

[THEME MUSIC]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Hi, and welcome back to Student Connections. Well, it's Friday night, and if you're watching this live, it is the 25th of September. If you're watching it on Catch Up, it might not be. And just a note on the Catch Up-- that will be available 24 hours after the session. So if you've missed any of the day's activities, you can go back and check all of that out.

Well, I'm Karen Foley, and I'm joined here with Andreas and Naomi. We're going to be talking about internet infidelity-- very, very topical topic. But first, I'd like to go to HJ and Rachel on the social media board. And I'd like to feedback what everyone at home has been saying.

**HJ:** Yeah, well there's been lots of great chat for this one, and we certainly enjoyed it, I think. Especially throughout the programme, there's been lots of interesting conversations. And it's just been great having all the questions, and thoughts, and comments come through, I think. But yeah, I definitely enjoyed that.

**RACHEL:** We've got a really good mix of new to OU students and some old-timers who have studied several modules. So it's quite handy because a lot students have been giving each other tips about how to maximise their study, how to enjoy the conference-- especially people who have seen our OU conferences before. And we've been putting some of the tips and some of the things on our board. So for those of you who have just joined us, this is our "My Face" board. Ta-da! So we've obviously got-- well, we'll start with the tips first. Then we'll get back onto locations and things like that. So we've got some tips here about look at what you want to study first, and then think about methods that you want to use.

**HJ:** That one was great because that was from a psychology talk we did earlier about all the different-- about psychology.

**RACHEL:** Not by psychologists--

**HJ:** Completely over my head. But that point, I think, is really good. And we talked about how social sciences are very dispersed and interconnected, which is absolutely brilliant. So I'm very pleased with that tip, which is why we pinned that one.

**RACHEL:** What is the tip?

**HJ:** The tip is-- well, we talked about qualitative and quantitative research. And a lot of people think, oh, I'd rather do some qualitative, or I'd rather do some quantitative. But the good tip was look at what you want to actually look at first, what you want to research, what you want to study. And then, find out what method best suits. And I like that. I think that's very good to keep in mind.

**RACHEL:** This fits quite nicely. And we've Laura's tip about keeping prompts-- for those of you who haven't seen this, check out the library session for catch-up tomorrow. But using prompt peer [www.whowherewhen.com](http://www.whowherewhen.com)

So these are all tips that are coming through from students. We've also got some selfies that came through from this morning's sessions.

**HJ:** Loads of selfies. We love these, and we can't get enough of them. So keep sending them in.

**RACHEL:** Just a brief recap-- we have Eleanor who's studying DD 102.

**HJ:** And Claire all the way from Weymouth in Dorset.

**RACHEL:** In Dorset

**HJ:** Dorset.

**RACHEL:** Rowena who's studying with us-- hopefully she's come back into the chat this evening. Hi, welcome back.

**HJ:** And Garreth, who's also been a brilliant contributor in the chat as well. Everyone's been. It's been fantastic.

**RACHEL:** We have another Laura.

**HJ:** Another one.

**RACHEL:** Who's also-- it's getting very confusing in the chat--

**HJ:** Yeah, there's a few Lauras.

**RACHEL:** But she's also studying DD 102.

**HJ:** I think that's a very popular course because I did that as well. And it's very interesting, and it's very broad, looking at all the different types of social sciences, and research, and city road in

Cardiff as well-- that's the classic one. But there we go. We got Fabricio, as well, at his computer. He still hasn't told us if he was at work while taking this and watching us. But we don't mind as long as his boss doesn't find out.

**RACHEL:** He has his earphones in so he could be at work sneakily on--

**HJ:** Maybe. We think so.

**RACHEL:** And ta-da! Another Laura from Northern Ireland. But we've also got somebody else here. And we've given him a little promotion. Here's Lee, and he's now on a selfie stick because that's how it works. And hopefully, we're looking for our mailman.

**HJ:** Yeah. Well apparently, he did pop by. I'm not too sure. But, um--

[BELL RINGS]

**RACHEL:** Ooh!

**HJ:** Well, yep. That's our ding. Of course he came by. If we hear our ding, we know mailman's come. Let's have a little look in here. Nice, big envelope. That's what we like to see.

