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The Relative Effects of Religion, Empathy, Anger, and Apology on Forgiveness

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THE RELATIVE EFFECTS OF

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIVE EFFECTS OF

RELIGION, EMPATHY, ANGER, AND APOLOGY ON FORGIVENESS

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St. Mary's University, 2018

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Researchers have begun elucidating the complex relationship between religion and forgiveness. This study examined the effects of religious measures on forgiveness beyond the variance explained by empathy, anger, and apology. Utilizing hierarchical multiple regression, this study investigated the predictive power of religious coping and Catholic religiosity on state forgiveness after controlling for the effects of the strongest known predictor variables: state empathy, state anger, and received apology. A discriminant function analysis allowed this researcher to conceptualize the religious variables further by comparing religious coping with Catholic religiosity. Parishioners from local Catholic churches were invited to participate in an online survey consisting of the positive and negative religious coping subscales of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE), Catholic faith practices, Batson's Empathy Adjectives, Anger scale, Apology assessment, Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory—18 (TRIM–18), and a demographic questionnaire.

Discriminant function analysis results indicated that among the religious variables Catholic religiosity was the strongest predictor of membership in the practicing Catholic

group. Unexpectedly, hierarchical multiple regressions results showed Catholic

religiosity demonstrated a small and significant effect size ($f^2 = .018$) while positive and

negative religious coping were not significant. The controlled variables (state empathy,

state anger, and received apology) had greater predictive power for state forgiveness than

the religious variables. These findings suggest that Catholic faith practices helped

Catholic participants forgive interpersonal transgression.

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I cannot begin to imagine completing this project without the help, prayers, and patience of so many.

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Chapter I

The Problem and Justification of the Study

As religious teachings have formed the foundation of modern understandings of forgiveness, researchers can benefit from reflection on religious perspectives about forgiveness and its transformative powers. Although researchers have confirmed the theoretical and empirical links between forgiveness and religion as well as religion's role in coping, the degree of correlation has varied considerably (e.g. Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, 2013; McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Despite the fact that for millennia major world religions have either directly promoted forgiveness or the virtues associated with it (Rye et al., 2000), McCullough and Worthington (1999) identified a "religion-forgiveness discrepancy" (Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005, p. 786) that interpreted their findings of only a modest and inconsistent relationship between being religious and the act of forgiving an interpersonal transgression. A meta-analytic review of religion and forgiveness research shed light on this discrepancy: contextual (state) measures of religion demonstrated a stronger influence on transgression specific (state) forgiveness than dispositional (trait) measures of religion (Davis et al., 2013).

An earlier meta-analysis of forgiveness studies identified state empathy, state anger, and apology as having the most influence on whether an individual forgave a recalled transgression (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). This study aimed to further both meta-analytic results by investigating the influence of state and trait religious variables beyond the predictive power of state empathy, state anger, and received apology on state forgiveness and thereby examine the simultaneous effects of multiple independent variables on state forgiveness (as suggested by Fehr et al., 2010).

Statement of the Problem

 Published research on the relationship of religion and forgiveness has documented mixed findings with some researchers identifying various strengths of correlations (e.g. Davis et al., 2013; McCullough & Worthington, 1999) while others have found none (e.g. Rackley, 1993). For instance, positive and robust relationships exist between religiosity and trait measures of forgivingness (Brown, Barnes, & Campbell, 2007; Edwards et al., 2002; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Gorsuch & Hao, 1993; Poloma & Gallup, 1991; Shoemaker & Bolt, 1977). In contrast, other research has demonstrated weak or negligible influence of religiosity on state forgiveness (Bryant, 1999; Rackley, 1993; Sheffield, 2003; Subkoviak et al., 1995; Wilson, 1994).

 This supports McCullough and Worthington's (1999) assertion of the importance of the level of specificity of the measurement of forgiveness. They identified trait forgivingness as the least specific and state forgiveness of a particular transgression as the most specific level of forgiveness measure. Additionally, they explained the significance of these measurement considerations when examining the relationship between measures of religion and forgiveness. They noted that general level measurements, measures of religiosity and trait forgivingness, would be more strongly related to each other while a transgression specific forgiveness measurement, a measure of state forgiveness, would be more strongly related to an "event-specific religion measure" (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p. 1154).

 Of note, the Fehr et al. (2010) meta-analysis also showed state correlates had greater main effects than trait correlates on state forgiveness. While they included the

trait measure religiosity in their analysis, they did not include a state measure of religion for comparison. Therefore, the current study measured religion in a more comprehensive manner and investigated both state and trait religious variables in the regression on state forgiveness.

Furthermore, the Davis et al. (2013) meta-analytic review of religion and forgiveness research did not include other nonreligious predictive variables for forgiveness. This study broadened the Davis research by including, for comparison, the three strongest predictors of state forgiveness following recall of a transgression (state empathy, state anger, and received apology). By shedding light on the nature of the relationship of the state (religious coping) and trait (Catholic religiosity) religious variables to state forgiveness, this researcher may find useful resources to help religious clients who struggle with the aftermath of painful transgression.

Research Questions

Hierarchical multiple regressions examined the influence of religion, empathy, anger, and apology on forgiveness. Specifically, the positive and negative religious coping subscales of the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998), Catholic faith practices (Marist Poll, 2015), Batson's Empathy Adjectives (Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978), Anger scale (McCullough, Pederson, Tabak, & Carter, 2014), and Apology assessment (Kirchhoff, Wagner, & Strack, 2012) measured the predictor variables. The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory—18 (TRIM–18; McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006) measured the criterion variable, state forgiveness. Explicitly, this study examined the following research question: "What is the predictive value of religious coping and Catholic religiosity on

state forgiveness after accounting for the influences of state empathy, state anger, and received apology?" This researcher investigated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis: Religious coping will add to the predictive value of state empathy, state anger, and received apology on state forgiveness.

Hypothesis a: Positive religious coping and received apology will correlate positively and moderately with state forgiveness.

Hypothesis b: Negative religious coping and state anger will correlate negatively and moderately with state forgiveness.

Hypothesis c: State empathy will correlate positively and strongly with state forgiveness.

This researcher also analyzed the religious variables to determine if they were adequate predictors of membership in the practicing Catholic group.

Rationale or Justification for the Study

The constructs selected for this forgiveness study: religion, empathy, anger, and apology were derived from meta-analytic investigations of state and trait correlates (Fehr et al., 2010) and religious correlates (Davis et al., 2013) of state forgiveness. Notably, this researcher examined the particular impact of two state religious correlates, positive and negative religious coping, suggested as promising predictors of state forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Moreover, this was an original use of the Catholic faith practices measure for Catholic religiosity.

Using a hierarchical multiple regression strategy, this researcher added the controlled variables in the following order: state empathy, state anger, and received apology. The addition of one of the religious variables completed each of the three

regression equations. These were positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and Catholic religiosity. This method evaluated how much the addition of each individual religious variable contributed to the explanation of the variance in state forgiveness beyond the controlled variables (state empathy, state anger, and received apology). This methodology permitted the researcher to (a) evaluate the size of the effect contributed by the religious variable that could not be accounted for by the strongest predictor variables for recalled transgression and (b) discern if adding a particular control variable in a specific order contributed to the prediction of state forgiveness beyond that available from preceding control variable(s).

Because of its greater relevance to concerns addressed in psychotherapy, transgression specific state forgiveness was selected as the criterion variable instead of trait forgivingness. Additionally, recall methodology more closely reflects the processes and issues relevant to clinical practice and was used instead of a scenario methodology.

For thousands of years religion has encouraged forgiveness and established a foundation for the variety of contemporary forgiveness attitudes and practices expressed today. Rye et al. (2000) pointed out social scientists can benefit from consideration of religious perspectives regarding forgiveness. They also asserted that religious disciples have attested to the spiritual and emotional benefits of forgiveness as well as being a potent change agent in one's life.

Furthermore, the forgiveness literature has affirmed the importance of the context of forgiveness related to various meaning systems. Specifically, "both researchers and mental health professionals need to be sensitive to differences in lived experiences and in meaning systems associated with forgiveness" (Cosgrove & Konstam, 2008, p. 2).

Legaree, Turner, and Lollis (2007) asserted the need for greater exploration "regarding how forgiveness is related to diversity (e.g., gender, culture, religion, etc.)" (p. 192). This echoes earlier declarations that research needs to investigate the nature of forgiveness in various cultural contexts and communities (McCullough, Pargament, Thoresen, 2000; Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003).

Most relevant to this study is the importance of being mindful of different understandings of forgiveness in particular religious communities (Sandage, 2005). More specifically, researchers have pointed out that within the Christian community a diversity of opinion exists about forgiveness (Legaree, Turner, & Lollis, 2007). Lastly, research needs to examine basic understandings of forgiveness as they pertain to religious practices and beliefs (Freedman & Chang, 2010, p. 8).

For a number of reasons, Catholics were the subjects invited to participate in this investigation. First, the literature supports the investigation of forgiveness in the context of a particular religious community and Catholics account for more than one fifth of the U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2014). Second, while interpersonal forgiveness is a central tenet of the Christian faith, the oldest Christian tradition, Catholicism, has a number of unique liturgical activities related to forgiveness widely practiced today. Furthermore, practicing Catholics were distinguished from nonpracticing Catholics. Other behavioral differences between the two groups, such as the utilization of Natural Family Planning, has been associated with significant outcomes. The use of Natural Family Planning has been linked to enhanced marital relationships (Borkman & Shivanandan, 1984; Rhomberg, Rhomberg, & Weissenbach, 2013; VandeVusse, Hanson,

Fehring, Newman, & Fox, 2004) and low (3%) divorce rate (Rhomberg, Rhomberg, &

Weissenbach, 2013).

There are myriad reasons why forgiveness is relevant to marriage and family

therapy. Perhaps as a reflection of its religious roots, forgiveness was initially and

exclusively conceptualized as an interpersonal phenomenon in the social scientific

literature (Bank & Kuhn, 1982; Bloomfield & Felder, 1983; Close, 1970; Pattison, 1969;

Tedeschi, Hiester, & Gahagen, 1969; Todd, 1985; Walters, 1984). Currently, forgiveness

is frequently conceptualized as an interpersonal process although this is not always the

case (Strelan, Mckee, Calic, Cook, & Shaw, 2013). Despite the more modern

conceptualization of forgiveness in the literature as an intrapsychic process, some

researchers still identify it as interpersonal in particular contexts: "when it involves

transactions between parent and child, romantic partners, or other in ongoing intimate

relationships" (Worthington, 2006, p. 19). This researcher's perspective accommodates

both the intrapsychic and interpersonal conceptualizations of forgiveness as the study

examined the participants' motivations towards their transgressor. In this manner, the

focus was on the relationship between the victim and transgressor rather than exclusively

on the victim.

The imperfect nature of human relationships challenged by interpersonal violence,

infidelity, divorce, marital distress, and family of origin issues provides many

opportunities for forgiveness to be a constructive response to transgressions. Moreover,

the resolution of problems that bring people into therapy can at times entail forgiveness.

Publications in the marriage and family therapy literature exploring forgiveness reveal

innovative research examining the relationships among demographic variables and

forgiveness; family functioning and forgiveness; marital couples' responses to

forgiveness; forgiveness interventions to the problem of infidelity; and a forgiveness

intervention for post-divorced co-parents.

Forgiveness has been associated with positive interpersonal and intrapersonal

outcomes. Interpersonal positive outcomes included enhanced social harmony (Hook,

Worthington, & Utsey, 2009), preservation of valued relationships; greater intimacy;

increased relational commitment; promotion of constructive communication; inhibition of

future transgressions; contributions to post-offense level of closeness and satisfaction

with the offender (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; Karremans & Van Lange, 2008;

McCullough et al., 1998; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005). Intrapersonal positive

outcomes have included better physiological health (e.g., Harris & Thoresen, 2005;

Lawler et al., 2003; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001); improved psychological

well-being (e.g., Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk,

& Kluwer, 2003; Orcutt, 2006; Toussaint & Webb, 2005); distress reduction; self-

protection from one's own anger; avoidance of confrontation; and forgiveness to gain

closure without reconciliation with an abusive partner. It seems only logical that

relational therapists would address forgiveness in their research.

Limitations

The current forgiveness investigation employed a natural setting rather than an

experimental manipulation, as it would have been immoral and unethical to prompt an

occasion for the forgiveness of a deep, personal, and unfair transgression. Furthermore,

due to the nature of a correlational research design, there was no manipulation of the

predictor variables. Therefore, results could only suggest relationships between the

religious, affective, and apology predictor variables and the forgiveness criterion variable rather than establish a causal relationship. Limited generalizability was due to the sample size of participants espousing a comparable set of religious beliefs for this investigation.

Definitions of Terms

Catholic faith practices refers to the degree of importance the participants placed on how they practice their faith. Practices included daily prayer, following the teachings of the Catholic Church, receiving the Sacraments, attending Mass regularly (at least once per month beyond weddings and funerals), belonging to a parish, and going to confession at least annually.

Catholic religiosity refers to participants' individual differences in their beliefs and religious response tendencies in pursuit of holiness within the Catholic tradition.

Received apology refers to whether participants received a statement of apology, acknowledgement of fault, expression of emotion such as remorse, or an explanation of the offensive behavior from the transgressor.

Religious coping refers to the ways and means that participants experienced religious transformation or religious preservation in response to life's adversities.

State refers to the most specific level of measurement and describes variables that were characterized by a particular set of circumstances or a specific instance related to the transgression. This characteristic is more fluid, relational, and can change over time. This term is analogous to situational and contextual.

State anger refers to how much participants felt a negatively valenced emotion (e.g., angry, enraged, furious) related to the transgression at the time of the survey.

State empathy refers to how much participants experienced other-oriented feelings (e.g., concern, warmth, compassion) toward the transgressor at the time of the survey.

State forgiveness refers to the degree of forgiveness for a specific interpersonal transgression by a particular transgressor.

Trait refers to the least specific level of measurement and describes variables representing general personality characteristics that are unchanging over time or a participant's particular response tendency regarding forgiveness. It is analogous to dispositional.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Forgiveness has received extensive attention in the psychological literature over the last three of decades. Researchers have collaborated with philosophers to define it, psychologists to establish its antecedents and identify its psychological benefits, medical doctors to determine its health benefits, and therapists to ascertain the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions. In the forgiveness literature religion is a particular area of interest that has grown considerably during the last decade.

The following review summarized the literature on forgiveness and religion relevant to this study. Forgiveness was defined and elaborated with respect to the nature of the process, target of forgiveness, and specificity of measurement. The theoretical importance of the specificity of measurement was also elucidated. In addition, the meta-analytic results of the strongest predictor variables of state forgiveness of a recalled transgression (Fehr et al., 2010) were compared to a meta-analysis that more closely examined the religious correlates of state forgiveness (Davis et al., 2013). The variables selected for this study were derived from these meta-analyses. Review of these variables in the extant forgiveness literature followed. Lastly, the review presented investigations of forgiveness in the context of couples and/or families.

Forgiveness Defined

Despite considerable research illuminating the antecedents, parameters, and consequences of the phenomenon commonly referred to as forgiveness, a universally accepted definition eludes the researchers investigating this construct, clinicians implementing this intervention in therapeutic settings, and lay people for whom this

option may or may not sound appealing. Even the instruments researchers and

practitioners use to evaluate the forgiveness experienced by research subjects and clients

do not always define the term. For this study forgiveness is, generally speaking, a

prosocial transformation characterized by the reduction of vengeful and avoidant

motivations and the increase of benevolent motivations (McCullough, Worthington, &

Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998). This multidimensional process is comprised of

the reduction or replacement of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors directed

toward the transgressor in response to a perceived or perpetrated transgression (Enright &

Fitzgibbons, 2000; Wade, Johnson, & Meyer, 2008; Wade & Worthington, 2005;

Worthington & Wade, 1999). The following most aptly describes the forgiveness process

in detail:

> People, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive
>
> when they willfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they
>
> have a right), and endeavor to respond to the wrongdoer based on a moral
>
> principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth,
>
> generosity, and moral love (to which the wrongdoer, by nature of the hurtful act
>
> or acts, has no right). (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p. 24)

Social scientific theorists and forgiveness researchers have a greater consensus

regarding what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is distinguished from condoning,

denying, excusing, forgetting, justifying, pardoning, or minimizing an offense (e.g.,

Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Harris et al., 2006). Although many draw a distinction

between forgiveness and reconciliation (Enright & North, 1998; Gordon & Baucom,

1998; Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2004; Freedman, 1998; Freedman & Chang, 2010; Knutson, Enright, & Garbers, 2008; Worthington, 2006) this perspective is not universal.

The distinction drawn between forgiveness and reconciliation is theoretically appropriate as well as psychometrically salient. Theoretically, forgiveness could be conceived of as an exclusively intrapersonal phenomenon, such as when a victim forgives a transgressor who is a stranger. In contrast, reconciliation is an interpersonal phenomenon requiring the activity of two persons. This distinction is especially relevant in research. Some researchers have expressed concern regarding negative consequences following the forgiveness of interpersonal transgression (Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, & Kumashiro, 2010; McNulty, 2010, 2011). Others have investigated the advantages of not forgiving (Rapske, Boon, Alibhai, & Kheong, 2010). The research designs and conclusions of the former did not make the distinction between forgiving interpersonal transgression and reconciling without setting healthier boundaries in continuing relationships. In addition, the latter study found that some of the participants justified their unwillingness to forgive because they "equated forgiving with reconciling" (Rapske et al., 2010, p. 1113). By comparison, a recent publication demonstrated that setting boundaries via "direct oppositional partner-regulation behaviors" made the difference whether or not negative outcomes followed forgiveness (Russell, Baker, McNulty, & Overall, 2018, p. 435). Taken together these findings support Worthington and Wade's (1999) admonition "to seek reconciliation with the offender if safe, prudent" (p. 386).

