Frequently within the African American community the words like cheating, stepping out, affairs, and man sharing are used often to explain infidelity. Rarely do individuals try to examine the roots of this phenomenon and identify ways to get through the ordeal of an affair, heal and stay married. This paper will examine the effects of infidelity upon a marriage and the psychological mindset of an individual who will indulge in such behavior. We will also provide an understanding of how couples can move past the hurt and shame of infidelity. Implications for unfaithfulness on couples are discussed. This paper will then address the impact of discovery on couples, types of faithful encounters, personality of a philander and the treatment stages for repairing a relationship that has been violated. Let’s begin where the issues usually get started.
Defining Infidelity

According to D. Lusterman, 1998 the definition for infidelity is the breaking of trust. When people marry they pledge before their friends, families and the state and in most cases, their part that they will remain faithful to one another til death do us part. The expectation of mutual trust is the foundation of each couples commitment to each other. There is an unspoken assumption that each person will remain sexually exclusive given that they have their taken marital vows. It is expected that marriage will require a certain level of intimacy that is reserved for the couple, not to be shared with anyone else. Having vowed to be faithful any violation of this fact causes extreme pain and shock upon the mate who has been betrayed.

Infidelity then, occurs when one partner in a relationship continues to believe that the agreement to be faithful is still in force, while the other partner is secretly violating it.
Infidelity can also be examined by exploring the function that it serves for the unfaithful partner. Pursuit behavior is the result of a deep seated personality disorder and takes the form of womanizer. Generally the individuals are pursuing ways to feel esteemed, desired and empowered.

Infidelity is for the most part planned behavior. It is a compulsive search for a woman or a man to bed and forget with the greatest possible efficiency. The goal of this behavior fills emotional emptiness, as is the case for most addictions. All affairs are not sexual and all affairs are not emotional. Women tend to seek affairs for love while some men’s involvements are more often linked to sex (Glass and Wright, 1995.) The number of women having affairs has increased four times that it was back in 1960.

Humphrey, 1987 proposed a schema for the description of infidelity, using six criteria. Lusterman, 1995 added seven criteria. He also suggested that it would be useful to conceptualize infidelity in terms of EMI (extra marital involvement) rather that the more specific EMS (extra marital sex). Here are Humphrey’s somewhat modified descriptions:

- Time
- Degree of emotional involvement
- Sexual intercourse or abstinence
- Secret or not
- Single or not
- Heterosexual or Homosexual
- Number of EMS (or EMI) partners. (Lusterman, 1995)
Philandering

Usually a philandering person may be seen as a type of personality disorder. Philanders crave quick sexual adventures. Romance does not interest them at all. Personality disorder is defined as, “an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that differs markedly from the expectations of the individuals culture.” This pattern is manifested in two (or more) of the following area: (1) cognition (ways of perceiving and interpreting self, other people, and events); (2) affectivity (the rage, intensity liability, and inappropriateness of emotional response); (3) interpersonal functioning and (4) impulse control. Frequently, players, cheaters those who are unfaithful would be diagnosed with the criteria of narcissistic personality disorder, particularly the qualities of grandiosity or self-importance, a belief in the person’s specialness, need for excessive admiration, entitlement, exploitativeness, and lack of empathy are often present in chronic womanizers. In the book, Father Style Advantage, (O’Shea and Windell, 2006) suggest that father-son relationships are essential for the development of empathy. O’Shea and Windell report: boys who had a warm, accepting relationship with their fathers also had a more highly developed conscience than did other boys deprived of father-son empathy building. These children with empathic fathers are more likely to have concern and be more sensitive to the distress their misbehavior causes someone else. This dynamic of empathy ability becomes important later in life when young boys become men in romantic relationships. If we for a moment think about the fact that young boys (also girls) in the African American community have a 1 in 5 chance of growing up with a fathers present we might understand how womanizing long precedes the extra martial affair. Plus when you add the gender imbalance within the African American community the conditions for mansharing and philandering become familiar dynamics. Frequently women aid and a bet the philandering behavior because they participate or ignore the insulting behaviors. Men on the other hand take full advantage of the women in the community sense of desperation.

OTHER TYPES OF AFFAIRS

Exploratory Affairs – these affairs are more likely to occur when a person becomes deeply aware that a marriage is in trouble but they have not yet clearly resolved whether to stay or to leave.
Tripod Affairs – people choose to stay in an unhappy marriage for a variety of reasons. Fear economic consequences of leaving, impact upon children, extended family reaction and effects of divorce.

Retaliatory Affairs – something the offended partner responds to by having an affair as an act of retaliation. Women are more likely to have retaliatory affairs.

In Exit Affairs - the involved partner with a lover has already made the decision to exit but does not want to be seen as the “bad guy or gal” so they find a therapist or professional to provide the platform to share the news that they are unhappy and want out.

One night stands - These encounters may occur during business trips, office retreats, happy hour events, conference, etc. They are not meant to last for more than 48 hours.

You can also experience this sense of violation even if you are not married but in a long term single exclusive relationship. For the purpose of this paper infidelity will be focused on married couples and husbands who become players. Let’s begin with the moment the evidence is exposed and the betrayal found out.

