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PhD THESIS

**A Model of Predictive Factors of Infidelity. Emotional Responses to
Sexual versus Emotional Infidelity**

Summary

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Infidelity is undoubtedly a sign of imbalance within the couple, as well as a reflection of the problems of each partner (Turliuc, 2009).

Most therapists place infidelity among the most serious problems of a couple (Weeks, Gambescia, & Jenkins, 2003). The negative effects of infidelity can be observed at the following levels: *individual, family and social* (Turliuc, 2009).

Drawing on the limitations of the studies analysing the effects of infidelity on the romantic relationship, the present paper aims to: (1) *analyse the predictors of infidelity*, (2) *analyse the emotional and behavioural responses*, (3) *analyse the investment model* at a dyadic level, (4) *analyse the role of attributions and forgiveness* in the dissolution process of a relationship as a result of infidelity as well as the moderating role of gender.

The present paper consists of eight chapters: the first four are primarily theoretical and the following four aim to re-evaluate the concept of infidelity from a practical perspective. Finally, the theoretical and practical implications of the studies conducted will be analysed.

In the first chapter of this paper we address the theoretical aspects related to the concept of infidelity, the types of infidelity and we elaborated on the theories and models that explain infidelity.

The definition of the concept of infidelity, based on a number of studies conducted at the University of Chicago between 1972 and 2010 is the following: “*a sexual relationship with a person other than the husband/wife*” (Crouch, 2011, p. 4). This definition confines infidelity to a sexual relationship.

Specialised literature describes different types of infidelity: *sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity* and *mixed infidelity*, which includes both sexual and emotional aspects (Glass & Wright, 1997).

■ *Intrapersonal theories*

The attachment theory is a “unique framework for explaining the development, maintenance and dissolution of interpersonal relationships, as well as a perspective on developing the personality and emotional regulation” (Fraley & Shaver, 2000, p.132). Thus, the secure attachment style provides a secure basis for the development and maintenance of a romantic relationship, the infidelity rate being very low (Fricker, 2006). Within the same context, persons with an avoidant or anxious attachment style record a low level of marital satisfaction in the current relationship, which is why they choose to get involved in acts of infidelity (Birnbau, Reis, Mikulincer, Gillath, & Orpaz, 2006).

The typology of love styles becomes a *predictor of extramarital relationships*, because some of these styles support the idea of obtaining as many rewards as possible from the romantic relationship.

In a study conducted by J. Fricker (2006), the following hypothesis was put forward: ludic love and manic love would be associated with a high level of infidelity, a view partially supported. Ludic love is in fact a significant predictor of both sexual and emotional infidelity. According to another confirmed assumption, there is a negative correlation between erotic love and infidelity. At the same time, storgic love and pragmatic love are not significant predictors of infidelity.

The results of the study confirm the fact that extraverts are much more likely to have a favourable attitude to infidelity (Barta & Kiene, 2005). The results of some studies show that people who obtained high scores for *neuroticism* have a liberal attitude regarding sex (Lameiras Fernandez & Rodriguez Castro, 2003), which explains why they prefer occasional sex (Schmitt, 2004). The low level of agreeability and consciousness shows an increase in the involvement in infidelity acts in the first four years of relationship. There are also studies that confirm the existence of a significant positive correlation between openness and divorce in a relationship, which is why this factor could be related to infidelity (Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999a).

■ *Interpersonal theories*

Social exchange theory. According to Blau (1964a, cited in Emerson, 1976, p.336), social exchange is a concept confined to “actions awaiting rewarding responses from others”. Generally, people become motivated to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of interpersonal relationships.

Equity theory becomes a predictor of extramarital relationships, as long as infidelity is associated to a form of restoring the equity level in a relationship (Touesnard, 2009). In a study, Pittman (1993) assessed to what extent infidelity is determined by the inequity level.

The triangular theory of love. Several studies (Previti & Amato, 2004) explored the role of passion, intimacy and commitment in maintaining the stability of a couple. The results indicated an inversely proportional relation between commitment and infidelity: the higher an individual’s commitment level is the more stable the relationship is, and the chances of engaging in infidelity are relatively low.

Predictive factors of infidelity. Specialised literature describes several studies whose main objective was to identify the predictors of infidelity. Thus, we have proposed a summary of the main categories of factors: (1) *demographic factors*, (2) *intrapersonal factors*, (3) *interpersonal factors*.

In the second chapter, the theoretical perspectives of emotional responses to infidelity will be analysed. Drawing on the natural selection theory, evolutionary theorists state that gender differences in emotional responses to infidelity are real and reflect the evolved mating process between men and women (Regan, 2011).

According to the *parental investment model*, women invest more biological and emotional resources in raising and caring for children. These resources invested by women are much more significant compared to the biological resources invested by men in the mating process (Trivers, 1972).

The “*double shot*” theory is developed as a potential alternative to the evolutionary theory regarding the gender differences in the responses to the partner’s infidelity (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996).

The *cognitive evaluation theory* states that emotions are the result of cognitive evaluations of stimuli that produce a certain situation (Lazarus, 1991).

