

Available online at www.postmodernopenings.com

e-ISSN: 2069-9387; ISSN-L: 2068-0236

Postmodern Openings

2016, Volume 7, Issue 2, December, pp. 167-178

The Two Dimensions of Infidelity

Iulian APOSTU

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18662/po/2016.0702.11>

Covered in:

EBSCO, CEEOL, DOAJ, Erih Plus, Index
Copernicus, Ideas RePeC, EconPapers,
Socionet, Ulrich Pro Quest, Cabel, SSRN,
Appreciative Inquiry Commons,
Journalseek, Scipio.

©2016 The Authors & LUMEN Publishing House.

Selection, peer review and publishing under the responsibility of LUMEN Publishing House.

How to cite: Apostu, I. (2016). The Two Dimensions of Infidelity. Postmodern Openings, 7(2), 167-178. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18662/po/2016.0702.11>

The Two Dimensions of Infidelity

Iulian APOSTU¹

Abstract: An objective assessment of a conjugal relationship should measure the level of satisfaction of each partner, so that the happiness produced by such a partnership to be equal for both of them. Also, in a relationship, guilt doesn't have to be sought in one of the partners, or in a final effect, but in the context of factors that generated it. However, conjugal postmodernity shows that the tendencies of partners' orientation are more obviously guided by conjugal individualism, which marks another stage in the development of the relationships between genders, but also in the type of functional relationship. The partners tend to see the other as a resource for individual fulfilment, and their fusion no longer gives priority to solidarity, but to the personal need for self-accomplishment through the other. They pretend from each other more than they are willing to offer themselves in a conjugal relationship, and all these new orientations seem to outline more obviously the postmodern structure of the conjugal individualism. Therefore, from an appreciative perspective, individualism appears, either in a client centred approach, or in an approach centred on task, both models being tributary to the model of deconstruction that underlies postmodernity. The individual and its actions matter more than the social and moral norms of the society, and the individual's dysfunctionality in report with the exterior norm is correlated with the more evident inconsistency of the systems to which they belong (Sandu, 2015, p. 185). The negative individualism is easy to explain conceptually. It is gradually being extracted from the moral norm of the majority, and it transcends the idea of solidarity; the personal ideal becomes norm for the other, and the solidarity towards the other quickly turns into a type of self-solidarity. The positive individualism is appreciated in a certain scientific community due to the sincerity of the partner in asking what he wishes from a conjugal relationship, but the impact of this "sincerity" can only have an individualist effect, not one that would lead to fusion. This is because the other's solidarity with "myself" ensures my security, while my solidarity to myself ensures my self-accomplishment. Thus, all the conjugal values have a double value, based on the type of evaluation: evaluation of own actions or evaluation of the partner's actions. My fidelity must be contextually appreciated, with fluctuations based on the circumstances of life, while fidelity of the other must be seen as an inflexible moral norm. In this regard, the very concepts of fidelity/infidelity acquire double value, based on the type of reporting: towards self or towards the other.

Keywords: fidelity; infidelity; conjugal modernity; conjugal postmodernity.

¹ Lecturer PhD, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, Romania, phdiulian@gmail.com.

Infidelity – dynamics and social consequences

Although the contemporary society tends more and more towards individualism, the conjugal relationships founded on solidarity remain a constant in determining a person's happiness. The dilemmas of happiness rather arise when the individuals rank the personal happiness and the happiness of the other. Therefore, solidarity, trust, love, fidelity, etc., are values of different intensity when talking about self or the other.

The society tends to become more obviously postmoralist, reason for which the contemporary ethics builds its norms based on pluralist liberal principles, and most of the times, pragmatic (Sandu, 2015, p. 23).

At conjugal level, the dysfunction of solidarity creates a series of knock-on effects regarding the trust in the other, the fusion, attachment, the fulfilment of mutual ideals, etc. On this background, infidelity appears as a form of the partner's reaction to the conjugal unhappiness or the lacks that mark the basic relationship.

