



Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales

Public Attitudes Toward Commercial Sex as Infidelity

A Quantitative Analysis of Spanish Society

Author: Alexander Philipp Harmsen

Clave: 202417949

Tutor: Olaya Garcia Vazquez

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Abstract

Whether paying for sex constitutes infidelity is a question with direct implications for how societies draw moral boundaries around commercial sexuality and intimate partnerships. Despite growing scholarly interest in sexual attitudes and infidelity norms, no nationally representative quantitative study had examined the predictors of infidelity classification with respect to commercially mediated sex in Spain. This thesis addresses that gap.

Drawing on CIS Study 3501 (*Relaciones sexuales y de pareja*, January 2025; N = 3,854), a nationally representative telephone survey of the Spanish adult population, the study employs binomial logistic regression to identify the sociodemographic and attitudinal predictors of whether individuals classify paying for sex as infidelity. 89.3% of Spanish adults classify paying for sex as infidelity. Women, practicing Catholics, and partnered individuals are more likely to do so, while older respondents are more permissive - a pattern consistent with a cohort rather than a developmental interpretation. Contrary to the conventional expectation, lower educational attainment is associated with more permissive classification, and sexual satisfaction operates as a suppressor variable, emerging as significant only once age is controlled. Political ideology is non-significant, reflecting cross-partisan consensus. These findings provide the first nationally representative quantitative evidence on this question in Spain, with direct implications for the ongoing legislative debate on the regulation of prostitution.

Keywords: infidelity perception, commercial sex, sexual norms, Spain, gender differences

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1 Introduction

The moral regulation of intimate relationships is a persistent concern in social sciences, yet the boundaries of what individuals consider to constitute infidelity remain poorly understood at the population level. While much of the empirical literature on sexual norms has focused on attitudes toward emotional affairs and online infidelity (Fernández et al., 2007; Negy et al., 2018), the intersection of commercial sexuality and relational fidelity remains largely unexamined. Whether paying for sex constitutes infidelity within a romantic partnership is a question that is theoretically significant, empirically underexplored, and politically charged, particularly in contemporary Spain, where a national debate over the legal status of prostitution has intensified since the early 2020s. How the public draws moral boundaries around commercial sex bears directly on legislative debates, on how sexual norms are transmitted across generations, and on how couples negotiate the terms of fidelity. Yet no nationally representative quantitative study had examined the predictors of infidelity classification specifically with respect to commercially mediated sex in Spain.

The central research question of this thesis is: what sociodemographic and attitudinal factors predict whether a Spanish adult classifies paying for sex as infidelity within a romantic relationship? The analysis draws on CIS Study No. 3501 (Relaciones sexuales y de pareja, January 2025), a nationally representative survey of the Spanish adult population. From this question, the thesis pursues four objectives. The first is to establish the prevalence of classifying paid sex as infidelity among Spanish adults. The second is to examine how sociodemographic characteristics - gender, age, religiosity, educational attainment, and relationship status - are associated with this classification. The third is to assess the role of attitudinal factors, namely sexual attitudes, perceived societal sexual prejudice, beliefs about gendered sexual needs, and political ideology. The fourth is to determine, by means of binomial logistic regression, which of these factors retain independent predictive power once the others are held constant, and to situate the resulting pattern within the ongoing Spanish policy debate on the regulation of prostitution.

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. Chapter II presents the theoretical framework, situating the study within the empirical and theoretical literatures on infidelity norms, attitudes toward prostitution, and the sociodemographic predictors of sexual attitudes. Chapter III describes the data source, sampling design, operationalisation of all variables, and analytical procedures in full. Chapter IV reports the results of the bivariate and multivariate analyses in turn. Chapter V interprets these findings considering the theoretical framework,

assesses model fit, acknowledges the study's limitations, and identifies directions for future research. A concluding chapter synthesises the main substantive contributions of the thesis and reflects on their implications for the ongoing policy debate concerning the legal regulation of prostitution in Spain.

2 Theoretical Framework

The review is organised thematically, moving from the conceptual foundations of infidelity as a social construct, through the documented gender, age, religious, and sociodemographic dimensions of infidelity-relevant attitudes, to the specific context of prostitution attitudes in Spain. The chapter concludes by identifying the research gap that motivates the present study and the theoretical expectations, derived from the literature, that inform the analysis.

2.1 Defining Infidelity: Conceptual and Normative Debates

Infidelity remains one of the most contested constructs in the social scientific study of romantic relationships. At its core, infidelity refers to a violation of an explicit or implicit agreement of sexual or emotional exclusivity within a committed relationship (Negy et al., 2018). However, the boundaries of what constitutes infidelity are neither universal nor fixed; they are shaped by cultural context, relationship type, gender norms, and individual negotiation between partners. Cross-national research by Negy et al. (2018) found substantial variation in how individuals across different countries define infidelity, with behaviors such as viewing sexually explicit material, forming close emotional connections with third parties, and engaging in commercially mediated sexual encounters all qualifying as infidelity for some respondents but not for others. A foundational distinction in the infidelity literature is that between sexual infidelity (involving physical or sexual contact outside the primary relationship) and emotional infidelity, which refers to deep emotional intimacy or romantic involvement with a third party (Fernández et al., 2007). Research in the evolutionary psychology tradition has documented that these two forms are not perceived as equally severe: women tend to be more distressed by emotional infidelity, while men tend to react more strongly to sexual infidelity (Fernández et al., 2007). These differential responses have been attributed to sex-specific reproductive strategies and investment asymmetries, though social learning theories offer alternative explanations centred on gender role socialisation.

The picture becomes more complex when the sexual act is commercially mediated. Paying for sex involves an economic transaction with a person outside the primary relationship, raising a conceptual ambiguity: is the purchase of a sexual service equivalent to relational betrayal, or does its commercial nature place it in a different moral category? Bellhouse et al. (2015), in a mixed-methods study of female indoor sex workers in Melbourne, documented a mechanism of “mental separation,” cognitively distinguishing paid encounters at work from intimate acts

in personal relationships; some partners of sex workers similarly framed these encounters as categorically different from romantic infidelity. For at least some individuals, then, the commercial framing may attenuate a transaction's perceived relevance to fidelity. An empirical question thus arises as to whether the general population aligns with this mental separation, or if the commercial context fails to dissolve the relational betrayal. This conceptual ambiguity has a direct theoretical referent in the economic sociology of intimacy. Zelizer (2005) challenges the "hostile worlds" assumption, the intuition that market exchange and intimate life occupy separate spheres that contaminate one another when mixed, arguing instead that people routinely combine economic transactions with intimate relations, performing "relational work" to match appropriate forms of payment to appropriate relationships. Read through this lens, classifying paying for sex as infidelity reflects a hostile-worlds logic in which the commercial transaction is treated as a breach of the intimate sphere, whereas declining to classify it preserves the separation between the two.

Kruger et al. (2013) further demonstrated that perceptions of infidelity-relevant behaviours are modulated by individual differences in attachment style: attachment-anxious individuals tend to apply stricter definitions of what constitutes cheating, regardless of the specific behaviour involved. This finding implies that infidelity categorisation is not purely a definitional or normative matter but is also shaped by the emotional salience an individual attaches to relational exclusivity. The literature positions infidelity, including the specific case of commercially mediated sex, as a normatively contested concept whose application is inherently variable and socially embedded.

2.2 Gender Differences in Infidelity Perception

Gender is among the most consistently documented predictors of infidelity-related attitudes. Across methodological traditions and national contexts, women tend to apply stricter definitions of infidelity and express greater intolerance of behaviours that violate sexual exclusivity (Fernández et al., 2007; Kruger et al., 2013). From an evolutionary-psychology perspective, this is explained by differential parental investment: women, bearing the biological costs of reproduction and caregiving, are argued to have evolved heightened sensitivity to sexual betrayal as protection against resource diversion and abandonment (Fernández et al., 2007). Social-constructionist accounts instead emphasise gendered socialisation, whereby cultural norms render female sexual loyalty more morally salient.

In Spain, gender differences in attitudes toward commercial sex are well established. García Vázquez (2023), studying youth aged 18–30, found women more likely than men to favour abolitionist positions, associating commercial sex with exploitation and gender-based power asymmetries. Rúa-Vieites et al. (2024) documented pronounced gender differences in perceptions of sex buyers, with women more likely to hold negative moral evaluations of those who purchase sex. Méndez-Juez et al. (2023), using a nationally representative sample, found a gap of 20 points between women (91.3%) and men (71.3%) in support for banning prostitution. These findings suggest Spanish women are more inclined to frame commercial sex as a moral and relational transgression, consistent with the expectation that gender predicts infidelity classification.

