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Violations of the Divine: Forgiveness of Ingroup Transgressors within Church Congregations of the Christian Faith

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VIOLATIONS OF THE DIVINE: FORGIVENESS OF INGROUP TRANSGRESSORS
WITHIN CHURCH CONGREGATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Science at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Abstract

FORGIVENESS OF INGROUP TRANSGRESSORS WITHIN CHURCH CONGREGATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

By Chelsea L. Greer, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science
at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

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Research on forgiveness has been expanding rapidly in the last decade with a subset of studies looking at how religious people forgive. A discrepancy persists between Christians' level of valuing forgiveness and forgiveness of actual transgressions. Several methodological issues and offense-specific variables have been presented as explanations. This present thesis examines the role of the congregation as a group identity, and applies it to a theory of relational spirituality, as a measure of the relationship between a victim and the Sacred. No existing research has polled congregants about offense-specific forgiveness of church peers. I collected data from members of Christian congregations throughout the United States (Study 1, $N = 63$) and college students belonging to Christian congregations (Study 2, $N = 387$) concerning group identity and within group forgiveness. In the present studies, group identification with a congregation predicted lower unforgiving and higher forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender.

Violations of the Divine: Forgiveness of Ingroup Transgressors within Church

Congregations of the Christian Faith

The scientific study of forgiveness has been flourishing little more than a decade. Originally, many people conceived of forgiveness as being a religious concept because all major religions endorsed it (Rye et al., 2000). However, with the beginning of the scientific study of forgiving, a shift in common perspective has occurred. As this topic has gained popularity as a topic studied within the social sciences, researchers have been examining what influences whether religious people—and often, Christians—forgive a specific offense. The present thesis will focus on forgiveness specifically in Christian populations.

In a qualitative review of the research, McCullough and Worthington (1999) reported that although Christians report higher trait forgivingness than the general population, Christians do not report a higher level of forgiveness of specific offenses. They posited several hypotheses to explain this apparently contradictory finding, and it is clear that more research is needed to explore the factors involved in offenses that may hinder forgiveness that Christians aim to extend. Forgiveness is a major component of Christian doctrine. In [Colossians 3:13](#), Paul states, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (NIV). Forgiveness is in line with most Christians’ personal values, but it seems difficult for many to achieve—at least from anecdotal reports and in research reviewed by McCullough and Worthington. Researchers have an opportunity to inform Christians and practitioners working with Christian clients about what may be barriers to forgiving and what may help these people forgive difficult-to-forgive specific offenses.

One strategy towards identifying what influences whether (or how much) a Christian forgives a specific offense is to examine who the offender is in relation to the victim. Davis, Hook, and Worthington (2008) suggested a model of relational spirituality and forgiveness that takes such relationships seriously. In fact, relationships between victim and offender occur at both a secular level and as a result of the victim's relationship with the Sacred (Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Van Tongeren, 2009) and the victim's perception of the offender's similar relationship to the Sacred (Davis et al., 2009a). Thus at the purely secular level, we can hypothesize inherent differences in forgiveness processes as concerning intimate partners versus coworkers, acquaintances versus long-time friends, etc. Researchers have discussed the phenomena such that forgiveness in sustained interpersonal dyads is a different construct than for those relationships that do not continue (see McCullough & Worthington, 1994; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Worthington, Sharp, Lerner, & Sharp, 2006).

Once we begin to consider spirituality, however, another dimension affects forgiveness. According to social identity theory, it is theorized that people identify highly with persons espousing similar values (Tajfel, 1978). People also tend to like others who are like them. Relationships that may be especially salient to Christians likely involve members of the same religious faith and congregation of current attendance due to similarity of values, time spent together, and pursuit of shared goals. Davis et al. (2008) as well as Davis et al. (2009a) hypothesize that the closer the victim perceives the offender to his or her spirituality, the more that the victim's forgiveness will be affected. Thus, one might hypothesize that people will forgive to the extent that they believe the offender to share more of the following qualities: religious commitment, religious values, religious beliefs, spiritual closeness to the same Sacred object, and even other beliefs and values that are attributed to religious and spiritual similarity.

As will be explored in more detail, ministers within a congregation are usually seen by parishioners as trusted leaders. Offenses by pastors, especially those sexual in nature, can be particularly damaging to church members (Sutton, McLeland, Weeks, Cogswell, & Miphouvieng, 2007). From the point of view of the relational spirituality and forgiveness model (Davis et al., 2008; Davis et al., 2009a), pastors can symbolize religious and spiritual ideals for parishioners. They might be seen not only as religiously and spiritually more or less similar, but as aspirational ideals as well. Within a Christian congregation, congregation peers and hired ministers constitute different types of social group members, but both can be considered important relations to another congregation member. As we will see in the forthcoming review, yet to be studied is how Christians handle offenses committed by fellow church-members, including peers, ministers, and other leaders.

Among religious populations studied, some variables have been found to relate to forgiveness. These include Sacred loss and desecration (Mahoney, Rye, & Pargament, 2005), spiritual similarity (Davis et al., 2009a), attachment to God (Davis et al., 2008), religious coping (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000), intrinsic/extrinsic religious motivation (Gorsuch and Hao, 1993), and religious commitment (Witvliet, Hinze, & Worthington, 2008).

I aim to study whether group identity, as a function of the victim's relationship to the Sacred and perception of the offender's relationship to the Sacred, relates to offense-specific forgiveness of Christian offenders within a congregation. In this present study, I investigate individual Christian lay people's level of forgiveness for specific offenses that are identified to have been perpetrated by members within a congregation. First, I review the foundation for the current view of this process that is the theory of relational spirituality, the literature

concerning the process of forgiveness, whether Christians forgive offenses, and what has been found to relate to Christians forgiving. Then, I lay out the structure and method of the current study, followed by the results. Finally I discuss the results in light of the theory of relational spirituality and forgiveness related to in-group relationships.

Review of the Literature

A relational model of forgiveness and spirituality (Davis et al., 2008; Davis et al., 2009a) has suggested that, when a transgression occurs, a victim's degree and likelihood of forgiveness might depend on the victim's relationship with the Sacred and the victim's perception of the similarity of the offender's relationship with the Sacred to his or her own. Thus, forgiveness is likely heavily related to the victim's social identity and the perception of the offender's social identity.

In the present review of the literature, I first define forgiveness and then review terminology about social identity theory and group identification, and their likely relation to whether one might forgive a transgression. I describe the method of my review of the empirical research. From that review of forgiveness and religion in general, I describe a theoretical and empirical discrepancy uncovered in a prior review by McCullough and Worthington (1999). I update that discrepancy, and I draw upon a model of forgiveness and relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008) to help resolve it. I then turn to the empirical research specifically on forgiveness by Christians of pastors who have erred or sinned. I discuss the findings in light of the theories of social identity, group identification, and relational spirituality and forgiveness, and I conclude by suggesting a research agenda.

Definitions, Concepts, and Theoretical Perspectives

Forgiveness of specific transgressions.

Researchers have debated the best definition of forgiveness. Two definitions are widely accepted definitions of forgiveness. In *emotional forgiveness*, the victim replaces negative feelings towards the offender with positive ones (Worthington, 2006). *Decisional forgiveness* is a behavioral intention statement in which the forgiver decides to act differently toward the offender by (1) treating him or her as a valued person and (2) eschewing vengeance. Importantly, decisional and emotional forgiveness are two different phenomena, not two halves of one phenomenon. It is essential to recognize that forgiveness does not necessarily include any type of reconciliation. Both decisional and emotional forgiveness are intrapersonal. *Reconciliation*, which is the restoration of trust in a relationship (Worthington, 2006) and communicating about transgressions are interpersonal. The majority of researchers who study forgiveness have agreed that forgiveness takes place within the victim/offended party (Worthington, 2005). Outside the professional realm, forgiveness is sometimes confounded with reconciliation (Kearns & Fincham, 2004).

Research on forgiveness has increased in recent years partially due to findings that, as a coping strategy, forgiveness relates more strongly to positive outcomes for the offended party than does unforgiveness. Several studies have shown stress-reduction and health related benefits for those who forgive and highly value forgiveness (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Thompson et al., 2005; for a review, see Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007). According to Worthington's (2006) stress-and-coping model, when an individual perceives that a transgression has occurred that affects him or her personally, he or she typically feels stressed. The victim then needs some way to reduce this stress. Worthington (2006) posits that forgiveness is a choice among many coping strategies

(such as justice, revenge, avoidance of the transgressor, acceptance, forbearance, turning the event over to God, anger with God) to cope with stress from an offense.

The emotional shift to more prosocial feelings may be terminated when all negative feelings have been neutralized, which is what typically occurs when one has been offended or hurt by a stranger or one with whom one does not seek a continued relationship. Or the emotional shift might not end until there is a net positive feeling toward the offender, which is typically the case when the relationship is valued and continuing. Although changed emotions might motivate the victim to reconcile with a willing and available offender, offenders are often not willing, nor are they available, and even the victim might not pursue reconciliation because it might not be possible, safe, or prudent to do so. Thus, forgiveness towards an offender—an internal experience—might or might not lead to reconciliation (a social experience).

The feelings of unforgiveness and forgiveness may both occur within an individual over time. Typically, one notices a decrease in negative emotions until negative emotions are negligible. We would say that emotional unforgiveness is declining as emotional forgiveness is increasing. However, most people do not immediately forgive (emotionally) without experiencing substantial negative emotions initially (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). McCullough et al., in a series of studies, have shown that unforgiveness motivations decrease with time (generally in a logarithmic function—faster at first and slowing as time goes on). Also, McCullough et al. termed an initial low rating of unforgiveness towards an offender *forbearance*, and they found that benevolence motivations and forgiveness increase slowly over time. In their conceptualization, *trend forgiveness* is the rate of decreasing avoidance and revenge motivations and increasing benevolence motivations towards the offender over time.

According to this view, thorough forgiveness typically takes time (see also Worthington et al., 2000). The rate of decrease of unforgiving motivations and increase in forgiving motivations also relates to the hurtfulness of the offense (see Davis et al., 2009a; McCullough et al., 2003).

Worthington et al. (2006) spoke of an *injustice gap* that can arise without conscious thought as an initial reaction to a transgression taking place. The *injustice gap* is the difference between the way a person would like a situation resolved and the person's current assessment of the situation. Bigger injustice gaps are harder to forgive. This concept has been studied in related ways by others (see Lerner, 1977; Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005). An injustice gap is common, not only when one views the victim as helpless. Rather it is more of a gut reaction (Worthington et al., 2006). After this initial reaction, several things can lessen the perceived injustice gap, including punishment of the offender, apology offered by the offender, and time. Worthington et al. (2006) posit that an injustice gap is salient even for those religious as a result of valuing treating others with beneficence.

Trait forgivingness.

Within the scientific study of forgiveness, researchers collect data on different aspects of the process. Depending on the aim of a study, one may be more interested in offense-specific forgiveness or dispositional *forgiveness* (one's tendency to be forgiving), or both. Several scales have been developed to measure one's dispositional forgiveness (see Heartland Forgiveness Scale, Thompson et al., 2005; Trait Forgiveness Scale, Berry et al., 2005; Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness, Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001). Personality characteristics such as trait anger, vengeful rumination, fear, hostility and neuroticism have correlated negatively to dispositional forgiveness, while extraversion, agreeableness, and trait empathy have correlated positively with dispositional forgiveness (see

Berry et al., 2001; Berry et al., 2005). A measure of a person's dispositional forgivingness should portray a somewhat stable tendency, so it could be expected to relate to personality characteristics, which are also considered stable over time.

Often, a scale measuring trait forgivingness is the only instrument included in a study to rate participants' level of forgiveness (see McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Mullet et al., 2003). Basing research findings on traits alone fails to collect information regarding people's reactions to real-life situations ignoring the inevitable divide between one's ideal self and actual self. Unfortunately, social desirability is also not consistently controlled for when collecting data on trait forgivingness. When investigating a socially desirable trait, such as forgiveness among religious persons, a check for a desirable response tendency is needed as well as data concerning how a person reacts to identified transgressions. If possible, it is beneficial to collect data for each participant (victim) concerning transgressions by multiple offenders and aggregate findings (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005). Knowing how a person deals with several transgression situations can give a more accurate view of a person's tendency to be forgiving. Studies measuring dispositional forgivingness with regard to religious affiliation and other religious variables are discussed in the next section.

Social identity theory and group identification.

Applications of social identity theory have developed far beyond the original definition of the concept. What originated as something socially constructed in a laboratory as the minimal group paradigm (Turner, 1975) has inspired much research and debate (Dimmock, & Guciarrdi, 2008; Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999). *Social identity* refers to broad categorizations in one's life such as gender and roles such as parent. *Group identification* is at the individual-level versus *group identity* referring to characteristics that

describe and define a group (Henry et al., 1999). Social identity has historically been treated as a dichotomous variable. Researchers have been careful to distinguish that group identification must be considered on a continuum. Whereas a person is either male or female, a parent or not a parent, one's level of identification with a political party (for example) can have more or less strength. Consider a mother that frequently attends PTA meetings and aims to stay informed of school policies and upcoming events. A good percentage of her time may be spent within the PTA group and many of her social connections tied to this participation, however, this does not necessarily mean that PTA membership is a highly salient aspect of the woman's identity. This illustrates the need to measure group identification as a continuous variable instead of a simple yes or no question of membership.

Tajfel (1978) outlines consequences of social identities in terms of group memberships. One principle is that a person remains a member of a certain group as long as it is beneficial for him or her. In the event that membership no longer yields any satisfaction, the person is likely to leave the group unless that is impossible or conflicts with essential values. If such difficulties are encountered by considering leaving said group, the person may reinterpret group characteristics or accept current features and attempt to change undesirable characteristics of the group. The final principle outlined by Tajfel is that all groups acquire meaning by comparison to other groups. A group is made important by being distinct from other groups.

According to the aforementioned principles of group identification, members in one group can have various levels of satisfaction with the group. A person may remain within a group though he or she is not pleased with all aspects of that group. Henry et al. (1999)

have argued for a more dynamic view of group identification by recognizing the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of the self in a group. The cognitive aspect has to do with whether a person self-categorizes as a member of a particular group. The affective component has to do with attraction among members such that the more members like each other, the more time they will spend together. Finally, the behavioral component has to do with interdependence. Capturing the salience of any one group identification, therefore, must be done by measuring these three facets: cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

Research is scant concerning the topic of group identity and forgiveness. Brown, Wohl, and Exline (2008) manipulated offense conditions in three separate samples to measure secondhand forgiveness for outgroup offenders transgressing against a participant's in-group. Results repeatedly showed that revenge and avoidance motivations were higher for participants that highly identified with the cultural group under attack as opposed to low-identifiers. This set of studies was measuring in-group members' reaction to an offense by outgroup members, which makes the results not generalizable to the concept of within group offenses. At the time of the present review, this was the only published experiment concerning group identity and forgiveness.

According to Henry et al. (1999), a person's social identity can include many important relationships and groups, and some are likely more salient than others. Their identification with particular groups is made up dynamic variables which can shift over time depending on satisfaction with a group and attraction to other members. Identification with a particular group needs to be measured by cognitive, affective, and behavioral connections to the group rather than a static assessment of group membership. Also, little is known about how level of group identification of a victim and offender will affect the forgiveness process within a group.

Religion/spirituality, forgiveness, and forgivingness.

As interest has grown around the topic of forgiveness, the pertinent questions asked by researchers have become, “What leads to forgiveness?” Various studies have since considered the link between personal characteristics (i.e. personality types; see Berry et al., 2005), offense-specific factors (i.e. hurtfulness, time; see McCullough et al., 2003), and offender characteristics (i.e. likability, apology; Thomas, White, & Sutton, 2008). One branch of this question is, “Do religious factors relate to forgiveness?” McCullough and Worthington (1999) presented a qualitative review of studies examining the values and frequency of forgiveness for four major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam (discussed previously). Trait forgivingness has correlated strongly with religiousness and spirituality over many studies (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang et al., 2005). However, the data collected up to that point asserted that while religious individuals value the act of forgiveness, offense-specific forgiveness was not higher among these populations than their secular counterparts.

In recent years, there have been a few publications examining religious affiliation, religiousness and dispositional forgivingness (see Fox & Thomas, 2008; Mullet et al., 2003; Touissant & Williams, 2008). Strong examples of this type of design included large samples (range of $N = 475-1,087$) of Christian, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim faith and people with no religious affiliation. These samples also included people from the United States, France, Italy, Portugal, Australia, Asia, and the Middle-east and findings were mostly similar across studies. Although each publication included different scales they were all scales that measure dispositional forgivingness. None of these studies collected data on offense-specific forgiveness.

Table 1

Summaries of Empirical Literature on Religions & Dispositional Forgiveness Literature.

Study	Participants	Design	Measures	General Findings
Mullet et al., 2003	Study 1 - 774 European adults Study 2 – 388 adults living in Portugal ($n = 74$ nuns)	Correlational	Study 1 - Questionnaires including items regarding religious beliefs, church attendance, and dispositional forgiveness. Study 2 - Questionnaires including items regarding religious beliefs, church attendance, and dispositional forgiveness.	Regular church attendance was related to higher willingness to forgive. Regular attendees reported fewer blockages to forgiving. Willingness to forgive was higher for older adults who were regular attendees. Nuns reported higher willingness to forgive and fewer blockages to forgiveness than regular church attendees.
Fox, & Thomas, 2008	475 European, Australian, Asian, Middle Eastern, and North American adults (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, & No religious)	Correlational	Questionnaires including measures of dispositional forgiveness, religiosity, social desirability, and items regarding religious affiliation, frequency of prayer and church attendance.	After controlling for age, gender, & social desirability, all religious variables (faith, interpretation, prayer, and church attendance) were positively correlated with

	affiliation)			all forgiveness variables (attitude towards forgiveness, forgivingness behavior, and projected forgivingness).
Toussaint, & Williams, 2008	1,087 North American adults	Correlational	Questionnaires including items regarding religious affiliation; forgiveness of self, others, and God; seeking forgiveness; religiousness/spirituality, and socio-demographic variables.	Protestants and Catholics were more forgiving of others and felt more forgiven by God than those with no religious affiliation (NRA). Conservative Protestants reported the highest level of seeking forgiveness (versus moderate and liberal Christians, Catholics & NRA).

For the purpose of this present review, the study by Fox and Thomas (2008) will be used as a typical example of this body of research. One exception to similarities in these studies is that the Fox and Thomas study was the only one of this set reviewed here which included a measure of social desirability in its questionnaires. Several measures of dispositional forgivingness were included, as well as a scale measuring religiosity, social desirability, and single-items regarding religious affiliation, frequency of prayer and church attendance. Participants were not recruited randomly, but by a snowballing method (n=475). In a Pearson product moment correlational design with age, gender, and social desirability as covariates, all religious variables (faith, interpretation, prayer, and church attendance) were positively correlated with all forgiveness variables (attitude towards forgiveness, forgivingness behavior, and projected forgivingness). Second, an ANCOVA measuring all groups (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and NRA) x each forgiveness measure revealed significant relationships. The three religious groups scored higher than the NRA group on attitudes towards forgiveness and projective forgivingness, but not behavioral forgivingness. Other findings included faith and frequency of prayer as the strongest predictors of forgivingness. Social desirability was also related to projective and behavioral forgivingness.

