

# **To be or not to be unfaithful**

## **Crises in couples relationship**

**psychotherapist Ramona Covrig**

*Institute of Adlerian Psychology and Psychotherapy*

[www.ippa-hhm.ro](http://www.ippa-hhm.ro)

*The aim of this article is not that of judging the behaviour or the choices made regarding sexuality, but to offer one of the explanations linked with this phenomenon.*

Infidelity can be considered one of the biggest challenges of a couple relationship in our times. In the psychotherapeutic practice, many of the clients/patients come with problems concerning their couple relationship, and a significant percentage is dedicated to those who face infidelity (they cheat or are cheated), so that, in time, I started to give a special attention to this social phenomenon. I have noticed that from the multitude of problems with which the human being is faced, infidelity is one of the most devastating and painful experiences that he can bear, and this due to the feeling of betrayal and of a deep feeling of losing confidence due to the violation of the ethical code of the couple. The impact of disclosure can be extreme, and I would compare with a seven degree earthquake, in which both partners (the one who cheats, but especially the one who is being cheated) can experience depression, anxiety, despair, the feeling of losing the personal Cosmos. The shock is being lived equally by both partners, one losing the feeling of belonging and security, one the contact with “the other”. This is why the one who is being cheated, but also the one who cheats see themselves exposed and vulnerable. With all the suffering endured and with all the drama that springs and on one part and the other, the question that comes to your mind is: “-And still why do people keep being unfaithful?” I heard someone say sometime that infidelity is “a hunger for

*alternative and it represents the refusal to live unhappy near another person. Maybe infidelity became an epidemia, but it is treated as a minor flu. In reality a major part of the community suffers from infidelity. When the small univers of each of us is shaken by discovering the infidelity – and I think here that children are a part of the small univers (in the cases where they exist), the extended family, friends and even family pets – then at a macro scale part of society will suffer. Unlike other collective sufferings however, this is not metered nor by the Ministry of Public Health, nor by the statisticians. It is something with which society seems to have gotten used to. People take in count that at one point in their couple relationship they could be shaken by the efect of infidelity.*

### **Some possible motives of infidelity**

When one of the patients confess his/her own infidelity I am interested to know what exactly determined this choice, the question asked is: *“What is the purpose/reason for which you got out into an extra-conjugal relationship? What were you expecting to find there and you have found?”*. More often, the reasons were:

*“- The other one listens to me, made me feel better/ more important”*

*“- I can communicate with her/ him, she/he cares about me”*

*“-My wife/husband made me feel inferior/ feel like I didn't count in her/his eyes”*

*“- I wanted to see if I still had impact on women ”*

*“- I wanted to conquer and thus to grow in my own eyes”.*

The thing being appreciated in the new relationship (although often ephemeral) is the apparent or real acceptance which is manifested in the dialog that's shared between the infidel partner and his/her lover. And because the primordial need of the human being is that of belonging and of being significant in the eyes of others, the feeling of “falling in love” doesn't take long to appear, because man has always been sensitive flattery in his moments of weakness and especially at the “warm” type of communication, in which the message is: *“- What you say interest me. I want to listen, I send you the message that I am interested in your interests, etc”*. Sex comes with “the package” as the inevitable completion of the action of being unfaithful and goes perfectly with efficient

communication and with expressing affection. Sex becomes the ultimate reason of infidelity.

And now lets see what reasons/ excuses do the couple partners find when they are cheating!

- ***“I feel unhappy in my marriage”***

When I think about this reason I have in mind one of the adlerian principles which states that behind a certain behaviour there is always a purpose, of which people are or are not aware. For the exemplification of his principle I will give an example. It happened to Rudolf Dreikurs in 1964 and it happened to me in 2007. *It is about Tudor, a very smart boy of nine years who came to my office with his mother. While she was talking with me, the child was moving his little feet all the time, and the mother easily irritated says to him: “- Why are you moving your feet?” And the boy says to her: “-I don’t know” and right he was, because his behaviour had an unconscious purpose, so as the children behaviours usually are, but if you take a look at what you have accomplished, namely attention from the mother, but also from the therapist, we will understand more easily what is that conscious and unconscious purpose.* To get back to our discussion, I think that there is a purpose (conscious or unconscious) for being unhappy or for maintaining a state of indisposition in the couple. The maintenance of a state of unhappiness can be an loophole towards extra-conjugal relationships. You will be able to find in this way an convenient “excuse” which will exonerate and takes the responsibility of your shoulders: “- What do you want? I was unhappy”.

*Ion and Maria come in the office for problems regarding the relationship. They are both very discouraged and their couple relationship is neglected for some while now. Ion told Maria that he intends to divorce and he puts this on the account of his personal unhappiness in the couple. Maria knows that there were some problems in the relationship and she even admits that she has a contribution to them, but she doesn’t understand why Ion doesn’t give her a chance to recompense. Ion talks to her honestly (it*

*seems he is honest after a very long time) that he has been keeping records of his unhappiness and that from his point of view she cannot do anything anymore because he stopped hoping. Maria doesn't understand how come he keeps the record of her mistakes, but he never told her something when she did them, so that she could change her behaviour for their relationships best interest. She feels betrayed and wronged, because her husband never told her how unhappy he is and how ready he is to get out of the relationship. She ends her dialog with the therapist saying that if her husband would have wanted to maintain their couple relationship, he would have let her know all the faults so that all the repairs could have been done in due time, but because he so well hid his feelings and frustrations, she understands that he didn't want this relationship. She is not willing to blame herself and to suffer for this divorce since she is not entirely guilty. She knows that from this point forward it's up to him if he will allow himself do get more involved or to give the couple another chance. For a relationship two are needed, and as long as only one of them wants to maintain the relationship it is not fair.*

The case of these young people is one of the cases in which there is not much you can do as a therapist, the two coming with the couple relationship at “repairs” far to late. They know this! And the therapist knows this. In one of J. Gottman's lectures in Seattle, I heard him say that people ask for specialized help with 4-6 years later than they could have asked. The couple relationship is like that of a driver with his car. When the car makes unusual noises or he feels that there is something wrong with it, the driver thinks of going with it in service for the diagnostic and possibly its imidiate repair. It doesn't happen the same with the couple relationship. The parteners are not very willing to prevent the big conflicts by resolving the small incidents... usually they give attention to the relationship when it is indeed overstressed and the two parteners cannot understand each other anymore not even about minor things, like who takes the garbage out or what tv programs to watch.

