

Healing Affairs Using Emotionally Focused Therapy

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Learning Objectives

Participants who attend this workshop will be able to:

- 1) Understand the unique power of attachment theory brings to understanding the impact of affairs.
- 2) Gain a basic knowledge of 7 main types of affairs.
- 3) Learn how to apply EFT principles in the healing of affairs.

EFT Brief Review

*All knowledge is experience
everything else is just information*

Albert Einstein

*“We can not solve our problems with the same level of
thinking that created them”*

Albert Einstein

EFT Steps are Additive

9) Consolidate new cycles

8) Facilitate creation new solutions

7) Ask for needs and wants - bonding

6) Promote acceptance and responsiveness

5) Own disowned needs, emotions and share

4) Reframe as cycle and attachment emotions

3) Access underlying attachment related emotions

2) Identify the negative interaction cycle on all levels

1) Create an alliance and identify the core conflict issues

The Negative Cycle

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Partner

Partner

Behavior
(pursue/withdraw)

Behavior
(pursue/withdraw)

Perceptions/Attributions
(View of Self and Other)

Perceptions/Attributions
(View of Self and Other)

Secondary Emotion

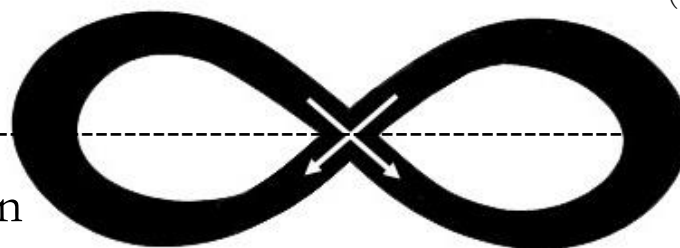
Secondary Emotion

Primary Emotion

Primary Emotion

Unmet Attachment Needs

Unmet Attachment Needs



Common EFT Interventions

Emotional Expansion

- Empathic Reflection
- Validation
- Evocative questioning
- Empathic Conjecture
- Heightening
- RISSSC –
 - Repeat
 - Images
 - Soft
 - Simple
 - Slow
 - Client words

Restructuring Processes

- Track and reflect cycle both within and between
- Reframe in terms of cycle and attachment intentions and longings.
- Enactments (shaping new interactions)

Infidelity

- A defining feature of committed relationships is typically to be sexually and romantically exclusive.
- This exclusivity is usually an inherent part of how couples define themselves as being “a couple” as opposed to “just dating” or “just friends”.
- Infidelity involves a betrayal of this exclusivity.

A Word about Language

Partner who has an affair:

- Straying Partner
- Unfaithful Partner
- Injuring Partner
- Betraying Partner
- Participating Partner
- Involved Partner

Partner who does not have an affair:

- Staying Partner
- Faithful Partner
- Injured Partner
- Betrayed Partner
- Refraining Partner
- Noninvolved Partner

The Self of the Therapist & Infidelity

What are your beliefs about infidelity?

How do you feel about :

- Straying Partners?
- Betrayed Partners?
- Third parties who pursue affairs with married/committed people?
- Relationships that result from an affair?

Sex and Attachment

- 1) Secure sex is a bonding behavior. It involves a feedback loop – love helps shape the nature of sex and visa versa.
- 2) A secure attachment facilitates “relaxed and confident engagement” in sex.
- 3) Secure partners report more and better sex - more satisfaction (both men and women)
(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Sex and Attachment

4) Motive:

- Secure partners identify closeness and connection as a primary motive for engaging in sex.
- Insecure partners report having sex to
 - please the other
 - avoid rejection
 - gain reassurance
 - self-enhancement
 - fit in
 - brag regarding performance
 - sensation

(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007)

Sex and attachment

- 5) Insecurity linked to :
 - 1) Lower sexual self-esteem – physical attractiveness of self
 - 2) More perceptions that sex is controlled by the other or the situation
 - 3) More problems in sexual communication (so less co-ordination of responses)
 - 4) Stronger concerns about sexual performance
 - 5) Less willingness to experiment sexually within a relationship

(Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007)

What is Secure Sex ?

