Revenge after termination of a romantic relationship in young adults: a self-regulation perspective

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Summary

The formation of romantic relationships is a fundamental aspect of young adulthood. Therefore, the end of a romantic relationship between young adults especially due to infidelity is often described as one of the most difficult and trying times during this developmental period. Infidelity is linked to a myriad of negative emotions which may lead to thoughts and fantasies of revenge. Revenge may be perceived as a compensatory act for assumed wrong doing and is thus an effort by the aggressed to adapt to the difficult situation. In this study, revenge was approached from a self-regulatory perspective, as self-regulation plays a predominant role in adapting to adversity.

The aim of this study was to explore typical thoughts and emotions integral to revenge after real or suspected infidelity and to propose a model representing the perceived cause and effect relationship between these thoughts, emotions and self-regulatory strategies. A non-probability sample of eight young adults participated in the study. Through Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA), and Thematic Analysis, 14 themes were identified and developed into a hypothetical model of revenge and self-regulation.

From the hypothetical model developed, five distinct phases were identified. These are: 1) The initial phase, which involved, initial shock and confusion, self-doubt, negative emotions, isolation from family and friends. 2) The rumination phase; rumination was postulated to be a key component in the development of revenge – the outcome of rumination, specifically the extent to which insight was gained appeared to decide whether revenge was executed, and which of the following routes were followed. 3) The non-revenge route, followed if insight was gained through rumination and comprised of seeking social

support; insight and closure; forgiveness and self-improvement. 4) The revenge route, occurred if rumination did not result in insight and understanding. This path comprised of revenge fantasies; revenge itself and justification for the revenge, as well as following/stalking and finally (5) the intersection between revenge and non-revenge, which encompassed, cutting ties and self-improvement.

In relation to revenge and self-regulation, revenge itself may reflect poor self-regulation. Not engaging in vengeful acts may be indicative of recurrent self-regulatory efforts. However, a person's ability to mitigate acting out, is reliant on the strength and importance of the impulse as well as their capacity in that moment to self-regulate. As illustrated, revenge is a complex construct which unfolds over time within a wider context of different systems of experiences, emotions, thoughts and behaviours. Taking the limitations of the study into account, final conclusions should be made with caution. Future research should explore, whether the suggested model would still hold true if large random samples were utilised. As rumination played such a significant role in whether revenge was executed further research on the exact role played by rumination, revenge fantasies and revenge-justification would be beneficial.

Preface

- This mini-dissertation forms part of the requirements for the completion of the degree Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. It has been prepared in article format (manuscript to be submitted for publication) with three chapters and complies with the requirements identified by the North-West University in rule: A.4.4.2.9.

- Chapter 1 includes an in-depth literature overview that aims to present the reader with background information and the defining concepts that are relevant to this study. Chapter 2 presents the manuscript that will be submitted to the *South African Journal of Psychology* for possible publication. The manuscript itself will include a short introduction, the aims of the study and the methodology followed, as well as the findings of the study and a discussion and conclusion on these. Finally, Chapter 3 presents a critical reflection by the researcher on the research process.

- The manuscript in Chapter 2 has been compiled in accordance with the requirements set out by the *South African Journal of Psychology,* with the goal of possibly submitting it for publication.

- The manuscript and the reference list have been styled according to the specifications of the APA (American Psychological Association, 6th edition) publication guidelines for the purpose of examination. Where journal specifications differ from the APA publication guidelines, the appropriate amendments will be made before submission for publication.

- For the purpose of examination, the pages will be numbered chronologically from the table of content page, ending with the addendum.

- A language practitioner conducted the language editing of this mini-dissertation.

- Data collection for the study (individual interviews) was conducted in the language preferred by the participants. Certain participants were interviewed in Afrikaans.

- Consent for the submission of this mini-dissertation for examination purposes (in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Clinical Psychology) has been provided by the research supervisor, Professor Karel Botha.

- Lastly, this mini-dissertation was submitted to Turn-it-in, which established that its content falls within the norms of acceptability regarding plagiarism.

Permission to submit article for examination purposes

I, the supervisor of this study, hereby declare that the article entitled *Revenge after termination of a romantic relationship in young adults: a self-regulatory perspective,* written by L. Müller does reflect the research regarding the subject matter. I hereby grant permission that she may submit the mini-dissertation for examination purposes and I confirm that the mini-dissertation submitted is in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. The article may also be sent to the *South African Journal of Psychology* for publication purposes.

Prof Karel F.H. Botha

Guidelines for authors

Description

This article is presented in the SAGE house style which complies with the requirements of the South African Journal of Psychology. The article will be submitted for possible publication in the *South African Journal of Psychology*. The South African Journal of Psychology is owned by SAGE Publications which publishes a variety of Southern African and African journal titles. The journal publishes contributions from all fields of psychology in English. Empirical research is emphasised; however, the journal accepts theoretical and methodological papers, review articles, short communications, book reviews and letters commenting on articles published in the journal. Articles relevant to Africa which address psychological issues of social change and development are prioritised.

Instructions for authors

General

In general, the manuscript must be written in a high grammatical standard in English. It must follow the specific technical guidelines that are stipulated in the submission guidelines. The American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition is followed in the preparation of the manuscript. The research within the manuscript should comply with the accepted standards of ethical practice, presented by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The journal endeavours to publish accurate, transparent and ethically sound research.

Manuscript style

The *South African Journal of Psychology* follows the SAGE house style guidelines stipulated in the SAGE UK House Style guidelines. The following format is required for research-based manuscripts:

- The introductory/literature review section requires no heading.

- The following headings/subheadings are necessary:
  - Method (Participants; Instruments; Procedure; Ethical considerations; Data analysis (which includes the statistical techniques or computerised analytic programmes, if applicable); Results; Discussion; Conclusion; References.

- Within the 'Ethical considerations' section, the name of the institution which granted ethical approval of the study must be stipulated.

Format. Only electronic files which adhere to the stipulated guidelines are accepted. The format of the manuscript may either be Microsoft Word or LaTex files. All manuscripts must be double-spaced throughout and with a minimum of 3cm for left and right-hand margins as well as 5cm at the head and foot. The text should be a standard 12 points.

Keywords and abstracts. An abstract of no more than 250 words should be included and should aid readers in finding the article online. Up to six alphabetised keywords should be included in the abstract and always highlighted. Key descriptive phrases should be repeated and focused on in the abstract. Thus, the abstract must be written in such a way that it conveys the necessary information/data which assists search engines in finding the article and ranking it on the search results page.

Artwork, figures and other graphics. Illustrations, pictures and graphs, should be provided in the highest quality and in electronic format. Further guidelines include:

- Format: TIFF, JPEG: Common format for pictures (containing no text or graphs).

- EPS is the preferred format for graphs and line art as it retains quality when enlarging/zooming in.

- Placement: Figures/charts and tables created in MS Word should be included in the main text rather than at the end of the document.

- Figures and other files created outside Word (i.e. Excel, PowerPoint, JPG, TIFF, EPS, and PDF) should be submitted separately.

- Resolution: Rasterized based files (i.e. with .tiff or .jpeg extension) require a resolution of at least 300 dpi (dots per inch). Line art should be supplied with a minimum resolution of 800 dpi.

- Colour: Images supplied in colour will be published in colour online and black and white in print.

- Dimension: The artworks supplied must not exceed the dimensions of the journal. Images cannot be scaled up after origination

- Fonts: The lettering used in the artwork should not vary too much in size and type (usually sans serif font as a default).

Reference style. The journal adheres to the APA referencing style. Specific guidelines are provided, and it is the authors' responsibility to produce an accurate reference list. The references are listed alphabetically at the end of the article while in-text references are referred to by name and year in parentheses. The references are structured as follows:

- Last name and initials of all authors

- The year the reference item was published (in brackets)

- The title of the article

- The name of the publication

- The volume number

- An issue number (if provided)

- The inclusive pages

- Digital object identifier (DOI)

The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition can be consulted for accurate formatting of reference. The style and punctuation of the references should conform to the APA style. Illustrated below are examples of different styles:

- Journal Article

    Gower, M. (2013). Revenge: Interplay of creative and destructive forces. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *41*(1), 112-118. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-012-0407-0

- Book

    Calfee, R. C., & Valencia, R. R. (1991). APA guide to preparing manuscripts for journal publication. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

English language editing services. The language used in the manuscript has to be accurate and of adequate quality to be understood by the editors and reviewers during the assessment of the manuscript. The author should consider having a colleague (whose home language is English), review the manuscript for clarity. Submit the manuscript for professional editing. Consider utilising the SAGE Language Service, which can format the manuscript to the specifications of the journal.

Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth literature review supporting the brief literature review included in Chapter 2. This review provides a comprehensive overview of the key concepts relating to this study. First, young adulthood and the related challenges will be outlined. Revenge will then be defined, and explored by: types, components, forgiveness, triggers, personality and gender differences, functions, outcome and theories on revenge. Self-regulation will then be defined and explored through its differing phases, as well as the implications of under- and misregulation. Finally, self-regulation will be discussed as a key factor in relationships and revenge.

Young Adulthood

Young adulthood (18-30 years), is associated with achieving certain tasks, specifically the development of an individual identity, responsibility, autonomy and financial independence (Arnett, 2004; Erford, 2017; Papalia, Sterns, Feldman, & Camp, 2007). These tasks are strongly modulated by establishing relationships with friends and romantic partners (Fincham & Cui, 2011; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). The attainment of intimacy in a romantic relationship is seen as a crucial developmental task representing progression into adulthood (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). The inability to establish and maintain a romantic relationship may not only impede development (Erikson, 1968) but it may also have grave consequences for well-being throughout a person's life-span (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). This period is often associated with high-risk behaviours, relationship instability and discord (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). The inability to manage stress and conflict in intimate relationships may lead to dissatisfaction, ineffective communication,

infidelity, aggression and the termination of relationships (Rodrigues, Hall, & Fincham, 2006).

The end of a romantic relationship between young adults is often described as one of the most difficult and trying times during this developmental period. Individuals may struggle to adjust to the breakup, finding it difficult to forgo the relationship (Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014). When extradyadic (physical or emotional infidelity) involvement is detected or suspected, it can destroy a relationship, cause enduring emotional scars, and adversely impact on the interpersonal dynamic of the couple (Allen et al., 2005).

When faced with infidelity, aggrieved partners often experience a myriad of negative emotions, such as shock, hurt, shame and anger (Feeney, 2004). The consequences of infidelity may include mistrust in the relationship and reduced intimacy and may impact on other valued relationships. However, individuals respond to infidelity differently. Some individuals may follow a constructive approach, by discussing the issues with their partner or seeking professional assistance. Others may take on a more passive approach, avoiding or denying the incidents. Finally, others may engage in a more vengeful approach, such as engaging in aggressive confrontations or getting even (Wang, King, & Debernardi, 2012).

Revenge

Fromm (1992) defines revenge as "a spontaneous reaction to intense and unjustified suffering inflicted upon a person. It differs from normal defensive aggression in two ways: (1) It occurs after the damage has been done, and hence is not a defence against a threatening danger. (2) It is of much greater intensity, and is often cruel, lustful and insatiable" (p.304). It involves getting even and executing payback against someone whom another feels has aggrieved them (Gollwitzer & Denzier, 2009). Revenge is, therefore, a reciprocal behavioural response to either a real or a perceived provocation (McCullough, 2008; Yoshimura & Boon, 2014).

Revenge is a common human trait (McCullough, 2008) and is a typical response to a perceived injustice (Gower, 2013). Pre-industrial civilisations considered revenge to be a fundamental aspect of retribution and justice (Amegashie & Runkel, 2012). Certain cultures view revenge as a duty, a way of re-establishing honour and justice and a way of deterring further victimisation (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

Types of revenge. Revenge can be considered on a continuum and can range from mild to moderate and to severe. The mild to moderate ranges, seen as "everyday" acts, may still fall within social norms and conventional patterns of interaction. These may include gossip, flirtation with non-significant others or ignoring or disregarding someone (Boon, Deveau, & Alibhai, 2009). These milder or more mundane acts occur more regularly than the severe acts of revenge, which may be more publicised (Yoshimura & Boon, 2014).

Revenge often takes the form of harming another or withholding benefits (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). In his analysis of the goals and emotional outcomes of revenge, Yoshimura (2007) proposes nine types of behaviours associated with revenge. His top three include: active distancing, physical aggressiveness and reputation defamation. The other types are comprised of: new relationship initiation, uncertainty-increasing attempts, damage to property, resource removal, verbal exchanges and other acts.

