A Research Study Examining Forgiveness, Empathy, Commitment, Trust, And Relational Satisfaction Among Adult Friends After Relational Transgressions

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A RESEARCH STUDY EXAMINING FORGIVENESS, EMPATHY, COMMITMENT, TRUST, AND RELATIONAL SATISFACTION AMONG ADULT FRIENDS AFTER RELATIONAL TRANSGRESSIONS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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June 2011
Advisor: Dr. Mary Claire Morr Serewicz
Abstract

This research project examined how forgiveness was managed by adult friends after relational transgressions. It studied how the emotion of empathy promoted the act of forgiving and why the construct of commitment related to trust and relational satisfaction among friendship dyads. Isolating the specific emotion empathy in regards to forgiveness heightened the understanding of what emotional behaviors were used to maintain friendships once a relational transgression was experienced. Measuring and analyzing the interaction between commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction helped to determine how these constructs promoted forgiveness among adult friends.
Acknowledgements

As I come to the end of this mid-life journey, the list of people I want to acknowledge for being a part of this process is long and I hope I do them justice in the section of my dissertation.

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pursue other interests. And to my life partner, Liza Lank, thank you for giving me the time, patience, space, understanding, and love to complete this project. I look forward to our life together, without weekends full of writing and working on this tome.

Now that this part of my education is complete, I look forward to what the future holds. May I continue to learn, live with passion, and strive to always forgive.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Asking for or giving forgiveness might be an easy task for some, but for others the idea of forgiving evokes other questions, such as: How do I forgive? Why should I forgive this person? If I forgive this person for her actions, does that mean I have to forget what she did? Will I be able to ever trust this person again? Would someone else be able to forgive me if I did the same thing to him?

At its root, forgiveness is a behavior, or choice, of the person who was injured and a process of understanding and expressing one’s feelings or emotions toward another person in order to take some kind of concrete action, usually moving from a negative affect to a positive affect or judgment of the transgressor (Subkoviak et al., 1995). Many emotions, communication techniques, behavioral tactics and even religious ideas or spiritual dimensions have been used to explain how and why people ask for or grant forgiveness to others. Forgiveness is sometimes associated with and often combined with other communication concepts, such as reconciliation, conflict resolution, or conflict management.

Reconciling through forgiveness requires “reestablishing trust in a relationship after trust has been violated” (Worthington, 2003, p. 170) in order for the relationship to continue. In some interactions without reconciliation from both parties, the relationship may cease to exist. Therefore, the act of reconciling is interpersonal in that both parties in
a relationship have to reconcile with each other, right the wrongs committed, settle
disputes or forgive each other for the relationship to continue.

Though other communication phenomena, such as conflict management, conflict
resolution, and management of relational transgressions, share similarities with
forgiveness, forgiveness is an interpersonal phenomenon worth examining in its own
right. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting the transgression as if it never happened
(Worthington, 2003). Granting and accepting forgiveness after a betrayal of trust in any
type of interpersonal relationship includes an array of emotions, thoughts, actions,
messages, and behaviors on both the forgiver and the forgivee sides. Examining both
parties’ involvement in the transgression and forgiveness process, especially that of the
victim, is vital to learn how people grant forgiveness to others and how this
communication phenomenon relates to adult friends (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Ingersoll-
Dayton & Krause, 2005; Ross, Hertenstein, & Wrobel, 2007). This research study
examines how forgiveness is handled among adult friends and why the wronged friends
forgive. The constructs, definitions, theories, prior research, and methodology used to
study forgiveness have been analyzed in detail, concluding in the method used for
investigating the relational consequences and communication antecedents of forgiveness
among adult friends.

Statement of the Problem

People form interpersonal relationships in two basic ways: non-voluntarily or
voluntarily. Some relationships are non-voluntary, such as the family one is born into or
legally made a part of through procreation, adoption, or the formation of a step family.
Others begin on a voluntary basis by choice, when two people interact and form a relationship based on what each person brings to the other and to the overall relationship itself, such as friendships.

A non-voluntary relationship is one “in which the actor believes he or she has no viable choice but to maintain it, at least at present and in the immediate future” (Hess, 2000, p. 460). Another factor in non-voluntary relationships is a perceived lack of a better or comparable alternative (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In some cases, non-voluntary relationships remain intact even if they are unsatisfactory because the people involved perceive no better alternative choices in other possible relational partners (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). These relationships may continue due to a lack of better options or more desirable alternatives. These types of interactions also tend to be more prevalent in non-voluntary relations, whereas voluntary relations are often based on the choice to begin and then remain in the relationship because of what the relationship offers to the members of the dyad (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995).

In relationships between family members, individuals usually do not have a choice in who becomes their mother, father, brother, or sister. Rather these types of relationships are more a matter of chance in being born to the same parents, adopted into a family unit, or becoming a step-child and/or step-sibling in a re-marriage situation. Therefore, even if one of the members of these non-voluntary relationships ceases communicating with another member of the family, these non-voluntary, familial relationships retain their basic essence. The parties may not communicate, but a non-
functioning, non-communicative relationship between the parties involved still exists, even if only in the legal or genealogical sense.

Voluntary relationships, on the other hand, are those in which the members make a choice to establish and maintain a relational connection with a desired person. Examples of voluntary relationships are romantic partnerships and friendships. Unlike non-voluntary relationships, voluntary relationships often have to be actively managed by the relational members. In a voluntary relationship, the relationship exists due to the ongoing choice to interact and is usually based on the value, commitment, satisfaction, or intimacy the continued interaction brings to one’s life. If one member chooses to end the relationship, the connection that previously bound the two people together is broken or altered in some manner.

A prime interpersonal example of a voluntary relationship is a friendship (Jehn & Shah, 1997). In friend dyads, each member has a choice in forming ties or dissolving involvement within the interpersonal relationship. True friendships are usually not exchange-based, in that members are not seeking or demanding equally reciprocal benefits from the other person, but instead the friends “are concerned about each other’s welfare” (Jehn & Shah, 1997, p. 776). Social support, closeness, proximity, frequency of interaction, common goals and interests, trust, and mutual ties are other, often universal, relational aspects of friendships (Jehn & Shah, 1997; Rose, Carlson, & Waller, 2007). Several other emotional and relational characteristics of friendships relevant to forgiveness among adult friends are empathy, trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction (Waldron & Kelley, 2008).
As a person ages, friendships take on a different role in one’s life. For adults, friends often become secondary to romantic relationships, which themselves started out as voluntary relationships. The ability to choose a romantic partner makes these relationships similar to a friendship; however, romantic relationships are often more emotionally and often legally and/or financially intertwined than friendships. During early adulthood (around age 22), people “begin focusing their relational efforts on establishing a new attachment bond” (Canary, Cupach & Messman, 1995, p. 91), usually in the form of a romantic relationship or life partnership with another compatible individual. Social science research has prioritized adult romantic relationships, which has lead to a “dearth of research on adult friendship conflicts” (Canary et al., p. 91). One reason for this emphasis could be the societal notion that romantic and familial relationships “are supposedly more important than are friends in adulthood” (Canary et al., p. 91). Increasing knowledge about voluntary adult friendships will enhance the understanding and the meanings of social values and constructs such as trust, fairness, and reciprocity (Fisher & Galler, 1988). A better understanding of why some adults are able to forgive a friend and maintain their voluntary bond after a relational transgression, and why other friendships cease to exist due to relational transgressions is necessary. This study addresses the research void of forgiveness as it relates to the relational and communicative characteristics of friendships. Studying how friends communicate and manage forgiveness will help to lessen the research dearth on conflicts among adult friends, thus adding to the interpersonal communication arena.
Purpose of the Study

Although many studies have examined forgiveness within families and romantic couples (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007; Finkel, Burnette, & Scissors, 2007; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachel, 1997; Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2005; Worthington & Wade, 1999), few have analyzed how forgiveness of relational transgressions is handled and communicated among adult friends. Once friendship roles and rules have been established, violations and transgressions of trust, relational satisfaction, and commitment can lead to a shift in relational interaction and overall satisfaction. Certain communication and psychosocial techniques are often called upon by people in these tested relational dyads to maintain or possibly dissolve the friend relationship. How the relationship was defined pre-transgression or the future value of remaining in the relationship brings to the members of the dyad often determines if forgiveness is even an option. This study examines how and why some friendships and not others are maintained after relational transgressions occur, and how forgiveness is used among adult friends as a choice in maintaining the friendship, while others choose not to forgive and dissolve the relationship.

Past studies of non-voluntary familial relationships are expansive in human communication, in particular concerning the use of relational maintenance behaviors, such as positivity, openness, assurances, networks, and sharing tasks, in a family unit (Morr Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, & Poole, 2007; Myers, 2001). Much of the remaining research on relational maintenance behaviors looks at interpersonal
relationships that begin as voluntary, such as marriage dyads and romantic relationships (Myers, 2001). In his review of past studies, Myers (2001) showed that the use of specific relational maintenance behaviors varies among these relational groupings—be they marriage, romantic relations, or friendship dyads. Since friendships have none of the legal ties which tend to accompany other interpersonal relationships such as a marriage, they are of particular interest because the voluntary link that keeps the two parties in the dyad together is not contractually bound. Walking away from these kinds of relationship does not usually have legal implications, as in the break-up of a legally-bound marriage (Canary et al., 1995).

In order to question people about how forgiveness was handled and communicated among friends, this study examined forgiveness in friendships after a relational transgression. Aspects of empathy, trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction within a friendship were measured in relation to how they pertained to forgiveness. By the nature of the timing of data collection in this study, only retrospective reports of these constructs could be captured since this research project only asked for the description of post-transgression relational interactions. Through sampling these types of voluntary relationships, the idea of forgiveness among adult friends was expanded to understand the voluntary aspect of these relational acts.

**Theoretical Foundation and Other Related Constructs**

Although many theories were considered as the foundation in this study, only one metatheory, social exchange theory, was used to examine the findings. Social exchange theory offered certain assumptions and constructs that applied to the study of forgiveness
among adult friends. This section examines the assumptions, concepts, and variables to explain how social exchange theory was used in conjunction with forgiveness among friends.

**Social exchange theory.** The roots of social exchange theory stem from economics and behavioral psychology, specifically the book *The Social Psychology of Groups* (1959) by Thibaut and Kelley. The main idea behind this metatheory is based on the behaviors of people, in particular the connection between the costs and rewards of being in a relationship and the resources and benefits gained from a relationship. Social exchange theory tallies how people determine the “cost” to be in or stay in a relationship and the “rewards” earned for being in or remaining involved within the interpersonal relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). People then compare the costs to the rewards when determining whether to maintain a relationship. In regard to this study on how forgiveness is handled among friends after a relational transgression, the cost/reward ratio comes into play when the wronged friend is deciding whether to forgive the transgressor after the cost of staying in a relationship is weighed with the rewards garnered from the friend or friendship interaction.

Another idea of social exchange theory, resources or benefits of interpersonal exchange, was borrowed from economics (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Within social exchange theory, any resources within a relationship are those “commodities” that can be used and exchanged through interpersonal interactions, such as time, network, or tasks (Foa & Foa, 1980). Often these basic concepts held within the social exchange theory are seen as harsh or impersonal when applied to interpersonal relationships (Stafford, 2008).
In this study among friends another form of commodity could be the act of forgiveness itself being used as a commodity or resource to be played by the victim to continue or discontinue a friendship.

Comparing possible outcomes is another idea within social exchange theory tied to the costs and rewards constructs. Whether people know it or not, most individuals will take into consideration the profit gained or potential loss felt when determining the value of remaining in or ending a relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Stafford, 2008). In developing social exchange theory, Thibaut and Kelley introduced the concept of comparison levels to explain the act of measuring the outcomes of remaining in or ending a relationship. According to the observations of Thibaut and Kelley (1959), an individual’s comparison level is “a standard by which the person evaluates the rewards and costs of a given relationship in terms of what he feels he deserves” (p. 21). There are many comparison levels that can be used in evaluating the costs and rewards received by certain interpersonal relationships—the amount of love, trust, or commitment felt, or even family ties, responsibility, and money are just a few. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) argued relational satisfaction was the comparison level most often used in determining the outcome of whether one continued or ended interactions with another. If people found the relationship to be satisfactory overall despite the costs involved, then the reward of a satisfactory relationship won out in the decision to maintain it. Conversely, if people feel less than satisfied in a relationship, then the benefits of ending will often outweigh the desire to continue the relationship.
However, comparison level of relational satisfaction is not the only criterion that people take into consideration when weighing the cost/rewards of continuing a relationship—comparison levels for alternative options are also taken into consideration in determining whether to stay or go. A comparison level for alternatives is defined as “how well you are doing relative to others outside of your position but in positions that supply an alternative choice” (Klein & White, 1996, p. 66). Therefore, one’s comparison level of alternatives is subjective, depending on a person’s set of comparable outcome options or other potential relational mates to choose from. According to Sabatelli and Shehan (1993), “regardless of whether a better alternative actually exists, the person who believes that one does is more likely to leave a relationship than a person who believes that no better relationship exists” (p. 400). So if another better option is viable and available, the relationship may end. However, often there are no other more satisfactory alternatives, and then the relationship may remain intact due to lack of better comparable options.

The notions of self-interest and interdependence are two other fundamental constructs embedded in social exchange theory. As sterile and self-serving as it may seem, self-interest is often the means to an end that drives individuals to act in such a way as to increase potential outcomes and “projections of rewards and costs associated with an exchange, or potential exchange, of resources” (Stafford, 2008, p. 378) within a relationship. In this sense, rewards and costs are interdependent on each other for the self-interest outcome that often results from interacting with others to meet the highest profit gained and negate potential loss. This may seem selfish, but actually this construct serves
as a form of reciprocity: The more one person in an interpersonal relationship receives rewards from the other person in the same relationship, the more that person will reciprocate similar outcomes or rewards that are meaningful to the other person, and thus “both parties’ profits are maximized” (Stafford, 2008, p. 380). It is in this manner that self-interest is tied to the construct of interdependence, meaning the outcomes or rewards of one person are influenced and linked to the efforts of the other person within the relationship (Stafford, 2008). Therefore, according to the social exchange theory our self-interests in relationships are interdependent on the self-interests of other people—and vice versa. However, these aforementioned constructs make many assumptions about human nature and the nature of social relationships, which will now be discussed and considered as to how these constructs and assumptions relate to this research project on forgiveness among friends.

**Assumptions of Social Exchange Theory.** Along with the constructs of cost/rewards, resources/benefits, outcomes and comparison levels, it is important to note and remember social exchange theory comes with the following views regarding human nature and how people interact and relate to others (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993; Stafford, 2008):

1. Individuals seek rewards or resources and avoid costs or punishments.
2. Individuals seek to maximize profits or resources for themselves while minimizing costs.
3. Individuals calculate rewards and costs and consider the outcomes of alternatives before acting.
4. Individuals use differing standards to evaluate rewards and costs.
As put forth in the first and second assumptions of human nature, social exchange theorists believe that since humans are rational and desire to obtain the greatest rewards with the lowest costs, they will be sensible in making decisions, basing their choices on information and input available to them at that moment in time. When it comes to human nature, social exchange supporters argue “within the limitations of the information that they [humans] possess and their ability to predict the future, they make the choices that will bring the most profit” (Nye, 1982, p. 23). To go one step further, Sabatelli and Shehan (1993) clarify that humans make choices based on the best possible outcome for explaining the third assumption with the notion that “…within the limitations of the information that they [humans] possess, they calculate rewards, costs, and consider alternatives before acting” (p. 396). These assumptions about human nature echo back to the constructs of self-interest and interdependence given the notion that rational individuals will look at “projections of rewards and costs associated with an exchange, or potential exchange, of resources” (Stafford, 2008, p. 378) within a relationship at the given time to determine how to react. The fourth assumption is that individuals use different standards to evaluate rewards and costs. The same behavior could have a different reward or cost value, depending on the person evaluating it.

