



Internet Infidelity and Attachment Injury in a Romanian Women Sample: A Qualitative Study of the Online Sexual Infidelity Dimension

Diana Filimon¹

Abstract: Sexual online infidelity dimension can have a devastating impact on the couple's relationship, as well as the individual's life. Studies show that many Romanian couples ask for divorce after experiencing sexual infidelity. This qualitative study explores the effects of sexual infidelity on Romanian attachment injured women asking for divorce. In this cultural study, 27 women with betrayal experience were interviewed. All interviews were transcribed word by word and were analyzed using *thematic analysis*. The results show the impacts of sexual betrayal, as an attachment injury, can be classified into four themes including 1) emotional effects, 2) cognitive effects, 3) behavioral effects, and 4) sexual relationships. It has been demonstrated that attachment injury caused by infidelity damages the cultural foundation of mutual trust within partners. Infidelity as an attachment injury is also discussed.

Keywords: Sexual online infidelity; attachment injury; divorce; Romanian women; qualitative analysis

Introduction

The background of this study suggests that both Internet sexual and emotional infidelity are a common theme in adulthood, both among those who marry and those who are domestic partners as well (Veldorale-Brogan, Kimber & Fincham, 2019). Such betrayals are extremely damaging to the longevity of the marital relationship and the well-being of couples, the betrayed one and the transgressor, so some scholars describe it as a trauma (Bird, Butler & Fife, 2007) and they call it as an "attachment injury" (Schade & Sandberg, 2012). Therefore, in this study we have investigated the effects of Internet sexual infidelity as an attachment injury in Romania to express qualitative results of addressing the consequences of this type of attachment injury on Romanian women. Attachment theory, which is now one of the most encouraging theories of lifelong romantic relationship in adulthood (Purnell, 2018), highlights the fundamental importance of emotional bonds to significant others (Johnson & Brubacher, 2017). Attachment theory suggests that all human experiences are much determined by these interpersonal bonds. In a secure couple relationship, both partners adequately provide profound psychological and physical interdependence, mutual relationship based on closeness, security, and comfort (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). As a lasting result of this profound bond, any remarkable incident in which one side fails to respond effectively at precise times of crucial need seems to powerfully influence the desirable quality of a relationship (Holmes, 2014).

Attachment theory is also known as the theory of the trauma (Johnson, 2003). In some cases, adverse incidents – notably those related to abandonment and betrayals, originates irreversible injury to the

¹ Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, Romania, Address: Address: Carol I Boulevard no. 11, Iasi, Romania, Corresponding author: diana_filimon_25@yahoo.com.

quality of the intimate relationship. Many couples typically seek the help of a qualified professional not only to bring necessary closure to these events but also to overcome their conflicts and progressively improve their intimacy. These damaging events, which are called attachment injuries, come up in therapy sessions.

Primarily, the concept of attachment injury emerged from the practice of emotionally focused therapy (EFT). EFT is an empirically validated approach to couple therapy, and it is perceived as one of the most effective approaches in properly resolving relationship conflicts (Makinen & Johnson, 2006). It has been manifested that these injuries are usually accompanied by overwhelming emotions, which is like flashbacks in post-traumatic stress disorder. When the other partner fails properly to provide reassurance and comfort, this injury is compounded and therefore, cause alienation to deepen. As a result, these couples might be stuck doggedly in a rigid, interactional cycle (e.g., attack – defend, pursue – distance). It has been demonstrated precisely that a secure romantic relationship is positively associated with useful marital life, including trust, supportive relationship, lifelong commitment, and mutual satisfaction – (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). It has been suggested that attachment-related injuries in individuals might result in the exhibition of critical characteristics of posttraumatic stress disorder. The concept of online infidelity damages individuals and their relationships as a traumatic event, though in most romantic relationships personal expectations are associated with sexual and emotional monopoly (Treas & Giesen, 2000).

In a study conducted by Feeney, five major traumatic events including active nonparticipation (denial of emotion or withdrawal of love and commitment), passive nonparticipation (ignoring the partner or keeping him/her out of programs), criticism, sexual betrayal, and deception (lying, breaking promises, and losing trust) were identified where infidelity, especially sexual infidelity, is one of the most important traumatic ones. In a study which was conducted by Leary et al. (1998), it was found that infidelity is one of the six major causes of injury. These six categories include active nonparticipation (explicit rejection, abandonment, or exclusion); passive nonparticipation (implicit rejection, such as ignorance), Criticism, betrayal, ridicule, and lack of emotional appreciation. Although individuals generally do not support online infidelity and believe that it threatens the stability of a love relationship (Adamopoulou, 2013), but treacherous acts are somehow common (Hall & Fincham, 2009) and almost 20% of men and women report that they have experienced temporary intercourse with someone other than their spouse when they were married (Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen 2011). Although there are no accurate statistics on the number of online sexual infidels in Romania, this type of infidelity is one of the main causes of divorce among Romanian couples. In fact, people's subjective assumptions in Romania that talk about sex is a very private matter and has led to some taboo about it, and people feel guilty, embarrassed, and anxious when talking about their online sexual infidelity or that of their spouse (Mousavi, Fatehizadeh, and Jazayeri, 2018). This has made research in this area a little more difficult in Romania, and as a result there has been limited research concerning the accurate estimation of spouse infidelity and attachment injuries resulting from this subject. Generally, marital betrayal is typically categorized into two groups, including, 1) sexual betrayal and 2) emotional betrayal (Rodrigues et al., 2017). Empirical studies show that both categories are equally adverse, and individuals respond almost the same to both events (Lishner et al., 2008). Studies show that while betrayal by men usually involves sexual intercourse, betrayal by women usually involves emotional relations with another man. Broadly speaking, studies show that the chance of men being romantically involved in an extramarital relationship is higher than women (McAlister et al., 2005). Although both men and women can be involved in the issue of online infidelity, the impact of infidelity on women is more severe because women are more sensitive to the signs of infidelity and can detect these symptoms faster and better than men (Ein-Dor, Perry-Paldi, Hirschberger, Birnbaum & Deutsch, 2015). Following men's infidelity,

