelity is seen as a hu:ge social problem, right (.) but (.) to me that's just (.) it's looking at it from the wrong way
- Rachel: mm

- 20 Doug: to me, the the fact that infidelity is such a constant issue, because people are always doing it, (.) surely doesn't that suggest that monogamy is a huge social problem
- Rachel: I do know what you mean, [yes (.) yeah]
- 25 Doug: [right? you know?] I mean to me it's a case of like everybody's (.) yelling away at the symptoms
- Rachel: mm
- Doug: and not spotting where the actual disease is you know
- Rachel: [laughing] yeah [yeah]
- 30 Doug: [and the] disease is is very obviously that humans can't behave monogamously.
- Rachel: mm
- Doug: we've been trying it now for three thousand odd years and are still not getting it fucking right, now this should, you know humans are good at getting things right when they've had a bit of practise.
- 35 Rachel: mm
- Doug: you know, for the most part
- Rachel: [mm mm]
- 40 Doug: [you know, socially,] we manage to stay civilised
- Rachel: mm =
- Doug: = I know it's only four square meals away from (.) falling apart but we manage it on a fairly constant basis (.) we manage to (.) not actually kill too many of each other a lot of the time (.) why can't we manage (.) to (.) to stay [laughing] sexually constant with someone, you know?
- 45 Rachel: [mmm]
- Doug: [and the] reason is (.) it's just not (.) in our nature
- Rachel: yeah
- 50 Doug: you know, I think, I think that monogamy is such a (.) an appa:lling construct
- Rachel: tell me what you don't like about it
- Doug: it's censorship Rachel (.) and it, it's self imposed
- Rachel: yeah
- 55 Doug: [laughing] it's censorship masquerading as freedom of choice this is what gets me
- Rachel: mm
- Doug: you know?
- Rachel: mm
- 60 Doug: and hopefully in future generations it'll be viewed as a very similar practice to the Chinese binding women's feet you know?
- Rachel: mm mm yeah
- Doug: it creates, it creates tortuous situations (.) we wouldn't have (.) break ups of families if families weren't designed to be broken
- 65 Rachel: you're so right [laughing] I'm finding this, this is (.) you know I'm finding it really difficult to a:rgue, devils, play devil's advocate with you because I agree with you so thoroughly [laughing]
- 70 Doug: you know
- Rachel: yeah [laughing]
- Doug: you know, how can you, how can, you can only break it up it's designed to be broken [you know]
- 75 Rachel: [yeah]
- Doug: it's like taking your best china and putting it in the middle of a room with a three year old in it and going now don't break anything
- Rachel: [laughing] yeah
- 80 Doug: you know, three year old with a hammer
- Rachel: yeah (.) that's right (.) [[laughs]]

- Doug: [because] (.) you know (.) at the end of the day (.) you're presented with the right horny opportunities (.) [[laughing]] intelligence and social
- 85 Rachel: [mm]
- Doug: responsibility just disappear, you know we're just not built that way
- Rachel: mm (.) h- how in that case I'm wondering do some people apparently manage to succeed at it? do you think anybody does?
- 90 Doug: I think they probably do (.) you know? (.) I think some people probably do. and okay that's great (.) but you know (.) this, this only appears laudable Rachel because (.) their personal choice fits in with what's expected
- 95 Rachel: mm
- Doug: right, it only appears to be a desirable situation because th- their choice fits in with the narrow limits of the choices that they're allowed =
- Rachel: = yes
- 100 Doug: you know?
- Rachel: mm
- Doug: and you know at the end of the day (.) I'm not saying that monogamy is wrong
- Rachel: [mm]
- 105 Doug: [I'm] not saying there's anything wrong with it, if you wanna be that way and that's the way you can live your life and you're happy with it and you're sure you're happy with it, well even if you're not, if you've chosen it fine
- Rachel: mm
- 110 Doug: you know (.) but what about the rest of us (.) probably the majority of us I, I would say
- Rachel: I don't know, it seems to me Doug that if you want sweeping generalisations then it seems to me that the um (.) majority of people probably are (.) unfaithful to their partners at some point and the majority of (.) people feel, those same people feel very passionately (.) that they do not want their partners to do this to them
- 115 Doug: mm mm (.) well yeah but you know (.) contradiction's something we're really good at as a species, isn't it (.) it's ridiculous
- Rachel: it makes me wonder why: (.) however passionately you might not like it: (.) the idea of your partner getting it on with somebody else (.) it makes me, I wonder at people's optimism
- 125 Doug: yeah
- Rachel: do you know what I mean? =
- Doug: = well I'd call it naïveté to be honest. (.) you know if you enter into a monogamous relationship with someone (.) with the the rosy eyed (.) view that (.) that person is going to remain faithful to you (.) I think that (.) it's like buying a lottery ticket and expecting to fucking win.
- 130

Like Kyle's, Doug's argument centres on universalising a hidden desire for and inclination toward infidelity (lines 7-14). An imaginary challenge is set up between Doug and the nameless "you" of line 7 who represents society's self-appointed moral guardians and is equivalent to Kyle's "people who are quick to point the finger." Doug's adversary is represented as able to produce only one possible "honest" answer to his rhetorical demands to know whether they have never "felt like it," never "thought about it," "never wrestled with it for a moment." Moreover,

this dramatic challenge turns out to be merely a preface to Doug's polemic of lines 16-131 in which he rails against the "appa:lling construct" of monogamy (line 51), attacking it in highly politicised terms (note the gender-specific reference to binding women's feet, line 61), and thereby successfully steers our conversation well clear of further discussion of any specific, personal harm that he might have caused to people such as his wife to whom he had certain normative, category bound obligations and responsibilities.

As in Extract 7.02, Doug chooses as the contrast case for infidelity not "fidelity" but "monogamy" (lines 16-31). However, Doug goes further than Heyn's participant, June. He does not just select monogamy as an ideological object about which one harbours "beliefs" and which gives rise to certain worthy but dull "prohibitions." Rather, he goes all out to undermine monogamy as "a huge social problem" (line 22). This is partly accomplished through use of an appearance/reality device in lines 16-31. Particularly notice the expression "surely doesn't that suggest" (lines 21-22), which displays Doug's take on (non-) monogamy as an irresistibly reasonable conclusion to anyone who can see the evidence that he is pointing out about the sheer prevalence and persistence of infidelitous behaviour - helpfully packaged in extreme case formulations on lines 20 ("constant") and 21 ("always").

Availing himself of the resources of boredom and fun, Doug does not hesitate to infer that universal behaviours are natural behaviours. From line 28 he begins to talk in terms of the category "humans," claiming that sexual exclusivity is "just not in our nature" (line 48) and that we humans are "just not built" (lines 86-87) in a way that provides for resistance when confronted with "the right horny opportunities" (lines 83-84). This lusty, spontaneous construction of human nature serves as the contrast case against which monogamy can be displayed as an "appalling" artefact of culture or civilisation. However, his attack on monogamy on the grounds that it is unnatural and therefore an unreasonable expectation does not stop him from additionally attacking it on political grounds. In lines 53-55 and again in lines 94-111 he invokes the highly individualistic language of "censorship" and "freedom of choice." In this context, his reference to the practice of binding women's feet (line 61) is highlighted as more than a comparison of his experience of normative monogamy to the unjust oppression of gender-specific social groups. He describes an ancient practice, rhetorically contrasted against the "future" of future generations on line 61, and thus produces a typically liberal "up the mountain" account of social progress. Moreover, he attributes that practice to "the Chinese" and in so doing invokes an East/West cultural divide, with Western individual freedoms pitted against (Western

stereotypes about) Eastern collectivism generally and Chinese communism in particular.

The hallmark of public morality, mainstream society is the construction of an imaginary opponent, some version of "mainstream society" or a personification of dogged conformity to (arbitrary and usually unjust or harmful) convention, against whom the speaker can be displayed as more honest, more courageous, more perceptive and/or more able to explain the known "facts." That faceless figure is a discursive substitution for any unique and particular individual with respect to whom the infidel might be required to account for their behaviour. It is this straw man to which Doug returns in the final part of his account. By this time, Rachel has joined in with Doug's construction of those "other people" who are the demons of the piece and she "wonders at their optimism" (lines 123-124) regarding their partners' fidelity given the observable "fact" that the "majority of people" are "at some point" unfaithful (lines 113-115). Doug picks up on the criticism in her use of "optimism" and upgrades it to "naïveté" (line 127), rounding off and ramming home in lines 130-131 the superiority of his (their) position relative to the others' with a well chosen idiom that summarises the extraordinarily remote likelihood that "what's expected" (line 94) by society will ever be matched by reality: the (for Doug, expectably British, national) lottery represents odds of approximately fourteen million to one.

Critique and Conclusions

This is the final section of Chapter 7 and subsequent to the data analysis a number of issues await consideration. Let's take a look at the agenda before plunging in. It is roughly divisible into three parts. Firstly, there are questions of what our individual pieces of analysis suggest about the overall discursive practice of constructing a generic rationale for infidelity. Secondly, we have noticed that there are similar patterns in the discourse of, on the one hand, research participants and other lay people who use generic rationales to defend themselves and, on the other hand, scholars working in quite heterogeneous disciplines under the broad umbrella of social science. Further to our analysis of the former sort of discourse there are some critical observations to be made about the latter. Thirdly, in light of those criticisms there will be occasion to say

how an alternative, discursive-psychological approach to the topics of interest would manage to avoid the various identified problems and pitfalls.

In this chapter we have looked at stretches of discourse that crucially include constructions of society, the human condition and other such grand, overarching conceptual objects. In the process of construction, speakers and writers have tackled big issues to do with human rights, competing systems of morality, the natural history of intimate relationships and so on. Analysing this material has not been a matter of weighing up accounts to find out which (if any) of them is "true." Rather, the objective has been to learn about the local functions that are served by discursive constructions of this sort; to get acquainted with their interactional effects.

The differences between varieties of generic rationale are themselves revealing. Versions of the sovereign infidel are notable for their function as transition stories in which people who are or were dyad-bound infidels account for their first steps beyond the limits of sexual exclusivity and simultaneously account for their being in a normatively exclusive relationship in the first place. Versions of boredom and fun are also characteristically produced by dyad-bound infidels. However, versions of public morality, mainstream society are comparatively rarely produced by speakers who describe themselves as presently committed to a traditional, exclusive dyadic relationship; this is more the preserve of third-party infidels and people who are (or consider themselves) freed from the demands of the traditional dyad. In other words, generic rationales vary meaningfully, not just in terms of their superficial content but in line with things like speakers' representations of their dyadic status.

That said, the generic rationales for infidelity are also united by a certain similarity of function. Overall, the point of constructing a generic rationale is that it provides a *justification* for infidelity. This is a defensive practice that accommodates infidelity of low distinctiveness, to borrow from the argot of attribution theory. Because it rationalises infidelity as a *general* practice it is usable by speakers who cannot claim *not* to be "that sort of person" and who have a whole history of misbehaviour to defend. Concomitantly, generic rationales will account prospectively for infidelities that are anticipated but have not happened (or been discovered) yet. The only other form of defence that admits low distinctiveness is constructing a special category of self. However, you may recall from Chapter 5 that constructing a special category of self is a defence of low consensus, meaning that it acknowledges that other folk are *not* routinely unfaithful to their partners, and quite right too. In contrast, the generic

rationales uniquely accommodate low distinctiveness *with* high consensus, an audacious combination that enables serial infidels to co-implicate their recipients, their victims and even claim the moral high ground.

