

THE ROLE OF REJECTION SENSITIVITY, ATTACHMENT, AND ATTRIBUTIONS  
IN FORGIVENESS OF ROMANTIC PARTNERS

by

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(under the direction of Steven R.H. Beach)

ABSTRACT

Individual vulnerabilities and attributions were examined in relation to forgiveness in intimate relationships. Individual vulnerability was operationalized as rejection sensitivity and insecure attachment. Participants were college students currently in intimate relationships of at least 3 months. They completed measures of attachment and rejection sensitivity, then described an event from their current relationship when they were hurt by their partner, which was coded for severity. They answered questions regarding attributions for the event and the likelihood that they would forgive their partner, and provided definitions of forgiveness. Rejection sensitivity moderated the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness, but insecure attachment did not. Objective severity remained a significant predictor of forgiveness when attributions were tested as a mediator. An alternative mediational model was tested, revealing that ease of forgiveness mediates the relationship between objective severity and event attributions. Definitions of forgiveness were examined qualitatively, revealing five major categories of definitions.

INDEX WORDS: Forgiveness, Rejection Sensitivity, Insecure Attachment, Attributions, Romantic relationships, Definitions of forgiveness

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## INTRODUCTION

Transgressions are likely to occur in every relationship. In their more severe form, relationship transgressions may produce significant distress. This distress, in turn, has the potential to ignite powerful emotional and behavioral responses that can disrupt or dissolve the relationship. Severe interpersonal transgressions may prompt a victim to question basic assumptions about the relationship itself and the transgressor; trust may be destroyed and replaced by doubt and avoidance as the victim attempts to make sense of what has occurred and to protect him or herself from further harm (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). How can we order and make sense of these complex reactions? McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) posit that all affective responses to a transgression can be captured along two basic continua. One dimension captures emotions related to righteous indignation (e.g. sadness, anger, and contempt), the other dimension captures emotions related to hurt and perceived attack (e.g. fear and worry). These affective responses in turn may prompt different types of reactions in the victim. Whereas affective responses on the first dimension may motivate the victim to seek revenge, emotional reactions falling along the second dimension may motivate avoidance of the transgressor in order to be protected from being further victimized. Transgressions are likely to occur in almost every relationship. In their more severe form, relationship transgression may produce significant distress. This distress, in turn, has the potential to ignite powerful emotional and behavioral responses that can disrupt or dissolve the relationship. Severe interpersonal transgressions may prompt a victim to question basic assumptions about the relationship itself and the transgressor; trust may be destroyed and replaced by doubt and avoidance as the victim attempts to make sense of what has occurred and to protect him or herself from further harm (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney,

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Behavioral reactions to the confusion and emotional distress caused by an interpersonal transgression are likely to place strain on the relationship over and above the transgression itself. Avoidance and revenge behaviors on the part of the victim may be reciprocated by the transgressor, or lead to other negative changes in relationship behavior, so that a build-up of negative interactions may result. As the victim and transgressor add more hurtful and negative interactions to the transgression, they may find it difficult to break out of this pattern, and the relationship may deteriorate significantly.

Some empirical evidence, particularly in the area of attributions, appears to bear this out. In response to negative partner acts, distressed couples have been found to make more “distress-maintaining attributions” and to make less “relationship enhancing” attributions in response to positive partner acts (Camper, Jacobson, Holtzworth-Munroe, & Schmalings, 1988). More specifically, differences in attributional content were also found, with distressed couples viewing negative partner behavior as stable and global, but not positive partner behavior. Bradbury and Fincham (1987) cite many studies in which distressed couples show a tendency to be more negative, to reciprocate negativity, and to have more predictable and structured interactions than non-distressed couples. Evidence is also cited to support the notion that marital satisfaction is determined more by negative behaviors than positive ones (Bradbury & Fincham, 1987; Baucom, Sayers, and Duhe,

1989). Thus, it appears that hurts in a relationship may significantly determine the overall nature and course of the relationship, over and above other types of interactions.

Unresolved hurts may lead to a cycle of negativity that is characterized by maladaptive attributions for partner behavior, that becomes potentially stable and inflexible, and that leads to deterioration of the relationship.

#### What role is played by forgiveness?

Forgiveness provides an alternative response to retaliation in response to a transgression. Forgiveness may also have the potential to reduce or completely circumvent some of the negative effects of the transgression for the victim, the transgressor, and the relationship. Forgiveness provides a process through which the victim of a relationship transgression may fully acknowledge the extent to which the transgression was hurtful or detrimental, and yet still make sense of the transgression and the reasons surrounding it. In this way, forgiveness has the potential to move the victim beyond the strong emotional reactions and cognitions that result directly from the transgression, so that a cycle of negative interactions and dyadic distress that can exacerbate the situation may be significantly shortened or stopped altogether. The benefits of forgiveness may therefore cast a wide net, extending to the victim, the transgressor, and the relationship. This is especially relevant for individuals interested in remaining in relationships despite a transgression.

The acknowledgment of hurt at the hands of someone to whom the victim is close is to lead to confusion, emotional distress, and negative interactions with the perpetrator that only exacerbate the distress already experienced by the victim. Negative effects may include depression, hostility, anger, or anxiety about future transgressions (Rusbult, et al., 1991; Haley & Strickland, 1986). In a study in which participants were asked to write about a time when they were angered by someone else (i.e. they were the victim), their accounts tended to focus on negative consequences, anger, and relationship damage (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). Their perceptions of the perpetrator's actions tended also to be negative, (i.e. that the act was unjustified, deliberately harmful, etc.).

So, in the aftermath of the transgression, the most salient emotions for a victim (anger, fear, distrust), in addition to negative attributions, may manifest themselves in avoidance or revenge behaviors. These reactions can further increase dyadic distress and negative interactions. They may also serve to confirm the victim's negative view of the transgression and the perpetrator. At the same time that negative attributions and behaviors are strengthened, the potential for a complete understanding of the event and positive interactions with the perpetrator are weakened.

Thoresen, Harris, and Luskin (2000) cite various examples of the deleterious effects of blame, hostility, and anger on both psychological and physical health. For example, anger, hostility, and hopelessness have been found to be correlated with a host of negative health outcomes ranging from suppressed immune functioning to higher rates of all-cause mortality (Schmaling & Sher, 1997). To the extent that it is not the victim's wish to terminate the relationship, these are important considerations for the potential long-term effects of an unresolved transgression.

One potential benefit of forgiveness, then, lies in its potential to free the victim from negative lasting effects of the transgression, as it may be re-experienced through memory or continued exposure to the transgressor (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000). Forgiveness has been conceptualized as a process through which the victim of a transgression undergoes a change in motivation, from negative to positive, towards the perpetrator. The initiation of the process of change is a choice or willingness on the part of the victim to let go of the negative factors related to the transgression. The process itself, however, must involve some mechanism for reducing the power or salience of these negative factors to the victim. Theories about this mechanism have been largely top-down in nature, and most contain similar elements. These include acknowledgment of the victim's own emotions, along with some attempt to take on the perspective of the perpetrator in understanding the motivation for the transgression and consideration of the

perpetrator outside of the transgression (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000; Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000; Fincham and Beach, in press). Presumably, it is this attempt to view the transgression and the perpetrator more objectively that may lead to the development of an empathic or more positively-valenced view of the perpetrator. For an individual who struggles with hurt at the hands of a partner and yet does not want to end the relationship, the partner remains an important person, but one who is now associated with negative emotions such as hurt and anger because of the pain he or she inflicted. Forgiveness allows for a change in the view of that partner so that the victim is able to experience the relationship positively again.

Considerable evidence has been found to support the notion that letting go of negative cognitive and emotional states can be beneficial to the victim. A few studies have directly examined the impact of forgiveness interventions on psychological health, particularly for the victim of the transgression. Enright has been largely responsible for the implementation of forgiveness interventions for such populations as incest survivors, parentally love-deprived late adolescents, and post-abortion men. In all of these studies, participants who received the forgiveness intervention experienced reductions in psychological symptoms such as anxiety, anger and grief (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995). The effects of anger and hostility on physical health have already been discussed. In addition, it has been shown that increasing positive emotional states reduced heart rate and improved immune functioning. To the extent that this is true, the implications of forgiveness for the health of the victim deserve consideration.

While the benefits to the victim are great, forgiveness has significant implications for the perpetrator as well. To the extent that the perpetrator wishes to remain in the relationship, despite the hurtful act against the victim, and that forgiveness is a way to facilitate that possibility, the perpetrator has a vested interest in the forgiveness process.

The perpetrator may suffer significant guilt and shame for the transgression. This suffering can be ameliorated if the victim is able to make sense of the transgression and let the perpetrator know that he or she is no longer in debt to the victim because of it. Prolonged feelings of being in debt can create resentment and anger towards the victim, emotions which are likely to be quite confusing to the perpetrator. While this may sound as though the forgiveness is only valuable for 'getting the perpetrator off the hook', the distress caused by prolonged, unresolved conflict in a relationship that continues after a transgression are unlikely to be isolated to the victim. Forgiveness potentially affords the perpetrator a changed view of self, in that he or she now has a clean slate and is no longer bound to the hurt done to the victim. A renewed sense of optimism or hope for the relationship may result. The perpetrator may also come to a changed view of the victim as more caring and understanding.

A successful forgiveness process has significant implications for the relationship as well. Forgiveness may change the types of relationship dynamics cited in previous sections as leading to deterioration of the relationship. Forgiveness may facilitate communication between partners in the sense that both partners may feel safer in the relationship and better communication may prevent future hurts from happening. In the same sense, partners may feel less defensive towards each other, in that they now have had experience with considering each other's point of view and are in a position to believe that their partner is willing to do the same. This affords both partners the potential to learn from their mistakes rather than feel the need to defend themselves in the face of blame and anger in the partner. All these points underscore the potential for a decreased likelihood that hurtful behaviors will be repeated once a hurt has been forgiven. Both partners may better understand the context surrounding the first one so that both may work to prevent that context from arising again. In addition, forgiveness has potentially

prevented a cycle of negative interactions that could foster the sort of negative context in which hurts are likely to occur.

### Definitional issues

While such research underscores the importance of studying forgiveness, it raises significant questions as well. The lack of a consensual definition for the construct of forgiveness is a frequently stated problem among forgiveness researchers (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Gordon, et al., 2000; Fincham, 2000). Yet, if there is no agreed upon definition of forgiveness, one might question the development and utility of forgiveness interventions such as those used by Enright. The nature of certain interpersonal transgressions (e.g. incest, domestic violence) should also give pause to researchers bent on ubiquitously asserting the positive nature of forgiveness. As no studies have examined the long-term impact of forgiveness on behavior towards a transgressor, it seems at least possible that victims interpret forgiveness as reconciliation or condoning behavior, and have the potential to be re-victimized in similar ways. In certain situations, the fear and anxiety that a transgression will occur again, which many researchers cite as a barrier to forgiveness, may be protective and adaptive.

Although researchers have gone to great lengths to differentiate forgiveness from other relationship variables (Fincham, 2000; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998), researchers do not yet agree on the best definition of forgiveness. Just as researchers do not agree on an exact definition, one may wonder whether the development of a solid scientific and theoretical definition will accurately reflect how forgiveness is understood and applied in everyday life. An interesting study presented by Shaver (1985) concerning definitions of responsibility attributions revealed that naïve perceivers and theorists made different distinctions about the construct. This finding has wide implications for how research on this construct is conducted and analyzed. It seems forgiveness researchers must address

this issue as well. While it might be possible to derive theoretical and scientific distinctions between forgiveness and other close constructs, the effort might be of little use if the general population does not make the same distinctions. Gaining insight into definitions of forgiveness utilized in everyday life seems particularly important to the development of interventions for situations such as incest, rape, or domestic violence. For example, a definition of forgiveness that implies condoning behavior or reconciling with a perpetrator could be potentially fatal in situations involving domestic violence. And yet, people may understand forgiveness to mean condoning or accepting a transgression. Katz, Street and Arias (1997) conducted research on individual differences in response to dating violence. They found that women who had lower self-esteem and made more negative self-attributions had higher intentions to forgive the violence and to stay in the violent relationship (were more tolerant of the violence). Further, negative self-attributions were uniquely associated with intentions to 'forgive' violence. No forgiveness definition was provided to participants, so that they were presumably responding from their own understanding of the construct. While theoretical definitions of forgiveness may require that the blame for the transgression be attributed to someone besides the victim, it appears that it may not be part of an everyday understanding of the construct. Further, such research underscores the importance of utilizing an inductive, rather than deductive, approach to researching forgiveness. Inductive examination is likely to yield a more complete picture of various ways in which forgiveness might play out for the victim, the transgressor, and the relationship.