women are more likely to experience periods of depression, but if women are betrayer, men are more likely to exhibit anger and aggressive behavior or beatings in response. Although in Romanian society, because of cultural context which like most other traditional contexts emphasize the purity of women, it is believed that female sexual infidelity is far more morally abusive than male sexual infidelity. But in Romania, male sexual infidelity can also be an important factor in breaking up marital relationships and causing major attachment injuries in women. Although divorce in the religious beliefs of the Romanian people is undesirable, reprehensible, and unpalatable, as it is considered the worst religious law, but divorce in Romania, like other countries, has experienced increasing growth in recent years.

To define sexual betrayal, Whitty, and Quigley (2008) state that sexual betrayal is sexual intercourse with an individual other than the individual's lawful spouse. It might typically include hugging, kissing, touching, cuddling, and sexual intercourse. In conclusion, betrayal-related behaviors can typically vary from flirting to sexual intercourse and could be grouped into three significant categories, including (A) obscure behaviors, such as talking on the Internet or hugging someone else; (B) explicit behaviors, such as sexual intercourse or oral sex, and (c) deceptive behaviors, such as lying or hiding information from the partner (Wilson et al., 2011). Undefined behaviors are known as the lowest indicator of betrayal, while deceptive behaviors are considered as the moderate indicator of betrayal, and specific behaviors are also considered as the highest indicator of betrayal. There is not much emotional exchange in an explicit sexual betrayal, despite the frequent presence of erotic components (Burdwood & Simons, 2015). Orthodox Church places a great emphasis on maintaining family cohesion, so from the Romanian point of view sexual infidelity is a very inappropriate behavior and is a great sin that carries punishments in the worldly life and in the hereafter.

In one recent study, Levy and Kelly (2010) examined the relationship between attachment style and the response to sexual betrayal and emotional betrayal. A recent study (Levy & Kelly, 2010), which investigated the relationship between attachment style and responding to sexual betrayal versus emotional betrayal, reported a significant relationship between these components. Men and women with detached attachment styles responded to their spouse's sexual infidelity through depression, while men and women with secure, anxious, and ambivalent attachment styles suffered more from emotional betrayals. Women with avoidant attachment style are more likely to view their spouse's sexual infidelity as a more disturbing event than women with secure and anxious attachment styles (Levy & Kelly, 2010). Johnson and Sims state that the sense of betrayal and attachment injury associated with it causes couples to fall into a cycle of pain and avoidance. If there is no interruption in this cycle, the couples may be separated. This makes the survival of the relationship difficult, and it dissolves the family institution. When the problem of online infidelity occurs in the marital life, couples can no longer communicate with each other as they did in the past, and often the desire for divorce in one or sometimes both is increased (Previti & Amato, 2004). In fact, divorce and infidelity are interrelated phenomena, and the results of many studies confirm this (Sweeney & Horwitz, 2001).

The present study only examines the attachment injury caused by male sexual infidelity and intends to answer the question that "what are the individual dynamics of women injured by the sexual infidelity of their spouses?" This study could be an important step toward further research in this field and provide useful information on the impact of attachment injury rising from sexual infidelity on women, especially in Romanian culture. This study also informs family professionals about the factors affecting the behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and sexual functioning of women who have been injured by sexual infidelity of their spouses and help them develop educational and treatment programs for these women. This research could increase the available information on the attachment injuries of betrayed women

that seem to be an important but ignored topic. This information will accelerate future research in this area and the growth and development of perspectives to help those affected people.

Method

This study investigates the profound effects of sexual infidelity on Romanian divorcing women. Sexual infidelity defined as a husband's sexual contacts with another woman, which occurred over a period, and involved sexual intercourse. In the initial part of the study, potential participants were informed about this research by flyers and online advertisement in courts and family therapy centers. In addition, we contacted seven therapists to request the participants. The overwhelming fear of confidentiality was one of the reasons that recruiting participants was a complicated process. Initially, 42 women agreed to participate. The sample was selected using purposive sampling and to avoid bias in selecting this population, the sample was selected from women who were involved only in divorce counseling not any other medical counseling. All participants decided to divorce from their spouses and attempted to do so. On average, 5.8 years had passed since their marriage. Although the saturation point was reached in interviews with the 14th person, the other five interviews were conducted with the remaining individuals to ensure that no new themes emerged. An individual appointment was scheduled for each participant. The locations of the interview were selected by participants (three interviews were conducted at the participants' home and two interviews at the investigator's office). 15 women decided not to participate. Participants were asked to complete an informed consent form.

