

[Barry University](#)
[Institutional Repository](#)

[Theses and Dissertations](#)

2017

**Factors that Contribute to Forgiving a Sexual Infidelity:
What is the Best Predictor?**

Fernanda Ponce

Factors that Contribute to Forgiving a Sexual Infidelity:

What is the Best Predictor?

Fernanda Ponce

Barry University

Abstract

Currently, the annual marriage rate is in decline while divorce rates display an age differential. People over age 40 are divorcing at higher rates than people under age 25. Research has demonstrated that infidelity is the number one reason for divorce. Nevertheless, not all of the couples who experience infidelity end up dissolving their marriage. Some couples choose to stay together and work towards improving their relationship. Forgiveness plays a defining role in the relationship outcome after extradyadic involvement. Forgiveness is a complex construct and as such, there are multiple factors that contribute to it within a romantic relationship context.

There is scarce research about why individuals reach the decision of either continuing or ending the relationship after a betrayal. Past research has identified the need to investigate the variables that influence the outcome of a relationship following an infidelity (Hall & Fincham, 2006; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). Consequently, the present study will evaluate the five most recognized factors associated with forgiving a sexual infidelity across five different degrees of the offense. The factors that will be examined include trait forgiveness, empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust.

The sample of the current study will consist of 105 men and women, with a minimum age of 18, who have been or currently are in a romantic relationship with one partner. Trait forgiveness, empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust will be measured using the Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Commitment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), Trust in Close Relationships Scale, respectively. In addition, The Degrees of Infidelity

Scenarios were created to assess forgiveness at different levels of an infidelity, ranging from least offensive (texting another person with a flirting message) to most offensive (having sexual intercourse with the other person). A regression model will be used to examine the relationship between forgiveness and each of the contributing factors aforementioned. Correspondingly, there will be a series of 5 multiple regressions.

Two hypotheses will be tested. First, at the lowest level of infidelity, trait forgiveness is hypothesized to be the best predictor of forgiveness. Second, at the highest level of infidelity, relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment are hypothesized to be the best predictors of forgiveness. The findings of this study are relevant because they will contribute to the understanding of why some people forgive their partners after an infidelity. Infidelity is a severe threat to relationship maintenance, which commonly leads to relationship dissolution. Thus, understanding why forgiving behavior may occur and identifying the most important factors associated with it, can help therapists better assist struggling couples in marriage and relationship counseling. The comprehensive understanding of not only how but why forgiveness may occur can help foster relationship longevity and satisfaction after an infidelity.

Factors that Contribute to Forgiving a Sexual Infidelity:

What is the Best Predictor?

The United States has experienced changes in the rate of marriage across history. From the mid-1800s until the late 1900s, the rate of marriage remained high in society. More than 90 percent of every female birth cohort on record since the mid-1800s eventually married (Cherlin, 1992). During the baby-boom years (1946-1964), the rate of marriage increased and peaked, and people started to marry at a younger age (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). However in the 1970s, the annual rate of marriage among unmarried women between the ages of 15 to 44 began to decline (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012). During the past few years, the number of marriages has continued to decrease. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) reports a decrease in the annual marriage rate from 8.2 (per 1,000) in the year 2000 to the latest 6.8 (per 1,000) in 2012. This change in marriage rates has been attributed to demographic factors such as higher divorce rates, postponement of marriage to later ages, and cohabiting (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002).

Many decades ago, people would marry at a very young age. This is not the case anymore. The age composition of the married population has changed over time. People are getting married older, their marriages last longer and they tend to remarry less (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). In addition, since people do not need to get married to live together, cohabitation is widespread. Cohabitation became noticeable in the 1970s among middle-class young adults (Cherlin, 2009). Although it was evident among college graduates, people with less education began this cohabitation trend before them. With cohabitation as a current and common occurrence, those couples who were usually

at a higher risk for getting divorced (e.g., teen parents), refrain from marriage altogether (Cherlin, 2004). Nonetheless, some couples still divorce.

Statistics and Demographics on Divorce

Divorce rates have fluctuated throughout the years. The annual number of divorces per 1,000 population rose from 2.2 in 1960 to 5.2 in 1980 (Amato, 2010). Since then, the divorce rate has gradually declined. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) reports a decrease in the annual divorce rate from 4.0 (per 1,000) in the year 2000 to the latest 3.4 (per 1,000) in 2012. These statistics indicate an increase in the stability of marriages since the 1980s. The increase in age at first marriage and education since the 1980s seem to account for this decline (Heaton, 2002).

Although the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports decreasing divorce rates, this information is contested among researchers on the basis of age composition. The statistics presented by government agencies (e.g., Census Bureau and CDC) are crude rates that refer to the number of divorces out of 1,000 members of the population in a given area (Amato, 2010). These rates comprise segments of the population who cannot marry, like young children. Research by demographers Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) reveals an increase in divorce rates of 40 % between 1980 and 2008 when accounting for the age composition of the population. They report that this increasing divorce trend has noticeable differences among age groups. Since the 1980s, the American Community Survey data shows a decrease in divorce rates amongst people under 25 years old and an increase in those over age 40 (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014).

This differential divorce rate across age groups may be explained by several factors. Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) suggest that the younger generations may be

becoming more selective in their partner choice. Decades ago, marriage was viewed as a necessity by society. People would get married at a young age, possibly to avoid criticism from their friends and families or simply because they wanted to conform. Currently, many people are highly career-driven. Marriage seems to have taken a backseat. Hence, it is only considered after individuals have fulfilled their educational and professional goals. There is less pressure to get married, so younger adults may be more discerning when choosing their mate. Ultimately, such selectivity in partner selection would lead to a more stable union. On the other hand, the divorce trend in people over age 40 may be due to a cohort effect. Between the 1980s and the 1990s, there was an unusual increase in divorce. People from that generation, known as the Baby Boomers, are now part of the middle-aged group, and they carry with them their pattern of marital instability (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014).

Another pattern within the divorce trend is its differential geographic distribution. Divorce rates vary by state. Some states have a higher level of divorce than others. For example, states in the Midwest are associated with a lower divorce rate than those in the West (Scott, Berger, & Weinberg, 2011). The factors that may explain higher divorce rates in certain areas include an unbalanced sex ratio of single individuals, the age when people get married, and the implications of the region itself.

In the United States, single men and single women are not distributed equally. The sex ratio of available single people is highly unbalanced. Research by Florida (2008) shows that the Northeast (e.g., areas like New York City, Long Island, Connecticut) has a higher concentration of single women whereas the West Coast (especially the city of Los Angeles) has a higher concentration of single men. This inequitable sex ratio is linked to

the idea of an existing "marriage market," which conceptualizes the mating of human populations as highly systematic and structured (Becker, 1991). Becker (1991) proposes that the uneven distribution of singles benefits the underrepresented sex by granting its members bargaining power. Consequently, the members of the sex in surplus would have to compete more aggressively to capture the attention of their potential mate. Florida (2008) suggests that a couple has a higher likelihood of divorce when there is a significant availability of single people in their area. Thus, a factor that may contribute to divorce is having increased options for potential mates. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that online dating serves to balance the marriage market. This kind of dating provides opportunities for singles to meet outside of their areas with inequitable sex ratios (Scott, Berger, & Weinberg, 2011).

Moreover, the age when people get married has an effect in the unequal divorce rate concentration. Kiernan and Eldridge (1987) show that first marriages of individuals age 14 to 19 have the highest divorce rates within 5 years. This is often attributed to a lack of maturity, overall resources (e.g., education, income) and life experiences to make long lasting decisions. Additionally, Kiernan and Eldridge (1987) indicate that the Northeast and North Central (also known as the Midwest) regions have the lowest divorce rates. Research points to an inverse relationship between divorce rates and age of first marriage (Scott, Berger, and Weinberg, 2011). Eastern states show lower divorce rates and higher average age at first marriage. By contrast, Western states exhibit higher divorce rates and a lower average age at first marriage. Cortright (2005) explains that in the 1960s, 80 percent of women were married before they reached age 24 whereas by 2005, 80 percent of women were married by age 32. People are now thoroughly assessing

the benefits of getting married versus the possible obstacles to career development, thus delaying the process.

The geographical region itself has certain effects on the disparate divorce rates in the nation. Every place has its own unique characteristics that may attract or deter people from moving there. Florida (2008) indicates locations vary in terms of what they offer to its residents. While some places may be good for finding a romantic partner, others may be great for starting a family. For instance, if an individual is trying to raise a family in an environment with higher availability of singles, low career prospects, and low quality of life, the high stress could tamper with the marriage stability, and the variables mentioned could influence the dissolution of the relationship. The place people decide to live affects every aspect of their lives, from the development of friendships to the overall quality of life (Florida, 2008).

Reasons for Divorce

Past research focused more on the differences in people's explanations for divorcing. Current research examines more closely the specific behaviors that lead couples to divorce. The reasons given vary by gender, socioeconomic status, education and life experiences.

Gender plays an important role in divorce. Women tend to be more relationship-centered (Thompson & Walker, 1991). As a consequence, they observe their relationships more closely than men, notice problems earlier, and are more likely to initiate discussions about the identified issues (Thompson & Walker, 1991). The gender differences pervade the explanations provided for divorce. Men tend to provide basic commentaries on why their marriages ended, while women tend to give long and comprehensive accounts

(Cleek & Pearson, 1985).

Level of education can be considered a close proxy to socioeconomic status (SES) (Kim, 2010). Hence, they are both important factors when examining divorce rates. Research by Kim (2010) indicates that there is a tendency for educational homogamy in marriages. He explains that people tend to marry within their economic classes and that educational intermarriage has been increasingly rare since the 1960s. He reports that people with low socioeconomic status show higher divorce rates than their counterparts. Perhaps, like some research suggests, higher SES contributes to marital success due to the better communication skills of the individuals in the relationship (Voydanoff, 1991). By contrast, other research suggests that higher SES leads to higher levels of stress and irritability which may lead to divorce (Conger et al., 1990).

Moreover, the risk of getting a divorce can be influenced by the life experiences of a person. Every person is born with unique characteristics. Then, individuals are exposed to different contexts and situations that shape their ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The life course theory highlights the importance of time and duration of events in people's lives (Elder, 1994). Several other demographic factors such as age at marriage (as previously mentioned), duration of marriage, cohabitation, parental divorce, and the presence of children, will thus, have an effect on divorce as well. Marrying at a younger age is associated with higher risk of divorce (Bumpass, Martin, & Sweet, 1991). Adults of divorced parents show a higher likelihood of divorce (Greenberg & Nay, 1982). The plethora of events in people's lives have an effect on their views on marriage, commitment, divorce, and relationship goals.

Infidelity. Amato and Previti (2003) used national panel data gathered between

1980 and 1997 to classify 208 people's open-ended responses to a question on why their marriages ended in divorce. They explored the explanations given by these couples as to why their divorce happened. They found that the most commonly reported reason for divorce was infidelity. The other frequently reported reasons were incompatibility, alcohol or drug use, growing apart, personality problems, lack of communication, and physical or mental abuse, in that order. These results corroborate previous findings that show extramarital sex as a powerful predictor of divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997).