**RACHEL:** Lots of mail.

**HJ:** Yeah, lots of mail. I like mail.

**RACHEL:** So while he's getting these out, don't forget to send your selfies to [connections@open.ac.uk](mailto:connections@open.ac.uk). Or submit them to Twitter using the hashtag #scc15.

**HJ:** Yeah. Well, on that point, we have been sent in some tweets. And everyone loves Twitter-- absolutely fantastic. But Ellie said she's watching the conference in her p.j.s, drinking coffee, and eating snacks, which is distance learning in a nutshell.

**RACHEL:** Definitely.

**HJ:** Definitely.

**RACHEL:** Definitely agree with that.

**HJ:** That's us most of the time, I think. Always the snacks-- I'd like to know what snacks. That'll be really neat. I don't know what snacks I usually have. But we got, yeah, snacks. What snacks do

you like to eat while you're studying? I want to know. I'm very interested in that one. And Sue just said she's enjoying the conference today, and well done, OU, very well done today, OU.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. Definitely a high five to the OU for this.

**HJ:** High five. Yeah

**RACHEL:** Especially the social sciences faculty.

**HJ:** Yes. Oh, definitely. Oh, yeah. And Elie actually sent in what it looks like from her desk, so her set-up. She's got her snacks and her coffee. And that looks like a really funky academic planner actually. I like that. I need to know where you got that from. So yeah, we'll find a nice place, put that on the board. Because I think, yeah, everyone needs their coffee, snacks, and planners as well.

**RACHEL:** And we still need more selfies from you guys. And Mr. Selfie himself has sent us another selfie. This time Lee is enjoying his jelly beans. So that's one snack.

**HJ:** That's one snack, jelly beans.

**RACHEL:** Yeah. So a treat. Also, Lee, I see your 36 jelly beans, and we will raise you a jar of jelly beans. Now if we go back to the couch, hand you back over to Karen, it looks like there's a whole bowl of jelly beans over there.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes. No. Well, we've had them here to tempt people into the studio. But no one's had time to eat anything. It's all just flown by. But they're a great source of sugar, so very, very handy for moments like this.

Well, thank you very much. That's been brilliant. And it's so, so lovely to have all of your pictures coming through. We're hoping that there's a lot of new people coming here tonight.

So I'm just going to briefly explain what this madhouse is, and how it all works. It's an online conference. So you can dip in and out as much as you want to. A lot of people are watching and aren't having access to the chat box, so you may wonder what that's all about. Well, if you go back to the website-- if you are doing that-- and you choose the "Live and interactive" button, you can then sign in with an OUCU, an Open University computer username that is completely free. Just fill in your details, and you can get one of those. And then you'll be able to see the chat. And if we have widgets there, you'll be able to see those as well. So you can

interact, chatting along, but also following, most importantly, what everyone else is saying. So do that if you haven't already. It will really enhance the experience. Obviously, that doesn't work on the Catch Up.

But we've had a brilliant day today. We've been talking a lot. We've had a lot of new students coming along. We've been doing sessions with the library, with the careers service. We've been talking about managing expectations. We've had updates on the psychology pathway and programme. We had also Richard Heffernan coming in and talking to us about his new politics module. So there's been so much discussion going on, also, about learning together at the OU.

But I'd like to bring Andreas and Naomi into the conversation now because you two are researching online on internet infidelity, which is a fascinating topic, very, very interesting. So could you tell us then, how did you start researching all of this, and where are you at with it all?

**ANDREAS:** So if I start--

**NAOMI:** Yeah.

**ANDREAS:** I mean, it all came about because some years ago, I think four or five years ago, we conducted research on couple counsellors and how to work with infidelity. So if couples present in their practises with infidelity, what are the challenges, and how did they work with that? So we conducted qualitative interviews. I heard you talked about research methods already. So that might be interesting. These were qualitative interviews because we were interested in getting a rich insight into their work and into their experiences. So again, what was said before-- it's really important to look first at a research question and then think about a method. So that was, for us, the best method to investigate this topic.