Components of revenge. Revenge "may initially present in fantasy but is realized in action" (Haen & Weber, 2009, p. 84). Revenge fantasies are often violent in nature, and persist over time (Frijda, 1994). Goldberg (2004) found that fantasies may assist in healing from hurt and that they may benefit psychological health if they remain only as fantasies. Fantasies assist in understanding and coming to terms with feelings of revenge (Gower, 2013). Goldberg (2004) describes the stabilisation of the ego through revenge fantasies. The fantasies preserve the bond between the aggressor and the transgressor, which is enacted

when separation is too unbearable to endure. It maintains hate, which is a way of holding on to the relationship.

Rumination is to be distinguished from revenge fantasies and can be defined as the "passive and repetitive focus on the negative and damaging features of a stressful transaction" (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003, p. 242). Although people vary in their inclination to ruminate (Maltby et al., 2008), it arises when the expectations of goal fulfilment are not accomplished and is mediated predominantly by anger (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007). People may ruminate to find meaning in hurtful encounters and to understand the implications of such encounters for their lives and in their relationships (Miller & Roloff, 2014). Rumination may extend anger, increase aggression (Bushman, 2002), lead to depression and intensify interpersonal and psychological suffering (Mor & Winquist, 2002). Two longitudinal studies have shown that continued rumination relates to increased measures of revenge as well as avoidance motivators (McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 2007).

Forgiveness. Reductions in avoidance motivations can be a measure for interpersonal forgiveness (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). Forgiveness involves letting go of negative feelings towards an aggressor and actively replacing them with positive emotions (Young et al., 2013). It is an adaptive psychological process which has been adversely related to rumination (McCullough et al., 2007). People who forgive those who have wronged them are less inclined to ruminate owing to their having cancelled the offender's debt. This reduces the possibility of experiencing negative emotions and increases the likelihood that they will be civil to their transgressor (Chan & Arvey, 2011). Further, forgiveness reduces motivations to revenge and decreases deliberate avoidance of the offender (McCullough et al., 1998).

Revenge triggers. Fantasies and thoughts of revenge often develop from *anger*, especially after someone has been placed in a position of inferiority in a humiliating way

(Böhm & Kaplan, 2011). Anger and retaliation are typical responses to victimisation, (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004) and punishment is often motivated by revenge (Bone & Raihani, 2015). Solomon (2004) distinguishes revenge and punishment according to the intensity of the emotions accompanying revenge. Some of these include spite and vindictiveness, which are lacking in punishment (Fitness & Peterson, 2008). Incidentally, punishing may increase ruminations about the event and inhibit people from dealing with negative emotions in more productive ways (Bushman, 2002). Negative emotions which are prompted by a transgression activate cognitive and motivational structures, including feelings, thoughts, perception biases and interpersonal motivations (Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, & Pollock, 2003). Miller and Roloff (2014) found that people who take conflict personally ruminate. This causes long-term hurt and enduring negative feelings towards the offender. Their study also suggests that, for some, hurt never really subsides and continues to cause emotional pain.

Miller and Roloff (2014) propose that *hurt* rather than anger is a mitigating factor for revenge. Certain hurtful events remain with people for extended periods of time. Chen and Williams (2011) suggest that social pain, which entails exclusion or being devalued in desired relationships or groups may last a lifetime. Being hurt affects behaviour, thoughts and attitudes and can affect current and future relationships (Vangelisti, 2009).

Within interpersonal relationships, Boon et al. (2009) noted three broad categories which explain participants' desire to get even. These are transgressions of relational norms (especially exclusivity and privacy), threats to the relationship (terminating the relationship or displaying relationships with others), and actions which degrade the self (gossiping, spreading rumours, exclusion and violence.) The vast variety of transgressions which elicit revenge helps to explain the differing actions in which people engage when taking revenge (Yoshimura & Boon, 2014).

Following a provocative incident, individual goals may drive or deter revenge behaviour especially when it comes to interpersonal relationships. This is especially evident when inflicting revenge could harm or terminate the relationship. Alternatively, goals aiming to sustain and repair the relationship may prevent vengeful behaviour (Boon, Alibhai, & Deveau, 2011).

The role of personality and gender in revenge. Research suggests that certain personality traits are more likely to either take revenge or forgive (Boon & Yoshimura, 2014; Lee & Ashton, 2012; Miller & Roloff, 2014; Strelan, Weick, & Vasiljevic, 2014; Young et al., 2013). The so-called "Dark Triad" traits, which include psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism, are personality traits encompassing low empathy, emotional aloofness, manipulation and exploitation (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013). These traits are associated with anger and envy and thus increase a person's propensity to take revenge (Veselka, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2014). Reduced empathy has been found to diminish a person's inclination to forgive (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002). An overestimation of the positive effects versus the negative consequences of revenge (Ferrigan, Valentiner, & Berman, 2000), as well as increased risk-taking and impulsivity (Crysel, Crosier, & Webster, 2013), has been linked to those with high levels of psychopathy. This suggests that people with high levels of psychopathy may be more disposed to taking revenge, irrespective of the personal risk it may pose. Those high in narcissistic traits may also be inclined to take revenge. Motivated to protect their reputations when offended, those high in narcissism act more aggressively when seeking retribution (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). They react impulsively, without considering the long-term consequences and tend to engage more in direct acts of aggression (Vazire & Funder, 2006). A narcissist's self-esteem is easily threatened, and they may try to compete with their rivals. This suggests that those high in narcissism may engage in more vengeful acts toward romantic rivals

(Goncalves & Campbell, 2014). People with higher levels of Machiavellianism have been found to pursue outcomes relating to power. The desire for power promotes the perception that, when someone is provoked, revenge is an effective response (Rasmussen & Boon, 2014). Machiavellianism is positively related to emotional revenge, so those high in Machiavellianism may resort more often to indirect aggression (Giammarco & Vernon, 2014).

Wilkowski, Hartung, Crowe and Chai (2012) explored whether revenge motivations explained differences in physical aggression between genders. Their study only partially substantiated their claim, suggesting that revenge is not the only mitigating factor. Their finding did, however, suggest that revenge rather than angry affect mediates gender differences in physical aggression. According to Campbell (2006), impulsivity, anxiety and the degree to which a person is able to empathise play an important mediating role.

The function of revenge. Revenge may serve as a function to help equalise or restore balance to a person after a perceived aggravation (Bone & Raihani, 2015). In order to find this balance, the quality and quantity of the revenge acts should be proportional to the original transgression (Bone & Raihani, 2015; Strelan et al., 2014; Yoshimura & Boon, 2014).

The experience of satisfaction is another motivating factor according to Gollwitzer, Meder, and Schmitt (2011), supporting an earlier study by Gollwitzer and Denzier (2009), which found that revenge was predominantly about conveying a message to the aggressor indicating the reasons for their suffering. However, revenge was considered effective only if this message was understood. De Quervain et al. (2004) found that the striatum, a subcortical brain structure, and the caudate nucleus were activated during a game which promotes acts of revenge, indicating that revenge offers the avenger feelings of satisfaction. However, the data was captured 1 minute before the actual act, which may indicate that the expected outcome

for the participants would be pleasurable. Carlsmith, Wilson and Gilbert (2008) duplicated

the study by de Quervain et al. (2004) with two additional components: 1: testing the

participants one minute after the act of revenge, and 2: testing the participants ten minutes

after the act of revenge. Their findings corroborated those by de Quervain et al. (2004), but

also indicated that the participants who engaged in revenge were considerably less happy

following the act performed at the indicated times.

Ramirez, Bonniot-Cabanac, and Cabanac (2005) found that hedonistic rewards were

experienced more by provoked than unprovoked aggression. However, Carlsmith et al.

(2008) maintain that people overestimate the hedonic rewards and that their experiences often

differ from their expectation. Their study showed that people who take revenge ruminate

more on the offender, and that people underestimate the emotional consequences of

instigating, executing and witnessing punishment. This phenomenon is known as the impact

bias and is the most commonly detected error in affective forecasting. Focalism, a cause of

the impact bias, is the tendency to overestimate the extent to which current thoughts will

occupy one's time in the future (Carlsmith et al., 2008).

Strelan et al. (2014) investigated the impact of the perception of power. They found

that people who perceive themselves to be chronically powerless have heightened sensitivity

to threats to the self. They counteract this by responding negatively. By contrast, people with

power of a higher status in relationships are more likely to forgive and can look past the

transgression to goals for maintaining the relationship (Karremans & Smith, 2010).

Differing theories of revenge have been proposed, including the General Strain

Theory (Agnew, 1992) which postulates that strains or dislikes for a certain event or

condition culminate in negative emotions which increase the need for corrective action (such

as revenge) to be taken. The action aids in escaping or tempering the strain. Bies, Tripp and

Kramer's (1997) Cognitive Theory of Revenge proposes that after a provocation people may

ruminate on the event to determine the offender's responsibility. The outcome of this appraisal will determine whether a person harbours vengeful fantasies or behaviours. Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958) suggests that responsibility for adverse conditions can be either internally or externally attributed. According to Horowitz (2007) this may lead to either outwardly displayed aggression or self-destructive behaviour.

Outcomes of revenge. Boon et al. (2011) suggest that, within romantic relationships, revenge may be both damaging and beneficial. Avengers may forsake their values, reputations and safety when engaging in revenge (Cota-McKinley, Woody, & Bell, 2001). Revenge may cause a cycle of revenge (Young et al., 2013). Stillwell, Baumeister and Del Priore (2008) argue that, as revenge is a distinctive form of aggression marked by emotional and behavioural intensity, it is often disproportionate to the preliminary transgression. This may lead to a cycle of retaliation, as the victim of the revenge may experience the payback as disproportional and may engage in their own counter-revenge. Thus, revenge may cause continuous conflict beyond that of the initial transgression, and may escalate conflicts, often with devastating consequences (Young et al., 2013). By contrast, Amegashie and Runkel (2012) surprisingly found that revenge may, in fact, stabilise conflict and lower its cost. However, Boon et al. (2011) found that in romantic relationships, when good outcomes were envisioned, they only benefited the avenger.

The literature and theories outlined, indicate that revenge may be perceived as a compensatory act for assumed wrongdoing and is thus an effort by the aggressed to adapt to the difficult situation. Therefore, it makes sense to approach revenge from a self-regulatory perspective, as self-regulation plays a predominant role in adapting to adversity.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is defined as "any effort by an individual to alter his or her own responses, overriding impulses and substituting them with another response that leads the

person's behaviour towards selected aim" (Luszczynska, Diehl, Gutiérrez-Doña, Kuusinen, & Schwarzer, 2004, p. 555). It encompasses the complex, protean and intricate process of setting logical and obtainable long and short-term goals and the ensuing regulation of emotions, cognitions and actions in a goal-directed manner which optimises the probability of goal achievement (Park, Edmondson, & Lee, 2012). Self-regulation thus encompasses aspects of self-control; the ability to override momentary impulses in favour of long-term goals (Carnevale & Fujita, 2016), cognitive control, which entails information processing and behaviour to adapt in relation to the current goal, rather than remaining rigid and inflexible (Wagner & Heatherton, 2016) and emotion regulation, which means comparing one's current emotional state to a desired state, and making the appropriate changes if these are incongruent (Carver & Scheier, 2017). Successful self-regulation requires constant self-monitoring and flexibility to adapt behaviour when progress in goal attainment is insufficient or when facing adversity (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Self-regulatory failure thus occurs when these processes are compromised.

Phases of self-regulation. Zimmerman (2000) identified three recurring phases relating to the process of self-regulation, namely: 1) the forethought phase; 2) the performance phase; and 3) the self-reflection phase.

The forethought phase. Forethought comprised of two distinct categories; task analysis and self-motivated beliefs. Task analysis refers to goal-setting and strategic planning (Zimmerman, 2002). It is a crucial process, as it entails the formation of goals, the formation of possible actions and the organisation of these components into goal-directed action plans. Self-motivated beliefs refer to self-efficacy: the belief in one's personal abilities; and outcome expectations: beliefs about the intended outcome and goal orientation entail the value associated with the process (Zimmerman, 2000).

The failure to self-regulate is attached to the failure to operationalise clear goals. Therefore, not having either a clear direction or discrepancies between goals, may lead to self-regulatory failure. Over- or underestimation of self-efficacy or one's ability may further lead to regulatory failure (Carver & Scheier, 2017; Zimmerman, 2000).

The performance phase. Zimmerman (2000) highlights two significant components in this phase; self-control and self-observation. Self-control encompasses processes such as "self-instruction, imagery, attention focusing and task strategies" (p. 26). These processes help to maintain focus and effort optimisation. Self-control enables a person to overrule desires or impulses which hinder the possibility of accomplishing other goals. Self-monitoring entails inspection and reflection on whether or not one is on the correct course to fulfil the desired goal. Thoughts, behaviours and emotions are regulated, and the continuous feedback is monitored by observing one's emotions and physical reactions, as well as obtaining feedback responses from others (Hoffmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, 2012).

