

# ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN RESPONSE TOWARDS SEXUAL AND EMOTIONAL INFIDELITY AMONG ADULTS



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July, 2023

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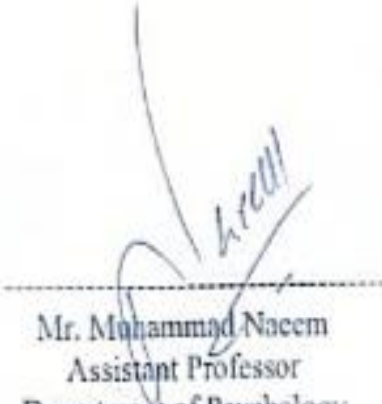
A Research Thesis submitted to the  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY

Faculty of Management and Social Sciences  
Capital University of Science & Technology,  
Islamabad  
July, 2023

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

It is certified that the Research Thesis titled "Role of Forgiveness in response towards Sexual and Emotional Infidelity among Adults" carried out by Mahnoor Ather, Reg No. BSP193022, under the supervision of Mr. Muhammad Naeem, Capital University of Science & Technology, Islamabad, is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a Research Thesis for the degree of BS Psychology.

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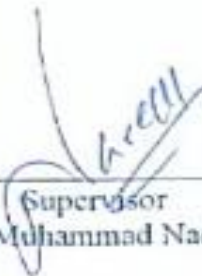
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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study and the immense effort I invested to myself, for demonstrating unwavering determination and resilience in completing this research. Throughout the journey, I encountered numerous challenges, but I refused to succumb to the pressures and instead persevered with unwavering commitment. This dedication serves as a reminder to never underestimate my own potential and to always believe in the power of my dreams. Additionally, I want to dedicate this work to the one who believed in me even when I doubted myself and when others attempted to discourage me. His unwavering support and faith in my abilities provided the much-needed motivation to continue moving forward, even during the most challenging moments. Although he's may not physically present with me anymore, but his belief in me, my success remains a driving force behind my accomplishments. Lastly, I wish to extend this dedication to every woman who faces numerous trials and tribulations on a daily basis. It is a tribute to their strength, resilience, and relentless pursuit of their dreams despite the obstacles that may come their way. In a world that often attempts to undermine and belittle them, they continue to work diligently and fiercely to achieve their goals. This dedication is a testament to their unwavering spirit and serves as a reminder that they are capable of greatness. In conclusion, I dedicate this study to myself, to the unwavering support of a dear individual, and to the indomitable spirit of every woman who strives to overcome adversity. May this dedication inspire others to persevere in the face of challenges and to never lose sight of their potential for greatness.

## DECLARATION

It is declared that this is an original piece of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged in text and references. This work has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution for tertiary education and shall not be submitted by me in future for obtaining any degree from this or any other University or Institution.

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July 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to myself for having the belief and determination to embark on this study, despite the doubts expressed by others. It was my unwavering faith in the value of this research that propelled me forward. I am proud to have taken on this challenge and proved that it was indeed possible. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Mam Saman Mujeeb, whose unwavering support and motivation played a pivotal role in encouraging me throughout the entire process. Her guidance and belief in my ideas were invaluable, and I am grateful for her constant encouragement to pursue this study. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Muhammad Naeem, for his warm welcome and unwavering support throughout the course of this study. His guidance, expertise, and valuable insights greatly contributed to the success of this research. I am truly fortunate to have had him as my supervisor. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance provided by my friends who played a significant role in various aspects of this thesis. Your contributions and support were instrumental in shaping the outcome of this study, and I will forever cherish the memories of our collaborative efforts. Lastly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all the participants who generously dedicated their time and shared their experiences, without whom this study would not have been possible. Your contributions have added richness and depth to the findings, and I am sincerely grateful for your involvement. In conclusion, the completion of this study was made possible by the support, encouragement, and collaboration of numerous individuals. I am truly thankful to



each and every one of them for their contributions and for making this research journey a rewarding and unforgettable experience.

## ABSTRACT

Infidelity is a challenging issue in relationships, and while ending the relationship may seem like the obvious choice, forgiveness can also be a viable option for some individuals. Previous research has indicated that gender differences exist in how individuals respond to infidelity. The present study aims to explore the role of infidelity in shaping forgiveness responses, specifically focusing on gender differences. To assess gender differences in response to sexual and emotional infidelity, the Infidelity Dilemma Questionnaire was utilized. In addition, the study investigated gender differences in decisional and emotional forgiveness using the Decisional Forgiveness Scale and the Emotional Forgiveness Scale, respectively. The sample consisted of 200 participants between the ages of 19 and 25, drawn from the population of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The obtained results were analyzed using correlational analysis and t-tests. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness. Conversely, no significant relationship was found between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness. Notably, a significant gender difference emerged regarding forgiveness responses to sexual and emotional infidelity, with males demonstrating an inability to forgive sexual infidelity and females exhibiting difficulty forgiving emotional infidelity. Moreover, a significant disparity was observed between males and females in terms of decisional and emotional forgiveness. Contrary to expectations, males were found to engage in emotional forgiveness, while females tended to lean towards decisional forgiveness. This outcome can be attributed to cultural influences. The sample size of 200 participants included in this study was drawn exclusively from the adult population aged 19 to 25 in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to broader populations. Future research endeavors should aim to replicate these results using larger and more diverse samples encompassing various regions, in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of gender differences in forgiveness responses to infidelity. In conclusion, this study sheds light on the significance of infidelity in shaping forgiveness responses, particularly considering gender differences. The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge and have practical implications for counseling and relationship support. By understanding the complex interplay between gender, cultural factors, and forgiveness processes, professionals can offer tailored interventions to individuals dealing with the aftermath of infidelity.

**Keywords:** Sexual infidelity, Emotional infidelity, Decisional Forgiveness, Emotional Forgiveness

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**CHAPTER 1****INTRODUCTION****Infidelity**

Love serves as an undeniable cornerstone in any relationship, irrespective of gender. Prior to entering romantic partnerships, individuals often spend significant time among peers of the same gender, shaping their perspectives on roles and expectations within a romantic union. For instance, men may place a greater emphasis on sexual intimacy, while women may prioritize emotional connection (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). However, it is important to recognize that beyond these gender-specific preferences, there are fundamental needs that apply universally to relationships – requirements that form the foundation of a successful bond. Without fulfilling these core needs, a relationship remains incomplete and lacks fulfillment. Commitment and trust, regardless of gender, stand as essential pillars of a thriving romantic connection. The rupture of trust and commitment represents a significant blow to any relationship, often resulting in what is commonly referred to as betrayal or infidelity. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the perception and definition of infidelity can vary based on individual perspectives of males and females regarding extramarital affairs. Throughout scholarly literature, infidelity is frequently described as cheating (Brand et al., 2007), unfaithfulness, or sexual dishonesty (Feldman & Kauffman, 1999). These different terminologies reflect the diverse interpretations and understandings of infidelity, underscoring the complexity of this phenomenon within the realm of romantic relationships.



Infidelity encompasses a wide range of behaviors that breach the agreed-upon boundaries and expectations within a committed partnership. It may involve engaging in physical or sexual interactions with someone outside the relationship, developing emotional connections with others that undermine the emotional intimacy within the partnership, or even engaging in secretive online or virtual relationships. Regardless of the specific manifestation, infidelity shakes the very foundation of trust, commitment, and exclusivity upon which a relationship is built (Canary et al., 2002). The consequences of infidelity are far-reaching and can profoundly impact both partners involved. The betrayed partner often experiences a profound sense of hurt, betrayal, and emotional distress. They may question their self-worth, struggle with feelings of inadequacy, and grapple with a loss of trust and security in the relationship. The individual who committed the act of infidelity may experience guilt, shame, and remorse, as well as face the challenge of rebuilding trust and repairing the damage.

### **Sex Differences in Committing Infidelity**

Numerous studies have dedicated their efforts to unraveling the intricate dynamics of infidelity and have yielded valuable insights into the patterns and occurrences of this phenomenon. One consistent finding that has emerged from this body of research is the presence of notable sex differences in the likelihood of engaging in infidelity (Blow & Hartnett, 2005b). While these findings generally indicate that men tend to be more prone to acts of infidelity than women, it is crucial to recognize that these observations are based on broad generalizations and do not imply uniform behavior across all individuals of a particular gender.

The prevailing notion that men are more likely to commit infidelity than women has been supported by a multitude of empirical studies. These investigations have highlighted various factors that contribute to this observed disparity, including evolutionary and sociocultural influences. From an evolutionary perspective, men may be driven by biological imperatives, such as seeking multiple sexual partners to increase their reproductive success. In contrast, women may prioritize emotional connection and investment in relationships due to their inherent role in reproduction and caregiving. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that individual differences within genders significantly shape behaviors related to infidelity. Not all men exhibit a higher propensity for infidelity, and not all women are impervious to engaging in such behavior. Factors such as personal values, relationship satisfaction, and opportunities for extramarital encounters can sway an individual's likelihood of committing infidelity, irrespective of gender (Mark, Janssen, & Milhausen, 2011). In conclusion, while research consistently suggests that men are more prone to engage in infidelity compared to women, it is important to approach these findings with caution and recognize the significance of individual differences within genders. Exploring the intricate interplay of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors can provide a more comprehensive understanding of infidelity and its manifestations across diverse populations. By examining these complexities, researchers can pave the way for tailored interventions, support systems, and relationship guidance that acknowledges and addresses the unique challenges faced by individuals navigating the intricacies of infidelity.