I have previously compared the defensive practices of *The Compleat Infidel* to those emerging from the discursive study of the Scarman tribunal hearings by Atkinson and Drew (1979). The comparison extends to constructing a generic rationale. Along with constructing a non-event (Chapter 3) it is a practice that closely resembles Atkinson's and Drew's type 1 (justificatory) defence. For the purpose of contrast, recall that the other defences identified by Atkinson and Drew either; (a) respond to the noticing of a blameable (failure to) act with a *reason* for the speaker's behaviour, or (b) attempt to forestall accusation with a narrative that conveys *how* the blameable incident came about. However, the type 1 (justificatory) defence pre-empts trouble by volunteering descriptions that are constructed so as to display that no action (or no alternative action) was in fact *necessary*. In Chapter 3, this manifested as descriptions that showed that the speaker's actions either did not meet the qualifying criteria for categorisation as "infidelity" (or whatever the category term relevant to that occasion happens to be) or else that special circumstances applied that rendered their ostensibly infidelitous actions "not prohibited." In the present chapter, it is accomplished by steering the conversation away from the topic of individual victims of infidelity and their unique relationships, substituting abstract, impersonal topics such as ideology, human nature and culturally specific moral regimes. These impersonal entities are proportionally easier to set up for the purpose of being knocked down; "beliefs," "prohibitions," "taboos," "constructs" and "expectations" that disallow non-monogamy are relatively easy to display as so unrealistic and deluded that it is patently unnecessary to tailor one's behaviour in the way that they direct.

In this chapter I have made a researchable topic of certain kinds of talk: social comment; natural history; political critique. I have shown that research participants and other lay people are capable of using these kinds of talk as resources from which to build generic rationales for infidelity. The speakers and writers in this chapter are not producing spontaneous, unsolicited reports that do nothing more than reflect the properties of the natural and social world. Rather, these people constitute the world as possessing certain properties, thereby orientating to and functionally performing the defensive interactional projects with which they are momentarily engaged. Now, people defending infidelity are not the only ones who use these discursive resources to bolster their arguments

and back up their claims. In this chapter and in Chapter 1 I have cited various sociologists, evolutionary theorists and constructionist critics who demonstrably invoke similar "facts" about the natural and/or social world. These authors work in very different traditions but the point that I want to make subsequent to this chapter's data analysis applies across the board.

The point is that these writers typically do not acknowledge their preferred versions of the world as resources. They may be willing to recognise some things as discursively constituted (e.g., as Burns, Dryden and company recognise infidelity) but they reify others (e.g., the gender disparity of the material and emotional consequences of infidelity talk). It could be argued that good reasons may underpin such reification; for instance, because the object of the exercise is to improve conditions for some oppressed or under-privileged group. One may undermine the ontological assumptions of the evolutionary psychologists in relative safety but it is another matter to appear to be taking pot-shots at political movements such as feminism which are not just science-for-its-own-sake but positive efforts to do some social good. Certainly, I do not intend to claim that such a social purpose is *not* a good and legitimate reason for reifying some aspect or version of the world. However, such practices invariably set limits on the sorts of analysis that can be performed and the range of phenomena that can be accounted for.

Let's take a couple of examples. To begin with, take one more look at Doug's comment on monogamy in Extract 7.06, lines 60-61: "hopefully in future generations it'll be viewed as a very similar practice to the Chinese binding women's feet." How is it possible for a recipient to understand that "the Chinese binding women's feet" is, in Doug's view, a bad thing? Other than the general clue that this remark occurs in the context of a long speech in which Doug explicitly complains about monogamy being "appalling" and so forth, what is hearably wrong about the practice he refers to here? The kernel of his criticism is the specificity of "women." If he had said "the Chinese binding people's feet" he would have been describing a practice that is hearably archaic, restrictive and perhaps rather perverse to Western ears but his description would have lost much of its rhetorical force. Similarly, if he had retained the specificity of "women" and substituted something else for "the Chinese binding feet" - let's say for example that he came up with, "hopefully in the future it'll be viewed as very similar to the medieval practice of locking women in chastity belts" - then he would have sacrificed the exotic otherness of "the Chinese" but the social injustice implied by "women-and-not-men" would have been preserved.

Doug constructs a world in which the following things obtain: (a) women and men are discrete and distinguishable social groups; (b) social practices that restrict women's behaviour and not men's are unjust and therefore wrong. Through this construction he asserts a version of the world as true and launches a political objection to or complaint about that world. As a feminist I could, if I chose, ally myself with Doug on both counts. However, treating his remark as simply an accurate reflection of the world as it really is (i.e., populated by "men" and also "women") along with a politically correct observation that "men and women ought to be treated equally" would be to miss the point that Doug could have expressed himself entirely differently or even declined to say anything at all. The reason for the appearance in Doug's talk of this particular construction, at this point in the dialogue, is that it uniquely serves the interactional purpose at hand. That purpose, it turns out, has nothing to do with the cause of feminism. It has everything to do with invoking some moral support for Doug's construction of *himself* as a person who deserves but is denied the "freedom to choose" (lines 55-56). This freedom of choice is in turn produced to warrant Doug's overall, highly controversial rationale that he, formerly a married man and now a man with girlfriend, is entitled to not "give a fuck about excuses" for infidelity (lines 1-2); if he "feels like" being unfaithful then that is or ought to be enough.

Here is the second example: it concerns nature and the idea that sexual exclusivity may not be a "natural" practice. We have seen plenty of evidence in this chapter that naturalising extramarital or extradyadic sex can play an active part in such discursive business as rationalising and ultimately justifying it. That evolutionary theories of sexual behaviour pay insufficient attention to this defensive potential is all too obvious and since feminists of every stripe have wasted no time in pointing it out I shall not dedicate valuable space to re-inventing their arguments here. The case I want to make is slightly more challenging: that standard feminist objections to (usually men's) claims about sexual continence being unnatural do not go far enough. It is insufficient to notice that naturalising infidelity (or rape or whatever the sexual behaviour happens to be) can represent a means for men to defend it, and leave it at that. It is insufficient because it overlooks the other things that such a claim might be doing. Recall that in Chapter 1, in my discussion of Dryden's feminist, constructionist approach to talk about marriage, I quoted briefly from Dryden's interview with Gillian and Patrick Henderson, a married couple (Dryden, 1999). Dryden notices that Patrick makes a remark that she treats as reducible to the gist that there is something objectionably unnatural about remaining faithful. She additionally notices that Gillian appears upset by Patrick's remark and from these

observations goes on to develop her account of women's emotional insecurity and men's self-serving "separation behaviour."

I would like to attempt a more interactionally attuned reading of (what is available of) the data. The quite long interview extract that Dryden supplies shows the three discussing a range of marriage-related issues including the relative merits of marriage versus cohabitation, possible reasons why "one in three marriages break up," the "positive aspects" of marriage and so on. The following material appears near the end of the extract. The bits of text within square brackets are Dryden's notes.

[I then ask about difficulties - in marriage in general.]

PATRICK: I s'pose fidelity's one of them isn't it. You - you're expected to remain faithful but er [pause] I don't think it's a very sort of natural thing to do. [pause] I happened to have - sort of - be faithful but um [pause] it's just um [slight laugh] no reason - there isn't a particular reason for that.

[pause]

[At this point Gillian looks as though she might burst into tears.]

(Dryden, 1999, pp. 139-140)

It is not unreasonable of Dryden to conclude from this that Gillian has heard something that she doesn't like. However, I think it is a mistake to summarise it as "[Patrick says] that he doesn't think fidelity is natural, and he just 'happens' to have remained faithful" (Dryden, 1999, p. 141). There is a bit more to it than that. Sadly, we do not know exactly what question Dryden asked or how she phrased it but we can see that it solicited examples of something like "difficulties" and that it proposed as the site for those difficulties "marriage in general" - not just "marriage," then, and not the Hendersons' marriage in particular. Now, a glance through the contemporary marriage guidance literature confirms (in)fidelity as a highly available and prominent example of a difficulty that marriages sometimes run into. Others that Patrick might have volunteered include "arrival of your first child" and "retirement." However, since marriage is a membership category that is even more normatively implicative of sexual exclusivity than it is of "having babies" and "not being at work," there is no reason why "fidelity," as Patrick describes it, should not appear at the top of his list. He then speaks as though it is incumbent upon him to say a few words about how fidelity could come to be a difficulty, why that should be. Having been asked about marriage *in general*, some of the explanations and accounts for infidelity that we have examined here in *The Compleat Infidel* clearly are not going to be appropriate, at least in the first instance. For example, "some married people are sex addicts" would not make a good first choice and neither would "sometimes a married person goes away by themselves and gets drunk and accidentally has a one night fling." Explanations

like these are good at constructing *exceptions* to some general category of infidelities but they are not good at accounting for the category itself. In contrast, the idea that humans (like other animals) may be "naturally" disposed to promiscuity or polygamy and that fidelity is a civilising principle that has to be imposed on that natural instinct is one that will account for infidelity "in general" and not just the exceptional or unusual cases.

In short, Patrick has responded in an entirely predictable and appropriate way to Dryden, remaining well within the normatively implied parameters of her request for talk about common marital "difficulties." However, in so doing he has also created a small interactional hazard for himself, flagged up by Gillian showing signs of "bursting into tears." That is, because his generalisable theory of infidelity accounts (prospectively and retrospectively) for any affairs participated in by Patrick himself as well as those of anyone and everyone else, the inference becomes available that he may have a personal interest or stake in what he is saying. His orientation to that possibility is revealed in the various pauses, hesitations, qualifiers and "slight laughter" that accompany his account. It is also indexed by his explicit mention that he personally *has* been faithful. Unfortunately, this claim about his own good record does not mesh well with the "human nature" type of explanation for infidelity that he has just offered Dryden. Saying that sexually exclusive relationships are not natural is an excellent way of explaining why people mostly or universally *are* unfaithful but it is not very good at explaining why some people *aren't*. (Turn back to Extract 7.06, lines 88-90: Rachel confronts Doug with this very question in reply to his universalising "human nature" account.) So Patrick falters; having naturalised infidelity and then followed up with a disclaimer that of course *he* individually *is* faithful, he finds himself unable to come up with "a particular reason for that"; a reason that does not undermine his human nature account and does not involve boasting that he is somehow more civilised than everyone else.

Let me round off Chapter 7 with a formulation of the alternative that discursive psychology offers to the social scientific treatments of infidelity and infidelity discourse that I have criticised above. In academic discourse, as in the discourse of lay people, there may be any number of good reasons for privileging *entities* such as society and social groups and *principles* such as gender equality and the right to sovereignty over one's body, as factual, reliable and non-negotiably real. There may indeed be various good reasons for treating things as universal features of the natural world. What these reasons are will obviously depend on whatever has to be accomplished by the discourse user on the particular

occasion of their speech or writing. However, if the object of the exercise is to gather materials in which people discuss, describe and account for infidelity and then to develop an analysis that leaves the fewest possible questions unanswered about the content and organisation of those materials, it is vital to know whether and how to distinguish between things that are part of the research topic and things that represent an analytic resource.

In discussing infidelity, research interviewees and other non-professional speakers and writers draw freely upon social and natural theories and political critique, making of these things a *resource* routinely and apparently without the need for deliberation or effort. For discourse users, the point of doing this is that representing infidelity as principally an expression of the right to personal freedom or essentially a symptom of untameable human nature or definitively an artefact of "this society," the name of an arbitrary behavioural "taboo," is a move that has various effects and consequences for themselves and their recipients in that immediate situation. We know this not because each natural, social and political theory is permanently anchored to some unique social purpose but because it is evident from conversation transcripts and other discursive products that where such resources are introduced into the proceedings, participants will conventionally orientate to the introduction as consequential, treating it as having some interactionally relevant import.

Because discursive psychology is reflexively self-conscious of acts of discursive instantiation as actively constructed and potentially consequential, it is able to account for the content and organisation of interview transcripts and other discursive materials more fully than analytic methods which do not recognise that the interpretative resources and conventional constructive practices used by the analyst and those used by the research participants who generate the data sometimes may be one and the same. For instance, discursive psychologists Potter and Wetherell (1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1989, 1992) have made a point of studying lay people's naturalisation of categories such as race, culture and nation and their use of miscellaneous theories about the nature and structure of society, the dynamics of social influence and conflict, political principles of rights and responsibilities and the possible avenues for social reform as resources for characterising and explaining specific and concrete topics such as particular outbreaks of violence, the racism of Pakeha New Zealanders and the teaching in schools of Maori language. That is, these political and social theories are recognised as participants' resources and correspondingly as part of the discourse analyst's topic of research. Moreover, this perspective enables Potter and Wetherell to respond to mainstream social psychologists' similar use of

the same explanatory resources as part of the phenomenon that they are interested in studying.