The results of the Fox and Thomas (2008) study were similar to studies by Mullet et al. (2003) and Toussaint and Williams (2008) in that religious participants were higher in forgivingness than non-religious people. One major difference was that in Mullet et al.'s two studies (2003), regular church attendance was related to forgivingness, but this was not found in the Fox and Thomas (2008) study, where self-reported faith was a stronger predictor of forgiveness than church attendance. An important design characteristic

highlighted by the Fox and Thomas study was the relationship between social desirability and forgivingness. However, even when social desirability was controlled, the religious groups polled still scored higher on forgivingness measures than the non-religious. Again, social desirability was not measured in the other studies in this body of research. Other researchers (as discussed in the proceeding paragraphs) have acknowledged that religious people rate forgivingness as a value higher than nonreligious people, but do not differ from the nonreligious when reported unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an offender for a specific offense. Since offense-specific forgiveness was not included in the data collected in these studies, we do not know the relationship between the high levels of dispositional forgivingness reported by the religious samples and how they may report forgiveness of a particular offense.

Since McCullough and Worthington (1999) identified the gap in valued (dispositional forgivingness) and reported forgiveness levels of specific offenses by Christians, researchers have focused on the religion-forgiveness discrepancy (coined by Tsang et al., 2005). The *religion-forgiveness discrepancy* is religious people rating the value of forgiving highly but not reporting high levels of forgiveness of specific offenses. McCullough and Worthington (1999) first offered possible explanations citing either rationalization or psychometric shortcomings of research. These four possibilities are as follows: (1) Social Desirability, (2) Aggregation and Specificity in Measurement, (3) Distal Location of Religion in the Causal Chain Leading to Forgiveness, and (4) Recall Bias.

Social desirability.

Up to the date of McCullough and Worthington (1999), most studies had not included a measure of social desirability when measuring offense-specific forgiveness. McCullough and

Worthington note that since forgiveness is a value of the major world religions (Rye et al., 2000), religious people are likely to espouse forgivingness as a value and desire to believe they are highly forgiving. However, when measuring forgiving motivations of specific offenses, perhaps researchers are discovering that religious people are actually no more forgiving than nonreligious people. The next three possible explanations of the religion-forgiveness discrepancy are due to psychometric shortcomings.

Aggregation and specificity in measurement.

When collecting offense-specific forgiveness motivations, studies typically only do so for one transgression experienced per participant. A snap shot of behavior does not give a reliable average of behaviors over time and across situations. In regard to specificity, McCullough and Worthington (1999) also recommended that when measuring a state-level behavior of forgiveness motivations, religious variables also be measured as time specific. This is in contrast to most studies published at the time which measured religiousness as a trait. Time specific measurement of religiousness collected along with offense-specific forgiveness should provide a clearer picture of how a person's current state of religiousness contributes to forgiving and unforgiving motivations at that time.

Distal location of religion in the causal chain leading to forgiveness.

Studies examining religiousness and forgiveness do not always include other variables that have been shown to relate to offense-specific forgiveness. McCullough and Worthington (1999) summarize findings of these social and social-cognitive predictors of offense-specific forgiveness. Some of these variables are the presence of offender apology, offender acceptance of responsibility, perceived severity of offense, empathy towards the offender, and intentionality

of offense. Future studies need to control for such social-cognitive variables which likely relate to a person's offense-specific forgiveness.

Recall bias.

The final hypothesized psychometric shortcoming by McCullough and Worthington (1999) is problems with recall bias in forgiveness research. Typical instructions in offense recall are to remember an offense the victim found difficult to forgive. It is logical to assume that victim's will recall an offense not yet forgiven in response to such instructions. Also particularly applicable to religious people is the chance that not many offenses remain unforgiven. Therefore, the religious person is not likely to recall a forgiven offense as they may have attempted to put such instances out of mind and not hold them against the offender any longer according to religious values. The recommendation in response to this possible problem is to include strict recall instructions to participants with clear parameters such as the type of relationship to consider when recalling an offender or restrictions of how recently the offense occurred.

Investigation of the religion-forgiveness discrepancy.

Tsang et al., (2005) examined the hypotheses by McCullough and Worthington (1999) by conducting three studies to illustrate how common psychometric shortcomings of forgiveness research might distort results. Through three studies, data supported that more stringent recall instructions given to participants and aggregation of multiple offense-specific transgression related motivations were associated with higher forgiveness ratings. Without these parameters, religiousness was not related to forgiveness (Tsang et al., 2005). In each study, the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998) was used to measure avoidance and revenge (unforgiving) motivations. In none of the three

studies were participants given instructions concerning the transgressing individual's characteristics such as religious, similarly religious or nonreligious.

Study 1 included college students that identified as Christian ($N = 224$). Recall instructions for offenses were not restrictive. Religiousness was not related to avoidance or revenge motivations in this sample. For study 2, students ($N = 91$) were instructed to recall a transgression occurring within the past 2 months. Sixty of these students completed the TRIM again 2 months later in regard to the same offense. Intrinsic religiousness was negatively related to revenge motivations at time 1 and time 2, indicating a relationship between religiousness and forgiveness. In the final study of this set, Tsang et al. (2005), collected data using more specific recall instructions. Students ($N = 137$) were instructed to recall two offenses for each of the following relationships: romantic partner, same-sex friend, and opposite-sex friend. They were told to remember the worst hurt inflicted by each of these three people and a second serious offense committed by each (a total of 6 TRIM accounts by each participant). Aggregated avoidance motivations were negatively related to interpersonal and intrapersonal religious commitment. Aggregated revenge motivations were negatively related to intrapersonal religious commitment. As Tsang et al. increased restriction of recall instructions and amount of transgressions recalled by each person, religiousness was related to lower unforgiving motivations. Their findings support the hypothesized psychometric issues posed by McCullough and Worthington (1999).

Tsang et al. (2005) also posed the possibility of rationalization causing the religion-forgiveness discrepancy. Proof of rationalization would be evidenced by religious people citing other religious principles that led them to not forgive an offender, such as seeking justice. Many scriptures in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible espouse the notion of offenders being

punished proportionately with their offense (see Ex 21, Deut 22). There was a theme of punishing offenders in the Old Testament to set an example of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. However, there are also numerous verses espousing God as the only one having authority to avenge a wrong (Deut. 32:35) and the responsibility of God's followers to not seek revenge (Lev. 19:18). Some studies have included a component to measure one's conceptualization of God as more retributive/just or more merciful/loving and endorsement of retributive versus forgiving scriptures (see Brown et al., 2008; Tsang et al., 2005).

Tsang et al. (2005) conducted a pilot study to examine the possibility of rationalization for unforgiveness by religious people. They polled participants' endorsement of types of scriptures and images of God with $N = 38$ Christian college students. Participants were chosen for the sample as reporting a transgression occurring within the prior 7 days. Along with the TRIM measure of forgiving and unforgiving motivations, items relating to religious commitment to justice and forgiveness, and scriptures related to the concept of a just God and forgiving God were included. Offender avoidance was negatively related to forgiveness-related scriptures. Benevolence was positively related to forgiveness-related scriptures. In reference to images of God, offender avoidance negatively correlated to forgiving God images. Revenge motivations did not correlate significantly with any variables under study. Based on these preliminary findings, Tsang et al. recommended more studies examine possible rationalization of unforgiveness in the name of supporting justice.

In a similar study by Brown et al. (2008), mercy and justice were both rated as core beliefs (ceiling effect) of God by the sample from a Baptist congregation. Offense-specific forgiveness was positively correlated to endorsement of statements that forgiveness is divinely mandated by God. Both of these studies were conducted with very small samples and show

partial support that some Christians may focus on offenders deserving justice or mercy based on conceptualizations of God and scriptures. I have reviewed studies conducted by Tsang et al. (2005) to investigate the proposals of McCullough and Worthington (1999) of methodological problems impacting study results of Christians' reports of offense-specific forgiveness. Implementing stricter recall instructions and aggregating transgressions resulted in a stronger relationship between religiousness and offense-specific forgiveness (Tsang et al., 2005). In the next section, I explain the theory of relational spirituality and forgiveness.

How religion operates psychologically to promote forgiveness.

The initial literature on forgiveness and religion was dominated by the question of whether forgivingness and forgiveness of events were related to religions. Furthermore, of particular interest was how does forgiveness operate in each religion (Rye et al., 2000), and which religion promotes forgiveness to the greatest extent?

After this early research, the attention of researchers has gravitated more to the psychology of how forgiveness occurs. One model to describe this was proposed by Davis et al., (2008) and Davis et al., (2009a). In that model, the authors take the spiritual dimension seriously. They describe both a horizontal and vertical level for considerations of the effects on forgiveness, and they are particularly concerned with the relationships. Spirituality is defined as closeness to some target that one considers Sacred. Worthington (2009) hypothesizes different types of spirituality: religious, human, nature, or cosmos spirituality, depending on the target that is considered Sacred. In the following section, I describe religious spirituality and its effects on forgiving.

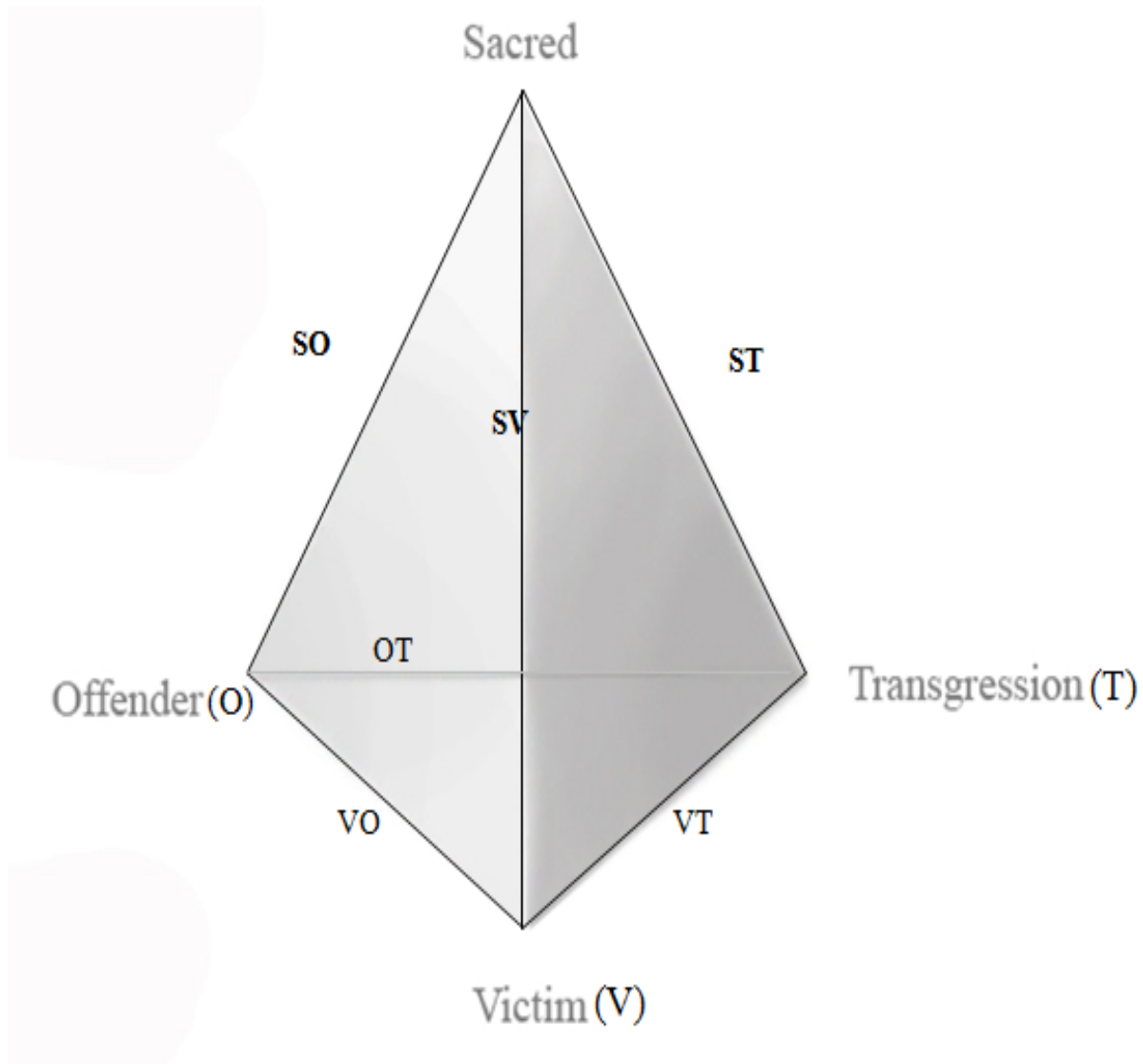
Relational spirituality and forgiveness.

Recently some professionals have been investigating possible influencing factors in the forgiveness process for Christians. Davis, Hook, and Worthington (2008) presented a new model for understanding how a religious victim may view an offense by adding a Sacred dimension as an overarching reference point. This model incorporates the construct described by Pargament, Magyar, Benore, and Mahoney (2005)—Sacred loss and desecration. The model describes relational spirituality and forgiveness. The concept of relational spirituality was initially outlined by Shults and Sandage (2006). Their conceptualization asserts that spirituality is only meaningful in the context of a relationship. Though for most people and for the purpose of this review, the Sacred in question is God, it could be another person, nature, or the cosmos (Worthington, 2009). Regardless of the Sacred being, spirituality involves relationship with someone or something outside the individual, hence the term *relational spirituality*.

This model of relational spirituality and forgiveness by Davis et al., 2008 draws on stress and coping theory described by Worthington (2006). Transgressions cause stress in victims and appraisal of the relational context of a transgression affects the level of stress the victim experiences (Lazarus, 2006). In response to a transgression, a victim has various ways to cope with the stress. Unforgiving emotions are likely to result when a victim appraises unresolved injustice (Worthington, 2006), which is perceived as the difference between the way a victim would like a situation resolved and the victim's current assessment of the situation (injustice gap). Unforgiving emotions such as desires for avoidance and vengeance cause stress to the victim. Forgiveness is one way to relieve stress from unforgiving emotions and cope with the aftermath of the transgression. Forgiveness

involves the victim replaces negative feelings towards the offender with positive ones (Worthington, 2006).

The victim's appraisal of the transgression and its relational context may be interpreted spiritually. The transgression and relationship with the offender may hold spiritual meaning for the victim (Pargament et al., 2005). When the transgression is interpreted as spiritually significant, the victim may experience strong emotional reactions. This model of relational spirituality posits that, in response to the spiritual appraisal of the transgression, positive moral emotions are likely to lead to emotional forgiveness and negative moral emotions will make emotional forgiveness more difficult (Davis et al., 2009a). Positive moral emotions are love, empathy, and mercy, while negative moral emotions include anger and disgust. Therefore, the nature of the religious victim's appraisal, whether morally positive or negative, will influence the likelihood of forgiveness of the transgressor. See the figure below (Figure 1) for the model of relational spirituality created by Davis et al. (2008). Following that is an example to illustrate each relationship appraisal in response to a transgression.



*Figure 1. Spiritual Appraisals of Relationship in Model of Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness. From Davis, D. E., Hook, J. N., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2008). Relational spirituality and forgiveness: The roles of attachment to God, religious coping, and viewing the transgression as a desecration. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27,293-301; p. 294. Copyright 2008 by Christian Association for Psychological Studies. Reprinted with permission. OS _ victim's appraisal of the relationship between the offender and the Sacred; VS _ victim's appraisal of his or her own relationship with the Sacred; TS _ victim's appraisal of the relationship between the transgression and the Sacred.*

Davis et al. (2008) give an example to illustrate the secular and Sacred relationships a victim may assess as a result of a transgression. In the example, a husband who

committed an affair is the transgressor and his wife is the victim. From her perspective, the victim may consider the following secular appraisals: (a) her relationship to the transgression (victim-transgression relationship; VT). Perhaps she sees the affair as a threat to her identity or values. (b) She appraises her relationship with her husband (victim-offender relationship; VO). The wife possibly views trust between them being broken. (c) She appraises her husband's relationship with his transgression (offender-transgression relationship; OT). Maybe she views the transgression as intentional or an unexpected betrayal.

Davis et al. (2008) go on to describe a new perspective of the victim's Sacred relationship appraisals following an offense. For religious/spiritual people, assessment of Sacred relationships may comprise an integral part of how a victim feels after experiencing a transgression. The victim's Sacred relationship appraisals (relational spirituality) follow within the same husband and wife example. The wife considers the relationship of the affair with the Sacred (transgression-Sacred relationship; TS). She may see this as a destruction of something holy. The wife appraises her relationship with the Sacred (victim-Sacred relationship; VS). She may see God as loving or distant. Finally, the victim appraises the offender's relationship with the Sacred (offender-Sacred relationship; OS). The OS appraisal can include the victim's perception of how spiritually similar/dissimilar the offender is to them and assessment of relational status of the offender towards the Sacred (i.e. ashamed, repentant, etc.) and the Sacred towards the offender (i.e. punitive, forgiving, etc.). Davis et al. purport that one is less likely to forgive an offense considered to be a desecration of the Sacred (whatever that is for the specific individual). At the time, there was not a measure of the victim's perspective of the offender-Sacred relationship.

In Davis et al. (2008) a sample of 180 college students at a large, mid-Atlantic public university were polled. As expected, anxious and avoidant attachments to God, negative religious coping, and viewing the transgression as a desecration were negatively correlated with forgiveness. Also, the situation specific measures of relationship with the Sacred and religious coping predicted an additional 10% of the variance in forgiveness above that of attachment to God in a hierarchical multiple regression. Finally, attachment to God was fully mediated by relational spirituality.

Davis et al., (2009a) created a measure for this new model measuring similarity of victim and offender (VO relationship) with 200 students. Two factors remained on the scale after exploratory factor analysis: human similarity and spiritual similarity. Perceived similarity predicted forgiveness above the effect of several other established related variables (i.e. time since offense, hurtfulness, attachment to God, Sacred loss & desecration, etc.). Another important finding was that similarity was mediated by empathy for the offender. A second study ($N = 182$) with students supported confirmatory factor analysis of the nine item scale. Results showed that the measure is able to distinguish between similar and different individuals in relation to the participant. These strong results showing relational spirituality as relating to forgiveness give direction to future research. More work is needed to explore the effect of human and spiritual similarity on one's relational appraisal as part of the forgiveness process. Now that I have explained the theories of (1) social identity and group identification, (2) stress and coping, and (3) relational spirituality and forgiveness, I proceed to outline the purpose of the present review of literature concerning within congregation offenses as enacted by clergy members. This limited body of research is a narrowly focused view of how congregation members respond to hypothetical clergy

offenses. Though limited, these studies imply the importance of group membership and identity of congregants by examining within group transgressions.

Purpose of the Present Review

The purpose of the present review is to analyze existing literature concerning transgressions occurring between congregation members in churches of Christian faith. What has been conducted thus far only examines church members' reactions to transgressions by clergy members. Following the review, the empirical body of clergy transgressions will be discussed in light of the theory of relational spirituality and forgiveness.

