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An Analysis of the Function of Systemic Variables within Forgiving and Unforgiving Families

Paul Byron Gilbert
AN ANALYSIS OF THE FUNCTION OF SYSTEMIC VARIABLES
WITHIN FORGIVING AND UNFORGIVING FAMILIES

By
Paul Byron Gilbert

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The members of the Committee approve the dissertation of Paul Byron Gilbert defended on June 16, 2004

Christine A. Readdick
Professor Directing Dissertation

Gary W. Peterson
Outside Committee Member

Mary W. Hicks
Committee Member

Marsha L. Rehm
Committee Member

Approved:

Ronald Mullis, Interim Chair, Department of Family and Child Sciences

Penny Ralston, Dean, College of Human Sciences

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
I dedicate this work to my best friend and wife, Susan, who has faithfully journeyed with me these past 12 years…
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ABSTRACT

The benefits of forgiveness for both interpersonal relationships and individual functioning are well established. In light of the fact that there are no known studies specifically examining the relationship between forgiveness and Olson’s Circumplex Model of family functioning, this study was an initial, exploratory effort aimed at examining the relationship of systemic variables to forgiving and unforgiving families. The Circumplex variables of cohesion, adaptation, and communication were hypothesized to discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems. In addition, it was hypothesized that these forgiving and unforgiving family systems would demonstrate a relationship to Olson’s taxonomy of balanced/unbalanced family types. The overall relationship of the three Circumplex variables was found to discriminate between the forgiving (n=24) and unforgiving groups (n=7) that had been classified from a sample of 31 couples (\(p<.036\)). Specifically, adaptation accounted for the greatest amount of variance between the forgiving and unforgiving groups, although all three Circumplex variables were highly correlated and found to individually discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems. There was anecdotal evidence for utilizing Olson’s family type taxonomy to better understand forgiving and unforgiving family systems, although there was not a significant relationship demonstrated between balanced and unbalanced family types and forgiveness (\(p<.241\)). As expected there was a significant difference found between forgiving and unforgiving family systems on marital satisfaction (\(p<.01\)). While this study was a low-power, exploratory effort, the merging of the forgiveness and family systems fields yielded important variables and patterns to be explored in future research.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Emergence of the Forgiveness Field

The topic of forgiveness has attracted increased interest in the social sciences in the past 20 years, both as a psychological construct and as a relevant concept for empirical study and qualitative exploration (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). The John Templeton Foundation’s “Campaign for Forgiveness Research”, co-chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former President Jimmy Carter, with its efforts to fund 60 different research projects on the power of reconciliation and forgiveness (1999), is an example of the international interest that surrounds the topic of forgiveness. This increased interest signals a recognition that the forgiveness process is one that has important implications for the problem of human relating in the context of countries, societies, cultures, groups, families, and individuals. This recognition has reached even into the mainstream of political thought, as leaders of the Max Planck Society, Germany’s elite scientific club, have offered formal and public apologies to survivors and victims of Nazi medical experiments during World War II (Czuczka, 2001).

Part of this increased interest in the topic of forgiveness is due to the fact that the forgiveness process has been associated with an array of benefits, including growth in relational functioning (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000); longevity in marriage (Fenell, 1993); psychological healing (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000); sociological reparations among people in a specific situational and cultural context (Temoshok & Chandra, 2000); and improved physical health (Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000). Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1996) theorize that, “The paradox of forgiving seems to be this: As we abandon a focus on self and give a gift of acceptance to an offending other, we ourselves are often healed from the effects of that offense” (p. 111). There has also been much discussion and debate about the very nature of the forgiveness process itself, its correlates, its definition, and its theoretical framework. The complexities of these discussions, as well as the emerging yet still relatively small body of empirical research on the topic, provide great challenges to the fruitful exploration of the forgiveness process. Nonetheless, such exploration continues unabated in the forgiveness field, fueled by the notion that human growth and healing is in part contingent upon better understanding and grasping the essence of forgiveness.
Statement of Problem

Endemic to human nature and existence is the seemingly perpetual state of violence, anger, discord, and mistrust that surrounds human relationships and interactions of all types (Enright & North, 1998). No human institution, whether it is nations, cultures, schools, work places, marriages, or relationships, remains untainted from the effects of anger, hurt, resentment, and misunderstanding. Therefore, the challenge of human forgiveness is one that confronts all areas of society and that has implications for human relating, taking into account the hurts of the past, embracing the reality of problems in the present, and looking forward with a greater degree of hope to the future. For example, the simple act of apology has massive sociological implications (Tavuchis, 1991). According to this author, grounds for membership in a moral community include the acceptance of apology as a core value. The validity and stability of relationships and group affiliations in such a community is contingent upon the knowledge, acceptance, and conformity to group norms, such as apology. Worldwide, forgiveness as a social concept has numerous possible applications (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1994). For example, conducting an intervention with two children, one Arab and the other Israeli, by exploring such concepts as unconditionality, inherent equality, and forgiveness “may stop a cycle of revenge that only promises to escalate if we proceed to insist upon justice as an exclusive guide in resolving the problems of that region” (p. 78). The sociological darkness that surrounds such horrific problems as school violence, racial genocide, slavery, or war desperately needs an ideal and unifying framework that forgiveness can help provide.

On the micro level of personal relationships and in the area of marriages and families specifically, forgiveness has potential to heal relationships, to enhance personal development, and to facilitate interpersonal growth. There are many challenges to the growth and to the development of marriages and families, and it is assumed that chief among these problems is finding satisfactory ways for couples and families to negotiate and to resolve the inevitable conflictual situations and resultant negative feelings that arise within the home. This is particularly true, for example, in situations where there has been marital infidelity (Buss & Shackleford, 1997). If a couple or family does not have at least some level of insight into the forgiveness process, then relationship growth and enhancement can be greatly hindered for forgiver and offender.

Conversely, McCullough (2000) maintains that people in relationships exhibiting the characteristics of closeness, commitment, and satisfaction are more likely to forgive than those in relationships that do not have these characteristics. Thus, positive relational attributes such as these seem to be related in some way to the forgiveness process, and the forgiveness process itself seems to reinforce these relational attributes. Couples and families, then, must embrace a process of interpersonal forgiveness that carries them through difficulties and disagreements, to the degree possible depending upon the context, to a place where relationships are supported and encouraged.

As a consequence, those in the helping professions have increased opportunities to facilitate personal growth in relationships with families, couples, and individuals through the forgiveness process. Therapists who present themselves explicitly as religious carry out functions that were previously reserved for clergy (Lovinger, 1984).
Therapists of any philosophical or religious orientation, in fact, find themselves at the center of the relational healing process and are thus confronted with elements of the forgiveness process. Walrond-Skinner (1998), speaking as a marriage and family therapist, notes that therapists are only beginning to open themselves to utilizing forgiveness constructs in therapy, in part because such constructs have been misunderstood and wrongly defined, or categorized as purely religious.

Because of their epistemological framework (systems theory), though, family therapists, in particular, must have a basic understanding of the forgiveness process and the skills needed to facilitate such process. Marriage and family therapists must come to terms with the concept of forgiveness, embracing the idea that “family systems theory is the most compatible intervention strategy for addressing forgiveness concerns because clients frequently seek to repair relational injury occurring in the family-of-origin or current marriage and family” (Hargrave & Sells, 1998, p. 24). This makes the development, testing, and implementation of forgiveness models that can be utilized by marriage and family therapists all the more relevant and necessary. Certainly, therapists must possess an adequate working definition of interpersonal forgiveness before introducing such topic to clients (The Human Development Study Group, 1991).

Interest in forgiveness constructs and interventions increased exponentially in the 1990s, as a few investigators attempted to measure forgiveness interventions within a familial setting. While there have been several other studies that have examined various variables and their correlates related to forgiveness [e.g., attributions of blame (Boon & Sulsky, 1997); intentionality and revenge (Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994); obstacles to interpersonal compliance, (Roloff & Janiszewski, 1989); accommodation, (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991)] within a family, marriage, or romantic relationship context, interpersonal forgiveness and its correlates need to be examined and to be better understood within a systemic and marital/family therapy framework. Specifically, a pressing need in the forgiveness field is to better understand the systemic dynamics of the forgiveness process within marriages and families.

**Theoretical Framework: Interpersonal Forgiveness and General Systems Theory**

**Interpersonal Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is both interpersonal and intrapersonal, so when speaking of “interpersonal forgiveness” one is making reference to forgiveness that happens in a relational context (McCullough et al., 2000). Interpersonal forgiveness is a process that occurs between people rather than between people and objects or events (Enright & Coyle, 1998). Essentially, forgiveness is an internal response (intrapersonal) that has another person or persons (interpersonal) as its reference point (The Human Development Study Group, 1991). Thus, forgiveness may only involve the internal responses of one person, although reconciliation by definition will include at least two people and serves as the ideal following forgiveness (Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulos, & Freedman, 1992). These “intra” and “inter” distinctions are redefined by other researchers so that
forgiveness is viewed as intrapersonal and reconciliation as interpersonal (Worthington & Drinkard, 2000; McCullough & Worthington, 1994).

Hargrave and Sells (1997) take this idea of forgiveness and reconciliation a step further by inseparably linking the two and conceptualizing the forgiveness process as the restoration and redevelopment of lost trust in a fractured relationship. This seems to echo Worthington and DiBlasio (1990) and others who do not so easily divorce the two concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, in this paradigm, forgiveness necessitates some sort of relational transaction and is not simply or merely an internal response. The proposed study will adopt the Hargrave and Sell’s framework because of its systemic underpinnings and applications.

From a contextual family therapy perspective (Hargrave & Sells, 1997), forgiveness is used to restore and to repair family relationships through the release of resentment, the healing of emotional wounds, and the exoneration of the person causing injury from potential retaliation by the victim. Accordingly, the work of forgiveness is the effort made “in restoring love and trustworthiness to relationships so that victims and victimizers can put an end to destructive entitlement” (Hargrave & Sells, 1997, p. 43). In this framework, a balance of justice, trustworthiness, loyalty, merit, and entitlement between family members is viewed as necessary in order for there to be a functional level of relationship ethics. Accordingly, relational ethics assumes that a balance of giving and receiving is requisite to maintain relational existence and that destructive entitlement behavior and lack of trust results when such balance is not achieved.

The overall forgiveness process in families is conceptualized as involving two separate aspects, exonerating and the overt act of forgiving (Hargrave & Sells, 1997). Exoneration is more of an internal process whereby the victim gains insight and some form of understanding of the victimizer’s behavior, while the overt act of forgiving involves the victim and victimizer involving themselves in the restoration of love and trust in their relationship. Thus, forgiveness requires some specific act whereby the victim, who is justified in holding the victimizer responsible for the wrong behavior, is nonetheless given good reason for believing that the victimizer assumes responsibility and promises to act in a trustworthy manner in the future. The end result is the reestablishment of the relationship that was broken. This framework for interpersonal forgiveness is one that views forgiveness not merely in terms of the internal processing that takes place within the victim, but as an external process that will by necessity involve the victimizer as well. Conceptualizing interpersonal forgiveness in this way seems conducive to viewing forgiveness as an inherently systemic dynamic.

**Systems Theory**

General Systems Theory (GST) is a theory applied to systems of all types and is a way of conceptualizing the world as a place of interrelated objects (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Viewing the family as a system means examining it as a whole unit rather than all of its individual parts. The core assumption of GST is that any system, including a family, cannot be understood or comprehended by merely examining its individual components in isolation from one another, as “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (GST’s Composition Law). The emergent properties of a system only materialize from their specific arrangement with one another within the system. Within
human systems, such as the family, systems have the ability to self-reflect and to make observations about themselves, thus giving the system meaning and symbolic content.

When the family is conceptualized as a system, GST can be utilized to better understand intrafamily processes, such as communication, transactional patterns, boundaries, hierarchy, cohesion, adaptation, and functioning (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). These processes must be viewed as a product of the functioning of the entire system, not merely in terms of contributions of each individual family member. It is the relationships and dynamics between family members as a whole that give rise to systemic processes and values. Because it is this interplay among family members that give rise to systemic processes, family members are interdependent and exert mutual influence upon one another to maintain the homeostatic equilibrium and balance of the family system. Family processes reinforce each other through continuous feedback loops as the system strives to achieve equifinality (the ability to achieve the same level of functioning through different routes). Instituting change in a family system is difficult if it is merely attempted through minor structural improvements of family members (first-order change). Only through a higher-level second-order change that involves influence from outside the system can family systemic processes be altered permanently.

A number of taxonomies that have been developed to better understand systemic family functioning and change. One such classification is Olson’s (2000) Circumplex Model, which utilizes the dimensions of cohesion, adaptation, and communication to facilitate relational diagnoses of a family system. The major hypothesis of the model is that balanced couple and family systems tend to be more functional than unbalanced family systems.

Family cohesion is defined as “the emotional bonding that family members have towards one another” (Olson, 2000, p. 145). The four levels of cohesion are disengaged (very low), separated (low to moderate), connected (moderate to high), and enmeshed (very high). The separate and connected dimensions correspond to balanced levels of cohesion, while enmeshment and disengagement are associated with problematic (unbalanced) family functioning. Family adaptation is defined as the “amount of change in its leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules” (Olson, 2000, p. 147), with the focus being on how well systems balance stability versus change. The four levels of flexibility are rigid (very low), structured (low to moderate), flexible (moderate to high), and chaotic (very high). The structured and flexible dimensions correspond to balanced levels of adaptation, while rigid and chaotic are associated with problematic (unbalanced) family functioning. Communication is the final dimension of the Circumplex Model and is conceptualized as a facilitating dimension to cohesion and adaptation and is considered essential to fostering movement with the other two dimensions. Too much or too little first-order change is problematic, and second-order change from one type of system to another occurs more easily in balanced family types as the system incurs stress and challenges from outside the system. Unbalanced systems tend to become “stuck” in one system type.

The three core hypotheses derived from the Circumplex Model (Olson, 2000), then, are:

1. Balanced types of couples and families will generally function more adequately than unbalanced types
2. If a family’s expectations support more extreme patterns, the family will then operate in a functional manner as long as all the family members like the family that way (family satisfaction is measured to assess this hypothesis)

3. Balanced types of couples and families will have more positive communication compared to unbalanced systems

Taken together, the Circumplex Model and its hypotheses allow for the examination of a family system’s internal processing in order to determine levels of functioning.

