

**THE EFFECT OF FORGIVENESS TRAINING IN THE ATTITUDE OF FORGIVENESS
IN MARRIED COUPLES**

By

Yarelle Calo Gobe

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the impact on the attitude of forgiveness in married couples participating in a 3-hour forgiveness group that incorporates Everett Worthington's Forgiveness Model: REACH (Worthington, 2008). The study measured the impact of the REACH-based curriculum from *Become a More Forgiving Person in Less Than Two Hours* (Worthington, 2020) in 32 couples attending the forgiveness class. The study used a quantitative approach/correlational design exploring the relationship between participation in a forgiveness class and attitude towards forgiveness. The focus was on measuring whether program participation increases an attitude of forgiveness and if the couple's reported satisfaction influenced the attitude of forgiveness using the pre-test and post-test responses to The Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Enright & Rique, 2004) and marital satisfaction based on the pre-test and post-test responses to the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Results from this study showed that the REACH class was effective as an intervention in increasing the attitude of forgiveness in couples and that the couples' satisfaction influenced the increment in the attitude of forgiveness. Couples who reported higher levels of satisfaction also reported a higher increase in the attitude of forgiveness after they participated in the REACH class.

Keywords: forgiveness, the attitude of forgiveness, REACH model, Couples Satisfaction Index, Enright Forgiveness Inventory

Dedication

To God Who strengthens me each day (Philippians 4:13). I dedicate this work to my husband Renzo and my children Faith, Giulian, Grace, Gabriel, and Milo, who gave up so much of their time with me so I could fulfill my dream of becoming a doctor. To my parents Johnny and Nilda, who taught me the value of perseverance through adversity and always encouraged me to never give up.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	12
Overview	12
Background	12
Problem Statement	16
Purpose Statement	17
Significance of the Study	18
Research Questions	19
Definitions.....	19
Summary	20
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	22
Overview	22
Conceptual or Theoretical Framework	22
Related Literature	23
Definition of Forgiveness.....	23
The Attitude of Forgiveness.....	29
Couple Satisfaction.....	36
Measurements of Forgiveness.....	43
Measurements of Couple Satisfaction.....	45
REACH Model.....	46
Other Psychotherapeutic Interventions to Promote Forgiveness.....	48

Summary	52
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	54
Overview	54
Design	55
Research Questions.....	55
Hypotheses.....	55
Participants and Setting.....	55
Instrumentation	56
Procedures	57
Data Analysis	62
Summary	63
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	65
Overview	65
Descriptive Statistics	65
Reliability of the Instruments	67
Results	69
Hypothesis 1	69
Hypothesis 2	70
Summary	74
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	75
Overview	75
Summary of Findings	75
Discussion	76

Implications	82
Delimitations and Limitations	84
Recommendations for Future Research	85
Summary	86
REFERENCES	88
APPENDICES	100
Appendix A- Institutional Review Board Approval Letter	107
Appendix B- Participant Letter	109
Appendix C- Informed Consent.....	110
Appendix D- Demographic Questionnaire	113
Appendix E- Couples' Satisfaction Index (CSI).....	114
Appendix F- Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) License to Use	115
Appendix G-REACH Workbook.....	116

List of Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Results of Gender and Issue of Struggle with Unforgiveness	66
Table 2. Descriptive Results of the Pre-tests and Post-tests CSI and EFI	68

List of Figures

Figure 1. Mean Plots of Changes in Forgiveness Scores Based on the CSI	73
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List of Abbreviations

Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI)

Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The divorce rates within intimate relationships have consistently increased over time (Amato, 2010). Successful and satisfied couples report that one of the most remarkable underpinnings of their marriages is the ability to forgive (Gottman, 1993). According to research, certain people are much more willing to forgive than others, yet the factors influencing these individual differences in forgiveness have not yet been well established.

In relationships, the attitude and the willingness to forgive include several factors that precede and influence the ability of an individual to forgive a partner, such as the individual's personality (Berry & Worthington, 2001), commitment level, and the individual's satisfaction with the relationship (McCullough & Worthington, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998). In general, there has not been ample research specific to the subject of forgiveness and couple's satisfaction. Nevertheless, due to the evidence found on the importance of forgiveness for an individual's emotional and physical well-being, specifically for maintaining marital relationships, it is necessary to study said factors to further the therapeutic area of couple's therapy.

Background

For decades, forgiveness has been the subject of many studies; however, it has only become a significant area of study in the last several years (Exline et al., 2008; Guzman, 2010; Harper et al., 2014; Langman & Chung, 2012; Mauger et al., 1992, McCollough et al., 1997, McCollough et al., 2000; Paleari et al., 2009; Pollard et al., 1998; Worthington, 2007; Tsang et al., 2006). From 2005, the number of publications has grown significantly, in part because of the increase in popularity of positive psychology, which focuses on the study of virtues and human's

strength and its effects on the quality of life in individuals (Casullo, 2008; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002; Seligman, 2002).

The topic of forgiveness is fascinating because all humans confront the daily challenges of relating to individuals who have wronged them one way or another. Therefore, forgiveness holds the key to understanding how individuals can retain good interpersonal relationships when an offense has occurred between partners. Forgiveness provides an alternative to the breakup of a relationship by promoting positive dimensions in the short and long terms (Allemand et al., 2007; Fincham et al., 2004a). Moreover, Worthington (2005) noted the potential benefits of forgiveness, referencing physical, mental, relational, and spiritual areas. There is also evidence of the relationship between the lack of forgiveness and the increase of depression in both men and women (Maltby et al., 2001).

Numerous studies have emphasized the positive association between forgiveness and health (Bono et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2003; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Studies related to forgiveness and physical health, specifically heart disease, high blood pressure, and stress management, noted that forgiving is associated with better health outcomes (Harris et al., 2006; Witvliet et al., 2001). A meta-analysis study completed by Riek & Mania (2011) confirmed that forgiveness positively impacts physical and mental health.

Another benefit of forgiveness is associated with spiritual health, as forgiveness increases internal peace and promotes harmony and a sense of serenity to the victim of the offense (Worthington, 2005). In addition to the overall effect of forgiveness on the individual's health, studies also show improved overall well-being in the offended person (Worthington et al., 2005). Completed longitudinal studies have also demonstrated the relationship between forgiveness at

positive mental health in individuals (Bono et al., 2008). Thus, forgiveness is associated with both better physical and mental health.

Forgiveness has also been studied because of its impact on maintaining interpersonal relationships, especially in marital relationships (Exline & Baumeister, 2000; McCullough et al., 2000). In relationships, several researchers have noted the benefit of forgiveness in improving the relationships between the person who was offended and the offender (Karremans et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 1998; Tsang et al., 2006). Because of the benefits that forgiveness offers for physical and mental health and the quality of interpersonal relationships, there is interest in implementing interventions for forgiveness as a therapeutic objective, especially in couple's counseling (Worthington, 2008; Worthington et al., 2007).

Forgiveness in couples is seen fundamentally as a two-dimensional phenomenon. It has a positive dimension that involves benevolence, positive affect, compassion, and negative dimensions, which involve revenge, avoidance, and negative emotions. Fincham et al. (2004a) noted that the negative dimension includes resentment, anger, avoidance, and desires for retaliation towards the offender; the positive dimension implies a genuine attitude of goodwill towards the offender and consists of a benevolent motivational state.

However, smaller correlations have been found between the positive and negative dimensions, suggesting that they may belong to different constructs (Reidl-Martínez, 2016; Rosales-Sarabia et al., 2020;). Thus, in individuals as well as in relationships, the concept of forgiveness is suggested as integrated from the revised positive dimensions (i.e., Enright et al., 1992; Fincham et al., 2004a; McCullough, 2008; Worthington, 2007), including positive emotions, cognitions, and behaviors that denote positive affectivity towards the transgressor. Although the unfair treatment and the harm caused are openly acknowledged by the person who

was offended, these positive dimensions of forgiveness are characterized by benevolence, compassion, positive emotions, behavior, and prosocial cognitions (Worthington, 2008). In contrast, negative dimensions, such as negative emotions, cognitions, and behaviors toward the transgressor, include resentment and are conceptualized as a construct independent from the aforementioned positive dimension (Worthington & Wade, 1999).

In addition to the positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness, forgiveness can also be conceptualized as a continuum, with forgiveness and resentment being considered the two end-points within that continuum. A low score for resentment implies a higher level of forgiveness and vice-versa (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2004; McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough & Witvelt, 2002). However, it is possible that some researchers report forgiveness when they, in fact, only measure resentment within their studies (e.g., Beltrán-Morillas et al., 2015). Likewise, very little research has been done around the concept of resentment. Enright (2012) points to the role of persistent anger and negative thoughts as central to resentment, which occurs when a person experiences anger persistently and intensely as a result of a transgression, generating a negative cognitive bias that promotes more punitive thoughts and reduces the willingness to behave morally.

Sierra-Otero et al. (2014) stated that unforgiveness could result in harm, re-experiencing a painful feeling, resentment, anger, or hatred towards the person who committed the offense. Sierra-Otero et al. (2014) indicate that unforgiveness may be detrimental for individuals and significantly negatively affects a couple's relationship. Therefore, due to the negative connotations and the impact of the negative dimensions of forgiveness in individuals and couples (i.e., Fincham & Beach, 2004; McCullough et al., 1998; Paleari et al., 2009), and the positive

connotations and benefits of forgiveness, studying the effectiveness of forgiveness interventions such as the REACH model (Worthington, 2008) becomes necessary.

Problem Statement

Forgiveness is a complex concept, and several authors have directed their efforts to measure the different dimensions of forgiveness (e.g., Enright & Rique, 2004; Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Kamat et al., 2006; McCullough et al., 1998; Paleari et al., 2009; Rye et al., 2001; Wade, 1989), noting that some of the dimensions are oppositional while others are interconnected. However, most researchers agree that true forgiveness implies a change in attitudes and behaviors of the individual who has been offended (Harris et al., 2006; McCullough et al., 2003).

Forgiveness and resentment, while assumed by some to represent two end-points of a continuum, have shown little covariance (Rosales-Sarabia et al., 2016). It has been consistently concluded that these positive and negative dimensions do not necessarily correlate with the same variables (e.g., Gassin & Lengel, 2011; Kato, 2016; Stoia-Carballo et al., 2008). Wade & Worthington (2005) noted that forgiveness decreases unforgiveness and promotes the positive dimension. In contrast, unforgiveness causes a natural reaction for the person who has suffered the offense, including negative behaviors such as avoidance and revenge (McCullough, 2001). However, these adverse reactions decrease when a person decides to forgive, and restoration can occur in relationships. Thus, forgiveness implies a conscious, intentional process in the offended person (Fincham et al., 2005). Forgiveness is also a voluntary election of the person who has been offended to forgive their transgressor (Baskin & Enright, 2004).

True forgiveness requires the individual's ability to see the other person as human in showing compassion, empathy, or any positive feeling towards the offender (Wade et al., 2005).

Moreover, individuals who show a degree of self-respect and self-esteem can forgive adequately (Wade et al., 2005). In relationships, forgiveness implies both an internal change and a change in the relationship.

In couples, forgiveness is related to personality type, the level of the relationship's satisfaction, the severity of the offense, and relationship time. It has also been linked to the level of empathy a person feels for the offender and even the type of relationship that they have. In reality, there is no definitive understanding of which factors may influence forgiveness, so it is essential to keep exploring the subject.

Purpose Statement

In relationships, some conflicts may be related to feeling hurt or offended by the partner. Examples of transgressions within relationships include lying, infidelity, addictions, abuse. Forgiveness is recognized as a strong predictor of a successful relationship (McCullough et al., 2000). However, teaching how to forgive is relatively overlooked as a potential intervention to help couples increase their ability to forgive each other, influencing their relationship satisfaction and determination to remain in the relationship (Aalgaard et al., 2016).

This study evaluates the efficacy of a forgiveness-based curriculum, *Become a More Forgiving Person in Less Than Two Hours* (Worthington, 2020), as a group intervention for couples to increase the attitude of forgiveness in marital relationships. Additionally, it also inquires whether the couples' reported marital satisfaction influences any changes in each partner's attitude of forgiveness. This is an important study area since studies on marital satisfaction suggest a relationship between the attitude of forgiveness and the value that an individual gives to the relationship and, thus, his or her motivation to work on forgiveness to preserve the relationship (McCullough et al., 2010; Tabak et al., 2012).

Significance of the Study

Research has shown the overall positive effects of forgiveness on overall well-being, including increasing the ability to manage emotions; individuals who experience positive dimensions of forgiveness have better health and better relationships. In addition, clinical interventions developed based on forgiveness research consistently show the efficacy of promoting forgiveness education and reducing the symptoms of anxiety and depression, and increasing self-esteem (Baskin & Enright, 2004). There are experimental and longitudinal studies evidencing the relationship between forgiveness and the restoration of the quality of the relationship (Paleari et al., 2005).

McCullough (2000) noted that forgiveness is associated with marital satisfaction, commitment, inhibiting aggression, and the restoration of the trust between the person who was offended and the offender, especially in relationships. Research suggests that the quality of the relationship after an offense improves after forgiveness occurs. Compared to individuals displaying unforgiveness, those who forgive others showed an increased ability to respond constructively to the offender's acts. These individuals also showed more cooperation with the offender. They raised their ability to sacrifice personal interest to benefit from the relationship with the offender, independently of the level of commitment they had with the offender (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Therefore, forgiveness is strongly associated with the possibility of restoring a relationship (Aquino et al., 2006).

This study contributes meaningfully to the literature as one of the few investigations of its kind to experimentally examine the influence of a REACH forgiveness model-based curriculum (Worthington, 2008) in couples. With the evaluation of the curriculum in the workbook titled *Your Path to REACH Forgiveness: Become a More Forgiving Person in Less Than Two Hours*

(Worthington, 2020), this study focuses on the effectiveness of teaching forgiveness to married couples in a group setting.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact a curriculum-based forgiveness training on couples' attitudes towards forgiveness as measured by The Enright Forgiveness Inventory?

RQ2: Is there a difference in scores on the attitude of forgiveness between couples who report low marital satisfaction versus couples who report high marital satisfaction as measured by The Couple's Satisfaction Index and The Enright Forgiveness Inventory after participating in the REACH class?

