



You Did What? The Relationship Between Forgiveness Tendency, Communication of Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married and Dating Couples

Pavica Sheldon , Eletra Gilchrist-Petty & James Adam Lessley

To cite this article: Pavica Sheldon , Eletra Gilchrist-Petty & James Adam Lessley (2014) You Did What? The Relationship Between Forgiveness Tendency, Communication of Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married and Dating Couples, Communication Reports, 27:2, 78-90, DOI: [10.1080/08934215.2014.902486](https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2014.902486)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2014.902486>



Published online: 06 Aug 2014.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 738



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

You Did What? The Relationship Between Forgiveness Tendency, Communication of Forgiveness, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married and Dating Couples

Pavica Sheldon, Eletra Gilchrist-Petty, & James Adam Lessley

Willingness to forgive is one of the most important factors contributing to healing and restoring damaged relationships. Although recent studies have emphasized the link between forgiveness and positive communication, this is among the first studies to examine how tendency to forgive influences the strategies married and dating couples use to communicate forgiveness to each other. According to the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model, links among vulnerabilities, stressors, and behaviors lead to changes in marital satisfaction and stability. One hundred and seventy-four participants completed a survey regarding their attitudes and beliefs about forgiveness after an isolated transgression, as well as their general response tendency within a given relationship. Participants were also asked about the severity of transgression and their overall relationship satisfaction after the event. Results showed that dating couples who have a higher natural tendency to forgive use nonverbal (hugging, kissing) and explicit (“I forgive you”) strategies. Among married individuals, severity of transgression was a more important factor when deciding which forgiveness strategy to use.

Keywords: Dating; Forgiveness; Interpersonal Relations; Marriage; Tendency to Forgive; Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model

Pavica Sheldon is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Eletra Gilchrist-Petty is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. James Adam Lessley was an undergraduate student at the time article was written. Correspondence to: Pavica Sheldon, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Department of Communication Arts, Morton Hall 342-C, Huntsville, AL 35899, USA. E-mail: Ps0027@uah.edu

Although most researchers have studied forgiveness from a psychological perspective, recent studies have emphasized the link between forgiveness and positive communication. For example, forgiveness contributes to the healing and restoration of damaged relationships (Waldron & Kelley, 2005) and is also positively related to marital satisfaction (Fincham, 2000; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). Furthermore, factors such as relational commitment, love, empathy, religion, fear of losing one's partner, and emotional involvement (Kelley, 1998; Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004) influence how individuals approach forgiveness.

Though these findings offer compelling evidence about the importance of forgiveness in relationships, we do not know enough about the factors influencing how couples communicate forgiveness to each other. Recent studies (e.g., Sheldon & Honeycutt, 2011) have focused on forgiveness behavior after an isolated transgression. Kachadourian et al. (2004), however, emphasized the importance of distinguishing between forgiveness of an actual transgression and "forgivingness" as a general disposition to forgive across time and situations (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001).

McCullough and Worthington (1999) distinguish among the levels of specificity with which forgiveness can be measured. At the least specific level (a), forgiveness could be assessed as people's attitudes, values, or beliefs about their own forgivingness (Roberts, 1995). At a more specific level (b), "forgiveness could be assessed as a general response tendency within a given relationship. At the most specific level (c), forgiveness could be measured as a response to a single, isolated transgression" (McCullough & Worthington, 1999, p. 1146). The goal of this study is to assess the potential interaction between forgivingness as a general tendency within dating and marital relationships and forgiveness as a response to a single, isolated transgression. We are interested in if the partner's general tendency to forgive within a given relationship (dating vs. married) is related to how he/she forgives a partner after the isolated transgression, and whether or not the strategies used to grant forgiveness related to relationship satisfaction.

