

INFIDELITY COUNSELLING: A CASE STUDY OF MANAGING FEELINGS ON THE JOB

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I respectfully acknowledge the Yugambah People, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and pay my respect to their elders past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples here today.
- I also acknowledge ACA as Australia's largest single registration body for Counsellors and Psychotherapists and am grateful that ACA serves a crucial role in advocating and advancing the profession of counselling and psychotherapy.

INTRODUCTION

- Today I am going to talk about some preliminary findings from my PhD study into managing infidelity counselling.
- I will focus on a case of emotional labour in infidelity counselling, using narrative inquiry and its in-depth interview method.
- I will show that managing emotional labour is a critical part of the business of managing infidelity counselling, with a focus on its positive use of strategies for creating rapport with a difficult client.

EMOTIONAL LABOUR

- Emotional labour is increasing in a wide range of occupations where working with people is prominent, such as in health care, education and other service industries.
- According to Hochschild, emotional labour “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.” (1983/2003, p. 7)
- Emotional labour is a vital skill within the “caring business” of counselling. (Mann, 2004)

- Within counselling, “failure to display the appropriate emotion (e.g. sympathy)” and “leakage of an inappropriate one (e.g. boredom)” can have “serious implications for the well-being of the client and their continued relationship with the professional.” (Mann, 2004, p. 205)
- Perhaps the main reason for this is that those employed in health caring professions are “socialised” to express care and empathy. (Diefendorff et al., 2011)
- This means that it is not appropriate for a therapist to respond to a client’s anger and rudeness with comparable emotions. Instead, the therapist must suppress these and display a look of concern or other appropriate response. (Mann, 2004)
- However, the trouble with such surface acting is that feeling one thing and feigning another can evoke “emotional dissonance.” (Edward et al., 2017)

HOW CAN ONE EXPRESS AN APPROPRIATE DISPLAY OF EMOTION?

SURFACE ACTING	DEEP ACTING	NATURALLY
Hiding felt emotions and displaying unfelt emotions	Reappraising and regulating felt emotions	Expressing naturally felt emotions

- Research on emotional labour has found that the type, degree and intensity of the emotion displayed are governed by rules.
- These display rules *are* especially meaningful in the health caring professions for those performing emotionally charged work. (Edward et al., 2017)

THE CHALLENGING WORK OF INFIDELITY COUNSELLING

- Infidelity counselling is the work of therapists dealing with the action or state of being unfaithful to a spouse or other sexual partner. (Infidelity, n.d.)
- Infidelity is one of the most emotionally-laden problems that couples bring to therapy (Weeks & Fife, 2014) and the most difficult to treat (Peluso, 2019)
- In working with clients coping with infidelity, therapists need to match different therapeutic tools to the needs of the clients.

ETHICAL AND CLINICAL CHALLENGES OF INFIDELITY COUNSELLING

- There are ethical and clinical challenges particular to managing infidelity counselling
- The principles and limitations of confidentiality need to be discussed with the couple from the outset because the therapist cannot know in advance what issues will be revealed during therapy.
- If infidelity is disclosed by the unfaithful party to the therapist, but kept hidden from the faithful party, that therapist may find further infidelity counselling with the couple “difficult if not impossible” (Snyder & Doss, 2005, p. 1457).
- If this were to happen, therapists could take one of three main approaches to facilitate disclosure: “full disclosure,” “non-disclosure,” or “measured disclosure” (Butler, Seedall & Harper, 2008).

WHAT IS INFIDELITY?

- Although infidelity is widely recognised, there is no universally recognised definition of the term (Blow & Hartnett, 2005b).
- Infidelity is often defined as being involved with someone other than one's intimate partner "without their permission" (Jankowiak & Hardgrave, 2007) which suggests not only the breaking of an agreement but also secrecy (Dowd, 2012) and deception (Keffer, 2018).
- Each person may define infidelity differently, as the infamous statement by former President Bill Clinton about White House intern Monica Lewinsky indicates: "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" (Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal, n.d., par. 10)
- To reach a consensus in defining infidelity "you can go 'round and 'round but you'll never get a good answer about what is and isn't infidelity" (Peluso, 2019, p. 6).