- ***“- I don’t feel I’m evolving in this relationship. This relationship actually pulls me back instead of helping me go further. Moreover while I’m decreasing, he is growing...”***

One of the psychological needs that is necessary to be fulfilled in a couple relationship is that of evolving, of feeling that you are making small, but significant steps towards self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction ( professional satisfaction, spiritual satisfaction, soul satisfaction ). Each individual needs to grow, to get from a perceived minus to a perceived plus, to become better. Couple partners should support and help each other fulfill their dreams and hopes. Both of them should inform themselves from the beginning of the relationship regarding the following :

- Hidden desires
- Daydreams
- Plans made in childhood and hopes regarding their success
- Aspirations

Part of the couples that come in the office are in crises exactly because this psychological need is not fulfilled. People need to evolve, and this phenomenon is natural, although it is not always perceived as a positive phenomenon for the couple partner.

*I remember a young women who was in a couple relationship for ten years without being married however, though she would have wanted this very much. Two years back her couple partner was promoted and he accepted a better paid job in a branch abroad. In the last two years, since X accepted to work abroad (from Monday till Friday) she became depressed and she started having panic attacks. When X got back in weekends the panic attacks had a even bigger frequency. She attributed the deterioration of her mental health to him and since then she developed an increased aversion towards him. The first time she felt ill was after some weeks from his promotion, in the work car. She got home where she recovered, but from that moment on she started to avoid coming home alone. In the same time a series of problems with the partner started, because he didn’t understand what she was going through. For two years a pretty high frequency of*

*the panic attacks happened (every two days) so that the psycho-pharmacological treatment was necessary. "I was feeling bad every day, but in this time there were also good times. At home it was the only place where nothing serious happened to me." Y is an only child. On the first place in her couple relationship it was searching for superiority. Her life style is a combination between the baby type and the getter type life. In the first years of life she lived with her grandparents, but around the age of seven, she moved with her parents where she witnessed all her mothers states of illness. She lived with her parents until she moved with her grandmother from her fathers side. Here it was another traumatized period in which any of the output of the rules of the house would end up in accusations and labels like: "you are like your mother! Crazy like your mother!". Y described her childhood as being unhappy. The first years of life she spent with her grandparents where she had somewhat quite life. From the moment she returned to her family, she understood her mothers state and she realized what it means to be ill (she was diagnosed psychiatric) and not being able to control yourself. About her father she said he was a very sever and pretentious person, but with whom she had a lot of interesting conversations and from whom she learned very much. In the good periods of her mother, she turned out to be overprotective and the relationship was a close one. She was very careful in what concerns the health status, she would get easily impertinent at the smallest sign of physical state alteration both hers and her mothers. Y was thinking about her mother that she is a "fearful being, a frail, anxious woman, and when she had her crises she was appalling". Her father has placed great emphasis on education, Y noticing that due to her success at school she isolated, not having any friends while in school. She would have liked to make friends, but she didn't succeed and she didn't knew why. Although she was always ready at classes, in the moment when she was being listened to a powerful fear appeared and she was convinced that she couldn't do manage it. Her father was the one who chose her high school and even though he insisted that she would follow engineering, Y stood up to her father for the first time and she chose the university by her self, where she had very good results but she was not head of her class (the first injustice). Regarding her relationship with her partner, Y talks about the fighting over power, she sees him as a cliff especially with his new job. She doesn't*

*understand how come he doesn't see the direction in which their couple relationship is going. It is obvious for her that the change is irreversible and that the new situation suits him very much. He has a very comfortable couple's relationship, a weekend one, so that for him, the relationship is not at all consuming. In his family, X had a parental model which showed him that the men can leave anywhere, while the woman has to remain submissively at home. His expectations are that his women has to put up with this life style just as his mother put up, in the past, with the lifestyle imposed by his father. Y is worried that even when the partner is in the country, he avoids staying at home and he tries to go out or be late at work, declaring that his purpose in life is to be "with one step ahead of the others", and for this he has to sacrifice his relationship, his free time. He asks from her to obey and to accept the life he is offering her. Y describes me a day of her life: she communicates to me that she cannot disconnect from anxiety followed by nerves. A shower calms her or the fact that she takes care of herself. If she has a quiet moment she thinks about the use of being nervous, what is she trying to obtain by it. She wants to see which is the unconscious purpose of her behaviour. Y admits that always, when something wasn't suiting her or she needed to do something, even at work and it has always been this way, she expressed it bodily, either she became sick, or she had a headache, etc.. being a person who had read some psychology books, she knows that this is a interpretation of somatization, so that she reaches alone the conclusion that she makes this crises exactly because she is used to dissimulate. By the therapeutic process the panic attacks have decreased in intensity and number, and fighting the ideas which interfere with growth had a good effect over the patients thinking. She is aware that she was resisting and searching for excuses for feeling sick. According to her, the reasoning is logic: "It is clear that I keep resisting. I am searching for reasons to be sick. I see what I am doing, I am using the illness to elude life".*

*Another dissatisfaction about the relationship is that Y feels that she decreases, while he grows professionally: "- He grows, grows and I feel that this happens in my disadvantage, because I feel like decreasing and becoming smaller, insignificant in my eyes, in his eyes and in the eyes of everybody else. I despise him for what he is doing to me and I despise myself for feeling the way I feel. I think that love decreases and my*