Definition of Forgiveness and the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) Model

Granting forgiveness involves communication. The process of forgiveness starts when one relational partner discovers that another partner performed a harmful act (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) Model (see Figure 1) describes partners' evaluations of their relationships as a direct reaction to their interactions with each other. According to the VSA model, individuals bring enduring vulnerabilities to their marriages that include both their traits (e.g., neuroticism) and background (e.g., parental divorce) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). One of the experiential factors is the tendency to forgive. Kachadourian et al. (2004) argued that the tendency to forgive across time and situations reflects the history with a particular partner, as well as any general disposition to forgive. Relationships are also affected by stressful events (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), and in terms of the

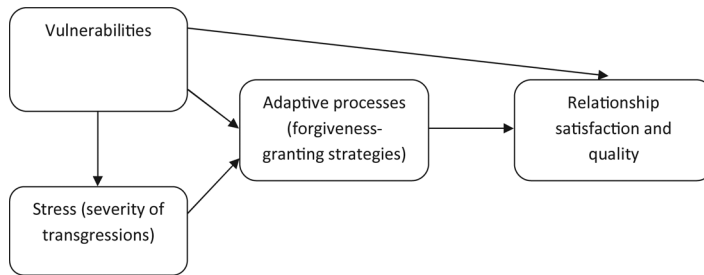


Figure 1 The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

VSA model (see Figure 1), they might include transgressions that partners commit toward each other. Finally, adaptive processes include couples' responses to stress (e.g., negotiation of forgiveness). Links among vulnerabilities, stressors, and behaviors lead to changes in marital satisfaction and stability (Langer, Lawrence, & Barry, 2008).

Depending on the transgression's severity, partners engage in different communication behaviors to seek or grant forgiveness. Waldron and Kelley (2005) found that romantic partners minimized the need for forgiveness when transgressions were less severe. When transgressions were more severe, they made forgiveness conditional (e.g., "I told them I would forgive them if the offense never happened again"). Communication style may also vary depending on the relationship context (e.g., friend, family, dating). People are more likely to forgive committed relationship partners (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). For example, Sabatelli (1988) found that dating couples are more satisfied with their relationships than married couples. However, dating couples are also more understanding of their partners, offer more support, and are less cynical, unlike married couples who already went through the "honeymoon" phase (Honeycutt, Woods, & Fontenot, 1993).

Depending on the type of relationship and the severity of transgression, individuals use different strategies to communicate forgiveness. Those strategies include nonverbal, minimizing, discussion, explicit, and conditional approach (Kelley, 1998; Waldron & Kelley, 2005). The first, *nonverbal* strategy, includes forgiving the other person not necessarily in words but in actions (e.g., hugs) (Waldron & Kelley, 2005). Nonverbal behavior can also communicate that forgiveness is simply unnecessary (Exline & Baumeister, 2000) or that a person is unwilling to confront the partner. In the *conditional* strategy, the hurt partner attempts to make the relationship more predictable by stipulating an if/then state of affairs, such as *if* you change your behavior, *then* I will forgive you (Waldron & Kelley, 2005). Third, *minimizing* strategy accentuates that the offense was not very important. Individuals do not want to invest the emotional energy into working through the transgression or may have tried to save the other person's face (Waldron & Kelley, 2005). The *discussion*-based approach includes renegotiating relationship rules, explaining why and how the transgression occurred, and expressing feelings to one another. Lastly, the *explicit* approach includes a simple statement "I forgive you" (Waldron & Kelley,

2005, pp. 734–735). In a recent study, Sheldon (2013) found that dating participants reported minimizing transgressions more often than married participants. Because individuals use different strategies to communicate forgiveness depending on the relationship type, the following question is asked:

RQ1: How is tendency to forgive within a specific relationship related to strategies married and dating couples use to forgive each other?

After couples forgive each other, relationships can strengthen, weaken, or normalize (Kelley, 1998). According to Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, and Finkel (2005), positive outcomes are more likely if the offended party extends forgiveness. However, in Waldron and Kelley's (2005) study, partners who used conditional forms of communication experienced relationship deterioration after the forgiveness episode. In contrast, nonverbal and explicit strategies were positively associated with relationship strengthening.

The ability to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to marital satisfaction (Fenell, 1993; Gordon & Baucom, 1998). The more spouses forgive, the more they make positive marital assumptions and have close and well-adjusted marital relations (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). However, another group of researchers (e.g., Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, & Kumashiro, 2010; McNulty, 2008) highlighted the potential costs of intervention designed to promote and encourage forgiveness. For example, McNulty's (2010) seven-day-diary study revealed that forgiveness was associated with more severe problems and less marital satisfaction among spouses married to partners who engaged in relatively frequent transgressions.