However beneficial (or detrimental) forgiveness might be in a given context, it is a complex construct, and one requiring greater understanding if it is to be helpful to victims of interpersonal transgressions. The context surrounding an interpersonal transgression is likely to be influenced by victim and perpetrator characteristics and the interactions of these characteristics. It may also depend on the nature and history of the



relationship (Emmons, 2000; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998). Added to the complexity of these issues is the context in which the transgression occurs (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Sillars, 1985), and the behaviors associated with the transgression. Research thus far has focused largely on single variables (Worthington & Wade, 1999), while forgiveness models attempt to provide for the wealth of possible variables involved. It seems that Fincham's warning that studying single constructs in close relationships leads to a 'disjointed, oversimplified portrayal' (Bradbury & Fincham, 1988, p. 713) may soon apply to forgiveness as well (Thoresen, Luskin, & Harris, 1998).

#### Types of forgiveness

In light of the considerable complexity and definitional issues associated with forgiveness, some researchers have posited that a better approach is to consider possible types of forgiveness. These types may be dependent on many factors, such as the age of the forgiver, the type of relationship in which the transgression occurred, or the motivation for forgiving (e.g. personal gain, for religious reasons, because one wishes to reconcile). Working with the idea promoted by Fincham (in press) of reducing the concept of forgiveness down to its most basic requirements in order to explore it in a bottom-up approach, it is possible to imagine several types of forgiveness.

Fincham posits that at the very least, forgiveness requires some change in the victim's motivation to act negatively towards the perpetrator to a more positive motivation. Various factors could contribute to this change, many of which have been considered by forgiveness researchers. For example, Enright based his model of forgiveness on Kohlberg's stages of justice, thus contributing six possible types of forgiveness. The most primitive is *revengeful forgiveness*, or forgiveness that is understood to occur only after the perpetrator has suffered to a degree comparable to that

of the victim. Followed by this is *conditional forgiveness*, or forgiveness that occurs after what was taken from the victim has been restored. This maps on to forgiveness that is motivated by significant concessions by the perpetrator, such as apologies or begging for forgiveness. *Expectational forgiveness* occurs because forgiveness is expected by others. So, the motivation to forgive is the social desirability of the act. This might be similar to Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer's (1990) concept of hollow forgiveness, which occurs when forgiveness is expressed to the perpetrator but is not truly felt on the part of the victim. The same is true for the next of Enright's stages, *lawful expectational forgiveness*, which occurs because of personal or religious laws, not because of any deliberate consideration on the part of the victim.

Finally, the last two stages, *forgiveness as social harmony* and *forgiveness as love*, are the most closely related to the theoretical conceptualization and other close constructs. *Forgiveness as social harmony* occurs because it is a way to maintain peace in the relationship. This seems particularly close to the concepts of acceptance, reconciliation, condoning, and forgetting, against which researchers have struggled to establish forgiveness as distinct. It is possible that some types of forgiveness involve the following: changing the cognitive context which makes the behavior less problematic (acceptance as described by Jacobson and Christensen, 1998), restoring the relationship to a pre-transgression level of functioning by completely rejoining with the perpetrator (reconciliation) or by pretending the offense never occurred (forgetting/distraction), or re-attributing the cause as lying within the victim rather than the perpetrator (condoning it as a reasonable response to something the victim did). The last stage is the most similar to theoretical conceptualizations of forgiveness. It allows for the acknowledgment of hurt on the part of the victim along with the possibility that this hurt can be overcome by love for or understanding of the perpetrator. So, forgiveness occurs because the victim is

internally motivated despite the hurt to move past the transgression, and is able to fully cope with the event cognitively and emotionally.

### Models of forgiveness

While the idea of possible ‘types’ of forgiveness is intriguing, it has been given little attention by researchers. Researchers have, however, given significant attention to the development of forgiveness models. Each model accounts for different issues surrounding forgiveness, such as precursors and antecedents of forgiveness, essential elements to the process of forgiveness, or the impact of transgressor behavior towards the victim on forgiveness.

### Enright’s developmental model

Enright was the first researcher to empirically test a model of forgiveness. He conceptualized forgiveness as process involving a series of stages that unfold over the life-span. These stages of reasoning about forgiveness, which were described in the previous section on types of forgiveness, were modeled after Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning. Enright studied reasoning about forgiveness in child, adolescent, and adult participants in response to a modified Heinz dilemma. The correlation between forgiveness stage and participant age was high (.70), thus lending support for Enright’s (1989) conceptualization of forgiveness as a developmental process. However, in another related study, differences between adolescents and parents in scores on a forgiveness measure were no longer significant when the degree of hurt was comparable (Mullet and Girard, 2000). These findings, which seem to throw doubt on Enright’s model, served a more important purpose in raising questions about how multiple kinds of relevant information come together to influence judgments about forgiveness. Subsequent studies have examined whether this information is considered in a summative (salient information, such as apologies, either adds or takes away, independent of other information) or configural (each piece of information is dependent of other information

present), with findings supporting a summative effect. This has implications for how factors related to forgiveness might be examined, and how interventions might be structured. For example, the above study found that propensity to forgive can be significantly influenced by information dependent on the perpetrator, namely apology and open confession. So, this might be an important piece of an intervention designed to help couples get past a hurtful event.

This model also has implications for the forgiveness type hypothesis. The stage model implies a continuum of reasoning about forgiveness along which individuals might fall. In adulthood, these individuals might demonstrate 'types' of forgiveness, depending on the level of reasoning they have achieved. It seems likely that this depends somewhat on experience with forgiveness, so that someone who has a significant history of being transgressed against in interpersonal relationships might demonstrate a different type of forgiveness than someone who is relatively new at grappling with the issue. It also seems possible that forgiveness type is relationship-dependent, in that someone might use different reasoning as a function of the type of relationship in which the transgression occurs (e.g. intimate partner versus parent). This could again be the result of experiences with forgiving in different types of relationships, or it could be related to perceptions of the transgressor (e.g. a parent should never transgress against his/her own child versus my partner and I are similar and I understand what s/he was going through).

#### McCullough's apology-empathy-forgiveness model

McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) define interpersonal forgiving as a 'set of motivational changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner, (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender, and (c) increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender's hurtful actions'. Implicit in this definition is the potential for various individual, relationship, and contextual factors to

play a role in the victim's motivational change. McCullough and colleagues presume that these factors play a role in the development of empathy for the transgressor, a step that is key to the process of forgiveness. Presumably, because the victim was close to, constructive toward, and trustful of the transgressor before the transgression, any number of factors could influence the victim to feel empathy towards that person. Once empathy for the transgressor reaches a certain level, it crowds out the victim's motivations to retaliate or avoid the partner and replaces these with caring and conciliatory feelings that in turn lay the foundation for forgiveness.

McCullough et al. (1997) tested the model via three hypotheses examined in two studies. The first hypothesis, that empathy mediates the relationship between dispositional or environmental variables (in this case, apology by the offender) and their effects on forgiveness, was supported. Empathy was found to be a partial mediator of the relationship between apology and forgiveness, so that an apology may facilitate the development of empathy towards the perpetrator. The second hypothesis found support in that forgiving was found to be strongly related to interpersonal behavior towards the transgressor, even when empathy was controlled for. The researchers took this to mean that forgiving is more proximally related to interpersonal behaviors toward the transgressor than is empathy. Thus, empathy precedes forgiveness, which influences subsequent behavior. In a second study, McCullough and colleagues conducted an empirical test of the empathy-forgiveness link. They compared two forgiveness seminars, with one promoting empathy as a precursor to forgiveness, and the other merely encouraging forgiveness. Affective and cognitive empathy were measured. Results showed that the empathy-promoting seminar significantly altered affective empathy, but that the empathy seminar did not change cognitive empathy over and above the comparison seminar. They also found that the empathy seminar facilitated forgiveness in the short-term, but that over time, participants who had not been instructed to consider

empathy forgave as well. The experimenters posited that perhaps the change in cognitive empathy produced by the comparison group was sufficient to facilitate forgiveness over a longer period of time.

This model is important in that it accounts for the relevance of social-psychological variables in the forgiveness equation. However, it is premature to draw strong conclusions about the effects of empathy on forgiveness until other variables have been further considered. In addition, while empathy may be an important precursor to forgiveness, it is obvious that it may not be an essential determinant, as participants in the control condition forgave over time.

#### The attribution-forgiveness-behavior model

The attribution-forgiveness model stems from a definition of forgiveness that requires the victim to 1) be conscious of having been hurt or wronged by the transgressor, b) believe that the hurt was committed with intention or negligence (i.e. transgressor could have foreseen that the victim would be hurt), and 3) experience a change in motivation from positive to negative towards the transgressor. The rationale behind this definition that is made up of necessary elements of forgiveness is to separate it from other close constructs (e.g. condoning, reconciliation) and to provide for the examination of forgiveness from many different angles (Fincham, 2000). For example, the extent to which the hurt was intentional on the part of the perpetrator may have a significant impact on the level of responsibility that the victim attributes to that person. The more responsibility attributed to the perpetrator, the more difficult it might be to forgive. Fincham (2000) conceives of this definition as a chain of factors: transgressor - act or omission - injury. This chain provides several potential angles of investigation, with the idea that any factor that weakens or strengthens the link between any part of the chain will influence forgiveness outcomes. One angle is the context surrounding the transgression itself. The nature of the transgression will be highly influential in the level

of hurt experienced, in the attributions made for it, and indeed in the decision about whether or not forgiveness is relevant or warranted. Thus, the perceived severity of the event is likely to significantly impact the likelihood of forgiveness. The perpetrator and his or her relationship to the victim are also likely to be interesting angles from which to view the outcome of the transgression. For example, if the perpetrator explains the reasons for the hurtful event, apologizes, or commits some act of restitution, forgiveness might be facilitated.

The attribution-forgiveness link has found some preliminary support. In a study of 71 British couples in their third year of marriage, Fincham (2000) found that forgiveness completely mediated the relationship between responsibility attributions and behavior for both spouses. These results remained when marital quality was controlled for. The current study proposes to examine variables that may contribute to attributions for a transgression that in turn influence forgiveness.

### The Current Proposal

The current proposal attempts to tackle a few of the aforementioned problems in the existing research of forgiveness processes and factors that may influence them. The proposed model includes contextual variables (ratings of severity for the transgression, attachment security, and rejection sensitivity) and attributions for the event. Thus, the model accounts for the view of forgiveness as a process that is multi-variate in nature, and subsequently provides for the examination of multiple influential factors. The model builds on Fincham's (2000) model exploring the relationship between responsibility attributions, forgiveness, and subsequent behavior. In the current study, I examine variables that may contribute to attributions for a transgression, which in turn influence forgiveness. In addition, I focus on real transgressions that have taken place in romantic relationships. As most studies have focused on hypothetical events, it is hoped that gaining information about forgiveness as it has actually occurred (or not occurred) will

strengthen support of the model, and contribute information about processes underlying actual forgiveness.

#### Attributions and forgiveness

In support of a model that includes attributions and forgiveness is the logical link between the two constructs - both by definition require the presence of at least two actors, and the presence of a relationship event for which someone is responsible. In terms of forgiveness, that relationship event is perceived as hurtful (i.e. a transgression). The occurrence of benign attributions of the partner's behavior (specific, unstable, and external) vs. maladaptive attributions (global, stable, and internal) are likely to be influenced by many of the same factors that will influence forgiveness (Fincham, in press). Variables characteristic of the victim, the perpetrator, and the situation itself all appear to play a role in types of attributions made (e.g. Worthington & Wade, 1999; Boon & Sulsky; 1997, Mongeau, Hale, & Alles, 1994; Baucom, Sayers, & Duhe, 1989).