When a couple begins a committed and monogamous relationship, there is an underlying agreement that neither member of the dyad will be unfaithful. However, this is not usually the case. Infidelity is a relatively common occurrence. Blow and Hartnett (2005) indicate that extramarital sex occurs in almost 25% of heterosexual marriages in the United States. Their findings also point out gender differences, given that more men than women appear to engage in infidelity. It has also been shown that infidelity is the most prevalent problem for dating and married couples who enter therapy (Glass & Wright, 1988). The definition of infidelity varies and there are gender differences in its expression or understanding.

Definition. There is much variability when trying to define infidelity. To some, holding hands with or kissing a person outside of the relationship may be considered cheating and consequently, enough grounds to terminate the union. To others, extradyadic sexual intercourse might be the ultimate example of what infidelity entails. In general terms, infidelity can be understood as any type of secret emotional, sexual or romantic behavior that fails to comply with the exclusivity rules established within the relationship (Glass, 2002). Some research focuses on the violation of commitment vows

that occurs with betrayal (Bernard, 1974), while other research addresses the elements of secrecy and concealment that constitute infidelity (Pittman & Wagers, 2005).

Narrower definitions of infidelity have focused on the specific behaviors involved. For instance Luo, Cartun, and Snider (2010) present a comprehensive list of "extradyadic behaviors" (EDB) that incorporates face-to-face and online interactions. Some of the items on their EDB measure include sharing sexual pictures, meeting for an alcoholic drink, receiving oral sex and engaging in phone sex (Luo, et al., 2010). It is important to note that the way researchers conceptualize infidelity may be different from how laypeople think of it. Weiser, Lalasz, Weigel, and Evans (2014) explain that laypeople strongly disapprove of infidelity, and that their focus is mainly on the immorality, emotional outcomes, concealment, violation of trust and secretiveness it entails. Thus, laypeople have more of a holistic conceptualization of infidelity, which does not place as much emphasis on sex as researchers do.

Researchers have identified three types of infidelity: emotional-only, sexual-only, and composite (a combination of emotional and sexual) (Glass & Wright, 1985). Nevertheless, these are not mutually exclusive categories. Glass and Wright (1985) indicate that these types are in a continuum of varying degrees of sexual and emotional involvement. Thompson (1984) notes that research seems to focus mostly on the incidence of sexual infidelity. His study revealed that people engage in emotional-only and composite extradyadic relationships just as much as the sexual-only type. Additionally, there has been proposed classifications for other general types of infidelities including Internet, work, and long-term relationships and one-night stands (Blow & Hartnett, 2005).

Gender Differences. Research shows conflicting information related to gender differences and infidelity. Some research shows that men are more likely to be unfaithful than women (Allen & Baucom, 2004). Prins, Buunk, and VanYperen (1993) discovered that although men have a stronger desire than women to partake in extradyadic relationships, their behavior does not differ. In their meta-analytic study of gender differences in sexuality, Oliver and Hyde (1993) found that males reported more acceptance of extramarital intercourse and experience less guilt, anxiety or fear than women. Nevertheless, when assessing the trend over time, they found that the differences between male and female attitudes towards infidelity are getting smaller. Hence, both genders show increasingly similar acceptability of extramarital intercourse throughout the years. In addition, research shows that females view infidelity as having more detractive consequences to the primary relationship, are more disapproving of it, and show higher behavioral disinclination towards it (Thompson, 1984). Nevertheless, Thompson (1984) also points that when taking emotional involvement into account (not just sexual intercourse), the differences between genders become much less apparent. Glass and Wright (1985) note that males engage in "pleasure-centered" extradyadic relationships, while females tend to be more "love-oriented" and thus develop the combined-type of infidelity. They also report that women are more inclined to kiss and hug during the infidelity situation; whereas men engage in more physically intense contact, including intercourse (Glass & Wright, 1985).

Evolutionary Perspective on Infidelity

Evolutionary psychology examines human behavior in terms of its adaptive value. Through natural selection, displaying adaptive qualities contributed to the survival and

reproduction of human ancestors in the evolutionary past. Infidelity has been examined within the context of evolutionary psychology.

According to the evolutionary narrative, men and women respond differently to emotional and sexual infidelities for various reasons. First, in all mammal species, the males deal with uncertainty regarding the paternity of their offspring (Buss et al., 1992). Women do not experience this because the probability of maternity is absolute. As a consequence, males must ensure their reproduction and avoid wasting resources raising another male's offspring (i.e., cuckoldry). Other reproductive costs for males include time, energy, nuptial gifts, mating opportunities and risk of investment on a competitor's gametes (Buss et al., 1992). Being indifferent to the sexual interactions of their mates with others, puts males at a severe reproductive disadvantage and increased selective pressures. Noticing cues of infidelity and acting upon it, thus displaying jealous behavior has been found to be adaptive by increasing the probability of paternity (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982). Using this evolutionary framework, men would be more upset and view as more menacing, a sexual infidelity rather than an emotional one.

For females, the reproductive costs of infidelity are different. Females face the potential redirection of their mate's investment to another female. Buss (1998) explains that this change could lead females to a partial or complete loss of resources, time, and commitment, thus jeopardizing their offspring (especially those who need biparental investment). Buss et al. (1992) notes that the development of a strong emotional attachment has been a reliable indicator to women of the potential reduction or loss of their mate's investment. Thus, following this evolutionary approach, an emotional infidelity would be more threatening and distressing to women.

Buss (1989) considered that conceptually, both sexes would be distressed by a partner's unfaithful behavior, but for the aforementioned reasons. Research has reported that that 60% of men versus 17% of women reported sexual infidelity to be more upsetting than an emotional infidelity (Buss, Larson, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). Similar results have been obtained from subsequent research (Harris, 2003).

By contrast, Carpenter (2012) conducted a meta-analysis using 52 articles, and found that only the data from U.S. students is consistent with what evolutionary psychology suggests here above. Among the rest of the men, who were not students and who were not American, most indicated emotional infidelity to be more distressing than sexual infidelity. The results of this study indicate that men and women do not differ in the types of infidelity that they find distressing. According to Carpenter (2012), the emotional distress experienced by both genders has to do more with the unfaithful partner's behavior threatening their relationship than with the impact on their long-term reproductive ability.

Forgiving an Infidelity

After an infidelity occurs, the couple is faced with two choices: continue the relationship or terminate it. Those who decide to remain in the relationship face the difficult task of forgiving the unfaithful individual and hopefully moving on from the infidelity. Due to the emotional distress an infidelity may cause, recovery from an affair has been conceptualized as equal to recovery from any other interpersonal trauma (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon (2002) refer to an infidelity using terms such as betrayal and violation. They also refer to the unfaithful partner as a perpetrator and transgressor and the faithful partner as a victim. Although the

intention to save the marriage may exist, forgiving is not an easy task. To understand forgiveness, it is important to operationally define it, understand the current models to explain its process and its benefits to both the individual and the distressed relationship.

Trying to define forgiveness has been difficult. Hook et al. (2012) suggest that forgiveness is different from the following: pardoning, condoning, excusing, justifying, forgetting, and (usually) reconciliation. Forgiveness may be defined as a prosocial change in the way a victim's thinks, feels, and/or behaves toward the transgressor (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Worthington (2005) indicates that forgiveness has been debated to include intrapersonal processes (i.e., occurring within oneself) or interpersonal interactions (i.e., with the offender). How a person conceptualizes the act of forgiving, may be related to the outcome after a transgression. Research has shown that having a more interpersonal conceptualization of forgiveness is associated with fewer avoidant motivations and more benevolent motivations toward an offender (Hook et al., 2012). Hence, having such interpersonal outlook may stimulate prosocial motivations and forgiveness, particularly in continuing relationships.

Forgiveness does not happen in an instant, it takes time. For this reason, it should be understood as a process rather than a single event. Gordon and Baucom (1998) proposed a three stage forgiveness model which derives from past research on typical responses to predominantly traumatic events (Horowitz, 1985; Janoff-Bulman, 1989). They describe forgiveness of major betrayals such as infidelity, to be an ongoing process of moving through stages whereby increasing levels of forgiveness are achieved (Gordon & Baucom, 1998).

First, Stage I or the "impact" stage, refers to dealing with the cognitive, emotional,

and behavioral changes after realizing a betrayal occurred. For instance, Gordon and Baucom (2003) found that people classified as going through Stage I reported five feelings. These are as follows: less positive assumptions about themselves and their partners, less psychological closeness with their partners, less investment in their marriages, greater feelings of powerlessness in their marriages, and less marital adjustment. Next, stage II or the "meaning" stage, occurs when the affected individual tries to understand why the infidelity happened. Finally, stage III or the "moving on" stage entails recovering from the transgression. Abrahamson, Hussain, Khan, & Schofield (2012) found four factors that were influential in the decision to maintain the relationship. These were motivation, acts of kindness, meaning making, and support. Additionally, they indicated that forgiveness and counseling helped the couples to restore their relationship.

Despite the difficulties associated with forgiving a betrayal, it is indeed possible to salvage the marriage and experience some benefits. First, forgiving the hurtful act of infidelity can be beneficial to the individual. Forgiveness may be a self-healing strategy that enables victims to feel better, achieve a sense of closure, and move on with their lives (Strelan, McKee, Calic, Cook, & Shaw, 2013). Thus, forgiving may have protective functions in terms of transgressions to the self. Experiencing an infidelity can endanger the victims' self-esteem, feelings of control and predictability in their lives, and trust in others. Consequently, one can expect individuals to be driven to defend against perceived attacks on the self (Baumeister, 1998). In addition, there are physiological advantages associated with forgiveness. The benefits of forgiveness include lower cardiovascular reactivity (both during the initial cognitive process and during later mental recreations)

and sustained protection from the adverse effects of cardiovascular distress (Larsen et al., 2012).

Forgiveness brings about benefits to the relationship as well. Gordon and Baucom (2003) discovered that people who achieved Stage III disclose five effects. The reported effects are the following: the most positive assumptions, the greatest psychological closeness, the most investment in their marriages, a more equal balance of power in their marriages and greater marital adjustment compared to couples who have not forgiven yet. Thus, forgiving an infidelity may serve to fortify the distressed relationship. It seems to be that forgiveness is key to healing after betrayal (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2005). In addition, Charny and Parnass (1995) conducted a study where they asked a sample of therapists to give an account of an incident of betrayal which they were familiar with. They found that 15% of the relationships in question improved after the infidelity while the rest were reportedly remained the same or worsened (Charny & Parnass, 1995). Perhaps going through such challenging times and succeeding together, may bring some couples a new understanding of trust and a deeper bond than they previously had.