Rather than looking at relationship outcome (positive, neutral, deteriorate) only, this study focuses on the degree of relationship satisfaction that married and dating couples experience. It examines how the tendency to forgive and how strategies used to grant forgiveness are related to relationship satisfaction (see Figure 1). Hence, the following research questions are asked:

RQ2: How is tendency to forgive related to relationship satisfaction in both married and dating couples?

RQ3: How are strategies used to grant forgiveness related to relationship satisfaction in both married and dating couples?

Method

Participants and Procedures

Eligible research participants were at least 19 years old (i.e., age of consent in the state this study was conducted) and currently married or in a dating relationship. One-hundred seventy-four adults completed a survey administered through a medium-size research university in an urban southeastern U.S. city. Of the 174 participants 94 were married and 80 were dating. Regarding those who were married, 76.6% were females, and 23.4% were males. Of dating couples, 75% were females,

and 25% were males. The average age for the married persons was 38.90 ($SD=14.2$) and 24.39 ($SD=6.3$) for the dating. On average, marriage has lasted for 12 years ($SD=10.58$), and romantic dating relationships have lasted for two years ($SD=1.82$). Most participants identified themselves as Caucasian (80%), followed by African American (15%), Hispanics (2%), Asian American (1%), and other (2%).

Participants were recruited via convenient and network sampling. Questionnaires were administered in a variety of communication and psychology classes, and the students recruited up to two members of their social networks who met the study's criteria. They earned an extra class credit for each person they recruited. Participants completed questionnaires in the privacy of their homes within a 2-week period and returned them in sealed envelopes to the student recruiter, who returned them to the principal investigators.

Participants first completed a consent form, followed by demographic information in which they listed their age and sex. They then completed a survey comprised of open-ended questions, where respondents described one relational transgression that caused conflict and was successfully resolved through forgiveness. Aside from the open-ended questions, Likert-type scales were used to measure the severity of relational transgressions, the communication strategies used to grant forgiveness, the degree of forgiveness within a specific relationship, and the ratings of relationship satisfaction.

Measures

Severity of the transgression was measured by three items (e.g., "At the time they occurred, how severe did you consider the other person's actions?" and "At the time they occurred, how damaging did you consider these actions to your relationship with the person?") (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Item responses were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale (5 = *very severe*, and 1 = *not severe at all*). Cronbach's alpha was .91 ($M=3.06$, $SD=1.18$) (Cronbach, 1951).

To measure the five types of *forgiving strategies* (i.e., conditional, minimizing, discussion, nonverbal display, and explicit) 13 items from the Waldron and Kelley (2005) scale were used. Answers were recorded on an 8-point Likert type scale (0 = *no use*, and 7 = *extensive use*). Respondents reported most extensive use of discussion strategy, followed by explicit approach, nonverbal strategy, conditional, and minimizing. The means, standard deviations, and alphas for aggregate items are reported in Table 1. When calculating Cronbach's alpha, the analysis revealed that one item measuring minimizing ("I joked about it so he/she would know they were forgiven") and one item measuring conditional approach ("I forgave him/her but it was not until later than I completely forgave") contributed to a low Cronbach's alpha and were, therefore, excluded from the analysis.

Forgiveness tendency was assessed using five items from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006). TRIM measure consists of three subscales: avoidance, revenge, and forgiveness. In this study, the TRIM was revised to assess the general tendency to forgive a partner's

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations and Scale Alphas for Forgiving-Granting Strategies

	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Discussion strategy	5.23	1.93	.85
Explicit strategy	4.43	2.49	n/a (1 item)
Nonverbal strategy	3.90	1.92	.87
Conditional strategy	2.37	2.42	.81
Minimizing strategy	1.97	2.19	.90

transgressions. This was done by asking participants to indicate their “general thoughts and feelings about the partner when he/she hurts you.” This modification was done in a previous study (Kachadourian et al., 2004) where authors used the original 11-item TRIM scale to measure the “tendency to forgive” in interpersonal relationships, rather than the tendency to forgive a partner after the specific type of transgression (episodic forgiveness; McCullough et al., 2006). Sample items included: “I want us to bury the hatchet and move forward with our relationship”; and “Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again.” Responses were measured on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree* and 1 = *strongly disagree*), and were averaged to form an overall forgiveness score (Cronbach's alpha = .78; $M = 3.87$, $SD = .85$). Higher scores indicated a greater tendency to forgive (Cronbach, 1951).

Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). Participants were asked to respond to seven questions (e.g., “How well does your partner meet your needs?” and “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?”). Answers were recorded on a 5-point Likert type scale (5 = *high satisfaction*, and 1 = *low satisfaction*). Cronbach's alpha was .90 ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .76$) (Cronbach, 1951).

Results

RQ1 asked how is the tendency to forgive within a specific relationship related to strategies married and dating couples use to forgive each other. Pearson-product moment correlations showed that for married partners, tendency to forgive was positively related to the use of minimizing and nonverbal forgiveness strategies (see Table 2). However, when controlling for the severity of transgression in multiple regression, tendency to forgive was not related to the use of any forgiving strategy. Severity of transgression, however, was the significant negative predictor of the use of nonverbal strategy to forgive ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$), as well as minimizing strategy ($\beta = -.51$, $p < .001$). The more severe the transgression, the less married couples use nonverbal and minimizing strategies.

For dating couples, tendency to forgive was positively correlated with use of nonverbal and explicit strategy (see Table 3). This was also true when controlling for transgression severity in a regression model (tendency to forgive predicting the use of

Table 2 Correlations between Forgiveness-Granting Strategies and Severity of Transgression, Forgiveness Trait, and Relationship Satisfaction in Married Couples

	Severity of transgression	Tendency to forgive trait	Relationship satisfaction
Nonverbal strategy	-.28*	.22*	.36**
Minimizing strategy	-.52**	.20*	.21*
Discussion strategy	.24*	.01	.04
Conditional strategy	.32**	-.17	-.19*
Explicit strategy	-.04	.11	.14

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

nonverbal strategy, $\beta = .29$, $p < .05$; and the use of explicit strategy, $\beta = .44$, $p < .001$). It is important to mention that when examining individuals' scores on the forgiveness tendency, dating individuals score equally high as married individuals.

RQ2 probed how the "tendency to forgive is related to relationship satisfaction in married and dating couples. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated that married couples who have a higher tendency to forgive are more satisfied with their relationship, $r(92) = .37$, $p < .001$. In addition, the results showed that men had a higher tendency to forgive their partner than women, $t(172) = 2.17$, $p = .036$). However, for dating couples, there were no significant relationships ($p > .05$) between "tendency to forgive" and relationship satisfaction and "tendency to forgive" and sex.

RQ3 asked how strategies used to grant forgiveness are related to relationship satisfaction in both married and dating couples. Results revealed that married couples who used nonverbal and minimizing strategies to forgive were more satisfied with their relationship, while those who used conditional strategy were less satisfied (see Table 2). However, when controlling for the severity of transgression, the relationship between the nonverbal strategy to forgive and satisfaction was the only significant

Table 3 Correlations between Forgiving-Granting Strategies and Severity of Transgression, Forgiveness Trait, and Relationship Satisfaction in Dating Couples

	Severity of transgression	Tendency to forgive trait	Relationship satisfaction
Nonverbal strategy	-.13	.30*	.13
Minimizing strategy	-.50**	.11	.16
Discussion strategy	.33*	.18	-.12
Conditional strategy	.40**	.12	-.21*
Explicit strategy	-.13	.44**	.23*

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

Table 4 Mean Differences for Major Variables in Two Relationship Types

	Mean		<i>p</i> value
	Married	Dating	
Severity of transgression	3.12	2.99	Not sign.
Tendency to forgive	3.91	3.82	Not sign.
Relationship satisfaction	4.26	4.21	Not sign.

one, $r(88) = .26$, $p = .006$. In dating couples, those who used explicit strategy were more satisfied, and those who used conditional were less satisfied (see Table 3). When controlling for severity of transgression, the relationship between the explicit strategy to forgive and relationship satisfaction remains positive, $r(74) = .20$, $p = .046$. It is also important to mention that both married and dating couples experienced similar amounts of transgressions and also did not differ in relationship satisfaction (see Table 4). However, there was a positive and significant relationship between the severity of transgression and the time it took to forgive a partner, $r(173) = .58$, $p < .001$. Also, the more severe the event that caused the conflict, the more dissatisfied with their relationship the partners were. This was true for both married, $r(93) = -.46$, $p < .001$ and dating couples, $r(80) = -.40$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The present study indicates that the way forgiveness is communicated is related to the relationship type, severity of transgression, and tendency to forgive within romantic relationships. Overall, the present findings can be discussed in light of the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model (VSA). Dating couples are less prone to the transgressions (or stressors) in the relationship and forgive each other without making forgiveness conditional. For them, the relationship between the tendency to forgive and forgiveness strategies is not mediated by stressors (i.e., the severity of transgression) (see Figure 1). For married individuals, transgression severity mediates the relationship between the tendency to forgive and strategies used to grant forgiveness. Severity also influences how long it takes to forgive a partner. Moreover, married individuals who score higher on the tendency to forgive are more satisfied with their relationship. Among dating individuals, there is no relationship between the tendency to forgive and relationship satisfaction. However, for both dating and married individuals, the relationship between communication strategies used to grant forgiveness and relationship satisfaction is similar.

