ESTABLISHING LINKS BETWEEN DESECRATION, FORGIVENESS, AND MARITAL QUALITY DURING PREGNANCY

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ABSTRACT

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Both academic and religious communities have long considered forgiveness a salient aspect of interpersonal relationships and individual well-being. This construct has been researched extensively in a secular context, but the religious aspects are only beginning to be addressed. In particular, the experience of a perceived desecration, or a violation of the sacred, may have unique impacts on the forgiveness process and also on both interpersonal relationships and individual well-being. These links become particularly important in a marriage, which is a union considered sacred by a majority of Americans. Forgiveness has been shown to be positively linked to marital quality, but the impact desecrations may have on these aspects of life have yet to be carefully studied.

The purpose of the current study was to address this gap in the research. This study examined links between desecration of a marriage, spousal and spiritual forgiveness, and marital quality as shown through satisfaction and love. One hundred and seventy eight married couples in a Midwestern community completed a variety of measures designed to address these constructs.

Main analyses revealed that desecration was associated with wives’ report of lower levels of marital love. Marital quality, both satisfaction and love, was associated with spousal, but not spiritual, forgiveness for both wives and husbands. Desecration was associated with lower levels of spousal forgiveness in wives, but higher levels of spiritual forgiveness in both wives and husbands. Furthermore, analyses revealed that wives’ spousal forgiveness may partially mediate the relationship between desecration and lower levels of marital love. These findings are discussed along with post-hoc analyses, implications, limitations, and future directions.
This thesis is dedicated to my family. Their support throughout the years has helped me learn and grow more than they could possibly know. Thank you Dad, Mom, and Jed.
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INTRODUCTION

Marital quality has been a topic of intense research for decades. Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) state “the sheer magnitude of this work attests to the continued importance placed on understanding the quality of marriage” (p. 964). The time leading up to the transition to parenthood, pregnancy, may be one of the most important times to establish or maintain marital quality. Although the transition to parenthood is typically viewed as a normal life transition and is experienced by many couples (Cowan & Cowan, 1995), the unique stressors involved in this transition often result in significant decreases in marital quality from the time of pregnancy through the early years of the child’s life (e.g. Cowan et al., 1985; Glade, Bean, & Vira, 2005). Given the importance of marital quality to the entire family unit and the individuals within it (Glade et al.; Cowan & Cowan), it would seem that it is important to ensure a high level of marital quality during pregnancy, that is, the time leading up to this transition to parenthood.

It has been suggested that possessing a spiritual lens through which to view one’s marriage may enhance marital quality. More specifically, viewing one’s marriage as having divine character and significance (i.e., sanctification of marriage) has been linked to higher levels of marital quality (Mahoney et al., 1999). Such spiritual perceptions about marriage, however, may also foster a tendency to interpret spousal wrong-doings as a violation of the sacred, or a desecration. In turn, based on initial research on desecration in other areas of life, viewing a partner’s wrong-doing as a desecration may be tied to lower levels of marital quality. Hopefully, however, spouses can call upon resources such as forgiveness to cope effectively with spousal wrong-doings which may then lead to higher levels of marital quality. While research has shown that this potential for forgiveness is real when dealing with wrong-doings, the possibly deleterious impact that a desecration may have on the forgiveness process has been largely...
ignored. That is, if spouses frame their partners’ serious wrong-doings as desecrations, they may encounter unique challenges to extending forgiveness to their partners. However, given the sacred nature of the violated object, they may be more inclined to engage in the forgiveness process in order to preserve and protect the sacred. Therefore, examining forgiveness and its potential mediating effects in the face of a perceived desecration by a partner is imperative to our understanding of marital quality.

The primary purpose of the proposed thesis project was to examine links between marital quality, spousal desecrations, and forgiveness. To set the stage for the study’s specific hypotheses, I have provided a review of the relevant literature as follows. First discussed is the importance of understanding the construct of marital quality, particularly during pregnancy. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the potential associations between marital quality and spousal desecrations. Specifically, experiencing a violation of this sanctified aspect of life as a spousal desecration may be linked to decreased marital quality. Following this is a brief discussion of a construct that may be linked to higher levels of marital quality: forgiveness. After establishing the importance of studying forgiveness and marital quality, I examined the potential links between forgiveness and spousal desecrations. On one hand, experiencing a violation of a sanctified aspect of life as a spousal desecration may be linked to lower levels of forgiveness. Alternatively, however, a spousal desecration may motivate more forgiveness in context of being married and on the verge of having a child with the spouse who engaged in the desecration, with the intent of preserving and protecting this sacred relationship. In either case, forgiveness may mediate direct links between desecration and marital quality. Finally, this review is tied together through a more detailed examination of the potential links between forgiveness, spousal desecrations, and marital quality. In this project, I examined two types of forgiveness. The first
encompasses a general tendency to be forgiving towards one’s spouse and the second is a specific spiritual strategy of turning to one’s faith for aid in the process of forgiveness. I examined the potential of these two types of forgiveness to mediate the links between spousal desecrations and marital quality, given the potentially unique challenges desecration may present to both marital quality and forgiveness.

Marital Quality

The construct of marital quality has a long history in psychological research. I begin this section with a brief discussion of this history in the context of the measurement of this construct. The assessment of marital quality in this research has encompassed a broad range of measures, from global, three-item measures (e.g., Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, KMS; Schumm at al., 1986) to omnibus measures that are longer and more detailed while still offering an efficient way to measure marital quality. In particular, the 15-item Short Marital Adjustment Test, (SMAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) and 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) have been widely used over the past several decades and are often interpreted to be valid, efficient indicators of marital quality. In fact, these two measures have generally been embraced by marital quality researchers as “gold standards” to capture the quality of marital relationships in both basic research and marital therapy outcome studies. However, these measures have also been said to have created some confusion regarding the best way to conceptualize and assess the construct of marital quality. This is because these measures combine global, subjective ratings of marital happiness and satisfaction with spousal reports about multiple specific aspects of marital functioning (e.g., frequency of disagreement about specific topics, amount of time spent together, Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). That is, they combine diverse elements of marital quality without empirical evidence as to if or how these elements are inter-related. For example, these
measures include items about global, subjective views of marital quality along with items tapping into constructs such as communication, conflict, and shared engagement in activities that presumably contribute to spouses’ global ratings of marital quality (Spanier, 1976).

Due to the conceptual confusion created by reliance on indices such as the SMAT and DAS as to what marital quality is and how to measure it, researchers such as Fincham and Bradbury (1987) have argued for the field to move toward differentiating between spouses’ own global evaluations of marital quality—e.g., global marital satisfaction or happiness—from other clinically or theoretically important dimensions of marital quality. Although total scores provided by measures such as SMAT or DAS may provide an efficient index of overall marital quality, a clearer and more conceptually differentiated understanding of marriage may be obtained by examining elements of marital quality separately. One of the main reasons for this argument is that, historically, even when using measures like the SMAT or DAS researchers have turned to global satisfaction items (often embedded within the longer measure itself) as the standard item to correlate to other factors of marital quality. That is, global items are often used as the main marker of marital quality, even when they are embedded in longer measures. Additionally, Fincham and Bradbury argue that, if one wishes to explore what constructs do indeed correlate with marital quality, one cannot use a measure of marital quality that includes the construct that one wishes to link to it. For example, if a researcher would like to examine associations between marital quality and conflict, a scale measuring marital quality that includes items measuring conflict could not be used due to construct overlap. It will therefore be important for future research to include both global measures of satisfaction and more specific measures (e.g., love, conflict, communication) that may tap into the broader construct of marital quality.
In light of controversy that has emerged over time about the conceptualization and assessment of marital quality, it is important to make clear what aspects of marital quality were examined in this study. This study focused on two aspects of marital quality. First, spouses’ subjective ratings of their overall satisfaction with their marriage were assessed with the 3-item KMS (Schumm et al., 1986). These three items ask a married individual about his/her satisfaction with the marriage, his/her satisfaction with the spouse, and his/her satisfaction with the relationship with the spouse. As mentioned above, these items are fairly highly correlated with total scores generated by multi-item measures of marital quality but conceptually tap into subjective appraisals of the relationship. Second, this study assessed partners’ reports about the degree to which they feel and express love toward their spouse using a subscale created by Braiker and Kelly (1979). This measure of spousal love has repeatedly been used as an indicator of marital quality in the transition to parenthood literature. It also appears to be very sensitive to changes in spouses’ feelings across the transition to pregnancy, whereas global levels of marital satisfaction tend to be more stable (Belsky & Rovine, 1990). Examining spousal love also highlights the emotional dimension of marital quality, and taps into feelings of connectedness, dependency, affection, and devotion to the spouse. Such feelings may not necessarily be a high priority for some people’s sense of global satisfaction, especially for those who avoid emotional intimacy and attachment, so it is important to assess these feelings along with global satisfaction.

Given the above discussion, for the purposes of this study, marital quality was conceptually defined as “one’s sense of the overall state of his/her marriage, as shown through feelings of satisfaction with the individual’s marriage and love of his/her spouse.” In reviewing prior literature and research studies, I have referred to additional, broadband constructs that have been conceptualized as tapping into marital quality as “marital quality” even if researchers
referred to their measures as “marital functioning,” “marital adjustment,” “marital maladjustment,” “marital satisfaction,” “marital dissatisfaction,” “marital distress,” or “marital discord.” This was done for the sake of consistency throughout this review.

So why has marital quality received such widespread attention in the field of psychology? Most simply, marital quality is an important, overarching construct to better understand due to the high value that society places on achieving a relationship marked by high marital quality. In addition, poorer marital quality is associated with poorer outcomes concerning the marriage and lower psychological well-being of the spouses as individuals and the children of the marriage. Specific to the marriage, the links may seem obvious. One may presume that if the level of marital quality is low, there may be higher levels of negative interactions (e.g., conflict) and, eventually, divorce. Research has shown that lower levels of marital quality and higher levels of conflict are indeed potential risk factors for divorce (e.g., Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007).

