

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION FOLLOWING OFFENSES IN MARRIAGE

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## ABSTRACT

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

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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.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Marriage

Establishing and maintaining healthy marital relationships requires effort by both spouses, but despite even the best attempts, most marriages experience some type of distress. There is an abundance of literature that focuses on marital relationships and the problems that occur in them. Many studies have explored marital satisfaction as it relates to multiple problems such as the most frequently cited couple problem, communication (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997), as well as financial problems (Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003). Further, marital dissatisfaction has been associated with other marital problems that are more specific to particular couples' situations (Gimbel & Booth, 1994; Henry & Miller, 2004; Quittner, et al., 1998).

#### *Marital Satisfaction*

Many research studies looking at marital satisfaction have involved a variety of predictor and outcome variables. A PsychInfo search of publications on marital satisfaction found that between the years 1836 and 2008 there were 4475 articles that included the key words "marriage" and "satisfaction". In the first 100 years of publications, articles included titles such as "Women's Colleges and Race Extinction" (Moore, 1930) and "Romance Outside the Pale" (Wile & Winn, 1929). As Alfred

Kinsey's work on sexuality became more widely known and accepted in the 1950's and 1960's, the research began to reflect the changing views of the time. Publications began to explore topics related to marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction, particularly in women. During the last twenty years research has included topics related to parenting, divorce, and step-families. Researchers have associated marital satisfaction with such predictors as the impact of having a child (Guttman & Lazar, 2004), attending graduate school (Legako & Sorenson, 2000), and engaging in military combat (Gimbel & Booth, 1994). In addition, other studies have associated marital dissatisfaction with marital violence (Byrne & Arias, 1997), raising children with chronic illnesses (Quittner et al., 1998), marital interactions (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989), and attributions and expectations (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000). Marital satisfaction has been studied from many different perspectives and with a variety of constructs. The marital satisfaction literature base continues to grow as it follows the changes that occur in our developing society.

### *Marital Statistics*

According to 2001 data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), nearly 62% of Americans getting married every year are entering marriage for the first time (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). The SIPP survey also reported that 41% of men and 39% of women aged 50-59, had been divorced at least one time, and that most first marriages that ended in divorce lasted an average of eight years. As these statistics indicate, marital dissolution is a reality of many marriages. Even marriages that do not end in divorce still experience marital distress at one time or another, with some distress occurring as early as the first few months of marriage (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, &

Lee, 2005). Despite the high percentages of divorce, people do not appear to be deterred from entering marriage. Because the vast majority of people do get married, researchers and clinicians alike have been asking, “What contributes to marital problems and how do married couples overcome those problems to remain satisfied in their relationships?”

### Forgiveness

To answer that question, researchers have begun to study the use of forgiveness in interpersonal relationships. Forgiveness is a process which dissipates feelings of anger following interpersonal betrayals (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Forgiveness is not based on emotions, but is a decision made by victims to give up their resentment and anger toward offenders. Enright and Fitzgibbons clarify what forgiveness is and what it is not because it is frequently misinterpreted as condoning or excusing. Even mental health professionals do not always understand forgiveness; therefore Worthington and Wade (1999) suggest that forgiveness is not simply the absence of revenge, anger, or hostility. Instead, forgiveness is a choice by victims to reconcile with their offenders through empathy for those who offended them.

Over the last twenty-five years forgiveness has become an effective therapeutic technique when people understand what it is and how to apply it to interpersonal transgressions (Baskin & Enright, 2004). The only meta-analysis published to date on the benefits of forgiveness interventions in therapy indicated that participants who received a process-based forgiveness intervention were better off than 95% of those who did not receive a forgiveness intervention. The populations that were represented in the meta-analysis varied in the types of offenses being addressed. Examples of populations included elderly females (Hebl & Enright, 1993), post-abortive men (Coyle & Enright,

1997), female incest survivors (Freedman & Enright, 1996), and parental-love-deprived college students (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995).

Not only is forgiveness beneficial for recipients of individual psychotherapy, research has begun to establish the health benefits of forgiveness of interpersonal transgressions (Lawler-Row, Karremans, Scott, Edlis-Matityahou, & Edwards, 2008). College students were asked to recall a time when one or both of their parents had made them upset, angry, annoyed, or hurt and were asked to describe the event to an interviewer. Participants were given a short time to think about the event and then completed the state forgiveness inventory. After five more minutes of quiet time they completed several more questionnaires including measures of state and trait forgiveness, anger, and physical health. Trait forgiveness was significantly related to fewer medications, less alcohol, and lower blood pressure and heart rate in forgiving participants than non-forgiving participants. In addition, participants with higher levels of trait forgiveness were less likely to express anger through yelling, sarcasm, using profanities, or raising their voices. From the same study, state forgiveness was associated with fewer physical symptoms and lower heart rate. The authors concluded that both state and trait forgiveness play an important role in physical responses to interpersonal offenses or betrayals.

Like marital satisfaction, forgiveness has been used as an outcome variable in many empirical studies. For example, the domains of the five-factor personality model were found to predict forgiveness in the expected directions (Brose, Rye, Lutz-Zois, & Ross, 2005). Forgiveness measures were negatively correlated with Neuroticism and positively correlated with Agreeableness and Extroversion. Adult attachment style also

has been used to predict dispositional forgiveness (Webb, Call, Chickering, Colburn, & Heisler, 2006). Participants with secure attachment styles scored significantly higher on measures of self, other, situation, and total forgiveness than participants with insecure attachment styles. In another study, securely attached participants were more forgiving of specific offenses in close relationships and had lower blood pressures than insecure participants immediately following interviews in which the offenses were discussed (Lawler-Row, Younger, Piferi, & Jones, 2006). Other research has explored barriers to forgiveness such as narcissistic entitlement (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). Entitlement was negatively correlated with measures of forgiveness as was offense severity. The presence of an apology, pre-offense closeness, and religiousness were factors that promoted forgiveness. Also, when participants were asked to consider retrospectively any ways they may have benefited from enduring relationship violations (realizing personal strengths, growing closer in a relationship, or becoming wiser or stronger), writing of the benefits promoted forgiveness significantly more than writing about the actual relationship transgressions or a control topic (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006).

More research has suggested that participants with ambivalent attitudes toward their spouses were less likely to forgive marital offenses, but only when participants ruminated on the offenses (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005). Another important element related to forgiveness level is commitment level. Participants who scored higher on measures of commitment level were less likely to seek revenge or give spouses a cold shoulder than participants with lower commitment levels (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). However, commitment level was not significantly related to pro-

relationship behaviors such as constructively talking of the offenses. Gunderson and Ferrari (2008) examined whether discovery method, frequency of offense, and presence of apology were associated with forgiveness of marital infidelity. In a hypothetical study using scenarios of infidelity, forgiveness was more likely to occur if the offense was an isolated event rather than repeated offenses. Also, participants whose scenarios included an apology by the offending spouse were more likely to forgive, found it easier to forgive, were more likely to trust their partner, and needed less time to forgive than participants whose scenarios did not include an apology. Discovery method did not yield significant results for any scenario.

### Infidelity

Marital infidelity is a serious problem that occurs in marriages, and it has been identified as the primary reason couples divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Although prevalence rates vary widely in the number of men and women who report engaging in extra-marital relationships, infidelity impacts a large proportion of marital relationships. One recent study of participants ranging in age from 17 to 78 found that of the 546 respondents, 233 individuals reported engaging in infidelity and 285 reported not engaging in infidelity (Brand, Markey, Mills, & Hodges, 2007). Of those who reported engaging in infidelity, 50.6% were women and 39.3% were men. The authors' definition of infidelity was broad and included "any form of romantic and/or sexual involvement" (p. 104) whether it occurred one time or was on-going. Romantic behaviors could include anything the participants deemed as unfaithful such as kissing, hugging, holding hands, or intercourse with someone other than their partner. When the authors limited the definition of infidelity to intercourse only, 19% of women and 21% of men reported

engaging in infidelity. Due to the negative stigma and personal nature of this problem, people are not usually open about sharing their involvement in adulterous relationships; therefore, statistics should be interpreted accordingly.

Infidelity is one of the most difficult problems for clinicians to address and clinicians feel inadequately trained for working with infidelity in marital counseling (Whisman, et al., 1997). One reason it is difficult to treat this couple problem is that marital infidelity is difficult to define. If infidelity is defined only by engaging in sexual intercourse, it would be much simpler, however, there are many behaviors that are considered to be unfaithful that do not include sexual intercourse. Infidelity does not require physical involvement and could be emotional involvement only. Because of the lack of a clear definition for infidelity, it leaves many questions about how close two people can be before the relationship changes from a friendship to an affair. Most definitions of infidelity (also known as “having an affair” or “extra-marital relationships”) suggest that a key component is the engaging in any behavior that violates the partners’ expectations for exclusivity (Pittman, 1989). Because different couples have different expectations for each other and for their relationships, infidelity can be very different for each spouse. Regardless of what the specific behaviors are, infidelity is perceived as an act of betrayal or breach of trust between the partners (Pittman, 1989).

Due to the personal nature of this problem, spouses may be hesitant to admit that they have been unfaithful in their marriages and injured spouses may not report infidelity due to embarrassment or shame. These feelings may inhibit spouses from using language such as “infidelity” when discussing betrayals involving third parties. Regardless of how spouses choose to describe relationship offenses, marital betrayals involving issues of

trust are often very damaging to relationships, and forgiveness of these offenses may play a key role in re-establishing or maintaining satisfaction within relationships. As spouses work through common problems, they eventually must decide the fate of their relationships. Some will choose to separate or divorce while others will overcome their problems and attempt to move beyond them. This study is interested in the latter group. What factors determine whether spouses will be able to maintain marriages and/or lead to increased marital satisfaction?

To summarize, most marriages experience some form of relationship problems and many marriages end in divorce. However, since not all marriages end in divorce, it is safe to assume that there are many spouses who experience problems and are able to maintain their marriages despite experiencing problems. Some of the common marital problems include communication problems, financial stresses, and infidelity/betrayals of trust. To date, forgiveness has proven to be an effective intervention for working through interpersonal transgressions. It is expected that forgiveness may also have an important role in marital satisfaction.

The present study will contribute to the growing body of forgiveness literature by examining forgiveness and trust as predictors of marital satisfaction. Specifically, it will use both quantitative and qualitative data as it explores the types of offenses that occur in marriages in which spouses have chosen not to dissolve their relationships by separations or divorces. The primary purpose of the present study is to examine whether trust and forgiveness predict relationship satisfaction. The second purpose of this study is to identify the types of offenses that occur in non-distressed marriages and to determine if offenses of unfaithfulness to the marriage impact differently from other types of offenses.

By measuring dispositional forgiveness, situational forgiveness, and trust as predictors of marital satisfaction, this study will attempt to answer the question, “What are the offenses that occur in intact marriages and what role do forgiveness and trust play in the relationship satisfaction of marriages despite their problems?” A multiple regression analysis will be performed to test for correlations between the predictor variables and relationship satisfaction. Analyses will be conducted by gender to check for any differences due to gender, though none are hypothesized and are not expected. Also, although it is possible that both husbands and wives within the same marriage will complete the surveys, previous research has indicated that analyzing the data as couples did not contribute to predicting satisfaction with a college dating sample (Markle, 2008). As a result, data will not be collected by couples and there will be no way of connecting any particular participant to a corresponding spouse. The hypotheses are listed below.

#### Hypotheses

*Hypothesis 1:* Situational forgiveness, dispositional forgiveness, trust, and pain will predict relationship satisfaction. Specifically, total scores on the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale-18 (TRIM-18), Dissipation Rumination Scale, and the Trust Scale will be positively associated with scores on the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) while the severity of pain will be negatively associated with scores on the RAS.

*Hypothesis 1a:* Severity of pain due to the betrayal as rated by participants on a scale from 1-10 (where 1 is very little pain and 10 is significant pain) will be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Situational forgiveness (measured by the TRIM-18) will predict relationship satisfaction. Specifically, higher scores on the revenge subscale and avoidance subscale of the TRIM-18 will predict lower levels of satisfaction, while higher scores on the benevolence subscale will predict greater relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Dispositional forgiveness will predict relationship satisfaction. Specifically, after reverse scoring of the instrument higher scores on the Dissipation Rumination scale (dispositional forgiveness) will indicate more forgiving traits and will be positively associated with relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 1d:* Trust as measured by scores on the Trust Scale will predict relationship satisfaction. Higher scores on dependability and faith (subscales of Trust Scale) will positively correlate with relationship satisfaction, while higher scores on predictability (subscale of Trust Scale) will negatively correlate with relationship satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2:* One or more of the predictor variables will serve as mediators of relationship satisfaction in the final model.

*Hypothesis 3:* Participants who report offenses of spouse unfaithfulness will differ from participants who report other types of offenses (such as communication problems or not getting along with in-laws) on the relationship satisfaction measure.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Marriage

Marriage is a complex phenomenon that has intrigued researchers for many decades. What makes the marital relationship so special? Why do people choose to marry and why do some marriages stay together while other marriages end in divorce? In an attempt to answer these questions and others like them, researchers have identified over 200 variables and over 900 results have been reported on the construct of marriage, with marital stability and marital satisfaction the most common variables of interest (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

#### *Marital Satisfaction*

Research exploring marital satisfaction started with publications as early as 1836. In general, the results of the marital satisfaction literature suggest that marriages in which spouses are more satisfied are less likely to end in divorce. Because of the important implications of these findings, researchers seem justified in making marital satisfaction the most commonly researched marital construct and also in putting forth continued efforts at understanding this construct. Because marital satisfaction has been studied from so many different angles, it would be difficult to adequately review all of the literature that has been published, however the following studies are presented as a sample of the marital satisfaction literature.