Method of the Review

On January 5, 2010, PsycINFO was searched for literature published between the years 2000 - 2009. First, articles were retrieved under the search terms: pastor/clergy/minister+offense+forgive*, and church+conflict+forgiv*. An initial base of articles resulted from these searches ($n = 13$). This resulting list was narrowed to include only empirical studies concerning individuals' perceptions of transgressions by church members and those able to be accessed electronically. This narrowing reduced the number of articles to $n = 4$. The reference lists of articles in this small group were subsequently searched, producing $n = 2$ additional resources, for a total of $n = 6$ articles.

A developing body of research was found concerning hypothetical forgiveness of an offending clergy member. Most of these articles concerned a sexual affair as the offense in question. No empirical literature investigating forgiveness processes of church members towards actual transgressing clergy were found, nor was there any literature concerning transgressions of congregation members found.

Review of Empirical Literature

Lack of research on within congregation forgiving.

The purpose of the present thesis is to investigate relational influences on within congregation forgiving of members of the Christian faith. As stated previously, there was no literature found on this topic to critique in the current review. However, there is a small body of research concerning church members' attitudes of restoration and/or forgiveness of transgressing clergy. For the current thesis, the empirical literature regarding restoration and/or forgiveness of transgressing clergy will be critiqued and serve as a starting point for research to investigate further forgiveness within Christian congregations.

A review of the limited empirical literature on church leader transgressions.

A handful of articles have considered whether church members and clergy would forgive and/or restore a clergy member who has transgressed. These studies mainly concern reactions to a minister having an affair and whether members would support restoring the minister to his or her position in that congregation. They are presented as hypothetical situations (see Luzombe, & Dean, 2009; Pop, Sutton, & Jones, 2009; Sutton, & Thomas, 2005a; Sutton, & Thomas, 2005b; Sutton et al., 2007; Thomas, White, & Sutton, 2008). One might speculate that people would respond to a hypothetical situation differently than to a real-life situation. The body of studies conducted by Sutton and Thomas (2005a), Sutton et al. (2007), Thomas et al. (2008), and Pop et al. (2009) are very similar in design, sample sizes and results. Sample sizes from the studies range from $N = 18-85$ all taken from students at a small, Midwestern Christian college and members and ministers within assemblies of God congregations. None of these aforementioned studies included a measure of social desirability. Data were collected using only self-report survey measures.

Table 2

Summaries of Empirical Literature on Clergy Transgressions and Church Member Forgiveness.

Study	Participants	Design	Instruments	General Findings
Sutton, & Thomas, 2005a	Study 1 – 10 Christian college students Study 2 – 53 Assemblies of God pastors Study 3 – 18 Assemblies of God pastors	Study 1 – Pilot Study, Correlational Study 2 – Quasi-experimental between subjects design Study 3 – Quasi-experimental between subjects design	Study 1 – Questionnaire including items of global restoration to ministry (GRM), spouse (GRS), and God (GRG), and restoration to public ministry (RPM), and spouse (RS). Study 2 – GRM, GRS, RPM, RS Study 3 – GRM, GRS, RPM, RS	Students were more in favor of restoring a pastor involved in a romantic affair versus a sexual affair. Students and ministers were more supportive of restoring a younger offending pastor and believed the younger pastor was more likely to have a successfully restored marriage than an older offending pastor.
Sutton et al., 2007	Study 1 – 67 Christian college students Study 2 – 76 Christian college students	Study 1 – Quasi-experimental between subjects design Study 2 – Quasi-experimental between subjects design	Study 1 – Questionnaire including items of GRM, pastoral forgiveness and restoration (PFR), pastor restoration (PR), religious faith measure, dispositional forgivingness measure. Study 2 – Same as Study 1	People were less supportive of restoring an offending pastor of the opposite gender. An avoidant attachment to God related to lower dispositional forgivingness. Anxious attachment to God was related to restoration attitudes of a pastor with anger problems. Highly forgiving

				men were more supportive of restoration than highly forgiving women and low forgiving men were less supportive of restoration than low forgiving women.
Thomas, White, & Sutton, 2008	Study 1 – 85 Christian college students & Assemblies of God congregants Study 2 – 119 Assemblies of God congregants	Study 1 – Quasi-experimental between subjects design Study 2 – Quasi-experimental between subjects design	Study 1 – Questionnaires including items of GRM, RPM, offense-specific forgiveness measure, forgiveness self-efficacy measure Study 2 – Offense-specific forgiveness measure, forgiveness self-efficacy measure	Participant gender related to restoration. Men were more supportive of pastor restoration for either gender than were women. Interaction of pastor gender and apology condition. Men and women participants were more forgiving of the offending pastor of the opposite gender who did not apologize. Interaction between participant gender and offender responsibility-taking.
Pop, Sutton, & Jones, 2009	60 Christian college students	Experimental between-subjects design	Questionnaire including items from GRM, PFR, and Global Restoration Scale	Interaction of self-interest and group influence. Participants in condition 4, exposed to both these conditions,

				were most in favor of restoring the pastor.
Luzombe, & Dean, 2009	47 Catholic priests and 51 Catholic graduate students	Correlational	Questionnaires including a religious faith measure, and items measuring forgiveness of priest and forgiveness of church.	Higher religious faith was related to higher forgiving of the abusive priest and the Catholic church as an institution. People were more forgiving of the abusive priest when moderating factors existed (apologies, one-time abuse, reconciliation, etc.).

The study conducted by Thomas et al. (2008) will be reviewed as an example of this work. Thomas, White, and Sutton (2008) conducted two studies in order to extend the previous work examining restoration of offending pastors in a clergy sample (Sutton & Thomas, 2005a) and in a student sample (Sutton et al., 2007) by polling congregation members in Pentecostal churches and students affiliated with the Pentecostal denomination. The sample of church members and affiliated college students ($N = 85$) completed questionnaires including a pastor affair scenario, one measure of restoration and two measures of forgiveness. Pastor gender and presence of apology were alternated between scenarios presented to participants. Of this sample, 48% reported having been in full-time ministry at some time, 71% had a family member in full-time ministry, and 69% said a minister at a congregation they attended had relationship issues that interfered with their ministry.

Participant gender related to restoration attitudes. Regardless of receiving an apology, men were more supportive of pastor restoration for either gender than were women. There was an interaction of pastor gender and apology condition. Also, men and women participants had greater forgiveness self-efficacy towards the offending pastor of the opposite gender who did not apologize. The participant gender interaction with forgiveness self-efficacy is similar to the results found by Sutton et al. (2007). Thomas et al. (2008) did not anticipate the result of participants being more forgiving of pastors in the no apology condition. There was also an interaction between participant gender and offender responsibility-taking. Women were more in favor of restoring a pastor who took responsibility of their actions, while men were more in favor of restoring the pastor who did not take responsibility of their actions. In regard to men being more supportive of restoration, the researchers speculated that women may be less willing to restore a pastor after a sexual affair as women tend to be the victims in cases of sexual abuse. They also suspect that participants were less supportive overall of restoration than forgiveness because forgiveness is explicitly commanded in the Bible while there may be less Biblical teachings about restoring a sinner.

Briefly, I give a summary of findings from the other articles mentioned in this group examining restoration attitudes for an offending pastor. A main finding of the studies by Sutton and Thomas (2005a) were that students and ministers were more supportive of restoring a younger offending pastor and believed the younger pastor was more likely to have a successfully restored marriage than an older offending pastor. Sutton et al. (2007) also studied restoration attitudes towards an offending clergy member. Results from the first study showed that people were less supportive of restoring an offending pastor of the opposite gender. An avoidant attachment to God related to lower dispositional forgivingness, but not to restoration. Anxious

attachment to God was related to restoration attitudes of a pastor with anger problems. In the second study, highly forgiving men were more supportive of restoration than highly forgiving women and low forgiving men were less supportive of restoration than low forgiving women. Spirituality did not seem to relate to outcomes and Sutton et al. (2007) explain this may be due to a restricted range of scores from a homogenous sample. Finally, in a study examining effects of group influence and self-interest on moral decisions, Pop, Sutton, and Jones (2009) presented a scenario of a pastor caught in infidelity and exposed participants to different self-interest and/or group discussion conditions before rating the pastor for forgiveness and restoration. Self-interest and group influence interacted such that participants exposed to both these conditions were most in favor of restoring the pastor.

All the studies reviewed in the preceding section were conducted with very small samples in a homogeneous population. Results cannot be generalized beyond assemblies of God churches. In a similar fashion, however, Luzombe and Dean (2009) examined forgiveness attitudes of congregants in response to hypothetical priest sexual abuse scenarios in Catholic churches. The sample included Catholic priests ($n = 47$) and Catholic college students ($n = 51$). Survey procedures and types of measures were similar to those reviewed in the previous paragraphs with Christian congregants. In Luzombe and Dean the sampled priests were more forgiving towards the offending priest than the lay Catholics. People that scored higher on a measure of spirituality were more forgiving of the abusive priest and the Catholic church as an institution. They were also more forgiving of the abusive priest when moderating factors existed (apologies, one-time abuse, reconciliation, etc.). Like the other studies concerning assumed forgiveness and restoration of an offending minister, the Luzombe and Dean study was

conducted with Catholic church priests and members included a small sample, used only self-report measures, and did not concern a real-life situation.

Summary

The aforementioned body of literature regarding church member restoration and/or forgiveness of offending clergy included several studies examining different variables in each study. Therefore, the results are wide spread according to the variables under consideration in each study. Some of the main findings across these studies were that (1) participant gender interacted with restoration attitudes towards pastors of different genders, (2) participant gender interacted with forgiveness in response to apologies, (3) forgiveness was higher towards pastors who did not apologize and those who did not take responsibility for the offense in an apology condition, (4) self-interest and group influence interacted and related to more favorable restoration attitudes, and (5) higher religious faith related to higher forgiveness of offending priests and the Catholic church as an institution. Limitations of the reviewed findings are that measures of religious faith and commitment were not used in all the studies. Also detrimental to the purpose of this review is that few relational variables were included in the studies, which will be discussed further in the proceeding section. Also, most of these studies did not control for social desirability in Christian respondents though polling for socially desirable behaviors in a religious population. Finally, the studies regarding restoration and/or forgiveness of offending clergy involved all hypothetical scenarios, not real-life transgression occurrences.

Discussion

The Empirical Research on Clergy Transgressions Seen in Light of Three Conceptual Frameworks

I have described the conceptual frameworks of (a) stress-and-coping theory of forgiveness, (b) relational spirituality and forgiveness, and (c) social identity theory and group identification. The process of forgiveness for religious/spiritual people has been described according to the theory of relational spirituality. I now analyze the empirical research of church members' restoration and/or forgiveness of offending clergy in light of those models.

Connections between the results of the clergy transgression literature and the conceptual frameworks of the stress and coping theory of forgiveness, relational spirituality and forgiveness, and social identity theory and group identification have not yet been made in empirical literature. The lack of measurement of relational variables in the studies of forgiveness of clergy leaves much to be assumed about possible connections with forgiveness. The measures concerning the relationships described in the relational spirituality model were almost completely nonexistent in this literature. These would include the victim-transgression relationship (VT), victim-offender relationship (VO), offender-transgression relationship (OT), transgression-Sacred relationship (TS), the victim-Sacred relationship (VS), and the offender-Sacred relationship (OS). One study (Sutton et al., 2007) in this body of literature measured the VS relationship by including the Attachment to God Scale (AGS, Rowatt, & Kirkpatrick, 2002). The results were that an avoidant attachment to God related to lower dispositional forgivingness, which is in line with previous findings (Davis et al., 2008). Also, anxious attachment to God was related to less favorable restoration attitudes of a pastor with anger problems (Sutton et al., 2007). These add support to the idea that a religious victim's relationship with the Sacred may affect their forgiveness of an offender.

Measures involving the intentions of the offender (OT), hurtfulness of the offense (VT), the closeness of the VO relationship, and spiritual similarity of victim and offender (OS) would

be limited in the literature reviewed due to the nature of measuring responses to hypothetical scenarios. True measures of these relationships require actual person-to-person relationships in an offense situation. Results from the pilot study by Sutton and Thomas (2005a) cannot be generalized due to the small sample size ($N = 10$). However, it is worth noting that participants were more favorable of restoring a pastor involved in a romantic, nonsexual affair rather than a sexual affair. This may relate to religious people having different perceptions of types of offenses as more or less degrading of the Sacred (OS).

In regard to social identity theory and group identification, similar constraints apply to this review as level of group identification of the offender and victim were not studied and could not adequately be studied due to hypothetical offense scenarios. A victim's level of group identification and perception of the offender's level of group identification could be assessed when asking participants to recall a real-life offense within an identified group. An identified church congregation is being treated as a Sacred object in the present study as Christian Biblical teachings identify the church as the body of the Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (NIV). The chapter containing this passage discusses the function of the church as a body that is to function together with one purpose. Tajfel (1978) asserts that pursuit of common goals is an important value to members of a group. The church congregation is an acceptable example of an identified social group and a Sacred object to its members. The measure of a victim's level of group identification is an assessment of the VS relationship and perception of the offender's level of group identification is another assessment of the VO relationship. This will provide information on the similarity of level of group identification between the victim and offender within an identified group.

Research Agenda

The theoretical framework of relational spirituality and forgiveness outlines several relationships to be considered in the study of forgiveness among religious people. This can be applied to situations involving similarly or non-similarly religious offenders. In light of the relationships included in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness proposed by Davis et al. (2008) and the importance of level group identification in a person's social identity and relation to group members, I propose the following research agenda.

1. Research is needed investigating forgiveness among members of particular religions for greater understanding of the factors that influence the forgiveness process for members of each religion.
2. Research should examine religious people's forgiveness of offenders who are similar and non-similar religiously to investigate possible differences in the forgiveness process according to this religious relationship variable.
3. Research should examine religious people's forgiveness of offenders who are similar and non-similar in level of group identification within particular church congregations and other religious bodies to investigate possible differences in the forgiveness process according to salience of group identity.
4. Future research should investigate forgiveness within identified social groups, including employees within a company, a small team of workers within a larger company, leaders within a company, members of a sports team, players and leaders within a sports franchise, peers in church congregations, laymembers and leaders within congregations, leaders within a congregation, various leaders in the hierarchy of a denominational church board, etc.

5. Studies should focus on the forgiveness culture as a function of the leadership's influence on a group, whether purposeful, led by example, ignored or combated by vengeful behaviors among leaders.
6. Studies should focus on the difference of the forgiveness process within different cultural groups such as those within individualistic versus collectivist societies. Collective groups may operate within individualist societies based on group norms.
7. Researchers should consider finding a way to measure the impact of a group member's transgression on the group's reputation as seen by other in-group members.
8. Research should examine the impact of differences in level of group identification within church congregations on forgiveness between couples who both identify as members of the congregation and couples who identify with different religions according to salience of group identity.

Conclusion

Though research exists examining various relationships described in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness (Davis et al., 2008), the construct of spiritual similarity of victim and offender is new and in need of further investigation. There is little literature concerning church members' restoration and/or forgiveness of offending clergy and no empirical literature to date investigating forgiveness among church members within a congregation. Methodological shortcomings in the offending clergy literature such as not controlling for social desirability, using hypothetical offense scenarios and not measuring relationships between offender and victim, and the transgression, victim and offender with the Sacred, hamper the application of this research to the Christian community and knowledge of how relational variables influence a Christian's forgiveness of a Christian offender. I reviewed the models of

stress and coping theory and forgiveness, relational spirituality and forgiveness, and social identity theory and group identification to integrate the concepts and apply them to forgiveness among Christians within a congregation. I explicated a research agenda based on these theories to be applied to various socially defined groups. Next I continue in chapter 3, to explain the current problem implied by the theories of group identification (Henry et al., 1999; Tajfel, 1978) and relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008; Shults & Sandage, 2006), and the lack of empirical literature concerning in-group transgressions in religious populations.

Statement of the Problem

In Chapter 3, I describe two studies examining the relationship between group identification with a church congregation and a victim's forgiveness of a fellow congregant. First, I offer a general statement of the problem. In Chapters 4 and 5, I describe the specific statement of the problem, method, hypotheses, results, and discussion for each study separately. In Chapter 6, I provide a general discussion of the present studies, relate the findings to previous literature, identify limitations, discuss the implications of the findings, and discuss a potential research agenda for the future.

General Statement of the Problem

Though research concerning the concept of forgiveness has been flourishing for two decades, there are few studies examining how religious people forgive. The research that has focused on religious populations and forgiveness has failed to examine forgiveness of specific offenses (for a review see Davis et al., 2011, under review). Rather, it has measured attitudes towards and dispositional tendencies to forgive others. Also, researchers have only begun to examine how the spiritual relationship between the victim, offender, transgression and the Sacred may influence forgiveness of an offense (Davis et al., 2009). This present thesis takes this

concept of relational spirituality between the victim and relevant factors in an offense situation and applies it to a specific social milieu of similarity defined by level of group identification within a church congregation. Though this has not been studied before, theoretical models that guide this approach have been explicated (stress-and-coping theory, Worthington, 2006; relational spirituality and forgiveness model; Davis et al., 2008; Shults & Sandage, 2006; social identity theory and group identification, Henry et al., 1999; Tajfel, 1978). The closest empirical study of within-congregation offenses and forgiveness is the body of research by Sutton and colleagues published between 2005-2009 (see Pop, Sutton, & Jones, 2009; Sutton, & Thomas, 2005; Sutton et al., 2007; Thomas, White, & Sutton, 2008). They examine church members' expected forgiveness of an offending clergy member. The present research goes further. I examine responses and forgiveness to real offenses and consider all church members, not only clergy, as possible offenders.

In the previous chapter, I described the model of relational spirituality and the relationship appraisals likely to affect the victim's forgiveness process (Davis et al., 2008). To fully consider the relational influences affecting a victim in regard to a specific offense situation, all six relational appraisals must be measured. These relational appraisals are situation specific. They provide a conceptual picture of the offense from the victim's point of view. Measures are available that consider the secular relational appraisals. Religious measures have been applied within the model of forgiveness and relational spirituality to measure the Sacred relational appraisals (i.e., Attachment to God Scale, Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002; Religious Commitment Inventory-10, Worthington et al., 2003; Sacred Loss and Desecration, Pargament et al., 2005). More recently, measures were created to assess the offender-Sacred relationship from the victim's viewpoint (Similarity of Offender's Spirituality, Davis et al., 2009a) and the victim's

relationship with the Sacred (i.e., Dedication to the Sacred [DS], Davis et al., 2009b; Relational Engagement of the Sacred for a Transgression [REST] scale; Davis et al., 2010a; Spiritual Humility Scale [SHS], Davis et al., 2010b). No current study has used the relational spirituality relationship appraisals to examine forgiveness for in-group offenses within a church congregation.

Purpose of the Present Studies

The purpose of the present studies is to examine possible influences of group identification with a church congregation on forgiveness of in-group transgressions. Worthington (1988) theorized that religious people in the top 10-15% of religious commitment usually consider relationships through the lens of religious schemas (including religious group norms). Thus, they are likely to compare their religious values to those of others and consider religious relationships in deciding how to respond to transgressions. A person high in religious commitment may be theorized to highly identify with a particular church congregation as a function of their commitment. According to Worthington's (1988) assertion, religious people view their social relationships through religious schema including scripture, doctrine and group norms, which would especially apply to relationships within their identified church congregation of current membership (in-group). Therefore, when studying forgiveness of specific transgressions, the relationship appraisals of most concern in a religious sample may be those regarding the relationships of transgression, victim, and offender with the Sacred. Various measures have been used in the past to assess these relationships. For parsimony, not all of these measures are used in the current studies.