*indifference and fury grows towards him". Y complains that also because of him she lost all her friends and that she was sociable before, but she remembers that one year she went out with a group of friends and when she came back, he made a very big scandal so that slowly, slowly sh lost almost all her friends. His jealousy made her become withdrawn and to give up the pleasure of socializing. "-And if you cheat only with thought, it still means you are cheating!" Y remembers while quoting X! In the last couple of years since she has the panic attacks, she noticed that she started to suffer from jealousy. Since he has been gone abroad she became jealous and possessive.*

*Maybe her biggest sensitivity is the one concerning criticism. According to J. Gottman, harsh criticism is one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. The criticism assassinates the character and destroys the courage of being imperfect. She remembers, that one day after she had stood in front of the mirror three quarters of an hour, he told her: "-You look like hell! Put something nicer on you! I will buy you a new dress only to get rid of this pleated skirt." This was the moment in which Y decided to cheat. Her biggest surprise was that after the infidelity, the panic attacks decreased in intensity, until slowly by slowly she succeeded in mastering them.*

The panic attacks are like a seism on the inside. You think you have to choose only between two options, when, in reality there are a variety of choices. Because, usually you are not choosing neither one nor the other (confrontation or running), all the energy you have to consume, consumes itself on the inside through this psychological and bodily seism. Maybe the panic attacks of our patient disappeared also because she wanted to regain, indeed, the control over her life, but it is possible that the infidelity she did "put its shoulder". I don't believe that infidelity is a form of self-cure, it could be interpreted that way. Maybe before the panic attacks was the thought of being infidel to the person who prepares himself to be also infidel, because the biggest fear that our client had was that along with his professional growth, he will change his lifestyle and certainly he will desire to met other women and will cheat on her. So that the panic attack can be seen as an "excuse" to slip into infidelity, thinking something like: "-He pushed me" or "-I'd rather cheat first than be cheated".

- **„-Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. The need for revenge/retaliate”.**

One of the harmful games for couple's relationship and which is accepted by the support of both partners is the “guerrilla war” or “war on front”. Often, the two partners are not openly informing themselves about the hostilities that will follow. The surprises can come in a chain reaction! For revenge, the two partners can use one of the two extremes, they can choose to hurt the other person or can choose to show how exactly they can be hurt. In both cases the person who wants to retaliate will restore, at least for some time, the self image, thinking maybe: “-I will do this to you so that you could understand with whom you are fighting and I will use whatever means I have to use, in order to make my declaration”, but the couple’s relationship (that common good or common dream) has to suffer. Sometimes when the couple becomes a family, and the children are in the middle, the most common form of retaliation is “*the fight over the children*”. They become collateral victims, and if the two don’t reach an argument and the restauration of mutual respect, their harmful behavior can lead implicitly at the apparition of a devinat behaviour in the child (school failure, enuresis, running away from home, aggressive disorder, depression, withdrawal in a virtual world-computer).

“- *You cheated on me, I am cheating on you or I will cheat on you*” is the motto that can be used as a guide by someone who was betraied in love at one point. But it is possible that the difficulty appear only then when you discover that after you have cheated in turn to “balance” (you believe!) the scale, you can feel hurt (twice and possibly by two people). First of all there is the pain suffered after discovering the infidelity and loosing confindence in the partner. The second suffering can be that to find out about yourself that you don’t have lovers “ambitions” and that you didn’t obtain what you’ve proposed (obtaining a better self image, overcompensating an inferiority complex, the answer to the question concerning your sexappeal) and that your new achizition was an opportunist. With a simple inner accounting you can make the amount and draw the conclusion that you have lost more than you won after this choise. In my personal statistics, one of the periods in which men cheat on their partners is during the pregnancy period (5-8 months of pregnancy).

*And so it is that one day I received in my office the visit of a young woman, married for two years and mother of some months. She was happy for her new status, but she was unhappy for what had happened in her couple's relationship. Around the fifth month of pregnancy, she discovered that her husband is cheating on her with a colleague from his office. After the period of shock which lasted three weeks, she proposed herself that after she will give birth, she will also cheat on her husband. Some months after the pregnancy and after she recovered stoically the grace of her body, our young woman decided to cheat. She didn't speak with anybody about her intentions, and in my office she came only afterward... She became open to the advances of men – common friends, so that two days from the beginning of the flirt she had an affair with one of the men from their circle of friends. The patient tells me in the office that after she had this affair she fall into the deepest depression, linked probably with the postpartum depression also. She was in psycho-pharmacological treatment, and after she recovered partially she was recommended to begin psychotherapy. Her biggest sadness was connected with the fact that she sacrificed her self (her morality) in order to give a her husband a harsh lesson, because one of the values of her family of origin regarded respecting the marriage institution. Unfortunately, her husband didn't learn any lessons.*

Family values give meaning to life. When you break your own values thinking that you can bear the change or the choice, but you discover that, actually you are still too fragile to give up the idea, it is, sometimes, a bit too late (but finally you can recuperate). It is better to be cautious and to postpone the decision (even that of getting revenge) for the moment in which you could be sure that you can take the step, that you can bear the consequences of your choice, consequences that can have a definite effect on your life, but also on the life of the people towards whom you are or you should feel responsible for/of. I try to make an analogy with car thieves. There are two types of car thieves, in my opinion, some with and some without “consciousness”. Those without “consciousness” steal a car, they disassemble and they sell it piece by piece or they sell it in one piece. The thief with “consciousness” stumbles upon these (you can even stumble on a ounce of

consciousness), steals the car, blames himself, so that he then tries to get the car back in the parking. At his return, though, he is caught by the owner or the policemen so his action is not to be acclaimed. The same with infidelity! “-If you know you can go all the way, then good be good if not, you would better give up this sport!” a man expert in infidelity (the effeminate type) once told me.