- 1) Both partners accessible, responsive and engaged emotionally and physically .
- 2) INTEGRATED attachment, sex and care giving
- 3) Best aphrodisiac / technique is secure attachment between partners - sex as intimate play and connection
 - a) A safe adventure – tension/excitement plus comfort, surrender to sensation.
 - b) Touch arouses and comforts, oxytocin – cuddle hormone released in sexual arousal.
 - c) Synchrony sex – resonance

The Inherent Vulnerabilities of Sex: Physical, Emotional, Psychological

Inextricably Connected Vulnerabilities:

- To experience “*just sex*” without any emotion (positive or negative) typically requires numbing or cutting off from one’s own emotional experience.
- Emotional numbing around sex is a way of avoiding experiencing vulnerability and pain.
- Emotionally numbing is often involuntary.



Lucretia gently tries to persuade Captain Horatio
that it just might be more intimate
without the armor.

Artist: WATERHOUSE
TITLE: *The Captain*
YEAR: 1905

Sexual & Emotional Connection

- 1) Sexual relations can be growth promoting or damaging.
- 2) Emotional connection is a need in that we get sick and die without it.
- 3) Sex is not a need in that we don't die without it.
- 4) Sex is not an entitlement; it must be shared willingly to be healthy.
- 5) The lack of a fulfilling sexual relationship can be emotionally distressing.
- 6) Feeling sexually desired by a partner can help create a sense of security.

Affairs: An EFT Perspective

- 1) Straying partner's Ineffective/Destructive Attempts to:**
 - a) get attachment needs met
 - b) attempt to avoid or cope with primary emotion(s) associated w/ unmet attachment needs
- 2) Straying partner may or may not develop a Competing Attachment**

Affairs: An EFT Perspective

3) ***NOT*** the Betrayed Partner's Fault:

- a) No one can “cause” another person have an affair. A partner can make it easier or harder, but they cannot make another person have an affair.
- b) There are other ways to get attachment needs besides an affair

Affairs: An EFT Perspective

4) Shaming or “Finding the Bad Guy” makes things worse.

However don't ignore:

- The deep hurt and betrayal.
- The fact that people can make choices.

Myth 1: Attraction to someone else means your partner is not the right person for you.

REALITY:

“Being attracted means you’re still breathing”

Shirley Glass, 2003

Myth 2: Affairs Don't Occur Unless There Are Problems in the Relationship

REALITY:

- Some affairs are related to problems in the relationship, but many are not.
- Affairs do occur in reasonably happy relationships: Men who engaged in primarily sexual affairs were as satisfied with their marriages as faithful men (Glass, 2003)
- Many affairs are an unintentional result of: attraction, opportunity, & failure to follow precautions (Glass, 2003)

MYTH 3: Partners Don't Stray Unless They Aren't Getting Enough of What They Need

REALITY:

- Partners who stray are often not **GIVING** enough in their relationship.

“The spouse who gives too little is at greater risk than the spouse who gives too much because he or she is less invested” (Glass, 2003)

MYTH 4 : There is No “Safe” friendship with a member of the gender to whom one is attracted.

REALITY:

- Friends must also be a friend of the relationship. In healthy committed relationships couples:
 - Construct walls that shield the relationship from outside forces which could split them.
 - Look at the world outside the relationship through a shared window of openness and honesty.
- To assess if a friendship is threatening ask “*Where are the Walls and Windows?*” Glass (2003, p.25)

Myth 5: Most Affairs are Sexual without Emotional Connection

REALITY:

85% of women & 55% of men in a clinical sample of people who had extramarital sexual intercourse reported a “***strong***” or “***extremely deep emotional attachment*** to the affair partner”

(Glass, 2003, p. 57)

Myth 6: A third person is *not a threat* to the relationship unless it is sexual

REALITY:

- Emotionally intimate relationships with people outside can be competing attachments that drain energy and intimacy from the couple relationship.
- Affairs can be:
 - Emotional
 - Sexual
 - Both Sexual and Emotional

The Threat of Emotional Affairs

“Emotional affairs are characterized by:

1) Secrecy

2) Emotional Intimacy

3) Sexual Chemistry”

- 1) Attempts are made to hide feelings or interactions
- 2) There develops more companionship, intellectual sharing, and understanding in the friendship than in the marriage (which is a warning sign)