The discursive psychological approach espoused by Potter and Wetherell recognises that what they observe in their data are not simple references to pre-existing objects and entities but categorisations; not expressions of attitudes but evaluations; not identities so much as identifications. They take it that research participants and social psychologists alike are engaged in acts of discursive instantiation. The advantage for Potter and Wetherell is that they can avoid getting involved in their participants' various arguments and fact-constructive efforts. Similarly, in this chapter we have managed not to take the same road as Atwater, Baker and Bellis, Dryden *et al.* in the sense of privileging some parts of the infidelity data as simple reflections of the facts, as literally true. A more thoroughly discursive perspective has opened up lines of analysis that would have remained unavailable if we had followed these authors' examples and retained among our analytic resources assumptions about the descriptive truth and necessary function of feminist principles of gender equality, for instance, or assumptions that claims about infidelity being unnatural are reducible to equivalence, such that if some are conspicuously serving a broad social purpose then all must be attempting basically the same thing.

Conclusions and Implications

Final Analytic Conclusions

In the preceding analytic chapters, by way of mapping the discursive terrain, I have identified five major themes or sets of resources used by speakers and writers who would defend infidels and/or infidelity. As captured in the titles of the five analytic chapters, the options are:

- construct a non-event (Chapter 3);
- construct an isolated episode (Chapter 4);
- construct a special category of self (Chapter 5);
- construct a specific reason (Chapter 6);
- construct a generic rationale (Chapter 7).

In this final chapter, at the end of our analysis, we are in a position to say something about why some given instance of defensive accounting should come to depend on one of these themes or lines of argument in preference to any of the others. On what basis might a complete infidel choose among these five major sets of constructive resources? This is a broad question of *defensive practice*. The answer can be approached through discussion of the interactional context into which each kind of defence is characteristically introduced. We have already encountered one dimension of this context: the twin possibilities of being a dyad-bound and/or a third-party infidel can have a bearing on which particular version of a defence is produced (e.g., recall the uniquely third-party design of "mistake of fact" in Chapter 4). In the following paragraphs some further aspects of the interactional context are discussed. The format of the discussion will be to focus on each of the five major constructions in series.

As a preparatory measure, it will be useful to quickly compare the observations that I have made about the varying distinctiveness, consistency and consensus implied by these five lines of argument. Recall that distinctiveness is a term that I

have used in this document to characterise the practice of making available for recipients inferences about the cause of some individual's infidelity by assessing particular cases of infidelity against the person's usual or normal behaviour. Figure 8.1, the first of four aerial snapshots, shows how constructions of high and low distinctiveness vary with the five lines of defence.

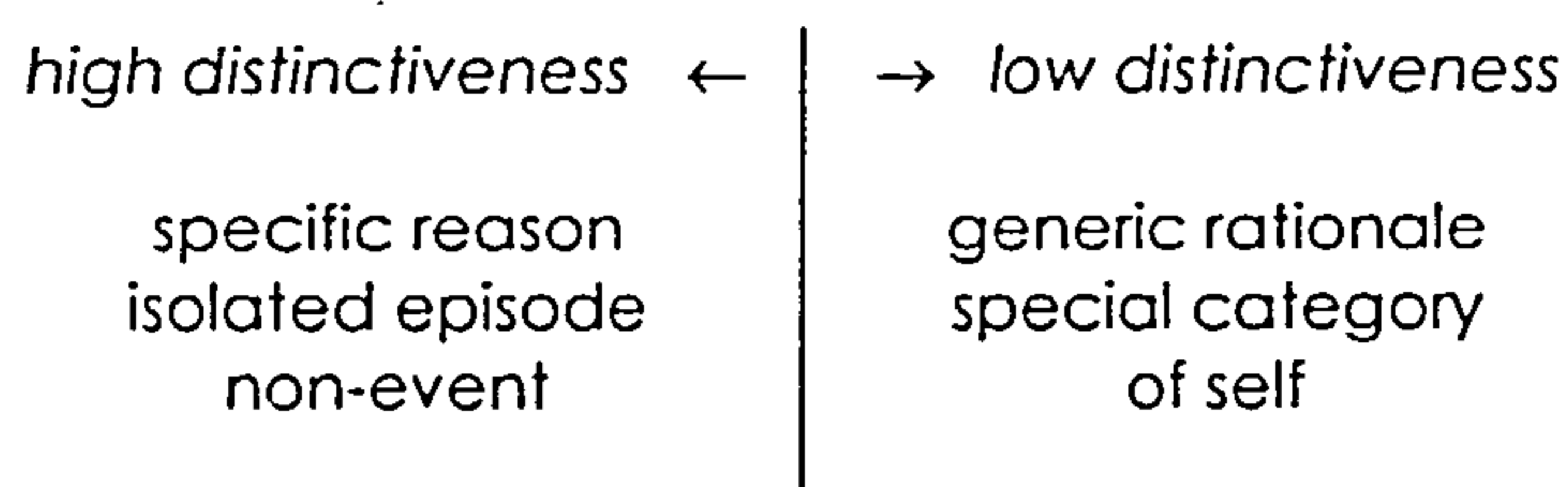


Figure 8.1 *High/low distinctiveness varies with defence.*

Constructions of non-events, isolated episodes of infidelity and specific reasons all make a case for high distinctiveness; that is, they try to display the individual as a person for whom infidelitous behaviour is *not* usual practice. They work to discourage any dispositional attribution on the part of recipients. It would not be surprising if infidels were keen to convey a strong impression of high distinctiveness most of the time. This may not always be possible, depending on what evidence to the contrary recipients happen to possess. Moreover, as we saw in Chapters 5 and 7, infidels sometimes volunteer an assessment of low distinctiveness. This is a phenomenon which will be discussed in more detail a little later.

Consistency is a term that I have used to capture features of the infidelity itself. Is it some brief, historical event that can be accounted for retrospectively or is there an infidelitous relationship currently ongoing? For infidels who are willing to admit to low distinctiveness, this kind of question about the duration and status of particular infidelities need not become an issue; where the cause of infidelity is voluntarily located somewhere in "the self" rather than in "the world," ongoing, habitual and even career infidelity can be provided for. Meanwhile, those who prefer to construct a non-event are effectively claiming "zero consistency" in their argument that infidelity (or whatever sanctionable category of act or activity they are trying to avoid) simply never happened. For them too, the past or present, brief or protracted nature of some particular alleged offence is not necessarily a problem. However, for speakers who want to claim high distinctiveness but are willing to admit that something infidelitous has gone on, the question of consistency is salient. It is for these speakers that the isolated episode and the specific reason serve two different purposes. As illustrated in Figure 8.2, the former deals with infidelities that can be plausibly packaged and presented

as having only low consistency while the latter accounts for more highly consistent infidelities.

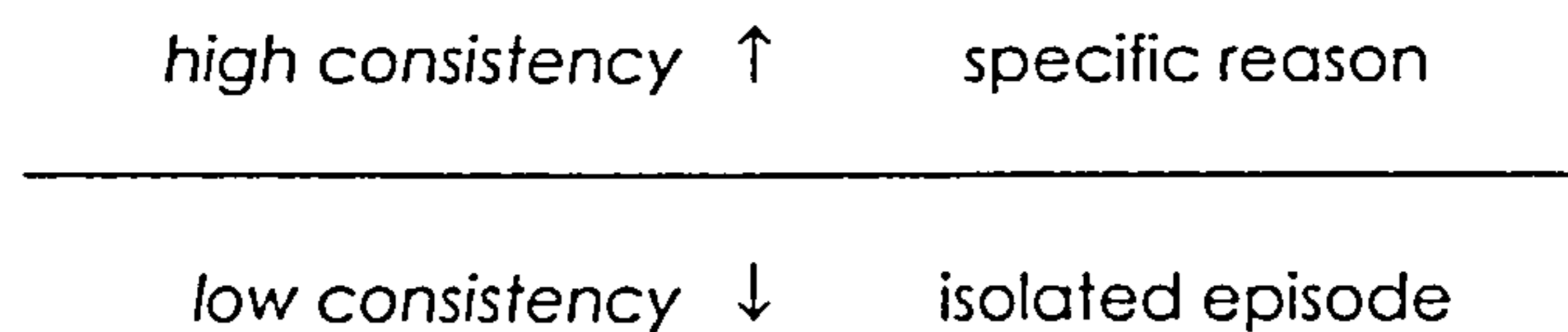


Figure 8.2 *A specific reason defends infidelity that is constructed as highly distinctive and highly consistent.*

Given that a claim of high distinctiveness makes a point of externalisation, providing for the audience's or recipients' inference that the speaker is *not* "that sort of person" who is dispositionally inclined to cheating on their partner, anything that can be written off as an isolated episode is going to be easier to defend than the sort of infidelity that seems to have persisted over time, up to and including the present day. For example, consider the motif of "accidental infidelity" that we encountered in Chapter 4. As Scott and Lyman (1968) point out, while it seems to be a generally accepted feature of accidents that they may happen to anyone, a single individual may not repeatedly fall victim to the same accident if the description "accident" is to be sustained. To this I would add that the "folk logic" (Buttny, 1993, p. 49) underlying the notion of accidents is such that the term is best applied post facto: it is difficult to claim that "I am currently having an accident." The unique purpose of the specific reason, which identifies something in the infidel's local relationship network that has provoked them into action rather than simply explaining the action away, is that it reconciles high distinctiveness (implicitly a description of the infidel as "not that sort of person") with high consistency (a description of the infidelity as relatively enduring). This reconciliation is something that an isolated episode would expectably be unable to achieve.

Consensus is a term that I have applied to the defences of constructing a special category of self and constructing a generic rationale. These are defences of low distinctiveness and the notion of consensus describes the extent to which speakers recognise that low distinctiveness as being both unusual and undesirable. Figure 8.3 shows how consensus differs between these two.

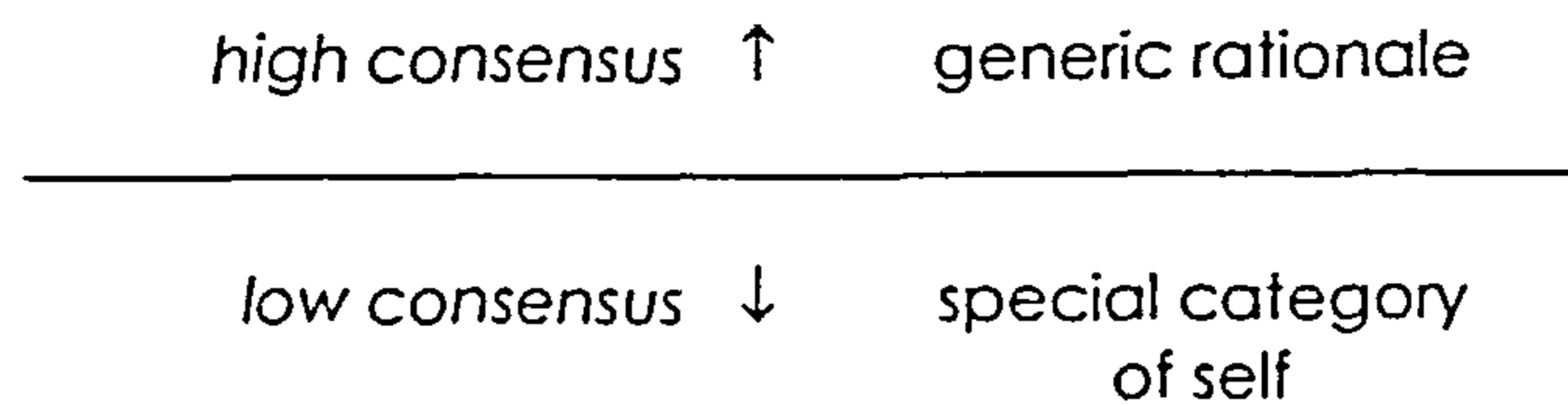


Figure 8.3 A *generic rationale* defends infidelity that is constructed as *lowly distinctive* with *high consensus*.