In one study that associated marital satisfaction with attributions and role expectations a sample of couples married between 15 and 20 months found a reciprocal relationship between attributions for negative spousal behavior and marital satisfaction, which were mediated by efficacy expectations (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000). The efficacy expectations, or participants' beliefs that they have the abilities needed to resolve conflicts, were positively correlated with marital satisfaction and negatively correlated with causal and responsibility attributions. In another study, Guttman and Lazar (2004) examined differences in marital satisfaction between first time parents and childless couples. The results of the study indicated that first time parents were more satisfied with their relationships, specifically in the area of Agreement and Consideration, which included such things as mutual respect, cooperation, handling disagreements, and division of labor at home. Marital satisfaction has also been examined as it relates to premarital education (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006). In a large study of 2,533 participants, premarital education was associated not only with increased relationship satisfaction, but also with higher levels of relationship commitment and lower divorce rates. The likelihood of participants receiving premarital education was associated with higher levels of education and being married in a religious setting.

Another study examined marital satisfaction and physical aggression. This study found that marital violence was positively associated with dissatisfaction in marriage (Byrne & Arias, 1997), specifically, wives who reported high negative responsibility attributions (selfishness or bad intentions) for their husbands' behaviors were more likely to be in physically violent relationships and have lower levels of marital satisfaction. There was no effect for husbands or for wives with low negative responsibility

attributions. Finally, marital satisfaction has been associated with communication, hostility, and neuroticism (Rogge, Bradbury, Hahlweg, Engl, & Thurmaier, 2006). In this study participants who scored high on measures of hostility and neuroticism were more likely to be divorced after five years than those who scored lower on the same instruments, while poor communication predicted lower levels of marital satisfaction.

### *Marital Problems*

Given the high divorce rate, it is clear that problems exist in many marriages. Although some problems may be minor and may little affect the relationship, other problems are too troublesome to ignore and result in marital dissolution. Identifying common marital problems has been a focus of much research. The most common marital problems were identified as communication and financial matters while emotional intimacy, sexual issues, and decision-making were also frequently cited problems (Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, & White, 2003). Other problems exist that are more specific to particular couples' situations. For instance, some couples struggle with role strain and a decrease in marital satisfaction when they have a child with a chronic illness (Quittner, Espelage, Opiari, Carter, Eid, & Eigen, 1998). Other couples experience decreases in marital satisfaction and stability due to one spouse having experienced military combat (Gimbel & Booth, 1994). Additionally, more problems may be due to phase of life issues. One study found that midlife couples experienced financial matters, issues of raising children, and sexual issues as the most common source of marital dissatisfaction (Henry & Miller, 2004). Unlike other studies of marital satisfaction, communication was not identified as one of the major sources of problems in the marriage of these midlife couples.

One longitudinal study (Amato & Rogers, 1997) examined how marital problems predicted divorce between the years 1980 to 1992. It found that women were more likely than men to report that problems existed in marriage, however the reports of marital problems by both men and women predicted divorce equally well. In addition, factors such as jealousy by husbands and husbands spending money foolishly were associated with earlier divorces. Delaying marriage decreased the likelihood of at least three problem behaviors (jealousy, infidelity, and drugs/alcohol) while church attendance decreased all six problem areas (jealousy, moodiness, infidelity, irritating habits, spending money foolishly, and drinking/drug use). The strongest predictor of divorce was infidelity.

Other research has explored such topics as conflict resolution and whether the ability of married couples to move from conflict to more positive interactions predicted divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Interactions between partners were videotaped and affect of partners was coded. At four year follow up, researchers concluded that couples who remained married had more husband interest and less husband contempt/disgust and more wife interest and less wife sadness than couples who divorced. Divorce was accurately predicted at 82.6%. Rates of divorce prediction were more accurate (92.7%) for couples who moved from conflictual conversations to more positive conversations. These interactions were more likely to have wives who expressed less anger and husbands who expressed less contempt/disgust. Other researchers have looked to see if factors such as gender attitudes, perceived unfairness in relationships, and relationship alternatives impact dissolution of marriage (Sanchez & Gager, 2000). Results indicated that gender attitudes did increase odds of marital dissolution. Specifically, wives with

more traditional gender attitudes were less likely to divorce, whereas husbands with more traditional gender attitudes were more likely to divorce. In addition, for husbands only, both perceived disagreements and thoughts of how their lives would be different without their spouses increased risk for divorce. Unfairness did not appear to impact marital dissolution.

### *Betrayals and Infidelity*

Relationship betrayals are subjective and what might constitute a betrayal for one spouse might be acceptable behavior in another relationship. Betrayals are violations of expectations for relationships. Sometimes expectations for relationships are clear, and other expectations may be unstated or less clear. When betrayals occur in relationships they impact the level of trust in the relationship. Knowing what to expect and having spouses who reliably and predictably behave in expected ways build trust, and when spouses are betrayed, their levels of trust diminish.

Betrayals may take many forms, however the most difficult betrayals for marriages to endure are those involving betrayals of trust with extra-marital partners. Extra-marital affairs, also known as acts of infidelity, are common in marriages, but no less difficult to manage. For the same reason that prevalence rates of infidelity are difficult to measure, researching infidelity is also difficult. Much of the research on infidelity has relied on the use of participants responding to vignettes rather than participants with actual infidelity experiences. In addition, the lack of random sampling of participants has compromised the generalizability of some of the studies (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). That said, the results of various research studies have identified risk factors for extra-marital relations. First, women's extra-marital

relationships tend to be more emotional in nature and women are more likely to justify their infidelity due to love. Men's extra-marital relationships are more likely to involve sex-only relationships and men justify their sexual behaviors with other women by their lack of emotional connection with the extra-relational partners (Glass & Wright, 1985).

Factors that may increase a partner's involvement in extra-marital relationships include being male, black, young, working outside of the home (especially if one's spouse does not), infrequent church attendance, low marital satisfaction, alcohol consumption, narcissism, impulsivity, pre-marital sex, liberal political attitudes, and attitudes of gender inequality (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & Christensen, 2005). Specifically, partners who reported that their relationship was "pretty happy" or "not too happy" were two to four times more likely to report an extra-marital sexual act than those who reported being "very happy" with their marriage (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Those participants who reported an income over \$75,000 were 1.5 times more likely to have had an affair than participants making less than \$30,000. In addition, a discrepancy was found between participants with a graduate degree and participants who reported having less than a high school education. The more educated, the more likely the participant was to have had a sexual relationship outside of marriage (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Finally, couples who engaged in extra-marital relationships reported more time spent apart, more sexual dissatisfaction, and increased issues with trust and marital instability (Atkins, Yi, Baucom, & Christensen, 2005).

*Types of Infidelity*

Pittman (1989) identified four types of infidelity: accidental, philandering, romantic affairs, and marital arrangements. Accidental infidelity is an extra-marital relationship that one partner simply “stumbles upon.” This type of affair is not planned nor sought by the partner. Frequently it occurs in relatively happy marriages where one spouse has a friendship that goes too far. This type of infidelity may occur when spouses are simply curious about what other types of sexual encounters they may be missing. Other explanations for the accidental type of infidelity may be going along with what friends were doing, being too polite to say no, or succumbing to flattery.

A second type of infidelity is philandering. Pittman (1989) described this type of infidelity as typically men who have strong beliefs of stereotypical gender roles. Often philanderers depersonalize women and use them as a means for pleasure. Some philanderers use sex with women to control the power that they perceive women have over them, while other philanderers may be attractive and charming (AKA Don Juan) and simply find women irresistible. There are many types of philanderers, but each of them engages in on-going patterns of extra-marital relationships.

According to Pittman (1989) romantics engage in extra-marital affairs out of need for the excitement and passion associated with falling in love. These affairs involve taking risks and becoming engulfed in the relationship to the point of using it as an escape from reality. These relationships are intense and often experienced as worth all of the costs that might be involved with having the affair. These affairs are typified by soap operas and movies during which the love is often forbidden and to which there are many obstacles in the way of their ultimate and passionate love.

Finally, Pittman (1989) refers to marital arrangements as the final type of infidelity. This form of infidelity occurs when married couples arrange for one or both of the spouses to have sex outside of the marriage. This situation most often occurs when the spouses are unhappy in their marriage, yet choose to remain married. Pittman suggests that divorce is expensive and some couples choose to remain married to provide stability for children. Whatever the reason, the spouses agree on an arrangement that best fits their needs as a couple.

A common belief about marital infidelity is that infidelity only occurs in marriages that already have problems or where marital satisfaction is already low. As stated previously, most marriages experience some marital problems and many factors contribute to marital satisfaction. Although lower marital satisfaction is strongly associated with infidelity (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001; Amato & Rogers, 1997) it is not the only cause of marital infidelity. Opportunity has also been identified as a factor in marital infidelity (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). The use of the internet has created another avenue or opportunity for spouses to meet new people in an anonymous setting. In addition to the traditional extra-marital relationships, there are now opportunities for online infidelities.

Young, Griffin-Shelley, Cooper, O'Mara, and Buchanan (2000) described an ACE model for understanding online infidelity. In this model "A" stands for anonymity. People are more likely to engage in behaviors when they know their identity will be protected. The anonymity associated with on-line relationships creates an opportunity that partners may not have considered previously due to fear of being caught. The internet provides security from being seen by others. Users can create screen names or

provide false information without giving their true identities. The “C” stands for convenience. People do not need to leave the comfort of their own home or office to participate in sexual encounters with others around the globe. Finally, the “E” stands for escape. Young et al., (2000) suggest that despite how lonely, insecure, or unhappy people are they can use the internet to escape the negative feelings, empty relationships, and stresses associated with life. Although the research on online infidelity is still in its infancy, it suggests that these affairs are quite damaging to a relationship and increases the likelihood that a partner will engage in other types of infidelity.

### *Effects of Infidelity*

The discovery of infidelity by one’s spouse is often an emotionally traumatic experience. The violation of trust and the breach of the marital agreement are often difficult to comprehend. Injured spouses may experience deep confusion. Spouses may feel a sense of their lives being out of control as well as a shattered sense of self-worth (Abrams Spring, 1996). Abrams Spring (1996) identified several different types of losses that should be addressed after discovering a partner’s affair. First is the loss of identity. It is common for injured spouses to question who they are and to go through a process of reevaluation. They may also suffer from a loss of feeling special to one’s spouse or the thought that the injured spouse is replaceable. This often includes fears that the spouse may be happier with another person. In addition, injured spouses might experience a loss of self-respect. This loss is associated with injured spouses feeling desperate to win back the spouse and engaging in behaviors that violate their values or beliefs to do so.

Abrams Spring (1996) suggests that discovering a spouse’s affair frequently leads to feelings of guilt for allowing the affair to continue without questioning or following

through on suspicions. It also often results in injured spouses feeling they have no control over their mind or body and they may obsess on the affair and the lies. Repeatedly checking on the offending spouse sometimes becomes automatic. It is also typical for injured spouses to lose their sense of order and justice. It is normal for injured spouses to question how the world works and to struggle with the thoughts that their assumptions about the world are no longer true. Along these same lines is the loss of religious faith. This loss is feeling that God has punished or abandoned them.

Another loss according to Abrams Spring (1996) is the loss of connection with others. The betrayal of marital infidelity is a shaming experience. It is not uncommon for injured spouses to want to tell others how unfairly they have been treated, yet not want anyone to know what happened. Discovering infidelity of a spouse creates a dilemma in the need for validation from others and the need to protect oneself and one's spouse from embarrassment and shame. Finally, there is a loss of sense of purpose. This loss may lead to thoughts of suicide when the injured spouse struggles to find meaning in living.

The experience of discovering spousal infidelity has been described by researchers as a relational trauma. Common responses to discovering infidelity appear to resemble responses people have to other types of traumas (Glass, 2002). It is common for injured spouses to experience flashbacks, distressful dreams, distress at cues that symbolize the affair, and efforts to avoid recollections such as songs, talk shows, or other reminders of the betrayal. In addition to experiencing the symptoms of trauma, injured spouses also frequently experience strong negative emotions.

## Trust

Becoming involved in close relationships increases one's risk of being hurt or betrayed. When people enter relationships they are placing hope in their partners that their partners will be responsible with the physical and emotional investments they are given. This concept is referred to as trust. Trust develops when the amount of closeness between two people increases leading to an increase in reliance on one another to get their needs met (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). As people begin to trust each other they evaluate their relationships looking for evidence that partners are going to be consistent and reliable. Reducing uncertainty about how partners will respond to our needs, both in the present and in the future, is at the core of trust.

The development of trust starts with predictability (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). The consistency with which partners respond to others' needs leads others to view partners as stable and having a positive orientation. At this early time in development the predictability is simply behavioral. Predictability by itself does not indicate the motivations or the reasons for the consistent behavior. Partners who are reliable and cooperative simply because they are nice do not promote trust; instead, trust increases when it is evident that partners are benevolent, honest, and reliable, because they care about their partners. Attributions for the behaviors must be associated with partners' care.

Trust is frequently viewed as a changeable characteristic of any given relationship. It is considered a result of prior experiences and can be enhanced or diminished depending on the dynamics and experiences between any two specific partners. Although trust is relationship specific, it appears to have great importance in all close relationships. As a result, it is a construct of great interest to researchers. A review

of the research indicates that the role of trust has been examined as it relates to marital satisfaction and marital quality. Particularly, it is often viewed as a condition for conflict resolution or problem solving.

In one study, Tallman and Hsiao (2004) tested a model using structural equation modeling to determine if marital satisfaction and trust would predict couple cooperation and problem solving. The authors used couples in the early years of marriage who came to the laboratory for an interview. Participants then kept a diary for four weeks and returned for a taped problem-solving session. Participants completed two measures of relationship satisfaction and a measure of trust. Participants repeated the process for a total of three waves of data collection. Results of the study found overall support for the model (particularly at wave one) that marital satisfaction and trust lead to cooperative problem solving. It was expected that increased problem solving at wave one would increase marital satisfaction and trust leading to an upward spiral. Although the goodness-of-fit for the model at waves two and three were acceptable, they appeared to be impacted by factors associated with the progression of the marriage.