- **“What can I do, this is who I am! I fall in love easily!”**

Not many alternatives seem to exist in this case. You either accept it, or you leave ! The paradox is that this “excuse” works better than others ! The person who sees himself/herself as being weak (“I have lean meat”, “I’m prone to cheating”) can afford thereby not to take responsibility for his actions and in time he/she can convince his partner/her partner that “there is no other way”. Having benefits the person accepts and wears the label of the helpless. Which is the gift of a placed and assumed label ? Tell a man that he is “forgetful” and he will show you from morning till evening how “forgetful” he can be (ex. you tell him days in a row to go and pay the cable, to get your clothes from the cleaners or to change the light bulbs in the lobby, he promises you he will, but then he excuses himself saying that he forgot). Tell a child that he is “kind of fearful” and maybe he will not easily detach from you, he will cry when you go away or when you want to put him to sleep in his bed and his room. When the woman thinks that her husband is helpless, in some ways she pushes him (knowingly or unknowingly) to show his helplessness. The label becomes a stereotype, and the effect can be the getting stuck in a useless behaviour of the person wearing it. For the maintenance of a stereotype in the couple relationship two people are needed, and so the solution seems handy, but requires time for practice, part of this consists in breaking the vicious circle of thinking and doing „the opposite of what you have been doing so far”. If a behavior doesn’t have any results (it is in the useless part of life) it is good to try something else, for example to offer the other one the chance to change, even if the other one’s change means your change as well. The change in my behaviour leads, implicitly to the change in the others

behaviour, because we are both „system” that react, interact and act on the others behaviour.

This year I gave a course of couple psychotherapy in Piatra Neamt to an entuziast group of psychologist, social workers, psychology students and psychopedagogists. All the participants were women at an age where one is already in a relationship. After the first day of course they went home (in the couple’s relationship) where they wanted to apply/test directly a little bit of what they remembered from the course. Thereby, some of them tried to behave towards the Other (ex. partner, parent, child) contrary than they usually acted (this techniq applies only if the initial behaviour is harmful). The second day they felt the need to talk about the other one’s reactions. There were mainly three types of reaction: „- What happend to you, are you crazy ? Have you done something wrong ? Do you want something from me?”. The second type of reaction was : „Thank you. It has been a long time since I last saw you in such a good or pleasend mood, as you were at the beginning of our relationship”. The thired type of reaction was : „ -You were at one of your courses again? Again you try to apply something new on me ? ”. From this ad-hoc research we can deduct that people desire change and that this doesn’t take long to happen, but it has to be announced, prepared and assumed as an important task of life and above all, change most be characterized by consistency.

*When I met the two of them for the first time, I had the impression that the couple standing in front of me will be „easy” to work with. Their sincerity and openness towards change helped us a number of times reach very useful conclusions. The two are in a relationship for sometime now and they got to know each other and to anticipate the other one’s steps. This is both the advantage and disadvantage of the couple’s relationship. There is the advantage of the security given by what is familiar and the disadvantage of setting a stereotype. When the two of them met the first time, they confessed regarding their weaknesses. In this way, he found out about her that she suffers from (easily) “falling in love” (she was in a relationship when she fell in love with him), and she found about him that he will not stay in a couple relationship if the passion is lost (the reason for leaving the other relationship was that he felt no longer*

*significant in her eyes). The both decided from the beginning to give the relationship a chance, although they were never really convinced that they should get married. They were both very surprised in the first two years to notice that they are easily keeping their commitment. They even used to make fun of their fears. Then one day she got back from work happily announcing that she was promoted and this requires serious commitment, delegations and working over hours. The delegations turned out to be their hardest try. Knowing about her weakness, he would make sure to warn her about her inclination towards infidelity. On her return, in the airport the first discussion would be about her fidelity. “- I have a weakness and I admit it, but I fight with it and I try to control it. This doesn't mean that I am unfaithful” she used to repeat every time she got back. They don't even know if the delegations or the endless discussions made her give in and respond to the advances of a man she met one of the evenings at the hotels bar. She says that it was easy for her to fall in love with him because she was “every woman's dream” (business man, careful, generous, humorous). When she returned home after a week she was already changed, even though she tried to hide the state of her feelings... He understood. He had forgiven her, but from that moment on they stopped making love (or sex) and since a relationship without passion was his nightmare, shortly they started to grow apart from each other, throwing themselves in work or spending their free time in different circles of friends. For a long time nobody took care of the relationship so that when they arrived in the office they were already reconciled with the thought that therapy was the last chance given to their “common dream”.*

Although the majority of patients/ clients seek psychotherapy as their last solution (even though they don't give it many chances from the start) for the couple's therapist it is important to think that, however, if the two are in the psychotherapy office and not in the divorce lawyers office, this could mean their desire (although fragile) to save or to try to understand what is happening. The purpose is not keeping them in the relationship, but helping them understand how did they get to this point. When a couple seeks psychotherapy the two of them come with bad thoughts (among other things). The first thought is that the other one is guilty (“- I didn't do anything. He/she is guilty. He/she is

“broken”. He/she is the one you have to fix”). And the second thought is that psychotherapy should last and cost little and eventually the therapist has to “lift the weights” for them.

Psychotherapy also has an educational part, she supports the two persons to make realistic expectations regarding what happens or what will happen during the sessions. Helping the others understand “the behavioural why” is the most important task of the therapist. It turns out that many times she remains also the last task, since a great part of the patients choose to end therapy after they obtain the necessary insight to go on in life. Of course, there is also that vast category of patients/clients who continue following psychotherapy for the continuation of the process of personal growth in the presence and with the support of a “coach”.