Crucially, the gender effect on infidelity perception is not fully explained by a single theoretical framework. Kruger et al. (2013) found that attachment-related variables moderate the gender gap in infidelity perception, and that differences between men and women in infidelity categorisation were attenuated when attachment anxiety was controlled for. The implication is that gender's effect may be partly mediated by psychosocial characteristics that are themselves distributed along gendered lines. In this thesis, gender is treated as a primary sociodemographic predictor, with the expectation that female respondents will be significantly more likely to classify paying for sex as infidelity within a romantic relationship.

2.3 Age Differences in Infidelity Perception

The relationship between age and sexual attitudes is a recurring theme in social research, but the interpretation of observed age differences is contested. An individual developmental interpretation holds that attitudes change as people age, with older individuals becoming more conservative because of processes associated with maturity, family formation, or reduced sexual activity. A cohort interpretation, by contrast, argues that apparent age differences in cross-sectional data reflect differences in the socialisation environments of different birth cohorts rather than within-individual change over time (Twenge et al., 2015).

Twenge et al. (2015), in a landmark longitudinal analysis of sexual permissiveness in the United States spanning four decades (1972–2012), provided robust evidence that observed age differences in sexual attitudes are primarily cohort effects: successive birth cohorts displayed increasingly permissive sexual attitudes independently of ageing processes. This finding has important methodological implications for cross-sectional studies such as the present one. When older respondents are observed to hold different attitudes than younger respondents, this

should be interpreted as reflecting the historically more restrictive socialisation environments of older cohorts, rather than as evidence of developmental conservatism.

In Spain, the cohort interpretation is particularly salient. Older adults were socialised during and after the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), under strict Catholic moral orthodoxy, patriarchal family norms, and the formal prohibition of extramarital sex. At the same time, prostitution was historically tolerated as a male prerogative even while officially condemned, a double standard well documented in Spanish social history. This configuration may have produced cohorts who hold traditional attitudes toward marital fidelity in the abstract yet are accustomed to treating commercial sex as categorically separate from relational intimacy. The expectation is therefore that older respondents will be less likely to classify paying for sex as infidelity, reflecting a cohort-level normalisation of the separation between commercial and relational sexuality.

Evidence from Spain shows the age dynamic is not straightforward. Méndez-Juez et al. (2023) found younger citizens more likely than older ones to support banning prostitution, inverting the assumption that younger cohorts are invariably more permissive. This may reflect contemporary feminist discourse, to which younger generations are more exposed, framing prostitution as gender-based exploitation. Age thus operates differently across attitudinal dimensions: younger Spaniards may be more feminist toward the sex industry while holding different views on what constitutes relational infidelity.

2.4 Religiosity Differences in Infidelity Perception

Religion has long been theorised as a primary determinant of sexual conservatism. From a Durkheimian perspective, religious institutions provide collective moral frameworks that regulate individual behaviour by attaching sacred significance to norms of purity and fidelity. In Catholic-majority societies such as Spain, formal doctrinal opposition to extramarital sex, prostitution, and sexual permissiveness has historically been institutionalised through ecclesiastical authority and, during certain periods, through state policy (Boza Moreno, 2019). Catholic teaching frames marriage as a sacramental covenant and sexual fidelity as a moral imperative, creating a doctrinal basis for classifying any extramarital sexual act, including a commercial one, as a transgression against both the relationship and a sacred moral order.

Empirical evidence on the independent effect of religiosity on infidelity-specific attitudes is, however, more equivocal than the doctrinal account might suggest. Negy et al. (2018), in a cross-national study using student samples, found that religiosity was not a significant predictor

of whether respondents classified various behaviours as infidelity once other variables were controlled. Similarly, Méndez-Juez et al. (2023) found no significant association between religious identity and support for banning prostitution in a nationally representative Spanish sample, interpreting this null result in terms of the broad cross-social consensus on the issue that transcends traditional religious versus secular divisions.

These null findings notwithstanding, this thesis anticipates that practising Catholic identification will be positively associated with classifying paying for sex as infidelity. The reasoning is twofold. First, Negy et al.'s (2018) student samples are a restricted, secular demographic, whereas a nationally representative adult sample contains more actively practising Catholics, who may align more closely with doctrinal positions on fidelity. Second, the outcome here, infidelity classification, engages the doctrinal concept of marital fidelity more directly than does regulatory preference on banning prostitution. Religious identity may therefore predict the former more than the latter, and the study expects a positive association.

2.5 Attitudes Towards Prostitution in Spain: Legal and Social Context

Spain occupies a distinctive position in European prostitution policy. Unlike the Nordic countries, which criminalise the purchase but not the sale of sex, or Germany and the Netherlands, which have legalised and regulated sex work, Spain has neither prohibited nor formally legalised prostitution nationally (Boza Moreno, 2019). Boza Moreno (2019) describes this as “alegalidad” (quasi-legality): paying for sex between consenting adults is not in itself criminal, while third-party facilitation such as running a brothel or living off a sex worker's earnings may be prosecuted under anti-pimping statutes, and street prostitution is governed by municipal ordinances that vary by city. This unresolved framework has been the subject of sustained political, legal, and academic debate throughout the post-transition period, and forms the institutional backdrop to the attitudes measured here.

García Vázquez (2023), studying Spanish youth aged 18–30, found a substantial proportion favouring abolitionist approaches, criminalising demand while decriminalising the sale of sex, particularly among women and those with feminist orientations. García Vázquez emphasises that attitudes toward prostitution are not simply a matter of partisanship but are mediated by value frameworks around gender equality, sexual autonomy, and whether prostitution is framed as exploitation or as legitimate labour. Meneses-Falcón (2023) corroborated this, documenting the persistence of both victim and agency framings of sex work in Spanish public and policy discourse and arguing that these framings shape moral evaluations of those involved.

This thesis builds on and extends García Vázquez's (2023) agenda in two ways. First, where that study focused on a youth cohort (18–30), the present study uses a nationally representative sample across all age groups, giving a broader basis for population-level inference. Second, it examines a conceptually distinct dependent variable: not the respondent's attitude toward legal regulation, but their classification of paying for sex as infidelity within a relationship.

At the population level, Spanish citizens hold broadly restrictive attitudes toward prostitution. Méndez-Juez et al. (2023) found 83% supporting a ban, with striking cross-partisan consensus: both conservative (PP) and social-democratic (PSOE) voters favoured prohibition. Antolínez-Merchán et al. (2025) traced how both major parties have progressively adopted abolitionist positions, driven by feminist advocacy and concerns about trafficking and exploitation. Ranea Triviño (2020), from an abolitionist feminist perspective, argues that the demand for prostitution is a form of sexual irresponsibility perpetuating gender-based domination, a framing that has shaped much of the recent policy debate.

Comparative evidence further contextualises Spain's profile. Megías et al. (2025), comparing Norway, Spain, and Germany, found Spanish respondents combined normative disapproval of sex buying with conditional support for practical regulation. Adriaenssens et al. (2025), exploiting cross-national variation in prostitution law as a natural experiment, found a feedback effect: countries criminalising demand showed greater moral condemnation of sex buying over time, suggesting law and norms reinforce one another. Spain's prolonged regulatory ambiguity may thus itself contribute to the attitudinal ambivalence visible in population data.

Crucially, the present thesis is not a study of prostitution policy attitudes per se, but of how a specific commercial sexual act is mapped onto the relational category of fidelity. A person may favour banning prostitution on public policy grounds while not considering their partner's use of sex workers as relational infidelity; or, conversely, may be tolerant of prostitution as a social practice while viewing a partner's use of sex workers as a profound personal betrayal. The infidelity classification question thus engages a distinct moral and relational logic, one that depends not only on abstract attitudes toward commercial sex but on beliefs about what romantic commitment entails and who is obligated to uphold it.

2.6 Sexual Satisfaction Differences in Infidelity Perception

Sexual satisfaction is a multidimensional construct encompassing physical, emotional, and relational dimensions of sexual experience within intimate partnerships. Research in Spain and

internationally consistently identifies sexual satisfaction as a key contributor to overall relationship quality and stability (Ruiz de Viñaspre-Hernández et al., 2021). That study validated a Spanish-language instrument for measuring sexual satisfaction among women in Spain, confirming robust psychometric properties and strong associations with broader relationship wellbeing, and supporting the use of self-reported sexual satisfaction as a predictor variable in quantitative analyses of relationship-relevant attitudes.