Evolutionary Perspective on Revenge and Forgiveness

After a wrongdoing, individuals may or may not forgive their transgressors. Among people who do not forgive the offender, some display revengeful behavior. Some revengeful behavior may be adaptive because it may inhibit loss of resources or status. However, an inability to inhibit revenge would be detrimental in the long run, to the development of the relationships needed for survival. According to Solomon (1994), forgiveness is closely related to revenge. He indicates that if revenge evolved, so did forgiveness, and they are complexly related to each other.

McCullough (2008) explains that when a member of a kin grouping transgresses, retaliatory behavior such as expulsion from the group may ensue. However, in an attempt to preserve valuable relationships within a network, sometimes the offender is brought back into the group showing reconciling behavior (Newberg, D'Aquili, Newberg, & DeMarici, 2000). Reconciling behaviors such as forgiving the transgressor will foster group cohesion and cooperative interactions.

Furthermore, forgiving transgressions may lead to being taken advantage of or exploited. Humans may commit revenge to prevent exploitation and forgive to restore valuable social relationships following exploitation (Burnette, McCullough, Van Tongeren, & Davis, 2012). McCullough (2008) also suggests that people forgive those who they care about, those who are perceived to have value, and those who are unlikely to pose future harm. Nevertheless, often times people forgive transgressors who do not meet those three conditions. The offender may bring repeated harm to the individual or to the group it belongs to. Thus, the transgressor may disrupt useful relationships and exploit others.

The famous German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (2006) wrote, "It is far pleasanter to injure and afterwards beg forgiveness than to be injured and grant forgiveness. He who does the former gives evidence of power and afterwards of kindness of character" (p.163). This statement implies that forgiveness is maladaptive for survival and it deems those who display it as weak individuals. However, the evolutionary narrative presents forgiveness as a good strategy. Forgiveness may serve a role in social cohesion, a necessary element for the group-living human species.

First, forgiveness entails the resolution of interpersonal conflict. Since humans are

highly social and interdependent beings, forgiveness is necessary for maintaining intimate relationships. The evolution of forgiveness entails principles of kin selection (i.e., organisms being selected to help their relatively close kin) and reciprocal altruism (Trivers, 1971). Forgiveness may have evolved as part of a conflict resolution strategy to foster cooperation and altruism. Luebbert (1999) explains that throughout evolutionary history, individuals who forgave one another achieved greater reproductive success than those who did not. He goes on to say that such success develops due to the advantages close relationships may entail, including greater security and resources.

Factors That Contribute to Forgiving Infidelity

Individual Factors. These factors pertain to the unique characteristics of the individual. They refer to those personality traits and features that the individual brings to the relationship. These individual factors influence how people will think, act, and feel when interacting with their romantic partners. They also shape how individuals respond to relationship stressors such as an infidelity.

Trait forgiveness. Forgiveness has been described as a prosocial change where the victim of hurtful actions moves toward more positive thoughts, emotions, motivations or behaviors toward a transgressor (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). After experiencing an interpersonal transgression in a romantic relationship, forgiveness may serve as a coping mechanism to deal with the consequent pain. Forgiveness has been associated with positive short-term and long-term consequences related to relationship satisfaction and marital longevity (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007). In addition, being forgiving in a romantic relationship is related to constructive communication (Fincham and Beach, 2002) and better conflict resolution (Fincham,

Beach, & Davila, 2004).

Despite the potential benefits, forgiving others for their hurtful actions is not an easy task. Some people show a general and stable tendency to forgive transgressions more than others do. Thus, they exhibit forgiveness as a personality trait. Roberts (1995) suggested the term "forgivingness" to distinguish trait forgiveness from the episodic type. At this dispositional level, people show a tendency to forgive others throughout time and across a variety of circumstances (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001).

Conversely, episode forgiveness refers to a specific interpersonal transgression. Individuals who may not necessarily consider themselves as particularly forgiving people may forgive certain offenses due to a variety of factors. The decision to forgive a transgressor is influenced by the characteristics of the wrongdoing itself (e.g., intentionality, severity, etc.) and the context (e.g., commitment, relationship satisfaction, etc.) (Allemand et al., 2007). People are more inclined to forgive less severe and unintentional transgressions, than the opposite.

Moreover, Allemand et al. (2007) explored how trait forgiveness and relationship satisfaction may facilitate episodic forgiveness. They found that trait forgiveness interacts with relationship satisfaction in predicting episodic forgiveness. Individuals with high trait forgiveness and who are satisfied with their relationships showed high episodic forgiveness. In contrast, individuals with high trait forgiveness who are dissatisfied with their relationships, exhibited low episodic forgiveness. Thus, it is important to consider the link between forgiveness and relationship satisfaction when it comes to forgiving an interpersonal transgression such as infidelity.

Empathy. Empathy has been defined in different ways. In cognitive terms, it is the ability to understand the affective or cognitive status of another person (Borke, 1971). In affective terms, it has been described as concern for another person's position or experiencing an affective response congruent with the other's welfare (Batson & Coke, 1981). It has also been described as a person's vicarious matching of another's affective state (Feshbach & Roe, 1968).

This factor seems to foster several kinds of prosocial qualities that include helping others and forgiving. McCullough, Worthington and Rachal (1997) found that feeling empathetic affect and understanding the cognitive perspective of the offender are strongly associated with global measures of forgiveness. McCullough et al. (1998) indicate that affective empathy toward the offender seems to be a key social–cognitive determinant of forgiving. This provides an explanation for the considerable variability in people's self-reported forgiving of a transgressor.

Furthermore, apologies influence the relationship outcome after a transgression. People are more likely to feel empathy when an apology is provided, and thus, they may be more inclined to forgive the offender (McCullough et al. 1997). Interventions usually target empathy as a means to achieve forgiveness in a distressed couple. McCullough (2000) explains that to the extent of his knowledge, empathy has been the only variable shown to help people forgive specific interpersonal transgressions when experimentally manipulated.

Big Five personality factors. The Big Five or Five-Factor model presents broad domains often used to describe personality. These dimensions include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

When studying forgiveness, its relationship to the Big Five personality factors has been questioned. Researchers have found positive correlations between agreeableness and forgiveness (Emmons, 2000; Berry et al., 2001). Both studies obtained consistent results showing a stable and moderate correlation between the two variables. People who are high on agreeableness, are successful in relating to others and engage in less interpersonal conflict. Additionally, individuals that are high on agreeableness tend to score higher than their counterparts when measured on trait forgiveness (Brown, 2003).

On the other hand, trait forgiveness is negatively related to extraversion and neuroticism. Walter and Gorsuch (2002) found that three facets of neuroticism (anxiety, emotionality, and distrust) are negatively related to forgiveness, while emotional stability is positively related to it. Hence, emotionally stable individuals are more likely to forgive, than those who lack this particular characteristic.

Differentiation of self. When examining relationship outcomes, it is reasonable to consider the dynamics and the characteristics of the relationship itself. However, it is important also to evaluate how each member of the dyad may affect the relationship. People go into relationships having their emotional needs and expectations. They have their particular styles of relating to others and behaving in social settings. An individual's level of interpersonal functioning will serve as a template for relational development. Thus, if an individual does not function well in different types of relationships (e.g., work, family, and friends) the outcome of a romantic relationship would follow a similar pattern.

In his book, Bowen (1978) discusses two emotional forces that keep the relationship system in balance. The first force is togetherness, which entails the drive to

achieve emotional closeness, love, and approval. The second force is individuality, which comprises the need to be a productive and autonomous individual. People desire togetherness and individuality in different degrees. These variations constitute the individuals' level of self-differentiation (i.e., their lifestyle). Those with high levels of self-differentiation are less relationship directed. They follow their life course based on the pursuit of their independent goals, and not based on other people's thoughts. They function well alone and with the company of others. They experience the full range of emotional intimacy without feeling a loss of identity in the process. Additionally, they tend to function better under stress, be more resistant to the adverse effects of stress and have higher relationship satisfaction than their counterparts (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Gubbins, Perosa and Bartle-Haring (2010) also found a positive relationship between levels of differentiation and relationship satisfaction.

In contrast, those with low levels of self-differentiation focus all their attention on seeking harmony and closeness in their relationships. Consequently, they do not have energy left for achieving their personal goals. If asked about their own goals, they would give general and vague answers. They are completely relationship oriented. Their main concern is to keep balance in their relationships and relieve the discomfort and anxiety disequilibrium brings. In addition, Balswick and Balswick (1999) suggest that these individuals are more likely to be unfaithful to their spouses and have a more difficult time recovering from those affairs than highly self-differentiated people.

Moreover, Bowen (1978) explains that individuals tend to seek partners with equal levels of self-differentiation. He indicates that low self-differentiated individuals tend to fuse themselves with their romantic partner, losing their ego boundaries and forming

what he continuously refers to as an "ego mass". When a person has low levels of differentiation of self, he or she will seek togetherness at the expense of his or her romantic partner. Since low self-differentiated people do not have high needs for individuality, their drive for togetherness will most likely deprive their partners of their freedom to be autonomous. This will disrupt the relationship equilibrium and lead to distress. The anxiety and discomfort experienced by low self-differentiated people when their needs are not met will prompt them to try harder at achieving togetherness. Negative behavior (e.g., arguing, acting dictatorial, pleading, clinging, and fighting) will ensue. Gubbins et al. (2010) found that the level of self-differentiation was negatively related to the emotional flooding (e.g., criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling) that occurs during an argument.

Skowron (2000) explored the relationship between marital satisfaction and the various aspects of differentiation identified by Bowen (1978). The findings indicated an association between higher levels of satisfaction with the following dimensions of self-differentiation: low levels of emotional reactivity (ER), low emotional cutoff (EC), low fusion, and high levels of ability to take I-positions (IPs) in relationships. On the other hand, couples in which individuals showed lower levels of self-differentiation (high ER, high cutoff, high fusion and low IPs) reported greater marital distress than their counterparts. Although this research shows the link between differentiation of self and relationship satisfaction, it does not explain how these variables interplay when it comes to forgiving an infidelity.

As explained in previous sections, the typical response to an extra-dyadic affair is explained by trauma model that includes the three stages of impact, meaning, and

recovery (Gordon and Baucom, 2003). This process requires cognitive work. The findings from Gubbins et al. (2010) pertaining to the emotional flooding during marital disagreements, imply that being highly self-differentiated would allow for better cognitive stability and objectivity during stressful interpersonal situations (e.g., facing an infidelity). As a result, remaining emotionally stable would allow for cognitive work to begin, which could promote forgiveness.

Research on how aspects of self-differentiation interact in the process of forgiving infidelity has been limited. A few studies have investigated the link between self-differentiation and forgiveness, in general, not specifically addressing infidelity. Findings by Sandage and Jankowski (2011) indicate that differentiation of self mediates the relationship between forgiveness and psychological functioning. Other findings have reported an association between differentiation and specific aspects of forgiveness, such as inhibition of harmful intention and reduction of negative emotion (Holeman, Dean, DeShea and Duba, 2011). Heintzelman, Murdock, Krycak, and Seay (2014) investigated self-differentiation and forgiveness within the context of an infidelity. Their results showed a positive relationship between differentiation of self and forgiveness levels. They also concluded that differentiation moderated the relationship between trauma and forgiveness.

