An Investigation of the Relationships between Developmental Forgiveness Stages and Forgiveness Communication Strategies

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by

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Chapter I

Introduction

Researchers in psychology have given forgiveness a marked degree of attention over the past two and a half decades (see McCullough & Worthington, 1994, for a comprehensive, albeit early, review). Communication, however, has only begun to sketch its own description of how individuals communicate forgiveness and what messages are used to do so; and has concentrated largely on what impact such messages have on relationships and intrapsychic constructs, such as relational satisfaction (see Kelley, 1998; Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Merolla, 2008; Waldron & Kelley, 2005, Waldron & Kelley, 2008).

Much forgiveness work, both in psychology and in communication, has been based on Enright's (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991) concept of forgiveness, as outlined in his theory of developmental forgiveness. Briefly, Enright's work follows that of Kohlberg's (1969), both proposing that individuals develop increasingly complex reasoning about moral issues over the life span. Both categorize moral development as moving through three stages. The first stage, the pre-conventional, is usual for pre-adolescents. It is distinguished by viewing moral situations in terms of personal cost and benefit. The conventional stage follows this, reached during adolescence. Here, the individual defines morality according to social norms, seeking to conform to the expectations of the community. The adult individual enters the post-conventional stage, conceiving of morality as universal principles that apply to all persons. Enright's major departure from Kohlberg's work is in adding a dimension of mercy to the stages of moral development, extending Kohlberg's purely justice based
concept. To make this distinction clear, Enright refers to his stages as stages of forgiveness development, rather than simply moral development. For Enright, the developmental stages serve as the motivations for one person to forgive another.

Scholars of the communication of forgiveness literature have not as yet aligned their own work as an empirically verified extension of that theory or any other existing theory. In particular, there has been no systematic study of changes in one's method of communicating forgiveness across the span of moral development. The purpose of the present study is to link the forgiveness literature in communication to Enright’s theory by exploring these very changes and the forgiveness messages associated with them. Specifically, it will be determined if the stages of Enright’s theory of developmental forgiveness are related to Kelley’s (1998) typology of forgiveness communication messages. More plainly put, do the ways in which we routinely determine if it is appropriate to forgive predict how we express that forgiveness to those who injure us?

Kelley’s (1998) typology contains three strategies of forgiveness: direct, indirect and conditional. This typology bears some conceptual links with Enright’s (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991) model of developmental forgiveness. For instance, Kelley's strategy of conditional forgiveness requires that the transgressor make some positive act, or refrain from further negative acts, in order for the offended person to forgive. This is somewhat similar to the pre-conventional development stage's concern with personal costs and benefits. An argument can also be made that Kelley's indirect strategy of returning to behaviors that were usual before a transgression reflects the conventional stage's focus on social norms. This second argument is decidedly more tenuous, however. Connecting the direct strategy, which consists of messages that
unambiguously declare the transgressor to be forgiven, and the post-conventional stage is even more so.

More importantly, Kelley’s initial study empirically demonstrated similarity to Enright's (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991) model in the motivations for forgiveness. The current study proceeds from this observation, arguing that if the construct of forgiveness proposed by psychology is indeed the same construct of forgiveness that we communicate, then our strategies of forgiveness should reflect the stage of developmental forgiveness we are at internally.

Researchers of forgiveness, whether in psychology or communication, have not well integrated their findings with existing theory, resulting in a rather sparse nomological framework (McCullough, Hoyt & Rachal, 2000) from which other researchers might proceed. Even Enright’s process model (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991) is associated with its originating theory, Kohlberg’s (1969) theory of moral development, more through common assumptions and parallel constructs rather than through rigorously tested relationships and empirical studies.

**Argument for Integration of Forgiveness Communication and the Psychology of Forgiveness**

To put forth forgiveness as an area worthy of deep study, researchers must begin to develop strong, integrative theories that both build upon our existing knowledge of human behavior and also expand this knowledge by offering new, and testable, propositions. Although researchers have lamented the preliminary state of forgiveness measures (see McCullough, Hoyt & Rachal, 2000), those who study forgiveness are able to test these measures to help define the bounds of the construct. The greater failing has
been the tendency to propose models that treat forgiveness as a novel behavior. Studies have demonstrated relationships between forgiveness and other personality variables or relational outcomes, but without integrating forgiveness into established theory. Forgiveness does not stand alone in an ill-defined nexus of theology and behavioral science, and its concepts must be integrated into a more cohesive conceptual framework if it is to be properly studied as a human behavior.

Kelley’s (1998) early study of forgiveness provided evidence that the motivations to communicate forgiveness to a transgressor are much like Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) elucidation of the motivations for internal forgiveness, although not precisely analogous. Kelley claims that the motivations of the forgiver are strongly tied to the selection of forgiveness strategy. He proposes that the decision to forgive is based on the ability of a strategy to obtain the goal of a particular motivation. Thus, an individual motivated by personal well-being may find that this goal is best achieved by a conditional strategy, requiring a transgressor to recompense the forgiver for the injury.

The current study can no more offer causal evidence of why a particular forgiveness strategy is chosen than could Kelley’s (1998). However, the possibility of finding a relationship between developmental forgiveness stages and forgiveness communication strategies would at least lend weight to the idea that intrapsychic forgiveness processes and interpersonal forgiveness behaviors are both related to a common ancestor in a like construct of forgiveness.

The argument that forgiveness messages stem from a developmental process finds further circumstantial support in the correlation of forgiveness messages to relational
satisfaction (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Kelley's (1998) typology included three strategies. Conditional forgiveness involves requiring that the transgressor promise to refrain from offending again or make some form of restitution for the injury. One achieves indirect forgiveness by dismissing the seriousness of the offense or behaving as if it had not occurred. Direct forgiveness is defined as explicit messages that the transgressor is forgiven. Conditional forgiveness correlates negatively with later relational satisfaction. Conversely, direct forgiveness is correlated positively with satisfaction. Indirect forgiveness and satisfaction have no demonstrable correlation. These data are consistent with the possibility of a cognitive-developmental model of forgiveness communication, in which early attempts at forgiving through demanding conditions produce poor results, shifting to neutral results as one progresses to forgiving through restoring normal interaction, and culminating in positive outcomes from simple, direct forgiveness. A claim that forgiveness communication strategies and motivations for forgiveness follow similar developmental paths does not conflict with any research yet published.

However, a hypothesis that forgiveness messages directly represent developmental levels based solely on Merolla and Zhang's (2011) data is unwarranted. A cognitive-developmental model of forgiveness communication based solely on relational outcomes ignores the very real possibility that persons at higher developmental levels may be better able to enact whatever strategy they might use. Developmental forgiveness also might be evidenced in other relational domains, producing better outcomes regardless of the specific message of forgiveness.

A relational outcome-based explanation of forgiveness strategy selection also fails to produce a rationale as to why a person would not swiftly determine which forgiveness
strategy produced the most desirable outcome, and then continuously deliver that forgiveness message. This possibility, however, ignores a number of difficulties inherent in moral learning. Foremost among these difficulties is the temporal expanse over which forgiveness occurs. A serious transgression and the subsequent forgiveness of the same are unlikely to occur coincident in time. As recollection of specific events becomes more difficult as time passes (Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Metts, Sprecher & Cupach, 1991; Tsang, McCullough & Hoyt, 2005), it seems unlikely that an individual would remember that a specific forgiveness message preceded a change in relational satisfaction; unless that individual were particularly introspective or prompted by another.

It is still more difficult for a forgiver within a relationship to discern a possible causal connection between a forgiveness strategy and later relational satisfaction. Relational satisfaction, a condition subject to constant flux, is not a clear outcome of one’s method of forgiveness. As a product of numerous internal and situational factors, relational satisfaction is difficult to link directly to the forgiveness events that precede them (Merolla & Zhang, 2011) even for the researcher, armed with statistical and experimental controls. One notes that such controls are generally lacking in everyday discourse.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study attempts to begin the integration of the research on how persons communicate forgiveness and the research on developmental forgiveness. Specifically, it attempts to discover what motivations for forgiveness, expected to change over the course of development, are associated with particular strategies that individuals select to communicate forgiveness. In doing so, one hopes that the existing work on forgiveness
will be more tightly integrated in existing theory. Additionally, the study explores the influence of two situational elements, transgression severity and relationship commitment, on the selection of forgiveness strategies.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

This literature review provides a brief outline of the construct of forgiveness. First, the paper discusses the problems that have been historically associated with defining forgiveness as a concept. This discussion ends by proposing that North’s (1987) definition is the most generally acceptable. The chapter then provides a short discussion of the benefits and possible drawbacks to forgiveness. Following this is an introduction to Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) theory of developmental forgiveness. The next section consists of a sketch of Kelley’s (1998) findings on the motivations and strategies of forgiveness communication. Finally, the author proposes four research questions to investigate three possible predictors of forgiveness strategies.

**Delimiting and defining forgiveness**

Forgiveness itself is an oddly situated construct. Although generally considered a beneficial behavior, it requires a preceding negative behavior, or transgression. While forgiveness has the potential to deepen or strengthen a relationship, it can only do so once that relationship has already been weakened. Other constructs associated with conflict resolution, such as reconciliation or restoration, also require this initial breach, but they are the decided exception, rather than the rule (McCullough, 2001: McCullough, Paragament & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini & Miller, 2007). Moreover, laypersons often conflate forgiveness with these other terms (Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou & Moore, 2007).

In the attempt to achieve a consensus definition of forgiveness, researchers have
agreed most in denying this conflation. Forgiveness is not a repairing of a broken relationship, excusing or condoning the transgression, nor a denial of the injured party's right to justice (Enright & Gasser, 1992; McCullough & Worthington, 1994). Perhaps most crucial, from the perspective of communication, it does not require a response from the transgressor. Forgiveness is itself a response by the injured party. Forgiveness may, on occasion, be an entirely intrapsychic behavior and never be communicated to the transgressor. This is a particularly important point to bear in mind when investigating the communication of forgiveness. Researchers of forgiveness communication confine themselves to the outward manifestation of forgiveness. We must rely on other disciplines to explore its solely internal properties.