**Effects on the Relationship**

The ramifications of infidelity extend far beyond the act itself, permeating various facets of a relationship and profoundly impacting the individuals involved. The discovery or disclosure of infidelity often triggers a cascade of emotions and challenges that reverberate throughout the partnership. Foremost among these emotional responses is the profound concern for the future of the relationship. When infidelity comes to light, the betrayed partner is confronted with a whirlwind of emotions. Feelings of anger, sadness, betrayal, and confusion intertwine, creating a tumultuous internal landscape. Trust, which serves as a cornerstone of any healthy relationship, is shattered, leading to a deep sense of disenchantment and questioning. The betrayed individual must grapple with the daunting task of deciding whether to continue the relationship, work through the aftermath, and rebuild trust, or to contemplate separation or the termination of the partnership altogether. The path forward in the aftermath of infidelity is highly personal and influenced by a myriad of factors. The nature and extent of the betrayal play a significant role in shaping the response of the betrayed partner. Acts of infidelity can vary in severity, ranging from a single incident to prolonged affairs, each carrying its own emotional weight. The level of emotional investment in the relationship further compounds the complexity of the decision-making process. Couples deeply intertwined in long-term commitments, such as marriage or cohabitation, often face additional challenges when considering the future of their partnership. Individual coping mechanisms also come into play, as each person navigates the aftermath of infidelity in their own unique way. Some individuals may be inclined to seek professional counseling or therapy to process their emotions and rebuild trust, while others may rely on personal introspection and

communication to navigate the difficult path ahead. Support systems, such as family, friends, or support groups, can also play a crucial role in providing guidance and solace during this trying period (Shackelford et al., 2002). It is important to note that the impact of infidelity on a relationship is not solely limited to the betrayed partner. The individual who engaged in infidelity may also experience a range of emotions, such as guilt, remorse, and a desire to make amends. The process of healing and repairing the relationship requires a collective effort from both parties, as they confront the underlying issues that led to the infidelity and work towards rebuilding trust and establishing a stronger foundation.

### **Types of Infidelity**

The impact of infidelity extends beyond the act itself and varies depending on the specific type of betrayal that occurs within a relationship. Broadly speaking, infidelity can be categorized into two distinct types: sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. Sexual infidelity encompasses engaging in sexual intercourse with someone other than one's committed partner, breaching the boundaries of physical exclusivity (Atkins et al., 2001). Conversely, emotional infidelity involves the development of affectionate feelings toward an individual outside the relationship, without engaging in physical intimacy. This type of betrayal highlights the erosion of emotional exclusivity and can lead to a profound sense of betrayal (Eaves & Robertson-Smith, 2007). It is important to note that both genders may exhibit varied responses to these categories of infidelity, influenced by factors such as societal norms, personal values, and individual experiences (Shrout & Weigel, 2017)

## **Consequences of Infidelity**

### **Forgiveness**

The aftermath of infidelity leaves individuals faced with a pivotal decision—whether to pursue forgiveness or opt for a breakup or separation. While the natural response for many may be to sever ties and seek solace in separation, it is important to recognize that forgiveness is a viable alternative. In the context of infidelity, forgiveness entails the absence of negative and pessimistic feelings directed towards the partner who has committed the act of betrayal. It involves a conscious choice to let go of resentment and negativity, with the intention of rebuilding trust and moving forward in the relationship. Forgiveness in the aftermath of infidelity is a deeply personal and multifaceted process, influenced by various factors. The depth of emotional investment in the relationship plays a significant role in shaping one's capacity for forgiveness. For some, the years of shared experiences, emotional connection, and commitment may create a willingness to consider forgiveness as a means of salvaging the relationship. On the other hand, individuals with less emotional investment or a history of strained dynamics may find forgiveness more challenging to attain. The willingness of the transgressor to make amends is another crucial factor in the forgiveness equation. Genuine remorse, transparency, and efforts to rebuild trust can contribute to the potential for forgiveness. Open communication, the willingness to address the root causes of the infidelity, and a shared commitment to relationship repair are essential elements in the process (Fincham et al., 2006). It is important to note that forgiveness does not imply a dismissal or minimization of the pain and hurt caused by the infidelity. Rather, it represents a conscious choice to release negative emotions and work towards rebuilding the relationship on a foundation of trust and

understanding. Forgiveness does not negate the need for open dialogue, establishing boundaries, and addressing the underlying issues that contributed to the infidelity. Forgiveness may not be the path chosen by all individuals in the aftermath of infidelity, it represents a possibility for healing and potential relationship repair. It offers an alternative to the immediate termination of the partnership, allowing for growth, transformation, and the potential to rebuild trust. Each person's journey towards forgiveness is unique, and the decision to forgive or not is a deeply personal one, influenced by individual values, experiences, and aspirations for the future.

### **Forgiveness in a Relationship**

The capacity to forgive plays a pivotal role in the dynamics of a healthy romantic bond. It is an essential factor that influences the overall satisfaction and longevity of the relationship. Research has consistently shown that the ability to forgive predicts higher levels of relationship satisfaction, even in the face of partner transgressions (Owen et al., 2008). Forgiveness can be seen as a transformative process, encompassing emotional healing and personal growth within the relationship. It involves the deliberate choice to let go of resentment, bitterness, and negative emotions associated with the transgression. By engaging in forgiveness, individuals open themselves to the possibility of rebuilding trust, restoring emotional intimacy, and fostering a stronger connection with their partner (Fincham et al., 2007). The decision to forgive is influenced by various factors, including the nature and severity of the transgression, the level of emotional investment in the relationship, and the willingness of the transgressor to take responsibility for their actions. The ability to empathize with the transgressor,

understand their motivations or circumstances, and recognize their potential for change can also play a role in the forgiveness process. Forgiveness is not synonymous with forgetting or condoning the transgression. It does not imply minimizing the hurt or denying the impact of the betrayal. Instead, forgiveness involves a conscious effort to release negative emotions and foster a sense of compassion, empathy, and understanding towards the transgressor. It allows the wounded partner to reclaim their power, move beyond the pain, and actively engage in the process of healing and rebuilding the relationship. However, it is important to note that forgiveness is not always immediate or easy. It is a complex and individualized journey that requires introspection, self-reflection, and emotional processing. The process of forgiveness may involve confronting and working through feelings of anger, betrayal, and mistrust. It may also involve setting boundaries, establishing new norms, and implementing strategies to prevent future transgressions (Exline et al., 2003). In conclusion, forgiveness holds significant importance in maintaining a healthy and thriving romantic bond. It predicts higher levels of relationship satisfaction, contributes to emotional healing, and fosters personal growth within the partnership. Forgiveness is a transformative process that requires empathy, understanding, and a willingness to let go of negative emotions associated with the transgression. While forgiveness may not always be easy or immediate, it offers a path towards healing, rebuilding trust, and creating a stronger and more resilient relationship.

### **Types of Forgiveness**

However, forgiveness should not be viewed as a singular concept limited to a single dimension. It can be further divided into two distinct types: decisional

forgiveness and emotional forgiveness. Decisional forgiveness occurs when a person consciously chooses to forgive, yet still experiences emotional pain, harboring a desire for the transgressor to someday experience the same pain. This form of forgiveness may involve setting boundaries and working towards rebuilding trust (Worthington et al., 2007). On the other hand, emotional forgiveness involves a complete release of resentment toward the transgressor, free from any lingering grudges. It signifies a deep emotional shift where the hurt and anger are replaced with compassion and empathy (Hook et al., 2012). Research has shown that decisional forgiveness is more prevalent than emotional forgiveness in various relationship contexts (Chi et al., 2019). However, both types of forgiveness play important roles in the process of relationship repair and can contribute to the overall well-being and longevity of the partnership (Fincham et al., 2007). Understanding these nuances of forgiveness can provide valuable insights for couples seeking to navigate the complex terrain of reconciling after a transgression and fostering a healthier, more resilient relationship.

## **Difference in Type of Forgiveness**

### **Cultural Influence**

When it comes to forgiveness, individuals often strive to cultivate positive emotions towards their partner after making the decision to forgive. However, it is important to recognize that complete control over these emotions is not always within their grasp. The cultural and social values that envelop an individual play a pivotal role in shaping the type of forgiveness that the victim is capable of extending to the offender (Hook et al., 2008). These cultural and social influences permeate every aspect of a person's life, including their beliefs, norms, and



expectations regarding forgiveness. Thus, it becomes evident that forgiveness is not solely an individualistic act but is profoundly intertwined with the cultural fabric in which it takes place. The diversity of cultures around the world means that attitudes and approaches to forgiveness may vary significantly, leading to distinct manifestations and expressions of forgiveness across different societies. It is through this cultural lens that we can begin to comprehend the multifaceted nature of forgiveness and appreciate the complexities that underlie its practice in various contexts. By understanding the cultural underpinnings of forgiveness, we gain insight into the factors that shape people's perceptions, reactions, and choices when confronted with instances of betrayal or transgressions within relationships.