Definitions

1. Forgiveness- the act of renouncing to the retribution for damages caused (Worthington, 2005, 2008; Worthington & Wade, 1999, 2003, 2005)
2. Attitude of forgiveness- the disposition to forgive in various situations and time, attributed to personality (Worthington & Wade, 1999, 2003, 2005)
3. Unforgiveness- lack of forgiveness; a combination of feelings of resentment, bitterness, hate, hostility, and fear resulting from ruminating about offense; may include the desire to revenge or avoid the offender (Worthington & Wade, 1999, 2003, 2005)
4. Dispositional forgiveness- the general tendency to forgive multiple offenses in relationships and various situations (Berry & Worthington, 2001; McCullough et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2005)

5. Dyadic forgiveness- the tendency to forgive multiple offenses in a specific relationship, including in marriage (Fincham et al., 2002); forgiveness to multiple offenses over time towards a particular individual (e.g., spouse or partner) (Berry & Worthington, 2005)
6. Episodic forgiveness- refers to specifically forgiving one offense within a specific context (Paleari et al., 2009)
7. Marital satisfaction- an individual's perceived level of benefits resulting from a marriage (Gottman, 1993)

Summary

Forgiveness is essential in all human relationships, especially romantic ones. When a transgression occurs in relationships, the absence of forgiveness can have substantial implications in the quality of any relationship. The process of forgiveness has constituted an essential element of study in marital relationships due to the intensity of the attachment established in this type of relationship (Dillow et al., 2011).

Forgiveness has been studied during the last past decades. It has become a focus of study theoretically and empirically within psychology, especially in clinical psychology (Guzman, 2010). Different studies have focused on different aspects of forgiveness. One aspect that has received research focus includes how establishing forgiveness restores marital relationships. Forgiveness has been deemed the key to understanding how individuals can maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships (Allemand et al., 2007).

For the purpose of this study, forgiveness is conceptualized as a process used to cope with an offense and mainly benefits the person who was offended (Fitzgibbons, 1986) by reorienting their emotions, feelings, and behaviors towards the offender. In addition, forgiveness

implies a complex interaction between the person who forgives and the offender, including reestablishing the relationship's equilibrium, diminishing negative feelings towards the offender, and decreasing the desire for revenge.

Forgiveness encompasses two processes: reducing negative feelings resulting from the offense and the positive consideration and promotion of positive emotions and motivations towards the offender (Fichman et al., 2005; Wade & Worthington, 2005; Worthington & Wade, 1999). In summary, forgiveness is a pro-social change towards the offender that ultimately benefits the individual who forgives, promoting better overall physical and mental health and positively influencing and restoring relationships. In couples, forgiveness has been identified as a strong predictor of a satisfactory relationship. However, in clinical settings, forgiveness is not always considered an important tool to increase marital satisfaction. Therefore, assisting couples in developing an attitude of forgiveness is of utmost importance as it promotes empathy, humility, repentance, and commitment in a relationship (Fife et al., 2013). These unifying factors help a couple recover trust, solidarity, and connection often lost because of an offense. Working with couples to develop an attitude of forgiveness can help them redefine the relationship after a transgression. Thus, this study focuses on evaluating a curriculum that may assist in developing this attitude of forgiveness in marital relationships.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Thompson et al. (2005) noted that having an attitude of forgiveness benefits the individual's mental health and influences the dispositional attitude of forgiveness, which is essential in maintaining healthy intimate relationships. Forgiveness is predictive of the quality of intimate relationships (Berry & Worthington, 2001) and positively correlates with a measure of relationship satisfaction and commitment (McCullough et al., 1998). Likewise, forgiving people tend to have longer, more satisfying romantic relationships than people who are comparatively lower in forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2005). Interestingly, there is little empirical exploration of forgiveness within couples within the social sciences, making it a topic worthy of further exploration (Forster et al., 2019; McCullough et al., 2000). The temporal relationship between forgiveness, psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and relationship duration remains an understudied topic within this field (Thompson et al., 2005).

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

Everett Worthington began to investigate forgiveness as a clinical method in 1990. The central core of his theory centered on restoration through forgiveness in couples and individuals in group and individual counseling sessions. Through his therapy practice, he determined that the significant issues faced by couples originate from a lack of forgiveness; this lack of forgiveness is what prevents improvement in a couple's relationship (Wade et al., 2014).

Two forgiveness intervention models used in most forgiveness interventions research are those created by Enright (2001) and Worthington (2006). This dissertation study focuses on

Worthington's REACH Forgiveness model. Worthington elaborated his method with two of his graduate students, Michael McCullough and Steve Sandage, who developed the technique of forgiveness called "REACH", which aimed to teach forgiveness. In this model, each letter in the acronym REACH represents a significant component in the forgiveness process. In the first step, participants recall (R) the hurt they experienced and its accompanying emotions (Wade et al., 2014). During step two, participants work to empathize (E) with their offender, take another's perspective, and consider factors contributing to their offender's actions without condoning the other's actions or invalidating the offended person's (often strong) feelings that resulted from the offense (Wade et al., 2014). Then, participants explore the idea that forgiveness is an altruistic (A) gift to the offender (Wade et al., 2014). Next, participants learn that forgiveness can be freely given or legitimately withheld and recall times when others forgave them. In the next step, participants commit (C) to forgive, including committing to the forgiveness that one has already achieved and committing to work toward increasing their ability to forgive, understanding that forgiveness is a process that is accomplished over time (Wade et al., 2014). Lastly, the participants seek to hold (H) onto or maintain their forgiveness through times of uncertainty or during a return of anger and bitterness (McCullough et al., 1998; Wade et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2014).

Related Literature

Definition of Forgiveness

The number of definitions of forgiveness present in the scientific literature is extensive. For example, Hargrave & Sells (1997) define forgiveness as "an effort to restore love and trust in relationships" (p.43). Similarly, Makinen & Johnson (2006) stated that "forgiving involves repairing emotional wounds, restoring trust and rebuilding the bond" (p.1056). Other authors

(e.g., McCullough et al., 2000) have also highlighted that having the capacity to forgive leads to benevolent attitudes and positive feelings.

Likewise, Gordon & Baucom (2003) stated, “forgiveness implies a complex interaction between the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven, involving the achievement of a more balanced vision of the relationship, a decrease in feelings negative towards the other, and a lesser desire to punish the other person” (p.180). In contrast, Strelan & Covic (2006) conceptualize forgiveness within the framework of stress coping mechanisms and as a process of neutralizing a particular type of stressor - perception of an interpersonal wound. Lastly, McCullough et al. (1997) pondered the most accepted definition of forgiveness, defining it as a “series of motivational changes through which the person feels less motivated to retaliate against the partner than infringed the damage, as well as to stay away from it and increasingly motivated towards reconciliation and goodwill towards the offender” (p.491).

Enright et al. (1992) stated that affection, cognition, behavior, compassion, and benevolence are the components of forgiveness. He conceptualized it as an affective, behavioral, and cognitive change in the offended toward the transgressor, where the one who forgives can have a new attitude of benevolence, compassion, and even love toward the transgressor, even if the latter has no morally justifiable right to receive forgiveness (Enright et al., 1992).

Worthington (2007) noted a more straightforward conceptualization of forgiveness by highlighting the importance of the affective component. He conceptualized forgiveness as an affective change, characterized by increased positive emotions oriented to the transgressor to decrease negative emotions characteristic of resentment (Worthington, 2007). Worthington’s conceptualization of forgiveness is not opposed to Enright et al. (1992) but focuses more on the affective transformation as the core of his concept of forgiveness. Moreover, McCullough

(2008), who highlighted the role of revenge, avoidance, and reconciliation as fundamental elements to understand forgiveness in close relationships, conceptualized forgiveness as the decrease in the victim's motivation to take revenge or retaliate against and avoid the transgressor while increasing the reason to have prosocial and reconciliation behaviors towards the transgressor.

Despite the large number and definitions, the first point of consensus, in most authors, agrees that forgiveness implies a decrease in the negativity of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors towards the offender (Fincham et al., 2005; Kachadourian et al., 2004; Strelan & Covic, 2006). That is, it involves a motivational transformation from the negative to the positive. Further, forgiveness is an interpersonal process rather than an isolated event (Fife et al., 2013); Gordon & Baucom (1998) noted that forgiveness involves an interaction between the person who forgives and the offender affecting their relationship. Likewise, forgiveness facilitates affective, cognitive, and behavioral changes for both the offender (self-forgiveness) and the betrayed person (Gordon & Baucom, 2003). Moreover, forgiveness is a complex process that generally lasts for a considerable time and includes substantial internal and interpersonal changes in the person who experiences it (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Kearns & Fincham, 2004). Therefore, forgiveness is a process in which the person is intentionally involved and has both an individual and interpersonal character (Fincham et al., 2005). The individual aspect arises because, with the granting of forgiveness, there is a change in one's thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. The interpersonal aspect arises because forgiveness occurs in an interrelational context: the couple (Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Hoyt & McCullough, 2005; McCullough et al., 2000).

Forgiveness is an elective action because one can choose to forgive regardless of whether forgiveness is deserved (Allais, 2013). Forgiveness involves change and is best viewed as a

process rather than a specific act (Alvaro, 2001; McCullough et al., 1998; Witvliet, 2005). Moreover, forgiveness can be seen as the development of attitudinal change, incorporating thoughts, feelings, and behavioral tendencies, along a dimension that ranges from hostility to friendliness (Forster et al., 2019). Thus, the definition and focus of forgiveness are more about the change in feelings or attitudes that result from forgiveness. Many people view forgiveness as an interpersonal transaction and thus focus on how it manifests in dyadic interactions (Fincham, 2000; Worthington, 1998).

McCullough et al. (2000) noted that the concept of forgiveness could be understood in three different ways, which include dispositional forgiveness, dyadic forgiveness, and episodic or specific forgiveness. Dispositional forgiveness refers to the general disposition or tendency to forgive multiple offenses produced throughout various relationships and situations. It is an available style of response that supersedes the offense and the interpersonal relationship of the individual. Some studies have conceptualized it as a personality trait (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Thompson et al., 2005). Dyadic forgiveness refers to an individual's tendency to forgive a particular offender of multiple offenses in the context of a specific relationship, including the tendency to forgive a spouse within a marital relationship (Fincham et al., 2005). In other words, dyadic forgiveness is the forgiveness an individual gives to a specific partner over multiple offenses (Berry et al., 2001). Episodic forgiveness refers to one forgiveness act for one concrete offense. It is regarded as an act rather than a personality trait (McCullough et al., 1997; Paleari et al., 2009).

Even though there is no universal definition of interpersonal forgiveness, there is a universal agreement about what forgiveness is not (Forster et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2006; Wade et al., 2014). To forgive is not necessary to reconcile; an individual may decide to forgive and

even end a relationship without the need for reconciliation. Forgiveness is not related to tolerating or excusing an offense (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade & Worthington, 2005). Forgiveness also does not imply negating that an offense had occurred or forgetting the offense, nor does it entail accepting the motives of the offender (Fincham et al., 2006; Rye et al., 2001)

Finkel et al. (2002) stated that forgiveness is directly related to transgression, which is the perceived violation by a member of the relationship of the pre-established norms for that relationship. Therefore, willingness to forgive depends in part on the perceived severity of the transgression (Finkel et al., 2002). Finkel et al. (2002) grouped the common transgressions in couple's relationships in four categories. The first category is described as the violation of the norm of monogamy, which occurs when a partner has been emotionally or physically unfaithful or has exhibited a lack of compromise. Secondly, the violation of dependency norms results from a partner displaying jealousy or possessive behavior. The third category is violating privacy standards, which occurs when a partner shares private information with others, violating the couple's privacy. Lastly is the violation of the norms of decency, which unfolds when a partner lies or deceives the other, insults, embarrasses the other in public, or is critical of the other (Finkel et al., 2002). Within this categorization, infidelity has been considered the most severe offense (Abrahamson et al., 2012). Consequently, infidelity represents the most significant betrayal within a couple's relationship (Gordon et al., 2004), causing a deterioration in trust, stability, and the couple's interpersonal connection.

Once the transgression has occurred, two automatic types of responses may appear. Avoidance occurs when the victim of the betrayal avoids his transgressor. Seeking revenge occurs when the injured person looks for opportunities to hurt his offender (McCullough, 2001). Forgiveness would occur when both avoidance and revenge-seeking (or the desire to engage in

these processes) decrease (Fincham et al., 2006). We can then assert that forgiveness is not the natural response to transgression but rather a conscious choice. Concurrently, forgiveness is conceptualized as mainly an intrapersonal experience that does not include resolution with the offending individual even though reconciliation might be associated with it (Wade et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2014). Likewise, researchers can agree that forgiveness is not condoning, forgetting, excusing the wrongdoing, or simply the absence of resentment and vindictiveness (Wade et al., 2014; Forster et al., 2019). Forgiveness is different from denial, which is the unwillingness to see that damage has occurred, and from extinction, which refers to the removal of the offense from the conscience. It is also different from justification, which involves accepting the reasons why the offender made his mistake (Fincham et al., 2006; Konstam et al., 2001) and, lastly, from reconciliation, which includes the re-establishment of the relationship (e.g., Fincham et al., 2006; Gordon & Baucom, 2003; McCullough et al., 1997). In general, forgiveness is the substitution of bitterness, anger, and feelings of vengeance that are often the result of an offense, with positive emotions of goodwill towards the offender (Wade et al., 2005). Moreover, forgiveness is a complex process in which hostility and unforgiveness are replaced with positive feelings and, more importantly, with new boundaries to preserve the offended individual.

As postulated by researchers, the conceptualization of forgiveness within the psychology literature is not entirely consistent with ordinary usage and, therefore, may be contentious or initially confusing (Harris et al., 2006; Wade et al., 2014). Also, increasing an attitude of forgiveness involves reducing unforgiveness and increasing positive emotions and perspectives, such as empathy, hope, or compassion (Harris et al., 2006). Notwithstanding the existence of common elements in the conceptualization of forgiveness, it continues to be a subject of study due to the complex aspects related to the potential overall benefits of forgiveness, the conditions

in which the presence of benevolence towards the transgressor develops, and the psychological process of forgiving in itself (Guzman, 2010).

The literature suggests that, in relationships, the most relevant aspect of forgiveness is the concept of dyadic forgiveness, which involves the willingness to forgive within a specific relationship (Kachadourian et al., 2004). In relationships, forgiveness has a greater probability of occurrence due to the intimate ties that the individuals share. However, despite the common elements in the conceptualization of forgiveness, some aspects continue to be examined, such as the specific potential benefit of forgiveness in relationships and the models that explain the actual forgiveness process (Guzman, 2010). Moreover, forgiveness has been identified as a strong predictor of a successful relationship (McCullough et al., 2000). Despite this, even forgiveness is somewhat overlooked as a potential intervention to help couples increase their satisfaction within the relationship (Aalgaard et al., 2016) and warrants further study within the field of marital counseling.