Relational Factors. These factors refer to the characteristics of the relationship. Couples have features that may promote or deter their growth. These relational factors influence how the dyad would respond to stressors such as an infidelity.

Commitment. Over time, individuals might start to feel that they are not psychologically invested in a romantic relationship. Perhaps this feeling developed

gradually due to a build up of relationship problems, personal concerns or stress. Consequently, the individuals who do not feel as invested in the relationship may not work hard to maintain it, which may result in dissolution. Commitment can be conceptualized as having the following three components: a degree of attachment to the partner, an intrinsic desire to persist and maintain the relationship, and a long-term orientation regarding the couple's future (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Thus, when facing an infidelity in a romantic relationship, the commitment individuals have towards each other will influence their corresponding reactions to the offense.

Commitment has been shown to be related to forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998; Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001). For instance, in relationships where partners are committed to one another, the victims of an offense desire less revenge (McCullough et al., 1998). Also, the victims may engage in more peacemaking behaviors toward the offender (Finkel et al., 2002). Molden and Finkel (2010) suggested that commitment could foster forgiveness in one of two ways. First, it could increase perceptions of the remarkable value of what is gained by maintaining the relationship (i.e., thoughts related to the opportunities that are available with this particular relationship partner as opposed to others). Otherwise, commitment could increase perceptions of the potential loss of investments caused by a failing relationship. People tend to evaluate they may gain or lose from choosing to either continue the relationship or break up. If committed to their romantic partner, people will give high value to the relationship and be more inclined to forgive a transgression (McCullough, 2008).

Satisfaction. There seems to be a strong link between relationship satisfaction,

closeness, and commitment when it comes to forgiveness. Research has shown that couples characterized by those relationship qualities are more likely to forgive an interpersonal transgression (Roloff and Janiszewski, 1989; McCullough et al., 1998). McCullough et al. (1998) found that the degree of self-reported relationship closeness, satisfaction and commitment is related to the forgiver's degree of forgiveness of both the worst and the most recent serious offenses. They also noted that when couples exhibit those qualities, the offenders are more likely to give an apology, prompting empathic affect from the victim. Additionally, Allemand et al. (2007) found that relational characteristics (e.g., relationship satisfaction) may be more important in understanding forgiveness of interpersonal transgressions in close relationships than trait forgiveness.

Karney and Bradbury (1995) reviewed 115 longitudinal studies comprising over 45,000 marriages. They examined how the quality and stability of marriages changed over time. Their findings indicate that relationship satisfaction influences relationship stability. Their meta-analysis demonstrated that lower relationship satisfaction was associated with higher risk of marital dissolution. They explained that relationship satisfaction interacts with coping processes or problem-solving skills of the partners. Thus, couples who are more negative during their interactions, experience poorer marital outcomes over time.

Trust. Trust has been described as the acceptance of vulnerability based on positive expectations of the actions or intentions of others (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer, 1998). Like many other psychological constructs, the concept of trust is complex and difficult to define. According to Holmes and Rempel (1989), when people trust their intimate partners, they have strong expectations for positive outcomes. People feel that in

the present and the future, their needs will be met by their partner. This factor has been widely accepted as a strong contributor to forgiveness dynamics (e.g., Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998).

Molden and Finkel (2010) explained that amongst the wide array of definitions, the core feature of trust is expecting others to behave in a benevolent or beneficial way. They noted that trust may serve to increase forgiveness in one of two ways. First, trust may act by increasing perceptions of safety from future offenses. Alternatively, trust may act by increasing perceptions of opportunities for future benefit in the relationship. People who trust their relationship partners form more benign interpretations regarding the hurtful actions (Rempel, Ross, and Holmes, 2001). They also maintain more positive judgments of the offenders following the transgression (Holmes and Rempel, 1989).

Moreover, Molden and Finkel (2010) found that trust in a relationship partner strongly predicted forgiveness among promotion-focused individuals. These people are concerned with their advancement, attainment of goals, and the pursuit of their ideals. In contrast, commitment to a relationship partner strongly predicted forgiveness among prevention-focused individuals. These people focus on maintaining their security and upholding responsibilities in order to avoid negative outcomes. Thus, those individuals who are committed to the relationship are more likely to forgive when their focus is on preventing adverse results. When their focus is on obtaining rewards and pursuing their dreams, then trust will be the leading factor predicting forgiveness.

Sociocultural factors. These factors pertain to the influence of society and culture. The individuals' upbringing and context play a role in their interpersonal behavior. These sociocultural factors shape how individuals interact with their romantic partners and

respond to relationship problems such as an infidelity.

Collectivistic worldview on forgiveness. For the past 25 years, the most prevalent framework used for the understanding of cultural differences has focused on individualism and collectivism (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier, 2002). Individualism can be described as a worldview that focuses on personal goals, identity, uniqueness, self-fulfillment, concern for oneself and immediate family, personal goals, autonomy, and an emphasis on rights above duties (Hofstede, 1980). Conversely, collectivism prioritizes the social aspects of life. In collectivist societies, there is a sense of community and cohesion characterized by mutual obligations and expectations based on statuses (Schwartz, 1990). For people with a collectivistic worldview, sharing a common fate, goals, and values is the linchpin of the social unit.

There is limited research pertaining the relationship of collectivism and forgiveness. For example, the study presented by Kadiangandu, Mullet and Vinsonneau (2001) indicates differences in forgiveness between samples Congolese people (collectivistic) and European people (individualistic). The Congolese sample was less willing to seek revenge when compared to the European sample. In another study, the Japanese sample (collectivistic) displayed a tendency to avoid conflict and was more concerned with maintaining good relationships than the American sample (Ohbuchi and Takahashi, 1994). Park, Eun, and Song (2005) found that Korean participants showed greater intention to apologize after committing a transgression than the American participants. Also, this study revealed that the Korean sample viewed apologies as more credible and normal than their counterparts. It is important to note than offering an apology enhances harmony in a group, as opposed to denying or justifying a

transgression.

By reviewing past literature, Hook, Worthington, and Utsey (2009) proposed a theoretical model to explain the association between collectivism and forgiveness. They present two main premises. First, they suggest that collectivistic forgiveness occurs within a broad context of social harmony, reconciliation, and relational repair. Second, the decision to forgive from a collectivistic standpoint is driven by social harmony as opposed to experiencing emotional forgiveness. In collectivistic societies, forgiving is motivated by the social harmony and not by the feelings inner peace it may bring. Therefore, when examining the relationship outcome after an infidelity, cultural differences should be addressed. This would provide a better understanding on the individuals' motivations for their decisions.

Religion. The concept of forgiveness is social in nature. Forgiveness, as previously explained, has been described as a prosocial behavior that promotes group cohesion. When people think about forgiveness, religious images may readily come to mind. Forgiveness plays a central role in monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Rokeach (1973) explored the link between religious involvement and the value people ascribed to being forgiving. The results showed that people who were high in church attendance, high in self-rated religiousness, and who were categorized as intrinsically religious or pro-religious, gave being “forgiving” a higher ranking in their personal value systems than their counterparts did. In addition, Poloma and Gallup (1991) obtained similar results. They reported that a variety of measures of religious involvement were positively associated with people’s attitudes toward forgiveness. Data

from this study indicates that religious individuals believe that they should attempt forgiveness following a hurtful transgression. McCullough and Worthington (1999) examined the link between religion and trait forgiveness. They found that people who consider themselves to be highly religious tend to value forgiveness more highly and report higher trait forgiveness than those who consider themselves less religious. Thus far, research indicates a strong and stable relationship between religiousness and people's self-reported values and attitudes regarding forgiveness. It is important to point out that this positive association has been found between religion and dispositional forgiveness.

In contrast, research has not shown religion to be related to episodic forgiveness. Rackley (1993) found that among 170 married individuals, self-reported forgiveness for a particular offense by the spouse was not significantly correlated with religious involvement. McCullough and Worthington (1999) explain that the influence of religious involvement when it comes to forgiving a specific transgression has been negligible.

Socioeconomic development. This contextual factor is also associated with forgiveness. Hanke and Fischer (2013) explain that in a prosperous environment where basic needs are met (e.g., food, shelter, etc.), the likelihood of forgiving a transgression is higher. This is because life is more secured in that environment, and people have the opportunity to wonder about problems unrelated to survival. On the other hand, people living in the context of scarcity, focus their attention on trying to survive so dealing with interpersonal transgressions is less important.

Forgiving is a process that requires gathering information, understanding and analyzing different aspects of the transgression. Hence, there is a great deal of thinking involved. Thoughts pertaining to livelihood may deter people from seeing forgiveness as

an option. Inglehart and Welzel (2010) indicate that levels of trust, interpersonal helping, and prosociality significantly decrease in poor environments. Trust is a crucial factor in the forgiveness process (Wieselquist, 2009). If levels of trust are reduced in poor contexts, a comparable outcome for forgiveness might be expected.

As mentioned in previous sections, forgiving others may bring several positive feelings. Forgiveness is related to social affiliation and self-transcendence (Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, and Schaller, 2010). According to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, the associated benefits of forgiveness would be considered a higher level need. Therefore, it may only become important after achieving lower level needs, such as physiological and safety needs. This is consistent with Inglehart's (1995) affluence hypothesis. He states that in affluent countries individuals can switch their focus from their own survival needs to concerns about other people.

Moreover, Hanke and Fischer (2013) predicted that increased socioeconomic development is associated with more interpersonal forgiveness. Their hypothesis was partially supported. They found a marginally significant association between the socioeconomic indicator and interpersonal forgiveness. They also found that in more highly developed societies individuals reported higher forgiveness scores. The underlying idea from the research thus far, is that in wealthier countries people are more likely to forgive. In the context of infidelity, these past research studies would suggest higher leniency from people living in prosperous environments. When facing this specific interpersonal transgression, individuals in wealthier contexts would be more likely to forgive their unfaithful partner.

Summary

Currently, the annual marriage rate is in decline. People are either cohabiting with their partners, postponing marriage, or abandoning the idea of marriage altogether. There is a decrease in divorce rates amongst people under 25 years old and an increase in those over age 40. Factors such as a high availability of single individuals in a region, low age of marriage and unfavorable characteristics of the geographical location (e.g., high stress and lack of family resources) are associated with an increased risk of divorce. Out of all the reasons commonly reported for divorce, infidelity tops the list. Past research shows differing ways of defining infidelity, with a variation in the key qualities or specific behaviors that may distinguish and identify it. Researchers identified three types of infidelity: sexual, emotional, and a combination of both. All of these types existing in a continuum. After an infidelity occurs, some people may decide to forgive their partner. Forgiving a betrayal may be beneficial to the victim mentally, emotionally, and even physically. It may also contribute to the improvement of the relationship by making the couple feel closer, more invested, more balanced and better adjusted. By evaluating forgiveness using the evolutionary approach, its function within a social network is understood. Forgiveness may have evolved to restore the disruption of group cohesion following a transgression. However, there is risk of exploitation in groupings. Forgiveness may enable exploitation, while revenge may deter it.