In the present studies, I focus on the conceptualization of the victim-Sacred relationship (VS) as a function of group identification with a church congregation. To support the decision of

using group identification with a congregation as a measure of the VS relationship, established measures of the VS relationship will be included as well for comparison in Study 2 (DS, Davis et al., 2009b). I will employ Study 1 as a pilot study to determine whether relationships are found between a victim's identification with a congregation and their forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards an offender within the group (congregation). In Study 1, I collect data from a community sample drawing from several Christian church congregations across the United States. In Study 2, I expand the research design to measure all relationships from the model of relational spirituality with a student sample in which participants identify as members of a Christian church congregation. The purpose of Study 2 is to determine whether the measure of group identification fits within the model of relational spirituality (Davis, Hook, & Worthington, 2008) as a measure of the VS relationship and predicts forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards an in-group offender.

Study 1

Statement of the Problem

Despite a burgeoning field of the scientific study of forgiveness, only a small percentage of studies in this area examine forgiveness with religious and spiritual populations (for a review, see Davis et al, 2011). Within the particular focus of religious populations and forgiveness, many studies measure trait forgivingness and its relation to religious commitment or affiliation (see Fox & Thomas, 2008; Mullet et al., 2003; Touissant & Williams, 2008). The problem with interpreting results of these studies is that they do not give an accurate picture of how religious individuals respond to actual offenses. Trait forgivingness may evaluate how much a person values being forgiving, but it does not measure how one actually responds to a hurtful offense. A recent meta-analysis has shown that the effect size between religion/spirituality and trait

forgivingness was .29, and effect size between religion/spirituality and offense-specific forgiveness was .14_ (Davis, Hook, Worthington & McDaniel, 2011). This is what has been identified as a discrepancy between teachings of major religions as holding forgiveness as a duty with the lack of evidence of high levels of forgiveness of actual offenses by religious victims. Methods to examine this discrepancy have been outlined by McCullough and Worthington (1999) and examined by a few researchers (Tsang et al., 2005).

One suggestion from McCullough and Worthington (1999) is using the same level of specificity in measurement of offense responses. Measuring a person's religious affiliation does not capture how much that person adopts the teachings of the religion. More personal, state level measures assessing how strongly one adheres to religious teachings or feels connected to a spiritual being are needed to better predict offense-specific forgiveness. More recently some researchers have approached the religion-forgiveness discrepancy by employing a model of relational spirituality (see Figure 1) which allows for measurement of several relevant relationships in offense situations (Davis et al., 2008). Whereas, past measurement examined relationships between the victim, offender, and transgression, the model of relational spirituality adds a reference point of the Sacred in relation to these three other entities. Further studies showed evidence of these spiritual relationships as relating more strongly to a victim's offense-specific forgiveness (Davis et al., 2009a, 2009b).

Within the literature concerning religious populations and forgiveness, researchers have mostly neglected to examine whether religious victims forgive (or do not forgive) particular types of offenders differently. An exception to this is the creation of the Similarity of Spirituality (SOS) scale by Davis et al. (2009b) which assessed how spiritual similarity of the victim and offender may affect forgiveness for a specific offense. Findings supported the

concept that higher spiritual similarity would predict higher forgiveness. However, no one has yet examined whether victims forgive religiously similar (or different) offenders. A few studies have recently explored how church members purport to forgive their religious leaders for offenses (see Pop, Sutton, & Jones, 2009; Sutton, & Thomas, 2005; Sutton et al., 2007; Thomas, White, & Sutton, 2008). Several offense situation variables related to hypothesized forgiveness, such as apologies, type of offense, and interactions of gender of victim and offender (see the review of these articles in Chapter 2). However, the studies by Sutton and colleagues did not assess offense specific relationships such as dedication to the Sacred (Davis et al., 2009a) or closeness of relationship to the offender. The purpose of the present study is to examine one new conceptualization of relational spirituality, the victim's level of group identification with a congregation as a Sacred body (victim-Sacred relationship), and how it relates to unforgiving and forgiving motivations of a specific offense.

The purpose of measuring group identification with a congregation as a relational spirituality factor stems from the tenants of group identification and the explicit teaching of forgiveness as mandatory in Christianity. According to Henry et al. (1999), a person's social identity can include many important relationships and groups, and some are likely more salient than others. Their identification with particular groups is made up dynamic variables which can shift over time depending on satisfaction with a group and attraction to other members. Groups are defined by particular norms and differences from other groups (Tajfel, 1978). Members of a group are tasked with the responsibility to remain distinct from other groups by maintaining norms particular to that group. Biblical teachings define the norms for Christian congregations today (McCullough & Worthington, 1999), which includes the explicit command in scripture to

forgive those who offend you. Forgiveness as a necessary response to an offender is a norm in Christianity.

An identified church congregation is being treated as a Sacred object in the present study as Christian Biblical teachings (1 Cor 12:27) identify the church as the body of the Christ: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (NIV). The chapter of 1 Corinthians that contains this passage discusses the function of the church using the metaphor likening it to a body that is to function together with one purpose. Tajfel (1978) asserts that pursuit of common goals is an important value to members of a group. The church congregation is an acceptable example of an identified social group and a Sacred object to its members. To maintain cohesion in a congregation, we would expect congregants to be more forgiving to other in-group members. I hypothesize that this should be evidenced by lower unforgiving motivations and higher forgiving motivations in response to an offense for victims who are high in group identification with that particular congregation.

The present study examines victims’ level of group identification with their current congregation of attendance and how it relates to victims’ forgiveness of an offense perpetrated by an in-group member. Data were collected from members of Christian congregations from across the United States. Participants were asked to identify a particular offense from another member in that congregation that they perceived as hurtful. This is an initial test of the relationship of group identification with a congregation affecting unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender, so analyses were limited. Specifically, I hypothesized that (a) the victim’s level of group identification prior to the offense occurring would predict forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the in-group offender; (b) the victim’s current

level of group identification with the congregation would predict forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the in-group offender.

Method

Participants

Members of several Christian church congregations were collected voluntarily by responding to information posted in congregations' weekly bulletins. Interested parties were asked to submit their personal email address. An electronic link to the survey was sent out through email to those who volunteered. The sample was 44.4% female and 22.2% male (for those who gave a response for sex; 33.4% of the sample did not answer this question). Distribution of ages among the sample was 7.9% between 18-25; 25.4%, 26-35; 6.3%, 36-45; 7.9%, 46-55; 12.7%, 56-65; and 7.9%, over 65. Ethnicities of participants were 61% Caucasian/White, 0.3% African American/Black, 0.1% Latino/a, and 0.1% Multiracial (for those who gave a response for gender; 38.5% of the sample did not answer).

Measures

Demographic information. A demographics data page included single-item questions concerning age, sex, and ethnicity (see Appendix B for copies of all measures).

Victim-Sacred relationship: Group identification. (Henry et al., 1999). The Arrow-Carini Group Identification Scale 2.0 assesses a person's identification with a defined social group. It was used to assess the victim's current level of identification with the church congregation they attend. There are three subscales on the Arrow-Carini Group Identification Scale: cognitive, affective, and behavioral indicators of identification. An example from the behavioral subscale is, "This congregation [changed from group] accomplishes things that no single member could achieve," and from the cognitive subscale, "I see this congregation

[changed from group] as part of who I am.” Items are rated on a 7-point rating scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. In testing estimated internal consistency, Henry et al. (1999) found coefficient alpha values ranging from .76-.89 for the overall scale and the three subscales. The cognitive and affective subscales were moderately correlated. Evidence for construct validity was adduced by having students in an initial round of data collection distinguish between important and unimportant social groups to which they belonged. Norms were based on a sample of 420 students from a large, Mid-western, public university and 320 students from a large, West-coast, public university. The participant will be asked to complete the measure of group identification as how they felt prior to the offense and at the present time.

Victim-transgression relationship: Unforgiving and benevolent motivations.

(TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998). Forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards an offender for a specific offense were measured with the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM). The items ($n = 18$) make up 3 subscales: avoidance (TRIM-A), revenge (TRIM-R) and benevolence (TRIM-B), which measure avoidance, revenge and conciliatory motivations respectively. Participants rate items on a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores on the TRIM-A and R subscales indicate higher levels of unforgiveness. Higher scores on the TRIM-B subscale indicate more motivation toward forgiveness. The TRIM-A and TRIM-R subscales were produced in one study (McCullough et al., 1998) and the TRIM-B in a later study (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). The TRIM-A and TRIM-R made up the original measure and will be discussed first. McCullough et al. (1998) estimated internal consistency and found coefficient alpha values ranging from .84 to .92. The Avoidance and Revenge subscales were strongly correlated across studies with correlation coefficient values ranging from .43-.54. In one sample with recent offense victims,

estimated temporal stability across eight weeks was .44 for the TRIM-A and .53 for the TRIM-R. In a different sample with participants having difficulty forgiving a target transgression, estimated temporal stability across nine weeks was .64 and .65 for the TRIM-A and TRIM-R, respectively. With this same sample, estimated temporal stability across three weeks is .86 and .79 for the subscales. Reported means for the Avoidance subscale range from 12.9-15.0 (SD = 5.0-7.6) and for the Revenge subscale range from 7.7-7.9 (SD = 3.3). Construct validity was evidenced by correlations in the expected directions with relationship satisfaction, commitment and closeness, and positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and a single-item measure of forgiveness. Norms were based on samples of students from a medium-sized Southern university and a medium-sized Midwestern university, one sample was comprised of students in heterosexual romantic relationships.

Victim-transgression relationship: Forgiving motivations (TRIM-B). Concerning the Benevolence subscale, McCullough and Hoyt (2002), estimates for internal consistency reliability for TRIM-B were coefficient alpha levels ranging from .86 to .97. Norms in this study were based on undergraduate college students. Means on TRIM-B ranged from 2.3 to 4.1 (SD = 0.7-1.0) across types of transgressions reported. As evidence of construct validity, TRIM-B was highly negatively correlated with TRIM-A and TRIM-R.

Victim-transgression relationship: Transgression assessment of hurtfulness. Two single items will be included to assess the victim's perception of hurtfulness of the transgression and time since the transgression occurred. Hurtfulness is measured on a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *very little hurt* to 5 = *large amount of hurt*. Participants will be asked to specify the length of time (in days, weeks, months, or years) since the transgression in question occurred. Similar items have been used in other studies of forgiveness of a target transgression.

Procedure

Participants were recruited for voluntary participation by responding to an announcement in weekly bulletins distributed in church congregations. Interested participants were asked to submit their personal email address to a contact person within the congregation. Then an electronic link was emailed to them to complete the survey online. They completed state measures of group identification prior to the offense and at the present time. Then, they were asked to identify an interpersonal transgression from an offender within the identified church congregation. Then, participants completed measures of forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the offender.

The victim was to identify the most severe transgression in terms of having hurt the victim's feelings (see Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998) specifically by someone currently in the congregation in which the person worships (i.e., the offender). The defining characteristic is that it is the transgression that most severely inflicted hurt the victim's feelings of any that is remembered. The victim was told that the event could have occurred at any time in the past (from very recent to years ago), but both people had to have been members of the same congregation. The victim was also told that the transgression might be still raw, partially soothed, or completely soothed. The degree to which it is resolved is not important; the degree of hurt is what is important.

Hypotheses and Analyses

Hypothesis #1. Following are a statement of the research hypothesis, a justification for it, and a plan for analysis.

Statement. I hypothesize that the victim's level of group identification prior to the offense occurring will predict forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the in-group offender.

Justification. Relational measures used in past studies (see Davis et al., 2009a, 2009b) of relational spirituality and forgiveness have shown that measures of the VS and OS relationships predict forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the offender (VO relationship). In this present study, group identification with a church congregation is considered a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship due to the Christian belief that the church is an extension of the body of the Christ. (see 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" [NIV]). The church as the body of Christ can be considered a Sacred being. The expectation that the victim's level of group identification will fit into the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness as a measure of the VS relationship is based on the principle of the church being a holy assembly as an extension of Christ. The strength of identification with the congregation as relevant to the victim's interpretation of the offense is based on the importance of defined group norms. The more a person identifies with a given group, the more important the identified characteristics, goals of that group, and relationships with other group members should be to them (Henry et al., 1999). Though many offenses between committed church members may be seen as norm violations, forgiveness is an explicit value of the Christian faith. I expect that the norm to forgive will increase in salience as group identification increases. Therefore, group identification should be related to lower unforgiving motivations as an explicit group norm is to forgive fellow Christians for offenses. Also, group identification should be related to higher forgiving motivations for the same reason. A victim's identification with the congregation prior to the offense occurring should affect how the victim currently feels towards

the offender because level of group identification at that time would relate to the strength of influence of the church's group norms on the victim.

Analyses. I will conduct three regression equations with avoidance, revenge, and benevolent motivations as the respective criterion variables and past group identification as the predictor variable.

Hypothesis #2. Following are a statement of the research hypothesis, a justification for it, and a plan for analysis.

Statement. I hypothesize that the victim's current level of group identification with the congregation will predict forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the in-group offender.

Justification. A victim's current level of identification with a congregation should relate to how strongly they ascribe to the church's group norms, such as forgiving wrong-doers. Therefore, the victim's current level of group identification with the congregation should influence their forgiving and unforgiving motivations towards the offender.

Analyses. I will conduct three regression equations with avoidance, revenge, and benevolent motivations as the respective criterion variables and current group identification as the predictor variable.

Results

Means, standard deviations, alphas, and ranges for all variables are reported in Table 3. The data were first checked for normality, missing data, and outliers. Variables met the assumptions of normality with levels of skewness and kurtosis being less than 1 in absolute value. Missing data was eliminated on a pairwise basis for analyses. There were no outliers outside the ranges of expected values and should represent true responses.

Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Alphas for Measures, N = 63

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	Range
Avoidance	17.38	7.74	0.94	7-35
Revenge	6.5	1.98	0.66	5-13
Benevolence	23.07	4.57	0.89	12-30
Group ID past	58.35	8.32	0.65	36-76
Group ID present	56.41	10.8	0.65	29-72

Note. Group ID past = Arrow & Carini group identification scale, prior to the offense. Group ID present = Arrow & Carini group identification scale, at the time of assessment.

Intercorrelations of all scales in Study 1 are reported in Table 4. I used a Bonferroni-corrected alpha of .02 to determine statistical significance of correlations. As expected, group identification prior to the offense was related to avoidance and benevolence; however, it was not significantly related to revenge. Group identification at the present time was not significantly related to any of the forgiving or unforgiving motivations.

Table 4.

Intercorrelations for Variables in Study 1, N = 51

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Avoidance	-				
2. Revenge	.41**	-			
3. Benevolence	-.79**	-.43**	-		
4. Group ID past	-.36**	-.23	.41**	-	
5. Group ID present	-.23	-.19	.25	.78**	-

Note. ** $p < .02$.

To investigate Hypothesis 1, I conducted three regression equations with avoidance, revenge, and benevolent motivations as the respective criterion variables and past group identification as the predictor variable. I found that group identification prior to the offense predicted avoidance motivations towards the offender, $r = -.36$, $p = .009$. Group identification

prior to the offense did not predict revenge motivations towards the offender, $p = .113$. Group identification prior to the offense predicted benevolent motivations towards the offender, $r = .41$, $p = .003$. The higher that a victim's level of group identification was prior to the offense, the less avoidant he or she feels currently towards the offender. The higher that a victim's level of group identification was prior to the offense, the more benevolent he or she currently feels towards the offender. Regarding Hypothesis 2, current group identification did not predict forgiving or unforgiving motivations towards the offender. Significance values for avoidance, revenge, and benevolence, as predicted by current group identification, were $p = .13$, $.22$, and $.11$ respectively.

Discussion

In the present study, I investigated how a congregant's identification with a congregation predicted how forgiving and unforgiving he or she felt towards an offender from within the same congregation. To date, no other studies have explored the relationship of group identification with the congregation and its effect on how a victim feels towards an actual offender. Prior studies have explored expected responses of congregants towards hypothetical offenses by a pastor (see Pop, Sutton, & Jones, 2009; Sutton, & Thomas, 2005; Sutton et al., 2007; Thomas, White, & Sutton, 2008). In the present study, I found that the measure of group identification with a congregation prior to an offense does predict the avoidant and benevolent motivations of a congregant towards an in-group offender. These relationships were in the expected directions with higher group identification predicting lower avoidance and higher benevolence.

Limited statistical tests were run on this data set due to a small sample size ($N = 63$) but the results warrant further investigation of level of group identification as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship within the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness of offenses (see Figure 2; Davis et al., 2008). In addition, collecting a larger sample would allow me to

investigate more variables that are theoretically connected to group identification and forgiveness. Therefore, in Study 2, I included numerous measures to examine the scope of the model of relational spirituality and to investigate the measures' relationships to the victim's level of group identification.

Limitations and Areas for Future Study

The most problematic limitation of this study was the small sample size. Out of almost two dozen congregations contacted, only $N = 63$ congregants completed questionnaires. This is a typical problem of data collection from non-college student populations, especially church groups. Future studies should consider visiting congregations in person to collect data from paper and pencil surveys, instead of online, if possible. Due to the small sample size, power of the results is limited.

Another inherent limitation of between-subjects research on offense-specific forgiveness is gathering data on unforgiving and forgiving responses without a complete picture of the victim's trend forgiveness over time (McCullough et al., 2010). Participants reported offenses from less than one month to more than one year ago. Typically, motivations towards offenders change over time. Past research suggested assessing victim's responses to multiple offenses at multiple time points (see McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang & McCullough, 2005). Future studies could specify a given time limit on offense recall instructions. For this study, data on whichever offense was viewed as most hurtful by another congregation member was needed as the goal was to see how congregants react to serious offenses by in-group members.

A third limitation of the findings of this study is that it is the first time these variables have been examined empirically. No prior study has investigated the effect of group identification with a congregation on unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an in-group

offender. Therefore, more data are needed on this topic. In Study 2, I aim to further research on this topic with a larger sample size allowing for more thorough analyses of group identification as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship in the model of relational spirituality.