With much of what forgiveness is not widely agreed upon, some debate yet exists over what forgiveness does in fact entail. Psychodynamic models, such as that of Lapsley (1966), have postulated that forgiveness is a cancellation of the forgiver's "contracts." These contracts are sets of internalized rules for interpersonal behavior. Transgressions occur as others violate these contracts (see also Exline & Baumeister, 2000). Forgiveness, then, consists in creating new contracts that allow for more mature interactions.

A small number of interpersonal process models (e.g., Augsburger, 1981; Nelson, 1992) have proposed that, following the refusal of the injured party to seek revenge, the transgressor must repent of his or her actions. Following repentance, both the forgiver and transgressor then engage in restoration of the relationship. The majority of forgiveness researchers, however, refute this inclusion of reconciliation as a component of forgiveness. As most forgiveness researchers study the concept within psychology,
this refutation may represent a bias toward internal explanations of behavior.

Perhaps the most widely accepted definition of forgiveness, certainly within the communication literature (see Kelley, 1998; Merolla, 2008; Waldron & Kelley, 2008), is that drawn from the work of North (1987). North proposes that forgiveness consists of the reduction of negative affect and the increase of positive affect toward the transgressor. It is particularly important to note that North's definition states that simply reducing negative affect alone cannot be considered forgiveness. As developed in Enright's developmental theory of forgiveness (see Enright & Gassin, 1992), it is crucial that the injured party now act toward the transgressor with compassion and love. Forgiveness is thus a construct that engages affective, cognitive and behavioral systems. As Enright's theory of forgiveness, which is grounded in North’s definition, has been the most extensively researched (see McCullough & Worthington, 1994), it is North's definition that will be the basis for this study. Specifically, forgiveness is here defined as both the reduction of negative affect and the increase of positive toward a transgressor, a transgression, or both. Forgiveness communication, then, is the message by which one informs a transgressor that this change in affect has occurred.

**Benefits of forgiveness**

It should not be imagined that the importance of forgiveness' intrapsychic aspect lessens the import of the communication of forgiveness. Studies of intrapsychic forgiveness have found that forgiveness has an abating effect on stress, hostility and vengeful rumination. A more complete discussion of these effects can be found in the review of forgiveness and well-being by Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini & Miller (2007). An intriguing study in accident prevention has even discovered a positive relationship
between forgiveness and safe driving (Moore & Dahlen, 2008).

Intrapsychic forgiveness, of course, is itself a component of the process of interpersonal forgiveness. The preceding benefits can be found in interpersonal forgiveness episodes as well. The communication of forgiveness has benefits beyond those above. Communicating forgiveness is associated with greater skill in conflict resolution for married women (Fincham, Beach & Davila, 2007), decrease in depression for both partners (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008), reduction of fear and hurt (noted in Maltby, Macaskill & Gillett, 2007), and increase in relational satisfaction (Kelley, 1998). Of greatest importance, perhaps, persons who forgive are less likely to indulge in emotions that damage relationships (Thompson, et al., 2005), are more oriented toward relationships as a whole (Burnette, Taylor, Worthington & Forsyth, 2007), place a higher value on and demonstrate less jealousy than their romantic partners (Sidellinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2007) and demonstrate higher degrees of empathy and benevolence (Emmons, 2000) than unforgiving persons.

**Objections to forgiveness as a positive behavior**

A number of objections can be raised to the assumption that forgiveness is a pro-social behavior. The two most cogent of these objections are addressed here (for a fuller discussion, see Enright & Gassin, 1992). One can characterize the forgiver as weak, being unable to assert his or her right to justice (Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Nietzsche, 1887). As discussed above, forgiveness is a construct distinct from pardon. Thus, forgiveness does not involve the relinquishing of one's right to justice. Nor, in practical terms, does forgiveness prevent one from acting upon that right. It is the exercise of this right that allows forgiveness to be an effective tool in therapy with incest survivors.
Both O'Shaughnessy and Droll (as cited in Enright & Gassin, 1992) have claimed that forgiveness is a negative behavior. They argue that forgiving places the transgressor in a morally inferior position in relation to the forgiver. It is noteworthy that either this objection or the previous possibly can be true, but that the two are mutually exclusive. To address this objection directly, however, requires that one recall that the transgressor's response is immaterial to the fact of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not cease to exist if the transgressor believes that he or she is forgiven as a manipulation of power. The forgiver can, with total altruism, grant forgiveness with no expectation of gain. It is the behavior of the forgiver in response to the transgression that is defined as forgiveness, rather than the ensuing conduct of the relationship.

With a vast array of positive outcomes and no substantive objections to their use, it is surprising that communication has failed to address forgiveness messages. This is particularly so given the prevalence of forgiveness in our daily lives. Given the great amount of discourse within psychology upon the subject, it would be foolhardy indeed to fail to draw upon this fund of knowledge.

Enright's theory of developmental forgiveness

Enright's theory of developmental forgiveness (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) is drawn from Kohlberg’s (1969) theory of moral development. Both propose that individuals develop more complex ideas about morality over the life span. Enright’s theory extends moral development beyond Kohlberg’s concept of justice and into reasoning about mercy. Enright's conceptualization of forgiveness does not require the reciprocity that Kohlberg's justice-based morality does.
For Enright, the development of forgiveness does not entail a growing awareness that the forger must also be forgiven.

In general, however, Enright's developmental forgiveness theory (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) follows the structure of Kohlberg's moral development (Kohlberg, 1969). Enright proposes six styles of forgiveness motivation (see Table 1) that collapse into three stages. This structure parallels Kohlberg’s theory. Although Enright, in his focus on issues of mercy, does not produce a model isotonic with Kohlberg’s, the two still share much. Both name their three stages pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional; as well as defining these in much the same way.

**Enright's Stages of Developmental Forgiveness (Table 1)**

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<th>Pre-Conventional Stage</th>
<th>Conventional Stage</th>
<th>Post-Conventional Stage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Style 1: Forgive after punishment of offender</td>
<td>Style 2: Forgive following restitution</td>
<td>Style 3: Forgive in response to social pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Style 5: Forgive to restore harmony</td>
<td>Style 6: Forgive to promote love.</td>
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Enright's model (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991), in that it captures the development of mercy as well as justice, is not strictly coincident with Kohlberg’s (1969) theory of the psychological development of moral reasoning about justice. A single published study has demonstrated a moderate correlation between Enright's and Kohlberg's stages (Knutson, Enright & Garbers, 2008). This does suggest that the two are not wholly divorced from one another. However, the forgiveness construct is more concerned with using developing cognitive skills in such arenas as
empathy and perspective-taking. Both Kohlberg (1969) and Enright (Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Park & Enright, 1997) find similar age groupings at each stage. Both also follow, in a general sense, Piaget’s (in Overton, 2003) model of cognitive development.

Enright's pre-conventional stage of developmental forgiveness (Enright & the Human Development Group, 1991) is concerned primarily with punitive or compensatory modes of thought. Its styles are characterized by revenge and restitution. At this stage, a person will offer forgiveness only if the transgressor is punished with a like degree of hurt or if the transgressor offers a benefit to offset the injury done. This benefit may be the actual replacement of a damaged good; but can be extended to such things as a promise for a future favor, a gift valued by the forgiver, or even a pledge of good will. It is also possible at this level for one to forgive if pressured to do so by a more powerful party, generally in the form of shame. The individual is focused primarily on his or her own benefit in this stage. This stage represents the developmental level of the pre-adolescent child.

The pre-conventional stage is typified by power, reward and punishment. It is essentially self-centered and concerned with weighing the costs and benefits associated with forgiving a particular transgressor. An offended person will forgive if doing so will provide a benefit or avoid a cost. Additionally, should the transgressor act positively toward the forgiver, this positive action is itself a benefit.

Social pressure and maintenance of community characterize the conventional stage of forgiveness (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991). Led by either the general disapprobation or expressed approval of society, or by the dictates of
one's legal or religious community, one forgives to affirm the strictures of the community with which is associated. It is important to note that the forgiver at this stage has not internalized the principles that guide the community. As the pre-conventional stage is concerned with weighing the costs and benefits of a relational partner, the conventional stage is concerned with the costs and benefits of acting in concert with the community. This stage is considered the appropriate developmental stage for the adolescent.

The conventional stage of forgiveness development is concerned largely with what is considered normal within the forgiver’s community. Choosing to forgive because a particular relationship exists with the offender is perhaps the most common manifestation of this stage’s reasoning. Judgments about responsibility, as a social norm, are also associated with this stage; as are similar judgments about how inappropriate an offense is. Persons who indicate that their social or religious communities expect them to forgive likewise betray a conventional developmental stage.

Post-conventional forgiveness (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) extends beyond affiliation with a particular community. The individual begins to recognize forgiveness as the most appropriate way to deal with a transgressor. This awareness is proposed to culminate in forgiveness being equated with love. The love described by Enright in this stage is a love for individuals based on their simply being persons, rather than love for an individual based on a relationship or desirable characteristics. Enright's claim that high moral development should result in forgiveness being offered universally is bound to the insistence that forgiveness is not equated with condoning or excusing an offense (Enright & Gasser, 1992; McCullough & Worthington, 1994). To forgive someone does not release the transgressor from the demands of justice.
It requires only that the forgiver think less negatively, and more positively, about the transgressor.

At this level of development, transgressions are considered not to jeopardize love between the transgressor and the offended (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991). The failure to forgive, however, does jeopardize the relationship. The focus on love that characterizes the final style within this stage bears perhaps more conceptual relation to Kohlberg's (1969) seventh stage of cosmic perspective, but, as it concerns itself with interpersonal relationships, it has historically remained associated with post-conventional thought. Enright proposes that the post-conventional stage of forgiveness development is reached in adulthood.