According to White & Mullen (1989), people react immediately when they perceive a sudden threat. In the context of romantic relationships, this threat or loss is generated by perceiving a real or potential attraction to the partner.

What are emotional responses to the partner’s infidelity? Thus, the first of the most complex studies was conducted by Sharpsteen (1993). The results obtained identified a set of 86 thoughts, behaviours associated with infidelity. These responses can be classified into 17 dimensions (example: revenge, fear, sadness).

The third chapter analyses the stability factors of a relationship. The interdependence theory “imposes” a link between *internal factors* (satisfaction) and *external factors* (alternative partners). The interdependence theory develops two models: *the marital cohesiveness model and the investment model*.

The investment model becomes a theoretical framework for the topic of infidelity. *According to this model, the main factor affecting infidelity is the commitment level*. The feelings of commitment explain the degree of dependence of the two partners involved in a relationship and the costs of an act of infidelity (Regan, 2011).

The fourth chapter. Specialised literature proposes several models describing the process of relationship dissolution; most of these concern romantic relationships. These models include: (1) *the stages of relationship dissolution model*, (2) *the responses to dissolution model*, (3) *the dissolution “cascade” model*, (4) the dissolution strategies.

Specialised literature proposes several models that aim to restore the balance in the romantic relationship after an act of infidelity. *For instance,*

the forgiveness model proposes a parallel between forgiving an act of infidelity and recovering after a trauma (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005).

APPLICATION

■ *Study 1 A predictive model of infidelity factors.*

The present study intends to analyse the variables associated with the likelihood of engaging in an extramarital relationship and to design a model of infidelity predictors.

Following data analysis, significant correlations were identified between the following variables: demographic, relationship development, relation stability, relationship dynamics, Big Five model variables and infidelity. This model was created by the introduction, in several steps, of independent variables significantly associated with the *infidelity* dependent variable.

Therefore, the predictors identified help us shape the portrait of an unfaithful person. Thus, this person is an extravert, has a high level of sexual self-esteem, an anxious attachment style, a maniac love style, and an extrinsic religious orientation. In addition, infidelity decreases when the person has a secure attachment and a high level of communication, consensus, satisfaction, cohesion and expressing affection in the romantic relationship. At the same time, involvement in an extramarital relationship decreases when the person has a high level of commitment, sexual satisfaction, intimacy, passion and sexual communication in the current relationship. A significant difference between the types of infidelity is shaped around the *agreeability* factor (sexual infidelity), and the erotic love style factor (emotional infidelity). There is a considerable difference between the two genders: men with an extrinsic religious orientation and women with an avoidant attachment style are at a risk of engaging in infidelity. In case of women, intimacy and passion are shaped as negative predictors of infidelity. The gender differences are also obvious in case of sexual infidelity, and thus extrinsic sexual orientation and a manic love style are positive predictors of a man's infidelity, and agreeability and consciousness appear as negative predictors in women.

■ *Study 2 Emotional responses to sexual versus emotional infidelity*

✿ *2.1. Designing and validating the scales for measuring emotional responses.* The objective of this study was to design and validate multidimensional scales for evaluating emotional responses to sexual/emotional infidelity, based on the evolutionary theory and the cognitive evaluation theory. The instruments were named: (1) Scale of emotional responses to sexual infidelity (REISS), (2). Scale of emotional responses to emotional infidelity (REIES).

- *the construct validity* for these instruments implied an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using the analysis method of the main components and the Varimax rotation method and a confirmatory analysis (CFA).
- REISS – the values of absolute indicators that were calculated indicated the superiority of the uncorrelated seven-factor model: *sadness, fear, anger, pain, dread, jealousy and guilt*.
- REIES- the values of absolute indicators finally indicated the superiority of the uncorrelated seven-factor model: *guilt-acceptance, sadness, fear, anger, dread, jealousy, pain*.
- the exploration of the *convergent validity* of the REISS and REIES scales emphasised significant correlations between the scores obtained for the previously mentioned instruments and other instruments used to measure emotional responses.

✿ 2.2. *Analysis of emotional responses to sexual versus emotional infidelity*

- in order to evaluate the emotional responses to infidelity we used a similar design to the one used for the analysis of jealousy
- the results of the study confirm that there are significant gender differences in the overall emotional response to the partner's infidelity: men are more disturbed by the partner's sexual infidelity, while women are more affected by the partner's emotional infidelity.
- thus, the basic idea of the evolutionary theory and of the parental investment model is confirmed. Therefore, a woman's sexual infidelity implies a decrease in the reproductive success of the man, whereas the man's emotional infidelity reduces the access to several resources (attention, love, material goods).
- Therefore, men tend to feel angrier and more jealous when faced with their partner's sexual infidelity, which is in fact the result of perceiving that a *potential rival* has certain features which are interpreted as being more valuable than in reality.
- If, in case of *gender*, *the assumptions of the evolutionary theory were confirmed*, this is not valid for the *model of maintaining self-esteem*. According to the results obtained we can conclude that regardless of the self-esteem or sexual self-esteem level these do not have a significant effect on emotional responses.
- At the same time, no combined effect of gender and self-esteem on emotional infidelity was observed. A combined effect of gender and sexual self-esteem on sexual infidelity was neither confirmed.