### **Literature review**

To gain a deeper understanding of reactions to sexual and emotional infidelity, a comprehensive study was conducted using two groups. In the first group, participants were asked to envision a scenario involving romantic betrayal and then provide responses through a forced-choice questionnaire. Meanwhile, the second group was presented with a similar questionnaire that included an option to indicate whether both forms of infidelity were equally bothersome. The purpose of this study was to determine if individuals found sexual and emotional infidelity equally upsetting. The findings of the study revealed interesting insights. For the first group, the results leaned towards perceiving sexual infidelity as more distressing. However, in the second group, where participants had the option to choose both forms of infidelity as equally bothersome, the responses indicated a similar level of discomfort for both sexual and emotional betrayals (Lishner et al., 2008).

These findings highlight the variability in individuals' perceptions and reactions to different types of infidelity. Further research delved into how gender differences play a role in extreme jealousy and responses to infidelity. The results demonstrated that individuals with high levels of jealousy exhibited greater gender differences in their responses to sexual and emotional infidelity (Miller & Maner, 2009). This suggests that extreme jealousy may influence how individuals react to different forms of betrayal based on their gender.

Additionally, an investigation was carried out to explore sex differences in response to sexual and emotional infidelity. In this study, participants, both men and women, were shown photographs depicting infidelity scenes involving their partners. The results indicated that sexual infidelity was more distressing overall. Furthermore, when examining sex differences in response, it was found that sexual infidelity evoked more distress in men compared to women (Kato, 2014). These findings shed light on the complex interplay between gender, emotions, and reactions to infidelity.

In another intriguing research endeavor, participants were invited to contemplate hypothetical scenarios in which their partners engaged in physical contact with someone else or developed romantic feelings for another individual. The outcomes of this study revealed fascinating gender patterns: heterosexual men demonstrated greater disturbance in response to sexual infidelity, while heterosexual women exhibited higher levels of distress in the face of emotional infidelity. Surprisingly, for bisexual men and women, there appeared to be no significant difference in the degree of disturbance experienced in relation to sexual infidelity (Frederick & Fales, 2014). These findings underscore the complexity of human reactions to infidelity and the potential influence of sexual orientation.

Similarly, another study involving 83 participants, predominantly students, explored gender differences in the perception of infidelity. Females tended to rate emotional infidelity as more distressing, while males placed higher importance on sexual infidelity (Moreno & Kahumoku Fessler, 2018). These results suggest that societal and cultural factors may contribute to divergent views on the significance of different forms of infidelity. Furthermore, the construct of jealousy was investigated in relation to infidelity in a study that included both male and female participants. To capture a comprehensive understanding, the researchers employed two methodologies: a forced-choice measure and a physiological experiment. The findings revealed that men tended to exhibit stronger responses to sexual infidelity, highlighting a gender-specific pattern in the experience of jealousy (Buss, 2018). This study adds further depth to the exploration of the intricate interplay between gender, jealousy, and responses to infidelity.

Expanding on the exploration of responses to infidelity, another study involved 288 college students who were in committed relationships. They were presented with photographs of individuals varying in attractiveness, and participants were asked to rate their level of distress if their partner were to engage in infidelity with the individual depicted. The results demonstrated that sexual infidelity elicited higher levels of distress, reinforcing the notion that the imagination of sexual betrayal tends to provoke intense emotional responses (Kato, 2019). This study contributes to our understanding of the subjective experiences individuals may have when confronted with the possibility of infidelity in their relationships.

In an intriguing experiment exploring the effects of emotional and decisional forgiveness on forgetting, a group of 42 undergraduate participants was involved. The

results yielded compelling insights, indicating that emotional forgiveness exhibited a robust influence on the process of forgetting (Lichtenfeld et al., 2015). This study highlights the potential significance of emotional forgiveness in the healing and reconciliation process.

Another comprehensive study involving 515 participants focused on assessing scales of decisional and emotional forgiveness within romantic relationships. The findings suggested that females tend to engage in higher levels of emotional forgiveness towards their significant others (Cowden et al., 2019). This research sheds light on the potential gender differences in the manifestation of forgiveness within intimate connections.

Delving further into the intrapersonal and interpersonal factors of decisional and emotional forgiveness, a study incorporated a sample of 154 participants who responded to scales measuring both forms of forgiveness. The outcomes revealed that men exhibited higher levels of decisional forgiveness compared to emotional forgiveness (Chi et al., 2019b). These results contribute to our understanding of the nuanced dynamics surrounding forgiveness and how they may vary across gender.

To explore the role of decisional and emotional forgiveness over time, a longitudinal study was conducted involving religious individuals in serious relationships who had experienced harm from their partners. The findings showcased an equal emphasis on decisional and emotional forgiveness, underscoring their importance in the process of healing and reconciliation (Choe & Elise, 2021). This study offers valuable insights into the longitudinal aspects of forgiveness and its impact on relationship dynamics.

In a cross-sectional study aimed at examining the relationships between forgiveness and personality variables, two samples of 259 and 263 participants were included. The results revealed that apology played a significant role in both decisional and emotional forgiveness (Kaleta & Mróz, 2021). This study deepens our understanding of the multifaceted nature of forgiveness and how individual personality traits may interact with forgiveness processes.

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between personality traits and forgiveness following instances of infidelity. The research included both married and divorced couples who actively participated in a Facebook event. Additionally, the study explored the role of forgiveness as a moderator in the association between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction. The findings indicated that individuals who reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction were more inclined to forgive their partners for infidelity (Roscoe et al., 2004).

Another study focused on examining the influence of forgiveness as a moderator on the relationship between the personality trait of openness and marital satisfaction. The results demonstrated a positive correlation between emotional forgiveness and overall satisfaction in marriage (Porter, 2022).

In Pakistan, a study was conducted to investigate gender differences in responses to infidelity and their relationship with forgiveness among married adults. The research involved 300 married participants who completed a forced-choice questionnaire. The results revealed that males perceived sexual infidelity as more difficult to forgive, whereas females found emotional infidelity to be more challenging to forgive (Urooj & Anjum, 2015).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Evolutionary Theory**

In the year of 1992, Buss introduced the Evolutionary Psychology Perspective, which provides a framework for understanding the link between infidelity and reproductive fertilization, particularly in women. Throughout history, men have faced concerns surrounding the paternity of their offspring. Unlike maternity, which is always certain, paternity is not always 100% confirmed. This uncertainty leads men to fear investing their resources, such as financial support, in a child who may not be biologically related to them. The need for paternity tests further amplifies their hesitation, as it requires significant financial investment. This concern stems from the possibility that their partner may have engaged in a sexual relationship with someone else, raising doubts about paternity. Consequently, sexual infidelity in their romantic partners tends to deeply disturb and stress men. On the other hand, females do not face the same risk of paternity uncertainty. However, if their male partner becomes emotionally involved with another female, it creates challenges for the female partner in terms of time, attention, commitment, and investment from that male, both for herself and their children. Thus, emotional infidelity becomes a significant source of distress for females when their romantic partner develops an emotional connection with someone else and diverts resources and affection away from their primary relationship. It is important to note that individual differences exist, as some individuals form attachments with those they have a sexual relationship with, while others engage in sexual relationships with those they have emotional attachments to. However, from an evolutionary psychology perspective, it is suggested that males are more distressed by sexual

infidelity in their partners compared to females, who are more distressed by emotional infidelity in their partners. This perspective highlights the underlying evolutionary pressures and reproductive concerns that have shaped these distinct responses to infidelity in men and women.

### **Error Management Theory**

Another influential theory in the domain of infidelity is the Error Management Theory, originally proposed by David Buss and Martie Haselton. According to this theory, there is specific a difference in cognitive biases of their perception and decision-making related to infidelity. Specifically, males are believed to perceive females as having a greater inclination toward engaging in sexual encounters with multiple partners, while females tend to perceive males as being more inclined toward emotional connections with multiple partners. These biases influence the decision-making process, including the decision to forgive a partner's infidelity. The Error Management Theory suggests that these cognitive biases have deep-seated evolutionary roots. In ancestral environments, males faced the risk of investing resources in offspring who might not be genetically related to them due to female infidelity. Consequently, males have developed a heightened sensitivity to sexual infidelity as a means of minimizing the chances of investing in offspring that are not their own. On the other hand, females faced the risk of losing resources and investment from their male partners to potential alternative mates. Hence, females have developed a heightened sensitivity to emotional infidelity as a means of safeguarding their own resources and the resources directed towards their children. These cognitive biases, rooted in the Error Management Theory, are considered adaptive strategies that evolved to address the specific

reproductive challenges faced by males and females. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is significant individual variation, and not all individuals conform to these heuristics in precisely the same manner. The Error Management Theory provides valuable insights into the decision-making processes regarding forgiveness and infidelity, shedding light on how these biases may influence individuals' responses in relationship contexts.