The Attitude of Forgiveness

The close relationship between forgiveness and mental health appears to be determined by a person's attitude of forgiveness (Alvaro, 2001; Hight, 2008; McCullough et al., 1998). A great deal of the research about forgiveness has been done by researchers who assumed that forgiveness is largely beneficial and worthwhile (Worthington, 2005). However, almost all scientific accounts admit that forgiveness can be costly to undertake (Alvaro, 2001; Forster et al., 2019). Theoretically, forgiving implies that the hurtful action was seen as wrong; otherwise, there is nothing to forgive. However, offering forgiveness, particularly to an unrepentant offender, could be perceived as minimizing the offense's importance. This minimizing of the offense may prevent forgiveness and, in turn, perpetuates the negative affect and psychological

impact associated with holding onto resentment and anger (McCullough et al., 1998; Wade et al., 2005). People who forgive frequently think they give up the right to retaliate or even the score (Worthington, 2007). Thus, high emotional costs can be experienced by people who express forgiveness (Wade et al., 2005; Witvliet, 2005). Fincham et al. (2005) suggested that severe offenses are more challenging to overcome and may require a more complex understanding of forgiveness.

There is some controversy related to arguments focusing on the elective aspect of forgiveness (Allais, 2008). Past hurtful experiences and traumatic life experiences may lead to negative emotions such as anger, revenge, shame, and guilt that can prevent individuals from living successful lives. In time, these individuals need to overcome these experiences effectively to protect their mental health and to be able to maintain appropriate relationships (Ascioglu & Yalcin, 2017; Wade et al., 2005).

To explain the cognitive and psychological systems in which forgiveness emerges, McCullough et al. (2013) noted that forgiveness and vengeance could act as defense mechanisms and have roots in natural biological responses. Further, the revenge mechanisms are designed to avenge the damage, and the forgiveness mechanisms are designed to solve a problem related to the preservation of the relationship, regardless of the damage (McCullough et al., 2010).

Merolla (2008) established that the emotions produced after transgressions have lasting adverse effects. These negative affective states include anger (Haden & Hojjat, 2006), indignation, regret, sadness, disappointment, loss of self-esteem (Finkel et al., 2002), and pain or anger, these negative emotional states can decrease the probability of granting forgiveness, perpetuating an attitude of resentment and non-forgiveness (Prieto-Ursúa et al., 2012). Individuals exposed to higher levels of betrayal report lower general and interpersonal trust

(Gobin & Freyd, 2013) than those who had not experienced betrayal. Partners who have suffered betrayal more frequently are more likely to either betray or be tolerant of betrayal in the future (Sharpe et al., 2013). According to Allemand et al. (2007), when an interpersonal transgression occurs in a close relationship, the adverse effects can lead to the disturbance of the relationship. Conversely, Tu et al. (2015) concluded that interpersonal trust has an inhibitory effect on betrayal.

While some relationships dissolve due to these transgressions, other couples want to repair the damage done to their relationship and achieve reconciliation. For this, the latter will have to grant and receive true forgiveness, through which it is possible to achieve true reconciliation and the potential rekindling of the relationship. Thus, the process of forgiveness can assist couples in repairing past wounds caused by betrayal, renewing their attachment security, and rebuilding a sense of unity, resulting in significant changes at the heart of the relationship (Butler et al., 2009). Although the probability of granting forgiveness is inversely proportional to the severity of the perceived transgression (Waldron & Kelley, 2005), forgiveness provides a way to endure and cope with interpersonal injuries and is related to positive short-term and long-term consequences (Pell et al., 2008).

Guzmán et al. (2015) noted that forgiveness and apologies are phenomena found in all human relationships and, by extension, in romantic ties. Therefore, when a transgression occurs within close relationships, such as marriages, the presence or absence of forgiveness can have substantial implications for the quality of the relationship (Guzmán, 2010). Due to the intensity of the connection between partners in romantic relationships, forgiveness is an essential element of research (Dillow et al., 2011). The establishment of forgiveness is a critical aspect in recovering from significant transgressions in couples. Forgiveness can be seen as the key to

understanding how people are adept at maintaining a couple's satisfaction (Allemand et al., 2007; Fincham et al., 2006; Karremans & Van Lang, 2004). Similarly, evidence has shown the association between forgiveness and physical, emotional, and relational health (McCullough & Root, 2008; Thompson et al., 2005; Toussiant & Webb, 2005; Tse & Yip, 2009; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Consequently, part of the interest in the study of forgiveness has been formulated within positive psychology and marriage counseling (Casullo, 2008; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002).

Additionally, forgiveness and having an attitude of forgiveness are imperative when addressing past wounds or childhood trauma, even within a marriage. Adults with unresolved past trauma often bring these unresolved issues into their current relationships (Jenna & Wang, 2017). Thus, forgiveness is the first step out of the darkness. It is a conscious, intentional decision to release feelings of bitterness or retribution toward a person or group who has harmed, irrespective of whether they deserve the forgiveness (Hicks, 2018).

Forgiveness may be an essential process, although more highly valued by some groups than others; for example, religious individuals may be more forgiving because, in general, Christians value forgiveness (Kanz, 2000a); Christianity is the religion among the world's religions that is the most characterized by forgiveness (Lampton et al., 2005). In addition, the habitual practice of forgiveness is one of the buffers individuals have against judgment, resentment, and sometimes rejection of their faith (Lampton et al., 2005).

When deciding to forgive, the barriers people face often depend critically upon their meaning of forgiveness (Raj & Wiltermuth, 2016). Forgiveness can be interpreted as an intrapersonal, within-victim phenomenon or an interpersonal, victim-perpetrator phenomenon (Raj & Wiltermuth, 2016). Likewise, experiencing forgiveness is intrapsychic and evident

through one's actions and behavior toward the transgressor. Moreover, expressed forgiveness is explicitly granted to the transgressor (Raj & Wiltermuth, 2016). The biggest problems originate in the lack of forgiveness, which does not improve a couple's relationship (Wade et al., 2014).

Forgiveness is also an essential element in romantic relationships; the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most substantial factors contributing to marital longevity and satisfaction (Wade et al., 2005; Worthington, 1994). Similarly, an attitude of forgiveness seems to correlate closely with intimacy levels in couples (Worthington, 1994). Thus, it is imperative to determine and discuss the construct of forgiveness in ongoing relationships, such as marriage, as a unique phenomenon (Worthington, 1994). Subsequently, it has been suggested that measuring forgiveness is the same as measuring marital quality (Gottman, 1993). In contrast, Fincham & Beach (2002) and Fincham et al. (2004) determined that forgiveness is a unique process and different from marital quality.

Many researchers and clinicians believe that forgiveness is the cornerstone of a successful marriage (Worthington, 1994; Wade et al., 2005). For example, McCullough et al. (2000) found that partners who reported greater satisfaction and commitment also expressed higher levels of forgiveness within their romantic relationships. Although the causal relationship between the constructs is somewhat uncertain, research suggests that a more significant commitment to the relationship facilitates interpersonal forgiveness in couples (McCullough et al., 2000; Finkel et al., 2002).

Forgiveness is also related to conflict resolution among married couples and tends to work independently of relationship satisfaction. For example, Fincham et al. (2004) found that retaliation and avoidance (negative dimensions of forgiveness) among husbands and a lack of benevolence (the positive dimension of forgiveness) among wives were linked to ineffective

conflict resolution. Although both attempts to integrate forgiveness into broader theories of marriage and develop theoretical perspectives on forgiveness in marriage are limited. Therefore, it is widely believed that forgiveness can help couples deal with existing difficulties and prevent the emergence of future problems (Alvaro, 2001). Several possible mechanisms are proposed, including a greater likelihood of confession and apology in satisfying intimate relationships, leading to more forgiveness (Alvaro, 2001; McCullough et al., 1998). There is also emerging evidence that marital quality predicts forgiveness and data that trait forgiveness predicts later marital satisfaction since it appears that forgiveness-based interventions may boost marital satisfaction (Alvaro, 2001).

As previously mentioned, infidelity represents the most significant betrayal within a marital relationship and provokes an immediate downfall in the areas of trust, stability, and connection (Gordon et al., 2004). The implication of emotional or sexual infidelity violates the relational exclusivity within partners. Further, infidelity often means the dissolution of the relationship between partners, especially if it was sexual infidelity, as this is the type of infidelity that is less likely to be forgiven (Pettijoh & Ndoni, 2013). Therefore, infidelity is one of the transgressions that require the most treatment in clinical settings and is also the most difficult to forgive within the marital relationship (Fife et al., 2013). Gender differences have also been observed in relation to the likelihood of forgiving infidelity. Women whose partners betrayed them reported higher hurt, sadness, and insecurity than men, thus impacting their forgiveness attitude (Pazhoohi et al., 2019). Lastly, additional research suggested that, when emotions are more extreme, forgiveness is less likely to occur, especially when individuals perceive or imagine betrayal or a lie denied by the other partner rather than when they recalled an actual negative experience. This demonstrates that anger is a crucial emotion to address when working

on forgiveness (Pazhoohi et al., 2019; Wade et al., 2005). Therefore, assisting couples in reducing anger and developing an attitude of forgiveness may also reignite their intimacy and could benefit many other aspects of their marriage, as it increases commitment and promotes ongoing forgiveness, union, and integration of the couple (Gottman, 1993; Wade et al., 2005). Thus, having a forgiveness attitude is a strong indicator of a long-lasting fulfilled couple's relationships since it appears that there is an associated correlation with being the innocent partner in cases of infidelity and the forgiveness attitude (Pazhoohi et al., 2019).

In Christianity, interpersonal forgiveness is expected to be understood as divine forgiveness (Matthew 18: 21-22, NIV). In other words, as God forgives one, he or she must forgive others since divine forgiveness involves God accomplishing the conditional casting away of sin after both repentance and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and unconditionally drawing the person in love (Enright et al., 1992). Forgiveness in religious settings has been positively correlated with a measure of relationship satisfaction and commitment (Wade et al., 2014; Forster et al., 2019). A partner's forgiveness is often viewed as a manifestation of spirituality, suggesting that a partner's spiritual beliefs about marriage indicate their ability to forgive (Alvaro, 2001; Hight, 2008). Studies noted that an increase in spirituality causes an increase in the attitude of forgiveness (Exline et al., 2004; Edwards et al., 2002). Individuals who consider themselves more spiritual possess a more substantial moral value of forgiveness and consider themselves more capable of forgiveness than those who consider themselves less spiritual (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). However, individuals who report being more spiritual are not necessarily more forgiven but rather believe and are convinced to do it.

Religiosity is characterized by autoregulation, providing the individual with a moral code and the capacity to autoregulate and fulfill that code (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). The

effects of spirituality in the forgiveness of a transgression do not cause a unidirectional relationship (Tsang et al., 2005). The fact that a person is spiritual or religious is not a dispositional factor of forgiveness. The attitude of forgiveness may also be related to the individual's desire to show as spiritual or religious (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In addition, studies suggest that religiosity can exert pressure over the individual to forgive independently of the affect and cognition generated by the offense (Mullet et al., 2005).

Couple Satisfaction

Couple satisfaction can be conceptualized as how the couple perceives and experiences their marital life (Sánchez, 2011) or as the favorable attitude or unfavorable towards the relationship in a given moment (Roach et al., 1981). Different authors conceptualized marital satisfaction as the global and subjective evaluation that an individual makes of his spouse and his relationship, so it is subject to the personal perceptions of each member of the dyadic relationship (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Paez, 2004). Burr (1970) stated that it is the evaluation of specific aspects of married life. While Boland & Follingstad (1987) point out that marital satisfaction is a general description of attitudes, feelings, and self-reports of marriage that are framed in dichotomous polarities such as happiness versus unhappiness and satisfaction versus dissatisfaction. Roach et al. (1981) instead propose that marital satisfaction is the attitude of favorability or unfavorability towards one's marital relationship. Therefore, the quality of the marriage bond is determined by the attitude expressed in response to this estimate (Pick & Andrade, 1988b; Rojas, 2007). Thus, it can be observed that marital satisfaction as a concept is a multidimensional entity that includes personal aspects such as adjustment and happiness and interpersonal levels such as consensus and cohesion (Margalef, 2006).

Couple satisfaction has been a focus of research. In regards to the marital relationship, most findings concur that marital satisfaction changes as the duration of the marriage increases. However, there is conflicting evidence regarding how marital satisfaction changes (Miranda & Ávila, 2008; Pick & Andrade, 1988). Some studies have found that marital satisfaction decreases progressively over time (Pick & Andrade, 1988; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). In other studies, satisfaction in marriage is high in the early years, decreases in the intervening years, and increases again later (Pollard et al., 1998; Burr, 1970). Such contradictions are reported both in studies that measure global rates of marital satisfaction and those that show satisfaction scores in different areas of marital interaction (Burr, 1970; Miranda & Avila, 2008). Regardless of the trajectory of marital satisfaction, most scholars agree that marital satisfaction is an important indicator of overall marital happiness and stability, and also is a predictor of many other variables of interest within the study of close relationships (Hicks & Platt, 1970).

Marriage is conceived as a dynamic process, subject to various changes that allow growth in the couple over time (Cole, 2002; Covarrubias et al., 1988). The marital relationship leads two people in building a bond of love and mutual satisfaction, which translates into a sense of well-being in the company of the other (Adolfi & Zwerling, 1985; Bucay & Salinas, 2000; Carrillo, 2004; Cole, 2002; Covarrubias et al., 1988b; Elsner et al., 2000; O'Neill, 1978; Roche, 2006; Sarquis et al., 2003; Valdez et al., 2005). The marital relationship is considered one of the most complex human relationships, being subject solely and exclusively to the will of the people who build it (Elsner et al., 2000). In this regard, Sager (1976) points out that the quality of the marriage relationship is determined by the conscious and unconscious expectations of the members of the dyadic relationship. Thus, the conjugal relationship acquires a special meaning for each partner since it represents an interpersonal bond of behaviors, affections, emotions, and

dynamics that under their presence characterize and describe each of the members of the system and the relationship they make up (Sarquis et al., 2003). Marital relationships face a series of imbalances that are not always easy when they are accompanied by fears, insecurities, oppressions, dependencies, incompatibility of personal projects, among other things that can overtake their willingness to continue with the relationship (Cole, 2002; Sarquis et al., 2003). Maintaining higher levels of couples satisfaction assists in consolidating feelings of unity, trust, affection, and solidarity that allow them to overcome personal difficulties and face the changes of the marital cycle (Elsner et al., 2000; Roche, 2006; Sarquis et al., 2003).

According to Moral (2008), there are three models that can be used to approach the concept of marital satisfaction: one-dimensional, two-dimensional, and multidimensional. The one-dimensional model primarily considers an underlying value dimension: pleasure-displeasure. Using this model, authors such as Locke & Wallace (1959) point out that satisfaction is the product of a balance between positive and negative aspects of marriage. Conversely, the two-dimensional model states that happiness in marital life is not one-dimensional but is a complex state resulting from two independent dimensions: satisfaction and dissatisfaction, with happiness resulting from the balance between both dimensions (Larson & Bahr, 1980). Last, the multidimensional model defines satisfaction as a multidimensional attitude towards the spouse and the marital relationship. In all models, there are aspects such as interaction, expression of affections, aspects of dyadic organization, and structure (Pick & Andrade, 1988).