Relevance of Forgiveness Process Conceptualization

For thousands of years before the scientific method and development of the social sciences, the major world religions were instructing the faithful on forgiveness.

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Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism all either directly promote

forgiveness, or the virtues associated with it (Rye et al., 2000). Forgiveness remained the

domain of theologians and philosophers until the mid-twentieth century when the first

published social scientific explorations of forgiveness reflected the interpersonal

paradigm promoted by the aforementioned religions (Close, 1970; Pattison, 1969;

Tedeschi et al., 1969). Currently, and most particularly among relational therapists, the

interpersonal construct of forgiveness is widely utilized as it focuses the level of analysis

on the relationship between the victim and offender (e.g. Exline & Baumeister, 2000;

Hargrave & Sells, 1997).

By the turn of the last century Pargament, McCullough, and Thoresen (2000)

recognized a discrepancy in the forgiveness literature between identifying the forgiveness

process as interpersonal or intrapersonal. This provides a possible explanation for the

inconsistency in the conceptualizations of forgiveness, where some researchers defined

forgiveness as an interpersonal process while others defined it as a strictly intrapersonal

process. It is also understandable how the prosocial and interpersonal nature of

forgiveness could be confounded with reconciliation.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal do not merely refer to the target of forgiveness,

such as a transgressor or the self. The focus instead is on the actual process of

forgiveness following a transgression. Interpersonal forgiveness identifies the process as

situated at the level of the relationship between a single victim and a single offender,

typically in an ongoing relationship between coworkers, friends, and family members

(Exline & Baumeister, 2000). By comparison, intrapersonal forgiveness is an

intrapsychic process where change occurs within the individual (e.g. DiBlasio, 1998;

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Gordon et al., 2004; Konstam et al., 2000; Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000; Worthington, 2006). This process reflects, "a change in cognitions, behaviors, emotions, and/or motivations that can unfold even if the individual is no longer engaged in a relationship with the offender, even if the offender is no longer alive" (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000, p. 302).

This researcher embraces the concept that forgiveness has a dual character. McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) characterized forgiveness as a psychosocial construct, stating, "it is interpersonal as well as intrapersonal" (p. 9). To support this claim, they cite other psychological constructs with interpersonal natures, such as empathy, noting that "each construct has other people as its point of reference" (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000, p. 9).

An investigation completed by Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou, and Moore (2007) supported this conclusion. These researchers asked participants to define forgiveness. The coding of these definitions resulted in three categories of orientation: intrapersonal, attention focused on self; interpersonal, attention focused on other; and both. Less than half of the responses were coded as intrapersonal only. Even more interesting to this researcher, approximately one in five definitions included both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors.

Worthington (2006) may have touched upon the mechanisms leading to a resolution of the apparent dichotomy between interpersonal and intrapersonal forgiveness. He described the phenomenon of forgiveness as arising in an interpersonal context when precipitated by a hurtful or offensive action by another. The pain resulting from this circumstance can and often does influence the victim's response. One may

choose to hold a grudge, seek vengeance, or forgive. By practicing a response often

enough, the victim can lock in his or her personality, simultaneously shaping his or her

interpersonal world. Worthington (2006) asserted that this practiced response pattern

influences one's "mental, physical, relational, and spiritual health" (p. 9).

In addition, researchers Fehr et al. (2010) proposed a three-part forgiveness

process model describing when victims forgive their offenders. This model consisted of

the "victims' cognitions, affect and constraints following the offense" (p. 907). The

intrapsychic or intrapersonal dimensions of forgiveness encompassed by cognitions and

affect comprised two-thirds of this model. The remaining third of this model reflected

interpersonal dimensions represented by the "relational and socio-moral *constraints* on

forgiveness" (p. 896). The victim's relational constraints were defined as embeddedness

in the relationship with the offender. More specifically, "when victims hold close,

committed, or satisfying relationships with their offenders, they can be described as

embedded within the dyad" (p. 896). The socio-moral constraints manifested internalized

social and moral standards related to maintenance of a socially desirable image and

adherence to religious beliefs, respectively.

The current study examined the comparative strengths of the relationships

between correlates from each of the three parts of the process model (cognitions, affect,

and constraints) of state forgiveness. These included a cognitive correlate, two affective

correlates, and two constraints. Received apology, the cognitive correlate, can diminish

the victim's negative appraisals of the transgressor and or the transgression. The

affective correlates, state empathy and state anger, can enhance or reduce the victim's

motivations to forgive, respectively. The constraints, religious coping and Catholic

religiosity, represented internalized moral standards that extended beyond the

transgression. They are of two types, state and trait correlates, respectively. Positive and

negative religious coping, the state correlates, identified ways the participants utilized

religious strategies to deal with the aftermath of the transgression. Catholic religiosity,

the trait correlate, identified the importance of adhering to the religious practices of the

participants.

Measurement Specificity

To account for the religion-forgiveness discrepancy identified in the extant

literature, McCullough and Worthington (1999) proposed several explanations. Reasons

given included social desirability, recall bias, distal location in the causal series of

forgiveness, and construct measurement issues. The last two, addressed by the current

research design, will be examined. The construct measurement issues were theoretically

described in terms of the principles of aggregation and specificity. The principle of

aggregation refers to the lack of correlation between attitude and behavior (Fishbein &

Ajzen, 1974). In this study it referred to the correlation between the trait variable

Catholic religiosity and actual forgiveness of a specific transgression (state forgiveness).

Furthermore, the principle of aggregation supports the finding of positive robust

relationships between general trait measures of religiosity and trait measures of

forgivingness. Religiosity, a trait variable, refers to an individual's religious beliefs,

values, attitudes, and practices that tend to be stable over time. Trait forgivingness

reflects the aggregation of many self-reported acts of forgiveness and refers to an

individual's general disposition toward forgiving or forgiveness response tendency.

Research examples of this included religiosity as positively related to highly valuing

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forgiveness (Brown, Barnes, & Campbell, 2007; Shoemaker & Bolt, 1977), greater

forgiveness motivation (Gorsuch & Hao, 1993), and self-reported propensity to forgive

(Edwards, Lapp-Rinker, Magyar-Moe, Rehfeldt, Ryder, & Lopez, 2002; Exline,

Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Poloma & Gallup, 1991).

Additionally, the principle of specificity refers to the idea that in order "to predict

specific behavior in a particular situation, the attitude measure needed to match the

behavior in terms of time, place, and specificity" (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p.

1152). In other words, to predict state forgiveness the measure of religion ought to be

state rather than trait. State religious measures are those characterized by varying within

the religious individual according to the specifics of time, place, and circumstances of a

particular situation. Examples include the spiritual meaning of the transgression and

seeking support from one's church. Utilizing an event-specific religious measure

improves specificity. In particular, the religious state measure of religious coping

(RCOPE) developed by Pargament, Smith, and Koenig (1996) is suggested as a

potentially "good candidate for a religious measure that would predict people's

forgiveness for specific transgressions" (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p. 1154).

Meta-Analytic Results of State Forgiveness

A meta-analysis examining the state and trait correlates of state forgiveness from

($k = 175$) forgiveness studies or samples was comprised of 26,006 participants (Fehr et

al., 2010). Inclusion requirements of studies from a wide variety of psychological

disciplines consisted of written in English with a quantitative forgiveness measure, at

least one quantitative measure of a forgiveness correlate, and enough information to

calculate a relationship between them. All reported effects had a $k \geq 3$ and data collection ended Dec. 31, 2008.

As mentioned in the Relevance of Forgiveness Process Conceptualization section, Fehr et al. (2010) proposed a three-part model of interpersonal forgiveness consisting of cognitions, affect, and relational and socio-moral constraints following a transgression. Constructs from this three-part model were further categorized as state or trait correlates. Examination of 22 distinct state and trait correlates of state forgiveness resulted in significant effects that were the strongest for state empathy ($\bar{r} = .53$), intent ($\bar{r} = -.49$), state anger ($\bar{r} = -.46$), and apology ($\bar{r} = .36$). All of these were state correlates. Fehr and colleagues provided evidence to confirm previous theory that state measures accounted for greater forgiveness variance than victim dispositions. Despite this generally being the case, there were considerable within-category differences between state and trait correlates.

The meta-analytic results suggested that methodology exhibited some moderating effects on the cognitions and affect of the victim. More specifically, scenario methodologies prompted greater effects for cognitions while recall methodologies prompted greater effects for affect. This is especially salient regarding intent. Although intent ($\bar{r} = -.49$) was ranked second among the 22 constructs examined, significant moderating effects of study methodology influenced this outcome. While the correlation between intent and state forgiveness was ($\bar{r} = -.66$) for scenario methodologies, it was significantly lower among the recall methodologies ($\bar{r} = -.31$). Recall methodology most closely imitates the processes and issues relevant to clinical practice and is the method of choice for this study. For these reasons, intent was not included in this study. Although

moderating effects of methodology were also found for state empathy ($\bar{r}$ = .58 for recall) and apology ($\bar{r}$ = .37 for recall), neither of these reached significance (Fehr et al., 2010).

Despite the trend of state constructs accounting for greater forgiveness variance than trait constructs and the promotion of interpersonal forgiveness among centuries old major world religions (Rye et al., 2000), the construct of religion was only represented by the trait correlate of religiosity. The significant effect of religiosity ($\bar{r}$ = .19) only accounted for a small variance (4%) of state forgiveness. State correlates of religion, such as religious coping, were not examined. However, the researchers did suggest that "additional studies may shed light on more nuanced associations between forgiveness and religious constructs" (Fehr et al., 2010, p. 908).

More recently Davis et al. (2013) performed a meta-analytic review of the literature on forgiveness and religion/spirituality. Although their research also examined trait forgivingness and self-forgiveness as criterion variables, these criterion variables were not germane to this study and were not included. Their meta-analysis (k = 50) examined the religious correlates of state forgiveness for 8,932 participants. This compares to the aforementioned meta-analysis consisting of (k = 28) religion and forgiveness studies comprised of 5,224 participants (Fehr et al., 2010). Additional studies were located via published reviews, examining references from the articles identified by the search, and contacting authors of religion/spirituality and forgiveness studies to request unpublished manuscripts. Data collection ended January 5, 2011.

The relevant Davis et al. (2013) meta-analytic variables of state forgiveness and religion/spirituality were considered. State forgiveness was defined as one's degree of forgiveness for a specific transgression. Following consideration of actual transgressions,

state forgiveness measurements allowed participants to rate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors regarding that transgression. Spirituality was defined as one's search for a connection with the sacred. By comparison, religion was defined as a one's search for the sacred within a community and tradition where there is common agreement about beliefs and practices. This meta-analysis examined both trait and state constructs of religion/spirituality. Trait measures of religion/spirituality reflected constructs that were apt to be relatively unchanging over time, such as attachment to God and religious commitment. In contrast, state measures of religion/spirituality reflected constructs that were more fluid and change over time. Some of these included viewing the transgressor as spiritually similar and appraising the transgression as the destruction of something sacred (desecration).

Additionally, these researchers identified a trend in forgiveness and religion/spirituality research that began with a focus on trait religion/spirituality constructs and has moved to state religion/spirituality constructs. They explained that the initial focus yielded weak support for a main effect of trait religion/spirituality constructs on interpersonal forgiveness. In fact, this area of research suggests that trait religion/spirituality constructs only predict approximately 4% of the variance of state forgiveness. Furthermore, the development of the psychology of religion resulted in the definition and investigation of state religion/spirituality constructs describing how religious/spiritual individuals understand and deal with stressors. Consequently, forgiveness researchers started investigating more contextual, relational, and fluid explanations of how religion/spirituality affects forgiveness. Programmatic investigations of religion/spirituality and forgiveness, compared to studies simply

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including a religion/spirituality covariate, have become increasingly focused on state constructs.

As such, one goal of their meta-analysis was to examine whether the correlation between state forgiveness and religion/spirituality was stronger utilizing state measures or trait measures of religion/spirituality (Davis et al., 2013). Measures of religion/spirituality were grouped into two categories: state and trait. The logic used explained that more proximal variables to the forgiveness process (state religion/spirituality constructs) may have a stronger relationship to state forgiveness than more distal variables to the forgiveness process (trait religion/spirituality constructs).

This logic was derived from McCullough and Worthington's (1999) causal chain explanation for the lack of influence religiosity demonstrated on the forgiveness of an interpersonal transgression. They reasoned that because forgiveness for an actual transgression has been shown "to be under the control of many proximal social-psychological conditions, the influence of religion on transgression-specific forgiveness might be quite distal in the causal chain" (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p. 1151). They identified numerous cognitive and affective correlates researchers showed facilitated interpersonal forgiveness. Some of these included apology (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Kremer & Stephens, 1983; McCullough et al., 1997; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1990; Zillman & Cantor, 1976), responsibility (Darby & Schlenker, 1982), intent (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Gonzales, Haugen, & Manning, 1994), severity (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989), and empathy (McCullough et al., 1997).

To test the relationship between state forgiveness and religion/spirituality, Davis et al. (2013) performed a meta-analysis that estimated the effect size and examined moderators. State forgiveness was determined using a self-report measure of participants' degree of forgiveness related to the remembrance of an actual offense. The results indicated a small effect size ($r = .15$) between state forgiveness and religion/spirituality. This finding of Davis et al. (2013) was consistent with earlier reviews that suggested a weak relationship between state forgiveness and religion/spirituality (Fehr et al., 2010; McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Upon scrutiny, the relationship between state religion/spirituality constructs and state forgiveness was stronger than when religion/spirituality was measured as a trait construct. This was evidenced by a higher effect size for state religion/spirituality constructs ($r = .31, p < .001$) than trait religion/spirituality (R/S) constructs ($r = .10, p < .001$). "This supports the idea that contextual R/S constructs that are more proximal to the forgiveness process are more strongly related to state forgiveness than are more distal aspects of R/S" (Davis et al., 2013, p. 6).

This meta-analysis of forgiveness and religion/spirituality constructs also seemed to support the theory that state correlates of state forgiveness accounted for greater variance than trait correlates. Subsequently, Davis and colleagues asserted the importance of making these distinctions with religion/spirituality variables in future research. Furthermore, they suggested directions for future research to include investigation of "the contextual issues that may influence the forgivingness of an R/S community" (Davis et al., 2013, p. 6). To this end, the present study has examined two state religious correlates and included a trait religious correlate for comparison.

Forgiveness Correlates

The variables selected for this study were derived from the meta-analytic results of the investigations of the influence of state and trait correlates (Fehr et al., 2010) and religious correlates (Davis et al., 2013) on state forgiveness. The state correlates of this study included state empathy, state anger, and received apology. The religious correlates were positive and negative religious coping and Catholic religiosity. The meta-analytic results in the forgiveness literature for each variable were reviewed first and then more recent research examining the relationship between state forgiveness and the specific correlate was reviewed.

Positive and negative religious coping. As we return to the Davis meta-analysis of the religious correlates of state forgiveness, one study utilized the Brief RCOPE to evaluate religious coping related to state forgiveness (Davis et al., 2013). This study, comprised of African American men ($N = 171$) who experienced racial discrimination, examined various correlates of forgiveness in response to this transgression, including positive religious coping (Hammond, Banks, & Mattis, 2006). Religious coping was measured using only five of the seven items from the positive religious coping subscale of the Brief RCOPE (Pargament, 1999). This instrument assessed collaborative religious coping, benevolent religious appraisal, seeking spiritual support, the search for spiritual connection, and overall religious coping. Reliability for this instrument was acceptable ($\alpha = .88$). The Pearson correlation for positive religious coping and forgiveness was ($r = .29$, $p < 0.01$). Negative religious coping was not used.

The investigation of a model of forgiveness and relational spirituality employed Christian undergraduates ($N = 180$) and examined various religious correlates of state

forgiveness (Davis, Hook, & Worthington, 2008). Both positive and negative subscales of the 14-item Brief RCOPE assessed religious coping. For this sample, reliability was acceptable for the Negative Religious Coping subscale (α = .92) and the Positive Religious Coping subscale (α = .85). Forgiveness was positively correlated to positive religious coping (r = .15, p = .06), but was not significant. In contrast, negative religious coping (r = -.30, p < .01) was negatively correlated to state forgiveness and significant. Moreover, using hierarchical regression the researchers confirmed that the state measures of positive and negative religious coping predicted forgiveness beyond the trait measures (anxious or avoidant attachment style to God) examined. "The betas were .24 *(p < .05)* for positive religious coping and −.28 *(p < .01)* for negative religious coping" (Davis et al., 2008, p. 298).