The link between sexual satisfaction and infidelity classification is not straightforward. On one hand, individuals reporting lower satisfaction may perceive greater emotional distance and be more alert to relational transgressions, yielding stricter categorisation. On the other, higher satisfaction may accompany a more open, positive disposition toward sexuality that moderates the tendency to classify commercial sex as infidelity. Bellhouse et al. (2015), studying female sex workers' personal relationships, found that the quality of sexual intimacy served as a central marker distinguishing personal from commercial encounters, suggesting the relational meaning of sex influences how boundary violations are perceived.

In this study, sexual satisfaction is included as a predictor given its theoretical relevance to relational attitudes. However, no directional expectation is specified for it because the expected direction of the effect is theoretically ambiguous, and because exploratory analysis revealed a suppressor relationship in the multivariate model, a pattern of sufficient complexity that a post-hoc directional claim would risk capitalising on chance findings. The observed pattern of lower satisfaction associated with stricter infidelity categorisation after controlling for other predictors is discussed in the results and discussion chapters as an exploratory finding warranting further investigation.

2.7 Education and Ideological Differences in Infidelity Perception

Educational attainment is a widely used proxy for exposure to liberal social norms, cognitive sophistication, and socioeconomic position. In the broader literature on sexual attitudes, higher education has been associated with more permissive orientations toward non-normative sexual practices and with greater tolerance of sexual diversity (Alonso-Martínez et al., 2023). European comparative research has replicated this pattern: Ludwig et al. (2023), studying sexual attitudes in a German sample, found education among the significant predictors of permissiveness, and Vlase and Grasso (2021) found similar effects in a Romanian survey on attitudes toward prostitution legalisation.

In Spain, however, the link between education and prostitution-specific attitudes is less clear-cut. Méndez-Juez et al. (2023) found no significant effect of education on support for banning prostitution, suggesting the consensus cuts across educational lines. For infidelity classification the expected direction is similarly uncertain. Higher attainment may, through feminist or equality-oriented discourses, increase the tendency to view commercial sex as exploitation and therefore as infidelity; alternatively, it may introduce more nuanced framings that distinguish commercial from affective transgression, reducing infidelity classification. The thesis includes education as a predictor. Following the general pattern in the broader sexual-attitudes literature, a negative association (higher education, more permissive classification) is the default expectation; the exploitation-framing mechanism noted above, however, gives clear theoretical grounds for the reverse, and this competing possibility is retained as an explicit alternative.

Political ideology is a second major predictor. Cross-country research links right-wing orientation to more traditional sexual attitudes, including greater condemnation of prostitution and stricter infidelity norms (Vlase & Grasso, 2021; Ludwig et al., 2023). However, as noted regarding the Spanish context, Spain shows an unusual cross-partisan convergence on anti-prostitution attitudes, with both major parties adopting broadly abolitionist positions (Méndez-Juez et al., 2023; Antolínez-Merchán et al., 2025). This makes the standard assumption that right-wing ideology predicts stricter sexual norms less applicable to Spain. Accordingly, the thesis does not predict a significant ideology effect and treats a non-significant finding as theoretically interpretable rather than a model failure.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Source and Sampling Design

This study draws on data from Study 3501, *Relaciones sexuales y de pareja (Sexual and Romantic Relationships)*, conducted by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), the Spanish public research centre responsible for national social surveys. Fieldwork was conducted between 22 and 30 January 2025 using computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI), targeting the resident population of Spain aged 18 years and older.

The sampling design employs stratified probability sampling, with stratification by autonomous community and municipality size. Post-stratification quotas were applied for gender and age to correct for differential non-response. The designed sample comprised 4,000 interviews; 3,854 were successfully completed. CIS provided a post-stratification weight variable (PESO) to ensure national representativeness; this weight was applied throughout all analyses. For procedures where non-integer weights are not supported (specifically t-tests and logistic regression as implemented in Jamovi), PESO was rounded to the nearest integer prior to estimation. The implications of this rounding for the regression estimates are negligible given the overall sample size.

Following the exclusion of non-substantive responses (no-sabe/no-contesta; NS/NC) to the dependent variable, the effective analytical sample for bivariate and multivariate analyses comprises 3,791 valid cases. The regression model operates on a further reduced sample of $N = 3,178$ following listwise deletion of cases with missing data on one or more predictors (see Section 5.9).

3.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is derived from item P2_7 of battery question P2, which asks respondents to judge whether a series of behaviours constitute infidelity within a romantic relationship. The specific item reads: “Having sexual relations with a person to whom one pays.” The original response options are:

Yes, No, Not sure, and Don’t know / No answer (NS/NC).

For the purposes of this analysis, the variable, hereafter referred to as infidelity perception, was recoded into a binary indicator: Group 1 (coded 0) comprises respondents who classify paying for sex as infidelity (Yes); Group 2 (coded 1) comprises those who do not (No). Responses indicating uncertainty (“Not sure”) were excluded from all analyses, as they do not represent a clear normative judgement and would introduce ambiguity into the binary outcome model.

NS/NC responses were treated as missing values. This operationalisation follows the logic that the research question concerns the held moral boundary around infidelity, not uncertainty about whether such a boundary exists. Among the 3,791 valid respondents, 89.3% (n = 3,387) are in Group 1 and 10.7% (n = 404) in Group 2.

3.3 Independent Variables

The analysis includes two blocks of independent variables: sociodemographic characteristics and attitudinal measures.

Sociodemographic Variables

Gender is measured by variable SEXO (male / female), which is included as a binary predictor. In the regression model, female is coded 1 and male serves as the reference category.

Age was recorded in whole years (EDAD; range 18≥75). Although age is a discrete (integer-valued) variable, it was entered into the regression as a single numeric predictor modelled linearly, allowing the model to estimate the odds ratio per additional year of age, avoiding arbitrary categorisation and maximising statistical power. Descriptive age-group distributions are reported in the sample characteristics table for readability.

Educational level (P20aa) is operationalised as a six-category ordered factor: no formal education, primary education, lower secondary, upper secondary, vocational training, and higher education. A residual “Other” category with near-zero weighted count (n ≈ 3) was excluded from the regression model. Higher education serves as the reference category in the regression, allowing all other levels to be compared against the most educated group.

Religious identity (P21) is captured across six self-identification categories: practising Catholic, non-practising Catholic, other religion, agnostic, indifferent/non-believer, and atheist. Practising Catholic is retained as the reference category in the regression, given that it represents the group with the most clearly institutionalised moral position on paid sex. Although some categories are small, all six are retained in the analysis given that the multivariate results reveal meaningful distinctions across denominational groups.

Relationship status (P4) was recoded into a binary variable distinguishing respondent currently in a relationship (partnered) from those who have had at least one relationship but are not currently partnered (single). Respondents who reported never having had a partner (P4 codes 0, 6, 8, 9) were excluded from analyses involving this variable, as the concept of infidelity is definitionally contingent on the existence of a committed partnership: it presupposes a relational agreement of exclusivity whose violation constitutes the transgressive

act (Negy et al., 2018). Individuals who have never formed such a partnership cannot meaningfully classify a behaviour as a violation of a commitment they have not entered. Partnered is the reference category in the regression. The resulting analytical sample for this variable is $N = 3,707$.

Political ideology is measured by variable ESCIDEOL, a self-placement scale running from 1 (far left) to 10 (far right), derived from questionnaire item P15. It is included as a continuous predictor.

Attitudinal Variables

Sexual satisfaction (P11) is measured on a five-point scale from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (not at all satisfied). Respondents who reported having no current sexual life (category 7) and those with NS/NC responses were excluded from analyses involving this variable, as their satisfaction scores are not interpretable in the same framework. P11 is included as a continuous predictor.

Sexual attitude items (P6_1 through P6_5) are five statements from battery question P6, each rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree). The items are:

P6_1: Spanish society still harbours many sexual prejudices.

P6_2: Between adults, anything goes if there is mutual consent.

P6_3: Men have greater sexual needs than women.

P6_4: Real sex must include penetration.

P6_5: A person's sexual preferences can change over the course of their lifetime.

Each item is included as a continuous predictor in the regression model, treating the discrete ordinal Likert scale (1–5) as an interval-level variable for analytical purposes, a common practice in large-sample survey research where the distance between scale points can be assumed approximately equal (Norman, 2010).

