
COLLECTION

The Essentials of Applied Psychology

Infidelity and Jealousy



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Table of Contents

Introduction — When Trust Wavers	5
Chapter 1 — Why People Cheat: The Psychological Factors	8
Chapter 2 — Micro-Cheating in the Digital Age	24
Chapter 3 — Jealousy: Normal or Pathological?	36
Chapter 4 — Discovering Infidelity: The Shock	51
Chapter 5 — The 5 Steps to Overcoming Infidelity	65
Chapter 6 — Forgiveness: Is It Possible?	77
Chapter 7 — Leaving: When Separation Is the Right Decision	90
Chapter 8 — Rebuilding Trust	101
Conclusion — Choosing Consciously	116
<i>Bibliography</i>	119

INTRODUCTION

When Trust Wavers

There are pains that leave no visible trace. No cast, no scar that you could show to explain why you are staggering. Infidelity is one of those invisible wounds that nonetheless upend the entire existence of those who endure it — and, more than we think, of those who commit it.

As a cognitive-behavioral psychotherapist, I have supported hundreds of people confronting the issue of infidelity. Men and women of all ages, all backgrounds, all histories. Some came after discovering their partner's betrayal. Others came to confess their own, consumed by guilt or confusion. Still others came for a jealousy that was devouring them, even though no act of infidelity had been committed.

What I have learned over the course of these encounters is that infidelity is almost never what it appears to be at first glance. It is not simply the story of a body that strays or a heart that splits in two. It is the revealer of deep dynamics — individual, relational, sometimes transgenerational — that deserve to be explored with rigor and compassion.

The numbers speak for themselves. According to the most recent epidemiological studies, between 20 and 40 percent of people in committed relationships acknowledge having been unfaithful at least once in their lives. In France, IFOP estimates that roughly one-third of men and one-quarter of women have experienced an extramarital relationship. These figures, as striking as they may be, say nothing about the scale of suffering that each percentage represents. Behind every statistic, there is a couple, a family, sometimes children, and always human beings trying to make sense of something that seems to have none.

Jealousy, for its part, is an almost universal companion of love. Who has never felt that pang in the stomach imagining the beloved in someone else's arms? But between a passing jealousy, a sign of attachment, and a devouring jealousy that poisons daily life, there exists a broad spectrum that we will explore in these pages. Neuroscience teaches us that jealousy activates the same brain circuits as physical pain — so it is not "all in your head," as people sometimes say dismissively. It is in the body, in the gut, in every fiber of one's being.

This book was born from a conviction: that knowledge is the first step toward liberation. Understanding why infidelity occurs does not mean excusing it. Analyzing the mechanisms of jealousy does not mean trivializing it. On the contrary, the aim is to give each person the tools to navigate these ordeals consciously, to make informed choices rather than choices dictated by panic, anger, or shame.

You will find in these pages an approach firmly grounded in scientific research. Every claim is supported by studies published in peer-reviewed journals. I have drawn on the work of internationally renowned researchers — John Gottman, Shirley Glass, Esther Perel, Janis Abrahms Spring, to name but a few — as well as the most recent publications in clinical psychology and affective neuroscience.

However, this book is not an academic treatise. It is above all a practical guide, written to be useful. Each chapter contains fictional clinical cases — inspired by real situations but entirely anonymized and recomposed — that put a face and a story to the concepts presented. Each chapter also offers practical exercises that you can complete alone or as a couple, at your own pace.

The journey I propose follows a deliberate logic. We will begin by exploring the psychological reasons for infidelity, then address the new forms of betrayal born of the digital world. We will delve into the mechanisms of jealousy before pausing on the shock of discovery. The central chapters will guide you through the stages of recovery and the delicate question of forgiveness. We will also address, without taboo, the decision to leave when it is necessary. Finally, we will conclude with the rebuilding of trust — whether with the same partner or with a new one.

Whatever point you find yourself at in your own story — whether you have just discovered infidelity, are in the midst of questioning, are trying to rebuild, or are considering leaving — this book is for you. It will not tell you what to do, but it will give you the means to understand, to feel with greater clarity, and ultimately, to decide for yourself.

For this is perhaps the most important lesson that infidelity and jealousy teach us: no one can choose in our place. But we can choose to no longer be passive victims.

Happy reading.

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