Another study examined the role of trust in the intergenerational transmission of marital conflict (Tallman, Gray, Kullberg, & Henderson, 1999). Researchers hypothesized a five phase model of intergenerational transmission of marital conflict that included having an unstable and volatile family of origin which led to a self-image that affected both behaviors and expectations for their own marital relationships. Suspicion and fear led to mistrust and an interpretation of partners' behaviors as malevolent rather than benevolent. The concept of trust was important in this model in that it was the mechanism by which adults indicated their goodwill and concern for their partners which

led to positive expectations for the relationship. In a five-year, three wave study of newlyweds, participants were interviewed, kept a four week diary, and returned to the lab for videotaped interactions. In addition, couples were administered a self-deprecation scale, a measure of parents' marital happiness, a depression scale, and a trust scale. Results concluded that the data were a good fit to the model at wave one. However, by wave two and three the individual factors of parents' status, family experiences, and self-image had no direct effect on the transmission process. In waves two and three couple trust was the factor that had the most direct effect on the process.

In another attempt to explain how commitment and trust motivate people to behave in pro-relationship behaviors (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), the authors examined the motivations of people for behaving in pro-relationship ways when there were conflicts of self-serving needs versus needs of the relationship. They were interested in determining why some people were willing to endure personal costs to promote the well-being of the relationship while others did not. It was hypothesized that as one's level of dependence on the relationship increased so would the level of commitment to the relationship. Next, as the commitment levels increased, so would the pro-relationship behaviors. Self-reports of one's own pro-relationship behaviors were expected to positively correlate with partners' pro-relationship behaviors. As partners' pro-relationship behavior increased their trust level would increase. Finally, as partners' trust level increased, their dependence on the relationship would increase. Results of the study found that one's commitment level was positively associated with partners' level of trust and the overall model was well-supported.

One final example of the trust research is a study looking at trust and marital quality, in which Hassebrauck and Fehr (2002) attempted to develop a scale to determine the prototypical romantic relationship. Participants rated 64 relationship descriptors and completed an instrument measuring attachment style. Factor analysis resulted in a four factor model of intimacy, agreement, independence, and sexuality. Attachment styles were used to validate the scales; for example, positive other attachment was expected to correlate with intimacy while negative other attachment was expected to correlate with independence. Results of the correlations of each of the four scales with attachment styles supported the validity of the scales. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted which resulted in the same four factors. Of interest to the current study, intimacy (which included descriptors such as taking time for each other, listening to one another, openness, honesty, and trust) resulted in the highest correlation with relationship satisfaction. In addition, intimacy consistently received the highest rating for describing the prototypical relationship.

## Forgiveness

### *Definition of Forgiveness*

In order to explore the concept of forgiveness, many researchers have put forth their own definitions of what forgiveness is and is not, which has resulted in multiple definitions. For instance, Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) describe forgiveness as a process which serves as an antidote to anger. They define it as an act of the will by the victims to give up their resentment and anger toward the offenders. They state forgiveness is a “merciful response to (an) injustice” (p.23). Enright and Fitzgibbons also suggest that forgiveness is not pardoning, condoning, excusing, reconciling, justifying,

forgetting, a quick fix, revenge, acceptance, just saying the words “I forgive you”, or getting even. Worthington and Wade (1999) argue that contrary to how many professionals approach forgiveness, it is not simply the absence of behaviors of unforgiveness (such as revenge, anger, and hostility) instead, they suggest it is a choice made by the victim to reconcile with the offender. Walrond-Skinner (1998) refers to forgiveness as a process that dismisses a debt against another in order to restore an impaired relationship.

With numerous definitions of forgiveness created to operationalize the concept for research studies, McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) decided to establish one definition of forgiveness that could be used for all purposes. McCullough and colleagues found that when forgiveness occurs the offended experiences a decrease in negative feelings and an increase in positive feelings toward the offender, which is a common element in all of the major definitions. This common theme was also supported by Sells and Hargrave (1998) who stated that the releasing or letting go of negative feelings toward the offender was found in most definitions. With this common element, McCullough et al (2000) suggested the following as a consensual definition of forgiveness: forgiveness is a “prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context” (p. 9).

### *Forgiveness Models*

As difficult as it is to explain what forgiveness is, it is similarly difficult to explain how forgiveness works to bring about change in a person’s thoughts and feelings. Researchers have suggested many models to help explain the process of forgiveness. One such model is Worthington’s (1998) Empathy - Humility - Commitment model.

Worthington suggests that all forgiveness starts with a wound. This hurt may be in the form of a physical or psychological violation of boundaries or trust which results in the victim either attacking or withdrawing from the offender. This protective response negatively impacts the loving relationship and continues to cause harm until the relationship ends or the wound is addressed. Worthington purports that forgiveness will help heal the wound and potentially repair the relationship. There are three components to this model of forgiveness. First, Worthington states the victim must feel empathy for the offender. Next, the victim must experience a sense of humility and realize that he or she, just like the offender, has the capacity to harm others. Finally, a commitment must be made to forgive. It is necessary that all three conditions be met for full forgiveness to occur.

Another model of forgiveness is Enright and Fitzgibbon's (2000) Phase Model of Forgiveness. This developmental model includes four phases: uncovering phase, decision phase, work phase, and deepening phase. In the uncovering phase the offended person describes the impact the offense has had on his or her life. This may be a time of coming to terms with the hurt and pain and the consequences of the offense, and it precedes the other three phases. In the decision phase the offended person is encouraged to consider forgiveness, including what it means to him or her to forgive and what forgiveness is and is not. In this second phase the offended person makes a decision to forgive or to not forgive. In the work phase the offended person gains insight into the offender's behaviors and develops a compassion for the offender. Finally, in the deepening phase the offended person considers how he or she may have offended others, which leads to a change in how he or she interacts with the offender.

Hargrave (1994) developed a four station model of forgiveness specifically for working with families. Hargrave's (1994) stations of forgiveness include two exonerating stations (insight and understanding) and two forgiving stations (compensation and overt act). In the first station the couple/family members gain insight into the negative event. This includes telling their story and recounting the pain. The second station involves understanding the reasons behind the transgression. Receiving emotional compensation for the hurt takes place in the third station and the final station is engaging in a ritual or manifestation of the forgiveness. Hargrave emphasizes that these stations are not sequential and one may vacillate between the stations many times.

All of these models help to explain the process of forgiving, and they also have been applied to the therapeutic setting to help heal wounds and repair relationships. Applying the forgiveness literature to the therapy setting has given clinicians another tool to offer their clients. One area that has especially benefited from the application of forgiveness to therapy is marital and couple therapy. Most of the presenting problems in marital and couple therapy involve issues of broken trust and violations of the marital commitment. As a result, forgiveness is a very appropriate technique to consider in those cases.

#### *Effectiveness of Forgiveness*

The use of forgiveness as a therapeutic intervention became more prevalent in the 1990's. In what appears to be the only meta-analysis conducted to examine the forgiveness intervention studies, Baskin and Enright (2004) found nine empirical studies that used forgiveness as an intervention. These studies included forgiveness as an intervention for elderly females, a brief psychoeducational intervention, parental-love-

deprived college students, female incest survivors, and post-abortion men. Baskin and Enright (2004) categorized their findings as decision-based forgiveness, process-based group forgiveness, and process-based individual forgiveness.

Results of the meta-analysis (Baskin & Enright, 2004) concluded that the effectiveness of the process-based individual model of forgiveness was  $d = 1.66$ , which indicates that the average participant receiving the process-based individual forgiveness interventions were better than 95% of the participants who did not receive the process-based individual forgiveness intervention. In addition, the effect size of the process-based group forgiveness intervention was  $d = .82$  which signifies that participants who received the process-based group forgiveness intervention were better than 75% of the participants who did not receive the intervention. The decision-based forgiveness interventions were not statistically significant with an effect size of  $d = -.04$ . These results concluded that the process-based models of forgiveness were efficacious while the decision-based models of forgiveness were not.

One reason the process based approaches may have demonstrated greater efficacy is due to the length of treatment. The process based forgiveness interventions in this study ranged from six sessions to fifty-two sessions while the decision based interventions ranged from one to four sessions. To compare decision-based and process-based models of forgiveness it is necessary for researchers to consider this difference.

### Forgiveness, Trust, and Marital Satisfaction

#### *Methods*

Articles collected for this review were found using the electronic databases PsychInfo and Ebscohost. Key words for the search included: marriage/marital,

forgiveness, trust, and satisfaction. Inclusion requirements were articles written in English and which specifically referred to forgiveness and trust in marriage. The articles were limited to marital relationships, therefore articles focusing on dating relationships, friendships, or familial relationships were excluded from the search. Dissertations were excluded from this review.

### *Results*

The literature search resulted in a total of 32 publications related to forgiveness, trust, and marital satisfaction. Included in the results were 11 dissertations, one book chapter, one book, one book review, one article review, and 17 articles. One poster presentation was included in the literature review. When using the keywords forgiveness and marital satisfaction the search resulted in 17 publications. Three additional publications were found using the key words marriage, forgiveness, and satisfaction, and an additional five publications were found using the keywords forgiveness, trust, and satisfaction. Finally, using the keywords forgiveness, trust, and marriage resulted in an additional seven publications. After examining the publications for use in the present review, the dissertations, book review, article review, a scale development, and the book were excluded leaving a total of 16 articles for this review. The dates of the publications ranged from 1989 to 2008. Of the 16 articles that are included in this review, five of them are theoretical pieces, one is a case study, one is a qualitative study, one is a poster presentation, and nine are quantitative studies.

### *Theoretical Articles*

Of the theoretical articles relating to forgiveness, trust, and marital satisfaction, three of them specifically address understanding and repairing marital relationships after

an affair. A fourth article refers to general betrayals rather than the specific betrayal of infidelity. It suggests that the betrayals include anything that is outside of the norms of what is expected within the relationship. Finally, the fifth theoretical article is a response from a sociologist's perspective to prominent authors in the marriage and family literature. Each of the three articles specifically addressing infidelity included therapeutic factors to be considered in the treatment of post-affair couples.

First, Bagarozzi (2008) suggested that at least four factors must be considered when treating a post-affair couple. Included in the four factors are type of affair, personality of the offending spouse, the non-involved spouses' perceptions of the marriage and their assumptions regarding the offending spouses' commitment to the marriage, and other problems in the marriage. The suggested assessment is very complete. It involves such assessments as trust, justifications for the affair, affection in the marriage, axis II diagnoses in the offending spouses, and readiness to forgive, among others. In addition, Bagarozzi (2008) suggested that the perception that both spouses have of the marriage impacts their willingness to restore the relationship. He reminds the reader that not all spouses desire to forgive following an affair and that there are different reasons for choosing to forgive or not to forgive. For instance, forgiveness may be withheld by the non-offending spouse as a means of shifting the balance in the relationship. For couples who do choose to forgive, guidelines are offered for working through that process.

The first step of reconciliation is to define forgiveness for couples and to inform them that forgiveness includes a decision to pardon the spouses for the infidelity and for the offended spouses to discontinue feelings of anger or resentment toward the offending

spouses (Bagarozzi, 2008). This includes giving up the right to retaliation for the betrayal. The offending spouses then are asked to acknowledge their offenses and accept complete responsibility for their actions. They must make a request for forgiveness and agree to terminate the extra-marital relationships. The offending spouses are responsible for showing their spouses their sincerity and to promise not to become involved in other extra-marital relationships.

In this model, there is a transitional period in the post-affair recovery that includes non-trusting behaviors by betrayed spouses that include checking on the offending spouses (Bagarozzi, 2008). Monitoring phone calls, opening mail, checking email, and reviewing receipts are not uncommon behaviors following betrayals. Because of the importance of rebuilding trust in post-affair marriages, Bagarozzi suggested the use of the Trust Scale (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) to measure faithf, predictability, and dependability at both pre-treatment and post-treatment. Ultimately, clinicians working with couples with infidelity issues must approach this problem with an understanding of the role of trust in the reconciliation process and with a realization that there are multiple factors that impact whether couples want to forgive and reconcile or whether they will choose to terminate the relationships.

Another article suggesting treatment recommendations for therapists working with couples after affairs included a three stage model for helping couples repair their relationships (Spring, 1999). In this article, the author addressed many assumptions about forgiveness that may serve as barriers to the forgiveness process. Examples of such assumptions included, “When you forgive you admit that your negative feelings toward your partner were wrong or unjustified” (p. 56), “Forgiveness happens completely and all

at once” (p. 54), and “When you forgive you ask for nothing in return” (p. 57). In addition to debunking commonly held beliefs, the author concluded by offering hope to couples who have experienced the difficulties of an affair by suggesting that rebuilding a broken relationship is difficult, but if done can result in better relationships in the long run.

In a third article that addressed treatment of marital infidelity, Jagers (1989) addressed issues involved with working with post affair couples from a Christian perspective. His article offered practical suggestions for working with couples post affair and purported that it is important for therapists working with couples with infidelity to realize the power they have in helping couples repair their relationships. Included in his article are discussions regarding how to “deal” with various consequences of discovering infidelity such as closure of the affair, handling anger, working on trust and forgiveness, and renewing physical intimacy. This article emphasizes the significance to the victims of being betrayed by spouses. Although this article makes recommendations for Christian counselors and has a section of useful scriptures for post affair couples, the seven issues addressed would be applicable for secular counseling too.

It is suggested that there is a probationary period for offending spouses following discovery of infidelity (Jagers, 1989). This probationary period is a result of broken trust in relationships and must be addressed for relationships to mend. During this time it is common for non-involved spouses to attempt to control offending spouses, leading offending spouses to feel defensive. It is recommended that therapists work with couples to help them improve communication, particularly around voicing hurts without giving ultimatums or being vengeful. In addition, therapists may assist couples with managing

reactions to cues or reminders of the affair. There is often much suspicion before couples are able to trust each other again, during which spouses might overreact, try to guess what the other is thinking, and/or try to interpret their spouses' behaviors. It is recommended that therapists assist couples in balancing trust with the reality of the situation.