Procedure

Due to the lack of exploration of the women's perspective after an online sexual betrayal in Romania, we deemed a qualitative study and thematic analysis, which is more appropriate for this research. We used semi-structured interviews for data collection. Interviews were based on a specific interview manual developed prior to the data collection.

The purpose of this semi-structured interview was to directly explore the influence of the effects of marital betrayal on women's lives. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder and was transcribed word-by word for further analysis. A coding system was developed so that the participants' responses to the semi-structured interview questions could be easily identified. These codes represent the fundamental content of the categorization process, which will be described later.

Semi-structured interview

Major starting question: Explain about your partner's sexual infidelity and its effects on you.

Some questions will be asked during the interview for further understanding. Some of these are listed in the following table for example:

Point: The event in all questions refers to the sexual infidelity of the spouse.

When and how did you find out about your spouse's infidelity? Describe your initial reactions after you understand the subject.

What did you expect your spouse to do after that? Did your expectations meet?

What emotions did you have after that?

After this event, have you satisfying sex with your husband?? Explain the reasons.

How has that event affected your current relationship?

How do you feel about your spouse after that event?

With thinking about that event, what thoughts come to your mind?

What emotions do you still feel about that event like the first day?

Have you ever had unpleasant feelings about your sexual relationships after that event?

After that event, which problem was the most difficult one to overcome?

What was the hardest part of adapting to this event, why? How long did it take?

What was your emotional and cognitive state before this happened? Express your emotional and cognitive changes after that.

What was your reaction after that event, how was your reaction immediately after the event and how was your reaction after a few days?

What did you do to improve your condition after that event?

After this, did you distance yourself from your spouse or try to get closer to him?

What changes do you think should be made in your relationship with your spouse to improve your marital condition?

What were your emotions about yourself after that?

Is there anything else about betrayal of your spouse that I should have asked you about?

Analysis

To analyze the transcribed interview, an interactive step-by-step thematic analysis has been carried out. First, we followed the transcribed interviews, so that we could familiarize ourselves with the narratives. Second, initial open coding was generated and was grouped into categories based on their similarities. In the second step, themes were developed following a series of coding stages: first, open coding was used, and initial codes were generated. Next, initial codes were grouped into categories according to their similarities. Next, in the third step of thematic data analysis, categories were grouped into themes. In this stage, categories were combined into themes which could accurately depict the data. The purpose of this stage was to capture relevant data that would represent some pattern and meanings within the data set (Braun et al., 2014). In the fourth step of the data analysis, we extracted and grouped quotation independently, so that each quotation would correspond to one of the themes. In the fifth step of the data analysis, a comprehensive examination of the data was carried out to understand which themes could contribute to an understanding of the narratives. Finally, in the sixth step, reports were produced, and a detailed description of the data set was provided.

Results

In this section, the result of the thematic analysis of the data is provided. The results showed that narratives could be categorized into four themes, including, 1) emotional effects, 2) cognitive effects, 3) behavioral effects, and 4) sexual relationships.

The activation of sexual relationship to meet the needs of attachment

In several Romanian female participants, especially those who have noticed about a sexual competitor recently, spouse sexual betrayal has triggered the activation of attachment needs, such as assurance and nearness: "Sexual intercourse means he is still mine and takes away the fear of being alone".

Emotional effects. Emotional disorders

At an early stage of the discovery of betrayal, “emotion locking” was the reaction reported by some female participants after experiencing attachment injury: “I felt choking ... I had got trouble in my heartbeat and breathing was hard for me ... but there was no doubt ... it seemed that something was slammed on my head ... “. Most of these women reported that after a few days, their emotions were locked up, and an explosion of emotion occurred: “I could not stop my tears ... as if the barrier of my eyes was broken ... I had got no control over myself ... I was aggressive, shouting, and sometimes I laughed indecently ...”.

Sexual conflict and divorce

Most injured women had coldness and conflict in their sexual relationships, one participant thought that her husband’s body was dirty due to sexual betrayal, and she could not approach him: “Every time I think that he has been with another person, I’m feeling bad ... I feel like I’m hurt when he touches me ...” when I have to have sexual intercourse, I stay in the bathroom for a few hours because I think his dirt has been transferred to me ... “in a number of women, this sense of sexual disgust led to a complete break in sexual relation: “I cannot even imagine having sex with him again ...”.

Sexual desperate and inadequacy

Several participating women attributed the sexual betrayal to their inadequacy, and they believed that if they had higher sexual adequacy, this would not happen: “They say it’s not your fault ... but I know that if I had a little more attractiveness, it would not happen ...”.

Trauma symptoms

Several injured women showed PTSD indications: “Even seeing a man who took a woman’s hand in the street, crippled me badly and I had got severe and sudden nausea.” One of the participants, described her mode after discovering her husband’s betrayal very shocking, like “frosting in the heat of the summer”, after which the person is always “earshot” of bad things.

Negative emotions toward oneself

The experience of injury in several women has led to an assessment and comparison oneself with others: “There is not a day in which I do not compare myself with others, and especially with that rival, and do not feel miserable ...”. The loss of value and self-esteem was a feeling that many participants experienced it because of comparing themselves with others: “It’s very hard to believe that I am a valuable person ... when I was thrown out like a paper towel ... I would have liked to die and not to experience this humiliation ...”. The feeling of being oppressed and being victimized was another common sense in women injured due to her husband’s sexual betrayal: “I’m really disappointed ... I do not know that I should be punished for committing which crime ... I do not deserve this ...”.