And in those interviews-- I think we had seven relate counsellors-- what came up a lot was that they said it has changed over the years. We got more and more couples coming in where the internet or mobile phones played a role in cheating, where people said, oh, my partner's doing something online, on the internet, and I don't really like it. Because I don't know what he's doing there and, he might chat with someone. And they also said, the couple counsellors, it's kind of blurring the lines because people and couples haven't talked much about what's OK for them and what's not OK for them to do online. And often, they don't know from each other what the partner feels about it. So I think that brought us into the topic. And we thought. I mean, it's really important and interesting to do some research on internet infidelity. And then

we started.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. And I mean, it's a topic that, I guess, resonates with a lot of people. And I'm going to ask you, sort of, I guess, about those parameters. But before we go into that, because you're both from that the counselling department, and of course, boundaries, and parameters, and what we share is obviously very important in this sort of setting-- Naomi, I wonder if you could sort of briefly-- because we would like the audience at home to chit-chat online. But equally, there is a whole sort of issue of safety and things like that. How do you work with all of that? What sort of advice would you give?

**NAOMI:** Well, we know that internet infidelity broadly is fairly common. So there are some fairly conservative statistics that say in long-term, committed couples, it's about one in four. So what we know is that there's an audience out there that will have had experience with this issue. And as a result, it's very possible that there are people for whom this is quite a live issue, either now or in the past. And that means, on either side-- either it's the person who finds out, or it's the person who kind of slips into doing something. So what we think about this topic-- it tends to evoke quite a lot of interest-- but that it can be quite sensitive for people. So when we talk about it, we try and remind people that it's important to be safe. So if you guys are going to be posting things, or asking questions, just look after yourselves and maybe don't post too much detail about yourself. So that's kind of how we look after the boundaries around this, I guess.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. We're doing a session tomorrow on managing digital identities and things like this. And I think so often, we feel so safe in terms of chatting, and we're not always aware of where that can go or that it can then sometimes be a permanent artefact that could be used, isn't it?

**NAOMI:** It can be exposing. Yes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** No, absolutely. So how do we define this internet infidelity? Because I guess it can mean something very different from one person to the next.

**NAOMI:** I mean, what we've really, kind of, I guess, explored in our earlier research was that people really vary in what they think internet infidelity is, what infidelity, generally, is. And what we found in the research that we've done today is that there is a similar kind of variety.

We got some responses where people said nothing that you do online is infidelity. And then other responses that said, "everything," direct quote, "that you do online is infidelity". But also

within that, there are people who see some sort of behaviours as definitely not OK, but this is OK. So for example, there's quite a lot of information in our survey that many people don't see getting engaged in, looking at pornography as being problematic, in terms of the relationship, whereas they might see doing something that's more relational and sexual as being problematic. But if it's a passive observer, voyeur kind of status, then they wouldn't see it as being problematic. And that's just really interesting. And that possibly is about a kind of attitude shift. Because maybe that wouldn't have been true 15 or more years ago.

**ANDREAS:**

But I think it's also, generally, fair to say that it's a very subjective thing. So you could say there are as many definitions out there as there are people out there. Because everyone has his own idea of what they would consider as infidelity, and what behaviour is OK, and where a partner is crossing the line with something. And that causes, of course, a problem for research. For example, if you use the quantitative approach, and if you want to have a "one fit for all" definition, that doesn't really work. Because it might fit for some people. It might be the right definition for some people. But other people might say, this is not really what I think is infidelity. So you get completely different answers from those two kind of people.

So therefore, I think what we choose to do is rather to ask people directly. So the first question in our survey is to ask directly, what kind of behaviour and activities do you think, would you count as infidelity? And to ask them to list them and to give us an idea of what they feel is infidelity, before we then asked more quantitative questions about what kind of behaviour is distressful.