Poor marital quality has also been associated with lower levels of individual functioning. Low levels of marital quality have been linked to increased depression, sadness, irritability, and lower levels of sexual drive (e.g., Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003). Poor marital quality may also have an impact on the physical health of the individuals within the marriage. Some research has shown that marital discord may be associated with physiological reactivity (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994, as cited in Beach et al.) and suppressed immune system functioning (Kiecolt-Glaser, Malarkey, & Chee, 1993, as cited in Beach et al.), which can lead to serious health complications.

In addition to the impact on the individuals within the marriage, poor marital quality has also been found to affect those closest to the relationship. Based on an extensive review of the state of marriage and child development research, Fincham (1998) concludes “it is clear that
harmonious marriages are associated with more favorable child outcomes, and that troubled marriages are associated with more maladaptive child behaviors” (p. 544). Importantly, links have been found longitudinally between a couple’s marital quality before having a baby and their parental effectiveness during the child’s first years of life (e.g., Belsky & Rovine, 1990; Cowan & Cowan, 1992, as cited in Cowan & Cowan 1995).

It is speculated that the period prior to the transition to parenthood may be one in which it is particularly important to establish buffers to stressors that may challenge marital quality. Although the transition to parenthood is considered by many to be a normative occurrence, (it is estimated that around 90% of married couples have children, Cowan & Cowan, 1995), it continues to be a difficult one for many couples. Cowan et al. (1985) found that, out of 11 studies, 9 reported significant decreases in marital quality following this transition. Cowan et al. go on to describe a study in which they found the marital quality of parents to decline significantly from pregnancy to six months after their baby was born. Additional, larger, drops in marital quality continued to occur from six to eighteen months post-partum. LeMasters (1957) reported that 83% of the population in his study experienced “extensive” or “severe” crises in the years following this transition (p. 353). John Gottman (1999) describes one of his studies on newlyweds in which 67% of couples experienced a “precipitous drop in marital satisfaction” (p. 49). A more recent article by Glade et al. (2005) explains that this continues to be a common finding in the research on the transition to parenthood.

Cowan et al. (1985) suggest that one of the main causes of decreased satisfaction is an increase in conflict and the couple’s inability to resolve this conflict. In their study, couples that reported higher levels of conflict during pregnancy also reported lower levels of marital quality six months after the birth of their baby. Furthermore, couples who reported ineffective problem-
solving six months after their baby was born reported lower marital quality one year later. Cowan et al. go on to suggest that therefore it is not necessarily the rising level of conflict itself that affects the marriage, but “how effectively parents learn to work together to meet these challenging changes that differentiates couples who adapt well and those who experience distress during their transitions to parenthood” (p. 477).

Fincham (2003) suggests that unresolved conflict between spouses may have an especially negative impact on the children in the family. This suggests that, while some conflict is inevitable, it is especially important for couples to learn how to resolve this conflict in a supportive manner. If couples can learn to resolve conflict prior to the inevitable stressors they will encounter during the transition to parenthood, perhaps the transition will have less of an impact on their marital quality. Jordan, Stanley, and Markman (1999; as cited in Glade et al., 2005) suggest that there are several areas that couples can work on to enhance their relationship in preparation for the transition to parenthood. One of these areas is forgiveness.

In summary, the importance of studying the construct of marital quality in a clear and concise manner is imperative to the advancement of research in this area. Although marital quality has been conceptualized and assessed in many different ways throughout years of research, spouses’ subjective views of their marital quality have been shown to be an important indicator of marital quality. Using these global indices along with specific indicators of this construct, such as marital love, aids researchers to better understand factors that contribute to marital quality. Understanding the factors that are associated with marital quality is of utmost importance, given the links that have been shown between marital quality and the marriage, individual spouses, and children. The importance of establishing marital quality increases in the
period prior to the couple’s transition to parenthood, given the decreases in marital quality following this transition.

Desecration and Marital Quality

I now turn to an emerging construct within the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality that has potentially important implications for marital quality: desecration. First, I define the concept and briefly review an important aspect of this definition, sanctification. I then move on to explain the more deleterious effects this construct may lead to when one experiences a violation of their sanctified marriage as a desecration. Desecration has been defined as “a perceived violation of a sanctified aspect of life” (Mahoney, Rye, & Pargament, 2005, p. 59). To unpack this definition, it is first helpful to review what is meant by a “sanctified aspect of life,” particularly if marriage is the aspect that is viewed as sanctified, and then consider the implications of experiencing a violation of a sacred aspect of life.

Sanctification has been defined as “perceiving an aspect of life as having divine character and significance” (Mahoney, Rye, et al., p. 58). Sanctification, therefore, is a process in which an aspect of life is imbued with sacred qualities or is seen as a direct manifestation of God. It has been suggested that when people hold something as sacred, they are more likely to invest in it, preserve and protect it, and derive greater satisfaction and well-being from it (Mahoney, Pargament, et al., 2005; Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005).

Sanctification may be especially important within the context of marriage. It has been reported that 95% of married couples identify themselves as affiliated with a religious organization (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Some researchers suggest that the search for a romantic partner - for a mate who can provide a family - may indeed be the ultimate search (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). It has been
proposed that sanctification has the potential to give romantic relationships a deeper sense of meaning. It also has the potential to enhance satisfaction, personal pleasure and fulfillment in the relationship. People may feel safeguarded, or more secure and confident in the relationship, and may engage in higher investment in the relationship (e.g. more time, energy, and resources).

While there are many benefits associated with the sanctification of an aspect of life, experiencing the sacred may also have the potential to elicit more negative thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. Due to their potentially intense investment in sacred areas of life, people may be less flexible in their beliefs and less tolerant of others, may engage in greater defensiveness, and may experience greater emotional suffering when a sacred aspect of life is lost, threatened, or harmed. They may engage in more anger, sadness, fear, and vengefulness when people violate or obstruct a sanctified aspect of life (Mahoney et al., 2002; Mahoney, Rye et al., 2005). For example, in a study of 117 adults randomly selected from the community, Pargament et al. (2005) examined the impact of desecration on well-being. It was found that experiencing a desecration was associated with greater negative religious coping ($r=.599$, $p<.001$), intrusive thoughts ($r=.398$, $p<.001$), avoidant behaviors ($r=.558$, $p<.001$), state anger ($r=.480$, $p<.001$), state anxiety ($r=.334$, $p<.001$), state depression ($r=.278$, $p<.01$), and depression ($r=.266$, $p<.01$). In regression analyses, desecration was found to predict greater anger ($\beta=.316$, $p<.01$) and avoidant behaviors ($\beta=.297$, $p<.01$). Additionally, desecration was found to predict lower levels of posttraumatic growth ($\beta=-.349$, $p<.01$).

With regard to the sanctification and desecration of marriage in particular, there are societal, religious, and personal guidelines for what makes a good spouse and a good marriage. These rules may be seen as the skeleton of the sacred marriage. Oftentimes, one is not even aware of these rules until they are violated. Unfortunately, violations are inevitable and occur in
a variety of relationships, including marriage. Much of the research done on violations within a marriage has focused on more secular aspects of this topic. However, given the sacred nature of marriage, one may perceive a spousal wrong-doing as a desecration. A wide range of broken rules have the potential to be perceived as desecrations, including sharing marital secrets, lying, engaging in verbal or physical aggression, or infidelity.

Experiencing a desecration in a marriage could result in serious and lasting negative consequences. Theoretically, it has been suggested that when a sacred aspect of life has been violated, the violation may have significant effects on many areas of life, including one’s worldview, religious beliefs, and relationship with God (Mahoney, Rye, et al., 2005). People’s religiousness and spirituality often shapes how they view the world. What they view as sacred may be critical to how they relate to the world around them. If this aspect of life is violated, it may not only affect how they view and relate to that specific aspect, but also how they view and relate to the world. Experiencing a desecration may also reshape aspects of one’s religious beliefs. If one has held an aspect of life as sacred and it is violated, the victim might actually retract the aspect’s sacred status in order to avoid having to go through the process required to rework the aspect into the victim’s sacred circle. An example of this is the annulment of a marriage, which is basically stating that the marriage and its sacred qualities never actually existed. Additionally, experiencing a desecration may affect how the victim views God and their relationship with God. For example, one may not understand how the sacred object was not protected by God and may begin to question God’s benevolence or power.

One may presume that these potentially major shifts in how people view and relate to the world around them have the potential to affect the well-being of the individuals and their marriages. This seems especially likely if victims have a difficult time reconciling why their
spouse, a person they likely consider to be closest to them, was the cause of these life-changing shifts.

Empirically, one study has been done on the occurrence of desecrations in romantic relationships. In 2001, Gina Magyar did a cross-sectional study with 360 college students (296 female, 64 male) in a Midwestern university. Students were recruited from psychology courses and were told they either had to have been or currently be in a romantic relationship. Participants answered a variety of survey questions that they completed in a classroom setting. They were reported to be seated in a manner that would ensure confidentiality. Surveys completed covered a range of topics, including demographics, religiousness, wrong-doing within their romantic relationship, desecration of their relationship due to these wrong-doings, religious coping, forgiveness, and physical health. It was found that higher levels of negative affect were linked to experiencing a wrong-doing in the relationship as a desecration, including both theistic desecration ($r=.34, p<.01$), and non-theistic desecration ($r=.36, p<.01$). Theistic desecration refers to a desecration experienced as a violation related specifically to a higher power (e.g., “I feel like something that came from God was dishonored,” “My partner’s actions were not only an offense against me, but also against God”). Non-theistic desecration items do not specifically mention a higher power. That is, items focus more on language such as “sacred,” “holy,” and “my religious and/or spiritual identity” (e.g., “Something made sacred by God was violated,” “Part of my religious and/or spiritual identity was shaken”). More adverse physical health symptoms were also linked to experiencing a desecration, both theistic ($r=.30, p<.01$) and non-theistic ($r=.20, p<.01$). More intrusive thoughts were linked to greater theistic desecration ($r=.25, p<.01$) but not to greater non-theistic desecration, though more avoidant thoughts and behaviors were linked to experiencing both greater theistic ($r=.34, p<.01$) and non-theistic ($r=.11, p<.05$)
desecration. This study only looked at college students in a romantic relationship, not marriage, and did not examine the impact of the desecration on the relationship. However, as discussed above, one may presume that these negative individual constructs have the potential to be linked to negative interpersonal constructs as well. Links found between other constructs in this study are discussed later.