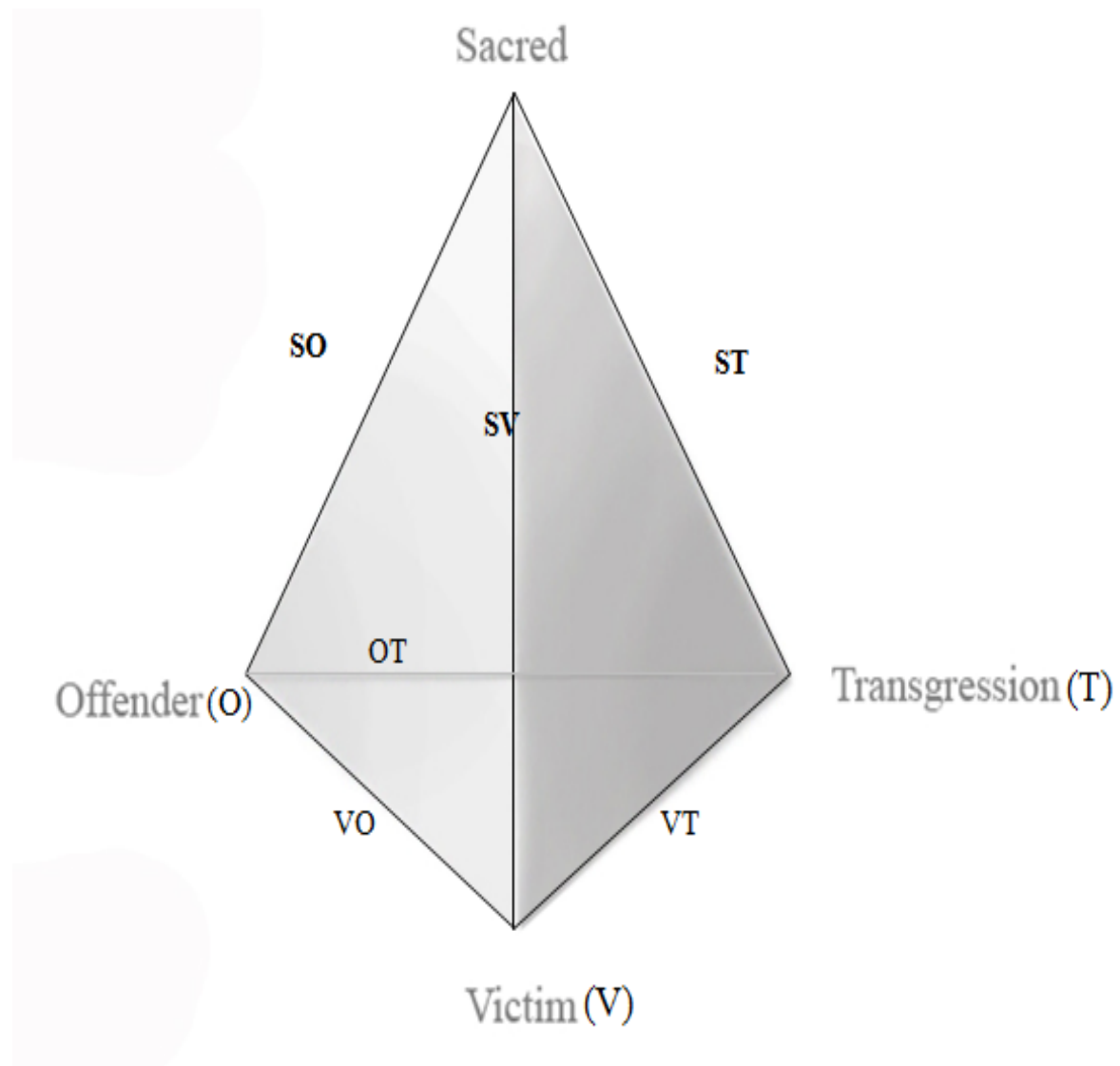


Figure 2. Spiritual Appraisals of Relationship in Model of Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness. Davis et al. (2008).

Study 2

Statement of the Problem

In Study 1, I investigated the relationship of group identification with a congregation with unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender. Results supported the hypothesis that higher level of group identification with the congregation prior to an offense occurring predicted lower revenge motivations and higher benevolent motivations towards an in-group offender at the present time. The sample collected in Study 1 was small but provided reasoning to test group identification with a congregation as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship in the model of relational spirituality with a larger sample. Therefore, in Study 2, I examine how group identification with a congregation functions as a measure of the VS relationship. The purpose of Study 2 is to provide evidence that group identification with a congregation is a relevant measure of a victim's relationship to the Sacred with the church as a Sacred body (1 Cor 12:27, NIV).

In Chapter 4, I described how the tenants of group identification and social identity theory relate to group members adhering to group norms. In the present study, I expect group identification with a congregation to relate to unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an offender on the basis of forgiveness being an explicit command within Christianity. As forgiveness is a pillar of the Christian faith, it should function as a distinguishing group norm among the members of the group (Tajfel, 1978; McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Henry, Arrow, and Carini (1999) developed a measure based on the facets of group identification (cognitive, behavioral, and affective). This measure aims to capture self-categorization, attraction among the membership, and level of interdependence. Henry et al. (1999) purport that clear self-categorization ("I think of this group as part of who I am"), high level of attraction to

the group and satisfaction with members (“Members of this group like one another”), and high level of interdependence (“This group accomplishes things that no single member could achieve”) indicate that the group in question is strongly integrated as part of the individual’s identity. Therefore, the more a congregant identifies with a congregation, the more that congregation is a part of his or her identity and influences his or her behavior.

In the present study, I assess participants’ relationships with the transgression, offender, and Sacred in reference to a particular in-group offense based on the model of relational spirituality. Past research has provided evidence that state-level measurement of the spiritual relationships in this model strongly relates to an individual’s unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an offender (Davis et al. 2009a, 2009b). Relationships need to be assessed in the moment rather than as trait variables when examining state-level offense situations (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Measuring group identification with a congregation prior to the offense and at the time of the study provides time-specific evidence of how identification with the congregation may influence a victim’s response to a particular offense. In Study 1, group identification with a congregation prior to the offense related to unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an offender, while current group identification did not relate as strongly. Considering the principle of specificity in measure (McCullough & Worthington, 1999), this finding is in line with prior evidence that strength of relational variables at the time of the offense predict the victim’s response to the offense. A congregant who highly identifies with a congregation prior to an offense is more likely to adhere to the group norms of forgiving the offender when the offense occurs. The occurrence of the offense may change the victim’s level of group identification, affecting the rating of the current level of group identification (rather than the current group identification affecting the victim’s response to the offense).

Due to measurement of group identification with a congregation prior to an offense (GI past) capturing a member's dedication to the group (church) and its norms, and providing time-specific assessment of these relationships in reference to an actual offense, I hypothesize that GI past will relate to lower unforgiving motivations and higher forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender more strongly than relational spirituality measures previously studied. In order to test the incremental predictive validity of group identification prior to an offense on unforgiving and forgiving motivations, I will control other relational factors for each relationship included in the model of relational spirituality. I will also control personal traits of the victim which may influence level of unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were undergraduates at a large Mid-Atlantic urban university. Participants were recruited from undergraduate classes and participate as part of a course requirement or in exchange for a small amount of course credit. The sample was 68.1% female. Distribution of participant ages was 1%, Under 18; 94.8%, 18-25; 1.6%, 26-35; 0.8%, 36-45; and 0.3%, over 65. Ethnicities reported by participants were 46.5% Caucasian, 23.9% African American/Black, 13.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.2% Latino/a, 0.8% Indian/Native American, 2.3% Other, and 8.1% Multiracial.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire included single-item questions concerning age, sex, ethnicity, and frequency of church attendance. These variables are commonly collected in research with religious populations. Frequency of church attendance is rated on a 6-point scale from 0 = *never* to 5 = *several times per week*.

Trait measures: Dispositional forgivingness. (TFS; Berry et al., 2005). The TFS is a 10-item instrument which measures tendency to forgive others as a steady trait. Participants rate statements from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Some items reflect an individual's tendency to forgive, "I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did," or to not forgive, "If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same." Items 1, 3, 6, 7, and 8 must be reverse scored so that higher scores on the TFS indicate greater tendency to forgive others. Norms were based on samples of students from a large, Mid-Atlantic university and a private university in the Pacific Northwest. Berry et al. analyzed the ten-item measure in four studies and estimated coefficient alphas ranged from .74 to .80. Evidence supporting construct validity was that the TFS correlated negatively with traits such as anger, depression, hostility, and vengeful rumination. The TFS was positively correlated, as hypothesized, with positive emotional traits such as empathy and agreeableness.

Religious commitment. (RCI-10, Worthington et al., 2003). The Religious Commitment Inventory – 10 measures commitment to one's religion in a non-sectarian fashion. It is made up of two subscales, Interpersonal Religious Commitment and Intrapersonal Religious Commitment. Items are rated on a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *not at all true of me* to 5 = *totally true of me*. In testing estimated internal consistency, Worthington et al. (2003) found coefficient alpha values ranging from .87-.96 for the overall scale, the Intrapersonal subscale and the Interpersonal subscale. The subscales are highly correlated, $r(154) = .72$, $p < .001$. An example of the Intrapersonal subscale items is, "Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life," and an Interpersonal item, "I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation." Estimated temporal stability across three weeks is .87 for the full scale, .86 for Intrapersonal Religious Commitment, and .83 for Interpersonal Religious Commitment.

Construct validity was evidenced across six studies by higher scores on the RCI-10 for religious people versus non-religious (based on ranking salvation as a top value), positive correlations with participation in a religion, and self-rated spirituality. Norms were based on samples of students at secular and Christian colleges, adults in the community and clinical samples from secular and Christian counseling agencies. Means among secular participants ranged from 21-26 (SDs = 10-12). Means among the Christian samples ranged from 37-46 (SDs = 10-12).

Social desirability. (MC-C; Reynolds, 1982). The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form-C is made up of 13 items taken from the original 33-item social desirability scale created by Crowne and Marlowe (1960). Items measure defensiveness and approval-seeking tendencies by respondents. Respondents mark statements as true or false. Example items are, “I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget,” and “I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.” Estimated internal consistency was found at the alpha coefficient level $\alpha = .76$. Concurrent validity was supported by a strong correlation between the MC-C form with the standard form ($r = .93$). Norms were based on a sample of students from a medium-sized state university. Means for the short forms under review and standard form ranged from 4.4 (SD = 2.1) to 15.0 (SD = 5.9).

Victim-Sacred relationship: Dedication to the Sacred scale. (DS, Davis et al., 2009b). The 5-item DS Scale assesses people’s relationships with what they personally define as Sacred at any point in time. This relationship is seen as a state variable which can shift over time. Items are rated on a 7-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. An example item is, “My relationship with the Sacred is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.” Norms for the DS were based on samples of students from an urban Mid-Atlantic university. Davis and colleagues, through three studies, examined the appropriate items through

factor analysis and then explored validity for the final version of the DS. Items were initially pulled from a marriage commitment scale and applied to the person-Sacred relationship due to the parallel in religious views of intimacy with God. The 5 items maintained on the DS all had factor loadings higher than .60. In estimating internal consistency, Davis, Worthington, et al. found alpha coefficient levels of .88 to .94 for the DS. In the third sample, construct validity was supported by the DS correlating positively with religious commitment and forgiveness. The mean score of participants in study three was 23.1 (SD = 9.2).

Victim-offender relationship: Dyadic Adjustment Scale-7 (DAS – 7; Hunsley, Best, Lefebvre, & Vito, 2001). The 7-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was used to measure the commitment, satisfaction, and closeness of the victim-offender relationship as perceived by the victim prior to the offense-in-question occurring. The DAS-7 contains three subscales: commitment, satisfaction, and closeness. Closeness is measured with three items on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 0 = *always disagree* to 5 = *always agree*. Commitment is measured with three items on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 0 = *never* to 5 = *more often*. Satisfaction is rated by a single item on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 0 = *extremely unhappy* to 6 = *perfect*. In testing internal consistency, Hunsley et al. (2001) found coefficient alpha values ranging from .75 to .91 among samples. Norms were based on two samples of adults in the community (heterosexual couples) who were mailed surveys and a sample of adults in a romantic relationship from clinical files at a training facility. Means ranged from 25.8 (SD = 4.7) for the community sample to 17.8 (SD = 5.5) for the clinical sample. Construct validity was evidenced in one sample in the study by positive correlations with marital satisfaction and emotional disclosure. The participant was asked to complete the DAS-7 as he or she felt about his or her relationship with the offender before the offense and at the present time.

Transgression assessment of hurtfulness. The same single-item measures of time since offense and hurtfulness of offense will be used as in Study 1.

Transgression-Sacred relationship: Sacred Loss and Desecration scale (SLD; Pargament et al., 2005). The SLD Scale ($n=23$ items) measures the degree that a victim appraises a transgression as a loss or desecration of something Sacred (theistic and nontheistic). Some items are, “Something symbolic of God was purposefully damaged,” and “Something that was Sacred to me was destroyed.” Items are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. Estimated internal consistency found coefficient alpha values of .92-.93 for the two subscales (Pargament et al., 2005). The subscales were moderately correlated, $r(116) = .48, p < .0001$. As a test of discriminant validity, analyses of variance using the Sacred Loss and Desecration scales as independent variables and the type of event described as the dependent variable were conducted. Both Sacred Loss and Desecration showed significant relationships. Norms were based on a sample of 117 adults from mid-sized, mixed small town/suburban/rural county in the Mid-west. Means ranged from 11.8 to 27.0 according to the type of event described.

Offender-Sacred relationship: Similarity of Offender’s Spirituality scale. (SOS; Davis et al., 2009a). The SOS scale is a 9-item measure of the victim’s appraisal of participants’ similarity to an offender humanly and spiritually. The estimated internal reliability coefficients for these two subscales were reported by Davis et al. (2009) as .79 and .87 respectively. Participants rate statements on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 0 = *completely disagree* to 6 = *completely agree*. An item measuring human similarity is, “Even though our bond as humans was broken, I knew we were both the same under the skin,” and for measuring spiritual similarity, “I recalled how similar we were in fundamental values.” The subscales are correlated.

Construct validity was evidenced by both subscales correlating in expected directions with measures of religiousness, spirituality, forgiveness, and empathy. Norms were based on samples of students at a large Mid-Atlantic, urban university.

Group identification. (Henry et al., 1999). The same scale was used as in Study 1 to assess the victim's level of identification with the congregation prior to the offense and at the present time.

Victim-transgression relationship: Unforgiving and benevolent motivations. (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998). The three subscales of the TRIM inventory were used to measure the VT relationship again in Study 2.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from an online study for undergraduates at an urban Mid-Atlantic university. They completed state measures of group identification, religious commitment, and Sacred commitment. Then, they were asked to identify an interpersonal transgression from an offender within the identified church congregation. Then, participants completed relational measures of victim-offender, offense-Sacred, and offender-Sacred relationships.

The victim was to identify the most severe transgression in terms of having hurt the victim's feelings (see Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998), specifically by someone currently in the congregation in which the person worships (i.e., the offender). The defining characteristic is that it is the transgression that most severely inflicted hurt the victim's feelings of any that is remembered. The victim was told that the event could have occurred at any time in the past (from very recent to years ago), but both people had to have been members of the same congregation. The victim was also told that the transgression might be still raw, partially

soothed, or completely soothed. The degree to which it is resolved is not important; the degree of hurt is what is important.

I made the following two general hypotheses. First, degree of hurtfulness of the transgression would be predicted by the elements in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness (Davis et al., 2008), but beyond that, group identification at the time of the hurt will provide incremental predictive power. Second, unforgiving and forgiving motivations will also be predicted by aspects of the model and then group identification at the time of the hurt will provide incremental predictive power.

Hypotheses and Analyses

Hypothesis #1. I state the hypothesis formally, provide a justification for it, and suggest analyses to test it.

Statement. The victim's perceived hurtfulness of the target offense will be affected by the other personal and relational variables in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness. After removing variance accounted for by other variables assessing aspects of the model, the group identity at the time of the offense (GI_{past}) is hypothesized to account for significant variance.

Justification. I want to provide a conservative statistical test of the effect of group identity on hurtfulness. Therefore, I will remove variance due to other aspects of the model and then test the effect of group identity. Variables will be entered into the regression equation according to the model of relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008), first assessing relationships at the base of the triangle and then those in relationship to the Sacred: victim traits, victim-offender relationship,

Measures will be included in analyses to assess each aspect of the model of relational spirituality beginning with variables specific to the victim, and then moving around the model to measures pertaining to the victim's relationship to the Sacred, the offender, and the transgression, and the relationship of the transgression and the offender with the Sacred. Then the variable of interest in the current study is included as the last step to test the incremental predictive validity of group identification in the model. These include: the victim's non-religious traits (trait forgivingness), personal religious variables (church attendance, religious commitment, dedication to the Sacred: VS relationship), relational variables (relationship commitment, closeness, and satisfaction with offender: VO relationship), event variables (time since offense: VT relationship; Sacred loss and desecration: TS relationship), perception of the offender's spirituality (similarity of spirituality: OS relationship), and finally, group identification (new measure for the VS relationship). Trait forgivingness is included in step one due to its influence on offense-specific forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2003). Personal religious variables which have been shown to relate to offense-specific forgiveness are included in the second step (Davis et al., 2009a, 2009b) as well as church attendance, which is measured in the current study as an indicator of affiliation with the group and its practices. Relational variables of the status of relationship between the victim and offender are entered in step three because past research confirms that victim's are more forgiving to offenders to whom they are closer (Finkel, Rusbult, Kamashiro, & Hannon, 2002). Event variables (time since the offense; Sacred loss and desecration) are included in step four as these have been shown to impact offense-specific forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2003; Davis et al., 2009b). Similarity of spirituality is included in step five as a measure of the offender-Sacred relationship, which was created specifically to assess this relationship within the model of relational spirituality, and

predicts offense-specific forgiveness above that of other personal relational variables (Davis et al., 2009b).

Analysis. I will conduct a hierarchical multiple regression with hurtfulness as the criterion variable to measure the effect of other variables on the perceived hurtfulness of the offense. Relational variables will be entered in order of the victim's non-religious traits, personal religious variables, relational variables, event variables, perception of the offender's spirituality, and finally, group identification. The equation is as follows: Hurtfulness of the offense = [TFS] + [Church attendance + RCI-10 + DS] + [DAS-7] + [Time + SLD] + [SOS] + [GI past]

Hypothesis #2. I state the hypothesis formally, provide a justification for it, and suggest analyses to test it.

Statement. I hypothesize that after removing the variance accounted for by all other relationship and offense variables in the relational spirituality model (personal variables [demographics, trait forgivingness, social desirability, religious commitment], time since the offense, perceived hurtfulness, relationship closeness before and after the offense, dedication to the Sacred, Sacred loss and desecration, and similarity of the offender's spirituality), level of group identification of the victim prior to the offense will add incremental predictive validity to unforgiving and forgiving motivations of the victim towards the offender.