Emotional withdrawal/adherence

A number of women reported that they were interested in being with their husbands emotionally and looked for confidence in their interest: “Although I know he does not like, I am beside him constantly ... I cannot accept that he leaves me one day ... I’m afraid without him ...”. In contrast to the first group, a number of women did not have any interest in being with their unfaithful husbands and prefer the emotional withdrawal: “From the beginning I should not have relied on him ... I would prefer loneliness ...”.

Negative emotion over the husband

A number of injured women had the feelings of someone who was deceived in a sad way by someone who loved, and they can no longer trust anyone: “I did not believe that someone who is trusted and believed in everything would deceive me ... The feeling that nobody in the world is trustworthy is the most emotion that I experience these days.” The loss of confidence in a number of participants led to anger and jealousy and they responded that the perception of all the relationships between her husband and strangers and even familiar women are accompanied with envy and great anger in a sickly manner: “I cannot control it ... when I see him talking to a woman, even my sister, I become anxious and extremely nervous, and I’m showing a bad reaction there ...”.

*Cognitive effects**Damage to the mental models of yourself and the other*

The feeling of being unworthy for their spouse and the lack of access and accountability to the spouse led to the activation of negative mental models of themselves and the other observed in many participants. “I do not deserve to be loved at all ... others also do not deserve value and respect ... I hate myself and all of them ...”.

Disturbance in cognition

Most of the injured women had a disorder in their interpretations and cognition, in a way that a number of decision-making powers were lost: “I do not know what’s right and what’s wrong ... I sometimes get ill-fated and think about strange thoughts ...”.

Negative thoughts about yourself, spouse, and relationship

Rumination and auto-negative thoughts were among the major effects of attachment injury in the cognitive domain: “I cannot stop thinking on how he has been able to betray me even for a moment ... How did he feel and how was he thinking and how can I trust him ...? “In a number of participants which were involved in rumination associated with betrayal, a frequent illustration occurred regarding the sex of their spouse with a competitor: “As I close my eyes, I see scenes of their sex in front of me ... as if I’ve really seen it...”. Negative thoughts in a large number of participants were associated with catastrophic thinking: “I always think that there is no light for the future of this life...”.

*Behavioral effect**Communication spying*

Several participants checked and spied their spouse in a variety of ways, due to the suspicion of injury. One of the participants who used a variety of methods to control spouse stated that: “If there is an opportunity, I check his messages and conversations ... I follow him secretly ... search his pockets for the sign of betrayal...”.

Behavioral withdrawal and nearness

A number of women abandoned their husbands and tried to avoid physical and emotional encounters as much as possible: “I have to stay with him in the house for the children, but as far as possible, even I try not to look in his eyes ... I wish that we were not together even under a sky ...”. In contrast to the previous group, several participants had more sticking behaviors due to the anxiety caused by the release or rejection, despite the bad feelings of betrayal that they had against their spouses. “He tries to take a distance from me, but I beg him to behave the same way as before ...”.

Attacking on spouse's personality

The sense of lost self-esteem in a number of participants has led to constant blames, these women tried to repress the feelings of contempt they had experienced by blaming their spouse: "Blame is a little punishment for his great mistake ... He must understand that my value was more than that he wants to ignore me ...".

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate on the attachment-based intrapersonal dynamics of women who are the victims of the sexual infidelity in Romania. According to the findings, four main themes were obtained including sexual dynamics, emotional dynamics, cognitive dynamics, and behavioral dynamics. The model developed based on the findings of the present study has been shown in Figure 1. The results of this study are consistent with many previous studies (Asanjarani, Jazayeri, Fatehizade, Etemadi, Demol et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2005; Davis et al., 2004; Fitness, 2001; Heiman, 2007; Heller & LaPierre, 2012; Johnson et al., 2001; Metz & McCarthy, 2007; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Schore, 2002; Sue, 2008).