Conclusion

Placing interpersonal forgiveness squarely within the context of GST and family systems theory, forgiveness will be seen as a function of the family system. Extrapolating from Hargrave and Sells’ (1997) conceptualization of forgiveness as contextually based in the family system, forgiveness can then be viewed as a family system value, or ethic. Forgiveness or unforgiveness is a process reinforced by every member of the system, with all mechanisms in the family functioning in such a way as to maintain the homeostatic balance of forgiveness or unforgiveness. When assessing, then, forgiving versus unforgiving family systems, Olsen’s Circumplex dimensions of cohesion, adaptation, and communication can be seen as elements and variables of systemic functioning that may foster or hinder the ethic of forgiveness in family systems.

Purpose of Investigation

The purpose of the current study was to conduct an analysis of the function of systemic variables within forgiving and unforgiving families. A “snapshot” of systemic dynamics for individual families was captured in order to measure and then to analyze systemic variables within forgiving and unforgiving family systems. In an attempt to link forgiveness theory and Olson’s taxonomy of family system functioning, two primary research questions were posed:

Research Questions

(1) Can the systemic variables of cohesion, adaptation, and communication be used to successfully discriminate between forgiving family systems and unforgiving family systems?

(2) What is the relationship between balanced and forgiving family systems and unbalanced and unforgiving family systems?

Two additional research questions were also postulated, the first in light of Olson’s (2000) own research linking family type and family satisfaction, and the second because of the researcher’s personal interest in the traditional links between religiosity and forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999):
(1a) Will forgiving family systems demonstrate significantly higher levels of satisfaction than unforgiving family systems?
(2a) Will forgiving family systems demonstrate significantly higher levels of religious involvement than unforgiving family systems?

**Hypotheses**

(1) Cohesion, adaptation, and communication will be variables that successfully discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems.
(2) There will be a positive and significant relationship between balanced and forgiving family systems and between unbalanced and unforgiving family systems.

It was further hypothesized that:
(1a) Forgiving family systems will demonstrate significantly higher levels of satisfaction than unforgiving family systems.
(1b) Forgiving family systems will demonstrate significantly higher levels of religious involvement than unforgiving family systems.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this investigation, the following definitions were employed:

**Discriminant Analysis** – a quantitative method of analysis used to predict group membership based upon a hypothesized set of variables.

**Empirical Literature** – written works in which quantitative or qualitative data is collected as a basis for the writing.

**Families** – those household units that include at least two parents, with a variable number of children. Couple dyads are designated as a “family”, even though data may be collected only from parents and not any respective children.

**Interpersonal Forgiveness** – a relational transaction that occurs within a relational context, between at least two people.

**Pilot Study** – the anecdotal study completed by the researcher prior to the collection of data for the main study for the purpose of testing the validity of the proposed criterion question.

**Abbreviations**

**ENRICH** – The pre-marital preparation test that measures relational dimensions such as satisfaction and communication between partners.

**FACES II** – The second version of the Family Adaptation and Cohesion Scale used to measure the systemic dynamics of families.
TRIM - The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory that purports to measure the motivational system that underlies the forgiving process.

Assumptions

In conducting this investigation, the researcher made the following assumptions:
1. Subjects’ responses were an accurate reflection of their genuine opinions.
2. Subjects understood and interpreted the survey items and questions correctly.
3. Area pastors, therapists, and couples were willing facilitators of the study.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following:
1. Sample size was determined in part by the willingness of area pastors and therapists to participate in the study.
2. It is unknown to what degree participants accommodated their responses to the fact that their partners were also participating in the study.

Delimitations

The researcher limited the study to the following:
1. Only married couples participated in the study.
2. Parents, not children, of family systems, completed surveys.
3. Data was collected in the spring of 2004.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The emerging data and studies over the past 20 years in the forgiveness literature have witnessed a corresponding, widespread development of models, definitions, and approaches to the construct of forgiveness. In fact, McCullough et al. (2000) note that the greatest challenge facing the forgiveness field is the lack of a clear, consensual definition of the forgiveness process. At the heart of the conceptual ambiguity facing the forgiveness field is whether or not forgiveness is: a process versus a decision, intrapersonal versus interpersonal, or a relational transaction versus a psychological response. The first section of this review will begin by highlighting these issues of conceptual ambiguity and definitional challenges related to the construct of forgiveness. Then, the dominant and competing paradigms/models for understanding the construct of forgiveness will be examined, along with the supporting empirical literature for each. The second section of the review will include an overview of those empirical studies in the literature that examine forgiveness and its correlates within a marriage, family, or romantic context. Included in this section will be an examination of forgiveness and its relationship to key variables in the proposed research hypotheses, including: (1) The Circumplex Model and other variables related to its cohesion, adaptation, and communication dimensions; (2) marital satisfaction; and (3) religious participation.

Definitional Focus and Forgiveness Models

Conceptual Ambiguity

Pioneers in the forgiveness field, the Human Development Study Group (1991) state that forgiveness is essentially an internal response (intrapersonal) that has another person or persons (interpersonal) as its reference point. From this perspective, forgiveness may only involve the internal responses of one person, while reconciliation by definition will include at least two people and serves as the ideal act following forgiveness (Enright et al., 1992). Freedman (1998) supports this idea that reconciliation is merely the ideal or possible result of the forgiveness process, not the goal. In contrast, Hargrave and Sells (1997) conceptualize forgiveness as the restoration and redevelopment of lost trust in a fractured relationship, emphasizing the relational nature
of forgiveness and its inherently contextual emphasis in terms of its impact on the family unit through the restoration of trusting relationships. This seems to echo Worthington and DiBlasio (1990) and others who do not so easily divorce these two concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, these “intra” and “inter” personal distinctions are redefined by these researchers so that forgiveness is viewed as intrapersonal and reconciliation as interpersonal (Worthington & Drinkard, 2000; McCullough & Worthington, 1994). In response to this definitional milieu, McCullough et al. (2000) propose a minimalist definition of the forgiveness process. They maintain that forgiveness is an “intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific, interpersonal context” (p. 9). These are not unimportant distinctions, as preliminary research seems to indicate that even those outside the forgiveness field in the general population have different conceptualizations about the nature of forgiveness and often view reconciliation as a part of the forgiveness process (Kanz, 2000).

Forgiveness as Process

Process models of forgiveness view forgiveness in terms of the phases or steps through which a person might proceed in his or her quest to reach an end point of “forgiveness.” Enright and colleagues, utilizing such a process model, define forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior towards one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love towards him or her” (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998, pp. 46-47). This model is based in the Kohlbergian tradition that essentially views forgiveness from a developmental process and hierarchical perspective and embraces the concept of abstract identity whereby humans are believed inherently worthy of receiving forgiveness. Enright’s Process Model of Forgiveness utilizes a 20-step process (Table 1) and focuses on one person forgiving another for an unjust offense. The forgiveness process itself is conceptualized as affecting change on the cognitive, affective, and emotional levels (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996).

Enright’s Process Model of Forgiveness and its relationship to psychological health has been specifically tested by measuring levels of forgiveness and personal variables (self-esteem, depression, anxiety, hope) after psychotherapeutic interventions in four studies. In the first (Hebl & Enright, 1993), a group of elderly females demonstrated significantly higher forgiveness profiles and lower levels of anxiety and depression than their control group counterparts, after taking part in an eight-week group in which the goal for each person was to forgive one person who had inflicted significant psychological hurt, as judged by the client.

In a second study (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995) college students who judged themselves to be love-deprived were able to forgive their parent(s) and thus exhibit lower anxiety, more hope, and greater self-esteem upon completing a 6-day workshop utilizing the forgiveness model. Similar results and trends were seen in a Freedman and Enright’s study (1996) in which female adult survivors of incest underwent a yearlong therapy program that utilized the process model of forgiveness as an intervention as the focus of the therapeutic regimen. This group of females gained
more than the control group in the areas of forgiveness and hope and decreased more in anxiety and depression.

Finally, in a study of post-abortion men (Coyle & Enright, 1997), men who underwent a 12-week intervention program demonstrated a significant gain in forgiveness and a significant reduction in anxiety, anger, and grief as compared to the control group. Thus, these four studies taken together provide substantive, empirical support for Enright’s Process Model of Forgiveness and make this model one of the most extensively researched in the forgiveness field.

Table 2.1: Enright’s Process Model of Forgiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective Phases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Uncovering Phase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Examination of psychological defenses (Kiel, 1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbor the anger (Trainer, 1981/1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate (Patton, 1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Awareness of cathexis (Droll, 1984/1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense (Droll, 1984/1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Insight that the injured party may be comparing oneself with the injurer (Kiel, 1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Realization that oneself may be permanently and adversely changed by the injury (Close, 1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Insight into a possible altered “just world” view (Flanigan, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Decision Phase</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>A change of heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working (North, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.1 – Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Cognitive, Behavioral, and Affective Phases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Commitment to forgive the offender (Neblett, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Reframing, through role taking, of who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context (Smith, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Empathy and compassion toward the offender (Cunningham, 1985; Droll, 1984/1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Acceptance/absorption of the pain (Bergin, 1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Giving a moral gift to the offender (North, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Finding meaning for oneself and others in the suffering and in the forgiveness process (Frankl, 1959)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Realization that oneself has needed others’ forgiveness in the past (Cunningham, 1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Insight that one is not alone (universality, support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Realization that oneself may have a new purpose in life because of the injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Awareness of decreased negative affect, and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table reproduced from Chapter 6, “The Process Model of Forgiveness” (Enright & Coyle) in Dimensions of Forgiveness, edited by Worthington, E. L. (1998). References included in parentheses are cited directly from Enright and are not included in this study’s bibliography.

Hill and Mullen (2000), like Enright, also conceptualize forgiveness as a discovery process but do so from a pastoral-theological perspective that embraces the religious dimensions of forgiveness. Patton (2000) reinforces this perspective by noting that “pastoral care is the effort of a.... faith group to offer healing, sustaining or guiding to those who acknowledge it as a source for help” (p. 281). “Human forgiveness is not
doing something but discovering something”, says Patton (1985, p. 16), echoing Hill and Mullen’s view that the act of asking forgiveness is something that occurs at the end of the personal discovery process. By highlighting religious dimensions such as repentance, the pastoral-care perspective embraces the idea that forgiveness may have lasting impact if it is grounded in the larger context of process and discovery.

Motivational models of forgiveness are those that identify an underlying set of personality traits or motivational attributes that either encourage or discourage the construct of forgiveness. McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997); McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, and Hight (1998); McCullough (2000); McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, and Johnson (2001); and McCullough and Hoyt (2002) conceptualize forgiveness as a two-factor motivational system that involves a complex set of psychological changes that takes place when an offense occurs. When an offended person forgives, his or her motivations to (a) seek revenge and (b) avoid contact with the offender decrease, while conversely his or her motivations to demonstrate benevolence and to resume a positive relationship with the offender increase. These two negative affective states that sometimes characterize interpersonal transactions in relational contexts are seen to correspond to two motivational systems that govern interpersonal responses to perceived offenses (McCullough, 2000). Specifically, McCullough and his colleagues contend that:

(a) Feelings of hurt-perceived attack correspond to a motivation to avoid personal and psychological contact with the offender (i.e., avoidance); and
(b) feelings of righteous indignation correspond to a motivation to seek revenge or see harm come to the offender (i.e., revenge). These distinct motivations, along with a motivation toward benevolence (which typically decreases when someone hurts, insults, or otherwise offends us) work in concert to create the psychological state that people refer to as “forgiveness” (McCullough, 2000, p. 44).

McCullough et al. (1997) found that the relationship between both receiving an apology from and forgiving one’s offender is a function of increased empathy for the offender and that forgiving is uniquely related to conciliatory and avoidance behavior toward the offending person. In addition, McCullough et al. (1998) discovered that several indexes of relationship-level variables were associated with self-reported forgiving, and offense-level variables such as empathy, apology, and rumination were also closely associated with the forgiveness construct. McCullough et al. (2001) further demonstrated validity for this two-factor motivational system, observing that vengefulness, a corollary to relationship avoidance, was associated with less forgiving feelings and behaviors.

In attempting to ascertain the variables related to self-forgiveness, Meek, Albright, and McMinn (1995) discovered that guilt was an important mediating factor in discriminating between the way intrinsically-oriented religious subjects and extrinsically-oriented religious subjects processed forgiveness. While intrinsically oriented subjects were found to be more guilt prone about their offenses (as well as more likely to confess such guilt), this guilt was postulated to be “healthy” in motivating offenders to forgive those that they offended. These results were supported in Gold and Weiner’s 2000 study
on the relationship between forgiveness and transgressions committed. Remorse demonstrated the largest overall effect on the forgiveness construct, serving a utilitarian function. In addition, the researchers note that it appears that for forgiveness to be most effective, it must be accompanied by confession.

Girard and Mullet (1997), in examining the evolution of the propensity to forgive others, examined the factors related to this propensity in various age groups. The researchers found that the propensity to forgive was a function of age as well as such factors as cancellation of consequences, intent, social harmony, and apologies. (Note: While there are additional studies that highlight other motivational factors and attributes related to forgiveness, these studies do so in a marital or romantic context and thus will be highlighted in the second section of this review.)

Systemic Models of Forgiveness

Systemic models of forgiveness conceptualize forgiveness as the function of the relational processes and dynamics occurring within a family system. Hargrave and Sells (1997) use a contextual family therapy perspective to elucidate the construct of systemic forgiveness within families. This systemic model of forgiveness is distinguished from others in that it purports to examine “both sides” of the forgiveness equation in the form of the impact that forgiveness has on both offender and offended. Specifically, the work of forgiveness is the effort made “in restoring love and trustworthiness to relationships so that victims and victimizers can put an end to destructive entitlement” (Hargrave & Sells, 1997, p. 43).

The “exoneration” and “overt act of forgiving” variables capture this systemic dynamic in that exoneration is more of an internal process whereby the victim gains insight and some form of understanding of the victimizer’s behavior, while the overt act of forgiving involves the victim and victimizer involving themselves in the restoration of love and trust in their relationship. Hargrave and Sells’ (1997) own study on the development of a forgiveness scale demonstrates validity for the model in that the newly developed instrument was able to discriminate between clinical and non-clinical populations on scores of relational pain and the transaction of forgiveness. In addition, Sells, Giordano, and King (2002) found in a small pilot study based upon this model that a brief marital group therapy forgiveness protocol produced statistically significant but modest gains on forgiveness behaviors when implemented with couples. These gains later atrophied at post-test.