PARTIES TO INFIDELITY

- Infidelity (also called adultery, cheating or having an affair) has been described as “the love triangle” because it involves three parties among whom there are conflicting and competing attachments of a romantic nature. (Karbeinig, 2018)
- Some terms used for the parties to infidelity:
- The party having an affair –the infidel, the traitor, the cheating partner, the betrayer
- The party not having an affair – the cuckold, the hurt partner, the betrayed partner, the exclusive partner
- The third party –the affairee, the rival, the lover, the mistress
- I refer to these parties as the faithful party, the unfaithful party and the other party

TYPES OF INFIDELITY

- The literature talks about four main types of infidelity, including: 1. sexual infidelity; 2. emotional infidelity; 3. a combination of these and 4. Internet infidelity. (Zare, 2011)
- Each of these types ranges on a continuum from mild to major involvement. (Moller & Vossler, 2015)

1. oral ☐ penetration

2. flirting ☐ cuddling

3. flirting ☐ penetration

4. sexting ☐ cybersex

MANAGING INFIDELITY

- Hochschild found that while the proprietary claims that a husband and wife make upon each other are often to blame for evoking jealousy, couples can “rid themselves of the agreement to be monogamous and therefore of the right to jealousy” when “making love to someone outside the marriage is defined not as adultery but as ‘sharing your love.’” (1983/2003, p. 73)

FACES OF INFIDELITY

- Like the face itself, these change with time
- Infidelity as Power -Throughout history, those with power, class or rank have been more able to have affairs and avoid punishment (Lammers & Maner, 2015).
- Infidelity as Sin - Major religious teachings have condemned infidelity and declared it a sin (Fife, 2016).
- Infidelity as Crime - Historically, infidelity was considered a crime resulting in the adulterers' punishment (Rhode, 2016)
- Infidelity as Disorder - Infidelity is often associated with various mental disorders (Whisman, 2015).

PREVALENCE OF INFIDELITY

- Sexual Health Australia (2020) reports that around 60% of men and 45% of women are willing to report that an affair has occurred sometime in their marriage and suggest that 70% of all marriages experience an affair.
- Infidelity is the reason why most people seek counselling. (Peluso, 2019)
- But many therapists feel inadequately prepared to treat the devastating effects that infidelity can have on individuals, couples, families and societies. (Zapien, 2018)

REASONS FOR INFIDELITY

- Infidelity could serve to enhance a couple's relationship (Hakim, 2012)
- Usually indicates that something is missing in the primary relationship such as declining sexual and relationship satisfaction (Bowen, 2004; Peluso, 2019).
- Opportunity – “cup of coffee affair” (Humphrey 1983).
- Conflict avoidance, intimacy avoidance, sexual addiction, empty nest and out-the-door (Brown, 2013).
- Infidelity tends to run in families (Weiser & Weigel, 2017)

EFFECTS OF INFIDELITY

Anxiety & depression

(Azhar et al., 2018)

Sexual diseases

(Kang & Pongou, 2019)

Breakup & divorce

(Hall & Fincham, 2013)

Suicide & homicide

(Ratnarajah et al., 2014; Horder & Fitz-Gibbon, 2015)

- Dealing with such effects is one of the most common and challenging problems to manage in infidelity counselling. (Abrahamson et al., 2012; Peluso, 2019).
- To date no other studies have looked at emotional labour in the infidelity counselling encounter.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

- This study is informed and guided by narrative inquiry—a qualitative interdisciplinary enterprise that has moved beyond its origins in management science to include a diverse range of fields in the human sciences. (Freedman et al., 2019).
- Based largely on the works of Polkinghorne (1988, 1995) this unique approach differs from other approaches in which “detail and specificity slip away in favour of general statements about the phenomena of interest” (Riessman, 2016, p. 364).
- As such, it is well suited to examining particularities in the narrative of a therapist managing emotional labour in the infidelity counselling encounter.

The infidelity counselling encounter took place in the therapist's clinic in an organisation on the Gold Coast in Australia.

It provided a tranquil setting for our narrative interview.



OUR NARRATIVE INTERVIEW: INTRODUCING THE PARTICIPANTS

- Therapist Lily
 - Experienced counsellor, with specialist training in infidelity counselling.
 - Favours a humanistic approach, “*remaining non-judgemental*” when counselling individuals, couples and families.
- The family
 - The wife was in her 50s, worked as a teacher and was the faithful party.
 - The husband was in his 60s, worked overseas for months at a time and was the unfaithful party.
 - The daughter was in her 30s, loved both parents and encouraged them to attend infidelity counselling.

LILY'S STORY

- Lily began her story about counselling this family by sharing that she believes that it is possible to recover from infidelity, though she added that,
 - “it’s very, very difficult and, um, it takes a lot of work and a lot of understanding on both parts and many couples don’t recover from it.”
 - “I suppose forgiveness is an integral part of marriage for the smaller things as well as the big ones.”
 - “So it’s managing all of that and I think therein lies why it’s such a difficult (pause) difficult process.”