Speakers constructing some special category of self to explain and defend their infidelities, by making an exception of themselves as individuals, acknowledge that most people's behaviour is electively not like their own. They describe various character flaws, behavioural deficiencies and psychological dysfunctions that provide for them to sound somewhat apologetic about their failures to live up to normatively expected codes of conduct even as they preserve the idea that they may never successfully achieve a wholesale reform or change. In contrast, constructions of generic rationales make more of a point of underlining the similarities between the individual speaker and the larger community. Even when it is conceded that most other people do not go so far as to actively engage in infidelity, generic rationales incorporate claims that they at least must *want* to, have been *tempted* to and/or are *entitled* to step outside the boundaries of conventionally correct behaviour. Clearly, this is a more controversial and potentially inflammatory line of argument than constructing a special category of self although as defences of low distinctiveness neither is notable for its likely acceptability to hostile recipients who would count themselves members of the moral majority. Again, this is a point to be discussed in more detail below.

Having quickly reviewed the ways in which our five lines of argument are organised along the dimensions of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, we are in a position to consider some new aspects of the various interactional contexts in which they are produced. In Chapter 2 I commented on the deliberately inclusive and eclectic variety of sources and media from which the materials for this study were drawn. At that stage, prior to analysis, speculation about the defining characteristics of a research interview or the essential differences between works of academic and popular psychology could have gone on forever. However, at this end of the analytic project it is a different story. The five major defensive constructions have been made to serve unique functions and applications that display what participants themselves take to be the relevant features of the discursive exchanges or endeavours to which they

contribute. Participant orientation is the key to understanding how these discursive environments (if I may describe them thus) vary with the construction of each major defence.

Before considering each of the major defences in turn, there is one broad finding that can be reported with respect to the simply conceived sources from which they were culled. It is represented graphically in Figure 8.4.

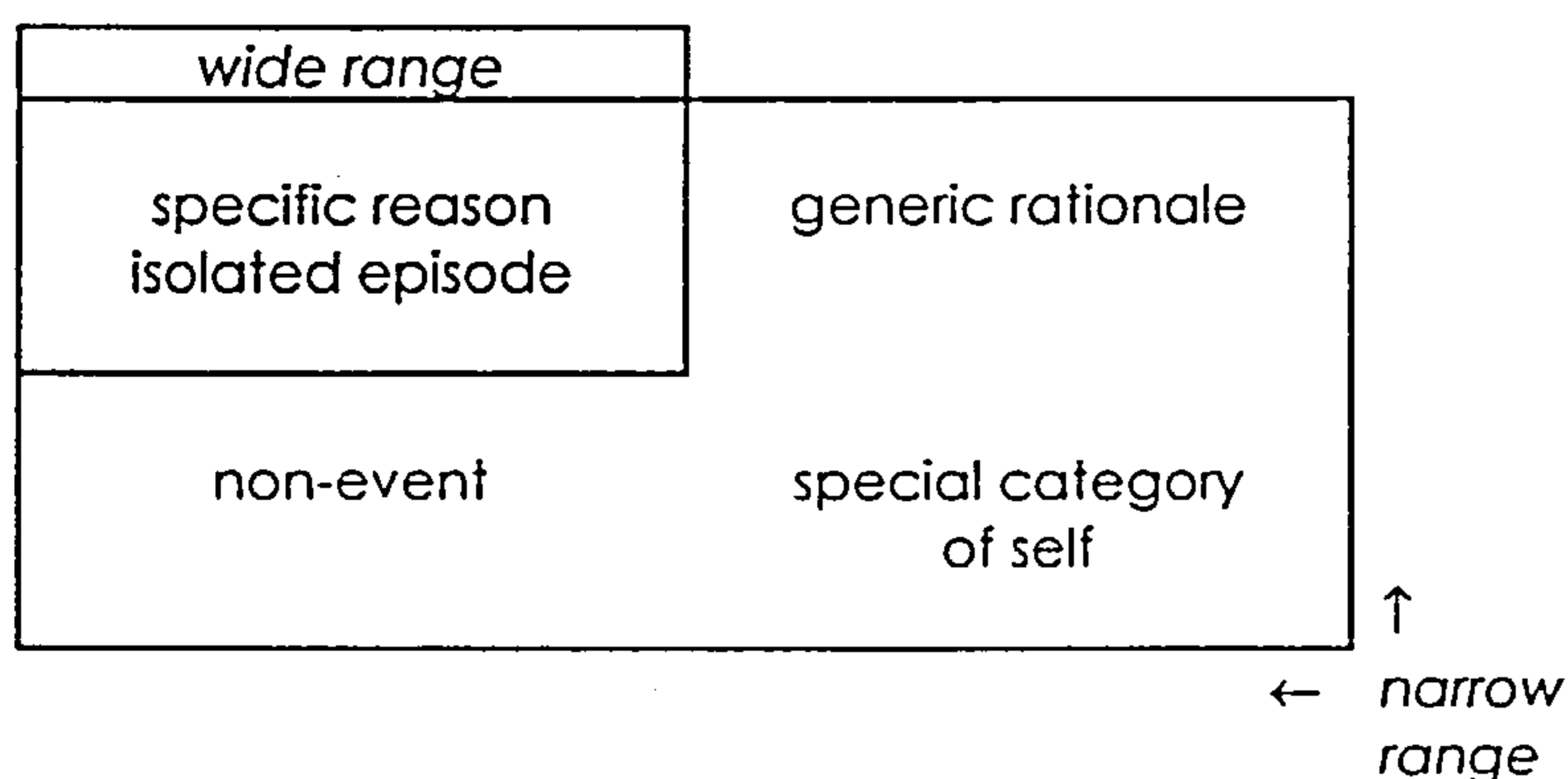


Figure 8.4 *Defences appear in a wide or narrow range of source materials.*

Generic rationales, special categories of self and non-events were discovered in just a handful of all the many sources that were scoured for data - precisely which sources to be elucidated, below. In contrast, isolated episodes and specific reason were comparatively agrestal, cropping up in sources that ranged all over the data-base. Note that this is not to say that all terrains seemed equally "preferred" by these two common styles of defence; again, these particular sources will receive further comment in a moment. For now, the point is that "isolated episode" and "specific reason" exhibited from the outset a certain flexibility and ease of application that was not shared by the other three kinds of defence. This observation, and the earlier ones about distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, inform the following discussion in which I shall now consider each of the five major defences individually, drawing some final conclusions about the discursive environments in which they flourish.

Construct a Non-Event

The conceptual maps set out in the above paragraphs show that a unique feature of the defence of constructing a non-event is that while it claims high distinctiveness, it can be traced to only a narrow range of sources. The sources which have yielded examples of the construction of non-events notably include:

(a) my own, original research interviews on the subject of infidelity; (b) written responses to questionnaires and surveys on general issues to do with sex and sexuality such as that of Susan Quilliam. Readers may also recall that Chapter 3 featured an excerpt from Bill Clinton's grand jury testimony of 1998. Across these different sources and media, speakers and writers treat as relevant two features of the discursive environment.

(1) The situation requests personal information from the speaker and presupposes their ability and willingness to supply answers on the basis of relevant category membership. Following a national advertising campaign for her study on "women and sex," Quilliam's respondents were obliged to contact her by mail to receive their copy of her questionnaire. It presumes a good deal of (hetero-) sexual experience on the part of respondents in its string of approximately 300 direct questions. The section entitled "Unfaithfulness/Affairs" is number 23 in a series of 28, following questions about respondents' body image, first experience of intercourse, usual habits in "foreplay" and so on. By this time, their knowledge-entitlement and capacity to function satisfactorily in the role of respondent to Quilliam's questions is well established. Similarly, participants in my own research interviews find themselves in the situation of having volunteered to take part and now being obliged to find something to say. Clinton, of course, faces a grand jury hearing that has convened for the specific purpose of interrogating him about his behaviour. In other words, non-events are constructed in situations where it is nearly impossible for speakers to say *nothing* or alternatively to say that they know nothing about the topic at hand and are unqualified to comment. Insofar as the topic is something sanctionable such as "infidelity," "being unfaithful," "cheating," "lying," "perverting the course of justice" or whatever, speakers are thereby presented with a problem: their co-operation with the presupposition of knowledge entitlement may provide for inferences about them that are highly unfavourable. Fortunately:

(2) The requirement for "answers" does not restrict speakers to a yes/no, forced-response format but permits them some opportunity to negotiate and transform the point of a question or line of enquiry. Quilliam's respondents write statements of a few lines that address section 23, "Unfaithfulness/Affairs," in a general, overall way, allowing them to favour such questions as "What do you consider is meant by the word 'unfaithful'?" (question 23A) as primary and avoiding or glossing over more dangerously blame-implicative questions such as "How did you feel after the first time you were unfaithful? [] How did this sex compare with that of your relationship?" (question 23D). Participants in my own study exploit the informal structure and ambiguous aims of the research interview:

is the point to collect attitudes on matters of widespread debate or to document personal experience? If the latter, should it only include experience of "actually" being unfaithful or can it include experience of *nearly* being unfaithful or being *accused* of being unfaithful? Is the role of participant restricted to reporting experience as an uncritical subject or can it include "going meta" and assuming a share in the job of commenting on and analysing experience? Meanwhile, Clinton famously avoids citing concrete examples of his "inappropriate behaviour" with Monica Lewinsky by focusing on what he has previously "understood" and "believed" to be covered by a certain *definition* of "sexual relations" attributed to "Judge Wright." In short, non-events are constructed in discursive environments which: investigate and ask questions about culpable matters such as infidelity; oblige speakers to contribute *something*; but leave enough (in Clinton's case, just barely enough) room for speakers to protect their own interests through shifts of footing and through ontological gerrymandering.

Construct a Generic Rationale

Generic rationales admit low distinctiveness and are traceable to only a narrow range of sources, these being similar to the sources of non-events. They notably include: (a) my own research interviews; (b) anonymous, online responses to opinion polls about infidelity such as that of the "Friends and Lovers" website. Recall that Chapter 7 also featured quotes from interviewees of social commentators Atwater (1979) and Heyn (1992).

The practical application of generic rationales displays one of the advantages of claiming low distinctiveness. Its capacity to account for habitual infidelity with an unspecified number of accomplices might, of course, become necessary, depending on what is known about the infidel by recipients. However, it is also good for boiling down individual victims to an homogeneous mass. As I observed in Chapter 7, criticisms about the dishonesty and naïveté of society in general and especially "those who point the finger" are employed to skate over individual distress, drawing attention away from the speaker's victims. Similarly, universalising talk about what everybody wants, what all relationships are like and so on can be used to shift the discussion away from specific events and activities in which the speaker is personally involved. As before, there is an element here of speakers taking the chance to protect their own interests by changing footing and "going meta" so that their role incorporates not merely reporting experience but also analysing and commenting on it.

The comprehensive inclusiveness of this line of argument - the higher authority of principles of individual sovereignty over one's body, the inevitability with which marriage becomes sexually boring, the human naturalness of following up "horny opportunities" - and its accompanying ability to co-implicate all victims of infidelity in their own downfall is the great rhetorical strength of justification by generic rationale. However, it also co-implicates the immediate recipient(s) of the account who, unless they too are positively pro-infidelity, are likely to treat the generic rationale as highly offensive. Consider the consequences had Clinton chosen it instead of negotiating a personal non-event, for instance. Constructing a generic rationale is rarely an easy or possible manoeuvre.