Today, infidelity is one of the most common reasons for marital dissolution. For this reason, 41% of divorces are caused by physical or emotional infidelity (Statistic brain, 2016, Associated Press, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy)

Each couple, individual or group can have a different opinion and attitude towards what infidelity means (Terec-Vlad, 2015). Their attitude towards it can be different, but they both respond negatively to the other's infidelity. Nowadays, men and women still have debates on the sum of behaviours that constitute infidelity. Women, a lot more than men, tend to consider to be important, besides the sexual behaviour, also the affective behaviour as well as certain contacts in the on-line environment as being acts of infidelity, this reflecting also on their own behaviour (Knight, 2010, pp. 27-28).

The sociological studies, and the ones in the field of psychology describe three big categories that can group these behaviours: emotional, on-line and sexual infidelity.

The emotional infidelity is defined by the category of poses through which a partner expresses its emotional resources, such as: love, time and attention to another person, other than the life partner (Knight, 2010, p. 2). This doesn't involve the intimate relationship too, but also doesn't exclude its possibility. Emotional infidelity occurs also as a subjective concept in which each partner, based on the level of tolerance, identifies different sets of gestures as being unacceptable: discussing certain ideas with a certain level

of intimacy, secrets, spending time together, discussions on sexuality and eroticism, etc.

In a newer context, infidelity in the on-line environment also appears in the category of undesirable behaviours. Today, the internet offers multiple ways to establish new relationships, and implicitly favours infidelity. Among the “advantages” that this type of infidelity has, is the possibility of keeping the on-line relationships private, and also the possibility of emotional closeness without losing the intimacy. It combines elements from the sexual infidelity (cybersex, partners’ simulation, adult movies, etc.) and emotional infidelity (flirting, sharing intimate secrets, talking to someone who shares a romantic interest) (Knight, 2010, p. 3).

Discovering the infidelity often leads to emotional shock and a conflict between the partner who was cheated and the one who cheated, the relationship ending most of the times. However, in most cases, the adventures are symptoms of problems in the couple, rather than the cause of it. The problems in a couple are some of the main reasons which determines the individuals to “go wrong”. Julia Cole & Relate talk about 6 of these symptoms: losing a family member may stray the partners if they were already facing tensions; reaching middle age; concerns about the money, them being the main reason for couples fighting; changing the lifestyle (changing home, losing or getting a new job); relationship problems (Cole, 2005, p. 82).

Many of the researches on infidelity focused on the partners’ motivation for this issue. In this regard, Gerard Leleu shares the causes of infidelity into 7 big categories. He starts from the predisposition to infidelity, considered to be a “remote hereditary cause” who was justified through the fact that the ancestors practiced free love and polygamy. He also states that the human population presents these characteristics, 80% of the population being polygamist. Also, the human species presents a sexual dimorphism, where the male is dominant (the man has a superior stature over the woman), feature only found in races practicing free love (Leleu, 2011, p. 74).

Also, from a series of causes inherent to the human nature, the author states that the human being keeps deep inside a hunger for the other, and an exploratory tendency which determines him to approach his peers, to touch and get to know them. These deviations cannot be explained only through sexual compulsion, but they also correspond to a need for living intensely, spectacularly. Also, from a multipolar perspective, people have multiple faces, in terms of consciousness or even unconsciousness. Our

needs are diverse and differ from one person to the other, and because the everyday life sometimes becomes monotonous, the feelings start losing intensity. Therefore, infidelity seldom emerges from the lust for new, the need for regeneration outside the couple where the old habits and the routine have brought boredom and extinguished the vital enthusiasm, like a “revolt against monotony”. (Leleu, 2011, p. 80)

Other causes may be found in the relationship between the man and the woman, in the physical and emotional dissatisfaction or the relaxation of the mentality regarding sexuality, etc.

From a different point of view why shows the cause of infidelity from a psycho-social perspective, the motivations gain a different depth. The lack of attachment of one of the partners makes him anticipate the end of the relationship. Called by Julia Cole as being “an adventure of the one opening the door”, escaping from such dysfunctional conjugal system takes a period of transition from the old relationship towards a new one, through a relaxed behaviour that would diminish the emotional costs or the suffering caused by the separation. Cole describes as “the three-legged chair”, the act of infidelity of one of the partners as a form of releasing himself from the pressure on the couple. Counterintuitive with the effects anticipated by such an action, the author specifies that the couple’s sexual life can even improve, and the relationship between the partners relax.