**NAOMI:**

So then we asked them-- we pulled lots of stuff from the literature and from our own research that we thought might be an issue for some couples. So for example, if you were in a relationship and you change or leave your status "single" on social media sites, does that count? Or if you are chatting with somebody in an online forum, and it's not sexual, but you're talking about deep and personal things-- maybe you're talking about the fact that you just had a horrible argument with your partner, and you're telling about the detail of it. So you're sharing information that's kind of to do with the relationship with somebody else who potentially fits into the romantic partner box. So for some people, that was problematic too. But it isn't directly sexual. So that was kind of really interesting too. I mean, there's quite a lot of stuff in the literature about the difference between sexual infidelity or emotional infidelity.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Because aside from researching it, you're obviously both clinicians. And so, I guess, what I'd wonder is how you then deal with couples in that sort of setting? I mean, you're saying it's

very, very subjective. And I guess you would be talking about where those parameters lie. But equally, you've got two people then in this relationship and then their definitions may vary wildly. How do you then compromise? Or is it a compromise on some middle ground? How do you work with people in that therapeutic setting?

**ANDREAS:** I mean, I think that-- if you want one of the lessons from our research, in terms of for practitioners, what's important in working with couples who present with internet infidelity, or with infidelity as well--

**NAOMI:** Yeah. More broadly, I think, too.

**ANDREAS:** So I think the approach is to make sure and make them understand what they think what they've done-- there's nothing wrong with it. Their partner might feel very differently about it. So that's the issue about what they define as infidelity. It's not necessarily what their partner says is infidelity. There is not always a compromise possible because both partners have their position. But at least, it's necessary to kind of lay it out in the open that one partner thinks like that, and the other partner doesn't think like that. And therefore, they are hurt if their partner does something which they feel is kind of infidelity for them. And that, hopefully then, raises an understanding in the other partner that OK, whilst I think there's no problem with that, my partner is really hurt by that and hates it. So I think that's the important thing in the initial stages to raise that awareness in couple counselling, that people have different emotions about it and feel differently about it.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. Absolutely. We've had a lot of students here before who were very interested in the whole idea of counselling. And I just would like to pop over to the social media desk in a minute. Because I'd like to see what sorts of things people are saying at home. I know that we sort of mentioned safety, and obviously, parameters and things. But it would be very interesting to see what people at home feel about this whole thing. So HJ and Rachel, how is the chat going? And what are people feeling? Is there any resonance here?

**RACHEL:** Well, we've got sort of a mix here for the internet infidelity. Well, one person is saying that her and her husband have even met online. They'll be celebrating their 14th wedding anniversary in a few days, so congratulations. She says how I don't think that we'd ever think nothing online counts as infidelity, but it really depends on the couple.

We've also got comments about, you know, if you need to hide your online activity from your partner, what does that say about your relationship? You know, surely if you can tell your



partner it's OK, because it's about what matters to you as a couple instead of a dictionary definition of infidelity, whereas other points are suggesting that the availability of, sort of, online places and spaces can create serious problems in relationships, especially when it generates suspicion, and even worse, when it pushes somebody to even spy on their partner's activities by using, sort of, "deep web" kind of methods to find, hack into people's accounts. There was also discussion about-- is it the Ashley Madison--

**HJ:** The Ashley Madison hack and how that's brought out a lot of questions about internet infidelity, and especially exposing those people who, of course, were hiding behind this veil, and how that would impact relationships as well.

**NAOMI:** Yeah. I mean, I guess one of the things that is really clear in our research is participants feel-- and what's different about our research than much of the research in the area. Much of the research in the area-- weirdly, perhaps-- has been done with undergraduate student populations. So they're kind of 18 to 21, very young. And also, a lot of it is being done with, sort of, a hypothetical scenario. So I'm going to give you a list, and you're going to tell me, yes, I think this might be possible if I was ever in a relationship in the future, something I worry about.

So why our research is different is that we actually talked to people who'd experienced it. And what is really clear in the data is that quite a lot of our participants think that the internet does facilitate doing things that might cross relationship boundaries. So you can imagine somebody's had a really horrible day, they're going through a really bad patch in their relationship, and that little space where they chat every day is calling. And maybe, in that context, it becomes easier. And we certainly have really interesting data about that. So there's one participant who talked about her online affair, in terms of, sort of, like fast food-- sort of cheap, easy to get, very convenient, and makes you feel pretty awful afterwards.