Viewed as a means for post affair couples to move from distrust to trust, forgiveness is an important part of the recovery process (Jagers, 1989). This article suggests that forgiveness begins with an apology and expressed remorse for offensive behaviors. In order for forgiveness to be meaningful and lasting, spouses should seek forgiveness for specific behaviors. Also for forgiveness to be effective it should be viewed not as a one time event, but as a process. For this reason, couples should revisit offenses at a later date to ensure that the betrayals have been forgiven and not overlooked. Finally, couples should recognize that forgiveness may occur at many different levels, some of which might not surface immediately. This would require couples to appreciate the work they have accomplished, but also be willing to continue to forgive at an even deeper level if necessary.

Two other theoretical articles addressed forgiveness and marriage. The first article focused on marital betrayals and how spouses forgive such betrayals (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Finkel, & Wildschut, 2002). The authors defined betrayals as behaviors that exceed the expectations of the relationship and which cause distress to the other spouse. By this definition, betrayals may include any type of behavior that goes against what is allowed or required in any given relationship. Using characters from the movie "The War of the Roses," the authors make their point that forgiveness can be very difficult and they

demonstrate the extreme negative consequences of unforgiveness. This article suggests that commitment and trust promote forgiveness and other pro-relationship behaviors. Behaviors identified as contrary to forgiveness and marital satisfaction were identified as rumination on betrayals and narcissism. Finding a balance between serving the interests of self and the interests of the marriage might be an important factor in forgiving marital betrayals.

The final theoretical article in this review is a critique of three leading authors in the family literature (Amato, 2007). The author agreed with suggestions in the literature that processes such as forgiveness, commitment, and sacrifice are associated with healthy outcomes in marriage. He questioned, however, why the literature has failed to include the construct of love as a process that might also contribute to positive outcomes in marriage. Using a sociological perspective, the author put marriage into an historical context and identified marital trends. It was concluded that the current marital trend is much more individualistic and spouses are much more likely to leave marriages where their individual needs are not met. Because factors such as forgiveness and commitment are contrary to the individualistic trend, they are that much more important to understanding how they contribute to marital satisfaction and healthy marriages.

### *Quantitative Studies*

Most of the empirical studies in this literature review consist of married couples in various stages and years of marriage. Of the empirical studies, one is a structural equation model to determine a causal relationship between forgiveness and marital quality, and one compared first married couples with remarried couples on marital quality. Two of the studies focus on conflict resolution (one of which is longitudinal), one

other study is longitudinal, two address group interventions for married couples, two focus on abuse and aggression as related to forgiveness, and the final study is a forgiveness scale development.

The first two empirical studies of this review include one that examined the effects of forgiveness on marital satisfaction as it relates to marital stability and one that attempted to determine the direction of the effects of forgiveness on marital quality. Orathinkal and Vansteenwegan (2006) compared 787 first married versus remarried participants from Belgium on measures of forgiveness and marital satisfaction. They hypothesized that first married participants would report higher levels of forgiveness and marital satisfaction than remarried participants. In addition, they believed that they would find a significant positive correlation between forgiveness and marital satisfaction. Of the sample tested, 424 participants were first married and 363 were remarried. All participants completed the Maudsley Marital Questionnaire and the Enright Forgiveness Inventory which was translated into Dutch then back-translated into English prior to its use. Results of the study found no significant differences between first married and remarried participants on the overall forgiveness inventory, however, two forgiveness subscales (Positive Behavior and Negative Cognition) were significantly higher for first married participants (Orathinkal & Vansteenwegan, 2006). There was a significant difference found between first married and remarried participants on levels of marital satisfaction, and interestingly the remarried participants reported significantly greater marital satisfaction than the first married participants. Finally, the result of the regression analysis suggested that forgiveness is highly correlated with one subscale of the marital

quality measure, General Life Adjustment, but is not with the other two subscales Sexual or Marital.

To determine the direction of the effects of forgiveness and marital quality, Fincham and Beach (2007) implemented a study using structural equation modeling on a sample of 91 married couples with two sets of data gathered twelve months apart. Participants completed a marital quality assessment and an offense-specific forgiveness inventory. The forgiveness inventory involved having the participants recall and describe a time within the past six months when they were offended by something their partners said or did. After describing the offenses, the participants rated the pain on a nine-point scale and answered three items related to the offenses and their responses to the offenses. Both measures were used 12 months later, and at time two participants were reminded of the offenses they listed at time one.

Results of the Fincham and Beach (2007) study showed that the means for both forgiveness and marital quality were stable at time one and time two, and that forgiveness and marital quality were significantly positively related. There was no association between husbands' and wives' reports of forgiveness; however the marital quality responses between spouses were significantly related. Level of hurt was significantly, negatively correlated with forgiveness for both spouses and to marital quality for wives only. Using a cutoff score on the marital quality assessment, couples were categorized as distressed versus non-distressed, and analyses suggested that distressed couples were significantly less forgiving than non-distressed couples with no differences found on the amount of hurt reported from the offenses.

As stated, one of the purposes of the Fincham and Beach (2007) study was to determine the direction of the effects of forgiveness and marital satisfaction. Using structural equation modeling (maximum likelihood estimation) in a cross-lagged stability model, the path from time two marital quality to time two forgiveness was significant for both husbands and wives. The results also indicated that the path between marital quality and forgiveness may be bi-directional for women, though not for men. The results for men indicated a unidirectional path from marital quality to forgiveness.

The next two empirical articles of this review are studies of forgiveness and conflict resolution. Fincham, Beach, and Davila (2004, 2007) examined whether increased forgiveness in married couples leads to improved conflict resolution. In their first article (2004) 52 British couples in their third year of marriage completed measures of marital satisfaction, forgiveness, and conflict resolution. The forgiveness measure was created by the authors of the study and participants answered six scaling questions regarding their responses to their partners' offenses. The forgiveness items were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis which yielded a two-factor model which they named retaliation and benevolence. Alpha coefficients for retaliation were .78 for men and .87 for women, and the alpha coefficients for benevolence were .72 for men and .78 for women (Fincham et al., 2004). Results of correlation analyses indicated that ineffective conflict resolution was significantly and negatively correlated with marital satisfaction. Also as expected, spouses' benevolence was significantly, positively correlated with marital satisfaction, and ineffective conflict resolution was significantly, negatively correlated with benevolence. Even after controlling for any shared variance between ineffective conflict resolution and marital satisfaction, the results held and both

dimensions of forgiveness were associated with ineffective couple conflict resolution (Fincham et al., 2004).

In the same article, a second study was conducted that included couples who had been in longer term marriages and had greater lengths of time since the offenses occurred (Fincham et al., 2004). Using the same marital satisfaction and conflict resolution scales as study one, 96 couples from Buffalo, New York participated in the second study. Participants listed and described a transgression by their spouses within the past six months. To measure forgiveness participants rated the distress from the transgression on a nine-point scale then rated nine other statements related to their spouses' transgressions. Again, the forgiveness items were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis, though this time it yielded a three factor model: retaliation, avoidance, and benevolence. Regression analyses indicated that husbands' avoidance significantly predicted wives' ineffective conflict resolution and wives' benevolence significantly, negatively predicted husbands' ineffective conflict resolution. These results suggested that forgiveness is an important component in couples' abilities to work through conflicts.

To test whether forgiveness predicts conflict resolution in married couples over time, Fincham et al., (2007) designed a 12 month follow up study to their previous research study (Fincham et al., 2004). Using a subsample from the original 96 couples, 86 couples completed the follow up measures. Participants completed the same marital satisfaction and conflict resolution inventories as they had 12 months earlier. Forgiveness was also measured as it was 12 months earlier. Results indicated that wives' benevolence was the only forgiveness dimension that (negatively) predicted husbands' ineffective conflict resolution at 12 month follow up. The only predictor of wives' ineffective

conflict resolution at 12 month follow up was husbands' initial level of conflict resolution (Fincham et al., 2007). This longitudinal study concluded that forgiveness does predict conflict resolution in married couples over time; particularly the less women expressed benevolence toward husbands' offenses, the more their husbands reported them having ineffectual conflict styles.

In a separate longitudinal research study, researchers examined the impact of spouses' willingness to forgive their partners in the first two years of marriage (McNulty, 2008). Seventy-two newly married couples (average length 3.2 months) completed a packet of information and then reported to a laboratory for two videotaped sessions. Couples were left alone for two sessions of approximately 10 minutes each to attempt to resolve a couple-identified area of tension in their relationships. The couples were mailed inventories to complete at six-month intervals over the course of the next two years. The measures included a marital satisfaction inventory, a marital forgiveness inventory, and a reported behavior inventory taken from the Conflict Tactics Survey. In addition to the completed measures of the participants, researchers coded the laboratory discussions of the couples using a modified version of the Verbal Tactics Coding Scheme. Each partner was assigned a score from -1 (every spoken turn was positive) to 1 (every spoken turn was negative). Results indicated that levels of negative behavior were low and levels of forgiveness were high. In addition, reports of spouses' behaviors were correlated with the observed laboratory behaviors. The results did support previous research finding a positive correlation between increased levels of forgiveness of spouses and increased marital satisfaction, less severe problems, and spouses behaving less negatively. Over time, both husbands and wives indicated being significantly less satisfied with their

marriages, and wives (but not husbands) had increased problem severity over the course of the two years.

The next two studies described in this review examined forgiveness as it relates to group marital therapy. First, Sells, Giordano, and King (2002) conducted a pilot study with five couples using a forgiveness curriculum. This study was based on Boszormenyi-Nagy's (1987) contextual family theory and Hargrave's (1994) forgiveness theory, with the premise that healthy couples must maintain a balance between entitlements and obligations. In this study the couples were exposed to empathic listening skills, conflict resolution skills, and forgiveness skills. Most of the group time was spent discussing homework assignments and talking about their responses to the material. The group met for one and one-half hours for eight weeks.

Group members were evaluated on several measures, including the Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, the State-Trait Anger Inventory, and the Symptom Checklist-Revised 90. The group was given the inventories as a pretest, posttest, and follow-up three months after the group ended. The results of the pilot study suggested that group members' forgiveness skills improved significantly from pretest to posttest and some skills were still retained at the three month follow-up. This increase in forgiveness skills was significantly, positively correlated with marital satisfaction, decreased psychological symptoms, and decreased anger (both state and trait). Though marital group therapy is not nearly as common now as it was in the 1960's and 1970's, the authors make a case for incorporating forgiveness into a marital group setting.

In another study examining group therapy with married couples, DiBlasio and Benda (2008) randomly assigned 44 couples to a forgiveness treatment group, a problem-solving treatment group, or a control group. The forgiveness intervention used a decision based forgiveness model that included instructions through a step-by-step forgiveness process that was approximately three hours in length. This intervention had three sections which included defining forgiveness and preparing for forgiveness, seeking and granting forgiveness, and a ceremonial act of forgiveness. Each spouse was given the opportunity to disclose their own hurtful behaviors and focus on the hurt and pain caused by their actions. Spouses were given the opportunity to ask questions and give their emotional responses to the offenses. Eventually, the offending spouses could make a formal request for forgiveness from their spouses and the spouses could decide whether to grant or withhold forgiveness. Once forgiveness was granted the couple would decide upon a ceremonial act to represent that the forgiveness took place.

In the problem-solving group participants were given the opportunity to express their emotions regarding the offenses (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008). In this group the therapists refrained from focusing the spouses on their own hurtful behaviors (which is an important difference from the forgiveness treatment group). After the couples shared their feelings regarding the offenses, the therapists focused the group members on developing specific strategies for solving the problems mentioned in the group. A plan was developed and the couples were offered the opportunity to make a commitment to follow the plan. The control group did not receive any intervention. All participants completed a forgiveness inventory, a marital satisfaction inventory, and the Generalized Contentment Scale at pre-test and two weeks after the final group intervention (the control group took

the post-test approximately six weeks after taking the pre-test). Results of this study concluded that participants in the forgiveness group were more forgiving at post-test than the other two groups. In addition, scores on marital satisfaction and on general contentment improved more for participants in the forgiveness group than the problem solving and control groups.

DiBlasio and Benda (2008) conducted a second study to examine whether Christian couples would benefit more from a forgiveness intervention than non-Christian couples. To test this, the authors used participants from the first study if they indicated having Christian beliefs on two questions from the demographics form. Of the 73 participants in the first study, 26 of them indicated strong Christian beliefs and were included in the second study. Using the same three instruments, responses of pre- and post-test scores were compared using paired *t*-tests and results indicated that this group did make significantly greater improvements on all three measures than the non-Christian couples.

Although most of the studies have examined the benefits of forgiveness, there may be situations in which forgiveness may contribute to on-going problematic relationships. An example of such a marital situation is marital violence. Fincham and Beach (2002) examined whether forgiveness would predict acts of psychological aggression and constructive communication in married couples. Specifically, the authors believed that forgiveness may have a role, not only following aggressive behaviors, but also in contributing to the context leading up to aggressive behaviors. In their first study, British couples in their first year of marriage were given a psychological aggression scale, a forgiveness scale, and a marital satisfaction scale. The forgiveness instrument

assessed positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness regarding two hypothetical, psychologically aggressive acts they were asked to imagine of their partners. The positive dimension of forgiveness included having motivation to behave in approach behaviors toward the offender with an attitude of goodwill. A positive action would be “I forgive my partner for this behavior.” The negative dimension of forgiveness included avoidance behaviors toward the offender. A negative action would be “I would retaliate in some way to get my own back – e.g., be verbally aggressive, destroy something my partner valued” (p. 243). Scores for the positive and negative dimensions were summed yielding a single score for each dimension. Higher scores on the positive dimension indicated greater forgiveness, while higher scores on the negative dimension indicated greater retaliation. In this first study Fincham and Beach (2002) found a slight negative correlation between the positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness. In addition, they found that for husbands, forgiveness was negatively correlated with wives’ reports of psychological aggression toward their husbands, but for wives retaliation positively correlated with husbands’ self-reports of psychological aggression toward their wives. The results also indicated that marital satisfaction significantly, negatively predicted psychological aggression in both spouses. When the data were analyzed at the multivariate level to determine the role that marital satisfaction may have played in the bivariate results, the authors concluded that although marital satisfaction did explain a significant amount of the variance, the results did hold and forgiveness did predict psychological aggression in both spouses.