Catholic religiosity. The positive and negative religious coping state variables were compared to Catholic religiosity, a trait variable. A discriminant function analysis evaluated the ability of the Brief RCOPE and Catholic faith practices (Marist Poll, 2015), the measure of Catholic religiosity, to identify membership in the practicing Catholic group and thereby further conceptualize the religious variables. Catholic faith practices referred to the degree of importance the subjects placed on how they practice their own faith. These practices included daily prayer, following the teachings of the Catholic Church, receiving the Sacraments, attending Mass regularly (at least once per month beyond weddings and funerals), belonging to a parish, and going to confession at least once a year. Thus, the Catholic faith practices measure evaluates some of the unique traditions and liturgical activities involved in practicing the Catholic faith. This is an original use of the Catholic faith practices measure and therefore, there were no reliability

or validity statistics from other research for comparison. However, elements of this psychometric were found in other correlates related to forgiveness, such as prayer, Confession, Church teachings, and the Sacraments.

Prayer. Researchers investigating prayer have demonstrated its influence on state forgiveness. Vasiliauskas and McMinn (2013) performed an experimental study with (N = 411) Christian undergraduates seeking to forgive a transgression.   Participants were randomly assigned to the intervention prayer group focused on forgiveness, a devotional group, or control group. After the 16-day intervention, participants in the daily prayer group demonstrated posttest increases in both state forgiveness and greater empathy for their transgressor. Notably, even those in the daily devotional group demonstrated commensurate increases in state forgiveness.

Another experimental study examined the effects of brief prayer on forgiveness across cultures and different religions (Toussaint, Kamble, Marschall, & Duggi, 2016). College student participants were identified as either Americans (n = 51) or Indians (n = 100). The Americans' demographics included 88% Christians and 12% not religiously affiliated. The Indians' demographics included 58% Hindus, 25% Christians, and 16% Muslims. Participants were randomly assigned to the intervention, a 3-minute self-guided prayer for their romantic partner, or control group.   Participants in the prayer intervention demonstrated a significant change in forgiveness. The magnitude of change did not differ across cultures. Furthermore, the religious affiliation of Indian participants did not moderate these effects.

Lambert, Fincham, Dewall, Pond, and Beach (2013) performed five studies investigating partner-focused prayer. Two studies demonstrated more frequent prayer

resulted in less vengeful ratings by objective coders. In Study 3 the romantic partners of

the praying participants noticed an increase in the participants' forgiveness when

compared to control group.   "In Study 5, participants who prayed for a close relationship

partner reported higher levels of cooperative tendencies and forgiveness" (p. 184).

Confession. In addition, elements of the Sacrament of Confession (e.g., self-

examination, self-disclosure, receiving unconditional positive regard, repentance,

absolution, forgiveness) have also found their way into psychotherapy and forgiveness

research. In particular, DiBlasio & Benda (2008) investigated the utility of a couples'

forgiveness intervention during which each spouse disclosed offensive behavior,

expressed remorse, committed to discontinue behavior, requested forgiveness, and

participated in a ceremonial act. This intervention significantly increased forgiveness of

interpersonal transgression.

Self-examination of one's offensive behavior has also promoted forgiveness of

interpersonal transgression. Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, and Witvliet (2008) found

subjects' sense of their own personal capability to commit transgression predicted greater

interpersonal forgiveness of hurtful transgression. Although religiosity did not correlate

with personal capability in their investigation, it was also not measured in the manner of

this present study. Furthermore, personal capability did correlate with humility, which

may indicate a correlation to an intrinsic religiosity. Lastly, Lawler-Row (2010) found

that feeling God's forgiveness was significantly correlated to forgiveness of others.

Church teachings. Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989) replicated their

research exploring the morality of forgiveness using a social cognitive developmental

model analogous to Kohlberg's stages of justice. They investigated the relationship

between degree of religiosity and the level of sophisticated reasoning regarding

forgiveness as a problem-solving strategy in response to an interpersonal transgression

scenario. Subjects included children and adults. The forgiveness stages ranged from 1 to

6. Results from both studies found greater religiosity was significantly correlated to

forgiveness considerations located at higher stages, regardless of age. Notably, 29% of

the adults in their Catholic samples demonstrated the most advanced understanding of

forgiveness as the "universal ethical principle orientation" (p. 96). Stage 6 identified

> forgiveness as love. I forgive unconditionally because it promotes a true sense of
> love. Because I must truly care for each person, a hurtful act on his/her part does
> not alter that sense of love. This kind of relationship keeps open the possibility of
> reconciliation and closes the door on revenge. (Enright et al., 1989, p. 96)

Sacraments. The Catholic religiosity measure included three items related to the

Sacraments that do not exist in virtually all other religions. The grand mean = 3.98 for

reception of Sacraments, Mass attendance, and Confession reveals that this Catholic

sample considered the Sacraments to be important. The Catholic Church teaches that the

Sacraments are the ordinary means by which one receives grace. Patrick, Beckenbach,

Sells, and Reardon (2013) investigated the effects of relational grace and found that it

influenced a couple's use of empathy and that ultimately contributed to forgiveness.

State empathy. Fehr et al. (2010) meta-analysis ($k = 32$) representing 4,906

participants examined the relationship between state empathy and state forgiveness.

They found state empathy ($\bar{r} = .53$, $r^2 = 28\%$) accounted for the greatest amount of

variance in forgiveness. Moreover, state empathy was the only correlate of the 22

examined to display a strong positive correlation to forgiveness.

Seventeen antecedents and six consequences of forgiveness were examined in another meta-analysis (Riek & Mania, 2012). This research ($k =13$) representing 2,164 participants investigated the relationship between state empathy and state forgiveness. State empathy ($\bar{r} = .50$) was expected to be one of the most proximal and strongest predictors of state forgiveness and it demonstrated a significantly greater variance in forgiveness than the other factors. This slightly smaller amount of variance may be evidence of the moderating role of methodology where two of the 13 studies utilized hypothetical methodology, which has demonstrated enhanced effects for cognitions when compared to real cases of forgiveness.

A series of four studies designed to develop and test the validity of the Forgiveness Aversion Scale also examined the empathy forgiveness relationship (Williamson, Gonzales, Fernandez, & Williams, 2014). Study 2 was relevant to this review as it tested a forgiveness model and found that empathy mediated the path of forgiveness aversion to forgiveness. University students ($N = 206$) completed measures of individual differences, various forgiveness aversion predictors, demographic items, and a brief description of the transgression. Empathy was measured using an 8-item scale ($\alpha = .91$) composed of empathy adjectives describing the victim's feelings toward the transgressor. Similar scales have been used in other research (e.g., Batson, Chang, Orr, & Rowland, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 1997). The Enright Forgiveness Inventory ($\alpha = .99$) was used to measure state forgiveness (Subkoviak et al., 1995). Results suggested that at significance of $p < .05$, the regression weight of the path from empathy to forgiveness was ($\beta = .34$).

A series of three studies in the development of the Relational Engagement of the Sacred for a Transgression (REST) Scale also explored empathy and forgiveness (Davis et al., 2010). In Study 3 with university students ($N = 296$), researchers examined the construct validity for the REST Scale by comparing it with various measures of relational spirituality, state empathy, and state forgiveness. State empathy was measured using the 8-item Batson Empathy Adjectives (Batson, 1986; Coke et al., 1978) with ($\alpha = .93$). State forgiveness was measured using the TRIM–12 (McCullough et al., 1998), a 12-item instrument with two subscales: Revenge and Avoidance. Lower scores indicated higher forgiveness. In this sample, ($\alpha = .93$) for unforgiveness, ($\alpha = .88$) for revenge, and ($\alpha = .95$) for avoidance. Results indicated that at significance of $p < .01$, state empathy was correlated to unforgiveness ($r = -.58$), revenge ($r = -.47$), and avoidance ($r = -.58$). Finally, researchers proposed various measurement models indicating that empathy mediated the relationship between REST and forgiveness and that the regression score between state empathy and unforgiveness was ($r = -.62$). This stronger correlation may reflect the proposition that forgiveness and unforgiveness are not diametrically opposed (Worthington, 2006).

A series of three studies validating the Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS) also found a significant relationship between empathy and forgiveness (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2009). In Study 1 researchers examined measurement models of MOFS and found evidence of discriminant validity using data collected from long-term married couples ($N = 148$) living in Northern Italy. Emotional empathy was measured using a 3-item scale used previously to study forgiveness in families (Paleari et al., 2005). This scale demonstrated ($\alpha = .87$) for husbands and ($\alpha = .80$) for wives.

Forgiveness was measured using the 12-item MOFS consisting of benevolent motivations (five items), revengeful motivations (five items), and avoidant motivations (two items). Correlations of empathy with the MOFS positive dimension of benevolence was ($r = .63$, $p < .001$) for husbands and ($r = .40$, $p < .001$) for wives. Correlations of empathy with the MOFS revengeful and avoidant negative dimensions were ($r = -.44$) for husbands and ($r = -.36$) for wives.

State anger. The correlate of state anger ($\bar{r} = -.46$, $r^2 = 21\%$) accounted for the next greatest amount of variance in state forgiveness following recall of an interpersonal transgression (Fehr et al., 2010). This medium negative effect on state forgiveness was derived from ($k = 20$) representing 2,442 participants.

Another meta-analysis also examined state anger and forgiveness (Riek & Mania, 2012). Their research ($k = 15$) represented 2,143 participants and investigated the relationship between state anger and two variations of forgiveness, state ($k = 6$) and trait ($k = 9$) forgiveness. More specifically, these studies represented only ($k = 5$) *real cases* while the others were ($k = 3$) *hypothetical cases* and ($k = 7$) a *no scenario* label where participants were simply asked how often they forgave others. State anger ($\bar{r} = -.37$) was notably smaller than the Fehr et al. (2010) meta-analysis.   Researchers examined possible moderating effects of the type of forgiveness measure (state or trait) and found none. One could reasonably speculate that the smaller effect of state anger found in this meta-analysis was attributable to the moderating effect of the type of forgiveness (recall, scenario, or no scenario). Fehr et al. (2010) found that victim affect had a greater impact on state forgiveness when evaluated with a recall versus scenario measure. Unfortunately, data related to this moderating role was unavailable for state anger.

Received apology. Lastly, apology ($\bar{r} = .36$, $r^2 = 15\%$) accounted for the third greatest amount of variance in state forgiveness following recall of an interpersonal transgression. This medium positive effect on state forgiveness was derived from ($k = 23$) representing 4,009 participants (Fehr et al., 2010). These studies represented recall ($k = 15$) and scenario ($k = 8$) samples.

Apology was examined in another meta-analysis, which included ($k = 20$) representing 3,736 participants (Riek & Mania, 2012). Similar results demonstrated a medium positive effect of apology ($\bar{r} = .33$) on state forgiveness. These studies represented ($k = 18$) real cases and ($k = 2$) hypothetical cases. It may be that the inclusion of a majority of real cases contributed to a mildly reduced effect of this cognitive correlate on state forgiveness.

Finally, an investigation focused on the role of apology on forgiveness following infidelity (Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008). Researchers investigated the responses of ($N = 196$) undergraduate students who responded to a scenario about the infidelity of an imaginary romantic partner. Assessments examined the method of discovering the infidelity, frequency of infidelity, presence of an apology, and forgiveness. In particular, apology was measured by its presence or absence while forgiveness was measured using a 7-point Likert scale rating six statements relevant to forgiveness. Results showed that with an apology, subjects "were more likely to forgive, $F (1, 188) = 150.82$, $p < .001$, $es = .45$; considered forgiveness more important, $F (1, 188) = 116.37$, $p < .001$, $es = .38$; found it easier to forgive, $F (1, 188) = 35.26$, $p < .001$, $es = .16$; were more likely to trust their partner in the future, $F (1, 188) = 20.43$, $p < .001$, $es = .10$; were less likely to end

the relationship, F (1, 188) = 68.65, $p < .001$, $es = .27$; and needed less time to forgive, F (1, 188) = 90.28, $p < 001$, $es = .32$" (Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008, p. 9).

Marriage and Family Forgiveness

Contemporary publications in the marriage and family therapy literature reveal research examining forgiveness related to family functioning (Batson & Marks, 2008; Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009; Hill, 2010; Hill, Hasty, & Moore, 2011; Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005; Kiefer et al., 2010; Lee & Enright, 2009; Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008; Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010).   Forgiveness has also been examined in the context of married couples and partner relationships (Batson & Shwalb, 2006; DiBlasio & Benda, 2008; McNulty, 2008; McNulty, 2010; Miller & Worthington, 2010). Additionally, forgiveness has been examined in marital infidelity interventions (Bagarozzi, 2008; Olmstead, Blick, & Mills, 2009; Snyder, Baucom, & Gordon, 2008) and divorce adjustment (Bonach, 2009; Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011). Lastly, forgiveness has been explored in relation to several familial demographic variables (Orathinkal, Vansteenwegen, & Burggraeve; 2008).

Family functioning. A couple of family therapy journal articles explored theoretical conceptualizations of forgiveness. These utilized clinical cases to illustrate how differentiation of self (Hill, Hasty, & Moore, 2011) and empathy (Hill, 2010) foster forgiveness in couples and families. Authors suggested the importance of conceptualizing forgiveness in terms of history, relational attachment, and the context of family of origin. Furthermore, both articles described forgiveness as releasing an emotional injury through a complex cognitive, emotional, and relational process.

Batson and Marks (2008) used a narrative approach to interview six devout Catholic families with children. Participants were asked to share their experiences of faith and family life. Three themes emerged: prayer, faith, and forgiveness. In greater detail, "forgiveness allows unity to flourish" (Batson & Marks, 2008, p. 400).

Worthington, Jennings, and DiBlasio (2010) discussed a variety of evidence-based interventions to promote forgiveness among children, couples, and families. Their research revealed ($k = 12$) forgiveness interventions with minors, ($k = 11$) with couples, only ($k = 1$) with parents (Kiefer et al., 2010), and none with families. The interventions in the literature demonstrated the use or adaptation of Enright's process model, Worthington's REACH Forgiveness program, DiBlasio's Decision-based model, and Worthington's Forgiveness and Reconciliation through Experiencing Empathy model. Forgiveness is conceptualized as a coping response to transgression in their stress-and-coping model. Although it is acknowledged that various interpersonal experiences may initiate forgiveness, a distinction is made between the intrapersonal processes of decisional and emotional forgiveness and the discussion of transgressions.

Kiefer et al. (2010) provided a 9-hour psychoeducational workshop teaching ($N = 27$) parents how to forgive transgressions of their co-parenting partners. This intervention consisted of Worthington's Forgiveness and Reconciliation through Experiencing Empathy (FREE) model. FREE is comprised of an intrapersonal forgiveness element, the REACH model, and reconciliation. Participants "exhibited increased forgiveness of a target offense by the parenting partner and increased forgiveness of all parenting offenses" (p. 32).

Lee and Enright (2009) explored whether forgiveness would mediate the relationship between a father's perception of unfair treatment by a member of his family of origin and anger toward his own son. Data was collected using a questionnaire, Enright Forgiveness Inventory, Family of Origin Hurt Scale, Anger With the Child Scale, and State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-II from ($N = 80$) married fathers who have a young child. A moderation analysis identified ($n = 20$) fathers, who were hurt by their own fathers, and had sons between 2-7 years of age. For these fathers, the relationship between perceived unfair treatment and anger with the child was significantly moderated by forgiveness ($p = .034$) suggesting an intergenerational gender effect. This study seems to indicate the relational nature of forgiveness as extending beyond the victim and victimizer dyad as demonstrated by its intergenerational effects.

Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, and Davila (2005) reported the results of two studies consisting of ($N = 175$) families who provided data on their TRIMs from recollections of general forgiveness. A TRIM rating of high Benevolence motivation scores and low Avoidance and Revenge motivation scores confirmed forgiveness. Findings indicated that individual and dyadic levels of analysis accounted for considerable variance in forgiveness and suggested the importance of victim forgivingness, offender forgivability, and relationship-specific effects to forgiveness motivations in families. Hoyt et al. (2005) acknowledged both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors were key elements of forgiveness motivations and pointed "to the need to embed the study of forgiveness in more complex psychosocial contexts" (p. 375).

Maio, Thomas, Fincham, and Carnelley (2008) examined the hypothesis that the process of forgiveness is fundamentally different across various kinds of relationships by

examining the role forgiveness plays in diverse family relationships. ($N = 114$) families consisting of two parents and one child participated in two sessions separated by a 1-year interval. Data collection included a new measure entitled the Family Forgiveness Questionnaire. This instrument was designed to measure one's tendency to forgive others and one's perceptions of forgiveness granted by others. Participants also completed several assessments of variables representing multiple levels of forgiveness analyses comprising the individual, relationship, and family levels. Using cross-sectional analyses, the Family Forgiveness Questionnaire was validated and a longitudinal analysis was performed to study the role of forgiveness in particular types of family dyads. This investigation revealed numerous positive consequences of forgiveness for individuals, specific family dyads, and the general family environment. Additionally, significant differences in the antecedents and consequences of forgiveness emerged between parental dyads and parent and child dyads demonstrating the importance of the relational context of forgiveness.

Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, and Litzinger (2009) examined the relationships between forgiveness of a significant betrayal and features of family functioning. Specifically, their investigation examined both positive and negative forgiveness. Negative forgiveness was characterized by avoidance, holding grudges, desiring revenge, and dysregulation of affect and cognitions. Positive forgiveness was characterized by increased empathy, resolution of anger, an inclination toward forgiveness and a more compassionate view of the offender. Self-reports from ($n = 87$) wives and ($n = 74$) husbands, their spouses, and their adolescent children were collected. "Findings suggest that forgiveness of a marital betrayal is significantly associated with marital satisfaction,

the parenting alliance, and children's perceptions of parental marital functioning"

(Gordon et al., 2009, p. 1).