It would seem, then, that experiencing a desecration within a marriage may be linked to lower levels of marital quality. Given the unique impacts that experiencing a desecration may have on the victim and the marriage, I now turn to a topic that intuitively follows: forgiveness. I first discuss forgiveness and its links to marital quality. Then, given the unique challenges desecration may present to a marriage, I turn to a discussion of the links between desecration and forgiveness.

Forgiveness and Marital Quality

Forgiveness has been defined in many ways. One definition that appears to be taking root (e.g., Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007; Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006; Leach & Lark, 2004; Worthington, 2005) was put forth by McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000). This definition purports that forgiveness is “intraindividual, prosocial change toward a transgressor that is situated within an interpersonal context” (p. 9). This definition allows for change that may be either only a decrease in negative feelings or both a decrease in negative and an increase in positive feelings. Either way, this change is prosocial, as it aids in setting the stage for more positive social interactions (without necessitating reconciliation). Furthermore, this definition does not purport that one must fully revert back to his or her original relationship with the transgressor. That is, it is not stated that one must achieve a certain amount of change in order to have forgiven, but rather goes through a process that leads to some degree of prosocial
change. This definition also takes into account the fact that forgiveness is something that happens within the individual, but also that it occurs in an interpersonal context, as there must be a victim and an offender. This definition provides a solid base for understanding the concept of forgiveness while allowing for interpretation based on the type of forgiveness being studied.¹

Much marital research has focused on how couples handle conflict and negative interactions. However, some longitudinal research (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995, as cited in Fincham, 2003) has shown that looking at conflict alone accounts for only a small portion of variability when predicting marital outcomes. Fincham, Beach, and Davila (2004) suggest that unresolved (i.e., unforgiven) transgressions may play a role in future transgressions and conflict. That is, if transgressions are not fully resolved and forgiven, they may actually create new, or exacerbate existing, conflict. According to a study done by Margolin and Wampold (1981; as cited in Bradbury et al., 2000), couples who engaged in higher levels of negative reactions (shown by increased levels of negative behavior and decreased levels of positive behavior) to their spouse’s negative behavior were more distressed. The difference here appears not to be in the spouse’s original negative behavior, but in the other spouse’s reaction to that behavior. In addition, Bradbury et al. explain that much research has been done on both conflict and conflict resolution. They note that while there is ambiguity in the research, it has been shown that displays of affection from one spouse to another may moderate the effects of negative behavior on marital quality (Huston & Chorost, 1994; as cited in Bradbury et al.).

These displays of affection may include acts of forgiveness. Fenell (1993) conducted a study with 147 couples that were in their first marriage and had been married for over twenty years. Couples were given a questionnaire containing 59 items representing various marital

¹ This definition allows for the study of most types of forgiveness other than some study of self-forgiveness, which is outside of the context of this study.
characteristics. From these items, each participant ranked what they considered to be the top ten most important characteristics for a long-term marriage. Within these ten characteristics is “willingness to forgive and be forgiven” (Fenell, p. 456). However, only 29% of the sample endorsed this item. It will be important to conduct further research to understand the characteristics of this sub-sample and what experiences they may have encountered that have made them believe in the importance of forgiveness. In a review on marital literature, Fincham, Stanley, and Beach (2007) suggest that the field is indeed at a stage in which it is time to study more dynamic processes following conflict (e.g., forgiveness).

Overall, research suggests that learning skills to cope effectively with marital conflict, including the experience of violations, may be especially important in the period prior to the transition to parenthood. If couples can learn how to resolve violations effectively before they experience the myriad of stressors many new parents face, perhaps their marital quality can be maintained or even improved throughout this transition. Indeed, as stated above, Jordan, Stanley, and Markman (1999; as cited in Glade et al., 2005) suggest that forgiveness is an important skill couples can develop in order to prepare their relationship for the transition to parenthood. As will be described below, research has consistently supported positive links between forgiveness and marital quality. I now turn to a discussion of a construct that may have the potential to either hinder or augment the forgiveness process.

Desecration and Forgiveness

Religion and forgiveness have been intertwined for centuries. Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism all contain teachings and values consistent with forgiveness (Rye, 2005). According to polls of the American population, 81% identify with a particular religion (Kosmin, Mayer, & Keysar, 2001), and it has been shown that many of these people
continue to use religious influences to shape and live out their own personal models of forgiveness (Rye). People use methods such as prayer, religious texts, and clergy to aid them in their journey through forgiveness following a transgression.

Empirical evidence shows that people who are more religious tend to value forgiveness more and to see themselves as more forgiving. In a review article, McCullough and Worthington (1999) write that people who report being more religious also tend to rate themselves as more forgiving. For example, they discuss a nationwide study of over 1,000 people done by Gorsuch and Hao (1993). Gorsuch and Hao found that people who reported higher overall religiousness also reported higher levels of forgiveness. In a more recent study, using Hochberg criteria to explore mean differences, Macaskill (2007) found that clergy members rated themselves highest in valuing forgiveness, followed by a group of Christians (difference was significant with SE=0.58, p<0.001, 95% CI=0.29-0.57). Both of these groups rated themselves as valuing forgiveness higher than did a non-religiously affiliated (NRA) group (difference between clergy and NRA was significant with SE=0.08, p<0.001, 95% CI=0.88-1.23; and between Christians and NRA with SE=0.08, p<0.001, 95% CI=0.45-0.84).

Although those who tend to be more religious also say they value forgiveness relatively more than those who are less religious based on global markers (e.g., religious affiliation, church attendance), it is possible that certain religious or spiritual interpretations of wrong-doings may create obstacles for forgiveness. Specifically, experiencing a sanctified aspect of life as having been violated, or desecrated, may present distinctive challenges to forgiveness. As mentioned earlier, when a person has invested heavily in an aspect of life they hold sacred, valuable, and meaningful, it may be difficult to forgive someone who would act in a way that desecrates this
aspect of life, especially given the intense personal distress and serious threats to the relationship this desecration may instigate.

Although empirical research specifically focused on the forgiveness of desecrations is very sparse, a few studies indicate that the more one interprets a wrong-doing as a desecration, the more psychological distress the individual may feel, accompanied by more negative feelings toward the offender, including revenge, which is the antithesis of forgiveness. In a study of 259 college students in Ohio and 57 college students in New York City, conducted right after the 9/11 attack, it was found that people who felt that they had experienced a desecration were more likely to exhibit wishes of revenge and feelings of anger (Mahoney et al., 2002). Students were asked to report on feelings of desecration, demonization of the terrorists, post-traumatic symptoms, depressive symptoms, and psychological and spiritual growth. They were also asked about possible methods of retaliation and support of governmental action. Higher levels of desecration were related to more extremist reactions towards perpetrators (OH r=.22, p<.001; NY r=.26, p<.05) and more support of government action to punish the terrorists (OH r=.29, p<.001; NY r=.34, p<.01). They were also related to more post-traumatic symptoms (OH r=.12, p<.05; NY r=.24, p<.05). These results support the idea that, since people tend to be highly invested in the things they hold sacred, they may be more likely to be defensive of them and lash out when they are threatened, rather than engage in pro-active forgiveness.

There have been a myriad of studies done on forgiveness, and the study discussed above examined people’s negative reactions to a desecration. However, the study conducted by Magyar (2001), described above, is the only known study that includes the constructs of desecration and forgiveness in romantic relationships. Students who had been or were currently in a romantic relationship completed surveys on various topics, including their experience of wrong-doings
within the relationship and their view of the extent that these wrong-doings were a desecration of their relationship. It was found that people who experienced a desecration found it harder to forgive the transgressor (theistic desecration $r=-.24$, $p<.01$; non-theistic desecration $r=-.25$, $p<.01$), especially if they believed that their partner was intentional in their wrong-doing ($r=-.83$, $p<.01$).

The above study was conducted with college students who were dating and not married. While transgressions and forgiveness in marriage have been studied, the unique impact that perceiving wrong-doings by a spouse as a desecration may have on marital quality has not been addressed empirically, and has been addressed only marginally in the theoretical literature. For example, in a book chapter on desecration and forgiveness, Mahoney, Rye, et al., (2005) provide examples of how marriage may be particularly susceptible to the impacts of marital desecrations. For instance, they discuss the case of a spouse committing infidelity; they propose that since the spouse is likely aware of the sacred status of their marriage, and was aware they were violating this in their act of infidelity, it may be harder for the victimized spouse to forgive their partner.

Given the unique challenges that desecrations pose to the forgiveness process, it would appear that desecration within marriages may be linked to lower levels of forgiveness. However, empirical research has shown that, in samples where victims maintain their relationships with transgressors, they are more likely to engage in the forgiveness process (Magyar, 2001). It is not clear, though, if they are in actuality more forgiving or if they simply try harder to forgive. Mahoney, Rye et al., (2005) also address this theoretically. They suggest that, when people are in a relationship that needs to be maintained in order for the individuals in it to continue to experience the sacred, they may work harder to maintain this relationship. In this case, they may consider their attempts to forgive their spouse their own way of trying to keep the sacred in their
lives. For instance, the victim may believe that God expects and desires the forgiving of the
offending spouse. Thus, the victim may extend forgiveness to sustain his/her own relationship
with God. In addition, the victim may believe that the marriage itself is a sacred bond that is part
of the sacred domain and thus merits an extension of forgiveness to the offending spouse. Going
through the process of forgiveness may be psychologically experienced as a sign of the
strengthened spiritual character of the marriage. In the one empirical study done in this area
(Magyar), it was found that those who remained in the relationship with their partners, even if
they perceived the wrong-doing as a desecration, appeared more likely to engage in the
forgiveness process ($r=.18$, $p<.01$). Furthermore, those who remained with their partners and had
experienced forgiveness tended to see their relationship as more sacred since the desecration
($r=.38$, $p<.01$).

Given the discussion thus far, it would seem that forgiveness would be an important
construct to study in the context of a desecration of a sanctified marriage. In a recent review of
the literature on forgiveness and marriage, Fincham et al. (2006, p. 424) suggest “forgiveness
and the sacred” within marriage as one of three new exciting areas for future research. I now turn
to a discussion of the mediating effects forgiveness may have between desecration and marital
quality.