Decision Based Models of Forgiveness

There are also behavioral models of forgiveness that view forgiveness as essentially a decision-based process, emphasizing the power of personal choice and behavior in the forgiveness process (DiBlasio, 2000). DiBlasio (1998) defines decision-based forgiveness “as the cognitive letting go of resentment and bitterness and need for vengeance” (p. 78). In this framework, forgiveness is essentially a choice and act of the will to let go of resentment and anger (1998, 2000). DiBlasio (2000) notes that the preponderance of forgiveness literature conceptualizes forgiveness as the process of “letting go” and becoming “emotionally ready” to forgive, oftentimes coming to fruition
at the end result of a lengthy, intrapsychic process. While acknowledging that such an intrapsychic process might indeed be necessary in some instances, the decision-based model does not assume *a priori* that this is essential. In fact, DiBlasio notes process models do not adequately explain why some people, particularly in crisis situations like death and illness, achieve lasting forgiveness in a short time.

DiBlasio (1998, 2000) outlines a 13-step protocol for achieving forgiveness between persons that takes place over a lengthy (2-3 hour) session within a specific intergenerational/family context. The steps are broadly arranged into the three primary categories of defining and preparing; seeking and granting forgiveness; and the ceremonial act. While the forgiveness protocol is illustrated through two case studies, one of which occurs in response to a situation of marital infidelity, there is no known empirical support for this decision-based model.

**Synthesized Models**

And finally, there are synthesized models of forgiveness that draw from a variety of models and perspectives related directly or indirectly to forgiveness (i.e., decision-based forgiveness; trauma and crisis). For example, Gordon and Baucom (1998, 1999) postulate a synthesized model of forgiveness to be used in marital therapy with cases of marital infidelity. A three-stage model of forgiveness in marriage is posited that draws from three major theoretical fields of study related in some way to forgiveness (Gordon et al., 2000). The first is the cognitive-behavioral approach, which seeks to understand the negative thoughts that have provided a context for relational violations (i.e., infidelity) as well as behavioral strategies for the future. This cognitive-behavioral perspective is in turn coupled with an insight-oriented approach that adds a psychodynamic perspective to the forgiveness intervention in the form of couples better understanding underlying, negative emotions from the past that have been carried into relational transactions in the present. The wedding of these cognitive-behavioral and insight-oriented approaches are then implemented in a marital therapy format where two partners are presented with the idea of working through their relational issues within the framework of forgiveness.

Gordon et al. (2000) outline the three major steps of this synthesized model as involving “(1) absorbing and experiencing the impact of the interpersonal trauma; (2) a search for meaning as to why the problem occurred, along with the implications for this new way of understanding; and (3) moving forward with one’s life in the context of a new set of relationship beliefs” (p. 216). Validity for the model was given some support through a recent study in which the researchers developed and tested a measurement tool based upon their synthesized model (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2003). Initial results offered preliminary support for the inventory’s validity as well as the model, as individuals placed into groups based upon their scores reported expected levels of global forgiveness. The authors, though, note that the cross-sectional nature of the research does not offer conclusive support for the stage model (2000, 2003).
Conclusion

It seems that the majority of models in the forgiveness field conceptualize forgiveness in terms of the intrapsychic perceptions and behavioral responses of injured or offended individuals, with only one model (Hargrave & Sells, 1997) attempting to contextualize the forgiveness process within a larger familial context. Because each of the forgiveness models outlined here hypothesize that forgiveness is a potentially powerful construct for individuals, it might be assumed that forgiveness could also be a powerful construct for a group of individuals, such as a family unit. Understanding how forgiveness functions in and is experienced by a dyad or family unit, then, could be a profitable exploration.

Forgiveness in Close Relationships: Marriage, Family and Romantic Contexts

Forgiveness Interventions in Close Relationships

Interest in the construct of forgiveness has seen a steady and consistent increase over the past decade in the form of empirical studies. Of these, there has been an emergence of literature examining forgiveness directly within a marital, family, or romantic context. Worthington and Drinkard’s (2000) assertion that, at the time, no published empirical studies had investigated forgiveness in a context where both partners of a dyad were present seems to be slowly changing. Worthington and Ripley’s (2002) psycho-educational intervention with couple dyads is an example. In this study, both partners in couple dyads joined together with other dyads in a group setting to take part in various interventions, including hope-focused marriage enrichment and empathy-based forgiveness instruction. While no significant differences between the hope-focused/forgiveness group(s) and a control group on the forgiveness measure after the interventions were demonstrated, this effort was important because it brought both dyad partners together at the same time to undergo a forgiveness treatment.

Sells et al. (2002) conducted a group experiment designed to help couples learn forgiveness skills through a marital group therapy intervention. While this pilot study yielded only modest gains that later atrophied on such dyadic measures as forgiveness, satisfaction, anger management, and a global symptom index, this study holds some promise. The nature of this pilot study was that no control or waiting list groups were utilized due to the exploratory intent of this experiment, meaning that the modest improvements in forgiveness skills can be more thoroughly investigated and analyzed in future studies.

Other investigators have studied forgiveness interventions in a romantic, marital, or family context as well. In two of these studies Enright’s Process Model of Forgiveness was used with two different population groups. In the first, Al-Mabuk et al. (1995) examined the forgiveness construct in a familial setting, utilizing an extensive educational-based forgiveness intervention with late adolescents who reported being love-deprived during childhood. Results revealed that these students not only demonstrated lower anxiety, more hope, and greater self-esteem upon completing a 6-day
workshop utilizing the forgiveness model, but also demonstrated significant gains in forgiveness and positive attitudes towards parents. This experimental group showed significantly higher gains on the measure of forgiveness after completing the six-session forgiveness intervention than did the control group that took part only in a human relations program.

The second study testing Enright’s Process Model was conducted with post-abortion men (Coyle & Enright, 1997) who each reported being hurt because of the abortion decision of a partner. Participants took part in 12 weekly, 90-minute educational sessions aimed at teaching and implementing the forgiveness construct. Results indicated evidence for the effectiveness of the forgiveness intervention, as all of the men in the study demonstrated significant increases in forgiveness toward their partners as well as significant decreases in anger, anxiety, and grief. Where self-forgiveness was an issue, significant decreases were demonstrated with this variable as well.

Rye and Pargament (2001) reported successfully using a forgiveness intervention with college-age women that focused on providing either secular or religious-based forgiveness strategies for hurts the participants were presently experiencing as part of being wronged in the context of a romantic relationship. Not only did the secular and religious groups improve significantly more than the control group, participants in the treatment groups also demonstrated significant gains on measures of existential well-being, thus providing another link between forgiveness and existential satisfaction.

Variables Mediating Forgiveness in Close Relationships

As discussed previously, a number of researchers have examined forgiveness within the context of motivational, attributional, and psychological dimensions that shape personal responses to forgiveness. Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon (2002) highlight the theme of vengeance by showing that victims’ self-oriented reactions to betrayal are antithetical to the forgiveness process, promoting instead feelings of grudge and vengefulness.

Guilt is another motivational factor that has demonstrated a relationship to corollaries of the forgiveness process, such as the avoidance of transgressions and the desire to treat partners well (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Baumeister et al. (1994) postulated in their review of empirical literature that in those communal situations, such as couples and families, in which there are expectations of mutual concern, guilt serves various relationship-enhancing functions. These same researchers tested these hypotheses in a later study (1995) and found that feeling guilty was related positively to changing behavior, to apologizing, and to confessing. Results support the idea that guilt functions as a mechanism in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships by altering behavior. Conversely, though, guilt itself may be mediated by such factors as revenge and intentionality. Mongeau et al. (1994) found that offenders experience less guilt and remorse when they intentionally act out of a motive of revenge. The offenders’ accounts of such acts appear to make reconciliation more difficult, negating the positive role of guilt in such situations.

In addition to psychological and intrapersonal factors that mediate forgiveness in relationships, there are also relational and interpersonal factors that serve this same
mediating function. For example, Roloff and Janiszewski (1989) point to relational
closeness as an important variable in the decision intimates face about whether or not to
forgive their partner. Boon and Sulsky (1997), though, found that those who were not
involved in romantic relationships were more consistent in their applications of
forgiveness criteria than those who were involved in such relationships, and that males
expressed a greater willingness to forgive than did females. Participants utilized the
criteria of intent more so than severity of offense and avoidability when making a
decision about whether to forgive. Shackelford, Buss, and Bennett (2002) reported that
men, relative to women, have greater difficulty forgiving an instance of sexual infidelity
than women and are more likely to terminate the relationship because of such.

Commitment, another relational variable, is also related positively to forgiveness.
McCullough et al. (1997) note that the intent by the victim to persist in the relationship is
itself based on a pro-relationship motivation that encourages the forgiveness process.
This study in part lends support to the earlier findings of Rusbult et al. (1991) that
commitment plays a role in the accommodation process that occurs when one partner
injures another. Specifically, the willingness of one partner to react destructively to the
transgression of an offending partner was mediated by the relational variable of
commitment. McCullough et al. (1998) also supported this commitment-forgiveness
link, noting that the results of their study indicate that forgiving as a motivational
transformation takes place more readily in committed relationships.

Fincham, Paleari, and Regalia (2002) attempted to explore the role that relational
quality, attributions, empathy, and affect play in promoting interpersonal forgiveness
with long-term married couples. Support for a model in which “positive marital quality
was predictive of more benign attributions that, in turn, facilitated forgiveness both
directly and indirectly via affective reactions and emotional empathy” (p. 27). The
researchers maintain that the findings support the conclusion that attributions and
emotional reactions that spouses develop in response to their partners’ negative behaviors
are important in understanding interpersonal forgiveness.

Obviously, there could potentially be other mediating variables or corollaries of
the forgiveness process not yet examined by researchers. This could be particularly true
of variables that are more systemic and less intrapsychic in nature. Understanding how
such interpersonal and relational variables relate to the forgiveness process could prove to
be a useful area of exploration.

Forgiveness and Olson’s Circumplex Model

While Olson (as cited in Olson, 2000) notes that the Circumplex Model has been
utilized in hundreds of studies examining a variety of issues and variables related to the
functioning of the family system, it does not appear that the forgiveness process has been
among those variables investigated. Nonetheless, there have been many studies utilizing
the Circumplex Model that have examined key variables contained in the hypotheses of
this study. Specifically, the key hypothesis of Olson’s model (as cited in Olson, 2000)
that balanced family systems function at higher levels than unbalanced family systems
has been substantiated by more than 250 studies, almost all of which have used the
FACES self-report scales (Olson, 2000). In addition, Carnes’ study (as cited in Olson,
2000) examined the family systems of sex-offenders (a family system type in which it is

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assumed that there will be a variety of forgiveness issues at stake), and found high levels of unbalanced family types in relation to non-offender families. The idea that balanced family systems communicate more effectively and have better communication skills than unbalanced family systems has also been strongly demonstrated by Barnes and Olson (as cited in Olson, 2000).

While there is considerable research on the relationship between particular attributes and motivational systems and the forgiveness construct, there is not a corresponding body of study attempting to relate family or couple attributes to forgiveness. In fact, there is no research specifically bringing together Olson’s Circumplex Model with forgiveness, although there are several that examine forgiveness with variables related to cohesion and adaptation. Roloff and Janiszewski (1989) examined the variable of relational closeness and its relationship to forgiveness. Results indicated that relational closeness indeed mediates willingness to forgive, although intimates are more likely to forgive if their partner refuses a “big” request versus a “small request.” In other words, relational closeness seems to lead intimates to contextualize and thus to forgive their partner’s unwillingness to comply with major requests while at the same time leading them to be less forgiving over the failure of said partner to comply with a small request. Coates (1997) reported similar results in that there was a main effect for relational closeness on forgiveness of others. As mentioned previously, Boon and Sulsky (1997) found that those who were not involved in romantic relationships were more consistent in their applications of forgiveness criteria than those who were involved in such relationships, and that males expressed a greater willingness to forgive than did females.

Using the research data from the McCullough et al. (1998) study, Worthington (1998) found that while relationship, offense, and post-hurt variables accounted for 22% of the variance in reported relational closeness, forgiveness variables accounted for an additional 39% of the additional variance of this closeness. Worthington notes that while forgiveness is not necessary for closeness (reconciliation), forgiveness does appear to facilitate such closeness greatly.

Communication, which Olson identifies as a mediating variable in the Circumplex Model, is examined in several studies in relationship to forgiveness. Worthington and Ripley (2002), in a study cited previously, subjected two treatment groups to a variety of couple enrichment interventions, including instruction in empathy-based forgiveness. Results showed that on a measure of couple communication (evaluated by comparing negative versus positive communication behaviors), there were no significant differences between the control group and the dyad intervention groups; the teaching of empathy-based forgiveness perspectives did not result in a corresponding increase in positive couple communication behaviors.

Fincham and Beach (2002) examined the forgiveness-communication link within the context of marriage relationships and noted that unforgiveness is strongly related to psychological aggression. For husbands, the wives’ constructive communication was found to predict the husbands’ readiness to forgive. Forgiveness seems to be very relevant as it relates to positive engagement between partners.

Finally, it might be expected then that communication and cohesion will play key roles in the forgiveness transactions between family members, although there have been no known studies specifically examining the adaptability-forgiveness link. It is unknown
if, or how, these variables might collectively provide an important mediating function in those families that consistently engage in forgiving behaviors as opposed to those families exhibiting unforgiving behaviors.

Forgiveness and Couple Satisfaction

As mentioned previously, Worthington and Ripley (2002) subjected two treatment groups to a variety of couple enrichment interventions, including instruction in empathy-based forgiveness. On a measure of marital satisfaction, there were no significant differences between the control group and the dyad intervention groups. Specifically, the hope-focused marital enrichment and empathy-based forgiveness interventions did not result in a corresponding increase in marital satisfaction.

Fenell (1993) investigated characteristics of relationships of those couples that were part of first-time, satisfactory marriages of over 20 years in duration. Specifically, couples were asked to comment on and to identify those marital characteristics that they believed to be most important to the satisfaction and duration of their marriages. “Willingness to Forgive and Be Forgiven” was one of the ten most oft-mentioned characteristics by both men and women in their marital relationships.

In addition to the findings of the McCullough et al. (1998) study mentioned in previous sections of this review, the researchers also found in their study that there is a dyadic satisfaction – forgiveness link. Forgiveness seems to occur more readily within the context of satisfactory, romantic relationships. Woodman (1991) reports the same kind of themes in her own work, noting that forgiveness is related to marital adjustment “and that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are integral components in the forgiveness process. Those who report more forgiving and less unforgiving responses to spouses after injury show consistency in these three areas” (p. 24). Sells et al. (2002) demonstrated a modest relationship between a forgiveness intervention and marital satisfaction in a pilot study, but these results atrophied over a 3-month period.