But nonetheless, something that has the same attractiveness and the same availability as, you know, burgers by chains that we won't mention. And I think there is something slightly, kind of, seductive about that. Because, you know, OK, you just had a row with a partner. But there's somebody online who's going to love you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So there was, in a sense, this research gap. Because, like you say, I mean, so much psychological research is done with undergraduate students, often in America, for course credits. And you just look at the methodology behind a lot of this. And like you say, researching

real participants is really important. So how is this all adding to the area or not? What are you finding and what are you then doing with that?

**ANDREAS:** Yeah. I mean, just to reinforce the point, what you just said. It's not only that a lot of research was done with undergrad students, it's also they did it with hypothetical scenarios. So they didn't ask people who had experience with internet infidelity. They rather asked undergrad students, if a certain thing would happen in your relationship, how would you then react, or how would you feel about it? And that's not the same thing than asking people about their real experience.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes. Because that's what we say we do is very different to what we do do.

**NAOMI:** Yeah.

**ANDREAS:** So therefore, we really thought it's important for our study to really ask people about their experiences. And I mean, on the online survey we did, we got around 200 people who replied. But we have to say-- and that's an important thing, also, in terms of limitations of our research-- we have to say our sample is quite biased in a certain way. Because we have, I mean, the majority is female participants-- I think 80%, 86% or so-- female participants. And also, most of those female participants were on the receiving side. So they had experienced that their partner did something online, and they felt hurt and pain.

And I mean, we had a mixture of kind of open response questions where people could write about their experiences, in addition to quantitative questions. And in those open response questions, it was amazing how much, in a negative sense, amazing, how much pain and how much hurt is in those accounts of those people who, kind of, were at a receiving end. And I mean, that's a research finding from our study that shows-- because some of the people who are actively doing some things that could be counted as infidelity might say to their partner, listen, darling. This is not really something you need to worry about. This is all virtual. It's not real. Nothing has happened. It's just on the internet. But our data shows it doesn't matter that much whether it's in the real world or whether it's done online. The effects on the partner can be as traumatic and as distressful. If you read those accounts, I mean, it's heartbreaking.

**NAOMI:** Yes. And lots of people are describing these events as relationship-ending. So the idea that if something happens online, it's not as bad as if it happens face-to-face-- definitely not true. So I think that's a really important finding, and something that was suspected, but we have kind of pushed the boundary a bit further on that.

And I think the other thing in terms of, sort of, understanding, there is definitely-- and well, we have this skewed sample, so it kind of caveats around that-- but there is definitely something about women, at least, seem to report that they find these activities more difficult. Now whether or not that's actually the case, or whether or not kind of social stuff about how men report their experience is playing out isn't clear to us.

I think the other thing that came up that I thought was really interesting-- what we both thought was really interesting-- is this notion that for some people, it's slightly addictive, that they kind of get hooked in, and that it's sort of secret buzz, that there's something about that kind of connection that pushes people who might, in the real world, be kind of too shy. It becomes easy. And then it's very soothing to the ego, in some way. And then-- ooh! I'll do it again. So people described situations where partners had repeated online affairs of some kind or another.

**KAREN FOLEY:** No, exactly. Because I'm aware [INAUDIBLE] chat. And I'll just come to Rachel and HJ in a second. People are talking about how you can go after these things, and how you can mark it. And like you were saying, it can be like a drug-type thing. And people can actively seek something that they then have fulfilled. HJ and Rachel--

**RACHEL:** We're discussing the ease of internet infidelity. You know, especially, apps such as Tinder, where you swipe left, swipe right. Where it doesn't matter whether you're in a relationship or not, lots of people use those things. Or comments saying, there is no difference whether it's online or offline. The difference is just the technology. Facebook messaging, smartphones-- it just makes the infidelity easier to facilitate. A good point here-- somebody said they feel worried about the sorts of adverts you get online about cheating on your wife, et cetera. What's happened to society? Barry also did his DD 307 project on sexting. So one of his OU modules. And we have a question for you guys as well. That is "My question is what are people looking for in the internet? Some variety or real intimacy that people cannot find in their own relationships?"