3.4 Statistical Analysis Strategy

The empirical analysis proceeds in three sequential steps: descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate. Statistical significance is evaluated at the conventional $\alpha = .05$ threshold throughout.

Step 1: Descriptive Analysis

Frequency distributions and weighted percentages are reported for all key variables to characterise the analytical sample. For continuous variables (age, political ideology, sexual

satisfaction), weighted means and standard deviations are reported. The distribution of the dependent variable across the full valid sample ($N = 3,791$) is presented to contextualise the strongly asymmetric split between Group 1 (89.3%) and Group 2 (10.7%).

Step 2: Bivariate Analysis

For continuous predictors (age, political ideology, and sexual satisfaction), independent-samples t-tests are used to compare Group 1 and Group 2 on each variable. Levene's test for equality of variances is reported where it reaches significance, and the appropriate degrees of freedom are adjusted accordingly. For categorical predictors (gender, education, relationship status, religious identity) and the five ordinal attitude items (P6_1–P6_5), Pearson chi-square tests of independence are computed alongside Cramér's V as a standardised effect size measure. While the P6 attitude items are treated as continuous in the multivariate model to preserve degrees of freedom, they are retained as discrete ordinal categories in this bivariate stage to allow for detailed cross-tabulation and cell-residual analysis. Adjusted standardised residuals are reported for each cell to identify which specific categories drive statistically significant associations. A cell-level significance threshold of $|SR| > 1.96$ is applied.

Step 3: Multivariate Analysis, Binomial Logistic Regression

A binomial logistic regression is estimated to identify independent predictors of the permissive response (Group 2: paying for sex is not infidelity). The dependent variable is coded 0 (Group 1, infidelity) versus 1 (Group 2, not infidelity); the model therefore estimates the log-odds of Group 2 membership. All independent variables described in Section 3.3 are entered simultaneously in a single block, with no stepwise selection, to obtain estimates of each predictor's unique contribution net of all others.

Reference categories are as follows: gender (male), relationship status (partnered), educational level (higher education), and religious identity (practicing Catholic). For categorical variables, dummy coding is applied. Coefficient estimates (B), standard errors (SE), Wald Z -statistics, p -values, and odds ratios ($OR = \exp(B)$) are reported. Model fit is assessed using the McFadden pseudo- R^2 (McFadden, 1974) and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). No formal goodness-of-fit test (e.g., Hosmer–Lemeshow) is applied, as this test is sensitive to large samples and is not routinely used as the primary fit criterion for nationally representative survey data of this size.

3.5 Data Processing and Software

All statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi. Data were imported directly from the CIS-supplied dataset in .sav format. The CIS post-stratification weight (PESO) was applied throughout.

The logistic regression is estimated using listwise deletion: cases with missing data on any predictor included in the model are excluded from the regression sample. This reduced the effective regression sample from 3,791 (bivariate valid cases) to $N = 3,178$ (net loss: 613 cases, or 16.2% of the bivariate sample; 15.9% of the original 3,854 completed interviews). The pattern and potential consequences of this missingness are discussed in Chapter V (Section 5.9).

3.6 Research Design and Limitations

The study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative design. Data were collected at a single point in time, which means the results can identify associations between variables but cannot establish causal directionality. Observed associations may reflect cohort effects, period effects, or unmeasured third variables. All variables are based on respondents' self-reports and are therefore subject to the standard limitations of self-report measurement, including subjective interpretation of item wording and social desirability bias. The CATI methodology, in particular, may lead to underreporting of socially sensitive attitudes around paid sex and infidelity norms. Finally, the single-item binary operationalisation of the dependent variable, while necessary given the structure of the CIS instrument, cannot capture the nuance, conditionality, or ambivalence that respondents may apply to the concept of infidelity in practice.

4 Results

4.1 Description of the Sample

In terms of gender, the sample is approximately balanced. The mean age is 50.12 years. Regarding educational attainment, the largest group holds lower secondary qualifications (28.3%), followed by those with higher education (24.8%). Concerning religious identification, non-practising Catholics constitute the largest category (35.0%), followed by atheists (16.5%) and practising Catholics (16.1%). Of the 3,770 respondents who had previously had at least one partner, 70.3% reported being in a current relationship at the time of the interview (the relationship-status analyses in Section 4.2.4 are based on the 3,707 of these respondents who also gave a valid answer on the dependent variable). On the political ideology scale (1 = far left, 10 = far right), the sample positions slightly left of centre ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 2.71$). Sexual satisfaction, measured on a scale from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (not at all satisfied), yields a mean of 2.21 ($SD = 1.24$); respondents who reported having no current sex life (category 7) and those with NS/NC responses were excluded from this variable.

The dependent variable, P2_7, is the seventh item of battery question P2 (“Having sexual relations with a person to whom one pays”), whether paying for sex constitutes infidelity in a relationship. The distribution is strongly asymmetric: among the 3,791 valid respondents, 89.3% ($n = 3,387$) answered affirmatively (Group 1: infidelity) and 10.7% ($n = 404$) answered negatively (Group 2: not infidelity). Full sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics (N = 3,854)

Variable	Category	%	(n)
Gender	Men	48.5	1,871
	Women	51.5	1,983
Age	M = 50.12 (SD = 17.94)		
Education	No formal education	4.5	172
	Primary	11.7	452
	Lower secondary	28.3	1,091
	Upper secondary	15.3	589
	Vocational training	14.8	572
	Higher education	24.8	955
	Religious identity	Practising Catholic	16.1
	Non-practising Catholic	35.0	1,350
	Other religion	5.3	203
	Agnostic	11.6	447
	Indifferent / non-believer	12.9	497
	Atheist	16.5	635
Relationship status	In a relationship	70.3	2,648
	Not in a relationship	29.7	1,122
Political ideology	Mean = 4.82 (SD = 2.71)		
Sexual satisfaction	Mean = 2.21 (SD = 1.24)		
Paying for sex = infidelity?	Yes, Group 1 (infidelity)	89.3	3,387
	No, Group 2 (not infidelity)	10.7	404

Data source: CIS, 2025.

4.2 Bivariate Analyses

4.2.1 Age and Political Ideology

Age shows a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t(3,784) = -9.47, p < .001$). Respondents who classify paying for sex as infidelity (Group 1) are on average notably younger ($M = 48.06, SD = 17.24$) than those who do not (Group 2: $M = 56.84, SD = 17.66$), with a mean difference of 8.78 years. Political ideology does not differ significantly between groups ($t(3,423) = -0.15, p = .882$): both groups score nearly identically on the 1–10 left-right scale (Group 1: $M = 4.77, SD = 2.69$; Group 2: $M = 4.79, SD = 2.80$).

Table 2 Independent Samples T-Test Results: Age and Political Ideology by Infidelity Perception Group

Variable	Group 1 (Infidelity) M (SD)	Group 2 (Not Infidelity) M (SD)	t	df	p
Age (years)	48.06 (17.24)	56.84 (17.66)	-9.47	3,784	< .001
Political ideology	4.77 (2.69)	4.79 (2.80)	-0.15	3,423	.882

Note. Group 1 (infidelity) n varies: Age = 3,399; Ideology = 3,075. Group 2 (not infidelity) n varies: Age = 387; Ideology = 350. Weights rounded to nearest integer (Jamovi).

4.2.2 Gender Differences in Infidelity Perception

The association between gender and the perception of paying for sex as infidelity is statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 24.9, p < .001$), though the effect size is weak (Cramér's $V = 0.081, N = 3,791$). Among men, 13.2% classified paying for sex as not constituting infidelity (Group 2), compared to 8.2% among women. The standardised residuals confirm that men are significantly over-represented in Group 2 ($SR = +4.99$) and under-represented in Group 1 ($SR = -4.99$), while women display the inverse pattern ($SR = +4.99$ in Group 1, $SR = -4.99$ in Group 2). Both residuals exceed the ± 1.96 threshold, indicating statistically significant cell deviations from expected frequencies.