The Threat of Emotional Affairs

- 3) Sexual chemistry is only enflamed by admissions that a sexual attraction exists but won't be acted on
- 4) Husbands tend to save emotional intimacy for their wives. Consequently when they let themselves become open and vulnerable with another woman it is much more likely to jeopardize the marriage

(Glass, 2003)

Emotional Affairs

- 1) Unintentional Affairs most often begin as “friendships”, then become emotional affairs. Many then become sexual.
- 2) Emotional Affairs are typically more of a threat than “sex only” affairs because emotional connection is more difficult to end.
- 3) Increased opportunity for emotional affairs because of workplace relationships, internet, & social networking

MYTH 7

There is Safety in Ignorance of an Affair

REALITY:

- When the straying partner hides the affair, there will always be a wall of shame and secrecy that separates him/her emotionally from the Betrayed Partner

Unplanned Infidelity: The Slippery Slope

May involve:

- Being in the wrong place at the wrong time with poor boundaries
- Forming deep emotional connections without realizing these lead to love.

Unplanned Infidelity

- **82% of 210 Partners who had affairs** reported that the affair started with someone who was at first “**just a friend**”
- **44% wives’ & 62% husbands’** affairs were with **someone at work.**

Many people do not plan to stray, but end up betraying not only their partners but also their own values, which can provoke an inner as well as relational crises. (Glass, 2003)

The Allure of An Affair: Thin, Narrow Intimacy

Affairs can offer cheap opportunities to:

- Break out of old roles and established views of self.
- Expand and shift view of self through the experience of seeing self through the “new other”/affair partner’s eyes
- Creates the fantasy of greater empathy and acceptance than an established, committed, “real life” relationship.

Thin/Narrow Intimacy

Thin intimacy is

- Seductive because it comes easily
- Cheap because it requires little investment or risk
- Dangerous because of its emotional power, which people can confuse with more complete, whole and rich intimacy.
- For emotional intimacy to last, the price of creating a life together must be paid - solve problems, risk consistent connection, repair hurts and misunderstandings etc.

Technology & the Allure of Pseudo Intimacy

Experience less of possible negative stimuli involved in real life contact (eye contact, voice tone, physical presence, & other non-verbal cues)

- Provoke Less Anxiety
- Reduce Inhibitions
- Fuels the Fantasy

Overview Treatment

- 1) Calm people down and express confidence it can be understood and things can get better.
- 2) Assess and prevent any possible suicide or homicide.
- 3) Access, validate, and organize the intense emotions associated with the affair such as pain, fear, and despair.
- 4) Healing an affair starts in stage I and moves through stage II.
- 5) The focus of therapy often goes back and forth between affair content and emotion specifically, and the relationship process and emotional drivers in general.

EFT Repairing the Bond

Forgiving injuries happens when partners can:

- make sense of their own hurt
- know that their lover connects and feels that hurt with them. (Johnson, 2008 p.258)
- knows that the injury is not likely to happen again.

Assessing for Ongoing Affairs

Ask Partners Together & Individually

- 1) Has all contact ended? What measures have been taken to end all contact?
- 2) What were the methods of contact (texts, work, email, phone calls, etc.) during the affair?
- 3) If contact continues, what keeps the straying partner from ending all contact? What will it take for the straying partner to end all contact?
- 4) If contact continues, what form does it take? What measures are still needed to end all contact?

Assessing for Ongoing Affairs: Confidentiality

- 1) EFT is grounded in authenticity. Consequently the EFT Therapist does not keep secrets that would undermine the relationship.
- 2) Partners are encouraged to share major secrets:
 - at an appropriate time
 - in a safe and respectful manner.

Motivations for Straying

- It is common for straying partners to not really understand why the strayed.
- Understanding the intra-psychic and interpersonal motivations for an affair can help
 - Organize treatment
 - End the affair(s)
 - Avoiding future affairs
 - Create a coherent narrative around why the affair(s) happened and how to protect the relationship

Affair Drivers

Affairs can be primarily driven by:

- 1) Relationship Dynamics
- 2) Intrapsychic factors
- 3) Both Relationship and Intrapsychic factors

Relationship Dynamics

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- **Protest/Revenge Affair:** A reactive protest against the partner not being accessible/responsive/or engaged. A form of protest, retaliation or revenge for being hurt, rejected and/or abandoned by the partner.
- **Come and Get Me Affair:** Attempt to draw partner closer by making him/her jealous and/or testing to validate his/her importance to the partner.
- **Burned Out Exit Affair:** Straying partner is burned out on the primarily relationship. The affair may be a way of ending the relationship or exploring leaving the relationship.