### **Rationale**

The primary objective of this study is to extensively investigate the intricate dynamics between sexual and emotional infidelity and the processes of decisional and emotional forgiveness among adult individuals. While previous literature has explored the connection between infidelity and forgiveness, there remains a need to deepen our comprehension of how both males and females perceive and respond to infidelity in terms of forgiveness. This study seeks to fill this gap by shedding light on the influence of cultural and religious factors on forgiveness within the specific context of sexual and emotional infidelity among individuals who are either in a committed relationship or engaged. The significance of this study lies in its potential to uncover the multifaceted nature of forgiveness and infidelity, while also taking into account the cultural and religious background of the participants. By focusing on the Pakistani context, where previous research has predominantly concentrated on sexual and emotional infidelity among married adults, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the role and impact of culture and religion on forgiveness processes in response to infidelity. Through examining the interplay between sexual and emotional infidelity and forgiveness, this study aims to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this topic and offer a deeper understanding of how individuals, irrespective of gender, navigate



forgiveness in the face of different types of infidelity. By embarking on this exploration, we can gain valuable insights into the factors that shape individuals' perceptions, decision-making processes, and emotional responses within the context of infidelity. Ultimately, this will enhance our understanding of the intricate complexities of forgiveness within relationships that have been impacted by infidelity. By incorporating cultural and religious dimensions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of forgiveness processes within the Pakistani context and contribute to the broader cross-cultural discourse on infidelity and forgiveness. This research recognizes the significance of cultural and religious factors in shaping individuals' perceptions and responses to infidelity, and seeks to uncover the specific nuances and dynamics that influence forgiveness within this context. By exploring forgiveness through a cultural lens, this study acknowledges the role of societal norms, values, and beliefs in shaping individuals' experiences of infidelity and their subsequent forgiveness responses. The inclusion of cultural and religious dimensions in this study holds implications for various aspects of practice and research. Firstly, it has the potential to inform interventions and therapeutic approaches that are culturally sensitive and tailored to the unique dynamics of forgiveness in response to infidelity. By recognizing the cultural and religious factors that influence forgiveness processes, counselors and therapists can provide more effective support to individuals and couples navigating the aftermath of infidelity. This may involve integrating cultural practices, belief systems, and values into therapeutic interventions, promoting a more holistic and relevant approach to healing and reconciliation.

Moreover, the incorporation of cultural and religious dimensions opens avenues for future research to delve deeper into the intricate interplay between culture, religion, gender, and forgiveness. This study serves as a starting point for exploring how cultural and religious contexts shape individuals' interpretations and responses to infidelity, including forgiveness. Future studies can build upon these findings by examining other cultural contexts and exploring the influence of specific religious beliefs or practices on forgiveness processes. Additionally, comparative research across cultures can contribute to a broader understanding of forgiveness as a universal or culturally specific phenomenon.

By expanding the scope of investigation to encompass cultural and religious dimensions, this study adds depth and richness to the existing literature on forgiveness and infidelity. It recognizes the importance of context in shaping individuals' experiences and responses, and highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches to understanding and supporting individuals affected by infidelity. Through this research, we can gain insights into the intricate interplay between culture, religion, gender, and forgiveness, ultimately enhancing our understanding of this complex phenomenon. In conclusion, the incorporation of cultural and religious dimensions in this study not only provides a comprehensive understanding of forgiveness processes within the Pakistani context but also contributes to the broader cross-cultural discourse on infidelity and forgiveness. It has practical implications for counseling and therapy, promoting culturally sensitive interventions, and opens avenues for future research to explore the intricate interplay between culture, religion, gender, and forgiveness. By considering these dimensions, we can deepen our understanding of the complexities

of forgiveness in response to infidelity and develop more effective approaches to support individuals and couples in their journey towards healing and reconciliation.

### **Research Objectives**

Following are the objectives of this study:

1. Established and analyzed the strength of the correlation between decisional forgiveness and instances of sexual infidelity.
2. Investigate and establish the extent of the correlation between emotional forgiveness and occurrences of emotional infidelity.
3. Explore gender differences in responses to emotional and sexual infidelity among males and females.
4. Assess gender differences in attitudes towards decisional and emotional forgiveness among males and females.

### **Hypotheses**

Following are the hypotheses of this study:

1. There will be a positive and significant relationship between instances of sexual infidelity and the level of decisional forgiveness exhibited.
2. There will be a positive and significant relationship between occurrences of emotional infidelity and the level of emotional forgiveness displayed.

3. There will be a significant difference in responses to sexual and emotional infidelity between males and females. Specifically, it is expected that males will demonstrate less forgiveness towards sexual infidelity, while females will exhibit less forgiveness towards emotional infidelity.

4. There will be a significant difference in the preference for decisional forgiveness versus emotional forgiveness between males and females. It is anticipated that males will tend to lean towards decisional forgiveness, whereas females will lean towards emotional forgiveness.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

#### **Research Design**

The research design employed in this study was a Cross-Sectional design, allowing for a snapshot of data at a specific point in time.

#### **Population and Sample**

The target population for this study consisted of unmarried males and females. The sample was drawn from adults aged between 19-25 who were studying at universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample size comprised 200 participants.

#### **Inclusion Criteria**

The inclusion criteria for this study encompassed unmarried adults who were either engaged or in a relationship.

#### **Exclusion Criteria**

The exclusion criteria of this study is Unmarried adults who were single or experienced mental or physical disabilities were excluded from the study.

### **Sampling Procedures/Technique**

Snowball sampling was utilized as the sampling technique for this study, whereby participants were identified through referrals from initial participants, forming a chain-like network.

### **Measures/Instruments**

There were three measurements used in this study, these are following:

#### ***1. Infidelity Dilemmas Questionnaire***

The Infidelity Dilemmas Questionnaire (Buss, 1999) was employed as a forced-choice questionnaire to assess responses to sexual and emotional infidelity among both males and females. The questionnaire consisted of six hypothetical scenarios, with participants required to select between two options. Three scenarios were for sexual infidelity and three scenarios were for emotional infidelity, the scale demonstrated good reliability, with a coefficient alpha of 0.87.

#### ***2. Decisional Forgiveness Scale***

The Decisional Forgiveness Scale (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) was used to investigate gender differences in responses to decisional forgiveness. This scale comprised eight items, and its reliability was established at 0.82.

#### ***3. Emotional Forgiveness Scale***

The Emotional Forgiveness Scale (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) was employed to investigate gender differences

in responses to emotional forgiveness. This scale consisted of eight items, and the reliability of it was determined to be 0.81.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In terms of ethical considerations, strict adherence to the ethical guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) was ensured throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study before they were given the instruments, and they were given the complete right to withdraw from the study at any point. Anonymity and privacy of their data were guaranteed, ensuring confidentiality and protecting their identities.

### **Procedures**

The study began by obtaining a permission letter from the department prior to initiating data collection. Subsequently, the selected sample was approached, and their informed consent was obtained before they were given the questionnaires. The participants were initially provided with a demographics sheet to fill out, providing essential background information. Following that, they were given the Infidelity Dilemmas Questionnaire to assess their responses about forgiveness over sexual and emotional infidelity. After completing the questionnaire, they were asked to respond to the Decisional Forgiveness Scale, followed by the Emotional Forgiveness Scale, in accordance to their responses about sexual and emotional infidelity.

### CHAPTER 3

#### RESULTS

To fulfill the objectives of the study, the collected data underwent rigorous statistical analysis. The demographic information was subjected to frequency analysis to determine the distribution and percentage of each demographic characteristic within the sample. Descriptive statistics were computed for all the measures included in the study, enabling an examination of the overall trends and characteristics of the data. The internal consistency of the scales utilized in the study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient, which provides a measure of the scales' internal reliability and consistency. To explore the relationships between variables, Spearman correlation analysis was conducted. This statistical technique allowed for the determination of the strength and direction of associations between different variables. Additionally, to assess differences between males and females on the variables of interest, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was employed. This test is appropriate for comparing two independent groups and examining whether there are significant differences between them. Through these statistical analyses, the study aimed to uncover meaningful findings and shed light on the research objectives.