- **Experiencing feelings of loneliness or solitude.**

Here the person seeks in the relationship the fulfillment of a new sense of belonging. Alfred Adler basis his whole philosophy on these need. He affirms that before all needs the most stringent need is the need of belonging, of having a place. I would apply this theory in couple psychotherapy saying that every man wants to be significant in the eyes of someone else. People don't see life otherwise even though they sometimes don't recognize such a absence. Experiencing the feeling of loneliness is linked with that of abandonment or „cancellation”. When the other one is more preoccupied with the „outside world” ignoring the state of unhappiness, the message is : “-You are not so important as to preoccupy me. You are not in my attention“. If the context allows infidelity, this doesn't take long to show.

- **The need for excitement**

The people who excuse their infidelity by claiming such a need, could fit in the lifestyles of the excitement or strong emotions seeker type. According to Harold H. Mosak, the parent of these typology, the lifestyle of the excitement seeker type belongs to those who search mainly strong emotions regularly or when life becomes boring, routine or gray.

This are either inner emotions or exterior emotions. Thus the person can create, conscious or not, a gloomy atmosphere for eluding from the responsibility in what concerns his part of contribution, but especially to excuse himself for his infidelity.

- **The need of strengthening your Self.**

At first this “excuse” finds an echo in personality having somewhat of an effect on the person, because the effort made, but also reaching the aim and releasing the tension, makes the person think about himself/herself that he/she has won or is a winner. In some cases the reasoning is correct, but there is also the situation often met in practice of those who after a short period of “euphoria” go through a period of suffering.

Other reasons:

- fear of too much intimacy with the partner;
- the need of more emotional closeness;
- the feeling of being neglected;
- from the need of making the other one jealous and to revive the couple’s relationship
- experiencing the feeling that you are permanently at the mercy of the other person.

**Most common types of infidelity to be found in psychotherapy practice:**

Infidelity can take more forms, and from the observations I drew from working with couples in which infidelity existed, I have noticed at least five types of cheating, each modality implied keeping the secret at any cost:

- *emotional infidelity* – undated and connecting outside the relationship (ex. relationship on the internet, business relationship, long distance relationships maintained by phone);
- *sexual infidelity* – for ex. one night stand; long term relationship, which can go in parallel with the existing couples relationship;

- *financial infidelity* – based on obtaining financial benefit;
- *the combination between sexual infidelity and emotional involvement* – these one is often fatal for the couple, the risk is for the infidel partner to choose the extra-conjugal relationship
- *infidelity as a sexual compulsive behaviour* – infidelity by phone, by e-mail, via internet, pornography, cyber sex or “hot-line” sex, multiple anonymous partners, unprotected sexual relationships, constant demands for sex, spending time in strip clubs, use of prostitutes/ escorts, etc.

The vast majority of couples who are seeking for psychotherapeutic treatment, suffer more from emotional infidelity. These implies the construction of an inappropriate intimate emotional relationship with someone from outside the couple. These may mean that the partner starts to share his/her personal or professional problems, desires, successes with a co-worker more than he/she does with the person home. Infidelity is also accompanied by secrecy, sexual attraction being part of the equation, even though it is not always put in practice. Emotional infidelity is hard to prove. Many patients complain that while they felt that something wasn't right, they would always receive from the partner the following type of affirmations: “-Are you crazy? We are only friends and that's it! We are co-workers.”

Infidelity is hard to prove because feelings and emotions can be camouflaged. Proving infidelity becomes, in this way, a detective's job, which implies large energy consumption and negative feelings. All of a sudden you find yourself Sherlock Holmes or detective Colombo. The aim of this detective job is that of knowing the truth, of being able to make the right decision regarding your couple's relationship. Infidelity, usually, starts with the attraction towards someone you know very well, someone you spend daily time with (a co-worker, an employee, the boss, the friend of your girlfriend, the friend of your husband, etc.). Most extra-conjugal relationships that occur at the work place, begin with drinking a coffee together in the coffee shop in the corner or at the dispenser in the firm's kitchen. Some people when they sense the danger of slipping in an extra-conjugal

relationship, tries to avoid it searching for psychotherapeutic help, a friends help or even the partners help.

Alfred Adler talks about human needs, he says that *they are essential for growth, for self esteem. They are crucial.* The four C's are terms that rise from the work of psychotherapist Lew and Betty Low Bettner (1996, 1998). They say *that in order for you to feel like belonging to a place you need to satisfy your psychological needs.* Along side with instinctual needs for food, water, shelter and sex, these psychological needs also exist, without which it is hard to feel like belonging.

*“We need each other. We need a partner who thinks about us that we are irreplaceable, to feel that we are connected. We need to be independent. We need others to need us. We need to feel useful. We need to be significant in the eyes of others”.* We need to be treated from an equal position. We need private time, a time for us. We need to know that we have impact. We need to know that we are useful and that our help is welcomed. This is the secret of psychological health. Apart from these needs there are also *emotional needs* such as Admiration, Affection, Conversation, Domestic support, Family commitment, Honesty, Openness, Sexual involvement.

Maybe the difference between the “long-race” couples (married or not) and “short-race” couples, consist precisely in the existence or absence of those four necessities or psychological motivations, all closely related to self esteem.