Table 3 Gender × Infidelity Perception

Gender	Group 1 (Infidelity) n (%)	Group 2 (Not Infidelity) n (%)	Total n	SR (G1)	SR (G2)
Men	1,608 (86.8%)	245 (13.2%)	1,852	-4.99	+4.99
Women	1,780 (91.8%)	159 (8.2%)	1,939	+4.99	-4.99
Total	3,387 (89.3%)	404 (10.7%)	3,791	-	-

4.2.3 Educational Differences in Infidelity Perception

Educational level is the categorical variable with the strongest bivariate association with the dependent variable ($\chi^2(6) = 83.3$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.149$, $N = 3,775$). The proportion classifying paying for sex as not constituting infidelity (Group 2) decreases with higher educational attainment, from 21.8% among those with no formal education to 7.0% among those with higher education. Standardised residuals exceed $|\pm 1.96|$ for all substantive education categories, confirming significant over-representation in Group 2 for the three lowest levels (no formal education, primary, and lower secondary) and significant under-representation for the three higher levels (upper secondary, vocational training, and higher education).

Table 4 Education × Infidelity Perception

Education	Group 1 (Infidelity) n (%)	Group 2 (Not Infidelity) n (%)	Total n	SR (G1)	SR (G2)
No formal education	131.5 (78.2%)	36.7 (21.8%)	168.2	-4.77	+4.77
Primary	348.8 (82.3%)	74.9 (17.7%)	423.6	-4.93	+4.93
Lower secondary	932.8 (86.5%)	145.6 (13.5%)	1,078.4	-3.52	+3.52
Upper secondary	547.9 (93.5%)	37.9 (6.5%)	585.9	+3.60	-3.60

Education	Group 1 (Infidelity) n (%)	Group 2 (Not Infidelity) n (%)	Total n	SR (G1)	SR (G2)
Vocational training	527.2 (92.4%)	43.1 (7.6%)	570.3	+2.64	-2.64
Higher education	880.1 (93.0%)	65.8 (7.0%)	945.9	+4.31	-4.31
Other	3.1 (100.0%)	0.0 (0.0%)	3.1	+0.61	-0.61
Total	3,371 (89.3%)	404 (10.7%)	3,775	-	-

Note. $\chi^2(6) = 83.3$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.149$. $N = 3,775$. Weighted cell counts. Cell percentages are row percentages (% within each education category). SR = standardised residual (adjusted). The Other category ($n \approx 3$ weighted) has near-zero expected frequency; its standardised residual should be interpreted with caution. Reference: Higher education (Superiores).

4.2.4 Relationship Status

Relationship status (P4) shows a statistically significant association with the dependent variable ($\chi^2(1) = 10.2$, $p = .001$), though the effect size is very weak (Cramér's $V = 0.053$, $N = 3,707$). Among partnered respondents, 9.4% classified paying for sex as not constituting infidelity (Group 2), compared to 12.9% among single respondents. Standardised residuals confirm that partnered respondents are significantly over-represented in Group 1 (SR = +3.20) and under-represented in Group 2 (SR = -3.20), with single respondents displaying the inverse pattern. Both residuals exceed the ± 1.96 threshold.

Table 5 Relationship Status \times Infidelity Perception

Relationship Status	Group 1 (Infidelity) n (%)	Group 2 (Not Infidelity) n (%)	Total n	SR (G1)	SR (G2)
In a relationship	2,376 (90.6%)	246 (9.4%)	2,621	+3.20	-3.20
Not in a relationship	946 (87.1%)	140 (12.9%)	1,086	-3.20	+3.20
Total	3,322 (89.6%)	386 (10.4%)	3,707	-	-

Note. $\chi^2(1) = 10.2$, $p = .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.053$. $N = 3,707$. Cell percentages are row percentages. SR = standardised residual (adjusted). Respondents with no prior relationship history excluded (P4 codes 0, 6, 8, 9).

4.2.5 Religiosity Differences in Infidelity Perception

The association between religious self-identification and the perception of paying for sex as infidelity does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance at the bivariate level ($\chi^2(5) = 9.42$, $p = .093$, Cramér's $V = 0.051$, $N = 3,695$). The proportion classifying the behaviour as not constituting infidelity ranges from 7.5% among agnostics to 12.1% among indifferent respondents. No standardised residual exceeds ± 1.96 , indicating that no individual religious category is significantly over- or under-represented in either group when considered in isolation. Practising Catholics show similar distributions across both groups (90.0% in Group 1 vs. 10.0% in Group 2).

Table 6 Religious Identity \times Infidelity Perception

Religious Identity	Group 1 (Infidelity) n (%)	Group 2 (Not Infidelity) n (%)	Total n	SR (G1)	SR (G2)
Practising Catholic	538.6 (90.0%)	60.0 (10.0%)	598.7	+0.42	-0.42
Non-practising Catholic	1,174.7 (88.2%)	157.1 (11.8%)	1,331.9	-1.91	+1.91
Other religion	181.9 (91.8%)	16.3 (8.2%)	198.2	+1.08	-1.08
Agnostic	410.8 (92.5%)	33.4 (7.5%)	444.2	+2.20	-2.20
Indifferent / non- believer	434.3 (87.9%)	59.8 (12.1%)	494.0	-1.23	+1.23
Atheist	565.6 (90.1%)	61.9 (9.9%)	627.5	+0.59	-0.59
Total	3,306 (89.5%)	389 (10.5%)	3,695	-	-

Note. $\chi^2(5) = 9.42$, $p = .093$, Cramér's $V = 0.051$. $N = 3,695$. Not statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$. Cell percentages are row percentages. SR = standardised residual (adjusted).

4.2.6 Sexual Attitude Items (P6_1–P6_3)

A series of chi-square tests was conducted to examine the bivariate association between three of the five sexual attitude items (P6_1–P6_3) and the dependent variable. P6_4 and P6_5 are included in the multivariate model (§4.3) but are not presented in the bivariate analysis as they do not carry independent directional expectations. Each item was measured on a five-point

Likert scale from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly disagree). Two of the three items show statistically significant associations with P2_7 at the $\alpha = .05$ level (P6_1 and P6_3); P6_2 does not reach significance.

The item P6_1 (whether society still harbours sexual prejudice) shows a significant association with the dependent variable ($\chi^2(4) = 38.11$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.101$, $N = 3,739$). The proportion classifying paying for sex as not constituting infidelity is lowest among those who strongly agree (9.9%) and agree (9.0%) that society harbours sexual prejudice, and highest among those who strongly disagree (21.8%). The standardised residual for the Strongly disagree category in Group 2 ($SR = +5.98$) is the largest observed across all five attitude items, confirming marked over-representation of permissive responses in that subgroup.

Table 7 Chi-Square Tests: Sexual Attitude Items (P6_1–P6_3) \times Infidelity Perception

Attitude item	$\chi^2(4)$	p	Cramér's V	N
P6_1: Society still harbours sexual prejudice	38.11	< .001	.101	3,739
P6_2: Anything goes if consensual	8.28	.082	.047	3,746
P6_3: Men have greater sexual needs than women	19.68	< .001	.073	3,652

Note. $df = 4$ for all tests. Items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree, 5 = Strongly disagree).

The item P6_2 (whether anything goes between consenting adults) does not show a statistically significant bivariate association with the dependent variable ($\chi^2(4) = 8.28$, $p = .082$, Cramér's $V = 0.047$, $N = 3,746$). The distribution of Group 2 responses across agreement levels is relatively stable, ranging from 6.2% among those who disagree to 11.2% among those who strongly disagree. No standardised residual exceeds ± 1.96 ; the largest observed is +2.51 for the Disagree category in Group 1.

The item P6_3 (whether men have higher sex drives than women) shows a significant association with the dependent variable ($\chi^2(4) = 19.68$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = 0.073$, $N = 3,652$). Respondents who strongly disagree with this statement show the highest rate of Group 2 responses (14.5%), compared to 9.7% among those who strongly agree. The standardised residual for the Strongly disagree category in Group 2 ($SR = +4.34$) confirms significant over-representation of permissive responses in this subgroup. The Disagree category (code 4) also shows a significant positive residual in Group 1 ($SR = +2.37$), indicating over-representation of the infidelity classification.

4.3 Multivariate Analysis: Binomial Logistic Regression

To assess multicollinearity prior to the multivariate logistic regression, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among all continuous predictors. No correlation exceeded the conventional threshold of $r = .80$, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in the regression model (Table 8).