It is possible when people are cloaked in anonymity and addressing an unknown, silent audience as when responding to a one-question, one-shot-reply "survey" about infidelity on the internet such as the one at the Friends and Lovers website. In such a situation, speakers have the option to behave as though "freed from any restraining reasonableness," to borrow a phrase from Billig's remarks about the unrepentant, even exuberant expressions of prejudice produced in group discussions by National Front supporters (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley, 1988, p. 117). Constructing a generic rationale for infidelity is also possible in environments such as a one-to-one research interview with a recognisably encouraging interviewer. We do not know exactly what Lynn Atwater and Dalma Heyn said to their interviewees about their own feelings on the subject of infidelity. However, their published writing about the interviews conveys a marked sympathy. Atwater chooses the journal *Alternative Lifestyles* as her platform and waxes political about such matters as "elimination of the sexual double standard" (Atwater, 1979, p. 53). Heyn goes even further, gushing that "adultery is, in fact, a revolutionary way for women to rise above the conventional" (Heyn, 1992, p. 10).

In my own interviews the words exchanged between researcher and participant are available for study. Emma, Doug and Kyle quickly discover that movements in the direction of a generic rationale are given an enthusiastic reception. Moreover, these participants can be seen doing a lot of joint category membership in their constructions of generic rationales. For instance, through such expressions as "like you say" (Extract 7.04), participants draw in the researcher and remind her on which side of the moral fence her loyalties are expected to lie.

Construct a Special Category of Self

This is the only style of defence other than constructing a generic rationale that admits low distinctiveness. It derives from a narrow range of sources which notably include: (a) tabloid newspaper the *Sunday People*; (b) men's "lifestyle" magazine *Arena*; (c) journalist Virginia Lee's (1993) collection of interviews with infidels, entitled *Affairs of the Heart*.

An advantage of the special category of self is that it provides for low distinctiveness without necessarily co-implicating victims or recipients in anything blameworthy. As can be seen from Kyle's contributions to Chapters 5 and 7, it can perform as a complementary alternative to a generic rationale, marking off a smaller category of people than a universal "everyone," "society in general" or whatever. Moreover, it does not evade the possibility that the infidel's behaviour has caused specific and unnecessary suffering as is the case with generic rationales. Manufacturers of special categories of self actively draw attention to the cost of their infidelities, to themselves as much as anyone else. Presentation of an account for one's infidelity as a voluntary confession of chronically diminished capacity co-implicates recipients in a new way: sufficient emphasis on being ongoingly insecure, scarred by abuse or living with a "driving emotional need" anticipatively constructs the response as not anger or objection but something softer such as sympathy and perhaps counselling (Edwards, 1997, p. 157).

However, the special category of self is more than a complement to constructing a generic rationale. The range of sources from which the two derive are not coterminous. The special category of self is characteristically found in discursive environments where it can be presented not just as a confession but also as news. Now, in this case I am not speaking of self-consciously serious news such as that disseminated via television interviews (see Clayman, 1992) or the "quality" papers studied by Edwards and Potter (1992, p. 59). Special categories of self are constructed as news in the sense of being newsworthy, bringing something new or remarkable to the attention of audiences but with a more or less explicit ambition to entertain as well as inform. This ambition is particularly clear in the case of *Arena*: the article from which Extract 5.02 derives is presented as the transcribed proceedings of a group exploring the potentially newsworthy topic of "What Men Want" from their sexual relationships. However, the word "experts" appears inside ironising inverted commas in the subtitle, "Arena assembles a panel of "experts"." the pull-quotes from the main text draw readers' attention to talk of "big breasts" and "arse" (with bright colour images of the referred-to parts) and there is none of the empiricist discourse or quantification

rhetoric that one would expect from a serious attempt to convince readers of some set of facts produced by "real" experts about contemporary issues in gender and sexual relations.

Lee's book (Extract 5.05) makes more effort after empiricist reportage ("The underlying motive for addressing this topic is to tell the truth," p. 2) but counterbalances with a frivolous, even salacious aspect; for instance, her book is subtitled *Men & Women Reveal the Truth about Extramarital Affairs* (emphasis added) and on page 3 encourages readers past the introduction with the promise that interviewees have "dared to expose their most intimate selves" in the pages that follow. The *Sunday People*, an "actual" newspaper, characterises its report about sex addiction (Extract 5.06) as news through such devices as choosing a minor celebrity for its subject, describing the interview as exclusive as though it would have been considered a coup by rival newspapers and so on. However, readers are primed not to over-react to this "news." The informal language of Jim's "cheating ways," marital "bust-ups" and reported jokes about being "addicted to wedding cake!" make it clear that this is not a "grave confession" or a "disturbing confession" but an "amazing confession." The report constructs infidelity not as a disaster but as an impropriety and even sets up laughter as the relevant next action (cf. Jefferson, 1979; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987).

Construct an Isolated Episode

Isolated episodes derive from a very wide range of sources in the original database for this study and it is perhaps expectable that this should be a popular choice of defence. It combines high distinctiveness ("I'm not like that") with low consistency ("it was only a brief encounter") while fulfilling the implicit or explicit expectation that *something* infidelitous has gone on and thereby avoiding the more ambitious project of total exoneration. Some sources turned out to be especially rich in isolated episodes and these include "women's" magazines such as *Marie Claire*, *New Woman* and *Cosmopolitan*. Recall that Chapter 4 also included a vignette from the popular mental health website at www.cmhc.com (Extract 4.07).

Similarly to special categories of self, constructions of some isolated episode characteristically orientate to their discursive environment through presentation as one or another kind of confession. However, special categories of self anticipate and accommodate the disalignment of recipients by attending

to what is exceptional - about the infidel (so as to avoid co-implicating those who would resist joint category membership) and about the defence itself (this making it a good basis for news and light entertainment). In contrast, isolated episodes foreground that which can be presented as unexceptional and ordinary. The infidel themselves is emphatically normalised and in their account of "how it happened" whatever factors are claimed to have contributed to the occurrence of some romantic or sexual slip-up are made to seem as routine as possible. If objection is anticipated, it is not that the isolated episode of infidelity will be treated as implausibly outlandish, misplaced outside laddish magazines and prurient tabloid newspapers. If anything, the concern is that it might be criticised as an excuse that is too ordinary and familiar; over-used, old, a cliché. Isolated episodes make heavy use of idioms and other scripting devices (Edwards, 1995, 1997), inviting recipients to recognise that the matter being confessed was caused by an all-too-familiar conspiracy of circumstances. They are invited to reflect that an accident can happen to anyone, not excluding themselves (e.g., see Extracts 4.03, 4.07). This kind of defensive practice is not about making exceptions that leave room for recipients' disalignment with the infidel doing the confessing but about constructing an anonymous generality that paves the way for recipients to envisage themselves in the position of having an infidelity to confess.

I have stressed this last point because it makes sense of the use of isolated episodes to address mass audiences. These heavily scripted accounts of infidelity may not distinguish themselves as the exotic objects of "amazing" news reports but they are ideally suited to the sort of *human interest journalism* that concerns itself with readers' presumed worries and problems. At the Mental Health Net website such matters are characterised as the "moral and ethical dilemmas that society is grappling with today." In *Marie Claire* they are the subject of a regular series of features entitled "Emotional Issues." In *New Woman* they are fodder for that genre of writing known as "readers' true experiences." In *Cosmopolitan* they are the business of "The Agony Column" and articles whose titles take the form of questions that readers might hearably ask themselves, "Is it ever okay to be unfaithful?" being a case in point. Of all the problems and concerns that publishers of human interest stories anticipate as relevant to readers en masse, the "question of infidelity" is one of the most returned-to.

Construct a Specific Reason

Like isolated episodes, specific reasons for infidelity admit (or make little of denying) that something infidelitous has occurred and attempt to recover a sound moral character for the infidel. However, they do this without recourse to mitigating claims of low consistency. Specific reasons derive from a wide range of sources and many show people defending infidelity in contexts where it is necessary to acknowledge its high consistency because this is already being treated by recipients as a non-negotiable fact. However, the abundance of specific reasons in certain quarters of the data shows people also treating high consistency as something to be positively volunteered and turned to their advantage. These sources notably include discussion threads from public access internet newsgroups, forums and bulletin boards such as 'The Other Side of an Affair' (Extracts 6.02, 6.04, 6.06). Recall that Chapter 6 also featured extracts from *The Guardian* and from sociologist Lawson's book, *Adultery* (1988).

In the "Other Side of an Affair" data or OSA, participants orientate to an interactional context of argumentation. As Billig (1989) observes, "the views put forward in an argument have a duality, which arises from the rhetorical nature of argumentation" (p. 213); "an argument can simultaneously be about an issue [e.g., infidelity] and about ways of arguing about the issue" (ibid.). That is, participants may argue about the adequacy of each other's contributions as arguments, appealing to common "rules of play" and so on. For instance, in the OSA debate, criticisms of another participant's argument often take the form of complaints that s/he has ceased to argue "properly" and has instead lapsed into "mud slinging," "bashing," "getting personal" and so on. Another oft-invoked principle is that people are entitled to hold on to "beliefs" and "views" that arise from their own, first-hand experience, even when these are unusual and in direct contradiction to pieces of knowledge and experience that are held by other parties. Claiming high consistency can be a real advantage in context such as this. For instance, the self-identified "other" women of OSA seem to start out from a morally and rhetorically weak argumentative position relative to the wives but they can legitimately remain unpersuaded that "people have affairs out of selfishness [] with whatever gullible person they can find" and "the husband *always* returns to the wife" if their own experience of an ongoing, enduring, highly consistent relationship with a partner who was or is dyad-bound tells them otherwise: "there are real relationships [] and true love is found."

Sources such as *The Guardian* and Lawson's *Adultery* can be compared to those such as the *Sunday People* and Lee's *Affairs of the Heart* of Chapter 5.

The latter are examples of "popular" journalism and social science and they have a more or less explicit ambition to entertain readers as well as to inform. The former are correspondingly "serious" with more empiricist discourse. *The Guardian* is one of Edwards and Potter's "quality" broadsheet newspapers (1992, p. 59), willing to investigate a "dating agency exclusively for people who are married or attached" (Extract 6.03) but apparently not the sex addiction of "TV Jim" (cf. Extract 5.06). Lawson (Extract 6.05) does not seduce her readers with promises that "intimate selves" are about to be "exposed" (cf. Lee, 1993, p. 3) but prefers to impress them with diagrams, tables and other forms of quantification rhetoric (many of which also appear in *The Compleat Infidel*). Lawson and *Guardian* journalist Sanai are in the business of making the sort of news that reports facts. Their introduction of witnesses such as "Dr. Reynolds" and "Arabella" into the text to illustrate their stories is a fact-constructive manoeuvre in itself. Moreover, when witnesses can be quoted as engaging in affairs of relatively high consistency, the now-ness and immediacy of the news is enhanced. A gain is made for these reports that would be lost if Sanai and Lawson could find only witnesses who would admit to historical, isolated episodes of infidelity.

Implications for the Study of Infidelity

In the above section I have drawn final analytic conclusions that support my overall thesis that infidelity discourse is action orientated. Let me take a moment to expand on that. Chapter 1 ended with a section entitled "the research problem" and there I observed that among users of contemporary, Anglo-American discourse there is recognisably a broad, tacit agreement about what sorts of things can and can not be legitimately produced to account for infidelity. Holiday flings, attacks of true love, deficient and boring dyadic relationships and so on are familiar objects to anyone who has sustained the briefest of conversations on the subject of infidelity, even though the discursive terrain has not been formally mapped until now. Having mapped the terrain and marked out five distinct features or types of construction, in the opening section of Chapter 8 I have shown that the variability among these five is more than a superficial matter of appearance or gross content. These constructions are produced and perform their defensive functions (exoneration; mitigation; appeals to diminished capacity and provocation; justification) in the course of orientating

to various aspects of the immediate inter-action-al (or intertextual) setting. This is a reflexive process, both context-sensitive and context-shaping.