There are established and significant positive relationships between relationship satisfaction and both mental and physical health (Bradbury et al., 2000; Feeney, 2002; Gottman & Levenson, 1999). Further, the relationship's satisfaction constitutes the gold standard for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions designed to address marital conflict (Mattson et al.,

2012). Thus, research has sought to identify factors that increase relationship/couple satisfaction. In this context, and particularly in the positive psychology framework, various studies have concluded that the capacity to forgive increases couple satisfaction (e.g., Braithwaite et al., 2011; Fincham et al., 2006; Gordon et al., 2009; Kachadourian et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Paleari et al., 2005).

According to Guzmán (2010), in relationships, there is always the possibility of feeling hurt by the partner's behaviors. Similarly, in most relationships, conflicts that occur are often related to feeling hurt or betrayed by the other person's behavior (Guzmán et al., 2015). Because of the nature of marriage, the likelihood of experiencing transgressions is high, with transgressions ranging from slight and unintentional emotional injuries (such as saying something without thinking or forgetting an appointment) to more severe ones (such as betraying trust, lying with impunity, or being unfaithful) (Pell et al., 2008). Even though offenses are part of a couple's dynamics in all relationships, the amount of hurt reported in response to offenses can vary greatly between individuals. When these offenses are extremely painful, an individual may develop attachment injuries (Johnson et al., 2001). In such instances, there is a subjective experience of non-forgiveness frequently characterized by feelings of pain, anger, fantasies of revenge, avoidance behaviors, or distance from the transgressor (Prieto-Ursúa et al., 2012). Therefore, the perceived severity of the offense and the degree of the resulting hurt can influence couple satisfaction.

Just as lack of forgiveness can decrease couple satisfaction, forgiving can potentially improve couple satisfaction. Specific to the relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction, the literature noted that marital satisfaction is associated with higher levels of dyadic adjustment in forgiveness (Gordon & Baucom, 2003); this effect was observed cross-sectionally

and longitudinally (Paleari et al., 2005). Concurrently, the higher levels of dyadic adjustment in forgiveness are associated with patterns of more constructive communication and minimal levels of psychological aggression (Fincham & Beach, 2002). It is also associated with experiencing the relationship in more positive terms (Kachadourian et al., 2004). Thus, an increase in the attitude of forgiveness can influence the development of more positive cognitions of self and of the relationship and achieve greater closeness and intimacy in the relationship (Finkel et al., 2002).

Braithwate et al. (2011) noted that the association between forgiveness and couple satisfaction could be explained by decreasing conflicts and attempts to self-regulate specific responses to care for and maintain the relationship. Although there is research documenting the relationship between the two variables, most studies have considered the forgiveness of particular offenses or forgiveness as a characteristic of the personality rather than the tendency to forgive within a relationship (i.e., dyadic forgiveness). However, it is possible that forgiveness is not solely related to the individual's personality traits but also results from the relationship's dynamics and foundation.

Because both lack forgiveness and forgiveness have been found to influence couple satisfaction, it is important to consider factors that increase or decrease the likelihood of forgiving. Various factors can influence the likelihood of forgiving in relationships, including the couple's level of commitment. The commitment represents the experience of dependence in a relationship and long-term orientation, including feelings of attachment towards the partner and the desire to maintain the relationship, for better or worse (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). Thus, commitment is a subjective state with cognitive and emotional components directly influencing a wide range of behaviors within an ongoing relationship, including forgiveness in relationships

(Arriaga & Agnew, 2001). A higher degree or level of commitment between partners facilitates, or not, the granting of forgiveness in couple relationships (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001).

Rusbult (1983) suggested three factors that influenced commitment: the level of satisfaction, or positive or negative consequences experienced in the relationship; the quality of the alternatives, or perception of the convenience of available options to the current relationship; and the investment in the relationship, or resources tied to a relationship that would be lost if it were to end (Rusbult et al., 1998). These factors are distinguished from commitment, which, in turn, has its psychological reality, such as being psychologically attached, adopting a long-term orientation, and intending to maintain the relationship. However, a strong psychological attachment, long-term orientation, and the intention to persist are not the only indicators of a compromised state in a relationship. Instead, these components are some psychological characteristics of being engaged (Gottman, 2002). Rusbult (1983) suggested that the basis through which human relationships are formed, especially couple relationships, is through cost-benefit analysis and available alternatives. Commitment in relationships is a multidimensional construct including psychological attachment to the relationship, long-term orientation regarding the relationship, and the intention to persist in it (Arriaga et al., 2016).

The level of satisfaction in a relationship has been conceptualized as a psychological state that is involuntary and requires investment from both partners (Allemand et al., 2007). In particular, the couples' satisfaction is related to each partner's reported levels of happiness and enjoyment of their relationship; satisfaction is one of the more significant indicators associated with the quality of the relationship (Bradbury et al., 2000). Further, satisfaction in the relationship is considered one of the main factors related to forgiveness (Worthington, 1998). Research completed has identified a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and

forgiveness (e.g., Allemand et al., 2007; Paleari et al., 2005) and a negative correlation between low satisfaction and lack of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998). Moreover, research completed by McCullough et al. (1998) noted that both the level of commitment and the couples' satisfaction in a relationship are associated negatively with the desire to avenge and the avoidance reported by the participants after suffering a transgression, as well as the negative recalling of the incident.

The association between couples' satisfaction and forgiveness is bidirectional (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Subsequently, longitudinal studies provided evidence that marital satisfaction is a predictor of forgiveness, and forgiveness is also a predictor of marital satisfaction (Finchman & Beach, 2007; Paleari et al., 2005). Additional research has also noted that forgiveness is a predictor of couples' satisfaction when related explicitly to transgressions in couples (e.g., Aalgaard et al., 2016; Finchman et al., 2006; Greenberg et al., 2010).

Lastly, forgiveness can help partners heal emotionally after being hurt or offended by their partners (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015; Manahem & Love, 2013) and is linked to more satisfying romantic relationships (Aalgaard et al., 2016), with more significant commitment (Finkel et al., 2002) and having more quality-based relationships (Berry & Worthington, 2001). At an individual level, people who forgive report fewer physical health problems (Toussaint et al., 2012), are less depressed (Worthington, 2007), have a better quality of sleep (Stoia-Carballo et al., 2008), report greater levels of life's satisfaction (Macaskill, 2012), and face adversity maintaining positive affect and mood (Hampes, 2016).

Measurements of Forgiveness

The development of ways to measure forgiveness began in the late eighties (e.g., Wade, 1989). With the growth in theoretical and empirical research, many scales and a wide variety of

measured dimensions are now available to study both the positive factors (positive affection and prosocial attitudes towards the transgressor characteristic of forgiveness) and negative factors (negative affect and dissociative attitudes towards the transgressor) of forgiveness.

The elaboration of different measurements has been primarily focused on measuring the general disposition to forgive, the process of forgiving a concrete offense, and the forgiveness of multiple offenses by the same offender. One of the first scales created to evaluate the general propensity to forgive is called Forgiveness of Others by Mauger et al. (1992). The Psychological Profile of Forgiveness and the Willingness to Forgive Scale, both developed by Hebl & Enright (1993), were developed afterward. The Forgiveness Questionnaire (Gorsuch & Hao, 1993), The Family Forgiveness Scale (Pollard et al., 1998), The Forgiveness Questionnaire (Mullet et al., 1998), and the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations- TRIM-12 (McCullough et al., 1998) followed. It is during the last decade that more scales were developed, including the Forgiveness Attitudes Questionnaire (Kanz, 2000b), Forgiveness Likelihood Scales (Rye et al., 2001), the Tendency to Forgive (Brown, 2003), the Willingness to Forgive Scale (DeShea, 2003), the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005), the Forgiving Personality Scale (Kamat, 2006), the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (Worthington et al., 2007), the Family Forgiveness Questionnaire (Maio et al., 2008), the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Enright, 2008), the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (Berry & Worthington, 2001), and the Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2000), which are among the most popular measurements of forgiveness. The last two are the most utilized scales in the latest research.

Regardless of the number of instruments available to measure forgiveness, there is still the need to create more valid, reliable, and culturally-relevant instruments that measure forgiveness in partners (specifically resentment) in more diverse ethnic groups (Enright &

Fitzgibbons, 2011). Also, the available instruments have both the positive and negative dimensions, which are considered within forgiveness but do not generate a direct measurement of resentment; resentment is instead inferred from low forgiveness scores or measured by reverse scoring in the negative dimensions with are considered the composite score (e.g., Enright & Rique, 2004; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Paleari et al., 2009; Rye et al., 2001; Wade, 1989; Worthington et al., 2008). Other measures infer forgiveness from low scores in resentment (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998).

Not all authors report the results of exploratory factor analysis, but in the review made the percentages of variance explained ranged from 43.9% (Forgiveness Likelihood Scale; Rye et al., 2001) and 68% (TRIM-12; McCullough et al., 1998); however, the TRIM-12, only has two negative dimensions (avoidance and revenge), so it does not constitute a direct measurement of forgiveness, which weakens its content validity. In addition, indicators of internal consistency are lower when having instruments with both positive and negative dimensions (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2002; Paleari et al., 2009; Rosales et al., 2016; Rye et al., 2001), which also suggests that forgiveness and resentment are two distinct constructs.

Forgiveness (positive dimensions) and resentment (negative dimensions) may not be the extremes of a continuum, as they have low covariance (Rosales et al., 2016). It has even been consistently found that positive and negative dimensions do not necessarily correlate with the same variables (e.g., Enright & Gassin, 1992; Kato, 2016; Stoia-Carballo et al., 2008). So it is possible that findings interpreting forgiveness are being reported when, in fact, resentment was measured (e.g., Beltrán-Morillas et al., 2015; Watkins et al., 2011), or a single score composed of reagents of forgiveness and resentment with inverted tips is being integrated (e.g., Exline & Zell, 2009; Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2012). It is also worth noting that there is discussion and

disagreement regarding the measurement of reconciliation as part of the measurement of forgiveness. Specifically, Coyle & Enright (1998) distinguished forgiveness from pseudo-forgiveness, which includes oblivion, justification, apology, denial, minimization, disregard, and, indeed, reconciliation, because couple relationships can be maintained while still harboring vindictive motivations of avoidance, anger, anger, or anguish. Still, none of the measurements are focused on the nature of the transgression, which is fundamental to measuring forgiveness or resentment. Thus, it may be necessary to develop other instruments that measure forgiveness and resentment independently, without assuming one from the scores of the other.

This study utilized the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) as the pre-test and post-test, which has precise components for measuring the attitude towards forgiveness (Enright & Rique, 2004). The Enright Forgiveness Inventory is a self-report measure that assesses forgiveness as a multidimensional phenomenon. A global scale is subdivided into three dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of interpersonal forgiveness. The global EFI covers 60 objective items, and each factor consists of 20 items which must be answered using a concordance scale of six points (1- Strongly disagree, 6- Strongly agree). Forgiveness is indicated by increased positive affections, judgments, and behaviors towards the offense and the offender (Enright & Rique, 2004).

Measurements of Couple Satisfaction

Most married individuals express that the quality of the marital relationship has a strong effect on the reported happiness and satisfaction with life overall and that, in turn, marital satisfaction affects the marital relationship overall. For this reason, the research tries to identify and study the factor associated with the initiation, maintenance, and termination of a marital relationship (Arias-Galicia, 2003; Herrera, 2007). In this case, couples' satisfaction.

Various instruments aim to measure the satisfaction construct in the couple from a one-dimensional approach. These include the Marital Satisfaction Scale (Roach et al., 1981), which measures people's perception of their marriage, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1983), which assesses, with three reagents, a person's current satisfaction with their partner, the Marital Satisfaction Index (Hudson, 1992), a two-factor scale considered an instrument of one-dimensional orientation due to the high correlation between them, and the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) which examines the overall value judgment of the person towards their relationship among others.

This study utilized the Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI) (Funk & Rogge, 2007) as a measurement tool for a couple's satisfaction. This scale can be adapted into 4, 8, 16, or 32 version scales. The higher results scores indicate higher satisfaction levels with the relationship (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Funk & Rogge (2007) compared the CSI with several other assessments, including the Dyadic Assessment Scales, the Quality of Marriage Index, the Semantic Differential, the Marital Adjustment Test, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, and reported correlation coefficients between 0.85 and 0.98 with all the measures (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

REACH Model

Psychoeducation interventions and other models have been developed to try to teach the concept of forgiveness. The main objective of most is to provide steps to teaching forgiveness in clinical settings. If successful, an individual can learn to forgive through a teaching and education model or psychotherapeutic interventions. Two of the most prominent models are Enright (1998a) and Worthington (2008). Based on their research, they propose a therapeutic model generally applicable to individuals. Enright (1998) developed a model consisting of four

stages and 20 steps. Worthington's model (2008), REACH, indicates a more straightforward approach with only five steps to achieve forgiveness. This study will focus on the application of the REACH Model.

Everett Worthington (2008) suggested that the lack of forgiveness is similar to resentment. Moreover, a mixture of emotions between pain and offense occurs as people repeatedly remember a transgression (Worthington, 2008). For this reason, an individual may seek to get rid of the negative feeling, and the most effective is, of course, forgiveness, though not the only method as Worthington (2008) also noted an alternative to forgiveness, the reduction of non-forgiveness, if forgiveness is not a viable option. On the contrary, forgiveness is the experience of empathy, compassion, agape love, even gratitude for the experience; it is an emotion opposite to the previous one and is replaced by a positive tonality. Beyond resolving a conflict, it is essential to recognize what next steps are needed while working towards forgiveness and reconciliation. It is, therefore, necessary, from this perspective, to repair the damage done.

Worthington (2008), as noted above, differentiates between reducing unforgiveness and the actual action of forgiving. He developed the REACH model to address the latest one, a methodological process that responds to a 5-stage process. During the first step of the model, the individual "recalls" recognizing and remembering the wound (Worthington, 2008). Secondly, the individual is encouraged to be empathetic with the offender by placing the moments when the victim has been a perpetrator or moments when she or he can remember gratitude for being forgiven, a step called "empathy" (Worthington, 2008). Third, the "altruistic" step invites the person to forgive in an almost altruistic way, deliver forgiveness (Worthington, 2008). Next, the individual can commit to the process, a step called "commitment" (Worthington, 2008). Finally,

work is encouraged to sustain the forgiveness process over time, a step known as “hold” (Worthington, 2008).

Regarding the REACH model, Wade et al. (2014) noted that a six-hour psychoeducational group treatment showed $SD = 0.6$ for forgiveness. Further, more increases were recorded in individual therapy than in group interventions. Specifically, the variable of time was the primary factor in the quantity of forgiveness experienced by an individual with an increase of 0.1 SD per hour of intervention. This model was not superior to other models.

