

THE EFFECTS OF INFIDELITY ON COUPLES FROM A THERAPEUTIC POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract: Infidelity is a common problem for which people consult a specialist, but the specialty literature is limited when it comes to infidelity and the aftermath of it. Even so, in this article, there will be two case studies presented, which were concluded after a few counseling sessions conducted on two subjects. Both subjects are males, aged 40-41. They consulted a specialist because they're relationships suffered because of the phenomenon called infidelity. The two subjects are business men that have families, but the problem that tends to destroy the harmony in they're family and tends to distort personal balance is infidelity.

Keywords: Infidelity, couple, extra-conjugal, relationship, marriage, counselor, counseling, unbalance, divorce.

Introduction

One of the fundamental needs of a human being is to create intimate bonds with a person of the opposite sex or, in some cases, even the same sex. Since the beginning of mankind, the need to reproduce brought to the development of an emotional bond that can increase the need for attachment towards the partner with whom they engage in reproductive act. This phenomenon manifests itself through the union of two people that are attracted to each other, resulting in a relationship or marriage, which further enables the development of a family.

Throughout this process, conflicts can arise, resulting in a disharmonious relationship in which couples can drift apart, thus leading to infidelity. This being said, infidelity is represented as a betrayal that destroys the most fundamental assumption of a relationship, and that is, its exclusivity. After studying the specialty literature, it is apprehended

that not much is known about the ones capable of infidelity, and about the relational context that promotes it. Following a study carried out at the University from Austin, Texas, it is perceived that the personality factors which are in close relations with the susceptibility of infidelity are high levels of narcissism and low conscientiousness. Furthermore, the relational contexts which are in close relations with the susceptibility of infidelity include sexual dissatisfaction and specific conflict sources such as the partner's jealousy (David M. Buss and Todd K. Shackelford, 1997).

Infidelity is a common problem for which people consult a specialist, but the specialty literature is limited when it comes to infidelity and the aftermath of it. Even so, in this article, there will be two case studies presented, which were concluded after a few counseling sessions conducted on two subjects. Both subjects are males, aged 40-41. They consulted a specialist because they're relationships suffered because of the phenomenon called infidelity. The two subjects are business men that have families, but the problem that tends to destroy the harmony in they're family and tends to distort personal balance is infidelity. Marriage counselors report that the most destructive and hardest problem to solve that couples confront is that of extra-conjugal relationships (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

1. The couple

"Male-female", "man-woman" - an archetypal structure based on the polarity of principles, identifiable from the most subtle, metaphysical plans of existence to the most coarse plans of primary biology (Mitrofan Iolanda, Ciupercă Cristina, 2002).

2. Marriage

Marriage represents the sexual union, socially legitimated starting with a public announcement, introducing the idea of permanence through a contract that specifies the rights and obligations between spouses and towards each and every child they have (Stephens, 1963).

From a psychological perspective, defining marriage means talking about a psychological relationship between two conscious people, with it being a complicated structure, made out of an entire series of subjective and objective data, having, undoubtedly, a very heterogeneous nature (C.G. Jung, 1994).

Marriage is a "lived experience", that can only be truly understood through experience. Going through marriage can often reveal a personal path in life, unrepeatable, because each marriage is unique. It has the potential to lead us to "fulfillment", but not every potential will

automatically transform itself into reality (Mitrofan Iolanda, Ciupercă Cristina, 2002).

3. Infidelity

Infidelity is defined as a "sexual, romantic secret, or emotional involvement that breaks the commitment to an exclusive relationship" (Glass, 2002).

A total of 25% of marriages have dealt with infidelity (Greeley, 1994; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Wiederman, 1997) and it can damage the relationship and the people involved.

Infidelity is the number one cause of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Beitzig, 1989; Kitson, Babri, & Roach, 1985) and it can lead the ones who had infidel partners to anger, disappointment, self-doubt (Buunk, 1995) and depression (Cano & O'Leary, 2000). In conclusion to the specialty literature studies, it is more likely that a woman's infidelity would lead to divorce than that of a man, covering a variety of cultures (Betzig, 1989). Reports say that the women's whose husbands had extra-conjugal relationships are more likely predisposed to forgiving their partners than their male counterpart (Lawson, 1988).