The finding that accounts of isolated episodes of infidelity, special categories of self, specific reasons and so on are constructed with a sensitivity to the interactional context of their production does not *only* apply to the discursive materials in this study that are most obviously recognisable as data (such as the extracts from my research interviews, for instance). It does not only apply to the discursive output of research participants. As we have seen, it is also applicable to the discursive output of various kinds of professionals such as journalists and social scientists. Indeed, rather than having to impose from the outset an abstract taxonomy of kinds of journalistic discourse, kinds of social scientific writing and so on, we have seen that the significant features of these discursive styles and contexts are emergent from within the material we have studied: they are orientated to and endogenously generated through the selection and configuration of various rhetorical devices and bits of conversational machinery.

Of course, *The Compleat Infidel* is no exception to this practice. Devices such as membership categories, contrast pairs, idioms, evaluative and extreme case formulations, empiricist discourse, emblematic instances and a host of others have been selected and arranged in *The Compleat Infidel* as the means by which this document characterises itself as belonging to a particular genre and anticipatively orientates to the context of the *viva voce* as an occasion for assessing and accrediting doctoral research (a discursive phenomenon that is reflexively explored in the unsurpassed analysis of Ashmore, 1989). In other words, the analytic principles that we have used to shed light on the materials treated herein as data additionally account for and render explicable *The Compleat Infidel* itself.

This is an important point. I expressed in Chapter 1 the intention of developing an account of infidelity discourse that would accommodate this document as a discursive phenomenon in its own right as well as rival analyses and the materials called "data." To the extent that I have been successful in that endeavour, *The Compleat Infidel* offers a considerable improvement on the traditional social scientific approaches to infidelity that I criticised in Chapter 1. For instance, the evolutionary psychologists are undoubtedly able to account for infidelity but they have yet to explain how it is evolutionarily adaptive behaviour to spend one's time producing such accounts. The lengthy, self-imposed isolation entailed in such academic work does not seem to be a very good "reproductive strategy" compared to some of the alternative ways that these authors could have occupied their time. Now, let me anticipate a possible objection. At this

point, some readers may be thinking that the behaviour of psychologists - of whatever theoretical or methodological predilection - is not itself a universal activity and therefore does not fall within the remit of the task that evolutionary psychologists set themselves. However, I would argue that it is a mistake to assume that human activities easily and naturally divide into those that are universal and those which are not. In earlier chapters of this document, and particularly in Chapter 7, I have attempted to show that reports and descriptions of things as universal need not be taken at face value as simply reflecting the properties of the pre-existing, pre-discursive world. They do more than that; reports and descriptions are reflexive in the sense of not just representing the world but also being involved in it and acting on it in a practical way. In the case of evolutionary theorists such as Baker and Bellis, for instance, their reports are involved in practical activities such as engaging in certain academic endeavours and debates. In the case of research participants such as Kyle and Doug, their universalising reports and descriptions are involved in the practical activity of defending themselves and their known infidelities. As speakers and writers go about conducting the practical business that is particular to their circumstances, they avail themselves of various rhetorical resources, one of which is *universalisation*. For the evolutionary theorists, no less than for Kyle and Doug, representing certain features of the world as universal is a constructive, discursive activity and a method of getting things done. This being the case, there is no reason to suppose that infidelity itself is in fact any more or less universal than the behaviour of attempting to explain and account for infidelity - a behaviour that is not exclusive to Baker, Bellis and their colleagues but is shared by the other psychologists and sociologists who have appeared in *The Compleat Infidel* and by the lay people whose talk has been treated in this document as data. Ultimately, then, whether or not the behaviour of psychologists is universal is not the issue. The point is that the business of explaining and accounting for human behaviour is potentially constructible as universal, to no greater or lesser an extent than the activity of infidels.

Let me return to my original point with another example. It is undeniable that scholars of social cognition and close relationships have managed to account for infidelity. However, the cognitive motors they posit do not account equally well for the interpersonal behaviour of entering into a research relationship with people who are contrastively treated as "participants" or even "subjects." Again, it could be argued that this is beyond the remit of the task that these authors have set themselves. Perhaps if the primary objective is, for instance, to explain the role of infidelity in the dissolution of couples' relationships,

one need not also be concerned with explaining the relationship between researchers and participants. Perhaps it is not of great import if tensions are discovered in social cognitive approaches between that which is reified and treated as a measurable feature of the real world and that which is relativised and treated as variable from one individual or situation to the next, or if it seems that authors in this field sometimes have overlooked a resemblance between their own accounting practices and those of the couples they study. Certainly, I am not going to suggest that researchers in this line of work ought to abandon their activities. As I have already pointed out in chapters 1 and 7, in both academic and lay discourse there may be very good reasons for privileging certain aspects of the discursively constructed world as factual, reliable and non-negotiably real, and for attending to some kinds of human relationships (such as couple relationships) to the exclusion of others (such as those between researchers and participants). Clearly, what these reasons are will depend on the interactional demands and requirements of the circumstances in which the speaker or writer finds themselves. However, in the case of the document *The Compleat Infidel* and the occasion of its writing, the object of the exercise has been to notice that the very possibility of infidelity is a discursive achievement and to provide an account of the discursive practices surrounding it that is reflexively able to accommodate itself as recognisably a part of the phenomenon that is being studied. To that extent, the approach to infidelity that has been taken in *The Compleat Infidel* offers an advance on these other, more partial forms of analysis.

The findings described above represent a contribution to a broadly conceived knowledge-base about how to study infidelity. In the remainder of this section I would like to tailor my discussion to a more specifically conceived set of interests and concerns. The readers who expectably will have the most interest in this discussion about the contribution and implications of *The Compleat Infidel* are those who have already recognised in a more or less formal way that discourse matters because it is unavoidably constructive and thereby political in its effects. These are readers with some political project at hand, be it feminism, socialism, anti-racism or whatever. In particular, the readers I have in mind are feminists: not just because of the feminist constructionist studies that I reviewed in Chapter 1 but because, as Lynne Segal (1999, p. 231) remarks, feminism is the movement most associated with the ongoing forging of links and connections between that which is obviously political and the detail of personal and private life.

At various points in this document I have described myself as "a feminist," referred to "the cause of feminism" and otherwise constructed feminism as a unitary object. That is sometimes a sensible discursive manoeuvre, for example in circumstances where "feminism" is introduced to form one part of a contrast pair such that the other entity or category is something equivalent to "not-feminism." These are cases where I have characterised feminism as a project of social reform; one with a specific emphasis on improving the lot of women as a distinct social group (cf. the first of the objectives of feminism described by Segal, 1999, p. 200). However, as Segal points out, feminism can be equally well constructed as multiple versions or feminisms. For example, in *Why Feminism?* (1999) she contrasts feminism that has the very practical objective of bringing about change and ultimately justice for women through campaigning and similar forms of direct action with a postmodern or poststructuralist school of feminism. Indeed, it is this school of feminism rather than the campaigning, reformist school which better describes my own brand of feminist politics. In the following paragraphs I shall engage with some of the points that Segal raises about postmodern and poststructuralist feminist perspectives, by way of exploring the political character and potential of *The Compleat Infidel*.

In contrast to the *reformist* objective of traditional feminist activism, the objective with which Segal (1999, p. 200) associates poststructuralist feminism is one of *revolution*, to be realised through such projects and activities as "reinvent[ing] the meanings of womanhood" and developing discursive practices and modes of expression that manage to "radically subvert existing binaries of sex, gender and sexuality" (ibid.). In comparison to the reformist kind of feminism it is not always clear how such revolutions are to be accomplished or what direct benefits will accrue to women in the event of success. On the other hand, these questions have not been entirely neglected. In particular, some fairly specific solutions inhere in popular treatments of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and, to a lesser extent, *Bodies That Matter* (1993). For instance, Corinne Squire (1995, p. 152) cites Butler's "work on 'performativity', tactical queerings of gender and sexuality through parody and theatricality" as an example of how a pragmatic approach within discourse analysis (loosely and inclusively defined) "allows feminists to propose short-term tactics aimed at goals [of social change] that otherwise look unattainable" (ibid.). The specific sorts of change that Butlerian feminists have in mind prominently include increased empowerment for women through the achievement or recovery of agency. Acts of sexual dissidence that contradict or otherwise disrupt the norms that mark out the "proper" performance of gender and (hetero)sexuality are taken to be empowering experiences

through which individuals can discover new opportunities to form and fashion their own identities. Inviting as this may sound, certain limitations and potential problems or areas of difficulty seem to accompany this approach. Two of these can be summarised as follows. Firstly, it may be unwise to place too much emphasis on individuals' performances, strategies for resistance, acts of subversion and transgression, along with individualised notions of increased autonomy and choice. Segal (1994, p. 305) quite rightly points out that the language of liberal individualism is one that "serves conservative ends more readily than progressive ones." Secondly, it is far from self-evident that announcements and performances that are intended to be subversive or disruptive are actually going to have the desired effects. As Segal (1999, p. 63) tartly observes, displaying "an awareness that gender is 'socially', 'performatively' or 'discursively' constructed" is a very long way from actually dismantling it.

Having made a quick sketch of this "revolutionary" rather than "reformist," postmodern or poststructuralist, strand of feminism, I shall now say a few words about its relationship to *The Compleat Infidel*. In this document I have taken a discourse-centred, relativistic view of the world that is suspicious of gender and other apparently natural categories, along with claims about material and social reality. It clearly owes a debt to postmodern and poststructuralist theory, especially the Derridean variety in contrast to the Lacanian and Foucauldian strands. I think that Segal (*passim*.) is substantially correct in her criticism of these latter approaches for making too little of the culturally and contextually specific social institutions and normative frameworks through which contemporary gender relations and sexual relations are organised, facilitated and maintained. These are matters neglected by the universalising tendencies of Lacanian theory and Foucauldians' characteristic vagueness when it comes to the details about how power is implemented and resisted in any particular situation. In my view, one of the merits of the ethnomethodological approach to normative accountability that I have adopted in *The Compleat Infidel* is precisely that it provides for close attention to the specific, situated social practices (including practices that are constitutive of one or another institution) through which people's intimate relationships are normatively arranged.

Alongside the broadly poststructuralist theoretical persuasion of *The Compleat Infidel*, consider its unique subject matter. Infidelity, in its various incarnations (especially "adultery"), is a topic that is easily regarded as intimately bound up with sexual experience and behaviour, gender and Butler's heterosexual matrix. It is just the sort of topic that feminism is interested to address; superficially private and personal but with readily exposed political dimensions

that are discovered to support the concept and give it its familiar shape. Moreover, were we to adopt the position articulated in some of the accounts literature (e.g., Scott and Lyman, 1968) whereby infidelity is defined as some kind of discrete offence or breach, it would not be difficult to imagine *The Compleat Infidel* as a promotion or recommendation for this sort of behaviour as a Butleresque act of disruption or subversion. As a corollary, one might expect to find that the point of following this recommended strategy or tactic for trouble-making is articulated in terms of its empowering and otherwise liberating effect for individual women. Recall Dalma Heyn's confident announcement that "adultery is, in fact, a revolutionary way for women to rise above the conventional" (Heyn, 1992, p. 10). It would have been perfectly possible to craft this document in the same ringing tones. However, Heyn's sentiments are not mine.