In reference to the first research question examining the relationship between tendency to forgive and forgiving-granting strategies, we found that dating partners who score higher on the forgiveness tendency are more likely to use nonverbal or explicit strategy to forgive their partner after experiencing a transgression. In other words, they use healthier forgiveness strategies (Waldron & Kelley, 2005). Dating

couples forgive each other without discussing the problem or making forgiveness conditional. This, however, was not the case with married partners. In the sample of married individuals, tendency to forgive was a significant predictor of using non-verbal and minimizing strategy to forgive; however, when severity of transgression was included as a covariate, the relationship between forgiveness tendency and forgiveness strategies was not significant. From these findings, it is obvious that while dating, the severity of transgression does not have much influence on the way partners decide to communicate forgiveness. Married individuals, in contrast, tend to pay more attention to the transgression's severity. In light of the VSA model, married individuals are affected by stress more than dating individuals. As alleged by Cody and McLaughlin (1990), this might be due to the multiple transgressions that married individuals sometimes experience during the course of their marriage. For example, married couples fight about money a lot, whereas dating couples generally fight less about money simply because they less often share the same financial pool or equally depend on each other for sound financial decisions (Sheldon, Gilchrist, & Lessley, 2013). Previous research shows that the inability to deal with financial issues productively is one of the leading causes of divorce (e.g., Betcher, & Macauley, 1990; Chatzky, 2007; Englander, 1998; Papp, Cummings, & Goeke-Morey, 2009). In their longitudinal study, Neff and Karney (2004) found that when stress was low, spouses on average were able to explain each other's negative behaviors, but after periods of relatively high stress, the same spouses who had demonstrated this ability were significantly less likely to do it. It is also likely that dating couples pay attention to the severity of transgression, but they do not want to run the risk of ending the relationship.

In married relationships, the tendency to forgive was also related to marital satisfaction, per RQ2. This was not the case in dating relationships where there was no relationship between tendency to forgive and satisfaction in a relationship. A possible explanation might be in the length of the relationship. Fenell (1993) found that in long-term first marriages, the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to marital longevity and satisfaction. Married individuals might feel a moral obligation or even pressure to forgive from friends and family (Johnson, 1999). Married couples are just more invested in their relationships and, therefore, might think more about the relationship satisfaction. Although some other studies (e.g., McNulty, 2010) have revealed that forgiveness can actually lead to more severe problems and less marital satisfaction, this was not the case with our participants. Married couples who were more willing to forgive were also more satisfied with their marriages. It is also important to mention that married and dating couples in this study did not differ in their overall relationship satisfaction or in their overall tendency to forgive. However, the results indicate (RQ3) that when controlling for transgression severity, married adults who use nonverbal strategy to forgive are more satisfied with their relationships. According to Waldron and Kelley (2005), this way of expressing forgiveness is positively related to strengthening relational outcomes after forgiveness has been granted. Similarly, dating couples who use explicit strategy are more satisfied with their relationship, regardless of the event's severity.

The explicit strategy includes a simple statement “I forgive you” and may indicate the unwillingness of dating partners to discuss the transgression further.

Additionally, married men are more ready to forgive than married women (RQ2). Fincham and Beach (2002) found that men’s readiness to forgive is a significant predictor of their partner’s constructive communication. Vangelisti and Daly’s (1997) research showed that women believe that their standards were fulfilled less often compared to men. Based on those assessments, they might be more likely to reevaluate their relationships, and have a harder time forgiving committed partners. Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton (2001) discussed how marriage is often the primary source of social support for men and the presence or absence of a wife has the greatest effect on men’s health, while women’s health is most influenced by the relationship’s quality. If this is the case, it could also be that women are less likely to forgive their partner than men are, as they are less affected by the absence of men. Kachadourian et al. (2004) argued that men are less sensitive to transgressions.