This phase is called the test phase in the recurrent phases. This is owing to the nature of testing whether one's goals and current trajectory are in alignment. As this entails constant self-monitoring, ceasing to do so compromises self-control (Wagner & Heatherton, 2014).

The self-reflection phase. This phase demands self-judgement, which involves the inspection of one's enactment and the attribution of causality. It also includes self-evaluation, which necessitates the comparison of "self-monitored information with a standard or goal" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 31). If a discrepancy is foreseen between the set goals, and the anticipated outcome is jeopardised, a person may experience emotional discomfort. Therefore, the phase also includes the concept of change, whereby a person adjusts themselves to realign their goals and redirect their effort to reach goal attainment (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002). However, despite clear goals, and effective self-

monitoring, self-regulation failure may still occur due to the inability to achieve a specific goal (Wagner & Heatherton, 2015).

Brandtstädter and Rothermund (2002) propose a framework for understanding the discrepancies between unwavering goal pursuit and the plans that take form during adjustment, which affect goal attainability. Their model comprises two modes. "The *assimilative mode* comprises intentional efforts to modify the actual situation in accordance with personal goals, whereas the *accommodative mode* engages mechanisms that promote the adjustment of goals to constraints and changes in action resources" (p. 117).

The above explanation makes it apparent that self-regulation is a complex process. Therefore, several pathways to self-regulation failure will be outlined. According to Baumeister and Heatherton (1996), self-regulation failure can be divided into two categories, namely: under-regulation and misregulation. Under-regulation pertains to failures in exerting control over the self, whereas misregulation concerns exerting control in a manner which fails to produce the desired outcome.

Under-regulation

Self-regulation depletion. Self-regulation can be viewed either as a temperament-based trait which pertains to the ability to control impulses at differing times and in differing situations, or as a capacity-limited commodity, which can deplete after frequent use (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Owing to the nature of this study, we focus only on the capacity limited commodity of self-regulation. Self-regulation can be likened to a tank of fuel. With constant or continual use, fuel is burnt, and the tank may become empty, leaving the car with no reserves to continue driving. The car can be used again only if it is refuelled. So too for humans, the ability to self-regulate may become depleted, and will have to be replenished only after resting (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Reduced blood glucose levels, the underdevelopment of emotional

regulation skills, impairments in executive functions or recent or continuous exposure to environmental or situational stressors may impede a person's ability to self-regulate. When faced with real or perceived threats, discrimination or lack of congruity between a desired goal and reality, a person may negatively overreact (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007; van den Bos, 2010).

Under-regulation of cognition and emotions: Cognitive control is initiated by attention; initial awareness relates to the first stage of information processing. Attentional control is thus an integral aspect of self-regulation. Effective management may prevent the initiation of an undesirable response sequence. After losing attentional control, people may struggle to regain it (Wagner & Heatherton, 2016). Thus, loss of attentional control is related to self-regulatory failure. A crucial aspect of cognitive control includes transcendence. Transcendence involves focusing one's awareness beyond the immediate situation. The failure of transcendence is central to self-regulation failure. When attention shifts from long-term goals and attaches instead to the immediate current situation in the here-and-now, a person's capacity to self-regulate may weaken (Faber & Vohs, 2013). Transcendence is also an aspect of emotion regulation (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001; Wagner & Heatherton, 2014). Looking past the current situation is an important aspect of the mitigation of frustration, disappointment and anger. Emotional distress may impede a person's ability to suppress unsolicited impulses often resulting in engagement in self-defeating behaviours (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Wagner & Heatherton, 2014). However, excessive regulation over a period of time may also prompt emotional reactivity and weaken a person's capacity for emotion regulation. Negative affect decreases self-monitoring, and depletes self-regulatory resources. In this state, people often forgo goals, succumbing to impulses in an attempt to repair their moods (Tice et al., 2001).

A controversial notion of self-regulation is the idea of acquiescence (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). This notion postulates that few behaviours are truly involuntary and that people may (perhaps unconsciously) contribute to their own failures to self-regulate (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Sayette & Creswell, 2013). Acquiescence is noticeable in behaviours like binge eating and drinking (Sayette & Creswell, 2013) as well as in aggression and violent crimes (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996).

Misregulation

In contrast to under-regulation, misregulation is a form of self-regulatory failure associated with situations where resources are misdirected. An individual may be able to exert a level of self-control, but ultimately still fail, as efforts are mistaken or wasted in various other ways (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) found three main causes of misregulation, of which the first is misunderstood contingencies or false beliefs about the world and the self. This may involve setting unattainable goals which are likely to fail. Excessive persistence in these goals and continued failure may increase frustration and emotional distress. False assumptions about emotions may increase the likelihood of acting aggressively in the hope that these actions will decrease the emotions. Affect regulation is further hampered by the belief that methods previously used on one type of emotion will be successful in resolving other emotions (Cervone, Mor, Orom, Shadel, & Scott, 2013). The second cause of misregulation is that of unrealistic efforts to control the uncontrollable, for example, thought suppression. Efforts to try and control thoughts may inadvertently cause obsessive intrusion of the thought. Actively focussing on processes which have become automatic may cause a person to choke under pressure (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Finally, misregulation is caused by over-prioritising of affect regulation. This entails focussing on irrelevant issues within the problem. Problems often necessitate multiple self-regulatory efforts. If someone focuses on the incorrect aspect to regulate, they

may fail to solve the problems that are ultimately causing the issues to become exaggerated (Clarkson, Hirt, Jia, & Alexander, 2010; Clarkson, Otto, Hassey, & Hirt, 2016). A common mistake is that of prioritising short-term affect regulations at the expense of other more practical aspects. With focus diverted onto affect, the problem may become compounded, worsening the outcome. This form of misregulation is evident in procrastination. Further, focussing on affect is associated with the inability to control impulses. This may lead to risky behaviour in an effort to control negative affect (by drinking, smoking, going on shopping sprees). These behaviours may briefly soothe the affect, but, ultimately, distraction is time-limited, and negative affect returns, because the underlying cause was not addressed (Faber & Vohs, 2013; Sayette & Creswell, 2013).

Lapse activated responses. Another form of misregulation is that of lapse-activated responses (Wieber & Gollwitzer, 2016). This entails lapsing in self-regulatory behaviour (such as having a cigarette, while trying to quit). This initial lapse initiates subsequent behaviour ("I've already had one cigarette, I may as well have the whole box"), as people believe that they have failed in totality at their initial regulatory efforts. Failure is attributed to the self, lowering self-control. The subsequent behaviour, however, has far more detrimental consequences than the initial lapse. Subsequent lapses may result from reduced self-monitoring after the initial lapse (Faber & Vohs, 2013). This may be due to the distressing nature of the person having to face their behaviour after having failed to live up to their own standards. Alternatively, gaining much pleasure from the initial lapse, a person may choose to focus on the gain achieved (Laran & Janiszewski, 2011; Sayette & Creswell, 2013).

Self-Regulation as a Key Factor in Relationships and Revenge

Research on relationships and self-regulation suggest two fundamental notions, namely, that a) relationship partners influence the manner in which the other self-regulates and b) the way in which a relationship partner self-regulates influences the quality of the

relationship (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004; Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Finkel et al., 2006; Gable, 2006; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). Similarly, self-regulatory resources and strategies have ramifications for relationships. These may influence how people act or feel towards the relationship partner (Feeney, 2004; Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Karremans, Verwijmeren, Pronk, & Reitsma, 2009). Low levels of satisfaction and depleted self-regulation have been linked to infidelity (Ciarocco, Echevarria, & Lewandowski, 2012). Aggrieved individuals differ in how they cope with these provoking events.

Infidelity can be viewed as a form of rejection. An adulterous partner has rejected the norms and values of the relationship, and possibly rejected the love and affection of the aggrieved partner. Rejection has been found to lower self-control (Blackhart, Baumeister, & Twenge, 2006) and increase vengeful behaviour (Chester & DeWall, 2016). However, how rejection was attributed, as well as personal rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996) was found to influence a person's self-control (Sinclair, Ladny & Lyndon, 2011). Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958) pertains to attaching meaning to our own and others' behaviours to determine the cause of certain events. Indirect rejection can be assigned as an external attribution for rejection (e.g., my travelling was the cause of his cheating). This may lead to the demise of the relationship being blamed on external factors, increasing hope as well as behaviour aimed at maintaining the relationship (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Direct rejection assigned an internal attribution, such as using another's personal characteristics to justify the rejection. Internal attributions include "physical appearance, intelligence, behavior, and/or the personality traits of the rejected individual" (Sinclair et al., 2011, p. 505). External attributions assist the self-serving bias in protecting the self-esteem (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004). Therefore, if an external attribution cannot be made, self-esteem is negatively impacted and a person's desire to retaliate is heightened (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). Factors that influence engagement in goal-directed action include: (a) belief that a

degree of control is exerted over one's actions and (b) there is a fair world wherein actions lead to predictive outcomes (see Kay, Sullivan, & Landau, 2015; Landau, Kay, & Whitson, 2015). Depleted self-regulation is linked to aggressive responses in situations where a person's desired goals are in direct contrast to their current reality (Denson, von Hipple, Kemp, & Teo, 2010; DeWall, Baumeister, Schurtz, & Gailliot, 2010; DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2005). Infidelity and the possible breakup of a relationship produces a discrepancy between the desired goal of having a relationship and the current state of the relationship. To reconcile the discrepancy, a person may change their desired goal (i.e. no longer desire to have a relationship). Alternatively, a person may respond automatically with goal-directed behaviour aimed at maintaining the relationship. These behaviours may be unsolicited, and entail monitoring, following and attempts to re-engage in the relationship (Battaglia, Richard, Datteri, & Lord, 1998; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Palarea, Cohen, & Rohling, 2000).

In contrast, insufficient self-regulatory resources may hinder acceptance and relinquish the relational goal. This may impede a person's inclination to disengage in automatic goal-directed behaviour. When the desired goals are not attained, rumination ensues, which may increase the possibility of taking revenge (McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 2007; Wells & Mathews, 1996). From a self-regulatory perspective, Goal Process Theory states that rumination progresses after failed advancement towards higher-order goals (Martin & Tesser, 2006). A central assumption in the theory is that the closer the unattained goal is to one's self-concept (such as maintaining a relationship), the more frequent and intense the ruminative response will be. Relief from rumination is achieved only once attainment of the goal has been accomplished and feedback on inadequate progress is received or when the goal is disregarded (Martin & Tesser, 2006). Although rumination is considered a beneficial strategy for gaining insight into and reducing negative affect

(Papageorgiou & Wells, 2001), rumination on emotions and experiences of anger has been associated with relational aggression in young adults (Peled & Moretti, 2010). Rumination on anger was found to impede executive functioning, especially relating to switching attention away from ruminative thoughts, and obstructing long-term memory (Whitmer & Banich, 2009). In an effort to control the intrusive and aversive mental processes, Denson (2009) proposes that anger rumination can deplete limited self-regulatory resources which in turn may increase the likelihood of retaliatory aggression.

Conclusion

Young adulthood is a developmental period during which forming romantic relationships is considered vital. However, infidelity and the demise of romantic relationships is postulated as some of the most challenging experiences during this period. Infidelity is linked to a myriad of negative emotions and long-lasting consequences. In order to overcome this trying period, aggrieved partners may engage in thoughts and actions of revenge. Revenge may serve a variety of functions, including repaying a debt, delivering a message, gaining satisfaction and beliefs about hedonistic pleasure. Revenge comprises different components, including, fantasies, rumination and actual acts of revenge. These components were found to have both constructive and destructive potential. To understand revenge and its components in more depth revenge should be understood from a self-regulatory perspective. Self-regulation pertains to adjustment of the emotions, cognitions and actions in relation to specific goals. Self-regulatory failure occurs when these processes are compromised by either under-regulation or misregulation. Under-regulation pertains to failures in exerting control over the self, whereas misregulation concerns exerting control in a way that fails to bring about the desired outcome. Infidelity not only creates a discrepancy of the goal of having a relationship but may also deplete self-regulatory resources. How discrepancies are attributed is associated with the if, how and extent to which people will engage with revenge.

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Abstract

The formation of romantic relationships is a fundamental aspect of young adulthood. The aim of this study was to explore typical thoughts and emotions integral to revenge after real or suspected infidelity and to propose a model representing the perceived cause and effect relationship between these thoughts, emotions and self-regulatory strategies. A non-probability sample of eight young adults participated in the study. Through Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA), and Thematic Analysis, 14 themes were identified and developed into a hypothetical model of revenge and self-regulation. The results show that revenge is a complex construct which unfolds over time within a wider context of different systems of experiences, emotions, thoughts and behaviours. It was postulated that rumination is a key deciding factor in the development of revenge, depending on the extent to which insight was gained through rumination. However, taking into account the hypothetical aim and limitations of the study, recommendations for further research were suggested before final conclusions could be made about the complex interplay between revenge and self-regulation.