**Table 1**

*Sociodemographic characteristics of sample (N=200)*

Demographics	Categories	<i>f</i>	%
Gender			
Male	Male	95	47.5
Female	Female	105	52.5
Age			
19-21	19-21	63	31.5
22-25	22-25	137	68.5



Qualification			
Fsc	Fsc	32	16
Bs	Bs	119	59.5
Masters	Masters	49	24.5
City			
Islamabad	Islamabad	140	70
Rawalpindi	Rawalpindi	60	30
Economic status			
Upper class	Upper class	32	16
Middle class	Middle class	132	66
Lower class	Lower class	36	18
Relationship status			
In a relationship	In a relationship	128	64
Engaged	Engaged	72	36
Years of relationship			
6 months-1 year	6 months-1 year	71	35.5
1 year-5 year	1 year-5 year	86	43
5 year-10 year	5 year-10 year	43	21.5
Reasons of relationship			
Love	Love	35	17.5
Personality	Personality	38	19
Looks	Looks	47	23.5
Finances	Finances	30	15
Mutual interest	Mutual interest	25	12.5
Arrange	Arrange	25	12.5

*Table 1: f= frequency, %=percentage*

The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample play a crucial role in understanding the findings and generalizability of the study. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the key sociodemographic variables that were assessed in this research. The gender distribution of the sample shows a nearly equal representation of males and females, with 47.5% males and 52.5% females. This balanced gender

distribution allows for a more comprehensive examination of gender differences in forgiveness responses to infidelity. Regarding age, the majority of participants fall within the 22-25 age range, suggesting that this study primarily focuses on young adults. This age group is particularly relevant as they are likely to be engaged in dating or committed relationships, making them more susceptible to infidelity experiences and forgiveness processes. Qualification is an important sociodemographic variable as it reflects the educational background of the participants. In this study, a significant proportion (59.5%) of the sample holds a Bachelor's degree, indicating a relatively high level of education among the participants. This may have implications for their understanding and decision-making processes related to forgiveness and infidelity. The city variable provides insight into the geographic location of the participants. With a majority (70%) of the sample residing in Islamabad, the findings of this study may have specific relevance to individuals living in this particular city. However, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other regions or cities. Economic status provides information about the participants' financial backgrounds. The predominance of individuals from the middle class (66%) in this study suggests that the findings may be more applicable to individuals with similar economic circumstances. It would be valuable for future research to include participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of forgiveness responses to infidelity. The relationship status variable highlights that the majority (64%) of the sample is currently in a relationship. This is important because individuals who have experienced infidelity within a current or past relationship may have different perspectives and forgiveness responses compared to those who have not encountered infidelity. Years of relationship is another significant variable, as it sheds light on the

duration of participants' romantic relationships. The majority (35.5%) of individuals in this study reported being in a relationship for 1-2 years. Different relationship durations may influence individuals' perceptions of infidelity and their propensity for forgiveness. Lastly, the reason for entering the relationship provides insight into the initial motivations of the participants. The fact that a considerable proportion (23.5%) of individuals cited physical attractiveness as a reason for entering the relationship may have implications for their expectations, perceptions, and forgiveness responses related to infidelity.

**Table 2**

*Reliability analysis and Cronbach's Alpha Relationship with Mean and Standard*

*Deviation of the scale, (N=200)*

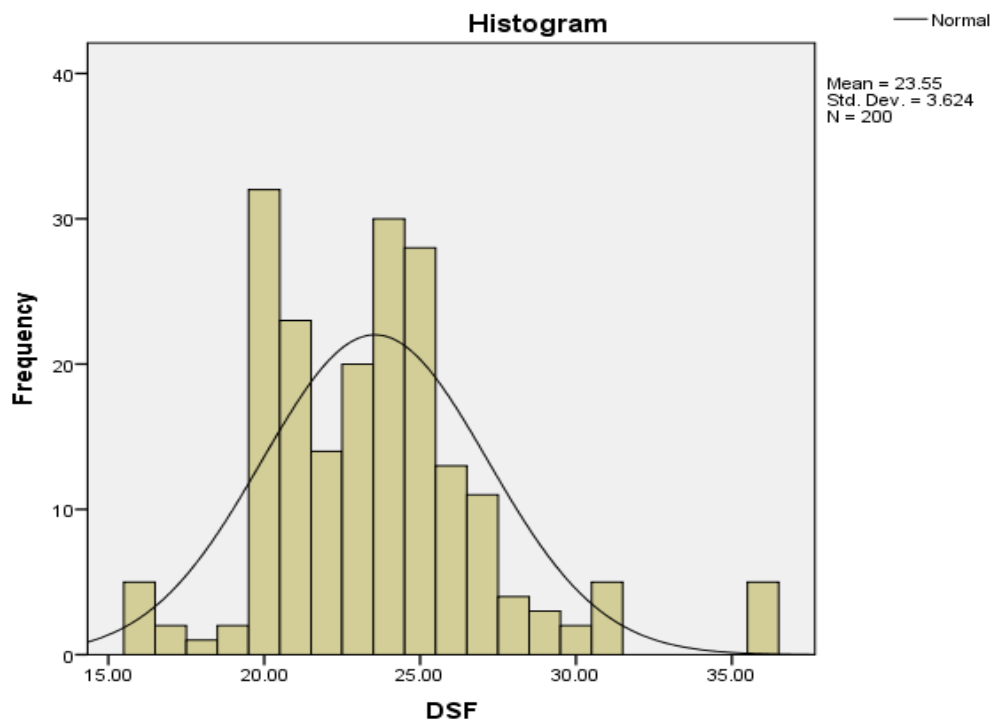
Scale	N	a	M	SD	Skew	Kurtos	Range		K-S	p
							Potential	Actual		
INFS	3	1.00	4.45	1.50	.060	-2.0	3-6	3-6	.348	.000
INFE	3	.991	4.49	1.49	.001	-2.0	3-6	3-6	.337	.000
DFS	8	.555	23.5	4.89	.94	2.1	5-25	16-36	.130	.000
EFS	8	.529	22.8	4.71	.20	-7.7	5-25	14-33	.100	.000

*Table 2: N=Number of items, a=cornbach's alpha, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Skew=Skewness, Kurtos=Kurtosis, p=significance.*

Table 2 provides valuable information regarding the psychometric properties of the scales used in this study. The reliability coefficients, indicated by Cronbach's alpha, demonstrate the internal consistency of the measures. The good reliability coefficients suggest that the scales consistently measure the intended constructs, providing confidence in the accuracy and precision of the data collected. The means and standard deviations presented in Table 2 offer insights into the central tendencies and variability of the participants' responses across the different scales. The presence of variability suggests that participants' attitudes and perceptions toward forgiveness and infidelity

differ to some extent, contributing to the richness and diversity of the data. Skewness and kurtosis values are measures of the shape of the distributions. Deviations from perfect normality are expected in most real-world datasets, and the slight deviations observed in this study's data are not unusual. These deviations indicate that the distributions may exhibit some degree of asymmetry or peakedness, which can be further explored in data analysis and interpretation. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test provide statistical evidence of the departure of the distributions from normality. The p-values less than 0.05 suggest that the observed distributions significantly deviate from a normal distribution. It is important to note that deviations from normality do not invalidate the study's findings or interpretations but may prompt researchers to use appropriate statistical techniques that account for non-normality in further data analysis.

