The American Journal of Family Therapy, 31:179–199, 2003

0192-6187/03 $12.00 + .00
DOI: 10.1080/01926180390167188

BrunnerRoutledge Taylor & Francis healthsciences

Forgiveness and Marriage: Preliminary Support for a Measure Based on A Model of Recovery From A Marital Betrayal

KRISTINA COOP GORDON
University of Tennessee-Knoxville
DONALD H. BAUCOM
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Forgiveness is an issue that recently has received increasing attention in the psychological literature, yet little empirical research has been conducted on this topic. This article presents initial support and validation of an inventory based upon Gordon and Baucom's (1998) three-stage synthesized model of forgiveness in marital relationships. This model places forgiveness in the framework of a reaction to a traumatic interpersonal event. One hundred seven community couples completed several measures of marital functioning, along with the new measure of forgiveness. The measure achieved internal reliability, and a confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the resulting subscales are a good fit with the data. Further results offered preliminary support for the inventory's validity and its relation to various aspect of marital functioning. Individuals placed into groups based upon their scores on this measure reported expected levels of global forgiveness, relationship power and closeness, and assumptions about themselves and their partners. The limitations of the study are identified, and clinical and research implications of these findings are discussed.

Despite a relative lack of empirical interest, the discussion of forgiveness and its applications to psychotherapy have been gaining ground during the last twenty years, and several models of forgiveness have been proposed (e.g.,

Address correspondence to Kristina Coop Gordon, 310B Austin Peay Bldg., Department of Psychology, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Knoxville, TN 37996, USA. E-mail: kgordon@utk.edu

This investigation was conducted as a portion of a doctoral dissertation by Kristina Coop Gordon under the direction of Donald H. Baucom at the University of North Carolina.

The authors thank Douglas K. Snyder for his insightful comments on the development of this model.

Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage et al., 1998; Rosenak & Harnden 1992; Rowe, Halling, Davies, Leifer, Powers, & van Bronkhorst, 1989; Smedes 1984, Worthington, 1998; Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990). Recently the authors of the current article proposed a model of forgiveness that integrated their own clinical observations with these existing theoretical writings on forgiveness and empirically based marital and forgiveness research (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). The purpose of the current study is to present preliminary validation for an inventory based on this model.

As the model previously outlined is a stage model, it ultimately requires a longitudinal design to definitively test its validity. However, as longitudinal designs require considerable investment of time and money, it is preferable to first examine the important constructs cross-sectionally to ascertain patterns in the data indicating a stage-like model, which would then suggest that investment in longitudinal research might be warranted. Additionally, the existing peer-reviewed, published forgiveness measures are all primarily state or dispositional measures of forgiveness (e.g., Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage et al., 1998). Currently, there are no measures that examine different elements of the forgiveness *process,* despite the fact that many forgiveness theorists suggest that forgiveness follows a stage-like process. Thus, it is necessary to develop a measure that assesses the specific cognitive, behavioral, and emotional experiences that individuals might encounter in each of the stages. Nonetheless, due to its cross-sectional design, this paper and this inventory must be viewed only as the first step in a long process of examining the complex course of forgiveness; it is designed only to capture how much an individual is experiencing specific cognitive, behavioral, and emotional experiences that have been hypothesized to occur in each stage. Finally, while forgiveness most frequently (but not always) is a dyadic process, the work described here focuses primarily on the injured individual, although some attention is paid to the partner. Future work will be needed to outline the dyadic processes more clearly.

OVERVIEW OF FORGIVENESS MODEL

A description of the stage model follows, but, due to space limitations, this description is necessarily a brief overview. Readers are referred to papers by Gordon and Baucom (1998, 1999) and Gordon, Baucom, and Snyder (2000) for a more thorough review of the literature and of this model. First, the model proposes that forgiveness of *major* betrayals (e.g., infidelities, significant deceptions, and violations of trust) can closely parallel some aspects of