Social exchange theory also ascribes assumptions about the nature of social relationships, but though the use of other constructs and embedded assumptions (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993; Sprecher, 1998; Stafford, 2008). Social exchange theory purports three main assumptions about relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993; Sprecher, 1998; Stafford, 2008):
1. The first assumption of social exchange theory is that social relationships and exchanges are characterized by interdependence.

2. The second assumption of social relationships is that these exchanges are regulated by relational norms.

3. The third assumption embedded in this theory pertains to trust and commitment, and how, why and when these relational experiences stabilize relationships.

As already stated, the interdependence idea of the first assumption of the nature of social relationships within social exchange theory means the outcomes or rewards sought by one person in an interaction are influenced and linked to the efforts of the other person within the same relationship (Stafford, 2008). This assumption has lead to the development of a sub-theory of social exchange theory called interdependence theory, which concentrates on projected alternative and comparison levels (Stafford, 2008). In particular, interdependence theory focuses primarily on …the point that satisfaction—and thus decision making and action—is based on how much above or below one’s comparison level the outcomes of a particular situation are, as well as how much above or below the projected outcomes the outcomes from alternatives are perceived to be (Stafford, 2008, p. 383).

Satisfaction is determined by perception, and perception is influenced by dependence on the relationship. This does not mean that a person’s projections are accurate, but that our comparison levels are based on dependence on the relationship—meaning the more one has invested in the relationship or the perceived strength of the relationship, the more likely a person is to overlook or downplay any comparable alternatives (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000).

Interdependence theory also establishes the idea that a person’s dependence on a
relationship is correlated with the perceived rewards from that relationship versus those that could be received in another comparable relationship. Consequently a person’s chances of staying in a relationship are based on the strength of the dependence on the relationship and possible rewards lost, or costs, from leaving or ending the relationship (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994). All things considered, if a person is invested in a relationship and committed to the other partner, interdependence theory states the more we overlook certain costs in order to stay in the relationship, the more possibility there is to reap the potential rewards based on previous interactions and interdependence with the relationship.

The idea that social exchanges are regulated by certain socially accepted and even socially expected relational norms, such as reciprocity, justice, and fairness, is the second embedded assumption of social exchange theory. This assumption also serves as the foundation of a secondary theory within social exchange called equity theory. This sub-theory looks at people not as greedy, profit-focused consumers carefully weighing every cost and reward to achieve maximum outcomes in relational investments, but also views humans as rational, fair-minded individuals who consider reciprocity as a key element of social interactions (Stafford, 2008). Equity theory does not assert that reciprocity, or a give-take-give cycle, will always occur or that fairness will be apparent in every interaction, but that “a sense of equity or inequity accumulates over the course of a relationship that is not apparent in any one interaction” (Stafford, 2008, p. 384). Symbolic value and rewards in a relationship are created through communicative acts of reciprocity over time and the life-span of a relationship (Molm, Schaefer, & Collett,
conditions of exchange and reciprocity within a certain relationship “must be uncertain in the sense that there is a structural or situational potential for nonreciprocity” (Molm et al., 2007, p. 202). As a result fairness or “distributive justice” (Adams, 1965) is spread over the life-span of a relationship in that one person comes to realize that their rewards may not be immediate, but will come due at some point in the duration of the relationship. In other words, we act and react with other individuals, recognizing and anticipating that these actions and reaction will be noticed and in some way reciprocated and will receive a return on their communicative and relational investment at some point (Sprecher, 1998).

According to the third assumption embedded within social exchange theory, trust and commitment will most likely result from the on-going experiences and social interactions of individuals within relationships, and both trust and commitment help to stabilize relationships over time. Trust is as a form of learned compromise in which one person accepts vulnerability in a relationship based on the perceived outcomes or rewards of past behavior of another person (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Commitment entails one’s long-term investment in a relationship and dependence on the relationship, including behaviors and actions that show intent to continue the relationship with a partner (Tsang, McCullough, & Fincham, 2006). Various studies have revealed that “individuals who are committed to their relationships are more accommodating toward their relationship partners, more willing to sacrifice, and likely to perceive their partner’s transgression to be less severe” (Tsang et al., 2006, p. 449). Through the life-span of a relationship, or even the conclusion or ending of a relationship, partners may
come to expect and believe they will be treated fairly by each other. When a relationship takes on this pattern of expected, or trusted, reciprocity and fairness, over time the people involved will come to expect certain rewards from the relationship—in particular they come to trust the other person and in turn become committed to certain outcomes and rewards the relationship brings based on past experience (Blau, 1964; McDonald, 1981; Rusbult, 1983; Stafford, 2008).

How This Theory Applies to Studying Forgiveness Among Friends

In regards to forgiveness among friends, social exchange theory has ways of viewing relations embedded in its assumptions that would benefit this current project. The continued development of social exchange theory, as well as the sub-theories interdependence and equity, is possible through a study on forgiveness among friends, thus taking up the “challenge to test the utility” of these theories and looking for “an explication of links between theoretical working strategies” (Shelly, 2002, p. 119), potentially adding to the overall growth of the ideas and assumptions put forth in each. The cost/rewards analogy brought forth by social exchange theory, how people subjectively tally the cost and rewards of a relationship, is an individual choice with a “vast repertoire of possible behaviors” (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 10) or outcomes. Why one person would stay in a relationship and another would leave is not required or demanded, but individually determined with a vast amount of options and choices for the outcome of a relationship. As for how forgiveness is handled among friends, this common assumption of various ways to interpret one’s relationships and outcomes will help in understanding how forgiveness is used differently within friendship dyads. The
outcome construct featured in the social exchange theory, when combined with this assumption of a multitude of ways to socially construct relationships, allows for a vast amount of outcomes within friendships after a transgression has transpired, forgiveness being one of those possible outcomes.

Social exchange theory has the idea that communication is intentional and goal-driven (Stafford, 2008). Additionally, social exchange theory incorporates the constructs of self-interest and interdependence to explain how human behavior is intentional within relationships in order to influence the current and future action of others (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Stafford, 2008). Often individuals will intentionally calculate rewards and cost to maximize profits, with the end goal to be “their ability to predict the future” of a relationship (Nye, 1982, p. 23). Therefore people are able to co-create interdependence through their interactions based on costs and rewards of the future of a relationship. As for how these shared assumptions and constructs relate to forgiveness among friends, data may reveal a socially shared self-interest aspect of the use of forgiveness within a relationship after a transgression—meaning forgiveness may be one way people maximize profits or resources for themselves while minimizing costs in a friendship. The self-interest and interdependence ideas put forth in social exchange theory may be what drive some friends to grant forgiveness, while others may intentionally withhold forgiveness after a relational transgression.

In keeping with yet another assumption in the social exchange theory, individuals use differing standards to evaluate rewards and costs (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993; Stafford, 2008). These alternatives or individual differences in forming
one’s reality or future could take on the form of comparison level for alternatives when determining the outcomes of an existing relationship. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) felt that the standard of an individual’s level of comparison was subjective based on outcome options and any other relational factors. In this current study, how respondents standards of trust, commitment and relational satisfaction relate to forgiveness offer insight into the future of the friendship after a relational transgression.

Other useful assumptions and constructs may reveal themselves in performing and reviewing data analysis through this study. In addition, the development and expansion of social exchange theory is possible through a study in forgiveness among friends by challenging and testing the utility of this theory and looking for links between theoretical assumptions and working strategies (Shelly, 2002). When adult friends exchange forgiveness after a relational transgression, certain constructs, including relational satisfaction, empathy, commitment, and trust, also come into play. The next section of this dissertation will address and define these terms, followed by the methodology for how these constructs were measured in this dissertation project.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

An exploration of past literature and research projects on forgiveness revealed a myriad of emotions, communication techniques, tactics, and even religious ideas or spiritual dimensions used by people who sought or granted forgiveness to others. Some philosophical arguments against forgiveness existed, stating “it leaves the forgiver open to other abuse” (Subkoviak et al., 1995, p. 642) by the transgressor. Other scholars thought forgiveness was often conflated with reconciliation—for true forgiveness to occur the forgiver must be reunited with, appease, or continue to interact with the person who wronged against him or her (Enright, 2001; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Reconciliation through a continued relationship was not always the case, and the act of forgiveness, in and of itself, actually concerned “one person’s stance toward another” (Subkoviak et al., 1995, p. 642-643), and did not mean the forgiver had to respect, be in contact with, or ever see the transgressor again. For instance, if a person died before forgiveness was received or granted, true reconciliation through verbally communicating or physically reconnecting with an interpersonal relationship could not occur. Or, if one member of the relational dyad chose not to forgive or accept forgiveness from the other, or even refused continued interaction, reconciliation could not occur. However, forgiveness of self or of the altercation itself could occur, making forgiveness an intrapersonal action performed by the person who was wronged did the transgression. The exchange became interpersonal through the statement of a person’s feelings toward
another through interpersonal communication after a relational transgression (Subkoviak et al., 1995).

This interpersonal act of forgiving and continuing a friendship was studied in the current research, which addressed why some people forgave certain friends and the outcome of that forgiveness action. Although much research has been conducted on the religious aspects of forgiveness, this study focused primarily on the relational and communicative characteristics. Starting with interpersonal communication and definitions of friendship and forgiveness, the rest of this chapter presents the research of friendship and forgiveness scholars, as well as scholarly research in the areas of empathy, trust, and commitment, and how these relate to the idea of forgiveness as an interpersonal communication phenomenon. The chapter ends with research hypotheses that were explored and tested.

**Literature Review**

For this study, interpersonal communication between friends consisted of a multitude of levels and channels depending on the type of relationship and the specific interaction. The type of information and how it was handled, both within and outside a relationship, can often enhance or alter a relationship in many ways. Senders and receivers of messages continually assess and exchange information, taking in not only the actual words stated, but the non-verbal behaviors and any intra- and interpersonal noise that affects the communicative act. Communication can often be misinterpreted, or the actions and behaviors of the members of a relationship can affect the status or continued success of the relationship itself. These misinterpreted behaviors can lead to turbulence
within a relationship, causing the members to re-evaluate and even re-establish emotional ties and relational rules or boundaries. There are many ways in which this relational turbulence or transgressions can be handled or rectified—forgiveness of the transgression being just one reaction.

All types and variations of relationships exist, just as all types of interactional behaviors and violations of established relational standards. When two people interact, there is no telling what behaviors, emotions, and communication techniques will help or hinder the relationship. Often specific behaviors or violations of relational rules or boundaries may even bring an end to the relationship, a change in the relational dynamic, or a deeper understanding of and commitment to each other. Forgiveness is one way in which relationships are maintained after a transgression or violation of relational rules or boundaries.

How forgiveness is handled often depends on how the relationship was formed and maintained over time. Non-voluntary relationships, such as families, often have no other choice than to continue interaction with another member of the family by mere sake of the relationship itself, and not necessarily the choice of the actors. Both non-voluntary and voluntary relationships, such as friendships, can have a defining moment or relational transgression that may cause continued interactions to end if communication tactics, like forgiveness, are not used to maintain the relationship after a transgression. However, the voluntary aspects of friendships make them a unique interpersonal relationship with their own perspectives and complexities, which were explored and analyzed in this research project.
**Friendship.** In defining the concept of friend or friendship, there are as many definitions of this relational term as there are different kinds of these types of relationships (Willmott, 1987). For some, a friend was often defined as a non-familial relation, but for others a family member can also be a friend. Blieszner and Adams (1992) investigated participants’ definitions of friendship and found some people termed co-workers or neighbors friends, while others would only call someone a friend who has the singular role of being a friend. Men tended to categorize friends as people they did things with, while women considered intimacy and sharing of emotions a factor in friendships (Blieszner & Adams, 1992).

With all these varying thoughts in mind, the overarching description used in this research to explain adult friendships included four main characteristics: friendships are voluntary, egalitarian, privately negotiated, and mutually involved interpersonal relationships (Rawlins, 1992, 2009). The voluntary nature of friendships suggests choice in deciding who to be and who not to be friends with (Pecchiono, Wright, & Nussbaum, 2005). Voluntary relationships are based on value, satisfaction, or the intimacy the relationship brought to each member. A conscious decision to stay in a relationship because of the relationship is also a factor. The egalitarian aspect of friendships refers to the idea that most people were friends with those they felt equal to in background, social status, and the effort expended to maintaining the relationship (Pecchiono et al., 2005). This egalitarian part of the description and research on friendship relates to the Social Exchange Theory, in that most friends sought for equality and interdependence in relationships (Johar, 2005; Rawlins, 1992). The third characteristic, private negotiation of
friendship roles, related to the “unique code…understood by each partner within the context of the relationship” (Pecchiono et al., 2005, p. 99). The mutual involvement of both people within a friendship was also a key characteristic used to describe these specific types of interpersonal relationships (Perlman & Fehr, 1986; Pecchiono et al., 2005). Mutual investments of time and energy based on the rewards garnered were aspects of friendship related to the cost/reward ratio of social exchange theory.

The literature also revealed another role of friends was social networking and support (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Rawlins, 2009). People had friends to be socially interactive and to spend time with each other based on shared interests or a mutual interpersonal attraction to each other (Cillessen, Jiang, West, & Laszkowski, 2005; Duck, 1975; Willmott, 1987). The attractive factors of a friend could be shared interests, sex/gender, reciprocity, and proximity; accordingly, people tended to form social networks, or friendships, with others of the same sex, who lived near them, and who enjoyed similar activities (Leenders, 1996).

The support and communicative functions of friend relationships have been characterized as someone who was “always there for me” (Walker, 1995, p. 273), “someone you can always turn to for help,” and “someone you can talk to freely about anything” (Willmott, 1987, pp. 82-83). Within this communicative sharing, trust has been found to be an expected behavioral role of friends, specifically in how friends are able to express themselves to each other and know this shared information would be protected within the relationship (Rawlins, 1992; Willmott, 1987). Research showed this disclosure and safe-guarding of information was a factor in both relational satisfaction and closeness.
among friends (Hendrick, 1981; Miller & Kenny, 1986; Morry, 2005). Still other research also found that the reciprocal act of being able to give and receive information was also found to be important in overall relational satisfaction and maintenance of adult friendships (Cole & Teboul, 2004).

Research has revealed three main stages of friendships: formation, maintenance, and dissolution (Blieszner & Adams, 1992). As for adult friendships, the formation of these relationships has been found in many places, primarily work life, marriages, parenting, school, community, and neighbors (Rawlins, 1992; Verbrugge, 1979). The formation of adult friends was composed primarily of social environment and the day-to-day interactions of individuals (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Rawlins, 1992; Verbrugge, 1979). These same social interactions led to the maintenance and adaptation of adult friendships (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Rawlins, 1992). Finchum (2005) found that in long-distance friendships, access to one another was a key factor in friendship maintenance. As for the dissolving of certain friendships, research revealed that this stage often came about in adult friendships due to geographical or time constraints, such as change in jobs, switch in social interactions, or parenting demands as children grew older (Rawlins, 2009).