Couples. Batson & Shwalb (2006) questioned ($N = 130$) Roman Catholic couples between the ages of 24-84 from three suburban churches in a southern U.S. city. Respondents completed a section of the Family Forgiveness Scale and the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. Levels of faith and forgiveness were similar between husbands and wives. As expected, higher levels of faith were positively associated with higher levels of forgiveness. Faith was correlated with most forgiveness dimensions. Faith and some aspects of forgiveness were related to duration of marriage (Batson & Shwalb, 2006).

DiBlasio and Benda (2008) pursued two studies on the efficacy of a decision-based forgiveness intervention with marital couples. They used the following measures: Enright Forgiveness Inventory, Index of Marital Satisfaction, and Generalized Contentment Scale. In the first study, 44 couples ($N = 88$) participated in a randomized clinical trial that compared three groups: forgiveness treatment ($n = 38$), problem-solving treatment ($n = 32$), and control ($n = 18$). In the second study, participants were Christian volunteers ($N= 26$) whose responses reflected a belief in Jesus as the Messiah and that salvation is through Jesus' death and resurrection. Both studies utilized a pre- and post-test design. Results provided initial evidence for a three-hour decision-based forgiveness intervention to increase forgiveness and improve marital satisfaction while decreasing depression in married couples.

McNulty (2008) utilized a longitudinal study to examine the consequences of spousal tendency to forgive for ($N = 72$) couples during their first two years of marriage.

This research design was comprised of four waves of data collection, each approximately six months apart. Data collection consisted of mailed questionnaires and videotaped laboratory sessions to assess the frequency of negative verbal behaviors during dyadic discussions. The questionnaires utilized were the Quality Marriage Index, a new measure of marital forgiveness that was modeled after the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness, and the Verbal Aggression subscale from the Conflict Tactics Survey. The Verbal Tactics Coding Scheme was adapted to code the videotaped marital discussions. Congruent with the results from previous research, McNulty found positive correlations between forgiveness and marital outcomes cross-sectionally. No significant main effects of forgiveness on the changes in marital satisfaction or problem severity emerged from initial analyses when cross-sectional correlations between forgiveness and marital outcomes were controlled. This finding suggested that, generally speaking, forgiveness is not related to marital development. However, while still controlling for the cross-sectional correlations between forgiveness and marital outcomes, further analyses revealed that spousal negative verbal behavior moderated the effects of the other spouse's forgiveness on marital development. Specifically, as related to changes in marital satisfaction,

> a pattern of significant negative interactions emerged between husbands'
> tendencies to forgive their wives and observations of the frequency of those
> wives' negative behaviors…and between wives' tendencies to forgive their
> husbands and reports of the frequency of those husbands' negative behaviors. (p.
> 173)

McNulty drew the conclusion that for spouses whose partners infrequently behave negatively, more forgiveness seemed beneficial over time. By comparison, less forgiveness seemed harmful over time for these couples. In contrast to spouses whose partners frequently behave negatively, more forgiveness seemed harmful over time and less forgiveness seemed beneficial over time.

McNulty (2010) explored the negative implications of forgiveness, where the removal of undesirable interpersonal outcomes following transgressions may increase the probability of subsequent spousal transgressions. Newlywed couples (N= 135) utilized a daily-diary for seven days to investigate the relationship between forgiveness of the spouse and the probability of the spouse behaving negatively the following day. Participants were asked to record "whether their partner engaged in a negative behavior that day, how much they disliked that behavior, and whether they forgave that behavior" (pp. 787-788). Results from multilevel model testing confirmed the author's hypothesis that forgiveness of a partner's negative behavior would be correlated with an increased likelihood of that partner engaging in a negative behavior the following day. This relationship emerged from the analysis of the ($n = 26$) participants who demonstrated variance in forgiveness in their diaries. The analysis revealed that these newlywed "spouses were more than six times more likely to report that their partners had engaged in a negative behavior on days after they had forgiven those partners than on days after they had not forgiven those same partners" (p. 789). McNulty points out that "it appears to be daily variations in forgiveness within the 26 spouses who reported such variance, rather between-spouse variations in the tendency to forgive, that accounted for whether or not partners engaged in negative behavior again the next day" (p. 789). Based on this

evidence McNulty draws the conclusion that "interpersonal theories and interventions designed to treat and prevent relationship distress may benefit by acknowledging this potential cost of forgiveness" (p. 787).

Miller and Worthington (2010) utilized self-report assessments to investigate any gender-based differences in marital forgiveness, perceptions of spouse's forgiveness, and any "relationships between sex, marital satisfaction, marital forgiveness, and self-reported mental health" (p. 12). Newlyweds ($N = 311$) from a nonclinical population participated in this cross-sectional, correlational research design. Miller and Worthington used the following measures: demographic data sheet; depression, anxiety, and hostility subscales from the Brief Symptom Inventory; Couple's Assessment of Relationship Elements Scale; Batson's Empathy Adjectives Scale; and an abbreviated version of the Commitment Inventory. They collected additional data using measures designed for this study to examine marital forgiveness, perceived spousal forgiveness, weekly stress, and a transgression index. Lastly, single-item measures identified transgression frequency and transgression severity. Newlywed men reported more marital forgiveness and spousal empathy than did newlywed women. Additionally, wives perceived their husbands as more forgiving of them than husbands perceived their wives' forgiveness. Variance in marital forgiveness was accounted for by gender, marital satisfaction, and severity of hurts. And finally, variance in mental health symptoms was accounted for by gender, marital satisfaction, marital forgiveness, frequency of transgressions, and severity of hurts.

Infidelity. Utilizing a multidimensional model, Bagarozzi (2008) addressed the treatment of marital infidelity. The author identified several diagnostic elements to

consider when setting goals for therapy. Among others, these included personality factors, marital dynamics, capacity for forgiveness, and willingness to reconcile. He points out the importance of not assuming that the offended spouse is willing to forgive simply because he/she has begun marital therapy. He also notes that even when couples desire to reconcile, the offended spouse may not be willing to grant forgiveness. Furthermore, he notes that forgiveness may be strategically withheld as a means of changing the power dynamics in the marriage. "When both spouses desire to work toward forgiveness, the therapist's role is to help them explore the meaning of forgiveness and the conditions under which forgiveness is typically granted" (p. 12). Bagarozzi provides a definition of forgiveness and its major constituents. His definition reflects decisional forgiveness combined with pardoning the spouse for infidelity. Furthermore, by granting forgiveness the betrayed spouse will renounce the right to retaliate, refrain from using the transgression as a strategy or weapon against the offending spouse, and "agrees to cease feeling angry and resentful feelings toward the offending spouse" (p. 12). Along with the conditions of forgiveness that the offended spouse agrees to, the offending spouse is required to acknowledge and discontinue the extramarital affair, accept full responsibility, ask for forgiveness, promise to refrain from any future infidelity, and agree to demonstrate both sincerity in this endeavor and that all affairs have been ended.

Snyder, Baucom, and Gordon (2008) describe an affair-specific intervention for helping couples recover from infidelity. This couple-based intervention addresses the consequences of infidelity for both the individual and the relationship and draws integratively from a variety of empirically supported interventions including those from the forgiveness literature. The three-stages of this intervention include addressing the

affair's impact, exploring and understanding the affair's context, and deciding how to move on. Stage 3 treatment strategies provide a therapeutic context in which to discuss forgiveness. More specifically these strategies describe the forgiveness model; identify the couples' beliefs about forgiveness; explore the consequences of forgiveness; and deal with blocks to forgiveness. The authors highlight the importance of striking "a balance between respecting partners' personal values and beliefs about forgiveness while also challenging ways in which partners' beliefs may interfere with moving on in an emotionally healthy manner" (p. 305). Furthermore, psychoeducation regarding forgiveness helps couples understand that forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation or making oneself vulnerable to infidelity in the future. Instead, couples are taught how to forgive and "appropriately hold the partner responsible for her or his behaviors" (p. 305). Empirical evaluation of this affair-specific intervention has shown it to be an effective conjoint therapy for recovery from infidelity.

Utilizing a qualitative methodology, Olmstead, Blick, and Mills (2009) studied how therapists integrate forgiveness when treating marital infidelity. Structured interviews with ($N = 10$) licensed marital and family therapists were conducted and transcribed. Open, axial, and selective coding analyses of these transcripts generated two major, sequential categories each containing major themes and subthemes. The two sequential categories were infidelity and forgiveness. Treatment of infidelity included the assessment of family of origin and a relationship history that identified the etiology and patterns of infidelity. A thorough understanding of the couple's history of infidelity was important for the therapist to prudently proceed to forgiveness without condoning the extramarital affair. Infidelity treatment also included discussion of mutual acceptance of

responsibility in the creation of a marital context for the infidelity. As forgiveness became part of the therapeutic process, the following four themes emerged from the therapists' descriptions: understanding forgiveness, psychoeducation, clarity, and time. Initially the therapist assessed the client's understanding of forgiveness. Subsequent psychoeducation regarding forgiveness provided the means to address the meaning of forgiveness, the process of forgiveness, and any misunderstandings about forgiveness. It was important that clients understand the difference between forgiveness and other similar concepts. Therapists also helped couples clarify what they wanted and needed for the future of their relationship. Additionally, clarification of the language used to describe forgiveness was vitally important to the therapeutic process. Lastly, therapists identified the importance of the timing of the forgiveness element in therapy and the need to educate clients that the forgiveness process requires time.

Post-divorce. One study that stands out investigated numerous demographic variables in relation to forgiveness for couples in their first marriage and those remarried. Orathinkal, Vansteenwegen, & Burggraeve (2008) studied the effect on forgiveness of the following variables: age, gender, level of education, status of employment, number of children, and length of marriage. Researchers surveyed ($N = 787$) Belgian respondents using the Enright Forgiveness Inventory and a demographic questionnaire. They identified a significant main effect of number of children on forgiveness when corrected for gender ($p < .002$) and marital status ($p < .005$). When corrected for education ($p < .04$), length of marriage ($p < .01$), and number of children ($p < .003$), they also found significant main effects of gender on forgiveness. Furthermore, their study found

women's forgiveness to be significantly higher than men's forgiveness ($p < .005$, one-

tailed, $d = .20$).

Chapter III

Methods

Research Design

This correlational research design utilized hierarchical multiple regression analyses as its primary means of investigation. Secondarily, a discriminant function analysis was implemented to further elaborate the religious variables of interest.

This study utilized a hierarchical multiple regression analysis strategy and examined the predictive value of religion on forgiveness after controlling for the influences of empathy, anger, and apology. The results of two forgiveness meta-analyses supplied this study's constructs. Fehr et al. (2010) examined the influence of state and trait correlates on forgiveness and reported their weighted population correlations. Using a recall methodology, they found the following main effects on state forgiveness: state empathy ($\bar{r} = .58$), state anger ($\bar{r} = -.46$), and apology ($\bar{r} = .37$). It is noteworthy that these correlates were the strongest predictors of state forgiveness. These state correlates also supported earlier theorizing about state constructs explaining more variance in state forgiveness than the dispositions of the victim. Despite this generally being the case, evidence of considerable within-category differences prohibited concluding that state correlates always account for greater state forgiveness variance than trait correlates (Fehr et al., 2010). In addition, Fehr and colleagues recommended that future research examine the interrelationships between the correlates they investigated and "test the *simultaneous* effects of the predictors of forgiveness" (p. 909). By following this suggestion, the current study evaluated the relative strengths of the religious correlates beyond the

predictive power of the strongest known predictors for state forgiveness following recall of an interpersonal transgression.

The Davis et al. (2013) examination of the influence of state and trait religious/spiritual (R/S) correlates on forgiveness was the second meta-analysis utilized. Researchers found a stronger relationship between religion and state forgiveness by measuring religion as a state construct instead of a trait construct. Although Fehr et al. examined the religiosity trait correlate ($\bar{r} = .19$) they did not include religious coping or other religious variables among their state correlates. However, Davis et al. (2013) more recently made the distinction between state religious correlates (i.e., religious coping) and trait religious correlates (i.e., religiosity). Davis and colleagues found that state religious measures proximal to the process of state forgiveness exhibited a greater correlation ($r = .31$) than the trait religious measures ($r = .10$) to state forgiveness. Their meta-analysis of religion and forgiveness research provided evidence and an explanation for the religion-forgiveness discrepancy discussed by McCullough and Worthington (1999). It also challenged the predominantly dispositional, or trait, representation of religion in forgiveness research.

Davis and colleagues proposed, "that researchers continue to focus on contextual [religious/spiritual] R/S variables that will help understand why R/S is related to higher levels of forgiveness" (Davis et al., 2013, p. 7). Although the state religious correlates of positive and negative religious coping as measured by the Brief RCOPE were included in their meta-analytic results, they were reported as an aggregate of state R/S measures. This study directly evaluated the correlations of state variables, positive and negative religious coping as measured by the Brief RCOPE, with state forgiveness.

Utilizing a hierarchical regression design, this study investigated the predictive

value of state (religious coping) and trait (Catholic religiosity) religious correlates, after

controlling for the influences of state empathy, state anger, and received apology on state

forgiveness. Religious coping referred to the ways participants experienced religious

transformation or preservation following interpersonal transgression and identified

potentially beneficial or adverse religious expressions. Catholic religiosity referred to the

importance of the practice of the participant's beliefs and religious response tendencies

within the Catholic tradition. Practices included prayer, doctrinal fidelity, and faith

community participation. State empathy referred to prosocial feelings (e.g., tender,

warm, compassionate) for the transgressor at the time of the survey. State anger referred

to negative feelings (e.g., angry, enraged, furious) regarding the transgression at the time

of the survey. Apology referred to the prosocial behavior of the transgressor following

the transgression. This included whether or not the victim received an apology statement,

fault acknowledgement, expression of emotion from the transgressor (i.e., remorse), or

explanation of the transgressor's behavior. State forgiveness referred to the act of

forgiving a specific interpersonal transgression by a particular transgressor. It assessed

the victim's vengeful, avoidant, and benevolent motivations following a recalled

transgression.

Using a discriminant function analysis, the Brief RCOPE was compared to

Catholic faith practices to further conceptualize the religious measures. The Brief

RCOPE identified a variety of religious coping functions (i.e., spiritual connection,

religious focus, spiritual discontent). These global religious functions represented a more

universal assessment of the religious construct. By comparison, the Catholic faith

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practices measure evaluated the importance of some of the specific traditions and liturgical activities involved in practicing Catholicism. As this study was designed to survey *Catholics*, the religious correlates were analyzed for their ability to predict membership in the practicing Catholic group.

Subjects

This study recruited participants from Catholic parishes in a major metropolitan area in the Southwest. After gaining permission from five pastors of local parishes (Appendix A), participants were solicited through advertising (Appendix B) in church bulletins and informational cards made available for distribution. Advertisements sought volunteers who had forgiven an interpersonal transgression they identified as "personal, unfair, and deep" (Smedes, 1984, p. 5). The risk associated with recall of a transgression was attenuated by requesting participants report on a transgression that was not ongoing at the time of their participation. To be eligible to participate in the study volunteers must have been at least 18 years old and identified as a Catholic. The solicitation materials also had a brief description of the study and the URL to the study's website. Informed consent was located on the study's website. Participation was kept anonymous and confidential via online survey strategy.

The estimated sample size was 193 participants. This number was calculated using a subject-to-variable ratio of 3.5 times 55 items representing the major variables included in the hierarchical multiple regressions (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999; Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986; Henson & Roberts, 2006). This method accommodates factor analysis. The actual sample size was ($N = 211$) participants.

Measuring Instruments

Brief RCOPE. A brief measure of religious coping (Pargament et al., 1998) assessed religious coping methods implemented to deal with interpersonal transgression. The Brief RCOPE (Appendix C) provided information regarding the function of religion during the process of handling crisis and transition. More specifically, it quantified the ways participants experienced religious change or religious conservation in response to the transgression. The Brief RCOPE was derived from the factor analysis of the full RCOPE and consisted of positive and negative Likert-type subscales. Religious coping methods from the positive subscale reflected religious forgiving, benevolent religious reappraisal, spiritual connection, collaborative religious coping, seeking spiritual support, religious focus, and religious purification. In contrast, religious coping methods from the negative subscale reflected spiritual discontent, demonic reappraisal, interpersonal religious discontent, punitive God reappraisal, and reappraisal of God's power. Both subscales consisted of seven items each for a total of 14 items. Item range was 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*) and total score range for each subscale was 7 to 28. Higher scores indicated greater use of either the positive or negative religious coping methods. As the two subscales are generally uncorrelated, they were treated separately during analyses (Pargament et al., 1998).

A more recent review of Brief RCOPE reported on its psychometric status (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). This review contained 30 studies representing 5,835 participants with data on one or both subscales. Results demonstrated good internal consistency. The median Cronbach's alpha for the positive religious coping subscale ($\alpha = 0.92$, ranged 0.67 to 0.94). The median Cronbach's alpha for the negative

religious coping subscale (α = 0.81, ranged 0.60 to 0.90). Brief RCOPE revealed good concurrent validity on both subscales. The positive religious coping subscale demonstrated significant positive correlations with psychological and spiritual well-being constructs. Additionally, the negative religious coping subscale was significantly and positively correlated to poor functioning indicators. The measure's incremental validity was also supported. After controlling for relevant psychosocial and demographic variables, both subscales were able to predict outcome variables. For instance, the Brief RCOPE was predictive of outcomes beyond the effects of religiousness variables. Thus, confirming its distinctive contribution to the investigation of religion. Two studies examined the measurement's predictive validity and provided initial support for the ability of the positive subscale to predict greater well-being and the negative subscale to predict poorer adjustment over time.