The hypothesis that a model of forgiveness should include attributions about a transgression is supported by numerous findings concerning the link between relationship attributions and subsequent behavior and satisfaction (Bradbury, Beach, Fincham & Nelson, 1996; Bradbury & Fincham, 1988). Bradbury and Fincham (1992) found that maladaptive attributions were related to fewer problem-solving behaviors, and to increased incidences of negative behavior during a problem-solving discussion. Bradbury, Beach, Fincham, and Nelson (1996) found associations between attributions and behavior for both distressed and non-distressed couples, but only for wives. Additional research has shown that attributions that maintain distress tend to be made in response to negative partner behavior (Camper, Jacobson, Holtzworth-Munroe, & Schmaling, 1988). Further, distressed couples tend to be characterized by more maladaptive attributions (Kyle & Falbo, 1985) especially if the female is depressed (Bradbury, Beach, Fincham, & Nelson, 1996; Harvey, 1981). This is also true of couples



who report less relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham 1987). Bradbury and Fincham (1992) propose a process through which attributions can account for the above findings. They propose that negative partner behavior may reinforce already existing maladaptive attributions, which begins a cycle of negativity that erodes relationship satisfaction. This cycle could include both devaluation of the partner (Bauserman, Arias, & Craighead, 1995; Baucom, Sayers, & Duhe, 1989) and negative behavior following maladaptive attributions. Research has yet to bear this out.

These findings can be extended to forgiveness such that maladaptive attributions following a relationship transgression lead to negative behavior and maintain distress, thus making it more difficult to forgive. However, as the above research illustrates, there are likely to be factors beyond the event itself that influence the extent to which maladaptive attributions are made. The proposed study posits that attributions following a transgression may be influenced by the subjective impact of that transgression on the victim. Further, the current study examines attachment security and rejection sensitivity as potential moderators of the relationship between the severity of the transgression and ease of forgiveness.

### Moderators

Certain individual characteristics may make an individual vulnerable to the negative effects of a transgression, such that the subjective impact of a given transgression is more negative for that particular individual than it would be if experienced by someone without that vulnerability. An example of such a vulnerability would be an excessive fear that a transgression might lead to loss of a significant relationship. Rejection sensitivity and insecure attachment are two related ways of examining this fear as it relates to interpersonal transgressions. Rejection sensitivity is an idea forwarded by Downey to specify the types of reactions an individual might have to

repeated experiences of rejection by others. Attachment theory is more broad and well-established, and may serve to capture other aspects of subjective impact.

### Attachment

Attachment is construed as a “behavioral control system” which “organizes and directs behaviors or activities to achieve specific set goals” (West & Sheldon-Keller, 1994; Collins & Read, 1994). While previously described as an infant adaptation developed to get needs met by a caregiver, attachment has recently been researched as characteristic of adult romantic relationships (Kunze & Shaver, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The goal for which attachment is adaptive is “a sense of security” which is achieved by “proximity to a special and preferred other” (West & Sheldon-Keller, 1994). Hazan and Shaver (1987) found evidence that the prevalence of secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment styles were similar in adulthood as in infancy, that these three types had different (and predictable) experiences of love, and that attachment was meaningfully related to mental models of the self, social relationships, and relationship experiences with parents.

Attachment in adulthood has been described in cognitive-emotional processing terms. Specifically, early interpersonal experiences with the caregiver become internalized. When a child’s sense of security is threatened, he or she seeks out the attachment figure. The attachment figure’s response to the threat (restores security vs spurns child’s needs) becomes the basis for a cognitive affective schema of relationships. This ‘internal working model’ of relationships influences the child’s expectations for future relationships. Expectations shape cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to interaction that have the potential to influence subsequent relationship experiences (Collins & Read, 1994). So, a child whose needs have not been met by a caregiver may enact behaviors (avoidance for self-protection or increased-proximity seeking due to fear of losing caregiver altogether) that strain the relationship and negatively influence the

likelihood that the attachment figure will meet the child's needs. Thus, as the child grows into adulthood, the internal working model has the potential to become crystallized (West & Sheldon-Keller, 1994; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). Perception of relevant information takes on a top-down, theory driven quality so that the cognitive response patterns form in response to attachment situations; internal working models affect processing of new information through selective attention, selective memory encoding, and inference and explanation (Collins & Read, 1994; Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). Thus, new experiences are likely to be viewed as very similar to old ones. These patterns that develop may be altered by positive experiences with a partner who reacts differently to relationship needs (Baldwin et al., 1996). However, the shaping of expectations and cognitive-emotional processing by early experiences is likely to heavily influence the cognitive and emotional processing of future interpersonal experiences (Collins & Read, 1994).

Attachment thus has the potential to heavily influence the cognitive-emotional processing of a relationship transgression and the behavioral response to it, depending on the structure of a given individual's internal working model. Internal working models contain information about the both the self and about others. Thus, two dimensions affect the pattern of attachment responses a given person may develop: the "model of self" involves how worthy a person believes himself to be of love from another, while the "model of other" involves the extent to which that person believes the other is willing and reliable in giving love or providing for needs (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; Fields 1998). The model of self is related to anxiety and dependency ("Am I worthy of being loved?"); the model of other is related to the extent to which a person will seek or avoid close others ("Should I risk asking for it?") (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

These two dimensions (collectively termed attachment security) are likely to affect attributions, or explanations, for the transgression. Individuals with a negative

other model (high on the avoidance dimension) are likely to make maladaptive attributions about their partner in the face of the transgression, and thus enact a negative behavioral response. Individuals with a negative self-model (high on the anxiety dimension) may be more likely to believe that the transgression was justified or simply be prompted by the transgression to fear the loss of the partner, thus prompting behavior that ensures that this will not occur. These individuals may be less likely to make maladaptive attributions towards their partner.

### Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity may be a significant predictor of forgiveness outcomes, as it is likely to significantly influence how interpersonal transgressions are both interpreted and responded to. Rejection sensitivity is defined as the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Transgressions that may require forgiveness against those who are highly sensitive to rejection are likely to be interpreted as signs of rejection. This specific interpretation by individuals sensitive to rejection, by definition, is likely to produce overreactions such that the probability of a forgiving response is likely to be significantly reduced. The notion of negative forms of overreacting by rejection-sensitive individuals to events interpreted as rejections is well supported by the literature. Maladaptive responses to rejection have been shown to take the form of hostility, jealousy, and abusiveness (Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen, & Shoda, 1999; Dutton, Ginkel, & Landolt, 1996). Rejection sensitivity has also been linked to poor outcomes in a variety of realms, such as increased interpersonal difficulties and declines in school performance for children (Downey, Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998), heightened experience of traumatic symptoms following traumatic interpersonal events (Reyes, 1999), and accelerated HIV progression in gay men who have not openly revealed their sexual orientation (Cole, Kemeny, & Taylor, 1997). These findings suggest both that rejection-sensitive individuals may be particularly at risk for negative outcomes

as a result of being victims of a relationship transgression, and that forgiveness as a positive alternative response to perceived rejection for these individuals has significant clinical value.

Research in the development of rejection sensitivity has focused mainly on attachment theory. According to the theory, early interpersonal experiences influence the development of internal working models of relationships, or templates for how relationships are expected to work. From early experiences with caregivers, children learn to expect that others will respond to their needs for security either positively or negatively. One example of a negative response to security-seeking behavior is rejection. Children whose needs are met with rejection may come to expect rejection in later relationships - they become rejection sensitive (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Thus, expressing needs to others produces anxiety and anticipation of rejection, and the primary concern becomes avoidance of rejection. Downey and Feldman (1996) couch this in cognitive-affective terms in which early rejection experiences “shape the expectations, values, and concerns, interpretive biases, and self-regulatory strategies that underlie behavior in particular interpersonal contexts”. Rejection sensitivity thus becomes embedded in the context of intimate relationships, as these involve some dependence on a partner to meet one’s needs. The model predicts that rejection sensitive individuals are likely to perceive negative partner behaviors as rejecting, to feel anxiety about getting their needs met by the partner, and to respond to perceived rejection with hostility (Ayduk et al., 1999), diminished support (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998), or jealousy (Dutton, 1996). These over-reactive behaviors are likely to have deleterious effects on relationship functioning. Indeed, in a study of the effects of rejection sensitivity on romantic relationships, Downey and Feldman (1996) found that couples in which one person was rejection-sensitive were unhappy in their relationships, and that the over-reactive responses (jealousy in rejection-sensitive men, hostility and decreased

support in women) accounted for a significant amount of dissatisfaction. The behavioral responses of rejection sensitive individuals to perceived rejection has also been shown to elicit rejection, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in intimate relationships and increasing the likelihood of a break-up (Downey et al, 1998). Thus, forgiveness might be valuable to the rejection-sensitive individual in that it provides an alternative response to the damaging responses likely to be enacted by rejection-sensitive individuals in their intimate relationships. In the same vein, to the extent that rejection-sensitivity alters or precludes forgiveness, it would be an important consideration for forgiveness interventions.

Relationship transgressions for which forgiveness might be appropriate map on well to the model of rejection sensitivity. Transgressions against a rejection sensitive individual are likely to be viewed as evidence of rejection. The negative reactions shown by the literature to be produced by perceived rejection are likely to influence the forgiveness process a rejection-sensitive individual goes through. If high rejection-sensitive individuals do forgive, it is likely to be a different ‘type’ of forgiveness than that experienced by low rejection-sensitive individuals. Because the rejection-sensitive individual is likely to interpret the transgression as rejecting, the transgression may prompt significant anxiety about the potential loss of the relationship and emotional overreactions (Downey, Bonica, and Rincon, 1999). The motivation to forgive is therefore likely to be significantly based in this fear. The rejection-sensitive victim’s concerns may be more focused on ensuring that the rejection does lead to the end of the relationship, rather than any acknowledgment of hurt or justification to act negatively toward the perpetrator. Downey et al. (1999) have theorized two different behavioral manifestations for these concerns, which they term *reflective responses*. This term implies cognitive-processing of the implications of the transgression, and both types of reflective responses are aimed at preventing loss of the relationship implied by the

transgression. The rejection-sensitive individual may react with *coercion*, becoming angry, sullen, or violent (holding out forgiveness in order to make the partner feel guilty or fearful of what would happen if they ended the relationship). Or, the rejection-sensitive individual may react with *compliance*, attempting to cause the perpetrator to see that individual in a positive light and decrease any potential for the perpetrator to end the relationship.

Another response typology outlined by Downey et al. (1999) is *reflexive* response. This implies a more immediate emotional overreaction to the transgression. This heightened emotional reaction may impede the rejection-sensitive individual's ability to devote sufficient cognitive resources necessary for forgiveness to occur. Thus, it appears that rejection sensitivity may predict both 'forgiveness' and non-forgiveness. However, it is likely that the type of forgiveness experienced by a rejection-sensitive individual will be somewhat superficial, in that it will be motivated by desires to keep the relationship together rather than to fully process a relationship transgression.

#### Goals of the Current Study

The current proposal will attempt to gain an understanding of forgiveness that pulls from and is supported by research findings and theories related to attachment, rejection sensitivity, and relationship attributions. In addition, it will attempt to inform forgiveness research by building on a model that has already gained some empirical support (Fincham, 2000), thus lending strength to interpretations about subsequent findings. Findings regarding attachment security, rejection sensitivity, and attributions may also serve to inform forgiveness interventions (See Figure 1).

An additional goal of the proposal is to gain information regarding the definitions of forgiveness people tend to work with in response to everyday life situations. It is possible that there are different patterns of forgiveness utilized by individuals, which would produce interesting speculations about individual characteristics that might

influence a conceptualization of forgiveness. This information would be valuable both in organizing future forgiveness research and designing interventions.

### Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Attributions for the transgression will be important predictors of expectations about forgiveness. Specifically, maladaptive attributions for the transgression will be negatively related to the expectation of forgiveness.

Hypothesis 2: Certain vulnerabilities may play a significant role in the types of attributions made for a relationship transgression. Specifically, insecure attachment and/or high levels of rejection sensitivity may moderate the relationship between the severity of the transgression and expectations about forgiveness.