**NAOMI:** Ooh, that's an interesting question.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It is. Yeah.

**NAOMI:** I think, kind of a couple things, if it's all right, Andreas.

**ANDREAS:** Yeah, sure.

**NAOMI:** I think some people are definitely looking for intimacy. And I think they can get it in ways that-- there's quite a lot of research, actually, that online research methodologies can let people divulge things in a way that they wouldn't. So sometimes, you might want to do a Skype interview or an email interview. Because people actually tell you more. Because it's a disinhibiting effect. Actually, sometimes you can get a sort of feeling of being more intimate with somebody that you've never met. And also, because you can't necessarily see them, or you don't really know what they look like. I think for some people, however, it isn't about intimacy. It's about potentially having a sexual experience, or exploring part of yourself sexually that you aren't able to do in a committed relationship. And that's quite a different kind of motive.

**ANDREAS:** And just to add to that-- I mean, perhaps there are also kind of bigger issues that need to be discussed in that context. Because there is a little bit of research, not by us, but by other researchers, into people who go in chat rooms and have cyber sex and sexual chats with people there. And they were interviewed about it. And one of the findings of that qualitative study, again, was that some of the people said, well, I really struggle with monogamy, in a way. Because monogamy is a cultural, accepted, dominant kind of concept in our society. And people marry. And the expectation is they live monogamous. Some people say they struggle with that, but they don't want to break up with their wife and their relationship. Because they value their relationship.

So they were saying in those interviews what the internet offered them to do is kind of having, I think, they called it electronic polygamy or electronic monogamy-- polygamy, probably, rather. So it's not real polygamy. And it allows them to stay in their relationship and to continue with their relationship. But they have the possibility on the internet to try out different things with different people, perhaps also to slip in different roles they wouldn't adopt in the real world, but just to try out things there.

And what they tell themselves-- it could be a bit of denial, but they're telling themselves-- that's what I said before, this is not really harmful. I'm just playing around a bit. And I try out things. You know, I love my wife, and I don't want to leave her. And she doesn't need to know about this. It's just for me a way to relax and to try out different things. So that could be a reason why people do it, because they feel it helps them. It sounds a bit weird, but it could be it helps them to stay in their relationship. It's kind of a method for them to stay in the relationship, but still live out some of their fantasies.

**NAOMI:** Yeah. I mean, Andreas is a couple counsellor. And I do work with adult individuals. And we both know-- long-term relationships are complicated, right? And people often find that they're in a long-term relationship with somebody that they love a lot, and that there will also still be points of conflict, or parts of you that aren't being met. And so I think we don't have a particular value stance on infidelity. What we want to suggest to people and to couples is that what's important is that you as a couple negotiate it. So that you don't get to a "oh, my gosh place" when you discover that your partner is doing something that really frightens you or upsets you. So that you negotiate in advance. And how you negotiate that is up to the individual couple.

And what might work really well-- so you might say, OK, I don't mind if you go on the internet and look at these kinds of sites. I don't want to do that with you. Thank you. But you can go and do that. You can do that bit on your own, and that will be all right with me. Or, I don't mind if you go and you chat with this guy in the States, because I know that you're never going to actually move there. So it's not, for us, about having a particular moral line or a value line. It's about suggesting to couples that they kind of foreclose problems or get in front of potential problems by just having open conversations. And what we think-- because the pace of change is so fast, and you know, everybody has a mobile phone. You can do this anywhere. You can access all of this stuff instantly. The pace of change means that we don't think about the fact that we should discuss it.

**ANDREAS:** Just to reinforce it because one of our findings was in terms of what people really hurt and what people really feel in terms of what a partner does. An underlying issue was often secrecy and betrayal. So as we said before, there is no clear definition. But often, it's the secrecy and the betrayal that people feel.