Also, another cause which arises as a false remedy with hard effects on the relationship is also the tendency for revenge which emerges when one of the partners feels hurt due to the other’s affair, and tries to punish the partner in the same way, or to recover the self-confidence through this affair (Cole, 2005, p. 92).

Other causes may arise from the tendency of avoiding intimacy, involvement and potential vulnerabilities or effects generated by the limited sexual experience. The partner involved in the affair usually seeks to discover how a sexual experience with a different person would feel like, and starts from there. This type of adventure is perceived and accepted differently by men and women, their reactions being different (Cole, 2005, p. 103).

The studies in 1998 showed that a man may lead this life in one of the two basic stages of masculine sexuality: loaded – the stage that being 24 hours after the last orgasm and lasts until the next orgasm; unloaded – the 24 hours from the previous orgasm. The period of time in which the man is “unloaded” is the time with the fewest tendencies of having uncontrolled

behaviour. The stage of “loaded”, on the other hand, is the main reason for breaking commitments. A man in this stage is like “a train that rushes, a disaster in everything he does” (Smith & Doe, 1998, p. 30).

Of course, without showing a type of behaviour that would be a genetic particularity which would excuse the male infidelity, the tendency towards infidelity is a fake remedy that needs to be evaluated in a complex framework of dysfunctions that mark a conjugal relationship. The man is overwhelmed by the needs that gradually increase in intensity, and in its attempt to manage the psycho-physical state he is rather prone to listening to his body rather than his mind.

Also, a sick or depressive individual may stimulate the search for conjugal vitality elsewhere. This situation also involves a reduced or inexistent sexual activity between the partners. A partner being away is also a source of infidelity. The trips being very common, the other partner spend a lot of time alone, his sexual and emotional needs being neglected due to the partner’s work, so he can seek to satisfy these needs elsewhere, reaching to another person. Most of the times, certain personality traits of the partner, for example the lack of trust that the partner shows through jealousy, are a factor in determining the involvement in love affairs (Raoul-Duval, 2000, p. 35).

Methodology

The study is based on sociological survey, being a quantitative research. As a form of sociological investigation, we used the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 200 young people (100 men and 100 women) aged between 29-39, with a conjugal experience of at least 3 years, regardless of their current marital status. Building the sample it was aimed to select the individuals in the age category that would focus on both the conjugal functionality and the dysfunctionality, so the young people in the medium age category (25-29 years old, which is 35.6% of the total of marriages), and the category of medium age in divorce (35-39 years old, which is 19.88% of all divorces). Also, in the age category of 25-39 years old, 58.36% of marriages end, and 57.62% of divorces occur. (Source: INSSE)

The objective of the study was the comparative analysis of the opinions regarding own fidelity versus the other’s infidelity.

The research starts from the premise of the theory of Gilles Lipovetsky (1996) on the twilight of duty who states that the postmodern society is a post-moralist one. Therefore, the theory is deconstructed in

favour of the individual. It has a double value based on the direction from which it is analysed – towards self or towards the other. In this context, regarding fidelity and infidelity, the individual no longer feels censored by the moral norm, becoming useful only in the context in which it produces good or personal security.

Infidelity – a two-way dimension

As shown by the theoretical approach, infidelity doesn't have to be seen only as an immoral act of one of the partners, but also as an effect of a relationship with a certain level of dysfunctionality.

From a sociological point of view, the coherence of all conjugal functions ensures stability and balance in any conjugal relationship. Among these, the function of solidarity is what ensures the internal cohesion of the couple, which permanently validates the level of mutual fulfilment, it is what sums love, respect, trust and which secures the couple, orienting conflicts towards mediation, etc.

The results of the research show that a share of 25% of the interviewed see lack of trust as being the biggest issue in couples, and 22% of them state that the lies of the partner is what bothers most. The analysis of the two indicators shows that, one way or another, the issue of trust marks almost 50% of the quality of life in a couple. The lack of trust and the related problems (lies, miscommunication of needs, fear of discussing the problems, etc.) becomes a source of constant tension which, left unresolved, may lead to separation (Unguru, 2010). At the same time, the deepening of the state of dissatisfaction, of relational incompleteness, may be the premise of an extremely diverse range of conjugal relationships: temporary separation, permanent conflicts, self-censorship, infidelity or separation.