recovery from more general traumatic events. Although there are many theories and approaches to the treatment of trauma, there are several existing models in the literature that appear to fit closely with the responses people spontaneously report after interpersonal betrayals (e.g., Rowe et al., 1989). These trauma models suggest that the typical response to a traumatic event incorporates three phases: (a) impact, (b) a search for meaning, and (c) recovery (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Janoff-Bulman, 1989; McCann, Sakheim, & Abrahamson, 1988; Resick & Calhoun, 2001). The forgiveness process described in our previous paper, and, in fact, many of the other existing models of forgiveness, may be seen to parallel these three phases. Furthermore, trauma research has suggested that post-traumatic stress reactions evolve from "violated assumptions" (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1989; McCann, Sakheim, & Abrahams on, 1988; Resick & Calhoun, 2001). The major betrayal that requires a forgiveness process can be seen as an interpersonal trauma that disrupts the person's previous assumptions and expectations of his or her partner and their relationship in general. Therefore, the need to engage in the forgiveness process may result from an individual's attempt to reconstruct or modify these former beliefs about the partner and the relationship, and to regain a sense of interpersonal control, predictability, and safety in the relationship if the person is to effectively move on from the event.

In Stage I, or the "impact," stage, the injured partners begin to realize the effect of the betrayal upon themselves and their relationships. Almost all forgiveness stage models suggest that this stage is a period of significant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disruption (e.g., Enright et al., 1991; Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Hargraves & Sells, 1997; Rosenak & Harnden, 1992; Rowe et al., 1989; Smedes 1984). Individuals in this phase are likely to report feeling as if "the rug were pulled out" from beneath them. These responses indicate that important assumptions about their marriages have been disrupted. These violated assumptions often involve beliefs that one's partner can be trusted, that the relationship is safe, that one can predict how one's partner will behave, that one has reasonable control over one's own relationship, and so on. The betrayal can call these important assumptions into question; injured partners no longer can trust their assumptions to guide their daily interactions or to predict future events. Therefore, they are likely to engage in a process of collecting details related to the negative event or betrayal in an attempt to explain, or develop attributions about what has happened. Furthermore, these violated assumptions often leave the "victim" feeling out of control, powerless, and no longer able to predict future behaviors on the part of his or her partner. Consequently, they are likely to lash out in a punitive manner toward their partners in order to "even the score." In addition, they also are likely to withdraw significantly from their partners and their relationships in order to protect themselves. These phenomena are natural reactions to a painfully traumatic event and are similar to the ap-

proach-avoidance strategies used by victims of traumatic stress (e.g., Horowitz, 1985; Horowitz, Stinson, & Field, 1991).

Most trauma and forgiveness theories posit that the injured partners must attempt to place the betrayal trauma in a wider context in order to understand why it occurred (e.g., Enright et al., 1991; Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Horowitz et al., 1991; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Rosenak & Harnden, 1992; Rowe et al., 1989; Smedes, 1984; Worthington, 1998). Therefore, the focus of Stage II of this forgiveness model, the "meaning" stage, is to discover why the betrayal occurred in order to make the partner's behavior more understandable and predictable. With this increased understanding also comes the possibility of an increased sense of control over one's own life, accompanied by an increased sense of safety and security, and a decreased feeling of powerlessness. This increased understanding also aids individuals in reconstructing their violated assumptions and creating new beliefs and expectancies for the future of the relationship. Furthermore, clinical observations suggest that many couples engage in patterned bouts of restitution or retribution in order to right the sense of power imbalance.

Again, similar to most trauma victims, in Stage III, or the recovery or "moving on" stage, the injured person must move beyond the event and stop allowing it to control his or her life. The understanding gained from Stage II is consolidated during Stage III of the forgiveness process. Under optimal circumstances, the injured partner develops a non-distorted view of his or her partner and their relationship. In addition, the injured individual often experiences less intense negative feelings toward the partner, either from the increased understanding that has been obtained, or from the realization that clinging to high levels of anger has disruptive effects on the person experiencing those emotions. Similarly, the injured person recognizes that continuing to punish the partner will not "even the score" and makes it difficult to move forward with life. Finally, the injured person must reevaluate the relationship and make a decision regarding whether or not he or she wishes to continue with the relationship. Thus, the forgiveness process as currently described by the authors' model does not necessarily imply reconciliation, although theorists differ on whether forgiveness without a renewal of the relationship is a complete forgiveness (see Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Murphy, 1982; Rowe et al., 1989; Smedes, 1984). Again, as described earlier, the elements of forgiveness in this final stage of the process are echoed in almost every existing forgiveness model. Indeed, these elements might be seen as the definition of forgiveness: (a) regaining a more balanced view of the offender and the event; (b) decreasing negative affect towards the offender; and (c) giving up the right to punish the offender further (e.g., Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Rosenak & Harnden, 1992; Rowe et al., 1989; Smedes, 1984).