**GRAPHS**



*Figure 1:DSF*

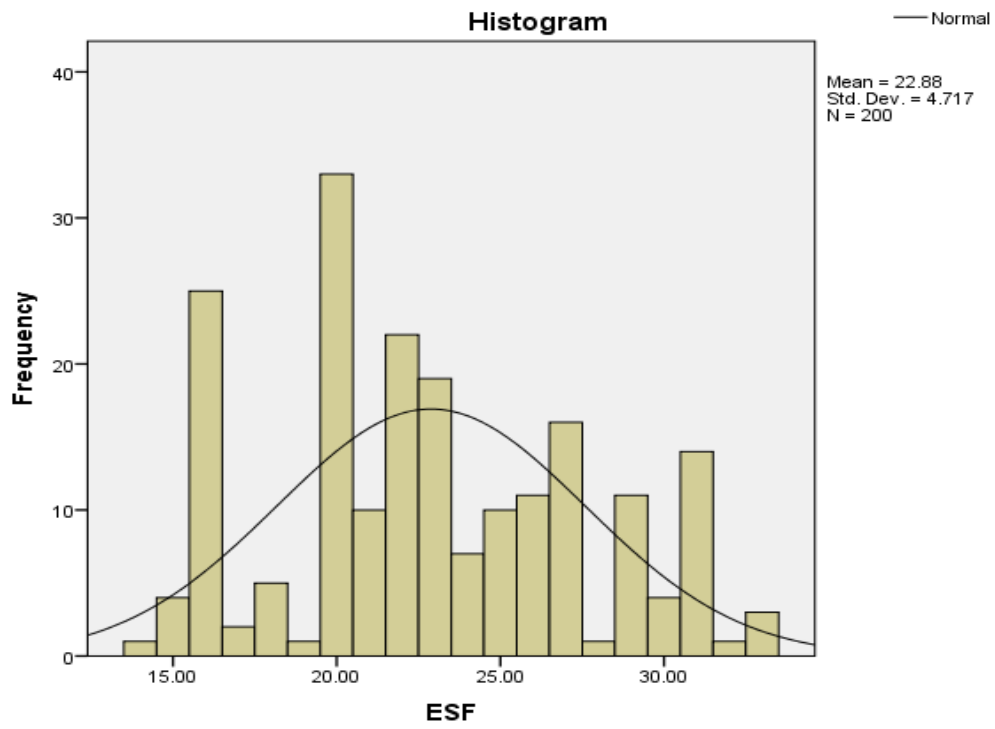


Figure 2:ESF

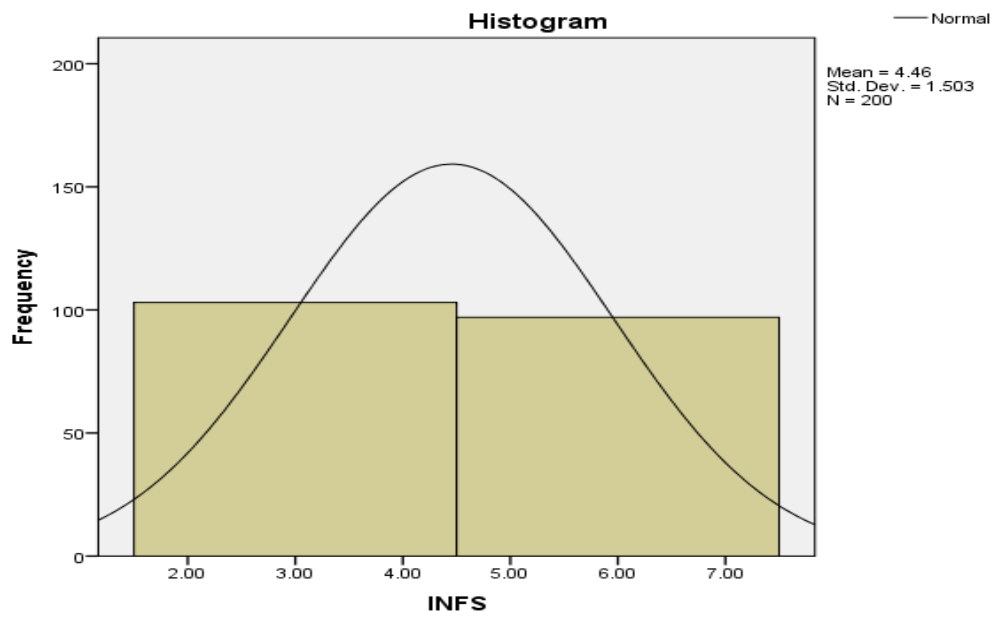


Figure 3:INFS

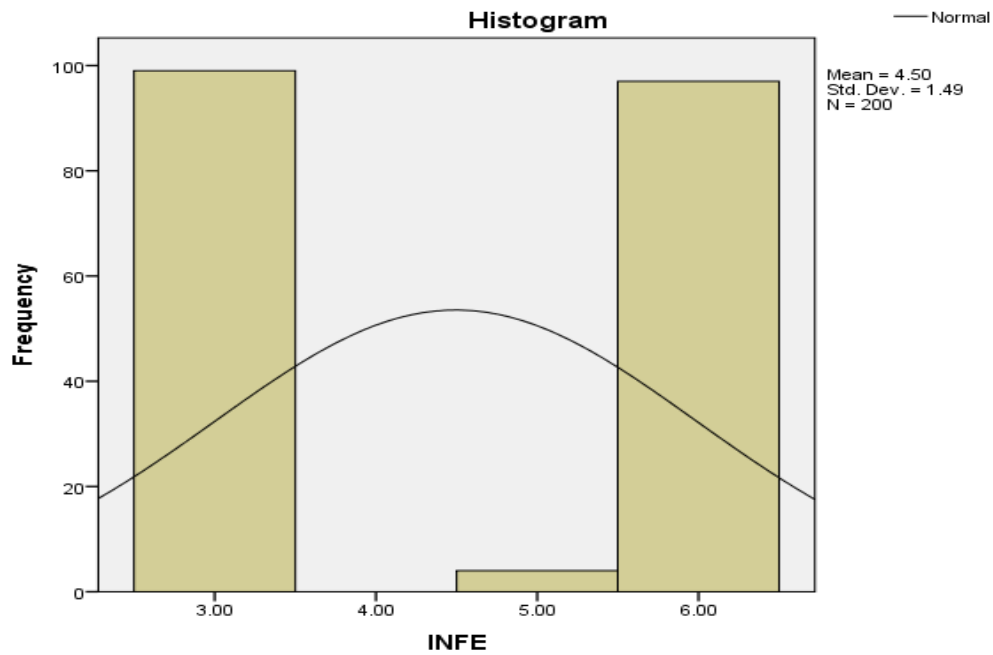


Figure 4:INFE

**Table 3**

*Correlation between role of forgive ness in response toward sexual and emotional infidelity (N=200)*

	INFS	INFE	DSF	ESF
INFS	-			
INFE	.990**	-		
DSF	.224**	-.233	-	
ESF	-.671**	-.671	.381	-

Table 3

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 presents the results of the Spearman correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationships between sexual infidelity, emotional infidelity, decisional forgiveness, and emotional forgiveness. These correlations provide insights into the associations between these variables, shedding light on the interplay between infidelity and forgiveness processes. The correlation coefficient between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness is .224\*\*, indicating a significant positive relationship. This

finding suggests that individuals who perceive higher levels of sexual infidelity are more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness. In other words, when faced with sexual infidelity, individuals may be inclined to make a conscious decision to forgive their partners. Conversely, the correlation between sexual infidelity and emotional forgiveness is  $-.671^{**}$ , indicating a non-significant negative relationship. This finding suggests that there is no strong association between sexual infidelity and emotional forgiveness. It implies that individuals may not experience emotional forgiveness as a prominent response to sexual infidelity. Furthermore, the correlation between emotional infidelity and decisional forgiveness is  $-.233$ , indicating a non-significant negative relationship. This finding suggests that emotional infidelity is not strongly associated with decisional forgiveness. Individuals may not be inclined to engage in decisional forgiveness when confronted with emotional infidelity. Similarly, the correlation between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness is  $-.671$ , indicating a non-significant negative relationship. This finding implies that emotional infidelity does not strongly predict emotional forgiveness. Individuals may not readily offer emotional forgiveness in response to emotional infidelity. These correlation results provide important insights into the relationships between different forms of infidelity and the two types of forgiveness. However, it is essential to consider that correlation coefficients only capture the strength and direction of the relationships and do not imply causality.

**Table 4**

Differences of role of forgiveness and response toward sexual and emotional infidelity among male and female (N=200)

	Male		Female		U	r	p
	M	Md	M	Md			
INFS	150.95	6.0	150.8	3.0	195	0.96	.000
INFE	150.93	6.0	154.8	3.0	197	0.93	.000
DSF	86.33	23.0	113.3	24.0	3641.5	0.64	.001
ESF	60.46	20.0	25.7	26.0	1183.5	0.13	.000

*Table 4: M=Mean, Md=Median, U= Mann-Whitney U, r=effect size, p=significance.*

Table 4 provides valuable insights into the differences in forgiveness responses towards sexual and emotional infidelity between males and females. The results indicate significant gender differences in both the types of infidelity and the approach to forgiveness. Firstly, the table reveals a significant difference in forgiveness response between males and females when it comes to sexual infidelity. Males appear to be less forgiving of sexual infidelity, whereas females exhibit a similar pattern of non-forgiveness towards emotional infidelity. These findings align with previous research, which has consistently shown that sexual infidelity tends to be more distressing for men compared to women (Kato, 2014). This discrepancy in forgiveness response may be attributed to societal and cultural factors that influence gender-specific expectations and norms regarding infidelity. Additionally, the table highlights a significant difference in the approach to forgiveness between males and females. Contrary to expectations and prior literature, which often suggested that females engage more in emotional forgiveness (Cowden et al., 2019), the current study's findings reveal that males are more inclined towards emotional forgiveness, whereas females tend to lean towards



decisional forgiveness. This unexpected result may be influenced by cultural factors and the collective nature of the society under study. Females may experience societal pressures and expectations that lead them to prioritize decisional forgiveness, even in the face of emotional pain caused by infidelity. These gender differences in forgiveness responses and approaches underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of how individuals, particularly males and females, respond to different types of infidelity. By recognizing and addressing these differences, counselors and relationship experts can tailor their interventions to better support individuals dealing with the aftermath of infidelity. It is worth noting that these findings are specific to the sample used in this study, which consisted of individuals from Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Thus, caution should be exercised when generalizing these results to the wider population. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in larger and more diverse samples from various regions to obtain a comprehensive understanding of gender differences in forgiveness responses to infidelity.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the role of forgiveness in response to sexual and emotional infidelity among males and females. Specifically, two types of forgiveness, namely decisional and emotional forgiveness, were examined. To measure these constructs, three scales were utilized. The Infidelity Dilemmas Questionnaire (Buss, 1999), a forced-choice questionnaire, was employed to assess participants' responses to sexual and emotional infidelity. The questionnaire presented individuals with two options to choose from. The scale demonstrated high reliability with a coefficient alpha of 0.87. The Decisional Forgiveness Scale (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) was used to explore gender differences in responses to decisional forgiveness. This scale consisted of items designed to measure individuals' tendencies to engage in decisional forgiveness. The scale exhibited good reliability, with a coefficient alpha of 0.82. Similarly, the Emotional Forgiveness Scale (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) was employed to investigate gender differences in responses to emotional forgiveness. This scale comprised items aimed at capturing individuals' proclivity for emotional forgiveness. The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with a coefficient alpha of 0.81.

#### **Objective**

The first objective of the study aimed to examine the relationship between decisional forgiveness and sexual infidelity. As indicated in Table 3, the findings reveal a significant positive relationship between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness. Notably, this particular relationship has not been extensively studied

in previous research, making it difficult to compare the current results with existing literature.

The second objective sought to explore the relationship between emotional forgiveness and emotional infidelity. Table 3 demonstrates a non-significant negative relationship between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness. Similar to the relationship between decisional forgiveness and sexual infidelity, this association has received limited attention in prior studies, preventing direct comparisons with previous findings.