From the perspective of the study objectives, the frequency of these conflictual reasons shows that, in fact, two resources can stimulate infidelity because, as both the lack of trust and the presence of lies in the conjugal relationship are directly enforceable to the conjugal solidarity. Of course, these two problems may occur in the couple also based on certain internal processes, for example one of the partners' personality, while infidelity is a rather contextual problem. It is an effect of conjugal dysfunctions and can manifest in a certain favourable environment. The studies in the international area showed that the will for infidelity is greater than the infidelity. Therefore, a study conducted by American researchers shows that 74% of men and 68% of women admit the fact that they would want to

have an affair, but are too strongly controlled by the partner (Statistic brain, 2016).

The analysis of the indicators resulting from this research showed that the infidelity declared by the respondents is of 10.38%. In the applied survey, the respondents were asked to describe the person which, for them, may be a “temptation” hard to refuse. Thus, 71% of them described the optimal qualities in a potential partner, while only 29% of them chose the option of “I would never cheat”.

Regarding the perception on the physical or personality traits which may lead to infidelity, the results showed statistical variations, significantly different on gender. A very nice physical appearance is considered to be a basic characteristic which predisposes to infidelity in a percentage of 57% from the total. The gender-based approach shows variations strictly correlated with the socially general mentalities – 46% of women and 68% of men, fact which shows that, for men, beauty outweighs any other features. They double physical beauty as an element which expresses femininity – 14%, popularity – 11% and sincerity – 6%.

In the construction of the desired partner’s image, women value more the psycho-relational qualities than men. They double beauty with qualities such as empathy – 23%, the quality of good listener – 13%, sincerity – 8%, elements which express masculinity – 6% and popularity – 3%.

The analysis of opinions regarding own infidelity shows a generous level of acceptability, justified most of the times by the experience of the moment, without long-term implications. Therefore, the distribution of answers shows an increased share for three of the variables presented in the survey: releasing frustrations – 39%, receiving love and affection – 31% and curiosity – 24%.

The motivation of releasing frustrations describes the category of partners that reached a level of tension and conjugal dissatisfaction hard to mediate, infidelity being seen as a remedy for releasing the tension. The frustrations may arise in a couple both from the problems (lack of affection, lack of intimate relationships, dysfunctions in the erotic communication, constant criticism, misunderstandings, different ideals, etc.) as well as certain problems outside the couple (problems related to work, friends, etc.). All these may put pressure on the partner, determining his to search for alternatives to release the tension.

The need for love and affection can be described through the “theory of the partner that opens the door”. Studies in therapy show that a considerable category of conjugal partners reach a stage of low intimacy that they cannot surpass (Smalley, 2010). For this reason they accumulate frustrations, dissatisfactions, even when formally maintaining the solidarity. Gradually, the conjugal relationship loses its tonus, its emotional content, infidelity becoming the unconventional way of emotional revitalization. In this regard, the “adventure that opens the door” is, in fact, the strategy through which the unfaithful partner self-exposes to the other as dysfunctional, influencing the decision of dissolution.

The effect of an obsolete conjugal relationship also justifies the motivation of infidelity for the sake of curiosity. This is based on conjugal dissatisfaction, impaired relationships, the desire for individualist fulfilment, the tendency for comparative analysis, the need for a resource-experience that would underlie a potential dissolution, etc.

Infidelity doesn't always have direct conjugal causes, but also some strictly individual. Therefore, for 13% of the respondents, infidelity was justified also as a strategy of career advancement. The increased frequency of this item shows that for this category, the order of priorities downgrades marital relationships in favour of career development.

Regarding own infidelity, 22% of the respondents tried to engage emotionally with another person, and 25% said that without emotional implications, they had sexual relationships with another person while being already in a relationship. According to the analysed indicators, the two forms of infidelity (physical and emotional) were found together in 16% of the respondents in the sample, and in this category, the gender share for “double infidelity” is revealing – 61% of women and 39% of men.

