

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?
THE IMPACT OF ACCOUNTS AND ATTRIBUTIONS FOLLOWING MARITAL
INFIDELITY

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ABSTRACT

This research focused on accounts and attributions following marital infidelity using a two-part investigation. In Study One, 250 married or previously married participants responded to a hypothetical scenario which asked that they assess their expected level of guilt and tell what account they would likely give to their spouse after an incident of extramarital sex was discovered. Motivation to remain in the marriage and the level of intent prompting the infidelity were manipulated in the scenarios. Results indicated that low motivation to maintain the marriage and high intent were related to the use of aggravating accounts (justifications and denials) while low intent was related to the use of mitigating accounts (concessions and excuses). Study Two utilized qualitative interviews of 25 individuals who had actually experienced infidelity in a marriage. Results indicated that motivation to remain married was a salient factor in the transgressor's choice of account. Additionally, a concession was the prominent account preferred by victims.