Forgiveness as a Mediator Between Desecration and Marital Quality

Given the research suggesting that greater forgiveness is tied to better marital quality, one
might speculate that, while desecrations create unique challenges to forgiveness, if one is able to
forgive, this might mediate the links between desecrations and poorer marital quality. As
discussed above, Magyar (2001) found that those who had forgiven their partner and were still in
the relationship were actually more likely to express that they currently experienced greater
levels of sanctification of their relationship than they had prior to the desecration. Though experiencing a desecration may create negative impacts on the marriage, and also therefore on the individual and the family, being able to forgive one’s partner may be the link in maintaining, and perhaps even increasing, marital quality.

Although Orathinkal and Vansteenwegen (2006) conclude that research on the specific constructs of forgiveness and marital quality is not extensive, the research that has been done has produced some consistent links. In a review of marital forgiveness literature, Fincham et al. (2006) discuss forgiveness research in the context of its relationship to other constructs, including marital quality. This review concludes that forgiveness and marital quality have generally been shown to be positively linked. For example, in a study in which 154 married participants filled out a forgiveness inventory, Gordon and Baucom (2003) found that couples in the early stages of forgiveness (e.g., experiencing confusion, withdrawing from spouse, wanting retribution) reported lower levels of marital quality, while those in later stages of forgiveness (e.g., letting go of anger, experiencing positive emotions toward spouse) reported higher levels of marital quality. Furthermore, this study included a control group of couples that reported not having had a need to forgive their partner. Participants in the later stages of forgiveness reported similar levels of marital adjustment to those who had not yet experienced a need to forgive their partner. In an earlier study, Gordon and Baucom (1998; as cited in Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen) found that partners who were able to forgive their spouses also enjoyed greater marital quality and closeness. Based on the study done by Fenell (1993) described above, Fincham, Hall, & Beach (2005) state “Indeed, spouses report that the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to marital longevity and marital satisfaction” (p. 207).
While the specific types of forgiveness examined have varied throughout the research, for the purposes of this study, the first type of forgiveness I focused on is a general tendency to be forgiving of one’s spouse, or “spousal forgiveness.” This may prove to be an important distinction when studying how forgiveness is linked to marital quality. One may be a generally forgiving person but not generally forgiving of their spouse. It has been suggested that that the closer two constructs are matched (e.g., in time, place, specificity), the more likely it is they will be empirically linked (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974, as cited in McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Studying forgiveness of one’s spouse may prove to be more relevant to understanding its links to marital quality than studying one’s tendency to be a generally forgiving person.

While it is important to examine the links between marital quality and a general tendency to forgive one’s spouse, the majority of the research has been done without acknowledgement of religion or spirituality. However, there are aspects of religion and spirituality (e.g., desecration) that may play a large role in these constructs. Given the potentially devastating impacts desecration may have on both marital quality and the forgiveness process itself, it seems important that the links between these constructs are understood. If forgiveness can mediate the potentially negative links between desecration and marital quality, how does it do so? This becomes especially intriguing and imperative given the fact that experiencing a violation as a desecration may greatly decrease one’s willingness to forgive. I now turn to a brief discussion of a more specific form of forgiveness that focuses more on the process one may go through after experiencing a violation of the sacred.

This more specific form of forgiveness that has not been extensively studied is spiritual forgiveness. It has been found that many people turn to methods of spiritual coping in the face of a transgression (Rye & Pargament, 2002; Rye, 2005). Spiritual forgiveness may be one of these
methods. In other words, a victim may look toward God or a higher power for aid in their quest for forgiveness. One might pray for the strength to forgive or may ask God for help in trying to forgive. One might also ask God for help in letting go of negative thoughts and emotions such as anger, bitterness, or resentment.

While little empirical evidence has been gathered on spiritual forgiveness specifically, studies have provided some information on related constructs. Gorsuch and Hao (1993) report a study in which a “religious response” factor emerged as a primary aspect of forgiveness. This factor includes actions such as prayer (praying to God and praying for the transgressor) and asking God’s forgiveness. This is consistent with the idea of religious coping strategies proposed by Ken Pargament (e.g., Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, & Pargament, 2001). Religious, or spiritual, forgiveness has been proposed as a method of positive religious coping, which has been associated with positive mental health outcomes (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998).

Interventions done by Rye & Pargament (2002) and Rye (2005) produced some interesting results regarding the prevalence of the use of religious coping strategies in the face of a transgression. Both of these interventions included both secular and religious groups. It was hypothesized that both groups would improve in forgiveness but that the religious group would improve more. However, although both groups did improve, significant differences between them were not found. When questioned about what strategies they used to help them forgive, both groups reported using religious strategies. That is, even the secular group members who were not encouraged to use religious strategies did so.

In the first known empirical study done on spiritual forgiveness in response to a relational transgression, Krumrei, Mahoney, and Pargament (2008) examined these constructs in a sample
of 89 adults (52 female, 37 male; age 19-64) coping with a divorce. Participants filled out surveys within 6 months of filing for divorce and one year later. It was found that, following a divorce, the majority of ex-husbands and wives engaged in the process of spiritual forgiveness (72% at Time 1 to 75%, at Time 2, Krumrei et al.). While it was found that engaging in spiritual forgiveness did not predict change in psychosocial adjustment once global religiousness and prior levels of adjustment were controlled for, it did predict greater spiritual growth. It will be important to continue to study this construct in a context where the couple has decided to continue in their marriage in the face of a desecration, as it has been suggested both theoretically and empirically that forgiveness may differ when one chooses to maintain a relationship with the transgressor (Mahoney, Rye, et al., 2005; Magyar, 2001). As discussed above, if the victim maintains a relationship with the transgressor, they may feel the need to protect and preserve the sacred relationship. Spiritual forgiveness may therefore serve a different purpose in a situation in which the victim remains married to the transgressor, as opposed to a situation where the relationship need not be maintained.

It appears that forgiveness, including both a general tendency to be forgiving of one’s spouse and engaging in the process of spiritual forgiveness, has the potential to be associated with higher levels of marital quality. However, the nature and direction of these links is unclear. Given the above discussion, it appears that both types of forgiveness may have the potential to act as mediators between desecration and marital quality. That is, while desecration may be linked to lower levels of marital quality, if one does engage in one or both of these two types of forgiveness, they may experience higher levels of marital quality.

Conclusions
The importance of marital quality to the marital relationship, the individuals within the marriage, and the children of the marriage has been established. Given the significant decreases in marital quality that many couples experience during the transition to parenthood, understanding marital quality and its correlates may be particularly important during pregnancy, or the time prior to this transition. That is, perhaps if couples rely on coping methods that have been linked to higher levels of marital quality (e.g., forgiveness) during pregnancy, they may be more prepared to handle the stressors that many couples experience as they make this transition. The potentially unique impacts spousal desecrations may have on both marital quality and forgiveness have been discussed. What must be established, then, is how desecration is associated with marital quality and forgiveness and how spousal and spiritual forgiveness might mediate these links during a period of life that is wrought with potential stressors.

The Current Study

The importance of marital quality on the marital relationship, the individuals within the marriage, and the child has been established in the literature. Additionally, it has been suggested that pregnancy, the period prior to the transition to parenthood, is a unique period in a marriage in which it is important to establish a solid marital foundation. Although marital quality and forgiveness are both heavily researched topics, links between marital quality, desecration, and forgiveness remain unclear. While it has been suggested that sanctification may increase marital quality and forgiveness, it has also been suggested that if the sanctified object is violated, there may be serious implications for both marital quality and the forgiveness process. However, if one is able to find a way to forgive a desecration, this forgiveness may serve to mediate the links between desecrations and lower levels of marital quality. These factors have not yet been studied together.
In the current study, I first looked at the links between spousal desecration and marital quality. I then turned to an examination of the links between forgiveness and marital quality. I then went on to examine the links between desecration and forgiveness. Finally, I examined the potential for both spousal and spiritual forgiveness to mediate the potentially negative links between desecration and marital quality. Hypotheses were as follows (see Figure F1 for theoretical model):

*Hypothesis 1:* Higher levels of perceived desecration of marriage will be linked to lower levels of marital quality

*Hypothesis 2:* Forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) will be linked to higher levels of marital quality

*Hypothesis 3:* Greater perceived desecration of marriage may be linked to either lower or higher levels of forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual)

*Hypothesis 4:* Engaging in forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) will mediate the links between greater desecration and lower marital quality
METHOD

Participants

One hundred and seventy eight females and 178 males participated in this study. One hundred and seventy eight married couples were recruited from a mid-sized metropolitan area of the Midwest and surrounding suburban and rural areas. There were several eligibility requirements for participating in this study. Couples were married, had lived with each other for at least six months, would each be having their first biological child, talked to each other using mainly English, and lived within approximately 45 miles of Bowling Green, OH. This last requirement was due to the fact that graduate assistants, including the author, traveled to the homes of couples. At least one participant within each couple was self-reported to be at least “slightly religious” or “slightly spiritual.” Couples who were both self-reported to be “not at all religious” and “not at all spiritual” were excluded, as the surveys did not pertain to them. Other exclusionary criteria, such as considerably poor health of the baby or the mother, were used in order to control for potentially significant confounding variables.

See Table E1 for details on all demographics, which are summarized as follows. Couples had been in a relationship for an average of 5.53 years (range=0-18, SD=3.33), been cohabiting for an average of 3.13 years (range=0-14, SD=2.47), and been married for an average of 2.17 years (range=0-10, SD=2.12). Average age of females was 27.18 (range=19-40, SD=3.97) and of males was 28.72 (range=20-42, SD=4.44).

Regarding ethnicity among females, 90% identified as Caucasian/Euro-American, 4% as African-American, 3.5% as Hispanic or Latino, 2% as Multi-racial/ethnic, and 0.5% identified as Other. Among males, 83% identified as Caucasian/Euro-American, 5.5% as African-American, 5% as Hispanic or Latino, 3.5% as Multi-racial/ethnic, and 3% identified as Other. Female
education levels ranged from high school graduate to having obtained a graduate or professional degree. Male education levels ranged from partial high school (completing the 10th or 11th grade) to having obtained a graduate or professional degree. Combined household income as reported by both females and males ranged from under $25,000 to over $130,000, with the majority falling between $25,000 and $100,000.