Table 8 Pearson Correlation Matrix for Continuous Variables

	EDAD	P6_1	P6_2	P6_3	P6_4	P6_5	P11	ESCIDEOL
EDAD	-	.106***	.067***	-.117***	-.227***	.296***	.161***	.019
P6_1	.106***	-	.127***	-.018	-.109***	.261***	-.002	.185***
P6_2	.067***	.127***	-	-.003	.031	.150***	.027	-.010
P6_3	-.117***	-.018	-.003	-	.277***	-.142***	-.002	-.119***
P6_4	-.227***	-.109***	.031	.277***	-	-.299***	.019	-.133***
P6_5	.296***	.261***	.150***	-.142***	-.299***	-	.040*	.210***
P11	.161***	-.002	.027	-.002	.019	.040*	-	-.029
ESCIDEOL	.019	.185***	-.010	-.119***	-.133***	.210***	-.029	-

Note. N varies by variable pair (listwise exclusion of NS/NC). * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. P6_1: Society harbours sexual prejudices; P6_2: Anything goes between consenting adults; P6_3: Men have higher sex drives; P6_4: Real sex requires penetration; P6_5: Sexual preferences can vary across a lifetime.

A binomial logistic regression was estimated to identify the independent predictors of classifying paying for sex as not constituting infidelity (Group 2: permissive response). The model includes age, political ideology, sexual satisfaction (P11), five sexual attitude items (P6_1 to P6_5), gender, relationship status (P4), educational level, and religious identity. The single-respondent “Other education category” ($n = 1$ raw case) was excluded as missing. Non-integer weights are not supported by the estimation procedure; PESO was rounded to the nearest integer. After listwise deletion, $N = 3,178$ cases were included. Model fit indices are McFadden $R^2 = 0.083$ and $AIC = 1,681$. All coefficient estimates represent the log-odds of $P2_7 = 2$ (not infidelity).

Regarding sociodemographic predictors, age exerts a significant positive effect on the probability of a permissive response ($B = 0.027$, $SE = 0.005$, $Z = 5.95$, $p < .001$; $OR = 1.028$):

each additional year of age is associated with a 2.8% increase in the odds of classifying the behaviour as not constituting infidelity, holding all other variables constant. Gender is significant: women are significantly less likely than men to give a permissive response ($B = -0.576$, $SE = 0.138$, $Z = -4.18$, $p < .001$; $OR = 0.562$). Being single versus partnered is associated with greater odds of a permissive response ($B = 0.581$, $SE = 0.148$, $Z = 3.94$, $p < .001$; $OR = 1.788$). Political ideology does not reach significance ($B = 0.001$, $p = .959$).

With respect to educational level (reference: higher education), respondents with lower secondary education ($B = 0.436$, $SE = 0.186$, $p = .019$; $OR = 1.547$), primary education ($B = 0.746$, $SE = 0.240$, $p = .002$; $OR = 2.108$), and no formal education ($B = 1.067$, $SE = 0.316$, $p < .001$; $OR = 2.906$) all display significantly higher odds of a permissive response compared to higher education graduates. Vocational training ($B = -0.010$, $p = .966$) and upper secondary education ($B = -0.022$, $p = .926$) do not differ significantly from the reference group. The Other education category was excluded from the model due to the near-zero cell count.

Regarding religious identity (reference: practising Catholic), non-practising Catholics ($B = 0.623$, $SE = 0.225$, $p = .006$; $OR = 1.864$), indifferent or non-believing respondents ($B = 0.892$, $SE = 0.272$, $p = .001$; $OR = 2.440$), and atheists ($B = 0.730$, $SE = 0.276$, $p = .008$; $OR = 2.075$) are all significantly more likely to give a permissive response. Respondents of other religions ($p = .679$) and agnostics ($p = .091$) do not differ significantly from the practising Catholic reference group.

Among the sexual attitude items, all of which are scored 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), disagreement that society harbours sexual prejudice (P6_1) is associated with a permissive response ($B = 0.166$, $SE = 0.052$, $p = .001$; $OR = 1.181$), as is disagreement that men have higher sex drives than women (P6_3; $B = 0.100$, $SE = 0.045$, $p = .028$; $OR = 1.105$): in both cases the positive coefficient means the odds of a permissive response rise as responses move from agreement toward disagreement. Conversely, agreement that anything goes between consenting adults (P6_2) is associated with higher odds of a permissive response, the negative coefficient ($B = -0.210$, $SE = 0.069$, $p = .002$; $OR = 0.811$) indicating that the odds fall as responses move toward disagreement. P6_4 (penetration-centric definition of sex; $p = .103$) and P6_5 (sexual preferences can vary over a lifetime; $p = .476$) are not statistically significant in the multivariate model. Sexual satisfaction (P11), although non-significant at the bivariate level ($p = .403$), is a significant predictor in the full model ($B = -0.205$, $SE = 0.057$, $Z = -3.57$, $p < .001$; $OR = 0.815$). Full regression results are reported in Table 9.

Table 9 Binomial Logistic Regression: Not Infidelity

Predictor	B	SE	Z	p	OR
Intercept	-4.505	0.483	-9.330	< .001	0.011
Age	0.027	0.005	5.948	< .001	1.028
P6_1 “Society still harbours sexual prejudice”	0.166	0.052	3.216	.001	1.181
P6_2 “Anything goes if consensual”	-0.210	0.069	-3.039	.002	0.811
P6_3 “Men have greater sexual needs than women”	0.100	0.045	2.201	.028	1.105
P6_4 “Real sex requires penetration”	0.082	0.050	1.632	.103	1.085
P6_5 “Sexual preferences can vary across a lifetime”	-0.036	0.050	-0.714	.476	0.965
Sexual satisfaction (P11)	-0.205	0.057	-3.569	< .001	0.815
Political ideology (ESCIDEOL)	0.001	0.026	0.051	.959	1.001
Gender: Female (ref: Male)	-0.576	0.138	-4.181	< .001	0.562
Relationship: Single (ref: Partnered)	0.581	0.148	3.939	< .001	1.788
Education (ref: Higher education)					
Vocational training	-0.010	0.234	-0.043	.966	0.990
Upper secondary	-0.022	0.234	-0.093	.926	0.978
Lower secondary	0.436	0.186	2.347	.019	1.547
Primary	0.746	0.240	3.104	.002	2.108
No formal education	1.067	0.316	3.380	< .001	2.906
Religion (ref: Practising Catholic)					
Non-practising Catholic	0.623	0.225	2.762	.006	1.864

Predictor	B	SE	Z	p	OR
Other religion	0.185	0.447	0.413	.679	1.203
Agnostic	0.506	0.299	1.692	.091	1.658
Indifferent / non-believer	0.892	0.272	3.280	.001	2.440
Atheist	0.730	0.276	2.649	.008	2.075

Note. N = 3,178 (listwise deletion). McFadden $R^2 = 0.083$. AIC = 1,681. Dependent variable: P2_7 = 2 (No, paying for sex is not infidelity). OR = odds ratio (exponentiated B). Weights rounded to nearest integer prior to estimation. Education Other (n = 1 raw case) excluded. Reference groups: Gender = Male; Relationship = Partnered; Education = Higher education (Superiores); Religion = Practising Catholic. P6_1: Society harbours sexual prejudice; P6_2: Anything goes if consensual; P6_3: Men have higher sex drives; P6_4: Real sex requires penetration; P6_5: Sexual preferences can vary across a lifetime. P11 scored 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (not at all satisfied).

5 Discussion

The central aim of this study was to examine the sociodemographic and attitudinal predictors of classifying the act of paying for sex as infidelity in a relationship. The findings are discussed in order of their theoretical and substantive relevance, followed by a consideration of model fit, study limitations, and directions for future research.

5.1 Age: A Counterintuitive Effect

The most consistent and statistically robust predictor in the model is age, which exerts a significant positive effect on the probability of a permissive response. Each additional year of age is associated with a 2.8% increase in the odds of classifying paying for sex as not constituting infidelity, net of all other variables. This runs counter to the conventional expectation that older cohorts hold more conservative moral attitudes (Twenge et al., 2015). One interpretation is generational rather than maturational: respondents aged 55 and above were socialised during the late Franco era and the Transition, when the structural separation between marriage, sexuality, and commercial sex was more culturally normalised for men (Boza Moreno, 2019). On this reading, the permissive response reflects an internalised norm that paid sex occupies a categorically distinct space from relational fidelity, rather than liberal attitudes towards sexuality per se, an interpretation further supported by the gender asymmetry discussed below. Alternatively, older respondents, having longer relational histories, may apply a more pragmatic or transactional definition of infidelity (Fernández et al., 2007; Negy et al., 2018). Disentangling these mechanisms would require longitudinal or qualitative data beyond the present scope.