The empirical proofs suggest that the female partner's suffering isn't smaller than that of the male partner's one, especially if the extra-conjugal relationship is accompanied by emotional involvement (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992), but studies show that the male subjects are more susceptible to an extra-conjugal relationship without any emotional involvement while the female subject's extra-conjugal relationship is accompanied by emotional involvement (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Glass & Wright, 1985).

Infidelity extends itself even outside marriage, meaning that between 65% and 75% of the students who are in a serious relationship reported that they are in other relationships outside of the couple also (Shackelford, LeBlanc, & Drass, 2000; Wiederman & Hurd, 1999).

Some therapists state that some personality traits predict the predisposition to infidelity. Most common statements say that the ones with low tolerance for frustration, male insecurity (for males), and high levels of narcissism, are predisposed to extra-conjugal relationships (Buunk & van Driel, 1989). Other sources claim that complaints such as the sexual retention of one of the partners or jealousy conflicts can increase the chances of infidelity (David M. Buss and Todd K. Shackelford, 1997).

4. Psychological counseling. Definitions and techniques.

The ones who use counseling abilities can be divided in two groups: professional authorized counselors/psychotherapists, and people who offer support (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).

To have a better understanding of what is happening with the subjects that consult a specialist about the infidelity problem, we will be looking at the following techniques:

- Understanding the internal frame of reference of the subject - Understanding the point of view of the subject is another way to express the ability of understanding the internal frame of reference. There is an Indian proverb that says: "Don't judge any man until you have walked two months in his moccasins." (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Demonstration of attention and interest - When they are together, the counselors and subjects are always conveying each other messages. The body language of the counselors as listeners is not only important when they are listening, but when they are replying to the subjects too. In order to make the subjects feel like they can talk openly with them, the counselors have to transmit their emotional availability and interest. This is often referred through the syntagm present behavior (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Paraphrasing and reflecting feelings - means repeating what the subjects communicated. The verbalization of the counselors after the subjects' communication, offers the necessary gratifications for them to continue (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Beginning and structuring - Good starts heighten the chances of a good session and a good ending. Bad starts can lead to either losing the subject as a client, or to losing ground, which could be hard to recover. In formal or informal environments, counselors can start the process in a friendly and functional manner (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Asking questions - when counselors ask the subjects questions, there is the danger of returning to some relational ways and losing some, if not all, active listening skills. Counselors should refrain themselves from asking too many questions and not listening enough (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Monitoring - In addition to using active listening techniques and asking questions, in some cases, counselors can even help subjects clarify their problems through monitoring their feelings, their physical reactions, their thoughts, and communication of their actions (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Facilitating problem solving - Regarding the approaching of facilitating problem solving, counselors stay close to the internal frame of reference of the subjects and are mostly acting upon the changes that the subjects suggested (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).

- Training the subjects to relax - Counselors can teach the subjects muscle and mental relaxation techniques (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Improving the subjects' inner language - Counselors who have the ability to work with their own thinking will have a better understanding of the way they can work with the subjects' thinking than those who aren't as skilled. A good way in which counselors can learn how to use their mental abilities is to become an expert in using it in their own lives (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Improving the subject's rules - Counselors can help the subjects replace their idealistic rules with more realistic ones. Everyone has a set of rules that offers them templates after which they lead their lives, so that they don't have to contemplate much in every new situation. Most of people's rules that function well are rational, realistic, and based on the preferences of their own, of others, and of the environment (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Improving the subjects' perception - The subjects have systematic preconceived ideas in the way they interpret the information. These preconceived ideas, often go against their happiness and fulfillment (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Negotiation of homework - The counselors can often find it useful to talk about the activities that the subjects must do as homework until they meet again. Regarding formal counseling, this should represent activities between sessions (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Leading middle sessions - Once the schedule of the sessions has been established in an informal way, counselors can use strategies to help subjects reach one or more objectives. A way of seeing this middle phase is to consider the working phase of the session (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).
- Ending the counseling - Sometimes, subjects can end on their own accord, before the counselors considering that they are ready. This can either happen because of a discrepancy between counselor - subject, or because of the fact that the counselors were not skilled enough to make them reconsider. In some cases, subjects might even think that the sessions were productive indeed, but they feel confident enough to continue on their own. Sometimes, exterior circumstances, like changing the work place or an illness, prevents them from continuing. Some subjects don't think that they should change, and don't like the idea of counseling (Richard Nelson-jones, 2007).