Despite the invitations that seem to be extended by this particular combination of theory and topic I do not intend to advertise either the practice of infidelity or the document *The Compleat Infidel* as instances of feminist revolt. Available expectations to the contrary notwithstanding, it is not my aim to reinvent the meanings of infidelity with a view to helping women (or anyone else) empower themselves. This is partly because I am cognisant of the limitations of the empowerment-through-disruption style of feminism that I described above. Firstly, I would not want to argue that this document, by dint of its sheer existence, is dismantling the technologies of normative heterosexuality. I have difficulty hearing most reported instances of infidelity as particularly revolutionary; compared to alternative possible methods of "making trouble" it usually seems to me rather unambitious. Secondly, the liberal-humanist, therapeutic style of discourse is one that I have made the object of criticism in this document. Indeed, it was the individualised, skills-based, therapeutic language of the psychology of close relationships (especially its counselling and self help branches) that I was objecting to when I settled on the topic of defences for infidelity in the first place. The question now arises of what remains subsequent to these disclaimers. Is *The Compleat Infidel* doing nothing that could be politically interesting or useful? What are the relevant objectives and functional possibilities of this study?

This is not a project of "reinvention" but it is one of explication and denaturalisation. The five forms of defensive construction examined here are all familiar and commonplace but this study is the first to assemble a collection and display them side-by-side, thereby revealing the sensitivity to context that underpins their variability. I have argued the case that infidelity discourse is action orientated. My point in explicating the constructedness, contingency and

reflexivity of these accounts of and for infidelity has not been to reaffirm the truth of some other, preferred account of the "reality" of people's sexual behaviour and intimate relationships, be it hegemonic or oppositional. Rather, I hope that *The Compleat Infidel* serves to argue against taking any account of such matters at face value. For feminists, this is a matter of political import. For instance, comprehending the contingency and reflexivity of accounts pertaining to infidelity means that one can make informed, situationally appropriate decisions about which versions of the truth to ally with and participate in and which versions to object to, without being pre-empted by assumptions about what is "natural," what is an objectively established "fact," what is "known" about human biology, cognition, society and so on.

Sceptical as I can be of simply conceived gender categories and theories of society, the reflexive approach I describe is not about reducing contrasting accounts such as the feminist and the evolutionary to wilfully depoliticised equivalence on the grounds that they are all "made up." Quite the contrary: exposing the variety of versions and accounts that we have surveyed in this document as constructed and action orientated and (therefore) as political seems to me a basis for discursively-minded feminists to insist that proponents of evolutionary and other distasteful accounts must enter into the arena of political debate and answer political charges. It is a basis for insisting that they do not take refuge in empiricist claims that some things are above politics by virtue of being simply true. Perhaps the principal contribution that *The Compleat Infidel* has to offer (post)modern feminism is knowledge about the rhetorical, interactional mechanics with which accounts of infidelity and its world are built. With that knowledge, one is better equipped to get involved in political endeavours such as fighting the dissemination and propagation of spurious "facts" which demean and discriminate against women (or whatever the objection happens to be) whilst benefiting from a coherent, principled system of reasoning. At risk of sounding overly critical, what I mean by that is that one can serve a political agenda without finding oneself in a position like Dryden's where political critique has to be wrapped in articles of conjecture about women's "emotional insecurity" and such, derived from a largely unexplicated, intuitive interpretation of one's data.

Implications for Discourse Studies

The objective of this study has been to document and explicate the defensive practices of infidelity discourse. In Chapter 2 I surveyed three categories of research that are relevant to this objective; namely, the accounts literature, a small collection of action orientated approaches to discourse and of course the specific endeavour of discursive psychology. In this section I shall consider the contribution and implications of *The Compleat Infidel* for researchers working within these disciplines.

The point of discursive psychology is partly to develop a critique and respecification of familiar concepts and topics in mainstream psychology (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1998) but also, and just as importantly, to generate a coherent, discourse-orientated alternative perspective on psychological and social life (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p. 153). To this end, Potter (1996b) observes that one of the distinctive features of discursive psychology and its antecedents is that it is cumulative. That is, "a set of studies can be combined together and can build upon the insights of earlier work. [] There is thus a sense in which each new study provides a check upon the adequacy of the previous studies that are drawn on" (ibid., pp. 138-139). Accordingly, I shall frame the present discussion of the significance of *The Compleat Infidel* for discourse studies in terms of its cumulative validation of a selection of earlier programmes of research within the discursive tradition.

Of these, perhaps the most important is *Order in Court*, the work of Atkinson and Drew (1979) to which I have frequently referred in the previous chapters. Their data were transcripts of the Scarman tribunal hearings and among their topics for investigation were the defensive forms of accounting produced by police witnesses in those hearings. Specifically, Atkinson and Drew were interested to identify some systematic features of the design of witnesses' talk by means of which speakers attempted to manage the allocation of blame (1979, p. 138). Despite the specificity of Atkinson's and Drew's data, the analytic emphasis was on "properties of defences which we do not think are dependent on the specific setting of the incidents being investigated in the cross-examination (i.e. in Northern Ireland)" (ibid.).

In *The Compleat Infidel* we have looked at five forms of defensive accounting and concluded that the variability among these five is not just a feature of their content or surface construction but also a reflection of their varying functions, from exoneration to justification. These functions have not

been conceived as an abstract typology of defences that has to be superimposed on the data (cf. the taxonomic approaches found in the accounts literature); rather, they describe and summarise the findings that have emerged from our scrutiny of speakers' and writers' discursive behaviour as they build up their various constructions. What we have noticed is that the discursive actions and manoeuvres displayed in the infidelity data have very often been paralleled by the behaviour of Atkinson's and Drew's police officers.

To recall my earlier formulation of Atkinson's and Drew's overall findings, they discerned three discrete types of defensive practice: a "justificatory" defence type and two types of excuses. The type 1 (justificatory) defence included among its distinguishing characteristics the volunteering of descriptions that: (a) selectively fence off the ground to be defended, thus diverting attention away from alternative areas of possible blame, and; (b) in light of that selection, display that it was not necessary for the speaker to take any course of action other than the one they manifestly exhibited at the time. As such, the type 1 (justificatory) defence was echoed in the practices of constructing a non-event and constructing a generic rationale for infidelity. In Chapters 3 and 7 of this document we saw that speakers and writers exonerated and justified themselves either by manipulating the boundaries of categories such as "being unfaithful" in order to show that whatever they had been up to was not an instance of that category or by shifting the focus of the discussion from the particular to the general, the latter type of phenomena being relatively easier to criticise and disrespect without accruing blame.

The type 1(a) excuse discovered by Atkinson and Drew attended to blameable incidents and (in)actions by explaining how they happened. Police witnesses produced narratives and portraits of circumstances or events that were designed to show that the speaker's contested or blameable action occurred as a direct and unavoidable result of the things previously narrated or portrayed. This discovery was mirrored in the practices of constructing an isolated episode and constructing a special category of self. In Chapters 4 and 5 we saw that discourse users either described their infidelities as the product of mitigating circumstances or of unusual personality traits and other quirks in their individual psychological make-up. In contrast, the type 2 excuse unearthed by Atkinson and Drew distinctively involved providing some reason for the blameable behaviour. As such, it was matched by the specific reasons for infidelity that we encountered in Chapter 6. In both studies, speakers did not deny the relevance or superficial desirability of acting differently, nor did they defend themselves by appeal to mitigating circumstances or diminished capacity. Rather, they

displayed their contested actions as rational and reasoned, for instance by showing that they were necessary responses or solutions to something else.

It is my conclusion that the findings of *The Compleat Infidel* substantially confirm the tripartite defensive practice described by Atkinson and Drew. Moreover, they evidently succeeded in their expressed aim of identifying properties of defences which would be generalisable beyond the highly specific subject matter addressed in their data. Atkinson's and Drew's study was unambiguously an exercise in conversation analysis; as such they make additional claims specific to the sequential organisation of verbal material (for example, to do with the constraints of pre-allocated turn-taking systems) that I shall not make it my business to confirm or deny. However, those aspects of their findings which I have highlighted here as differentiating the three types of defence have been demonstrated by *The Compleat Infidel* to apply in infidelity discourse as well as in discourse about Northern Ireland, and in a wide range of textual materials as well as in transcripts of conversation.

I would now like to turn to a second, more inclusively characterised strand of research. In Chapter 2, in the section entitled "analytic procedure," I referred to the investigations of Wooffitt (1992) and Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) as examples of discourse studies which are distinguished by the relatively inauspicious position of the people who supply the analytic data. Wooffitt (1992) collected reports of paranormal experiences and remarked that "the mere act of claiming such an experience can lead to assumptions of, at best, crankiness, or worse, some form of psychological deficiency" (p. 2). Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) interviewed members of various youth subcultures and noticed that one of the problems faced by their participants was the availability of a body of negative common knowledge about such persons as "punks" and "rockers" which could potentially be used as an interpretative resource by recipients of these young people's accounts. Meanwhile, the kind of censure that can be meted out to those known to be guilty of (dyad-bound or third-party) infidelity was illustrated in some of the data examined in the analytic chapters. In Extract 4.03 we learned that the infidel's treatment of their dyadic relationship is equivalent to that of a "petulant brat" whose response to "a beautiful piece of machinery" is to "smash it to bits." In Extract 6.05 one infidel's treatment of his ex-wife was compared to "cold-blooded murder." More prosaically, in Extract 6.03 aspersions were cast upon third-party "marriage-breakers." In all of the analytic chapters we have looked at the ways in which speakers and writers deal with the highly inauspicious task of countering such censure with some defence. For analytic purposes, then, *The Compleat Infidel*, like the studies of Wooffitt (1992) and

Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995), "trades on the scepticism with which [such accounts] are commonly greeted" (Potter, 1996a, p. 160).

Both the above-mentioned studies, in their various incarnations (e.g., Widdicombe, 1993, 1995, 1998; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1990; Wooffitt, 1988, 1991; Wooffitt and Clark, 1998) have contributed to a burgeoning crop of research on the discursive construction and management of identities (e.g., Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). In particular, as a result of the peculiar challenges or problems of identity faced by Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's participants, these authors have attended to the use made by speakers of an alternative identity category: that of an ordinary person. The notion of "doing being ordinary" originates in the work of conversation analyst Sacks (1984) although contemporary studies of ordinary identities such as that of McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) also acknowledge the emergence of the ordinary self in discourse analysis (e.g., Potter and Wetherell, 1988; Wetherell and Potter, 1989).

The findings of *The Compleat Infidel* can be seen as broadly confirming Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's findings about the construction and management of ordinary identities by inauspiciously positioned speakers. For instance, in his study of 1992 Wooffitt discovers a rhetorical device that he calls "I was just doing X ... when Y." It is functionally similar to the device "at first I thought ... but then I realized ..." (Sacks, 1984) that we encountered in Chapter 6. In Extract 6.02 we saw the third-party infidel Skatterkat use that device to claim that, just like "everyone" else who knew Mark and Kelly, she initially was "happy for them" when they moved in together; only later (she says) did it become apparent that things between Mark and Kelly were "going wrong." The point, of course, was to display Skatterkat's alleged first impression as innocuous and the sort of thing that any normal person would think. By use of this device, in conjunction with the implied consensus and corroboration of "everyone," Skatterkat attends to the possibility that recipients will take it that she had a stake in believing or pretending that Mark's relationship with Kelly was doomed from the outset (a very real possibility, given the hotly argumentative climate of OSA).

To quickly gloss Wooffitt's findings, his interviewees use the device "I was just doing X ... when Y" to report their paranormal experiences such that they begin with a report of something hearably routine and mundane that they were feeling or doing just before the onset of the paranormal phenomenon, that business then being reported as interrupted. In so doing they attend to the possibility that recipients may not hear them as credible witnesses. As Wooffitt (1992, p. 136) remarks, recipients may try to "explain away" the mysterious phenomena. For instance, they may take it that the experience was merely a

self-fulfilling prophecy, the product of a naïve desire to witness something paranormal. Thus, the point of "I was just doing X" for speakers is to bolster their credibility by displaying their activities and circumstances as thoroughly unremarkable and thereby display themselves as normal, ordinary people.