**NAOMI:** Yeah. And that was one of the things that came up.

**ANDREAS:** --that come up there as well. For example, I think that was a quote from somewhere-- if the same thing would have happened on the screen, and the partner would sit next to the partner, it would have been OK. Because they would know about it, and it wouldn't be secret. But if the partner does it in secrecy and is hiding it, then the whole problem starts. The distress starts. And the feeling, oh, he's hiding something, and that must be infidelity. So just to reinforce, I mean, it's really important for couples. And that's something-- also a lesson for a couple counsellors to learn that it would be really helpful to initiate some of those discussions. So what we do usually in couple counselling as couples is we try to motivate them to talk about

boundaries, and what they think is OK in a relationship, and what not. But that needs to be extended to internet and to online activities. And they should initiate those discussions so that couples talk about those things, partners talk about something.

**NAOMI:** And it could be quite non-big things. It can be things like, how often are you texting that person at work? Are you texting on a Friday night at 10:00 with a work colleague? So it doesn't have to be, kind of, how can I say, over-exciting, very dramatic stuff. It can be very much the stuff of everyday life.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It sounds like one of those things. So obviously, you know, it's very, very subjective in terms of where that line is. It's something that I think is also, by what you're saying, very easy to cross inadvertently because of the way that we're using media, because we maybe haven't discussed these things. And I guess what I'm very interested in is the applied side. So you know, when you're both working-- I mean, you've mentioned how you might handle this in a therapeutic setting. I'm also conscious of the idea that once you've done something or thought something, it can't always be undone. And yet sometimes, you're trying to renegotiate some of these boundaries or parameters with people. Maybe someone has overstepped that mark inadvertently, and then that's caused all these problems. How do you then deal with, sort of, stepping back from some of these lines that may be--? I don't know.

**NAOMI:** I think relationships don't have to end because of infidelity. What we know and what a lot of research says is lots of them do. And the view of therapists generally is that infidelity of any kind happens because there's something rocky going on in the relationship. So you come home, and you've had a really difficult time at work for the last few months, and it's rough with the partner. It's those kind of contexts that make people vulnerable. So if you have the infidelity, whether it's online or in real life, it's something about addressing not only what happened, but actually the broad context. Because it's never just one. You know, relationships are dances. One movement makes somebody else move. So it's about unpacking it and looking at it. But sometimes people are so hurt that they don't want to. It's like, they're so angry, and so hurt, and so betrayed. It's like, I'm done. And one can respect that.

**ANDREAS:** So yeah, as you say, it doesn't always work. And it depends on whether people are committed, and they really want to work through. But if you have a couple and they want to work through, there are often different stages in that process. So the first stage would be that you need to give space and room for the distress and for those emotions. Because they're very strong in the beginning. Some people compare it with a trauma, and a reaction to a trauma. The

disclosure of infidelity is often very traumatic. So the first stage would be to give that space that it can be expressed, and the partner's there and listens to it. And then with internet infidelity, what's also quite important at the initial stage is often-- these are kind of practical things. So people agree then, for example, this is about rebuilding trust. Because as you said, things have happened. You can't make them unhappen. It's about rebuilding trust. So it might be necessary, if both parties agree, for the first, kind of, stage in that process, that they, for example, share their internet account. Or that the partner says, OK, you can look at my mobile phone if you want. So that they're more open about those things. And that's kind of often there to rebuild that trust. And then as Naomi said, after that, it's really important to look at the underlying issues. And that's a longer process to work on those underlying issues then.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I'd like to also mention the idea-- because I know a lot of people in the chat have been talking about different cultures. And how you'd mentioned this was a very sort of situated thing in terms of Western idea of monogamous relationships. And people have been talking about different settings that may-- concubines, various sorts of other more socially acceptable ways that other people interact. So how does-- in terms of research, you're looking at something quite context-bound and specific-- what would you say, I guess, in terms of those other aspects and how this might then fit into that?

**NAOMI:** It's really important. I mean, I think, our basic position is infidelity is contextual. It's about where you stand. And in a the broad scale clearly, it's about where you stand in terms of nationality, and class, and sexuality, and age. All of these things will make a difference. And where you come from, all sorts of ways. So one of the things-- there's some research that non-straight people may handle and think about fidelity and monogamy in quite different ways.