Justification. Relational measures used in past studies (see Davis et al., 2009a, 2009b) of relational spirituality and forgiveness should similarly relate to forgiveness of a target offense in the present study, so these will be included and controlled in the present analysis. Measures will be included in analyses to assess each aspect of the model of relational spirituality beginning with variables specific to the victim, and then moving around the model to measures pertaining

to the victim's relationship to the Sacred, the offender, and the transgression, and the relationship of the transgression and the offender with the Sacred. Then the variable of interest in the current study is included as the last step to test the incremental predictive validity of group identification in the model. These include: the victim's non-religious traits (trait forgivingness), personal religious variables (church attendance, religious commitment, dedication to the Sacred: VS relationship), relational variables (relationship commitment, closeness, and satisfaction with offender: VO relationship), event variables (hurtfulness of offense, time since offense: VT relationship; Sacred loss and desecration: TS relationship), perception of the offender's spirituality (similarity of spirituality: OS relationship), and finally, group identification (new measure for the VS relationship). Trait forgivingness is included in step one due to its influence on offense-specific forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2003). Personal religious variables which have been shown to relate to offense-specific forgiveness are included in the second step (Davis et al., 2009a, 2009b) as well as church attendance, which is measured in the current study as an indicator of affiliation with the group and its practices. Relational variables of the status of relationship between the victim and offender are entered in step three because past research confirms that victim's are more forgiving to offenders to whom they are closer (Finkel, Rusbult, Kamashiro, & Hannon, 2002). Event variables (hurtfulness and time since the offense) are included in step four as these have been shown to impact offense-specific forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2003). Perceived Sacred loss and desecration is included in step four as an event variable which measures the transgression-Sacred relationship. Sacred loss and desecration has been found to be a robust predictor of offense-specific forgiveness (Davis et al., 2009b). Similarity of spirituality is included in step five as a measure of the offender-Sacred relationship, which was created specifically to assess this relationship within the model of

relational spirituality, and predicts offense-specific forgiveness above that of other personal relational variables (Davis et al., 2009b).

The similarity of this study to the past studies examining the influence of relational spirituality factors on forgiveness of a specific offense are that information collected will concern an identified transgression and state variables of the relationships from the victim's perspective. The analysis will be modeled after prior work in this topic with the addition of level of the victim's group identification with the church congregation (VS relationship). Group identification with a church congregation is considered a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship due to the Christian belief that the church is an extension of the body of the Christ. (see 1 Corinthians 12:27, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." [NIV]). The expectation that the victim's level of group identification will add predictive power to the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness is based on the importance of defined group norms. The more a person identifies with a given group, the more important the identified characteristics, goals of that group, and relationships with other group members should be to them (Henry et al., 1999). Though many offenses between committed church members may be seen as norm violations, forgiveness is an explicit value of the Christian faith. I expect that the norm to forgive will increase in salience as group identification increases. Therefore, group identification should be related to lower unforgiving motivations as an explicit group norm is to forgive fellow Christians for offenses. Also, group identification should be related to higher forgiving motivations for the same reason.

Analysis. I will conduct three hierarchical multiple regressions to examine the variance added to unforgiving (avoidance and revenge) and forgiving motivations (benevolence) due to the victim's level of group identification with a church congregation. Relational variables will

be entered in order of the victim's non-religious traits, personal religious variables, relational variables, event variables, perception of the offender's spirituality, and finally, group identification. Avoidance motivations will be the criterion variable in the first regression, revenge motivations the criterion variable in the second regression, and benevolence motivations in the third regression. The steps leading up to the criterion variable will be the same in each equation. The equation is as follows: Unforgiving/forgiving motivations = [TFS] + [Church attendance + RCI-10 + DS] + [DAS-7] + [Hurtfulness + Time + SLD] + [SOS] + [GI past]

Results

Means and Standard Deviations

Means, standard deviations, alphas and ranges for all variables are presented in Table 5. Data were checked for normality, outliers, and missing values. Age of victims was somewhat skewed and kurtotic. However, this is to be expected as the sample was made up of college students (majority 18-25 years old). Time since the offense was somewhat skewed and kurtotic due to two outliers outside the normal expected range. After these two outliers (144 months since and 156 months since) were removed, the distribution of responses was much closer to expected values and *z*-scores were at acceptable levels. Missing data were excluded pairwise in analyses. The mean score for religious commitment ($M = 30.5$) was considerably higher than is typical for college students (see table in Appendix A with Mean scores on normative populations; Worthington et al., 2003; means ranged between 22.8 and 25.7 within the normative samples of university students at secular universities but 38.5 for students at explicitly Christian universities). This indicates that the sample in this study was highly committed to their religious affiliation—at least relative to other students at the present secular state university—which is beneficial for the current study because I sought to collect a sample of participants who strongly

identify with the norms of their religious congregation. People who are highly committed to their religion should similarly identify strongly with the norms of that religion as well (Worthington, 1988).

Table 5.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Alphas for Measures.

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Criterion variables				
Hurtfulness	1-5	3.15	1.21	
Avoidance	7-35	17.29	5.63	0.87
Revenge	5-24	12.93	4.66	0.86
Benevolence	6-30	20.05	4.96	0.85
Group ID difference	-21-18	-1.7	6.12	
Victim variables				
Age	0-6	1.03	0.36	
Victim status	0-8	1.04	0.91	
Church attendance	0-5	2.7	1.3	
Length of membership	0-6	2.64	1.53	
Social desirability	0-13	6.31	2.85	0.67
Trait forgivingness	17-50	31.01	3.84	0.81
Offender variables				
Offender status	0-8	2.12	2.37	
Offender group ID	28-73	53.48	9.9	0.70
Transgression variable				
Time since offense	0-96	13.95	16.67	
Victim-Sacred variables				
Group ID past	31-75	53.42	8.59	0.65
Group ID now	27-73	50.08	7.63	0.60
Dedication to Sacred	5-35	24.35	8.11	0.92
Religious commitment	10-50	30.05	9.04	0.91
Offender-Sacred variable				
Similarity of spirituality	0-54	29.81	10.43	0.88
Transgression-Sacred variable				
Sacred loss & desecration	23-115	48.38	22.67	0.97
Victim-offender variables				
Closeness past	0-34	15.93	6.1	0.79
Closeness now	0-34	12.3	6.94	0.89

Note. Group ID difference = change in group identification prior to the offense to current rating. Group ID past = group identification with the congregation prior to the offense. Group ID now = group identification

with the congregation at the time of the study. Closeness past = Dyadic Adjustment Scale- 7 in regard to relationship with offender prior to the offense. Closeness now = Dyadic Adjustment Scale-7 in regard to relationship with offender at the time of the study.

Intercorrelations

Intercorrelations of all scales are listed in Table 6 below. I used a Bonferroni-corrected alpha of .000 to determine statistical significance of correlations. As expected, group identification with a congregation prior to the offense was related to avoidance, revenge, and benevolence ($r = -.22, -.30, .42$, respectively; all $p < .000$). Group identification prior to the offense was also related to the victim's church attendance ($r = .43$), dedication to the Sacred ($r = .45$), religious commitment ($r = .48$), similarity of spirituality with the offender ($r = .41$), and Sacred loss and desecration of the offense ($r = -.23$; i.e., higher identification resulted in lower amount of sacred loss or sense of desecration). These findings suggest that data supported construct validity of the retrospective measure of group identification prior to the offense.

Several demographic variables were measures that were not significantly related to measures for the model of relational spirituality or the criterion variables, which are not listed in Table 6, including age, length of church membership, church status, gender and ethnicity. These variables were measured to check for correlations with criterion variables so that they could be controlled in analyses if needed. Because these variables were not found to be significantly related to the variables of study, they were not included in any subsequent analyses.

Table 6.
Intercorrelations of Variables in Study 2

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Criterion Variables																		
1. Hurtfulness	-																	
2. Avoidance	0.22**	-																
3. Revenge	0.10	0.44**	-															
4. Benevolence	-0.07	-0.61**	-0.47**	-														
5. Group ID Difference	0.03	-0.01	0.18*	-0.12	-													
Victim Variables																		
6. Church attendance	0.07	-0.12	-0.20**	0.21**	-0.08	-												
7. Social Desirability	-0.06	-0.06	-0.11	0.10	0.08	.15*	-											
8. Trait Forgiveness	-0.01	-0.33**	-0.33**	0.39**	-0.04	0.31**	0.39**	-										
Offender Variable																		
9. Offender Group ID	-0.03	-0.10	-0.17*	0.19**	-0.02	0.16*	0.08	0.10	-									
Transgression Variable																		
10. Time since offense	-0.04	-0.02	-0.05	-0.01	-0.02	-0.19*	-0.13	-0.07	0.03	-								
Victim-Sacred Variables																		
11. Group ID Past	-0.02	-0.22**	-0.30**	0.42**	-0.42**	0.43**	.15*	0.31**	0.29**	-0.08	-							
12. Group ID Now	0.02	-0.15	-0.16*	0.27**	0.37**	0.25**	.18*	0.23**	0.31**	-0.07	0.69**	-						
13. Dedication to Sacred	0.09	-0.11	-0.23**	0.30**	-0.07	0.33**	0.08	0.29**	0.24**	-0.07	0.45**	0.39**	-					
14. Religious Commitment	0.09	-0.13	-0.13	0.38**	-0.05	0.43**	.17*	0.30**	0.14*	-0.19*	0.48**	0.39**	0.60**	-				
Offender-Sacred Variable																		
15. Similarity of Spirituality	0.06	-0.30**	-0.22**	0.49**	-0.165*	0.25	0.07	0.23**	0.27**	-0.15	0.41**	0.26**	0.44**	0.41**	-			
Transgression-Sacred Variable																		
16. Sacred Loss & Desecration	0.31**	0.33**	0.41**	-0.29**	-0.01	-0.17*	-0.12	-0.28**	-0.19**	-0.05	-0.23**	-0.17*	-0.15*	-0.07	-0.14*	-		
Victim-Offender Variables																		
17. Closeness Past	0.09	-0.26**	-0.10	0.42**	-0.07	0.20**	0.03	0.16*	0.06	-0.18*	0.25**	0.19*	0.17*	0.27**	0.49**	0.06	-	
18. Closeness Now	-0.07	-0.33**	-0.03	0.38**	0.05	0.10	0.07	0.15	0.06	-0.20*	0.25**	0.28**	0.13	0.21*	0.49**	-0.03	0.62**	-

Note. ** = significant at $p = .000$. Only accept correlations at $p = .000$ level due to correction for amount of analyses run. Correlations at $p < .01$ noted. * = $p < .01$.

Offender Group ID = victim's perception of the offender's group identification with the congregation. Group ID past = victim's group identification with the congregation prior to the offense. Group ID Now = victim's current group identification with the congregation. Closeness Past = Dyadic Adjustment Scale with offender prior to the offense. Closeness Now = current Dyadic Adjustment Scale with offender.

Hypothesis 1: Relationship of Group Identification to Hurtfulness

According to Hypothesis #1, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with relational variables and the predictors and hurtfulness as the criterion variable. See Table 7 for results.

Table 7.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Hurtfulness

Predictor	Hurtfulness	
	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	0.00	
Trait forgivingness		-0.01
Step 2	0.01	
Church attendance		0.05
Religious commitment		0.05
Dedication to the Sacred		0.07
Step 3	0.01	
Closeness to offender		0.07
Step 4	0.11*	
Time since offense		0.00
Sacred loss & desecration		.35***
Step 5	0.00	
Similarity of spirituality		0.04
Step 6	0.00	
Past Group Identification		-0.06
Total R^2	0.13	
n	272	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The total variance accounted for by all variables in the model was 13 percent. No step other than Step 4 (time since offense and Sacred Loss and Desecration) accounted for significant variance. After all other variance from variables in the model was removed, group identification prior to

the offense did not significantly predict hurtfulness. Sacred loss and desecration was the only variable that significantly predicted hurtfulness of the offense.

Hypothesis 2: Relationship of Group Identification to Forgiveness and Unforgiving Motives

Three hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted as stated in the Hypothesis #2. The criterion variables in order of regressions run were avoidance, revenge, and benevolent motivations towards the offender. Group identification with the congregation prior to the offense was the final predictor variable in each equation. I summarized results from all three analyses in Table 8 below.

Table 8

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Unforgiving and Forgiving Motivations Towards the Offender.

Predictor	Avoidance		Revenge		Benevolence	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	0.11		0.11		0.15	
Trait forgivingness		-0.33***		-0.33***		.39***
Step 2	0.00		0.03		0.08	
Church attendance		-0.01		-0.10		-0.02
Religious commitment		-0.03		0.10		.25***
Dedication to the Sacred		0.01		-0.18*		0.07
Step 3	0.04		0.00		0.09	
Closeness to offender		-.22***		-0.03		.31***
Step 4	0.10		0.10		0.06	
Hurtfulness		.16**		0.01		-0.05
Time since offense		-0.06		-0.07		0.09
Sacred loss & desecration		.23***		0.32***		-0.21***
Step 5	0.02		0.01		0.04	
Similarity of spirituality		-.18**		-0.09		0.26***
Step 6	0.00		0.01		0.01	
Past Group Identification		-0.04		-0.14*		0.15**
Total R^2	0.28		0.26		0.43	
n	272		272		272	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Testing elements of the model. Before reporting the results of the hypotheses regarding the incremental predictive validity of group identification, let me observe the predictability of other variables in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness. First, trait forgivingness (not surprisingly) predicted all measures of forgiving motivations (avoidance, revenge, and benevolence). Second, religious variables (not surprisingly) predicted none (this was not surprising because participants were selected because of their religion, resulting in a restricted range). Third, closeness to the offender predicted avoidance and benevolence motives (but not revenge motives). Fourth, transgression-related variables (i.e., hurtfulness, time since the offense, and sacred loss and desecration) predicted all variables. Sacred loss was strongly predictive of all forgiving motives; hurtfulness predicted only avoidance motives. Fifth, even after the variance from all of these variables was removed, similarity in spirituality of the victim to the offender still predicted avoidance and benevolence.

Testing the incremental predictive validity of group identification. In the first regression, after removing variance from all variables in the model, group identification prior to the offense did not significantly predict avoidance motivations, $R^2 = .28$, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $F(10,262) = 9.95$, $\beta = .04$, $t = -.61$, $p = .55$. Some relational variables in previous steps of the hierarchical regression did significantly predict avoidance, which were trait forgivingness, closeness to offender prior to the offense, Sacred loss and desecration, and similarity of spirituality. See Table 8 for hierarchical regression equation results.

In the second regression equation, group identification prior to the offense significantly predicted revenge motivations above the effect of all other variables in the regression, $R^2 = .26$,

$\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(10,262) = 4.55$, $\beta = -.14$, $t = -2.13$, $p = .03$. Other variables that significantly predicted revenge motivations were trait forgivingness and Sacred loss and desecration.

In the third regression equation, group identification prior to the offense significantly predicted benevolent motivations above the effect of all other variables in the regression, $R^2 = .43$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(10,262) = 6.51$, $\beta = .15$, $t = 2.55$, $p = .01$. Other variables that significantly predicted benevolent motivations were trait forgivingness, religious commitment, closeness to the offender prior to the offense, Sacred loss and desecration, and similarity of spirituality.

Post hoc analyses. Post-hoc analyses were conducted to test the relationship of hurtfulness on the criterion variables of avoidance, revenge, and benevolence. The hypothesized regression equation did not predict level of hurtfulness. However, considering past findings of hurtfulness relating to relational variables, I tested the effect of level of hurtfulness on unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards the offender. A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of level of perceived hurtfulness on avoidance motivations towards an offender (see Figure 3).

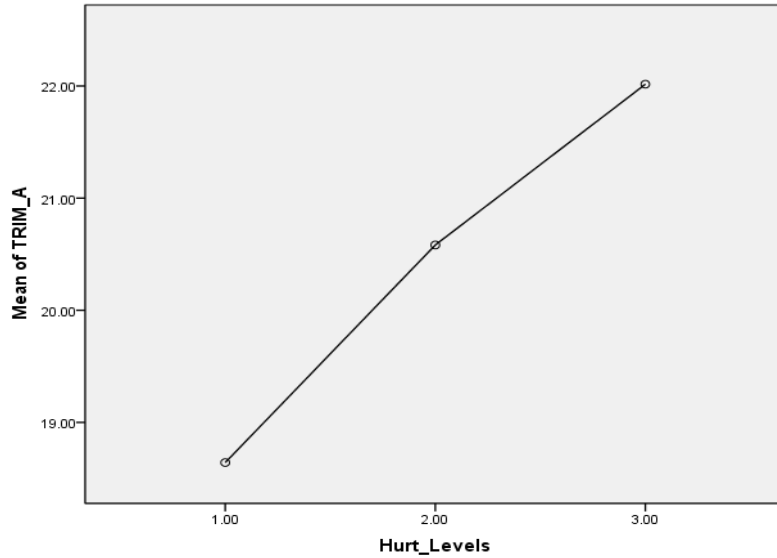


Figure 3. One-way ANOVA with Levels of Hurtfulness and Avoidance Motivations. Note that a Hurt Level of 1.00 corresponds to ratings of 1 and 2; Hurt of 2.00 corresponds to a rating of 3; Hurt of 3.00 corresponds to ratings of 4 and 5.

Subjects were divided into three groups based on ratings of perceived hurtfulness (Low: 1-2, Medium: 3, High: 4-5). There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in scores for the three hurtfulness groups, $F(2,353) = 8.78, p = .000$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score of avoidance for Group 1 ($M = 18.64, SD = 6.15$) was significantly different from Group 2 ($M = 20.58, SD = 6.50$) and from Group 3 ($M = 22.02, SD = 6.34$). Members of Group 1 reported significantly lower avoidance motivations than Groups 2 and 3. Group 2 did not differ significantly from Group 3 ($p = .19$). Victims perceiving a medium or high level of hurtfulness were more avoidant of offenders than those perceiving low hurtfulness.

A one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of level of perceived hurtfulness on revenge motivations towards an offender (see Figure 4).

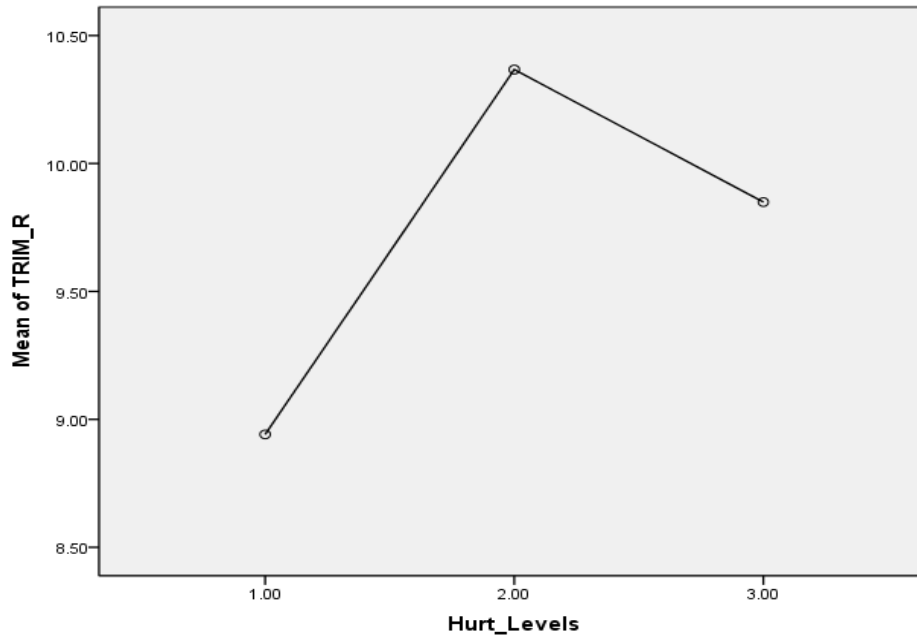


Figure 4. One-way ANOVA with Levels of Hurtfulness and Revenge Motivations. Note that a Hurt Level of 1.00 corresponds to ratings of 1 and 2; Hurt of 2.00 corresponds to a rating of 3; Hurt of 3.00 corresponds to ratings of 4 and 5.