OUR INITIAL CONTACT

- Lily said,
 - “The way I first met this family was I came into work and I drove into the carpark and I parked my car and as I opened the door of my car, it just touched the car next to me which was a great big, massive four wheel drive. It didn’t do any damage but it did hit the car and to me (pause) I thought the car was empty and the wife was in the back seat of the car and they were waiting and if you just imagine what that atmosphere would have been like in that car. And she jumped out of the car and verbally berated me and said, ‘WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING?’ and I was so taken aback. So our initial contact was extremely negative.” “I knew of course she was a client and I hoped against hope that she wasn’t my client (laughter) and I said ‘Oh I’m so sorry. Did I damage your car?’” (Lily)
- The wife responded with,
 - “JUST WATCH WHAT YOU’RE DOING’ or something like that.” (Lily)

ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

- When Lily was called into the waiting room to meet her new clients, she saw that they were the people in the car she had hit. As Lily put it,
 - “That was so difficult because she saw that I was the person that had hit her car. And so from the very first moment, I was on the back foot I felt, so I had a huge leap to make to establish rapport with that woman.”
- To do so, Lily performed emotional labour on the job, initially, with a display of surface acting, deep acting and naturally felt emotions.

AN EXAMPLE OF SURFACE ACTING

- Lily continued,
 - “So I just decided ... I took a moment to think how to approach her and I just decided I’d go out there and with my hand extended and say something, using a little bit of light humour like, ‘well we got off onto a really bad footing out there didn’t we? Can we start again?’... or something like that.” (Lily)
- The example of surface acting shows that Lily did not respond to her client’s anger and rudeness with comparable emotions, but instead, suppressed her naturally felt dread that the client would be her client and displayed a more appropriate response of a welcoming gesture and a little light humour.

SURFACE ACTING CAN HELP

- “In surface acting we deceive others about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves.” (Hochschild, 1983/2003, p. 33).
- Lily used surface acting to help overcome their difficult start, and it worked.
 - “I think the fact she did come back was a little, tiny bit of a triumph.”
- Lily avoids problems that can be associated with surface acting—where feeling one thing and feigning another can evoke emotional dissonance by using deep acting.

AN EXAMPLE OF DEEP ACTING

- In her story about counselling the faithful wife, Lily shared,
 - “I suppose I obviously had empathy for her shock and her grief and (pause) because I am a woman of a similar age, I could put myself in that position and I could fully get in touch with what it would be like to be abandoned like that and rejected and shocked by that news.” (Lily)
- “In deep acting we make feigning easy by making it unnecessary”—in a sense, “deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others.” (Hochschild, 1983/2003, p. 33)

DEEP ACTING CAN HELP

- The example of deep acting by Lily shows her experiencing or feeling the emotions needed to fully get in touch with the wife's experience.
- Lily performs deep acting to help successfully build rapport with her difficult client, who returned for another session.
- In describing deep acting, “actors ‘psyche themselves’ for a role in the same way, the service provider psyches himself or herself for a desired emotion” (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993. p. 93).