Other Psychotherapeutic Interventions to Promote Forgiveness

The study of psychotherapeutic interventions focusing on forgiveness has grown significantly in the past two decades, specifically in the assessment and further exploration of psychotherapeutic interventions solely focusing on promoting forgiveness and increasing an individual’s attitude of forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010; Worthington, 2005). As a result, a significant amount of research has been completed to assess if, in fact, therapeutic interventions that include forgiveness reduce common mental health problems and promotes marital satisfaction, positive affect, gratitude, hope, self-esteem, and spiritual health (i.e., Akhtar et al., 2017; Lundahl et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2005). Initial evidence establishes the efficacy of these forgiveness interventions, showing that they benefit participants by increasing their attitude of forgiveness, increasing hope and psychological well-being, and decreasing depression, anger, and anxiety (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade et al., 2005).

Forgiveness is an often long and challenging process. Various factors can inflame the memories of the betrayal. Adverse effects can be re-lived repeatedly, producing anger and frustration in the victim and impeding forgiveness (Fife et al., 2013). In this case, when the individual cannot forgive, he or she engages in self-preservation mechanisms to deal with the

betrayal. According to Finkel et al. (2002), these mechanisms are classified into four groups: harmful (exit), actively destructive strategies, such as seeking revenge; conciliatory (voice), actively constructive strategies, such as suggesting that the couple talks about what happened; permissive (loyalty), passively constructive strategies, such as continuing to put up with the partner, despite not being satisfied; and vengeful (neglect), passively destructive strategy, such as turning your back on your partner. Therefore, to facilitate forgiveness, the emphasis is on enhancing the presence of four unifying factors: empathy, humility, repentance, and commitment (Fife et al., 2013). These unifying factors help the couple regain trust, solidarity, and connection lost because of the transgression. In addition, working with the couple to facilitate the path to forgiveness can assist in the development of new relationship goals and meaning of the relationship, understanding sooner or later overcoming the transgression.

Since seeking to promote forgiveness in psychotherapy is more than simply reducing anger, bitterness, and vengeful rumination, the promotion of forgiveness as a psychotherapeutic method is more than merely reducing negative thoughts and feelings; it also includes helping clients move toward more positive, even optimal functioning (Wade et al., 2014). This is in line with a positive psychotherapy perspective that seeks to attend to and develop strengths rather than minimize problems (Gelso & Woodhouse, 2003; Seligman et al., 2006).

Forgiveness entails the degree to which individuals within a relationship can remove negative thoughts and feelings toward a transgressor (Thompson & Simkins, 2017). The forgiveness process begins with the release of the anger, hostility, or antipathy aroused by the offense and, at a minimum, requires abstaining from negative actions (Thompson & Simkins, 2017). Forgiveness stops the cycle of anger and hostility but does not require reconciliatory behaviors (Thompson & Simkins, 2017). Although forgiveness has received much attention in

the past two decades and its role in physical and mental health is being increasingly recognized, there is still a level of unawareness of its therapeutic benefits. Although forgiveness has shown beneficial, more research is needed, especially in inpatient psychiatric individuals. The role of bitterness and resentment in the connection of psychiatric disorders remains undervalued and requires further study (Gangdev, 2009).

While the majority of prior research explored the effects of group-based forgiveness therapy or dispositional forgiveness on specific mental health problems, or in limited cases, connections with personal levels of happiness, in recent times, an impetus has been given to forgiveness by the recent developments in the positive psychology movement, with forgiveness being recognized as a positive psychological attribute (Akhtar et al., 2017; Gangdev, 2009). Psychoanalysts, dialectical behavior therapists, and cognitive behavior therapists have all recognized the importance of forgiveness in healing, concluding that forgiveness is a virtue and a moral act that has therapeutic potential (Gangdev, 2009).

Specifically, for couples, marital group therapy and marital enrichment interventions are among the types of treatment that have been used to facilitate forgiveness among couples (Alvaro, 2001; Thompson & Simkins, 2017; Wade et al., 2014). In contrast, not all programs for facilitating forgiveness provide a complete answer to marital breakdown or relationship reconciliation, even if they are relatively effective in reducing retaliatory motives in the relatively calm, nonconflictual setting of forgiveness groups (Alvaro, 2001).

Even though the temporal relationships between forgiveness and psychological well-being, relationship satisfaction, and relationship duration are still not well established, research completed by Thompson et al. (2003) noted that having an attitude of forgiveness not only benefits the individual's mental health but also influences the dispositional attitude of

forgiveness as an essential factor in the maintenance of healthy intimate relationships. Equally, forgiving people tend to have longer, more satisfying romantic relationships than people who are comparatively lower in forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2003). Thus, research suggests that specific treatments to help people forgive their offenders can be effective more than no treatment, resulting in less revenge, fewer adverse reactions toward the offender, and fewer psychological symptoms (Wade & Meyer, 2009).

Moreover, a randomized controlled trial of treatment for forgiveness was compared between the Enright Process Model and the REACH Forgiveness Model, noted that both modalities produce changes in the attitude of forgiveness, according to the hours of therapy while also improving depression, anxiety, and life expectancy (Enright & Rique, 2004). Interestingly, research completed correlating forgiveness, and the attitude of forgiveness with somatization of symptoms and further pathological manifestations indicated that low levels of self-forgiveness were associated with eating disorder symptomatology, noting that individuals with eating disorders had lower levels of self-forgiveness when compared to control participants (Watson, 2008).

Still, on average, direct forgiveness interventions were more effective at promoting forgiveness than the alternatives. In addition, individual research projects indicate that forgiveness interventions might be more effective than specific psychotherapeutic interventions for dealing with some problems (Lin et al., 2004; Reed & Enright, 2006). Additional research noted that duration of therapy is fundamental to experiencing forgiveness; forgiveness is increased per hour of treatment (Enright & Rique, 2004). Moreover, a more significant result was obtained in the individual treatment than in a group setting (Wade et al., 2014). On the other hand, Baskin & Enright (2004) compared individual process-based interventions to process- and

decision-based group interventions, noting that individual interventions produced more significant results than group or couple interventions. Lastly, when using a short-term model, duration should be expected to play an essential role (Worthington et al., 2000a; Worthington et al., 2000b).

Summary

The present status of the research to date suggests that interventions on forgiveness are viable and successful for dealing with transgressions. Further, effects are maintained following the termination of the treatment, and the status of the research to date suggests that teaching forgiveness in therapeutic settings is a viable and evidence-based treatment for dealing with unforgiveness (Gangdev, 2009; Enright & Rique, 2004; Wade et al., 2014; Worthington et al., 2000b).

It seems to be robust literature supporting the positive correlation between the time individuals spent participating in explicit forgiveness interventions and the promotion of forgiveness in general. Interestingly, general psychotherapy supplemented by adjunctive forgiveness-promoting treatments, such as adjunctive psychoeducational groups to extend the amount of forgiveness, seemed to matter little in the number of benefits participants derived (Fehr et al., 2010; Wade et al., 2014; Worthington, 2005).

Although forgiveness interventions appear effective in promoting forgiveness and benefiting mental health overall, questions about moderators that can affect the forgiveness process in individuals remain unaddressed (Makinen & Johnson, 2006; Wade et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2014). It also remains essential to continue to explore the interplay between faith and forgiveness in the context of commitment and marital sanctity. This last also includes more research into couple therapy that explicitly promotes forgiveness, and more general couple

therapy would help develop our understanding more in this critical area (Makinen & Johnson, 2006; Wade et al., 2005;).

Many factors may positively or negatively influence forgiveness and the individual's well-being, such as seeing the offender as spiritually similar to self, shifting responsibility/karma, blaming, wanting restitution/apology, as well as practices such as prayer and meditation (Alvaro, 2001; Makinen & Johnson, 2006; Wade et al., 2005). Thus, to understand how forgiveness in individuals influences marital interaction and the relationship, there is also an implied need to explore forgiveness at an implicit, nonconscious level, mainly related to the prevailing focus of forgiveness as a voluntary and intentional act which also may need to be supplemented by a focus on forgiveness readiness (Alvaro, 2001; Enright & Rique, 2004).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Romantic relationships give meaning and purpose to the lives of human beings, although they are also the source of conflict, tension, and disillusionment (Díaz-Loving, 2010). When an interpersonal transgression has hurt a person, they may experience intense negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, contempt, fear, frustration, and worry (McCullough et al., 1997), which in addition to cracking the relationship, can also be deeply painful for the individual (Gunderson & Ferrari, 2008).

This study focused on completing a program evaluation to measure the impact of a REACH-based curriculum on the attitude of forgiveness in married couples attending the 3-hour class. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory and the Couples Satisfaction Index were utilized as pre-test and post-test to measure the difference in total factors influencing the willingness to forgive a partner and its influence on the overall couples' satisfaction.

Design

Research Topic

This study focused on assessing the effectiveness of a forgiveness curriculum by measuring the attitude of forgiveness in married couples participating in a 3-hour forgiveness class/group incorporating the Everett Worthington's Forgiveness Model (REACH). The study focused on completing a program evaluation to measure the impact of this curriculum on couples attending the forgiveness class. This study was descriptive and observational. According to Hernández et al. (2010), this type of research is appropriate when the aim is not to establish causality between the factors, noting that it also has limitations because it does not allow the

manipulation of the variables, nor establish causal relationships safely since it investigates the factors in their natural environment.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the impact a curriculum-based forgiveness training on couples' attitudes towards forgiveness as measured by The Enright Forgiveness Inventory?

RQ2: Is there a difference in scores on the attitude of forgiveness between couples who report low marital satisfaction versus couples who report high marital satisfaction as measured by The Couple's Satisfaction Index and The Enright Forgiveness Inventory after participation in the class?

Hypotheses

This study assessed the hypothesis that participation in forgiveness training affects the attitude of forgiveness in married couples based on the pre-test and post-test responses to The Enright Forgiveness Inventory.

H_{a1}: There will be a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores on The Enright Forgiveness Inventory after the REACH Model class in the experimental group.

H_{a1}: There will be a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores on the Couples Satisfaction Index after the REACH Model class in the experimental group.

Participants and Setting

Participants: Adult Married Couples

Participants were recruited through a convenience sampling method of couples; members of the study were added based on availability. A total of 32 couples participated in the forgiveness class.

Setting

The study took place at a religious organization setting, where the pre-test and post-test were completed at the beginning and the end of the forgiveness class.

Instrumentation

Demographic Questionnaire

Participant information, including age, gender, ethnicity, length of the marriage, number of marriages, number of children, income range, issue related to unforgiveness, and education level, were included to ensure group diversity.

The Enright Forgiveness Inventory

The Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) assesses the individuals' forgiveness of a specific transgression committed by another person. Responses to 60 items on a 6-point scale reflect how individuals feel, behave, and think about the transgressor (spouse), and the sum of six subscales yields a forgiveness score (Enright & Rique, 2004). The EFI measures two dimensions, the positive dimension consisting of positive behavior, positive cognition, and positive affect, and the negative dimension, which consists of negative behavior, negative cognition, and negative affect (Enright & Rique, 2004). The positive affect is characterized by a pleasurable emotionality towards the relationship, despite the transgressive behavior; positive thought patterns about the couple characterize the positive cognition, and long-term well-being is desired despite the transgressive behavior, and the positive behavior is the prosocial behavioral manifestations towards the relationship despite the previous transgressive behavior (Enright &

Rique, 2004). In contrast, the negative affect is the maintenance of an unpleasant state of emotionality, including emotional discomfort in the individual towards the relationship due to the transgressive behavior, the negative cognition is the maintenance of thought patterns that imply a negative perception about the partner due to the transgressive behavior, and the negative behaviors include both avoidances, tendency to reserve distance or ignore the partner due to transgressive behavior on the part of the partner or, revenge by the persistence of behaviors and cognitions that denote the desire for the partner to suffer for having caused harm (Enright & Fitzgibbonz, 2011; Enright & Rique, 2004).

This inventory has abundant evidence of construct validity and reliability: it maintains $\alpha=.95$ to $.99$ across cultures (Enright & Fitzgibbonz, 2011). The cost for the license to reproduce the tool was \$2.50 per participant. This license allows for the administration of the EFI via hard copy. The PDF file provided includes a copy of the EFI, permission to reproduce/administer the EFI for up to the quantity purchased, and the scoring key.

The Couples Satisfaction Index

The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) is a 32-item scale designed to measure an individual's level of satisfaction in a relationship. The measurement scale has a variety of items with different response scales and formats. The scale can be used as a 4, 8, 16, or 32-item format depending on the researcher's needs (Funk & Rogge, 2007). All the versions of the CSI scales are available free of charge for research and clinical use. For the purpose of this study, the CSI-4 was utilized. Funk & Rogge (2007) compared the CSI with several other assessments, including the Dyadic Assessment Scales, the Quality of Marriage Index, the Semantic Differential, the Marital Adjustment Test, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction

Scale, and reported correlation coefficients between 0.85 and 0.98 with all the measures (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Procedures

Recruitment

Participants were encouraged to join a free-of-cost forgiveness group session.

Participants were recruited through a convenience sampling method; members of the study were added based on availability. A total of 32 couples participated in the forgiveness class. The group information was posted before the class; the participant letter (see Appendix A) and the informed consent letter (see Appendix B) were available for the interested parties to review throughout the entire time.

A convenience sample allows for the selection of those accessible cases that agree to be included. This sample is based on the convenient accessibility and proximity of the subjects for the researcher. This sampling method allows for the costs of a study to be lower if the data of interest can be obtained from a general population sample. It also allows for efficiency since working with a small number of study subjects, representative of the desired population, the time required to conduct the study and obtain results and conclusions is ostensibly less (Otzen & Manterola, 2017). However, one limitation is related to the sample size since it could create an inadequate representation of the target population because of the small sample (Otzen & Manterola, 2017).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

After receiving phone contact from the 66 potential participants, the researcher contacted the participants to complete the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) via phone with each individual. After completing the questionnaire, the researcher determined the

appropriateness of the individuals for the intended group. The group from which the data was drawn met the criteria of married couples with disclosed unforgiveness issues in their marriage through infidelity, substance abuse, or others. From the inquiries received by phone, one couple was excluded due to their non-married status. A total of 64 married individuals or 32 couples were enrolled in the group.

Group Process

The couples were provided with the date and the time of the group and asked to at 9:00 am. On the stated date, the individuals arrived and were welcomed and escorted to a seat where they found the REACH workbook, two (2) copies of the pre-tests and post-tests (CSI and EFI), and a pen. Each copy set had a code number per participant, so the pre-test and post-test results could be paired and analyzed later. The participants were instructed to respond to the questions on the EFI using and exploring transgressions they have received from their partner while in the relationship and later rate their current level of marital satisfaction on the CSI. The participants were instructed to complete the pre-tests within a 30-minute time frame and, upon completion, to place them face down in a box labeled “pre-test.” The group began promptly at 9:30 a.m.