Subjects were divided into three groups based on ratings of perceived hurtfulness (Low: 1-2, Medium: 3, High: 4-5). There was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level in scores for the three hurtfulness groups, $F(2,353) = 3.62$, $p = .03$. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score of revenge for Group 1 ($M = 8.94$, $SD = 3.69$) was significantly different from Group 2 ($M = 10.37$, $SD = 4.29$). Group 1 reported significantly lower revenge motivations than Group 2. Group 3 did not differ significantly from Groups 1 ($p = .20$) or 2 ($p = .59$). Victims who perceived a medium level of hurtfulness had more revenge motivations towards an offender than those who perceived low hurtfulness. A final one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of level of hurtfulness on benevolent motivations towards an offender. Levels of hurtfulness experienced did not differ significantly in prediction of benevolent motivations.

Participant scores in group identification with the congregation changed in value from prior to the offense to the current rating. Regression equations were conducted to explore if unforgiving and forgiving motivations or relational variables predicted this change in group identification with the congregation. Of all the variables studied, only revenge motivations towards the offender predicted the change in score of group identification, $R^2 = .031$, $\Delta F = 8.28$, $\beta = .176$, $t(1,259) = 2.88$, $p = .004$. Higher revenge motivations towards an offender led to a larger drop in level of group identification with the congregation.

Discussion

Perceived hurtfulness was not predicted by relational variables as hypothesized. However, level of hurtfulness significantly affected avoidance and revenge motivations towards the offender. Victims who felt moderately to very hurt had higher reports of avoidance and revenge of offenders within the same congregation. It seems that unresolved hurt was still impairing the relationship between the victim and offender.

The main hypotheses were largely supported. Regarding the hierarchical regressions with group identification prior to the offense predicting unforgiving and forgiving motivations, two of the three regressions had the expected outcome. The victim's level of group identification prior to the offense occurring predicted revenge and benevolent motivations over and above the effects of the other relational variables studied. Higher group identification predicted lower revenge motivations and higher benevolent motivations. This is strong evidence of group identification with a church congregation functioning as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship in the model of relational spirituality. Relational variables that have been found to significantly relate to unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an offender were included in this study (dedication to the Sacred, religious commitment, Sacred loss and desecration, and similarity of

spirituality). Group identification with the congregation was a stronger predictor of revenge and benevolent motivations more than these proven variables. Group identification prior to the offense, however, did not significantly predict avoidance motivations above that of the other relational variables. This may suggest that while strong group identification with a congregation may buffer the motivation to be vengeful towards an offender (directly against Christian teaching) it does not prevent a victim from desiring to avoid contact with the offender. The finding that revenge motivations predicted the change in level of group identification with the congregation prior to and after the offense fits with the above suggestion. If a victim feels strongly vengeful towards an in-group offender, it violates the norms of the congregation, and may alienate other group members from the victim. They may push other group members away as well because they see that they want something that does not match the goals of the group. According to the theory of group identification, shared goals are an integral part of group cohesion (Tajfel, 1978). This fact can also inform future intervention research by encouraging lessening of revenge motivations in order to maintain victim group identification, and resultantly, group cohesion.

Limitations and Areas for Future Study

One major limitation of this study was that the sample was made up entirely of undergraduate college students, a convenience sample. Results may not generalize to non-college student church populations. Another limitation was that unforgiving and forgiving motivations were measured at only one time point and in response to only one offense. Past research suggested assessing victim's responses to multiple offenses at multiple time points (see McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005). Participants' reactions to offenses were assessed at only one time point due to the recall instructions calling for the most

hurtful in-group offense remembered rather than a recent offense (i.e. within the last month).

Therefore, participants reported a large range of time since the offense occurred. Another limit of this study is the bias associated with data being only from self-report measures.

General Discussion

In Chapter 3, I described a general statement of the problem in the current literature concerning offense-specific forgiveness and religious populations. Specifically, there is a lack of examination of in-group offenses in Christian congregations. In 2010, Worthington et al. called for more studies examining situation specific relational variables which may more strongly relate to a religious person's offense-specific forgiveness than trait variables studied in the past. The aim of the present studies was to respond to the call for research examining a religious population and situation-specific relational variables which predict forgiveness. In two studies, I examined the effect of group identification with a Christian congregation on a victim's unforgiving and forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender. In the present chapter, I discuss the general findings and the implications for future research.

Discussion of the Main Claims of the Thesis

Based on the model of relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008) and tenants of group identification (Henry, Arrow & Carini, 1999; Tajfel, 1978), I hypothesized that group identification with a Christian congregation would function as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship with the congregation being a Sacred body. Based on past research that a stronger victim-Sacred relationship related to lower unforgiveness and higher forgiveness (Davis et al., 2009), I expected that higher group identification would relate similarly. I hypothesized that group identification with the congregation prior to an offense would predict lower unforgiving motivations and higher forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender.

In Study 1, I found evidence that group identification with a congregation predicts lower avoidance (but not revenge) motivations and higher benevolent motivations towards an in-group offender. Based on this support, I conducted a second study to exhaustively test the model of relational spirituality with group identification with a congregation as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship. As predicted, group identification with a congregation prior to an offense predicted lower revenge (but not avoidance) motivations and higher benevolent motivations above the effects of other relational variables previously studied within the model. In addition, post-hoc analyses revealed that level of revenge motivations predicted the change in level of group identification from prior to the offense to the present time. No prior study has found evidence of transgression-related interpersonal motivations affecting changing a victim's relationship with the Sacred. If feeling vengeful towards an in-group offender changes a victim's group identification with a congregation, it could also affect his or her faith, relationships with other members, and relationship with God. This finding is substantial and warrants further investigation.

Post-hoc analyses also revealed that level of hurtfulness predicted avoidance and revenge motivations. This is in line with findings from McCullough et al. (2003) that the rate of decrease in unforgiving motivations relates to the level of hurtfulness of the offense, such that higher hurtfulness predicts a slower rate of decrease in unforgiving motivations. Avoidance and revenge motivations typically lessen over time and benevolent motivations increase over time. However, when an offense is perceived as very hurtful, this process takes longer.

The present studies add to the literature on forgiveness within church congregations, which was relatively unstudied with the exception of forgiveness of hypothetical leader transgressions by Sutton and colleagues (2005-2009). The present studies provide empirical

evidence of victims' forgiveness and unforgiveness of in-group offenders for actual transgressions. In the following sections, I discuss the meaning of the present findings for the model of relational spirituality, and implications for research and practice.

Discussion of the Meaning of My Findings for the Model of Forgiveness and Relational Spirituality

The model of relational spirituality and forgiveness proposed by Davis, Hook, and Worthington (2008) was largely supported. In the current study, we measured many of the variables in the model, and the results were similar to the initial test of the model by Davis et al. (2008) and a subsequent test by Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, Green, and Jennings (2009). I have summarized the correlations with measures of forgiveness and unforgiveness in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Comparison between the Current Study and the Study by Davis, Hook, and Worthington (2008)

Step of the Model/Variable	Davis et al. (2008)	Davis et al. (2009)	Greer (2011)	Greer (2011)	Greer (2011)
	Forgiveness (Rye) (<i>r</i>)	Forgiveness (Rye) (<i>r</i>)	Avoidance (β)	Revenge (β)	Benevolence (β)
Victim Variable (V)					
Trait forgivingness			-0.33***	-0.33***	.39***
Victim Relationship with					

Sacred (VS)					
Church attendance			-0.01	-0.10	-0.02
Religious commitment			-0.03	0.10	0.25***
Dedication to the Sacred			0.01	-0.18*	0.07
Anxious Attachment to God	-0.31**	-0.06			
Avoidant Attachment to God	-0.25**	-0.18			
Positive Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE)	0.15+				
Negative Religious Coping (Brief RCOPE)	-0.30**				
Relationship to Offender (VO)					
Closeness to offender			-.22***	-0.03	.31***
Transgression (T)					
Hurtfulness			.16**	0.01	-0.05
Time since offense			-0.06	-0.07	0.09

Relationship of Transgression to the Sacred (ST)					
Sacred loss & desecration	-0.31**	-.33**, -.19	.23***	0.32***	-0.21***
Relationship of Offender's Similarity in Sacred Matters (OS)					
Similarity of spirituality		0.28*, 0.29*	-.18**	-0.09	0.26***
Victim (V)					
Past Group Identification			-0.04	-0.14*	0.15**

In comparing across the three studies, we see that Sacred loss and desecration is consistently found as a significant predictor of forgiveness and unforgiveness. Perceiving an offense as a loss or harm to something Sacred predicts lower forgiveness in secular samples (Davis et al., 2008, 2009) and a Christian sample (the present study). Also, across two studies in Table 9, similarity of spirituality of offender and victim predicted forgiveness and unforgiveness. Specifically, higher spiritual similarity related to higher ratings of forgiveness. Lower spiritual similarity related to higher avoidance in the present study. Variables measured in the present

study, which were not included in the studies by Davis and colleagues, include trait forgivingness, dyadic adjustment, and group identification. All of these variables significantly predicted unforgiving and forgiving motivations. Group identification with a congregation prior to an offense predicted lower revenge and higher benevolence towards an in-group offender above the variance predicted by all other relational variables included in the model of relational spirituality. Group identification with a Sacred body (the church) appears to fit into the model of relational spirituality and requires further investigation in studies examining forgiveness and religious populations.

Implications of the Findings for Future Research

In light of the present findings supporting group identification with a Christian congregation as a victim-Sacred variable in the model of relational spirituality and significant predictor of unforgiving and forgiving motivations, I propose the following research agenda to further investigation of these relationships.

1. Study group identification with a religious body and its relation to forgiveness of in-group offenders with religious groups, other than Christian congregations, that value the teaching of forgiveness (i.e. Jewish synagogues, Buddhist temples).
2. Investigate a religious victim's forgiveness of an outgroup offender based on the impact of the victim's group identification with a religious body.
3. Measure group identification with a religious body immediately following a leader-transgression within the body to examine possible affects of identification with the group based on a group leader transgressing norms.
4. Conduct interventions aimed at strengthening group identification with religious bodies that have experienced substantial conflict. Measure forgiveness and unforgiveness of in-

group offenders before and after the intervention to find possible effects of stronger group identification predicting higher forgiveness.

Implications of the Findings for Interventions in Church Conflicts

The literature reviewed in the present thesis involved a set of studies by Sutton and colleagues between 2005 - 2009. Participants were members and pastors in assemblies of God congregations. Questionnaires presented hypothetical offense scenarios by pastors and asked participants for expected forgiveness and reactions to these in-group offenses. However, these studies did not include actual offenses or measures of participants' religious commitment, attendance, or identification with the congregation. More research is needed to inform interventions aimed at helping church members forgive. The present studies provide initial evidence of a social relational variable which predicts forgiveness in congregations, group identification of the victim.

Based on the findings of the present studies that group identification with a congregation predicts lower unforgiving and higher forgiving motivations of ungroup offenders, future church interventions are implicated. The measure of group identification with a congregation captured an individual's relationship with the Sacred with the congregation as a Sacred body. A congregant's relationship with this Sacred body appeared to influence adherence to group norms and practices which promote group cohesion (forgiving in-group offenders). Congregants who do not strongly identify with the Sacred body are less likely to adhere to the group norm of forgiving each other, as was discussed in the literature review concerning social identity theory and group identification (Henry et al., 1999). This suggests that interventions aimed at promoting forgiveness within religious bodies should consider targeting the congregants' group identification with the Sacred body. This adds to suggestions for programming in churches to

emphasize forgiveness among members by Magnuson and Enright (2008). Stronger group identification among congregants may impact likelihood of forgiving in-group offenders. Psychologists, consultants, and clergy who work with a church group following conflicts should consider first bolstering the group's identification with the Sacred body in order to predict higher forgiveness (for an intervention example, see Wade et al., 2008). Groups who value forgiveness can help individual members forgive (Wuthnow, 2000). See also the chapter on forgiveness in the church (Worthington, 2009), which is discussed in the next section. Worthington captures the tendency of congregants to create factions within a church body during conflicts which divide the original in-group.

Implications of the Findings for Counseling and Psychotherapy Interventions with Clients Who Have Experienced Church Conflicts and Disillusionment with Close Friends Who Are Christians

Models have been developed and tested to help clients through a process of forgiving offenders (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington, Mazzeo, & Canter, 2005). Practitioners working with religious clients who have difficulty forgiving offenders may explore the strength of the client's group identification with a certain religious body. Though a client subscribes to a particular religion, low group identification with a religious body may indicate he or she does not strictly follow the teachings of that religion. Clients may need help considering the need to strengthen group identification with the religious body or the need to find a new religious body with which to associate. Clients who struggle with revenge motivations towards a within congregation offender may have lost some identification with the congregation. Weaker identification with the congregation could inhibit forgiveness due to lack of connection to other members and infrequency of attendance. It may be important for clients to explore feelings of

unforgiveness towards an in-group offender and how these feelings alter the way they regard the Sacred body as a whole.

Worthington (2009) notes that in-groups and out-groups can form within a congregation when conflicting views surrounding a topic build steam. Typically, few individuals are offended and begin collecting a group of similar others around them to support their view point. The result can become factions within the same church body. These smaller in-groups then attempt to differentiate as much as possible from the perceived 'out-groups' in order to sustain their argument for one side of the issue. The goal, then, based on the findings of the present studies, is to emphasize the unity of the congregation as a whole with the goal of working together for shared goals. In most cases, conflicts that become large dividers in a congregation involve one specified issue, when both sides of the argument still agree on the majority of doctrinal subjects (Worthington, 2009). Clients struggling with unforgiveness towards other congregants may be stuck on the particular issue which led to division, while similarities with the other believers outweigh that difference.

Conclusion

Christian doctrine explicitly commands forgiveness but past research has identified a discrepancy between doctrinal values and forgiveness of actual offenses (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In a recent review, Worthington and colleagues (2010) revisited three main questions considered in past research of religions and forgiveness. In this review, two of the main questions were considered answered and no longer in need of research ("Which religion is the most forgiving?" and "Are religious people hypocrites for valuing forgiveness but not enacting it?"). The one area still lacking strong empirical support in religious populations and forgiveness is which relational variables influence offense-specific forgiveness. The present

studies investigated personal relational variables which may affect offense-specific forgiveness better than trait religiousness. Group identification with a congregation as the body of Christ was assessed as a measure of the victim-Sacred relationship in the model of relational spirituality (Davis et al, 2008). Results from the present two studies support the hypothesis that group identification with a congregation predicts lower unforgiving motivations and higher forgiving motivations towards an in-group offender. The present findings support further investigation into the relational variable of group identification with a congregation as a robust predictor of offense-specific forgiveness. In addition, interventions which enhance group identification and cohesion may encourage forgiveness among members of congregations that experienced substantial conflicts.

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List of References

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Appendix A

Figure 1

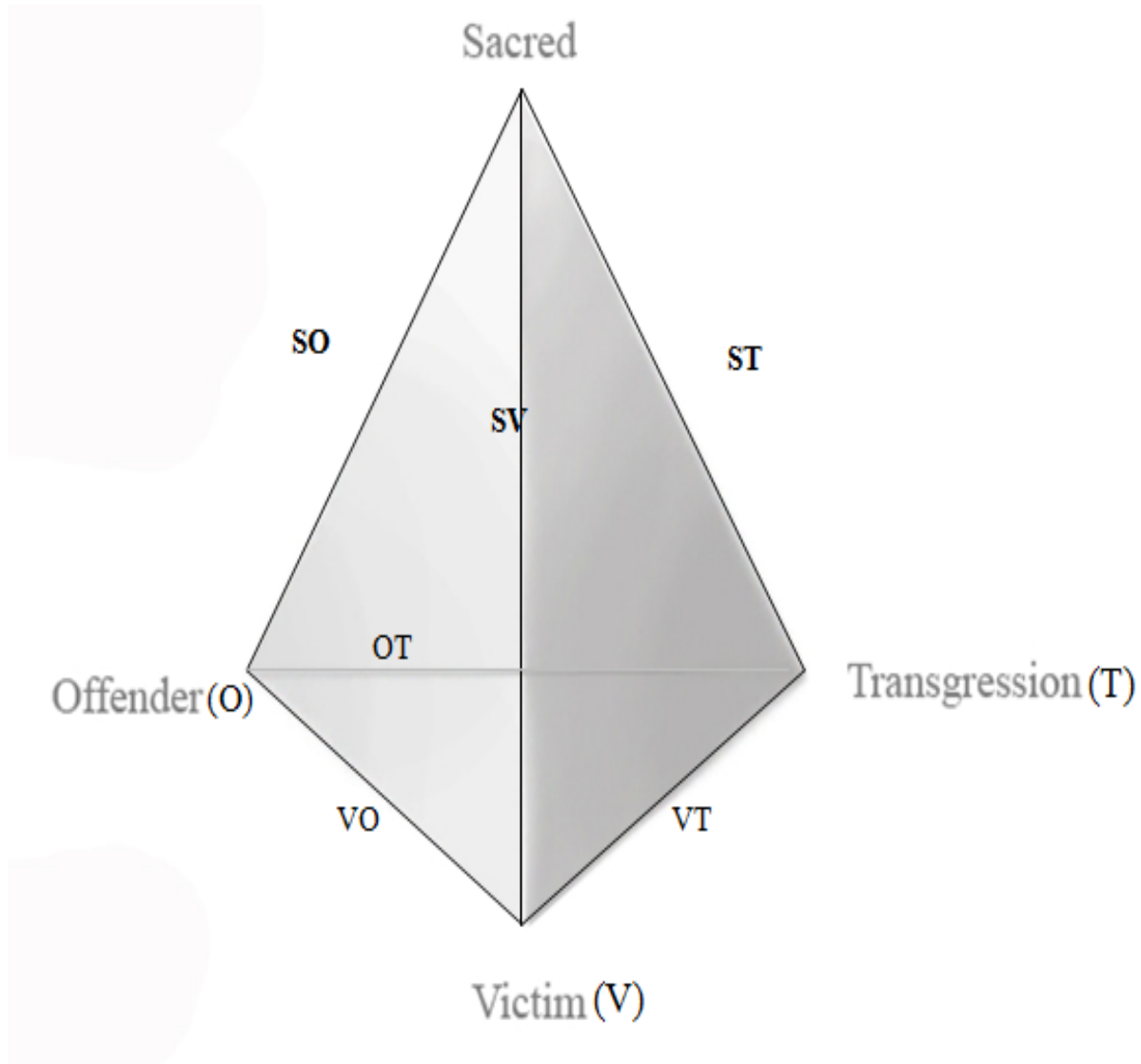


Figure 1. Spiritual Appraisals of Relationship in Model of Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness. From Davis, D. E., Hook, J. N., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2008). Relational spirituality and forgiveness: The roles of attachment to God, religious coping, and viewing the transgression as a desecration. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 27, 293-301; p. 294. Copyright 2008 by Christian Association for Psychological Studies. Reprinted with permission. OS _ victim's appraisal of the relationship between the offender and the Sacred; VS _ victim's appraisal of his or her own relationship with the Sacred; TS _ victim's appraisal of the relationship between the transgression and the Sacred.