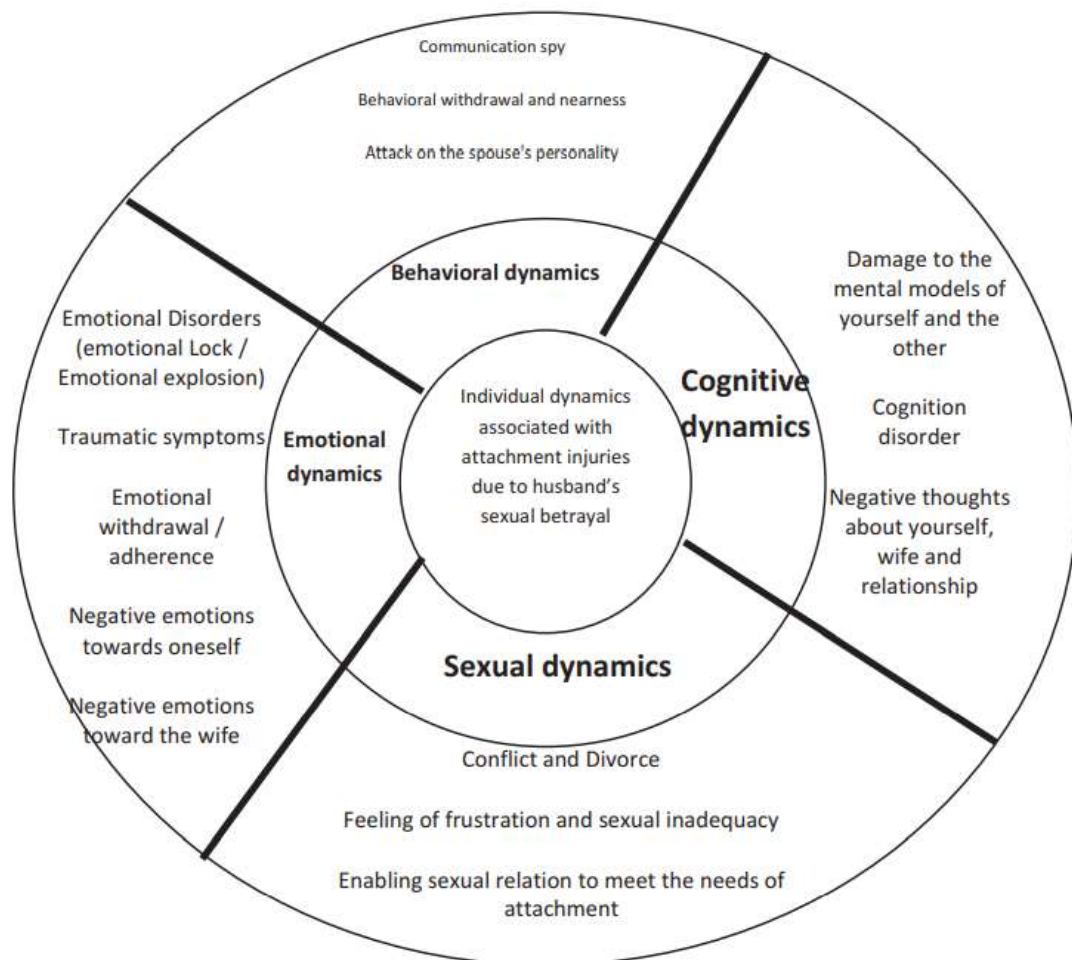


Figure 1. Model of Intrapersonal Dynamics Associated with Attachment Injuries due to Sexual Betrayal in Romanian Women

As shown in Figure 1, sexual dynamics is one of the major dynamics of women injured from sexual betrayal which includes sexual conflict and divorce, a sense of sexual inadequacy and frustration, and the activation of sexual relationship to meet the needs of attachment (the need for assurance and the need for nearness). We can be stated that the attachment injury can activate attachment behaviors such as the need for nearness and assurance (Bowlby, 1982). The sexual relation system can act as an attachment system, and purely sexual behaviors may act to serve the needs of attachment, namely, emotional intimacy, confidence, increasing self-esteem, reducing stress, protection, or receiving care (Davis et al., 2004). According to Heiman's (2007) view, the continuity in the lack of meeting attachment needs will lead to sexual disturbance. In this research, women were trying to use sexual behaviors to meet the needs of attachment, i.e., the need for assurance and the need for nearness, due to feeling a threat in their relationship. However, even at the time of sexual intercourse, they reported a high level of anxiety that has reduced the quality of communication and has increased sexual dysfunction (Bodenmann et al., 2010).

On the other hand, after discovering the husband's sexual betrayal, Romanian women often experience many conflicts and problems in their relationship with their spouse and, these conflicts had a direct effect on sexual performance and sexual satisfaction of individuals, especially women. The unconscionable prohibition of sex with their spouse by themselves from was one of the potential effects of conflict (Metz & McCarthy, 2007). It seems that this unconscionable prohibition it lasts for a long time, leads to a sexual divorce from the spouse and ultimately leads to problems in sexual desire and sexual arousal. The belief accepted by women that, the main cause for the betrayal of their husbands, can be due to their weakness in sexual relations, when it was associated with humiliation of the female body and sexual problems in marital life, ultimately, led to forming a kind of imagination like "unattractiveness" and "incompetence" in women; retaining this idea they had a sense of despair and anxiety in this relationship. Anxiety related to sexual unattractiveness may result in the lack of unconditional admission and the ability to achieve sexual satisfaction (Weeks & Gambescia, 2000).

In the long run, this can influence the quality of sex and marital happiness in general (Burdwood & Simons, 2015). Another major dynamic observed, as evidenced in Figure 1, was emotional dynamics which includes emotional disorders (emotional lock/emotional explosion), trauma indications, emotional withdrawal/adherence, negative emotions toward the self, and negative emotions toward the spouse. Two major emotional patterns observed in women injured from sexual betrayal are emotional adherence and emotional withdrawal. It seems that these types of patterns are associated with the attachment style of injured women. So that Romanian women with anxiety attachment face with great concern regarding the lack of access and lack of trust toward others and so they considered the spouse's sexual betrayal as a clue for threatening the relationship and therefore, they monitored actively their spouse for affordable assessment and accountability to prevent emotions of fear and anxiety caused by the feeling of being released (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). When the hope for accountability is lost, the second more avoidant strategy to counteract the lack of secure emotional participation is to disable and suppress emotions and attachment needs and to avoid emotional participation and ultimately to withdraw the relationship. However, in most cases, suppression of emotions is hard and ineffective and often leads to an increase in arousal and physiological stress (Gross, 2001). Several injured women showed a tendency to fluctuate from a state of arousal to another and sometimes excessive stimulation in indications, like the PTSD indications, and similar indications to what Johnson (2008) called the "trauma" which includes a physiological sensation of progressive risk, restlessness, intense stress, jumping and frozen responses. Feeling anxiety and seeking physical contact at the same time, disturbance in the ability to express emotion or avoid emotion, the Somatoform pain, which is unexplainable medically, excessive risk-taking and disability in the experience of positive emotion or

