

Fidelity and infidelity in romantic relationships: Characters and conflict in ordinary life

Infidelity – Love – Narrative – Conflict – Sign

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“Happy love has no history” (Rougemont, 1939): according to the author, in almost all occidental literature concerning love, adultery prevails. Centuries ago, both in narrative arts as well as in society, it was visible an opposition between a contractual union made for social convenience and the romantic love felt by the individual. Nowadays, conflict concerning infidelity remains, with all its dramatic strength. This theme's dominance, across ordinary life and cinema narratives, signals the presence of intense emotional processes. Which are them? The answer(s) seems fundamental to those who choose to talk about love through the narratives and scripts they create. To understand how people experience fidelity and infidelity in romantic relationship, it was carried a theoretical and empirical research (226 questionnaires and 29 interviews). Empirical data were analyzed qualitatively (content analysis) and quantitatively (automatic analysis of textual data). In order to interpret results, it was proposed a semiotic approach of psychological processes. Extra-relational involvement emerged as a signifier: a visible exteriorization of more occult contents (signified), such as lie, disrespect, insecurity, desire, novelty, dissatisfaction... Each sign configuration revealed in the study – “not to be unfaithful”, “to be betrayed”, “to be unfaithful” and “fidelity” – assumes certain evaluative position, motivations and action tendencies. Inside a person, we find multiple forces, characters, “beings”, that ally, fight, hide, with and from each other. Between the yearning for relational union (total, happy, secure) – the lost paradise – and the urge for adventure (for exploration, growth, development...), journeys of fidelity and infidelity are crossed.