Some research studies have identified turning points or transgressions in friendships, which usually occur when commitment in the friendship begins to dissolve, and eventually leads to the end of the friendships themselves (Becker, Johnson, Craig, Gilchrist, Haigh, & Lane, 2009; Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur, & Villagran, 2003; Johnson, Wittenberg, Haigh, Wigley, Becker, Brown, & Craig, 2004). While one
reaction to these turning points in a friendship could be the end of the relationship, some people forgave their friends for the transgression (Subkoviak et al., 1995). It was the act of forgiveness as an alternative reaction to a transgression that was the main focus of this research project.

**Forgiveness.** According to Enright, Freedman, and Rique (1998), forgiveness is:

…a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her.

(pp. 46-47)

As maintained by this view, forgiveness is a behavior or choice of the person who was injured and involves a process of understanding one’s feelings toward another person, usually moving from a negative affect to a positive affect or judgment of the transgressor (Subkoviak et al., 1995). A combined understanding of self and other allows for forgiveness, and permits for both personal and relational benefits in forgiving another person.

On the interpersonal level, forgiveness has been shown to reduce guilt, increase confidence and evoke a general feeling of well-being and empathy on the part of the person wronged (Exlin & Baumeister, 2000). Behaviors include feelings of guilt leading to repentance on the part of the perpetrator who wronged another person (Exlin & Baumeister, 2000). Thus forgiveness is seen as an *intrapersonal change* on the part of the person who was wronged within a specific *interpersonal context* directed at a perceived perpetrator (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). In this view, both the forgiver
and the forgivee have the potential to change after a transgression was committed. This change in self and toward another suggests that both the intrapersonal and social aspects of forgiveness are relevant and make forgiveness a psychosocial construct (McCullough et al., 2000).

Most of the research on forgiveness has found that the act of forgiveness as a relational behavior is an adaptive way of coping with others, and that forgiveness is associated with an individual’s psychological well-being (Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen, Billings, Heinze, Neufeld, Shorey, Roberts, & Roberts, 2005). To understand what psychosocial constructs pertain to forgiveness, researchers have investigated the intrapersonal behaviors that were important in a person who allowed forgiveness to occur within his or her interpersonal relationships. McCullough et al. (1997) found that forgiveness was facilitated by the development of empathy for the offender, which overshadowed the feelings experienced by the transgression. Therefore, intrapersonal empathy and an interpersonal commitment toward the perpetrator were two of the motivational behaviors behind the act of forgiveness within a close relationship. Whether these constructs and behaviors were inherent to the nature of the relationship itself or if they were motivational traits each person brought to the relationship that made forgiveness more likely was not addressed.

According to some research findings, “forgiving … resides at the level of people’s basic motivations toward an offending relationship partner” (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998, p. 1598). One of these basic motivations included a link between forgiveness and empathy, implicating empathy and
forgiveness were interrelated (McCullough et al., 1998). Several other psychological and relational factors showed associations with forgiveness and satisfaction (McCullough et al., 1998). In some interpersonal relationships, forgiveness was used to regulate and reconcile damaged interpersonal relationships in an attempt to restore the relationship as much as possible to what it was before the transgression (Tsang et al., 2006). Research has shown that, by taking time to think about the transgression from another person’s perspective, people eventually used positive, pro-social traits, including the ability to feel and express empathy, to forgive (Berry, Worthington, O’Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001). Respondents who scored low on levels of initial acts of revenge tended to increase commitment with their transgressor once forgiveness was granted and received (Tsang et al., 2006). High levels of benevolence, or empathy, were shown to increase closeness and commitment in relationships as time passed (Tsang et al., 2006). Equally, low levels of avoidance increased commitment over time (Tsang et al., 2006).

Both the offender and forgiver are important to the overall process of forgiving, as are the nature of the relationship, the relational repair behaviors of both parties, and the personal, cognitive well-being of both the forgiver and the forgivee (Kelley, 2003). Certain common constructs have been found in forgiveness: forgiveness was both an intrapersonal action on the part of the person who was offended or wronged and an interpersonal behavior on the side of the transgressed and the perpetrator; empathy or understanding of the transgressor seemed to be one emotional motivator of forgiveness; certain personality traits and behavior tactics were necessary to forgiveness; and
forgiveness was more likely in close relationships that are committed and satisfactory pre-transgression, and were therefore more likely to be satisfactory post-transgression (McCullough et al., 1998).

The constructs of empathy, commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction were examined individually to determine how they related to and were either predictors or outcomes of the main forgiveness construct.

**Empathy.** In both voluntary and non-voluntary relationships, emotional ties bind the members. Certain emotions are based on the interactions and shared environment between the individuals, “serving an adaptive function by mediating between continually changing situations and the individual’s behavior” (Kubzansky & Kawachi, 2000, p. 324). The emotions found in familial relationships, such as parent-child or sibling relationships, require different regulations than those among adult friends. In non-voluntary as well as voluntary relationships, however, emotions surface or are suppressed depending on the relationship and situation at hand. Often these emotions are not formally addressed after personal information is mishandled, which often led to strained or severed relationships (Kubzansky & Kawachi, 2000). In any type of relationship, the emotional ties bind the dyad and make the members feel close to one another. When these emotional ties are tested in reaction to relational transgressions, often forgiveness or other conflict resolution behaviors are communicated in order to salvage the relationship.

In the current study, empathy was the predisposing emotional behavior measured as it related to forgiveness. The term empathy has often been described in conjunction with sympathy, altruism, compassion, and love (Bateson, 1991), and this emotion has
also been considered way to inhibit or come to terms with one’s negative, more aggressive emotions (Bateson, 1991). Empathy is a person’s attempt to feel the same emotions as another individual (Bateson, 1991; Enright, 2001). The perspective-taking aspect of empathy pertains to the cognitive way people go about understanding another person’s emotional actions and reactions to a situation (Davis, 1994; Long, 1990; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachel, 1997). For this study, empathy serves as the victim’s altruistic way of coming to terms with negative feelings after a relational transgression (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003).

Forgiveness and empathy were described by participants in one qualitative research project that asked participants to describe two separate incidents of forgiveness: one in which they were the transgressor or offender and another in which they were the victim of the transgression (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Researchers found the roles of both the victim and offender must be examined to truly study forgiveness and its relationship to empathy. People with higher emotional levels of empathy, usually women, tended to forgive more than those with lower empathy levels (Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002). Other researchers found no significant sex difference when it came to granting or receiving forgiveness: however, a difference existed in the use of empathy in forgiving others (Macaskill et al., 2002; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). The question of whether empathy was an innate emotion or something that was learned has been studied less often, primarily due to the difficulty of capturing the longitudinal aspects of this issue.

Macaskill et al. (2002) deduced that those who can recognize the feelings of others and share their emotions tend to be more likely to forgive—in other words,
empathetic people seem to be more inclined to forgive others. Though women were more empathetic than men, no apparent difference in the ability to forgive was found between males and females (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). People often use empathy to forgive by ruminating or taking time to think about the transgression from another person’s perspective (Berry et al., 2005; Konstam et al., 2001). This finding supports the idea that forgiveness and empathy are linked and related in some way as relational constructs.

In addition to the emotional aspects of forgiving, several communicative, behavioral, and cognitive constructs are prevalent in the forgiveness literature: commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction. These constructs are central in much of the research on forgiveness and are discussed below.

**Commitment.** Commitment relates to one’s long-term investment in a relationship, “including the behavioral intent to remain with a relationship partner” (Tsang et al., 2006, p. 449). Tsang et al. (2006) found that “individuals who are committed to their relationships are more accommodating toward their relationship partners, more willing to sacrifice, and likely to perceive their partner’s transgression to be less severe” (p. 449). A psychological factor was also present in commitment in that the attachment to a relationship was a positive factor in maintaining close relationships (Tsang et al., 2006). Thus, the commitment an individual felt toward an interpersonal relationship predicted forgiving a partner’s transgression (Tsang et al., 2006). If no future is imagined in the relationship, the members involved enact little or no maintenance strategies to keep the relationship going (Canary & Stafford, 1992). Therefore, in regard to forgiveness, past research has shown that if the parties were not committed to the
relationship, they were not as likely to forgive each other as the people in a committed relationship.

In another study using a cross-sectional survey and an interaction record, Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon (2002) were interested in the effects of commitment on each member of a relationship as it related to the likelihood of forgiveness. These researchers found that certain cognitive, affective, and interactional behaviors, such as the desire to cease holding a grudge or to end acts of vengeance, often motivated forgiveness actions within interpersonal relationships. Commitment to the relationship was also found to have a motivating effect on granting forgiveness for transgressions in interpersonal relationships in this present study, again denoting the importance of commitment as a construct in forgiveness.

Commitment is based on one’s intention to remain invested in and dependent on a relationship despite any potential challenges or difficulties. This construct is based on the behavioral tendencies of interdependence and relational investments observed over time found within the assumptions of social exchange theory (Finkel et al., 2002; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). One’s intention to stay committed to another is linked to the costs and rewards of staying a relationship, but is most observed in the rewards found in remaining in the relationship despite inevitable challenges over time or the need to forgive after a relational transgression (Finkel et al., 2002; Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Other research on friends showed that among adult friends (i.e., older than 22), conflict existed, but it was not the main regulating or terminating factor in friendships (Dykstra, 1990). Instead, respondents were found to stay in a relationship because of
enjoyment and other satisfying features of the friendship, despite any conflict or relational transgressions (Dykstra, 1990). Friends often directly avoided addressing or confronting conflict or transgressions issues, perhaps because conflict had negative implications for adult friendships, and friendships had positive effects on adults’ lives; therefore, understanding transgressions in which forgiveness was a likely relational maintenance tactic benefits adult friendships (Dykstra, 1990). Research has often shown that to maintain the relationship people overlooked the seriousness of the transgression based on the value each dyad member placed on the friendship (Canary et al., 1995). If these factors were not overlooked, the friendship dissolved (Canary et al., 1995). As a result of these past study findings, the idea that forgiveness is the relational tie that binds friendships was tested in this study. The variables of empathy and commitment to the relationship were tested to determine if they predict forgiveness in adult friendships. Additional questions addressed in the current research included how trust was affected by forgiveness in relationships.

**Trust.** Trust has been defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon the positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). In interpersonal relationships such as friendships, trusting another person made one vulnerable to the behaviors and actions of another—in particular for this study, trust among the members of a friendship dyad made each person vulnerable when possible violations of trust occurred (Rousseau et al., 1998). After a violation of trust, forgiveness was often discovered to be needed and even
expected for the friendship system to remain intact (Rousseau et al., 1998). Thus trust was tied to forgiveness as an important factor in fostering this phenomenon.

However, according to the findings of Macaskill (2007), “there is currently no empirical research to support this contention” (p. 206). When it comes to forgiveness and trust, Macaskill compared survey results from Christian clergy to those from the general population, hypothesizing “that trust would be a positive mediator of forgiveness” (p. 212). The findings of this study concluded that while forgiveness was involved after the betrayal of trust and in forgiving someone trust had to be re-established, this perceived correlation did not indicate that a personal level of trust was a predictor of forgiveness (2007). The basic premise was that “individuals who are more trusting will be more forgiving” (Macaskill, 2007, p. 215), which was deemed to be an accurate assessment of the clergy group, who had the highest levels of both trust and forgiveness, but not the general population respondents. Macaskill (2007) further determined that “to forgive someone requires that trust be re-established, but it seems that the basic level of trust that an individual has is not a good predictor of their forgiveness” (p. 215). These research findings underlie the current study’s hypothesis that trust is an outcome of forgiveness, not a predictor. However, Macaskill’s study was conducted with no specific relational factor in mind, leaving a gap in research examining how forgiveness is handled within specific relationships, such as friendships, versus interpersonal relationships as whole. Since this former study’s main goal was to compare clergy to non-clergy, findings regarding trust and forgiveness might have been skewed due to the inclusion of highly
spiritual individuals (i.e., clergy) instead of isolating trust as a predictor of forgiveness among friends.

Friends’ confidence levels in each other and the overall friendship itself is another important aspect of trust (Twyman, Harvey, & Harries, 2008). Displays of competence and an underlying confidence in the friendship constitute trust determined by a past history of expectations having been met over the span of the relationship (Rousseau et al., 1998; Twyman et al., 2008). Therefore, relational trust is derived through “repeated interaction over time” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 399) between members of an interpersonal dyad. Information and repeated interactions “from within the relationship itself” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 399) help to form trust over time in interpersonal relationships such as friendships. If care, concern, and commitment are reciprocated within a friendship over time, attachment and long-lasting trust usually form, which allow individuals to take the risk of being vulnerable based on past responses and behaviors within the relationship (Finkel, Burnette, & Scissors, 2007; Rousseau et al., 1998).

According to the findings of a past research study among dating partners, trust was found to be an “implicit gauge” of a partner’s commitment to the relationship (Finkel et al., 2002, p. 972). Trust was strengthened when a partner showed a willingness to sacrifice his or her own self-interest in order to benefit the overall relationship (Finkel et al., 2002). One form of beneficial sacrifice for the sake of a relationship may be a willingness to ask for or grant forgiveness, which may explain the relationship between trust and commitment as these two constructs relate to forgiveness.
In another past study on forgiveness, Kelley and Waldron (2008) described trust in the relation to the risk one takes in remaining in a relationship after a transgression. According to their findings in multiple studies, granting forgiveness for some people has been used as a rebuilding of trust by the members of the relational dyad, in hopes of minimizing the risk of continued or future harm (2008). Therefore the challenge of ending the relationship may be weighed against the reward of staying committed to the relationships based on the potential growth of trust. By granting and receiving forgiveness after a relational transgression, adult friends may realize the reward or benefit of forgiving their friend in the rebuilding of trust within the relationship. In forgiving their friend, the potential reward of trust would be enhanced and relational risks would be reduced (Kelley & Waldron, 2005).

The most recognized and widely-accepted definition of trust considers it to be a cognitive interpretation and intention to be vulnerable to another person using past interactions and experiences with that person as a basis for making expectations on how he or she will reciprocate certain actions or transgressions (Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust is the belief based cognitive interpretations of how a relationship will continue into the future (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). When it came to forgiving a friend after a relational transgression, trust was the construct most vulnerable and disrupted by the transgression. Already-established trust levels among the members of a friendship dyad made each person vulnerable when possible transgressions occurred. But through showing trust in the other person and a commitment to the long-term relationship, forgiveness was one way to continue a relationship into the future even after a relational transgression. How
these behaviors relate to overall relational satisfaction may also play a role in the use of forgiveness among friends.

**Relational satisfaction.** Past research has shown that if a person is basically satisfied with a relationship, he or she is more likely to work out transgressions. Conversely, unsatisfied relational partners are less likely to work out issues or continue a faulty relationship in the future (Carver & Jones, 1992; Dindia, 2000). Often the reaction to a transgression or the ability to forgive is directly related to the overall satisfaction felt within a relationship before a transgression occurred (Carver & Jones, 1992). When it comes to forgiveness among friends, Kelley (1998) found the desire to restore a satisfying or valuable relationship to be a primary motive in seeking and granting forgiveness, strengthening the premise that people are more likely to forgive transgressions if the relationship itself is satisfying overall.