Based upon these satisfaction-forgiveness links, those families engaging in more forgiving behaviors are might be more likely to demonstrate higher levels of dyadic satisfaction than those who do not. Thus, it is possible that relational satisfaction will be either a by-product of or a mediating factor in forgiving relationships.

Forgiveness and Religious Participation

McCullough and Worthington (1999), in their extensive review of the literature that examines the link between religiosity and forgiveness, note that the relationship between these two concepts is robust. Indeed, “religiosity is associated with people’s values and self-reported dispositions to forgive – and even their willingness to forgive (at least hypothetically)” (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p. 1151). While the authors note that “religious people appear convinced that they should be forgiving people”, religious involvement itself may only play a small role in determining who will or will not forgive. This seems to be related to whether a dispositional measure of forgiveness is being used or a transgression-specific measure, an issue reviewed more fully below.

Meek et al. (1995) found that intrinsically religious participants were more likely to feel guilty, to confess their moral failings, and to forgive themselves than extrinsically
religious subjects. Gorsuch and Hao (1993) noted that of those respondents completing a Gallup poll questionnaire with forgiveness item responses, Protestant, Catholics, evangelicals, and the more personally religious participants reported more forgiving responses than less personally religious respondents. In another national survey, Wuthnow (2000) indicated that 61% of participants involved in prayer, bible study, or other religiously oriented small groups themselves indicate that their group had helped them to forgive someone. Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989) suggested that religious involvement is positively associated with forgiveness and people’s moral reasoning regarding such.

Contrary to this hypothesis that religious participation promotes forgiving attitudes and behaviors, Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, Gassin, Freedman, Olson, and Sarinopoulos (1995) found a significant but modest correlation between self-reported religious behaviors and self-reported forgiveness for people who had harmed them via a specific transgression. McCullough and Worthington (1999) postulate that such a discrepancy between these studies might be the result of measurement issues, participant recall bias, or religious social desirability, leading to their conclusion that “basic conceptual and technical issues must be resolved before we can develop reliable scientific understanding of the relationships among forgiveness, religion, and personality” (p. 1159).

Because of the traditional links between religion and forgiveness, it might be anticipated that those families that demonstrate consistently forgiving behaviors would be more frequently involved in religious activities than those who do not. The aforementioned studies, though, point to the complexity of the forgiveness-religion relationship, particularly in regards to outward manifestations of religious behavior as compared to an inward orientation towards forgiveness.

Conclusion

It seems that the forgiveness field has begun to respond to calls from various researchers and theoreticians to address the dearth of empirical literature examining key components of the forgiveness construct. The past three to four years, in particular, have witnessed an emergence of empirical exploration into the dynamics of forgiveness within marriages and families in the forgiveness literature. Forgiveness interventions, motivational systems underlying forgiveness, forgiveness links to communication, and relationships between couple satisfaction and forgiveness are all aspects of the forgiveness process that have been given attention in empirical studies.

Where the forgiveness literature has witnessed continued gaps, though, is in its examination of forgiveness and its impact on various members of a family system. Specifically, there are no known studies that have attempted to examine the relationship of Olson’s Circumplex model to the forgiveness construct. Even though many of the studies reviewed here attempted to better understand forgiveness from a familial or marital referential point, fewer than five (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham et al., 2002; Worthington & Ripley, 2002; Sells et al., 2002) captured the perspectives of more than one family member at the same time as part of the same study. It is not surprising, then,
that forgiveness and systemic dynamics receive scant attention in the literature and thus leave much in question as to how family systemic functioning, as well as other mediating variables, promotes or discourages interpersonal forgiveness.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study, in light of the dearth of studies that contextualize forgiveness within a systems theory framework, was to examine systemic variables hypothesized to be related to forgiving versus unforgiving family systems. A “snapshot” of systemic dynamics for individual families was captured in order to measure and then to analyze systemic variables within forgiving and unforgiving family systems. The primary goal of the study was to identify variables that successfully discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems and thus to provide a better understanding into the systemic dynamics of families with propensities towards forgiveness or unforgiveness. Approval for this research project was given by the Florida State University Human Subjects Committee on November 17, 2003 (Appendix A).

Sample

The sample for this project included two specific groups: (1) couples who were classified into forgiving family systems, and (2) couples who were assigned to unforgiving family systems. Demographics for the sample are presented in tables 3.1 and 3.2. Total sample size was thirty-one couples (n = 31), with the forgiving group containing twenty-four couples (n = 24) and the unforgiving group seven couples (n = 7). Among the relevant information collected about these couples includes the fact that there was very little variation in the forgiving vs. unforgiving samples for: religious participation ($M = 1.23$, recoded to 3 times a month; $M = 1.0$, recoded to 4 times a month); number of children ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 1.5$; $M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.38$); ethnicity (95.8% Caucasian vs. 100% Caucasian); and marital history (87.5% married just once vs. 100% married just once). Sixty-six percent of forgiving couples reported being married less than 15 years, while 43% of unforgiving couples reported being in their current marriage less than 15 years.
Table 3.1: Demographic Information for Forgiving Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Means/Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years Married (by couple):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (by individual):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital History (by couple):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Once</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced but Remarried</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Participation for Males:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly (coded 1)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly (coded 2)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annually (coded 4)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Participation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.33 (SD = .87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Participation for Females:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly (coded 1)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly (coded 2)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Participation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.13 (SD = .34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Religious Participation Per Couple</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.23 (SD = .61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children:</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.50 (SD = 1.50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2: Demographic Information for Unforgiving Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Means/Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years Married (by couple):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (by individual):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital History (by couple):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Once</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Participation for Males:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly (Coded 1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Participation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(M=1.0, SD=0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Participation for Females:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly (Coded 1)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Participation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M=1.0, SD=0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Religious Participation for Each Couple</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.00 (SD = 0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Four times monthly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.29 (SD = 1.38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A criterion sample of couples was purposefully selected within the greater Tallahassee area from a church (n = 21), therapy private practices (n = 7), and miscellaneous neighborhoods within the community (n = 3). Because discriminant analysis (the primary statistical analysis used in this study) does not depend upon random sampling and assignment for its efficacy, the Tallahassee area was chosen for convenience purposes. In addition, the researcher had professional relationships with several area church leaders and therapists, which made data collection easier and more natural. The church populace was targeted because of the relative abundance of potentially willing couples that would participate in the study, and private practices were
accessed because of the likelihood that many couples in therapy would be dealing with issues in which forgiveness is a relevant construct.

A general sampling frame was determined by initiating contact with several “small groups” in the researcher’s own church community to determine if the group facilitators were willing to have couples in their groups participate. This same procedure was followed by contacting several private practice therapists in the Tallahassee area to ascertain whether or not they would be willing to have any of their couple clients take part in the study. In addition, a few miscellaneous couples that were acquaintances of the researcher were asked to participate. Parameters for inclusion were that couples were married and that both partners were willing to complete the survey.

Instrumentation

This study utilized one survey comprised of three instruments totaling 62 items, plus a criterion question that was used for classification purposes, as well as a demographic section. Twelve items were drawn from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations (TRIM) Inventory, 30 items from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales – Second Edition (FACES II), and 20 items from the Marital Satisfaction and Communication scales of the ENRICH inventory.

The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations (TRIM) Inventory (Appendix B) is a twelve-item instrument comprised of two subscales, Avoidance and Revenge, which purport to measure the motivational system that underlies the forgiving process (McCullough et al., 1998). This measure of forgiveness was chosen because it seems to not only capture the internal, affective responses associated with forgiveness that many researchers describe as “intrapersonal forgiveness”, but also because it measures the relational transactions and behaviors associated with these intrapersonal responses (i.e., interpersonal forgiveness). As outlined in the previous chapter, McCullough et al. (2001) maintain that when a wronged person forgives, his or her core motivations to seek revenge and to avoid contact with the person who has offended decrease and the motivation to resume a positive relationship is restored.

In the TRIM, individuals were asked to answer the items as they apply to an incident where their spouse hurt or injured them in the recent past (2 - 4 months or less). Scored in a 5-point Likert format ranging in choice from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”, the TRIM utilizes 5 items to measure Revenge and 7 items to assess Avoidance. Only the victim’s relational perceptions are captured on this self-report measure.

Reliability and validity data for the TRIM was generated from the initial validation study on the instrument (McCullough et al., 1998), as well as a follow-up study examining the relationship of the TRIM motivational factors to variables such as vengeance (McCullough et al., 2001). Results from the initial principal-components factor analysis (McCullough et al., 1998) indicated that the Avoidance and Revenge subscales had high internal consistency reliabilities, with alpha coefficients ranging from .85 to .93. A multiple regression equation indicated that the two subscales predicted 48% of the variance on a single-item measure [0 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree)] with which participants indicated the extent to which they had forgiven their offender.
These two subscales are correlated in the expected directions with many of the determinants that the researchers theorize are closely related to forgiving, including relational satisfaction, commitment, closeness, apology, empathy, social desirability, and rumination (McCullough et al., 1998, 2001; McCullough, 2000). Construct validity is demonstrated through a confirmatory factory analysis yielding a measurement model with a good fit (Comparative Fit Index > .90) to the 12 items (McCullough et al., 1998). Convergent and discriminant validity for the TRIM have thus been demonstrated. In addition, vengefulness correlated positively with avoidance and revenge and accounted for 23% of the change in TRIM scores in the follow-up study (McCullough et al., 2001).

The three central dimensions of family behavior as captured on the Circumplex Model are cohesion, adaptability, and communication. The Circumplex Model, along with its theoretical basis and hypotheses, was discussed in detail in chapter 2 of this study. Cohesion and adaptability are assessed with the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales – Second Edition (FACES II) while the facilitating dimension of communication is measured with one of the scales from the ENRICH inventory. The final variable of Marital Satisfaction that was used in this analysis is also assessed through one of the ENRICH inventory scales (see Appendix C for FACES II and the ENRICH subscales).

FACES II is a 30-item inventory containing 16 cohesion items and 14 adaptability items (Olson, Bell, & Portner, 1992). The cohesion dimension is made up of eight concepts (2 items each) which include emotional bonding; family boundaries; coalitions; time; space; friends; decision-making; interests; and recreation. The six concepts making up the adaptability dimension are measured with 2-3 items each and include assertiveness, leadership, discipline, negotiations, roles, and rules. Scores on the cohesion and adaptability dimensions are used to plot on the Circumplex Model the family type (balanced, mid-range, or extreme) represented by each family unit.

The FACES II inventory can be administered individually in a therapy context or as a family/marital unit responding in a mailed survey for a research project. Respondents are asked to read statements and to respond according to how frequently the described behavior occurs in the family. Answers are scored in a Likert Scale format ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) and are summed together to generate a total cohesion score and a total adaptability score. These two scores are then used to locate the corresponding 1-8 score for each dimension. Family Type is obtained by summing the 1-8 Cohesion and Adaptability scores and dividing by 2 and locating that score on the 1-8 Marital Type model.

Two primary scores that can then be generated from these results are the couple mean score and the couple discrepancy score. The mean score (average of both partners) assesses the couple for each dimension in the Circumplex Model, while the discrepancy score can examine the difference of perception between family members. These two scores have been found to be empirically independent/orthogonal (Olson et al., 1992).

Olson (as cited in Olson, 2000) notes that over 250 studies using FACES have supported the major hypotheses of the Circumplex model. Specifically, studies of clinical samples clearly demonstrate the discriminate power of the model in distinguishing between non-symptomatic and problem families and that balanced family types are more functional than unbalanced family types (Olson, 2000). The alpha reliability for FACES II is .87 for cohesion, .78 for adaptability, and .90 for the total.
The test-retest reliability, allowing for a testing period of 4-5 weeks, is .83 for cohesion and .80 for adaptability. There is very good evidence for both face and content validity, as therapists and researchers have evaluated the items in terms of face validity and find them to be acceptable (Olson, 2000). Correlation with social desirability is .39 and .38 respectively for each dimension, while the correlation between the two dimensions ranges from .25-.65, with the common variance not being problematic and the unique variance functioning well. The concurrent validity of FACES II when compared to such instruments as the Dallas Self-Report Family Inventory also demonstrates good evidence.

The Marital Satisfaction and Communication dimensions are measured using 10-item scales from the ENRICH inventory. Both scales are scored on a 1-5 Likert format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (2). Scores are obtained for each dimension simply by summing all of the answers into one aggregate score for each dimension.

The ENRICH inventory as a whole (the four scales of marital satisfaction, communication, conflict resolution, and idealistic distortion) has demonstrated the ability to distinguish between happily and unhappily married couples with 85-95% accuracy as well as other strong reliability and validity indicators (Fowers & Olson, 1989). A cross-validation study utilizing the ENRICH inventory with a second sample showed that background factors account for little of the variance in discriminating between happy and unhappy couples compared to their relationship dynamics (Fowers & Olson, 1989). The alpha and test-retest reliabilities for marital satisfaction are .86 and .86, and .82 and .90 for communication. Concurrent validity for the entire instrument was demonstrated by utilizing a comparison between the marital satisfaction scale with the classic Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment scale and resulted in the correlations of .73 and .81 for individual and couple scores.

The demographic section of this survey (Appendix D), in addition to soliciting individual subject characteristics, also included a question gauging the level of church participation and involvement. Religious participation was measured by asking individuals to classify themselves into one of five categories in response to the following question: “How often do you participate in an organized religious activity?” Answers were scored on a frequency scale with the following choices: 1 (weekly); 2 (monthly); 3 (quarterly); 4 (annually); and 5 (never).

**Data Collection**

The initial data collection effort took place with couples in the researcher’s local church. The researcher made a presentation at several small group bible studies where couples were present in order to solicit their participation in the study. At these meetings couples were given a research packet that included a cover letter from the researcher (Appendix E), separate informed consent forms (Appendix F), and the aforementioned scales packaged together in individual surveys. The cover letter and consent forms informed the participants of the option they each had of discussing their surveys with a member of the church’s pastoral staff. Couples were informed that their participation in
the research project was completely voluntary and at no time were couples told that they were taking part in a study on forgiveness in order to address the social desirability factors present with church members completing a survey on forgiveness. Couples who elected to participate in the study competed the surveys individually, with the researcher present, and turned in their surveys and informed consent forms independently to protect confidentiality. Surveys were coded anonymously so that partner results could be matched together after being turned in. The researcher collected the surveys and turned them over to an administrative assistant for data entry.