The participants participated in a 2-hour group. The REACH model of forgiveness was discussed using a guided workbook titled *Your Path to REACH Forgiveness: Become a More Forgiving Person in Less Than Two Hours* (Worthington, 2020) (see Appendix D). The class style was both psychoeducational and had process group components. In group work, processing refers to an activity that helps group members identify, examine, and reflect on their behaviors and what occurred in a group to increase understanding, extract meaning, integrate knowledge, and improve their functioning and outcomes (Ward, 2014). Also, processing activities and events in the group help group participants better identify their experiences in the group and relate to

their personal lives (Ward, 2014). Participants had the time, as stated in the workbook, to complete each exercise.

During the class, the researcher introduced, discussed, and explored Worthington's REACH Forgiveness Model: R = remember the damage, E = empathize with the other person, A = altruistic gift, C = commit, and H = hold onto forgiveness. For each letter, specific interventions will be completed and processed as detailed in the workbook (see appendix A). Participants were asked to apply these concepts in specific scenarios in their marriage.

Upon completing the class, the individuals were asked to complete EFI and the CSI again as post-tests within a 30-minute time frame and placed them face down in a box labeled "post-test" before they left. Participants left as they finished their tests.

The scores were analyzed and compared to the pre-test to answer the research questions and establish the level of significance. This study is observational of data in nature rather than seeking cause and effect.

Variables

Independent Variable: $X \rightarrow Y$, X =Participation in the REACH class

An X represents the independent variable. This variable is the factor that the researcher measures, manipulates, or selects to determine its relationship with the observed phenomenon or phenomena. This variable is also known as a stimulus or input variable in which the researcher manipulates to see the effects it produces on another variable. In the most straightforward relationship, a researcher studies what would happen to the effect variable when the values of the causal variable or independent variable change. For this study, the independent variable is the REACH curriculum class. In order to assess the impact and its effectiveness, participants completed the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for adults as a pre-test and again after the

completion of the class to measure the effectiveness of the class in increasing the attitude of forgiveness.

Dependent Variable: X → Y, Y=Attitude of Forgiveness

The Y represents the dependent variable. This variable is the factor that the researcher measures and observes to determine the effect of the independent variable. The dependent variable is known as the output variable. It is the factor that fluctuates as a result of the independent variable. For this study, the dependent variables are the attitude of forgiveness and the couples' satisfaction, measured by pre-test and post-test results. This variable is the resulting feelings and behavior of an individual that has been stimulated with the information and experience of participating in the REACH class. The dependent variable is considered so because its values will depend on the values of the independent variable. The dependent variable represents the consequence of the changes in the subject under study or the situation being studied.

Validity

Internal Validity

This study employed methods to control possible confounding variables such as only selecting participants identified as married couples, Christians with disclosed issues of unforgiveness, which will increase the internal validity. Internal validity is considered high since there are no identified confounding variables in this study (Warner, 2013).

External Validity

The sampling method is based on non-probability sampling, which does not rely on randomization techniques to select members. The screening process excluded any individuals not meeting the required demographics. This group will not be a representative sample of the

population in the community but rather a representation of a group with similar demographics and conditions.

In this sense, Palella & Martins (2011) noted that a sample of 10%, 20%, 30%, or 40% could be representative of the population, according to its size; with the limitation that if within the population coexist subjects who possess different characteristics must be represented in identical proportions that they have in it. Thus, results can be generalized to the population with the same sample shared characteristics.

Data Analysis

This study used a quantitative approach as applied level research, according to its purpose. Quantitative research is based on its study of accounting and measurable aspects, using real numbers transversally. The problematized facts or phenomena need the formulation of a probable answer to demonstrate the hypothesis. The research knowledge, in this case, poses significant problems feasible to solve through the approach of objectives, hypotheses, variables, and indicators and with the relevant statistics for continuous quantitative variable, and realize the hypothetical demonstration.

Statistical procedures combine factors such as the size of the total population and the sample (size); adopted confidence level (which can range from 90% to 99%); estimation error (between 1% to 15%), and population variability (standard deviation) to compensate for weaknesses in the validity in small samples and added statistical certainty of the actual representativeness of the sample (Galmés, 2012; Palella & Martins, 2011; Sierra-Michelena, 2004). Several statistical-mathematical formulas specify the sample size on a statistical basis, which allows estimating the representativeness of a sample following specific critical parameters at acceptable probability levels. According to Thorndike & Hagen (1977), by checking the

correlation between pre-test and post-test approaches in the value of the test, the reliability of confidence of the difference scores should approach 0. Braver & Braver (1988) stated that when covariance test and the variance test are applied, they can demonstrate the non-existence interaction between treatment and the pre-test, which provides validity to the results.

For this study, The Enright Forgiveness Inventory scores and Couple Satisfaction Index scores were analyzed descriptively with frequencies, measures of central tendency, and measures of variability. A paired-samples *t*-test was used to examine changes in The Enright Forgiveness Inventory scores and Couple Satisfaction Index scores before and after the implementation of the REACH class. A mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine if the change in The Enright Forgiveness Inventory scores varies based on participants' couple satisfaction levels. Parametric assumptions for all the statistical tests conducted were assessed. All data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS ver. 28.

Summary

The results obtained in this study provide further knowledge in terms of understanding the forgiveness phenomena in relationships. It is essential to consider that given the non-probabilistic nature of the sample, the generalization of the results from this study warrant caution. In addition, considering that the nature of this study does not allow for the establishment of relationships of causality and is intended as a program evaluation. Finally, while the studies using self-report questionnaires are valuable and suitable for capturing subjective experience, they have the disadvantage of being permeable to social desirability and acquiescence.

Lastly, in terms of its clinical implications, the background provided by this study may support the idea of reciprocity and the relevance of integrating forgiveness as a possible alternative to intervention, among others. While forgiveness is not the way of resolution of all

the marital conflicts is not always a path viable, it is possible to contribute to the elaboration of the pain associated with an offense, regardless of whether the couple decides to reconcile or separate.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This study aimed to evaluate the effect of the REACH curriculum on the attitude of forgiveness in married couples. The results of the descriptive analysis for the main study variables, the statistical tests used to evaluate the study's research hypotheses, and the parametric assumptions for each statistical test are detailed in this chapter. The results of the statistical analysis and supported conclusions of the research hypotheses are considered below. The findings of this study support the two proposed hypotheses indicating that the REACH class effectively increases the attitude of forgiveness in married couples.

Descriptive Statistics

The sample for the study consisted of 64 adult participants that were recruited into the study. All participants reported being married and dealing with issues of unforgiveness in their relationship, which was part of the requirements for inclusion into the study.

Table 1 below shows the descriptive results for the participants' gender and the issue disclosed by each as being the one for the struggle with unforgiveness.

Table 1

Descriptive Results of Gender and Issue that Makes Each Individual Struggle with Unforgiveness

		Issue that makes you struggle with unforgiveness in your relationship?				Total
		Infidelity	Physical Abuse	Substance Abuse	Verbal Abuse	
Gender	F	9	6	1	16	32
	M	9	5	1	17	32

Total	18	11	2	33	64
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As shown, half of the participants were female ($n = 32$), and the other half were male ($n = 32$). Descriptive results showed that the issues leading participants to struggle with unforgiveness were: 28.17% struggles with infidelity ($n = 18$), 17.19% struggles with physical abuse ($n = 11$), 3.13% struggles with substance abuse ($n = 2$), and 51.56% struggle with verbal abuse ($n = 33$). Results showed that both genders equally struggled with unforgiveness related to infidelity. Similarly, an equal number was found related to issues of unforgiveness due to substance abuse. In contrast, females struggled more with issues related to physical abuse and males with issues related to verbal abuse.

Gottman (2002) indicated that the most prevalent conflict within the couple's relationship is infidelity and the factors that arise from it. Another consequence of unresolved conflicts between couples is related to physical and psychological/verbal abuse, which are also predictors of divorce (Finchman & Beach, 2002). Many couples who attend therapy have disclosed episodes or problems with verbal or physical abuse. However, only a small proportion mention it as a fundamental reason to request help, except when it becomes very extreme (Finchman & Beach, 2002). Also, substance abuse in a partner can predict divorce if treatment is not secured (Gottman, 2002). Even though both partners can be committed in the relationship, the relationship can end when they cannot find the most appropriate way to forgive each other's transgressions and deal with these areas mentioned above (Gottman, 1993).

In order to assess the variable of the attitude of forgiveness in the studied population, all 64 participants completed The Enright Forgiveness Inventory and the Couples Satisfaction Index as pre-test and post-test. The post-test was completed immediately after the participants joined a two-hour class where the REACH forgiveness model was taught and discussed.

Table 2 shows the descriptive results for the pre-test and post-test scores of The Enright Forgiveness Inventory and the Couples Satisfaction Index.

Table 2

Descriptive Results of the Pre-test and Post-test of The Enright Forgiveness Inventory and the Couples Satisfaction Index Scores

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total EFI Pre-test	64	165	254	219.69	16.651
Total EFI Post-test	64	165	254	222.41	17.433
Total CSI Pre-test	64	9	15	11.61	1.454
Total CSI Post-test	64	10	15	12.69	1.296
EFI Score Difference	64	.00	20.00	2.7187	4.07652
CSI Score Difference	64	.00	4.00	1.0781	.98084

Reliability of the Instruments

In general terms, it is possible to affirm that The Enright Forgiveness Inventory works adequately to measure the attitude of forgiveness, demonstrating good psychometric properties for its use. The EFI has 60 items with three subscales of 20 items each. The EFI evaluates (a) positive and negative affect, (b) positive and negative cognition, and (c) positive and negative behavior (Enright & Rique, 2004). Responses for each scale item are in the form of the Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) for the items on each domain: positive affect, cognition, and behavior. To score the negative domains items on the test, they were reverse coded for the scales assessing negative affect, cognition, and behavior (Enright & Rique, 2004). Each subscale has 20 items assessing affect, behavior, and cognition. Scores can range from 20 (low) to 120 (high) points for each subscale. A total low score to the labeled

negative items indicates a lower level or an absence of negative affect, negative behavior, or negative cognition toward an offender (Enright & Rique, 2004).

In contrast, a high score to positive items indicated the presence of positive affect, positive behavior, or positive cognition toward an offender, and thus a higher presence of forgiveness (Enright & Rique, 2004). The EFI scale included five additional items to measure pseudo forgiveness, which was not included in this study. The pseudoforgiveness items can be considered and scored separately and do not have to be included in the total score of the EFI (Worthington, 2006).

The second instrument for pre-test and post-test, the CSI, is a 32-item scale designed to measure the individual's level of satisfaction in a relationship. The scale can be adjusted in the number of items depending on the researcher's need. For this study, the CSI-4 item was used. The responses are rated on a likert scale, with the first question having options from extremely unhappy (score of 0) to perfect (score of 6) and the 2-4 questions having the options from not at all true (score of 0) to completely true (6). CSI-4 scores can range from 0 to 21. Higher scores indicate higher levels of relationship satisfaction. CSI-4 scores falling below 13.5 suggest dissatisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007).

To measure the reliability of the instruments used in this study, Cronbach alphas of the pre-test and post-test usage of instruments were assessed. In terms of the internal consistency for the Couples-Satisfaction Index (CSI-4), the Cronbach alpha for the pre-test was 1.00, and the post-test was 1.00, which was higher than the reported by Funk & Rogge (2007). Since both the pre-test and post-test Cronbach values exceed .70, we can consider the instruments reliable among the sample. In terms of the internal consistency for the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI), the Cronbach alpha for the pre-test was .95, and the post-test was .95, which was similar

to the reported by Enright & Fitzgibbonz (2011). Since both the pre-test and post-test Cronbach values exceed .70, we can consider the instruments reliable among the sample.

Results

Hypothesis 1

The first research question for the study focused on whether there is a statistically significant change in forgiveness scores after the REACH model class in the experimental group. The hypothesis for this research question is that there will be a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores on The Enright Forgiveness Inventory after the REACH Model class in the experimental group. The results of the statistical analysis for this research question show that this hypothesis was supported.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine if there is a statistically significant change in forgiveness scores after the REACH model class in the experimental group. A significant change was found ($t(61) = -5.91, p < .001, d = .90$) Participants forgiveness scores are shown to increase from pre-test ($M = 219.53, SD = 16.87$) to post-test ($M = 221.74, SD = 17.29$).

Parametric assumptions assessed for paired-samples *t*-test include 1) absence of outliers among the differences in pre and post-test scores, 2) interval/ratio measurement of the dependent variable, 3) independence of observations, 4) randomness of difference in pre-post test scores, and 5) normality of difference in pre-post test scores (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019). Two outliers were present with *z*-scores that exceeded 3/-3 in the pre-test–post different of forgiveness scores. The two pairs of scores that are considered outliers were removed from the analysis. The interval/ratio measurement of the dependent variable assumption was met since forgiveness scores are measured numerically. The independence of observations assumption was met since each participant responded to the instruments independently in the study, and participants'

responses were not influenced by other participants' responses. The randomness of difference scores was assessed using a Runs test of randomness (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019).

The results of the Runs test were found to *not* be statistically significant ($Z = -.063, p = .950$). Non-significant results indicate that there is randomness among the difference scores. The normality of difference scores was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019). The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was found to be statistically significant ($D(64) = .26, p < .001$). These significant results indicate the difference in forgiveness score between pre and post-test is not normality distributed. However, the paired-samples *t*-test is robust to this normality violation since its sample is about 30 participants ($N > 30$) (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019).

Hypothesis 2

The second research question for the study focuses on whether there is a statistically significant change in couple satisfaction scores after the REACH model class in the experimental group. The hypothesis for this research question is that there will be a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores on Couples Satisfaction Index after the REACH Model class in the experimental group. The results of the statistical analysis for this research question show that this hypothesis was supported.

Results from the CSI pre-test indicated that from the sample size ($n = 64$), 46 individuals reported having lower couples' satisfaction compared to 18 individuals who reported high levels of couples satisfaction. A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to examine if there is a statistically significant change in couple satisfaction scores after the REACH model class in the experimental group. A significant change was found ($t(63) = -8.79, p < .001, d = 1.01$)

Participants couple satisfaction scores are shown to increase from pre-test ($M = 11.61$, $SD = 1.45$) to post-test ($M = 12.69$, $SD = 1.30$).