Hypothesis 3: The subjective impact of the event will mediate the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness.

Hypothesis 4: Attributions for the transgression will mediate the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness.

Hypothesis 5a: Definitions of forgiveness provided by participants will tend to fall roughly along the same dimensions as elaborated in Enright's model (revengeful, conditional, expectational and lawful expectational, forgiveness as social harmony, and forgiveness as love).

Hypothesis 5b: Definitions of forgiveness will influence expectations about the ease of forgiveness. Specifically, definitions of forgiveness will account for additional variance in expectations about ease of forgiveness beyond event severity, the interaction of event severity and vulnerability, and negative attributions.



## METHODS

### Participants

Participants (N=232) were undergraduates recruited from a large southeastern university who were in a dating relationship of at least three months at the time of the study. A three month long relationship was required to allow time for relevant relationship issues are more likely to emerge and to allow dating partners develop interdependence and some sense of 'couple' identity. Participants were recruited from the subject pool, and were given course credit for their participation. In terms of age, 62% of the participants were between 17 and 19 years of age, 35% were between 20 and 22 years, and the remainder of the sample was above 22 years of age. The group was predominately white (88%), with 7% African American, 1% Hispanic, and 2% Asian. Almost half (46%) were in their first year of college, while 25% were in their second year, 18% were in their third, and percent in their fourth (remaining percentages had been in college five or more years). They had been dating their current partner on average between 12 and 24 months, with a range from 3 months to over 36 months and reported viewing the relationship as exclusive (Table 1).

### Measures

#### Self-Report Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

The attachment measure is a 36-item self-report measure assessing attachment styles along avoidance and anxiety dimensions. Participants respond using a Likert scale with the extent to which they agree or disagree with an item. Examples of items include: 'I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep down' (avoidant) and 'I worry about being abandoned' (anxiety).

The measure was developed using a pool of 482 items designed to assess 60 attachment related constructs. These were factor-analyzed to produce two relatively orthogonal factors ( $r = .12$ ). An anxiety scale and an avoidance scale were formed based on the two factors, and demonstrated high internal consistency (alpha: anxiety=.91, avoidant=.94). Similar results were obtained for our sample (alpha: anxiety=.90, avoidance=.91). In terms of predicting forgiveness outcomes, secure versus insecure (fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive) styles are delineated on the basis that insecure attachment styles reflect concerns about partner support and stability, which will be associated with a decreased likelihood of forgiving (Table 2)

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

This measure was designed to measure the anxious expectation piece of rejection sensitivity. It consists of 18 hypothetical situations involving parents, peers, and romantic partner, and in which rejection is a possible outcome. Participants respond along two dimensions: degree of anxiety about the outcome and expectations of acceptance or rejection. A Likert-type scale is used for both dimensions, with 1 representing the lowest degree of anxiety and least likelihood of acceptance (most rejection) and 6 representing the maximum degree of anxiety and expectation of acceptance (least rejection). Scoring involves weighting the expected likelihood of rejection by degree of anxiety over its occurrence. The measure demonstrated high internal reliability (.83) and test-retest reliability. Initial scores and scores three weeks later correlated at .83. In a separate sample, the RSQ was re-administered 4 months after the initial administration, and scores correlated at .78. Comparable results were obtained for the current sample (alpha = .84) (Table 2).

Forgiveness Questionnaire. (unpublished questionnaire, Jackson, Beach, and Fincham, 2000).

This measure was based on the Reconciliation and Forgiveness Test (RAFT: Fincham and Beach, 2000), which addresses positive, negative, and forgiveness reactions

to hypothetical events. The current measure asked participants to describe a past transgression in their current relationship, and to rate how severe the event was (subjective impact variable). Participants also made causal and responsibility attributions about their partner's role in the event (adapted from the Relationship Attribution Measure, Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), which were aggregated to derive the event attribution variable. The higher the aggregate score (range 6-36), the more negative, or maladaptive, the attribution. Reliability for the six attribution items was adequate for this sample ( $\alpha=.63$ ) (Table 2).

Finally, participants were asked questions about their expectations for forgiveness and their actual forgiveness of the partner for the negative event. Questions included whether participants forgave, did not forgive, or partially forgave, ways in which the event changed their feelings toward their partner as well as the relationship, and factors they believed negatively or positively affected their likelihood of forgiving. The dependent variable, ease of forgiveness, was a composite of three questions regarding negative reactions towards the partner after the event ( 'How difficult was it to stop thinking about how you had been mistreated?', 'How easy was it to get over feeling negative or resentful for how you were mistreated?' (reverse coded), 'How much did you want to do something to even the score?'), three questions regarding positive reactions towards the partner after the event (How difficult was it to think of your partner in a positive way again after this happened?', 'How easy was it to feel warmly again towards your partner?', 'How long was it before you could act positively toward your partner after this happened?'), and a question regarding the initial inclination to forgive ('Initially, right after the event, how likely did you think you would be to forgive your partner?'). The seven items demonstrated good internal reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ) (Table 2) and were significantly correlated with each other (Table 4). Scores could range from 7 to 42. (See Table 3 for correlations among measures).

### Procedure

Participants were recruited in groups of 20. They first read and signed consent forms, and were then given two packets of questionnaires. The experimenter briefly described the nature of the study, discussed the instructions, and fielded questions. Participants were assured that their responses were confidential, and that their participation was voluntary. The first packet included the demographic questionnaire, the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ), and the Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment (MMARA). Once these questionnaires were completed, they were asked to complete the Forgiveness Questionnaire. The Forgiveness Questionnaire always followed the other questionnaires so that recall of a negative relationship event did not prime participants' responses to the initial questionnaires. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants were fully debriefed by the experimenter and given forms explaining the nature and purpose of the study. Referrals were provided for all participants in case anyone might have experienced discomfort during the study.

### Coding

#### Written description of the negative event

Descriptions of the negative interpersonal event between the participant and his or her partner were coded by an undergraduate research assistant and the experimenter. Coding instructions were to rate the severity of the event from the average person's perspective, in an effort to remove coder bias. Coders were instructed to ignore information about the impact the event on the participant. Coders independently rated each transgression on the same 10-point scale with which the participant rated it. The Spearman-Brown formula for calculating effective reliability was used to assess inter-rater reliability, following Rosenthal's recommendation (1982). Effective inter-rater reliability for event severity was calculated on 33% of the total usable sample. Severity

ratings of the two coders were correlated (.63), resulting in an effective reliability (the reliability of the mean of the two judges' ratings rather than a single judge) of .79 (Table 2).

#### Codes for forgiveness definitions

Codes for forgiveness questionnaires were derived from the definitions provided by participants. The experimenter read approximately 50 definitions in an attempt to derive consistent categories by which the others could be classified. The five resulting categories included: *forgiveness as understanding* (definitions describing communication between partners, attempts to 'talk things out', or understand the other's perspective or the reason for the event), *conditional forgiveness* (implies that a condition, such as an apology, retribution, or the promise that the event will not happen again, must be in place for forgiveness to occur), *forgiveness as moving on* (any statement such as 'putting the event behind', 'getting over', 'accepting the event as a mistake', 'getting over the hurt'), *forgiveness as restoration of trust* (restored trust or confidence in the partner and/or relationship), *forgiveness as termination of negative reactions* (statements about getting over a grudge or the urge to exact revenge on or behave negatively towards the transgressor). A final category, *forgiveness as acceptance* (implying a reframing of the event as something the victim should not be upset about or should live with), was added in the hopes that it might clarify definitional issues; however, only two individuals in the sample gave this as a definition of forgiveness. Accordingly, this definition could not be used in the current study.

Inter-rater reliability for the forgiveness definition codes was calculated using the formula for Cohen's Kappa. Reliabilities were calculated for each category separately. The results for each category are as follows: *understanding* (.75), *conditional forgiveness* (.87), *moving on* (.77), *restored trust* (.99), *stopping negative reactions* (.84). (Table 2).

### Analyses

Multiple regression analyses were used, following the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986) for analysis of moderation and mediation. In order to examine the relationship between all major study variables (objective rating of event severity, avoidant and anxious attachment dimensions, rejection sensitivity, subjective impact, and attributions) and forgiveness outcomes, Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted between all pairs of variables. Rejection sensitivity and attachment were analyzed as moderators of the relationship between objective severity of the event and attributions for the event. Subjective severity (the participants' rating of the event severity) and attributions for the event were both analyzed as mediators of the relationship between objective severity of the event and ease of forgiveness.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

#### Zero-Order Correlations

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was conducted for ease of forgiveness, objective severity ratings, rejection sensitivity, the avoidance and anxiety dimensions of the attachment measure, attributions for the event, and subjective impact. All variables except objective ratings, the avoidance dimension, and subjective impact, met criteria for normality. An examination of distributions for these variables revealed a slight negative skew for objective severity ratings, a negative skew for avoidance, and a positive skew for severity ratings.

The participants' age, the length of the current relationship, and religion were correlated with the criterion variable in order to rule out potential confounds. None of these variables were significantly related to ease of forgiveness. Only the length of the current relationship (number of months dating the partner) was significantly correlated with objective severity, rejection sensitivity, avoidance, and severity rating. Thus, all major analyses involving these variables were conducted controlling for this variable. The pattern of results did not change. In addition, examination of demographics revealed three individuals who had been dating for less than three months. Their data were removed from further analysis.

#### Gender

Gender was examined as it related to the variables in the model, including objective severity, rejection sensitivity, subjective impact, attributions, and ease of forgiveness, using independent-sample t-tests with gender as the grouping factor. Significant group differences were found for only one variable, subjective impact of the event. Males (N=61 for this analysis) appear to view the severity of the recalled negative relationship transgressions as less severe ( $M = 6.84$ ,  $S.D. = 2.58$ ) than women (N = 168)

( $M = 7.63$ ,  $S.D. = 1.87$ ) ( $t = -2.756$ ,  $p < .023$ ). This value is based on an assumption of unequal variances, as Levene's Test for Equality of Variances suggested inequality in male and female variances. As a result of this finding, it was decided that gender should be controlled for in analyses involving subjective impact (i.e. Hypothesis 3).

Hypothesis 1: Do maladaptive attributions for the relationship transgression predict decreased ease of forgiveness?

Attributions for the transgression were regressed on 'ease of forgiveness' in order to examine their predictive ability. Results showed that event attributions are a significant predictor of 'ease of forgiveness' ( $b = -.477$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Specifically, the more maladaptive the attributions for the transgression, the more difficult participants initially found it to forgive.

Hypothesis 2a: Does rejection sensitivity moderate the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness?

In order to examine the relationship between objective ratings of event severity, rejection sensitivity, and ease of forgiveness, an analysis of moderation was conducted following the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986). The first step involved dealing with potential multicollinearity between first-order and higher-order terms by centering both the objective severity and rejection sensitivity before conducting analysis of moderation (Aiken & West, 1991). The centered objective severity variable was entered at Step 1, followed by the centered rejection sensitivity variable at Step 2. Finally, the product term (objective severity x rejection sensitivity) was entered at Step 3. The product term was significant ( $b = .198$ ,  $p < .002$ ), indicating that rejection sensitivity does moderate the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness (Table 7).

While significant moderation indicates that the slopes of the regression lines for the two predictors are significantly different, it is necessary to examine whether each slope differs from zero, and the way in which they differ from each other. This is indicative of what is occurring within a group. Explication of moderation analyses were



conducted following the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991). This involved determining the simple slope for the interaction term by calculating the predicted values for ease of forgiveness at values both one standard deviation above and below the mean value of rejection sensitivity. These slopes were then subjected to regression analyses in order to determine whether they differed significantly from zero, and from each other. New variables were created that represented one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean for rejection sensitivity, respectively. Then, the cross-products of each of these variables with objective severity were created. Ease of forgiveness was regressed on objective severity, the respective new variable, and the relevant cross-product. The parameter estimates of objective severity at each level (high and low) of rejection sensitivity indicated the level of association between objective severity and ease of forgiveness at each of these levels of rejection sensitivity. T-tests of these slopes indicated whether they differed significantly from zero (Table 8). The simple slope of objective severity at high levels of rejection sensitivity was not significantly different from zero ( $b = -.162$ ,  $p = .103$ ). The simple slope of objective severity at low levels of rejection sensitivity was significantly different from zero ( $b = -.615$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). These slopes are plotted in Figure 2. As can be seen, the effect of objective severity on individuals low in rejection sensitivity is much stronger than the impact on individuals high on rejection sensitivity. The shape of the curves suggests that, over the range of severity examined, high rejection sensitive individuals were relatively insensitive to variations in severity. Conversely, for low rejection sensitive individuals, it was easy to forgive partner transgressions low in severity, but difficult to forgive higher severity events.