Concurrent with the above data collection efforts, the research solicited the involvement of four (n = 4) area therapists in the research project. Each therapist agreed to ask, at his or her own discretion, several couple clients to participate in the study. Therapists were given research packets with a cover letter from the researcher as well as informed consent forms, individual surveys, and self-addressed/stamped envelopes for couples to return their surveys individually. It was left to each therapist’s discretion as to whether the surveys were completed in the therapist’s office or away from the office. The surveys were returned to the researcher’s place of employment (a local church) and then turned over to administrative assistants for data entry.

Finally, a few miscellaneous couples that were acquainted with the researcher were asked to participate in the study. These couples were each given a research packet as well as two self-addressed envelopes so that surveys could be returned to the researcher individually. At no time were participants told that they were participating in a study on forgiveness.

Data Analyses

Responses to the survey items were coded and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet by a research assistant, and then crosschecked by another administrative assistant to ensure its accuracy. This data was then imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 10.0) for analysis. The researcher and a statistical assistant recoded relevant items on the Marital Satisfaction and Communication Scales as well as the FACES II instrument. For the few surveys that were missing data (4 questions for the entire data set), means were computed for that particular item from the entire data set and inserted for the missing data.

As part of the preliminary analyses, the couples in the initial sample were classified into two groups, forgiving and unforgiving family systems, based upon their response to a one-item criterion question. The criterion question was the single-item measure of forgiving that is a part of the TRIM inventory that asks individuals to indicate whether they have forgiven their spouse for a recent hurt (0 – 5, Strongly disagree to Strongly agree). Previous validation results with the TRIM inventory indicate that the single-item question explained a significant portion (48%) of the variance on TRIM scores in another study (McCullough et al, 1998). Thus, it is hypothesized that the classification question has empirical basis and support for discriminating between people who have either forgiven or not forgiven a person who has hurt them.
Couples in which both partners indicated a response of “Strongly agree” or “Agree” with the statement that they had forgiven their spouse for a recent hurt were assigned to the forgiving system group. If either one or both partners indicated a “Strongly disagree” or “Disagree” response to the statement that they had forgiven their spouse, then the couple dyad was classified as an unforgiving system. Pilot study results (to be discussed in the next section) seemed to indicate that when a participant’s response on a slightly revised criterion question did not indicate a definitive degree of certainty towards having forgiven someone, then this ambiguity could be seen as an indication that the person had not completely forgiven his or her spouse. Thus, for this study if either partner in a couple dyad indicated a “neutral response”, they too were assigned to the unforgiving group. It was theorized for this study that even if only one partner indicated a proclivity not to forgive that this was a basis for classifying an entire dyad as an unforgiving system, due to the fact that one part of a system reinforces and impacts the homeostatic equilibrium of the rest of the system (Whitchurch & Constantin, 1993). This propensity towards “forgiveness” and “unforgiveness” in one setting is thus extrapolated to indicate a personality proclivity and propensity towards “forgiving” or “unforgiving” in other settings and relationships.

Once these classifications were completed, two validation methods for the classification procedure were conducted: (1) a t-test on the two groups using their TRIM scores to determine if there was a significant difference between the two groups; and (2) a multiple regression on the single-item of forgiving using the Avoidance and Revenge subscales to determine if a significant amount of variance on this item was explained by the TRIM.

**Pilot Case Study**

As a precursor to the current study, a pilot study was completed in order to explore how well the preliminary analysis used here discriminated between and correctly classified forgiving and unforgiving family systems, as well as to determine the effectiveness of various sampling methods employed. Data was collected from 7 couples \( n = 7 \) that completed the 12 items from the TRIM inventory as well as a variation of the single-item measure of forgiving used in the main study (Appendix G). In addition, participants were asked to reflect and to comment upon an incident in their relationship when they had to employ forgiveness. This “Critical Incident Method” was utilized so as to generate anecdotal validity for classifying couples into “forgiving” and “unforgiving” groups.

Of the seven couples completing the pilot inventory, 5 included partners who each indicated that they had completely forgiven the other for a recent hurt. Mean TRIM scores for this group on the 12 items was 14.4, indicating a close correspondence between the single item criterion question and the TRIM inventory. In addition, the Critical Incident Method (CIM) completed by the participants generally provided solid anecdotal evidence that these same participants were in fact describing genuine, forgiving transactions. The other two couples had at least one partner that indicated an “almost forgiven” versus a “completely forgiven” response, with mean TRIM scores for this
group totaling 24.5. In the CIM’s for this second group some participants seemed to communicate residual thoughts and feelings that might indicate some degree of being unresolved about forgiveness. For the main study, this criterion question was revised to fit a “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” scale about whether a participant had forgiven their spouse for a recent hurt. Based upon the results of this pilot study, it was recommended that any response towards a participant other than “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” about having forgiven their spouse for a recent hurt should be viewed as indicating a high degree of certainty about relational unforgiveness.

Testing of Hypotheses

The two major hypotheses of the study, as well as the two secondary ones, were tested using the following methods:

Hypothesis #1: Cohesion, adaptation, and communication will demonstrate the ability to successfully discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems.
A discriminant analysis (regression) was performed using the variables of cohesion, adaptation, and communication to determine how well each variable successfully discriminated between couples that were a part of forgiving and unforgiving family systems. Mean couple scores for the cohesion, adaptation, and communication variables were computed and then entered first into a direct discriminant equation and then into a step-wise analysis to determine the contribution of each individual variable to the overall discriminant equation. Because this was a low-power, exploratory study given the number of variables and sample size involved, an alpha level of .10 was used for the omnibus tests when assessing significance.

Hypothesis #2: There will be a positive and significant relationship between balanced and forgiving family systems and between unbalanced and unforgiving family systems.
Mean couple scores were computed for each marital dyad and the corresponding family type was then assigned into a balanced or unbalanced category as specified by the Circumplex Model. A 2 X 2 Chi-square test with two levels of forgiving and two levels of balance was then performed to determine if there was a positive and significant relationship between unbalanced family types and unforgiving family systems and between balanced family types and forgiving family systems.

Hypothesis #1a: Forgiving family systems will demonstrate significantly higher levels of satisfaction than unforgiving family systems.
A t-test was conducted on the mean couple scores for marital satisfaction to determine if there was a significant difference between forgiving and unforgiving family systems on the Marital Satisfaction variable.

Hypothesis #2a: Forgiving family systems will demonstrate higher levels of religious involvement than unforgiving family systems and their religious involvement.
An overall mean score was computed for each group for the religious involvement variable. A t-test was not performed to determine if there was a significant difference between forgiving and unforgiving family systems and religious participation due to the lack of variance between the two groups.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine systemic variables hypothesized to be related to forgiving versus unforgiving family systems. The final sample consisted of 31 couples, and the data gathered were used to test the two primary and the two secondary hypotheses related to forgiveness and systemic functioning. The results of these analyses are detailed below.

Preliminary Analysis: Couple Classification

Using the single-item criterion question outlined in the previous section, couples were classified into forgiving and unforgiving groups. As a secondary method of verifying the classification scheme, two follow-up analyses were conducted. First, means and standard deviations for the forgiving and unforgiving groups were computed using the twelve items from the TRIM inventory (Table 4.1), and then an independent sample t-test was run between these two groups using the TRIM scores as the dependent variable. These results were not significant (t = .672, p < .507). Second, a regression analysis was conducted for the entire sample using this single-item and the twelve items from the TRIM inventory for each couple. No significant correlation was found between the single-item of forgiveness and the TRIM inventory (r = .074, p < .694). Couples were classified as forgiving and unforgiving on the basis of this single-item criterion question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRIM Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40.458</td>
<td>10.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unforgiving</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.714</td>
<td>12.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis #1: Discriminant Analysis on the Circumplex Model Variables

Cohesion, adaptation, and communication will be variables that successfully discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems. A discriminant analysis was conducted on the forgiving and unforgiving samples using cohesion, adaptation, and communication from Olson’s Circumplex Model as the criterion variables to determine how well each discriminated between the forgiving and unforgiving family systems. First, the means and standard deviations for both the forgiving and unforgiving groups on the three hypothesized criterion variables were computed (Table 4.2), and then entered as a set into the discriminant equation. The Box’s M test to determine if the covariance matrices for each group were equal (Box’s M = 9.975, F [6, 1.332] = .240 was not significant, providing an initial indication that the within-group variance for the unforgiving and forgiving samples was not problematic. The small sample size for the unforgiving group, though, makes this homogeneity assumption somewhat tenuous and tempers the interpretation of results (to be discussed in the next chapter). Table 4.3 contains the discriminant coefficients and within-group correlations for each of the criterion variables. The overall discriminant test for the three variables was significant (Wilks Lambda = .733, Chi-Square of 8.532 with 3 degrees of freedom, p < .036), with 27% of the variance (Eigenvalue = .364, r = .516) being explained by the unique linear combination of these three variables for the two groups.

Table 4.2: Means and Standard Deviations for the Forgiving and Unforgiving Groups on the Three Hypothesized Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>75.08</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unforgiving</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64.28</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>128.00</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unforgiving</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>112.42</td>
<td>6.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>107.29</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unforgiving</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>90.57</td>
<td>7.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3: Discriminant Coefficients and Within-Group Correlations for Each of the Criterion Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion Variables</th>
<th>Discriminant Coefficients</th>
<th>Within-Group Correlations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.510</td>
<td>.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>.606</td>
<td>.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>.738</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A step-wise analysis (Tables 4.4, 4.5) was then performed using the Wilks Lambda statistic as the specified criteria to determine the unique contribution of each predictor variable to the variance between the forgiving and unforgiving groups. Adaptation was significant and found to explain the greatest amount of variance (24%) between the two groups, (Wilks Lambda = .758, Chi-Square of 7.907 with 1 degree of freedom, p < .005). The analysis did not find either of the two remaining variables to contribute any additional significant variance to the equation, although a follow-up correlation analysis conducted for the three variables found a very high and significant correlation between the variables (Tables 4.6, 4.7).

Table 4.4: Step-Wise Analysis to Determine Unique Variance of Each Circumplex Variable (Step 0)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 0: Variables Not in Analysis</th>
<th>Wilks Lambda</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td>8.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>9.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>5.745</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5: Step-Wise Analysis to Determine Unique Variance of Each Circumplex Variable (Step 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable In Analysis</th>
<th>Wilks Lambda</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Correl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>9.272</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables Not In Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>.928</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high correlations for the three variables for both the forgiving and unforgiving groups indicate a multicollinearity issue that confirms that each of the three predictor variables are essentially measuring the same construct, and that only the first (adaptability) should be included in the analysis. The analysis also reveals such a large overlap between the three variables that adaptability has only a slightly higher priority than cohesion and communication in explaining group variance.

Table 4.6: Correlations of the Criterion Variables for the Forgiving Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.640**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.623**</td>
<td>.490*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at p ≤ .01
* Significant at p ≤ .05
Table 4.7: Correlations of the Criterion Variables for the Unforgiving Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.975**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.856*</td>
<td>.862*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at p ≤ .01
* Significant at p ≤ .05

To further explore this proposition, separate discriminant analyses were run on the three criterion variables individually to provide information about how the three Circumplex Model variables functioned together in relation to the forgiving and unforgiving groups. Results indicated significant and similar results for each of the three criterion variables (Table 4.8), with each of the three Circumplex variables individually discriminating between the forgiving and unforgiving groups. Therefore, the first hypothesis was accepted.

Table 4.8: Individual Discriminant Analyses for Each of the Three Criterion Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Wilks Lambda</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>Correl.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>.758</td>
<td>9.272</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td>7.616</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>5.151</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis #2: The Relationship Between Forgiveness and Family Types

There will be a positive and significant relationship between balanced and forgiving family systems and between unbalanced and unforgiving family systems. A 2 X 2 Chi-Square analysis was conducted using the two levels of group membership (Forgiving, Unforgiving) and the two levels of family type (Balanced, Unbalanced) in order to determine the relationship between Olson’s taxonomy of family type and forgiving and unforgiving family systems. The initial analysis revealed that while twenty-two of the thirty-one couples were correctly assigned to their hypothesized group (forgiving/balanced vs. unforgiving/unbalanced), the overall relationship was not
significant (Chi Square = 1.373, p < .241). The breakdown of the forgiving and unforgiving couples and their classification into family type groups is found in Table 4.8.

### Table 4.8: Cross-Tabulations and Chi-Squares For Family Types and Forgiving Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Family Type</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unbalanced</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A follow-up examination of the data indicated that when only the extremes of the balanced and unbalanced sample were used (n = 5), versus the entire sample that utilizes moderate couples from the balanced and unbalanced categories, all five couples were correctly classified (n = 3 for forgiving, n = 2 for unforgiving) into their hypothesized group. Therefore, the second hypothesis was partially supported.

### Hypothesis #1a: Couple Satisfaction and Forgiveness

Forgiving family systems will demonstrate significantly higher levels of satisfaction than unforgiving family systems. For the satisfaction variable, means and standard deviations were computed (Table 4.9) and an independent sample t- test was run on the satisfaction variable between the two groups. Levine’s test for equality of variance was not significant (F = .005, p < .946) indicating that the within-group variance for each group on the satisfaction variable was almost identical and thus robust for comparison. Results were significant for satisfaction between the forgiving and unforgiving groups (t = -2.737, df = 29, p < .01). Therefore, hypothesis #1a was accepted.

### Table 4.9: Satisfaction Means and Standard Deviations for Forgiving and Unforgiving Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73.91</td>
<td>11.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unforgiving</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>60.57</td>
<td>11.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis #2a: Religious Participation and Forgiveness

Forgiving family systems will demonstrate significantly higher levels of religious involvement than unforgiving family systems. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between the forgiving and unforgiving groups on the variable of religious participation, but this analysis was not included in this study. The forgiving group reported attending a religious activity approximately three out of four weeks a month (M = 2.45, SD = 1.10), while the unforgiving group reported attending a religious activity on a weekly basis (M = 2.0, SD=0.0). In other words, there was no practical variance between these two groups on this variable, as participants were almost entirely homogeneous in terms of their religious participation. Therefore, hypothesis #2a can be neither accepted nor rejected.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Because there are no known studies specifically examining the relationship between forgiveness and Olson’s Circumplex Model of family functioning, this study was an initial, exploratory effort aimed at examining the relationship of systemic variables to forgiving and unforgiving families. The results highlight several relevant themes for both forgiveness and family functioning. The difficulty in collecting data from unforgiving family systems, and the resultant low and unbalanced sample sizes dictates that the current research effort be viewed as an exploratory, low-power study that primarily serves to highlight relevant themes and patterns to be explored in future studies.