Relational satisfaction and the comparison options found in social exchange theory also play a role in the ability of the victim to forgive—if the relationship was satisfying before the transgression, the likelihood to end it or look for other options is lessened (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007). Satisfaction is a resource or investment over time into the relationship, so if a relationship is satisfactory the likelihood of forgiveness increases (Alleman et al., 2007; Sabatelli, 1998). Also, if a relationship has been found to be satisfactory over time, individuals are less likely to look for replacement or alternative options after a relational transgression, but they are more likely to forgive a transgression for the sake of continuing a satisfying relationship (Alleman et al., 2007; Sabatelli, 1998).
According to interdependence theory, commitment is also a resource found in relationships that would be related to satisfaction (Givertz & Segrin, 2005). The investments in and satisfaction with a relationship were shown to be strong predictors of commitment in a recent study among married couples (Givertz & Segrin, 2005). These researchers argued that feelings of commitment to the relationship developed as a result of high satisfaction, making it harder to leave a relationship after a transgression due to interdependence felt by the individuals on each other and the relationship itself. McCullough et al. (1998) found that among romantic partners measures of commitment to the relationship and satisfaction in the relationship were negatively correlated with revenge and avoidance, increasing the chances of forgiveness after a transgression. Relationship satisfaction was found to be related to attachment and forgiveness in another study, enforcing the idea that interdependence in the relationship due to rewards and the value it offers has a direct relation to forgiveness (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004).

Although previous research has shown relational satisfaction as a predictor of forgiveness, other research also exists showing relational satisfaction as an outcome of forgiveness. Kelley and Waldron (2005) found that among married couples, measures of relational quality and overall satisfaction rose after forgiveness was granted by the victim. According to their ongoing research on forgiveness, Kelley and Waldron (2005, 2008) note that forgiveness is more of a sense-making process on the part of the victim to intrapersonally analyze and cognitively reflect on the emotional impact of the transgression in order to plan for any future behavior and interactions with the
perpetrator. The displays of trust and commitment by the offender to the victim in regard to maintaining the relationship in the future often result in forgiveness being granted by the victim. This research, then, supports the prediction of the present study that following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between commitment and relational satisfaction among adult friends.

**Forgiveness Among Friends**

The overarching question studied in this research project was: If a transgression occurs in a friendship, what are the antecedents and consequences of forgiveness after the transgression? Empathy and commitment were measured to determine if these variables predict forgiveness following a relational transgression. Trust and relational satisfaction were measured to determine if these constructs were outcomes of forgiveness following a relational transgression between adult friends. To fully study and explain these constructs, the following research hypotheses were developed and researched.

**Research hypotheses.**

- **H1:** *There are significant correlations among forgiveness, empathy, commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction among friends after a relational transgression.*
- **H2:** *Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between empathy and trust among adult friends.*
- **H3:** *Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between commitment and trust among adult friends.*
- **H4:** *Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between empathy and relational satisfaction among adult friends.*
- **H5:** *Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between commitment and relational satisfaction among adult friends.*
Chapter Three: Methodology

This research project used measurements of empathy, commitment, relational satisfaction, and trust to determine the relationships of these constructs to forgiveness between friends following a relational transgression. Additional questions beyond the scope of this study were also included in the questionnaire to be used for future projects.

Research Design

The survey method allows the researcher to ask questions of participants for the purpose of generalizing the responses from a sample of the population to the general public. Surveys can be administered in any number of ways: in person, over the phone, by postal mail, by facsimile (FAX), or through electronic means via the Internet. Each of these methods has positive and negative aspects concerning the speed of response, the use of respondents’ time, and respondent availability (Cobanoglu, Warde, & Moreo, 2001). However, research on survey methodology shows little or no differences between mail-in or online research methods, revealing that both methods “produce virtually identical results” (Deutskens, de Ruyter, & Wetsels, 2006, p. 352).

The online survey research method best suited this study. The survey for this study was administered electronically to provide a simple and efficient way for respondents to input answers to 45 statements concerning forgiveness, empathy, commitment, relational satisfaction, trust, and various demographic questions (Cobanoglu et al., 2001; Hanna, Weinberg, Dant, & Berger, 2005). Since the participants
were recruited via the Internet, their access to the Internet was assured. Access to the survey, which was designed and implemented using an online service called Survey Monkey, was restricted to invited respondents. Responses were encrypted to ensure anonymity for participants and to allow the researcher control of the data. Final data were downloaded for statistical analysis. The responses were encrypted in such a way that information pertaining to study participants was kept anonymous, with participation in the study and the ability to exit the survey at any time being completely voluntary (Survey Monkey, n.d.).

An electronic survey was selected to save both time and money (Deutskens et al., 2006). The need to enter or re-enter data was reduced because data input was performed by respondents as they answered the series of questions. Responses were then downloaded from the Survey Monkey website into the analysis software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), for data analysis (Survey Monkey, n.d.). Administering the survey online also allowed respondents to complete the survey at a time and location that was convenient to them, versus setting aside time and coming to a specific location to fill out a paper survey or participate in a face-to-face interview at a remote location. The online survey method was also less costly than copying and mailing the survey instrument or renting space to conduct personal interviews (Deutskens et al., 2006). Paper use, another monetary and ecological expense, was kept to a minimum using electronic research methods (Deutskens et al., 2006).
Participants

Participants were recruited via the Internet through public community websites (e.g., www.craigslist.com), referred by other participants, and enlisted by snowball sampling of public list serves and social network e-mail databases. E-mail addresses were obtained through database listings of the researcher and other personal and professional connections.

The total number of participants who completed the entire survey was 187. The subject population for this study consisted of 35 men and 152 women. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 78, with an average age of 35. Participants included 51% percent who were married, 16% who were single, 16% who were dating someone, 11% who lived with their partner, and the remaining 6% who were separated, divorced, or widowed. The respondents were from 38 different states, with the top four states reported as Colorado (n = 27), California (n = 25), Texas (n = 14), and Alabama (n = 13).

Data Collection

Through an initial e-mail request, participants were directed to a secure data-collection website containing the survey (see Appendix A). Once participants accessed the site, they were asked to agree to participate in the research and told of any risks through a confidentiality consent form (see Appendix B). Contributing to this project was strictly voluntary, and the risks associated with this project were minimal. Participation in this study took between 30 and 45 minutes. The respondents’ answers were then downloaded into a master database of replies to be reviewed and analyzed by the researcher.
Once finished, respondents were asked, but not required, to provide e-mail addresses of other potential participants (see Appendix D), which increased the total pool of survey respondents by a method called snowballing (Babbie, 2004; Noy, 2008). In order to increase and entice participation, the names of all those who answered the survey were added to a drawing to win a gift certificate to a nationwide retail store. Once the survey was closed, three names were drawn at random, and winners were contacted via e-mail with an explanation about how to access their prize using the online gift certificate outlet at www.amazon.com.

The snowball sampling method contributed to variations in age, gender, and geographic location. However, this effect could also have resulted in an uncontrolled environment in which the respondents were asked but not required to give additional e-mail addresses of potential participants. The hope was that respondents would offer e-mail addresses to be helpful, but this action could not be required or even controlled. It may have been increased by the use of the gift certificate incentive, but again this outcome was not guaranteed for respondent recruitment.

To minimize potential risks, respondents were provided contact information for the researcher and for professional counseling services when completing the confidentiality consent form in case questions or concerns arose before, during, or after completing the questionnaire (see Appendix B). To protect the confidentiality of participants and their responses, coded numbers identified respondents, and there were kept separate from other identifying information. Only the researcher had access to
individual data records, which were kept in a locked file cabinet. Reports generated as a result of this study used only aggregated data.

**Instruments and Procedures**

A potential design flaw in any survey method involves the inclusion of leading questions, which can be alleviated by selecting formerly-used survey tools with well-tested correlations, proven inter-coder reliability, and valid measures of the topic under study (Hanna et al., 2005; Putka, Huy, McCloy, & Diaz, 2008; Sparrow, 2006). A set of previously-tested and reliable survey tools to measure forgiveness, empathy, trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction were used in this study (see Appendix C). Throughout the online survey, participants were asked to think about one specific friendship in which they had experienced a transgression and answer a series of statements, grouped into topic areas. Respondents provided numeric answers corresponding to a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) to each statement. Since participants in this study answered the survey post-transgression, relational satisfaction was measured in questions that asked how participants felt about the friendship before the transgression and how they felt about the relationship after the transgression. Other questions assessed if the respondents felt the incident harmed, changed, or benefited the relationship. They were also asked to provide an overall rating of how satisfied or dissatisfied they were currently with their relationship with their friend.

**Forgiveness.** Forgiveness was measured using a 13-item scale, originally developed by McCullough et al. (1998) called the Transgression-Related Interpersonal
Motivations (TRIM) inventory. Brown and Phillips (2005) adapted the TRIM inventory into a 7-item scale that measured a person’s level of state forgiveness and isolated feelings of hostility, avoidance, or retribution after a relational transgression. The 13-item TRIM inventory was most commonly used in research studies conducted on undergraduate students in any type of relationship, including romantic or friendly, which was used in this study. Answers were captured in a series of 7-interval Likert-type items (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), for statements such as “I have forgiven this person,” “I hope this person gets what’s coming to him/her for what he/she did to me” (reverse coded), and “If I saw this person again, I would try to avoid interacting with him/her” (reverse coded). The Brown and Phillips (2005) condensed state forgiveness measure had a high internal reliability when originally tested ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 5.65$, SD = 1.42) and was proven to be reliable in the current study as well ($\alpha = .84$, $M = 3.87$, SD = 1.60). See Table 1 for reliabilities, mean scores, and standard deviations and Table 2 for correlations between all study variables.

**Self dyadic perspective-taking scale (empathy).** To measure both the psychological perspective-taking and the empathetic tendency of survey participants, the Self Dyadic Perspective-taking Scale (SDPS) developed by psychologist Edgar C.J. Long (1990) measured a person’s empathy levels through the use of 13 statements answered on 7-interval Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Perspective-taking was thought to be the “cognitive dimension” of empathy (Long, p. 92) that varied depending on the relationship or situation. In other words, individuals were sometimes good at putting themselves in and understanding another person’s perspective, but inept
in other interactions (Long, 1990). The statements on the SDPS isolated the psychological tendency of a person to take on his or her friend’s perspective of a situation. Survey respondents responded to statements such as “I am good at understanding other people’s problems” and “I am able to sense or realize what my friends are feeling.” Empathy, the combination of sympathy and compassion, was addressed in statements such as “I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective” and “Before criticizing my friends, I try to imagine how I would feel in their place.” According to Long (1990) the SDPT demonstrated high reliability in the past ($\alpha = .89, M = 3.33, SD = 2.48$), and an even higher reliability was noted in this study ($\alpha = .94, M = 5.61, SD = 1.23$).

**Commitment.** The Measure of Commitment Scale was initially developed and administered by Stafford and Canary (1991) to measure commitment among heterosexual married couples. Myers and Weber (2004) later used it in the preliminary development of a scale to research relational maintenance behaviors among siblings by assessing the level of commitment toward the relationship after a transgression. Four statements, with 7-interval Likert-type responses (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), measured the level of commitment in maintaining the friendship, as well as how close the participants felt to their friend after the relational transgression. Statements included “I am committed to maintaining this relationship with my friend” and “I feel very close to my friend.” In previous studies, reliability coefficients for this scale ranged from .88 to .92 (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Canary, 1991). This scale proved to be highly reliable for this study ($\alpha = .95, M = 3.90, SD = 2.14$).
**Trust.** To reveal levels of trust toward the transgressor in the friendship dyad, the Dyadic Trust Scale was used (Larseleere & Huston, 1980; Myers & Weber, 2004). Originally developed for married couples, this survey was modified for use between by replacing words such as *spouse, husband,* and *wife* with *friend.* Statements were designed to measure levels of trust felt toward friends, how the respondents felt their friend treated them, and if their friend could be counted on to help them. Overall trust levels and the ability to trust the transgressor after a hurtful situation were measured with 6 separate statements, and responses were provided using 7-interval Likert-type items (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Statements included “There are times when my friend cannot be trusted” and “I feel that I can trust my friend completely.” The original Dyadic Trust Scale had a reliability of .93, making it highly reliable for measuring trust in close relationships (Larseleere & Huston). This scale was found to be moderately reliable based on data collected in this study on adult friendships (α = .76, M = 4.48, SD = 1.69).

**Relational satisfaction.** The Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS), originally developed by Huston, McHale, and Crouter (1986) and modified by Caughlin et al. (2000) to include an 8-item 7-interval scale that referred to friendships, using semantic differential items (e.g., hopeful/discouraging, worthwhile/useless, rewarding/disappointing) and a final satisfaction/dissatisfaction relational question: “Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your relationship with your friend AFTER the event?” Scores on the FSS were calculated by averaging the scores for the first 8 items, then averaging that mean score with the final item. Reliability was measured by calculating Cronbach’s alpha for the first 8 items and calculating the
correlation between the final item and the mean of the first 8 items. In past studies the first 8 questions in this scale had a high reliability ($\alpha = .91$), and a strong correlation ($r = .69$) between the 9th item and the mean of the first 8 items (Caughlin et al., 2000, revision of Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). In this study the reliability of the first 8 questions was acceptable ($\alpha = .73$, $M = 4.76$, SD = 1.55). The mean of these questions was strongly correlated factored with the overall satisfaction question ($\alpha = .78$, $M = 4.89$, SD = 1.50).

Table 1

*Reliabilities, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For all scales, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree

**Data Analysis**

The first hypothesis was tested using zero-order correlations to determine if the variables of relational satisfaction empathy, commitment, forgiveness, and trust (independent variables) were associated after a relational transgression (Babbie, 2004).

To determine if the final four hypotheses were supported, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method for testing mediated relationships between variables using multiple
regression was applied. First, the independent variables of empathy and commitment were tested to determine if they were significant predictors of the dependent variable of forgiveness. Then, empathy and commitment were tested to determine if they were significant predictors of the mediator of forgiveness. Finally, empathy and commitment and the mediator of forgiveness were tested to determine if together they were predictors of the dependent variables of trust and relational satisfaction. If the independent variables were found to be significant predictors in the first two equations, and the size of the regression coefficient for the independent variables decreased in the final equation, then evidence would support the claim that forgiveness mediated the relationship between levels of empathy and commitment as predictors of outcomes of trust and relational satisfaction. Shrout and Bolger’s (2002) bootstrap method was used to determine significance and proportion of mediation.

This chapter reviewed the method used in collecting data for this research project, which was an online survey featuring a series of statements on forgiveness, empathy, trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction. The results were then analyzed to determine if these constructs were related. Chapter 4 will now detail the findings of the data analysis.
Chapter Four: Findings

Five research hypotheses were developed and researched to study the antecedents and consequences of forgiveness after transgressions within adult friendships. Empathy and commitment were measured to determine if these variables predicted forgiveness following a relational transgression. Trust and relational satisfaction were measured to determine if these constructs were outcomes of forgiveness following a relational transgression between adult friends. This chapter will reveal findings used to either reject or fail to reject the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1

H1: There are significant correlations among forgiveness, empathy, commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction among friends after a relational transgression.