Hypothesis 2b: Does insecure attachment moderate the relationship between objective severity of the transgression and ease of forgiveness?

Insecure attachment was examined in relation to event attributions using each dimension (anxiety, avoidance) separately. Analyses of moderation as recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) were conducted in order to examine each dimension as a

moderator of the relationship between objective severity and event attributions. Before beginning analysis of moderation, both objective rating and the avoidance and anxiety dimension variables were centered, and cross-products created (objective rating x avoidance, objective rating x anxiety). These variables were then entered into an equation in steps, with objective severity entered first, followed by the relevant attachment dimension (anxiety or avoidance), followed by the relevant product term. Ease of forgiveness was the criterion variable. Neither the product term for anxiety (Table 5) nor the product term for avoidance (Table 6) were significant ( $b = .076$ ,  $p = .228$ ;  $b = -.056$ ,  $p = .368$ , respectively). Interestingly, the zero-order correlation between attachment anxiety and rejection sensitivity was .319, and the correlation between avoidance and rejection sensitivity .215, suggesting the possibility that these two scales were capturing overlapping variance (Table 3).

Hypothesis 3: Does the subjective impact of the event mediate the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness?

Analysis of mediation was conducted following the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1986). As gender was significantly correlated with subjective impact, it was controlled for in this analysis. Ease of forgiveness was regressed on objective severity in the first step ( $b = -.413$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), then subjective impact was regressed on objective severity ( $b = .486$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Finally, gender, objective severity, and subjective impact were entered into the model in steps, with ease of forgiveness as the criterion. Full mediation would be indicated if the significant relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness was attenuated by entering subjective impact into the model. This was not found to be the case, as objective severity and subjective impact were significant and independent predictors of ease of forgiveness ( $b = -.275$ ,  $p < .0001$ ;  $b = -.303$ ,  $p < .0001$ , respectively) (Table 10).

Hypothesis 4: Do attributions for the transgression mediate the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness?

The analysis of mediation was conducted as prescribed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Thus, the criterion variable ease of forgiveness was regressed on objective severity, and the mediator (attributions for the event) was regressed on objective severity. The regression of ease of forgiveness on objective severity was significant ( $b = -.413$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), as was the regression of event attributions on objective severity ( $b = .216$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Following these simple regressions, the predictor and mediator were entered into the model in a step-wise fashion, with ease of forgiveness as the criterion. Objective severity entered the model first, followed by event attributions. In order for attributions to have fully mediated the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness, the significant relationship between these two variables would have to become non-significant once attributions were entered into the model (thus showing that attributions accounted for the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness). The results we obtained suggest that attributions do not mediate the relationship; rather, objective severity and event attributions are both strongly and independently related to ease of forgiveness ( $b = -.322$ ,  $p < .0001$ ;  $b = -.437$ ,  $p < .0001$ , respectively) (Table 9). The negative signs indicate that these two variables are inversely related to ease of forgiveness; that is, as the severity of the event increases and attributions for it become more negative, it becomes less easy to forgive. When objective severity, rejection sensitivity, the product term for objective severity and rejection sensitivity (moderator) and event attributions were entered into the model together at the final step, rejection sensitivity ceased to be a significant moderator of the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness ( $b = .138$ ,  $p < .012$ ). (Figure 3).

Hypothesis 5a:

Categories of definitions were derived from definitions provided by participants, and not from Enright's model. This was in keeping with our goal of looking at everyday definitions of forgiveness rather than attempting to map these onto theoretical definitions

conceptualized by forgiveness researchers. Five fairly distinct categories emerged from the sample: forgiveness as conditional in terms of resting on an apology or some form of retribution, forgiveness as restoring trust lost after the event, forgiveness as putting an end to negative reactions towards the partner, forgiveness as getting past or moving on after the event, and forgiveness as understanding the context of the event (Table 11). Several of the categories derived from this sample map relatively well onto Enright's description of the "stages" of forgiveness. Specifically, the 'conditional forgiveness' category is similar to Enright's conditional forgiveness stage in that they both emphasize a concession on the part of the transgressor being essential before forgiveness can occur. Our category of 'restored trust' could also be said to map onto this stage as defined by Enright, in that conditional involves restoration of something lost (Enright, 1989). Getting over negative reactions and moving on after the event roughly map onto Enright's stage of forgiveness as social harmony in that both involve the restoration of the relationship to a pre-transgression state. Finally, the category forgiveness as understanding most closely fits Enright's stage of forgiveness as love in terms of involving acknowledgment of hurt on the part of the victim, communication about the event, and attempts to cognitively and emotionally cope with the event.

Some of the stages posited by Enright were not generated in this sample. Stages of forgiveness provided by Enright and not in evidence in our sample include revengeful forgiveness, and expectational and lawful expectational forgiveness. The stages not generated in our sample focus on forgiveness that is motivated by meeting the expectations of others, and is thus extrinsic. This might include forgiveness to follow the rules of religion, or to fulfill a particular social role. In terms of Enright's stage called revengeful forgiveness, this would best fit within conditional forgiveness as we have described it; however, no one in the sample described forgiveness in this way.

#### Hypothesis 5b:

In order to examine forgiveness definitions as they relate to the forgiveness process, the five categories (understanding, learning from/getting past, restoring trust,

getting over vengeful reactions, conditional forgiveness) were grouped in two super-ordinate categories. Some of the definitions, specifically forgiveness through understanding/communication and forgiveness as learning from the event/moving on, seemed to apply that the relationship would somehow be changed or different as a result of the event (new understanding of the relationship and partner, learning from the event). These definitions were grouped together under the category of “accommodative” forgiveness, although the term “transformative” might also have fit. The other three (trust, conditional forgiveness, getting over negative feelings), however, seemed to imply that the relationship would return to its pre-event level; in effect, that the event would not have changed the relationship in any way. These definitions were grouped together under the category of “assimilative” forgiveness. However, the term “restorative” might also have captured the sense of these definitions. We examined these categories as they related to initial forgiveness reactions, attributions for the event, and rejection sensitivity using independent-sample t-tests. Only initial forgiveness reactions (ease of forgiveness) approached significance ( $t = -1.925$ ,  $p = .056$ ). The mean for the assimilative group on initial ease of forgiveness was 29.26. The mean for the accommodative group on initial ease of forgiveness was 31.65. Thus, the group whose definitions of forgiveness implied simply returning the relationship to status quo were lower on initial ease of forgiveness than the group for whom the event altered their relationship in some positive way.

#### Additional analyses:

In addition to the hypothesized analyses, an alternative model was tested, placing initial ease of forgiveness as the mediator between objective severity ratings and attributions for the event. It made sense to test this model in light of the fact that event attribution items were not framed in such a way as the lead participants to consider their attributions at the time of the event, as the other forgiveness questions has been. Thus, participants could conceivably be answering in terms of their *current* attributions for the past event. If this were the case, then participants’ attributions as measured in this study could be considered cognitive sequela of forgiveness for a painful interpersonal event.

This alternative model still examines the forgiveness process, only it potentially provides some information about the aftermath of forgiveness and ways in which it alters thinking about the partner and the relationship. This alternative model has some intuitive appeal because it suggests that the ease of forgiving a partner's transgression is related to the attributions the individuals make for the event. In this model, it is ease of forgiveness that drives attributions rather than the other way around.

The hypothesis that initial reactions to forgiveness mediate the relationship between the objective severity of the event and event attributions was tested using analysis of mediation following the same steps outlined previously (Baron and Kenny, 1986). First, event attributions were regressed on objective severity ratings, with significant results ( $b = .216, p < .001$ ). Attributions were then regressed on initial reactions to forgiveness, also yielding significant results ( $b = -.477, p < .0001$ ). The final step was to enter both variables into the equation with event attributions as the dependent variable in order to determine whether ease of forgiveness mediates the relationship between objective ratings of severity and event attributions. This would be confirmed if the relationship between objective severity and event attributions were reduced to non-significance.

The results suggest that ease of forgiveness does mediate the relationship between objective ratings of severity and event attributions. The final model was significant ( $F = 36.221, p < .0001$ ), with ease of forgiveness significant ( $b = -.504, p < .0001$ ) and objective severity ratings no longer significant ( $b = .005, p = .931$ ) (Table 12). The negative weight indicates that the higher the score on ease of forgiveness (i.e. the easier it was to forgive), the less maladaptive the attribution for the negative relationship event (Figure 4). In addition, rejection sensitivity was no longer a significant moderator of the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness ( $b = .001, p = .941$ ). Thus, ease of forgiveness does have the power to influence attributions for negative relationship events.

## DISCUSSION

We obtained mixed support for the various hypotheses in this study. Specifically, findings supported Hypothesis One, and partially supported Hypothesis 2 and 5. Individuals who tended to make more maladaptive attributions for the relationship event appear to have a more difficult time with the issue of forgiveness (i.e. have increased negative behavioral, cognitive, and emotional reactions, and think it less likely that they will forgive initially) than those who make benign attributions. These results are consistent with previous research on reactions to negative partner behavior (Camper, Jacobson, Holtzworth-Munroe, & Schmaling; 1988, Bradbury & Fincham, 1987). Interestingly, this relationship appears to be independent of how severe participants perceive the transgression to be, as subjective impact was not found to be a mediator of the relationship between objective severity ratings and event attributions.

Rejection sensitivity was found to be a moderator of the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness. Specifically, individuals who were high in rejection sensitivity demonstrated similar reactions in terms of ease of forgiveness, regardless of objective severity. Thus, these individuals appear to be relatively insensitive to the severity of the transgression. The reactions of individuals who were low in rejection sensitivity, on the other hand, were impacted by objective severity, with events low in severity being relatively easy to forgive as compared with events high in severity.

A possible explanation for this finding offered by Downey, Bonica, and Rincon (1999) has yet to be fully explored empirically. Downey et al. have conceptualized different patterns of reacting to negative relationship events for the high rejection-sensitive individual. Specifically, a negative relationship event might prompt significant anxiety in the rejection-sensitive individual that the relationship is at risk of ending. This anxiety, in turn, might result in emotional overreactions that are manifested in different ways. One way, according to Downey et al., is for the rejection sensitive individual to

become more compliant in the hopes of once again being viewed in a positive light (The alternative response according to Downey et al. is to react coercively). In the case of compliant reactions, rejection-sensitive individuals are perhaps not as focused on their own hurt feelings or on gaining insight into why the transgression occurred, which theoreticians view as integral to true forgiveness. Rather, they are motivated to prevent the inevitable break-up. They might consider forgiveness both as a way to convey love and consideration of their partner, and as a way to deal with the transgression as quickly and smoothly as possible so that their relationship is not damaged and at less risk of terminating. If it is the case that some rejection sensitive individuals are motivated to 'forgive' to reduce the threat of losing a significant relationship, then a clear theoretical definition of forgiveness becomes more elusive. While theoreticians might argue that this does not constitute 'true' forgiveness, it becomes important to examine the processes underlying this form of forgiveness, as well as consequences for the victim and the relationship. It is possible that although the motivation behind forgiving in this case is fear, the process plays out in much the same way as when the motivation stems from full understanding, and that the victim and the relationship receive the same benefits from forgiving. Examination of forgiveness in truly rejection sensitive individuals is needed to answer these questions.

Attachment was also examined as a potential moderator of the relationship between objective severity ratings and ease of forgiveness. This relationship was not supported by the data. The significant correlation between rejection sensitivity and both attachment dimensions suggests that these constructs captured overlapping variance.