Catholic faith practices. Catholic religiosity was measured by Catholic faith practices (Marist Poll, 2015), a 6-item assessment of the degree of importance the participants placed on how they practiced their faith. A 5-point scale was used to rate each item 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*very important*) and total score range was 6 to 30. Higher scores indicated greater importance ascribed to faith practices. The practices assessed included daily prayer, following the teachings of the Catholic Church, receiving the Sacraments, attending Mass regularly (at least once per month beyond weddings and funerals), belonging to a parish, and going to confession at least once a year.

Batson's Empathy Adjectives. A questionnaire consisting of empathy adjectives (Appendix C) measured state empathy. This 8-item assessment allowed participants to quantify their prosocial feelings for the transgressor using the following adjectives:

compassionate, concerned, empathic, moved, softhearted, sympathetic, tender, and warm (Coke et al., 1978; Fincham et al., 2002; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 1997). Factor analysis (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Coke et al., 1978; Toi & Batson, 1982) found these adjectives loaded on a single factor. Item range was 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*) and total score range was 8 to 48 with participants indicating the degree to which they currently experienced each emotion regarding the transgressor at the time of the rating. Higher scores indicated greater empathy for the transgressor.

Reliability demonstrated by internal consistency estimates ranged from .87 to .92 (McCullough et al., 2003) and .79 to .95 (McCullough et al., 1997) while correlations of test–retest ranged from .61 to .82 (McCullough et al., 2003). For more than 20 years, the extensive use of some subset of these empathy adjectives in empathy-altruism investigations presented evidence of empathy manipulation (e.g., Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995; Coke et al., 1978; Toi & Batson, 1982), therefore the construct validity of this measure was assumed to be very good (McCullough et al., 1997).

Anger scale. The Anger scale (McCullough et al., 2014) measured state anger. The 5-point Likert-type scale allowed participants to identify the degree to which they currently felt negative affect about the transgression. The scale included angry, enraged, furious, hostile, and spiteful. Item range was 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*) and total score range was 5 to 25 with higher scores indicating more anger. Reported alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.87$) suggested good internal consistency (McCullough et al., 2014).

Apology assessment. Apology was measured by Apology assessment (Kirchhoff et al., 2012) comprised of the most relevant apology items for a severe transgression. This assessment indicated whether the participant received each of the following elements of apology from the transgressor: statement of apology, expression of emotions such as guilt and shame, acknowledgement of fault, and attempted explanation of the behavior resulting in the transgression. The item range was 1 (*yes*) to 2 (*no*) and total score range was 4 to 8. This researcher reversed scored the assessment so that higher scores indicated greater apology was received.

TRIM–18. The TRIM–18 (McCullough et al., 2006) is a state forgiveness measure that evaluated the degree of interpersonal forgiveness for a specific transgression by a specific transgressor. This inventory assessed the participant's vengeful, avoidant, and benevolent motivations following transgression. The inventory consisted of 18 items divided among the following three subscales: Revenge, five items; Avoidance, seven items; and Benevolence, six items. A 5-point scale is used to rate each item 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Benevolence subscale ranged 6 to 30, Revenge subscale ranged 5 to 25, and Avoidance subscale ranged 7 to 35. This researcher reverse scored the last two scales so the total score range, 18 to 90, had higher scores reflecting higher levels of forgiveness.

Cronbach's alpha in Study 1 ranged from .88 to .94 for Avoidance, .90 to .94 for Revenge, and .93 to .95 for Benevolence and demonstrated good internal reliability for a recalled severe transgression (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). In Study 2, it ranged from .91 to .96 for Avoidance, .87 to .94 for Revenge, and .91 to .97 for Benevolence (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Ghaemmaghami, Allemand, & Martin (2011) reported

other alpha coefficients for the individual subscales: Avoidance (α = .91), Revenge (α = .82), and Benevolence (α = .86). Earlier use of the negative subscales revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .90 for Revenge and .86 for Avoidance, moderate test-retest reliabilities ranged from .44 to .65, and confirmatory factor analyses supported construct validity (McCullough et al., 1998). Lastly, convergent validity was demonstrated by moderate correlations to rumination, empathy, and relational closeness measures while discriminant validity was evidenced by modest correlations to social desirability measures (McCullough et al., 1998).

Demographics Questionnaire. Demographic questions included items assessing gender, age, ethnicity, and education. Three additional questions assessed the transgression. These identified the severity of the transgression; time elapsed since the transgression; and a checklist identifying the nature of the transgression (Exline & Zell, 2009).

Procedures

Five parishes were involved in the solicitation of volunteers. Weekly monitoring of completed surveys during data collection indicated whether additional parishes needed to be included. They were not. It was estimated that the completion of the 55-item survey would take approximately 15 minutes. Data collection by self-report questionnaires accessed via Qualtrics online survey ensured maintenance of participant anonymity and data security.

Statistics

At the conclusion of data collection, all the survey responses were downloaded from Qualtrics onto SPSS 24 for data clean up and analysis. The original 246 survey

responses were examined to discern if eligibility criteria were met and if the surveys were completed. Those responses that did not meet eligibility requirements or were not completed were excluded. Data clean up included assessment of missing values and a single case was found and retained. The final sample ($N = 211$) was analyzed.

Preliminary data analysis confirmed that the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met for all the major variables, except negative religious coping. Negative religious coping was logarithmically transformed to accommodate the regression analysis. Descriptive statistics assessed the sample regarding the major variables as well as along a variety of demographic and transgression characteristics. Inferential statistics were acquired from the hierarchical multiple regression and the discriminant function analysis. The former provided bivariate and multivariate correlations. The bivariate correlations allowed for comparisons with the literature and the multivariate correlations answered the research questions. A discriminant function analysis further conceptualized the religious variables by identifying whether religious coping or Catholic religiosity could predict membership in the practicing Catholic group.

This study used a hierarchical multiple regression strategy to assess the independent and additive effects of the religious predictor variables on state forgiveness. This analysis facilitated the examination of the predictive role of religion after controlling for the strongest known predictors—empathy, anger, and apology—of forgiveness following a recalled transgression. The entire list of predictor variables included positive and negative religious coping, Catholic religiosity, state empathy, state anger, and received apology. The criterion variable was state forgiveness. Order entry for the regression began first with the controlled variables. The researcher added them in the

following sequence. The first entry was state empathy, the second entry was state anger, and the third entry was received apology. Then the researcher added a single additional religious variable (e.g., positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and Catholic religiosity) to complete each of the three regression equations. This method quantified how much, or if, the addition of each religious variable contributed to the explanation of the variance in state forgiveness beyond what was accounted for by state empathy, state anger, and received apology. Additionally, it permitted the researcher to assess both the bivariate and multivariate correlations of the predictor variables to state forgiveness. Comparison of the bivariate and multivariate correlations allowed the researcher to (a) evaluate them in light of published findings and (b) consider a more ecologically based strength of influence exhibited by each predictor variable.

Chapter IV

Results

This study investigated the relative influences of religion, empathy, anger, and apology on forgiveness of interpersonal transgression. Specifically, this research examined the relationships among the strongest known predictor variables of actual forgiveness: state empathy measured by Batson's Empathy Adjectives (Coke et al., 1978), state anger measured by Anger scale (McCullough et al., 2014), and received apology measured by Apology assessment (Kirchhoff et al., 2012). This researcher compared these state variables to religious state & trait variables: religious coping variables measured by the positive and negative religious coping subscales of the Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al., 1998) and Catholic religiosity measured by Catholic faith practices (Marist Poll, 2015). Bivariate and multivariate correlations between the aforementioned predictor variables and the criterion (outcome) variable, state forgiveness as measured by TRIM–18 (McCullough et al., 2006), were examined. Participants from Catholic parishes in a southwest city volunteered and survey data was collected anonymously online.

To further conceptualize the religious variables, discriminant function analysis evaluated the relationship between religious coping and Catholic religiosity among practicing and nonpracticing Catholics. Hierarchical multiple regression evaluated the predictive role of positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and Catholic religiosity on state forgiveness after controlling for the effects of the strongest known predictors: state empathy, state anger, and received apology. This chapter presents descriptive information about the sample, statistical analyses utilized, and study results.

Descriptive Statistics

The final sample (*N* = 211) was utilized for analysis. Survey solicitation received 246 online responses; however, two respondents did not consent and another 14 did not meet inclusion criteria (did not identify as a Catholic) and they exited the survey. An additional 19 respondents did not complete the survey resulting in exclusion.

Before analysis, the researcher assessed data entry accuracy and missing values of all variables. A single case had the only two missing values in the sample, in the variables *time since transgression* and *severity of transgression*. This case was retained.

The sample consisted of self-identified adult Catholics. Table 1 illustrates a predominantly female sample (*n* = 171, 81.0%). Most participants were at least 51 years of age (*n* = 122, 57.8%) and the median age range was 51 to 69 years old (*n* = 96, 45.5%). The clear majority had some college (*n* = 200, 94.8%). The median education level was college graduate for the sample (*n* = 93, 44.1%).

Table 1

Gender, Age, and Education Frequencies (Percentages)

Characteristic	Gender					
Age	Male		Female		Total	
18 – 34	7	(17.5)	19	(11.1)	26	(12.3)
35 – 50	8	(20.0)	55	(32.2)	63	(29.9)
51 – 69	16	(40.0)	80	(46.8)	96	(45.5)
Over 69	9	(22.5)	17	(9.9)	26	(12.3)
Total	40	(100.0)	171	(100.0)	211	(100.0)
Education						
High school/equivalent	2	(5.0)	9	(5.3)	11	(5.2)
Some college	4	(10.0)	37	(21.6)	41	(19.4)
College graduate	15	(37.5)	78	(45.6)	93	(44.1)
Graduate/professional degree	19	(47.5)	47	(27.5)	66	(31.3)
Total	40	(100.0)	171	(100.0)	211	(100.0)

Ethnic group self-identification was evenly split between White ($n = 102$) and

Hispanic ($n = 108$) as depicted in Table 2. A single participant identified as Black ($n = 1$,

0.5%). A few participants identified as other and wrote in a text description:

"Asian/Pacific Islander" ($n = 1$, 0.5%), "Asian/White" ($n = 1$, 0.5%), "Italian/German" (n

$= 1$, 0.5%), "Multiracial" ($n = 1$, 0.5%), and "Native American" ($n = 1$, 0.5%). As a

result, SPSS frequencies did not capture the additional "other White" responses and they

were manually corrected to include the Asian/White and Italian/German participants.

This researcher also allowed participants to self-identify by selecting more than one

ethnic group: White & Hispanic ($n = 3$, 1.4%).

Table 2

Ethnic Group Statistics

Ethnic group	n	%	% of 211 cases
White	102[a]	47.4	48.3
Black	1	0.5	0.5
Hispanic	108	50.2	51.2
Other	4	1.9	1.9
Total	215	100.0	101.9

Note. $N = 211$

[a]Participants were welcome to identify as more than one ethnic group.

The majority of participants identified as practicing Catholics ($n = 168$, 79.6%),

see Table 3. Catholic religiosity, a trait variable, referred to the stable individual

differences in participant's beliefs and religious response tendencies across various

situations. This was measured by Catholic faith practices (Marist Poll, 2015). This trait

measure allowed participants to describe their religiosity using a Likert scale response to

"how important to you is…daily prayer; following the teachings of the Catholic Church;

receiving the sacraments; attending Mass regularly (aside from weddings and funerals,

attend religious services at least once a month); belonging to a parish; going to confession at least once a year." Ratings for Catholic faith practices ranged from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*very important*). As expected, the average rating was higher on each item for practicing Catholics than for nonpracticing Catholics. Further details regarding Catholic religiosity will be addressed in the Description of Major Variables section.

Table 3

Religiosity of Nonpracticing and Practicing Catholics Statistics

Religiosity	Nonpracticing (n = 43)			Practicing (n = 168)			Total (N = 211)		
	M	(*SD*)	Range[a]	*M*	(*SD*)	Range[a]	*M*	(*SD*)	Range[b]
Prayer	3.40	(1.42)	1-5	4.65	(0.72)	2-5	4.39	(1.03)	1-5
Teachings	2.49	(1.12)	1-4	4.52	(0.71)	2-5	4.11	(1.15)	1-5
Sacraments	2.56	(1.18)	1-5	4.69	(0.63)	2-5	4.26	(1.16)	1-5
Mass	2.14	(1.36)	1-5	4.58	(0.78)	1-5	4.09	(1.35)	1-5
Membership	2.23	(1.31)	1-5	4.41	(0.93)	1-5	3.97	(1.34)	1-5
Confession	1.84	(1.30)	1-5	4.04	(1.27)	1-5	3.59	(1.55)	1-5
Total	14.65	(5.57)	6-27	26.90	(3.84)	12-30	24.40	(6.51)	6-30

[a]Actual range. [b] Actual and potential range.

As shown in Table 4, participants identified how severely hurt they felt by the transgression. Ratings ranged from 1 (*not at all hurt*) to 5 (*very deeply hurt*). Most participants (*n* = 179, 84.8%) characterized the hurt as at least *deeply hurt*. In contrast, (*n* = 3, 1.4%) participants described themselves as not at all hurt and the single missing value from this variable (*n* = 1, 0.5%) was from an individual who reported in the text of the type of transgression variable, "I have never really been hurt." Because the severity of transgression was not identified in the literature as one of the strongest predictor variables of forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010), it was not included in the analysis and the missing data was not an issue.

Participants also reported the time since the transgression occurred as seen in

Table 4

Transgression Severity by Time Frequencies (Percentages)

Time since	Severity of transgression hurt											
	Not at all		A little		Moderately		Deeply		Very deeply		Total	
Ongoing	1	(33.3)	2	(40.0)	0	(0.0)	7	(10.4)	12	(10.7)	22	(10.5)
Days	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	2	(8.7)	4	(6.0)	1	(0.9)	7	(3.3)
Weeks	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	3	(13.0)	4	(6.0)	3	(2.7)	10	(4.8)
Months	0	(0.0)	0	(0.0)	7	(30.4)	12	(17.9)	13	(11.6)	32	(15.2)
Years	2	(66.7)	3	(60.0)	11	(47.8)	40	(59.7)	83	(74.1)	139	(66.2)
Total	3	(1.4)	5	(2.4)	23	(11.0)	67	(31.9)	112	(53.3)	210	(100.0)

Note. N = 210

Table 4. Ratings ranged from 1 (*ongoing*) to 5 (*years ago*). While the majority of participants complied with the solicitation request that the transgression not be ongoing at the time of data collection, several (*n* = 22, 10.4%) reported on a transgression they identified as ongoing. More than three-quarters of respondents (*n* = 171, 81.1%) identified a transgression that was months ago or years ago. There was a single missing value in the time since transgression variable and it was from the same individual/case with the transgression severity missing value who reported never having "really been hurt." Because time since transgression demonstrated a negligible correlation to forgiveness in the literature (Fehr et al., 2010), it was not included in the analysis and the missing data was not an issue.

As depicted in Table 5, participants identified the type of the transgression by selecting options from a list of transgressions found in the forgiveness literature (Exline & Zell, 2009). Participants were welcome to select more than one option if it applied. Participants' selection of more than one type of transgression suggested the complex nature of transgressions precipitating a crisis of forgiveness. The most frequently

identified transgression was *selfish/insensitive behavior* ($n = 88$, 41.7%) whereas the least

was *misbehavior in a romantic breakup* ($n = 11$, 5.2%).

Table 5

Type of Transgression Statistics

Transgression type	n[a]	%	% of 211 Cases
Selfish/insensitive behavior	88	16.6	41.7
Disrespect	78	14.7	37.0
Trust violation	71	13.4	33.6
Verbal aggression	55	10.4	26.1
Rejection	50	9.5	23.7
Deception	49	9.3	23.2
Infidelity	35	6.6	16.6
Abandonment	26	4.9	12.3
Other	19	3.6	9.0
Physical aggression	18	3.4	8.5
Malicious gossip	17	3.2	8.1
Stealing	12	2.3	5.7
Misbehavior in a romantic breakup	11	2.1	5.2
Total	529	100.0	250.7

Note. $N = 211$

[a]Participants were welcome to select more than one transgression.

Description of Major Variables

The major variables positive religious coping, negative religious coping, Catholic

religiosity and the strongest known predictor variables—state empathy, state anger, and

received apology—demonstrated adequate fit of distributions with multivariate analysis

assumptions. Preliminary analyses assessing the assumptions of normality, linearity,

homoscedasticity revealed some skewness within acceptable limits for all independent

variables except negative religious coping. Negative religious coping was

logarithmically transformed in order to diminish extreme skewness and kurtosis and to improve pairwise linearity.

The positive and negative religious coping subscales of the Brief RCOPE measured the two state religious variables (Pargament et al., 1998). These state measures identified how frequently participants tried to use a specific religious coping method to deal with the hurt following the transgression. Positive religious coping ratings ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*), see Table 6. Many participants (*n* = 31, 14.7%) reported using all of the positive religious coping items a great deal to cope with the transgression. An additional (*n* = 36, 17.1%) used all of the positive religious coping items at least *quite a bit* and on average, all participants used it quite a bit.