This exploratory study did yield several important findings, though. First, the unique combination of cohesion, adaptation, and communication accounted for a substantial amount of the variance between forgiving and unforgiving families, with all three variables highly correlated and adaptability explaining the greatest amount of variance between the two groups. Second, there was some evidence linking Olson’s systemic model of balanced and unbalanced family functioning to the constructs of forgiveness and unforgiveness, although there was not a significant relationship between forgiving and unforgiving family types and balanced and unbalanced family types. Third, there was a significant difference for relational satisfaction between the forgiving and unforgiving groups. Finally, the link between religious participation and forgiveness was not tested because of the lack of variance between the forgiving and unforgiving groups for this variable.

As hypothesized, the combination of cohesion, adaptation, and communication indicated a separation for the forgiving and unforgiving groups. And of the three, adaptation provided the best separation between the two groups. While neither cohesion nor communication yielded any additional, significant separations based upon associations not found in the first variable, nonetheless, the variables functioned in conjunction together and discriminated between the two groups individually. This seems to not only support the theoretical formulation of the Circumplex Model but also link forgiveness with healthy systemic functioning.

Olson (2000) conceptualizes adaptability as the ability to balance stability and change in the family system. The rules the family operates by, the roles that each member encompasses, and the leadership style embraced by the entire family unit will certainly be challenged during the course of the family’s developmental life. From an adaptability standpoint, the functional family is one that can adapt it rules, roles, and leadership style to emerging new realities.
Olson (2000) notes that one aspect of healthy family functioning is the successful negotiation of interpersonal boundaries around emerging family realities. Thus, it would not be surprising to find, as in the present study, that forgiving families are those that can successfully adapt and negotiate change in the face of emerging realities and inevitable hurt. Harper and Hoopes (1990) speculate that families stuck in the extremes of rigid or chaotic boundaries exhibited by controlling or neglectful behaviors are then likely to suffer from emotions of fear and abandonment. Family systems such as these that do not have an underlying ethic of forgiveness might find themselves stuck in such extremes.

From a forgiveness perspective, relational changes and challenges can result in inevitable relational hurt and misunderstanding. Without a positive forgiveness dynamic, families may not be able to operate in a mode of second-order change, making the absence of forgiveness a crucial dynamic in a family’s ability to adapt and evolve. Hargrave and Sells’ (1997) contextual family therapy framework of relational ethics assumes that a balance of giving and receiving is requisite to maintain relational existence and that destructive entitlement behavior and lack of trust results when such balance is not achieved. Thus, forgiveness is conceptualized as a series of relational transactions that restore trust and reduce blame. Results of the present study may reflect, then, the reality that forgiving family systems adapt and change at a more functional level than unforgiving ones in that they have an interpersonal resource (forgiveness) by which to address the complex familial change process. Forgiveness in this context is seen as an important corollary to Olson’s adaptability variable.

Olson (2000) conceptualizes cohesion as the family system’s level of emotional bonding and togetherness. In healthy family systems, family members are able to experience appropriate degrees of closeness without forfeiting individuality or intimacy. Extreme forms of cohesion will reveal themselves in either an enmeshed family type where family members are extremely loyal and reactive to one another, or a disengaged family type where family members are disconnected and separated, unable to lean upon one another for emotional support.

Bringing together this concept of cohesion with the forgiveness construct, forgiving family systems could be seen as those that are able to regulate their emotional closeness through the forgiveness process. Relational volatility and relational isolation are both extremes that are related to the absence of forgiveness. McCullough et al. (1997, 1998) postulate that a key determinant of understanding forgiveness is assessing the degree to which there is either avoidance or revenge attitudes present in interpersonal interactions, which in turn could be seen as correlates of enmeshment (volatility/revenge) and disengagement (avoidance) in Olson’s model. In addition, from Hargrave and Sells’ (1997) contextual family therapy framework, forgiveness is used to restore and to repair family relationships through the release of resentment, the healing of emotional wounds, and the exoneration of the person causing injury from potential retaliation by the victim.

The presence of such negative emotions between family members could very well manifest themselves in extreme forms of cohesion. Extrapolated to the results of the current study, unforgiving couples could be seen as those that report greater difficulty in managing the emotional closeness of their relationship due to unresolved feelings of anger, bitterness, and hurt that drive family members apart from one another but also contaminate their interactions when they do come together. This idea is supported by Roloff and Janiszewski (1989) who discovered that relational closeness did indeed...
mediate the forgiveness construct. Coates (1997) reported similar results in that there was a main effect for relational closeness on forgiveness of others. Using the research data from the McCullough et al. (1998) study, Worthington (1998) found that while relationship, offense, and post-hurt variables accounted for 22% of the variance in reported relational closeness, forgiveness variables accounted for an additional 39% of the additional variance of this closeness. Worthington notes that while forgiveness is not necessary for closeness (reconciliation), forgiveness does appear to facilitate such closeness greatly.

Communication is viewed by Olson (2000) as the vital facilitating variable for regulating closeness and change in a family system. Families that are able to communicate positively, constructively, and informatively are those that are able to negotiate individual family members’ needs and requests for change and closeness. When communicative messages are instead filled with negativity, criticism, and blame, family members will vacillate to extreme forms of cohesion and adaptation.

A dynamic touched upon in the current study is one that reveals that unforgiving family systems reported more negative communication behaviors than forgiving families. This would seem consistent with the idea that unforgiving family systems simply may not have the communicative tools to resolve the inevitable hurt and misunderstanding that families experience as they change and relate together. Part of Olson’s (2000) hypothesis is that not only will family systems vary in degrees of adaptation and cohesion over the course of the family developmental cycle but also that such evolution is inevitable and necessary. Thus, those families that cannot positively and constructively communicate through this change process become developmentally “stuck.” The forgiving families in the current study, though, may be those that are less likely to engage in negative patterns of communication and are thus more likely to work through relational conflict. This idea is supported by Fincham and Beach (2002) who examined the forgiveness-communication link within the context of marriage relationships and noted that unforgiveness is strongly related to psychological aggression. For husbands, the wives’ constructive communication was found to predict the husbands’ readiness to forgive. Forgiveness, then, seems to be very relevant as it relates to positive engagement between partners in this study.

Regarding the linkage of forgiveness and balance in families, Olson (2000) notes the robust empirical links between unbalanced family types and family systems that exhibit a variety of dysfunctional problems. Indeed, the key hypothesis of Olson’s model (as cited in Olson, 2000) that balanced family systems function at higher levels than unbalanced family systems has been substantiated by more than 250 studies, almost all of which have used the FACES self-report scales (Olson, 2000). To conceptualize balanced families as ones that by necessity must engage in the forgiveness process is to link these concepts of family trust and family functioning (Hargrave & Sells, 1997). Within this framework, forgiving families are those that can both address and resolve the inevitable relational hurt and confusion that may result from the changing of family roles and rules. Because Olson classifies balanced and unbalanced families utilizing the dimensions of cohesion and adaptation, it would not be surprising to find a relationship between forgiving and balanced family types and unforgiving and unbalanced family types, particularly since the results in the current study revealed the relevance of these same variables for discriminating between forgiving and unforgiving families. This
relationship still remains somewhat tentative for the current study, though. The initial results reveal that of all couples in the current sample, only a subset were correctly assigned to their hypothesized classification. Yet, while statistical significance was not reached, a cursory glance indicates that the group classification scheme is in the expected direction linking balanced and unbalanced family types with forgiving and unforgiving family systems. When only the extreme balanced/unbalanced family types were examined, excluding the moderate levels of balanced and unbalanced families, all of those couples were correctly categorized, lending further anecdotal support to the family type-forgiveness link.

One possible explanation for the lack of statistical significance relates to the instability present when using such a small sample. This is particularly true in light of Olson’s statements (personal communication, May 13, 2004) concerning his recommended means of assigning moderately balanced and unbalanced family types to their correct group. Olson reported that these moderate family types could be either included or discarded, depending upon sample size and purpose of the study. This link, then, is tentative and an indicator that the profitability of utilizing Olson’s family type taxonomy for relating forgiveness with family functioning is still tentative.

Consistent with the proposed hypothesis, forgiving family systems indicated greater satisfaction with family functioning than did unforgiving family systems. Drawing from Hargrave and Sells (1997) conceptualization of forgiveness as the restoration of trust between family members, the absence of forgiveness would signify the presence of relational hurt, misunderstanding and betrayal, resulting in possible relational dissatisfaction. The converse would also be true in that forgiving family systems would be those that are better in resolving this relational hurt, misunderstanding, and betrayal, resulting in relational satisfaction.

As detailed previously, the marital satisfaction-forgiveness link is unclear. While McCullough et al. (1998) maintain that forgiveness occurs more readily in satisfied, romantic relationships, and Woodman (1991) notes an important link between forgiveness and marital adjustment, results in other studies are mixed. Worthington and Ripley (2002) reported finding no dyadic satisfaction-forgiveness link in their experimental study, while Sells et al. (2002) discovered that modest forgiveness-satisfaction links atrophied over a three-month period as part of that experimental study.

Nonetheless, the present study did seem to tap into a link between forgiveness and marital satisfaction. Some of the satisfaction items directly measured interpersonal dynamics such as communication and conflict resolution, correlates on some level with the forgiveness process (Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Fincham & Beach, 2002). The results seem to indicate that while the precise nature of the marital satisfaction-forgiveness link is unclear, relational satisfaction seems to be related in some way to forgiving transactions.

What will remain unclear from the current study is what link, if any, there is between religious participation and forgiveness. The fact that all of the unforgiving couples identified in this study reported attending religious activities on a weekly basis could, though, be seen as a preliminary indicator that religious participation does not necessarily promote forgiving behaviors. In fact, the internalized or externalized pressure within a New Testament community to view and identify oneself as “forgiving” may be at work. This would echo McCullough and Worthington (1999) who note that the current
research in the forgiveness field denotes a rather weak link between religious involvement and self-reported measures of a person’s forgiveness of specific offenders for a particular transgression. In support of this, Subkoviak et al. (1995) found only a modest correlation between self-reported religious behaviors and self-reported forgiveness. Because there was no variance on the religious participation variable for the current study, there is little to speculate about regarding the lack of religious participation and unforgiveness.

**Ambiguity and Implications for the Classification Method**

As noted previously, the validation analyses for the group classification scheme found no relationship found between the one-item classification method utilized in this study and the secondary validity measures employed using the TRIM inventory. This presents a dilemma in that not only does a previous study (McCullough et al., 1998) show such a relationship, but also the current study is predicated on correctly classifying couples into forgiving and unforgiving groups based upon this one-item.

There are several potential explanations for the TRIM Scores/Criterion Question discrepancy, but possibly the most likely relates to sampling frame. Almost the entire sample for the current study was taken from a religious/spiritual context where “forgiveness” is viewed as both an ideal as well as a positional (theological) reality. As such, participants might have been reticent to indicate through a direct statement that they had not forgiven their partner for a recent hurt or betrayal; the New Testament ethic of forgiveness within this group might have been very persuasive. In addition, the researcher was present throughout the data collection process (with the exception of the therapy sample), and this could have contributed to the already present social desirability dynamic. This social desirability concept as applied to forgiveness and religious groups is one that is reviewed at length by McCullough and Worthington (1999) and postulated as a reason religious people might more readily identify themselves as forgiving than others. Utilizing this social desirability framework, being oriented extrinsically to religious activities does not necessarily translate into intrinsic attitudes in forgiving.

There may be other factors at work in the TRIM-Criterion Question issue as well. The previous research effort by McCullough and colleagues (1998) linking this one-item question and the TRIM inventory sampled exclusively from college students at public universities where no idealized religious dynamic was present, utilizing sample sizes that were much larger and robust to statistical significance. In addition, the McCullough study specifically solicited participants who were either having difficulty in forgiving someone or who were recently hurt by a person close to them. Utilizing such a public plea for unforgiving people would, of course, greatly increase the likelihood of someone indicating through the one-item question that they had not forgiven their offender. There was no such criterion for participation for the current study, meaning that inclusion of acutely hurting or victimized participants was a matter of chance, greatly decreasing the odds of finding a sizable unforgiving group. In short, the small unforgiving sample size could have resulted in a smaller degree of variance between the two groups that was not sensitive to statistical analysis for the TRIM-Criterion Question relationship.
An additional issue to consider in regards to the classification scheme is that in the current study if only one partner in a couple dyad indicated an unforgiving stance, then the dyad was assigned to the unforgiving group, regardless of the response of the other partner. This could have resulted in less separation on the mean TRIM scores for each group, as the forgiving and unforgiving extremes simply could not be captured by the TRIM inventory under the current study design. Also, the McCullough study (1998) ran a multiple regression on the single-item and TRIM scores for each individual person, while the current study instead ran a multiple regression for each couple.

The discrepancies between the TRIM and single-item criterion question is not necessarily problematic, though, considering the single-item criterion question most likely captured an unforgiving sample. That is, for those participants in the current study who did indicate unforgiving attitudes towards their partners, despite the possible idealized forgiveness ethic that was present, there is a likelihood that a strong unforgiving dynamic and undercurrent was actually captured. Indeed, utilizing the single-item question was probably preferable to using the TRIM scores in terms of actually capturing the unforgiving extreme. The research “cost” of utilizing the single-item question, though, was that it resulted in a small sample size and low-power study when used in conjunction with this kind of study design.

In summary, the importance of this classification issue is crucial in terms of properly understanding that these study results should be viewed as tentative and simply providing evidence of particular patterns that can be explored further. This is particularly true in light of the fact that while an unforgiving extreme was likely captured through this classification method, it is also equally likely that the forgiving sample contained couples who were not at the other end of the forgiving extreme. Whether a more balanced sample that captured the extremes of forgiving and unforgiving couples would have resulted in even greater variance between the forgiving and unforgiving groups on the discriminant variables is a matter of conjecture to be explored in a future study.

**Unforgiving Couples as Case Studies: An Exploratory Effort**

While this study needs to be viewed as an initial, exploratory effort that begins to identify directions and patterns through its results, much can be learned about future classification efforts and identification of forgiving and unforgiving groups by viewing the unforgiving couples as case studies that provide anecdotal evidence to be explored and used in future research efforts.