OVERVIEW OF STUDY AND HYPOTHESES

The forgiveness measure evaluated in this study was explicitly tied to the predictions laid out in the model. The measure includes three subscales, each subscale corresponding to a hypothesized stage and consisting of questions asking directly about behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes hypothesized to be occurring in that stage. First, this measure was examined for adequate reliability. Then its validity was assessed in two ways. First, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed. Second, individuals were placed into one of the three stages of forgiveness and then these "stage" groups were compared on a number of aspects of marital functioning. Therefore a person labeled as Stage I would report on the inventory that they were predominantly engaging in specific behavioral, emotional, and cognitive processes that were hypothesized to be essential to Stage I. The following predictions were made for persons placed in each of these stage groups using the Forgiveness Inventory. Additionally, these participants were compared to married partners who reported that they have not had to forgive their spouses (a forgiveness-not-applicable group); this group served as a "control" group to evaluate the effects of ever having to forgive major betrayals versus never experiencing a major betrayal.

Hypothesis 1

It was hypothesized that individuals placed in the Stage I group (as identified by the Forgiveness Inventory) would report the least amount of forgiveness as measured by a global self-report item of forgiveness. Similarly, individuals classified in Stage III of the forgiveness process according to the inventory should report the greatest amount of forgiveness on a global level. Finally, persons classified in Stage II of the forgiveness process should rate their global level of forgiveness as intermediate between these two groups.

Hypothesis 2

Initially following the betrayal, the injured partner is expected to have had their positive assumptions about their partner and themselves violated; therefore, they should report the most negative assumptions about their marriage. However, as the injured partners proceed through the process of forgiveness, their assumptions about themselves, their partners, and their relationships should become less negatively distorted. In addition, given that the injured partner is likely to feel victimized by the betrayal, they are more likely to report a greater sense of a power imbalance in their relationship. However, this power imbalance is expected to be reduced as the individual proceeds through the forgiveness process (because the injured person begins to feel less victimized). Therefore, it was hypothesized that individuals

primarily reporting Stage I experiences on this inventory would report that their partners have the most power in their relationships, whereas individuals reporting primarily Stage II-type behaviors would be less likely to report this imbalance. Furthermore, persons reporting primarily Stage III experiences would be least likely to report this imbalance. Additionally, because persons reporting primarily Stage I experiences are likely to withdraw from the relationship to protect themselves, it was predicted that they also are likely to report less psychological closeness and less investment in their relationships than people reporting primarily Stage II and III experiences. Persons primarily reporting Stage II experiences likely would report more closeness and more investment in their relationships than persons reporting primarily Stage I experiences, but less closeness than individuals reporting primarily Stage III experiences.

Finally, as these disrupted assumptions, perceptions of a power imbalance, greater distance between partners, and reduced investment in the relationship are likely to have a broad-based, negative impact on the marriage, it was predicted that the global level of marital adjustment would increase commensurately with the stage of forgiveness in which the person is classified.

Hypothesis 3

This investigation also included, as a control group, a group of individuals who reported that they have not needed to forgive their partners. Although it was hypothesized that individuals reporting experiences characteristic of the early stages of the forgiveness process (i.e., Stages I and II) are likely to be experiencing relationship difficulties compared to persons who have never needed to forgive their partners, the relationship functioning of persons reporting experiences characteristic of Stage III of the forgiveness process as compared to the forgiveness-not-applicable group was uncertain. It could be argued that having experienced a relationship trauma would take a toll on the relationship. On the other hand, having experienced a betrayal but having forgiven one's partner could result in a "stronger" relationship. Therefore, no specific hypotheses were developed comparing persons in the final stage of forgiveness versus the forgiveness-not-applicable group.