Rudolf Dreikurs wrote in his book “Challenge in Marriage”, that *no person who finds total satisfaction in the couples relationship will search outside it. But as our need for love is restricted by discourages and distress, almost anybody in a certain period of time felt the need of variety. When this need prevails, the person being in this situation can choose divorce, in order to avoid breaking the ethical code of the couple.* And Betty Lou Bettner said one time at Icassi, Oberstaufen, 2005, that the fact *that one of the partners has a lover is not the problem, but the fact that something is missing in/from his/her couple relationship is. The affair is not the problem, the fact that something is missing from the relationship is.*

**How do men cheat. How do women cheat**

- Men are inclined to involve themselves more physically than emotionally, while women value more emotional connection and the feeling of belonging;
- Often a connection *can be* noticed between infidelity and the reason behind the parents divorce (the primary couple – the first couple observed by the child, now an adult and couple partner);
- Regarding the way of cheating, men *tend* to live more intense sexual experiences than women;
- Women as well as men with education or with professional success, including large financial gains, but also with bigger opportunities, have the tendency to cheat sometimes shortly after their professional growth or financial independents/growth;
- The unfaithful woman *seems much more* inclined to hug or kiss the man with whom she cheats, while the unfaithful man puts basis on the “sex”;
- Both sexes choose infidelity more often for reassuring their “virility” or for to retaliation;
- Sometimes infidelity is seen as a “medicine” for healing the couple’s relationship (“it either falls or it gets stronger!”), there are no grantees in this sens. Ultimately each partner will choose the attitude to adopt regarding his/her experience;
- The unfaithful woman *can be more inclined* to fall in love with the man with whom she cheats, while the unfaithful man is more inclined to make short term plans (ex. someone told me that once he wanted to keep his mistress three more months, until winter would have passed);
- There is a close connection between infidelity and the dissatisfaction's from the couple’s relationship, although I have noticed that a lot of times the dissatisfaction's have, in their turn, much to do with emotional infidelity, like in a vicious circle, in which you don’t know who was first the egg or the chicken, the emotional connection outside the relationship or the disconnection with the relationship (ex. the dissatisfaction's in the couples relationship can appear for example when, imperceptibly, I emotionally connect with my office colleague.

- Still infidelity doesn't always have to do with unhappiness in the couple, and unhappiness isn't always a predictor for slipping outside the relationship;
- Unsatisfactory sexual life can determine an inclination towards infidelity;
  - In many cases the presence of children and assuming parental responsibility (sometimes even over-responsibility) can lead to the decrease of marital satisfaction and loneliness in the couple. Often this thing happens because the women is less willing for a couples relationship and more willing for the mother's role;
  - After infidelity, people lose Confidence in Others and Confidence in Themselves, the most stronger emotion is Furry, the biggest concern is linked with Self Image, the biggest fight is for Rediscovering the Self and Restoring self esteem, the suffering most frequently associated with discovering infidelity is depression (experiencing depression episodes).

### **A perspective upon the psychotherapy of infidelity**

No matter what is the proposed treatment, the couple must be informed that this is not a promise that the relationship will be saved, but it is necessary to do everything humanly possible from both sides in order to try and overcome the difficult situation. The therapeutic process is more a time to explore other relational alternatives, possible changes. The therapeutic success can mean a better relationship or a better divorce. Some clients who are in couple's therapy tell me that they are good at divorce, so they ask if I can help them make their relationship better.

Firstly the therapist should be preoccupied in restoring the trust of the person who was betrayed in the person who betrayed them. The person who cheated is encouraged to support his/her partner. Partners are invited to express their emotions. The psycho-educational part of the psychotherapeutic treatment is that of making known to the couple the necessity of expressing emotions. The betrayed partner, almost inevitably

can pass through a period of expressing emotions in an aggressive-destructive way, even if these feature isn't a part of his/hers personality.

In the case in which the partners make an effort to overcome the hard period of the relationship, it can happen that after a week of calm, the betrayed partner, who tries to restore confidence in the other person starts to feel vulnerable and can become hipper-vigilant and incredulous in the other person. An explanation would be that he/she doesn't feel ready to give trust, because this would mean to assume the consequences that derive from here. And one of the consequences would be for the unfaithful partner to repeat the mistake. By delaying the forgiveness and the forgetfulness he/she shelters from a new infidelity or suffering.

Even if it is an effort from the therapist but also from the couple partners, this phase of trust restoration can last a pretty long time. Sometimes, even after overcoming this phase, it is possible to come back to it after a period of time. That is way the message is: TAKE TIME FOR TRAINING (TTT)! A certain amount of time, a realistic attitude and realistic expectations are needed. Often the infidel partner asks a certain time to be forgiven, usually short (one, maximum two months). This time is unrealistic even if in some situations it is good not to exaggerate with the "mourning" period.

There is the situation in which the person being hurt forgives or believes that he/she can forgive in order to continue the couple's relationship, and later on to reproach constantly to the person who was unfaithful his/her mistake. This game is even more damaging because it has at its basis the need of retaliation/ vengeance. The message is "- you have wounded me, I will show you what it means to be hurt in return" or "- you didn't believe you will get away so easily". And there is also the situation in which the betrayed partner, chooses, in his/her turn to betray, sending the message: "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth". But what this person doesn't know is that in order to hurt the other person you use your own person to "give a lesson".

Another important step in the treatment is examining the factors that predisposed to infidelity. We are interested in the *family of origin, of family constellation, of the feminine and masculine models, of their parents couples relationship, of family values*

*and early memories and of THE MOST MEMORABLE OBSERVATION OR PROMISE WHICH HAS BEEN MADE.*

For a clarification of *the technique linked with the most Memorable Observation*, here is a shortly synthesized case which can help you in the intercession of understanding the term and the technique:

The present case is of a thirty-nine year old men, married for seven years and having two children one of six and one of three. In the family of origin, he was the first born in a family with two children, the second born being a sister with three years younger and permanently left in his care. The atmosphere in his family of origin was gray and full of conflicts. Even if the parents didn't get along since the begging of their marriage, they decided to stay married for "*the children sake*". Nevertheless the children haven't been raised in a healthy environment, the fights being something common in his family of origin. The two children had been friends, the brother protecting his sister until she left home when she came of age.

**He was the child who:** "-Always did the right thing". His main belief was that in life you always have to show good. He tells himself "the gold man" or "the five stars man". In the present he is a professionally successful man, and from the three tasks of life (work, intimacy and friendship), work seems to be the place from where he ensures his energy. The other tasks of life are not in balance.