In an attempt to replicate and build upon their first study, Fincham and Beach (2002) conducted a second study using 66 British couples using recalled information

about partner transgressions. As in their first study, participants were given a psychological aggression scale, a forgiveness scale, and a marital satisfaction scale. For the second study the authors added a communication scale. The results of the second study concluded that the positive dimension of forgiveness was significantly positively related to couple communication. In addition, the negative dimension of forgiveness (retaliation) was negatively related to marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives, while the positive dimension of forgiveness was significantly positively related to marital satisfaction for wives only. When the data were tested to determine the unique contribution of forgiveness separate from marital satisfaction, the results were significant and indicated that forgiveness accounted for nearly as much variance as marital satisfaction in predicting aggression.

Katerndahl and Obregon (2007) also examined forgiveness as it relates to abuse and marital aggression. The authors tried to determine whether levels of religious beliefs and religious coping were associated with spousal abuse. Husbands and wives completed questionnaires independently. Husbands completed an alcohol screening form and the wives completed questionnaires about the marriage and family, including physical abuse and episodes of forced sex by their husbands. Using bi-variate correlations, followed by hierarchical linear regressions, the authors found that the following non-spiritual factors predicted violence: witnessing violence as a child, common law marriage, husband-wife differences in marital satisfaction, argument frequency, and husbands' alcohol intake. Of the six spiritual factors tested, only the perception of being judged by the congregation or by God predicted marital abuse in this study. However, at the multi-variate level, adding spiritual incompatibility between husbands and wives to the first model of non-spiritual

factors increased the amount of variance explained from .20 to .40 (Katerndahl & Obregon, 2007). Four of the six spiritual factors predicted marital violence, specifically, women in abusive marriages endorsed higher levels of forgiveness and increased sense of being judged, and lower levels of perceived congregational benefits and sense of closeness to God.

### *Case Study*

In a case study demonstrating how forgiveness can be applied to marital therapy, Barnett and Youngberg (2004) used a forgiveness ritual with a couple who experienced a violation of trust in their marriage. The forgiveness exercise was used with a Christian couple who had been married six years and who had no children. Both spouses were working and the husband's long hours at work were leaving little time for him to give attention to his wife. The relationship was described as distant and strained. The couple presented to counseling days after the husband disclosed to the wife that he had engaged in an extra-marital affair. Both spouses expressed a strong desire to repair their relationship.

Barnett and Youngberg (2004) chose a forgiveness ritual as an intervention to help the couple through the healing process following the betrayal in their relationship. Prior to using this intervention, they stated that therapists must pay close attention to spouses' readiness to forgive and should not use this intervention with couples who are ambivalent about their willingness to forgive. They suggested that this ritual exercise is appropriate for use with Christian couples as well as for other couples in therapy. It is anticipated that by using this forgiveness exercise couples will move beyond feeling stuck, will normalize feelings of pain and sadness, make the forgiveness specific and

concrete, and create new meaning for old behaviors. Finally, before the forgiveness exercise is introduced, the authors stated that therapists should understand their couples and be aware of their couples' narratives. Therapists must clearly explain the idea of forgiveness to their couples who must have an interest in forgiving to proceed.

In their case study, Barnett and Youngberg (2004) described how the forgiveness exercise worked with the couple described. First, the therapist explained the concept of forgiveness then asked the couple to make a list of items they would like forgiven. During the next therapy session the therapist presented the couple with a large flower pot on which they were instructed to write their three main offenses on the inside. The therapist asked each of them if they forgive their spouse of the listed offenses. When both spouses responded positively, together the couple covered the offenses with soil; then each planted a few flower bulbs into the pot. They were instructed to take the pot home and care for the bulbs until they bloomed. In the meantime the couple wrote on the outside of the flower pot (working gently not to spill the dirt) how the decision to forgive each other has positively impacted their relationship. When the couple returned in two weeks, they reported that they were more aware of their relationship and the benefits of forgiving one another. This ritual is a concrete example of the care needed to maintain an attitude of forgiveness and an on-going reminder of the benefits of forgiving each other.

### *Qualitative Study*

A qualitative study examined the emotional processes that couples experience following discovery of marital infidelity (Olson, Russell, Higgins-Kessler, & Miller, 2002). Couples who experienced marital infidelity were interviewed in-depth in order to offer empirical evidence for the many theories regarding infidelity that have been

proposed by clinicians and researchers. Using a grounded theory approach to collecting data, the authors first interviewed five pilot participants then continued to interview 14 other participants. Participants volunteered for the study by responding to a newspaper advertisement. They were compensated \$50 for the time taken to complete the interview. All interviews were completed over the telephone and lasted from 45 minutes to two hours in length. Interviews started with the broad questions about, “the circumstances surrounding the affair and its discovery” (p. 425). Theoretical saturation occurred after 13 interviews, therefore the sample for this study was  $n = 13$ . Of the 13 participants, all were married when the extra-marital affair was discovered. Eleven participants were females and two participants were males. All participants had children and 11 of the participants were still married at the time of the interviews. Two of the participants were the ones involved in the affair, and 11 of the participants were the non-involved spouses. The authors note that the two offending spouses were not the two men in the study.

Results of the interviews indicated that the sequence of emotions that participants experienced was a three-stage process following the discovery of an affair (Olson et al., 2002). The first of the three phases was referred to as the Roller Coaster. This phase contained a lot of negative emotions and behaviors. Spouses expressed a lot of anger and confronted their offending spouses. Some spouses expressed feelings of hate and intense negative emotions. Participants reported feeling depressed and despondent and stated they cried a lot after first learning of the affair. In addition, non-offending spouses also reported feeling inadequate and experienced thoughts of self-blame and guilt. In this first phase some participants reported the experience as “eye opening” and that they were

more aware of the need to fix problems they had been ignoring prior to the discovery of the affair.

The second phase of the post-discovery process is the Moratorium phase (Olson et al., 2002). This phase is marked by less emotional reactivity and a need to make meaning of the affair. Participants reported obsessing on the details of the affair and seeking information about what occurred. For many participants there was a significant amount of time away from their offending spouses. Thus, during the Moratorium phase, participants did not necessarily communicate with their spouses about non-essential topics. Although this phase involved less intense emotions, it was still a time of thinking of the affair and also of thinking of how to proceed with the relationship. Participants indicated that they had a strong desire to make the marriage work, despite not knowing how they were going to do it.

Eventually the participants moved on to the Trust Building phase (Olson et al., 2002). At some time the couples began the process of rebuilding trust and would become more involved in each others' lives again. Participants stated that remorse by the offending spouses was very important in the healing process. In addition, participants recalled behaviors that the offending spouses did that showed a commitment to the marriage as helpful in the recovery process. Many couples indicated that improved communication was an important factor in moving forward, and all of the participants stated that forgiveness played an important role in their healing from the infidelity. Although participants were at varying levels and had varying abilities to forgive, it was important to both the injured spouses as well as the offending spouses.

Another interesting outcome of this study was that many couples reported experiencing benefits from going through the discovery of their spouses' affair (Olson et al., 2002). Benefits were closer marital relationships, increased assertiveness, improved communication, and feelings of empowerment. In addition, participants expressed that after handling the discovery of the affair they were better able to express their needs and some expressed taking a better interest in their own lives, including diet, exercise, and pursuing interests/hobbies. Eight of the 13 participants sought marital and/or individual therapy after the discovery of the affair.

Participants were given an opportunity to give advice or suggestions to therapists and to other couples who are experiencing infidelity. The participants stated that they would have appreciated a "map" to help them navigate the thoughts and feelings they were experiencing, particularly during the early phase where negative emotions are so prevalent. They also expressed wanting answers and suggested that therapists attempt to guide them and to assist couples in identifying problems that might have contributed to the context of the affair. For other couples experiencing infidelity the participants suggested that couples continue to talk with one another, use natural support systems, and offer forgiveness.

### Summary

The literature on forgiveness, trust and marital satisfaction has established that forgiveness is indeed positively correlated with marital satisfaction. It appears that the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction is bi-directional and forgiveness appears to predict marital satisfaction over time. Forgiveness is a skill that can be taught as a component of a group intervention which improves marital satisfaction. This review

highlights the fact that much work has begun to establish the connection between forgiveness and marital satisfaction, yet there is still more to examine. First, the current literature would benefit from building upon existing theory and forgiveness models of recovery. So far, the literature is very independent and has not taken advantage of previous work by building on previous studies. Of the 17 publications in this review, five of them are theoretical pieces; however, the 10 quantitative studies do not specifically test the theories that are available. Olson et al., (2002) used qualitative methods to explore the processes that occur when spouses experience marital infidelity. They identified three distinct phases that people experience after discovering an affair in their marriage. Eight of the articles included in this review were published after 2002, yet none of the eight articles specifically addressed the results of the qualitative data. Although some authors have started building a literature base by expanding and attempting to replicate their studies (some using longitudinal methods) the literature still is in need of studies that specifically test the theories and address issues that occur clinically.

Of note in the current literature review is the use of international samples in the empirical studies. Most of the empirical studies in this review used community samples, three of which were from Belgium and Great Britain. Using international samples is both a strength and a problem in the literature. First, using samples from other countries is necessary to generalize the results of the research, however, it may be that using different samples might make it difficult for studies to build upon one another while the literature base is still in the process of being established.

In a series of studies in this review, Fincham and Beach (2007) and Fincham, Beach, and Davila (2007, 2004) had participants list offenses from the previous six

months and rate the level of pain associated with the offenses. The authors did not examine the offenses, rather they used them only to provide a situation for the participants to base their forgiving responses. The results of their studies indicated that level of pain was associated with forgiveness for both spouses and for marital satisfaction for women. However, the studies did not use a standardized assessment of forgiveness, but instead asked between three and nine questions regarding participants' responses to their spouses' offenses. Although they did subject the forgiveness questions to factor analysis with acceptable results, the authors did not use the forgiveness measures that have been established and replicated in the literature.

A difference noted between the empirical studies and the theoretical publications is the absence of trust as a construct in the empirical literature. All five of the theoretical articles address the importance of trust as a factor in repairing offenses in marital relationships. Specifically, Bagarozzi (2008) said that trust is such an important factor in couples healing after betrayals that he suggested using the Trust Scale as a clinical tool. Rusbult et al., (2002) stated that trust and commitment promote forgiveness in couples, while Jagers (1989) not only stated that trust and forgiveness are important, but that forgiveness is what moves couples from distrust to trust. The importance of trust was supported in the qualitative study which found that Trust Building was one of three phases in recovering from marital infidelity. Despite the significance of trust in the theoretical literature, none of the empirical studies used trust as a variable of interest. There is certainly a need for future studies to examine the construct of trust as it relates to forgiveness and marital satisfaction in couples.

In an effort to address the absence of trust as a variable in the forgiveness literature, Markle (2008) presented a paper at the 2008 American Psychological Association Annual Conference that examined offenses that occurred in college dating relationships and explored how college students coped with relationship betrayals. Specifically, it tested state and trait forgiveness, coping styles, amount of pain, and trust as predictors of relationship satisfaction. Although this study had a small sample size which might have limited the power of the study, results indicated that trust was the only variable that predicted relationship satisfaction. The present study will examine the role of trust and forgiveness in marital satisfaction. Using the theoretical literature as a guide, this study will test whether trust and forgiveness predict marital satisfaction as anticipated. Given the emphasis that the literature has placed on trust, it is important to test this construct empirically to ensure that the literature is heading in the right direction. If trust and forgiveness do indeed predict marital satisfaction, then research can continue to explore how they contribute to satisfying relationships. Future research can also be done to determine more specifically what factors of forgiveness and/or trust contribute to relationship satisfaction.

In addition to empirically establishing the role of trust and forgiveness in marital satisfaction, this study also will explore the offenses that occur in marital relationships. By asking participants to list the offenses that have occurred in intact marriages, the data will give a better understanding of the types of offenses that are tolerated in marital relationships. This information will also inform researchers about what is being forgiven. The advantage of this study is that the offenses are actual offenses and not imagined or hypothesized. Researchers can put participants' forgiveness in context according to the

severity of betrayal being forgiven as perceived by the participant who experienced the offense. Knowing the severity of the betrayal may assist researchers in understanding the relative ease (or not) of participants offering forgiveness to their spouse since different betrayals may be easier or harder for some to forgive.

## Chapter 3

### Study Methods

The primary purpose of the present study is to examine whether trust and forgiveness predict relationship satisfaction. In addition, it will identify the types of offenses that occur in non-distressed marriages and to determine if offenses of unfaithfulness to the marriage impact differently from other types of offenses. The following sections detail the methods used to test the study's hypotheses and to explain the data analyses.