The third objective of the study aimed to explore gender differences in responses to emotional and sexual infidelity among males and females. Table 4 presents the findings on the differences in forgiveness responses towards sexual and emotional infidelity. The results indicate a significant difference in forgiveness responses between males and females. Specifically, males exhibited lower forgiveness towards sexual infidelity, while females demonstrated lower forgiveness towards emotional infidelity. These findings align with previous literature, which has consistently highlighted that sexual infidelity is more distressing for men compared to women (Kato, 2014). Additionally, other studies have reported that females tend to rate emotional infidelity as more significant, while males tend to rate sexual infidelity as more significant (Moreno & Kahumoku Fessler, 2018). Moreover, research has shown that men tend to respond with less forgiveness towards sexual infidelity (Buss, 2018).

The fourth objective sought to examine gender differences in the approach to forgiveness, specifically decisional and emotional forgiveness, among males and females. Table 4 indicates a significant difference in the forgiveness approaches employed by males and females. Interestingly, the results demonstrate that males

tend to engage more in emotional forgiveness, while females lean towards decisional forgiveness. These findings contrast with previous literature, which suggested that females tend to engage in more emotional forgiveness (Cowden et al., 2019). However, according to the results of this study, it is evident that men are more inclined towards emotional forgiveness, while females exhibit a preference for decisional forgiveness.

### **Hypotheses**

There were four hypotheses examined in this study. The first hypothesis predicted a positive and significant relationship between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness. As shown in Table 3, the correlation between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness was found to be  $.224^{**}$ , indicating a significant positive relationship. Conversely, the correlation between sexual infidelity and emotional forgiveness was  $-.671^{**}$ , indicating a non-significant negative relationship. Since there is a lack of previous studies investigating this relationship, no direct comparisons can be made; however, this hypothesis was supported by the findings of the study.

The second hypothesis proposed a positive and significant relationship between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness. However, the results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that the correlation between emotional infidelity and decisional forgiveness is  $-.233$ , indicating a non-significant negative relationship. Similarly, the correlation between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness is also found to be  $-.671$ , suggesting a non-significant negative relationship. Although there is no prior research to compare these findings with, it can be concluded that this hypothesis was not supported as there was no significant

positive relationship found between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness.

The third hypothesis of this study aimed to examine the significant difference in forgiveness responses between sexual and emotional infidelity among males and females. The results presented in Table 4 indicate a significant difference in forgiveness responses between males and females. Specifically, males demonstrated lower forgiveness towards sexual infidelity, while females exhibited lower forgiveness towards emotional infidelity. These findings align with previous literature, which consistently highlights that sexual infidelity tends to be more distressing for men compared to women (Kato, 2014). Additionally, studies have shown that females tend to rate emotional infidelity as more significant, while males tend to rate sexual infidelity as more significant (Moreno & Kahumoku Fessler, 2018). It has been observed that men generally respond with less forgiveness towards sexual infidelity (Buss, 2018). Moreover, these findings also support the Evolutionary Psychology Perspective, which offers an explanation for the link between infidelity and fertilization in women, ultimately leading to reproduction. Throughout history, men have faced concerns regarding the paternity of their offspring. The uncertainty surrounding paternity raises doubts for men, as maternity is always confirmed, but paternity is not always 100% confirmed. Consequently, men may hesitate to invest their resources if they suspect that the offspring may not be biologically related to them, as they may be required to undergo paternity testing, which can be costly. This fear stems from the possibility of their significant other engaging in sexual relationships with other individuals. Thus, men tend to experience greater distress and concern when it comes to sexual infidelity. On the other hand, females are not faced with the same risk of uncertain

paternity. However, if a male is emotionally involved with another female besides his significant other, the female partner may encounter challenges related to time, attention, commitment, and investment from that male in both her and their children.

The fourth hypothesis aimed to investigate the significant difference between decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness among males and females. Contrary to previous literature suggesting that females tend to engage in more emotional forgiveness (Cowden et al., 2019), the results of this study indicate a significant difference in forgiveness approaches between males and females. Specifically, the findings reveal that males are more inclined towards emotional forgiveness, while females tend to lean towards decisional forgiveness.

This result challenges the prevailing literature, which highlights females' tendency towards emotional forgiveness. However, it can be attributed to the influence of cultural factors, particularly within a collectivistic culture. In such cultures, females may face societal pressure to compromise and maintain relationships regardless of the type of infidelity committed. Various factors, such as societal expectations, concerns related to children, and extended family dynamics, may contribute to this pressure. This mindset can be observed even among unmarried females who possess an ingrained belief system that discourages leaving a partner. Consequently, females may exhibit a greater inclination towards decisional forgiveness, wherein they choose to stay in the relationship despite the infidelity. In summary, Table 4 provides crucial insights into the gender differences in forgiveness responses towards sexual and emotional infidelity. The significant differences observed highlight the complex interplay between gender, societal expectations, and the forgiveness process. These findings contribute to the existing

body of knowledge and offer valuable implications for counseling, relationship support, and further research in the field.

These findings align with the Error Management Theory proposed by David Buss and Martie Haselton. According to this theory, males perceive females as having a higher sexual tendency towards males, while females perceive males as having a higher emotional tendency towards females. Based on these heuristics, individuals make decisions regarding forgiveness. In this case, males may be more inclined towards emotional forgiveness due to their perception of females' sexual tendencies, while females may prioritize decisional forgiveness, influenced by their perception of males' emotional tendencies. Thus, the results of this study highlight the complex interplay between cultural influences, gender roles, and cognitive biases in shaping forgiveness responses. It underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of forgiveness processes, considering the sociocultural context in which individuals operate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between different types of infidelity and forgiveness, as well as to explore gender differences in responses to sexual and emotional infidelity, considering the role of forgiveness. The results shed light on the hypotheses formulated for this research. The first hypothesis, which proposed a significant positive relationship between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness, was supported by the findings. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between sexual infidelity and decisional forgiveness. This suggests that individuals may be more inclined to forgive sexual infidelity on a decisional level, perhaps influenced by various factors such as

societal norms, personal values, or relationship dynamics. The second hypothesis, predicting a significant positive relationship between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness, was not supported by the results. It was found that there was no significant relationship between emotional infidelity and emotional forgiveness. This suggests that emotional infidelity may be just as distressing as sexual infidelity, and individuals may struggle to forgive emotional betrayal on an emotional level. The third hypothesis, which stated that there would be a significant difference between sexual and emotional infidelity among males and females, aligns with previous studies and was supported by the findings. The results indicated a significant difference in forgiveness responses towards sexual and emotional infidelity between males and females. Men tended to be less forgiving of sexual infidelity, while women showed less forgiveness towards emotional infidelity. These findings correspond to prior research that has consistently shown gender differences in the perception and response to different types of infidelity. However, the fourth hypothesis, proposing a significant difference between decisional and emotional forgiveness among males and females, with males engaging in emotional forgiveness and females practicing decisional forgiveness, was not supported by the results. Surprisingly, the findings indicated that females were more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness. This unexpected result can be attributed to the influence of the cultural context, particularly within a collectivistic culture, where females may face pressure to compromise and maintain relationships despite the type of infidelity committed. Societal expectations, considerations related to children, and the influence of extended family dynamics may contribute to this inclination towards decisional forgiveness among females, even when they are unmarried



In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of forgiveness responses towards sexual and emotional infidelity, as well as the gender differences in these responses. The findings highlight the complexity of forgiveness processes, suggesting that cultural factors and societal pressures play a significant role in shaping forgiveness behaviors. Further research is warranted to delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms and cultural influences that impact forgiveness in the context of infidelity.

### **LIMITATIONS**

The present study, while informative, has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the results. One limitation pertains to the measurement scales utilized. The scales employed did not account for the potential influence of social desirability bias, and participants' responses relied on self-reporting. This raises the possibility that participants may have provided answers they believed to be socially desirable rather than reflecting their genuine feelings or experiences. Future research could incorporate additional measures or alternative methods to mitigate the potential impact of social desirability bias on the findings. Another limitation of this study relates to the assessment of forgiveness towards sexual and emotional infidelity. The forced-choice format utilized in this study may not adequately capture the perspectives of individuals who find both forms of infidelity equally distressing or those who may have varied responses. By limiting participants to select between sexual or emotional infidelity as the more upsetting type, the study may have overlooked nuanced responses and the variability in participants' experiences. Alternative approaches, such as rating scales or qualitative interviews, could provide a more comprehensive

understanding of individuals' forgiveness responses to different types of infidelity. Additionally, the study's sample size was relatively small, and the participants were exclusively drawn from the Rawalpindi and Islamabad regions. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to the larger population. To enhance the external validity of future research, it is recommended to include a larger and more diverse sample from various regions across Pakistan. This would enable a broader representation of the Pakistani population or the population of Punjab as a whole. Considering these limitations, it is important to regard the conclusions drawn from this study as preliminary. Future research should strive to address and overcome these limitations to strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings. By employing more robust measurement techniques, increasing the sample size, and diversifying the participant pool, future studies can build upon the present research and provide a more comprehensive understanding of forgiveness in the context of sexual and emotional infidelity.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The implications of the findings from this study extend far beyond the immediate context, holding significance for various stakeholders involved in the realm of relationships and counseling. Counselors and therapists, in particular, can derive substantial benefits from the insights generated by this research. By gaining a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics of forgiveness in the context of sexual and emotional infidelity, counselors can offer more targeted and effective guidance to individuals and couples grappling with relationship challenges. Incorporating these findings into therapeutic interventions has the potential to facilitate the navigation of forgiveness processes, promoting healing, growth, and