improvement after experiencing an unhealthy condition are other indications that people with experience of trauma may express (Ford et al., 2013). Based on this view, the trauma experience provokes existential anxiety following the collapse in security assumptions (Naaman et al., 2005). Emotional disorders have been observed as another symptom of emotional dynamics in injured women. In the case of several participants, it appeared that the sexual betrayal of the spouse, especially at the beginning of the discovery by the individual, is accompanied by a limitation in the ability for adjusting the emotion. Several women reported that they were reluctant to describe their emotions about that event, or even there could have been no emotion. Perhaps, according to Heller and LaPierre (2012), the brain could not organize emotions during intense emotional injury and emotions felt at present in the present environment, and it seems that something turns off in the brain and although more research is needed, it seems that after discovering the betrayal of a spouse, the person shows a lack of ability to express emotion in the form of physical signs and physically, the person feels disturbed following having trouble in breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, digestion, and sleep (Heller & LaPierre, 2012). Shortly after the emotional lock, observed in several women, emotions were sometimes presented regardless of the proportion of content. Even the appropriate emotions emerged extremely in a number of participants, for example, temporary euphoria with excess energy. This kind of emotional response may be frightening to an individual because one may feel is “out of control” and even sometimes feeling “empty” for a moment. This kind of emotional instability can be the onset of emerging personality disorder if it is experienced in a severe and unconscious manner (Levy et al., 2015). Betrayal to long-term committed relationships can be perceived by the injured person because of a decrease in communication value. Decreased communication value indicates that the relationship is not further worthy, important, or intimate (Leary, 2001). In several participating women, the feeling of hating toward themselves was a major negative emotion that they have faced with. Heller and Lapier (2013) call this internalization of hatred as an internal act which based on it; the individual believes that he deserves a negative response toward himself. The greater tendency of women in feeling humiliation and hatred of themselves due to their husband’s sexual betrayal can reflect the current views of the society, based on which women are expected to be able to attract their partner. Therefore, it seems logical that women may have been taught by the community to be blamed at least when they are neglected by the spouse, which can lead to a sense of humiliation. When the person chosen by a spouse for the extramarital relationship is a familiar person (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2009), the discovery of betrayal is degrading and exacerbates the injury (Fitness, 2001).

On the other hand, a number of women showed negative emotions toward their husbands instead of themselves. Anger was the major emotion of individuals toward the opposite one, and perhaps this reflects the fact that, for women, such sexual betrayal is more preventable than emotional betrayal (Green & Sabini, 2006), they evaluated the lack of attempt by their spouse to keep their commitment to sexual intercourse as intolerable. This anger was higher in those who were more committed to their wife. The unreliable feeling about spouse was another major negative emotion, and the attachment injury acted as a warning alarm and sent a message to these women stating, their husbands could not be trusted to provide security and comfort (S. M. Johnson, 1996). The third major intrapersonal dynamics which was associated with attachment injury in women caused by sexual betrayal, as seen in Figure 1, was cognitive dynamics which includes harming the mental models of oneself and the other, disturbing the cognitions and negative thoughts toward themselves, the spouse and the relationship.

Based on what was obtained from qualitative findings, most Romanian female participants described a situation that can be described based on the attachment theory. The mental models include the perceptions and expectations of individuals in relation to two broad and correlated subjects: 1- Do people deserve love (the mental model of self) and 2) Are attachment faces available, responsive, and reliable

(the mental model of others) (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). In this way, events that endanger positive views about oneself or others are considered as representatives of a threat to security. And it can be experienced as a type of injury, which is similar to physical injury in many respects. These injuries make the injured partners question themselves regarding losing their basic beliefs about relationships, others, and themselves, and their sense of value will be decreased, along with their sense of security in the world (S. M. Johnson et al., 2001). This caused several women experiencing negative and disturbing thoughts about themselves, their husbands, and their relationship after the experience of attachment injuries. For example, several women embodied images of the betrayal and they had a kind of rumination about the event of sexual betrayal. Johnson et al. (2001) also describes this to be like a phenomenon called “repetitive shockwave flashback”.

Typically, the injured person drowns by flashbacks and the spouse does not do any effort to secure the attachment again; or the injured person does not accept the attempt that the spouse is providing for reassurance. In addition, these people were often overwhelmed with extreme suspicion, and they are afraid of being left by their spouse for the presence of someone else and they think that their relationship would not last (Campbell et al., 2005). In addition to negative thoughts, several women reported disturbances in cognition at some points in time, which led to disruptions in decision making. One of the participants interpreted it as “emptying the brain.” Scheure (2010) also argues that an individual with an attachment injury can have difficulty in understanding the expressions and faces of others or may interpret the motives of others badly. Their interpretation is formed based on the need for self-protection, so it is possible that they misinterpret a situation.