Post-conventional forgiveness development thus demands that the forgiver act from universal principles that extend beyond the community. Where conventional thought requires that one forgive a friend in a particular circumstance, post-conventional reasoning requires that all persons be forgiven in that circumstance. This stage also represents a tendency towards selflessness. The offended person forgives because to do so is better for the transgressor, rather than for the forgiver alone. The post-conventional forgiver is further concerned with the harmony of all persons, and reasons for forgiveness may be more abstract than those just given. Forgiving because doing so makes things better for all persons, not just the transgressor and forgiver, is consonant with this stage.

An example may be instructive to clarify the differences between the motivations to forgive in each developmental stage. An individual “borrows” a friend's iPod without permission and irreparably damages the device. At the pre-conventional stage of forgiveness development, the iPod's owner will forgive if the first individual replaces the
item with a new substitute. Alternatively, the owner might also forgive if the “borrower” is punished, perhaps following a conviction for theft of the item.

The iPod's owner, if at the conventional stage of forgiveness development, will be motivated to forgive if the community expects forgiveness. The social circle of the dyad may hold that friends are expected to allow one another to use freely one another's property, for instance. Friends of the pair might also directly apply pressure on the owner to forgive, arguing that the relationship of the dyad is such that the loss of property should be ignored.

At the post-conventional stage, the owner of the iPod would forgive simply out of love and concern for the transgressor. The owner forgives because not to do so would hurt the loved transgressor. A sweeping principle might also provide the impetus to forgive at this stage. The device's owner may hold to a principle that declares that damage to property is always forgiven, regardless of the transgressor.

The motivation to forgive is an essential component of Enright's (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) developmental forgiveness theory. Conversely, Kelley's (1998) early research into forgiveness communication did not seek to find information regarding motivation. However, Kelley's respondents found the motivation to forgive so important that a large minority (37%) provided this information unasked. Reflecting this perception of importance, Kelley categorized the reported motivations to forgive, although this work has been left largely unexplored since.

**Kelley's motivations to forgive**

In recent, yet seminal, work Kelley (1998) proposed a threefold typology of forgiveness communication strategies. He found that forgiveness is communicated
through direct, indirect and conditional messages. Kelley’s initial work provided the community with a qualitative study of 107 university students who provided narratives describing a time when they had been forgiven by another, when they themselves had been forgiven and when they had felt a need for forgiveness. From these narratives, descriptive data arose that provided insight into professed motivations for seeking and granting forgiveness, as well as strategies for both atoning and forgiving. The strategies for granting forgiveness have proven the most studied by the larger community and provide the focus for the current study.

Kelley (1998) found five motivations for forgiveness. Although his study did not ask for respondents to describe their reasons for forgiving a transgressor, 37% of the respondents supplied this information within their narratives. “Love” was the least frequently mentioned motivation. Clearly, this motivation is subsumed within Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) post-conventional developmental stage, which explicitly mentions love a reason for forgiveness. Kelley’s second motivation, that of “well-being,” is more complex. It includes forgiveness both for the benefit of the transgressor and the offender. As noted above, Enright’s post-conventional stage includes the motivation to forgive for the transgressor’s benefit. Similarly, the pre-conventional stage includes forgiveness motivated by the forgiver’s expected benefits.

Kelley’s (1998) third dimension of “restoring the relationship” was further broken down into three groups. Responses indicated that the forgiver might forgive simply that the relationship might continue, because the nature of the relationship demanded forgiveness, or because the severity of the transgression was diminished because of the
relationship’s value. The first two groupings reflect Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) conventional stage, as they are concerned with the social expectations of particular relationships. The third grouping may represent a concern with the benefits expected from the relationship and the costs associated with the transgression. This would suggest that these comments represent Enright’s pre-conventional stage. However, should the narratives reflect a particular concern with the expectations of proper behavior in the relationship, rather than its benefits, these comments would be classified within the conventional stage.

The motivation of “strategy of the other” included statements indicating that the transgressor apologized, accepted responsibility or demonstrated remorse (Kelley, 1998). The “other’s” strategy referred to in this motivation is the means by which the transgressor seeks forgiveness from the person wronged. Statements that clearly denote positive actions toward the forgiver would fall within Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) pre-conventional stage. It is more difficult to categorize a simple acceptance of responsibility, however. Enright’s stages do not directly address this as a motivation.

Kelley’s (1998) final motivation for forgiveness is “reframing.” These responses included statements that the forgiver did not view the transgressor as responsible, that the effect of the transgression was minor, or that the forgiver understood why the transgressor offended. Much like the transgressors’ acceptance of responsibility, this motivation does not clearly indicate a particular stage of Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) model. Indeed, absolution of responsibility and diminishment of negative effect are, by the definition of forgiveness used here, processes by which
forgiveness occurs, rather than motivations.

In total, Kelley’s (1998) forgiveness motivations, while not identical to Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) stages, do reveal some distinctions similar to those of Enright. One or the other might better describe forgiveness motivations, but this is irrelevant to the current study. Kelley’s findings on forgiveness motivations do indicate that laypersons consider many of the same factors in deciding to communicate forgiveness as Enright found that forgivers consider in intrapsychic forgiveness.

**Kelley’s typology of forgiveness communication**

The narratives Kelley (1998) collected further provided evidence of three strategies individuals use to communicate forgiveness. Kelley labeled these strategies as conditional, indirect and direct forgiveness. Conditional forgiveness is the granting of forgiveness contingent upon the transgressor’s actions. The forgiver communicates to the transgressor that forgiveness is granted if the transgressor performs some restitutive act, brings an end to ongoing damage generated by the transgression, or promises to refrain from engaging in like transgressions in the future.

A person might, for example, forgive a spouse an incident of infidelity only upon the condition that the unfaithful spouse never again indulge in an act of unfaithfulness. Although this message type initially appears to be more characteristic of such constructs as reconciliation, it is conjectured that the internal process of releasing negative affect and increasing positive affect (North, 1987) has been accomplished prior to the offering of conditions. The conditional message is the forgiver’s communication that forgiveness has occurred. It is a statement of the requirements necessary for the transgressor to avoid
the need for continuing forgiveness. This understanding does not reduce the communication to a solely source-focused construct. It does place the transactional aspects of forgiveness in their proper temporal frame; one which is not here under analysis.

The communication of indirect forgiveness (Kelley, 1998) avoids direct discussion of the offense and is characterized by the return to interactions typical of those before the transgression, if not necessarily a full restoration of the relationship. These messages deemphasize the transgression. This strategy effectively declares that the negative outcomes of the transgression do not strongly impact the positive feelings more usual in the relationship. In effect, they are a means by which the forgiver indicates a return to normalcy. This is accomplished by tacitly declaring that the transgression did not irreparably damage the relationship.

Direct forgiveness was originally characterized solely as verbal statements stating that the transgressor is forgiven (Kelley, 1998). However, later research suggests that this strategy most completely includes nonverbal cues, such as affectionate displays or looks (Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Merolla, 2008; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). Whether verbal or non-verbal, direct forgiveness is intended to demonstrate explicitly that the negative affect generated by the transgression has been replaced with positive affect toward the transgressor. Direct forgiveness messages also include discussions (Merolla, 2008) between the forgiver and transgressor about the offense.

It is noteworthy that of all three forgiveness messages, it is direct forgiveness that appears most likely to occur at a single point in time. Conditional messages leave open the possibility of retracting forgiveness should the transgressor fails to meet the
requirements of the forgiver. This makes the act of forgiving a task that can only end with the use of another message or the retraction of forgiveness. One can easily imagine a scenario in which an abused person realizes that the conditions they have set for forgiving their abuser (e.g., “It’s good that you’ve stopped hitting me, but I find I can’t really forgive you when you yell at me constantly”). As noted above, the possibility of retraction does not mean that forgiveness has not previously occurred. However, as interactions between the transgressor and forgiver continue throughout time, new behaviors may allow new occasions for forgiveness or non-forgiveness. In a like manner, it is a simple matter to envision a return to typical interaction, the defining characteristic of indirect forgiveness messages, as progressing through small steps that eventually lead back towards normalcy.

Further work provided a scale that incorporated an expanded five strategies (Waldron & Kelley, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Studying the impact of transgression severity on selection of forgiveness strategy, and that strategy’s correlation with later relational satisfaction among adult romantic partners, Waldron and Kelley’s (2005) principal components analysis provided a typology including nonverbal, discussion, conditional, minimizing and explicit strategies. Findings indicated that severe transgressions were most likely to result in conditional forgiveness, a strategy that was itself positively correlated with perceptions of weakened relationships. The face validity of this typology seems strained, however. The explicit category is particularly problematic, as it consists solely of the outright declaration, “I forgive you.” It is difficult to imagine how an embrace following estrangement conveys a qualitatively dissimilar message, or how a discussion that produces a messages of forgiveness could be entirely
tacit. Similarly, one can easily conceive of a dismissive wave following an apology, a gesture that is nonverbal in nature and simultaneously minimizes the need for an apology, and presumably the severity of the transgression. Indeed, labeling nonverbal as a category appears to be a confusion of channel with message.

Using the same scale in a study of relational outcomes and forgiveness strategies within the close relationships of university students, Merolla and Zhang (2011) found only the original three strategies (direct, indirect and conditional) using a maximum likelihood factor analysis with promax rotation. They also confirmed the correlations between conditional messages, transgression severity and diminished relational satisfaction. The use of conditional messages was shown to increase along with the perceived severity of a transgression. Both transgression severity and the use of conditional forgiveness served as positive predictors of lower relational satisfaction. Direct messages were also found to be positively associated with increased relational satisfaction. Merolla (2008) has also used the threefold typology in an earlier content analysis study. The 2008 study investigated forgiveness and relational outcomes within friendships and dating relationships. Merolla found that transgression severity positively predicted the use of both indirect and conditional forgiveness. The analysis also indicated that ongoing negative affect within the relationship was positively related to conditional forgiveness.