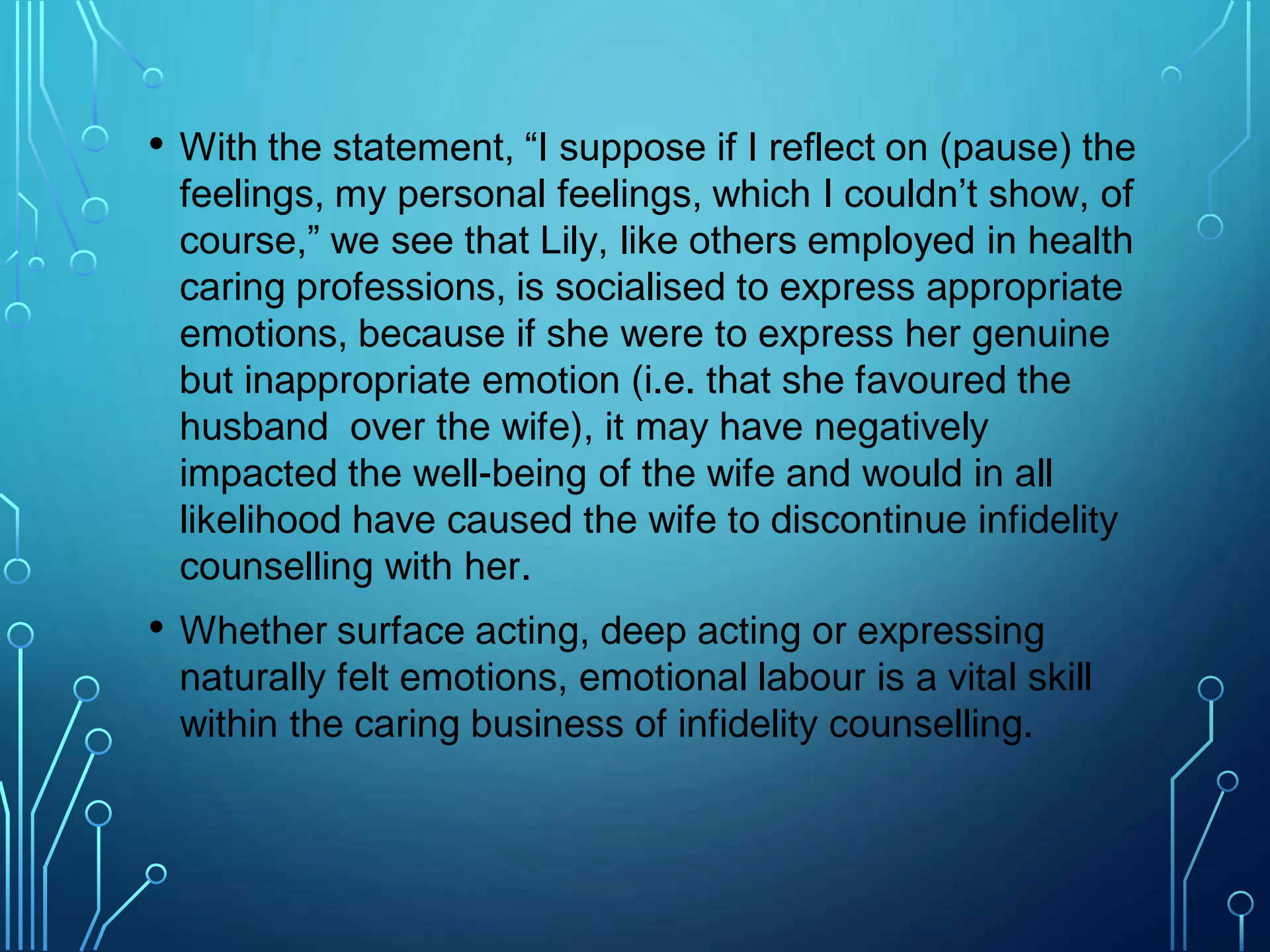
AN EXAMPLE OF EXPRESSING NATURALLY FELT EMOTIONS

- Lily made known that she cared for her clients and empathised with them,
 - “I remember the wife crying and (pause) well they both cried. It was deeply sad. The daughter cried too.” (Lily)
- When expressing naturally felt emotions, as in the case of feeling “deeply sad,” the “task of managing an estrangement between self and feeling and between self and display” is alleviated. (Hochschild, 1983/2003, p. 131)
- So one is deceiving neither oneself nor others.

EXPRESSING NATURALLY FELT EMOTIONS CAN HELP

- The genuine experience and expression of expected emotion (e.g., care and empathy) is a third means of accomplishing emotional labour. (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983/2003)
- Perhaps the main reason for this is that those employed in health caring professions are “socialised” to express care and empathy. (Diefendorff et al., 2011)
- Expressing naturally felt emotions is considered the most effective of the three strategies for emotional labour. (Jordan et al, 2008; Yang et al., 2019)

- However, expressing naturally felt emotions was not always the most effective strategy in the infidelity counselling encounter. As Lily explained,
 - “I suppose if I reflect on (pause) the feelings, my personal feelings, which I couldn’t show, of course, and I haven’t spent very long thinking about this, but now that I am reflecting on it today, um I think my stronger empathy would have been with the husband.”
 - “And that’s probably something I also had to fight (pause) that sense of understanding him a little bit (pause) more than I could understand her. I find that’s always the tension, isn’t it, to suspend judgement.”

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- The slide features a blue gradient background with decorative white circuit-like lines and circles in the corners. The lines vary in thickness and form, some ending in small circles, creating a technical or digital aesthetic.
- With the statement, “I suppose if I reflect on (pause) the feelings, my personal feelings, which I couldn’t show, of course,” we see that Lily, like others employed in health caring professions, is socialised to express appropriate emotions, because if she were to express her genuine but inappropriate emotion (i.e. that she favoured the husband over the wife), it may have negatively impacted the well-being of the wife and would in all likelihood have caused the wife to discontinue infidelity counselling with her.
 - Whether surface acting, deep acting or expressing naturally felt emotions, emotional labour is a vital skill within the caring business of infidelity counselling.

CONCLUSION

- Today I have focused my talk on a case of emotional labour in the infidelity counselling encounter, using narrative inquiry and its in-depth interview method.
- The findings have shown that managing emotional labour is a critical part of the work of infidelity counselling.
- The therapist performed emotional labour strategies to successfully create rapport with a difficult client, despite their initial contact being extremely negative.
- These findings have implications for the education of professional therapists with an interest in managing their own emotions at work.

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THANK YOU!

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