While event attributions were not found to be a mediator of the relationship between objective severity and ease of forgiveness, an alternative model in which ease of forgiveness mediates the relationship between objective severity and attributions was significant. This is potentially due to the fact that attribution items were not framed in such a way as to elicit attributions as they were after the event (items comprising ease of forgiveness were framed in such a way), but could have been eliciting *current* attributions



for the past relationship event. If so, then attributions analyzed in this way are consequences of the forgiveness process. In this case, the easier it is to consider forgiveness after the event, the less maladaptive the eventual attributions for that event. Thus, it seems as though ease of forgiveness might mitigate, or attenuate, the harm done by the transgression, and diminishing negative attributions.

In terms of definitions of forgiveness, our results support the notion that there is not an ideal type of forgiveness, and that individuals tend to think quite differently about the construct. Some individuals endorse definitions that imply learning from the event and allowing it to change the fabric of the relationship in a positive way, while others seem more focused on the hurt inflicted and ensuring that it will not happen again. In addition, many individuals endorsed more than one category of forgiveness, which contradicts Enright's idea of progression through stages of forgiveness. While this is informative from a qualitative perspective, it will be important to research these definitions in such a way that they can be examined as they relate to other variables relevant to the process of forgiving. Perhaps the various definitions provided by our participants can inform the development of a measure assessing forgiveness tendencies or attitudes that is more easily utilized in analyses of this sort. In addition, the inconclusive findings regarding forgiveness definitions might be due to the fact that in thinking about a definition, participants reported their *current* definition, one which potentially changed greatly after the event. This is an important consideration because many variables relevant to the study attempted to assess reactions immediately after the event.

The results of the study, specifically in terms of the alternate model, support the hypothesized benefits of forgiveness in helping to restore the relationship and circumvent some of the detrimental effects of the harmful event. This fits especially well with McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal's (1997) notion that forgiveness represents a change in the motivation to react negatively towards the offending partner (i.e. maladaptive attributions might be considered a part of this negative reaction) to more constructive behavior. However, in order to make a clean statement about changes in

attributions as a result of the forgiveness process, attributions must be examined both before and after the forgiveness process.

This alternative model potentially underscores the importance of examining forgiveness in individuals who have already been through the process. Individuals in this study were still involved in the relationship in which the negative event happened, and although it is conceivable that this could be true in the absence of forgiveness, the vast majority of the sample endorsed having forgiven their partner to some extent. Thus, the individuals in the sample had direct experience with the topic, rather than responding to hypothetical situations. In this way, the findings may provide a more clear and realistic picture of the forgiveness process. Additionally, these individuals understood forgiveness on their own terms, in the absence of a formal intervention.

While this study potentially reveals important information about cognitive sequelae of forgiveness (i.e. attributions), behavioral and emotional reactions still need to be examined. As previously discussed, this is particularly important research for revealing important differences (or similarities) between individuals who endorse different motivations for forgiving. In particular, this may tell clinicians working with populations for which forgiveness is salient where to most focus their attention. If cognitive, behavioral, and emotional consequences of forgiving are the same despite the motivation or conceptualization, then interventions should focus more on helping individuals through the process itself. On the other hand, if certain forgiveness motivations, such as anxiety about the relationship, or extrinsic causes, are found to impede the positive consequences of forgiveness or to create negative consequences, then effort should perhaps be aimed at assessing these motivations and exploring them before the forgiveness process is initiated.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the participants in this study were involved in dating relationships, some of which could have been as short as three months in length. In spite of this, almost all individuals endorsed some relationship event in which they were significantly hurt by their partner, and in which forgiveness was implicated. If

forgiveness is a construct that is salient in such early stages of a relationship, then this creates an even stronger pull for researchers to study forgiveness within the context of marriage. In particular, it would be interesting to examine if, and how, forgiveness processes change throughout the course of a lengthy relationship, and changes in couple functioning as a result. Perhaps notions and beliefs about forgiveness move and change over time, and build on one another as negative events are experienced throughout the course of the relationship. In this way, the process of forgiveness becomes more than what occurs around a single situation. Rather, it may be best examined as a changing process in which each forgiveness situation builds on the last, and the conceptualization of forgiveness becomes more complex over time.

This view of forgiveness suggests different variables that might be important, such as flexibility in thinking about the relationship and the transgressor, and changes in the motivation to forgive. In terms of marital relationships, this conceptualization of forgiveness might be an important basis for the comparison of relationships that remain intact versus to those that eventually dissolve. Perhaps differential motivations for or conceptualizations of forgiveness are implicated here. Individuals who forgive to protect the relationship, or only when certain conditions are met, may find that their strategies work well in initial stages of the relationship, but that over time, they are insufficient to effectively cope with the negative effects of partner transgressions.

These suggestions underscore the point that forgiveness is a complex process that has yet to be sufficiently explored. This is particularly concerning in light of the number of forgiveness interventions that have been proposed. While the present study speaks to some questions about individual differences and relationship variables that might be relevant to forgiveness, it raises at least as many questions. Further, it presents only one of many ways of studying the forgiveness process, many of which are not yet present in the literature (e.g. longitudinal studies, studies with married couples). It seems particularly risky to advocate a construct or develop an intervention designed to facilitate it without fully understanding its parameters or consequences. The most vital first step

should likely involve conducting studies designed to resolve the inconsistencies with which investigators view forgiveness. The current study suggests that coming to a unified definition will be difficult and is perhaps unnecessary, as it potentially ignores the importance of individual differences in beliefs about forgiveness. The most reasonable approach might be to accept Fincham's description of forgiveness as a transformation of motivation, for whatever reason, from negative to positive towards one's partner. This conceptualization is sufficient to describe forgiveness, while being broad enough to allow for differences in the process that depend on individual, situational, and relationship factors. While this may seem too broad to allow for systematic study or communication, it is almost certainly accurate. Perhaps coming to an understanding of the possible motivations for forgiveness or understandings of the process (such as the five categories described by our sample) would provide the level of specificity theoreticians seek.

Once researchers gain some understanding of the parameters of forgiveness, they will be in a better position to envision a systematic investigation of the variables that may play a role. An important piece of this might include dissecting interventions that already exist and appear to be effective in search of important factors. Alternatively, studying non-forgiveness potentially yields insight into barriers to the process, and consequences of non-forgiving. It seems likely that only a systematic approach to the study of forgiveness, which is built on the establishment of basic parameters, can adequately answer the types of questions essential to the development of interventions that meet the needs of individuals and clinicians facing difficult forgiveness situations. Without this approach to forgiveness research, it is a construct that is in danger of being lost amidst pieces of data that cannot be put together, and of being misapplied through intervention with uncertain consequences.

This study, and the alternative mediational model in particular, encourage additional research into the process of forgiveness. Specifically, the alternative model suggests that when the forgiveness process is initiated might be extremely important in determining the consequences of an interpersonal transgression. Some individuals might

begin to consider forgiveness as the process the negative impact the transgression has had on them, while others may give full vent to ruminations of the slight against them. The consequences of these two different scenarios would likely be quite different, with the first individual being spared the revictimization that ruminating about the event affords, while the other's hurt and anger build to such a point that forgiveness may not seem an option. Even were this individual to attempt forgiveness in order to dissipate these negative feelings, it is more likely that negative attributions and emotions will have become entrenched to the point that forgiveness will be significantly more difficult to obtain. While it seems logical that the severity of the transgression would have some bearing on this effect, the present study suggests that other factors are more important (such as immediacy and strength of the negative reaction to the event). Future research should examine the initiation of forgiveness considerations, and what factors are influential.

#### Limitations:

There are some important limitations to note in this study. One potential problem is the fact that forgiveness was assessed as it occurred in the past. Participants were asked to report on their cognitive, behavioral, and emotional reactions to a past event, and ways in which they considered forgiveness immediately following the event. While we hoped that eliciting the description would facilitate participants' recall of their experience of the event and the cognitions and emotions surrounding it, it is possible that not all participants shifted into this frame of mind. This is a particularly important possibility considering that almost the entire sample endorsed having eventually forgiven their partner.

In addition, the ease of forgiveness variable was comprised of items theorized to be components of forgiveness, including cognitive, behavioral, and emotional reactions to transgressions. While these factors make sense theoretically, they have yet to be subjected to thorough examination in terms of how they relate to forgiveness. While we weighted each equally, it is possible that one factor is more central to forgiveness than the

others, or exerts an effect on the development of other reactions that is important to tease apart. These factors as they underlie forgiveness should be explored more fully.

Finally, although the sample was large, it was somewhat homogenous in terms of age and race. This suggests caution in extrapolating too extensively to married couples. Additional research needs to be done in order to determine what differences exist between younger, dating relationships and more long-term or marital ones. In addition, no information was gathered about gay and lesbian relationships in this study. While there is no reason to suspect that forgiveness processes would necessarily differ in these populations, it is possible that interpersonal transgressions are interpreted or reacted to quite differently.

In spite of these limitations, this study is one of the first to examine forgiveness in terms of real relationship transgressions. Overall, the findings underscore the point that forgiveness is a complex process that should be more thoroughly explored in the literature before decisions are made about intervention. A systematic approach to the study of forgiveness, which focuses on processes, motivations, and consequences of forgiveness, is likely to yield leads in terms of factors most relevant to forgiveness.

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APPENDIX A:  
TABLES

Table 1.

Sample Demographics (N=235)

Demographic Characteristic	Percent Sample
Age	
<17	0%
17-19	62%
20-22	35%
23-26	1.7%
>26	.4%
Year in School	
one	45.6%
two	26%
three	18%
four	8%
five	1.7%
>five	.4%
Months dating current partner	
<3	2.1%
3-6	23.6%
6-12	19.8%
12-24	29%
>24	24.5%
Gender	
male	27%
female	72.5%

## Religion

none	9.7%
Buddhist	.4%
Protestant	23.2%
Baptist	33.3%
Catholic	14.8%
Jewish	3.0%
Islamic	.4%
Other	14.3%



Table 2.

Scale Summaries

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Alpha
Objective Severity	4.45	1.56	.95 <sup>a</sup>
Subjective Impact	7.35	2.12	
Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire	8.44	2.73	.84
Anxiety Dimension <sup>b</sup>	3.62	1.07	.90
Avoidance Dimension <sup>b</sup>	2.39	.93	.91
Event Attributions <sup>c</sup>	21.27	5.10	.63
Ease of Forgiveness <sup>c</sup>	31.21	7.57	.88

<sup>a</sup> inter-rater reliability, N=80; <sup>b</sup> Dimensions of Multi-Item Adult Romantic Attachment Scale;

<sup>c</sup> Items from Forgiveness Questionnaire

Table 3.

Correlations Among Objective Severity, Rejection Sensitivity, Anxiety and Avoidance Attachment Dimensions, Subjective Impact, Event Attributions (predictors) and Ease of Forgiveness (Criterion)

	Objective Severity	RSQ	Anxiety	Avoidance	Subjective Impact	Attributions	Ease of Forgiveness
Objective Severity	1.00	.107	.120	.064	.486**	.216**	-.413**
RSQ <sup>a</sup>	.107	1.00	.319**	.215**	.025	.029	-.092
Anxiety <sup>b</sup>	.120	.319**	1.00	-.010	.252**	.254**	-.094
Avoidance <sup>b</sup>	.064	.215**	-.010	1.00	-.047	.176**	-.222**
Subjective Impact	.486**	.025	.252**	-.047	1.00	.288**	-.389**
Attributions	.216**	.029	.254**	.176**	.288**	1.00	-.477**
Ease of Forgiveness	-.413**	-.092	-.094	-.222**	-.389**	-.477**	1.00

<sup>a</sup>Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire; <sup>b</sup>Anxiety dimension of Multi-Item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment; <sup>c</sup>Avoidance dimension of Multi-Item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment;

\*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

Table 4.

Correlations Among Items Comprising 'Ease of Forgiveness' from Forgiveness Questionnaire

	Item 16	Item 17	Item 18	Item 19	Item 20	Item 21	Item 22
Item 16	1.00	.797**	.325**	.636**	.561**	.553**	.574**
Item 17	.797**	1.00	.268**	.624**	.588**	.545**	.584**
Item 18	.325**	.268**	1.00	.392**	.336**	.380**	.262**
Item 19	.636**	.624**	.392**	1.00	.811**	.552**	.581**
Item 20	.561**	.588**	.336**	.811**	1.00	.579**	.574**
Item 21	.553**	.545**	.380**	.552**	.579**	1.00	.515**
Item 22	.574**	.584**	.262**	.581**	.574**	.515**	1.00

<sup>a</sup>Items reverse-scored

\*\*p < .01, two-tailed

Table 5.