#### Methods

##### *Participants*

This study used a sample of married adults from a Midwestern state. The investigator recruited participants primarily through word of mouth using the snowballing technique. The snowballing technique was initiated with a sample of convenience using a faith based group. An introductory email was sent to approximately 60 people from a local church that consisted of predominately Caucasian, middle class members. Participants were asked to complete the study and to forward it to all of the married persons they knew. It was expected that each person would introduce the study to a new circle of acquaintances of diverse backgrounds and demographics, and in turn, those persons would complete the study and forward it to an even broader circle of

acquaintances. This study was completely anonymous and participants were not compensated for their participation in this study. This study required that participants be at least 18 years of age, currently married for any length of time, and not seriously considering divorce or separation. Participants who were remarried were eligible to complete the study. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 77 with the mean age of 45.44, and a standard deviation of 13.23. Lengths of participants' relationships ranged from six months to 56 years with the mean length of marriage of 18.12 years and a standard deviation of 13.48. Ethnicity of participants was 98.1% Caucasian. Based upon the number of dependent variables used in the present study, it was estimated that this study would need 125 participants to have enough power for the results to be meaningful. Of the 168 participants who began this study, 15 participants did not complete the surveys and were removed from the sample. In addition, any given scale or subscale in which a participant omitted more than 20% of the items was not used in the analyses, therefore the sample size used to calculate the analyses depended upon the number of participants who omitted more than 20% of the items on the instruments used in each analysis. Of the final 153 participants, 61.3% were female and 37.4% were male. Two participants did not indicate their gender.

### *Procedures*

All data were collected electronically. The primary investigator loaded the introductory letter (see Appendix A), informed consent (see Appendix B), and the surveys onto Survey Monkey. The primary investigator notified acquaintances and colleagues of the on-line survey and sent an email with the link to the survey to any persons interested in sharing the information with their married acquaintances. The

primary investigator used word of mouth and the snowballing sample technique to inform potential participants of the opportunity to participate in the study. Participants were instructed that to qualify for the study they must be 18 years of age or older, legally married, and not seriously considering divorce or separation at the time of the study. This study was completely anonymous and no identifiable information was sought. Data collection was completed in 10 days. The instruments were placed intentionally to minimize response bias. The Relationship Assessment Scale preceded the List of Offenses to prevent participants' awareness of their partners' offenses from interfering with ratings of relationship satisfaction. The measures of forgiveness and trust followed the List of Offenses so that participants would have a specific offense in mind as they answered questions regarding forgiveness and trust.

### *Instruments*

*Demographics and Relationship Questionnaire* (see Appendix C). This questionnaire was designed for the purposes of this study. In addition to requesting basic demographic questions, it asked participants for length of current marriage and whether they have ever seriously considered ending the marriage. Other questions included number of children in the household, approximate number of arguments per week between participant and spouse, and length of courtship prior to marriage. Finally, participants were asked if they have ever sought treatment for marital problems with their current spouse.

*List of Offenses* (see Appendix D). This questionnaire was based upon techniques implemented in previous forgiveness studies (Fincham & Beach, 2004; Fincham et al., 2004, 2007). It simply asked participants to list three offenses they have incurred by their

spouse in their current marriage. Participants were asked to indicate which of the three offenses was the most difficult to experience.

*Pain Scale.* Pain was measured using a one-item, scaling question that asked participants to rate the amount of pain they incurred from the offenses they listed on the List of Offenses. The question read, “To what degree did the offense pain you?” Participants were asked to rate the amount of pain on a scale from one to ten where 1 indicated “not at all painful” and 10 indicated “extremely painful.”

*Trust Scale (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985)* (see Appendix E). The Trust Scale is a 16-item, self-report instrument, derived from theory, that measures the level of trust in personal relationships. The scale uses a seven-item response format that ranges from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” A sample item is, “In our relationship I have to keep alert or my partner might take advantage of me.” The Trust Scale has three subscales, faith, dependability, and predictability. During the scale development, each item was correlated with the remainder of the items in the subscale to which it belongs, as well as to the items in the other two subscales. This process provided evidence that each item was appropriately placed in the correct subscale. Previous Cronbach’s alpha for the overall scale was .81 and reliabilities for the subscales were .80, .72, and .70 for faith, dependability, and predictability, respectively. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha was .90 for the total scale with alpha coefficients of .89, .78, and .65 for the faith, dependability, and predictability subscales, respectively. Total scores and scores of each of the three subscales were used in the current study.

*Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988)* (see Appendix F). The RAS is a seven-item, self-report measure that assesses relationship satisfaction. A

principal components factor analysis yielded a single factor solution. Inter-item correlations of the RAS ranged from .57 to .76. The RAS correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale with a coefficient of .80. In addition, the RAS correlated with the dyadic satisfaction subscale of the DAS with a coefficient of .83. The RAS had good predictive ability in that it was able to predict couples who remained together at 91% and couples who separated at 86%. This measure is quick and short, and is easy to score. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the RAS for the current study was .86.

*Dissipation/Rumination Scale (Capara, 1986)* (see Appendix G). The Dissipation/Rumination Scale is a 20-item, self-report measure that assesses trait forgiveness. Participants are asked to rate the twenty items on a six-point scale that ranges from "Completely True for me" to "Completely False for me." Examples of items include, "When I am outraged, the more I think about it, the angrier I feel" and "It takes many years for me to get rid of a grudge." Scores range from 15 to 90 with low scores indicating dissipation and high scores indicating rumination. The construct validity of the scale was established through a principal components analysis of the original 50 items, with the first factor accounting for most of the variance. The fifteen items with the highest loadings were selected for the final scale. In addition to those items, five items were selected with loadings close to zero to counter any response bias. A previous reliability coefficient using a split-half method was .91 and test-retest was .81. The alpha coefficient for the current study was .89. This scale is unidimensional, therefore the overall score was used.

*The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory – 18 (TRIM-18; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003)* (see Appendix H). The TRIM-18 is an 18-item,

self-report instrument that measures situational forgiveness. This instrument is based upon the TRIM-12 (McCullough et al, 1998), which includes a 7-item subscale measuring motivations of victims to avoid perceived aggressors (“I am trying to keep as much distance as possible between us”), and a 5-item subscale measuring motivations of victims to seek revenge against perceived aggressors (“I’ll make him/her pay.”) Participants are asked to respond to the items on a 5 point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The TRIM-12 had good reliability with internal consistencies at or above  $\alpha = .85$  for both subscales. Test- retest reliability for both subscales over an 8 week period was reported as  $r_s = .50$ . The TRIM-18 includes an additional six-item subscale that measures motivations of benevolence (“Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again”). The benevolence items loaded strongly and negatively with avoidance, which explained 65% of the variance. The alpha coefficients for the current study were .91 for the total scale and .68, .88, and .82 for revenge, avoidance, and benevolence, respectively.

#### *Data Analysis*

Responses on the List of Offenses questionnaire were categorized according to whether they were offenses of unfaithfulness or offenses not of unfaithfulness (“other”). The primary researcher and three research assistants independently grouped the responses into one of two categories based on whether the offenses were considered to be unfaithful behavior. Research assistants consisted of two counseling psychology doctoral practicum students and one counseling master’s level intern. Prior to categorizing the offenses, the raters were trained on the process. The primary researcher informed the raters that they would receive a stack of index cards with one quote written on the front of each card.

They were told to read the quote and to consider whether or not it met the following definition of unfaithfulness: “Any behavior that violates the agreement of exclusivity of the relationship.” The raters were told that the quotations were offenses or complaints participants had about their spouse’s behaviors. After reading the offense on the first index card they were instructed to place the card in one of two stacks, one for offenses of unfaithfulness and one for other types of offenses. The primary researcher emphasized that every card must be placed in one or the other category. The primary researcher grouped the cards first, recorded the responses, and then shuffled the cards before giving them to the first research assistant to sort. After all of the cards were sorted by the first rater, the primary researcher recorded the unfaithful offenses before shuffling the index cards and giving them to the next rater, who received the same instructions. This process was followed for all three raters. Offenses required agreement by three of the four raters to belong to the unfaithful category. Offenses identified as unfaithful by two or fewer raters were not included in the unfaithful category. Examples of offenses were “spouse made important decisions without consulting me” or “spouse lied to me.” Once the offenses were categorized, the two groups were compared. Descriptive statistics were provided about the percentages and frequencies of offenses. Next, the groups were used to determine any differences between type of offense and relationship satisfaction using a one-way ANOVA (hypothesis 3).

To test the remaining hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with trait forgiveness, situational forgiveness, trust, and pain as predictors for relationship satisfaction. It was assumed there would be no differences by gender, however the data were tested by gender first and if no differences were found the data for males and

females would be combined. The first hypothesis tested was the overall model of situational forgiveness (measured by the Trim-18), dispositional forgiveness (measured by the Dissipation Rumination Scale), trust (measured by the Trust Scale), and pain (measured using one scaling question) regressed on relationship satisfaction (measured by the RAS).

Hypothesis 1a states that the severity of pain due to the listed offenses will be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Responses on the severity of pain scale ranged from 1-10 with higher scores indicating greater levels of distress from the reported offenses. For this reason, a negative relationship was anticipated. This relationship was tested using the correlation matrix from the overall model. In order to test hypothesis 1b, that situational forgiveness will predict relationship satisfaction, scores from the TRIM-18 were correlated with scores from the RAS. The overall scores were tested first, as part of the overall model. Next, scores from the subscales of revenge, avoidance, and benevolence were correlated with the scores from the RAS. Hypothesis 1c was tested by using the correlation matrix of the overall model to determine the relationship between Dissipation Rumination Scale and scores from the RAS. After reverse scoring the scale, higher scores on the Dissipation Rumination Scale indicate greater levels of state forgiveness, therefore a positive relationship was expected. Hypothesis 1d anticipated that trust would predict relationship satisfaction. To test this, the correlation matrix from the overall model was used to determine the relationship of trust with the RAS. Next, the three subscales were regressed on scores from the RAS. It was expected that higher scores on dependability and faith would correlate positively with relationship satisfaction, but high scores on the predictability subscale would

negatively correlate with relationship satisfaction. (The predictability subscale is a measure of lack of predictability in a significant other.) Finally, the data were tested using the Sobel test to determine if one or more of the variables served as a mediator variable (hypothesis 2).

## Chapter 4

### Results

Of the 153 offenses listed, all but three participants were able to recall at least one offense committed by their spouses. This is important because participants were asked to base their responses to the survey questions on the offenses that they listed. Participants were asked to briefly describe three offenses committed by their current spouse listing the most bothersome offense first. The first offense of each participant was used for this study which included several different types of offenses. The offenses were then grouped into one of two categories: unfaithfulness or other. A total of 10 participants (6.54%) indicated that spouse unfaithfulness was the most serious offense that had occurred in their current marriage. Nine out of 10 participants in the unfaithful group were female and ages ranged from 22 to 62 (two did not report an age). All four raters agreed that nine of the 10 offenses were unfaithful. Three raters agreed that “slow danced with a stranger while on a wild night out with the girls” was unfaithful, thus that offense was included. One of the four raters thought that “misunderstanding a friend’s relationship” was unfaithful, but the card was not included since it did not meet the requirement of 3/4 agreement. Examples of offenses in the unfaithfulness category included, “cheated,” “watching porn,” and “extra-marital affair 15 years ago.” Examples of offenses in the other category included such things as “being careless with money,” “lack of support

with the kids,” “does not listen,” “drinks too much,” and “lack of affection.” Although they were not included in the analyses, four participants listed unfaithful offenses as 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> offenses.

Before analyzing the quantitative data, an analysis was conducted to determine whether there were differences between male and female responses. It was determined through a one-way ANOVA that the mean scores for relationship satisfaction did not differ between male and female participants ( $p > .05$ ), therefore all of the subsequent analyses were conducted on the combined data for both males and females. Means, standard deviations, and internal consistency reliability estimates (alpha) for the major study variables appear in table 1.

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Consistency Reliabilities of Major Study*

*Variables*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>α</u>
RAS	150	4.12	.65	.86
Dissipation-Rumination	150	4.30	.82	.89
Trust	144	5.75	1.08	.90
Dependability	152	5.84	1.21	.76
Predictability	151	5.59	1.20	.65
Faith	147	5.74	1.29	.89
Trim-18 Forgiveness	139	4.46	.53	.91
Revenge	149	4.66	.47	.68
Avoidance	146	4.42	.73	.88
Benevolence	149	4.29	.65	.82
Pain	153	6.15	2.82	*

\* Because scale was a single item, internal consistency could not be estimated.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the predictor variables and relationship satisfaction. Correlations among all of the variables in the overall model are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Correlation Matrix*

<u>N=150</u>	Dissipation-Rumination	TRIM-18	Trust	Pain Scale
RAS	.22**	.73*	.75*	-.47*
Dissipation-Rumination		.36*	.30*	-.13
TRIM-18			.73*	-.34*
Trust Scale				-.46*

\*  $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$

To test the first hypothesis, all total scales were regressed on the RAS. This first regression analysis supported the overall model that indicated situational forgiveness, dispositional forgiveness, trust, and pain did predict 66% of the variance in relationship satisfaction in married participants ( $R^2 = .66$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Situational forgiveness measured by the TRIM-18 was the factor that contributed the most to the explained variance ( $B = .53$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while trust ( $B = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and pain ( $B = -.04$ ,  $p < .01$ ) also contributed. The Dissipation Rumination Scale did not significantly contribute to the overall model ( $p > .05$ ) (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Trust, Trim-18, Dissipation Rumination, and Pain as Predictors of Relationship**Satisfaction*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Trust	.24	.05	.00*
Trim-18	.53	.09	.00*
Dissipation Rumination	-.06	.04	.15
Pain	-.04	.01	.00*

\* Significant at the  $P < .01$  level.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that severity of pain from the offenses reported by participants would be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Participants rated the amount of pain they experienced on a scale from 1 – 10, where 1 is very little pain and 10 is significant pain. As indicated by the correlation matrix, this hypothesis was supported in the expected direction. Pain was negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = -.47, p < .01$ ).

The next hypothesis (1b) stated that situational forgiveness (measured by the TRIM-18) would predict relationship satisfaction and that higher scores on the revenge and avoidance subscales would predict lower satisfaction, while higher scores on the benevolence subscale would predict greater relationship satisfaction. As hypothesized, situational forgiveness was correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .74, p < .01$ ). In partial support of the hypothesis, avoidance was strongly correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $B = .73, p < .01$ ), however revenge and benevolence were not significant

predictors of relationship satisfaction ( $ps > .05$ ). Table 5 includes Beta weights, standard errors, and significance of the correlations for the subscales of the Trim-18.