As noted earlier, the five-fold typology of forgiveness strategies found by Waldron and Kelley (2005) is questionable in that it raises conceptual and statistical difficulties in clearly separating the five strategies, and the limited later work based on this typology confines itself to the original three strategies (Merolla, 2008; Merolla &
Confirmatory and maximum likelihood factor analysis conducted by Merolla and Zhang (2011) suggests that the expanded nonverbal and minimizing categories are subsumed under the original indirect strategy. Both discussion and explicit forgiveness are contained within the broader concept of direct forgiveness. Although these three categories are perhaps not exhaustive, they clearly distinguish one strategy from another, a test which the five-fold construct fails. The current study follows the restriction to the original three types of forgiveness messages, due both to the difficulties inherent in separating five strategies and the findings in Merolla and Zhang’s work.

Such a restriction also offers some parallels to the findings of Exline and Baumeister (2000), researchers of the interpersonal psychology of forgiveness. They proposed two types of forgiveness, explicit and implicit. Exline and Baumeister conceptualize forgiveness more in terms of an equity of justice than in the altering of affect toward the transgressor. Abandoning North’s (1987) definition of forgiveness, they state that forgiveness is the forgiver’s cancellation of the transgressor’s debt. Thus, they would characterize Kelley’s (1998) conditional forgiveness as a form of pseudo-forgiveness, as it does not cancel the debt incurred. This divide in definition prevents the proposal of relationships between Exline and Baumeister’s work and Kelley’s (1998) original typology. However, Exline and Baumeister have provided one of the few studies of the interpersonal behaviors associated with forgiveness. It is a conceptual comfort to recognize that they define explicit and implicit forgiveness as essentially identical concepts to Kelley’s direct and indirect forgiveness.

As direct and indirect strategies initially appear to encompass the whole of the constellation of possible forgiveness messages, it is necessary to establish an argument
that conditional forgiveness does, in fact represent a distinct means of communicating forgiveness, if one is to accept the face validity of the three category measure. Both direct and indirect messages are distinguished from conditional messages in that only the latter requires that the transgressor respond. Moreover, the distinct relational outcomes associated with conditional forgiveness (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005) argue strongly for the consideration of conditional forgiveness messages as a separate construct.

Overview of the Study

As noted above, the purpose of this study is to determine whether the use of the three forgiveness strategies identified by Kelley (1998) can be predicted from the three stages of developmental forgiveness proposed by Enright and his colleagues (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991). Additionally, the study investigates the extent to which the situational variables of transgression severity and relationship commitment can predict the use of each strategy. Toward this end, the study asked participants to recall and answer questions regarding two transgressions committed by close friends, with both incidents occurring within the last year. Considerations underlying the recall methodology adopted, the type of relationship investigated, and the inclusion of measures of transgression severity and relationship commitment are discussed below. The restrictions on both time and transgressor are expected to give a better consistency between the participants' usual behavior and the recalled incidents. The recollection of multiple incidents should further increase this consistency. Tsang, McCullough and Hoyt (2005) have previously explored the use of multiple incidents to gain greater consistency between respondents' disposition to forgive and forgiveness in
specific cases.

**Recall methods in past forgiveness research.** Tsang, McCullough & Hoyt (2005), following the taxonomic structure of forgiveness measurement suggested by McCullough, Hoyt and Rachal (2000), investigated the religion-forgiveness discrepancy. This discrepancy denotes findings in several studies (see McCullough & Worthington, 1999, for a comprehensive review) that persons who identify themselves as religious report a greater tendency to forgive as a trait, while reporting less actual forgiveness when asked to recall specific transgressions. Tsang, McCullough and Hoyt’s findings suggest that differences between offense-specific reports of forgiveness and dispositional forgiveness are a result of the salience of instances in which a participant’s actions were dissonant with that person’s disposition. Thus, those that most value forgiveness are more prone to think of a transgression they did not forgive when asked simply to recall a recent injury. Tsang, McCullough and Hoyt found that directing participants to recall a memory not of their own choosing, and requiring reports on two memories, significantly decreased this discrepancy. Their tactic of collecting data from recollections of multiple, specific incidents was followed in the current study.

Issues of accuracy in recollection are of particular concern with retrospective reports, particularly when specific behaviors are to be recalled. However, behaviors that are particularly difficult to observe are well served with such methods (Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Metts, Sprecher and Cupach, 1991). Forgiveness messages, as noted above, are apt to be infrequent, spread out over an extended time period and subject to great misinterpretation on the part of the observer. Without the perspective of the forgiver to give behavior meaning, it would be difficult to determine if an embrace is
intended to represent a release of negative affect or an indication of fear-based appeasement.

Tsang et al. (2005) have demonstrated vastly increased correlation between attitudes toward forgiveness and specific forgiveness behaviors when multiple incidents are recalled. In Tsang et al.’s study, requests that the participants report on yet more incidents improved this relationship, but such further increases were statistically small. The current researcher also expects that three or more recalled incidents would negatively impact the completion rate for the survey, given what would become an extremely long and repetitive set of requests. If the current participants had provided particularly detailed accounts of the transgressive incidents, recalling even two may have greatly reduced completion rates, which would call the validity of this study into serious question. However, few provided more than one or two sentence fragments to answer each question.

**Research questions.** As Kelley (1998) suggests that the motivation to forgive should affect how one chooses to communicate forgiveness, the present study extends this suggestion to develop an empirical link between the work on the communication of forgiveness and the more extensive work on the psychology of forgiveness. As discussed above, Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) stages of forgiveness development (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional) are based on the assumption that persons change their motivations to forgive as they develop into mature adulthood. The current research seeks to determine how a person’s stage of developmental forgiveness is related to his or her use of forgiveness strategies. The first research questions to be investigated is:
RQ1. Is there a relationship between victims’ stage of forgiveness development and the extent to which they adopt (a) conditional, (b) indirect, or (c) direct forgiveness strategies?

Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) developmental forgiveness theory does not claim that the developmental stage is the only factor that determines whether forgiveness occurs. Situational features, such as the perceived severity of a transgression or the value placed on a particular friendship, may also shape the desire to forgive (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). This study investigates the effects of two situational features – transgression severity and relational commitment – and controls for a third situational factor, type of relationship. Each of these situational variables is discussed below.

**Relationship type.** Previous work in forgiveness communication has concentrated on close relationships, whether those of family, romantic partnerships or friendships. It has frequently explored multiple relationship types in single studies (Kelley, 1998; Merolla, 2008; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Kelley’s (1998) initial work, in particular, noted that variation in relationship type is itself correlated with one’s motivation to forgive. The current study only looks at close friends as targets. Although intended to reduce some of the situational variance, this decision provides its own problems. As noted by Kelley (1998) and further explored by Merolla and Zhang (2011), the motivation of the forgiver varies with the relationship one has to the transgressor (see also Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Specifically, Kelley (1998) notes that persons are motivated to forgive within voluntary relationships (friends and dating partners) from a desire to restore the relationship. Forgiveness in intra-family
transgressions appears to be motivated by a desire to improve the well-being of one of the involved parties, according to Kelley's original findings.

The current researcher considered and decided against the inclusion of family members as transgressors. Different social pressures are expected in involuntary familial relationships than in voluntary associations. Similarly, the study omits romantic partners as possible transgressors to limit the influence of situational variables that could uncontrollably alter the motivations of the forgiver (Kelley, 1998; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Declaring a friendship over is less complex than disowning one's family, and the breaking of romantic ties varies wildly in its difficulty, attended as it is by such variables as relationship length, form of romantic partnership and the like.

**Transgression severity.** Communication scholars, as discussed above, have provided evidence that the perceived severity of a transgression predicts the use of conditional forgiveness strategies (Merolla, 2008; Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005). Merolla’s (2008) findings demonstrate a similar relationship between transgression severity and indirect forgiveness, as well as confirming the relationship between severity and the conditional strategy. This study seeks to expand these findings while expanding the pool of transgressive acts to include occasions in which persons are not forgiven. As the previous studies only measured the severity of transgressions that were eventually forgiven, it remains to be seen if the demonstrated relationships hold up when all transgressive acts, whether forgiven or not, are considered.

In the current study, transgression severity is operationalized as the victim’s perception of the severity of the transgression. That is, a transgression is most properly defined as a person determining that some action has had a negative effect. This effect
may occur by any means, whether physical, psychological or spiritual. Thus, a transgression need not necessarily be an action that directly affects the offended party. For instance, a child’s entry into the profession of prostitution, although unlikely to directly involve that child’s mother, may still be injurious to the mother, who might experience negative feelings of shame, failure or sorrow. The operational definition of a transgression is whatever an offended person believes to be a transgression. This recognizes that the perception of injury alters the relationship between two people. It further allows for a fuller exploration of forgiveness contexts.

RQ2. Is there a relationship between transgression severity, as perceived by the forgiver, and the extent to which one adopts a particular forgiveness strategy?

**Relationship Commitment.** Waldron & Kelley (2008) have suggested that relationship commitment might also predict the form forgiveness takes. No empirical studies of this relationship have yet been undertaken. Relational commitment has been shown to be a positive predictor of general forgiveness and a negative predictor of revenge (O’Riordan & Yoshimura, 2005). Should a relationship between commitment and forgiveness strategy be found, it yet remains to determine whether an individual's stage of forgiveness development explains significant variance in the extent to which each forgiveness strategy is adopted beyond any effects of transgression severity and relationship commitment.

RQ3. Is there a relationship between relationship commitment and the extent to which one adopts a particular forgiveness strategy?