5. Approaching infidelity from the therapeutic perspective

Like in every therapy, there are numerous ways to approach various problems, but after studying the specialty literature, it is found that the infidelity subject is limited, and specialists report that the most destructive and most difficult to solve problem is that of extra-conjugal relationships (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997).

Keeping in mind the content of this article and using the counseling techniques mentioned before we can take into account more aspects when approaching the infidelity issue in a couple, like:

- sexual retention of one of the partners or jealousy conflicts can increase the chances of infidelity (David M. Buss and Todd K. Shackelford, 1997).
- the ones with low tolerance for frustration, male insecurity (for males), and high levels of narcissism, are predisposed to extra-conjugal relationships (Buunk & van Driel, 1989).
- it can lead the ones who had infidel partners to anger, disappointment, self-doubt (Buunk, 1995) and depression (Cano & O’Leary, 2000).
- male subjects are more susceptible to an extra-conjugal relationship without any emotional involvement while the female subjects' extra-conjugal relationship is accompanied by emotional involvement (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Glass & Wright, 1985).

Case Studies

1. Case 1

Subject X is a 40 year old male who has been married for 16 years and has a 14 year old daughter. He is a businessman, with numerous investments in various places, but the main income is from a shop that his wife owns. Also, the main investment was conducted by the subject, and materially speaking he is fulfilled and has no problems, but the main reason he consulted a specialist was the fact that he was feeling agitated and could not stop thinking about the person with whom he engaged in an extra-conjugal relationship. After investigating the case, it was found out that he had had other extra-conjugal relationships in the past, but ultimately, was not affected by them.

Following the counseling techniques mentioned before, the therapeutic process lasted 7 sessions with one meeting per week. The issue that was worked on in these sessions was the infidelity of the subject and the effect it had on his mental balance.

The subject states that he is consulting a specialist because he cannot go on like this anymore. He stated that he was agitated, he could barely

eat, he could barely sleep, and he neglects his work. The subject claims that the state of his condition is due to the affair he has. This affair had such an effect on his mental balance, that he wanted to leave everything behind for this new relationship, meaning his family and home. The subject states that he cannot think about anything else but this person. She offered the subject what his wife couldn't. He states that the sexual relations he had with this person were good and he felt calm after, and she always listened to his problems.

After investigating the case, it was found out that the subject's wife knows about the affair, but she never reproached him anything. The subject states that he loves his wife, but she doesn't have time for his needs. She is at the shop the whole day and works until night, and when she comes home she is too tired to cook or talk to the subject. The subject's confessions state that she does not have to work the whole day at the shop because she's the manager, and that the employees can take care of the various tasks that she takes on. The subject states that his wife has been at the shop the whole day for a while now and she is working like an "ant". It can be said that work is the wife's safe place and she's accepting her husband's infidelity unconditionally. She is a calm, modest person who likes to work. She loves her daughter, and likes animals quite a lot, but lately she has been rather indifferent and treats her husband with an evasive attitude.

Their relationship is based on routine, and the communication between them is bad. The subject claims that he stayed with his wife because she always liked working, and this motivated him enough so that he won't be taken over by laziness. The subject used to have other affairs in the past too, but he could always return to his wife without being affected by them. One of the solutions that was talked about during the therapy was that he wants to leave his "mistress" for good, but he doesn't know how to stop thinking about her.

The fact that the new person in his life gave him everything he needed, made him fall in love with her, and that made him neglect his family and his work. What bothered the subject was the fact that she was very secretive with him and he assumed she had more partners beside him. The subject's expectations regarding this relationship were high, because he wanted to give up everything for her, but she did not get emotionally involved in the relationship, and that drove the subject mad.

Having a high levels of narcissism and the need to control everything, the subject was put in the position where he was being used, which in return ended up wounding his narcissism. He got everything he needed, but he could not control that. An extreme solution to which the subject resorted was to find another "mistress", in order to get over the one who

disturbed his inner peace. The solution didn't satisfy him though. He claimed that he wanted to give up the affairs and change. In the subject's last sessions, he claimed that he was feeling better and wanted to concentrate on his family.

Nothing is known about the subject's evolution after the last sessions, but if it continues how it was before, meaning sexual dissatisfaction, bad communication with his partner, and the need to control everything, it will eventually lead to divorce. These aspects represent a disharmonious algorithm for an unfortunate relationship.