Two interesting and seemingly relevant pieces of information to be gathered from the unforgiving couples group is the marital history and marital status variables. There is almost no variance in the group in terms of divorce/remarriage, as every couple indicates that they have been married only once, and to their current partner. In addition, almost all of the couples reported being married more than five years and over half more than twenty years. Intuition might dictate that unforgiving, non-adaptive couples would not demonstrate longevity and perseverance in their marital relationships. Useful information might be gathered by understanding the socio-religious context of which
most of these couples were a part. Conservative, New Testament communities are often stereotyped as having a very negative view of divorce and a correspondingly high commitment to the institution of marriage. Whether this is in fact a reality demonstrated by behaviors consistent with this belief system (Gushee, 2004), the current unforgiving sample does seemingly demonstrate a high commitment to marriage as witnessed by marital history and duration of current marriage, even in the face of an unforgiving dynamic present in their relationship. This “adaptability” issue, then, might be a double-edged sword in that while unforgiving couples might find it more difficult to adjust and adapt to emerging circumstances, one of the options they may not even consider is divorce.

This calls into question the role of forgiveness in marital resiliency. While there may be an adaptability-forgiveness link evident in the current study, there is also an unclear relationship between commitment and forgiveness. Specifically, there may be a priority of relational commitment that takes precedence over forgiveness in terms of relationship duration. The anecdotal evidence, as demonstrated by the fact that all of the unforgiving couples were part of committed marriages with no instances of divorce, might indicate that commitment in and of itself does not provide everything that is necessary to produce a context conducive to forgiveness. If so, this would be contrary to McCullough et al.’s (1997, 1998) findings that commitment did indeed mediate and promote forgiveness. Of course, the sample for the current study, as detailed previously, was much more homogeneous related to religious involvement than the studies just cited. Commitment for these couples might simply be a higher relational value and ethic than forgiveness.

**Methodological Issues and Limitations**

There are several methodological limitations that dictate caution when interpreting and generalizing results from the current study. First, robustness of results for a discriminant analysis would typically require an $N$ of at least twenty for each group (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1998) to maintain stability of results. Small sample size is thus an issue to consider when weighing the generalizability of all of the statistical results. This is particularly true in light of the fact that when sample size is small this raises the possibility of an inflated $R$ (correlation) for the criterion variables; thus, caution needs to be exercised when interpreting the variance that is explained by each criterion variable (G. W. Peterson, personal communication, May 18, 2004). Second, the small number of unforgiving couples in the sample greatly limited the kind of information that could be gathered and applied to this group. This issue was most likely exacerbated by a lack of variance for religious participation, suggesting that demographic homogeneity made data collection from unforgiving couples a great challenge. An additional issue resulting from the small sample size is that the study cannot account for the contribution of extraneous variables to the outcome. Third, this study faced the same kinds of limitations and challenges that many such social science studies face in terms of data collection. Accessibility of small group leaders, couples, and therapists as parties willing to distribute, complete, and turn in surveys in a timely fashion was a challenge. Finally, this
study was limited by a lack of measurement and diagnostic tools that could be reliably used to measure forgiveness within families and to make a consistent classification based upon such. This classification issue includes the fact that it is not known to what particular real-life scenario or problem that participants were responding to when they answered the single-item classification question. Group assignment was made without knowledge, for example, as to whether the hurtful scenario with their spouse was a relatively “minor” or “major” event. This study would have benefited, then, by having an inclusion criteria related to a particular kind of hurtful scenario reported by prospective participants.

To summarize these limitations, because this is a low power, exploratory study, results from both the main and secondary analyses must be viewed as only indicating general patterns and directions to be explored in the future. These shortcomings, though, must be weighed against what is gained by doing such an exploratory study and the information it yields for future studies. These limitations help to point the way for future forgiveness research efforts to address these gaps.

**Directions for Future Research**

Clearly, for future research to make any headway into exploring and understanding the forgiveness construct within a family relationship or family systems context, the issue of classification and measurement must be addressed. The development of suitable instruments is a primary issue, a sentiment echoed by McCullough, Hoyt, and Rachal (2000). These instruments would preferably be ones that capture the perspectives of all family members, instead of just the one who is deemed to be “victim”. The development of a diagnostic tool that could aid in the classification of couples or families into particular forgiving “types” would be greatly beneficial from a systems perspective. Such an instrument might consist a single-item criterion question, a more developed systemic forgiveness inventory, responses to hypothetical scenarios, or a rating system of forgiving responses. In the current study, the TRIM inventory and criterion question were based more upon an intrapsychic psychological perspective than a systems conceptualization.

A second direction that future studies might want to pursue in the quest to better understand forgiveness and family dynamics is to solicit participation from those couples who are having difficulty or who are experiencing ongoing relational hurt. The current study did not have any special criteria for participation in terms of relational difficulty or problems. Actively pursuing such couples, while more difficult, greatly increases the likelihood of obtaining a more diverse sample with greater variance, which in turn facilitates what can be learned about forgiveness with such a population group.

This notion of actively soliciting certain kinds of couples or families to participate in forgiveness studies suggests a third direction to pursue in future endeavors. It is obvious that future studies need not only more of certain kinds of participants but also greater numbers of total participants to address the robustness and generalizability issues mentioned previously. Such efforts will likely require increased sources of funding and
large venues for data collection, such as mental health agencies, hospitals, counseling centers, or large therapy practices.

A final direction for future studies to pursue would be to specifically explore the Circumplex Model-forgiveness links outlined in this study. This could mean examining adaptability and cohesion over the course of a certain phase of a family’s developmental life, such as transitions into adolescence, a dual-income family, a change of jobs, or relocation into a new city. This kind of longitudinal design would pose many challenges, but even specifically targeting a few families, such as those in the military who often experience ongoing episode of change and transition, to follow in a case-study/qualitative format for a specific duration of time could prove beneficial in highlighting important variables related to the forgiveness process.

**Implications for Marriage and Family Therapy**

As noted in Chapter 1, it would seem that marriage and family therapists, because of their epistemological framework, would be very interested in the forgiveness construct. Being concerned not just with the intrapsychic issues that clients grapple with but also the systemic dynamics that govern these clients’ interactions and relationships with family members, marriage and family therapists are likely to find forgiveness a relevant concept. In helping couples and families to potentially restore relational trust and end destructive entitlement behaviors (Hargrave & Sells, 1997), family therapists could draw upon the current study in a number of ways.

First, from a structural family therapy perspective, therapists are likely to find that helping clients facilitate the forgiveness process will also help them manage boundary issues. Specifically, encouraging clients to view change not as a threat but as a challenge to be addressed by the entire family system, drawing upon the forgiveness ethic when inevitable misunderstanding arises, will help clients negotiate the roles, rules, and leadership styles in their families. When inevitable feelings of mistrust and hurt arise, these will serve to short-circuit a family’s natural process of change apart from the utilization of a forgiveness ethic. Forgiveness, then, can be viewed as an interpersonal resource that clients can draw from in such times of change. Therapists might also find that the reverse is true, that by facilitating boundary issues with families, members are in turn provided a more stable context from which to employ the forgiveness process.

Second, therapists might find it productive, especially with religious clients, to emphasize the importance of embracing other relational values besides sheer commitment. Religious clients might believe that because they “will stay married no matter what”, commitment is their most important tool for successfully managing the challenges of family life. While commitment is important, couples may be relationally miserable because of the toxic levels of hurt, mistrust, and betrayal that have never been addressed or resolved through the forgiveness process.

And third, systems theorists could find it of considerable value to explore the way forgiveness might serve as a function of the family system. In examining the homeostatic mechanisms that either encourage or discourage families from engaging in second-order change, spirituality in general and forgiveness in particular might be found to be
important systemic values that affect family functioning. While the systems field has demonstrated an increasingly open attitude towards spirituality (Hargrave & Sells, 1998), fleshing out the systemic dynamics of spiritual values such as forgiveness could prove beneficial.

Summary

As there are no known studies specifically linking forgiveness and Olson’s Circumplex Model of family functioning, this study was an initial, exploratory effort aimed at examining the relationship between systemic variables and forgiving versus unforgiving families. Results indicate that cohesion, adaptation, and communication successfully discriminate between forgiving and unforgiving family systems, and that forgiving families report more relational satisfaction than their unforgiving counterparts.

Forgiveness, it seems, provides a vital interpersonal resource for healthy family functioning. While the results of this study highlight an important relationship between forgiveness and the Circumplex Model, the methodological design of the study does not indicate the precise nature of this relationship. It may well be that cohesion, adaptation, and communication are themselves covariates with forgiveness. If so, forgiveness could be viewed as an additional systemic variable that serves as an indicator of healthy systemic functioning, just as the Circumplex model does. This study, in beginning to highlight these realities, points the way for future efforts to explore the function of forgiveness in relation to the entire family system.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL
APPROVAL MEMORANDUM
from the Human Subjects Committee

Date: November 17, 2003
From: David Quadagno, Chair
To: Paul Gilbert
2628 Harwich Circle
Tallahassee, FL 32309
Dept: Family & Child Science
Re: Use of Human subjects in Research

Project entitled: Family Resiliency and Adaptation

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on November 12, 2003. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by November 11, 2004, you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IR800000446.

APPLICATION NO. 03.638
Cc: C. Readdick
APPENDIX B

TRIM INVENTORY
Directions: There are three sections of questions in this survey. The first (“Family Resiliency Questionnaire”) asks you to reflect on and answer questions about a recent interaction with your spouse. The second (“Family Adaptation Survey”) asks you to rate your thoughts and feelings concerning a variety of areas in your relationship with your spouse. The third is a brief demographic section that asks you to answer a few miscellaneous questions about yourself and your family. Please write your answers on this test booklet and do not confer with anyone while completing the survey. Turn in your test booklet to the test administrator at the front of the room after you are done. Make sure you have read, signed, and understood the Informed Consent Form before proceeding.

Section 1: Family Resiliency Questionnaire (TRIM Inventory)

Please think about a recent, hurtful incident or event (previous 4-6 months) that you have experienced in your relationship with your spouse. For the following questions, indicate your current thoughts and feelings about your partner in relation to this hurtful event. Use the following scale to indicate your agreement with each of the questions.

| 1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree |

___1. I’ll make him/her pay.
___2. I keep as much distance between us as possible.
___3. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
___4. I live as if he/she doesn’t exist, isn’t around.
___5. I don’t trust him/her.
___6. I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
___7. I find it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
___8. I avoid him/her.
___9. I’m going to get even.
___10. I cut off the relationship with him/her.
___11. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
___12. I withdraw from him/her.
___13. I have forgiven him/her.
Dr. McCullough:

I am a doctoral student seeking permission to use your TRIM inventory as part of a research project. Can you please tell me what the procedure is for securing such approval?

Also, you sent me a copy of the TRIM and its scoring procedures about a year ago, but I would also like to get a copy of the one-item question where participants are asked, based upon a 5-point Likert scale, to what extent they have forgiven the person who has wronged them.

Thank you!

Paul Gilbert
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL

Sure; feel free to use it. Please just cite its source. I would put the single-item forgiveness question on the same scale as the other TRIM items. Just ask participants to indicate the extent to which they endorse the statement, "I have forgiven him/her."

Good luck!

Mike

Michael E. McCullough, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology and
Department of Religious Studies
University of Miami
PO Box 248185
Coral Gables, FL 33124-2070
Phone: 305.284.8057
Fax: 305-284.3402
e-mail: mikem@miami.edu
http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/mmccullough/index.html
Michael E. McCullough, PhD
University of Miami
PO Box 248185
Coral Gables, FL 33124-2070

Dear Dr. McCullough:

I am completing a dissertation at Florida State University entitled, “An Analysis of the Function of Systemic Variables Within Forgiving and Unforgiving Family Systems.” I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

**Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale--12-Item Form (TRIM-12)**

**Source:**

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. This authorization is extended to University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the purpose of reproducing and distributing copies of this dissertation. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own [or your company owns] the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me in the enclosed return envelope. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Paul Gilbert

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Michael E. McCullough, PhD

Date: 5/25/04
APPENDIX C

FACES II AND ENRICH SCALES
Part II: Family Resiliency Survey (FACES II)

Complete these next questions using the following scale as you describe your marriage/partnership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ____ I am very happy with how we handle our responsibilities in our family/household
2. ____ I can express my true feelings to my partner
3. ____ I am unhappy with some of my partner’s personality characteristics or personal habits
4. ____ When we are having a problem, my partner often refuses to talk about it
5. ____ I am unhappy with our communication and feel my partner does not understand me
6. ____ My partner sometimes makes comments that put me down
7. ____ I am very happy with how we make decisions and resolve conflict
8. ____ I wish my partner were more willing to share his/her feelings with me
9. ____ I am unhappy about our financial position and the way we make financial decisions
10. ____ At times it is hard for me to ask my partner for what I want
11. ____ I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together
12. ____ Sometimes I have trouble believing everything my partner tells me
13. ____ I am very pleased with how we express affection and relate sexually
14. ____ My partner often doesn’t understand how I feel
15. ____ I am very happy with the way we each handle our responsibilities as parents
16. ____ I am very satisfied with how my partner and I talk with each other
17. ____ I am happy with our relationships with my parents, in-laws, and my partner’s friends
18. ____ It is difficult for me to share negative feelings with my partner
19. ____ I feel very good about how we each practice our religious beliefs and values
20. ____ My partner is a very good listener
Complete these next questions using the following scale as you describe your marriage/partnership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Almost Never</th>
<th>2 Once in Awhile</th>
<th>3 Sometimes</th>
<th>4 Frequently</th>
<th>5 Almost Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

21. ____ We are supportive of each other during difficult times.
22. ____ In our relationship, it is easy for both of us to express our opinion.
23. ____ It is easier to discuss problems with people outside the marriage than with my partner.
24. ____ We each have input regarding major family decisions.
25. ____ We spend time together when we are home.
26. ____ We are flexible in how we handle differences.
27. ____ We do things together.
28. ____ We discuss problems and feel good about the solutions.
29. ____ In our marriage, we each go our own way.
30. ____ We shift household responsibilities between us.
31. ____ We know each other’s close friends.
32. ____ It is hard to know what the rules are in our relationship.
33. ____ We consult each other on personal decisions.
34. ____ We freely say what we want.
35. ____ We have difficulty thinking of things to do together.
36. ____ We have a good balance of leadership in our marriage.
37. ____ We feel very close to each other.
38. ____ We operate on the principle of fairness in our marriage.
39. ____ I feel closer to people outside the marriage than to my partner.
40. ____ We try new ways of dealing with problems.
41. ____ I go along with what my partner decides to do.
42. ____ In our marriage, we share responsibilities.
43. ____ We like to spend our free time with each other.
44. ____ It is difficult to get a rule changed in our relationship.
45. ____ We avoid each other at home.
46. ____ When problems arise, we compromise.
47. ____ We approve of each other’s friends.
48. ____ We are afraid to say what is on our minds.
49. ____ We tend to do more things separately.
50. ____ We share interests and hobbies with each other.
Permission to Use FACES II

I am pleased to give you permission to use FACES II in your research project, teaching or clinical work with couples or families. You may either duplicate the materials directly or have them retyped for use in a new format. If they are retyped, acknowledgement should be given regarding the name of the instrument, the developers’ names, and Life Innovations.