Relationship Dynamics

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- **Escape Affair.** Involves an attempt to avoid dealing with problems associated with work, family, couple relationship, or feelings of failure by escaping to the excitement of easy romance and deception. Primarily relationship often distressed before the affair making it difficult to turn to the primarily partner.
- Once in the affair, straying partner may be ambivalent about giving up either relationship since both may serve function.

Intrapsychic Dynamics

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- **Hedge Fund Affair:** Expects abandonment as inevitable and wants to protect against being alone by having someone else on the side to go to so they will not be alone. People will often go from one relationship to another, each often ending with an affair with the new partner.
- **Power Player Affair.** Involves attempts to feel powerful and in control. Can involve gender related anger. Typically involves short, emotionally disconnected affairs. Often contenders in other areas of their lives – generally into power and control to feel safe.
- **Compulsive Affair.** Involves attempts to numb through disconnected sexual affairs, prostitutes, compulsive pornography, strip clubs, etc. Has compulsive/addictive characteristics.

Ten Factors Associated with Healing

(Clark & Woolley, 2013)

- 1) Ending the affair
- 2) Open and honest communication
- 3) Open discussion of the details of the affair
- 4) Straying partners' development of empathy for the betrayed partner.
- 5) Betrayed partners' development of empathy for the straying partner.

Ten Factors Associated with Healing

(Clark & Woolley, 2013)

- 6) Genuine apology from the participating partner
- 7) Participating partners' acceptance of responsibility
- 8) Mutual understanding of factors leading to infidelity
- 9) Participating partners' engagement in trust promoting behaviors
- 10) Forgiveness

Keys elements in Repair

- A. Injury must be validated and organized and tied to the attachment bond.
- B. Injured party must experience the other as understanding at an emotional level the pain and suffering of the injury and having deep remorse.
- C. There must be a reason to believe the injury will not happen again.
- D. They must develop a coherent narrative about what caused the injury and how the same thing will not happen again.

Healing Relationally Driven Affairs

- 1) The pre-affair problems in the relationship need to be addressed along with the new problems.
- 2) There may be multiple cycles – a cycle before the affair started and cycle after the affair.
- 3) Turning outside the primarily relationship can be framed as part of the cycle

Healing Intrapsychic Driven Affairs

- 1) If the affair(s) was largely driven by intrapsychic factors, EFT is still essential. Creating safe, healing relationships can bring internal healing.
- 2) However, there may need to be additional treatments such as group therapy for gender related issues, group therapy for addictions etc.

Healing Affairs in Stage I

Stage I

- Uncover/end the affair
- Assess for the type of affair
- Deescalate cycle around the affair
- Put the affair in the cycle
- Access and process emotions around the affair
- Begin to understand how the affair happened
- Reframe around the cycles underling attachment related emotions.

Healing Affairs in Stage II

Stage II

- Help each own, integrate, and share their deeper attachment related emotions, longings, and aspects of self.
- Work to help each see and accept what has been owned and shared.
- Help them develop strategies to protect their relationship from further affairs.
- Get both to reach to each other for comfort and connection. This includes having the injured partner reach for comforting connection to the formerly betraying partner.

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About Scott

Scott R. Woolley, PhD has trained therapists in Emotionally Focused Therapy in many areas of the world, including Canada, Chili, England, Finland, Guam, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Taiwan, The Netherlands, and throughout the U.S., and works closely with Dr. Susan Johnson, founder of EFT.

Dr. Woolley holds the rank of Distinguished Professor in the couple and family therapy program at the California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University. He is a founder and Director of the San Diego Center for Emotionally Focused Therapy and the Executive Director of the Training and Research Institute for EFT at Alliant (TRI EFT Alliant).

Dr. Woolley earned a B.S. in Economics and an M.S. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Brigham Young University, and a Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Texas Tech University. Dr. Woolley is an AAMFT Clinical Member and Approved Supervisor, and a Certified EFT Therapist, Supervisor, and Trainer.

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