✿ 6.3. *Analysing the link between emotional responses to infidelity and behavioural responses*

- men and women tend to react in a way that helps offsetting related costs.

- in case of men, discovering the partner's sexual infidelity is associated with a set of negative emotions like anger, jealousy.
- at the same time, when women discover their partner's emotional infidelity, the emotions they feel are pain, sadness.
- violence can be a way for men to offset the costs incurred by an act of sexual infidelity. Data confirm a connection between gender and violence, as men obtain higher scores for this type of behavioural response compared to women following an act of sexual infidelity.
- the need for compensatory social affiliation can be important especially to women because of the substantial resources and the support needed for raising children. The data confirm a link between gender and compensatory social affiliation, as women obtain higher scores for this type of behavioural response compared to men following emotional infidelity.
- Moreover, studies show that the link between *gender and violence* as a response to sexual and/ or mixed infidelity can be *totally mediated* by the manifestation of *anger and jealousy*. In the same way, *sadness and pain totally mediate the link between gender and compensatory social affiliation* as a response to sexual and/or emotional infidelity.
- **Study 3. The investment model and infidelity. A dyadic analysis**
- in these analyses we have used both basic models: the common fate model (CFM) and the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM), as well as mediation models (APIMeM, CFMeM).
- the patterns described by Kenny & Cook (1999) were also tested: (1) couple pattern, (2) contrast pattern, (3) actor-only, (4) partner-only.
- *The influence of the investment model using CFM* (Kenny, 1996).
- the marital satisfaction level predicts the partners' infidelity. A low level of marital satisfaction influences the partner's infidelity. The quality of alternatives predicts the acts of infidelity in the couple, the presence of alternatives influences the partners' infidelity. Moreover, the investment level predicts the partners' infidelity, a low investment level in the relationship influences infidelity in the couple. For the commitment level, the scores obtained predict the partners' infidelity, a low commitment level being related to infidelity.
- *Testing mediation using CFMeM* (Ledermann & Macho, 2009)
- the relationship between marital satisfaction and infidelity is partially mediated by the commitment level. Regarding the relationship between the quality of alternatives and infidelity, the results show that the commitment level partially mediates the relationship between the two aspects. The results also show that the commitment level partially mediates the relationship between the investment level and infidelity.

- *The actor-partner effects using the APIM model (Kenny, 1996)*

--using the APIM- actor partner model, the results show that: (1) the marital satisfaction model influences both one's own infidelity, as well as the partner's infidelity, (2) the quality of alternatives influences both one's own infidelity, as well as the partner's infidelity, (3) the investment level influences both one's own infidelity, as well as the partner's infidelity (4) the commitment level influences both one's own infidelity, as well as the partner's infidelity.

- *The k parameter*

- the results show the presence of a *romantic pattern* for each of the dimensions of the investment model.

- *Testing mediation using APIMeM (Ledermann et al., 2011)*

- the results show that: (1) the man's (woman's) marital satisfaction level predicts the woman's (man's) infidelity by the commitment level of both partners (partial mediation); (2) the quality of alternatives for the man (woman) predicts the woman's (man's) infidelity by the commitment level of both partners (partial mediation); (3) the man's (woman's) investment model predicts the woman's (man's) infidelity by the commitment level of both partners.

- *Study 4. Relationship dissolution as a consequence of infidelity. The mediating role of forgiveness and attributions*

- relationship dissolution negatively and significantly correlates with attributions and forgiveness. Thus, the presence of external attributions and a high level of forgiveness determine a decrease in the likelihood of relationship dissolution following the partner's infidelity.
- forgiveness fully mediates the link between attributions and relationship dissolution in case of mixed and sexual infidelity
- forgiveness partially mediates the link between attributions and relationship dissolution in case of emotional infidelity
- the attribution theory provides a useful framework for understanding the results obtained in this study, and the way to interpret the causes of relationship dissolution following infidelity (Freedman, 2000).
- our results also confirmed the *premises of the forgiveness model*. Even if the process of forgiving an unfaithful partner may seem impossible, forgiveness is one of the main components of intervention for couples experiencing such a crisis (Gordon & Baucom, 1999).
- gender does not play a *moderating role* in the link between forgiveness and relationship dissolution for none of the types of infidelity analysed, although forgiveness is a (total or partial) mediator for both men and women

- **CONCLUSIONS**

- this thesis offers new directions for research by addressing the needs to analyse data at the dyadic relationship level.
- in addition to the results obtained, our research brings an important contribution because of the methodology used. Drawing on regression analysis, t tests, ANOVA and MANOVA methods, we have used full dyadic data analysis techniques, i.e. the *CFM*, *APIM model* as well as the related *mediation models*. At the same time, the use of structural equations enabled us to analyse both indirect and direct effects of the variables included in the study.
- one of the most significant limitations of our study could be the fact that it is a transversal study; a longitudinal approach could provide more precise data on the consequences of infidelity on the partners and on the relationship as a whole.

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