In addition, a person may even be unable to precisely determine his inner situations (Monti & Rudolph, 2014). But the behavioral dynamics as the last category of the major intrapersonal dynamics in these women, included communication spying, behavioral withdrawal and nearness and the attack on the spouse’s character, as shown in Figure 1. Like emotional dynamics, expressing dual behavior namely withdrawal and nearness were reported by two groups of female participants in the behavioral dynamics of female injured by marital sexual betrayal. In fact, it seems that in the first strategy i.e., nearness, which is probably due to the anxiety in attachment of an individual, at the moment of understanding the lack of communication, the entire system of attachment, becomes too active. Extreme attachment and adherence behaviors are increased, and even aggressive attempts are also increased to get an answer from the unfaithful spouse. Even when the unfaithful wife responds, this response may not be reliable completely and the increasing emotional sensitivity may persist to the signs of communication (Davis et al., 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). As mentioned earlier, even more effort can be observed to have more sexual intercourse in these women. If nearness search is not considered as an option, a passive strategy will be implemented. This group, which was more likely to include women with avoidance in attachment, used “Deactivate” strategies which suppress the turmoil associated with attachment and avoidance of nearness. These people often did not allow themselves to get close to their unfaithful spouse or refer to them for receiving support in times of distress. Even a number of these participating women reported that they were trying to reduce their husbands’ dignity in the crowd and in front of others and show their husbands as a worthless and incompetent person to prevent from being known as guilty by others and to defend their personality, after experiencing the betrayal.

Although more research is needed, but it seems that this behavior, apart from its avoidance nature, can come from anger caused by the failure in meeting the needs of attachment. Bowlby (1982) also often saw anger in close relationships as an attempt to relate to an apparently inaccessible beloved. He distinguishes between anger for the hope that awaits a considerable reaction and a desperate anger that is dishonorable and compulsory. It seems that in this study, this type of anger and behavioral aggression

were carried out due to disappointment and compulsion, and the attacker person had no hope for improvement of relationship. In addition to aggressive behaviors toward the spouse, spying and spouse-watching behaviors were one of the most behaviors reported by women injured because of marital sexual betrayal. They reported that they have monitored the behavior of their spouse to find signs of extramarital relationship and they did observation behaviors, including careful observation of the spouse's daily activities, spying, or examining husband's attachments to find signs of betrayal.

The present research suffers from several limitations. One of the limitations is the small sample, which leads to a problem regarding the generalizability. Also, conducting research in the cultural context of Romania can be one of the main limitations of this research that, its generalization for non-Romanian cultures should be done with caution. Certainly, more studies are needed to see whether similar themes are found in different samples of different cultures, religions, and social situations. In addition, sexual betrayal is a two-person (mutual) injury, and since the current research has focused on women, the views of husbands should also be considered in future studies for better understanding of the dynamics of individuals.

According to the findings of this study, it is suggested that family and couple therapists should consider the internal and individual conditions of the individuals injured by sexual betrayal as the most important aspects of their quality of life and provide special programs for the prevention and treatment of injuries in this area. Creating such programs, especially in the cultural context of Romania, requires special attention of the family-therapists and couple-therapists to prepare a safe place for people in training and counseling environment to speak about their sexual betrayal and spouse without feeling ashamed. On the other hand, the present research has shown that attachment injury due to husband's sexual betrayal can have wide dimensions in the field of sexual relations, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral that will cause many personal and social damages, such as the spread of divorce. It seems that if probable problems and injuries such as sexual betrayal are taken into consideration before marriage, and plans are developed to train couples for preventing this injury and to implement them widely at community level, the degree of injury will be less for couples' lives, and the sustainability of marriage in general.

References

- Adamopoulou, E. (2013). *New facts on infidelity. Economics Letters*, 121(3), 458–462.
- Asanjarani, F.; Jazayeri, R.; Fatehizade, M.; Etemadi, O. & de Mol, J. (2018). Examining the reliability and validity of the fisher divorce adjustment scale: the persian version. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59(2), pp. 141–155.
- Baucom, D. H.; Gordon, K. C.; Snyder, D. K.; Atkins, D. C. & Christensen, A. (2006). Treating affair couples: clinical considerations and initial findings. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 20(4), pp. 375-392.
- Bird, M. H.; Butler, M. H. & Fife, S. T. (2007). The process of couple healing following infidelity: a qualitative study. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 6(4), pp. 1-25.
- Bodenmann, G.; Atkins, D. C.; Schär, M. & Poffet, V. (2010). The association between daily stress and sexual activity. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(3), p. 271. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019365>.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 52(4), p. 664.
- Braun, V.; Clarke, V.; Terry, G.; Rohleder, P. & Lyons, A. (2014). *Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burdwood, E. N. & Simons, R. F. (2015). Calm down! Emotion regulation ability predicts relationship resilience following interpersonal betrayal. *Psychophysiology*, Vol. 52, pp. S67- S67. USA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Campbell, L.; Simpson, J. A.; Boldry, J. & Kashy, D. A. (2005). Perceptions of conflict and support in romantic relationships: The role of attachment anxiety. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(3), p. 510.