The first hypothesis proposed there would be positive relationships between empathy, commitment, forgiveness, trust, and relational satisfaction between friends after a relational transgression. Data collected from the current surveys were analyzed for correlations to determine any statistical relationships between variables. Using zero-order correlations (Babbie, 2004), correlations ranging from .04 to .80 were found among these variables as shown in Table 2.
Table 2

*Correlation Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forgiveness</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Relational Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.73*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.76*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.80*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>.58*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.57*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .001

The first hypothesis was partially supported for all variables, except empathy. The correlations between empathy and all the other variables were weak, ranging from .042 with trust, .07 with commitment, .11 to forgiveness, and .125 with relational satisfaction. All these variables were statistically non-significant in relation to empathy (p < .05).

Forgiveness showed strong correlations with both commitment (r = .73; p < .001) and trust (r = .76; p < .001), and a moderate association with relational satisfaction (r = .58; p < .001). Commitment showed strong correlation to trust (r = .80; p < .001) and forgiveness (r = .73; p < .001), and a moderately high correlation to relational satisfaction (r = .61; p < .001). Trust was strongly correlated to both commitment (r = .80; p < .001) and forgiveness (r = .76; p < .001), with a moderate correlation to relational satisfaction (r = .57; p < .001). Relational satisfaction had moderate correlations with forgiveness (r = .58; p < .001), commitment (r = .61; p < .001), and trust (r = .57; p < .001).
Hypotheses 2 and 3

\textbf{H2:} Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between empathy and trust among adult friends.

\textbf{H3:} Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between commitment and trust among adult friends.

The second and third hypotheses pertained to whether forgiveness mediated the relationships between empathy, commitment, and trust. The second hypothesis predicted that forgiveness mediated the relationship between empathy and trust among adult friends following a relational transgression. The third hypothesis predicted that, following relational transgressions, forgiveness mediated the relationship between commitment and trust among adult friends.

According to Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method, moderators serve as a third variable to determine correlations between other variables. Moderated variables help determine the affect of a variable on the strength of the relation between the other variables entered in the equation. Shrout and Bolger’s (2002) bootstrap method was used to determine significance and proportion of mediation and to determine if any “interesting associations” (p. 422) occurred in the data analysis to support hypotheses 2 and 3.

To test these two hypotheses and determine if mediation occurred, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method for testing mediated relationships was applied, which required running three regression analysis models. In the first equation, empathy and commitment were entered as independent variables, with forgiveness as the dependent variable. The model with empathy and commitment as predictors of forgiveness was found to be significant \((R = .73; R^2 = .53; F[2, 184] = 103.85, p < .001, n = 186)\). Commitment was a
significant predictor of forgiveness \( (b = .35, \beta = .72, t = 14.25, p < .001) \), but empathy was not \( (b = .06, \beta = .06, t = 1.20, p = .23) \).

In the second equation, empathy and commitment were entered as independent variables, with trust as the dependent variable. The model with empathy and commitment as predictors of trust was found to be significant \( (R = .80; R^2 = .64; F[2, 184] = 162.09, p < .001, n = 186) \). Commitment was a significant predictor of trust \( (b = .47, \beta = .80, t = 17.98, p < .001) \), but empathy was not \( (b = -.01, \beta = -.01, t = -.26, p = .80) \).

In the third equation, empathy, commitment, and forgiveness were entered as independent variables to trust as the dependent variable. This model with empathy, commitment, and forgiveness as predictors of trust was found to be significant \( (R = .84; R^2 = .71; F[3, 183] = 147.25, p < .001, n = 186) \). Both commitment \( (b = .31, \beta = .52, t = 8.99, p < .001) \) and forgiveness \( (b = .46, \beta = .38, t = 6.57, p < .001) \) were significant predictors of trust, but empathy was not \( (b = -.04, \beta = -.04, t = -.87, p = .388) \).

Hypothesis 2 was not supported because empathy was not found to be significantly related to commitment and forgiveness. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method for testing mediated relationships because the relationship between commitment and trust was partially mediated by forgiveness \( (P_M = .34) \). The indirect effect was .16, corrected bias bootstrap 95% CI: \( \{.10-.23\} \).

**Hypotheses 4 and 5**

**H4:** Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between empathy and relational satisfaction among adult friends.
H5: Following a relational transgression, forgiveness mediates the relationship between commitment and relational satisfaction among adult friends.

The fourth and fifth hypotheses pertained to whether forgiveness mediated the relationships between empathy, commitment, and relational satisfaction. The fourth hypothesis predicted that forgiveness mediated the relationship between empathy and relational satisfaction among adult friends following a relational transgression. The fifth hypothesis predicted that, following relational transgressions, forgiveness mediated the relationship between commitment and relational satisfaction among adult friends.

Three multiple regression analyses were performed to answer the fourth and fifth hypotheses. In the first equation, empathy and commitment were entered as independent variables, with forgiveness as the dependent variable. The model with empathy and commitment as predictors of forgiveness was found to be significant ($R = .73; R^2 = .53; F[2, 184] = 103.85, p < .001, n = 186$).

In the second equation, empathy and commitment were entered as independent variables, with relational satisfaction as the dependent variable. The model with empathy and commitment as predictors of relational satisfaction was found to be significant ($R = .62; R^2 = .34; F[2, 184] = 55.86, p < .001, n = 186$). Commitment was a significant predictor of relational satisfaction ($b = .40, \beta = .60, t = 10.35, p < .001$), but empathy was not ($b = .12, \beta = .08, t = 1.44, p = .15$).

In the third equation, empathy, commitment, and forgiveness were entered as independent variables, with relational satisfaction as the dependent variable. This model with empathy, commitment, and forgiveness as predictors of relational satisfaction was
found to be significant ($R = .64; R^2 = .41; F[3, 183] = 43.00, p < .000, n = 186$). Both commitment ($b = .27, \beta = .40, t = 4.91, p < .001$) and forgiveness ($b = .38, \beta = .28, t = 3.34, p < .001$) were significant predictors of relational satisfaction, but empathy was not ($b = .09, \beta = .07, t = .07, p = .24$).

Hypothesis 4 was not supported because empathy was not found to be significantly related to commitment and relational satisfaction. Hypothesis 5 was partially supported following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method for testing mediated relationships because findings indicated that forgiveness was a partial mediator between commitment and relational satisfaction ($PM = .35$). The indirect effect was .14, corrected bias bootstrap 95% CI: {.05-.20}.
Chapter Five: Findings and Conclusion

The forgiving process involves intrapersonally coming to terms with one’s emotional state after a transgression in order to move on with interpersonal interactions without future retaliation or resentment toward the offender (Baumeister et al., 1998; Enright et al., 1998; Enright, 2001; Finkel et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 1997). Forgiveness scholars and relational therapists who work with clients on the process of forgiveness have noted that forgiving others after a relational transgression can often lead to a victim’s development of better emotional well-being and more satisfying health within a relationship (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2006; Worthington, 2003). The findings of this research study illuminate scholarly understandings regarding how various relational constructs associate with forgiveness and friends after relational transgressions.

To evaluate these constructs in this study, a survey was conducted using quantitative data collection methods to evaluate emotional, behavioral, and cognitive correlates of forgiveness, revealing correlations and mediations between certain interpersonal constructs. To determine and narrow the scope of possible constructs, the emotion-related construct used in this study was empathy, and to study the overall health of the relationship, trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction were measured to determine how they related to the forgiveness process.
This final chapter will delve into past research findings to explain the findings of the survey data, looking at how and why these constructs did or did not relate to forgiveness among friends based on assumptions embedded in social exchange theory. A discussion of study limitations and recommendations for future research to further the knowledge about how forgiveness is handled, communicated, and carried out among friends is also provided.

**Analysis of Findings**

The primary goal of this study was to determine how various emotional processes, behavioral tendencies, and cognitive factors related to forgiveness after relational transgressions among adult friends. Empathy felt by the victim toward the perpetrator along with commitment to the friendship were measured to determine if these variables predicted forgiveness following a relational transgression. The factors of trust and relational satisfaction were also measured to determine if they were outcomes of forgiveness following a relational transgression between adult friends.

After analyzing the data, empathy was found to have weak and non-significant associations with any of the other constructs measured. Positive relations between trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction were found. Strong correlations were found between trust and commitment, trust and forgiveness, and commitment and forgiveness. Moderate correlations were found between relational satisfaction and the variables of commitment, trust, and forgiveness (see Figure 1).
Empathy. As mentioned, empathy was not significantly related to trust, commitment, relational satisfaction, or forgiveness. Hypothesis 2 predicted that following a relational transgression, forgiveness would mediate the relationship between empathy and trust among adult friends. Hypothesis 4 predicted that following a relational transgression, forgiveness would mediate the relationship between empathy and relational satisfaction among adult friends. Therefore, hypotheses 2 and 4 were not supported by the data collected in this research project.

Finding a scale to measure empathy for this project proved to be a challenge, as most of the currently published scales reported moderate to low reliability. The primary definition of empathy used for this research study pertained to how individuals are able shift focus away from their own feelings to recognize the perspective of others (Kubzansky et al., 2000; Macaskill et al., 2002; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Zechmeister et al., 2002). This emphasis on the perspective-taking aspect of emotional sensitivity led to
the use of the Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale in this study to measure levels of empathy (Long, 1990). Long’s SDPS had an average reliability of .89 when sampled among married couples, as well as college students. The sample population differences between past research and the current study using friendships could account for the difference in the current findings since different relational groups were surveyed using this scale. However, the tools used for trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction were also formerly tested with married couples and college students, rather than friends. This new variation in subject pool had little effect on the scale psychometrics, with the various measurement instruments reaching similar, if not higher, reliability scores and the variables found to associate significantly with aspects of the forgiveness process. The SDPS itself showed high reliability in this study, but no significant correlations to forgiveness, trust, commitment, or relational satisfaction. These findings may indicate that empathy was not related to forgiveness, trust, commitment, or relational satisfaction in friendship, at least when using the SDPS.

Trying to capture the emotional process of forgiveness among friends by isolating a single emotion may be a futile effort because there is a strong possibility, and probability, that forgiveness encompasses a myriad of emotions and feelings. Other emotions often mentioned in forgiveness research are benevolence, compassion, mercy, and love (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 1998). More often than not, in previous research reports the general, non-specific terms “emotions” or “feelings” are used with no specific emotion mentioned. These studies simply put forth the overarching idea that
intrapersonal emotions are needed in forgiveness (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 1998).

Past research has focused on empathy and how people use empathetic responses to grant forgiveness (Kachadourian et al., 2005; McCullough et al., 1997; Paleari et al., 2005; Worthington & Wade, 1999), but with mixed results using married couples as the population primarily studied. Some research has shown empathy to be related to forgiveness, while still other research, such as this present study, has shown no relation between empathy and forgiveness. How empathy was measured differed in all these studies, and some even mentioned empathy being a personally cultivated trait. Both Worthington’s steps to forgiveness (2003) and Enright’s model of forgiveness (2001) refer instead to the ongoing development of empathy being important in the forgiveness process itself. Worthington believes empathy is felt on three levels or steps: understanding the other person’s perspective, emotionally identifying with the other person, and feeling compassion for the other person (Worthington, 2003). The tool used in this study to measure empathy as a trait only captured to the first, or “shallowest,” level of empathy according to Worthington’s steps to forgiveness (Worthington, 2003, p. 96). Within this first level of empathy, people are still trying to understand and work through the motives and actions of the perpetrator, but have not yet personally emotionally identified with the person (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 2003). Enright’s model of forgiveness also features empathy in the preliminary phases, which once felt by the victim may eventually lead to that individual feeling sympathy and compassion toward the offender. Both of these scholars have also noted that sympathy
and compassion take time to develop and even require both the victim and perpetrator to work together to achieve forgiveness (Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2003). This present study only looked at the side of the victim, who could only guess how his or her friend felt or would react after a transgression. The process of forgiveness among friends may be more of an interpersonal act based on the cognitive and behavioral reactions of both friends, instead of a one-dimensional empathetic way of one friend trying to understand and come to terms with the actions of the transgressor after a relational transgression.

Another factor in empathy not being related to the other constructs is the time lapse between the actual event and respondents reflecting back when taking the online survey. The transgression may have occurred so far in the past that asking respondents to remember how they felt at the time may be hard to capture, or their tendency toward empathy may have changed from the time passage between the actual transgression to the act of forgiving. Emotional research has historically shown that the expression of emotions is temporal, in that our emotional reaction to stimuli is based on an immediate perception and response to an initial event (Ekman & Davidson, 1994). What respondents felt as an initial reaction to the transgression may have faded, lessened, or even been forgotten, possibly due to the passage of time or changes in how they perceived the transgression. Forgiveness research often describes how time is needed to process the transgression as a factor in forgiving someone (Enright, 2001; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 2003). The lapse in time from when the relational transgression occurred to the respondents answering the SDPS may have affected the results. Therefore the involvement of multiple emotions, the development of empathy, and the passage of time
could have been some reasons for empathy not being related to forgiveness or the other constructs of trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction.

**Commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction.** By analyzing the survey findings in this study, the three constructs commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction were all found to be significantly related to forgiveness among adult friends. These findings are consistent with several past studies that looked primarily at romantic relationships, but that also found trust to promote forgiveness (Finkel et al., 2007), commitment to be causally related to forgiveness (Finkel et al., 2002; Finkel et al., 2007; Karremans, 2004; McCullough et al., 1998; Tsang et al., 2006), and relational satisfaction to be significantly related to forgiveness (Allemand et al., 2007; Kelley & Waldron, 2005). Forgiveness was also found to partially mediate the relationships between commitment and the outcomes of trust and relational satisfaction, which partially supported Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 5.

![Figure 2. Partial mediations and direct and indirect relations among constructs.](image)

The current study partially supported Hypothesis 3 showing that forgiveness partially mediated the indirect relationship between commitment and trust, which is consistent with past research findings (Finkel et al., 2002; Tsang et al., 2006). And because both of these constructs have been shown to be associated with forgiveness (Finkel et al., 2002; Finkel et al., 2007), the findings of this current study expanded past
research to show that trust and commitment are related not only in romantic relationships, but also in adult friendships.

Commitment is based on a person’s long-term investment in a relationship, including the behavioral intent and psychological attachment to remain in a relationship (Tsang et al., 2006). This study showed that victims’ commitment to a friendship was directly related to forgiveness of their transgressors. The high correlations found in this study between commitment and forgiveness suggest that the self-interested motive of receiving continued rewards by remaining in a committed and trusting relationship may increase the tendency of friends to forgive. This study supported one of the assumptions in social exchange theory in that if a victim has shown long-term investment in the relationship by being committed to the friendship, he or she is more likely to forgive a friend after a relational transgression.

There were also high correlations between forgiveness and trust, which showed trust as an outcome of forgiveness and an indirect relationship between commitment and trust. Much like commitment, trust is also based on long-term expectations and past interactions within a relationship. The basis of trust is the ability of the members of the dyad to overlook possible risks or costs in the relationship based on past rewards and potential future benefits of commitment and trust garnered from the relationship (Finkel et al., 2007). Both of these constructs relate to the idea of reciprocity of investments assumed by social exchange theory, that is as commitment and trust are developed and exchanged over time within a relationship, interdependence between the relational partners and their likelihood to remain in the relationship also increase (Agnew et al.,
1998; Finkel et al., 2002; Rousseau et al., 1998). So if commitment to continue the relationship is present, people become more likely to forgive relational transgressions for the sake of maintaining past and future rewards of trust within the relationship.