Table 4

*Betas, Standard Errors, and Significance of Benevolence, Revenge, and Avoidance (Subscales of the Trim-18) on Relationship Satisfaction*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Benevolence	.025	.063	.692
Revenge	-.001	.082	.995
Avoidance	.727	.060	.000*

\* Significant at the  $p < .01$  level.

Dispositional forgiveness was measured by the Dissipation Rumination Scale. Because higher scores on the Dissipation Rumination Scale indicate greater rumination, scores were reverse-scored in order that higher scores would indicate greater forgiveness and lower scores would indicate greater rumination. Thus, it was hypothesized (1c) that higher scores would positively correlate with relationship satisfaction in this sample of married participants. As shown in the correlation matrix, results indicated that dispositional forgiveness was significantly associated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ).

To more specifically test the relationship of trust and relationship satisfaction, correlations were conducted between the three subscales of the Trust Scale and the RAS. It was hypothesized (1d) that trust would be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. In addition, it was expected that dependability and faith would positively correlate with relationship satisfaction, while (lack of) predictability would negatively

correlate with relationship satisfaction. As previously shown in the correlation matrix, trust was strongly correlated with relationship satisfaction ( $r = .75, p < .01$ ). In addition, faith, dependability, and predictability also significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, ( $R^2 = .58; p < .01$ ), however, faith was the only predictor that seemed to be contributing to the model ( $B = .33, p < .01$ ). Dependability and predictability did not significantly contribute ( $ps > .05$ ). Tables 6 includes the Betas, standard errors, and the significance levels of the correlations for the subscales of the Trust Scale as described above.

Table 5

*Betas, Standard Errors, and Significance of Faith, Predictability, and Dependability (Subscales of Trust Scale) on Relationship Satisfaction*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Beta</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Faith	.328	.047	.000*
Predictability	.045	.037	.230
Dependability	.050	.047	.287

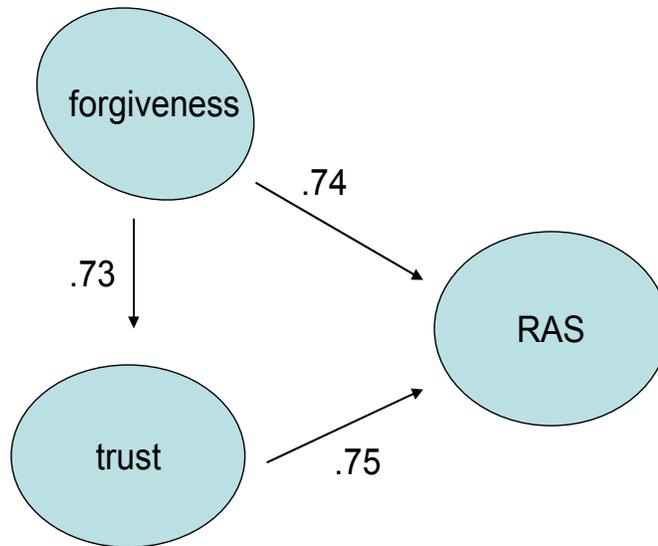
\* Significant at the  $P < .01$  level.

It was hypothesized (2) that one or more of the predictor variables may function as a mediating variable. Two variables met the requirements to be tested as mediators: trust and forgiveness. Two models were tested (see Figures 1 & 2). In order for a variable to be a mediating variable three conditions must be met. The independent variable must predict the dependent variable, the independent variable must predict the mediating variable, and the mediating variable must predict the dependent variable. If all three conditions are met, a Sobel Test can generate a statistic that indicates if the indirect effect

of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator variable is significant. The Sobel Test calculates the regression coefficients and the standard errors of the independent variable and the mediating variable, as well as the mediating variable and the dependent variable. In the first model trust was tested as a mediating variable. All three conditions were met and the Sobel Test statistic was not significant ( $p > .05$ ). The second model tested forgiveness as a mediator. Again, all three conditions were met and the Sobel Test statistic was significant (Sobel Test Statistic = 9.48,  $p < .01$ ). This confirmed that forgiveness is indeed a mediating variable of trust and relationship satisfaction.

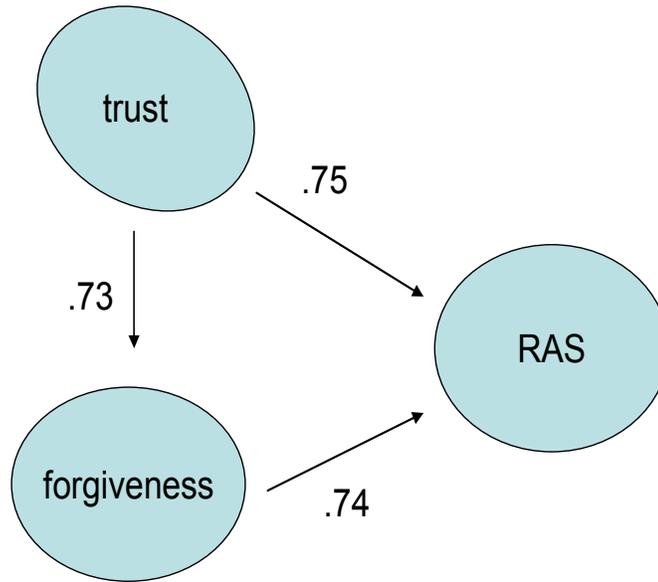
Figure 1

Model 1: Trust as a Mediator of Forgiveness and Relationship Satisfaction



*Figure 2*

Model 2: Forgiveness as a Mediator of Trust and Relationship Satisfaction



The final analysis tested the hypothesis (3) that participants who reported offenses of unfaithfulness would differ on ratings of relationship satisfaction than those who reported other types of offenses. To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if relationship satisfaction was impacted by type of offense.

Results indicated that there was no difference between mean scores on relationship satisfaction for unfaithful or other types of offenses ( $p > .05$ ). The mean score for the unfaithful category was 4.03 and the standard deviation was .70. The mean score for the other category was 4.1 with a standard deviation of .67. A second ANOVA compared the means of the unfaithful group with the other group on amount of pain experienced by the offenses. Results were significant at the  $p < .001$  level. On a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being not at all painful and 10 being extremely painful, the mean score of pain reported by the unfaithful group was 9.0 (standard deviation was 1.05), while the mean score of pain reported by the other offenses group was 5.96 (standard deviation was 2.79). These results indicate that offenses of unfaithfulness are more painful, however participants were no less satisfied in their relationships. These results will be discussed in detail in the discussion chapter that follows.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The famous Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was attributed with saying, “What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility.” This statement seems to be supported by the present research study. The purpose of the present study was twofold. First, the purpose was to examine whether trust and forgiveness predict relationship satisfaction. The second purpose of this study was to identify the types of offenses that occur in non-distressed marriages and to determine if offenses of unfaithfulness to the marriage impact differently from other types of offenses. Of the 153 participants who completed the list of offenses, 150 of them were able to list at least one offense committed by their spouse that bothered them. The fact that all but three participants were able to list at least one offense is important because this was a sample of participants who were considered to be in non-distressed marriages. Despite the fact that these participants were not in distressed marriages, offenses were still present. If all marriages incur offenses, why do some marriages remain intact while others dissolve? The present study offers some new and important insights into answering this question by examining the role of forgiveness and trust in relationship satisfaction of non-distressed marriages.

### Discussion of Study Results

The results of the present study strongly support the literature cited earlier in this paper that trust (Bagarozzi, 2008; Jagers, 1989; Spring, 1999) and forgiveness (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008; Fincham & Beach, 2007; Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002; Rusbult et al., 2002; Sells, Giordano & King, 2002) are important in maintaining healthy relationships. The regression analysis concluded that trust, situational forgiveness, and severity of pain do significantly predict relationship satisfaction. In the multiple regression analysis forgiveness explained more variance than trust or pain, however, trust was a significant contributor to relationship satisfaction. These results add an important contribution to the literature base given the absence of trust in the empirical literature. Although forgiveness was the strongest predictor in the model, it was expected to predict marital satisfaction based on the results of previous empirical studies. Trust, however, has very little empirical data as a predictor of relationship satisfaction, which makes the results more noteworthy. As stated earlier, all five theoretical articles in the literature review (Amato, 2007; Bagarozzi, 2008; Jagers, 1989; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Finkel, & Wildschut, 2002; Spring, 1999) cited trust as an important component to forgiveness and marital satisfaction, particularly following spouse unfaithfulness, however, none of the articles provided empirical support. The results of the current study suggest that the theoretical literature is heading in the right direction as it promotes trust-building to improve relationship satisfaction.

#### *Forgiveness as Mediator*

A key finding of the present study was determining that forgiveness mediates the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction. The role of a mediator is to

explain the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. It is a causal statement that tells how the variables are related. In this way, forgiveness explains the relationship between trust and relationship satisfaction. The results of the current study indicate that trust leads to forgiveness, which in turn, leads to relationship satisfaction. Given that forgiveness has been strongly and consistently associated with relationship satisfaction, the discovery of forgiveness as a mediating variable between trust and satisfaction begins to better explain the role of forgiveness in the relationships of married persons.

Several models have attempted to explain how forgiveness occurs (Enright & Fitzgibbon, 2000; Hargrave, 1994; Worthington, 1998). These models suggest that forgiveness is a process that frequently begins with a wound and involves a series of steps or stages that ultimately lead to a decision to forgive. In each of these models there are elements of empathizing with offenders, considering one's own potential for wounding others, and seeking answers or apologies for offenses.

An important part of the forgiveness process is experiencing empathy and humility (Worthington, 1998). Empathy is the ability to understand why the offensive behaviors occurred. It is not agreeing with or condoning the behaviors, but simply understanding the context in which the offenses occurred. Humility is having an increased awareness of one's own potential for making mistakes. Apologies and confessions work to increase the awareness of one's potential for being offensive. The generally consistent and reliable behaviors that lead to established trust in relationships may enable spouses to empathize with their offending partners, experience humility, and believe in the sincerity of the apology, which are necessary for forgiveness to occur.

The finding of the present study that forgiveness is a mediating variable between trust and marital satisfaction adds an important element to the existing theories of forgiveness. The relationship between trust and forgiveness, as confirmed in the present study, was suggested by Rusbult et al., (2002) who developed a comprehensive theory that proposed how forgiveness occurs in an interpersonal process theory context. Using interpersonal process theories as a guide, Rusbult et al. explained that when trust is established in relationships betrayals are less likely to be interpreted as disrespectful or intentional. Offensive behaviors are incongruent with a history of reliable and predictable behaviors which leads to the offensive behaviors being attributed to things other than partners' malevolence. This, then, leads to greater forgiveness of offenses. Although the theory involves much more than trust, it does suggest that trust promotes forgiveness following relationship betrayals by lessening the impact of the betrayals. Also, the authors suggested that trust, forgiveness, and commitment to the relationship are all fluid and change in response to partners' actions and motives. As partners become more dependent on the relationship they make greater commitments to the relationship and engage in more pro-relationship behaviors. In response to partners' pro-relationship behaviors, partners are perceived as more trustworthy which leads to increased dependence on the relationship. This cycle continues in an upward spiral. As trust continues to build, they expect forgiveness to continue to increase because trust produces "benevolent, schema-congruent interpretations of a partner's betrayal" (p. 274).

Stating the above theory using terminology from the trust literature, spouses who have established their partner's identity as trustworthy may be more willing to let go of offenses. This is a result of spouses' beliefs that their partners are consistent and reliable

in meeting their needs. They have faith that their partner will continue to be responsible with their needs in the future, therefore they are more willing to overlook offensive behaviors that are inconsistent with their overall beliefs about their spouse. The meaning of the behaviors may be attributed to something other than being untrustworthy and they will forgive the offenses.

In addition to supporting the Rusbult et al., (2002) theory, the present study also complements Jagers (1989) model that purports that post-affair recovery involves working on rebuilding trust. He suggested that forgiveness is what moves spouses from distrust to trust. Jagers' model starts with broken trust due to infidelity. His theoretical model indicates that after discovery of an extra-marital affair, relationships enter a probationary period during which much healing must occur before the relationship is repaired. Jagers suggested that improving communication, voicing hurts, managing reactions to reminders of the affair, and learning to trust again are tasks of the probationary period. Although the specific mechanism was not described, Jagers did indicate that forgiveness is the process that moves people from distrust to trust (and ultimately greater relationship satisfaction). In Jagers' model, as well as in the present study, forgiveness appears to be an important mechanism that facilitates positive change in relationships.

### *Trust*

As important as trust appears to be in predicting relationship satisfaction, this study found that one of the three Trust Scale subscales was responsible for explaining most of the variance in the model. Despite the perceived importance of spouse predictability and dependability, faith was the only subscale that was significant and

seemed to predict relationship satisfaction. To understand what this means, it is important to recall the difference between the three subscales. Predictability (or lack thereof) involves the consistency of partners' behavior (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). It is the extent to which one is certain of partner's future behaviors based on past behaviors. It is situation specific and focuses on behaviors only. Dependability is not based on specific behaviors but is more a product of the general beliefs partners have about the qualities of significant others. Dependability is more than predicting how partners will behave, instead it is the confidence that partners will behave in certain ways because they are caring and reliable people. Both of these components of trust are affected by past experiences or history they have had with their partners. The faith component is different in this way. Faith involves spouses believing that partners will behave responsibly in novel situations in which there are no past experiences to base their behaviors. It is this component that proved to be integral to the model predicting relationship satisfaction. This component of trust is the most advanced and mature of the three. It takes more time to develop and requires spouses to be more emotionally and physically vulnerable.