Keywords: Revenge, vengeance, self-regulation, romantic relationships, infidelity, young adulthood.

Revenge after termination of a romantic relationship in young adults: a self-regulatory perspective

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Introduction

Young adulthood is a developmental period strongly associated with the formation of romantic relationships (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Fincham & Cui, 2011; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). However, these relationships are often unstable and fraught with discord (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). The inability to resolve conflict in these relationships may lead to relationship termination (Rodrigues, Hall, & Fincham, 2006), which is marked as one of the most trying times in this developmental period (Lee & O'Sullivan, 2014). This may be further aggravated when the breakup is caused by infidelity. Aggrieved partners may face enduring emotional scars, varying negative emotions and adverse reactions in themselves and in the partner who has inflicted their pain (Allen et al., 2005; Feeney, 2004; Wang, King, & Debernardi, 2012). Subsequently, in an effort to regain stability and control, people often resort to vengeful thoughts and acts of revenge (Chester & DeWall, 2016).

Revenge is defined as "a spontaneous reaction to intense and unjustified suffering inflicted upon a person. It differs from normal defensive aggression in two ways: (1) It occurs after the damage has been done, and hence is not a defence against a threatening danger. (2) It is of much greater intensity, and is often cruel, lustful and insatiable" (Fromm, 1992, p. 304). It involves getting even and exacting payback against someone whom another feels has aggrieved them (Gollwitzer & Denzier, 2009).

However, not all aggrieved partners take revenge. Gunderson and Ferrari (2008) propose that certain individuals take revenge, while others harbour ill wishes towards their partners. Alternatively, others may opt to forgive the transgression. Blame attributions and behavioural responses are influenced by the perception of the severity of the unfair event (Bone & Raihani, 2015). Revenge can assume a variety of forms and can vary in intensity (Boon, Deveau, & Alibhai, 2009; Yoshimura & Boon, 2014; Yoshimura, 2007). Yoshimura (2007) proposes differing types of behaviours associated with revenge, inter alia: active distancing, physical aggressiveness, reputation defamation, new relationship initiation, uncertainty-increasing attempts, property damage, resource removal and verbal exchanges. Revenge can serve a variety of functions, for example, restoring balance (Bone & Raihani, 2015; Strelan, Weick, & Vasiljevic, 2014; Yoshimura & Boon, 2014); delivering a message (Gollwitzer & Denzier, 2009; Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011); gaining satisfaction (de Quervain et al., 2004; Gollwitzer et al., 2011); and the hedonistic pleasure believed to be derived from revenge (Ramirez, Bonniot-Cabanac, & Cabanac, 2005).

Revenge may initially develop from fantasies (Haen & Weber, 2009) that are often ferocious and enduring in nature (Frijda, 1994). Revenge fantasies have been found to have both destructive and constructive components; they may either assist in the healing process or they may lead to acts of revenge (Goldberg, 2004; Gower, 2013). Fantasies, thoughts and acts of revenge stem from negative emotions such as anger (Böhm & Kaplan, 2011), and hurt (Miller & Roloff, 2014). In romantic relationships, these feelings could occur after relational norms have been disregarded, when the relationship is threatened or when one person feels degraded (Boon et al., 2009). If conflict is taken personally, rumination may ensue (Miller & Roloff, 2014).

Rumination is defined as the "repetitive thoughts generated by attempts to cope with self-discrepancy that are directed primarily toward processing the content of self-referent

information and not toward immediate goal-directed action" (Mathews & Wells, 2004, p. 131-132). Like revenge fantasies, rumination has been found to have both beneficial and destructive components. Rumination may assist in understanding and making sense of hurtful encounters (Miller & Roloff, 2014). However, research has linked rumination to prolonged anger, increased aggression (Bushman, 2002), depression and interpersonal and psychological suffering (Mor & Winquist, 2002). Rumination has further been linked to increased measures of revenge (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001; McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007). Revenge could have both damaging and beneficial effects on romantic relationships (Boon, Alibhai, & Deveau, 2011). Values, reputations and personal safety are often forsaken in the pursuit of revenge (Cota-McKinley, Woody, & Bell, 2001). Because revenge may be perceived as a compensatory act for assumed wrongdoing and is thus an effort to adapt to the difficult situation, it makes sense to approach revenge from a self-regulatory perspective, as self-regulation plays a predominant role in the adaption to adversity.

In general, self-regulation pertains to the capacity to evaluate, alter and direct thoughts, emotions and behaviour in relation to specific goals (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Self-regulation entails setting both short and long-term goals and driving emotions, cognitions and actions in such a way that goal achievement is optimised (Park, Edmondson, & Lee, 2012). Luszczynska, Diehl, Gutiérrez- Doňa, Kuusinen, and Schwarzer (2004) define self-regulation as "any effort by an individual to alter his or her own responses, overriding impulses and substituting them with another response that leads the person's behaviour towards a selected aim" (p. 555). Self-regulation thus encompasses aspects of self-control - the ability to override momentary impulses in favour of a long-term goal (Carnevale & Fujita, 2016); cognitive control - which entails information processing and behaviour to adapt in relation to the current goal, rather than remaining rigid and inflexible (Wagner & Heatherton,

2016) and emotion regulation, which comprises comparing one's current emotional state to a desired state and making appropriate changes if these are incongruent (Carver & Scheier, 2017).

According to Baumeister and Heatherton (1996), self-regulation failure can be divided into two categories, namely: under-regulation and misregulation. Under-regulation pertains to failures in exerting control over the self, whereas misregulation concerns exerting control in a manner which fails to produce the desired outcome. A form of under-regulation is the assumption that self-regulation is a capacity-limited commodity. A person's capacity can become depleted with frequent use (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007) and will be replenished only after rest (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Ineffective or prolonged cognitive control may deplete resources, inhibiting emotional control; similarly, ineffective or prolonged emotional control may deplete resources, thereby inhibiting cognitive control. An aspect of cognitive control involves transcendence; the ability to focus awareness beyond the immediate situation. Failure to transcend entails the shifting of focus from long term goals to the here-and-now, which may weaken a person's capacity to self-regulate (Faber & Vohs, 2013). Depleted self-regulation is associated with aggressive responses in situations where a person's desired goals are in direct contrast with their current reality (Denson, von Hipple, Kemp, & Teo, 2010; DeWall, Baumeister, Schurtz, & Gailliot, 2010; DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2005).

Relationships have been found to influence the manner in which a person self-regulates, which in turn impacts on the quality of the relationship (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004; Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Finkel et al., 2006; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Gable, 2006). Infidelity has been associated with depleted self-regulation (Ciarocco, Echevarria, & Lewandowski, 2012). This form of rejection lowers the self-control of the aggrieved person (Blackhart, Baumeister, & Twenge, 2006) and increases

retaliatory behaviour (Chester & DeWall, 2016). Infidelity and the possible demise of a relationship negates the goal of having a relationship. A clear discrepancy is highlighted between the current reality of the relationship and the desired goal of the relationship. When discrepancies occur and cannot be resolved they deplete self-regulatory resources which may cause negative emotions and rumination (Carver & Scheier, 2017; Feeney, 2004; Martin & Tesser, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000). This may further hinder acceptance and prolong the efforts to let go of potentially destructive relational goals (McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 2007). Alternatively, relational goals may change (i.e. there is no longer a desire to have a relationship). According to Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958), individuals attach meaning to their own and others' behaviours to determine the cause of certain events. How these attributions are assigned may impact on an individual's self-esteem and their desire to engage in vengeful behaviour (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004; Sinclair, Ladny, & Lyndon, 2011).

In historical times the law of Talion (an eye for an eye) was an attempt to regulate the proportionality of revenge (Gower, 2013). The mere creation of this law indicated the need for action to curb blind revenge. The need for such regulation has persisted, yet few studies have examined revenge from a self-regulatory perspective. Fewer studies have investigated revenge in romantic interpersonal relationships, and current research has focused more on the descriptive and expressive nature of revenge (Boon et al., 2009; Boon et al., 2011). Studies on the mechanism which either deters or encourages revenge have focused largely on the motivations for revenge, and on personality traits and forgiveness (Bone & Raihani, 2015; Chan & Arvey, 2011; McCullough et al., 2007; Rasmussen & Boon, 2014; Sheppard & Boon, 2012; Young et al., 2013). Therefore, it remains unknown how self-regulation is employed in response to thoughts, feelings and acts of revenge. Knowledge of self-regulatory strategies related to revenge within romantic interpersonal relationships is critically

important, as it may assist counsellors and psychologists in their understanding of how revenge manifests and how thoughts, feelings and experiences of revenge can, rather than being potentially destructive, facilitate growth, insight and the maintenance of healthy and mutually fulfilling relationships.

The aims of this study are therefore : 1) to identify the typical thoughts and emotions young adults have / have had relating to revenge after the termination of former romantic relationships; 2) to identify the self-regulatory strategies employed for managing these revenge-related thoughts and emotions; 3) to establish the perceived cause-effect relationship between these thoughts, emotions and self-regulation strategies; and 4) to develop a hypothetical model of how revenge is self-regulated.

Methodology

Approach and Design

Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004) was employed to achieve the aims of the study. IQA is a structured multi-methodological approach that aims to develop a systematic representation of a collective understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It was founded on the principles of grounded theory, action research and concept mapping (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004).

Participants

A non-probability sample of eight young adults between the ages of 23 and 30 participated in the study. The sample consisted of three males and five females. The participants were identified by means of criterion sampling (Maree & Pietersen, 2016) by approaching colleagues and acquaintances of the researcher requesting assistance in identifying individuals they knew who complied with the inclusion criteria for the study. The participants had to be at least 23 years old and had to have been in a romantic relationship for a minimum of six months. The relationship had to have ended owing to real or suspected

infidelity. The relationship in question must have ended a minimum of one year before the interview. No participants could have had any prior relationship with either the researcher or the study leader, nor could any participant have had a professional or romantic relationship with a mediator. Finally, the participants should have appeared, as judged by the mediators to the best of their ability, to be well-functioning individuals who were able to constructively discuss aspects of themselves in relation to former relationships.

Data Collection

The data was collected in two distinct phases. The first phase consisted of conducting semi-structured individual interviews. These individual interviews followed the same structure as the IQA group discussions (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). During the interview, the participants were asked to write down the uncensored thoughts that were prompted by the following questions:

1. *What were the typical thoughts you had in response to the termination of the former romantic relationship?*

2. *What were the typical emotions you experienced in response to the termination of the former romantic relationship?*

3. *To what extent did these thoughts and emotions include ideas, plans or feelings of revenge or of getting the ex-partner back in any way?*

4. *What did you typically do with these thoughts and emotions, especially those related to revenge?*

5. *If you did not experience any clear revenge-related thoughts or emotions, how do you make sense of this – what did you do to prevent them, and what does it tell us about yourself?*

The participants then shared their notes with the interviewer, and each question was discussed and clarified. During the second phase, the themes that emerged from the

interviews were used to compile a 91-item questionnaire which investigated the causal

relationship among all the themes. Each item posed a cause-and-effect question of which the

participants should select one (please see Appendix A). The questionnaire was then emailed

to the participants. They were required to complete the questionnaire within 48 hours and to

email it back to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was structured in two distinct phases, namely (i) a thematic analysis of

the individual interviews and (ii) the IQA analysis of the perceived cause-effect relationships

among the themes generated during the first phase.

"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns

(themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail"

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). For the purpose of this study, an inductive approach was

followed. An inductive approach was followed, which postulates that the researchers should

not approach the data with a pre-determined set of themes but should rather allow the data to

guide the formation of themes during the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding

of each data set followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, all the

audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. This assisted the researcher in

acquainting herself with the data. The transcripts were then analysed using NVivo, a

qualitative coding computer programme which easily connects codes and generates diagrams

from which themes can be identified and further coded. All the transcripts were initially

coded by both the researcher and her supervisor, who acted as co-coder. Themes were then

identified, grouped, defined, reviewed, refined and named. Finally, themes were linked to

extracts, and a selection of extracts was chosen which best described the theme identified.