In exchange for providing this permission, we would appreciate a copy of any papers, theses or reports that you complete using FACES II. This will help us to stay abreast of the most recent developments and research regarding this scale. We thank you for your cooperation in this effort.

In closing, I hope you find FACES II of value in your work with couples and families. I would appreciate hearing from you as you make use of this inventory.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

David H. Olson, Ph.D.
Permission to Use ENRICH Couple Scales

I am pleased to give you permission to use the ENRICH Couple Scales in your research project, teaching or clinical work with couples or families. You may either duplicate the materials directly or have them retyped for use in a new format. If they are retyped, acknowledgement should be given regarding the name of the instrument, the developers’ names, and Life Innovations.

In exchange for providing this permission, we would appreciate a copy of any papers, theses or reports that you complete using the ENRICH Couple Scales. This will help us to stay abreast of the most recent developments and research regarding this scale. We thank you for your cooperation in this effort.

In closing, I hope you find the ENRICH Couple Scales of value in your work with couples and families. I would appreciate hearing from you as you make use of this inventory.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

David H. Olson, Ph.D.
David H. Olson, PhD
Life Innovations
PO Box 190
Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190

Dear Dr. Olson:

I am completing a dissertation at Florida State University entitled, “An Analysis of the Function of Systemic Variables Within Forgiving and Unforgiving Family Systems.” I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

ENRICH Couple Scales, including the cohesion and adaptation scales from FACES II, and the communication and marital satisfaction scales from ENRICH

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. This authorization is extended to University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the purpose of reproducing and distributing copies of this dissertation. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own [or your company owns] the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me in the enclosed return envelope. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Paul Gilbert

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

[Signature]

David H. Olson, PhD

Date: 5/14/04
APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET
Section Three: Demographics and Miscellaneous Questions

Length of Time of Your Current Marriage (check one)
- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- Over 31 years

Gender
- Male
- Female

Ethnicity
- African American
- Arab
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Jewish
- Native American
- Other

Marital History (check one)
- Married
- Divorced
- Remarried (Previously widowed)
- Remarried (Previously divorced)
- Single

How often do you participate in an organized religious activity? (Check one below)
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Annually
- Never

Number of Children _____

62
APPENDIX E

LETTERS OF INVITATION
LETTER OF INVITATION FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

Dear Church Member:

My name is Paul Gilbert, and as many of you are aware, I am on the pastoral staff at Four Oaks Community Church. What many of you may not know, though, is that I am in the midst of completing work on my PhD degree in Marriage and Family at Florida State University. I am writing to ask you to consider taking part in my research project entitled, “Family Resiliency and Adaptation.”

Your involvement would include both you and your spouse and would involve about 20-30 minutes of your time after a Sunday morning worship service on (date). You and your spouse would complete a 62-item questionnaire asking for your perceptions about how your family relates and functions together. Spouses will complete the surveys individually and answers will remain anonymous, even to myself. There will be an opportunity at the end of the research project where I will present and discuss relevant family themes in a seminar format. In addition, if you and your spouse would like to discuss your answers as part of a private counseling session, another member of our pastoral staff will be able to do that at your request.

Thank you for considering this request for being involved in my research project. Again, the date for participation is Sunday, (date), immediately after the 2nd service in the church sanctuary. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Paul Gilbert
LETTER OF INVITATION FOR THERAPY CLIENTS

Dear Client:

My name is Paul Gilbert, and I am a doctoral student at Florida State University in Marriage and Family. I am asking you to consider taking part in my research project entitled, “Family Resiliency and Adaptation.”

Your involvement would include both you and your spouse/partner and would involve about 20-30 minutes of your time before your therapy session. You and your spouse/partner would complete a 62-item questionnaire asking for your perceptions about how your family relates and functions together. You will complete the surveys individually and answers will remain anonymous, even to your therapist and myself. There will be an opportunity at the end of the research project where I will present and discuss relevant family themes in a seminar format. You are of course free to discuss your answers as part of a future therapy session with your therapist.

Thank you for considering this request for being involved in my research project. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Paul Gilbert
LETTER OF AGREEMENT FOR THERAPISTS

Dear (Therapist):

As you may or may not know, I am in the midst of completing my Ph.D. degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at Florida State University. As part of my doctoral research project, I am collecting data from married couples in an attempt to understand the systemic dynamics of families that tend to be “forgiving” versus those that tend to be “unforgiving.” I am writing to ask you to consider taking part in this research project by having some of your married clients complete and return a survey.

The proposed study will utilize one survey comprised of three instruments totaling 62 items, plus a demographic section that includes a criterion question that will be used for classification purposes. Twelve items will be drawn from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations (TRIM) Inventory, 30 items from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales – Second Edition (FACES II), and 20 items from the Marital Satisfaction and Communication scales of the ENRICH inventory. The demographic section of this survey, in addition to soliciting individual subject characteristics, will also include a question gauging the level of church participation and involvement.

Enclosed, you will find a copy of the questionnaires and informed consent form that I am asking research participants to complete, as well as a self-addressed, stamped envelope for you to return this signed Letter of Agreement if you agree to participate in the study. By participating in the study, you are agreeing to give couples this survey individually in your office who will then complete the questionnaires without collaboration and return them together via mail to the researcher (a stamp, self-addressed envelope will be provided). At no time should participants be asked to disclose or share the results with you, although participants should be given the option to talk with you individually or together about issues that may arise from completing the survey.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign this letter and return it in the envelope provided. Or, if you have further questions about the study, procedures, or questionnaires, please contact me at your earliest convenience. Otherwise, I will be in touch with you once I receive your signed letter in order to make arrangements for the study.

Sincerely,
Paul Gilbert
Doctoral Student

I agree to participate in Paul Gilbert’s doctoral study entitled, “Family Resiliency and Adaptation”.

__________________________________   ________________________
(Therapist)       (Date)

__________________________________
(Witness)
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR CHURCH MEMBERS

Research Project on Family Resiliency and Adaptation

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled, “Family Resiliency and Adaptation.”

Paul Gilbert, M.A., M.Div., who is a pastor and doctoral candidate at Florida State University in the program for Marriage and Family Therapy, is conducting this research. I understand the purpose of his research project is to better understand the dynamics of family interaction and adaptation to life stressors and events. I understand that if I participate in the project I will be asked to answer questions related to the way my family functions, patterns of behavior in my family, my feelings about family members, and my perceptions about how family members relate together.

I understand I will be asked to fill out paper and pencil questionnaires and that my participation in the study is contingent upon my spouse completing the same questionnaires. I also understand that my answers will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law, even to my spouse and researcher, and that my survey will be coded anonymously and matched only to the results of my partner, which will also remain confidential. The total time commitment will be about 20-30 minutes. If I participate in this study, I will have the option of discussing personal thoughts and feelings generated by the survey with another member of the pastoral staff either by myself, or with my partner. There will also be a public debriefing forum at the end of completion of this research project lead by the researcher to present and discuss relevant family themes in a seminar format. I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at anytime.

I understand there is a possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study. I might experience anxiety when thinking about relational difficulties or family problems. I am also able to stop my participation at any time I wish.

I understand there are benefits for participating in this research project. In addition to the private consultation and public forum options mentioned previously, one benefit is that I will be providing researchers with insight into family relationships and dynamics. This insight can assist them in formulating interventions and strategies that will improve family functioning.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning this study. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Paul Gilbert, Florida State University, Department of Family and Child Science, (850) 644-1388, or Dr. Christine Readick, Florida State University, Department of Family and Child Science, (850) 644-6849, for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Group results will be sent to me upon my request.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

I have read and understand this consent form.

(Subject) (Date)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THERAPY CLIENTS

Research Project on Family Resiliency and Adaptation

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled, “Family Resiliency and Adaptation.”

Paul Gilbert, M.A., M-Div, who is a pastor and doctoral candidate at Florida State University in the program for Marriage and Family Therapy, is conducting this research. I understand the purpose of his research project is to better understand the dynamics of family interaction and adaptation to life stressors and events. I understand that if I participate in the project I will be asked to answer questions related to the way my family functions, patterns of behavior in my family, my feelings about family members, and my perceptions about how family members relate together.

I understand I will be asked to fill out paper and pencil questionnaires and that my participation in the study is contingent upon my spouse completing the same questionnaires. I also understand that my answers will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law, even to my spouse and researcher, and that my survey will be coded anonymously and matched only to the results of my partner, which will also remain confidential. The total time commitment will be about 20-30 minutes. If I participate in this study, I will have the option of discussing personal thoughts and feelings generated by the survey with my present therapist, either by myself, or with my partner. There will also be a public debriefing forum at the end of completion of this research project lead by the researcher to present and discuss relevant family themes in a seminar format. I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at anytime.

I understand there is a possibility of a minimal level of risk involved if I agree to participate in this study. I might experience anxiety when thinking about relational difficulties or family problems. I am also able to stop my participation at any time I wish.

I understand there are benefits for participating in this research project. In addition to the private consultation and public forum options mentioned previously, one benefit is that I will be providing researchers with insight into family relationships and dynamics. This insight can assist them in formulating interventions and strategies that will improve family functioning.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning this study. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Paul Gilbert, Florida State University, Department of Family and Child Science, (850) 644-1588, or Dr. Christine Readick, Florida State University, Department of Family and Child Science, (850) 644-6849, for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Group results will be sent to me upon my request.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

I have read and understand this consent form.

(Subject)  (Date)
APPENDIX G

PILOT STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE
Family Resiliency Questionnaire

Please think about a recent, hurtful incident or event (previous 4-6 months) that you have experienced in your relationship with your spouse/partner. For the following questions, indicate your current thoughts and feelings about your partner in relation to this hurtful event. Use the following scale to indicate your agreement with each of the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 = Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 = Disagree</th>
<th>3 = Neutral</th>
<th>4 = Agree</th>
<th>5 = Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

___ 1. I’ll make him/her pay.
___ 2. I keep as much distance between us as possible.
___ 3. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
___ 4. I live as if he/she doesn’t exist, isn’t around.
___ 5. I don’t trust him/her.
___ 6. I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
___ 7. I find it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
___ 8. I avoid him/her.
___ 9. I’m going to get even.
___ 10. I cut off the relationship with him/her.
___ 11. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
___ 12. I withdraw from him/her.

___ To what degree have you forgiven your partner for this recent hurt?

1 = None
2 = Very Little
3 = Undecided
4 = Mostly
5 = Completely
Family Forgiveness Incident

Next, think about any past incident in your relationship with your partner/spouse (other than the one you used above) in which you have had to forgive your partner/spouse. Then, answer the following questions:

Briefly describe the hurtful event:

Thoughts and Feelings Towards Your Partner Before Forgiving Them:

Thoughts and Feelings Towards Your Partner After Forgiving Them:
December 18, 2002

Dear Participant:

Thanks for taking part in a study that will better help myself and others know how to help and encourage families during times of challenge and change. You and your partner/spouse are being asked to complete a questionnaire that examines how families relate to each other during difficult times and those family characteristics that help them to adapt and cope during such times.

Each partner/spouse is encouraged to complete this questionnaire individually without consulting with the other person and then to mail it back separately to the researcher in the attached envelope. While you may certainly discuss this questionnaire with your partner/spouse after completing it and mailing it in, be assured that each person’s results will be kept fully confidential.

If you and your spouse are in agreement that you would like to discuss the results together on a separate occasion, please contact me about doing so.

Thanks for your participation!

Paul Gilbert
Florida State Dissertation Project
556-4274
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Paul B. Gilbert

Personal History

Birthplace and Birth date
Chattanooga, Tennessee
April 2, 1969

Educational History

Florida State University
1996 – Present Tallahassee, FL
- Completed doctoral level course work in marriage and family therapy
- Doctoral candidate, scheduled graduation date of August 2004

Reformed Theological Seminary
1991-92; 93-96 Jackson, MS
- Master of Divinity
- Master of Arts, Marriage and Family Therapy.
- Graduated with a 3.7 GPA.

University of Tennessee
1987-91 Knoxville, TN
- Bachelor of Arts, Speech Communication.
- Graduated with Honors

Professional Associations
American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists - Student Supervisor in Training

Professional Interests
Psychology and Theology Integration
- Pastoral Counseling
- Pre-Marital Preparation and Training
Professional Positions

Associate Pastor for Family Ministries
1997 – Present Four Oaks Community Church Tallahassee, FL
- Oversee programs and staff for children, middle school, high school, and college students
- Provide pastoral counseling for families, individuals, and couples
- Engage in regular teaching and instruction opportunities

Teaching Assistant and Instructor
1996-98; 2001-02 Florida State University Tallahassee, FL
- Taught and managed an upper level undergraduate Adult Development class of 60
- Taught and managed a lower level undergraduate Family Relationships class for seven semesters

Marriage and Family Student Therapist
1996-1998 Florida State University Tallahassee, FL
1994-1996 Reformed Theological Seminary Jackson, MS
- Received training and supervision in a variety of marriage and family therapy treatment protocols.
- Counseled families, individuals, and couples as part of 700 hours of clinical experience.
- Supervised and trained beginning level therapists in clinical practicums.

Patient Coordinator
1994-1996 Charter Behavioral Hospital Jackson, MS
- Worked in patient care at a mental health hospital
- Helped children and adolescents in implementing behavioral and psychological treatment protocols

Youth Ministry Internship
1992-1993 Grace Evangelical Church Memphis, TN
- Oversaw and lead middle school and senior high ministries.
- Received training in philosophy of ministry strategies.
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<tr>
<th>Professional Activities</th>
<th>Guest Speaker for Community Christian School</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Spiritual Retreat for Secondary School Students</td>
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<td>Durham, North Carolina</td>
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<td><strong>Seminar Presentation entitled, “Understanding Your Teenager”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Organized Marital Enrichment Weekend entitled, “Enjoying Your</strong></td>
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