Analysis of the Anxiety Dimension of Insecure Attachment as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Objective Severity and Ease of Forgiveness.

Variable	df	F value	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta
1. Step 1 (objective severity)	(1, 212)	43.537	.170	.166	-.413***
2. Step 2 (objective severity)	(2, 211)	22.263	.174	.166	-.405***
anxiety <sup>a</sup> )					-.063
3. Step 3 (objective severity	(3, 210)	15.362	.180	.168	-.409***
anxiety <sup>a</sup>					-.067
product term)					.076

<sup>a</sup> Anxiety Dimension from Multi-item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment

\*\*\* p < .0001

Table 6.

Analysis of Avoidance Dimension of Insecure Attachment as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Objective Severity and Ease of Forgiveness

Variable	df	F value	R <sup>2</sup> (change)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta
1. Step 1 (objective severity)	(1, 212)	43.537	.170	.166	-.413***
2. Step 2 (objective severity	(2, 211)	28.036	.210	.202	-.401***
avoidance <sup>a</sup> )					-.199**
3. Step 3 (objective severity	(3, 210)	18.946	.213	.202	-.408***
avoidance					-.199**
product term)					-.056

<sup>a</sup> Avoidance Dimension from Multi-item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment

\*\* p < .001; \*\*\* p < .0001

Table 7.

Analysis of Rejection Sensitivity as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Objective Severity and Ease of Forgiveness

Variable	df	F value	R <sup>2</sup> (change)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta
1. Step 1 (objective severity)	(1, 212)	43.537	.170	.166	-.413***
2. Step 2 (objective severity rejection sensitivity <sup>a</sup> )	(2, 207)	22.172	.176	.168	-.409*** -.060
3. Step 3 (objective severity rejection sensitivity product term)	(3, 206)	18.831	.215	.204	-.389*** -.052 .198**

<sup>a</sup> Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire

\*\* p < .005; \*\*\* p < .0001

Table 8.

Explication of Interaction: Predicted Value on Criterion (Ease of Forgiveness) and Significance at One Standard Deviation Above and Below the Mean of Rejection Sensitivity and Objective Severity.

		Predicted Value of Criterion	df	F	Beta
High Rejection Sensitivity					
Objective Severity			(3, 207)	18.905	-.162
	Low	31.96			
	High	29.60			
Low Rejection Sensitivity					
Objective Severity			(3, 207)	18.905	-.615***
	Low	36.01			
	High	27.07			

\*\*\*  $p < .0001$

Table 9.

Analysis of Mediation with Event Attributions as Mediator

Variable	df	F value	R <sup>2</sup> (change)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta
1. Step 1 (ease of forgiveness on objective severity)	(1, 212)	43.537	.170	.166	-.413***
2. Step 2 (event attributions on objective severity)	(1, 213)	10.397	.047	.042	-.216***
3. Step 3 (ease of forgiveness on objective severity and event attributions)	(2, 210)	57.912	.355	.349	-.322*** -.437***

\*\*\* p &lt; .0001



Table 10.

Analysis of Mediation with Subjective Impact as Mediator

Variable	df	F value	R <sup>2</sup> (change)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta
1. Step 1 (ease of forgiveness on objective severity)	(1, 212)	43.537	.170	.166	-.413***
2. Step 2 (subjective impact on objective severity)	(1, 212)	65.394	.236	.232	-.486***
3. Step 3 (ease of forgiveness on gender objective severity subjective impact)	(3, 208)	22.277	.243	.232	.078 -.275*** -.303***

\*\*\* p &lt; .0001

Table 11.

Forgiveness Definition Descriptives (N=187)

Definition	Frequency (endorsed / did not endorse)	Percent (endorsed)
understanding	71 / 116	38%
conditional	29 / 158	15.5%
moving on	79 / 108	42.2%
restoring trust	17 / 170	9.1%
not holding grudge	50 / 137	26.7%

Table 12.

Alternative Mediation Model: Ease of Forgiveness as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Objective Severity and Event Attributions.

Variable	df	F value	R <sup>2</sup> (change)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta
1. Step 1 (objective severity)	(1, 213)	10.397	.047	.042	.216**
2. Step 2 (ease of forgiveness)	(1, 226)	66.718	.228	.225	-.477***
3. Step 3 (objective severity ease of forgiveness)	(2, 210)	36.221	.256	.249	.005 -.504***

\*\* p < .001

\*\*\* p < .0001

APPENDIX B:

FIGURES

Figure 1.

Proposed Model.

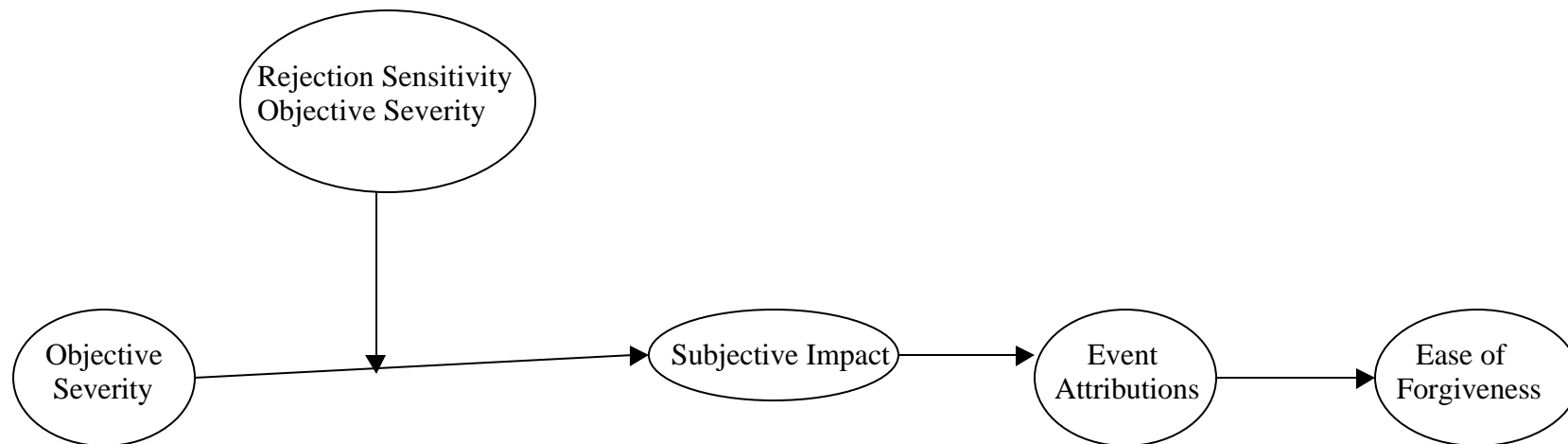


Figure 2.

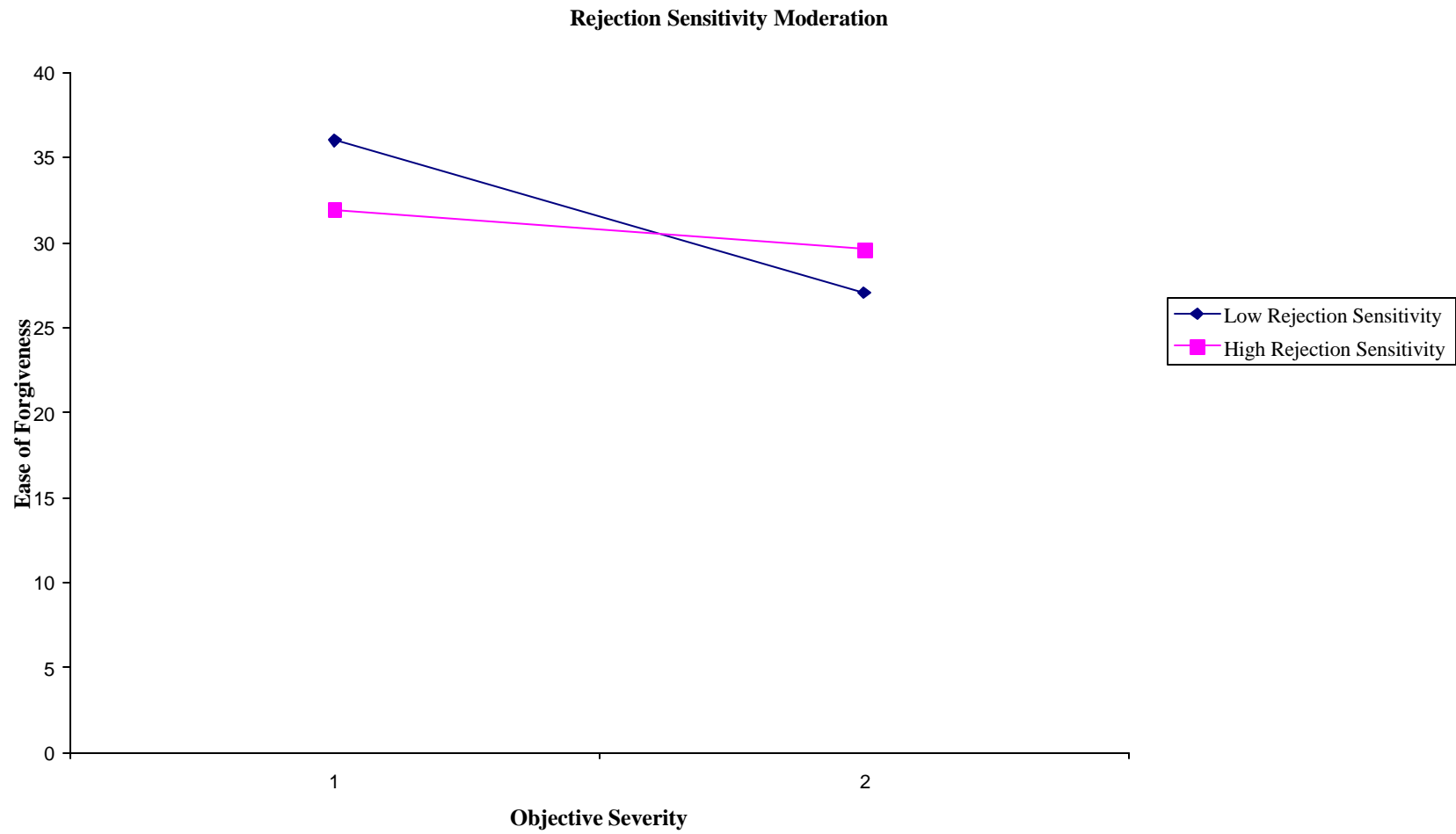


Figure 3.

Full Model.