Alongside this discovery, consider the finding of Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) that their punks, rockers and other interviewees made a point of describing their activities and circumstances as routine and mundane in the course of such interactional projects as complaining about their ill treatment by authority figures and members of the general public who are (represented as) definitively not punks or members of any other subcultural group. For instance, one respondent, in talking about the disadvantages of life as a punk, complains about being treated rudely and even abusively "cos of the way you look" (ibid., p. 118). The problem faced by this speaker is the possibility that stereotypical bits of knowledge about punks (that they are dirty, that they are violent and so on) may be taken by recipients as providing a reasonable explanation for the public reaction of which she complains. Her solution is a form of account in which her report of the complained-about behaviour is immediately and contrastively preceded by a description of her own, conspicuously normal activities and circumstances. These include going "for a quiet drink," "standing at a bus stop" and "walking down the street." Widdicombe and Wooffitt comment on these formulations as not just hearably innocuous but orientated to the conventional or institutional character of such activities as things that large numbers of ordinary people regularly do (1995, p. 118). They conclude that:

the description of the activity is designed to furnish certain inferences about the speaker. In representing her activity as an 'anybody's activity', she occasions the relevance of her own character as an ordinary person; that is, in attending to the pragmatic business of making a complaint she is doing 'being ordinary' [] as an interactional resource.

(Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, p. 119)

The same patterns are evident in the discursive practices of *The Compleat Infidel*, particularly the defences of high distinctiveness: constructing a non-event, constructing an isolated episode and constructing a specific reason for infidelity. For example, recall the efforts of Lizzy in Extract 3.05. In the analysis that accompanied that extract I included a discussion of the ways that Lizzy orientates to the possibility that recipients might infer that Kim had a legitimate reason for being angry; a discussion that I shall not repeat here. However, for the purposes of comparison with Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's study, let me draw attention to the fact that the principally complained-about behaviour - Kim's attempt to

throttle Lizzy - is preceded by descriptions of Lizzy's own activities and circumstances such as "the five of us were waiting for a cab" (line 93), "there was about a hundred people in this taxi queue" (lines 124-125) and Lizzy's response to her friend Anne crying: "I went over to see if she was okay" (line 127). These immediately and contrastively anticipate "this screaming harridan lurching herself at me" which was "the next thing I knew" (lines 127-129). Clearly, waiting for a taxi along with about a hundred other people and seeing whether a distressed friend is okay are activities of the same order as Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's "standing at a bus stop" and so on: activities that work to display the speaker as an ordinary person.

In addition to these kinds of examples in the data, a theoretical account of infidels' construction of themselves as normal, ordinary, law-abiding folk has been worked out in *The Compleat Infidel* through reference to Edwards's and Potter's (1992) insights on the mutual co-construction of "self" and "world" and of course Edwards's (1995, 1997) work on emblematic instances, episodes and script formulations. We have seen that infidels (or people liable to be regarded as such) make a resource of the ordinary by constructing versions of the world and histories of events that are built from scriptible discursive objects and categories such as "the classic holiday situation" (Extract 4.06) and "two types of affairs" (Extract 6.06). These versions describe things which are ostensibly external to the infidel but which are implicative and constitutive of the person's normal, ordinary "inner" character or disposition. Overall, then, I am able to conclude that *The Compleat Infidel* supports Widdicombe's and Wooffitt's accounts of the construction of ordinary identities by inauspiciously positioned speakers: it confirms that such practices are manifest in the discourse of infidelity as well as the discourses of the paranormal and youth subcultures, and in a wide range of discursive materials other than interview-like, research-orientated conversations.

Directions for Further Research

In the present study I have used a large and eclectic data-base to produce a comprehensive overview of the defensive practices of infidelity discourse, from exoneration to justification. This ambitious project has naturally been at the expense of some attention to various specificities of the topic and the contexts of

the analytic data. Accordingly, I propose two major dimensions along which further investigation of these defensive practices could profitably continue.

Firstly, there is the topic. This could be re-specified and narrowed down in any number of ways so I shall focus this short discussion on one or two that are of the most interest to me and expectably of the most interest to some of the anticipated readers of *The Compleat Infidel*. Having surveyed the practice of defending infidelity I would like to make a more detailed investigation of some particular kinds of infidelity or areas of defence. Readers may have noticed from some of the interview extracts in this document that one of my special interests is the business of third-party infidelity and the extent of such an infidel's moral responsibility towards their victim, the main or regular partner of the third-party infidel's dyad-bound accomplice. Third-party infidelity is an under-researched phenomenon, to say the least, and the question of moral responsibility towards one's victim has proved a fascinating aspect of that phenomenon about which those of my research participants who are willing to admit to such experience have had plenty to say. The issues that they have raised in regard to that question have included, for instance, the pre-existing relationship between the third-party infidel and the victim, given that at the outset of the affair these two individuals might be strangers and entirely unknown to each other or they might be close friends or even relatives. Should a friend or relative be afforded greater consideration than a stranger? If so, how can a distinction between such membership categories be logically and morally made and sustained? Another topic that interests me is guilt. Some of my interviewees have had surprising remarks to make about the sensation of guilt, its natural history and methods for coping with it, all of which I would like to make the object of some formal analysis.

In addition to the above-mentioned interests of my own, I expect that other analysts of discourse would appreciate a specific exploration of topics such as gender and sexual orientation. My data show that people are certainly capable of discussing infidelity as gendered and as part of an institution of heterosexuality when they are invited or required to do so. In the absence of such specific requests, it is my experience that people routinely do not invoke gender and sexual orientation as explanatory principles in their defences, any more than they invoke race, social class or physical (dis)ability. Occasionally, when men are constructing special categories of self such as "poor general aptitude" they hint at maleness as a relevant aspect of that self but overall it is apparently not (or no longer) usual to treat gender categories as a resource that can be invoked as part of a defence without hesitation or some accompanying account. Correspondingly, even the biologically-orientated accounts of the

evolutionary psychologists lately attend to infidelity (or extra-pair copulation, in their argot) as a behaviour manifested by both sexes and not the exclusive preserve of the male. This may be a significant research finding in itself, given earlier studies such as Hollway's (1984, 1989) in which discursively produced objects such as the "male sex drive" have taken centre stage. Possibly the relative de-emphasis of gender and sexual orientation in my data is a function of my focus on contemporary practices of defending infidelity rather than, say, condemning it. Moreover, in the specific case of the interview data, it may or may not be a function of participants' orientation to Rachel as a female and indeed a feminist interviewer. Nonetheless, as I have already indicated, when people are required to engage in a general (not specifically defensive) discussion of infidelity and its connection to matters of gender and sexual orientation, they are undoubtedly capable of doing so. That capacity is an obvious avenue for further research.

Secondly, there is the dimension of context. This study began with a deliberately inclusive policy of data collection and an effort to not impose upon the data a set of pre-conceived analytic categories. A major advantage of that strategy was that different kinds of discursive contexts were able to emerge from the data through analysis of speakers' and writers' orientations to their accounts as contextualised. This approach is consonant with studies in discourse and conversation analysis that have made a point of finding out how interviews, counselling sessions and other such phenomena are endogenously generated from within discourse (e.g., see Drew and Heritage, 1992; Schegloff, 1997). Thus, the findings recorded in *The Compleat Infidel* have included findings about the nature of question-and-answer sessions, of sympathetic and silent recipients in contrast to contexts of argumentation and of newsworthiness as a capacity to entertain as distinct from the capacity to inform. Clearly, there is room for these various findings about context to be developed and expanded upon. In particular, acknowledging studies such as those of Buttny (1993), Edwards (1995, 1997) and Greatbatch and Dingwall (1997, 1998) that investigate the conversational mechanics which underpin the institutions of "marriage guidance" and divorce mediation, further research on the defensive practices of infidelity discourse could be usefully narrowed down to a study of the construction of contexts of counselling and mediation within this defensive talk. Alternatively, or simply to put it another way, one could set out to investigate how institutionalised forms of talk such as those which generate the effect of counselling and mediation manage to accommodate and deal with participants' efforts to defend infidelity. Other research possibilities on the dimension of context suggest

themselves when one considers that counselling and mediation sessions are not unique in the sense of the topic of infidelity being more or less directly relevant to the context. It also becomes relevant where, for example, dedicated websites have been set up for the specific purpose of encouraging debate about relationship issues. Moreover, it is evidently salient whenever there is controversy to be stirred up on television and in the other mass media about the private life, character and ethics of some public figure. It would be interesting, then, to investigate further how discourse that defends infidelity simultaneously orientates to and constructs such publicity. Whichever among these possibilities for research may be eventually pursued, the preparatory groundwork has now been accomplished.

Appendix A:

Definition of Terms

In this document certain key terms are used to describe the roles and relationships that constitute the "eternal triangle" of infidelity. These terms have not been chosen because they are somehow objective or neutral; evidently, none is available that does not have its own unique etymology and its own set of implications and constructive effects. Rather, they have been selected for their ability to identify and differentiate in a fairly clear and concrete way the phenomena that *The Compleat Infidel* sets out to discuss.

Dyadic relationship. A romantic and/or sexual "couple" relationship, usually accompanied by the expectation of fidelity or exclusivity.

Extradyadic relationship. A romantic and/or sexual partnership that takes place "on the side" of a dyadic relationship, usually illicitly. An affair.

Dyad-bound infidel. A person who is in an exclusive, dyadic relationship but who strikes up an extradyadic relationship with some third party.

Third-party infidel. A person involved in an affair with someone who is already dyad-bound. Colloquially, a "lover," a "mistress," the "other woman" or "other man."

Dyadic partner. The regular or legitimate partner of a dyad-bound infidel. Also referred to as the *victim* because of the conventional truism that this is the person who is injured by infidelity.

In practice, it is entirely possible for an individual to occupy the positions of dyad-bound infidel, third-party infidel and victim simultaneously, depending on their particular circumstances and network of relationships. The point of the above terminology is not to obscure that possibility but to provide for clarification of which position or relationship is the relevant one in the context of any given discussion.

Appendix B: Transcription

Some of the data used in this study were transcribed from audio tapes, such as the extracts from my own research interviews. Readers interested in the theoretical aspects of transcription may wish to refer to the discussions supplied by discursive psychologists Edwards and Potter (1992, pp. 178-180; Potter, 1996b, pp. 137-138) and conversation analysts Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998, pp. 73-92). The transcription system appearing in this document is a "light" version, designed for simplicity and easy reading; the symbols and conventions listed below are common to discourse and conversation analytic research. The examples in italics are adapted from extracts used in the main body of this report.

- (.) A dot in round brackets indicates a pause.
I live with this guy (.) um (.) and I'll be living with him for another (.) month and a half
(Emma, Extract 5.04)
- (uncertain)
(xxx) Words in round brackets indicate the transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance. A triple "x" in round brackets indicates inaudible material.
I put it over as a mad thing really, like (xxx what you giving the xxx) against me for?
(Earl, Extract 4.08)
- [] Material in square brackets has been inserted by the transcriber for the sake of clarity.
Doug had already arranged to go to Peacock's [a nightclub] with a load of people.
(Lizzy, Extract 3.05)
- [] [] Extended square brackets indicate overlapping talk.
Lizzy: it's not ended up in sex but you [know] I've been in bed with someone
Rachel: [yeah]
(Extract 3.04)
- A dash indicates an abrupt cut-off of a word or sound.
I re- obviously I realised at that point
(Earl, Extract 4.08)

- : One or more colons indicate that the immediately preceding sound has been elongated or stretched.
it coulda been very very tricky for me but it smoo:thed itself out
 (Kyle, Extract 5.01)
- = The equals sign at the end of one speaker's utterance and at the start of another's indicates the absence of a discernable gap.
 Rachel: *did you mean justifying it to other people or to yourself or both?* =
 Kyle: = to yourself
 (Extract 7.05)
- underline Underlining indicates a speaker's emphasis.
it's like buying a lottery ticket and expecting to fucking win
 (Doug, Extract 7.06)
- CAPITALS Words in capital letters are noticeably louder than the surrounding speech, as with shouting.
all this time you've been SHAGGING MY HUSBAND
 (Lizzy, Extract 3.05)

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