Data analysis of the questionnaire consisted of a number of phases specific to the IQA methodology described by Northcutt and McCoy (2004), to provide a perceived cause-effect relation between the revenge-related emotions, cognitions and self-regulation strategies of participants in this study. The researcher scored the questionnaires by calculating the frequency of votes obtained by each possible relationship. A frequency analysis was completed to determine the cumulative frequency (CF), the cumulative percent relations (CPR), the cumulative percent frequency (CPF) and, finally, the power of degree optimisation. From these values, an Inter-Relational Diagram (IRD) indicating the strength and direction of the relations was compiled. The IRD was then used to develop a Systems Influence Diagram (SID), which is a visual representation or hypothetical model of the participants' perception of the relationship among the themes. To develop this model, the process outlined by Northcutt and McCoy (2004, p. 173-183) was followed systematically. The process entails plotting the themes in the model according to the extent to which they cause or are being caused by any other themes. Redundant causal links are then removed stepwise. Redundant links are "those links between two themes in which, even if removed, a path from the driver to the outcome can be achieved through an intermediary theme" (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p.178). The final outcome is the hypothetical model of the participants' perceived cause and effect relationship between the themes.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative enquiry of the study, Guba and Lincoln's framework as operationalised by Shenton (2004) was applied. The framework consists of a) credibility, b) transferability c) dependability, and d) conformability. *Credibility* was achieved by spending extended time on analysing the data and producing a descriptive interpretation of the data. Further, the IQA has a high internal validity owing to the repetitive manner in which questions are asked, which facilitates the formation of the data analysis. *Transferability* was not crucial in this study as generalisation was not the ultimate aim. This

study aimed to develop a model of revenge and self-regulation that would act as departure point/framework for further research. *Dependability* was achieved by following the precise and methodical rules for a visual representation outlined by Northcutt and McCoy (2004). *Conformability* was achieved by following an inductive approach to thematic analysis, while cause-effect relationships were based on the participants' perceptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained for this study from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University (NWU) (approval number NWU-00056-17-A1). The ethical principles of risk, dual relationships, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and reciprocity were applied to the study.

Risk. Although IQA is usually conducted in discussion groups, owing to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic under investigation in this study, individual interviews were conducted to generate themes during phase 1 of this study. An independent psychologist was employed to manage any possible emotional distress elicited by the study. *Dual relationships* may cause "a structural power differential that opens the possibility for abuse of participants by researchers" (Bourdeau, 2000, p. 1). Therefore, no participants had any prior relationship with either the researcher or the study leader, nor did any participant have a professional or romantic relationship with a mediator.

Informed consent. Informed consent forms were emailed to the participants well in advance of the interview. The informed consent form gave a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and the possible risks involved, as well as permission to record the interviews. *Confidentiality and anonymity.* The researcher protected the participants from the unintended contravention of confidentiality through anonymisation. Specifically, this included assigning new names to each participant when the transcripts were produced.

Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the identifiable data was separated. The original storing code which links individuals to data is securely stored. The researcher also ensured that, by restricting access to include only the researcher and her supervisor and by committing to maintaining confidentiality by not discussing issues which arose during the interviews so as not to identify a participant in any way, and by not disclosing what was discussed (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008) confidentially was ensured. Finally, the person who transcribed the interviews completed a confidentiality agreement.

Reciprocity. The participants were not remunerated for their participation but were offered a non-alcoholic beverage during the interview.

Results

Results from the first phases of data collection and analysis yielded 14 themes. Table 1 provides a detailed explanation of each theme and includes verbatim examples.

Table 1

Themes with verbatim examples

No.	Theme	Description and verbatim examples
1.	Self-doubt	This theme pertains to insecurities and self-blame as well as to how these insecurities lead to jealousy and difficulties in trusting. Insecurities are viewed as a lack of confidence in oneself. It relates to feeling threatened and inadequate and within this study leads to self-blame. Self-blame refers to participants feeling as if they had either done something or failed to do something in the relationship, which may have pushed their partner to cheat. This often leads to jealousy, in which the participants would compare themselves with the person with whom their partner had an affair. After the relationship's demise, the participants struggled to trust their former partner. They became suspicious, often dissecting previous interactions and communication with their ex to find inconsistencies. Verbatim examples: "I actually thought maybe it was my fault maybe I'm

not good enough, I didn't treat him well. I kept asking myself what did I do wrong for him to get to this point"; "I compared myself with her, why did he do this with her? What is wrong with me?"

| 2 | Isolation from family/friends | Isolation in this study describes withdrawing from others, such as family members and friends. This occurred after the relationship dissolved and may describe a time in which the participants kept to themselves the fact that the relationship had ended.

Verbatim example: "Because I stop talking to people, I stop spending time with my friends and sometimes because it was so intense I didn't want people to know what was going on in my life. I was just by myself with all the emotions." |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 3 | Cutting ties | This theme describes breaking any ties a participant had with their ex-partner. It is a period in which the participants did not contact or make any attempts to engage with their ex. This theme also includes blocking them on social media.

Verbatim example: "Cutting ties, as hard as it is, if I don't see what is going on in his life if I don't see new updates, even if I don't check anything because I feel like I will be reversing back somehow." |
| 4 | Initial confusion and shock | This theme refers to the participants' initial account of confusion and shock at the disintegration of the relationship. They often referred to being shocked at the actions of their partner and feeling confused as to why the transgression had occurred.

Verbatim example: "I honestly thought we were fine and suddenly it was just out of the blue"; "It was the last thing on my mind…I never expected it. Yah there is a shock actually." |
| 5 | Providing a justification for revenge | The participants required a reason for having vengeful thoughts and feelings. They particularly needed to justify to themselves why having such thoughts is permitted. Holding one's ex-partner accountable for their actions or wanting them to see the error of their ways often served as justification for the participants to engage in ideas of revenge.

Verbatim example: "Ek wil net hê so iemand moet ook die seer voel… Al is dit emosioneel, of iets,…ek het toe so gevoel dat ek ook net wil hê hulle moet dink oor wat hulle gedoen het, dat jy nie sommer net jou |

verantwoordelikheid in n verhouding kan weggooi nie."

6	Revenge fantasies	Revenge fantasies pertain to thinking about, considering, having fantasies about revenge on the ex-partner. It does not include the actual act of revenge.
		Verbatim example: "I wanted like two to three weeks where things are just going bad for him, like every second or third day just things going bad for him. Like I wanted someone to hack his email so that he couldn't get all these updates for work and really get fired."
7	Revenge	This theme describes the act of revenge. It includes acts performed to fulfil the goal of hurting and humiliating the ex-partner. Disclosure of intimate details to family and friends may serve to achieve these types of goals.
		Verbatim example: "I did hurt him a lot with my words which was fun at times"; "I asked this person [to accompany me] because I knew he would bother my ex."
8	Following, /stalking the ex-partner	Stalking in this study refers to either physical or online stalking. Physical stalking would relate to going to the ex-partner's home and work. Online stalking refers to the constant checking of the ex-partner (or the person they cheated with) on social media profiles like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Snapchat.
		Verbatim examples: "I was stalking him everywhere. I needed to know what he was doing, [and] who he was doing it with"; "I would go to Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook like anywhere, anything that he posted, so like yah I stalked him."
9	Negative emotions	Negative emotions in this study refer to a myriad of emotions which the participants described after the dissolution of the relationship. These predominantly included: emotions of anger; hurt; betrayal; embarrassment; shame; frustration; and disappointment.
		Verbatim examples: "After the relationship ended I was angrier that is when the revenge started, but then after a while when that anger turned to hurt I was like no this whole event thing is playing at my anger."; "deurmekaar…maar ook half kwaad en hartseer."

| 10 | Insight and closure | Insight refers to the participants gaining a greater understanding of the cause and effect of the troubles in the relationship. It pertains to the utilisation of rational thinking to obtain a degree of closure surrounding the events that led to the demise of the relationship.

Verbatim example: "I have accepted who I am, and I have realised that I have no power over the next person's actions, and my self-worth doesn't come from a relationship." |
|----|----|----|
| 11 | Forgiveness | Forgiveness pertains to a change in a participant's feelings and attitudes towards their ex-partners. It is marked by participants letting go of negative emotions such as anger and vengefulness and an increase in their ability to wish their ex-partners well.

Verbatim example: "I wish he ends up with a good person, wish they will end up getting married, and he is gonna [going to]. I wish him well." |
| 12 | Self-improvement | Self-improvement in this study pertains to any actions which participants took after the break-up to improve themselves. Self-improvement may include fitness and health, acquiring new skills or hobbies, or focusing on one's career or studies.

Verbatim examples: "I was like I'm gonna move on, and I'm gonna make myself a better person for who I am gonna find next."; "I got healthy." |
| 13 | Seeking social support | This theme showcases the support structures to which the participants turned during this difficult time. They derived support mainly from their family and friends. Support may include being available to the participant, listening to their concerns, engaging in gossip, engaging in revenge fantasies, giving advice, distraction and being a sounding-board.

Verbatim examples: "I had a lot of support from my family, friends during that time."; "My family was so lovely, and they would phone me every night and ask how am I doing." |
| 14 | Rumination | Rumination refers to the repetitive thoughts generated by attempts to understand, make sense or cope with the dissolution of the relationship. Rumination pertained to participants revisiting the content of their relationship, their faults, the ex-partner's faults, the break-up and what had occurred before and after the relationship ended. |

Verbatim example: "This is depressing me, literally consuming the time and everything, am not coping, am really not coping."; "I couldn't stop thinking about, stop making my days about him."

Table 2 shows The Frequency Table for the participants' perceived cause-effect relationship between themes. Originally, power reached a maximum at 42.77, explaining 90.6% of variance. However, this included a large number of ambiguous relations, which are relationships attracting votes in both directions (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). As these ambiguous relationships could not be successfully resolved, it was decided to include only those relational pairs that received 4 or more (50% or more) of the participants' votes. This explains only 55.1% of the variance, and it did not include any ambiguous relationships. Only the theme pairs included in the model are shown in the Table.

Table 2

The Frequency Table

Theme pairs	F	CF	CPR	CPF	POWER
1→8	7	7	0.55	2.00	1.45
1→13	7	14	1.10	4.00	2.90
4→9	7	21	1.65	6.00	4.35
4→14	7	28	2.20	8.00	5.80
9→13	7	35	2.75	10.00	7.25
1←4	7	42	3.30	12.00	8.70
4→6	6	48	3.85	13.71	9.87
4→13	6	54	4.40	15.43	11.03
9→14	6	60	4.95	17.14	12.20
1→9	6	66	5.49	18.86	13.36
5←6	6	72	6.04	20.57	14.53
11←13	6	78	6.59	22.29	15.69
12←13	6	84	7.14	24.00	16.86
1→14	5	89	7.69	25.43	17.74
3→8	5	94	8.24	26.86	18.62
4→7	5	99	8.79	28.29	19.49
4→8	5	104	9.34	29.71	20.37
5→8	5	109	9.89	31.14	21.25

10→11	5	114	10.44	32.57	22.13
11→12	5	119	10.99	34.00	23.01
2←9	5	124	11.54	35.43	23.89
6←9	5	129	12.09	36.86	24.77
6←14	5	134	12.64	38.29	25.65
7←9	5	139	13.19	39.71	26.53
7←14	5	144	13.74	41.14	27.41
10←13	5	149	14.29	42.57	28.29
1→2	4	153	14.84	43.71	28.88
1→12	4	157	15.38	44.86	29.47
3→6	4	161	15.93	46.00	30.07
3→12	4	165	16.48	47.14	30.66
4→5	4	169	17.03	48.29	31.25
6→7	4	173	17.58	49.43	31.85
10→12	4	177	18.13	50.57	32.44
2←4	4	181	18.68	51.71	33.03
8←9	4	185	19.23	52.86	33.63
8←14	4	189	19.78	54.00	34.22
13←14	4	193	20.33	55.14	34.81

Note. F = Frequency; CF = Cumulative Frequency; CPR = Cumulative Percentage; CPF = Cumulative Percentage Frequency.

Table 3 shows the Inter-Relational Diagram (IRD), which visually reflects the direction of the perceived cause-effect between the themes. Delta (Δ) is the difference between outgoing and incoming influences and indicates the position a theme takes in the hypothetical model. Theme 4 (initial confusion and shock) has the highest delta (9) and is therefore perceived as a primary driver (it causes, but is not caused by other themes), and is therefore placed to the extreme left of the model. In contrast, theme 8 (following/stalking) has the lowest delta (-6). It is therefore a primary outcome (only caused by other themes) and was consequently placed to the extreme right during the model's development.