2. Case 2

Subject Y is a 42 year old male who has been married for 17 years. He has two children, a 14 year old son, and a 6 year old daughter. He is a businessman, and owns a woodworking company. Financially speaking, the subject is fulfilled, but the environment in his family is unsettling him, so he consulted a specialist.

Using the counseling methods mentioned above, the therapeutic process lasted 5 sessions with one meeting per week. The issue that was worked on in these sessions was the subject's wife's infidelity and the influence of it had on the relationship and the subject's well-being.

The subject states that the reason he consulted a specialist was that he wasn't feeling comfortable in his home anymore. He claimed that his wife was not taking care of the children anymore, she did not cook, she did not wash the dishes, and would waste her whole day in the city or at a neighbor. He claimed that he couldn't communicate with her anymore, and when he confronts her about this, she is always reproaching. The subject speculates that his wife had extra-conjugal relationships, and that made the subject suspicious. Because of his suspicions, jealousy based conflicts kept arising. The subject claims that his wife had other extra-conjugal relationships that he found out about.

After hearing the subject's claims about his wife, it can be concluded that she is an irresponsible mother who doesn't love her husband anymore. She is not working, and she is spending large sums of money each day, money that she got from her husband. She is not helping for the well-being of the family, and has big expectations from her husband. She is not eating together with her family anymore, and the communication between her and her husband is bad. This was concluded based on the information that her husband gave, because she refused to join the counseling for a better understanding of the case. The refusal could mean that she is feeling comfortable in her current situation and does not want to change anything.

The relationship of the two spouses is based on jealousy, suspicion, lack of sexual relations, and lack of trust. The subject states that at the beginning of the relationship he made plans with his wife. They planned the establishment of the company that the husband is currently leading. He claims that at first his wife was interested, but lost interest along the way. The subject claims that his wife is not doing anything for the company nor for the relationship between him and the kids anymore. She is just spending large sums of money every day and is believed to have an affair. A solution that the subject came up with was to limit her budget, but he did not get to do it anymore.

The predominant state that the subject is in at the moment is sadness because of the disappointment of the relationship. His only hope in the family is his 6 year old daughter that he does not want to lose in any way or form. The subject's claims state that the wife does not care about the family at all, and that she is only interested in her own well-being. An extreme solution that the subject wants to undertake, is to give up on the important contracts that his company works with, thus reducing the company's income, and limiting his family's budget. That way, the wife will be constrained by the limited budget the family has.

More details about the case are unknown and it is not known whether the subject applied the last solution or not, because he stopped coming to sessions. The limitations of this case made it obvious, meaning the wife's refusal to join the sessions led this case to an unfavorable result, and the conclusions about her might be wrong. We can only assume that if the subject applied the last solution, and he's telling the truth about his wife, she will leave after a while, because she only seems to be interested in his money. If the subject did not apply the last solution, we can assume that things remained the same. He is being passive towards his wife, and his claims state that his wife did not seem to be affected by the situation.

Conclusions

For the first case, we can conclude that the subject's infidelity was the result of sexual dissatisfaction, poor communication between spouses, the need to control, and the subject's narcissistic tendencies. Keeping in mind these aspects, that lead to an unfortunate relationship, we can say that if neither one of the spouses contribute to the improvement of the relationship, then the most likely result is negative consequences on the relationship. If these aspects continue, the husband will have other extra-conjugal relationships, because of the desire to satisfy his needs, something that his wife is not doing. That being said, if nothing changes, the result will be divorce.

For the second case, we can conclude that the infidelity of the subject's wife is due to sexual dissatisfaction, poor communication between spouses, and the indifference of the wife. The limits of this case make it inconclusive, due to the fact that the only information we got about the wife where from the husband's claims. Based on this information, we can say that the relationship will not change, due to the fact that the wife did not seem to be affected by this situation, and the control she has over her husband. The moment the subject will make changes in the relationship, will most likely be the moment that will lead to a divorce, due to the fact that the wife will not accept the said changes.

The analysis of these two cases, along with the specialty literature, concludes that sexual dissatisfaction, poor communication between the spouses, high levels of narcissism, and the need to control, are aspects that generate unbalance in a relationship. If there is unbalance, the susceptibility for infidelity can grow significantly in the affected relationship, and it can lead those who have infidel partners to anger, disappointment, sadness, apathy, and it can make them bury themselves in work.

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