METHOD

Participants

Initial participants were 107 couples from a small, university community in North Carolina who agreed to take part in a larger community study of marriage. The average age for female participants was 39.2 years; for males, it was 41.4 years. Female participants had an average of 16.0 years of education; the males had an average of 16.6 years of education. The mean length

of time married was 14.9 years. Eighty-six percent of the women had been married once, and 14% had been married twice; 83% of the men had been married once, and 17% had been married twice. The couples also reported an average of 1.7 children. The majority of the sample was Caucasian (95.8%).

Ten additional participants were recruited through two marital clinics: a marital and family therapy clinic in College Station, Texas, and a local pediatric psychology practice in North Carolina that also provides marital counseling as part of its practice. It was hoped that by adding an additional sample of distressed couples, the number of people who were currently in the midst of the forgiveness process would increase. The average age for female participants for this second sample was 40.4 years; for males, it was 42.8 yearn. Female participants had an average of 15.8 years of education; the males had an average of 17.2 years of education. Eighty percent of the women had been married once, and 20% had been married twice; 60% of the men had been married once, 20% had been married twice, and 20% had been married three times. The mean length of time married was 15.5 years. The couples also reported an average of 1.8 children. All participants in this sample were Caucasian. There were no significant differences between the community and clinic samples on any demographic variables.

One hundred five people out of a total of 214 men and women (49% of the entire sample) completed the Forgiveness Inventory; 51 participants reported that the Forgiveness Inventory was not applicable. The remaining 58 people left the inventory blank, making it difficult to ascertain whether they had not had to forgive their partners for a major betrayal or, instead, had chosen not to report on their experiences; these people were not included in the analyses. Sixty-one percent of the participants reporting a betrayal were female, and 39% were male.

Procedure

Through the use of a commercial mailing list, couples were randomly chosen to participate in the investigation. Letters were sent to the couples explaining the purpose of the study. The letter was followed by a telephone call to answer questions and to assess the couple's interest in participating. Seventeen percent of couples asked agreed to participate; although this is low, this percentage agreement is consistent with other studies using this method of recruitment (cf., Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, & Tochluk, 1997). Those who agreed to participate were then mailed the questionnaires and instructed to fill them out separately and not discuss their answers. There were two separate packets, one for each spouse, containing the above measures as well as additional measures that were not employed in the current study. If the questionnaires were not returned within the time allotted, the couple received a follow-up telephone call. Once the couple had returned the inventories, they received a packet describing the hypotheses and results of

the study. Couples did not receive any incentive for their participation in this project. Over 80% of the sample returned the packets. Finally, as mentioned above, additional clients were recruited from clinics in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and College Station, Texas. Therapists offered participation in this study to clients who were presenting for their first marital therapy session. Clients from the two clinics who consented to participate in the study were given packets to complete before their third therapy session. Completed packets were returned to the therapist, who forwarded them to the investigators.

Materials

Several of the measures used in this study are new measures that have not been published. These measures were created to have high content validity and to ask directly about the constructs of interest. As demonstrated below, initial findings on these new measures suggest that they have acceptable reliability and validity. Copies of these measures may be obtained by contacting the first author.

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE (DAS; SPANIER, 1976)

The DAS is a 32-item, widely used measure of marital adjustment. Studies have reported good reliability and validity, and this measure is sensitive to clinical changes (Carey, Spector, Lantinga, & Krauss, 1993; Sharpley & Cross, 1982; Spanier, 1976).

GLOBAL SELF-REPORT OF FORGIVENESS

The participants also provided a rating of how much they had forgiven their partners for the incident on a single item scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely). In addition, similar measures of forgiveness also have been used to assess forgiveness effectively in recent published studies (e.g., Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1982; McCullough et al., 1998).