Table 6

Positive Religious Coping (PRC) Statistics

	Not at all		Somewhat		Quite a bit		A great deal			
PRC items	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*M*	(*SD*)
Connection with God	22	10.4	47	22.3	49	23.2	93	44.1	3.01	(1.04)
Sought God's love	20	9.5	47	22.3	54	25.6	90	42.7	3.01	(1.02)
Sought God's help	18	8.5	50	23.7	52	24.6	91	43.1	3.02	(1.01)
My plans with God	27	12.8	54	25.6	59	28.0	71	33.6	2.82	(1.04)
God strengthen me	32	15.2	47	22.3	45	21.3	87	41.2	2.89	(1.11)
Forgiveness for my sins	30	14.2	48	22.7	48	22.7	85	40.3	2.89	(1.09)
Focused on religion	50	23.7	54	25.5	56	26.5	51	24.2	2.51	(1.10)
Total	199	13.5	347	23.5	363	24.6	568	38.5	20.16	(6.14)

Note. N = 211, Item range 1-4, Total range 7-28

Negative religious coping, as shown in Table 7, was also Likert rated and ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a great deal*). The greatest response frequency (*n* = 90, 42.7%) reflected that participants used all of the negative religious coping items not at all to cope with the transgression. On average, negative religious coping was used not at all.

Bivariate scatterplots of the negative religious coping items 8-14 revealed they did not

have bivariate normal distribution and did not demonstrate a relationship. Because the

extreme scores characterizing this variable appeared connected to the rest of the cases, it

was logarithmically transformed to change the distribution shape to more normal.

Table 7

Negative Religious Coping (NRC) Statistics

	Not at all		Somewhat		Quite a bit		A great deal		
NRC items	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*M* (*SD*)
God abandoned me?	152	72.0	34	16.1	10	4.7	15	7.1	1.47 (0.88)
Punished by God?	168	79.6	26	12.3	6	2.8	11	5.2	1.34 (0.77)
Why punished?	163	77.3	26	12.3	10	4.7	12	5.7	1.39 (0.82)
Questioned God's love	165	78.2	28	13.3	7	3.3	11	5.2	1.36 (0.78)
Church abandoned me?	184	87.2	13	6.2	9	4.3	5	2.4	1.22 (0.63)
Devil made this happen	143	67.8	39	18.5	19	9.0	10	4.7	1.51 (0.85)
Questioned God's power	185	87.7	15	7.1	3	1.4	8	3.8	1.21 (0.65)
Total	1160	78.5	181	12.3	64	4.3	72	4.9	9.49 (4.17)
Log Transformed									0.95 (0.14)

Note. N = 211, Item Range 1-4, Total range 7-28

As mentioned earlier, the trait variable Catholic religiosity was measured by

Catholic faith practices where participants described the importance of various religious

activities using a Likert scale with a potential range of 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*very*

important). Please refer to Table 3 for the actual ranges of each item. As seen in Table

8, virtually two-thirds of participants identified daily prayer as very important (*n* = 140,

66.4%). Compared to the other items, annual confession received the least support (*M* =

3.59). On average, participants rated Catholic faith practices as important.

State empathy referred to the other-oriented feelings participants experienced

toward their transgressor at the time of the survey. This variable was measured using the

8-item Batson's Empathy Adjectives (Coke et al., 1978) and ratings ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*). As illustrated in Table 9, on average, participants described the degree of their feelings of empathy toward the transgressor as *somewhat*.

Table 8

Catholic Religiosity Statistics

Religiosity	Not important n (%)	Slightly important n (%)	Moderately important n (%)	Important n (%)	Very important n (%)	M	(SD)
Daily prayer	6 (2.8)	12 (5.7)	15 (7.1)	38 (18.0)	140 (66.4)	4.39	(1.03)
Church teachings	11 (5.2)	13 (6.2)	24 (11.4)	57 (27.0)	106 (50.2)	4.11	(1.15)
Receiving sacraments	12 (5.7)	8 (3.8)	24 (11.4)	37 (17.5)	130 (61.6)	4.26	(1.16)
Mass attendance	22 (10.4)	11 (5.2)	18 (8.5)	36 (17.1)	124 (58.8)	4.09	(1.35)
Parish membership	21 (10.0)	13 (6.2)	28 (13.3)	39 (18.5)	110 (52.1)	3.97	(1.34)
Annual confession	39 (18.5)	19 (9.0)	22 (10.4)	40 (19.0)	91 (43.1)	3.59	(1.55)
Total[a]	111 (8.8)	76 (6.0)	131 (10.3)	247 (19.5)	701 (55.4)	24.40	(6.51)

Note. N = 211

[a]Total range 6-30

Table 9

State Empathy Frequencies, (Percentages), and Statistics

Empathy item	Not At all	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderate	Very much	Extreme	M (SD)
Compassionate	54 (25.6)	33 (15.6)	35 (16.6)	42 (19.9)	27 (12.8)	20 (9.5)	3.07 (1.66)
Concerned	65 (30.8)	34 (16.1)	31 (14.7)	24 (11.4)	28 (13.3)	29 (13.7)	3.01 (1.81)
Empathic	73 (34.6)	41 (19.4)	29 (13.7)	35 (16.6)	15 (7.1)	18 (8.5)	2.68 (1.65)
Moved	99 (46.9)	42 (19.9)	21 (10.0)	23 (10.9)	14 (6.6)	12 (5.7)	2.27 (1.57)
Softhearted	83 (39.3)	35 (16.6)	25 (11.8)	19 (9.0)	31 (14.7)	18 (8.5)	2.69 (1.76)
Sympathetic	85 (40.3)	32 (15.2)	28 (13.3)	28 (13.3)	21 (10.0)	17 (8.1)	2.62 (1.70)
Tender	96 (45.5)	33 (15.6)	27 (12.8)	18 (8.5)	17 (8.1)	20 (9.5)	2.46 (1.72)
Warm	92 (43.6)	42 (19.9)	24 (11.4)	15 (7.1)	18 (8.5)	20 (9.5)	2.45 (1.71)
Total	647 (38.3)	292 (17.3)	220 (13.0)	204 (12.1)	171 (10.1)	154 (9.1)	21.26 (12.01)

Note. N = 211, Item Range 1-6, Total range 8-48

State anger referred to the negative feelings regarding the transgression at the time of the survey. This variable was measured using five-item Anger scale (McCullough et al., 2014). Ratings ranged from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). In Table 10, although the potential range of the variable sum was 5-25, the highest summed response was 23. Almost a quarter of respondents ($n = 49$, 23.2%) reported feeling very slightly or not at all angry on all the anger items. On average participants felt *a little* anger about the transgression.

Table 10

State Anger Statistics

Anger items	Very slightly or not at all		A little		Moderately		Quite a bit		Extremely			
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*M*	(*SD*)
Angry	61	28.9	53	25.1	38	18.0	39	18.5	20	9.5	2.55	(1.33)
Hostile	123	58.3	41	19.4	28	13.3	15	7.1	4	1.9	1.75	(1.06)
Enraged	136	64.5	27	12.8	27	12.8	16	7.6	5	2.4	1.71	(1.10)
Spiteful	132	62.6	37	17.5	20	9.5	16	7.6	6	2.8	1.71	(1.10)
Furious	128	60.7	33	15.6	21	10.0	22	10.4	7	3.3	1.80	(1.18)
Total[a]	580	55.0	191	18.1	134	12.7	108	10.2	42	4.0	9.51	(4.91)

Note. N = 211

[a]Actual range 5-23

Received apology referred to the comprehensiveness of the apology offered to the participant from their transgressor. The full apology consisted of a statement of apology; an apology that expressed emotions; admittance of fault; and an attempt to explain the behavior that led to the transgression without trying to defend the behavior (Kirchhoff et al., 2012). Apology assessment (Kirchhoff et al., 2012) measured the variable and it was

reverse scored to synchronize higher values with greater apology. Ratings ranged from 1

(*no*) to 2 (*yes*) and identified whether or not an apology was received. Table 11

illustrates that the majority of participants did not receive a full apology. Most

participants reported they received no apology (*n* = 106, 50.2%) compared to only (*n* =

28, 13.3%) who received a full apology.

Table 11

Received Apology Statistics

	Yes		No			
Apology items	*n*	%	*n*	%	*M* (*SD*)	Range
Apology statement	66	31.3	145	68.7	1.31 (0.47)	1-2
Emotional apology	57	27.0	154	73.0	1.27 (0.45)	1-2
Fault admitted	54	25.6	157	74.4	1.26 (0.44)	1-2
Explanation given	70	33.2	141	66.8	1.33 (0.47)	1-2
Total	247	29.3	597	70.7	5.17 (1.44)	4-8

Note. N = 211

State forgiveness referred to the participant's forgiveness of a particular

interpersonal transgression by an individual transgressor. This criterion variable was

measured using the TRIM-18 (McCullough et al., 2006). Ratings on this scale ranged

from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Revenge and Avoidant subscales

were reverse scored so that higher total scores on the summed scale reflected greater

forgiveness. As depicted in Table 12, (*M* = 64.0, *SD* = 14.7) summed scores had a

potential range of 18 - 90. The modal response (*n* = 10, 4.7%) revealed that participants

strongly agreed with all the items on the Benevolent subscale and strongly disagreed with

all the items on the Revenge and Avoidant subscales. On average participants *agreed*

with the sentiments expressing forgiveness of the transgression.

Table 12

State Forgiveness (TRIM–18) Statistics

TRIM–18 subscales	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree			
	n	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*M*	(*SD*)
Revenge[a]												
01	139	(65.9)	40	(19.0)	24	(11.4)	5	(2.4)	3	(1.4)	4.45	(0.89)
02	152	(72.0)	31	(14.7)	20	(9.5)	7	(3.3)	1	(0.5)	4.55	(0.84)
03	90	(42.7)	38	(18.0)	57	(27.0)	18	(8.5)	8	(3.8)	3.87	(1.17)
04	153	(72.5)	37	(17.5)	18	(8.5)	2	(0.9)	1	(0.5)	4.61	(0.73)
05	137	(64.9)	38	(18.0)	24	(11.4)	7	(3.3)	5	(2.4)	4.40	(0.98)
subtotal	671		184		143		39		18			
Avoidance[a]												
06	46	(21.8)	32	(15.2)	48	(22.7)	53	(25.1)	32	(15.2)	3.03	(1.38)
07	73	(34.6)	35	(16.6)	38	(18.0)	32	(15.2)	33	(15.6)	3.39	(1.48)
08	25	(11.8)	21	(10.0)	48	(22.7)	52	(24.6)	65	(30.8)	2.47	(1.34)
09	38	(18.0)	34	(16.1)	57	(27.0)	53	(25.1)	29	(13.7)	3.00	(1.30)
10	48	(22.7)	38	(18.0)	53	(25.1)	40	(19.0)	32	(15.2)	3.14	(1.37)
11	77	(36.5)	32	(15.2)	42	(19.9)	27	(12.8)	33	(15.6)	3.44	(1.48)
12	54	(25.6)	30	(14.2)	50	(23.7)	45	(21.3)	32	(15.2)	3.14	(1.41)
subtotal	361		222		336		302		256			
Benevolence												
13	8	(3.8)	15	(7.1)	47	(22.3)	87	(41.2)	54	(25.6)	3.78	(1.03)
14	24	(11.4)	27	(12.8)	59	(28.0)	43	(20.4)	58	(27.5)	3.40	(1.32)
15	34	(16.1)	27	(12.8)	47	(22.3)	44	(20.9)	59	(28.0)	3.32	(1.42)
16	38	(18.0)	43	(20.4)	45	(21.3)	47	(22.3)	38	(18.0)	3.02	(1.37)
17	10	(4.7)	20	(9.5)	44	(20.9)	74	(35.1)	63	(29.9)	3.76	(1.12)
18	20	(9.5)	37	(17.5)	63	(29.9)	49	(23.2)	42	(19.9)	3.27	(1.23)
subtotal	134		169		305		344		314			
Total[b]	1166	(30.7)	575	(15.1)	784	(20.6)	685	(18.0)	588	(15.5)	64.03	(14.72)

Note. 01 = I will make him/her pay. 02 = I wish that something bad would happen to him/her. 03 = I want him/her to get what he/she deserves. 04 = I'm going to get even. 05 = I want to see him/her hurt and miserable. 06 = I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible. 07 = I am living as if he/she does not exist, is not around. 08 = I don't trust him/her. 09 = I am finding it difficult to act warmly toward him/her. 10 = I am avoiding him/her. 11 = I cut off the relationship with him/her. 12 = I withdraw from him/her. 13 = Even though his/her actions hurt me, I have goodwill for him/her. 14 = I want us to bury the hatchet and move forward with our relationship. 15 = Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again. 16 = Although he/she hurt me, I am putting the hurts aside, so we could resume our relationship. 17 = I forgive him/her for what he/she did to me. 18 = I have released my anger, so I can work on restoring our relationship to health.

[a]Reverse scored. [b]Actual range 23-90 and Potential range 18-90.

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Discriminant Function Analysis

Previous forgiveness research identified varied strengths of correlation with religious variables. Inadequate conceptualization of religious variables and their relationship to state forgiveness may have contributed to weaker than expected correlations. Researchers in the forgiveness literature suggested that conceptualizing religious variables as contextual or state constructs made more theoretical sense when investigating correlations to state forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In addition to representing both state (religious coping) and trait (Catholic religiosity) religious variables, the religious variables were further conceptualized using a discriminant function analysis.

The discriminant function analysis strategy was used to investigate the ability of the positive and negative religious coping subscales of the Brief RCOPE and Catholic faith practices to distinguish between self-identified practicing and nonpracticing Catholics. Despite the poor split in Catholic practice (168 practicing to 43 nonpracticing); it was retained as the grouping variable for the discriminant analysis. Since the discriminant function analysis is robust to skewness and negative religious coping extremeness was not due to outliers, the original and untransformed data was analyzed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The pooled within-group matrices revealed low intercorrelations and supported the use of positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and Catholic religiosity as independent variables. Table 13 showed the largest mean difference between the Catholic faith practices scores suggesting it may be a good discriminator. By comparison, the mean difference between the positive religious coping

scores was much smaller. As the mean difference between the negative religious coping

scores was practically negligible, it was not expected to be an adequate discriminator.

Table 13

Nonpracticing and Practicing Catholics Group Statistics

Catholics		*M*	SD
Nonpracticing *n* = 43	Catholic religiosity	14.65	5.57
	Positive religious coping	16.56	6.73
	Negative religious coping	9.42	4.29
Practicing *n* = 168	Catholic religiosity	26.90	3.84
	Positive religious coping	21.08	5.64
	Negative religious coping	9.51	4.15
Total *N* = 211	Catholic religiosity	24.40	6.51
	Positive religious coping	20.16	6.14
	Negative religious coping	9.49	4.17

In Table 14, the tests of equality of group means provided strong statistical

evidence of significant differences between means of practicing and nonpracticing

Catholics for Catholic faith practices and positive religious coping, with Catholic faith

practices producing a very high *F* value. It also revealed that negative religious coping (*p*

= .903) was not significant. Furthermore, the Wilks' lambda = 1.000 indicated that none

of the variation in Catholic group membership was explained by negative religious

coping.

Further analysis revealed homogeneity of covariance was suggested by log

determinants similarity. Additionally, Box's M was 15.286 with *F* = 2.478 and was not

significant at *p* = .021 > .001, indicating no violation of the assumption of the equality of

Table 14

Tests of Equality of Group Means for Religious Variables

Religious variable	Wilks' Lambda	*F*	*df*1	*df*2	*p*
Catholic religiosity	.423	284.935	1	209	.000
Positive religious coping	.911	20.319	1	209	.000
Negative religious coping	1.000	.015	1	209	.903

covariance matrices. A canonical correlation of .766 revealed a high association between the discriminant function and practicing Catholic group membership. The model explained 58.68% of the variation in whether a participant was a practicing Catholic or not. Wilks' lambda showed a significant discriminant function ($p = .000$) where the proportion of total variability left unexplained was 41.4%. The structure matrix revealed Catholic religiosity score (.981) as the only notable predictor variable. Positive religious coping score (.262) was not an important variable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Negative religious coping score (.007) was the weakest predictor variable and supported previous statistics (difference of group means and tests of equality of group means) suggesting it was not a discriminator between the two groups. Furthermore, the negative religious coping mean indicated it was used not at all (see Table 7).

The standardized and unstandardized coefficients in Table 15 showed positive religious coping was inversely associated with the practicing Catholic group. While practicing Catholics had a higher mean for Catholic religiosity than positive religious coping (see Table 13), the nonpracticing Catholics had a higher mean for positive religious coping than Catholic religiosity. Results showed nonpracticing Catholics were more likely to use positive religious coping methods than Catholic faith practices while responding to interpersonal transgression.

Table 15

Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Religious variable	Standardized	Unstandardized
Catholic religiosity	1.076	.253
Positive religious coping	-.213	-.036
Negative religious coping	.046	.011
(Constant)		-5.558

The discriminant function equation: $D = .253$(Catholic faith practices) - .036(Positive religious coping of Brief RCOPE) + .011(Negative religious coping of Brief RCOPE) − 5.558 was derived from this analysis. The cross-validated classification revealed that the discriminant function equation correctly classified 89.6% of all the grouped cases.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses investigated the influence of religion on interpersonal forgiveness after controlling for empathy, anger, and apology. In particular, these analyses investigated the ability of positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and Catholic religiosity to predict state forgiveness after controlling for the effects of state empathy, state anger, and received apology ($N = 211$). Entry order of the controlled predictor variables (state empathy, state anger, and received apology) was predicated on meta-analytic results found in the forgiveness literature (Fehr et al., 2010). The strongest predictor, state empathy was entered first, state anger second, and received apology third. Each of the three religious variables (positive religious coping, negative religious coping, and Catholic religiosity) was then entered as the fourth step in three different regressions.