Conclusion

This study is significant in that it advances our understanding of differences between married and dating couples’ forgiveness tendencies. This study is further significant because it is among the first studies to test the relationship between the tendency to forgive and communication strategies used to grant forgiveness. Those who are inclined to forgive will use more nonverbal and minimizing strategies as opposed to discussion and conditional strategies. Forgiveness tendency is more important for married couples’ relationship satisfaction, whereas it was not related to dating couples’ relationship satisfaction. The present findings point to the importance of studying not only married or dating couples’ use of forgiveness, but other variables such as multiple transgressions that might predict why somebody uses conditional forgiveness strategy instead of indirect, or why there is a relationship between tendency to forgive and relationship satisfaction among married individuals and not dating couples. Future research could also focus on particular stressors, such as money, that influence how married couples communicate forgiveness to each other. It could also seek to determine if the nature or status of a relationship accentuates certain types of hurtful events over others.

From a theoretical perspective, this study shows that the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model can be applied to understanding married couples’ communication of forgiveness, but it is less applicable to dating couples, which is plausible given that the VSA model was originally developed to explain marital relationships. Future research should, therefore, further develop models for understanding how dating individuals communicate forgiveness. In light of the VSA model, married couples need to pay particular attention to stressors in the relationship. Most marital preparation programs focus on teaching couples how to communicate (adaptive processes), but they fail to recognize the importance of stressors that influence marital quality. Based on this study’s findings, marital preparation programs could greatly

benefit potential spouses by focusing on stressors that influence marital quality, and not just adaptive strategies. Also, considering that the average age of our married sample is 38 years old, one of the stressors in our sample might be the birth of the first child, which has been documented in past research (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Hence, it would be fitting for marital preparation programs to also address children as possible marriage stressors.

Limitations

Like all studies, the present research findings cannot be generalized to all populations. First, our participants were predominantly White, middle-class American students. In addition, the sample consisted of 80% females. Finally, the study relied on self-reports, which can skew objectivity of the data. For example, participants might not be honest in their answers, or may not recall the latest experienced transgression.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of control over the sampling method. For example, participants could choose to give a questionnaire to individuals that share the same traits and characteristics. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of our study limits causal inferences. Longitudinal future research of a more diverse sample would be appropriate for obtaining a more complete understanding of forgiveness in relationships.

References

- Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., Parrott, L., O'Connor, L. E., & Wade, N. G. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the transgression narrative test of forgivingness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*, 1277–1290. doi:10.1177/01461672012710004
- Betcher, W., & Macauley, R. (1990). *The seven basic quarrels of marriage: Recognize, defuse, negotiate, and resolve your conflicts*. New York, NY: Villard Books.
- Chatzky, J. (2007). *5 smart tips to manage money with your honey*. Retrieved from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20108870/from/ET>
- Cody, M. J., & McLaughlin, M. L. (1990). Interpersonal accounting. In H. Giles & W. P. Robinson (Eds.), *Handbook of language and social psychology* (pp. 227–255). Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, *16*, 297–334. doi:10.1007/BF02310555
- Doss, B. D., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). The effect of the transition to parenthood on relationship quality: An eight-year prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *96*, 601–619.
- Englander, D. W. (1998). Love, marriage, & money. *Dollar Sense*, 6–9.
- Exline, J. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). Expressing forgiveness and repentance: Benefits and barriers. In M. C. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: theory, research, and practice* (pp. 133–155). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Fenell, D. (1993). Characteristics of long-term first marriages. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, *15*, 450–460.
- Fincham, F. D. (2000). The kiss of porcupines: From attributing responsibility for forgiving. *Personal Relationships*, *7*, 1–23. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2000.tb00001.x

- Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: Implications for psychological aggression and constructive communication. *Personal Relationships, 9*, 239–251. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.00016
- Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002). Dealing with betrayal in close relationships: Does commitment promote forgiveness? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 956–974. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.82.6.956
- Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1998). Understanding betrayals in marriage: A synthesized model of forgiveness. *Family Process, 37*, 425–449. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.1998.00425.x
- Hendrick, S. S. (1988). A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 50*, 93–98.
- Honeycutt, J. M., Woods, B. L., & Fontenot, K. (1993). The endorsement of communication conflict rules as a function of engagement, marriage and marital ideology. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10*, 285–304. doi:10.1177/026540759301000208
- Johnson, M. P. (1999). Personal, moral, and structural commitment to relationships: Experiences of choice and constraint. In J. M. Adams & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal commitment and relational stability* (pp. 73–90). New York, NY: Kluwer.
- Kachadourian, L. K., Fincham, F., & Davila, J. (2004). The tendency to forgive in dating and married couples: The role of attachment and relationship satisfaction. *Personal Relationships, 11*, 373–393. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2004.00088.x
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin, 118*, 3–34. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.118.1.3
- Kelley, D. L. (1998). The communication of forgiveness. *Communication Studies, 49*, 255–271. doi:10.1080/10510979809368535
- Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., & Newton, T. L. (2001). Marriage and health: His and hers. *Psychological Bulletin, 127*, 472–503. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.127.4.472
- Langer, A., Lawrence, E., & Barry, R. A. (2008). Using a vulnerability-stress-adaptation framework to predict physical aggression trajectories in newlywed marriage. *Journal Of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 76*(5), 756–768. doi:10.1037/a0013254
- Luchies, L. B., Finkel, E. J., McNulty, J. K., & Kumashiro, M. (2010). The doormat effect: When forgiving erodes self-respect and self-concept clarity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*, 734–749. doi:10.1037/a0017838
- McCullough, M. E., Root, L. M., & Cohen, A. D. (2006). Writing about the benefits of an interpersonal transgression facilitates forgiveness. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 74*, 887–897. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.74.5.887
- McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1999). Religion and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality, 67*, 1141–1164. doi:10.1111/1467-6494.00085
- McNulty, J. K. (2008). Forgiveness in marriage: Putting the benefits into context. *Journal of Family Psychology, 22*, 171–175. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.22.1.171
- McNulty, J. (2010). Forgiveness increases the likelihood of subsequent partner transgressions in marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*, 787–790. doi:10.1037/a0021678
- Neff, L. A., & Karney, B. R. (2004). How does context affect intimate relationships? Linking external stress and cognitive processes within marriage. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 30*, 134–148. doi:10.1177/0146167203255984
- Papp, L. M., Cummings, E. M., & Goeke-Morey, M. C. (2009). For richer, for poorer: Money as a topic of marital conflict in the home. *Family Relations, 58*, 91–103. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00537.x
- Roberts, R. C. (1995). Forgivingness. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 32*(4), 289–306.
- Rusbult, C. E., Hannon, P. A., Stocker, S. L., & Finkel, E. J. (2005). Forgiveness and relational repair. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 185–205). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Sabatelli, R. M. (1988). Exploring relationship satisfaction: A social exchange perspective on the interdependence between theory, research and practice. *Family Relations*, 37, 217–222.
- Sheldon, P. (2013). *The experience of forgiveness among married and dating adults*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Alabama Communication Association (ACA), Montevallo, AL.
- Sheldon, P., Gilchrist, E., & Lessley, A. (2013). *You did what? The communication of forgiveness in married and dating couples*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, London, UK.
- Sheldon, P., & Honeycutt, J. M. (2011). Impact of gender and religiosity on forgiving communication. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 34(1), 59–74.
- Vangelisti, A. L., & Daly, J. A. (1997). Gender differences in standards for romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 4(3), 203–219. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.1997.tb00140.x
- Waldron, V. R., & Kelley, D. L. (2005). Forgiving communication as a response to relational transgressions. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22, 723–742. doi: 10.1177/0265407505056445
- Waldron, V. R., & Kelley, D. L. (2008). *Communicating forgiveness*. London, UK: Sage Publications. doi:10.1080/01463370500101097
- Worthington, E. L., & Wade, N. G. (1999). The psychology of forgiveness and unforgiveness and implications for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, 385–418. doi:10.1521/jscp.1999.18.4.385
- Younger, J. W., Piferi, R. L., Jobe, R., & Lawler, K. A. (2004). Dimensions of forgiveness: The views of laypersons. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 21, 837–855. doi:10.1177/0265407504047843