Regarding the feedback of their own infidelity, the respondents said that at the beginning of the emotional affair, the dominant feelings were of euphoria and emotion (33%). Another feeling mentioned by them is the uncertainty, with 27%, relatively close to euphoria. Liberty was also mentioned in 20% of cases, guilt and fear of being discovered representing the lowest response rate.

We find the frequency of the respondent's attitude over the evolution of the affair to somehow represent a reflection of the answers given to the previous question, the options being similar and highlighting similar traits of the respondents.

The analysis of the other's infidelity is done, naturally, through the systems of values of gender, this time being reverse engineered. For this reason, the second value dimension of infidelity is that of the other's "sin" (Sandu, Terec-Vlad, 2016). The personal projections that motivated infidelity through feelings of euphoria, emotion, liberty, are not converted in their antithesis – bitterness, emotional blockage, censorship. As previously mentioned, infidelity for a woman involves emotional commitment too, therefore, in the partner's evaluation, the intensity of the sin increases based on the level of physical and emotional involvement. The social stereotype according to which the man is genetically unfaithful can create a slight tolerance in women regarding the impact of an affair. However, the existence of feeling in an extra-conjugal affair considerably decreases the level of female tolerance due to the fact that the projection of emotional involvement signals the woman the proof of romantic fusion with someone else, and not only a momentary physical affair.

Women are genetically programmed to feel the mismatch between two messages or attitudes with a greater accuracy (Tudose, 2012). For this reason, emotional infidelity is understood as emptying the relationship of content because, all that we feel as intimate and profound in our own relationship, becomes a personal loss in favour of another.

For men, however, infidelity involves most of the times only the erotic side, therefore the evaluation of infidelity is done based on this boundary. Men tend to show a greater attention towards what is palpable and directly assessable. For them, the intimate relationship can rather become a boundary of attention, not an infidelity. Their level of developing a message, of communicating, firstly captures the direct message, and not its side nuances.

Another opposite attitude that once again justifies the two values of infidelity is finding out about the infidelity. Considering their own infidelity, 71% of the respondents declared that they wouldn't want it to be exposed. However, the analysis of the level of conjugal satisfaction of the 29% that don't experience the fear of exposure shows that the conjugal dysfunctions selected by the respondents in the survey (relational or erotic frustrations – 42%, the lack of affection – 31%, repeated separations – 13%, etc.) sufficiently emptied the relationship of emotional content so much, that the justification of lack of fear is rather based on a potential foresight of the dissolution through a set of behaviours that would involve morally assuming this "sin".

Regarding the other's infidelity, the "want to know"/"don't want to know" have different statistic levels – 81% of them wish to find out, and 19% don't want that. The analysis of the two sets of statistic frequencies once again shows a greater interest towards the other's infidelity. These aspects show that the appreciation of conjugal infidelity isn't done in the context of a functional dynamic. In evaluating the other, the effect of infidelity rarely appears correlated with the conjugal dysfunction. Infidelity is seen as a betrayal, a lack of love, a reason for dissolution, etc.

Therefore, the value counter clock described by the two values of infidelity shows that the subjectivity of self-evaluation appears more objective than when evaluating the other. If self-assessing the infidelity is seen as an effect of the relational issues, of all frustrations accumulated by the couple, assessing the partner's infidelity is seen from the perspective of guilt and not of the context which lead to the infidelity.

Conclusions

The data analysis resulting from the research shows that individual infidelity and conjugal fidelity are not similar concepts, but sometimes even opposing. Of course, the results of the study cannot be generalized, the infidelity in Romania not being a generalized social behaviour, but rather individual actions with a relative frequency.

Individual fidelity doesn't have an imperative value itself, but is an effect of personal fulfilment through a conjugal relationship. In terms of the perspective of expectations, conjugal fidelity is a constant from which we cannot make an exception. Therefore, fidelity of the partner becomes the guarantee of his love, of a mutual security that protects the couple from the violence of external temptations.