5 CASE STUDY

This case study is a review about an African American married man of 47 years and wife of 47 years who have been married for 25 years. They have two adult children, 23, and 19 years of age. They presented with issues of feeling stuck around forgiveness. She continues to feel that his affairs are not over. He claims it’s been over and just wants to move on. The therapy sessions with me were the second attempt to move toward resolution.

THE HISTORY

The husband met a woman in 1998 at work while he was stationed in the military in Korea for two years. (The couple married in 1979 and moved to Georgia in 1982, - Ft.
Bragg – 1985 – 1988 Germany, he relocated in Korea 1998 without his wife.) During this period he felt alienated and dismissed as the husband and father. The wife felt overwhelmed, anxious and abandoned during this period. He tries to reach out with phone calls (internationally) in the evening and she was often distant angry or not willing to hear what he was going through. He met a friend while in Korea they were each others confident through tough times and loneliness. He returned to the states took a stressful high demand job for the government, and continued to feel disconnected from his wife and himself and could not (would not) express what he was feeling inside.

The husband reconnected with the friend he met in Korea and at some point started an affair. The friend was available to talk to and was willing to listen. The husband wanted wife involved but she was too overwhelmed with her life, job, children and household matters. The couple continued to drift apart. In 2001, there was a connection that created a moment when he felt angry and sad about his empty distant partner so he acted out with another affair. Eventually the wife found out and said she was leaving, they began to seek help but could not get past the shame fear and rage.

In therapy of couples must work together in addition to many individual meetings. It was explained at the outset that it was each person’s responsibility to report to the other if there were individual meetings but that the content of individual meetings would be considered confidential.

6
MOMENT OF DISCOVERY

There are ten different types of losses that you, the hurt partner, are likely to experience. You may fool the world by appearing together on the outside but inside you are dying. Suddenly you feel you have lost your:

Identity
Sense of specialness
Self respect drops causing forfeiting of your values to win a partner back
Control over your thoughts and actions
Self respect for failing to acknowledge that you were wronged
Fundamental sense of order and justice in the world
Religious faith
Connection with others
Sense of purpose – even the will to live
Sleep, concentration, sense of safety and security
TREATMENT FOR COUPLE

The first issue in couple’s therapy is to deal with her/his posttraumatic reaction to the discovery of the infidelity. Over many sessions the person who was victimized can be helped to express their feelings and the other person can be helped to accept the demands of their partner that they stop their involvement with the other person.

PHASES OF TREATMENT

There are three phases in the treatment of infidelity, (Lusterman, 1989, 1995).

Phase 1, 2 and 3 although each stage focuses on specific therapeutic issues, it is unlikely that there will be a smooth continuity. Even after the therapist feels that phase one issue have been fully dealt with they frequently erupt during the second and third phases. A key to successful treatment is the ability to interrupt phase two and three and return to phase one the posttraumatic issues until the couple has sufficient competency to deal with these issues on their own.

Phase 1. Restoring trust is explored. The three phases should be outlined so the couple understands the path they are going to encounter. It is important to understand and make clear that the work may or may not save the marriage. Rather, it is time to explore, understand and make changes. A successful outcome of therapy is either a better marriage or a better divorce. During this phase it is important to help the discoverer express emotions rather than emote their feelings. Therefore, phase one will probably be a very long element of treatment. Periods of trust can often increase feelings of vulnerability, so a good session might at first be a predictor of a period of increased hyper vigilance on the part of the discoverer. The discovered person is still suffering during this phase with his or her feelings of guilt (and sometimes depression) they require
support from therapist so that they can continue to be a source of emotional support and holding for the discoverer.

Phase 2. Is a review of the courtship and marriage, with particular attention to conflicts and how they were (or were not) resolved is important (and a review of family history). Careful examination usually reveals that each member of the couple had thoughts, feelings and issues that they never revealed to each other. These issues are important to share and connect with the most recent breakdown in communication, intimacy, and closeness. Difficulty in self disclosure is often a significant precursor of infidelity.

Phase 3. The couple is reminded that the purpose of the work has been changed and that the object of therapy has been the possibility of moving toward a better marriage. By now the blaming that has occurred in phase one should have subsided because couple has reached an understanding of the issues that caused the infidelity.

The major task of phase 3 is to improve their self disclosure, problem-solving, intimacy skills and empathy tools. Couples are now at a better advantage to strengthen their marriage and move toward healthier experiences with each other.

To understand why extramarital behavior occurs for some individuals review the list below:

Not understanding what love is.
Inability to communicate feelings and needs.
Not having verbal skills to solve problems together.
Not being able to accommodate to one another’s needs or interest.
Sexual curiosity.
Emotional needs (feeling lonely in the relationship).
Sexual addiction.
Boredom and Angry.

Unfaithful partners almost never had the intention of harming their marital partner. For this reason, knowing that there is a way to move past the pain, anger and shame to a healing process can be very supportive and uplifting. If couples begin a mutual act of healing, and each individual in the dyad addresses their own unfinished business they can be assured of a more successful, stronger and lasting marriage.

REFERENCES


“Seldom or never does a marriage develop into an individual relationship smoothly and without crisis. There is no birth of consciousness without pain.”

C. Jung