Parametric assumptions assessed for paired-samples t -test include 1) absence of outliers among the differences in pre and post-test scores, 2) interval/ratio measurement of the dependent variable, 3) independence of observations, 4) randomness of difference in pre-post test scores, and 5) normality of difference in pre-post test scores (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019). There were no outliers present in the analysis since none of the difference scores had a z -score that exceeded $3/-3$. The interval/ratio measurement of the dependent variable assumption was met since couple satisfaction scores are measured numerically. The independence of observations assumption was met since each participant responded to the instruments independently in the study, and participants' responses were not influenced by other participants' responses. The randomness of difference scores was assessed using a Runs test of randomness (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019). The results of the Runs test were found to be not statistically significant ($Z = .60$, $p = .595$). Non-significant results indicate that there is randomness among the difference scores. The normality of difference scores was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019). The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was found to be statistically significant ($D(64) = .21$, $p < .001$). These significant results indicate the difference in couple satisfaction scores between pre and post-test is not normality distributed. However, the paired-samples t -test is robust to this normality violation since its sample is about 30 participants ($N > 30$) (Verma & Adbel-Salam, 2019).

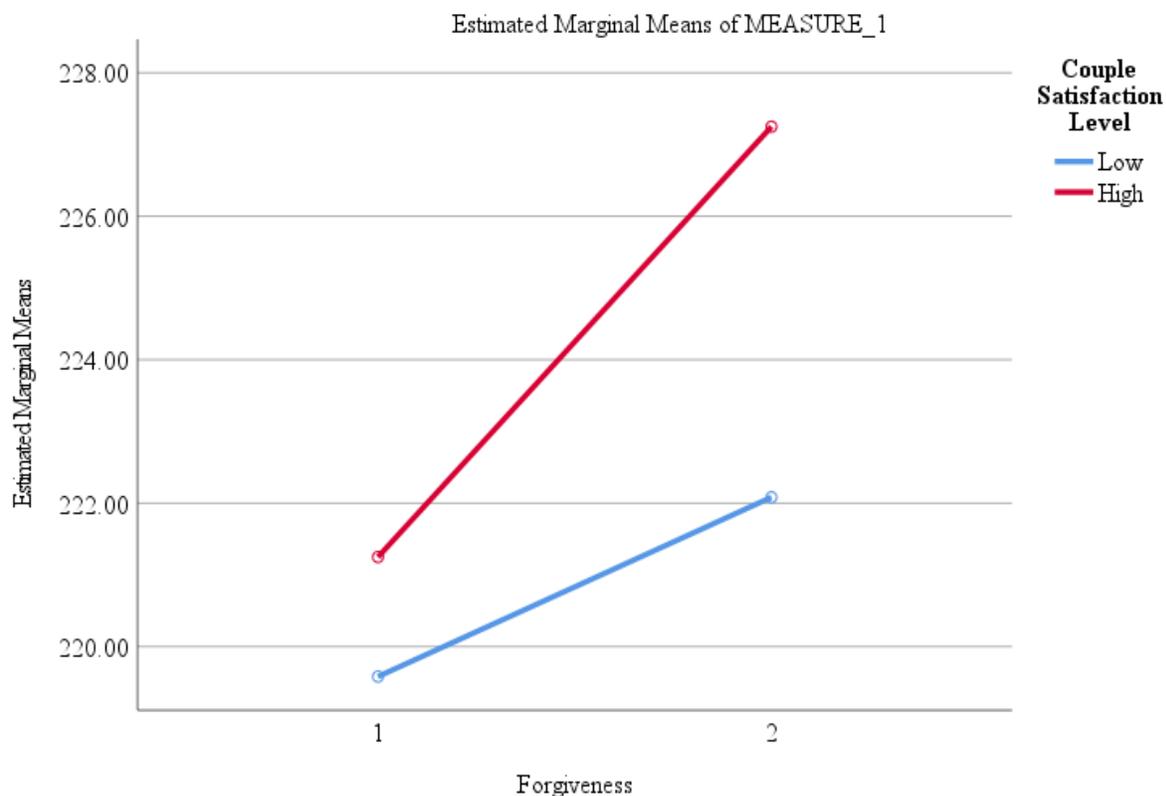
In addition, the results showed that the change in the attitude of forgiveness scores does vary based on the couple's satisfaction levels. A mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine whether the change in forgiveness scores after the REACH model class in

the experimental group varies based on participants' couple satisfaction levels (dissatisfied vs. satisfied in the relationship). There was a significant interaction effect (Wilks Lambda = .664, $F(1,60) = 30.38$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .34) and a significant main effect of forgiveness scores (Wilks Lambda = .884, $F(1,60) = 7.90$, $p = .007$, partial eta squared = .12).

Figure 1 below shows that the change in forgiveness scores between pre-test and post-test is much wider for participants with high couple's satisfaction scores.

Figure 1

Mean Plots of Changes in Forgiveness Scores Based on Couple Satisfaction Levels



Parametric assumptions assessed for mixed between-within subjects ANOVA include 1) absence of outliers among the differences in pre and post-test scores, 2) interval/ratio

measurement of the dependent variable, 3) independence of observations, 4) randomness of difference in pre-post test scores, 5) normality of difference in pre-post test scores, 6) homogeneity of variance, and 7) homogeneity of intercorrelations (Pallant, 2020). There was the presence of two outliers with z -scores that exceeded ± 3 in the pre-test–post difference of forgiveness scores. The two pairs of scores that are considered outliers were removed from the analysis. The interval/ratio measurement of the dependent variable assumption was met since couple satisfaction scores are measured numerically. The independence of observations assumption was met since each participant responded to the instruments independently in the study, and participants' responses were not influenced by other participants' responses. The randomness of difference scores was assessed using a Runs test of randomness (Verma & Abdel-Salam, 2019). The results of the Runs test were found to be not statistically significant ($Z = .60$, $p = .595$). Non-significant results indicate that there is randomness among the difference scores. The normality of difference scores was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Verma & Abdel-Salam, 2019). The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was found to be statistically significant ($D(64) = .21$, $p < .001$). These significant results indicate the difference in couple satisfaction scores between pre and post-test is not normally distributed. However, the paired-samples t -test is robust to this normality violation since its sample is about 30 participants ($N > 30$) (Verma & Abdel-Salam, 2019). The homogeneity of variance assumption was assessed using the Levene test of Equality of Error Variances (Pallant, 2020). The Levene test of Equality of Error Variances was found to be not statistically significant for both pre-test forgiveness scores ($F(1,60) = .04$, $p = .838$) and post-test forgiveness scores ($F(1,60) = .05$, $p = .832$). Non-significant results indicate the homogeneity of variance assumption has been met. The homogeneity of the intercorrelation assumption was assessed using Box's Test of Equality of

Covariance Matrices (Pallant, 2020). Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was found to be not statistically significant ($F(3,315,81) = .77, p = .509$). Non-significant results indicate the homogeneity of intercorrelations assumption has been met.

Summary

The statistical analysis that was conducted for the study and the results showed evidence to support the study's research hypotheses. Parametric assumptions for each statistical test conducted were assessed, and corrections were made when parametric assumptions were violated. The results of statistical analysis show that both hypotheses were supported within the analysis, indicating that participation in the REACH class influences the attitude of forgiveness in couples and that the couple's level of satisfaction correlates with the increased levels of the attitude of forgiveness.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature related to forgiveness interventions as a treatment modality for couple's therapy by evaluating the REACH model curriculum as a tool to increase the attitude of forgiveness in married couples. This was completed by comparing the results of the Enright Forgiveness Inventory and the Couples Satisfaction Index results to measure the attitude of forgiveness outcomes before and after participation in a 2-hour REACH forgiveness class. As predicted, the results from this study showed that the REACH intervention effectively increased the attitude of forgiveness in couples and that the likelihood of forgiveness increased as couples felt more satisfied with the relationship.

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to evaluate whether a REACH forgiveness model group was an effective intervention to increase the attitude of forgiveness. There were two research questions as part of this study. The first research question inquired about the impact of curriculum-based forgiveness training on couples' scores on the attitude of forgiveness as measured by The Enright Forgiveness Inventory. The second research question inquired about the difference in scores on the attitude of forgiveness between couples who report low marital satisfaction vs. couples who report high marital satisfaction as measured by The Couple's Satisfaction Index and The Enright Forgiveness Inventory after participation in the REACH class.

The hypothesized prediction was that there would be a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores on The Enright Forgiveness Inventory after the REACH Model class in the experimental group and that in addition, there would be a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores on Couples Satisfaction Index after the REACH Model class in the experimental group. The results of statistical analysis showed that both hypotheses were supported within the analysis, indicating that participation in the REACH class positively increases the attitude of forgiveness in couples and that couples with a higher level of satisfaction with the relationship are more likely to have a higher increase in their attitude of forgiveness after participation in the REACH forgiveness class.

Discussion

In the presence of frustrations, disappointments, or breakups, individuals in relationships seek strategies that promote the preservation of the relationship. Even though a couple can solve and continue to succeed in all areas of the relationship, it does not mean that the future of the relationship is assured since new situations can make it difficult to maintain a relationship. The benefit of forgiveness is well known to overcome anger, bitterness, resentment, and the desire for revenge (Worthington, 1998). Lack of forgiveness is detrimental to the person who refuses to forgive. Holding on to unforgiveness makes a person a slave of the offense, and the desire for revenge can become an obsession posing a danger to an individual's mental health.

In relationships, unresolved conflicts and offenses are an ever-present phenomenon, especially in marriage. It is necessary to propose interventions that positively reduce or redirect the conflicts that arise within the couple and teach them strategies to forgive as a means of reconnecting and revitalizing the marriage relationship. Each conflict can be a starting step to the

relationship's improvement. Conflicts are invaluable opportunities to promote readjustments to the demands imposed by the different stages of marital life.

Forgiveness is imperative in married couples for the sustainability of the marital relationship. Reconciliation and the restructuring of the couple's relationship are based on the ability to forgive each partner. Forgiveness can become a positive means in the resolution of conflicts and reconciliation. However, forgiveness can be misinterpreted or misused. In these instances, it can be confused with the development and dependence of toxic relationships, cycles of abuse, which can lead to dissatisfaction with the relationship. Also, it can trigger other conflicts in relationships and the development of codependent behaviors. For this reason, establishing a good and precise definition of forgiveness and describing its proper usage within the scope of couples' therapy is necessary to promote a more accurate idea about what forgiveness is within the couple and show its benefits at the individual level and within the couple.

The concept of forgiveness refers to changes that can facilitate social relationships that involve affections, understandings, motivations, and/ or behaviors between individuals who may perceive an offense that produced substantial emotional harm (McCullough et al., 2000a). Forgiving has significant implications, not only for the well-being of relationships but also for the well-being of each individual. Forgiveness does not mean to erase the memories; more so is to abandon the pride and disentangle the feelings that can cost physical ailments. Forgiveness is not allowing anything to happen or excusing anyone's behaviors without setting boundaries. On the contrary, forgiveness often entitles setting boundaries while deciding that the wrongdoing will no longer cause harm.

There are multiple and diverse benefits to which the practice of forgiveness can benefit the couple's relationship. However, forgiveness can become a double-edged sword, that is, of not being taken seriously or having been a merely superficial practice by both parties. It can become a vicious cycle that could lead to recurring reoffenses of the exact nature (e.g., multiple infidelities, multiple instances of abuse).

Forgiveness can be a difficult task to undertake. Sometimes, for some individuals, it may be easier to continue holding onto blaming others rather than to release themselves by offering forgiveness to others. Forgiveness does not mean to excuse the behavior of the people that have been hurt. Forgiveness is a decision to overcome the past and heal the present. Forgiveness leads us to a more productive harmonious life, free from bitterness and the desire for revenge. It leads to a reconciliatory state of mind and a changed lifestyle. It leads to a closer relationship with Jesus, the author, and the perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The main benefit of forgiveness within a couples' relationship is related to the concept of reconciliation. Baskin & Enright (2004) suggested that to achieve reconciliation in a relationship, individuals must create appropriate boundaries while also building bridges to overcome the offense. Overcoming the need for revenge and the path to reconciliation requires each partner to recognize the associated pain and listen non-defensively without judgment. With this listening act, the wounds of the offended partner are recorded not as an objective fact but as a subjective experience, a trauma (Baskin & Enright, 2004). Worthington (2013a) indicated that reconciliation is not simply overcoming a challenging period in the relationship; having a heart for reconciliation is a positive personality trait that many people attempt to cultivate. Thus, developing a reconciling attitude is, for many individuals, a transformation in their personality. This transformation predisposes partners in marital relationships to constantly pursue forgiveness

and attempt reconciliation not only in a specific context in which they are trying to forgive but overall in other different types of problems and scenarios.

Forgiveness is more than a decision is an option. It is a social construct alternative to violence related to conflict resolution that arises as an example for others in society. It requires cooperation and solidarity. It requires empathy and an altruist gift to others. Reconciliation is a process deeper than plain forgiveness. It arises when individuals in relationships that have conflicted can develop a positive perspective about their relationship. It implies personal development a change in the value of life. Developing or increasing an attitude of forgiveness is valuable due in part based on research benefits regarding this topic. Maintaining an ongoing attitude of forgiveness is a lifestyle as forgiveness and reconciliation are part of a spiritual journey born from God's grace. Thus, the need to continue studying the subject of forgiveness and identifying interventions to teach individuals how to forgive, especially in marital relationships.

Worthington et al. (2000a) suggested that forgiveness interventions must encourage the development of a sense of empathy towards the offender to promote an ongoing attitude of forgiveness in individuals. The authors suggested that when individuals are exposed to at least two hours of an empathy-based forgiveness intervention, they achieve forgiveness. Similarly, this study presented participants with the two hours of REACH, which is considered an empathy-based forgiveness intervention, demonstrating a significant increase in their ability to express forgiveness.

The REACH model is one of the most utilized models of forgiveness psychoeducation to promote an attitude of forgiveness (Worthington, 2007, 2013b; Worthington et al., 2000a). The REACH model teaches very in detail how to decide to forgive and how to develop an ongoing

attitude of forgiveness. The REACH acronym stands for R: Recalling the hurt (reflect on the event and observe the intensity of the feelings upon recollection); E: Empathy with the transgressor (developing and trying to observe the event through the eyes of the offender); A: Altruistic gift of forgiveness (reflect on times where the individual has been the recipient of forgiveness from others and God and identifying with those positive feelings); C: Commit to the emotional forgiveness (commit to the decision to extend forgiveness); H: Hold onto emotional forgiveness (setting reminders of the decision that was made to forgive) (Worthington, 2008).