RQ4. Does developmental stage of forgiveness predict the extent to
which victims use (a) direct, (b) indirect, or (c) conditional forgiveness strategies when the effects of transgression severity and relational commitment on the use of forgiveness strategies are controlled for?

The above questions provide the first block in constructing a bridge between Kelley's forgiveness strategies and Enright's forgiveness stages (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991). This bridge is an essential connection in the eventual construction of a theoretical path between the growing literature in forgiveness communication and that in the psychology of forgiveness. In this study, this connection is dependent upon the demonstration of associations between the indicated stage of forgiveness development and the forgiveness strategies demonstrated through forgivers’ messages.
Summary of Research Questions

RQ1. Is there a relationship between victims’ stage of forgiveness development and the extent to which they adopt (a) conditional, (b) indirect, or (c) direct forgiveness strategies?

RQ2. Is there a relationship between transgression severity, as perceived by the forgiver, and the extent to which one adopts a particular forgiveness strategy?

RQ3. Is there a relationship between relationship commitment and the extent to which one adopts a particular forgiveness strategy?

RQ4. Does developmental stage of forgiveness predict the extent to which victims use (a) direct, (b) indirect, or (c) conditional forgiveness strategies when the effects of transgression severity and relational commitment on the use of forgiveness strategies are controlled for?
Chapter III

Method

Participants

The study drew participants from a pool of undergraduates at a mid-sized, Midwestern university who received a small amount of course credit for participation. Although the participants represent a convenience sample, their demographic characteristics make them particularly well suited to exploring the research questions posed by this study. Transitioning from late adolescence to adulthood, this sample is expected to provide a wider range of developmental stages than is otherwise possible while maintaining a common educational level, shown to be a factor in moral development (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 1999).

Of the 201 participants, 104 were male, 89 were female, and eight did not indicate their sex. The mean of respondent ages within the narratives was 19.97 (SD = 1.70), with the study restricted to persons between the ages of 18 and 25, inclusive. Nearly half, 44.6%, of the respondents were in their first year at university. The number of respondents in each year diminished progressively; 27.7% were sophomores, 17.8% were juniors, 6.4% were seniors and 3.5% did not provide information on their class standing. The respondents were predominantly Caucasians (78.2%), with 8.4% of the participants African-Americans, 3.5% Asian or Pacific Islander and 2.5% Hispanic. No data on ethnicity was provided for 3.0% of the narratives and 4.5% were provided by persons who indicated their ethnicity as “other." Participants largely identified themselves as middle class (59.9%). Approximately one-fifth (20.8%) were working class and about one-eighth (12.4%) were upper class. Equal numbers of respondents, 2% each of the
total, identified as in poverty or as wealthy. Three percent provided no socio-economic information.

**Procedures**

A link to an online survey was emailed to all respondents, who had been previously notified that the study was concerned with forgiveness in close relationships. The survey asked the respondents to recall the incident in the last year when they were most hurt (emotionally, psychologically or physically) by a friend. Respondents were also asked to recall the most recent occasion within that time period when they were hurt, to any degree, by a friend. It was expected that these restrictions as regards time and transgressor, as well as the recollection of multiple incidents, would provide a better consistency between the participants' usual behavior and the recalled incidents.

The survey first asked respondents to identify whether the transgressor was a same-sex friend or a cross-sex friend; as well as whether or not they forgave the transgressor. Participants then provided a brief narrative of the actions of the transgressor. All participants were directed to refrain from the use of overt identifiers such as full names. This direction helped to ensure that the privacy of non-participants, as well as that of the participants, was maintained in the strictest manner possible.

The survey then required those participants who indicated that they had forgiven to provide a short narrative of the manner in which they communicated forgiveness to the transgressor. Those who did not forgive were likewise asked to describe the means by which they communicated their unforgiveness.

The survey required all participants who had indicated that they had forgiven the transgressor to give a short account describing the primary reason they had decided to
forgive. These responses provided coders the data needed to determine the developmental stage that the indicated forgiveness motivations represent.

The questionnaire then directed those participants who indicated that they had forgiven the transgressor to complete Waldron and Kelley's (2005) measure of forgiveness strategies. This indicated what form their messages of forgiveness took. Following this, all participants completed a measure of transgression severity and one of relationship commitment. This transgression narrative, and the scales associated with it, are referred to as the “most hurt” situation throughout this document.

All participants repeated the above measures for the most recent incident within the last year in which they were hurt by a friend. If this was the same as the previous, participants answered the questions regarding the incident immediately prior to the last. This transgression narrative, and the scales associated with it, are referred to as the “most recent” situation throughout this document. The respondents were then requested to put the specific incidents out of their mind to complete the rest of the survey. The final questions on the survey consisted of a short series of demographic queries.

To provide some support for those participants who found recalling these incidents disturbing, the survey closed with a recall exercise much like that used to recall the transgressions. The survey directed participants to recall an episode in which someone behaved kindly toward them, or during which they received an award. They were asked to write down this recollection. However, these narratives were not collected by the Qualtrics software and remained entirely private.
Measures

**Modified forgiveness strategy scale.** Waldron and Kelley's (2005) forgiveness strategy scale (reprinted with modifications in Appendix A) provides 13 items, rated on a 7 point Likert-type scale. The respondents rate the extent that each item was used in a particular forgiveness scenario, a score of 7 indicating a great deal of use. As the scale was initially used to determine strategies in a five-fold typology, the items were collapsed into the three strategies of direct, indirect and conditional, following the practice of more recent work in forgiveness communication (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). The means of the items in each factor provide the final score representing incidence of use for a given category.

Merolla and Zhang’s (2011) study provided the framework by which the items were separated into measurements of the three forgiveness strategies. Due to difficulties in replicating the previously discovered (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005), the scale was scored by following Merolla and Zhang's findings exactly. As noted above, this study elected this modification due to the conceptual problems in clearly separating the categories in the initial scale. The difficulties in replicating previous factor analyses are discussed in the following chapter. Despite those concerns, the items were placed in each strategy precisely as they were in the study by Merolla and Zhang. Likewise, those items omitted here are those that were omitted in that study.

The direct strategy was measured with five items (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). These included “I told them I forgave them” and “I gave them a look that communicated forgiveness.” The two indirect items were “I told them it was no big deal” and “I told them not to worry about it.” Conditional forgiveness was also measured with two items.
These were, “I told them I would forgive them if the offense never happened again” and “I told them I would forgive them only if things changed.” Four items from the original scale (Waldron & Kelley, 2005) were discarded by Merolla and Zhang. Two of the items discarded referenced discussion of the offense. Conceptually, one could use such discussion equally in either conditional or direct forgiveness. The discarded item “I forgave them but it was not until later that I completely forgave them,” appears to reference the fact that forgiveness is not an immediate process (Knutson, Enright & Garbers, 2008), rather than any particular forgiveness communication strategy. The final discarded item, “I joked about it so they would know they were forgiven,” appears to indicate indirect forgiveness, but did not appear related to that factor in Merolla and Zhang's (2011) analysis.

The almost non-existent use of this scale allows for only limited determination of its reliability. Merolla and Zhang (2011) report Cronbach’s alphas between .77 and .87 across the three strategies. Its validity is established primarily through Waldron and Kelley’s (2005) questioning of a small group of undergraduates as to the believability of each item as a forgiveness tactic. A mean of 91% of the respondents in their study found the items likely, with 81.5% acknowledging their own use of the items. The current study found Cronbach’s alphas of .84 for the direct forgiveness items in the “most hurt” situation and .78 for the “most recent.” In the “most hurt” situation, Cronbach's alpha for the indirect forgiveness items was .82, with a score of .76 for the “most recent” situation. For conditional forgiveness, those items in the “most hurt” situation scored a Cronbach's alpha of .76. In the “most recent” situation, Cronbach's alpha was .79 for the conditional items.
In an attempt to replicate Merolla and Zhang's (2011) work, a maximum likelihood factor analysis with promax rotation was conducted on the items in the forgiveness strategy scale. Maximum likelihood analysis is a variable reduction technique preferred when the underlying constructs are not directly measured by the items analyzed. A promax rotation allows for the expectation that the forgiveness strategies are rarely, if ever, used singly (Kelley, 1998). In the present study, both of these choices were made simply to recreate Merolla and Zhang's (2011) factor analysis exactly.

**Factor Analysis of Forgiveness Strategy Scale Items (Table 2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I told them I would forgive them if the offense never happened again.</td>
<td>.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discussed the offense with them.</td>
<td>.655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I initiated discussion with them.</td>
<td>-.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I told them I would forgive them only if things changed.</td>
<td>.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I forgave them but it was not until later that I completely forgave them.</td>
<td>.598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I touched them in a way that communicated forgiveness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gave them a hug.</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gave them a look that communicated forgiveness.</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expression on my face said, &quot;I forgive you.&quot;</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I told them it was no big deal.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.088Indirect</td>
<td>.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I told them it was no big deal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.125I told them not to worry about it.</td>
<td>.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I joked about it so they would know they were forgiven.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.042Non-Loading Items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.027</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I just told
The scree plot of the present study’s data also indicated three factors (see Table 3). However, the items within the factors did not correspond to Kelley's (1998) typology of forgiveness strategies. Rather, the first factor consisted of verbal behaviors, including items such as “I initiated discussion with them” and “I told them I forgave them if the offense never happened again.” A second factor consisted of non-verbal items. These included “I gave them a look that communicated forgiveness” and “I gave them a hug.” A third factor was nearly identical to the indirect strategy used in this study. It contained both of the items used here and added the item “I joked about it so they would know they were forgiven.” Despite clear separations between the factors in the factor analysis, a Pearson's product moment correlation indicated that indirect and verbal forgiveness were highly correlated $r(280) = .92, p < .01$. This degree of similarity indicates that these factors are not sufficiently differentiated to allow for useful analysis. With no previous research indicating that these factors were anything but an artifact of the sample surveyed, the items were organized following the format used by Merolla and Zhang.