Regarding religious affiliation in female participants, 26% identified as Christian/Protestant, 26.5% as Christian/Catholic, 30.5% as Non-denominational Christian, 0.5% as Jewish, 12% as other, and 4.5% reported having no religious affiliation. In male participants, 24% identified as Christian/Protestant, 27% as Christian/Catholic, 25% as Non-denominational Christian, 0.5% as Jewish, 0.5% as Muslim, 16% as Other, and 7% reported having no religious affiliation. Females reported going to services (e.g., church), on average, several times a year (with responses ranging from never to several times a week). They also reported praying privately an average of once a month (with responses ranging from never to more than once per day). Males also reported going to services (e.g., church), on average, several times a year (with responses ranging from never to several times a week), and praying privately, on average, a few times a month (with responses ranging from never to more than once per day).

Measures

Demographics and Control Variables

Demographics

Demographic information collected included: length of relationship; length of cohabitation; length of marriage; religious orientation; ethnicity; gender; age; education; and combined annual gross household income. See Appendix A.

Religiousness
Global religiousness was measured using two items: church attendance (public religiousness) and frequency of prayer (private religiousness). These items are widely used in religion research to represent global individual religiousness (Mahoney et al., 1999). See Appendix B.

*Marital Quality*

*Satisfaction*

The first scale used to measure marital quality was the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS; Schumm et al., 1986). This is a 3-item scale that asks “How satisfied are you with your marriage?,” “How satisfied are you with your husband/wife as a spouse?,” and “How satisfied are you with your relationship with your spouse?” This measure uses a scale of 1 (*extremely unsatisfied*) to 7 (*extremely satisfied*). As described above, this scale has been recommended by researchers such as Fincham and Bradbury (1987) for use in measuring marital quality. It has been reported to have adequate reliability, concurrent validity (Schumm et al.) and construct validity (Schumm, Bollman, Jurich, & Hatch, 2001). See Appendix C.

*Love*

A second questionnaire used to measure marital quality was a 10-item love subscale (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). This scale contains items such as “How attached do you feel to your spouse?” and “To what extent do you love your spouse at this stage?” This measure uses a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). As discussed above, this scale has been used often in the transition to parenthood literature and has been found to be sensitive to change across time. It has been reported to show high levels of both stability and consistency in factor loadings across four stages of long-term relationships (casual dating, serious dating, engagement, and marriage, Braiker & Kelley). See Appendix C.
Desecration

Desecration was measured using a 5-item scale. This scale measures perceptions of a spousal wrong-doing as a desecration. Participants were first asked if they had experienced a significant transgression within their marriage and then asked five questions regarding whether or not they viewed this transgression as a desecration. The final item specifically states “My spouse committed acts that desecrated our marriage.” Possible responses are 0 (not at all), 1 (somewhat), 2 (quite a bit), or 3 (a great deal). This scale was modified for this study based on scales that have been used in previous research. Previous scales have been found to have an alpha coefficient of .92, indicating adequate internal consistency. Discriminate validity has also been demonstrated ((F(3,113) = 15.54, p < 0.001; Pargament et al., 2005). See Appendix B.

Forgiveness

Spousal Forgiveness

This type of forgiveness was assessed using a subscale of Fincham’s measure (Fincham & Beach, 2002) of three dimensions of forgiveness: benevolence, retaliation and withdrawal. This is a 9-item measure (3 items for each dimension) measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Research has found that the positive and negative aspects of this measure may act as separate dimensions (Fincham & Beach; Fincham, Davila, & Beach, 2007), so using them as individual factors in analyses may allow for a truer fit of the data. Therefore, as this study focuses on forgiveness and not unforgiveness, only the first three items, or the benevolence subscale, of this measure will be used in these analyses. This subscale has previously yielded alpha coefficients of .77 for wives and .79 for husbands (Fincham et al.), indicating adequate internal consistency. See Appendix D.

Spiritual Forgiveness
Spiritual forgiveness was measured using a 5-item scale. This scale contains statements such as “I prayed for the strength to forgive my spouse” and “I sought God’s help in trying to forgive my spouse.” Possible responses are 0 (not at all), 1 (somewhat), 2 (quite a bit), or 3 (a great deal). This measure was developed specifically for this study. See Appendix D.

Procedure

This study was conducted within the context of an externally funded larger study entitled Sacred Lens. The Sacred Lens study followed married couples through the transition to parenthood. Data were collected in the third trimester of pregnancy and when the children were 3, 6 and 12 months old. This study used data collected during the third trimester of pregnancy.

As stated above, 178 married couples were recruited through presentations done at childbirth classes and flyers posted and given out around the community. Potential participants were told that they were invited to be in a study that would look at the transition to parenthood and how it affects the individuals and their relationship with each other and with their child. They were also told the researchers would be studying the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional impact of this transition on the couples and their child. If couples signed up at the childbirth class, they received a phone card worth $10 and were told that they would have no further obligation to participate in the study.

Couples were either asked to contact staff or were contacted by the staff in order to ensure that they met the eligibility requirements stated above and, if they did, to set up an appointment time. Two graduate assistants (GA’s) traveled to the couple’s home prior to the birth of their child, when they were approximately in their third trimester. All couples received informed consent forms detailing the study and other pertinent information such as their right to withdraw from the study at any point, contact information for the principle investigators, and
resources for couples in distress. These forms were reviewed and signed with the GA’s present. Two copies signed by the primary GA were left in the home for each couple. Surveys (and videotaped interactions, not used in this research) were conducted within the home with the two GA’s present. The surveys took approximately 1.5 hours to complete and the entire process took approximately 2.5-3 hours. Upon completion of the surveys and videotaped interactions the couple received a gift card of $75 to one of four major retailers around the area (Meijer, Walmart, Babies ‘R Us, or Kroger). Upon completion of the study (which entails three more visits during the child’s first year of life), couples will receive information detailing the study and information on how to obtain the results of the study.
RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were run in order to determine internal consistency reliability for all measures. Reliability was found to range from adequate to excellent for all measures (\(\alpha=0.66-0.97\)). Additionally, ranges, means, and standard deviations were calculated. Correlations between demographics and all other variables were calculated in order to examine if any of these demographics would need to be controlled for in further analyses. Demographics were not correlated with independent and dependent variables in such a way to make it theoretically sound to control for them in correlational analyses. However, as frequency of prayer was found to be significantly correlated with wives’ love of spouse (\(r=0.17, p<0.01\)), it was controlled for in mediational analyses using wives’ love as the dependent variable. See Table E2 for details on psychometric properties and demographic correlations.

Frequencies of reporting for each measure were also examined (see Table E3). The range of the marital satisfaction scale is 3-21, and the range of reporting was 10-21 for wives and 4-21 for husbands. 51.2% of wives obtained a score within the range of 10-20, while 48.3% of wives obtained a score of 21. 46.1% of husbands obtained a score within the range of 4-19, while 52.4% of husbands obtained a score of either 20 or 21. Wives reported a mean level of 19.54 (SD = 1.88) and husbands reported a mean level of 19.26 (SD = 2.13).

The range of the marital love scale is 10-90, though the range of reporting was 65-90 for wives and 50-90 for husbands. 47.1% of wives obtained a score within the range of 65-84, while 52.7% of wives obtained a score within the range of 85-90. 47.5% of husbands obtained a score within the range of 50-80, while 52.4% of husbands obtained a score within the range of 81-90.
Wives reported a mean level of 83.47 (SD = 5.24) and husbands reported a mean level of 80.16 (SD = 6.81).

Although these numbers seem to indicate that the wives and husbands within this sample are experiencing high levels of love for their spouses, these numbers appear to fall within the range of those reported in other studies examining this construct during the first pregnancy of married couples. For example, a study of 128 couples in their last trimester of pregnancy revealed mean scores of 80.63 for wives and 75.54 for husbands (Belsky & Rovine, 1990). A study of 67 couples having their first child resulted in a mean for husbands and wives of 78.4 on this scale during the last trimester of their pregnancy (Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985). In a study of 98 couples experiencing the transition to parenthood, husbands obtained a mean of 81.2 if they had a child within their first year of marriage and 83.9 if they had a child in their second year of marriage. Wives obtained a mean of 85.5 if they had a child within their first year of marriage and 85.6 if they had a child in their second year of marriage (MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990). However, in this study, it was unclear exactly how many couples interviewed during each phase were actually pregnant or had already had their first child. As reported means from these studies range from 78.4 to 85.6, it appears that the means for the current sample fall well within this range. However, according to Huston (1998), these scores fall within the range of “very much in love” (77-81) to “extremely high in love” (82-90), with the lower ranges of this scale being “average” (72-76), “lower than average in love” (65-71), and “well below average in love” (10-64). It seems that, while the current sample is within the range of scores for other couples during pregnancy, this appears to be a time when couples feel very much to extremely high in love.
The desecration scale has a range of 0-15. Wives reported within a range of 0-10, and husbands reported within a range of 0-15. 78.1% of wives obtained a score of 0 on this scale, indicating that they had not experienced a desecration. 10.1% of wives obtained a score of either 1 or 2, and 11.8% of wives obtained scores within the range of 3-10. 83.1% of husbands obtained a score of 0 on this scale, indicating that they had not experienced a desecration. 9.6% of husbands obtained a score of 1 or 2, and 7.3% of husbands obtained a score within the range of 3-15. Wives reported a mean level of 0.78 (SD = 1.89) and husbands 0.64 (SD = 2.13).

The range of the spousal forgiveness scale is 3-18. Wives reported within a range of 4-18 and husbands reported in a range of 5-18. 28.7% of wives obtained a score within the range of 4-11, 36% fell within the range of 12-13, and 35.4% fell within the range of 14-18. 33.7% of husbands obtained scores falling within the range of 5-12, 33.7% within the range of 13-14, and 32% within the range of 15-18. Wives and husbands reported a mean level of 12.54 (2.55) and 13.29 (2.39), respectively.

Finally, the range of the spiritual forgiveness scale is 0-15, and the range of reporting was 0-15 for both wives and husbands. 57.9% of wives obtained a score of 0 on this scale, indicating that they were not engaging in the process of spiritual forgiveness. 24.2% obtained scores falling within the range of 1-5, and 18% fell within the range of 6-15. 66.3% of husbands obtained a score of 0, indicating that they were not engaging in spiritual forgiveness. 18.5% obtained scores falling within the range of 1-5, and 15.2% obtained scores within the range of 6-14. Wives reported a mean level of 2.61 (4.08) and husbands reported a mean level of 2.11 (3.90).