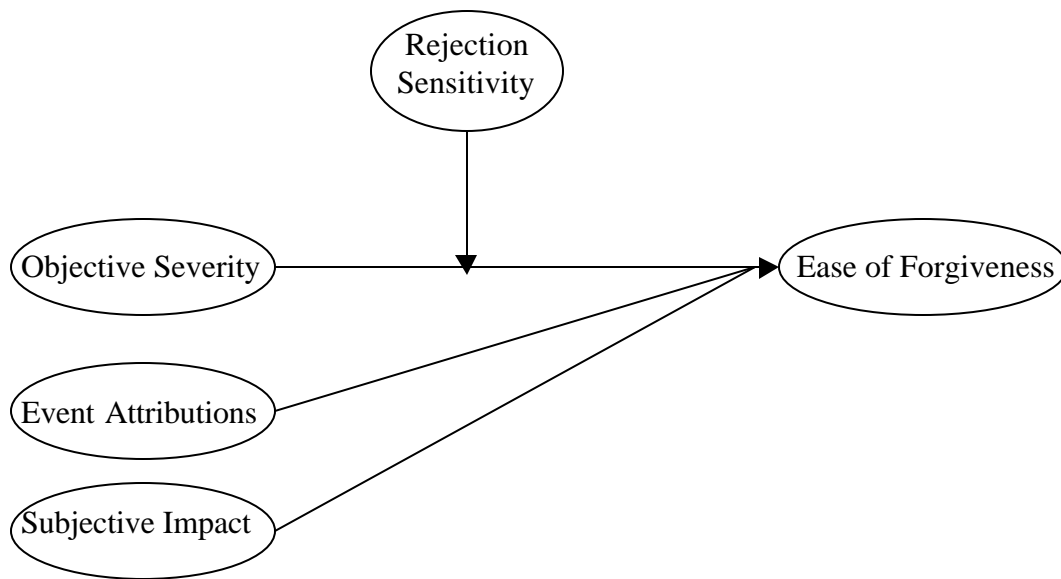
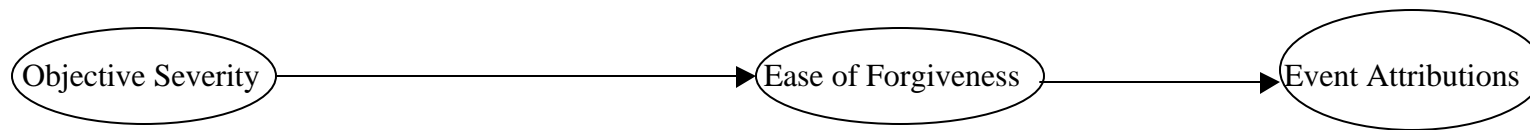


Figure 4.

Alternative Model.





APPENDIX C:  
MEASURES

## Demographics Questions

1. What is your age? a) younger than 17  
b) 17-19  
c) 20-22  
d) 23-26  
e) older than
2. What is your year in school? a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5
3. How many months have you been dating your current partner?  
a) less than 3 months  
b) 3-6 months  
c) 6-12 months  
d) 12-24 months  
e) over 24 months
4. How many months have you known your current partner?  
a) less than 6 months  
b) 6-12 months  
c) 12-24 months  
d) 24-36 months  
e) over 36 months
5. Please describe your relationship using the following continuum.  
a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5 f) 6 g) 7  
casual dating relationship serious dating relationship exclusive committed relationship
6. What is the number of past relationships you have been involved in which you would consider to have been serious?  
a) I have never been in a relationship I would consider serious.  
b) 1-2 serious relationships (I can be the current relationship)  
c) 3-5 serious relationships  
d) more than 5 relationships I would consider serious
7. Of what race or ethnic group do you consider yourself a member (multiple designations are fine)  
a) White b) African American c) Hispanic d) Asian e) American Indian  
f) other
8. How many children do you have?  
a) none b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) more than 3

9. What is your Annual Family Income (i.e. mom, dad, yourself, etc)?

- a) <10,000
- b) 10,000-25,000
- c) 25,000-40,000
- d) 40,000-60,000
- e) 60,000-100,000
- f) >100,000

10. To which religious group do you belong?

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| a) none       | e) Catholic |
| b) Buddhist   | f) Jewish   |
| c) Protestant | g) Islamic  |
| d) Baptist    | h) other    |

## RSQ

Please rate your responses to the questions following each hypothetical situation.

### **You ask someone in class if you can borrow his/her notes.**

11. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your classmate would want to help you out?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

12. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to help me out.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

### **You ask your boyfriend/girlfriend to move in with you.**

13. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to move in with you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

14. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to move in with me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

### **You ask your parents for help in deciding what programs to apply to.**

15. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want to help you with the decision?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

16. I would expect that my parents would willingly agree to help me with my decision.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

### **You ask someone you don't know well out on a date.**

17. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not he/she would want to go on a date with you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

18. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to go out with me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**Your boyfriend/girlfriend has plans to go out with friends tonight, but you really want to spend the evening with him/her, so you tell him/her so.**

19. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to spend the evening with you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

20. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to spend the evening with me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask your parents for extra money to cover living expenses.**

21. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want to give you the money?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

22. I would expect that my parents would willingly give me the extra money.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**After class, you tell your professor that you have been having some trouble with a section of the course and ask if he/she can give you some extra help.**

23. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your professor would want to help you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

24. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to help me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You approach a close friend to talk after doing or saying something that seriously upset him/her.**

25. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to talk to you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

26. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to talk to me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask someone in one of your classes to coffee.**

27. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your classmate would want to have coffee with you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

28. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to have coffee with me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**After graduation, you can't find a job and ask your parents if you can live at home for a while.**

29. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want to let you move back home?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

30. I would expect that my parents would willingly agree to let me move back home.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask a friend to go on vacation with you over Spring Break.**

31. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to go on vacation with you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

32. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to go on vacation with me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You call your boyfriend/girlfriend after a bitter argument and tell him/her you want to see him/her.**

33. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to see you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

34. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to see me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask a friend if you can borrow something of his/hers.**

35. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to let you borrow something?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

36. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to let me borrow something.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask your parents to come on an occasion important to you.**

37. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your parents would want to come to the occasion?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

38. I would expect that my parents would willingly agree to come to the occasion.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask a friend to do you a big favor.**

39. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your friend would want to do the favor?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

40. I would expect that he/she would willingly do the favor.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask your boyfriend if he/she really loves you.**

41. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to say he/she really loves you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

42. I would expect that he/she would say they really love me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You go to a party and notice someone on the other side of the room, and then you ask them to dance.**

43. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not the person would want to dance with you?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned

44. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to dance with me.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

**You ask your boyfriend/girlfriend to come home to meet your parents.**

45. How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your boyfriend/girlfriend would want to meet your parents?

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unconcerned					concerned



46. I would expect that he/she would willingly agree to meet my parents.

1	2	3	4	5	6
very					very
unlikely					likely

## MMARA

*Instructions:* The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Write the number in the space provided, using the following rating scale:

Disagree strongly			Neutral/mixed			Agree strongly
a) 1	b) 2	c) 3	d) 4	e) 5	f) 6	g) 7

- \_\_\_47. I prefer not to show my partner how I feel deep down.
- \_\_\_48. I worry about being abandoned.
- \_\_\_49. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_50. I worry a lot about my relationships.
- \_\_\_51. Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.
- \_\_\_52. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
- \_\_\_53. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
- \_\_\_54. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.
- \_\_\_55. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_56. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.
- \_\_\_57. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
- \_\_\_58. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.
- \_\_\_59. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
- \_\_\_60. I worry about being alone.
- \_\_\_61. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
- \_\_\_62. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
- \_\_\_63. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
- \_\_\_64. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
- \_\_\_65. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
- \_\_\_66. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feeling, more commitment.
- \_\_\_67. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
- \_\_\_68. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
- \_\_\_69. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
- \_\_\_70. If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry.
- \_\_\_71. I tell my partner just about everything.
- \_\_\_72. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
- \_\_\_73. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
- \_\_\_74. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.
- \_\_\_75. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
- \_\_\_76. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.
- \_\_\_77. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, and help.

- \_\_\_78. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
- \_\_\_79. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
- \_\_\_80. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.
- \_\_\_81. I turn to my romantic partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
- \_\_\_82. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.

We know that in every relationship, partners may do certain things (or fail to do things), thus leaving the other person feeling angry or hurt. What we would like for you to do is to think back over your current relationship and recall a time when you felt hurt by something your partner did. We would like you to spend a few minutes describing the situation, and writing about how you responded to it (blank sheet of paper provided). You might consider how the situation changed how you thought about yourself, your partner, or how it changed your relationship. Then, we will ask you some specific questions about the situation.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN TERMS OF HOW YOU FELT ABOUT THE EVENT ***AT THE TIME*** IT OCCURRED. Open-ended questions may be answered directly on the questionnaire or on the paper provided.

- a) How long ago did the event occur?
- b) What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you remember this event? Is there anything else that someone would need to know to understand your thoughts and feelings, or how you responded?

Using the following scale, rate the level of hurt you felt in response to the situation you described. Fill in the corresponding number on the scantron provided.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
not hurt									extremely
at all									hurt

Please respond to the following questions about the event you described earlier. Using the following scale, indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

a) 1	b) 2	c) 3	d) 4	e) 5	f) 6
disagree	disagree	disagree	agree	agree	agree
strongly		somewhat	somewhat		strongly

1. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My boyfriend/girlfriend's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g. the type of person s/he is, the mood s/he was in).
2. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My boyfriend/girlfriend's behavior was due to something about me (e.g. what I said or did, the kind of person I am).
3. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason for my boyfriend/girlfriend's behavior is not likely to change.

4. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The reason for by boyfriend/girlfriend's behavior is something that affects other areas of our relationship.
5. 1 2 3 4 5 6 My boyfriend/girlfriend deliberately behaved the way s/he did to hurt my feelings.
6. 1 2 3 4 5 6 The way my boyfriend/girlfriend behaved shows s/he thought mainly of his/her needs.

The following questions require that you rate your response to the described event.

7. How difficult was it to stop thinking about how you had been mistreated?

- |            |                        |                   |                       |                       |      |              |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------|--------------|
| a) 0       | b) 1                   | c) 2              | d) 3                  | e) 4                  | f) 5 | g) 6         |
| impossible | extremely<br>difficult | very<br>difficult | somewhat<br>difficult | slightly<br>difficult | easy | very<br>easy |

8. How easy was it to get over feeling negative or resentful for how you were mistreated?

- |            |                        |                   |                       |                       |      |              |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------|--------------|
| a) 0       | b) 1                   | c) 2              | d) 3                  | e) 4                  | f) 5 | g) 6         |
| impossible | extremely<br>difficult | very<br>difficult | somewhat<br>difficult | slightly<br>difficult | easy | very<br>easy |

9. How much did you want to do something to even the score?

- |            |                |          |      |                |              |                   |
|------------|----------------|----------|------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| a) 0       | b) 1           | c) 2     | d) 3 | e) 4           | f) 5         | g) 6              |
| not at all | very<br>little | a little | some | fairly<br>much | very<br>much | extremely<br>much |

10. How difficult was it to think of your partner in a positive way again after this happened?

- |            |                        |                   |                       |                       |      |              |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------|--------------|
| a) 0       | b) 1                   | c) 2              | d) 3                  | e) 4                  | f) 5 | g) 6         |
| impossible | extremely<br>difficult | very<br>difficult | somewhat<br>difficult | slightly<br>difficult | easy | very<br>easy |

11. How easy was it to feel warmly again towards your partner?

- |            |                        |                   |                       |                       |      |              |
|------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------|--------------|
| a) 0       | b) 1                   | c) 2              | d) 3                  | e) 4                  | f) 5 | g) 6         |
| impossible | extremely<br>difficult | very<br>difficult | somewhat<br>difficult | slightly<br>difficult | easy | very<br>easy |

12. How long was it before you could act positively toward your partner after this happened?

- |         |          |                |           |              |                  |                            |
|---------|----------|----------------|-----------|--------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| a) 0    | b) 1     | c) 2           | d) 3      | e) 4         | f) 5             | g) 6                       |
| no time | not long | a little while | some time | a good while | a very long time | still haven't been able to |

13. To what extent were you able to forgive your partner?

- |            |             |          |          |             |                |         |
|------------|-------------|----------|----------|-------------|----------------|---------|
| a) 0       | b) 1        | c) 2     | d) 3     | e) 4        | f) 5           | g) 6    |
| not at all | very little | a little | somewhat | pretty much | almost totally | totally |

14. Initially (right after the event) how likely did you think you would be to forgive your partner?

- |                   |                    |                   |                 |               |                  |                  |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| a) 0              | b) 1               | c) 2              | d) 3            | e) 4          | f) 5             | g) 6             |
| not at all likely | extremely unlikely | somewhat unlikely | somewhat likely | pretty likely | extremely likely | certainly likely |

15. To what extent were you able to put things right with (reconcile with) your partner after the event?

- |            |             |          |          |             |                |         |
|------------|-------------|----------|----------|-------------|----------------|---------|
| a) 0       | b) 1        | c) 2     | d) 3     | e) 4        | f) 5           | g) 6    |
| not at all | very little | a little | somewhat | pretty much | almost totally | totally |

16. Sometimes forgiveness means different things. What would forgiving your partner mean? How would your partner know that you had forgiven them?