That's just one example. It might be that people in different parts of the world also for very, kind of, traditional reasons, might conceptualise infidelity differently. And that's certainly what our therapist said in the prior research that we did that one couple was referred to where the wife didn't have a problem with the fact that the husband was endlessly having affairs. Because for her, that wasn't something that was relationship-threatening. And there was sort of an understanding. Well, you know, that's what men do. Which actually, traditionally, was an understanding in this country too. I mean, this notion of monogamy that we have is also a cultural construct.

**ANDREAS:** Yeah, but I mean, that's something, if you would ask about future research, what needs to be done, that's definitely something, we think, that needs to be done. Because most of the

research so far has been either in the US or in the UK, but in Western societies. And we haven't seen-- I don't know of any research that looks at different cultures, like Asian, or other cultures that are there. And there is little research also on non-heterosexual groups.

**NAOMI:** No, not a lot. But I mean, also, I was just sent a couple of papers to review-- because one of the things academics do is we get sent papers and say, I think this is good enough for our journal. And I was really struck by the fact that both of them were focused on married people. It's like, how kind of 19th century is that? I mean, that's very odd to me. So I think in all sorts of ways, it's really important to kind of broaden this.

**ANDREAS:** Or if you look at different age groups-- you could mention that teenagers or young people might feel quite differently about it, compared to, let's say, pensioners who live in long-term relationships.

**NAOMI:** What's interesting about our data sample is the youngest person is 20, and the oldest person is 73-something, and the mean age is sort of early 40s. So what we've got, again, is quite an unusual sample, compared to a lot of what's been published. But we would like more people. And we'd be particularly interested in people-- both men, and people who have engaged in infidelity. And we know that it might be difficult to talk about that, but I think it's really interesting for us to know more about why people engage. And again, in a very open way. I think it's important. People do things always for really good reasons, it seems to me, for them. Might not make sense to the partner, but for them, it's making sense. And I think we need to understand, as clinicians, much more about that.

**ANDREAS:** Perhaps to say at that point, I think the link to our survey is on the website.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes. I want to go on with that because we've had so much chat that I'm conscious we haven't had time to weave into all of this. But you've certainly kept our chat room very, very busy. And I did want to mention the survey because you've mentioned some of the qualitative research that you've done. But you also have a survey, don't you?

**ANDREAS:** No. I mean, the survey is our research. And it's a mixed method approach, if you want. So it has open questions, so a text response, open questions where people can talk their experiences.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So people can go do this now?



**ANDREAS:** Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Absolutely.

**NAOMI:** And we'd say, thank you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes. We would indeed. So this survey basically, you can find a link on the Resources page to it. So if you'd like to go and do that, and fill in the survey-- who can take part, then, in the survey? What criteria is there?

**NAOMI:** We're interested in just anybody who is adult, 18-plus, who've had experience themselves of internet infidelity.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And that experience would be a very subjective one, in terms of whether they categorise themselves either as a victim, I guess, or somebody who has--

**ANDREAS:** Yeah. But we would be especially interested, of course, because we have that biased sample at the moment, to hear more from people, from men, and also from people who have been active, so have done something online, and have been involved in activities that their partner felt was infidelity. So it would be great to have more participants with that kind of experience as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And, of course, doing one of these surveys is a great insight into how people construct surveys, and what sorts of information. We started by saying, you know, it's about the questions that you're asking, and then the answers that you generate from that. So do do that. Because aside from, obviously, adding to the wealth of knowledge, it's also very useful to do a survey and experience what that's like.

Well, thank you, both, Naomi and Andreas, so much for coming. And that's been really, really insightful. And I hope that everyone can take a moment to go and fill that survey in.

We now have a short video which is all about the banking crisis. It's actually a really, really good video. And we're going to come back and have a big conversation about public spending and whether that is a good thing for our civilisation. So I'm going to be joined by three different academics from different departments, and we're going to be discussing all of that then.

Also-- so do Naomi's and Andreas' survey if you've got a chance to. Don't forget to send us your selfies, any questions, or anything to either [connections@Open.AC.UK](mailto:connections@Open.AC.UK) or #scc15. We'll

see you in just over five minutes.

[THEME MUSIC]