

## ABSTRACT

**DISSERTATION:** Relationship Satisfaction Following Offenses in Marriage

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**DATE:** June 11, 2009

**PAGES:** 117

Problems occur in nearly all marriages at one time or another. Even individuals in healthy marriages have suffered from some form of relationship offenses by their spouses. The literature has examined many facets of marital satisfaction and marital stability. Because of the numerous studies associating marital dissatisfaction with marital dissolution, the focus of the literature on marital problems has typically been on distressed couples. This study's focus is on problems experienced by married participants who are not currently reporting thoughts of ending their marriages. It examined factors that contribute to maintaining satisfaction in marriages that are not considered distressed, but in which there has been some offense committed. Specifically, it examined the role of trust and forgiveness as predictors of marital satisfaction in married participants. Participants were asked to complete a series of measures that included the Trim-18 (which is a common instrument in the forgiveness literature to measure levels of forgiveness following specific relationship offenses), the Dissipation Rumination scale, the Trust Scale, and the Relationship Assessment Scale. As done in previous forgiveness research, participants were asked to recall and list offenses committed by their spouses.

They then rated the amount of pain experienced by the most bothersome offense on a scale from 1-10. All measures were regressed on the Relationship Assessment Scale. Results of analyses indicated that trust, forgiveness, and amount of pain did significantly predict relationship satisfaction. Specifically, avoidance (from the forgiveness measure) and faith (from the trust measure) seemed to explain the most variance in the model. Forgiveness explained slightly more variance than trust or pain, but all significantly contributed. Trait forgiveness, as measured by the Dissipation Rumination scale did not contribute to the overall model. The most notable finding of the current study was that forgiveness served as a mediator between trust and relationship satisfaction. Listed offenses were categorized into either an unfaithfulness category or other category. Of the 153 participants, 10 participants listed spouse unfaithfulness as the offense. No differences were found between type of offense and relationship satisfaction, however participants who reported unfaithfulness did differ significantly on the amount of pain reported.