Correlational Analyses – Wives

To test the hypothesis that higher levels of perceived desecration of marriage would be linked to lower levels of marital quality, Pearson correlations were calculated between
desecration and marital satisfaction and between desecration and marital love. Wives’ marital satisfaction and marital love were correlated high enough to show they are related, but not correlated at a level that allowed for them to be collapsed into one marital quality variable (r=.61). Desecration was not significantly correlated with marital satisfaction, but was significantly negatively correlated with marital love (r=-.23, p<.01).

To test the second hypothesis that forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) would be linked to higher levels of marital quality (as shown through marital satisfaction and marital love), Pearson correlations were calculated between these variables. Spousal forgiveness was positively correlated with both marital satisfaction (r=.43, p<.01) and marital love (r=.34, p<.01). Spiritual forgiveness was not significantly correlated with either marital satisfaction or marital love.

In order to test the third hypothesis that, based on prior literature, greater perceived desecration of marriage may be linked to either lower or higher levels of forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual), Pearson correlations were calculated between these variables. Desecration was correlated negatively with spousal forgiveness (r=-.16, p<.05). On the other hand, desecration was correlated positively with spiritual forgiveness (r=.57, p<.01). See Table E4.

Correlational Analyses – Husbands

To test the hypothesis that higher levels of perceived desecration of marriage would be linked to lower levels of marital quality, Pearson correlations were calculated between desecration and marital satisfaction and between desecration and marital love. As in the wives sample, husbands’ marital satisfaction and marital love were correlated high enough to show they are related, but not correlated at a level that allowed for them to be collapsed into one marital quality variable (r=.55). Desecration was not significantly correlated with either marital satisfaction or marital love.
To test the second hypothesis that forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) would be linked to higher levels of marital quality (as shown through marital satisfaction and marital love), Pearson correlations were calculated between these variables. Spousal forgiveness was positively correlated with both marital satisfaction (r=.19, p<.05) and marital love (r=.36, p<.01). Spiritual forgiveness was not significantly correlated with either marital satisfaction or marital love.

In order to test the third hypothesis that, based on prior literature, greater perceived desecration of marriage may be linked to either lower or higher levels of forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual), Pearson correlations were calculated between these variables. Desecration was not correlated with spousal forgiveness but was correlated positively with spiritual forgiveness (r=.43, p<.01). See Table E4.

Mediational Analyses

The fourth hypothesis, that engaging in forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) would mediate the links between greater desecration and lower marital quality, could be tested in one instance in which initial criteria were met for mediational analyses. All other mediational analyses could not be run because initial criteria were not met (Baron & Kenny, 1986). That is, for wives, higher desecration was correlated with lower levels of marital love (r=-.23, p<.01), higher levels of spousal forgiveness were correlated with higher levels of marital love (r=.34, p<.01), and higher levels of spousal forgiveness were correlated with higher levels of love (r=.34, p<.01). The only demographic variable that was significantly correlated with one of these variables (marital love) was frequency of prayer (r=.17, p<.01). Frequency of prayer was therefore controlled for throughout analyses.

Multiple regression was used in order to test for mediation. In the first step, desecration was shown to predict marital love (β=-.74, p<.01). In the second step, desecration was shown to
predict spousal forgiveness (β=-.22, p<.05). In the next step, both desecration and spousal forgiveness were entered as predictors and marital love was entered as the dependent variable. Spousal forgiveness was shown to predict marital love (β=.62, p<.001). Additionally, desecration continued to predict marital love (β=-.60, p<.01). However, the magnitude of this relationship was lower than when forgiveness was not entered into the analysis, indicating partial mediation. See Table E5.

Post-hoc Analyses

The Sobel Test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2006) was run in order to test if the drop in effect size found in the regression analysis described above was indeed significant. This test is known to be highly conservative and is widely used to test for the significance of the mediation effect. In order to achieve significance, the ratio calculated must exceed 1.96. The outcome of the Sobel Test in this case was -1.92 (p=0.06). This number is approaching but does not quite reach significance. Given the borderline significant outcome of this test, two other similar tests for significance were run. These tests produced similar results. The test statistic produced by the Aroian Test was -1.87 (p=0.06) and the Goodman Test produced the test statistic -1.96 (p=0.05).

Given the borderline significance resulting from these analyses, along with the low frequency of reporting (positive skewness) on measures such as desecration and spiritual forgiveness, further analyses were performed. First, a square root transformation was performed in order to see if this would normalize the distribution of scores. This approach did not appear to make a significant difference in normalizing the data. Therefore, it was decided to split the data into categories to create a more normal distribution and perform analyses of variance.

In order to decide how to transform the continuous variable of desecration into categorical data, the frequencies were examined first through looking at the raw numbers and at a
histogram. Categories were determined by an attempt to place an equal percentage of the sample in each range. This was possible for the spousal forgiveness scores. For the desecration and spiritual forgiveness variables, a high percentage of scores were 0, so this was used as one category and the remaining sample was split into two additional categories.

A 3x3 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then performed to look at main effects and interactions for eight possible models of main effects and interactions for both husbands and wives. Significance levels were generally lower than those obtained through correlations and regression analyses, but the same patterns of significance were obtained, with two exceptions, which will be addressed below. The following is a description of the results for the wives. The ANOVA run with desecration and spousal forgiveness as fixed factors and marital satisfaction as the dependent variable resulted in a significant main effect between spousal forgiveness and marital satisfaction ($F=3.45$, $df=2$, $p < .05$), but not a significant main effect between desecration and marital satisfaction ($F=1.90$, $df=2$, $p=.15$) or an interaction between the three variables ($F=.23$, $df = 4$, $p=.92$).

The ANOVA run with desecration and spiritual forgiveness as fixed factors and marital satisfaction as the dependent variable resulted in no significant main effects between spiritual forgiveness and marital satisfaction ($F=1.15$, $df=2$, $p=.32$) or between desecration and marital satisfaction ($F=2.90$, $df=2$, $p=.06$), and no significant interaction between the three variables ($F=1.08$, $df=4$, $p=.37$).

The ANOVA run with desecration and spousal forgiveness as fixed factors and marital love as the dependent variable resulted in significant main effects between both spousal forgiveness and marital love ($F=3.36$, $df=2$, $p<.05$) and between desecration and marital love
(F=3.84, df=2, p<.05). There was no significant interaction found between the three variables (F=.49, df=4, p=.74).

The ANOVA run with desecration and spiritual forgiveness as fixed factors and marital love as the dependent variable resulted in a significant main effect between desecration and marital love (F=4.79, df=2, p<.05). There was no significant main effect between spiritual forgiveness and marital love (F=2.41, df=2, p=.09), and there was no significant interaction found between the three variables (F=1.93, df=4, p=.11).

The following ANOVAS were run for husbands. The ANOVA run with desecration and spousal forgiveness as fixed factors and marital satisfaction as the dependent variable did not result in a significant main effect for spousal forgiveness and marital satisfaction (F=.75, df=2, p=.47). These two variables were significantly linked in correlational analyses. A significant main effect was also not found for desecration and marital satisfaction (F=.59, df=2, p=.55). No significant interaction was found between the three variables (F=.77, df=4, p=.54).

The ANOVA run with desecration and spiritual forgiveness as fixed factors and marital satisfaction as the dependent variable resulted in no significant main effects between either spiritual forgiveness and marital satisfaction (F=1.13, df=2, p=.33) or desecration and marital satisfaction (F=.07, df=2, p=.94). No significant interaction was found between the three variables (F=.26, df=4, p=.90).

The ANOVA run with desecration and spousal forgiveness as fixed factors and marital love as the dependent variable resulted in a significant main effect between spousal forgiveness and marital love (F=3.70, df=2, p<.05), but not between desecration and marital love (F=.22, df=2, p=.80). No significant interaction was found between the three variables (F=.73, df=4, p=.58).
The ANOVA run with desecration and spiritual forgiveness as fixed factors and marital love as the dependent variable resulted in no significant main effects for either spiritual forgiveness and marital love (F=.54, df=2, p=.59) or desecration and marital love (F=.07, df=2, p=.94). However, a significant interaction was found between the three variables (F=2.58, df=4, p<.05). To examine this interaction further, the means of marital love at each level of both desecration and spiritual forgiveness were computed and graphed (see Figure F2).

Additionally, a scatterplot was created to examine the relationship between spousal and spiritual forgiveness for both wives and husbands. These variables were found to be linked in opposite ways to marital quality and desecration measures, so it was thought that examining the relationship between spiritual and spousal forgiveness might shed light on these findings. Specifically, a curvilinear relationship was hypothesized to be creating possible suppression effects, as linear correlations were used to examine the data. It was thought that those experiencing either low or high levels of spiritual forgiveness might be experiencing low levels of spousal forgiveness, and those experiencing moderate levels of spiritual forgiveness might be experiencing higher levels of spousal forgiveness. A possible explanation for this is as follows.

People engaging in no or low levels of spiritual forgiveness may be doing so for various reasons. For example, they may not have a need to engage in forgiveness in the first place, they may deny the need to engage in forgiveness, or they may have already succeeded in forgiving their spouse. In the two former cases, people may not be reporting engaging in general spousal forgiveness because they feel they do not need to, though those who have already forgiven may still report being forgiving of their spouse based on past behaviors. On the other end of the spectrum, those who report engaging in very high levels of spiritual forgiveness may be stuck in an inability to forgive, which would lead them to reporting low levels of spousal forgiveness. Those who are
engaging in moderate levels of spiritual forgiveness may acknowledge that they use these methods to forgive their spouse of some, possibly more minor wrong-doings, and it would follow that these people may still report general spousal forgiveness. However, no relationship was found between spiritual and spousal forgiveness for either wives or husbands through an examination of the scatterplots.
DISCUSSION

Correlational, Medialional, and Post-hoc Analyses

The present study was designed to assess links between marital quality, desecration, and forgiveness. Theoretical postulation and empirical evidence point to links between marital quality and desecration, forgiveness and desecration, and marital quality and forgiveness. Specifically, links between marital quality and desecration are thought to be negative and links between marital quality and forgiveness are thought to be positive. That is, the more desecration experienced in a marriage, the lower marital quality is, and, conversely, the more forgiveness experienced in a marriage, the higher marital quality will be. The links between desecration and forgiveness are not as clear, as a desecration may propel someone into the process of trying to forgive, but may also provide unique challenges to this process. In this first known study of desecration within a marriage, these links were examined in an attempt to replicate and clarify these links.