Table 3

Inter-Relational Diagram (IRD)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	OUT	IN	Δ
1	■	↑		←				↑	↑			↑	↑	↑	6	1	5
2	←	■		←					←						0	3	-3
3			■			↑		↑				↑			3	0	3
4	↑	↑		■	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑				↑	↑	9	0	9
5				←	■	←		↑							1	2	-1
6		←	←		↑	■	↑		←					←	2	4	-2
7				←		←	■		←					←	0	4	-4
8	←		←	←	←			■	←					←	0	6	-6
9	←	↑		←		↑	↑	↑	■				↑	↑	6	2	4
10										■	↑	↑	←		2	1	1
11										←	■	↑	←		1	2	-1
12	←		←							←	←	■	←		0	5	-5
13	←			←					←	↑	↑	↑	■	←	3	4	-1
14	←			←		↑	↑	↑	←				↑	■	4	3	1

Note. ← = Incoming influence; ↑ = Outgoing influence; Δ = delta

Figure 1 shows the final hypothetical model of the participants' perceived cause-effect between the themes. According to figure 1, after the termination of their romantic relationship, the participants experienced an initial phase of confusion and shock. This led to self-doubt, which in turn made them experience negative emotions. Negative emotions led either to isolation from their family and friends or to repetitive thoughts. Isolation from family and friends was an outcome in itself, while repetitive thoughts led to one of two distinct routes – one clearly linked to revenge and the other clearly linked to non-revenge. The "revenge route" consists first of revenge fantasies, which culminates in either revenge or justification for revenge, followed by stalking/following the ex-partner. The "non-revenge-route" consists of first seeking social support, followed by gaining insight and achieving closure, forgiveness and finally self-improvement. It is interesting to note that the participants perceived cutting ties with the ex-partner as influencing both the revenge and the non-revenge routes.
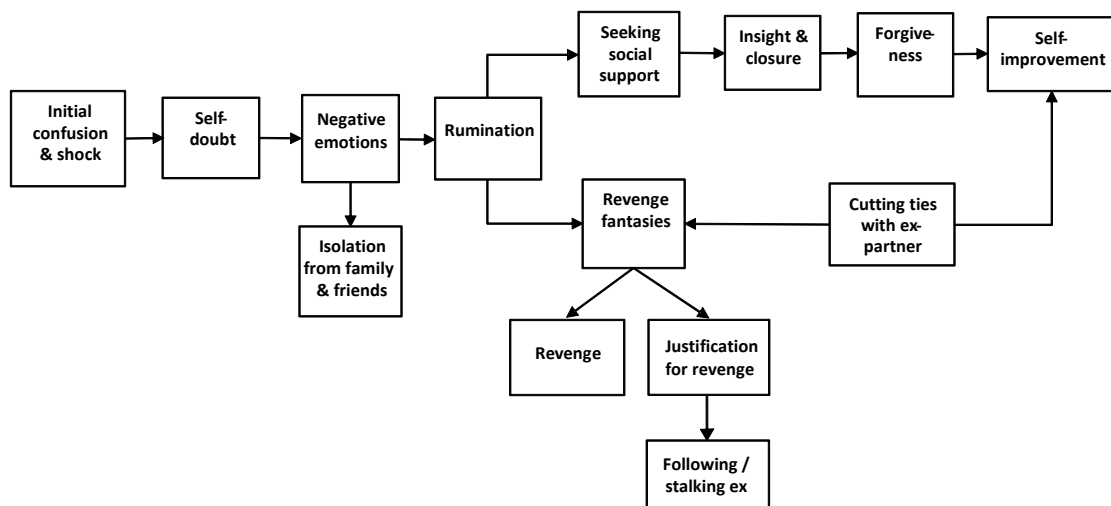
Figure 1. The Systems Influence Diagram (SID) / Hypothetical Model

Discussion

The discussion will systematically follow the different routes that emerged from the hypothetical model. The model can be divided into five main parts, namely: 1) The initial phase, 2) the rumination phase, 3) the non-revenge route, 4) the revenge route, and (5) the intersection between revenge and non-revenge

The Initial Phase

This phase included the initial stages of shock and confusion, self-doubt and negative emotions after the demise of a romantic relationship due to real or perceived infidelity. This resulted in some participants isolating themselves from their family and friends.

Theme 4: Initial shock and confusion. The initial shock and confusion serves as a point of departure within the model. Uncovering infidelity is often sudden, unexpected and filled with deception and lies (Subotnik & Harris, 2005). Hence, after such a revelation, initial shock and confusion are seen as normative reactions (Belu, Lee, & O'Sullivan, 2016). From a self-regulation perspective, infidelity (whether real or perceived, emotional or

physical) poses a threat to the establishment and maintenance of romantic relationships, which are understood to be a central goal of young adulthood (Fincham & Cui, 2011; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Both infidelity and the demise of the relationship cause a discrepancy between the goal of having a relationship and the reality of the present situation.

According to Carver and Scheier (2017) and Zimmerman (2000), a key aspect of self-regulation is to decrease a perceived discrepancy between a goal and a current state. The negative event may have caused the participants to lose cognitive control, making transcendence extremely difficult. The perceived discrepancy could, for the participants in this study, emphasize inconsistencies within the self. In addition, difficulty in looking beyond the transgression and deficits in cognitive control may be an indication of the cause of the next theme; self-doubt.

Theme 1: Self-doubt. Self-doubt reflected the participants' insecurities, jealousy and self-blame. This causality can be explained by self-discrepancy theory, which postulates that incongruent representations of the self result in emotional vulnerabilities (Higgins, 1987). Navigating through the initial shock and confusion, the participants may have experienced discrepancies between their actual and ideal selves, as well as possible discrepancies in societal and family expectations (Green, Campbell, & Davis, 2007). Green et al. (2007) further state that the self is cognitively linked to the representations of the other. This indicates that the participants' perception of themselves was interwoven with perceptions of their partners. They may have trusted their partners, which pertains to the belief that their partners would be receptive to their needs and would act in accordance with the best interests of the relationship (Rasmussen, Alibhai, Boon, & Ellard, 2016). With their perception of the other broken, doubt emerged. In trying to resolve this discrepancy, the participants gave way to self-doubt, wondering what they had done to contribute to their partners' behaviour. This is corroborated by Feeney (2008), who found that negative self-

perception linked relationship anxiety to negative working models of the self. Further, discrepancies have also been associated with low-esteem (Phillips & Hine, 2016) and emotional discomfort (Higgins, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000). This correlates with the proceeding theme of negative emotions.

Theme 9: Negative emotions. The intensity of negative emotions is linked to the attributions made about the relationship, the partner, the self and the act of cheating (Feeney, 2004; Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008). During the interviews a number of participants shared their views on the importance of the relationship, for example "we were talking marriage"; "we shared the same values". These statements are in line with literature, which emphasises the importance placed on romantic relationships (Conger et al., 2000; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001) and creates an understanding of the loss and severity of the negative emotions experienced by the participants in this study.

Negative emotions increase the prominence of whatever initiated the emotion (Wagner & Heatherton, 2014). This indicates that the participants' attention would thus be drawn to the transgression and their ex-partner. This focuses attention on the here and now, which makes transcendence difficult (Faber & Vohs, 2013; Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001; Wagner & Heatherton, 2016). A form of misregulation was noted in the participants. This specially referred to the beliefs that a solution which aided one emotion may help ease a different emotion. Social interaction is shown to help with sadness and depression, but social interactions have been found to fuel anger (Cervone, Mor, Orom, Shadel, & Scott, 2013), as one participant reported:

> When I was by myself it was mostly self-pity but whenever I was around other people like my friends I feel like that's what sparked the force of revenge, cause my friends were like, yeah I'm gonna get him and I was like yes we should.

Wagner and Heatherton (2014) found that negative emotions are the most prominent reason for unrestrained behaviour. This occurs because all the aspects of self-regulation are influenced by negative emotions like heightening desires for rewards, inhibiting self-monitoring, reducing the capacity for self-regulation, and prompting people to focus their attention on mood restoration. This occurs at the expense of goals and surrendering to impulses and desires. It is therefore not surprising that one outcome of negative emotions was isolation from family and friends.

Theme 2: Isolation from family and friends. The participants may have felt that isolation was the easier choice, as they felt overwhelmed, which is consistent with the opinions of Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, and Baumeister (2001), who reported that respondents isolated themselves as they were "too tired" (p. 229) to engage in hostile exchanges, as well as to counterbalance negative emotions or the escalation of conflict. Isolation may thus have assisted in conserving regulatory resources (Cunningham, Shamblen, Barbee, & Ault, 2005; Wesselmann, Wirth, Pryor, Reeder, & Williams, 2013) which may have been depleted by negative emotions. However, the literature (see Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Ciarocco, Sommer, & Baumeister, 2001; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998) reports that isolation or actively not engaging with others is extremely difficult, and that avoidance creates peculiar and trying interactions that can in themselves bring about a depleted state (Sommer & Yoon, 2013). This may explain why participants who did engage in isolation eventually sought out support from their family and friends, as illustrated by one participant:

I couldn't let anyone in because they will be like, that is crazy why would you do that?... It got to a point wherein it was too much, and I was struggling I could not go on this way I need[ed] to talk to somebody.

The Rumination Phase

Theme 14: Rumination. The second outcome following the negative emotions is indicated by the second phase of the model: rumination. From a self-regulatory perspective, rumination is defined as "repetitive thoughts generated by attempts to cope with self-discrepancy that are directed primarily toward processing the content of self-referent information and not toward immediate goal-directed action" (Mathews & Wells, 2004, p. 131-132). In contrast with studies which state that rumination led to negative emotions (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Kalokerinos, Résibois, Verduyn, & Kuppens, 2017), as well as depression (Donaldson & Lam, 2004; Lavender & Watkins, 2004; Phillips & Hine, 2016; Watkin & Mould, 2005), and negative self-evaluations (Rude, Maestas, & Neff, 2007), in this study it emerged that negative emotions led to rumination. The participants in this study therefore tended to use rumination as a strategy for understanding and minimizing negative emotions. This is consistent with the Self-Regulatory Executive Function (S-REF) Theory (Mathews & Wells, 2004; Wells & Mathews, 1996).

Differing views on rumination are expressed in the literature. Some (Papageorgiou & Wells, 2001; Mathews & Wells, 2004) postulate that rumination may prompt reflection and could enhance insight into negative emotions and problems. However, most research (Moberly & Watkins, 2008; Peled & Moretti, 2010; Phillips & Hine, 2016) focuses on the negative consequences associated with rumination. These differing views on rumination appear to highlight the two routes indicated in the SID, namely, the non-revenge route which could possibly be the result of insight gained through rumination, and the revenge route, which may have resulted from not gaining a sense of understanding through rumination.

The Non-Revenge Route

The non-revenge route encompassed seeking social support; insight and closure; forgiveness and self-improvement. This route is suggestive of more constructive coping.

Theme 13: Seeking social support. After rumination, those who chose to seek support from family and friends were less likely to engage in vengeful acts and more likely to forgive, which supports findings by other writers (Abrahamson, Hussain, Khan, & Schofield, 2012; Maynard, Piferi, & Jobe, 2016). The model thus suggests that support may act as a buffer against the revenge route. Support and familiarity could provide social safety, which offers acceptance and a sense of belonging (Akin & Akin, 2016). This has been linked to enhancing problem-solving, creativity, optimism and self-efficacy (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). It is thus reasonable to say that social support would influence insight and closure.

Theme 10: Insight and closure. Within this theme, a marked focus away from anger was noted in the participants' responses, which may indicate that a cognitive reappraisal occurred, or that the participants were able to transcend the negative event. They appeared to reframe the event leading to the demise of the relationship, which in turn changed their emotional responses to it. This supports findings by Finkel, Slotter, Luchies, Walton, and Gross (2013); and Troy, Wilhelm, Shallcross, and Mauss (2010). In alignment with Denson, Moulds, and Grisham (2012); as well as Sbarra, Smith, & Mehl (2012), the participants were better able to view the transgression rationally and thus to emotionally distance themselves from it. This could lead to enhanced subjective well-being (Gross & John, 2003). According to the model, insight and closure lead to forgiveness.

Theme 11: Forgiveness. McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang (2003) hypothesise that forgiveness may be "easier as [the] degree of responsibility changes" (p. 544), suggesting that as the participants attributed less blame to themselves and their partners, forgiveness may

have become easier. Forgiveness is, however, a complex concept. McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) define forgiveness as:

> the set of motivational changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner; (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender; and (c) increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender's hurtful actions (p. 321–322).

Even though insight and closure may lead to forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2003), forgiveness unfolds over time. Time is thus an essential component of forgiveness. It is evident from the interviews that the participants were still struggling to forgive their ex-partners: "I haven't entirely forgiven him"; "I'm not sure if I would say honestly, I have forgiven him and mean it, but I have forgiven myself". Therefore, the model does not necessarily imply that forgiveness has been obtained, but rather that a process towards forgiveness may have been started. The model shows that self-improvement logically follows insight and forgiveness.

Theme 12: Self-improvement. Self-improvement may entail self-discovery, exploration and advancement in motivation towards health and career prospects. Important relationships may restrict a person's desire and motivation (Subotnik & Harris, 2005), as one participant stated:

> I have learnt that I have to look out for number one, which is me, and I have to be my own person in a relationship, my partner cannot define me…my identity was him, everything about me was about that relationship…having my own identity is the best thing that has ever happened to me…I have learnt to appreciate me and love me first before somebody else.