Infidelity responds to certain subjective tendencies that the self doesn't go into moral dissonance with. It is a personal way through which the individual tries to remove himself from the community, from certain external moral imperatives. Infidelity is assimilated as being a state outside the couple, as a way of individual self-regulation due to eroded feelings that mark, temporarily or generally, the conjugal dysfunctions.

Also, considering infidelity from the two perspectives, it oscillates between the subjective condition of a temporary remedy or that of the sin, if we consider the partner.

The dual attitude of fidelity and infidelity in the contemporary space shows an increasingly evident tendency of the individualist behaviours in

conjuality. The individuals are more and more important for themselves, and the partners become a resource for personal fulfilment. The dual tendency of analysing such breaches of conjugal faith prove that in assessing the partner's infidelity and managing this impasse, the context is not important, but the act itself is, as a form of undermining the partner's trust. Fidelity therefore becomes a dimension of evaluating the other in relation to own need for physical and emotional stability.

In the subjective tendency of self-evaluating their infidelity, each partner understands his condition, the decision and the act itself. This analysis is done relative to the dysfunctions identified in the couple, infidelity appearing as a consequence of this unfortunate event, or as a fulfilment of certain shortcomings experienced in the relationship. Yet still, the awareness of the conjugal problems that justify the dysfunction doesn't have to become the source that subjectively motivates the infidelity.

Infidelity could be seen as an accidental situation generated by a set of factors of tension that should stimulate a mutual analysis of the dysfunctions. Contrary to this strategy with therapeutic effect, the partners affected by infidelity prefer to evaluate and react to the effect, and not to the context of causes which generated it. From the other perspective, the partner's orientation towards the problems transmits certain individualist behaviours with predispositions towards infidelity, and not solidary behaviours that would stimulate negotiation, conflict mediation and, subsequently, cohesion.

This dual attitude of the individual in relation to infidelity must be seen in strict correlation with the alterity, because it transcends any moral norm. The individuals assess their acts through a subjective report with immediate effects, not with the social norm. Therefore, the norm and the duty of fidelity remain a benchmark for the other, for the self, them being in the twilight.

References

- Cole, J. & Relate (2005). *Față în față cu infidelitatea. Continuăm sau divorțăm?* [Face to face with infidelity. Do we continue or do we divorce?]. București: Curtea Veche Publishing.
- Knight, E. (2010). *Gender differences in defining infidelity*. The Faculty of Humboldt State University.

- Leleu, G. (2010). *Cum să fim fericiți în cuplu? Între fidelitate și infidelitate. [How to be happy in a couple? Between fidelity and infidelity]*. București: Trei Publishing.
- Lipovetsky, G. (1996). *Amurgul datoriei, Etica nedureroasă a noilor timpuri democratice, [The twilight of duty. The painless ethics of new democratic times]*. București: Babel Publishing.
- Raoul-Duval, J. (2000). *Farmecul discret al adulterului. Scenariile infidelității, [The discreet charm of adultery. Scenarios of infidelity]*. București: Humanitas Practic.
- Sandu, A. (2015). *Etică și practică socială, [Ethics and social practice]*. Iași: Lumen.
- Sandu, A., Terec-Vlad, L. (2016). A Phenomenological Perspective on Transhumanism from the Perspective of the Spoken of Being. *Postmodern Openings*, 7(1), pp. 67-76.
- Smalley, G. (2010). *Cnd unu plus unu fac NOI, [When one plus one makes US]*. București: Curtea Veche.
- Statistic brain (2016). *Statistics infidelity*. Associated Press, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.
- Smith and Doe (1998). *Ce nu vor bărbații să știe femeile, [What men don't want women to know]*. București: Image.
- Terec-Vlad, L. (2015). From Communicative Action to social Practices. Book Review. Acțiune comunicativă, justiție deliberativă și restaurativă – authors Antonio Sandu and Elena Unguru, Tritonic Publishing House, 2014. *Postmodern Openings*, 6(1), pp. 209-2012.
- Tudose, C. (2012). *Gen și personalitate, [Gender and personality]*. București: Tritonic.
- Unguru E. (2010). Features of Lie in Verbal and Nonverbal Communication. *Postmodern Openings*, 2/2010, pp. 95 – 108.