The first hypothesis predicted that higher levels of perceived desecration of marriage would be linked to lower levels of marital quality. Links between higher levels of desecration and lower levels of love were significant only for mothers. All other links between these constructs proved inconsistent with the first hypothesis. It appears that, in this sample, males who had experienced a desecration were not experiencing lower levels of marital quality, as shown through marital satisfaction with and love of their wives. On the other hand, females who reported higher levels of desecration appear to also be experiencing lower levels of love for their husbands, but not lower levels of marital satisfaction.

Links found in the female sample between experiencing a desecration and lower perceived levels of love are consistent with Magyar’s (2001) findings that desecrations are
related to some aspects of relationship quality. However, the finding that desecration and other marital quality measures (wives’ satisfaction and husbands’ love and satisfaction) were not significantly linked is not consistent with empirical evidence, such as that of Magyar (2001), who found significant links between higher desecration and lower individual well-being, which, as discussed above, may serve as a marker of relationship quality.

The second hypothesis predicted that forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) would be linked to higher levels of marital quality. Links were significant between spousal, but not spiritual, forgiveness and higher levels of marital quality for both wives and husbands, again creating mixed consistency with regards to the second hypothesis. Furthermore, post-hoc analyses did not result in a significant main effect between husbands’ spousal forgiveness and marital satisfaction. In correlational analyses, then, both wives and husbands who engage in more spousal forgiveness also tended to experience higher levels of marital quality, including marital satisfaction and love. However, it appears that spiritual forgiveness is not related to marital quality for these husbands and wives.

Links found between spousal forgiveness and marital quality are consistent with previous research, which also suggests positive links between these constructs (e.g., Fincham et al., 2006, Gordon & Baucom, 2003, and Gordon & Baucom, 1998 in Orathinkal and Vanstevenwegen. 2006). The lack of significant links found between spiritual forgiveness and marital quality are a bit more puzzling. In general, as previously stated, research suggests stronger links between forgiveness and marital quality than were found in this study. However, when we look closer at how spiritual forgiveness, as opposed to other types or methods of forgiveness, was conceptualized and measured, potential explanations emerge. This will be discussed in further detail below.
The third hypothesis predicted that greater perceived desecration of marriage may be linked to either lower or higher levels of forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual). Spousal forgiveness was negatively related to experiencing a desecration for wives, but not for husbands. Spiritual forgiveness was positively linked to experiencing a desecration for both wives and husbands. The links between wives’ higher desecration and lower spousal forgiveness found in this study are consistent with previous research. Magyar (2001) found that subjects who had experienced higher levels of desecration had more difficulty forgiving. However, the fact that these links were not found for husbands, and links between spiritual forgiveness and desecration were positive, is not consistent with this research.

Taken together, the fact that the change in directionality of the links from positive to negative between these constructs depending on the type of forgiveness involved may at first appear counter-intuitive. However, upon closer examination, possible explanations emerge. First and foremost, the spousal forgiveness measure generally conceptualizes forgiveness as an outcome, whereas the spiritual forgiveness measure concerns forgiveness as a process. Those who have experienced a desecration may engage in the process of trying to forgive, particularly calling upon spiritual resources, given the spiritual nature of the violation. However, given the challenges experiencing a violation as a desecration may present to reaching forgiveness, those who have experienced a desecration may have a harder time attaining forgiveness as an outcome, even if they are in the process of trying to forgive, which appears to be the case within the female population. That is, if they are expressing high levels of spiritual forgiveness, this may be an indicator of continuous struggles with forgiveness rather than indicating an approaching resolution to the issue. Examining links between benevolent forgiveness and spiritual forgiveness would then be the equivalent of comparing apples to oranges.
Another potential contributor to these results arises when we look closer at the construct of desecration and the history of the study of marital quality. Much of the marital quality literature has studied conflict’s effect on marital quality, and vice versa. As desecration has begun to make its way into the field, it has been difficult at times to separate the constructs of desecration and conflict. It would be interesting to study both of these constructs together in order to see how they relate to marital quality in a study that clearly differentiates them. There may be qualitative differences between the way people forgive potentially more minor everyday causes of conflict and how they forgive major violations of sacred and salient aspects of their lives.

The fourth hypothesis, which predicted that engaging in forgiveness (both spousal and spiritual) would mediate the links between greater desecration and lower marital quality, could only be tested between wives’ love, desecration, and spousal forgiveness. It was found that possessing a tendency to be forgiving of one’s spouse may partially mediate the links between higher desecrations and lower levels of love. That is, when wives have a tendency to be forgiving of their spouses, the impact of desecration on their ability to have feelings of love towards their spouse is lessened. Interestingly, these results were found even with somewhat the low levels of significant findings discussed above. This has implications for future research and clinical interventions, which will be discussed below.

Post-hoc analyses revealed similar patterns of significance when independent, or fixed factor, variables were transformed into categorical data and analyses of variance (ANOVA) were run. One link, between husbands’ spousal forgiveness and marital satisfaction, did not hold its significance. This may simply have been due to low initial frequencies of reporting of spiritual forgiveness and the increased conservative nature of an ANOVA. However, one significant
interaction was uncovered for husbands when looking at the variables of desecration, spiritual forgiveness, and marital love. When examined further (see Figure F2), it appears that there is a similar drop in marital love from no desecration and no spiritual forgiveness to low levels of desecration and spiritual forgiveness. However, when medium to high desecration is experienced, there is an increase in marital love, whereas when medium to high spiritual forgiveness is experienced there is a decrease in love. When taking into account the explanations explored above, it makes sense that marital love would be lowest when spiritual forgiveness is highest, given the potential struggles the spiritual forgiveness process may be indicating. However, the increase in marital love when desecration increases is puzzling. Further research is needed to investigate the directionality of this link. There may be another construct at work here that is causing people to report higher levels of love when they have experienced a desecration. It may be that they are working harder to protect and preserve the sanctity of their relationship, and so they are working harder to experience these higher levels of feelings of love, which to many may be an important indicator of the sacred nature of a marriage. Perhaps, in this sample, the amount of people who are experiencing high levels of desecration is too low to make these results interpretable in a clear and meaningful manner. This limitation will be discussed further below.

Implications

The results of this study emphasize the importance of studying different aspects of forgiveness, rather than treating it as one overarching construct. That is, breaking the construct down into different types or methods of forgiveness, such as a general tendency to be forgiving versus using spiritual forgiveness as a coping mechanism, sheds light on some of the varying results achieved in this study, and may perhaps do so in other research as well.
This study also emphasizes the different roles various kinds of forgiveness may play in peoples’ lives, which necessitates taking into account the roles of these various kinds of forgiveness in our theories of and interventions surrounding forgiveness on individual, dyadic, and familial levels. The results of this study are concurrent with previous research that suggests that forgiveness is not a simple, static process. There appear to be different aspects and types of forgiveness, and each of these may be related to varying outcomes. That is, it appears that, within this sample, correlational trends suggest that those who had experienced a desecration were in the midst of using spiritual forgiveness as a resource but did not experience as much spousal forgiveness. Those who did not experience a desecration tended to also experience higher levels of spousal forgiveness, but were not engaging in the process of spiritual forgiveness as much. This may be due to the fact that they do not have a need to call upon forgiveness resources. It is important, then, for clinicians to be aware of these differences in the nature of forgiveness when approaching this topic in therapy or interventions.

Also important is the idea that engaging in the process of forgiveness does not always mean that people are adjusting well, or actually achieving forgiveness as an outcome. Forgiveness is indeed a dynamic and potentially complex process. When a religious component is added to this experience, it may become significantly more complicated. The results of this study highlight the potential to simultaneously experience high levels of both desecration and spiritual forgiveness.

This information can be taken into account in the development of theory, research, and clinical interventions surrounding the dynamic and complex construct of forgiveness, particularly in the context of the desecration of a marriage. This becomes especially salient given the results that spousal forgiveness may partially mediate the links between desecration and
lower levels of love. If we can examine how these people are engaging in the forgiveness process even in the face of a desecration, we can develop interventions to aid others as well.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that must be noted. The study was cross-sectional, which does not allow for causal attributions. It would be interesting to follow these constructs over time to monitor trends and patterns and be able to better infer causal pathways. For example, looking at the links between wives’ report of desecration and spousal forgiveness, we cannot tell if wives who experience a desecration then experience lower levels of spousal forgiveness, or if wives who are generally less forgiving of their spouse are more likely to perceive a spousal wrong-doing as a desecration. Performing a longitudinal analysis would allow for the monitoring of these constructs through the transition to parenthood. Examining a single time point may not paint a dynamic and fully accurate picture of the marital relationship. This would be particularly interesting to look at over the transition to parenthood, as overall levels of marital satisfaction and love seem to be quite high during pregnancy in this and other studies (Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985; Belsky & Rovine, 1990; MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990), which may contribute to lower levels of wrong-doing and desecration and therefore less need to engage in the forgiveness process. It would be interesting to see how these variables are linked over the transition to parenthood.

Although the number of participants in this study was large, these high levels of marital quality (and therefore low levels of variability) may at least partially account for the low correlations found within this particular sample. Due to the small amount of significant correlations that were found, I was not able to look further into the relationships between these variables. Perhaps this could have been attained had different measures been used. Some of the
measures could be improved to better suit the questions being asked. It would be helpful to have additional measures that allowed for more parallel comparisons between different types of forgiveness. That is, it would have been helpful to measure both spiritual and spousal process forgiveness along with both spiritual and spousal outcome forgiveness, instead of only spiritual process and spousal outcome forgiveness. Furthermore, it may have been beneficial to include the two subscales of retaliation and withdrawal from Fincham’s spousal forgiveness scale (Fincham & Beach, 2002), as it would be interesting to see if these constructs are related to being engaged in the process of spiritual forgiveness more so than benevolent forgiveness.