### *Implications*

The findings of the present research have promising clinical implications. First, if trust is strongly established, it is more likely that relationship offenses will be forgiven and satisfaction will be higher. However, if trust is low, it is a changeable characteristic and can be increased. This is something that clinicians can assess and offer strategies for improving. Educating couples on the developmental nature of trust may assist them in understanding how to earn trust from partners. Knowing that consistent behaviors are the beginning of trust, spouses may start building trust simply by being consistent and

reliable in their actions. Likewise, forgiveness is also a process that can be learned. The steps of forgiveness can be taught in a variety of settings including group therapy, individual therapy, or couple therapy. Forgiveness is also a skill that can be taught preventively; therefore couples do not have to wait until a problem has occurred to learn this skill. Forgiveness may be taught in pre-marital counseling or even school settings. Clinicians and educators alike can learn the skills that promote trust and forgiveness to use with anyone interested in improving relationships and experiencing general contentment. This may be especially useful for partners who have been seriously betrayed and do not know how to forgive. Teaching them the forgiveness process while teaching the offending partner how to earn trust might enhance the healing process.

#### *Strengths and Limitations*

Forgiveness has been positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and pain has been negatively associated with relationship satisfaction in previous studies (Fincham & Beach, 2007; Fincham et al., 2004; Orathinkal & Vansteenwegan, 2006). The present study supported the previous work done in this area, but it added some important elements to previous studies. Unlike the common practice of many previous forgiveness studies, Fincham et al., (2004, 2007) used actual offenses listed by participants rather than having participants estimate forgiveness on hypothetical situations. The current study attempted to improve their research method by adding a qualitative component to the study. The present study not only had participants list actual offenses, but analyzed the listed offenses to better understand what types of offenses were experienced and the amount of pain endured. It is important to know the types of problems that have occurred to put participants' forgiveness into context. In addition, the current study also used a

standard measure of forgiveness. Fincham et al., (2004, 2007) asked six to nine questions about their participants' responses to the offenses, but they did not assess their participants using a standard forgiveness measure with established psychometric properties.

One critique of the trust and forgiveness literature was the independence of the studies and the absence of research building on existing studies. To best understand these constructs, it will be imperative that researchers begin to design studies that build upon previous research. In an effort to do just this, the current study attempted to build upon the available literature. As stated above, it attempted to incorporate and improve previous study methods. In addition, this study expanded the work of Markle (2008) who found that trust was the primary predictor variable of relationship satisfaction in a college student population. The current study used similar instruments, including the Trust Scale as well as the List of Offenses. This study chose to survey married participants where the earlier study sampled college student couples. In response to the earlier study, the current study did not sample couples and instead surveyed married individuals. In addition, the current study selected established measures of forgiveness which allows the results of the current study to be compared to other studies using the same instruments.

The measures of this study were reliable and had strong internal consistency. The sample size provided sufficient power to produce meaningful results. There was a potential threat of instrumentation, as the author of this study and three research assistants did have to categorize the type of offenses. It is possible that the human raters could have differed during the subjective scoring, however the raters were tested for inter-rater reliability which indicated good reliability. Also, the measures were not counterbalanced

and it is possible that the content of the earlier instruments may have had an order effect on subsequent scales. This threat was addressed by placing the instruments intentionally to minimize bias. The RAS was intentionally placed before the List of Offenses so that the offenses would not impact ratings of satisfaction. The forgiveness and trust scales were intentionally placed after the List of Offenses with the expectation that participants would use the offenses they listed to base their responses on the forgiveness and trust items. The primary limitation of the present study is that 98.1% of the sample was Caucasian, which certainly limits the generalizability of the results. In addition, the generalization of this study may be limited given that the snowballing sampling technique started with a faith-based group. It is hoped that future studies will include a broader mix of participants in the sample.

#### *Future Direction*

The results of the current study build nicely on what has already been established in the literature and provide further direction for future studies. Specifically, the next logical step in this area would be testing the trust-forgiveness-satisfaction model using SEM or path analysis. The literature would benefit from more closely examining the latent variables involved with trust, forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction. In addition, future studies might explore the possibility that forgiveness may also mediate between other variables associated with relationship satisfaction such as commitment, attributions and expectations, or communication. Although the present study supported the general theoretical models of trust, it would certainly be worthwhile and a logical next step to test the models directly. There were a total of five models presented in the literature review, none of which have been tested.

*Conclusion*

No marriage is immune to problems. People are imperfect and they will make mistakes and they will offend their spouses. What separates the relationships that can work through the offenses from those that cannot? The answer, at least in part, seems to be the ability to establish trust and to forgive. The development of trust is a process that occurs over time and is a result of many things, including relationship history, family of origin interactions, level of dependency, and partners' needs. The amount of trust in any relationship is fluid and can change with any given situation. When betrayals of trust occur, trust decreases and forgiveness is one variable that brings couples back to a more satisfactory relationship. Forgiveness is not simply the absence of unforgiving behaviors, rather it is a decision that leads to changed behaviors once one gives up the right to anger. As trust increases it leads to increased forgiveness in relationships, which results in more satisfying marriages. This study has explored the relationship between trust, forgiveness, and relationship satisfaction. It set out to determine if trust and forgiveness would predict relationship satisfaction and if there were notable differences between satisfaction and type of offenses incurred. This study concluded that indeed, a strong relationship exists between trust, forgiveness, and satisfaction. Forgiveness was the factor that explained the most variance in the model, specifically, the avoidance subscale seemed to be the factor that contributed the most. Trust also contributed significantly to the model and the faith subscale was the only Trust subscale that significantly contributed to the model. The correlations between the predictor variables were so close that even though the mediation effect was significant, the exact process may not be a robust finding. However, the importance of both trust and forgiveness in marital satisfaction received strong support.

Finally, although type of offense did not differ on levels of satisfaction, betrayals of trust did differ on amount of pain experienced. As more research is done on this topic, it is expected that the unique roles of trust and forgiveness will continue to be made known as researchers distinguish between the two constructs and examine more closely the interactions between them and their impact on relationship satisfaction.

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List of Appendices

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Introduction

Dear Participant,

Thank you for signing up to participate in my marriage survey. Included in this email is the information you will need to complete the research study. This study consists of 61 questions inquiring about your current marital relationship. All information will be kept anonymous which means there is no way to connect you to your responses.

Answering these questions will help further what we already know about offenses that occur in marital relationships. Specifically, it will help us better understand what types of qualities are associated with intact marriages. Thank you, again, for your participation. Below is the information you will need to continue.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

You will need approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. You may take the survey from any computer with internet access. If your spouse is also completing the survey, please complete this survey independently of your spouse. You may discontinue your participation in the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact me at the email listed below. To begin the survey, please click on the following link or copy and paste the following into your web browser:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=u5vOjPpeSw250VkBaZ\\_2bgmA\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=u5vOjPpeSw250VkBaZ_2bgmA_3d_3d)

Thank you for your participation.

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## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this research project is to examine marital relationships. For this project, you will be asked to complete a series of questions about your current marriage including your thoughts and reactions regarding issues related to offenses that may have occurred in your marriage. It will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete the questionnaires. In order to participate in this study you must be at least 18 years of age, married, and not currently considering separation or divorce. If you are remarried you are eligible to participate.

All data will be maintained as anonymous. Data will be collected via the internet. It will be password protected. There will be no hard copies of the completed surveys.

The foreseeable risks or ill effects from participating in this study are minimal. There is a small possibility that answering some of the questions on the questionnaires may evoke some feelings of anxiety. Should you experience any feelings of anxiety, there are counseling services available to you at the local mental health center (765) 288-1928.

One benefit you may gain from your participation in this study may be a better understanding of your relationship and increased awareness of your own qualities that contribute to a satisfying marriage. In addition, this study will contribute to the growing body of literature pertaining to marriage. Specifically, it will better explain the types of offenses occurring in marriages and contributing factors of successful marriages.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to email the primary investigator if you have any questions before proceeding with the questionnaires. Your completion of the questionnaires will serve as an indication of your consent for participating in the study.

For one's rights as a research subject, the following person may be contacted:  
Coordinator of Research Compliance, Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070.

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this study.

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Appendix C

Demographics/Relationship Questionnaire

Please complete the following:

What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

African American \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_

Asian American \_\_\_\_\_

Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

Hispanic American \_\_\_\_\_

Bi-Racial \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender?

Male \_\_\_\_\_

Female \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you been in your current marriage? (Number of Years) \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever seriously considered ending this marriage? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever received professional counseling for concerns regarding your current marriage? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

How many children are currently living with you? \_\_\_\_\_

How many arguments have you had with your current spouse in the last two weeks? \_\_\_\_\_

How long did you and your current spouse date prior to marriage? \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D

List of Offenses

At one time or another, in most marriages, spouses will engage in behaviors that are hurtful to one another or behaviors that violate the expectations of the marital relationship. Please think of the times in your CURRENT marriage where your spouse has done something hurtful toward you. These may include anything from minor annoyances to serious behaviors that violated the agreement of your relationship. Please list the most bothersome offenses first, regardless of how minor they may seem or how recent/long ago they occurred.

Please list/describe three things your spouse has done in your CURRENT marriage that has offended or bothered you. In addition, please include how long ago the offenses occurred or indicate if they are on-going behaviors.

List the most bothersome offense first.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1 – 10; with 1 being not at all painful and 10 being extremely painful...To what degree did the offenses pain you? \_\_\_\_\_

On a scale of 1 – 10; with 1 being you have not resolved the offense at all and 10 indicating you have completely resolved the relationship offenses...To what degree do you believe you have resolved the offenses? \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E

Trust Scale

You are almost finished - just 16 questions left!

Please answer the following questions about your current spouse.

1 strongly disagree; 2 somewhat disagree; 3 mildly disagree; 4 neutral; 5 mildly agree; 6 somewhat agree; 7 strongly agree

- 1) My partner has proven to be trustworthy and I am willing to let him/her engage in activities which other partners find too threatening. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Even when I don't know how my partner will react, I feel comfortable telling him/her anything about myself; even those things of which I am ashamed. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Though times may change and the future is uncertain; I know my partner will always be ready and willing to offer me strength and support. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) I am never certain that my partner won't do something that I dislike or will embarrass me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) My partner is very unpredictable. I never know how he/she is going to act from one day to the next. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) I feel very uncomfortable when my partner has to make decisions which will affect me personally. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) I have found that my partner is unusually dependable, especially when it comes to things which are important to me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Whenever we have to make an important decision in a situation we have never encountered before, I know my partner will be concerned about my welfare. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Even if I have no reason to expect my partner to share things with me, I still feel certain that he/she will. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) I can rely on my partner to react in a positive way when I expose my weaknesses to him/her. \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will respond in a loving way even before I say anything. \_\_\_\_\_

- 12) I am certain that my partner would not cheat on me, even if the opportunity arose and there was no chance that he/she would get caught. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13) I sometimes avoid my partner because he/she is unpredictable and I fear saying or doing something which might create conflict. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14) I can rely on my partner to keep the promises he/she makes to me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15) When I am with my partner I feel secure in facing unknown new situations. \_\_\_\_\_
- 16) Even when my partner makes excuses which sound rather unlikely, I am confident that he/she is telling the truth. \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

## Relationship Assessment Scale

Please answer the following questions about your current relationship.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

Does not meet them at all	Often does not meet my needs	Sometimes meets my needs	Often meets my needs	Always meets my needs
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2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
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3. How good is your relationship compared with most?

Very poor	Poor	Neutral	Good	Very Good
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4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?

I never wish this	I rarely wish this	Neutral	I sometimes wish this	I wish this all the time
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5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

Does not meet them at all	Often does not meet my needs	Sometimes meets my needs	Often meets my needs	Always meets my needs
------------------------------	---------------------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

6. How much do you love your partner?

Not at all	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
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7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

None	Very Few	Some	Very Many	A lot
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## Appendix G

## Dissipation – Rumination Scale

Please indicate the response that reflects your first reaction to each statement below. Please be as spontaneous and accurate within the choices offered below.

Completely true for me 1	Fairly True for me 2	True to a certain extent 3	False to a certain extent 4	Fairly false for me 5	Completely false for me 6
-----------------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------------

- 1) I never help those who do me wrong. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) I will always remember the injustices I have suffered. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) The more time that passes, the more satisfaction I get from revenge. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) It is easy for me to establish good relationships with people. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) It takes many years for me to get rid of a grudge. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) When somebody offends me, sooner or later I retaliate. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) I do not forgive easily once I am offended. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) I often bite my fingernails. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) I won't accept excuses for certain offenses. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) I hold a grudge, for a very long time, towards people who have offended me. \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) I remain aloof towards people who annoy me, in spite of any excuses. \_\_\_\_\_
- 12) I can remember very well the last time I was insulted. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13) I am not upset by criticism. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14) I enjoy people who like jokes. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15) I still remember the offenses I have suffered, even after many years. \_\_\_\_\_
- 16) If somebody harms me, I am not at peace until I can retaliate. \_\_\_\_\_

- 17) When I am outraged, the more I think about it, the angrier I feel. \_\_\_\_\_
- 18) I like people who are free. \_\_\_\_\_
- 19) I am often sulky. \_\_\_\_\_
- 20) Sometimes I can not sleep because of a wrong done to me. \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

## TRIM-18

## Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale – 18

For the next set of questions, please indicate your current thoughts and feelings about your spouse based on the offenses listed on the previous page.

1. I'll make him/her pay  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
2. I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
3. Even though his/her actions hurt me, I have goodwill for him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
4. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
5. I am living as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
6. I want us to bury the hatchet and move forward with the relationship.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
7. I don't trust him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
8. Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
9. I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree

10. I am finding it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
11. I am avoiding him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
12. Although he/she hurt me, I am putting the hurts aside so we could resume our relationship.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
13. I'm going to get even.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
14. I forgive him/her for what he/she did to me.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
15. I cut off the relationship with him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
16. I have released my anger so I can work on restoring our relationship to health.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
17. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree
18. I withdraw from him/her.  
Strongly disagree    disagree    neutral    agree    strongly agree