The problem with which he comes into the office is because he has an affair type extra-conjugal relationship and he is in love, in spite of the fact that he knows he is married and he should be responsible for his marriage and his two children. Since his wife found out that she is being cheated, she suffered a depression and had a suicide attempt. Because only four months have passed since he has this relationship, the patient is still powerfully caught at an emotional level. If we can add the fact that he kept his relationship hidden and he enjoyed it quietly we can understand that the relationship is not at all consumed. However, none of the extra-conjugal relationships are entirely consumed, since the two don't spend their life together and don't live together twenty-four of twenty-four hours so that they could see the psychological wrinkles on their foreheads. His expectations from the therapy are those of succeeding to enter once again

in a connection with his wife for continuing their communication like in the past. He is honest and he admits that he doesn't want to continue the intimate connection with his wife, but he would want to separate in good terms so that he could maintain a good relationship with the children through her.

He describes himself as being a person with needs of social interaction, of a worldly life, of agitation around him. He was always restless. Because it was hard for me to obtain his early Memories, I tried to obtain The Most Memorable Observation. The American Psychologist Frank Walton, the initiator of this technique (which basis itself on the study of the original work of Alfred Adler) wrote to me in a electronic letter the fact that M.O. is a generalization linked with the life inside the house with the family of origin and when we use the most Memorable Observation we have to:

1. *Alert the client that there is the possibility that this behaviour happens: he/she can operate depending on his/ her personal logic and maybe not so much on the good common sense.*
2. *We want to help the client see how much was the event exaggerated in the case in which it happens and this because it was awful for him/her in his/hers preadolescence.*
3. *We need to help him see that so far he didn't learn, he hasn't been exposed and he didn't knew any technique or principles which could be used to improve like this a "appalling situation".*

In the case of our patient, this is: "- When I was twelve my father wanted to abandon my mother, but eventually he decided to stay with her for us. But we were not happy children, we have lived in an hostile environment".

M.O. it seems like saying: "- *It is a mistake for parents to remain in the relationship is this means suffering for the children or for them to be raied in an unhappy athmosphere. It is terrible*". We can imagine that he is perminently on guard and he hunts this in his relationship. The most Memorable Observation is a promise that we do to ourselves in childhood and we are concerned in the adulthood to keep our promise.

The patient operates on his private logic which has little to do with common sense. He is in this way capable of justifying his affair and excuse himself from the task of working together with his wife at improving their couple's relationship and its salvation. You need to know that shortly he stopped coming to therapy announcing that couple's psychotherapy isn't of any use to him and that his wife needs more a psychotherapy of depression. After a few weeks break, they came again for couple's psychotherapy, but after two sessions he stated that he is getting ready to leave the house and find some other place to stay. His desire is: "- to free myself now in order to be able to feel to get back in the marriage latter on". He wants to be away from his wife, but connected with the childre. It is curious how the most Memorable Observation changed a little. It sound different now: "- *It is a mistake for the parents to stay together if they are unhappy*". The children aren't in the middle anymore.

*"The soul of the universe is the same"* said Rachel Shifron one time at Icassi Oberstaufen, 2005. No matter where you come from, no matter the back up you are the same, the language of the early memories is the same, he shows the culture, tradition, values, towards what he/she is going, what motivates him/her, what doesn't. Before giving an example on how early Memories can be used as a working technique in psychotherapy, here are some modalities to look at them. This point of view is Rachel's Shifron perspective:

- *Early Memories describe accurately the current emotional situation; how do we feel regarding our life in this very moment.*
- *Early Memories can be seen as powers*
- *Through them we can conclude how the person sees the world, himself/herself, the people, as a metaphor for what the person is in this moment*
- *We can see early Memories as the sequences of an entire landscape, if we ask 3 E.M. they are sequences of the same problem*
- *We can see the persons interests*

- *When we look at early Memories as metaphors it becomes more easy to find the vocational interest of the person, as a process of discovering skills and vocation*
- *When we look at the metaphor of the early Memories we can discover the addictions from the life style (the more the skills are, they become even more addictive); therefore the identification with parental addictions*
- *When we use early Memories as metaphors we can understand the relationship between the partners, we can discover which are the aims of the couple, we can see where the couple got “stuck”, we can help connecting the couples partners.*

Usually from the two early Memories requested, one is a metaphor oriented towards action (the first E.M.) and the other one is oriented towards entertainment (the second E.M.). When the clients come in the office, they come because they are not aware of their strengths and qualities. When the client comes with pain or problems and strong emotions the most appropriate thing is to find their strengths. The early Memories are considered to be a way of discovering the present problem. The early Memories are used as resources for strengths and as a metaphor for the current situation. With their help a therapeutic relationship is being created, because even from the first session the therapist can know his/her client, and the client can say: “- *The therapist understands me, we speak the same language!*”.

In order to clarify the early Memories technique I will present a short case. *Ion is a man of Romanian ethnicity, with the age of thirty, judicial adviser at a firm of business consulting. He is married from 2005, but the couple’s relationship lasts from 1997, when he first met his partner in high school, in the ninth grade (she reproached him that he didn’t pay attention to the classes and that he made noise, and he fell in love with her). From what he said, he courted her for three years before she gave in. Although he was faithful to her a long time, it seemed natural that from some time to experiment extra-conjugal relationships as well. His conclusion was that there is nothing phenomenal in extra-conjugal relationships, only the novelty is what draws him.*