This indicates that personal goals have shifted. Previous goals may have concerned the maintenance of the relationship or avoidance of negative emotions and conflict, but through support and clarity these appear to have shifted towards self-improvement. Self-improvement enhanced the participants' self-esteem in alignment with Crocker and Park (2004) and Kurman (2006).

The Revenge Route

The alternate path from rumination in the model is the revenge route, which encompasses revenge fantasies; revenge itself and justification for the revenge, as well as following/stalking.

Theme 6: Revenge fantasies. It is proposed here that in those situations when rumination does not result in insight and understanding, revenge fantasies occur. This is indicated in the model in the causal relationship between rumination and revenge fantasies. Revenge fantasies are distinguished from rumination in this study, as they pertain to specific fantasies about hurting the ex-partner in various ways. As Frijda (1994) points out, revenge fantasies are often violent in nature. This was reflected by some of the participants as one stated, "Ek wou… laat iemand hom [the person she had cheated on] bliksem, goed bliksem, dit was nogal 'n sterk plan en ek het lank daarmee geloop". In the case of the inability to resolve painful feelings, revenge fantasies can be viewed as a coping strategy. This is consistent with the literature, which maintains that fantasies may increase satisfaction, lower frustration and enhance self-esteem (Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008; Haen & Weber, 2009). These studies corroborate Goldberg (2004), who reported that revenge fantasies may assist in healing from hurt and may benefit a person psychologically if they remain fantasies. It also supports Horowitz (2007), who posits that victims may gain a sense of power and

control through fantasy. However, this is not reflected in the model, as the participants either engaged in revenge acts or had to provide a justification for their fantasies.

Theme 7: Revenge. Acts of revenge primarily included belittling the ex behind their back, disclosing intimate details of the relationship to others, attacking the ex's character, confrontation, and acts aimed at inducing jealousy. Certain types of revenge acts were conducted on impulse, which is corroborated by findings that suggest revenge is, in fact, impulsive (Brewer, Hunt, James, & Abell, 2015). Overriding impulsive behaviour is a definitive feature of self-regulation (Luszczynska et al., 2004). One could therefore argue that, even though revenge fantasies may have positive benefits, revenge itself may reflect poor self-regulation. Not engaging in vengeful acts may be indicative of recurrent self-regulatory efforts. However, a person's ability to mitigate acting out is reliant on the strength and importance of the impulse as well as their capacity in that moment to self-regulate (Baumeister et al., 2007). In some instances, the effort to self-regulate may seem too high, and the benefits envisioned by self-regulation appear unsatisfactory or insignificant, so people give in to the impulse (Sayette & Creswell, 2013).

After engaging in vengeful action, the lapse-activated causes of misregulation may have encouraged further acts of revenge (Faber & Vohs, 2013; Wieber & Gollwitzer, 2016). The participants who did trangress may have felt that, because they failed in their initial efforts not to engage in revenge, they may keep on excuting revenge. Revenge may further have elicited certain negative emotions or cognitions (ie: guilt, or thoughts about being a bad person), making those participants feel worse. This mounting distress may prompt the lack of self-control, or acquiescence to impulsive behaviour (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), possibly resulting in further acts of revenge as well as having to provide a justification for revenge, which is the next theme.

Theme 5: Providing a justification for revenge. Apart from acts of revenge, within the model, revenge fantasies lead to the participants having to justify their fantasies. As previously pointed out, fantasies are often violent and extreme, which may have made the participants feel guilty or ashamed, as they judge themselves to be more evil then the perpetrator (Bloom, 2001). Justification thus also serves as a protection against such feelings. Guilt has been linked to the mitigation of vengeance (Wagner & Heatherton, 2014), so if the reason for the justification is driven by guilt, acts of revenge may be prevented. Bloom (2001) found that a sense of entitlement to vengeance can become so powerful that the victim may unconsciously start to treat others in the same way in which they were originally treated by the transgressor. This theme further highlights the inability to transcend; participants burdened by emotional distress may be unable to shift the attention away from their distress. Emotional distress may impede the ability to suppress impulses to do with revenge fantasies and acts of revenge (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Wagner & Heatherton, 2014).

Theme 8: Following / stalking the ex-partner. Although the term "stalking" was adopted in this study, it may be more appropriate to use other terms, such as "post relationship contact and tracking" (Belu et al., 2016), or "interpersonal electron surveillance (IES)" (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). These terms differ from stalking in that they do not cause the target of such behaviour to feel subjectively fearful (Belu et al., 2016). Tracking an ex-partner is seen as a normative reaction after a breakup (Belu et al., 2016; Fox & Tokunaga, 2015).

This study theorizes that the causal link between stalking and justification pertains to stalking being a way of obtaining information which could aid the participants in their justification of revenge fantasies, as well as providing material which can be incorporated into revenge fantasies. As one participant explained: "I needed to know what he was doing, who he was doing it with". Fox and Tokunaga (2015) state that surveillance is a coping

strategy, which they linked to the distress engendered by the breakup. How the breakup was initiated and how committed a person was to a relationship predicted the surveillance behaviours. However, these behaviours were found to prolong distress and trigger negative emotions (Belu et al., 2016; Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). This was evident in this study, and stalking may thus be seen as self-defeating. Stalking and following also included the person with whom the transgression had occurred. "I feel like I stalked the mother of a child more than I did to him". Negative comparisons were often made, as one participant expressed:

> Every time when she posts a picture on Facebook, I will post mine. I was sometimes
> in a competition with her, but she was not aware of the competition… I compared
> myself with her, why did he do this with her, what is wrong with me?

These comparisons caused envy and jealousy which are associated with self-doubt and negative emotions (Feeney, 2004). However, some participants' comparisons were associated with feeling as if they were better/prettier than the person with whom the transgression had occurred: "Looking at the girl he cheated with is someone who, if we put it blatantly…is below my standard". This also appeared to fuel the participants' justification of their revenge fantasies.

The Intersection Between Revenge and Non-Revenge

Theme 3: Cutting ties

Cutting ties with the ex-partner emerged as an intersection between revenge and non-revenge. Although it was uninfluenced by other themes, cutting ties brought about both revenge fantasies and self-improvement. First, the action may facilitate revenge fantasies based on the explanation by Goldberg (2004), who found that revenge fantasies stabilise the ego by preserving the bond between aggressor and transgressor. This is done when separation is too unbearable to endure and when maintaining hate is a manner of holding on to the

relationship. Secondly, cutting ties may also have a retaliatory purpose. Anger and hostility

may prompt the action, using aloofness as a form of punishment (Barnes, Brown, &

Osterman, 2009). This tactic was evident in one participant's account:

> I didn't speak to him for those three weeks. Eventually I started responding to his
>
> messages, but it wasn't like we spoke every day. He would send me a message and
>
> then I would choose when to respond to that message and that made me feel powerful.

Finally, as pointed out during the discussion on self-improvement, cutting ties may

indicate a change in the participants' goals, or transcendence (Tice et al., 2001; Wagner &

Heatherton, 2014), for example, where the initial phase was marked by maintaining the

relationship, it now may have changed to new goals separate from the ex-partner. By

expressing no desire for reconciliation, the participants were able to focus on their personal

goals and wishes for their futures.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations which must be considered in relation to the findings.

First, the study was comprised of a small sample of participants. Although the number of

participants falls within the recommended number suggested by Northcutt and McCoy (2004),

a larger sample would have made it possible to investigate whether there were any

differences in how revenge and self-regulation are related in terms of gender, culture, age,

sexuality and the type of relationship. A second limitation was that of deviation from the

prescribed methodology (IQA) by not holding group discussions. Owing to this change, the

participants did not identify the themes together as a group. The researcher and the study

leader coded themes from the individual interviews, and although the process followed the

strict outline prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006), bias may still have intruded during this

process. Third, the participants were sent the questionnaire and were required to read a

description of each theme before answering the questions. It is therefore unknown to what extent the themes were understood in the intended manner. Lastly, this study relied on retrospective accounts of feelings and thoughts. Although the event of infidelity is a highly intense experience, the participants' accounts may have been compromised by memory and reporting.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the perceived cause-and-effect relationship between revenge and self-regulation. The outcome was the creation of a hypothetical model from which new hypotheses could be developed to inform future research on the intersection between revenge and self-regulation. The study has contributed by showing that revenge is a complex construct which unfolds over time within a wider context of different systems of experiences, emotions, thoughts and behaviours. In essence, it was found that the participants in this study experienced an initial phase of shock and confusion after discovering that infidelity had occurred in their romantic relationship. This led to self-doubt, marked by insecurities, jealousy and self-blame, followed by negative emotions which led to either isolation from family and friends or rumination. Rumination seems to be a key component in the development of revenge – it was postulated that the outcome of rumination could decide whether someone would engage in revenge. If insight has been gained, through rumination, a non-revenge route, including forgiveness and self-improvement may be followed, otherwise revenge fantasies may develop which eventually makes it difficult, especially through a process of revenge-justification, not to avoid engaging in some sort of revenge or stalking behaviour. In relation to revenge and self-regulation, revenge itself may reflect poor self-regulation. Not engaging in vengeful acts may be indicative of recurrent self-regulatory efforts. However, a person's ability to mitigate acting out is reliant on the strength and importance of the impulse as well as their capacity in that moment to self-regulate.

Taking the limitations of the study into account, it would be sensible to emphasize that any final conclusions should be made with caution, and to provide some recommendations for further research. First, future research could further explore, in large random samples, the extent to which the hypothetical model developed in this study holds true. More specifically, the exact role played by rumination, revenge fantasies and revenge-justification ought to be unpacked. Second, the specific factors during rumination, if present, that decide why someone would tend towards revenge or not, should be explored. Focusing on specific components of revenge and self-regulation may assist in further clarifying the complex interplay between revenge and self-regulation.

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Chapter 3

CRITICAL REFLECTION

This chapter offers a personal reflection on how I engaged with and experienced the research process. Frustrations, insights, biases, as well as growth, is discussed.

When I received the call to say that I was accepted into the NWU master's programme, I felt a mixture of excitement and fear. A great deal of my concern surrounded the research component of the degree. On arriving for my first week of classes in December, I was tasked with finding a supervisor. I immediately knew that this was a crucial step. Finding a supervisor with whom I could communicate, work well with and feel supported by, can make or break a study. On looking at the list of potential supervisors and their topics of interest, I further knew that choosing a topic I have an interest in, was a priority for me. I circled a few names and made appointments to meet each of the supervisors.

The Professor and The Topic

On meeting Prof Botha, I immediately liked that his area of interest was broad and that self-regulation appears to be the crux of all conscious life. I respected Prof Botha's honesty and his pragmatism. After agreeing to engage with me as a student, we set up another appointment to focus on a topic, as Prof Botha had bluntly told me that the topic I was considering was too "high risk" and "too large for a master's dissertation". This frustrated me as I knew where my areas of interest lay. Knowing the time and effort that goes into producing a dissertation, I hoped as Prof Botha said, "to change the world". With my ego a little bruised, I went back to the drawing board to explore other topics for which I had an interest. With my list in hand, Prof Botha and I discussed each potential topic as well as the pros and cons. On reflection, I appreciated his patience and sensitivity as I argued for topics

like: "online self-mutilation". When the topic of revenge was presented, I immediately felt that I may have a topic which interests both my supervisor and me and which I thought was not high risk. Revenge, however, is a broad concept which can occur in many relationships. We thus had to focus the topic on a specific relationship. The nature of a romantic relationship felt obvious, as romantic relationships are deemed more personal and thus elicits more emotional reactions. This, however, still seemed too broad as revenge within romantic relationships may occur for a variety of reasons. Delving into our own biases and understanding of what actions may provoke revenge, the study's focus homed in on real or suspected infidelity. I believe that at this point I was more optimistic about my own understanding, rather than the potential impact on others.

On engaging with the literature, specific gaps became apparent. Few studies had examined revenge from a self-regulatory perspective and fewer studies had investigated revenge within romantic interpersonal relationships. Current research focused more on the descriptive and expressive nature of revenge (Boon, Deveau, & Alibhai, 2009; (Boon, Alibhai, & Deveau, 2011). Studies into the mechanism which either deter or encourage revenge, has largely focused on motivations of revenge, personality traits and forgiveness (Bone & Raihani, 2015; Chan & Arvey, 2011; McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007; Rasmussen & Boon, 2014; Sheppard & Boon, 2012; Young et al., 2013). Further, the sensitivity of the study become transparent. To mitigate this, my supervisor and I set up stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria. The age of the participants was a significant concern, as we felt that older participants would have more insight and closure into past relationships. Further, the time frame of when the relationship had ended was considered. Time was proposed as a factor in gaining insight, closure and healing; as well as taking the stance that every person has the propensity for vengeance, thus not looking for participants who had engaged in vengeful acts.