Preliminary analyses assessed the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Table 16 illustrated some skewness within acceptable limits for all major variables except negative religious coping (Sprenkle & Moon, 1996). Logarithmic transformation made the negative religious coping distribution more normal.

Table 16

Correlations and Psychometric Properties of Major Variables' Measures

Measure	TRIM–18	BEA	Anger	Apology	CFP	PRC	NRCLog	NRC
TRIM–18	——							
BEA	-.72***	——						
Anger	-.30***	-.21**	——					
Apology	-.38***	-.40***	.05	——				
CFP	-.17**	-.13*	.01	-.02	——			
PRC	-.16**	-.19**	.01	-.10	-.50***	——		
NRCLog	-.08	-.00	.13*	-.20**	-.01	.04	——	
Means	64.03	21.26	9.51	5.17	24.40	20.16	.95	9.49
Std Dev	14.72	12.01	4.91	1.44	26.51	-6.14	.14	4.17
Actual Range	23-90	8-48	5-230	4-8	6-300	7-28	.85-1.45	7-28
Potential Range	18-90	8-48	5-250	4-8	6-300	7-28	.85-1.45	7-28
Skew	-.14	-.71	1.02	-.91	-1.19	-.44	1.74	2.60
Kurtosis	-.66	-.65	-.11	-.60	-1.45	-.84	2.64	6.86
α	-.93	-.96	-.90	-.80	-1.92	-.92	2.89	6.89

Note. TRIM–18 = Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory—18; BEA = Batson's Empathy Adjectives; Anger = Anger scale; Apology = Apology assessment; CFP = Catholic faith practices; PRC = Positive religious coping subscale of the Brief RCOPE; NRCLog = Negative religious coping subscale of the Brief RCOPE logarithmically transformed; NRC = Negative religious coping subscale of Brief RCOPE.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Additionally, the bivariate correlations among all the major variables (positive religious coping, negative religious coping, Catholic religiosity, state empathy, state

anger, received apology, and state forgiveness) were examined and presented with

descriptive statistics in Table 16. The weak ($r = .001$, $p < .05$) to strong ($r = .50$, $p <$

.001) bivariate correlations among the independent variables were all below .90,

indicating no multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). This was confirmed by the

small variance inflation factors (< 10) that ranged from 1.00 to 1.30 for the predictor

variables (Hair et al., 1998). Negative religious coping ($r = -.08$, $p = .14$) was the only

predictor variable not significantly correlated with forgiveness. By comparison, all the

other predictor variables were significantly correlated with state forgiveness. This

indicated they were fit for the regression analysis while negative religious coping was

not. However, negative religious coping was included in the regression analysis to

confirm its negligible influence and lack of statistical significance. The other predictor

variables' correlations with the criterion variable ranged from weak ($r = .16$, $p < .01$) to

strong ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). ANOVA was significant ($p < .001$) for all three regression

models.

The initial steps of the hierarchical regression included entry of the strongest

known predictor variables: state empathy at Step 1, state anger at Step 2, and received

apology at Step 3. This model was statistically significant $F(3, 207) = 7.23$, $p = .008$ and

the effect ($R^2 = .555$) explained 55.5% of variance in state forgiveness. Each of these

variables made a unique and statistically significant contribution to the model as

illustrated in Table 17.

Next, Model 1 regression was run with positive religious coping entered as Step

4a. This model was not significant $F(4, 206) = 0.43$, $p = .51$ and demonstrated only a

negligible effect ($\Delta R^2 = .001$). The total variance explained by positive religious coping

and the control variables was 55.6%.

Then, Model 2 regression was run with negative religious coping entered as Step

4b. This model was also not significant $F(4, 206) = 3.48$, $p = .06$ and demonstrated only

a small effect ($\Delta R^2 = .007$). The total variance explained by negative religious coping

and the control variables was 56.3%.

Table 17

Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Forgiveness

Correlates	R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE	β	t
Step 1	.52	.52***				
State empathy			0.88	0.06	.72***	14.97
Step 2	.54	.02**				
State anger			-0.46	0.14	-.15**	-3.18
Step 3	.56	.02**				
Received apology			1.40	0.52	.14**	2.69
Step 4a of Model 1	.56	.00				
Positive religious coping			0.07	0.11	.03	0.65
Step 4b of Model 2	.56	.01				
Negative religious coping			-9.21	4.94	-.09	-1.86
Step 4c of Model 3	.56	.01*				
Catholic religiosity			0.21	0.11	.09*	1.98

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Lastly, Model 3 regression was run with Catholic religiosity entered as Step 4c.

Model 3 was significant $F(4, 206) = 3.90$, $p = .0496$ and explained an additional 0.8% of

the variance in state forgiveness ($\Delta R^2 = .008$). With this small effect, the total variance explained by Catholic religiosity and the control variables was 56.3%.

Analysis of coefficients revealed Catholic religiosity, state empathy, state anger, and received apology remained statistically significant predictor variables as seen in Table 17. Positive and negative religious coping were not significant. Also, positive religious coping ($t = 0.65$) and negative religious coping ($t = -1.86$) variables had a $t < 2$, indicating they did not belong to the regression model. Although Catholic religiosity ($t = 1.98$) also had a $t < 2$, it was still statistically significant and demonstrated in earlier analyses its significance and relevance to the regression model while the religious coping variables did not.

Due to a lack of statistical significance combined with weak or negligible influence on their regression models, both positive religious coping and negative religious coping regression models were rejected. Evidence supporting this conclusion was based on results found in the Pearson correlations, model summaries, and coefficients analyses.

When predicting state forgiveness, we will err by approximately 9.82 forgiveness-rating points based on a scale from 18 to 90. State empathy had a slope of .75 ($p < .001$), state anger -.53 ($p < .001$), received apology 1.48 ($p = .005$), Catholic religiosity .21 ($p = .0496$), and 40.36 was the Y-intercept for Model 3 regression equation.

Discussion

This study investigated the influence of religion on interpersonal forgiveness among Catholics and found that the trait religious variable, Catholic religiosity ($f^2 = .018$, $p < .05$), had a small and significant effect size on state forgiveness (Selya, Rose, Dierker,

Hedeker, & Mermelstein, 2012). Catholic religiosity explained a unique variance (0.8%) in state forgiveness after controlling for state empathy, state anger, and received apology. In other words, Catholic religiosity had a significant and weakly positive influence on actual interpersonal forgiveness.

Unexpectedly, hierarchical multiple regression results showed the state religious variables, positive religious coping ($f^2 = .002$, $p = .51$), and negative religious coping ($f^2 = .018$, $p = .06$), were not significant. These results did not confirm the research hypotheses that positive religious coping would correlate positively and moderately with state forgiveness and negative religious coping would correlate negatively and moderately with state forgiveness. Furthermore, the state religious variables (positive and negative religious coping) by comparison did not display a significant multivariate correlation to state forgiveness while the trait religious variable (Catholic religiosity) did.

These findings confirmed McCullough and Worthington's (1999) theoretical explanation of aggregation, in that Catholic religiosity was only modestly correlated to state forgiveness. However, the religious coping findings diverged from the theoretical expectations of specificity that predicted a stronger correlation between the state variables of religion (positive and negative religious coping) and state forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In this study, positive and negative religious coping did not demonstrate a statistically significant correlation to state forgiveness after controlling for the other predictor variables. Therefore, regressions Model 1 and Model 2 were rejected.

As negative religious coping was virtually unused by the participants, even the bivariate correlation to state forgiveness was negligible and not significant. Although

positive religious coping was on average used quite a bit, its significant bivariate correlation to state forgiveness was small. Once the stronger predictor variables were controlled for, positive religious coping failed to contribute to the regression Model 1.

A discriminant function analysis conceptualized the three religious measures based on their ability to predict membership in the practicing Catholic group. Catholic religiosity was the only religious variable able to predict practicing Catholic group membership. As expected, practicing Catholics used more positive religious coping ($M =$ 21.08) than nonpracticing Catholics ($M = 16.56$). Surprisingly, the analysis revealed positive religious coping was inversely associated with membership in the practicing Catholic group. This may be due to the fact that positive religious coping was used more frequently by the nonpracticing Catholics, than their comparative use of Catholic faith practices.

Hierarchical multiple regression revealed state empathy ($f^2 = .703$) had a very large effect size and was a strong and significant predictor of state forgiveness as evidenced in both bivariate and multivariate correlations to the criterion variable. This confirmed the state empathy research hypothesis of a strong and positive correlation to state forgiveness. State empathy accounted for 31.3% of the variance in state forgiveness after controlling for state anger and received apology.

State anger demonstrated a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.061$) as a multivariate on state forgiveness. State anger did not confirm the research hypothesis of a moderate correlation to state forgiveness although it did confirm the inverse relationship between the two. While state anger demonstrated a negatively moderate bivariate correlation to state forgiveness, after controlling for state empathy that influence was attenuated. State

anger accounted for only 2.8% of the variance in state forgiveness after controlling for state empathy and received apology.

Received apology also demonstrated a small effect size ($f^2 = .034$) as a multivariate on state forgiveness.   While received apology demonstrated a positively moderate bivariate correlation to state forgiveness, after controlling for state empathy and state anger that influence was diminished and the results did not confirm the research hypothesis. Received apology accounted for only 1.6% of the variance in state forgiveness after controlling for state empathy and state anger.

All of the controlled predictor variables were more strongly correlated to forgiveness than the religious variables. The hierarchical multiple regression analyses showed the results partially supported the multiple hypotheses.

Chapter V

Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

Summary

For three decades researchers have identified distinctions among types of forgiveness (e.g., trait forgivingness, interpersonal forgiveness, and self-forgiveness), factors contributing to forgiveness (e.g., empathy, apology, and relationship satisfaction), and impediments to forgiveness (e.g., anger, severity of hurt, and malicious intent). Researchers have examined the consequences of forgiveness in the lives of those who struggle in the aftermath of painful transgression and have empirically confirmed reductions in anxiety, depression, grief, anger, and stress. They have also found improvements in self-esteem and opportunities for reconciliation. In the context of a Catholic sample, this study examined the influence of religion on forgiveness after taking into account the impact of empathy, anger, and apology.

Research problem. Meta-analytic forgiveness research identified state empathy, state anger, and received apology as the variables with the greatest influence on state forgiveness following recall of a transgression (Fehr et al., 2010). Until a meta-analysis of religion and forgiveness research, religion's effect on forgiveness yielded puzzling, mixed results (Davis et al., 2013). In fact, McCullough and Worthington (1999) referred to a religion-forgiveness discrepancy to describe the lack of empirical support for a robust relationship between religion and forgiveness. Davis et al. (2013) clarified this matter when their meta-analytic review of religion and forgiveness research revealed state measures of religion had a greater influence on state forgiveness than trait measures

of religion. They proposed this resulted from the state religious measure's greater proximity to state forgiveness.

While the Fehr et al. (2010) research analyzed religiosity, this trait conceptualization of religion was lacking in exactly the manner critiqued by Davis and colleagues. While the Davis et al. (2013) meta-analysis did include the Brief RCOPE in their results, it was aggregated with the other state religious measures. This study resolved the religious measurement type issue by investigating both state and trait religious variables and their bivariate and multivariate correlations to state forgiveness. Utilizing the state variables, positive and negative religious coping, and a trait variable, Catholic religiosity, the predictive power of religious variables was compared to the influence of the strongest known predictor variables—state empathy, state anger, and received apology—on state forgiveness. State forgiveness was selected as the criterion variable and a recall methodology used because of their greater relevance to clinical practice.

A discriminant function analysis examined Catholic religiosity and religious coping to further conceptualize the religious variables. Then hierarchical multiple regressions investigated the predictive value of the major variables. The numerous hypotheses examined included (a) state empathy would correlate positively and strongly to state forgiveness, (b) received apology and positive religious coping would correlate positively and moderately to state forgiveness, and (c) state anger and negative religious coping would correlate negatively and moderately to state forgiveness. No hypothesis was put forth regarding Catholic religiosity because the researcher assumed (a) this measure would only be used to evaluate religious coping, (b) religious coping would be

able to differentiate practicing and nonpracticing Catholics, and (c) as a trait variable, it would not be proximal enough to state forgiveness to be significant. However, Catholic religiosity proved to be the only significant religious variable in the regressions.

Justification of the study. This study aimed to extend forgiveness research through the selection of variables derived from two meta-analyses. The religious variables (Davis et al., 2013) were compared to the strongest predictor variables (Fehr et al., 2010) of state forgiveness of a recalled transgression. More specifically, both state (religious coping) and trait (Catholic religiosity) types of religious variables were investigated using hierarchical multiple regressions to evaluate their predictive value beyond that of the strongest known predictor variables: state empathy, state anger, and received apology. Lastly, examining the forgiveness of transgressions in which participants were personally engaged promoted the clinical relevance of the results.

Forgiveness research literature identified the importance of a forgiveness context associated with various meaning systems. Specifically, a diversity of opinion exists about forgiveness within the Christian community. Catholics were the selected subjects as they make up a fifth of the U.S. population. In addition, Catholicism has received and advocates unique liturgical activities related to forgiveness.

Finally, forgiveness is especially relevant to marriage and family therapy. As an interpersonal phenomenon, it is focused on the relationship between the victim and transgressor. Strelan et al. (2013) found that relationally focused forgiveness was associated with decreased avoidance and increased relationship quality as compared to self-focused forgiveness strategies, which were associated with avoidance and reduced relationship satisfaction. Family life naturally provides various opportunities for

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forgiveness to be a constructive response to transgression. The identification of useful resources to help religious clients forgive painful transgression would be worthwhile.

Research methods. Letters were sent to local Catholic parish pastors requesting their permission to solicit volunteer subjects for study participation. Four parish pastors agreed to participate. Volunteers were solicited via parish bulletins and informational cards. The solicitation materials included eligibility requirements, a brief description of the study, and the URL to study's website. To be eligible for participation subjects must be at least 18 years old, identify as Catholic, and consider an interpersonal transgression that was not ongoing at the time of study participation. Advertisements sought volunteers who had forgiven an interpersonal transgression they felt was "personal, unfair, and deep" (Smedes, 1984, p. 5). Online data collection by self-report surveys accessed via Qualtrics ensured maintenance of participant anonymity, confidentiality, and data security. Data collection lasted two months and resulted in a sample size of 211 cases.

The extended research question investigated "what is the predictive value of religious coping and Catholic religiosity on state forgiveness after accounting for the influences of state empathy, state anger, and received apology?"

The criterion variable, state forgiveness was measured by the TRIM–18 (McCullough et al., 2006). This 18-item Likert scale assessed post transgression motivations of revenge, avoidance, and benevolence.

Religion included trait and state variables. The Catholic religiosity trait variable, measured by Catholic faith practices (Marist Poll, 2015), assessed the degree of importance the participants placed on how they practice their faith (e.g. daily prayer,

receiving the Sacraments, and attending Mass). Religious coping state variables were measured by the Brief RCOPE positive and negative religious coping subscales (Pargament et al., 1998). They assessed how participants experienced religious transformation or preservation post transgression (e.g., religious purification and spiritual discontent).

The strongest predictor variables were all state variables. State empathy, measured by Batson's Empathy Adjectives (Coke et al., 1978), indicated the degree participants presently experienced other-oriented emotions regarding the transgressor (e.g., concern, warmth, and compassion). The Anger scale (McCullough et al., 2014) measured the degree participants felt negative emotions (e.g., angry, enraged, and hostile) regarding the transgression at the time of the rating and quantified state anger. Received apology, measured by the Apology assessment (Kirchhoff et al., 2012) for a severe transgression, identified whether or not participants received some form of an apology (e.g., statement of apology, expression of remorse, or acknowledgement of fault).

Demographics questionnaire items included gender, age, ethnicity, and education. Three transgression questions assessed the severity of the transgression, time since the transgression, and the nature of the transgression (Exline & Zell, 2009).

First, a discriminant function analysis was performed to confirm the religious variables' ability to distinguish between practicing and nonpracticing Catholics. Next, three hierarchical multiple regressions identified the predictive value of the religious variables for the criterion variable, state forgiveness. This researcher added the control variables in the following order: state empathy, state anger, and received apology. Then regression Model 1 was completed with the addition of positive religious coping. Next,

regression Model 2 was completed with the addition of negative religious coping. Lastly, regression Model 3 was completed with the addition of Catholic religiosity.

Major findings. Discriminant function analysis determined whether Catholic religiosity, positive religious coping, or negative religious coping variables could predict membership in the practicing Catholic group. Negative religious coping could not. Although positive religious coping was a very weak discriminator, the structure matrix identified it as not important to the discriminant function equation. Catholic religiosity was a strong predictor of practicing Catholic group membership.

