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Because ‘you feel alive’: Exploring the Phenomenology of Falling in Love Outside Marriage

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Abstract

Infidelity is one of the most frequently cited reasons for divorce as it can shake the foundations of marriage. This is especially true today, when the concept of infidelity is expanding and may inflate its apparent prevalence. The current study explores the lived experiences of four married men who have fallen in love outside their marriages. The method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2015) was used, which yielded three superordinate themes capturing the experience of the phenomenon: 1) you feel alive; 2) internal and external transformations; and 3) redefining life. The findings suggest that participants' experiences are in many ways unique but they also share certain commonalities: the feeling of being alive includes characteristic manifestations or ‘symptom’ patterns and an escalation of feelings by perceived obstacles and hope; a married man's falling in love with another woman brings about internal and external transformations, whereby most important to the man is he himself, which is why many things are seen from a new perspective. Ultimately, this experience brings a sense of redefining life and gains and/or losses as well as the ability to understand what true love is in retrospect.

Keywords: infidelity; interpretative phenomenological analysis; lived experience; romantic love; Smith.