RELATIONSHIP DIMENSIONS PROFILE (RDP; DAIUTO & RAUCOM, 1994)

The RDP is a recently constructed questionnaire designed to assess couples on important dimensions of marital functioning. For reasons described earlier in the overview of the study, three of these dimensions were selected for use in this investigation: Psychological Boundaries, Investment, and Power-Partner. Psychological Boundaries refers to the degree of psychological and emotional distance between the partners and the extent to which they experience a "couple identity." Investment indicates the types and amount of contributions that an individual makes to the relationship and the extent to which the relationship is a priority for the respondent. Power-Partner refers to the amount of influence a person believes that his or her partner has in

the relationship relative to himself or herself. Examples of items from each of these dimensions are: (a) "My partner knows what I am thinking and feeling before I speak" and "I think of myself as part of a "couple" more than as a separate person" (Psychological Boundaries); (b) "Not much energy goes into our relationship" and "We devote time to being together only after all other things are taken care of (Investment); and (c) "Our relationship goes the way my partner wants it to go," "I do things that I would prefer not to do because I have somehow been influenced by my partner." (Power-partner). Alpha coefficients range from .71 (Power-partner) to .90 (Investment).

ASSUMPTIONS SCALE (CARELS, COOP, & BAUCOM , 1994)

This 26-item measure was constructed specifically for this study using dimensions from Janoff-Bulman's original assumptions measure (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) and dimensions of basic schemas/assumptions proposed by McCann and colleagues (1988). The Assumption Scale consists of three sub-scales: Marital Assumptions about Self, Marital Assumptions about Partner, and Marital Assumptions—General. Examples of items from the various scales are: "I can trust my judgments about my partner" (Self); My partner cares about me (Partner); "Partners are generally able to trust each other" (General). These items initially were given to a group of clinical psychology doctoral students participating in a marital studies laboratory in order to assess their content validity. Items that were considered unclear or invalid were altered or discarded. All remaining items were judged to have good content validity. For each of the items, participants were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with the assumptive statements on a six point scale, Higher scores indicated more disagreement (i.e., more negative assumptions). In this study, reliability analyses for these scales indicated acceptable alphas for all the scales r = .83 – .91).

FORGIVENESS INVENTORY (COOP & BAUCOM, 1994)

The Forgiveness Inventory is a 25-item questionnaire that was developed to test the forgiveness model outlined in this study. Based upon the investigators' theoretical model, clinical observations, and the forgiveness literature, items were generated to represent each stage in the process and each component (cognitive, behavioral, and emotional) in the three stages. These items initially were given to a group of clinical psychology doctoral students participating in a marital studies laboratory in order to assess their content validity. Items that were considered unclear or invalid were altered or discarded. All remaining items were judged to have good content validity. In the current investigation, participants first were asked to describe an incident of major betrayal that occurred either in their current or a past relationship. They were given examples of betrayals such as affairs, alcohol abuse, and major lies. Actual betrayals listed ranged from extramarital affairs to years of

emotional neglect to forgetting to take a spouse home after major surgery to killing a beloved pet. Then, keeping this incident in mind, participants were asked to rate how much they currently experience each item on a scale of 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). Psychometric information regarding this scale is reported below.

RESULTS

Reliability and Validity of the Forgiveness Inventory

Cronbach's alphas were computed for the original theoretical scales. Alphas for the original items for Scale 1, Scale 2, and Scale 3 were .77, .55, and .56, respectively. Items were then discarded or moved to other scales based on their correlations with each scales and if the change was deemed consistent with the theory, until adequate alphas were obtained. See Table 1 for the items that comprised the final scale. All subscales achieved acceptable levels of reliability; Cronbach's alpha levels for the final scales were .85, .76, and .75 for the Stage I, the Stage II, and the Stage III subscales, respectively. Furthermore, a confirmatory factor analysis supported the existence of the three subscales, each of which contained the cognitive, behavioral, and affective components as proposed in Table 1. The final model, which allowed the emotional components of Stage II and III to load negatively on the Stage I factor, obtained an adequate goodness of fit index, $\chi^2 (df = 22) = 29.45$, $p = .132$. This index was non-significant, indicating that this model does not significantly differ from the observed data and provides a good fit to the data, and a better fit to the data than a null model consisting of no common factors, or a simple model consisting of one factor. For more detailed information on these analyses, please contact the first author.