Figure 2

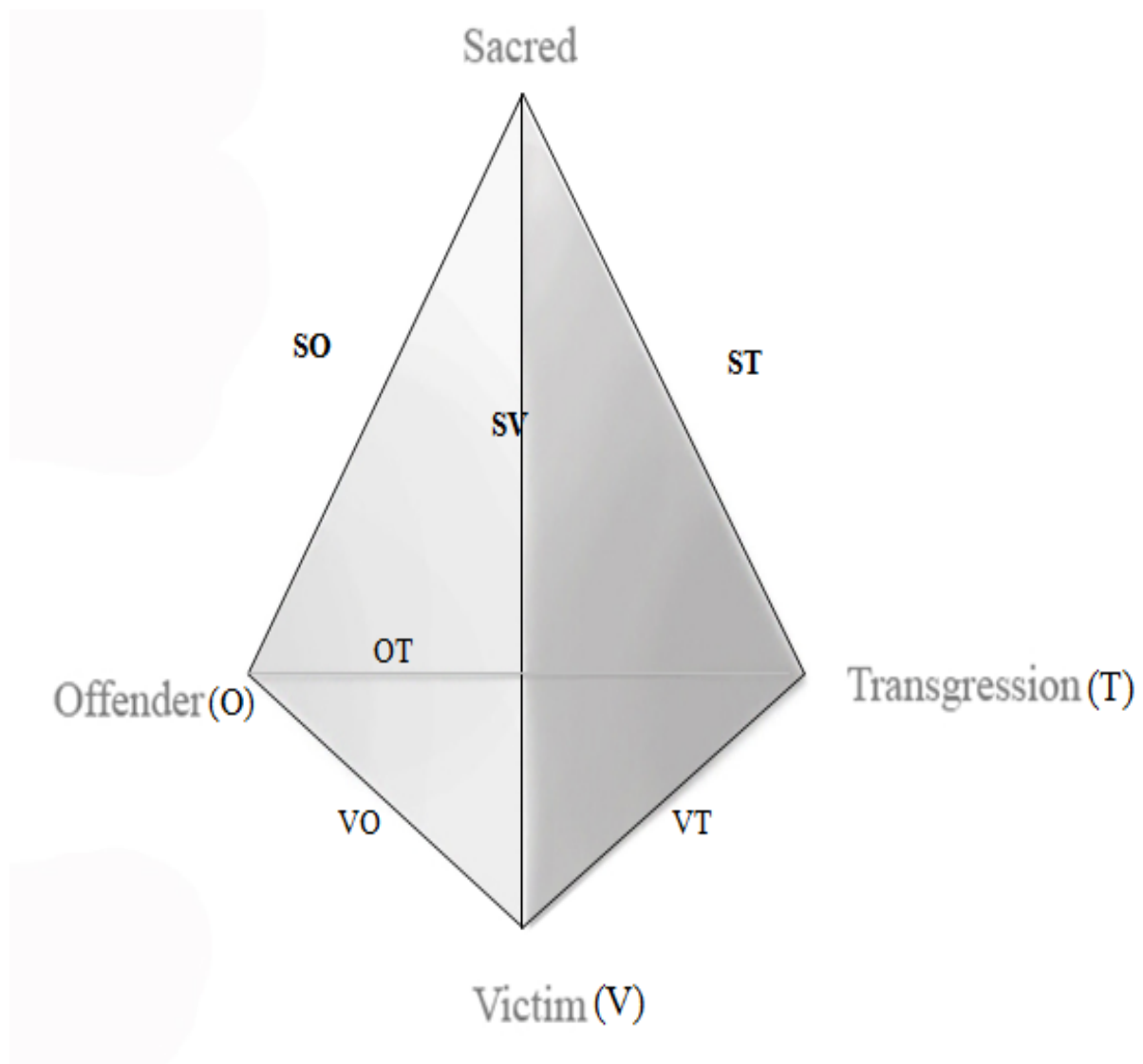


Figure 2. Spiritual Appraisals of Relationship in Model of Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness. Davis et al. (2008). Measures of present study added to figure.

Appendix B

Measures Used in Study

Identification of a Target Transgression

Identify a Particular Hurt or Offense

Please think of someone who has deeply hurt or offended you within the current church congregation you attend. This person needs to be another member of this same congregation where you claim membership. Without writing the name, write yourself a brief description of what the person did to hurt or offend you. (Note: if the person has done many things, it is important to recall one *specific* event on which you focus.) Write a short description below to remind yourself of the event.

Hurtfulness of the Hurt or Offense

Please rate the hurtfulness of the offense, using the scale below. Circle your answer.

1	2	3	4	5
Very little hurt				Large amount of hurt

Time Since the Hurt or Offense

Please estimate the time in months since the offense occurred.

The offense occurred _____ months ago.

Directions: Please identify the membership status of the offender you have in mind. This should apply to their current status within the congregation where you both hold membership. Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Visitor
- ☐ Member
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Committee member
- ☐ Deacon

- ___ Elder
- ___ Minister on staff
- ___ Administrative assistant on staff
- ___ Counselor on staff

Transgression-Related Motivations Inventory (TRIM)

Directions: With the specific offense you have just recalled, please describe how you feel about the offender now by rating the following statements. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement for you now.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = neutral
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree

1. I'll make him/her pay.
2. I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.
3. Even though his/her actions hurt me, I have goodwill for him/her.
4. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
5. I am living as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.
6. I want us to bury the hatchet and move forward with our relationship.
7. I don't trust him/her.
8. Despite what he/she did, I want us to have a positive relationship again.
9. I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
10. I am finding it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
11. I am avoiding him/her.
12. Although he/she hurt me, I am putting the hurts aside so we could resume our relationship.
13. I'm going to get even.
14. I forgive him/her for what he/she did to me.
15. I cut off the relationship with him/her.
16. I have released my anger so I can work on restoring our relationship to health.
17. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.
18. I withdraw from him/her.

Scoring: Reverse score items 3, 6, 8, 12, 14, and 16. Then add points; higher scores indicate more unforgiveness.

Arrow-Carini Group Identification Scale 2.0 (GI)

Directions: With the particular offense that you have recalled in mind, think back to the time before this offense happened. Imagine yourself in that time, before this offense happened. At that time, you were a member of your current church congregation. To the best of your ability, please rate how much you would agree or disagree with the following statements in regard to the congregation you belong to currently. Remember to be imagining you are rating these statements as you would before the offense occurred.

Rate each statement on a 7-point scale, with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

1. I would prefer to be in a different congregation. (R)
2. In this congregation, members don't have to rely on one another.
3. I think of this congregation as part of who I am.
4. Members of this congregation like one another.
5. All members need to contribute to achieve the congregation's goals.
6. I see myself as quite different from other members of the congregation. (R)
7. I enjoy interacting with the members of this congregation.
8. This congregation accomplishes things that no single member could achieve.
9. I don't think of this congregation as part of who I am. (R)
10. I don't like many of the other people in this congregation.
11. In this congregation, members do not need to cooperate to complete group tasks. (R)
12. I see myself as quite similar to other members of the congregation.

NOTE: (R) indicates a reverse-scored item.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-7a)

Directions: Continue to think of the time before the offense occurred. Rate the following statements about your relationship with the offender you identified. You should rate how your relationship was before the offense occurred. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and the offender for each item on the following list.

1. Philosophy of life ____
2. Aims, goals, and things believed important ____
3. Amount of time spent together ____

5	4	3	2	1	0
Always	Almost Always	Occasionally	Frequently	Almost Always	Always
Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree

How often would you say the following events occur between you and the offender?

4. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas ____
5. Calmly discuss something together ____
6. Work together on a project ____

0	1	2	3	4	5
Never	Less	Once or	Once or	Once a	More
	than once	twice a	twice a	day	often
	a month	month	week		

7. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
.
Extremely	Fairly	A Little	Happy	Very	Extremely	Perfect
Unhappy	Unhappy	Unhappy		Happy	Happy	

Note: The total score for the DAS-7 is the sum of the responses to the seven items.

Arrow-Carini Group Identification Scale 2.0 (GI)

Directions: Now, please think of how the offender would rate the following statements. Rate how much you think the offender you have identified would agree or disagree with these statements about the congregation where you and the offender hold membership. Remember to rate this as if you were the offender.

Rate each statement on a 7-point scale, with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

1. I would prefer to be in a different congregation. (R)
2. In this congregation, members don't have to rely on one another.
3. I think of this congregation as part of who I am.
4. Members of this congregation like one another.
5. All members need to contribute to achieve the congregation's goals.
6. I see myself as quite different from other members of the congregation. (R)
7. I enjoy interacting with the members of this congregation.
8. This congregation accomplishes things that no single member could achieve.
9. I don't think of this congregation as part of who I am. (R)
10. I don't like many of the other people in this congregation.
11. In this congregation, members do not need to cooperate to complete group tasks. (R)
12. I see myself as quite similar to other members of the congregation.

NOTE: (R) indicates a reverse-scored item.

Arrow-Carini Group Identification Scale 2.0 (GI)

Directions: Now, please think of yourself in the present time. Please rate the following statements as you feel right now about the congregation where you are a member. Remember to rate these statements about your own feelings in the present.

Rate each statement on a 7-point scale, with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

1. I would prefer to be in a different congregation. (R)
2. In this congregation, members don't have to rely on one another.
3. I think of this congregation as part of who I am.
4. Members of this congregation like one another.
5. All members need to contribute to achieve the congregation's goals.
6. I see myself as quite different from other members of the congregation. (R)
7. I enjoy interacting with the members of this congregation.
8. This congregation accomplishes things that no single member could achieve.
9. I don't think of this congregation as part of who I am. (R)
10. I don't like many of the other people in this congregation.
11. In this congregation, members do not need to cooperate to complete group tasks. (R)
12. I see myself as quite similar to other members of the congregation.

NOTE: (R) indicates a reverse-scored item.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-7b)

Directions: Now, please think about your current relationship with the offender. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list. Remember to rate these statements as your relationship is right now with the offender you have in mind.

1. Philosophy of life ____
2. Aims, goals, and things believed important ____
3. Amount of time spent together ____

5	4	3	2	1	0
Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree

How often would you say the following events occur between you and the offender?

4. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas ____
5. Calmly discuss something together ____
6. Work together on a project ____

0	1	2	3	4	5
Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often

7. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
.
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

Note: The total score for the DAS-7 is the sum of the responses to the seven items.

Similarity of an Offender's Spirituality Scale (SOS)

Directions: In trying to get over the serious harm done to you by the offender(s), you may or may not have considered how you and the offender(s) have related to the Sacred. For each statement, please indicate the degree to which you would disagree or agree whether it has played a part in how you dealt with the offense by the offender(s).

- 0 = Completely disagree
- 1 = Mostly disagree
- 2 = Somewhat disagree
- 3 = Neither disagree nor agree or uncertain
- 4 = Somewhat agree
- 5 = Mostly agree
- 6 = Completely agree

1. Our beliefs overlap in important ways.
2. I thought about how similar my basic religious beliefs were to his/hers.
3. I thought, we are basically committed to the same belief system.
4. I recalled how similar we were in fundamental values.
5. I believe that he/she is a similar spiritual person to me.
6. I thought to myself that this person was a brother/sister human.
7. Even though our bond as humans was broken, I knew we were both the same under the skin.
8. I reminded myself that I was no better as a person than the one who hurt me.
9. I said to myself that he/she was no worse as a person than I am.

Scoring: Items 1-5 make up the Similarity of Spirituality subscale; items 6-9 the Similarity of Humanity subscale. Higher scores indicate more similarity.

Sacred Loss and Desecration (SLD)

Directions: Think about the offense you have recalled. Please rate the following statements as your view of this particular offense.

Use a five-point scale, from 1=not at all to 5=very much.

Item	1=not at all	2	3	4	5=very much
Something from God was torn out of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
Something that gave Sacred meaning to my life is now missing.	1	2	3	4	5
Something of Sacred importance in my life disappeared when this event took place.	1	2	3	4	5
Something symbolic of God left my life.	1	2	3	4	5
A part of my life in which I experienced God's love is now absent.	1	2	3	4	5
My life lost something that once gave me a sense of spiritual fulfillment.	1	2	3	4	5
I suffered a loss of something that was given to me by God.	1	2	3	4	5
Something I held Sacred is no longer present in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
This event involved losing a gift from God.	1	2	3	4	5
Something that connected me to God is gone.	1	2	3	4	5
A source of spirituality became absent in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
Something that contained God is now empty.	1	2	3	4	5
In this event, something central to my spirituality was lost.	1	2	3	4	5
This event was an immoral act against something I value.	1	2	3	4	5
The event was a sinful act involving something meaningful in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
This event was both an offense against me and against God.	1	2	3	4	5
Something evil ruined a blessing in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
Something Sacred that came from God was dishonored.	1	2	3	4	5
The event ruined a blessing from God.	1	2	3	4	5
Something symbolic of God was purposely damaged.	1	2	3	4	5
A Sacred part of my life was violated.	1	2	3	4	5
The event was a violation of something Sacred.	1	2	3	4	5
Something that was Sacred to me was destroyed.	1	2	3	4	5

Dedication to the Sacred Scale (DS)

Please answer each question below by indicating how strongly you **agree or disagree** with the idea expressed related to your relationship with the Sacred (as you define it). Please try to respond to each item as you feel **right now**.

1 = strongly disagree

7 = strongly agree

1. My relationship with the Sacred is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.
2. I want my relationship with the Sacred to stay strong no matter what rough times I may encounter.
3. I like to think of the Sacred and me more in terms of “us” and “we” than “me” and “him/her/ it.”
4. My relationship with the Sacred is clearly part of my future life plans.
5. It makes me feel good to sacrifice for the Sacred.

Note. The Dedication to the Sacred Scale is intended to be used in the context of assessing responses to a transgression. When used in that way, the scale directions should begin, “In light of the transgression, you might be considering your own spiritual life. Thus please answer....”

Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS)

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

- 5 = Strongly Agree
- 4 = Mildly Agree
- 3 = Agree and Disagree Equally
- 2 = Mildly Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

- _____ 1. People close to me probably think I hold a grudge too long.
- _____ 2. I can forgive a friend for almost anything.
- _____ 3. If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same.
- _____ 4. I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did.
- _____ 5. I can usually forgive and forget an insult.
- _____ 6. I feel bitter about many of my relationships.
- _____ 7. Even after I forgive someone, things often come back to me that I resent.
- _____ 8. There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.
- _____ 9. I have always forgiven those who have hurt me.
- _____ 10. I am a forgiving person.

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)

DIRECTIONS: Read each of the following statements. Using the scale to the right, **CIRCLE** the response that best describes how true each statement is for you right now.

	Not at all true of me 1	Somewhat true of me 2	Moderately true of me 3	Mostly true of me 4	Totally true of me 5
1. I often read books and magazines about my faith.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I make financial contributions to my religious organization.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life.	1	2	3	4	5
8. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I enjoy working in the activities of my religious affiliation.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions.	1	2	3	4	5

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale Short Form C (MC-C)

Directions: Listed below are a number of statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Read each item and decide whether the statement is *true* or *false* as it pertains to you personally.

- ___ 1. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.
- ___ 2. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.
- ___ 3. On a few occasions, I have given up Doing something because I thought too little of my ability.
- ___ 4. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.
- ___ 5. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.
- ___ 6. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.
- ___ 7. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
- ___ 8. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
- ___ 9. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.
- ___ 10. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.
- ___ 11. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.
- ___ 12. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.
- ___ 13. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.

Scoring: True=0, False =1; Higher scores indicate more biased self-presentation.

Demographic Information

Directions: You are finished with the survey. We would like to have a little bit of information about you. Please complete these last questions as they apply to you.

Age

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56-65
- ☐ Above 65

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Race: Please check all that apply

- ☐ Caucasian/White
- ☐ African-American/Black
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Latino/Latina
- ☐ Indian/Native American
- ☐ Other (please specify: _____)

Ethnicity

- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Not Hispanic

Member Status: Please check all that apply

- ☐ Visitor
- ☐ Member
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Committee member
- ☐ Deacon
- ☐ Elder
- ☐ Minister on staff
- ☐ Administrative assistant on staff
- ☐ Counselor on staff

Length of Membership:

Please indicate how long you have been a member at your current congregation

- ☐ Have not placed membership
- ☐ Less than one year
- ☐ 1-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11-15 years
- ☐ 16-20 years
- ☐ More than 20 years

Church Attendance:

Please indicate how often you attend activities at this congregation

- ☐ never
- ☐ twice or less per year
- ☐ several times per year
- ☐ one to three times per month
- ☐ weekly
- ☐ several times per week

Appendix C

Normative Data for the RCI-10 for State University Students, Community Christians, Students of Various Religious Identities, Clients, and Counselors.

Sample	Study	<i>N</i>	Total RCI-10	Intrapersonal Commitment (Factor 1)	Interpersonal Commitment (Factor 2)
University students	Archival data collected over a 7-year period.	710	23.1 (10.2)	14.4 (6.7)	8.8 (4.3)
University students	Study 1	155	23.6 (10.8)	14.7 (7.1)	9.0 (4.5)
University students	Study 2	132	25.7 (11.9)	15.9 (7.3)	9.8 (5.1)
Christian students at explicitly Christian Colleges	Study 3	150	38.5 (7.9)	24.6 (4.9)	13.4 (3.7)
Married, Christian adults	Study 4	190	39.0 (9.3)	24.0 (5.9)	15.2 (3.7)
University students	Study 5	468	22.8 (10.5)	14.1 (6.6)	8.5 (4.4)
Sub-sample Buddhist students	Study 5	52	21.1 (8.8)	13.2 (5.3)	7.9 (3.8)
Sub-sample Christian students	Study 5	278	25.8 (10.3)	16.0 (6.3)	9.8 (4.4)
Sub-sample Hindu students	Study 5	10	24.5 (9.9)	15.1 (6.9)	9.4 (3.3)
Sub-sample Muslim students	Study 5	12	29.7 (15.1)	18.4 (9.2)	11.3 (6.0)
Sub-sample Non-religious students	Study 5	116	14.9 (7.1)	9.5 (5.0)	5.3 (2.5)
Clients in Christian	Study 6	167	37.0 (10.4)	23.1 (6.3)	13.9 (4.7)

Agencies					
Clients in a secular counseling center	Study 6	46	21.4 (11.7)	14.1 (7.7)	7.3 (4.5)
Therapists in Christian agencies	Study 6	33	45.9 (4.4)	28.5 (1.8)	17.4 (3.0)
Therapists in a secular counseling center	Study 6	18	25.5 (11.3)	16.2 (7.2)	9.3 (4.4)

Appendix C. Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade, N. G., Hight, T. L., Ripley, J. S., McCullough, M. E., Berry, J. W., Schmitt, M. M., Berry, J. T., Bursley, K. H., & O'Connor, L. (2003). The religious commitment inventory -10: Development, refinement, and validation of a brief scale for research and counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50(1), 84-96. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.50.1.84. Reprinted with permission.

Personal Biography

Chelsea L. Greer was born July, 8, 1983 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Chelsea is currently a second year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at Virginia Commonwealth University. She received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Rochester College in 2004, and Master's degree in Counseling from Michigan State University in 2009. Chelsea lives in the greater Richmond area with her husband, young daughter, and dog. The Greer family is originally from metro-Detroit, Michigan.