There are several factors that contribute to forgiving an infidelity. Some factors are those that occur within the individual. For instance, people with high trait forgiveness have the tendency to forgive others throughout time and across a variety of situations. Individuals who are naturally forgiving and who are highly satisfied with their

relationships, show higher episodic forgiveness. People with higher empathy are more likely to understand and forgive the offender, especially when an apology is provided. Agreeableness has been linked to high trait forgiveness. Individuals with high self-differentiation are more likely to forgive transgressions than their counterparts. Additionally, there are factors that occur with the context of the relationship. Relationships with high commitment, satisfaction, and trust are more likely to display higher forgiveness. Lastly, there are sociocultural factors that influence the outcome after an infidelity. People in collectivistic cultures, people who consider themselves religious and individuals living in environments with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to forgive others than their counterparts.

Rationale

The current study examined the five most recognized factors associated with forgiving a sexual infidelity across five different degrees of the offense. The five factors are trait forgiveness, empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust. The five levels of infidelity are sending a text to another person with a flirting message, sending a text to another person with sexually explicit content, going on a date without any type of physical contact with the other person, kissing the other person and having sexual intercourse with the other person. There were two main hypotheses in this study. First, at the lowest level of infidelity, trait forgiveness was hypothesized to be the best predictor of forgiveness. Second, at the highest level of infidelity, relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment were hypothesized to be the best predictors of forgiveness.

Data Analysis

The data were subjected to a series of 5 multiple regressions. In each regression, the dependent variable was forgiveness. The independent variables were trait forgiveness, empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust. Each regression represents a different level of sexual infidelity ranging from least severe to most severe.

Hypotheses

1. In regression 1, for scenario 1 (*Your partner sent a text to another person with a flirting message*) it was hypothesized that the best predictor of forgiveness would be trait forgiveness.
2. In regression 2, for scenario 2 (*Your partner sent a text to another person with sexually explicit content*) it was hypothesized that the best predictor of forgiveness would be trait forgiveness and relationship satisfaction.
3. In regression 3, for scenario 3 (*Your partner went on a date but did not have any type of physical contact with the other person*) it was hypothesized that the best predictor of forgiveness would be trust.
4. In regression 4, for scenario 4 (*Your partner went on a date and kissed the other person*) it was hypothesized that the best predictor of forgiveness would be empathy.
5. In regression 5, for scenario 5 (*Your partner had sexual intercourse with the other person*) it was hypothesized that the best predictor of forgiveness would be relationship commitment and relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

There were 167 participants who initiated the survey, and 52 were deleted due to unanswered items and blank responses. This left 115 participants whose data were used. Of those participants, 35 were males and 80 were females, who ranged in age 18 to 69 years, ($M = 32.80$, $SD = 13.462$). This participant sample included individuals who have been or currently are in a romantic relationship with one partner.

The sample of respondents was mainly comprised of White Non-Hispanic (47.8%) and Hispanic (35.7%) (Table 1). Religious affiliation of the respondents included Catholic (36.8%), Christian (22.8%) and Other (38.6%) (see Table 2). In terms of educational level, 43.2% of the respondents in the sample were graduates, college degree holders (27.2%), and those with some college (26.3%) (See Table 3). Socio economic status profile of the sample was – 44.3% middle class, 25.3% upper middle class, 17.4% lower middle class, 9.5% working class and 3.5% upper class (see Table 4).

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of Ethnicity Groups

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
White Non-Hispanic	55	47.8
Black	8	7.0
Hispanic	41	35.7
Other	11	9.6
Total	115	100.0

Table 2
Frequency Distribution of Religious Affiliation

Religion	Frequency	Percent
Catholic	42	36.8
Christian	26	22.8
Jewish	2	1.8
Other	44	38.6
Total	115	100.0

Table 3
Frequency Distribution of Education Level

Education level	Frequency	Percent
High school	4	3.5
Some college	30	26.3
College degree	31	27.2
Graduate degree	49	43.0
Total	115	100.0

Table 4
Frequency Distribution of Socio Economic Class

	Frequency	Percent
Working Class	11	9.6
Lower Middle Class	20	17.4
Middle Class	51	44.3
Upper Middle Class	29	25.2
Upper Class	4	3.5
Total	115	100.0

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. This survey asks basic demographic questions, such as age, gender, ethnic group, religion, and level of education. It also includes questions pertaining to the participants' current or last romantic relationship.

Trait forgiveness. Dispositional forgiveness was assessed using the 4-item *Tendency to Forgive Scale* (TTF; Brown, 2003). The internal consistency of this measure is $\alpha = .76$. This scale has consistently shown good psychometric properties, including strong predictive validity across various studies (Brown, 2003; Brown & Phillips, 2005). Participants responded to each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The total score was derived by summing the individual scores of the 4 items. The total scores ranged from 4 to 28.

Empathy. A modified version of the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (IRI; Davis, 1980) was used to assess empathy. The original IRI is a 28-item scale consisting of four 7-item subscales, each assessing a different aspect of empathy. The subscales are the

following: Perspective Taking (the tendency to adopt the psychological point of view of others), Fantasy (the tendency to transpose oneself into the feelings and actions of fictitious characters in books, movies, and plays), Empathic Concern (tendency to experience feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others), and Personal Distress (tendency to feel anxiety and discomfort in reaction to the emotional responses of other people). The IRI provides a reliable and valid way of assessing people's empathic tendencies via self-report (Davis, 1994). This scale was adapted for the current study. Only 2 items per subscale were used for a total of 8 items. Participants responded to each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The total score was derived by summing the individual scores of the 8 items. The total scores ranged from 8 to 56.

Relationship commitment. This factor was measured using a modified version of the 9-item *Commitment Scale* developed by Lund (1985). This scale was modified to allow responses related to the current or the last relationship. Thus, the items included past tense for these cases. Only 8 items were used because one of them is not applicable and cannot be modified (How likely is it that you and your partner will be together six months from now?). Participants responded to each of the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). The total score was derived by summing the individual scores of the 8 items. The total scores ranged from 8 to 56.

Relationship satisfaction. This factor was measured using a modified version of the 7-item *Relationship Assessment Scale* (RAS; Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). This instrument has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of relationship satisfaction. This scale was modified to allow responses related to the current or the last

relationship. Thus, the items included past tense for these cases. Participants indicated their degree of agreement with each of the items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The total score was derived by summing the individual scores of the 7 items. The total scores ranged from 7 to 35.

Trust. This factor was measured using a modified version of the *Trust in Close Relationships Scale* (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). The original instrument is a 17-item scale designed to assess the level of trust in one's relationship partner. It contains 3 subscales: Predictability, Dependability, and Faith. This scale was shortened to 6 items, with 2 items chosen per subscale. Participants responded to each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The total score was derived by summing the individual scores of the 6 items. The total scores ranged from 6 to 42.

Infidelity. The *Degrees of Infidelity Scenarios* were created specifically for this study. Four hypothetical conditions assessed forgiveness at different levels of an infidelity, ranging from least offensive (texting another person with a flirting message) to most offensive (having sexual intercourse with the other person). Participants responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely likely*).

Procedure

Participants were recruited in two ways. One, through the Psychology Department's participant pool. An email containing a link to the survey was sent out to all Psychology students. Two, the survey was posted in a data collection website for people interested in taking Psychology surveys. The name of the website is socialpsychology.org. Participants

were given a link to [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) with the survey for this study. The page included seven forms: a demographic questionnaire, Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Commitment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), Trust in Close Relationships Scale, and The Degrees of Infidelity Scenarios. The page also included a consent letter. The data were collected anonymously.

Results

Reliability Analysis

The five scales used as independent measures were subjected to tests of internal consistency by using Cronbach's alpha measure. All the scales were found to have satisfactory reliability. These are as follows: trait forgiveness scale ($\alpha = .75$), empathy scale ($\alpha = .52$), relationship commitment scale ($\alpha = .79$), relationship satisfaction scale ($\alpha = .895$), and trust scale ($\alpha = .83$).

Assessment of Infidelity Scenarios

Five hypothetical conditions assessed forgiveness at different levels of infidelity, ranging from least offensive ($1 = \textit{not at all}$) to most offensive ($5 = \textit{completely likely}$). The means and standard deviations for forgiveness were calculated at each infidelity scenario so as to examine the likelihood of forgiving a particular offense (see Table 5). Differences in mean forgiveness score across the five scenarios were tested using paired samples t test (see Table 6). In general, the rated degree of infidelity was in the direction predicted. However, Scenario 2 showed a similar mean forgiveness score to that of Scenario 4. Thus, Scenario 2 was deemed to be more offensive than Scenario 3, which did not follow the anticipated direction. Except for Scenario 2 and Scenario 4, all other pairs of scenarios showed significant differences in mean forgiveness score.

Table 5
Mean Forgiveness Scores for Infidelity Scenarios

	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	2.96	1.15
Scenario 2	1.79	.96
Scenario 3	2.07	.99
Scenario 4	1.67	.93
Scenario 5	1.43	.77

Table 6
Results of Paired t test for Difference in Mean Forgiveness Score across Five Scenarios

Difference	Mean	SD	t
S1 - S2	1.165	.982	12.729**
S1 - S3	.887	1.122	8.477**
S1 - S4	1.287	1.122	12.300**
S1 - S5	1.522	1.142	14.289**
S2 - S3	-.278	.913	-3.267**
S2 - S4	.122	.751	1.738
S2 - S5	.357	.716	5.343**
S3 - S4	.400	.686	6.256**
S3 - S5	.635	.892	7.633**
S4 - S5	.235	.597	4.216**

Note: S1: Least offensive level (texting someone with a flirting message), S2 = second least offensive level (texting another person with a sexually explicit content), S3 = moderate offensive level (went on a date but did not have any type of physical contact

with the other person), S4 = high offensive level (went on a date and kissed the other person), S5 = Highest offensive level of infidelity (had sexual intercourse with the other person). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Multiple Regression Analysis

A series of five multiple regressions were performed. In each multiple regression, the dependent variable was forgiveness and the independent variables were the scales of trait forgiveness, empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to test if these independent variables significantly predicted the participants' likelihood of forgiveness. This was done separately for each of the five scenarios representing different level of infidelity.

None of the five regressions were significant. The regression for scenario 1 was not significant $F(5,109) = .78, p = .57$, and hypothesis 1 was not supported. The regression for scenario 2 was not significant $F(5,109) = 1.496, p = .19$, and hypothesis 2 was not supported. The regression for scenario 3 was not significant $F(5,109) = 1.426, p = .22$, and hypothesis 3 was not supported. The regression for scenario 4 was not significant $F(5,109) = 1.587, p = .18$, and hypothesis 4 was not supported. The regression for scenario 5 was not significant $F(5,109) = 1.664, p = .15$, and hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Discussion

The hypotheses of this study were not supported. Multiple regressions were performed to determine if trait forgiveness, empathy, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, and trust significantly predicted the participants' likelihood of forgiving a sexual infidelity. It was expected that some of these factors would be more influential in terms of forgiving at different levels of infidelity, ranging from least to most

offensive. Previous literature indicated a varying relationship between each factor and forgiving an infidelity that takes into consideration the severity of the transgression.