**Transgression severity scale.** A four item, five point, Likert-type scale was used to measure transgression severity. This scale has been adapted from a measure of regretted messages (Meyer, 2007). It contains both positively and negatively worded items, and focuses on the respondent’s perception of the global outcomes of the transgression (see Appendix B). Items included “The transgression had costly outcomes” and “The transgression had minor consequences.” The latter item was reverse coded.
Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was .81 in the present study for all responses. However, in only the “most hurt” situation, Cronbach’s alpha was only .73. In the “most recent” situation, Cronbach’s alpha was yet lower, at only .70. The measure demonstrates acceptable reliability for each situation individually, and is strong across both.

**Adapted relationship commitment scale.** Relationship commitment was assessed with the Commitment Level subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998). This is a seven item measure with both positive and negative statements (albeit only a single negative) concerning the respondent’s general desire to maintain a romantic relationship. The subscale was altered to follow a five point Likert-type model to reduce possible confusion in participants from repeated changing of scales. It was also reworded to refer to friends rather than romantic partners. One item, “It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year” was excised entirely. All degree-influencing adverbs (e.g., “very”) have been removed to enhance linguistic clarity of the items (see Appendix C). Prior to these modifications, the subscale established excellent reliability, with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .91 to .95 over three studies (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998). The current study found a Cronbach’s alpha of .80 for the adapted scale in the “most hurt” situation and .84 in the “most recent” situation. Both scores indicate strong reliability for each situation.

**Developmental forgiveness stage coding.** A content analysis of respondent’s narratives of their primary reason to forgive was used to determine the developmental forgiveness stage for each incident. The survey asked respondents to “(b)riefly tell us the primary reason you decided to forgive this person” for both the “most hurt” and “most recent” situations. These responses were then coded into one of the three stages of
developmental forgiveness: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional. This is similar to the method used by Kohlberg to determine moral developmental stages (see Kohlberg, 1977; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau & Thoma, 1999; and Rest, Thoma, Narvaez & Bebeau, 1997). The procedures used for the content analysis are described in detail in the next section.

**Demographic data.** The survey also collected demographic data to provide contextual details about the sample. Apart from the standard items of age and sex, the respondents' year in school (first year, sophomore, junior, senior) and socioeconomic class were also provided.

**Analysis**

**Content Analysis.** Each respondent was asked to provide two transgression narratives. The unit of analysis for the content analysis described below was the individual narrative. The analysis excluded those narratives where forgiveness did not occur. This exclusion resulted in 242 usable narratives. Of the 201 respondents, 137 provided narratives discussing why they forgave when they were most hurt, and 105 provided narratives for situations when they were most recently hurt.

The coding scheme provides three categories, representing the three stages of Enright's (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) developmental forgiveness model. The coding scheme is shown in Table 2. The first category, pre-conventional, included those narratives that described reasons for forgiveness as personal costs and benefits, or when a more powerful individual directed the respondent to forgive the transgressor. Examples of the items coded in this category are: “I was holding onto a lot of anger and I needed to do it for myself” and “I hate the feeling of being mad at
someone, and someone being mad at me.”  

**Developmental Forgiveness Coding Scheme (Table 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Forgiveness Stage</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Conventional</td>
<td>Earliest stage of forgiveness development. Concerned with personal costs and benefits, and commands by more powerful individuals. Example items: “I forgave her for myself, not because she deserved to be forgiven.” “Well, honestly, the only reason I forgave her was because my RA told me we were stuck being roommates so I had to try to make the best of it.” “I just got over it. I didn't feel like putting in the effort to keep being upset about it, so I just let it go.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Middle stage of forgiveness development. Concerned with upholding social norms and response to community pressures. Example items: “He is one of my best friends.” “Religious views.” “We have been best friends forever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Conventional</td>
<td>Final stage of forgiveness development. Concerned with universal principles, equal treatment for all persons and love. Example items: “I love her. I can't be mad at her for what she did but I am mad she lied to me.” “Always have to forgive once.” “Once again because I love him and I know he loves me, and even though the things he does sometime hurts me, he's human and he makes mistakes and I need to love him for his imperfections.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The category of “conventional” was concerned with community pressure and upholding social norms. In the current study, the overwhelming majority of this category referenced expectations associated with particular relationships. Examples of these responses are: “We are best friends and we have each others' backs” and “John and me were like brothers.”

The post-conventional category included those narratives that discussed universal
principles, treating all persons in a particular way or love for the transgressor. Examples in this category are: “I live life by the saying you should always forgive but not forget” and “I love her and I believe she did what was right in her mind.”

Following training in the use of the codebook (see Appendix D) two independent coders, both graduate students at the author’s institution, separately coded all but ten responses. Coding was conducted in two rounds and considered the statements as a whole. Following the first round, a simple percent agreement between coders was calculated. This intercoder agreement was 73%.

Analysis by the author indicated that most of the disagreements involved narratives that concerned the respondents’ decision that holding a grudge would be wrong. These statements could be split into two groups. The first group consisted of declarations that holding a grudge is wrong. The second group contained narratives that contained some variation of believing that it was wrong to hold a grudge against a friend. The first group, being concerned with a universal principle, falls under the post-conventional stage of development. The second group modifies the same principle as in the first, limiting its scope to a particular relationship. Therefore, these statements represent the social pressures of the conventional stage. Statements directly addressing these two groups were added to the codebook and a second training session was held.

During the second training session, both coders worked jointly to code ten of the discrepant items from the first round. Further instructions were issued to deal with the coders’ concern over responses that contained more than one primary reason for forgiveness. In general, coders were to still regard the responses as a whole. If multiple reasons were given, the coders determined if a particular stage was mentioned more
frequently than others. If so, this predominant stage was entered as the appropriate code. For those responses in which no predominant stage could be determined, the coders selected the first statement within the response as indicative of the developmental stage.

When the coders and the author were satisfied that the alterations to the codebook were understood, the coders commenced the second round of analysis. In this round, coders separately coded all narratives apart from the ten discrepancies that were jointly coded in the second training session. Following this round, intercoder agreement was .85 as measured by Krippendorff’s alpha (Krippendorf, 2004). This statistic allows for an intercoder agreement calculation for any number of coders, values or variables, accounts for chance agreement, and can accept multiple levels of measurement.
Chapter IV

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question attempted to determine what relationships exist between the selection of forgiveness strategies and developmental forgiveness stages. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed for each of the three strategies. This test allows the relationship between the levels of a categorical fixed factor as the independent variable and an interval dependent variable. In each case, the interval score for each strategy of forgiveness communication (direct, indirect and conditional) in the modified Forgiveness Strategy Scale (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005) served as the dependent variable. For all ANOVAs, the three level, between-subjects independent variable was the stage of developmental forgiveness (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional), determined through content analysis. In the “most hurt” situation, 27 narratives were in the pre-conventional category, 72 in the conventional and 38 in the post-conventional. In the “most recent” situation, the pre-conventional category contained 20 narratives, the conventional contained 57 and the post-conventional contained 28. The ANOVAs for each strategy were conducted separately for the “most hurt” and “most recent” situations, for a total of six ANOVAs. This separation avoids the need for a repeated measures test and is useful here as it is uncertain that the two situations will elicit like responses from the participants. The analysis included only those responses in which participants indicated they had forgiven their transgressors.

RQ1(a). In the “most hurt” situation for conditional forgiveness, the ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 135) = .60, p = .55$. The mean scores for direct forgiveness in
this situation were 3.61 (SD = 1.89) in the pre-conventional stage, 3.18 (SD = 1.74) in the conventional stage, and 3.28 (SD = 1.72) in the post-conventional stage. The ANOVA for the “most recent” situation in conditional forgiveness was also not significant, $F(2, 95) = .60, p = .55$. The mean scores for direct forgiveness in the “most recent” situation were 3.73 (SD = 1.82) in the pre-conventional stage, 3.16 (SD = 1.86) in the conventional stage, and 3.43 (SD = 1.75) in the post-conventional stage.

**RQ1(b).** In the “most hurt” situation for indirect forgiveness, the ANOVA was nonsignificant, $F(2, 133) = .05, p = .95$. The mean scores for indirect forgiveness in this situation were 3.65 (SD = 1.91) in the pre-conventional stage, 3.76 (SD = 1.85) in the conventional stage, and 3.80 (SD = 2.01) in the post-conventional stage. The ANOVA for the “most recent” situation in indirect forgiveness was also nonsignificant, $F(2, 97) = .50, p = .61$. The mean scores for indirect forgiveness in the “most recent” situation were 3.46 (SD = 1.72) in the pre-conventional stage, 3.99 (SD = 1.72) in the conventional stage, and 3.91 (SD = 1.75) in the post-conventional stage.

**RQ1(c).** In the “most hurt” situation for direct forgiveness, the ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 135) = .16, p = .85$. The mean scores for direct forgiveness in this situation were 3.47 (SD = 1.74) in the pre-conventional stage, 3.63 (SD = 1.54) in the conventional stage, and 3.70 (SD = 1.69) in the post-conventional stage. The ANOVA for the “most recent” situation in direct forgiveness was also nonsignificant, $F(2, 96) = .51, p = .60$. The mean scores for direct forgiveness in the “most recent” situation were 3.32 (SD = 1.58) in the pre-conventional stage, 3.34 (SD = 1.51) in the conventional stage, and 3.67 (SD = 1.47) in the post-conventional stage.
Research Question 2

Research question two asked what correlation existed between transgression severity and the three forgiveness strategies. This study did not provide a prediction for this relationship due to the conflicting findings of Waldron and Kelley (2005) and Merolla (2008). The relationship of each strategy to severity was calculated with Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient which calculates both the strength and direction of a correlation between two interval variables. Transgression severity served as the independent variable for each of the three independent variables of conditional, indirect and direct forgiveness. Only responses in which participants indicated that they had forgiven were calculated.