The hierarchical multiple regressions produced results that partially supported the multiple hypotheses. Catholic religiosity ($f^2 = .018$, $p < .05$) weakly predicted state forgiveness with a small and significant effect size. Both of the religious coping variables were not significant multivariate correlates of state forgiveness. Furthermore, they were both very weakly correlated to state forgiveness instead of moderately as proposed by the research hypotheses. However, they did partially confirm the research hypotheses by being correlated to state forgiveness in the proposed directions.

The following variables were significant and had more predictive power for state forgiveness than the religious variables. State empathy ($f^2 = .703$, $p < .001$) strongly predicted state forgiveness with a very large effect size. This strong and positive correlation supported the research hypothesis. State empathy predicted 31.3% of the variance in state forgiveness even after accounting for the influences of state anger and received apology. State anger's small effect size ($f^2 = 0.061$, $p < .001$) weakly predicted state forgiveness. Although negatively correlated to state forgiveness, the strength of state anger's correlation was only weak instead of moderate as hypothesized. Received

apology (f^2 = .033, p < .01) weakly predicted state forgiveness with a small effect size. Although positively related to state forgiveness, the correlation was also only weak instead of moderate as hypothesized.

Implications

State of knowledge. While the results for the religious variables did not support the study's hypotheses, they also did not provide support for previous research (bivariate correlations) demonstrating that state measures of religion have a stronger influence on state forgiveness than trait measures of religion. As this study was the first to use hierarchical multiple regressions and explore the multivariate correlations identifying the predictive value of religion while controlling for empathy, anger, and apology, it is without comparison in the forgiveness literature. The bivariate and multivariate correlations of the religious variables will be addressed first and will be followed by a brief discussion of the empathy results.

As expected the bivariate correlation of the trait variable, Catholic religiosity (r = .17, p = .007) was positively and weakly correlated to state forgiveness. This was within the 95% CI [.16, .22] reported in Fehr's meta-analysis of religiosity, but they did not distinguish between trait and state measures of religion. However, Davis' meta-analysis did make this distinction. Davis et al. (2013) meta-analysis revealed an effect size (r = .10, p < .001) for the trait measures of religion and a 95% CI [.05, .15] which was weaker than the current study. This slight difference may be attributed to the wide variety of instruments used to measure religiosity as well as the differences between the meta-analytic samples and the current Catholic sample.

The multivariate correlation of Catholic religiosity found in the results of the hierarchical multiple regression Model 3 was the only one of significance. These results suggested that Catholic faith practices (e.g., daily prayer, following Church teachings, and receiving the Sacraments) positively influenced the forgiveness of interpersonal transgression, even beyond the impact of empathy.

Unanticipated results were generated for both religious coping measures. Negative religious coping ($r = -.08$, $p = .135$) was inversely and very weakly correlated to state forgiveness. This bivariate correlation was not statistically significant. The small average score ($M = 9.49$) indicated that negative religious coping was not used, and this coupled with the restricted range may explain why negative religious coping scores did not correlate with forgiveness. As a multivariate, negative religious coping was inversely correlated to state forgiveness; however, the correlation was very weak and not statistically significant. Therefore, the negative religious coping regression Model 2 was rejected. Results suggested that Catholics do not use negative religious coping as a strategy when forgiving interpersonal transgression.

By comparison, positive religious coping ($r = .16$, $p = .009$) was significantly correlated to state forgiveness; however, the bivariate correlation was weak. It was weaker than Davis et al. (2013) meta-analytic results ($r = .31$, $p < .001$) and fell below the 95% CI [.22, .40] reported for the bivariate correlations of state religious constructs.

While the Catholic participants typically used positive religious coping quite a bit, it is possible that they also used other traditionally Catholic means of religious coping not represented in the positive religious coping subscale of the Brief RCOPE. Similar to the differences in the religious beliefs and attitudes represented by Catholic religiosity, the

differences in the activities of Catholics following interpersonal transgression may also be significant and demonstrate a stronger correlation to state forgiveness for the Catholic sample. These alternative and specifically Catholic strategies associated with problem solving following a transgression may have a stronger relationship to interpersonal forgiveness for this sample than the more general positive religious coping measures. Some of these specifically Catholic strategies may include adoring God in the Holy Eucharist, praying a Novena, having a Mass celebrated, asking a saint for intercessory prayer, speaking with priest, speaking with a spiritual director, making a spiritual retreat, or uniting one's suffering with Christ's redemptive suffering on the cross for salvation. Hill and Pargament (2003) support the conclusion that "measures of religious and spiritual change and growth need to be tailored to fit the unique characters of different faiths" (p. 71).

The regression analysis demonstrated that positive religious coping was positively correlated to state forgiveness; however, the strength of this correlation was very weak and it was not statistically significant. Consequently, Model 1 was rejected.

One explanation may be that the multivariate correlation of state empathy was so strong for state forgiveness, that it eclipsed the influence of positive religious coping. This conclusion is supported by the effects of state empathy on all of the predictor variables, except negative religious coping. With state empathy in the regression model, the multivariate correlations between all of the predictor variables (except negative religious coping) and state forgiveness were reduced from the strengths of their respective bivariate correlations.

Just like the Catholic faith practices measure maintained its significant influence on interpersonal forgiveness, even after accounting for the impact of empathy; it is possible that for Catholics other traditionally Catholic means of religious coping may also have a stronger as well as significant multivariate influence on state forgiveness.

Lastly, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of positive religious coping, or any other state religious variable, and empathy to predict state forgiveness is unknown in peer reviewed forgiveness literature. Therefore, no comparisons can be made at this time.

It is worth noting that state empathy ($r = .72$, $p < .001$) correlated positively and strongly with state forgiveness. This bivariate correlation was stronger than ($r = .50$) with confidence interval 95% CI [.40, .59] (Riek & Mania, 2012) and ($r = .58$) with confidence interval 95% CI [.47, .68] from the meta-analytic forgiveness literature (Fehr et al., 2010). This study's stronger bivariate correlation may reflect a Christian anthropology where participants followed Church teachings regarding the dignity of every person and loving one's enemies (Enright et al., 1989). State empathy also demonstrated a very strong and significant multivariate correlation to state forgiveness. State empathy even explained more variance in state forgiveness than the other predictor variables combined. These results suggest that emphasis placed on the cultivation of empathy for one's transgressor will have the greatest influence on the promotion of interpersonal forgiveness.

Clinical practice. Considering these results, it seems logical to locate empathy and the elements of Catholic faith practices in therapeutic interventions for Catholics.

Some of this has been investigated if not applied in clinical settings. Such is the case in the general population.

Catholic faith practices items may explain the consistent significance of the measure's bivariate and multivariate correlations to state forgiveness. A number of these items are congruous with interventions that have successfully promoted state forgiveness. In particular, prayer interventions have demonstrated increased state forgiveness in forgiveness research (Lambert et al., 2013; Toussaint et al., 2016; Vasiliauskas & McMinn, 2013). Additionally, elements of the Sacrament of Confession have also promoted forgiveness of interpersonal transgression (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008; Exline et al., 2008; Lawler-Row, 2010). Enright et al. (1989) may also help explain the greater multivariate correlations between Catholic religiosity and state empathy with forgiveness. These researchers demonstrated greater religiosity was significantly correlated with more sophisticated considerations of forgiveness, those founded upon unconditional love. Lastly, Patrick et al. (2013) demonstrated that relational grace influenced empathy and forgiveness.

In conclusion, both state empathy and Catholic religiosity demonstrated a stronger relationship with actual forgiveness than reported in Fehr et al. (2010) and Davis et al. (2013), respectively. Both of these pieces of evidence may reflect the assertion, "The more one practiced one's faith, the higher one was in forgiveness stage" (Enright et al., 1989, p. 95).

Recommendations

Future research. In this study, empathy explained more than 30% of the variation in the forgiveness regressions, remaining the strongest predictor of interpersonal

forgiveness. Further investigations into the antecedents and interventions promoting empathy (e.g. religion, humility, self-examination, grace) for one's transgressor are recommended.

Unexpectedly, Catholic religiosity revealed a small and significantly stronger multivariate correlation to actual forgiveness than both religious coping variables. Hill and Pargament (2003) recommend using measures of religious change that fit the religious group. The development of measures that quantify specifically Catholic religious coping strategies are warranted.

Limitations. Some of the limitations to this study could be addressed in future research. The negative religious coping measure was quite skewed, indicating that most participants did not use this method for coping with transgression. As a means to increase the variance in the responses to the negative religious coping measure, future researchers may consider replication of this study and include other faiths and/or nonreligious participants in the sample. In addition, the correlational design of this study did not allow the identification of causal relationships. A future longitudinal study would be necessary to explain the directionality of the correlations found. Future research could also sample more diverse populations to investigate the generalizability of these results.

Clinical practice recommendations. As these results suggest, empathy for the transgressor is very strongly related to interpersonal forgiveness. Interventions that facilitate empathy when facing a crisis of forgiveness may be the most efficacious way to help clients forgive when facing a hurtful transgression. For Catholic clients, integrating elements of their faith practices into therapeutic interventions as a problem-solving

strategy when addressing transgression is not only culturally sensitive, it may also be

very effective.

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APPENDIX A

Pastor's Letter

Date

Name of Pastor
Parish
Address
San Antonio, TX ZIP

Dear Name of Pastor:

My name is Christine Lopez and I am a doctoral student in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at St. Mary's University. I am requesting your permission to invite parishioners to participate in an anonymous online survey. You can help by allowing me to announce this opportunity in your church bulletin and distribute a card with similar information. Volunteering parishioners will be asked to go online to complete the anonymous survey if they choose to participate.

As we anticipate the Jubilee Year of Mercy, you have the unique opportunity to help further our understanding of the impact religious coping has on forgiveness. For decades, the psychological literature has reflected a negligible influence of religion on forgiveness. We know the importance and impact our faith has in life's struggles, such as the forgiveness of transgression. I hope you will agree that it is imperative for the professional literature to reflect this reality. I plan to address the religion-forgiveness discrepancy in the literature by studying a more proximal and contextual variable, religious coping. My investigation surveys Catholics to examine how well religious coping predicts interpersonal forgiveness as compared to known predictors (empathy, anger, and apology).

Rye and colleagues (2000) pointed out that social scientists can benefit from consideration of religious perspectives regarding forgiveness. With an increased understanding of the influence of religious coping on interpersonal forgiveness, the mental health profession can be more effective in helping persons who struggle following interpersonal transgression.

Please contact me by email (merciful4giveness@gmail.com) or phone (210-779-7747) to let me know if you would be willing to allow me to recruit members of your parish or if you have any questions.

Thank You,

Christine Lopez, MA
Doctoral Student
St. Mary's University

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Statement for Church Bulletin and Solicitation Card

I am seeking volunteers who have experienced a transgression they consider to be personal, unfair, and deep. You will not be asked details about the transgression, but you will be asked about your responses that could influence your forgiveness of that transgression. The purpose of this research is to identify resources that may help others forgive.

To be eligible to participate, Catholic volunteers must be at least 18 years old and identify an interpersonal transgression that is not ongoing at the time of your participation in this research. The anonymous survey takes less than 15 minutes. If you are interested, please go to the online survey at

http://tinyurl.com/ForgivenessResearch

If you have any questions please contact me, Christine Lopez, at # 210-438-6400 or Clopez17@mail.stmarytx.edu

Thank you! Your help is greatly appreciated!
Christine Lopez, St. Mary's University Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

WELCOME!
This research investigates forgiveness and the circumstances that influence it.

Your participation takes approximately 15 minutes to honestly answer the research questions. All data collected is anonymous and kept confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time.

Please be advised that while there are no physical risks associated with participation, you may experience some discomfort reviewing your thoughts and feelings.

Please be advised that while you will not receive compensation for participation in this study, the gift of your participation will help the investigator better understand the nature of forgiveness. Your experience with forgiveness can make a valuable contribution and help others in their pursuit of forgiveness in counseling.

If you like, you may contact Christine Lopez, the Principal Investigator, at 210-438-6400 or email at Clopez17@mail.stmarytx.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or concerns about this research study please contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board, St. Mary's University at 210-436-3736 or email at IRBCommitteeChair@stmarytx.edu. ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY ARE GOVERNED BY THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

   I VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.
   I DO NOT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE.

Please answer the following questions as they relate to you.

Are You Catholic?

      Yes
      No

What is your age?

> Under 18
> 18 - 34
> 35 - 50
> 51 - 69
> Over 69

Demographic Questions

What is your gender?

> Male
> Female

What is your racial/ethnic group?

> White
> Black or African American
> Hispanic or Latino
> Other (Please specify)

Please indicate the highest level of your education completed.

> High School or equivalent
> Some College
> College Graduate
> Graduate/Professional Degree

Catholic Practice

As a Catholic, do you consider yourself…

> Practicing
> Non-practicing

Thinking about how you practice your own faith, how important to you is…

> 1 = Not Important
> 2 = Slightly Important
> 3 = Moderately Important
> 4 = Important
> 5 = Very Important

…Daily prayer
…Following the teachings of the Catholic Church
…Receiving the Sacraments
…Attending Mass regularly (aside from weddings and funerals, attend religious services
   at least once a month)
…Belonging to a parish
…Going to confession at least once a year

Transgression

The rest of this survey is related to forgiveness following a hurt or transgression. Sometimes we are hurt unfairly and deeply by the actions of another person. This person may be a family member, friend, co-worker, neighbor, classmate, or other. Please think of one person who you experienced as treating you unfairly and deeply hurting you at some point in the past. For a moment, visualize in your mind the events and the interactions you may have had with the person who offended you. Try to visualize the person and recall what happened. The next set of questions is about the nature of the hurt. Recall that all responses are anonymous and confidential, so please respond honestly.

How deeply were you hurt by the transgression **at the time** it occurred?

       Not at all hurt
       A little hurt
       Moderately hurt
       Deeply hurt
       Very deeply hurt

How long ago was the transgression?

       Ongoing
       Days ago
       Weeks ago
       Months ago
       Years ago

What was the hurt that took place? Please identify the nature of the hurt by marking the most appropriate box. You may select more than one if it applies.

       Trust violations
       Selfish/insensitive behavior
       Rejection
       Deception
       Verbal aggression
       Misbehavior in a romantic breakup
       Disrespect
       Stealing
       Infidelity
       Abandonment
       Malicious gossip
       Physical aggression
       Other _____

Apology

Please indicate if the person responsible for what happened to you…

> 1 = Yes
> 2 = No

…**offered a statement of apology** (such as "I apologize" or "I am sorry").

…offered an **apology that expressed emotions** (such as guilt, shame, regret, remorse).

…**admitted fault** by acknowledging that with the transgression he/she broke an agreed upon rule.

…attempted to **explain his/her behavior** that led to the transgression without trying to defend or justify his/her behavior.

Anger Scale

This scale consists of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then indicate how much you **currently** feel each emotion related to the transgression. Use the following scale to mark your answers:

> 1 = Very Slightly or Not At All
> 2 = A Little
> 3 = Moderately
> 4 = Quite a Bit
> 5 = Extremely

angry
hostile
enraged
spiteful
furious

State Empathy (BEA)

Consider how you feel right now toward the person responsible for what happened. Please indicate the degree to which you **currently** feel _____ toward him/her.

      1 = Not At All
      2 = Slightly
      3 = Somewhat
      4 = Moderately
      5 = Very Much
      6 = Extremely

compassionate
concerned
empathic
moved
softhearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE)

The following items deal with the ways you may have coped with this hurt. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. Obviously different people deal with things in different ways, but we are interested in how **you** tried to deal with the hurt.

We want to know how much or how frequently you did what the item says. Don't answer on the basis of what worked or not – just whether or not you tried it. Rate each item separately in your mind from the others.

Make your answers as true **FOR YOU** as you can. Select the answer that best applies to you.

    1 = Not At All
    2 = Somewhat
    3 = Quite A Bit
    4 = A Great Deal

Looked for a stronger connection with God.
Sought God's love and care.
Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.
Tried to put my plans into action together with God.
Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.
Asked forgiveness for my sins.
Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems.
Wondered whether God had abandoned me.
Felt punished by God for my lack of devotion.
Wondered what I did for God to punish me.
Questioned God's love for me.
Wondered whether my church had abandoned me.
Decided the devil made this happen.
Questioned the power of God.

Forgiveness (TRIM-18)

For the following statements, please indicate your **current** thoughts and feelings about the person who hurt you. Use the following scale to indicate your agreement with each of the statements.

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

I will make him/her pay.
I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.
Even though his/her actions hurt me, I have goodwill for him/her.
I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
I am living as if he/she does not exist, is not around.
I want us to bury the hatchet and move forward with our relationship.
I don't trust him/her.
Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again.
I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
I am finding it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
I am avoiding him/her.
Although he/she hurt me, I am putting the hurts aside so we could resume our relationship.
I'm going to get even.
I forgive him/her for what he/she did to me.
I cut off the relationship with him/her.
I have released my anger so I can work on restoring our relationship to health.
I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
I withdraw from him/her.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

| December 2018 | Doctor of Philosophy in Marriage and Family Therapy
St. Mary's University |

| August 1998 | Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy
Distinguished Graduate
St. Mary's University |

| May 1989 | Bachelor of Science in Biology with a Chemistry Minor
Cum Laude Graduate
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EXPERIENCE

| 2000-2003 | Marriage and Family Therapy intern
Ecumenical Center for Religion and Health |

| 2006-2011 | Adult Education and Faith Formation
St. Matthew Catholic Church |

| 2011-2016 | Counselor
Facilitator of Divorce Recovery Group
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VOLUNTEERISM

Sacristan
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