First, research has shown that individuals with trait forgiveness are likely to forgive across a variety of circumstances (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001). Thus, it was hypothesized that this variable would determine the likelihood of forgiving an offense at the lowest level of severity (*Your partner sent a text to another person with a flirting message*). Second, Allemand et al. (2007) demonstrated an interaction between trait forgiveness and relationship satisfaction in predicting episodic forgiveness. Given that individuals with high trait forgiveness and who are satisfied with their relationships have been shown to exhibit high episodic forgiveness, it was hypothesized that this duo of factors would influence the next level of severity of an infidelity (*Your partner sent a text to another person with sexually explicit content*). Third, research has shown that people who trust their relationship partners develop more favorable interpretations regarding the hurtful actions and maintain more positive judgments of the transgressors following an offense (Rempel, Ross, and Holmes, 2001). Molden and Finkel (2010) suggested a strong association between trust and increased forgiveness. Therefore, it was hypothesized that on the next level of infidelity (*Your partner went on a date but did not have any type of physical contact with the other person*) trust would predict forgiveness. Fourth, McCullough, Worthington and Rachal (1997) indicated that feeling empathetic affect and understanding the cognitive perspective of the offender are strongly associated with forgiveness. At the following level of infidelity (*Your partner went on a date and kissed the other person*), empathy was hypothesized to be the best predictor of forgiveness. Fifth, research has shown a

strong link between relationship satisfaction and commitment when it comes to forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998). At the highest level of severity for an infidelity (*Your partner had sexual intercourse with the other person*), both factors were predicted to play a crucial role in determining the likelihood of forgiveness.

Although the results did not support the hypotheses, this study contributes to the present research on forgiving an infidelity. There is limited research on why people decide to forgive the partner after an interpersonal transgression has occurred. Previous research had identified the need to examine the possible factors that may contribute to forgiving an infidelity (Hall & Fincham, 2006; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). This study investigated the influence of five specific variables on the likelihood of forgiving five specific offenses, which no study had done before. Despite not finding support for any of the variables as possible predictors for forgiving an infidelity, this study aimed to build upon research that explores forgiveness in the context of romantic relationships and extradyadic behavior. Research on this subject has traditionally understudied the factors that play a role when deciding to forgive an infidelity, as it has mostly been focused on investigating forgiveness and infidelity independently.

Limitations

Despite previous research suggesting these five factors as possible predictors of forgiving a sexual infidelity, the aforementioned hypotheses were not supported. None of these factors were shown to predict forgiveness at any level of a sexual infidelity. Most of the participants were female (69.6%), White Non-Hispanic (47.8%), educated at a graduate school level (43.2%), and of middle class (44.3%) in terms of socioeconomic status. The sample showed variation in demographic characteristics. It was mostly a

balanced sample, with the exception of gender, as females predominate. Thus, the sample does not seem to be the problem in this study.

There are a few possible explanations for these results. First, it is likely that these were not the right variables to examine for these infidelity scenarios. Although the literature suggested that these variables would be useful predictors of forgiving an infidelity, research also pointed to self-differentiation, other personality factors (e.g., agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism), and sociocultural factors as additional variables to consider.

Second, the present study took the idea to the next level by providing specific transgressions. The design of such transgressions was based on the comprehensive list of "extradyadic behaviors" (EDB) presented by Luo, Cartun, and Snider (2010). It is important to note that research presents a variety of definitions for what constitutes an infidelity, and that those definitions often differ from those of laypeople (Weiser, Lalasz, Weigel, & Evans, 2014). Therefore, participants' interpretation of what an infidelity means may subjectively vary.

Third, the scenarios were ranked from least to most offensive according to a continuum where the transgression moves toward the ultimate offense, that is, sexual intercourse. This difficulty of ranging infidelity from least to most offensive was previously reported by Luo, Cartun, and Snider (2010). These researchers found that the subjective severity attributed to a transgression is associated to the individual's operational definition of the infidelity construct. In the present study, a paired samples t-test was used to evaluate the differences in mean forgiveness score across the five scenarios. It was originally thought that the scenarios would be in order of lesser

forgiveness expected. However, it was found that participants viewed the second scenario (*Your partner sent a text to another person with sexually explicit content*) as worse than the third scenario (*Your partner went on a date but did not have any type of physical contact with the other person*). In other words, scenario 2 was interpreted as more hurtful than scenario 3, and was interpreted as essentially similar to the severity of scenario 4, which entails going on a date and kissing another person. Except Scenario 2 and Scenario 4, all other pairs of scenarios showed significant differences in mean forgiveness score. This may be because scenario 2 reflects explicit sexual intent, whereas scenario 3 is open to benign explanations. Thus, the limitations in this study lie within the specific transgressions presented in the scenarios and the faulty hierarchy of such transgressions.

Fourth, the reliability for the empathy scale was low while the other four scales exhibited acceptable levels of reliability. This scale had the lowest level of reliability items ($\alpha = .52$). None of the other four scales exhibited problems with reliability, as their Cronbach's alpha values were higher than ($\alpha = .75$). A modified version of the *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (IRI; Davis, 1980) was used in this study. The original IRI has 28 items, whereas this version utilized only 8 items. Therefore, this altered version of the scale might not be the best method of assessing a person's level of empathy.

Fifth, there was a large difference between the percentages of male and female participants. Most of the participant sample was female. It is likely that this research topic was more appealing to female volunteers than to males. Thus, an implication for future studies would be that it has to appeal to males also, so as to obtain a more accurate representation of the population overall. Past research has shown that there is a gender difference in terms of how one interprets the severity and hurtfulness of an infidelity

(Luo, et al., 2010). Thus, with a larger and more balanced sample, it would be important to show how different genders respond to various levels of an infidelity.

Future research should consider providing more specific explanations and details when delineating the infidelity scenarios. It would be advisable to provide specific examples to clarify the scenarios (e.g., sending texts with sexually explicit content such as pictures of nudity and invitations for sexual encounters). In addition, future studies should investigate other elements as their main variables, such as sociocultural factors. While this study addressed ethnicity in the demographic questionnaire, it did not emphasize cultural factors in the context of forgiving a sexual infidelity. In addition, this study did not inquire about the sexual orientation of the participant sample. Because forgiveness is a broad construct and infidelity is universal, it would be important to examine the differences of the results in each sexual orientation subgroup in order to determine whether the results are generalizable to all populations.

References

- Abrahamson, I., Hussain, R., Khan, A., & Schofield, M. J. (2012). What helps couples rebuild their relationship after infidelity? *Journal of Family Issues*, 33, 1494–1519. doi:10.1177/0192513X11424257
- Allemand, M., Amberg, I., Zimprich, D., & Fincham, F. D. (2007). The role of trait forgiveness and relationship satisfaction in episodic forgiveness. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 26(2), 199-217.
- Allen, E. S., & Baucom, D. H. (2004). Adult attachment and patterns of extradyadic involvement. *Family Process*, 43, 467–488.
- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 650-666.
- Amato, P.R., Previti D (2003). People's reasons for divorcing: gender, social class, the life course and adjustment. *J Fam Issues* 2003;24:602–26.
- Amato, P. R., & Rogers, S. J. (1997). A longitudinal study of marital problems and subsequent divorce. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 59, 612-624.
- Arriaga, X. B., & Agnew, C. R. (2001). Being committed: Affective, cognitive, and conative components of relationship commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 1190–1203.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York, NY: Jason Aronson.
- Brown, R.P.(2003).Measuring individual differences in the tendency to forgive:Construct validity and links with depression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 759–771.
- Balswick, J., & Balswick, J. (1999). Extramarital affairs: Causes, consequences, and

recovery. *Marriage and Family: A Christian Journal*, 2, 419–427. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.net/>

- Batson, C. D., & Coke, J. S. (1981). Empathy: A source of altruistic motivation for helping? In J. P. Rushton & R. M. Sorrentino (Eds.), *Altruism and helping behavior: Social, personality, and developmental perspectives* (pp. 167-211). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1998). The self. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & L. Gardner (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (Vols. 1 and 2, 4th ed., pp. 680–740). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Becker, Gary S. (1991), *A Treatise on the Family*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bernard, J. (1974). Infidelity: Some moral and social issues. In J. R. Smith & L. G. Smith (Eds.), *Beyond monogamy: Recent studies of sexual alternatives in marriage* (pp. 130–158). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Parrott, L., O'Connor, L. E., & Wade, N. E. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (TNTF). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 1277–1290.
- Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. J., Parrott, L. I., O'Connor, L. E., & Wade, N. G. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (TNTF). *Personality And Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(10), 1277-1290. doi:10.1177/01461672012710004
- Blow, A. J., & Hartnett, K. (2005). Infidelity in committed relationships II: A substantive

- review. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 31, 217–233. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2005.tb01556.x
- Borke, H. (1971). Interpersonal perception of young children: Egocentrism or empathy. *Developmental Psychology*, 5, 262-269.
- Bramlett, M. D., & Mosher, W.D. (2002). Cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the United States. *Vital Health Statistics*, 23(22), 1-87.
- Brown, R.P., Measuring individual differences in the tendency to forgive: Construct validity and links with depression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 2003;29:759–771.
- Brown, R. P., & Phillips, A. (2005). Letting bygones be bygones: Further evidence for the validity of the Tendency to Forgive Scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 38(3), 627-638.
- Brown, S. L., & Lin, I. (2012). The gray divorce revolution: Rising divorce among middle-aged and older adults, 1990–2010. *Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 67, 731–741.
- Bumpass, L. L., Martin, T. C., & Sweet, J. A. (1991). The impact of family background and early marital factors on marital disruption. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12, 22-42.
- Buss, D.M. (1988). From vigilance to violence: Tactics of mate retention in American undergraduates. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 9, 291-317.
- Buss, D. M. (1989). Conflict between the sexes: strategic interference and the evocation of anger and upset. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 56(5), 735.
- Buss, D. M., Larsen, R. J., Westen, D., and Semmelroth, J. (1992). Sex differences in

jealousy: Evolution, physiology, and psychology. *Psychological Science*, 3, 251-255.

Burnette, J. L., McCullough, M. E., Van Tongeren, D. R., & Davis, D. E. (2012).

Forgiveness results from integrating information about relationship value and exploitation risk. *Personality And Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(3), 345-356.
doi:10.1177/0146167211424582

Carpenter, C. J. (2012). Meta-analyses of sex differences in responses to sexual versus emotional infidelity: Men and women are more similar than different. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 36, 25-37.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2015, February 19). National Marriage and Divorce Rate trends. Retrieved June 2, 2015, from
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>

Charny, I., & Parnass, S. (1995). The impact of extramarital relationships on the continuation of marriages. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 21, 100–115.
doi:10.1080/00926239508404389

Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 848–861.