Finally, the intercorrelations among the three factors were examined. As predicted, the Stage III factor was negatively correlated with the Stage I factor, $r = -.20$, and positively correlated with the Stage II factor, $r = .23$. Furthermore, also as predicted, the Stage I and Stage II factors were positively correlated, $r = .66$.

Assignment to Stage of Forgiveness

The first step in the second phase of the validational analyses involved classifying each spouse into a stage of forgiveness. In order to accomplish this task, each scale on the Forgiveness Inventory was considered separately, and raw scores for that scale were converted to *z*-scores to control for social desirability issues. Subsequently, each participant's three subscale *z*-scores were compared. The participant was then assigned to the group corresponding to the highest of his or her three subscale *z*-scores, This method of assignment yielded a sample size of 34 for the Stage I group, 32 for the Stage II group, and 48 for the Stage III group.

TABLE 1. Revised Forgiveness Inventory Scales

Stage I (alpha = .85)
Cognitive items:
8) Our relationship feels out of balance as a result of what happened.

Emotional items:
10) I feel overwhelmed by confusing emotions about what happened.
18) My emotions about what happened change from day to day.
22) I am too numb to feel any emotion about what happened.

Behavioral items:
2) I find myself withdrawing from interaction with my partner.
21) I keep trying to "even the score" between my partner and me.
20) I feel like I want to punish my partner for what he/she did.
24) I want to make my partner "pay" for what he/she did.

Stage II items (alpha = .76)
Cognitive items:
4) I want to find out why my partner did this.
3) I am examining my views about what I should realistically expect from my partner.
5) I spend my time convincing myself that I am still a good person in spite of what happened.
9) I am learning that many different factors caused this event.

Emotional items:
23) My emotions about what happened are becoming clearer.

Behavioral items:
1) I want to ask my partner for all the details about the event.
11) I find myself collecting information about my partner's behavior.
15) I find myself trying to be a better partner.

Stage III items (alpha = .75)
Cognitive items:
14) Understanding what my partner did is more important to me than blaming him/her.
16) I can see both the positive and negative aspects of our relationship.
17) I am able to look at both good and bad qualities of my partner.

Emotional items:
7) I feel I am ready to put what happened behind me.
19) I am able to let go of my anger about what happened.
13) I feel my emotions about the event are under my control.

Behavioral items:
12) I know how I feel about continuing our relationship.

Hypothesis I: The Relationship Between the Inventory "Stages" and Self Reported Forgiveness

Participants in these three stages of forgiveness were compared on their global self-report rating of forgiveness, which they completed before completing the Forgiveness Inventory. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) with stage of forgiveness as the independent variable and the one item global rating of forgiveness as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect for stage of forgiveness, $F(2,101) = 7.76$, $p < .001$. As predicted, spouses in the Stage I group reported the lowest amount of forgiveness; the Stage II group reported more forgiveness than the Stage I group and less forgiveness

than the Stage III group. Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations according to the stage of forgiveness.

Hypotheses 2 and 3: The Relationship Between the Inventory "Stages," Marital Assumptions, Marital Power, Investment and Closeness, Marital Adjustment, and People Who Have Not Had to Forgive

For the following analyses, the participants were divided into four groups: Stage I, Stage II, and Stage III (forgiveness groups), and forgiveness not-applicable (FNA; $n = 69$). In these analyses, only participants who reported on forgiveness in their current relationships were included, which reduced the sample sizes of the Stage I, II, and III groups to 24, 24, and 37, respectively.