Past studies, most of which looked at romantic relationships, also found forgiveness was related to these two constructs (Finkel et al., 2007; Tsang et al., 2002). In one research study (Tsang et al., 2006), commitment was found to predict forgiveness after a relational transgression based on an overall commitment to continuing the relationship in the future. These researchers supported the idea that commitment promotes long-term investment in a relationship, which leads to certain behaviors, such as accommodation and sacrifice. In still other previous studies, trust has been shown to promote commitment (Karresman, 2004), and commitment has been shown to help in gauging trust (Finkel et al., 2002). The indirect connection between commitment and trust displayed in this study would seem to be supported by interdependence theory, in that behaviors (forgiveness) of individuals are shaped by and dependent on factors of their relationships (commitment) (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). If levels of commitment were high to begin with, then forgiveness would be more likely to result. However, since there was a direct relation found between commitment leading to forgiveness, impacted trust levels were an outcome partially mediated by forgiveness.

Another research study also showed that trust promoted commitment (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004), and that “trust can be construed as an implicit gauge of the strength of a partner’s commitment” (Finkel et al., 2002, p. 972), supporting an indirect relationship between commitment and trust from Hypothesis 3. Both the high level of commitment
and the act of forgiveness would then contribute to increased trust toward the transgressor. Support for this connection can also be found in a previous study that showed that study “trust can be construed as an implicit gauge of the strength of a partner’s commitment” (Finkel et al., 2002, p. 972).

Previous research also supported Hypothesis 5 that forgiveness mediated the interaction between the constructs of commitment and relational satisfaction among adult friends (Agnew et al., 1998; Finkel et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 1998; Tsang et al., 2006). This current study revealed that forgiveness partially mediates the relationships between commitment and relational satisfaction among friends after a relational transgression. The positive correlations between forgiveness, commitment, and relational satisfaction in this current study also supported the idea that forgiveness is one of the indirect ways friends remain committed and continue to be satisfied in the friendship even after a relational transgression.

Displaying one’s commitment to remain in a relationship was shown to be related to increased relational satisfaction and positively associated with satisfaction levels (Agnew et al., 1998; Finkel et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 1998; Tsang et al., 2006). Numerous past studies reported a link to interdependence theory in that relational satisfaction was indicated and related to commitment based on the potential rewards of remaining in a satisfied and committed relationship (Cate, Levin, & Richmond, 2002; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Givertz & Segrin, 2005). One’s level of commitment to a partner has been shown to result in the desire to remain dependent on the relationship to augment the possible outcome or reward of relational satisfaction,
which was also found to be true in this current study (Finkel, et al., 2002). According to this theoretical assumption, dependence on the outcome of a committed relationship after forgiveness was granted would in turn indirectly result in being satisfied in the relationship (Agnew, et al., 1998). Based on the findings in the current study, the idea that commitment is indirectly associated with increased relational satisfaction may be one of the reasons friends are more likely to forgive another friend after a transgression. In this sense, the desire or potential reward to increase or at the least maintain relational satisfaction is partially based on the victim’s commitment to stay dependent on the friendship, which is found in the positive correlations between forgiveness, commitment, and relational satisfaction.

The ideas of equity and interdependence found in social exchange theory explain how commitment predicted forgiveness, which in turn was directly related to the outcome of relational satisfaction. According to the equity aspect of social exchange theory, people are committed to relationships based on certain rewards or outcomes the relationships bring, such as trust or relational satisfaction. Commitment levels pre-transgression have been shown to play a part in forgiveness in that individuals who have personal resources such as commitment invested in a relationship may be more likely to forgive based on maximizing the potential rewards likely found in a committed, satisfying relationship (Allemand, 2007). Often forgiveness has shown to result in a new or improved “relationship covenant” based on a renewed commitment to the relationship (Hargrave, 1994). In the findings of this current study, the influence of commitment on relational satisfaction is partially mediated by forgiveness. This indirect link was also
supported with past research findings (Agnew, 1998; Finkel et al., 2002; Givertz & Segrin, 2005; Tsang, 2006), showing relations between commitment and relational satisfaction. Past research among married couples has also shown that forgiveness usually results in a stronger, higher quality relationship (Kelley & Waldron, 2005). Therefore it would seem that friends in committed relationships who forgive often receive the outcome of relational satisfaction.

**Implications of the Study**

The non-voluntary nature of family relations offers a different take on how forgiveness works when compared to the voluntary nature of friendship (Pecchioni et al., 2005). Forgiveness among friends is used for different reasons than among married partners or family members. Friends are friends for the mere fact of what the relationships offers and rewards garnered from continued interactions (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Pecchioni et al., 2005; Rawlins, 1992, 2009). Family members are often related to each other through bloodlines or marriages, but that does not mean they have to be friends or even like each other. Unlike voluntary relationships such as friendship, non-voluntary relationships often do not have to be actively managed by the relational members. In contrast, voluntary relationships exist because of the ongoing choice to interact and through privately negotiated expectations (Pecchioni et al., 2005). When a transgression occurs in either of these types of relationships, how forgiveness is handled may be different. What was uncovered in this study and supported by past research is that the rewards gained from friendship, such as commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction, are positively related to forgiveness. Since friends are often friends for the
mere sake of the rewards the relationship offers, forgiveness could be viewed as a form of reciprocity among adult friends for them to “strive for equity in their relationships” (Pecchioni et al., 2005, p. 105). In social exchange terms victims weigh the cost and rewards of the friendship when deciding whether to forgive. This study revealed that forgiveness partially mediated the relationships between commitment and the rewards of trust and relational satisfaction.

Previous research on forgiveness mostly looked at how this construct was handled among married couples, romantic partners, and families. How forgiveness is handled among friends has received little attention (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). This research project was an effort to expand the area of forgiveness to understand how this phenomenon relates to the voluntary nature of friendship—in particular to examine how certain emotional, behavioral, and cognitive factors play a part in the forgiveness process and if the same constructs used in previous marriage and family research (e.g., Finkel et al., 2002: Waldron & Kelley, 2008) would also relate to friendships. The emotional component isolated in this study was empathy, the cognitive constructs were trust and relational satisfaction, and the behavioral variable was commitment.

The emotional aspect of forgiveness turned out to be a tricky part to isolate in this and other studies—segregating one emotion used in forgiveness may be a never-ending task, and even an unneeded search in understanding the forgiveness process. Many other researchers simply use broad, generalized terms such as emotions or feelings when explaining the emotional component of forgiveness (Subkoviak et al., 1995; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). In this study, empathy was chosen as the emotion most salient to
forgiveness, but was shown to have no relation to any of the other constructs. A reason for this could be because emotions are used to make sense of the transgression earlier in the forgiveness process than was captured in the research findings for this study. Everett Worthington (2003) has done expansive research on the forgiveness process culminating in his Pyramid Model to REACH Forgiveness, with the E of this model representing the ability to empathize. His 5-step REACH model of forgiveness is used in psychotherapy to help individuals and couples replace negative emotions with more positive ones like empathy in order to achieve forgiveness (2003). The REACH process starts with Recalling the hurt, then Empathizing with the transgressor, offering the Altruistic gift of forgiveness, Committing publicly to forgive, and ends with Holding on to forgiveness. However, even Worthington (2003) recognizes that empathy is only one of many emotions an individual could use in forgiving another person—sympathy, compassion, and love are other emotions proposed as replacements for negative feelings as people progress though the Pyramid Model to REACH Forgiveness. Robert D. Enright (2001) also offers a step-by-step process for forgiving in which he too notes that the emotions of forgiveness include more than just empathy. Enright focuses on a phase of forgiveness called “working on forgiveness” (2001, p. 157) when victims examine the feelings experienced after a transgression, which encompasses a vast scope of feelings depending on the individual victim and the relational transgression. Both Worthington and Enright refer to forgiveness as a process that is rooted in feeling sympathy and compassion for the transgressor—feelings that take time to develop. In attempting to isolate empathy as the emotion of forgiveness, this current study delved more into the working process of
forgiveness and even holding on to forgiveness instead of how empathy is developed to reach forgiveness.

This study revealed that the cognitive and behavioral constructs of trust, commitment, and satisfaction showed much stronger relationships to forgiveness than the emotional construct of empathy. One answer to why empathy was not related to these other constructs could be that there is no specific emotion tied to forgiveness, especially when asking participants to recall a past event. The transgressions being remembered and then reported on ranged from respondent to respondent, each of whom could have been in different stages of the forgiveness process in which the emotional aspect of forgiveness would differ per individual. The exact emotions of the forgiveness process may have faded over time or still be felt depending on when the transgression occurred for each respondent, but the relationship being reported on was left with higher levels of commitment, trust, and satisfaction based on the act of forgiveness after the transgression. Along with Worthington and Enright, Waldron and Kelley’s Forgiveness Episode Model (2008) also suggests that the management of emotions comes early in the forgiveness process, during which time people make sense and negotiate the relationship in order to grant forgiveness. Their model of forgiveness is based on the passage of time, during which the victim experiences emotion early in the circular process before seeking or granting forgiveness. All of three of these methods of forgiveness acknowledge and emotional component early in the process, but tend to focus more on the sense making and rebuilding of the relationship. What is left after forgiveness is granted and the
relationship transitions into the future is monitoring of more cognitive and behavioral construct of the relationship, such as commitment, trust, and satisfaction.

When it comes to how victims transition to forgive their friends, the associations with commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction add to the research in this area. Past studies on marriage and romantic relationships also showed correlations among these cognitive and behavioral constructs (Finkel et al., 2002; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), and this study among friends supported these findings. As for trust and commitment, the high correlations in this study revealed these two constructs to be even more strongly related than in studies among married couples or family relations (Larselere & Huston, 1980; Myers & Weber, 2004; Serewicz et al., 2007). This adds to the idea that friendships are based on egalitarian trust and commitment found in these interdependent relationships (Johar, 2005; Pecchiono et al., 2005; Rawlins, 1992). The social support aspect of friendships was also upheld in the correlations found between trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Rawlins, 1992; Walker, 1995; Willmott, 1987).

Past research on friends looked more at formation of these types of relationships and maintenance strategies used in interactions (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Friedman, 1993; Rawlins, 1992, 2009). More recently, research has shifted to expand and explain “turning points” in managing friendship conflicts (Becker et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2003, 2004), but even these studies related back to maintenance strategies instead of isolating forgiveness as a possible maintenance strategy. The turning points studied in other reports often lead to dissolution or deterioration of the relationship (Canary et al., 1995), while this current study revealed that forgiveness is one way to maintain a
friendship even after a turning-point transgression. A previous study by Argyle and Furnham (1983) looked at conflict in close relationships and found that individuals reported higher satisfaction for friends than sibling, family or parental relationships. They also found a lower conflict frequency among friends, but did not isolate how conflict was resolved in friendships. One way could be through forgiveness. Instead of walking away from the friendship, this study revealed that individuals who are committed to the relationship are more likely to use forgiveness as a way to move forward in the relationship toward improved trust and satisfaction. The cognitive and behavioral construct of the relationship, commitment, trust, and satisfaction, are key for friends to manage and work through the process of forgiveness.

**Conclusions and Extensions**

Even though commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction were found to be specific constructs related to friends and forgiveness, the theoretical application and abstract notions brought forth by the findings of this study go far beyond those three cognitive and behavioral correlates of forgiveness. The specifics of this current research project delved into whether forgiveness was a mediator between empathy and commitment (as independent variables) and trust and relational satisfaction (as dependent variables) among friends after a relational transgression. But empathy, commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction are only some of the specific constructs that could be applied to the theoretical and abstract notion of forgiveness within personal relationships. This research project was the start of discovering how forgiveness relates to friendships after a
relational transgression, shedding light on this infrequently researched area of human interactions.

The study of forgiveness as it relates to interpersonal communication and relationships has increased over the last few decades, as scholarly researchers, religious officials, and psychological practitioners have come to wonder and ask why forgiveness is important in human interactions and the continuation of relationships. For many researchers, at the root of forgiveness is the need for individuals to heal or mend a relationship after a transgression (Enright, 2001; McCullough, et al., 2000; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 1998). Many scholars tend to focus on how personal relationships and those within the relationships heal and move on after a relational transgression. But moving on is not always achieved, and any reaction to a wrongdoing depends on the individual persons and specific actions involving and surrounding the transgression. Healing through forgiveness, on the other hand, is an intrapersonal matter dealt with by either the transgressed or transgressor, but not necessarily dependent on another person for forgiveness to occur within someone’s life. As a conceptual definition forgiveness is a personal matter, a process and reaction to a transgression more often felt internally by the victim or the transgressor and then possibly expressed externally to the transgressor. In other words, forgiveness is an intrapersonal change felt by someone after a relational transgression with no time limit, no specific constructs, and no right or wrong process. This intrapersonal change to forgive one’s self or another can be felt by either the transgressed individual, the victim, or the person who performed the transgression, the perpetrator. According to the findings of this study, perhaps the links between
forgiveness and the outcomes of trust and satisfaction are explained by the healing of oneself. As the findings of this study showed, forgiving the perpetrator had outcomes of increased trust in the friendship and was seen to result in increased levels of relational satisfaction. Forgiveness is not exclusively felt or experienced merely and only by the person who was wronged (i.e., the victim)—often the people, or perpetrators, who transgressed against another must also forgive themselves of the transgression that they committed in order to move on and heal the relationship despite their own previous transgressions. Trust and relational satisfaction are likely indicators of healing in relationships after a relational transgression, and in this study forgiveness within friendships was found to promote those outcomes.

When it comes to the communication aspect of expressing forgiveness, this behavioral tactic can be either an outward verbal action or an inward intrapersonal process. Since forgiveness is believed to be an intrapersonal change that occurs within an interpersonal context, the communicative act of forgiveness can be either between the parties involved or can be intrapersonally experienced by one member of the relationship. The transgressor does not necessarily have to even know he or she transgressed against someone, but the victim may feel he or she was wronged in some way and seek forgiveness of self intrapersonally in order to move on interpersonally in the future with the relationship—or even end the relationship with no explanation, but still desire a need to forgive oneself. In this respect, forgiveness is both an intrapersonal and interpersonal communicative act in that it is felt internally and then expressed externally. Since forgiveness is often communicated in both these ways, empathy may not be the only
emotion being felt and expressed. In this current study, this intrapersonal aspect of forgiveness was shown not to relate to empathy. This anomaly could be because empathy may be more other-focused and, thus, not related to the intrapersonal aspects of forgiveness, making forgiveness more of an internal communicative process that promotes forgiveness of not only others, but also oneself. Therefore, the communicative act of forgiveness can be either intrapersonal or interpersonal, depending on the relational, emotional, and cognitive needs of those involved.

However, forgiveness was show to relate to communication in that the act of healing of self or moving on must be expressed in some way. Again, this can be an intrapersonal process or and interpersonal verbal interaction, but the act of forgiveness must be understood and a cognitive change felt in order for the transformative process to take place and the individual, as well as the relationship, to thrive. According to the findings of this study, dealing with one’s own internal, intrapersonal emotions after a transgression among friends would seem to be more necessary than outward or other-person focused expressions of emotions, such as empathy. This study was proof that the outward emotion of empathy shows no relation to forgiveness, commitment, trust or relational satisfaction, making forgiveness among friends a more inward, intrapersonal reaction in response to a relational transgression.