In the “most hurt” situation, transgression severity was negatively correlated with the strategy of indirect forgiveness, \( r(139) = -.30, p < .001 \). No significant correlations were found in the “most recent” situation. Correlation tables for severity, commitment and the three forgiveness strategies in each situation are provided in Tables 4 and 5.

Intercorrelations of Severity, Commitment and Forgiveness Strategy Use - Most Hurt

Situation (Table 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>2. Commitment</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Direct</td>
<td>-.12</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Indirect</td>
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<td>.48**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Conditional</td>
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<td>.40**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: N = 143. Means for severity and commitment are on a 5 point scale. Means for forgiveness strategies are on a 7 point scale. * \( p < .05 \), ** \( p = <.01 \).
Intercorrelations of Severity, Commitment and Forgiveness Strategy Use - Most Recent Situation (Table 5)

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3. Direct</td>
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<td>4. Indirect</td>
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<td>.32**</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>1.85</td>
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</table>

Note: N = 140. Means for severity and commitment are on a 5 point scale. Means for forgiveness strategies are on a 7 point scale. * p < .05, ** p = <.01.

Research Question 3

Research question three was similar to the second question, asking what correlation might exist between relationship commitment and forgiveness strategies. With no previous study of this relationship and no clear theoretical direction, the study did not make a prediction concerning these relationships. A Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was again used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variable of relationship commitment and the dependent variables of each forgiveness strategy.

In the “most hurt” situation, relationship commitment was positively correlated with direct forgiveness, \( r(140) = .28, p = .001 \). In the “most recent” situation, relationship commitment was positively related to both direct forgiveness, \( r(137) = .38, p < .001 \), and conditional forgiveness, \( r(136) = .30, p < .001 \).

Research Question 4

Research question four asked if the stages of developmental forgiveness would have a relationship with the strategies of forgiveness communication if the effects of transgression severity and relationship commitment were held constant. This question
was explored through a separate Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) for each strategy. The “most hurt” and “most recent” situations were again analyzed separately. Again, the interval score for each strategy of forgiveness communication (direct, indirect and conditional) in the modified Forgiveness Strategy Scale (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron & Kelley, 2005) served as the dependent variable. The stage of developmental forgiveness (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional), determined through content analysis, again acted as the three level, between-subjects independent variable. The interval variables of transgression severity and relationship commitment served as covariates for each ANCOVA. As above, only those responses in which the participant indicated that they had forgiven were calculated.

**RQ4(a).** Relationship commitment was not a significant predictor of conditional forgiveness in the “most hurt” situation, \( F(4, 132) = .19, p = .66, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .001 \). Transgression severity was also not significant covariate, \( F(4, 132) = .08, p = .78, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .001 \). Developmental forgiveness stage did not explain any unique variance in the use of conditional forgiveness in the “most hurt” situation when both covariates were controlled, \( F(4, 132) = .83, p = .44, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .01 \).

In the “most recent” situation, relationship commitment emerged as a significant predictor of conditional forgiveness, \( F(4, 92) = 11.63, p = .001, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .11 \). Transgression severity was not a significant predictor, \( F(4, 92) = .01, p = .94, \) partial \( \eta^2 = 0.0 \). The stage of forgiveness development did not explain any variance in the use of conditional forgiveness with the covariates held constant, \( F(4, 92) = 1.67, p = .19, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .04 \).
**RQ4(b).** Transgression severity significantly predicted the use of indirect forgiveness in the “most hurt” situation, $F(4, 130) = 11.00, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. Relationship commitment was not a significant predictor, $F(4, 130) = .29, p = .59$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. With both covariates held constant, the stage of forgiveness development did not predict any significant variance in the use of indirect forgiveness, $F(4, 130) = .40, p = .67$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$.

In the “most recent” situation, neither covariate was significant as a predictor of an indirect forgiveness strategy. Transgression severity resulted in an $F(4, 94)$ of .78, $p = .38$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$. Relationship commitment produced $F(4, 94) = .07, p = .80$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. After controlling for both covariates, developmental forgiveness stage also did not significantly predict the use of indirect forgiveness, $F(4, 94) = .61, p = .54$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$.

**RQ4(c).** Relationship commitment was a significant predictor of direct forgiveness in the “most hurt” situation, $F(4, 132) = 7.75, p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Transgression severity was not significant, $F(4, 132) = 1.72, p = .19$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Developmental forgiveness stage did not explain any unique variance in the use of direct forgiveness in this situation when both covariates were controlled, $F(4, 132) = .20, p = .82$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$.

In the “most recent” situation, relationship commitment was again a significant covariate of direct forgiveness, $F(4, 93) = 21.53, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .19$. Transgression
severity was not significant, $F(4, 93) = .82$, $p = .37$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Developmental forgiveness stage similarly did not act as a significant predictor of forgiveness strategy when the covariates were controlled, $F(4, 93) = 2.55$, $p = .08$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. 
Chapter V

Discussion

The overall purpose of the present study was to investigate the possibility of an empirical link between Kelley's (1998) typology of forgiveness communication strategies and Enright's (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) stages of developmental forgiveness. Specifically, the study had four objectives, represented by its research questions. First, the relationship between the strategies of forgiveness communication (Kelley, 1998) and the stages of developmental forgiveness (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) was explored. The second and third objectives investigated the predictive abilities of two situational variables, transgression severity and relationship commitment, on the selection of forgiveness strategies. The final objective attempted to determine if the stages of developmental forgiveness could explain any unique variance in the use of forgiveness strategies when the situational variables were held constant.

Even when controlling for situational variables, no relationship could be determined between the stages of forgiveness development and the strategies used to communicate forgiveness. However, the study did provide the scholarly community with more information on the relationship between transgression severity and forgiveness strategy. Interestingly, this finding is in conflict with previous findings. Most excitingly, this research provides communication researchers with the first empirical data regarding the relationship of forgiveness strategies and relationship commitment. Although Waldron and Kelley (2008) have proposed that such a relationship exists, no work has given any indication of what that relationship might be.
Summary and Implications

Developmental forgiveness and forgiveness strategies. The lack of any demonstrated relationship between the stages of forgiveness development and the strategies used to communicate forgiveness indicates some difficulty in bridging the existing literature in psychology and communication on forgiveness. However, connecting the two bodies of research is not entirely denied. The present study has shown that forgiveness development does not predict the strategy used to communicate forgiveness. It does not indicate that the developmental stage fails to predict if one decides to communicate forgiveness at all.

Enright's (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) developmental forgiveness model also allows for persons at any given stage to use the reasoning of prior stages, although the mechanism by which this occurs is unclear. In measuring the reasoning for a specific forgiveness incident, this study cannot guarantee that the developmental stage data obtained here truly represent the participants' usual stage. Should a measure that can reliably indicate an individual's normal developmental stage be developed, Enright's stages may yet provide insight into how we select forgiveness strategies. If the stages as measured here do represent a situationally driven form of reasoning, the forgiveness strategy selected might yet be influenced by a more stable developmental forgiveness stage.

Presuming that stages of developmental forgiveness are truly unable to predict the selection of forgiveness strategies, it is useful to consider definitional issues. Communication researchers have largely accepted North’s (1987) definition of forgiveness as an increase of positive, and decrease in negative, affect toward a
transgression or transgressor. No researcher has yet proven that this concept is indeed what a forgiver is attempting to communicate to a transgressor. Communicating a change of affect is conspicuously absent in Kelley’s (1998) analysis of narratives of forgiveness motivation. A research team led by Lawler-Row (2007) suggests that laypersons not only have multidimensional definitions of forgiveness, but that these definitions change as one ages.

However, previous research on the psychology of forgiveness does provide its own alternatives to North’s (1987) definition. Particularly germane to the discipline of communication, Exline and Baumeister’s (2000) work on the psychology of interpersonal forgiveness is roughly parallel to Kelley’s (1998) typology of forgiveness communication. Exline and Baumeister propose that forgiveness can be expressed both explicitly and implicitly. Explicit forgiveness, just as direct forgiveness, entails making clear the transgression’s consequences and plainly indicating that one offers forgiveness to the transgressor. In implicit forgiveness, like indirect forgiveness, the forgiver indicates that no offense was truly committed or that it was unimportant. No analogue exists with conditional forgiveness in their work, however. Conditional forgiveness requires that the transgressor make some form of reparation to the forgiver. In Exline and Baumeister’s definition of forgiveness, it is necessary that the forgiver forgo collecting on the debt incurred by the transgressor. Requiring that the transgressor act to reduce the hurt caused, as in conditional forgiveness, does not allow the forgiver to truly cancel the debt.

Given that Exline and Baumeister’s (2000) definition of forgiveness is strikingly different from that used by Waldron and Kelley (2008), it is unclear if the two can be
integrated. The author believes this is possible. Nothing in Kelley’s (1998) typology requires that the strategies be based on North’s (1987) definition of forgiveness. Moreover, classifying conditional forgiveness as a form of pseudoforgiveness is consonant with Merolla’s (personal communication) belief that the conditional strategy indicates incomplete forgiveness.

No result of the current study positively indicates that Exline and Baumeister’s (2000) concept of forgiveness is more likely than any other psychological construct of forgiveness. However, as most forgiveness psychology is concerned only with internal forgiveness, their interpersonal constructs seem likely to be useful in connecting the work in forgiveness psychology and communication.

**Transgression severity and forgiveness strategy.** The finding that transgression severity is negatively related to indirect forgiveness in the “most hurt” situation appears to be at odds with findings by Merolla (2008) and Waldron and Kelley (2005). Such a conclusion ignores the expected confound of relationship type. The current study investigated only transgressions that occurred within friendships. Although Merolla (2008) found severity to be positively related to both conditional and indirect forgiveness, his study was concerned only with romantic relationships. Similarly, Waldron and Kelley’s finding that severity was positively related to conditional forgiveness was the result of an analysis of both romantic partnerships and friendships. Additionally, Waldron and Kelley's study used their expanded five-fold typology, making direct comparisons problematic.

