

The State of Affairs: A New Clinical Approach to Infidelity

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DESCRIPTION

Sexual infidelity is generally regarded as a grave symptom of a troubled relationship. Consequently, the revelation of an affair often triggers a crisis that threatens the entire foundation of trust and connection in a couple. Conventional practices mandate that therapists should insist upon full disclosure, never keep secrets, and view all infidelity as a highly traumatic event. However, when it comes to affairs, there is no one size fits all.

This presentation locates infidelity within the broader social context of modern marriage, the digital culture, sexuality, and monogamy. Affairs are an act of betrayal and they are also an expression of longing and loss. Hence, this model presents how to work from a dual perspective: hurt and betrayal for one and growth and expansion for the other.

We will explore the unique pain points of romantic betrayal and the meanings and motives that underlie illicit loves and desires. In addition, will discuss truth and accountability, detective and investigative questions, loyalty, and faithfulness. A three stage model for emotional and erotic recovery is laid out to help couples rebuild trust and intimacy, or to part with dignity.

Combining didactic material, case studies, and video vignettes, we will lay out a nuanced therapeutic approach for working with extramarital relations, past and present, fantasized or real, disclosed or shrouded in secrecy. The approach aims to be inclusive, multicultural and nonjudgmental.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

1. To assess a 3 part definition of infidelity- secrecy, emotional involvement and sexual alchemy
2. To describe 3 specific interventions to help couples work through the crisis, the meaning making and the vision.
3. To create a safe therapeutic environment to work with the cost and benefits of secrets and to manage confidentiality, transparency, and truth-telling