relationship satisfaction among clients. Furthermore, the implications of this study reach directly to the couples themselves. Couples who are made aware of the gender differences in forgiveness responses towards sexual and emotional infidelity can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their partner's perspectives. This heightened awareness can foster open and honest communication within the relationship, enabling couples to navigate the aftermath of infidelity with greater empathy and compassion. Armed with this knowledge, couples can engage in constructive dialogue, address issues related to trust and intimacy, and actively work towards rebuilding their relationship. The insights gained from this study can empower couples to confront the challenges posed by infidelity, ultimately strengthening the bond they share. Additionally, the research findings serve as a foundation for future exploration by other researchers in the field. By contributing to the existing body of knowledge on forgiveness and infidelity, this study highlights the need for more comprehensive assessments that take into account the role of cultural and societal influences. Future researchers can build upon these findings and delve deeper into the complexities of forgiveness by conducting experimental studies that address the limitations identified in this study, such as social desirability bias. Incorporating experimental designs in future research endeavors will enable researchers to establish causal relationships and provide stronger evidence regarding forgiveness and its association with different types of infidelity. In conclusion, the implications of this study transcend the boundaries of counseling, reaching counselors, couples, and researchers alike. By shedding light on the intricate dynamics of forgiveness in response to sexual and emotional infidelity, this research offers valuable insights that have the potential to enhance counseling practices, improve relationships, and stimulate further

investigation in the field. The knowledge gained from this study holds the power to make a meaningful impact in supporting individuals and couples as they navigate the complexities of forgiveness and strive towards building healthier, more fulfilling relationships.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings, several recommendations can be made for future research on the topic of forgiveness in response to infidelity:

1. ***Conduct Experimental Studies:*** To address the limitations associated with self-reported measures and the risk of social desirability bias, future studies could incorporate experimental designs. By manipulating variables and observing participants' responses in controlled settings, researchers can gather more objective data and minimize the influence of biases. Experimental studies can provide deeper insights into the causal relationships between different types of infidelity and forgiveness responses.
2. ***Expand The Sample Size And Diversity:*** This study had a relatively small sample size limited to unmarried adults from Rawalpindi and Islamabad. To increase the representativeness of the findings, future research should aim for larger and more diverse samples. Including participants from various regions of Pakistan and different demographic backgrounds would enable researchers to draw more comprehensive conclusions and generalize the findings to a broader population.

3. ***Longitudinal Studies:*** Infidelity and forgiveness are dynamic processes that unfold over time. Conducting longitudinal studies would allow researchers to explore the changes in forgiveness responses and attitudes towards infidelity as individuals and couples progress through different stages of their relationships. Longitudinal designs can provide valuable insights into the trajectories of forgiveness and the factors that influence its development and maintenance.

4. ***Consider Cultural Factors:*** Culture plays a significant role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to infidelity and forgiveness. Future research should incorporate a cross-cultural perspective to examine how cultural factors influence forgiveness responses. Comparing different cultural contexts can reveal variations in forgiveness norms and provide a more nuanced understanding of forgiveness processes.

5. ***Qualitative Approaches:*** In addition to quantitative measures, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups can provide rich insights into individuals' subjective experiences of infidelity and forgiveness. Exploring participants' narratives, emotions, and personal reflections can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding forgiveness in the context of infidelity.

By implementing these recommendations, future research can build upon the present study's findings and address its limitations. Conducting experimental studies, expanding the sample size and diversity, utilizing longitudinal designs, considering cultural factors, and incorporating qualitative approaches can further advance knowledge in the field of infidelity and forgiveness, leading to more comprehensive and robust conclusions

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**APPENDICES**

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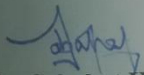
Capital University of Science and Technology (CUST) is a federally chartered university. The university is authorized by the Federal Government to award degrees at Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate level for a wide variety of programs.

**Ms. Mahnoor Ather**, registration number **BSP193022** is a bona fide student in BS Psychology program at this University from Fall 2019 till date. In partial fulfillment of the degree, she is conducting research on "Role of forgiveness in response towards sexual and emotional infidelity among adults". In this continuation, the student is required to collect data from your institute.

Considering the forgoing, kindly allow the student to collect the requisite data from your institute. Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Please feel free to contact undersigned, if you have any query in this regard.

Best Wishes,

  
**Dr. Sabahat Haqqani**  
Head, Department of Psychology  
Ph No. 111-555-666 Ext: 178  
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## Scales

### *Infidelity Forced-Choice Questionnaire*

This is a forced-choice questionnaire, please select any one option, out of two.

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**Table 1.** Buss et al.'s (1999) Items

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**Scenario Pair 1:** Which of the following events would be more distressing?

- A. Imagining your partner forming a deep emotional attachment to that other person (*emotional infidelity*), or
- B. Imagining your partner enjoying passionate sexual intercourse with that other person (*sexual infidelity*).

**Scenario Pair 2:** Which of the following events would be more distressing?

- A. Imagining your partner falling in love with that other person (*emotional infidelity*), or
- B. Imagining your partner trying different sexual positions with that person (*sexual infidelity*).

**Scenario Pair 3:** Imagine your partner *both* formed an emotional attachment to another person *and* had sexual intercourse with that other person. Which aspect of your partner's involvement would upset you more?

- A. The sexual intercourse with that other person (*sexual infidelity*), or
- B. The emotional attachment to that other person (*emotional infidelity*).

**Scenario Pair 4:** Which would upset or distress you more?

- A. Imagining your partner having sexual intercourse with that person, but you are certain that they will *not* form a deep emotional attachment (*sexual, without emotional infidelity*), or
- B. Imagining your partner forming a deep emotional attachment to that person, but you are certain that they will *not* have sexual intercourse (*emotional, without sexual, infidelity*).

**Scenario Pair 5:** Which would upset or distress you more?

- A. Imagining that your partner is still sexually interested in the former lover, but is no longer in love with this person (*sexual, without emotional infidelity*), or
- B. Imagining that your partner is still emotionally involved with the former lover, but is no longer sexually interested in this person (*emotional, without sexual, infidelity*).

**Scenario Pair 6:** Which would upset or distress you more?

- A. Imagining your partner having sexual intercourse for just one night with another person, with no chance of any further involvement (*sexual, without emotional infidelity*), or
- B. Imagining your partner becoming emotionally involved with another person, with no chance of any sexual involvement (*emotional, without sexual, infidelity*).

*Decisional and Emotional Forgiveness Scale*

**DFS (This DFS assesses behavioral intentions. It seems to be used equally often with Davis et al., 2016, Decision to Forgive Scale)**

Think of your current intentions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree
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<sup>1</sup> Scores reflecting disagreement range from 7 to 14 in the avoidance subscale and from 5 to 20 in the revenge subscale. Thus, scores ranging from 12 to 24 reflect low unforgiveness.

	(SD)				(SA)
1. I intend to try to hurt him or her in the same way he or she hurt me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I will not try to help him or her if he or she needs something.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. If I see him or her, I will act friendly.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I will try to get back at him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I will try to act toward him or her in the same way I did before he or she hurt me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. If there is an opportunity to get back at him or her, I will take it.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I will not talk with him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I will not seek revenge upon him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

**Note:** I recommend using Davis et al. Decision to Forgive Scale or this one, Decisional Forgiveness Scale, depending on whether you want a more global assessment of whether one says they have forgiven (DTFS) or behavioral intentions (DFS). The Emotional Forgiveness Scale is complementary to both, and it assesses emotional forgiveness and has good psychometrics. An article is in preparation on it.

Worthington, E. L., Jr., Hook, J. N., Utsey, S. O., Williams, J. K., & Neil, R. L. (2007, October). *Decisional and emotional forgiveness*. Paper presented at the Positive Psychology Summit, Washington, DC, October 5, 2007.

**EFS (Emotional Forgiveness Scale)**

Think of your current emotions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I care about him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I'm bitter about what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I feel sympathy toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I'm mad about what happened.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I like him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I resent what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I feel love toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

Worthington, E. L., Jr., Hook, J. N., Utsey, S. O., Williams, J. K., & Neil, R. L. (2007, October). *Decisional and emotional forgiveness*. Paper presented at the Positive Psychology Summit, Washington, DC, October 5, 2007.

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

I am conducting a study "Role of Forgiveness in Response towards Sexual and Emotional Infidelity among Adults" under supervision of my supervisor for academic purpose.

I understand that the participation of the males and females is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. The information collected, will remain confidential and no information that identifies the males and females will be made publically available.

I consent to use the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**DEMOGRAPHICS SHEET**

Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female (circle one) \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Education: FSC \_\_\_\_\_ BS \_\_\_\_\_ MS (circle one) \_\_\_\_\_

City: Rawalpindi \_\_\_\_\_ Islamabad (circle one) \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship Status: In a Relationship \_\_\_\_\_ Engaged (circle one) \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason of getting into the relationship with your significant other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Plagiarism Report

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