5.2 Gender: A Persistent Asymmetry

Gender is a significant predictor at both bivariate and multivariate levels. Women are significantly less likely than men to give a permissive response, meaning men are nearly twice as likely to classify paying for sex as falling outside the definition of infidelity. The bivariate effect size, though significant, is weak, so gender alone explains only a modest share of the variance; nevertheless, the direction and stability of the effect across both levels is theoretically meaningful. This asymmetry is consistent with the double standard in sexual morality documented extensively in the literature (Fernández et al., 2007; Alonso-Martínez et al., 2023): paid sex has historically been framed as a male prerogative, with fidelity norms applied more rigorously to the emotional or romantic transgressions women are more likely to experience as infidelity-relevant (Fernández et al., 2007). It may also reflect differential exposure to

discourses on prostitution and exploitation: women, disproportionately represented among those who sell sex, may be more likely to read the transaction as relationally and ethically significant (Bellhouse et al., 2015; Meneses-Falcón, 2023). Crucially, the gender effect persists after controlling for political ideology and sexual attitudes, suggesting it is not fully mediated by the attitudinal variables captured here.

5.3 Education: An Inverse Gradient

Educational level shows the strongest bivariate association of any categorical variable and produces one of the clearest patterns in the regression. Compared to higher-education graduates, respondents at the three lowest levels - no formal education, primary, and lower secondary - are significantly more likely to give a permissive response, the effect being strongest at the lowest level (full odds ratios are reported in Table 9). Vocational training and upper secondary education do not differ significantly from the reference group, indicating that the threshold effect operates primarily at the lower end of the educational distribution. The direction of this gradient, lower education associated with more permissive classification, is the opposite of what a simple liberalism account would predict, since higher education is associated with more permissive sexual attitudes; it corresponds, however, to the alternative possibility explicitly anticipated in Section 2.7. A more plausible interpretation is that higher attainment brings greater exposure to feminist and gender-equality frameworks within which paid sex is framed as structurally coercive and therefore morally incompatible with a consensual relationship (Ranea Triviño, 2020; Delgado Álvarez, 2018). Alternatively, the gradient may reflect differential awareness of trafficking and exploitation discourses, more present in higher-education curriculums and media consumption (Meneses-Falcón & Urió, 2024; Pérez Freire, 2018). The pattern is not driven by age or ideology, both controlled in the model. The gradient thus runs opposite to the conventional liberalism expectation, with lower attainment associated with greater permissiveness rather than greater conservatism.

5.4 Religious Identity: Bivariate Null, Multivariate Signal

At the bivariate level, religious identity does not reach conventional significance, with no markedly divergent pattern across denominational categories. The multivariate model, however, reveals a more structured picture once age, gender, and education are controlled: non-practising Catholics, non-believers and indifferent respondents, and atheists are all significantly more likely than practising Catholics to give a permissive response, while agnostics narrowly miss significance. The bivariate null is therefore likely a suppression effect,

with the confounding influence of age and education masking the underlying denominational gradient. Once these are held constant, the expected pattern emerges: practising Catholics, for whom the moral prohibition on paid sex is explicitly doctrinal, are the strictest classifiers. This is consistent with research in Catholic-majority societies showing that active religious practice, rather than nominal affiliation, drives sexual conservatism, particularly salient in Spain, where the Catholic Church's role in the moral regulation of commercial sex was mediated by intensity of observance rather than denominational identity alone (Boza Moreno, 2019; Adriaenssens et al., 2025). The non-significance of agnostics relative to practicing Catholics merits further investigation; it may reflect positional ambiguity on moral-religious questions rather than a genuinely distinct attitude pattern.

5.5 Relationship Status

Being single is associated with greater odds of a permissive response than being partnered. The direction is theoretically intuitive: respondents not currently in a relationship may apply the concept of infidelity less personally or urgently, engaging with the question in a more abstract or detached manner. A further mechanism is self-serving attribution: partnered respondents, for whom the scenario is personally relevant, may be motivated to classify it as infidelity to affirm the boundaries of their own relationship (Fernández et al., 2007; Negy et al., 2018). The effect is moderate in size and robust across both analytic levels, making it one of the more interpretively clean findings in the study.

5.6 Sexual Attitudes: Perceived Prejudice, Consent, and Gendered Beliefs

Disagreement that Spanish society still harbours widespread sexual prejudices (P6_1) is associated with a permissive response in the multivariate model. Because the item is scored 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), a positive coefficient means that respondents who disagree, those who do not perceive prevailing societal prejudice, are more likely to classify paying for sex as not constituting infidelity. Conversely, those who agree that sexual prejudices remain widespread apply stricter fidelity boundaries, consistent with social norms theory: when individuals perceive that conservative sexual norms dominate public life, they tend to align their own judgements with those norms rather than resist them.

Agreement that anything goes between consenting adults (P6_2) is associated with higher odds of a permissive response. This is the expected direction for a liberal sexual-permissiveness item: respondents who endorse broad consensual freedom are correspondingly more inclined to place paying for sex outside the domain of relational infidelity. The association does not

reach significance at the bivariate level but emerges as a significant independent predictor once the other variables are controlled. Disagreement that men have greater sexual needs than women (P6_3) likewise predicts a more permissive classification, although the effect is weak ($p = .028$); one tentative reading is that rejecting the notion of an innate male sexual imperative reflects a more gender-egalitarian outlook, within which paying for sex is judged less as a relational betrayal than as a private transaction between consenting adults. P6_4 and P6_5 are not significant in the multivariate model, consistent with their bivariate associations being largely attributable to age confounding.

5.7 Sexual Satisfaction: A Suppressor Effect

Sexual satisfaction (P11) is non-significant at the bivariate level but emerges as a significant negative predictor in the multivariate model. This is diagnostic of a suppressor effect mediated by age: age correlates positively with both sexual dissatisfaction and permissive classification, so in the bivariate analysis these two age-driven tendencies cancel out, masking the relationship. Once age is controlled, the independent association becomes visible: greater sexual dissatisfaction is associated with stricter classification of paying for sex as infidelity. One mechanism is that respondents dissatisfied in their sex lives may be more sensitive to the relational implications of paid sex, experiencing it as a more threatening substitution; alternatively, dissatisfaction may correlate with relational insecurity, itself associated with stricter infidelity boundaries (Kruger et al., 2013). The finding reinforces the case for multivariate analysis: bivariate null results do not preclude meaningful independent effects once confounding age-related variance is removed.

5.8 Political Ideology: Non-Significant Predictor

Political ideology (left-right self-placement) is non-significant at both the bivariate and multivariate levels. This null is noteworthy given the substantial literature linking right-wing orientation to sexual conservatism (Ludwig et al., 2023; Vlase & Grasso, 2021). Several explanations are plausible. First, in Spain attitudes towards prostitution do not map neatly onto the left-right axis: abolitionist and regulationist positions exist within both the left (feminist abolitionism vs. sex-work rights) and the right (Catholic moralism vs. libertarian non-interference) (Antolínez-Merchán et al., 2025; Méndez-Juez et al., 2023). Second, the specific question, whether paying for sex constitutes infidelity, may be perceived as relational rather than political, decoupling it from ideological self-identification. Third, the 1–10 scale may be too coarse to capture the relevant distinctions. Future studies should consider multi-item

measures of sexual conservatism or moral traditionalism rather than a single self-placement scale.

5.9 Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusions

The model achieves a McFadden R^2 of 0.083, modest in absolute terms but consistent with the fact that pseudo- R^2 measures in logistic regression are structurally lower than their OLS counterparts and cannot be compared against OLS benchmarks (Hosmer et al., 2013). The unexplained variance reflects the limits of cross-sectional survey data in capturing the full range of factors shaping moral attitudes, and the AIC of 1,681 provides a baseline for future model comparisons. The listwise deletion of 613 cases (16.2% of the valid sample) is a limitation worth acknowledging: if missingness is systematically related to a predictor - for example, older or less-educated respondents being more likely to decline the attitude items - the estimates may be subject to attrition bias, which multiple imputation could address in future work.

Several further limitations should be acknowledged. First, the dependent variable is a single binary item that cannot capture the nuance, ambivalence, or conditionality with which respondents may apply the concept of infidelity. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference: associations between, for example, age or education and moral classification may reflect cohort effects, period effects, or unmeasured confounders. Third, the telephone methodology (CATI) may introduce social desirability bias, particularly on questions touching paid sex and relationship norms, potentially leading to underreporting of permissive attitudes. Fourth, the analysis relies on self-reported satisfaction and attitude items, subject to the standard limitations of self-report measurement.