For communication scholars, the findings of this research project would apply to the ways we teach and do research on forgiveness in many ways. Past research on forgiveness has primarily focused on marital or familial relationships, with little attention paid to forgiveness among friends (Enright, 2001; McCullough, et al., 2000; Waldron &
Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 1998). However, as stated earlier in this dissertation, most marriages and families have some sort of non-voluntary aspect or built-in feature of remaining in the relationship after a transgression for the sake of the relationship that may not be experienced in friendships. In committed romantic relationships or marriages, a sense of loyalty for the sake of others who would be affected if the marital relationship ended may often be taken into consideration when it comes to the act of forgiving after a transgression. Through these types of relationships, forgiveness would be related to other constructs not shared by friend relationships, such as legal ties, familial responsibilities, and even monetary matters. For this study, though, the voluntary aspect of being friends for the mere sake of the friendship offers insight into the voluntary act of forgiveness that has not been researched at length. Why people forgive some friends and not others is of interest when considering these voluntary relationships.

Although friendships may be voluntary, as shown in this study’s findings some level of commitment is involved in order for forgiveness to occur. Since forgiveness was found to mediate the relationships between commitment and the outcomes of trust and relational satisfaction, this showed there was some obligation to stay in the friendship even after a relational transgression. This obligation could be in the potential outcomes of increased levels of trust and satisfaction, thus making forgiveness the binding construct in some friendships after a relational transgression. Committed friendships, much like committed romantic relationships, are more likely to use forgiveness after a transgression, resulting in increased trust and satisfaction (Finkel, et al., 2002; Tsang, et al., 2006). Commitment within friendships is the essence of the relationship, intertwined
with trust and satisfaction because of the voluntary nature and possible rewards gained by being friends. Unlike nonvoluntary relationships, such as families or marriages that come with institutional or legal ties, commitment found in friendships is more of a personal, voluntary choice often based on the rewards of trust and satisfaction gained by being in the relationship. Therefore, the findings of this current study are able to expand the notion of forgiveness beyond romantic relationships and families into friendships that has not been fully explored in the past. By expanding the previous notions of forgiveness to friendships, this study offers insight into these specific kinds of relationships that deserves continued research, personal and teaching application, and expanded study.

**Limitations of the Study**

One of the main limitations to this study was data being collected post-transgression. Respondents were asked to report retrospectively on a relational transgression, which led to variation in length of time that had passed since the initial transgression and the forgiveness process. Self-reported data were collected from only one member of the friendship dyad, making it difficult to relate findings to both members of the friendship. Though forgiveness was measured using a continuous scale, a dichotomous measure of whether or not forgiveness was actually granted was not included in study results. Including such variables would offer even more insight into the forgiveness process among friendships.

Participants in the student were mostly women (n=141), with only one-third of respondents being men (n=46). It is possible that forgiveness-related issues and behaviors are specific depending on the gender of the friends, which could be addressed in future
studies. Regarding culture, participants who responded to the survey were all from the United States. The meaning of forgiveness and the other constructs measured could differ between countries and cultures.

The types of instruments used to measure forgiveness, empathy, trust, commitment, and relational satisfaction could have affected results, as could the fact that the study relied on self-report measures at varied timeframes after the initial transgressions. The instruments used were chosen for their consistently high internal reliability levels, all of which were met or even exceeded in the current study. In this study a modified TRIM inventory was used to measure forgiveness with 13 questions, which did a reasonably good job in achieving a high internal reliability, but utilizing other scales may offer more insight into forgiveness among friends. Often in past forgiveness studies, instead of a series of Likert-type questions being presented to respondents, researchers ask participants to report how they would respond if they were in hypothetical situations (Finkel et al., 2002; Macaskill, 2007; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Findings are then analyzed for patterns of behaviors. Other forgiveness scales include the Tendency to Forgive scale (Brown, 2003), the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (Berry et al., 2001), and Enright’s Forgiveness Inventory (2000). These scales are also quantitative and feature numerical data, but the process of asking respondents to rate their forgiveness levels is different.

As mentioned earlier, empathy tends to be a multidimensional construct, so only using one scale to measure it was a limitation for this study. Many other scholars have also attempted to isolate this variable to understand how it related to other constructs, but
their findings did not achieve substantial internal reliability. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index was considered for this study, but it has only shown moderately satisfactory internal reliability ranging from .62 to .71 (Brems, 2001; Davis, 1980). In past studies the Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale used to measure a person’s empathy levels through 13 questions garnered a high reliability of .89, with an even higher reliability of .94 noted in this study. But by measuring other emotions such as sympathy and compassion along with empathy, this study on friends and forgiveness may have offered more complete results.

The Measure of Commitment Scale used in this research featured four statements that previously showed reliability coefficients ranging from .88 to .92 (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Stafford & Canary, 1991), all of which were exceeded by even higher reliability for this study ($\alpha = .95$). However, this construct is also multidimensional and may warrant more direct and varied statements in the measurement tool. The 7-item Dyadic Trust Scale (Larselere & Huston, 1980; Myers & Weber, 2004) has shown a reliability of .93 in the past when used to survey married couples, but was found to be moderately reliable in this study on adult friendships with an alpha of .76 based on data collected. Even though trust was shown to be correlated to commitment and satisfaction, other scales such as the longer 84-item Revised Philosophies of Human Nature Scale (Macaskill, 2007; Wrightman, 1974) could be used in future studies to delve deeper into this construct. When that original trust scale was been shortened to 20 items, reliability coefficients ranging from .78 to .83 resulted in
other studies (Macaskill, 2007). Measuring trust may warrant more questions in future studies on forgiveness and friends.

As for the measurement tool used to isolate relational satisfaction, the Family Satisfaction Scale (Caughlin et al., 2000, revision of Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986) previously had a high reliability of .91, and a strong correlation \((r = .69)\) between the ninth question and the mean of the first eight items. In this study the reliability of the first eight questions was acceptable at .73. The mean of these questions was correlated factored with the overall satisfaction question to reach a moderately reliable internal reliability of .78. But since the Family Satisfaction Scale was developed for families, a modified version that includes other non-familial dimensions may result in higher reliability when used to measure relational satisfaction among adult friends.

When it comes to retention of participants, 278 respondents started the survey, but only 187 completed the entire survey from beginning to end. Approximately 90 participants stopped filling in information after the empathy tool statements, which was the first series of Likert-scaled questions (see Appendix C). Fortunately the amount of respondent who did finish the survey exceeded the required power level to test the hypotheses, but if the length of the survey had been shorter the number of participants finishing the entire survey may have increased adding to overall data results.

Another limitation could be in the online-only recruitment of participants. Other methods that could have been used included in person or direct mail. Research on survey methodology has shown little or no difference between mail-in and online collection methods. The fact that the survey itself was administered online was a way to ensure
participants were able to access the survey site. Even though there were some limitations to this study, these very limitations can spark ideas for future studies, which will now be covered.

**Future Directions and Recommended Studies**

This research project and its findings will help to advance our understanding about forgiveness as it relates to the relational dyad of friendships. Friendships are a unique relational type in that they are strictly voluntary in nature. There are no legal binds keeping these dyads together. This relationship group has not been explored much in social sciences research, which has relied mostly on marriage or romantic relationships to understand and explore the forgiveness process. That is not to say that marriages or romantic interactions are not important and a worthy area to study, but by expanding the research on forgiveness in friendships this study provided support for the claim that forgiveness among friends was related to some of the same constructs as in married couples and romantic relationships.

The results of this study also offer a look into how voluntary relationships handle transgressions. Future studies could look at how other constructs are related to forgiveness and compare findings to the current study. It would also be noteworthy to compare findings of voluntary relationships to non-voluntary relationships to uncover if similar direct and indirect relationships occurred among variables.

Suggestions for future research include addressing transgression severity and its effect on forgiveness among friends. Collecting qualitative data would be helpful in isolating various levels of transgression severity and then comparing the levels to the
likelihood to forgive or how long it takes individuals to forgive based on the severity of the transgression. Also, how and if severity relates to pre-transgression and post-transgression levels of commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction to determine if the type of transgression relates to these constructs would offer more information into the area of forgiveness as it relates to friends.

The time factor of the overall forgiveness process would be another area to study, such as how long the individuals have been friends, how long ago the transgression occurred, and how these factors relate to granting or not granting forgiveness among friendships. Past research has mentioned how forgiveness is a process, and the time factor as being important in the cognitive and behavioral aspects of granting forgiveness (Enright, 2001; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; Worthington, 2003). Comparisons of levels of commitment, trust, and relational satisfaction at various time increments would offer potential guidance in the forgiveness process as it relates to termination, maintenance, or adjustments of interpersonal relationships. Isolating and categorizing the exact types of turning points and how the passage of time related to forgiveness versus relational termination would be of interest.

Assessing how close or satisfied friends were both before and after the transgression would be another area to study. Comparing these two dimensions of the relationship may offer some insight into how transgressions alter a friendship. Journal entries taken before and after a transgression have been studied to analyze the entries for routine betrayals respondents encountered in romantic interactions and how they reacted after the transgression (Finkel et al., 2002). More qualitative measures such as these types
of journal entries using both the victimized and perpetrating friends to respond would be one way to isolate and evaluate relationships before and after a transgression, but would take time and effort on the part of respondents to capture these kind of written data.

This study surveyed only the friend who was transgressed against and expanded research on the victim’s reaction to a relational transgression. Surveying both the victim and the perpetrator would offer a more complete look at how relational transgression and forgiveness affect friendships. Parsing out and reviewing the two sides of the transgression and forgiveness process would offer more insight into how individuals differ in granting and seeking forgiveness depending on if they are the victim or the perpetrator. Researching apologies or other ways perpetrators ask for forgiveness and then relating these behaviors to whether forgiveness was actually granted would be another interesting line of inquiry.

Parsing out forgiveness as it relates to similar concepts such as reconciliation, conflict management, or atonement would add to the overall study of forgiveness. Often these terms are used interchangeably or even confused with one another, so treating each as unique aspects of forgiveness different types or levels of forgiveness could help to learn how they are similar and different. Applying other theories to the research findings, such as attachment theory, may also explain the phenomenon of forgiveness beyond that of social exchange. Testing the quality of the friendship and other demographic factors such as gender, age, frequency of contact, how far friends live from one another, and educational or work-related factors may also add to the research area.
The current study was conducted to expand the research on forgiveness to the voluntary interpersonal relationships of friends. By conducting research using friends as the relational medium, this study expanded findings on the forgiveness process beyond married and romantic couples to another relational dyad, thus adding to and revealing more about our understanding of forgiveness among adult friends.
References


Appendix A: Survey Recruitment Message

Greetings! I need your HELP! As you may know, I am currently working on a Ph.D. at the University of Denver and am looking for participants to fill-out an online survey for my dissertation research on forgiveness among friends to determine how people manage these kinds of interpersonal relationships after a transgression or betrayal. I am looking for both males and females age 22 or older to fill out an online survey, asking questions about and discussing times they have or have not forgiven or been forgiven by a friend.

Participation will involve responding to a number of questions from your perspective as a member of an adult friendship—whether the friendship is still intact or interaction with this person has dissolved. The survey will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete and all answers will be kept confidential. Upon completing the survey, the e-mail addresses of participants will be entered in a random drawing for a chance to win one of five $20 gift certificates to amazon.com.

If a transgression with a friend is not coming to mind immediately, take time to think of one (but don't make it up...I want/need real stories between friends). This survey will be available for you to take at your convenience for the next week and will close on Sunday, Aug. 9, 2009 (possibly extended, so check the link below to determine if data collection is still taking place after this date). Remember, the friendship you base your survey answers on can either still in existence despite any “growing pains” or disagreements, or the former friendship can be one that has ended due to a transgression, betrayal or other relational matters.

>> By clicking on the LINK TO THE SURVEY below, you will be asked to indicate your informed consent to participate in this research:


Should you choose to participate, please be assured that your individual identity will be protected. The internet survey company I selected, Survey Monkey, allows me to block all ISP addresses from respondents. Your anonymity and confidentiality are therefore protected. Additionally, though I would greatly appreciate your answering all survey questions, you have the right to skip or omit any question or questions you do not desire to answer. My goal is to analyze the data over the summer and be prepared to present the findings to all interested parties in the fall 2009.

Please e-mail me at lpoole@du.edu for more information. I need as many responses and possible and would appreciate you passing on the message to potential participants. So, feel free to forward this request to other people you know who may be interested in filling out a survey.
Thank you for your participation!

L. Lori Poole, Ph.D Candidate
Department of Human Communication Studies
University of Denver
lpoole@du.edu
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

The researcher will treat all information gathered for this study as confidential. This means that only the researcher and research advisors will have access to the information you provide. An identification number will be used on your survey responses. Only the researcher will have the list that matches this number with your name, and this list will be kept in a secure setting. In addition, when the researcher report information, it will be reported either for the entire group of subjects, or if for any one individual, by identification number. Because these data are being collected through SurveyMonkey.com, you should know that the survey link is SSL-encrypted. SurveyMonkey promises to maintain privacy of data gathered through their online surveys; SurveyMonkey will not use data collected in any way. Technical information about SurveyMonkey’s data security procedures is available at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/HelpCenter/Answer.aspx?HelpID=42&q=privacy

Your survey responses will be locked securely in Lori Poole’s office. Your consent to participate and your contact information will be stored separately from your other responses in a locked office.

Although this research does not address the following, I am required to inform you that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

The benefits of being involved in this study include gaining insight into your values about forgiveness and how you and your friends manage private information. You may also enjoy the ability to provide information about your own experiences.

Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing how friends talk about forgiveness information may be upsetting. If this occurs and you would like to talk with a counselor, there are many options for finding help. If you are in the Denver area, the University of Denver Professional Psychology Center (303-871-3626, http://www.du.edu/gspp/professional-psychology-center/) offers counseling to the community and has a sliding scale for fees. If you are outside of the Denver area, the National Mental Health America (NMHA) Resource Center (1-800-969-6642, www.nmha.org) can provide information and help in finding community-based mental health services and individual therapists. The 1-800-Therapist Network (1-800-843-7274, www.1-800-therapist.com) provides referrals to therapists through its international network. Additional information and referral options are listed on the NMHA website (www.nmha.org).

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for
the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-3453 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

For your records, you can receive an email message containing the text of this consent form. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, the researcher will be happy to provide one for you. If you have questions or want to receive a copy of either this consent form or results of the study, please contact Lori Poole at the phone number or e-mail address listed below:

Lori Poole, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Human Communication Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303) 902-5892, E-mail: lpoole
Appendix C: Friendship Forgiveness Survey

NOTE: Comment boxes and pull-down menus were used for the open-ended questions. A closeness scale has been added to this survey, which is beyond the scope of this study, but may be used in other studies if statistical differences are noted between variables.

1. Welcome to the Forgiveness Research Project Survey!

WELCOME! Thank you for visiting this survey and hopefully agreeing to participate in a study investigating interactions and communication among adult friends after relational transgressions. The project is being conducted by Lori Poole, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Human Communication Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303) 903-5892, Email: lpoole@du.edu

The survey will take about 30-45 minutes to complete. Participation will involve responding to a number of questions from your perspective as a member of an adult friendship. Your involvement is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question on the survey and are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Refusal to answer a question or withdrawal from participation involves no penalty.

In order to progress through this survey, please use the following navigation links:
- Click the "Next" button at the bottom of each page to continue to the next page.
- Click the "Prev" button at the bottom of each page to return to the previous page.
- Click the "Exit the Survey Early" link at the top right-hand corner if you need to exit the survey. If you exit the survey and want to return, please keep in mind you may have to re-enter all the previously entered information.
- Click the "Done" button at the bottom of the last page to submit your survey.