Cherlin, A. (2009). *Marriage, divorce, remarriage*. Harvard University Press.

Cherlin, Andrew J. 1992. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cleek, M. G., & Pearson, T. A. (1985). Perceived causes of divorce: An analysis of interrelationships. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 47, 179-183.

Conger, R. D., Elder, G. H., Lorenz, F. O., Conger, K. J., Simons, R. L., Whitbeck, L. B.,

- et al.(1990). Linking economic hardship to marital quality and instability. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, 52, 643-656.
- Costa, P. T., Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) professional manual. Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
- Cortright, Joseph (2005), "The Young and Restless in a Knowledge Economy." *CEOs for Cities*.
- Daly, M., Wilson, M., & Weghorst, S.J. (1982). Male sexual jealousy. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 3, 11-27.
- Davis, M. H. (1980). A multidimensional approach to individual differences in empathy. *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10, 85.
- Davis, M.H. (1994). *Empathy: A social psychological approach*. Colorado: WestviewPress.
- Elder, G. H., Jr. (1994). Time, agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57, 5-15.
- Elliott, D. B., Simmons, T., & Lewis, J. M. (2010). Evaluation of the marital events items on the ACS (U.S. Census Technical and Analytic Reports on the American Community Survey). Washington, DC: U.S.Census Bureau.
- Emmons, R. A. (2000). Personality and forgiveness. *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*, 156-175.
- Feshbach, N. D., & Roe, K. (1968). Empathy in six- and seven-year- olds. *Child Development*, 39, 133-145.
- Florida, Richard L., (2008), *Who's Your City?: How the Creative Economy Is Making*

Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life. New York: Basic Books.

Fincham, F. D. (2000). The kiss of the porcupines: From attributing responsibility to forgiving. *Personal Relationships*, 7, 1–23.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: Implications for psychological aggression and constructive communication. *Personal Relationships*, 9, 239–251.

Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2004). Forgiveness and conflict resolution in marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 72–81.

Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002). Dealing with betrayal in close relationships: Does commitment promote forgiveness of betrayal? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82, 956–974.

Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Human, all too human: Parts One and Two*. Dover Philosophical Classics.

Gordon, K., & Baucom, D. (2003). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a measure based on a model of recovery from a marital betrayal. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31, 179–199. doi:10.1080/01926180301115

Gubbins, C. A., Perosa, L. M., & Bartle-Haring, S. (2010). Relationships between married couples' self-differentiation/individuation and Gottman's model of marital interactions. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 32, 383–395. doi:10.1007/s10591-010-9132-4

Glass, S. P. (2002). Couple therapy after the trauma of infidelity. In A. S. Gurman & N. S. Jacobson (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (3rd ed., pp. 488–507).

New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- Glass, S. P., & Wright, T. L. (1985). Sex differences in type of extramarital involvement and marital dissatisfaction. *Sex Roles*, 12, 1101–1120.
- Glass, S. P., and Wright, T. L. (1988). Clinical implications of research on extramarital involvement. In R. Brown and J. Fields (Eds.), *Treatment of Sexual Problems in Individual and Couples Therapy* (pp. 301-346). Costa Mesa, CA: PMA.
- Goldstein, J. R., & Kenney, C. T. (2001). Marriage delayed or marriage forgone? New cohort forecasts of first marriage for US women. *American Sociological Review*, 506-519.
- Gordon, K., & Baucom, D. (1998). Understanding betrayals in marriage: A synthesized model of forgiveness. *Family Process*, 37, 425–449. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.1998.00425.x
- Gordon, K., & Baucom, D. (2003). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a measure based on a model of recovery from a marital betrayal. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31, 179– 199. doi:10.1080/01926180301115
- Gordon, K., Baucom, D., & Snyder, D. (2005). Treating couples recovering from infidelity: An integrative approach. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61, 1393–1405. doi:10.1002/jclp.20189
- Greenberg, Ellen F., W. Robert Nay. 1982. "The intergenerational transmission of marital instability reconsidered." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 44:335-347.
- Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2006). Relationship dissolution following infidelity: The roles of attributions and forgiveness. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25(5), 508-522.

- Harris, C. R. (2003). A review of sex differences in sexual jealousy, including self-report data, psychophysiological responses, interpersonal violence, and morbid jealousy. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 7, 102-128.
- Hanke, K., & Fischer, R. (2013). Socioeconomical and sociopolitical correlates of interpersonal forgiveness: A three-level meta-analysis of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory across 13 societies. *International Journal of Psychology*, 48(4), 514-526.
- Heaton, T. B. (2002). Factors contributing to increasing marital stability in the United States. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23, 392-409.
- Heintzelman, A., Murdock, N. L., Krycak, R. C., & Seay, L. (2014). Recovery from infidelity: Differentiation of self, trauma, forgiveness, and posttraumatic growth among couples in continuing relationships. *Couple and Family Psychology: Research and Practice*, 3(1), 13.
- Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C. (1998). The relationship assessment scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15(1), 137-142.
- Higgins & A. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 564–596). New York: Guilford.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Holeman, V. T., Dean, J. B., DeShea, L., & Duba, J. D. (2011). The multidimensional nature of the quest construct forgiveness, spiritual perception, & differentiation of self. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 39, 31–43.
- Holmes, J. G., & Rempel, J. K. (1989). Trust in close relationships. In C. Hendrick (Ed.), *Close relationships* (pp. 187–220). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., & Utsey, S. O. (2009). Collectivism, forgiveness, and social harmony. *The Counseling Psychologist*.
- Hetzel, A. M. (1997). U.S. Vital Statistics System. Major activities and developments, 1950–95 (DHHS Publication No. (PHS) 97-1003). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
- Horowitz, M. J. (1985). Disasters and psychological responses to stress. *Psychiatric Annals*, 15(3), 161–167.
- Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L. Jr., Utsey, S. O., Davis, D. E., Gartner, A. L., Jennings, D. J. II. ... Dueck, A. (2012). Does forgiveness require interpersonal interactions? Individual differences in conceptualization of forgiveness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53, 687–692.
- Inglehart, R. (1995). Changing values, economic development and political change. *International Social Science Journal*, 145, 379–404.
- Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2010). Changing mass priorities: The link between modernization and democracy. *Perspectives on Politics*, 8(2), 551–567.
- Janoff-Bulman, R. (1989). Assumptive worlds and the stress of traumatic events: Applications of the schema construct. *Social Cognition*, 7, 113–136.
- Kennedy, S. & Ruggles, S. (2014). "Breaking up is Hard to Count: The Rise of Divorce in the United States, 1980-2010." *Demography*, 51: 587-298
- Kadiangandu, J. K., Mullet, E., & Vinsonneau, G. (2001). Forgiveness A Congo-France Comparison. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32(4), 504-511.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and

stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118, 3–34.

Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius V., Neuberg, S. L., & Schaller, M. (2010). Renovating the pyramid of needs: Contemporary extensions built upon ancient foundations. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5, 292–314.

Kerr, M., & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family evaluation: An approach based on Bowen theory*. New York, NY: Norton.

Kim, J. (2010). A diverging trend in marital dissolution by income status. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 51(7), 396-412. doi:10.1080/10502556.2010.504091

Kiernan, K. and Eldridge S. (1987), “Age at Marriage: Inter and Intra Cohort,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38(1), pp. 44-65.

Kreider, R. M., & Ellis, R. (2011). Number, timing, and duration of marriages and divorces: 2009 (Current Population Reports P70-125). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Larsen, B. A., Darby, R. S., Harris, C. R., Nelkin, D. K., Milam, P., & Christenfeld, N. S. (2012). The immediate and delayed cardiovascular benefits of forgiving. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 74(7), 745-750. doi:10.1097/PSY.0b013e31825fe96c

Luebbert, M. C. (1999). The survival value of forgiveness. In D.H. Rosen et al. (Eds.), *Evolution of the psyche: Human evolution, behavior, and intelligence* (pp. 169-187). Westport, CT Praeger PublishedGreenwood Publishing.

Lund, M. (1985). The development of investment and commitment scales for predicting continuity of personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 2, 3-23.

- Luo, S., Cartun, M. A., & Snider, A. G. (2010). Assessing extradyadic behavior: A review, a new measure, and two new models. *Personality and Individual Differences, 49*, 155–163. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2010.03.033
- Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York, NY: Harper.
- McCullough, M. (2008). *Beyond Revenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McCullough, M. E. (2000). Forgiveness as human strength: Theory, measurement, and links to well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19*(1), 43-55.
- McCullough, M. E. (2008). *Beyond revenge: The evolution of the forgiveness instinct*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. E. (2000). The psychology of forgiveness: History, conceptual issues, and overview. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 1–14). New York: Guilford.
- McCullough, M.E., Rachal, K.C., Sandage, S.J., Worthington, E.L. Jr., Brown, S.W., & Hight, T.L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*, 1586–1603.
- McCullough, M. E., Worthington Jr, E. L., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 73*(2), 321.
- McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1999). Religion and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality, 67*, 1141–1164.
- Molden, D. C., & Finkel, E. J. (2010). Motivations for promotion and prevention and the

- role of trust and commitment in interpersonal forgiveness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(2), 255-268.
- M.E. McCullough, K.I. Pargament, C.E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*, Guilford Press, New York (2000)
- McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. J., Brown, S. W., & Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, 75(6), 1586-1603. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.75.6.1586
- National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). (2012). National Vital Statistics System: Marriages and divorces. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/mardiv.htm>
- Newberg, A.B., E.G. d'Aquili, S.K. Newberg, & V. deMarici (2000). The neuropsychological correlates of forgiveness, in *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*. McCullough, Michael E. (Ed.); Pargament, Kenneth I. (Ed.); Thoresen, Carl E. (Ed.); pp. 91-110. New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.
- Oliver, M. B., & Hyde, J. S. (1993). Gender differences in sexuality: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 114, 29–51.
- Ohbuchi, K. I., & Takahashi, Y. (1994). Cultural Styles of Conflict Management in Japanese and Americans: Passivity, Covertness, and Effectiveness of Strategies. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24(15), 1345-1366.
- Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological bulletin*, 128(1), 3.
- Park, H. S., Eun, H., & Song, J. A. (2005). I am sorry to send you SPAM. *Human*

Communication Research, 31(3), 365-398.

Pittman, F. S., & Wagers, T. P. (2005). The relationship, if any, between marriage and infidelity. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 4, 135–148.

doi:10.1300/J398v04n0212

Plateris, A. A. (1973). 100 Years of marriage and divorce statistics, 1867–1967 (National Vital Statistics System Series 21(24)). Rockville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

Prins, K. S., Buunk, B. P., & VanYperen, N.W. (1993). Equity, normative disapproval, and extramarital relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10, 39–53.

Rempel, J.K., Holmes, J.G. & Zanna, M.P. (1985). Trust in close relationships., 95-112. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49

Roberts, R.C. (1995). Forgivingness. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 32, 289-306.