*His personal history: the youngest in a family with two children, he has a sister thirteen years older whom he says beat him almost all his childhood. She is totally his opposite, he describes her behaviour in terms of “Not like this!”. She ran away from home a number of times and created big problems to the family and especially to their mother whom was the most involved at the time. His parents divorced when he was six years old. He was conceived by his mother after an extra-conjugal relationship with a man (we will call him Vasile) who passed for many years as a family friend. This man was married also at the moment of the infidelity and one year after Ion’s birth, he had a son from his own couple’s relationship. As well the patient found out that his father (at that moment the patient thought he was his natural father, we will name him Mihai) had extra-conjugal relationships and that after the divorce he remained with the woman with whom he was unfaithful. It seems that infidelity has been a family value since all the important members of the family were involved in extra-conjugal relationships. He confesses that he wanted Vasile, the family friend, to be “his true father” because he admired him. He had suspicions and he did not understand why when Vasile wanted to take him to the park, in the house there were always fights, until his mother started advising him to lie to his father, Mihai, and to keep hidden from him going out with father Vasile.*

*His role in the family: “I was the child who had to listen to my sister and to do what she was telling me, otherwise she would snap me. Nevertheless the relationship has been good, she would take me dating, when she was working and I was a pupil she would help me with the money. I was also vengeful, sometimes I would call my mother at work and my mother would argue with her on the phone and because she could not put the phone down, I used to kick her when she was speaking with my mother on the phone”.*

### **Six years**

*I was playing in the attic with a gasoline lamp*

*I waited for the little glasses to burn, they burned and then I used to repeat the operation **being used to control fire***

*And the drops bounced on me and my coat caught fire.*

*It was a difficult moment, my sleeve was burning and I spilled the gasoline,*

*But I found some sand and I poured sand on the floor and only then I removed the danger,*

*Only afterward I felt **pain, burning***

*Mp- when I took off my coat and I was quenching it with my feet*

*Emotion- clearly fear, there are fractions of a second and there was the risk that I could have taken fire*

***During the time of danger I have shown great maturity and I succeeded in quenching my clothes. I saved myself and I saved the house!***

*Although he strives to process facts, events and this was reflected in the actions he was taking, his conclusions are erroneous. If he drew the conclusion that he saved himself and the house it is a wrong conclusion, because the house wasn't attacked from the outside, but he was the one who came to destroy it believing that he could face the life's limit situations. Once he proved and continues proving, putting his prestige and his family and couple's life in danger, expecting to be discovered as an "hero-rescuer". He causes situations. He shoots, he kicks with his head, he scores. He pays a price for the courage of experimenting "fire" and "playing with fire". Due to the pleasure of the game, he risks not to feel his burn. I don't expect the controllable situation to become uncontrollable. I expect the rules of the game not to change. In life you have to take into consideration the risks and always have near you "the bag of sand".*

Regarding the actual couple we are interested to know if there were any conflicts and the way in which they were solved, if the psychological needs were fulfilled, what priority number do the two partners have and what damaging games have they played in the couple (for example: "I have debit, you have credit). If there were no conflicts it means that there were some lack of discussions, undisclosed emotions and thoughts and that is why they were never solved.

Few unfaithful partners remain in treatment until the end. Some abandon prematurely the therapy even with the thought of giving up the relationship. Maybe is better to communicate that “before they will be better, for a while it will be worse” but this “worse” is for their good. It is good to reassure them whenever necessary that our role is not that of judging, but that of trying to be useful.

### **An instrument that can serve as a predictor for slipping into infidelity**

#### **To be or not to be unfaithful**

Author psychotherapist Ramona Covrig

1. Do you feel that in your couple's relationship there is no closeness, you don't feel emotionally connected in the good sense of the word? (emotional connection can be a warm type, a cold type, indifferent and maybe also aggressive)
2. Do you feel alone in your couple's relationship?
3. Do you have the tendency of falling in love easily?
4. Do you have the tendency to avenge on your partner for what he/she did or didn't do for you?
5. Do you feel unhappy in the couple's relationship?
6. Do you feel like you don't find your place in the couple?
7. Are you more often willing to make love/sex while your partner doesn't feel the need of physical closeness or makes up excuses?
8. Do you hardly refrain? Are you used to answer to your impulses? Maybe do you function on the principle of pleasure “I want this here and now”?
9. Do you feel the need of proving your virility or the fact that you are still desirable?

10. Are you “crazy” for sex?
11. Is your partner depend to much on you? You don’t have any more private time? Are you living in “symbiosis” very close to each other and you want some time for yourself?
12. Do you feel you are neglected by the partner and do you feel you are insignificant in his/her eyes?
13. Do you feel that in the current couple’s relationship your dreams and hopes have been fulfilled? Do you feel that you haven’t “grown”? Do you feel like stalled instead of developing as a personality at a professional, social and spiritual level?
14. Do you feel the need of to make your partner jealous thinking that in this way your couple’s relationship will work better and it will revive?
15. Do you feel somehow that you are at the mercy of your partner?
16. Do you feel that you cannot communicate with the partner or that what you say is irrelevant to him/her?
17. Do you feel discouraged by the couple’s partner or do you feel that you are not encouraged by him/ her?
18. Do you easily answer an invitation to coffee from other men/women colleagues at work or the boss?
19. Do you have the tendency to complain to women if you are a man or to complain to men if you are a woman about your private couple life?

**Bibliografie:**

Bettner, B, L., & Lew, A. (1993). The Connexion Focusing Technique for couple therapy: A model for understanding lifestyle and complementarity in couples. *Individual Psychology: The journal of Adlerian Theory, Research & Practice*

Bettner, B, L., & Lew, A (1996). *Raising kids who can*. Newton Center, MA: Connexions Press.

Dinkmeyer, D., & Carlson, J. (1985). TIME for better marriage. *Individual Psychology: The journal of Adlerian Theory, Research & Practice*

Dreikurs, R.(1946). *The challenge of marriage*. New York: Hawthorne Books.

Carlson, J., & Sperry, L. (1998). *The disordered couple* by Brunnel & Mazel

Bettner, B, L., Icassi, Oberstaufen, Germany (2006). *Enrichment couple*