- Davis, D.; Shaver, P. R. & Vernon, M. L. (2003). Physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to breaking up: The roles of gender, age, emotional involvement, and attachment style. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(7), pp. 871–884.
- Ein-Dor, T.; Perry-Paldi, A.; Hirschberger, G.; Birnbaum, G. E. & Deutsch, D. (2015). Coping with mate poaching: gender differences in detection of infidelity-related threats. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 36(1), pp. 17-24.
- Fitness, J. (2001). Betrayal, rejection, revenge, and forgiveness: An interpersonal script approach. *Interpersonal Rejection*, 2(2), pp. 73–103. <http://www.psych.purdue.edu/~willia55/392F-'06/FitnessBetrayal.pdf>.
- Ford, J. D.; Grasso, D.; Greene, C.; Levine, J.; Spinazzola, J. & Van der Kolk, B. (2013). Clinical significance of a proposed developmental trauma disorder diagnosis: Results of an 18 M. DARAB ET AL. International survey of clinicians. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 74(8), pp. 841–849.
- Green, M. C. & Sabini, J. (2006). *Gender, socioeconomic status, age, and jealousy: Emotional responses to infidelity in a national sample*. *Emotion*, 6(2), p. 330.
- Gross, J. J. (2001). Emotion regulation in adulthood: Timing is everything. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(6), pp. 214–219.
- Hall, J. H. & Fincham, F. D. (2009). Psychological distress: precursor or consequence of dating infidelity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35(2), pp. 143-159.
- Hazan, C. & Zeifman, D. (1999). Pair bonds as attachments. *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, 3(3), pp. 336–354. <http://adultattachmentlab.human.cornell.edu/HazanZeifman1999.pdf>.
- Heiman, J. R. (2007). *Orgasmic disorders in women. Principles and Practice of Sex Therapy*, 4 (1), pp. 84–123. <http://adultattachmentlab.human.cornell.edu/HazanZeifman1999.pdf>.
- Heller, L. & LaPierre, A. (2012). *Healing developmental trauma: How early trauma affects self-regulation, self-image, and the capacity for relationship*. North Atlantic Books.
- Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Davis, K. E. (1994). Attachment style, gender, and relationship stability: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(3), 502.
- Leary, M. R. (2001). Toward a conceptualization of interpersonal rejection. *Interpersonal Rejection*, 3(2), pp. 3–20.
- Leonidou, L. C.; Aykol, B.; Hadjimarcou, J. & Palihawadana, D. (2018). Betrayal in buyer– seller relationships: Exploring its causes, symptoms, forms, effects, and therapies. *Psychology & Marketing*, 35(5), pp. 341–356.
- Levy, K. N. & Kelly, K. M. (2010). Sex differences in jealousy: A contribution from attachment theory. *Psychological Science*, 21(2), pp. 168–173.
- Lishner, D. A.; Nguyen, S.; Stocks, E. & Zillmer, E. J. (2008). Are sexual and emotional infidelity equally upsetting to men and women? Making sense of forced-choice responses. *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, 6(4).
- Mikulincer, M. & Florian, V. (1998). The relationship between adult attachment styles and emotional and cognitive reactions to stressful events. J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.). *Attachment theory and close relationships*, pp. 46–76. NY: Guilford.
- Mikulincer, M. & Shaver, P.R. (2007). Boosting attachment security to promote mental health, prosocial values, and inter-group tolerance. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18(3), pp. 139–156.
- Monti, J.D. & Rudolph, K.D. (2014). Emotional awareness as a pathway linking adult attachment to subsequent depression. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 61(3), p. 374.
- Moosavi, S.; Fatehizadeh, M., & Jazayeri, R. S. (2018). The effect of couple training based on personality-systemic couple therapy model on marital adjustment. *Research in Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences*, 7(2), pp. 83-106.
- Naaman, S.; Pappas, J.D.; Makinen, J.; Zuccarini, D. & Johnson–Douglas, S. (2005). Treating attachment injured couples with emotionally focused therapy: A case study approach. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 68(1), pp. 55–77.
- Negash, S.; Veldorale-Brogan, A.; Kimber, S.B. & Fincham, F. D. (2019). Predictors of extradyadic sex among young adults in heterosexual dating relationships: A multivariate approach. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 34(2), pp. 153-172.
- Previti, D. & Amato, P.R. (2004). Is infidelity a cause or a consequence of poor marital quality. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21(2), pp. 217-230.
- Purnell, C. (2018). Attachment theory and attachment-based therapy. *Attachment and human survival*, pp. 119–136. Routledge.

Rodrigues, D., Lopes, D., & Pereira, M. (2017). Socio-sexuality, commitment, sexual infidelity, and perceptions of infidelity: Data from the second love web site. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 54(2), pp. 241–253.

Makinen, S.M., J.A., & Millikin, J.W. (2001). Attachment injuries in couple relationships: A new perspective on impasses in couples' therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 27(2), 145–155. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2001.tb01152.x>

Treas, J. & Giesen, D. (2000). Sexual infidelity among married and cohabiting americans. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(1), pp. 48-60. Weeks, G. R. & Gambescia, N. (2000). Erectile dysfunction: Integrating couple therapy, sex therapy, and medical treatment.

Wilson, K.; Mattingly, B.A.; Clark, E.M; Weidler, D.J. & Bequette, A.W. (2011). The gray area: Exploring attitudes toward infidelity and the development of the perceptions of dating infidelity scale. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 151(1), pp. 63–86.

WW Norton. Whitty, M.T. & Quigley, L.L. (2008). Emotional and sexual infidelity offline and in cyberspace. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 34(4), pp. 461–468.