Rackley, J. V. (1993). The relationship of marital satisfaction, forgiveness, and religiosity. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

Rempel, J. K., Ross, M., & Holmes, J. G. (2001). Trust and communicated attributions in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 57–64.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York: Free Press.

Roloff, M. E., & Janiszewski, C. A. (1989). Overcoming Obstacles to Interpersonal Compliance A Principle of Message Construction. *Human Communication Research*, 16(1), 33-61.

- Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 393–404.
- Rusbult, C. E., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (1996). Interdependence processes. In E. T. Schwartz, S. H. (1990). Individualism– collectivism: Critique and proposed refinements. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 21, 139–157.
- Sandage, S. J., & Jankowski, P. J. (2011). Forgive- ness, differentiation of self, and mental health. In M. M. Maamri, N. Nevin, & E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Eds), *A journey through forgiveness* (pp. 87–98). Oxford, England: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Skowron, E. A. (2000). The role of differentiation of self in marital adjustment. *Journal of Counseling Psychol- ogy*, 47, 229–237. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.47.2.229
- Scott, H., Berger, P., & Weinberg, B. (2011). Determinants of the U.S. Divorce Rate: The Impact of Geography and Demography. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(19), 171-186.
- Solomon, R. C. (1994). Sympathy and vengeance: The role of emotions in justice. In S. H. van Goozen, N. E. van de Poll, & J. Sergeant (Eds.), *Emotions: Essays on emotion theory* (pp. 291-311). New Jersey: Erlbaum.
- Strelan, P., McKee, I., Calic, D., Cook, L., & Shaw, L. (2013). For whom do we forgive? A functional analysis of forgiveness. *Personal Relationships*, 20(1), 124-139.
- Sutton, P. D., & Munson, M. L. (2008). Births, marriages, divorces, and deaths: Provisional data for July 2007 (National Vital Statistics Reports 56(14)). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

- Thompson, A. P. (1984). Emotional and sexual components of extramarital relations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46, 35–42.
- Thompson, L., & Walker, A. J. (1991). Gender in families: Women and men in marriage, work, and parenthood. In A. Booth (Ed.), *Contemporary families: Looking forward, looking back* (pp. 76-102). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Trivers, R. L. (1971). The evolution of reciprocal altruism. *Quarterly review of biology*, 35-57.
- U.S. Census Bureau (May 2006). "American Community Survey: Design and Methodology" (PDF). p. 2-1. Retrieved 2015-07-08.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (1908). *Marriage and divorce, 1887–1906* (Bulletin 96). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2012). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2012*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Voydanoff, P. (1991). Economic distress and family relations: A review of the eighties. In A. Booth (Ed.), *Contemporary families: Looking forward, looking back* (pp. 429-445). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Walker, D. F., & Gorsuch, R. L. (2002). Forgiveness within the Big Five personality model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 32, 1127–1137.
- Wieselquist, J. (2009). Interpersonal forgiveness, trust, and the investment model of commitment. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 26(4), 531–548.
- Weiser, D. A., Lalasz, C. B., Weigel, D. J., & Evans, W. P. (2014). A prototype analysis of infidelity. *Personal Relationships*, 21(4), 655-675. doi:10.1111/per.12056

- White, L. (1991). Determinants of divorce: A review of research in the eighties. In A. Booth (Ed.), *Contemporary families: Looking forward, looking back* (pp. 141-149). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
- Worthington, E.L. Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness*, Brunner-Routledge, New York (2005)
- Wright, C. D. (1889). *A report on marriage and divorce in the United States, 1867 to 1886*. Washington, DC:U.S. Government Printing Office.

Appendix A

Announcement Letter

You are invited to participate in an anonymous psychological survey examining the various factors that influence forgiving a sexual infidelity.

This will take approximately 20 minutes, and you may receive one unit of extra credit.

Please go to the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me, Fernanda Ponce, at Fernanda.Ponce@mymail.barry.edu, or my supervisor, Dr. Frank Muscarella, at fmuscarella@barry.edu.

Thank you,

Fernanda Ponce

Appendix B

Cover Letter Form

**Barry University
Cover Letter**

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is Factors that Contribute to Forgiving a Sexual Infidelity: What is the Best Predictor? The research is being conducted by Fernanda Ponce, B.S., a graduate student in the Psychology Department at Barry University, and it is seeking information that will be useful in the field of psychology. The aims of the research are to examine the various factors that contribute to forgiving a sexual infidelity and determine the best predictor. In accordance with these aims, the following procedure will be used: a demographic questionnaire, Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Commitment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), Trust in Close Relationships Scale, and The Degrees of Infidelity Scenarios, follow this letter. I anticipate the number of participants to be 105.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: Answer the questions on a demographic questionnaire, Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), Commitment Scale, Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), Trust in Close Relationships Scale, and The Degrees of Infidelity Scenarios. The questionnaires are estimated to take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects. If you are a student, there will be no effect on your grades.

There are no risks to this study. The following procedures will be used to minimize any risks: You can skip any questions you do not want to answer. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, your participation will contribute to research in the area of psychology. If you are a student, you may be able to receive extra credit for your participation. Print the last page as proof of your participation.

As a research participant, any information that you provide is anonymous, that is, no names or other identifiers will be collected. SurveyMonkey.com allows researchers to suppress the delivery of IP addresses during the downloading of data, and in this study no IP address will be delivered to the researcher. However, SurveyMonkey.com does collect IP addresses for its own purposes. If you have concerns about this you should review the privacy policy of SurveyMonkey.com before you begin.

By completing and submitting this electronic survey you are acknowledging that you are at least 18-years-old and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Fernanda Ponce, by phone at (305) 372-6263 or by email at **Fernanda.Ponce@mymail.barry.edu** or my academic supervisor, Dr. Frank Muscarella at (305) 899-3275, or at **fmuscarella@barry.edu**. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, by phone at (305) 899-3020 or by email at

bcook@mail.barry.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Fernanda Ponce, B.S.

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

What is your age? _____

What is your gender? Male _____ Female _____

What is your ethnicity? (Check one)

White (Non-Hispanic) _____ Hispanic _____
Black _____ Other _____

What is your religion? (Check one)

Catholic _____ Christian _____
Jewish _____ Muslim _____ Other _____

What is your level of education? (Check one)

Less than high school _____ High school _____
Some college _____ College degree _____ Graduate degree _____

With what socioeconomic class do you identify yourself with?

Poor _____ Working class _____
Lower middle class _____ Middle class _____
Upper middle class _____ Upper class _____

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?

Yes _____ No _____

How long have you been with your current (or were with) your last romantic partner?

Less than 1 year _____ 1-5 years _____
5-10 years _____ 10-20 years _____ 20 or more years _____

Have you ever been sexually unfaithful in a romantic relationship?

Yes _____ No _____

Has any of your romantic partners ever been sexually unfaithful to you?

Yes _____ No _____

Did your relationship end as a result of the infidelity?

Yes _____ No _____

Which partner ended it? (Check one)

Self _____ Partner _____ Both _____

Appendix D

Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF) (Brown, 2003)

Instructions: Below, you will find statements that may describe you. Please circle the number between 1 and 7 that best reflects you. Use the following key to the meaning of their numbers:

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Somewhat disagree

4 Neither agree or disagree

5 Somewhat agree

6 Agree

7 Strongly agree

1. I tend to get over it quickly when someone hurts my feelings.
2. If someone wrongs me, I often think about it a lot afterward.
3. I have a tendency to harbor grudges.
4. When people wrong me, my approach is just to forgive and forget.

Appendix E

Modified Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1980)

Instructions: Below, you will find statements that may describe you. Please circle the number between 1 and 7 that best reflects you. Use the following key to the meaning of their numbers:

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Somewhat disagree

4 Neither agree or disagree

5 Somewhat agree

6 Agree

7 Strongly agree

1. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.
2. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.
3. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm.
4. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.
5. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters.
6. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me.
7. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.
8. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me.

Appendix F

Commitment Scale (Lund, 1985)

Instructions: Below, you will find statements that may describe your thoughts pertaining to your relationship. Please circle the number between 1 and 7 that best reflects your thoughts. Use the following key to the meaning of their numbers:

1 Not at All

2 Very little

3 Little

4 Some

5 Much

6 Very much

7 Extremely

In your current or last relationship:

1. How likely is (or was) your relationship to be permanent?
2. How attracted are you (or were you) to other potential partners or a single life style?
3. How much trouble would ending your relationship be (or was) to you personally?
4. How attractive would a potential partner have to be (or was) for you to pursue a new relationship?
5. How likely are (or were) you to pursue another relationship or single life in the future?
6. How obligated do (or did) you feel to continue this relationship?
7. In your opinion, how committed is (or was) your partner to this relationship?
8. In your opinion, how likely is (or was) your partner to continue this relationship?

Appendix G

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998)

Instructions: Below, you will find statements that may describe your relationship. Please circle the number between 1 and 5 that best reflects how you feel. Use the following key to the meaning of their numbers:

1 *Not at all*

2 *Little*

3 *Some*

4 *Much*

5 *Very much*

In your current (or last) relationship:

1. How well does (or did) your partner meet your needs?
2. How satisfied are you (or were you) with your relationship?
3. How good is (or was) your relationship compared to most?
4. How often do (or did) you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship?
5. To what extent does (or did) your relationship meet your original expectations?
6. How much do (or did) you love your partner?
7. How many problems are (or were) there in your relationship? (reversed)

Appendix H

Trust in Close Relationships Scale (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985)

Instructions: Below, you will find statements that may describe your relationship. Please circle the number between 1 and 7 that best reflects how you feel. Use the following key to the meaning of their numbers:

1 Strongly disagree

2 Disagree

3 Somewhat disagree

4 Neither agree or disagree

5 Somewhat agree

6 Agree

7 Strongly agree

1. My partner has proven to be trustworthy and I am willing to let him/her engage in activities which other partners find too threatening.
2. Even when I don't know how my partner will react, I feel comfortable telling him/her anything about myself, even those things of which I am ashamed.
3. My partner is very unpredictable. I never know how he/she is going to act from one day to the next.
4. My partner behaves in a very consistent manner.
5. Whenever we have to make an important decision in a situation we have never encountered before, I know my partner will be concerned about my welfare.
6. I am certain that my partner would not cheat on me, even if the opportunity arose and there was no chance that he/she would get caught.

Appendix I

Degrees of Infidelity Scenarios

Instructions: For the statements below, please consider your current relationship. If you are not currently in a relationship, think of what you actually did or would have done if these events occurred during your last relationship. Assume that each scenario is a one-time isolated event, not reoccurring in the relationship. Please circle the number between 1 and 5 that best reflects your response given the incident. Use the following key to the meaning of their numbers:

1 Not at all

2 Slightly likely

3 Moderately likely

4 Very likely

5 Completely likely

How likely would you be to forgive the following events:

1. Your partner sent a text to another person with a flirting message.
2. Your partner sent a text to another person with sexually explicit content.
3. Your partner went on a date but did not have any type of physical contact with the other person.
4. Your partner went on a date and kissed the other person.
5. Your partner had sexual intercourse with the other person.