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**Study type:** Quantitative analysis of a mail-in survey

**Sample size:** 117 couples (234 individuals) from small communities in North Carolina and Texas; a control group of 69 participants was used.

**Demographics:** 95.8% Caucasian. Age mean: 39.2 female, 41.4 male. Average years of education: 16.0 female, 16.6 male. Average time of marriage: 14.9 years. Married once: 86% female, 86% male. Married twice: 14% female, 17% male. Average number of children: 1.7. Participants reporting a betrayal: 61% female, 39% male.

**Key findings and quotes:**

- Study focused primarily on the injured individual’s ability to forgive their spouse after betrayal had occurred.
- “The major betrayal that requires a forgiveness process can be seen as an interpersonal trauma that disrupts the person’s previous assumptions and expectations of his or her partner and their relationship in general” (p. 181).
- The forgiveness process for such an event includes the individual’s ability to rebuild formerly-held beliefs about their partner and the relationship, and achieve a new sense of control and safety.
- Three stages to trauma-forgiveness:
  - Stage I: “Impact” stage, where injured partners realize the impact of the trauma on themselves and their relationship. Important assumptions of their relationships have been disrupted. There is a power imbalance in the relationship due to the betrayal.
  - Stage II: “Meaning” stage, where injured partners try to understand why the behavior occurred, to make their partner’s behaviors more understandable and predictable.
  - Stage III: “Moving on” stage, where the injured partner moves beyond the event and stops allowing it to control their life. In optimal situations, the injured partner develops a non-distorted view of their relationship and their partner.
- Study found “Spouses in the Stage I group reported the lowest amount of forgiveness; the Stage II group reported more forgiveness than the Stage I group and less forgiveness than the Stage III group” (pp. 189-190).
- “Individuals in Stage I of forgiveness reported: (a) the least positive marital assumptions about themselves and their partner; (b) the least psychological closeness and investment; (c) the most power-other; and (d) the least marital adjustment. Persons in Stage III of forgiveness reported: (a) the most positive assumptions about themselves, their partners, and their marriages; (b) the most
psychological closeness and investment; (c) the least power-other; and (d) the highest levels of marital adjustment" (p.192).

• “Partners in Stage II of forgiveness obtained means for these variables that consistently fell between the scores for individuals in Stage I and the Stage III of forgiveness” (p. 192).