Additionally, it would be helpful to have data on whether or not the desecration had been forgiven or not. This would shed light on whether or not those reporting high levels of spiritual forgiveness do indeed continue to have difficulties forgiving the desecration and, in turn, help to clarify the links found in the current study.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from high levels of marital satisfaction and love, it is possible that low levels of desecration and spiritual forgiveness contributed to the somewhat incongruent findings. That is, only 39 out of 178 females and 30 of 178 males reported experiencing a desecration, and the majority of these reported low levels of desecration, which does not allow for a great amount of variability. However, this, combined with the high levels of reported marital satisfaction and love, may actually indicate the strength of the significant connection found between desecration and lower levels of love for females.

Low reporting of spiritual forgiveness may also aid in explaining low correlations, especially with marital quality. 75 out of 178 females and 60 out of 178 males reported engaging in spiritual forgiveness. While this number is significant and meets criteria to run analyses, even those who are engaging in spiritual forgiveness in this sample are not reporting engaging in high
levels. That is, there is not a large subsample of people in this population who are actively engaging in high levels of spiritual forgiveness. While this may make the significant findings (such as links between spiritual forgiveness and desecration for both husbands and wives) more intriguing, in that they were significant even in this small subsample, it may account for other correlations (such as spiritual forgiveness and both measures of marital quality, satisfaction and love, for both husbands and wives) being nonsignificant.

Future Directions

It would be beneficial to study the links between these constructs within a more diverse sample of couples. This could include cohabiting couples or married couples who are at different life stages (e.g., newlywed, already have children). This may allow for a wider distribution of experiences (e.g., desecrations) and higher variability of marital quality, which may alter the links between these constructs. Additionally, examining these constructs as they unfold over time (e.g., in a longitudinal study) would allow for a deeper look into the nature of their links and allow for casual inferences. In addition to widening the sample to examine a greater breadth of experiences, it would be helpful to study a wider range of types of forgiveness, as discussed above. Studying process-oriented, outcome-oriented, and trait-oriented forgiveness on both a spiritual and a more secular level would allow for greater parsing apart of the links in the hopes of eventually integrating them into a more comprehensive understanding of forgiveness and its links to desecration and marital quality. Further research is needed in order to clarify and integrate these constructs.

For example, it may be beneficial to examine links between spiritual forgiveness and aspects of unforgiveness, such as retaliation and withdrawal (Fincham & Beach, 2002). If those who are engaging in high levels of spiritual forgiveness are indeed engaged due to struggles with
forgiveness, they may be more likely to also be experiencing feelings of unforgiveness rather than the benevolent spousal forgiveness that was examined in this study. Examining links between spiritual forgiveness and aspects of unforgiveness such as retaliation and withdrawal might clarify the links between these constructs and help to further explain the change in directionality of links between spousal and spiritual forgiveness and measures of marital quality and desecration.

Gaining a more comprehensive understanding of these constructs would also provide insight into the development of interventions focused on forgiveness. Knowledge of how people use different kinds and stages of forgiveness within varying levels transgressions and marital quality would help develop and tailor these interventions for specific people. Allowing clinicians to gain a deeper understanding of these constructs would also aid them in guiding people through the often deep, difficult, and multi-layered process of forgiveness.
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APPENDIX A

Demographics

Length of relationship
How long have you and your spouse been in a relationship? ____ Years ____ Months

Length of cohabitation
How long have you and your spouse lived together? ____ Years ____ Months

Length of marriage
How long have you and your spouse been married? ____ Years ____ Months

Religious orientation
What is your religious preference?
___ Christian/Protestant  ___ Muslim
___ Christian/Catholic  ___ Jewish
___ Non-denominational Christian  ___ None
___ Other (specify): ___________________

Ethnicity
How would you describe your ethnicity?
___ Caucasian/Euro-American  ___ Asian American  ___ Multi-racial/ethnic
___ African American  ___ Hispanic or Latino  ___ Other:________

Gender
Your gender: ____ Male  ____ Female

Age
Your age: ____ years

Education
What is your highest educational background?
___ Less than 7 years
___ Junior high school
___ Partial high school (10th-11th grade)
___ High school graduation
___ Partial college/post high school training (1 year or more)
___ Standard college graduation
___ Graduate/professional degree

Combined annual gross household income
What is your approximate, combined annual, gross household income?
___ less than $25,000  ___ $50,001-75,000  ___ $100,001-130,000
___ $25,001-50,000  ___ $75,001-100,000  ___ more than $130,000
APPENDIX B

Religiousness and Desecration

*Global Religiousness*

How often do you attend religious services?

___Several times a week        ___2-3 times per month        ___About once or twice a year
___Every week                   ___About once per month        ___Less than once per year
___Several times a year         ___Never

How often do you pray privately in places other than church or synagogue or temple?

___More than once per day       ___Once a week                   ___Less than once a month
___Once a day                    ___A few times a month         ___Never
___A few times a week            ___Once a month

*Desecration*

The statements below describe ways that people may view and deal with serious wrongdoings committed by a spouse. To what extent does each statement apply to your views and responses to your spouse’s wrongdoings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My spouse’s wrongdoings were sinful acts against our marriage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My spouse’s wrongdoings were offenses against our marriage and against God.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The sanctity of our marriage was dishonored by my spouse’s wrongdoings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Our sacred vows were violated by my spouse’s wrongdoings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My spouse committed acts that desecrated our marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Forgiveness Measures

Spousal Forgiveness

Please show the extent to which you agree with the following statements using the rating scale below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mostly disagree</th>
<th>Mostly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. When my partner wrongs me, I just accept their humanness, flaws and failures
2. I am quick to forgive my partner
3. I try to live by the motto "Let bygones be bygones" in my marriage

Spiritual Forgiveness

The statements below describe ways that people may view and deal with serious wrongdoings committed by a spouse. To what extent does each statement apply to your views and responses to your spouse’s wrongdoings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. I sought help from God in letting go of my anger at my spouse
7. I asked God to help me overcome my bitterness or resentment towards my spouse
8. I sought God’s help in trying to forgive my spouse
9. I asked God to help me be more forgiving to my spouse
10. I prayed for the strength to forgive my spouse
APPENDIX D

Marital Quality

Satisfaction

Please read the following questions and circle the number that best reflects your opinion about your relationship with your spouse.

Extremely dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied | Somewhat dissatisfied | Neutral | Somewhat satisfied | Very satisfied | Extremely satisfied
1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7

1. How satisfied are you with your marriage?
2. How satisfied are you with your husband or wife as a spouse?
3. How satisfied are you with you with your relationship with your spouse?

Marital love

Instructions: The following questions ask you about certain aspects of your relationship with your spouse. Please answer these questions for the present time in your relationship by circling the number that best describes your relations with your spouse.

Not at all | Very Much
1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9

1. To what extent, do you have a sense of “belonging” to your spouse?
2. How much do you feel you give to this relationship?
4. To what extent, do you love your spouse at this stage?
6. To what extent, do you feel that the things that happen to your spouse also affect or are important to you?
7. To what extent, do you feel that your relationship is special compared with others you have been in?
9. How committed do you feel toward your spouse?
10. How close do you feel toward your spouse?
12. How much do you need your spouse at this stage?
14. How sexually intimate are you with your spouse?
15. How attached do you feel to your spouse?
## APPENDIX E

### Tables

#### Table E1

**Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Couple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial high school (10\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th} grade)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial college/post high school training (1 year or more)</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard college graduation</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/professional degree</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average combined household income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $25,000</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,001-50,000</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001-75,000</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,001-100,000</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,001-130,000</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $130,000</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity\textsuperscript{1}</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/Euro-American</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial/ethnic</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{1}One wife and one husband did not report ethnicity
Table E1, con’t

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Couple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of years in relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years cohabitating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E1, con’t

**Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Wives</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Couple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian/Protestant</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian/Catholic</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious affiliation</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of church attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a week</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every week</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 times per month</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once per month</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a year</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once or twice a year</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once per year</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once per day</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table E2

**Psychometric Properties of Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range Possible</td>
<td>Range Reported</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General marital satisfaction</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>10-21</td>
<td>19.54</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital love</td>
<td>10-90</td>
<td>65-90</td>
<td>83.47</td>
<td>5.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived desecration by spouse</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General tendency to forgive spouse</td>
<td>3-18</td>
<td>4-18</td>
<td>12.54</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in process of forgiveness of spouse through spiritual means</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, ** p < .01
Table E3

*Frequency of Reporting*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Wives’ Report</th>
<th>Husbands’ Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>% reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General marital satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-84</td>
<td>65-84</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-90</td>
<td>85-90</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived desecration by spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General tendency to forgive spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-11</td>
<td>4-11</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in process of forgiveness of spouse through spiritual means</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-15</td>
<td>6-15</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)One report (0.6%) missing
Table E4

*Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General marital satisfaction</th>
<th>Marital love</th>
<th>Perceived desecration by spouse</th>
<th>General tendency to forgive spouse</th>
<th>Engaging in process of forgiveness of spouse through spiritual means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) General marital satisfaction</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Marital love</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Perceived desecration by spouse</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.23**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) General tendency to forgive spouse</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td>-0.16*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Engaging in process of forgiveness of spouse through spiritual means</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>-0.15*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Correlations for report of wives are located in the lower left hand triangle and correlations for report of husbands are located in the upper right hand triangle.

* * p < .05, ** p < .01
Table E5

*Meditation of Spousal Forgiveness on Links Between Desecration and Love of Spouse in Wives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>Marital Love</th>
<th>Forgiveness</th>
<th>Marital Love</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desecration</td>
<td>-0.74**</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.09***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Frequency of prayer was controlled for throughout analyses, as it was significantly correlated with love of spouse (\( r=.17, p<.01 \))

*Note.* The drop in magnitude of the bolded coefficient indicates that spousal forgiveness partially mediates the links between desecration and marital love

*\( p<.05, ** p<.01, ***p<.001 \)
Figure F1. Theoretical Model
Figure F2. Interaction Between Husbands’ Desecration, Spiritual Forgiveness, and Marital Love