To show appreciation for participants’ time, the names of all participants will be added to an overall list of possible recipients of gift certificates to an online retail store. Names will be drawn at random, and winners will be contacted via e-mail, stating how they can access their prize.

To get started, please click the NEXT button below:
2. Consent Form

After reading through the full consent form below, please click on the appropriate option below if you understand and agree to participate.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called “A research study examining forgiveness, empathy, commitment, trust, closeness, and relational satisfaction among adult friends after relational transgressions.” I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I have asked to receive a copy of the consent form or printed a copy via this screen for my records.

○ I consent to participate  ○ I DO NOT consent to participate
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR DISSERTATION PROJECT:

“A research study examining forgiveness, empathy commitment, trust, closeness, and relational satisfaction among adult friends after relational transgressions”

The researcher will treat all information gathered for this study as confidential. This means that only the researcher and research advisors will have access to the information you provide. An identification number will be used on your survey responses. Only the researcher will have the list that matches this number with your name, and this list will be kept in a secure setting. In addition, when the researcher report information, it will be reported either for the entire group of subjects, or if for any one individual, by identification number. Because these data are being collected through SurveyMonkey.com, you should know that the survey link is SSL-encrypted. SurveyMonkey promises to maintain privacy of data gathered through their online surveys; SurveyMonkey will not use data collected in any way. Technical information about SurveyMonkey’s data security procedures is available at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/HelpCenter/Answer.aspx?HelpID=42&q=privacy

Your survey responses will be locked securely in Lori Poole’s office. Your consent to participate and your contact information will be stored separately from your other responses in a locked office.

Although this research does not address the following, I am required to inform you that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal
concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

The benefits of being involved in this study include gaining insight into your values about forgiveness and how you and your friends manage private information. You may also enjoy the ability to provide information about your own experiences.

Potential risks of being involved include the possibility that discussing how friends talk about forgiveness information may be upsetting. If this occurs and you would like to talk with a counselor, there are many options for finding help. If you are in the Denver area, the University of Denver Professional Psychology Center (303-871-3626, http://www.du.edu/gspp/professional-psychology-center/) offers counseling to the community and has a sliding scale for fees. If you are outside of the Denver area, the National Mental Health America (NMHA) Resource Center (1-800-969-6642, www.nmha.org) can provide information and help in finding community-based mental health services and individual therapists. The 1-800-Therapist Network (1-800-843-7274, www.1-800-therapist.com) provides referrals to therapists through its international network. Additional information and referral options are listed on the NMHA website (www.nmha.org).

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the research sessions, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at (303) 871-3453 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at (303) 871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

For your records, you can receive an email message containing the text of this consent form. If you would like a copy of the results of the study, the researcher will be happy to provide one for you. If you have questions or want to receive a copy of either this consent form or results of the study, please contact Lori Poole at the phone number or e-mail address listed below:

Lori Poole, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Human Communication Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, (303) 902-5892, E-mail: lpoole
3. Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (Empathy)

Think about your friendships IN GENERAL. How well do the following questions describe your behavior and actions with your friends overall, where "Completely
Disagree" does NOT describe you very well and "Completely Agree" describes you very well? Select the box that is the best description of yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completely Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Completely Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am good at understanding other people’s problems.

I not only listen to my friends, but I understand what they are saying, and seem to know where they are coming from.

I very often seem to know how my friends feel.

I am able to sense or realize what my friends are feeling.

Before criticizing my friends, I try to imagine how I would feel in their place.

I always know exactly what my friends mean.

I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.

In my relationship with my friends I believe that there are two sides to every question, and I try to look and think about both sides.

I try to look at my friend’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

Even if my friends have difficulty in saying something, I usually understand what they mean.

When I'm upset with my friend, I usually try to put myself in his/her shoes for a while.

I usually do not understand the full meaning of what my friends are saying to me.

I am able to appreciate exactly how the things my friends experience feel to them.
Forgiveness Survey

3. Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale

Think about your friendships IN GENERAL. How well do the following questions describe your behavior and actions with your friends overall, where "Completely Disagree" does NOT describe you very well and "Completely Agree" describes you very well? Select the box that is the best description of yourself.

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am good at understanding other people's problems.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to sense or realize what my friends are feeling.</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always know exactly what my friends mean.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
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<td>In my relationship with my friends I believe that there are two sides to every question, and I try to look and think about both sides.</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Transgression Question

Describe an interaction with ONE of your FRIENDS when you felt unfairly and deeply hurt by this person.

NOTE: The terms "friend" or "friendship" refer to any voluntary relationship that offers some form of social support and mutual enjoyment of interaction. Please keep in mind the relationship must be a friendship, meaning no romantic involvement either in the past, currently or potentially. This can be an active or inactive relationship, so you can still be friends or no longer be friends.

By the word “transgression,” this means an interaction with one of your friends when you felt unfairly and deeply hurt by this person. It is HOW the transgression was managed after it occurred among the members of the friendship that is of interest in this research survey.
5. Situational Questions

What did you do or SAY to handle this transgression with your friend? How was this situation handled by communicating or not communicating by you and your friend?

What did you think about as you decided how to handle this transgression with your friend?

NOTE: The terms "friend" or "friendship" refer to any voluntary relationship that offers some form of social support and mutual enjoyment of interaction. Please keep in mind the relationship must be a friendship, meaning no romantic involvement either in the past, currently or potentially. This can be an active or inactive relationship, so you can still be friends or no longer be friends.

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Forgiveness Survey

5. Situational Questions

What did you do or SAY to handle this transgression with your friend? How was this situation handled by communicating or not communicating by you and your friend?

NOTE: The terms "friend" or "friendship" refer to any voluntary relationship that offers some form of social support and mutual enjoyment of interaction. Please keep in mind the relationship must be a friendship, meaning no romantic involvement either in the past, currently or potentially. This can be an active or inactive relationship, so you can still be friends or no longer be friends.

By the word “transgression,” this means an interaction with one of your friends when you felt unfairly and deeply hurt by this person. It is HOW the transgression was managed after it occurred among the members of the friendship that is of interest in this research survey.

What did you think about as you decided how to handle this transgression with your friend?

NOTE: The terms "friend" or "friendship" refer to any voluntary relationship that offers some form of social support and mutual enjoyment of interaction. Please keep in mind the relationship must be a friendship, meaning no romantic involvement either in the past, currently or potentially. This can be an active or inactive relationship, so you can still be friends or no longer be friends.

By the word “transgression,” this means an interaction with one of your friends when you felt unfairly and deeply hurt by this person. It is HOW the transgression was managed after it occurred among the members of the friendship that is of interest in this research survey.
6. Situational Questions 2

How long ago was the offense? (please specify the amount of years and/or months; EX: 2 years ago OR 3 years, 4 months ago)

How long have you been/were you friends with this person? (please specify the amount of years and/or months; EX: 2 years ago OR 3 years, 4 months ago)

Are you still friends with this person?
   ○ Yes    ○ No

There will be other questions throughout this survey regarding the current status of this friendship, but feel free to qualify the relationship here if desired.
7. Location Questions

How far away from this friend do you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same city</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same state, different cities/areas</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different states, same regions of U.S.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different countries</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you see each other face-to-face?

How often do you have contact with each other (not face-to-face)?

Methods of communication with this friend (i.e., phone calls, e-mails, texting, video, letters, through other people, at gatherings/meetings, etc.):

Main Method: _____________________________________________
Other Method(s): ___________________________________________
Your Preferred Method(s): _________________________________
Your Friend’s Preferred Method(s): _________________________
## Forgiveness Survey

### 7. Location Questions

**How far away from this friend do you live?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Same city</th>
<th>Same state, different cities/areas</th>
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<th>Different states, different regions of U.S.</th>
<th>Different countries</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**How often do you see each other face-to-face?**

[ ]

**How often do you have contact with each other (not face-to-face)?**

[ ]

**Methods of communication with this friend (i.e., phone calls, e-mails, texting, video, letters, through other people, at gatherings/meetings, etc.):**

Main Method: [ ]

Other Method(s): [ ]

Your Preferred Method(s): [ ]

Your Friend’s Preferred Method(s): [ ]
8. Forgiveness Scale

In thinking through the friend and event you shared, please consider the following questions and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Completely Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There really was no problem now that I think about it.
I was never bothered by what happened.
My friend was not wrong in what he or she did to me.
My feelings were never hurt.
What my friend did was fair.
Our friendship has moved on despite the transgression.
I have forgiven this person.
If I saw this person again, I would try to avoid interacting with him/her.
Even though his/her action hurt me, I do not feel ill-will toward my friend.
I dislike this person.
I feel warmly toward this person.
I hope this person gets what’s coming to him/her for what he/she did to me.
I still feel angry toward this person.
In thinking through the friend and event you shared, please consider the following questions and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>I was never bothered by what happened.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My friend was not wrong in what he or she did to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My feelings were never hurt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What my friend did was fair.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our friendship has moved on despite the transgression.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have forgiven this person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I dislike this person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel warmly toward this person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope this person gets what's coming to him/her for what he/she did to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I still feel angry toward this person.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Closeness Scale

In thinking through this same person and event, please consider the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Completely Disagree</th>
<th>2 Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>3 Disagree</th>
<th>4 Neutral</th>
<th>5 Agree</th>
<th>6 Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>7 Completely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I talk openly with my friend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am careful in what I tell my friend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am comfortable in expressing doubts and fears to my friend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>My friend is available when I need to talk.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My friend and I express affection toward each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>My friend would help me if I had a problem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel close to my friend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>My friend is interested in things I do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>My friend knows me well.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
10. Trust Scale

In thinking through the person and event you shared earlier in this survey, please consider the following questions:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
<td>Completely Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My friend is primarily interested in his/her own welfare.

There are times when my friend cannot be trusted.

My friend is honest and truthful with me.

I feel that I can trust my friend.

My friend treats me fairly and justly.

I feel my friend can be counted on to help me.
11. Commitment Scale

Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

<table>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am committed to maintaining this relationship with my friend.

I want this relationship with my friend to last as long as possible.

I think it is unlikely that this relationship will end in the near future.

I feel very close to my friend.
12. Relationship Satisfaction

Please think about your CURRENT relationship with your friend (i.e., after the event) and use the following words and phrases to RATE or compare the relationship using opposing dimensions. For example, if you think that your relationship with your friend is very miserable since the event shared in this survey, select option closest to the word “miserable” if words were placed on a scale from 1 to 7. If you think it is very enjoyable, select option closer to “enjoyable” if words were placed on a scale from 1 to 7. If you think your relationship with your friend is somewhere in between, click the option next to the number that is most appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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Forgiveness Survey

12. Relationship Satisfaction

Please think about your CURRENT relationship with your friend (i.e., after the event) and use the following words and phrases to RATE or compare the relationship using opposing dimensions. For example, if you think that your relationship with your friend is very miserable since the event shared in this survey, select option closest to the word “miserable” if words were placed on a scale from 1 to 7. If you think it is very enjoyable, select option closer to “enjoyable” if words were placed on a scale from 1 to 7. If you think your relationship with your friend is somewhere in between, click the option next to the number that is most appropriate.

miserable ..............................................................

enjoyable

☐ miserable 2 3 4 5 6 ○ enjoyable

hopeful ..............................................................

discouraging

☐ hopeful 2 3 4 5 6 ○ discouraging

empty ..............................................................

full

☐ empty 2 3 4 5 6 ○ full

interesting ..............................................................

boring

☐ interesting 2 3 4 5 6 ○ boring

rewarding ..............................................................

disappointing

☐ rewarding 2 3 4 5 6 ○ disappointing
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<tr>
<td>understanding</td>
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13. Relational Questions

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with your relationship with your friend BEFORE the event?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Completely Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

How do you CURRENTLY feel regarding the actions or steps you took to handle or resolve the transgression?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Completely Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Has the incident ever been discussed again since it occurred?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

...If YES, specifically how, when and/or why has the incident been discussed since it occurred?

...If NO, specifically why has the incident not been discussed since it occurred?

Rating this event on the scale below, how harmful or beneficial was this incident for you and your friendship? If you think your relationship with your friend was harmful, select choice next to the word “harmful.” If you think it was beneficial, click the circle next to “beneficial.” If you think your relationship with your friend is somewhere in between, select the appropriate rating.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Harmful  Beneficial

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your relationship with your friend AFTER the event?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Completely Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Agree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree
Forgiveness Survey

13. Relational Questions

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with your relationship with your friend BEFORE the event?

- Completely Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Completely Satisfied

How do you CURRENTLY feel regarding the actions or steps you took to handle or resolve the transgression?

- Completely Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Completely Satisfied

Has the incident ever been discussed again since it occurred?

- YES
- NO

...If YES, specifically how, when and/or why has the incident been discussed since it occurred?

...If NO, specifically why has the incident not been discussed since it occurred?

Rating this event on the scale below, how harmful or beneficial was this incident for you and your friendship?

If you think your relationship with your friend was harmful, select choice next to the word “harmful.” If you think it was beneficial, click the circle next to “beneficial.” If you think your relationship with your friend is somewhere in between, select the appropriate rating.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with your relationship with your friend AFTER the event?

- Completely Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Completely Satisfied
### 14. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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Forgiveness Survey

14. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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**Your City, State**

- City/Town:   
- State:   

**Friend’s Age:**   

**Friend’s Sex:**   

**Friend’s Educational Level:**   

**Friend’s Ethnicity:**   

**Friend’s Sexual Orientation:**   

**Friend’s marital status:**   

**Friend’s City, State**

- City/Town:   
- State:   
16. THANK YOU!

THANK YOU for taking the time to share your story and answer the corresponding survey questions. Remember all information will be kept confidential and potentially used in future research reports. My goal is to analyze the data over the summer and be prepared to present the findings to all interested parties in the fall 2009.

To exit this survey, please click the DONE button below.

Thanks again!
Lori Poole
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Human Communication Studies
University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208
E-mail: lpoole@du.edu
Appendix D: Snowballing Survey Participant Request for E-mail Addresses of Potential Participants

Snowballing Survey Participant Request for E-mail Addresses of Potential Participants for Dissertation Project:
“A research study examining forgiveness, empathy commitment, trust, closeness, and relational satisfaction among adult friends after relational transgressions”

15. Request for E-mail Addresses of Potential Participants

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS RESEARCH SURVEY!

To show appreciation for your time, the names of participants will be added to an overall drawing of 5 possible $20 gift certificates to amazon.com. Names will be drawn at random, and the 5 final winners will be contacted via e-mail, stating how they can access their prize.

In order to be added to the drawing, please insert your preferred e-mail address below:
Participant E-mail: ___________________________

KNOW OF ANY OTHER POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS?

In order to increase participation and overall survey data, would you be willing to provide e-mail addresses of potential respondents (such as friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, etc.)? This contact information will only be used in relation to this current survey and will not be sold or give to any third parties.

These potential participants can be either male and female friends, family members, co-workers or any other people you know who are age 22 or older. Participation will involve responding to the same questions you just answered from their perspective as a member of an adult friendship. All answers and e-mail addresses will be kept confidential.

Thank you in advance for any potential participant e-mail addresses you provide.
E-mail 1: ___________________________
E-mail 2: ___________________________
E-mail 3: ___________________________
E-mail 4: ___________________________
E-mail 5: ___________________________
Forgiveness Survey

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E-mail 1
E-mail 2
E-mail 3
E-mail 4
E-mail 5