Methodology

As a novice researcher, I felt overwhelmed at how I would investigate the topic. On the suggestion of the supervisor, I read the book on Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA) (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004). I was excited at the structured approach, as well as how the participants code the data, thus eliminating researcher's bias. This was achieved by collecting data in a group setting. However, collecting data in a group was a contentious issue. Reviewers of my proposal felt that the topic under investigation was too sensitive to be discussed in groups. Initially, I confess my annoyance at this stance. I felt frustrated and stifled. The methodology thus changed to individual interviews. Before I conducted my first interview, I practised on a friend. This practice session made me realise how stubborn and ignorant I had been. Watching my friend cry, I knew that the reviewers had been correct in their assessment of my topic. Perhaps it was too sensitive to be conducted within a group setting. I believe this experience humbled me and allowed me to reflect on how my frustrations, time constraints, work stress and trying to juggle working full time and doing research perhaps limited my own resources. to the point where I just wanted to get the project done instead of investigating the ethical dilemmas which could have a profound and long-lasting effect on participants. This bothered me, as I too have had to overcome a relationship tainted by infidelity. Was I too dissociated to conceive the impact on the participants? Had it been that long that I no longer could access how painful that time was? I spent some time thinking, consulting and reflecting on this, and believe that in doing so, I found my passion for my research again. I decided to rather finish my research in 2018, as I felt that I did not have the time or energy to produce quality and considered work. Although this decision was daunting, I derived a sense of peace from it. While recruiting participants, I was surprised at how helpful my colleagues were. Without their persistence, this study would not have been complete. After my practice interview, I was a little apprehensive but noticed that the more

interviews I conducted, the more relaxed I became. I enjoyed the flexibility that a semi-structured interview allowed. After a few interviews, specific themes were noticeable. I remember thinking that I shouldn't let this influence further interviews. I noted these in my diary and tried to allow the participants to relay their experiences organically.

During the interviews, I became aware of certain stigmas about infidelity. This made me more conscious of being a woman. Gender is said not only to be biologically constructed but is constructed socially too (Connell & Hunt, 2006). Were there biases I held about male or female infidelity? Did I too believe that men are driven by their inherent need for sex, thus condoning infidelity? Or that women who lack emotional fulfilment from a relationship are more inclined to cheat? These questions had to be thoroughly explored and brought to the conscious mind before I embarked on coding the data.

I was familiar with thematic analysis but have never been able to grasp how it can be done manually. I thus bought NVivo, a computer programme which allows one to code qualitative data electronically. I was familiar with Atlas.ti and therefore had to learn how to navigate this new computer programme. As with learning something new, there were challenges and confusion, and I spent many hours watching online tutorials on how to make sense of all these new terms and buttons. I, however, felt that doing so aided me in coding the data efficiently. Initial codes were first produced and then organised in relation to the research questions. It was challenging to distinguish overlapping themes, however having this process overseen by my supervisor, aided in thwarting possible researcher bias and making sure that participants' meanings were correctly captured. After identifying and defining these themes a questionnaire was compiled and emailed to each participant. Participants were only given 48 hours to return the questionnaire. I was anxious that this time limit would hamper my return rate of the questionnaires. However, I was surprised that it did not and that all participants returned the questionnaires timeously. This once again showed me the

commitment the participants had made to the study was genuine and sincere, and that they too had a vested interest in the results.

Findings

A thorough review of previous literature had to be conducted to understand the result. As is the nature of reading academic literature, once I started reading, the more I felt I needed to read. At times I got infuriated with myself, as I was anxious to start writing but just kept reading. The topic of self-regulation is so vast and has many model and meta-theories, which made me indecisive, and I struggled to decide which to include as they all felt relevant and important. In formulating the model of this study, much thought went into how to conceptualise the model. After many hours of staring at the model, the phases and routes became apparent. This significantly aided me in understanding the pathways of the model as well as being able to discuss them.

Final Words

Overall this research study was a daunting and challenging task. I am thankful that from the start I was able to find a supervisor I worked well with and a topic which I found engaging. I am grateful for the lessons I have learnt along the way, not only about the research topic but also about myself. I will end with a quote which I feel encompasses my experience with the topic of revenge:

"I know what it is to feel unloved, to want revenge, to make mistakes, to suffer disappointment, yet also to find the courage to go forward in life".

- Tim O'Brien

References: Chapter 3

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APPENDIX A

IQA Questionnaire

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

IQA – QUESTIONNAIRE

(Phase 2: **NWU-00056-17-A1)**

Dear participant:

Just to remind you: You had been invited to participate in this study because a previous romantic relationship in which infidelity was either discovered or was suspected. The relationship was terminated due to real or suspected infidelity. We were interested in the typical thoughts and feelings concerning revenge that you might have had in relation to this previous romantic relationship. From the individual interviews conducted with you and other participants, 14 themes (page 2) were identified. Please carefully read what each theme means, before you answer the questionnaire itself, starting on p.3. The questionnaire aims to explore how you perceive the cause-effect relationship between the different themes as it relates to *your* experience. If a specific theme does not relate to your experience, you should tick the final option (indicating no cause-effect relation between two specific themes).

The questionnaire will take you about 45 minutes to complete. Remember that there are no wrong answers – we are interested in YOUR experience. Thank you.

Lerinda Müller & Karel Botha

THEMES

No.	Theme.	Description.
1	**Self-doubt**	This theme pertains to insecurities and self-blame as well as how these insecurities lead to jealousy and difficulties in trusting. Insecurities is defined as a lack of confidence in oneself. It relates to feeling threatened and inadequate. Self-blame refers to feeling as if you had either done something or failed to do within the relationship, which may have pushed your partners to cheat. It includes a lack of confidence in oneself.
2	**Isolating myself from family/friends**	Withdrawing from others, such as family members and friends after the relationship dissolved. It describes a time in which you may have kept the fact that the relationship ended to yourself.
3	**Cutting ties with my ex-partner**	Breaking any ties you had with the ex-partner, a period in which you did not contact or make any attempts to engage with or purposefully avoided your ex-partner. For example, blocking them on social media.
4	**Initial confusion and shock**	Initial accounts of confusion and shock at the disintegration of the relationship. Being shocked at the actions of your ex-partner and feeling confused as to why the infidelity and break-up had occurred.
5	**Providing a justification for revenge**	Your reasons for having vengeful thoughts, feelings and fantasies, for example holding your ex-partner accountable for his/her actions or wanting them to see the error of their ways.
6	**Revenge fantasies**	Revenge fantasies pertain to thinking about, considering, having fantasies about revenge against the ex-partner. It does <u>not</u> include actual performance of the revenge.
7	**Revenge**	Any acts performed to fulfil the goal of taking revenge, for example emotionally hurting or humiliating the ex-partner, or disclosure of intimate details to family and friends.
8	**Following / stalking my ex-partner**	Refers to following the ex-partner either physically or online. <u>Physical</u> – for example going to the ex-partner's home or work without them knowing, to check on them. <u>Online</u> - for example the constant checking of the ex-partner's (or the person they cheated with) social media profiles like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. "Following / stalking" in this case is <u>not</u> an act of revenge.
9	**Negative emotions**	Negative emotions refer to any unwanted emotions, for example feeling angry, hurt, betrayed, embarrassed, shame, frustration and disappointment as a result of the break-up.
10	**Insight & closure**	Gaining a greater understanding of the cause and effect of the troubles within the relationship. Getting insight and closure regarding the events that led to the break-up. It does <u>not</u> include FORGIVENESS.
11	**Forgiveness**	A clear change in your feelings and attitudes toward the ex-partners. Letting go of negative emotions such as anger and vengefulness and an increase in your ability to wish your ex-partner well.
12	**Self-improvement**	Any actions which you took after the break-up to improve yourself, for example becoming fit, improving your health, acquiring new skills or hobbies, or focusing on your career or studies.
13	**Seeking social support**	The support structures like family and friends that you turned to during this difficult time, making use of their availability, care and compassion.
14	**Repetitive thoughts**	All those repetitive thoughts generated by attempts to cope with and

		process what is going on, for example revisiting the content of the relationship, your faults, the ex-partners faults, the breakup and what had occurred before and after the relationship ended. It does <u>not</u> include any thoughts or fantasies about revenge.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

ONLY MARK (WITH X) THE <u>ONE</u> STATEMENT MOST RELEVANT TO YOUR EXPERIENCE IN EACH CASE:

1. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt & Isolating myself from family/friends had no influence on each other	

Mark only <u>one</u> of these 3 in each case, with X

2. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Cutting ties with my ex-partner had no influence on each other	

3. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Initial confusion and shock had no influence on each other	

4. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Providing a justification for revenge had no influence on each other	

5. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Revenge fantasies had no influence on each other	

6. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Revenge	
Revenge caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Revenge had no influence on each other	

7. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other	

8. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

9. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

10. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

11. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

12. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

13. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-doubt caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Self-doubt	
Self-doubt and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

14. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Cutting ties with my ex-partner had no influence on each other	

15. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Initial confusion and shock had no influence on each other	

16. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Providing a justification for revenge had no influence on each other	

17. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Revenge fantasies had no influence on each other	

18. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Revenge	
Revenge caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Revenge had no influence on each other	

19. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other	

20. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

21. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

22. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

23. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

24. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

25. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Isolating myself from family/friends caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Isolating myself from family/friends	
Isolating myself from family/friends and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

26. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Initial confusion and shock had no influence on each other	

27. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Providing a justification for revenge had no influence on each other	

28. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Revenge fantasies had no influence on each other	

29. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Revenge	
Revenge caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Revenge had no influence on each other	

30. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other	

31. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

32. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

33. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

34. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

35. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

36. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Cutting ties with my ex-partner caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Cutting ties with my ex-partner	
Cutting ties with my ex-partner and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

37. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Providing a justification for revenge had no influence on each other	

38. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Revenge fantasies had no influence on each other	

39. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Revenge	
Revenge caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Revenge had no influence on each other	

40. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other	

41. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

42. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

43. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

44. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

45. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

46. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Initial confusion and shock caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Initial confusion and shock	
Initial confusion and shock and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

47. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Revenge fantasies had no influence on each other	

48. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Revenge	
Revenge caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Revenge had no influence on each other	

49. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other	

50. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

51. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

52. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

53. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

54. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

55. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Providing a justification for revenge caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Providing a justification for revenge	
Providing a justification for revenge and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

56. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Revenge	
Revenge caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Revenge had no influence on each other	

57. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	

| Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Revenge fantasies | |
| Revenge fantasies and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other | |

58. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

59. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

60. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

61. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

62. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

63. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge fantasies caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Revenge fantasies	
Revenge fantasies and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

64. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Revenge	
Revenge and Following / stalking the ex-partner had no influence on each other	

65. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Revenge	
Revenge and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

66. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Revenge	
Revenge and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

67. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Revenge	
Revenge and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

68. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Revenge	
Revenge and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

69. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Revenge	
Revenge and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

70. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Revenge caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Revenge	
Revenge and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

71. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner and Negative emotions had no influence on each other	

72. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

73. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

74. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

75. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

76. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Following / stalking the ex-partner caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Following / stalking the ex-partner	
Following / stalking the ex-partner and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

77. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Negative emotions caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure caused Negative emotions	

Negative emotions and Insight & closure had no influence on each other	

78. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Negative emotions caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

79. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Negative emotions caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

80. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Negative emotions caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

81. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Negative emotions caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Negative emotions	
Negative emotions and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

82. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Insight & closure caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure and Forgiveness had no influence on each other	

83. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Insight & closure caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

84. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Insight & closure caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

85. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Insight & closure caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Insight & closure	
Insight & closure and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

86. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Forgiveness caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness and Self-improvement had no influence on each other	

87. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Forgiveness caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

88. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Forgiveness caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Forgiveness	
Forgiveness and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

89. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-improvement caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement and Seeking social support had no influence on each other	

90. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Self-improvement caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Self-improvement	
Self-improvement and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

91. AFTER THE BREAK-UP, I EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING:

Seeking social support caused Repetitive thoughts	
Repetitive thoughts caused Seeking social support	
Seeking social support and Repetitive thoughts had no influence on each other	

THANK YOU

APPENDIX B

Declaration of Language Editing

Dr Karen Batley

BA (Hons), BEd, UED (UCT); MA (UP); D Litt et Phil (Unisa)

Academic and language practitioner

2018-02-25

<u>To whom it may concern</u>

In my capacity as a professional editor, I was responsible for the English language editing of the thesis written by Ms Lerinda Müller: **Revenge after termination of a romantic relationship in young adults: a self-regulatory perspective**.

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