Several directions for future research emerge from these findings. The counterintuitive age effect warrants further investigation using cohort-based designs or qualitative methods to distinguish generational socialisation from life-course mechanisms. The attitudinal predictors would also benefit from more differentiated measures, particularly items distinguishing consent within versus outside market contexts, a distinction the single P6 battery cannot capture. The suppressor dynamic between age and sexual satisfaction suggests that bivariate analyses of attitude predictors in this domain may be systematically misleading; researchers in sexual sociology should routinely report multivariate alongside bivariate results. Finally, the non-significance of political ideology in the Spanish context invites comparative cross-national work examining whether this decoupling is context-specific or more general.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a substantive contribution to the literature on sexual norms and infidelity in contemporary Spain. Using a large, nationally representative sample and a multivariate design, it shows that classifying paid sex as infidelity is a socially structured attitude, shaped by age, gender, education, religious practice, relationship status, and sexual attitudes in theoretically coherent ways. The findings challenge both a simple liberalism account (higher education yielding more permissive outcomes) and a simple ideological-conservatism model (right-wing ideology yielding stricter classification), pointing instead to a more complex landscape in which feminist-adjacent educational exposure, doctrinal religious commitment, and personal relational context combine to produce moral boundary-drawing. The study thereby grounds ongoing policy debates around the regulation of prostitution in Spain and the broader question of how sexual-market transactions are morally integrated into or excluded from the relational scripts governing intimate life.

6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer a single question: what sociodemographic and attitudinal factors predict whether a Spanish adult classifies paying for sex as infidelity within a romantic relationship? This study found that an overwhelming majority of Spanish adults, 89.3%, classify paying for sex as infidelity, confirming that for most of the population the commercial nature of the transaction does not dissolve its relational significance. The remaining 10.7% who regard it as falling outside the domain of infidelity are not a random residual: their responses are systematically predicted by a combination of sociodemographic position and sexual attitudes, and the present study identifies those predictors with empirical precision for the first time in the Spanish context.

The analysis identifies a coherent set of predictors. Classifying paid sex as infidelity is more likely among women, practicing Catholics (once age and education are controlled), and partnered respondents, and less likely among older cohorts, a pattern best read as generational rather than developmental, reflecting the historical normalisation of commercial sex as a categorically distinct domain among Spaniards socialised under the Francoist regime. At the attitudinal level, rejecting the belief that men have greater sexual needs predicts more permissive classification, while perceiving widespread sexual prejudice in Spanish society predicts stricter classification. Political ideology produces a clean null result at both analytic levels, reflecting the cross-partisan character of anti-prostitution sentiment in contemporary Spain.

One finding in particular departs from the conventional expectation. Contrary to a simple liberalism account, lower educational attainment is associated with more, not less, permissive classification: higher education appears to increase exposure to feminist and exploitation-focused frameworks within which commercial sex is construed as structurally coercive and therefore as an unambiguous relational transgression. This reversal points to a broader conclusion: whether paying for sex constitutes infidelity is not reducible to a liberal-conservative axis but depends on the specific moral frameworks through which commercial sex is interpreted.

Sexual satisfaction operates as a suppressor variable in the multivariate model: non-significant in bivariate analysis, it emerges as a meaningful independent predictor once age is controlled, with lower relational satisfaction associated with stricter infidelity classification. This finding demonstrates a broader methodological lesson of the thesis, that bivariate null results can conceal genuine independent associations when correlated confounders are left uncontrolled,

and that multivariate approaches are indispensable for disentangling attitude determinants in survey data.

The contribution of this thesis is twofold. Empirically, it offers the first nationally representative quantitative examination of infidelity classification with respect to commercially mediated sex in Spain, showing that public attitudes, while condemnatory, vary in predictable and theoretically interpretable ways across the population. Theoretically, it demonstrates that the boundary between market transaction and relational betrayal is not arbitrary but is structured by gender, generation, religious practice, and educational exposure. For the ongoing legislative debate on the regulation of prostitution in Spain, this matters: frameworks that assume uniform public consensus on the relational meaning of commercial sex risk misreading how different segments of the population draw that line.

This study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, the dependent variable is a single binary item that cannot capture the nuance with which individuals apply the concept of infidelity, and listwise deletion of roughly 16% of valid cases may introduce attrition bias if missingness is non-random. Future research would benefit from longitudinal and qualitative designs capable of probing the mechanisms behind the counterintuitive findings identified here, particularly the reversed education gradient, and from attitude measures of finer resolution than the present battery. These constraints acknowledged, the thesis offers a rigorous account of where Spanish society draws, and does not draw, the line between commerce and infidelity.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Declaration of Use of Generative AI

I, the undersigned, Alexander Harmsen, student of Business Administration and Management (ADE) at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, in submitting my Bachelor's Thesis entitled “Public Attitudes Toward Commercial Sex as Infidelity: A Quantitative Analysis of Spanish Society”, declare that I have used the generative Artificial Intelligence tool ChatGPT, or other similar generative AI tools, only in the context of the activities described below:

1. Brainstorming research ideas: used to ideate and outline areas of research.
2. Critic: to find counterarguments to a specific thesis I intended to defend.
3. References: used together with other tools, such as Science, to identify preliminary references that I subsequently checked and validated.
4. Methodologist: to discover methods applicable to specific research problems.
5. Code Interpreter: Used to perform preliminary data analysis.
6. Style and language proofreader: to improve the linguistic and stylistic quality of the text.
7. Reviewer: to receive suggestions on how to improve and refine the work at various levels of rigour.
8. Translator: to translate texts from one language to another.

I affirm that all the information and content presented in this work are the product of my own research and individual effort, except where otherwise indicated and due credit has been given (I have included the appropriate references in the TFG and have specified the purposes for which ChatGPT or other similar tools were used). I am aware of the academic and ethical implications of submitting non-original work and accept the consequences of any breach of this declaration.

Date: 3 June 2026

Signature: 

Annex 2: Search Strategy

This literature review was conducted using a systematic search strategy across multiple electronic databases. The primary databases consulted were Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Dialnet, and PsycINFO. Searches were conducted during the period January to April 2025 and covered publications from 2005 to 2025, with seminal theoretical works published prior to 2005 included where considered foundational to the conceptual framework. The primary languages of retrieval were English and Spanish, reflecting both the international character of the relevant scholarly literature and the substantial Spanish-language production addressing local empirical and legal questions regarding prostitution and sexual attitudes.

Search terms were selected to capture the principal thematic domains of the review. In English, terms included: “infidelity perceptions,” “sexual infidelity,” “paying for sex,” “sex work attitudes,” “prostitution attitudes,” “sexual permissiveness,” “cohort effects sexuality,” “religious norms sexuality,” and “gender sexual attitudes.” In Spanish, equivalent terms included: “infidelidad,” “actitudes hacia la prostitución,” “percepción de la prostitución,” “normas sexuales,” and “satisfacción sexual en España.” Results were filtered to include peer-reviewed empirical articles, book chapters from established academic publishers, and reports from recognised research institutions. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on clinical populations, were unavailable in full text, or addressed neither infidelity norms nor attitudes toward commercial sex directly. Table A1 summarises the search criteria.

Table A1 Literature Search: Databases, Search Terms, and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Details
Search databases	Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Dialnet, PsycINFO
Date range	2005–2025; seminal works prior to 2005 included where foundational
Languages	English and Spanish
Search terms (English)	infidelity perceptions; sexual infidelity; paying for sex; sex work attitudes; prostitution attitudes; sexual permissiveness; cohort effects sexuality; religious norms sexuality; gender sexual attitudes; sexual satisfaction relationships

Criterion	Details
Search terms (Spanish)	infidelidad; actitudes hacia la prostitución; percepción de la prostitución; normas sexuales; religiosidad y sexualidad; desigualdad de género y sexualidad; satisfacción sexual
Inclusion criteria	peer-reviewed empirical articles, books, and book chapters; studies measuring attitudes or perceptions toward infidelity, sex work, or sexual norms; Spanish-context studies or comparative studies including Spain; full text available
Exclusion criteria	Non-empirical or purely theoretical works (unless foundational); studies with no relevance to infidelity or prostitution attitudes; studies focusing exclusively on clinical populations; full text unavailable

Note. Search conducted January–April 2025.