The negative correlation between severity and indirect forgiveness in the “most hurt” suggests that friends prefer to confront and discuss more hurtful transgressions
when they forgive one another. There is little information, however, to help explain why transgression severity was unrelated to any forgiveness strategy in the “most recent” condition. Perhaps the most likely conclusion would be that the forgiveness process had not reached its conclusion (Knutson, Enright & Garbers, 2008) in many of these cases. However, it may be that the relatively small sample size for this situation was unable to detect a small effect from this variable.

These findings add another small piece to the collected knowledge about the relationship of transgression severity and forgiveness communication. Taking the published findings together with those revealed here, it is clear that continued research into forgiveness strategies must account for relationship type as an influence on the selection of forgiveness strategy.

**Relationship commitment and forgiveness strategy.** The positive correlation of commitment and direct forgiveness in the “most hurt” situation suggests that individuals prefer to offer forgiveness freely and without condition more often to closer friends. This explanation is somewhat complicated by the finding in the “most recent” situation that commitment is positively related to both direct and conditional forgiveness. Both direct and conditional forgiveness strategies require the forgiver to openly address the offense with the transgressor. It may be that conditions are placed initially when forgiving close friends. Doing so would allow the forgiver to repair the breach rapidly while maintaining some protection against future injury. As time passes following the initial offer of forgiveness, the forgiver may remove these conditions and offer unconditional forgiveness. As the forgiver continues the forgiveness process, these conditions may become less important in memory, resulting in an increased report of conditional
forgiveness when the injury is more recent. As no data were collected regarding the frequency of interaction with the transgressors, it is unclear if these results are related to simply having more or less opportunity to speak with the transgressor.

However, the propositions that elapsed time alters responses to transgressions and that closer relationships predict more discussion of transgressions have support in the literature on hurtful messages. Researchers in that domain (Parker-Raley, Beck, Surra & Vangelisti, 2007) has found that relational satisfaction, a construct at least tangentially related to relational commitment, among romantic partners is negatively impacted by hurtful messages immediately, but that this effect is reduced over time. More directly pertinent to the finding here, previous research (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998) demonstrated that relational satisfaction is positively associated with active verbal responses to hurtful messages. Although satisfaction and commitment and plainly distinct constructs, it is not unlikely that they are related and would have similar predictive abilities as regards responses to transgressions.

Although not a primary question within the research here reported, an analysis of the relationship between severity and commitment was conducted. Pearson’s product moment correlation did not produce a significant result. Thus, no relationship was found to exist between relationship commitment and transgression severity. Further, more focused, research will be required to determine if this is unique to the population represented by this sample or if the population at large makes a clear distinction between these two variables. If the latter should find support, this would indicate that we are just as hurt whether a close or distant friend injures us.
Study Limitations

As noted above, this study uses a convenience sample. This sample is uniquely suited to evidence variation in developmental forgiveness stages. However, the ecological validity of the study would be increased by surveying a wider range of ages. To obtain more accurate indications of developmental stage, the present study would have needed to survey pre-adolescent children, adolescents and mature adults. A study to confirm the findings here should recruit participants from each of these groups to ensure that the lack of findings in this study were not a non-generalizable artifact of the student respondents.

The lack of a scale to measure developmental forgiveness stage induced a lack of accuracy in measurement. A more subtle measurement device may yet find a relationship between developmental levels and strategies of forgiveness. As noted above, the coding for the stages was necessarily tied to specific instances of forgiveness. These responses may represent more the whim of the moment rather than a more stable stage of development. However, assuming that the codes for the responses were accurate in using Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) definitions, the profound lack of any relationship found here suggests that these two constructs are truly separate.

The most disconcerting limitation of this study is the performance of Waldron and Kelley’s Forgiveness Strategy Scale (2005). Their study was unable to confirm that Kelley’s (1998) original typology of forgiveness strategies were accurately measured, instead proposing a new five-factor typology. Although Merolla and Zhang (2011) were able to perform a factor analysis that supported the original typology, the present study
found a third set of factors.

It is also noteworthy that direct forgiveness demonstrated a fairly high degree of correlation with indirect and conditional forgiveness strategies, regardless of situation (see Tables 3 and 4). Pearson’s $r$ ranged between .32 and .51 in these relationships. Although the factor analysis conducted in this study, as well as that conducted by Merolla and Zhang (2011), accounted for related factors with a promax rotation, this is still worrying. The limited amount of research into forgiveness communication does not provide sufficient evidence that Kelley’s (1998) original three-fold strategy typology truly provides discrete categories of forgiveness communication. Three studies have conducted factor analyses of the items in the Forgiveness Strategy Scale (Merolla & Zhang, 2011; Waldron and Kelley, 2005; and the current study), with no two agreeing on the dimensions measured. This strongly suggests that the scale requires expansion and refinement. Indeed, it hints that Kelley’s original categories may themselves require revision.

**Future Research**

As just noted, it is imperative that the development of measures of forgiveness communication continue. Although the research into forgiveness communication is only beginning, the inability of the only available measure to produce consistent results presents a tremendous obstacle to furthering our understanding of the process of forgiving. Lack of accurate measurement denies the possibility of effective empirical research. A starting point for developing an alternative measure may well be Exline and Baumeister’s (2000) proposal of a two dimensional interpersonal forgiveness. Although testing of this proposition has not yet occurred, it is solidly grounded in the relatively
expansive literature on the psychology of forgiveness. Conversely, Kelley’s (1998) typology is the result of a single qualitative study. This in no way denigrates Kelley’s work, as his study was both extensive and rigorous. However, the pursuit of alternative measures seems warranted as the Forgiveness Strategy scale continues to develop.

The present study attempted to connect the work on psychological forgiveness with the limited work on forgiveness communication. Although no relationship was found between Kelley’s (1998) forgiveness strategies and Enright’s (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991) developmental forgiveness strategies, the integration of the findings of forgiveness communication research with existing psychological theory is still necessary to obtain a full understanding of the construct of forgiveness. Retaining the divide between the disciplines will result in communication scholars needing to repeat much of the fundamental research that has already been conducted, rather than exploring novel ideas and positively contributing to the knowledge of human behavior.

It can be argued that one may currently utilize the findings of forgiveness psychologists, absent any evidence that the two fields are empirically connected. However, doing so makes an unwarranted assumption that the two disciplines are indeed researching a single construct. As Lawler-Row and her co-researchers (Lawler-Row et al, 2007) have demonstrated, definitions of forgiveness within the lay community are strikingly dissimilar to any of the several definitions provided by forgiveness researchers. Moreover, although many researchers have come to accept North’s (1987) definition of forgiveness as standard, it is far from universal acceptance. Indeed, as Exline and Baumeister’s (2000) definition demonstrates, the various concepts of forgiveness used in research can have nothing in common apart from the existence of a forgiver and a
transgression.

Similarly, forgiveness communication research needs to integrate with the larger body of communication theory. Waldron and Kelley (2008) propose a number of theories that may explain the process of communicating forgiveness, but these propositions remain untested. Integration with psychological research on forgiveness can provide us with a better understanding of the subtleties of forgiveness, but integration with communication theory is needed to fully explore the place of forgiveness in human relationships.
Appendix A


Each item is scored on a 7 point Likert-type scale, ranging from "did not use" (represented by 1) to "used a great deal" (represented by 7).

Direct

I told them I forgave them.

I gave them a hug.

I touched them in a way that communicated forgiveness.

I gave them a look that communicated forgiveness.

The expression on my face said, "I forgive you."

Indirect

I told them it was no big deal.

I told them not to worry about it.

Conditional

I told them I would forgive them if the offense never happened again.

I told them I would forgive them only if things changed.

Items discarded

I discussed the offense with them.

I initiated discussion with them.

I joked about it so they would know they were forgiven.
I forgave them but it was not until later that I completely forgave them.
Appendix B

Transgression Severity Scale

Participants rate each item on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = Do not agree at all, 5 = Agree Strongly).

1. The transgression had negative consequences.

2. The transgression had costly outcomes.

3. The transgression had minor consequences. (Reverse coded)

4. The problem caused by the transgression was large.
Appendix C

Adapted Relationship Commitment Scale

Participants rate each item on a five point Likert-type scale (1 = Do not agree at all, 5 = Agree Strongly).

1. I want our relationship to last for a long time.

2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my friend.

3. I would not feel upset if our relationship were to end in the near future. (Reverse coded)

4. I feel attached to our relationship -- strongly linked to my friend.

5. I want our relationship to last forever.

6. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my friendship.
Appendix D

Developmental Forgiveness Codebook

Pre-Conventional (1)

The first developmental level, expected at the pre-adolescent stage, is typified by forgiveness motivations concerned with self-centered issues of power, reward and punishment.

Forgive because:

- Offender punished
- Offender acts positively following offense
- Told to do so by individual authority
- Personal advantage

Conventional (2)

The middle developmental level, expected to be reached in adolescence, is typified by forgiveness motivations concerned with community pressures, whether legal, social or religious. Specifically, this refers to pressure from an organization or group, rather than an internal congruence with the principles that the norms and rules of the community represent.

Forgive because:

- Social norms of relationship demand forgiveness
- Pressure from peer group
- Legal direction to forgive
- Expectation of forgiver’s religion
- The offense should be forgiven because of the particular relationship
Post-Conventional (3)

The final developmental level, expected to be reached in adulthood, is typified by forgiveness motivations that arise from universal principles, most notably equality and love. It often includes arguments to forgive that deny community norms.

Forgive because:

- Love for the offender
- Desire for harmony
- Declared universal principle
- Promote love among others (not just between offender and forgiver)
- The offense should be forgiven no matter who the transgressor is


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