The REACH model workbook utilized as the intervention for this study incited participants to reflect on an offense caused by their partners that was causing struggles with unforgiveness. Through 12 10-minute exercises, the participants were able to navigate the forgiveness process. The first lesson encouraged the participants to rate their usual use of forgiveness and how forgiving they were as a person. As part of this section, they were also encouraged to identify a hurt that was caused by their partners and later rate their decision to forgive said offense and the level of an emotional decision as well. The second lesson of the workbook presented the participants with the overall benefits of forgiveness while directing participants to apply these benefits into their own lives. The third lesson encouraged the participants to make a solid decision to forgive the offense by presenting injustice gaps and challenging them to release the burden of unforgiveness. Lesson four moved the participants into recalling the details of the offense (R) and changing their mindset about it. It assisted them in creating an alternative narrative by soliciting a different viewpoint rather than a victimized one. Later in the lesson, the participants were able to develop empathetic views of the offender (E) while trying to understand the possible reasons for the offense. Lesson five continued with the empathetic view with a focus on developing compassion for the offender. During lesson six, the

participants were presented with the term of altruistic gift (A), which was applied through their own experiences being forgiven in the past when they themselves had caused harm to others. Lesson seven encouraged the participants to commit (C) to forgive based on their personal experiences with forgiveness and later on to hold (H) onto forgiveness when in doubt. Lesson eight continued the challenge to hold onto forgiveness while also providing tools to be successful on this task. Lessons nine and ten challenged the participants to make forgiveness a change of lifestyle. Lessons eleven and twelve directed the participants to self-reflection about the workbook experience and the work completed during the class/group.

The subjects participating in this study were taught the REACH model and shared their decision to forgive, including replacing the negative beliefs and feelings towards the offender with more constructive ones. The offenses shared by individuals were significant, and so was the increase in the forgiveness attitude after the couples attended the REACH forgiveness group class.

The participants ($n = 64$) disclosed having unforgiveness issues primarily due to experiencing verbal abuse in their relationships (51.56%), followed by infidelity (28.17%), physical abuse (17.19%), and substance abuse (3.13%). The results from this study support the first hypothesis indicating that forgiveness training will result in increasing changes in the attitude of forgiveness in married couples. Not only the participation in the REACH forgiveness model class increase the attitude of forgiveness in married couples, but the findings also supported the second hypothesis indicating that there was a significant correlation between couples' satisfaction and forgiveness which are similar to findings from previous studies (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2002; Gordon & Baucom, 1998). Individuals who reported higher satisfaction

levels with the relationship also reported a higher increase in the attitude of forgiveness after participation in the REACH class.

Likewise, other studies about couples' satisfaction and forgiveness evidenced that marital satisfaction predicts overall happiness and willingness to forgive, above and beyond other types of satisfaction (Guzman, 2010) and can serve as a safeguard for stressful life events, including overcoming offenses (Blocher & Wade, 2010). This last is essential because low levels of marital satisfaction are associated with an increased risk of dissolution of marriage (Kato, 2016). Wade et al. (2014) stated that conflict resolution strategies, including quickly forgiving offenses, were associated with marital satisfaction in long-term marriages. When spouses use more conflict-oriented strategies, including forgiveness and less confrontational actions leading to control, couples have more reported satisfaction (Worthington, 2013a). Maintaining a marriage requires spouses to use conflict resolution that promotes personal growth and the ability to forgive (Fincham et al., 2002; Worthington, 2013b). Knowing how to manage conflict and learning how to forgive is a vital skill for satisfaction in marriage (Worthington, 2007).

Implications

Forgiveness is a process rather than an isolated event. It is somewhat complicated to understand with certainty what true forgiveness entitles and feels. On many occasions, individuals can cycle through the forgiveness process before they feel that they have achieved true forgiveness related to a specific offense (Worthington, 1998).

Gordon & Baucom (2003) noted that forgiveness involves a change in cognition in the individuals who forgive, their view about the person who committed the offense, and their relationship. Likewise, forgiveness facilitates affective, cognitive, and behavioral for both the offender, through self-forgiveness, and the person who was the victim of the offense. Although

forgiving is a complex process that usually extends for a considerable time and includes complex internal and interpersonal changes which significantly vary between individuals.

In therapy settings, to facilitate the emergence of forgiveness, emphasis should be placed on enhancing the presence of four unifying factors: empathy, humility, repentance, and commitment (Forster et al., 2019). Within the context of couple's therapy, these unifying factors can help the couple to regain confidence, solidarity, and connection, which had been lost because of the transgression. The REACH model of forgiveness, which was the subject of the program evaluation as part of this study, includes exercises to promote all these four unifying factors.

Paleari et al. (2005) stated that forgiveness is a fundamental tool in treating various psychological problems, including those related to couples' relationships. Forgiveness is a process not achieved in one class nor in a few days as it depends on the depth and intensity of the offense. Forgiveness is a lifestyle that gradually transforms individuals from victims of their circumstances into autonomous co-creators of their reality (Raj & Wiltermuth, 2016). The REACH model provides the comprehensive tools and simple interventions to encourage commitment towards maintaining a forgiveness attitude and the process of holding into forgiveness as well. In addition, it is favorable that both partners develop the means to follow the path to forgiveness, setting a new goal and giving a new meaning to their relationship, understanding sooner or later the overcoming of the offense. Findings from this study confirmed that the REACH forgiveness model intervention positively influences the attitude toward forgiveness.

Forgiveness, as a treatment goal for couples, implies positive changes in the subjective experiences of each partner, both intrapsychic and interpersonal, so these changes are considered effectively therapeutic because they would decrease anxiety, depression, and sadness. In

addition, new meanings and feelings that transcend anguish, hopelessness, and revenge can be discovered, and negative and hostile attributions about offenders are replaced by more benign and compassionate attributions that ultimately benefit the marriage relationship. The REACH model provides tools to develop the required compassion and empathy-based attributions required to maintain forgiveness and a healthier married relationship. The increase observed in the attitude of forgiveness shown in this study suggests that the REACH interventions can positively influence these positive attributions.

Lastly, the outcomes from the program evaluation completed of the REACH forgiveness model indicated the effectiveness of the REACH model as an intervention for married couples. The REACH model can be used as an effective intervention in couples counseling to assist in the overcoming of unforgiveness issues that can threaten the relationship. Therefore, clinicians wanting to work with forgiveness with couples should target interventions to promote both decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness as presented in the REACH model (Worthington, 2008). Emotional forgiveness can be mastered when a considerable extent of time has passed, focusing on cultivating empathy and compassion towards the offender (Worthington et al., 2000a). Clinicians should also be open to tailoring the REACH interventions to incorporate the values and experiences unique to individuals to facilitate individualized treatment planning in promoting forgiveness in married relationships, including developing an inclusive disposition towards forgiveness as a lifestyle in married couples.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study only provides a limited generalization of the results as it is a non-probabilistic sample and included only members of a single religious faith. Future studies could assess

whether the instrument behaves similarly in more heterogeneous samples and in different ways of living the couple (domestic partners versus married couples, for example).

In addition, Lundahl et al. (2008) found that lack of forgiveness after a transgression was related, in some cases, to a more significant presence of lower satisfaction in relationships. Other studies also found positive effects of forgiveness depending on the context of the relationship (Makinen & Johnson, 2006). Forgiveness has a positive effect on self-concept and self-respect when the aggressor acts in a way that provides security and recognition to his partner. When this is not the case, forgiveness hurts the self-concept of the forgiver. Some researchers advise about the danger of an inadequate work of forgiveness in therapy as it may not be convenient to always promote forgiveness, since doing so can perpetuate dynamics of abuse and social oppression by reducing the motivation generated by anger to mobilize for social and personal change (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Bono et al., 2008). Therefore, it is essential not to generalize forgiveness or any treatment interventions as one size fits all.

Another limitation is the weaknesses inherent in self-reporting questionnaires, which are more permeable to social desirability and require an adequate level of introspection to be answered. Therefore, future research could complement this type of forgiveness measurement with others of a more observational nature of the report of significant third parties (Hoyt & McCullough, 2005). However, this work is a step forward in providing a platform for developing a broader and more integrated body of research on forgiveness in close relationships.

Recommendations for Future Research

A couple's relationship is a progression developed by both partners in which different and unique realities and origins converge. These are the main reasons why disagreement, conflict, friction, and offenses occur. Without the appropriate tools, individuals struggle to

negotiate these convergents, which can lead to the separation or rupture of the relationship, so it is necessary to become aware of this reality and continue with the study and the implementation of methods that lead to the strengthening of the relationship and the overall well-being of relationship's partners.

Therefore, future research is necessary to continue studying the willingness to forgive between couples, where research tools allow to know the dynamic between the couple that can foster this willingness. It is also essential to study the proposed relationship between personality, conflict management strategies within the couple, and the willingness to forgive. Further studies should focus on more significant sample sizes, different self-reporting forgiveness measures for the continued use and evaluation of the REACH model as a married couple's intervention in therapy.

Summary

The practice of forgiveness and the ability to forgive can have a beneficial impact on individuals' lives, improving their emotional stability and considerably reducing the emotional alterations that may affect the individual due to being the victim of some grievance or aggression. In couples, forgiveness can be the decisive force between a long-lasting, satisfying relationship and divorce. Forgiveness is seen as a possible path for conflict resolution and in the restructuring of the couple relationship and as a way of psychological improvement for one or both partners.

The results of this study support that the intervention of the REACH model is effective and can contribute significantly to the increase in the attitude of forgiveness in married couples. Findings of this study support that participation in forgiveness training increases the likelihood of individuals being able to forgive in relationships, which could significantly contribute to the

field of couples' therapy. This study shows that couple's satisfaction is also a predictor of an increase in the attitude of forgiveness, and according to the predicted, there is a direct correlation between forgiveness and satisfaction with the relationship, as stated in a series of previous studies (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2002; Gordon & Baucom, 2002). Couples highly satisfied with their relationship are more likely to forgive and increase their attitude toward forgiveness. Therefore, creating and continuing studying tools to assist couples in achieving forgiveness is imperative.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 8, 2021

Yarelle Calo Gobeia
John Petko

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-40 THE EFFECT OF FORGIVENESS
TRAINING IN THE ATTITUDE OF FORGIVENESS IN MARRIED
COUPLES

Dear Yarelle Calo Gobeia, John Petko,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

Participant Letter

September 8th, 2021.

Dear participant,

As a graduate student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to evaluate if training in forgiveness affects the attitude of forgiveness in married couples. I am inviting eligible participants to join my study.

To participate in this study, you and your spouse must be 18 years old or older, legally married, and struggling with disclosed un-forgiveness issues in your marriage. Both spouses must meet these criteria to be able to participate in this study. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete two pre-tests at the beginning of the class, which will take approximately 30 minutes, then participate in a 2-hour class on forgiveness (the REACH model of forgiveness) in which you will use a workbook to answer exercises about the topic, and lastly complete a post-test at the end of the class which will also take approximately 30 minutes. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

A consent document is located in the waiting area/lobby. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the information provided. The informed consent form contains additional information about my research. Because participation is anonymous, you do not need to sign and return the consent document unless you would prefer to do so.

If you choose to participate in this study, please contact the researcher, Yarelí Calo Gobeá, LPC.

Sincerely,

Yarelí Calo Gobeá

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Title of the Project: The Effect of Forgiveness Training in the Attitude of Forgiveness in Married Couples

Principal Investigator: Yarelle Calo Gobeia, LPC, LMHC, CPCS, Liberty University Doctoral Student

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a couples' research study. To participate, you and your spouse must be 18 years old or older, legally married, and struggling with disclosed un-forgiveness issues in your marriage. Both spouses must meet these criteria to be able to participate in this study. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Both spouses must meet the criteria to be able to participate in this study.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore forgiveness in married couples, including the attitude of forgiveness and couples' satisfaction.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete two pre-tests on paper at the beginning of the class: The Enright Forgiveness Inventory and the Couple's Satisfaction Index. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the tests.
2. Partake in a 2-hour class where the REACH model of forgiveness will be discussed using a workbook. The workbook is yours to keep. The answers recorded in your workbook will not be used in the study.
3. Complete the same two on-paper tests as post-tests at the end of the class. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the tests.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participation in this study will provide you the opportunity to acquire new information and insight about forgiveness that can be used to improve your marital relationship.

Benefits to society include providing the opportunity for acquiring new information regarding forgiveness and developing new insight on the topic of forgiveness.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

The researcher is a mandatory reporter for child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous but the researcher will know who participates in the class.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked cabinet. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hard copies will be shredded.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in class settings. While discouraged, other members of the class may share what was discussed with persons outside of the class.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

To limit potential or perceived conflicts the study will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the researcher's practice. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the pre-test without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Yarelle Calo Gobeia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. John Petko.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

APPENDIX D**Demographic Questionnaire**

1. Gender: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Ethnicity: _____
4. City where you live: _____
5. Education: _____
6. Income Range:
_____ less than \$25,000
_____ between \$25,000 and \$50,000
_____ more than \$50,000
7. Marital Status: _____
8. Religious affiliation: _____
9. Do you attend church with your spouse? ____ Yes ____ No
10. Please mark with an X the issue(s) that make you struggle with unforgiveness in your relationship?
_____ Past or current infidelity from your spouse
_____ Past or current substance abuse in your spouse
_____ Past verbal, physical, sexual, or financial abuse in the hands of your spouse (circle which one)
_____ Other; Please specify: _____

APPENDIX E

Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4)

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

	Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
			Not at all TRUE	A little TRUE	Some- what TRUE	Mostly TRUE	Almost Completely TRUE	Completely TRUE
I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner			0	1	2	3	4	5
			Not at all	A little	Some- what	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely
How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?			0	1	2	3	4	5
In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?			0	1	2	3	4	5

PERMISSION FOR USE: We developed the CSI scales to be freely available for research and clinical use. No further permission is required beyond this form and the authors will not generate study-specific permission letters.

SCORING: To score the CSI-4, you simply sum the responses across all of the items. The point values of each response of each item are shown above. NOTE – When we present the scale to participants, we do not show them those point values. We just give them circles to fill in (on pen-and-paper versions) or radio buttons to click (in online surveys) in place of those point values.

INTERPRETATION: CSI-4 scores can range from 0 to 21. Higher scores indicate higher levels of relationship satisfaction. CSI-4 scores falling below 13.5 suggest notable relationship dissatisfaction.

CITATION: If you are using this scale, then you should cite the research article validating it as follows:

Funk, J.L., & Rogge, R.D. (2007). Testing the Ruler with Item Response Theory: Increasing Precision of Measurement for Relationship Satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21*, 572-583.

APPENDIX F

Enright Forgiveness Inventory License to Use

For use by Yarelle Gobeia only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on June 17, 2021



www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Enright Forgiveness Inventory

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.

Sample Items:

I feel warm

I do or would do show friendship

I think he or she is wretched

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Sincerely,

Robert Most

Mind Garden, Inc.

www.mindgarden.com

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APPENDIX G

REACH Workbook: Your Path to REACH Forgiveness- Become a More Forgiving Person in Less Than Two Hours- <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/diy-workbook>