To test these hypotheses, a series of MANOVAs and ANOVAs were conducted with the three stage groups and the forgiveness-not-applicable group as the four levels of the independent variable and scores on the three assumptions scales (self, partner, and general), the Psychological Boundaries scale, the Investment scale, the Power—Partner scale, and the DAS served as the dependent variables. Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations according to level of forgiveness for the various dependent variables. A significantly greater percentage of women than men reported a betrayal (Pearsons Chi-Square ($df = 1,183$) = 5.699, $p < .05$). Although it was not predicted, there also was the possibility that there were gender differences on the dependent variables of interest and on the forgiveness variable described above. Therefore, these analyses were initially performed using a 2 ×2 ANOVAs with gender and stage as the two independent variables, with forgiveness, dyadic adjustment, power, psychological closeness, investment, assumptions about oneself, and assumptions about one's partners as dependent variables. None of these analyses revealed either significant main effects for gender or for the gender × stage interactions (which had an average p-value of .37); however, a main effect for stage was significant in all analyses except for two, psychological closeness and power, where the p value was .053 and .058 respectively. In order to simplify the presentation of the findings, the results with only stage as an independent variable are presented below.

To assess the relationship between forgiveness and marital functioning on the Relationship Dimensions Profile, a MANOVA was performed with the thee stage groups and the forgiveness-not-applicable group as the four levels of the independent variable and scores on the Investment, Psychological Closeness, and Power-Partner scales scores from the Relationship Dimensions Profile as the dependent variables. The overall MANOVA was significant, $F(9, 321) = 3.90$, $p < .001$. Next, three univariate analyses of variance, one for each of the dependent variables, were performed. To assess the

TABLE 2. Means and Standard Deviations According to Stage of Forgiveness-Not-Applicable (FNA) Groups

	Stage I		Stage II		Stage III		FNA	
Measure	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Stage I subscale	17.49	5.70	11.03	2.87	9.11	1.57	N/A	N/A
raw score (z-score)	(1.08)	(1.13)	(−.20)	(.57)	(−.59)	(.31)		
Stage II subscale	21.80	6.80	25.87	4.47	18.25	4.72	N/A	N/A
raw score	(.11)	(1.06)	(.74)	(.74)	(−.45)	(.74)		
Stage III subscale	26.06	4.84	29.77	3.84	32.99	1.72	N/A	N/A
raw score	(−.86)	(1.07)	(−.05)	(.85)	(.67)	(.38)		
Global report—								
forgiveness	3.29	1.30	4.00	.89	4.40	.69	N/A	N/A
Marital Adjustment								
(DAS)	104.00	12.25	110.33	12.00	116.35	10.61	119.03	12.67
Investment	30.82	10.85	31.68	9.45	37.77	10.74	36.90	9.37
Psychological								
Boundaries	25.11	5.04	26.59	6.93	29.29	6.30	32.18	6.12
Power	17.78	7.34	16.68	6.66	13.74	5.31	12.75	4.27
Assumptions—								
general	13.00	2.83	11.91	3.53	13.80	3.89	12.45	4.31
Assumptions—								
partner	8.50	3.29	7.55	2.67	6.34	2.15	5.68	1.44
Assumptions—								
self	14.83	3.79	12.23	3.66	11.20	2.49	10.70	2.50

relationship between assumptions and level of forgiveness, a MANOVA with the three stage groups and the forgiveness-not-applicable group as the four levels of the independent variable and scores on the Self, Partner, and General scales from the Assumption Scale as the dependent variables was performed. The overall MANOVA was significant, $F(9,336) = 4.95$, $p < .001$. Again, three additional univariate analyses of variance, one for each of the dependent variables, were performed. An analogous ANOVA was performed with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

As can be seen in Table 3, all univariate ANOVAs were significant, with the exception of the ANOVA in which Marital Assumptions—General was the dependent variable. Furthermore, the means of the three stage groups consistently fell into a significant linear pattern, and the means did not significantly deviate from linearity as assessed by tests of linearity. For more detailed information on these analyses, please contact the first author.

Thus, as predicted by stage models of forgiveness, individuals in Stage I of forgiveness reported: (a) the least positive marital assumptions about themselves and their partner; (b) the least psychological closeness and investment; (c) the most power-other; and (d) the least marital adjustment. Persons in Stage III of forgiveness reported: (a) the most positive assumptions about themselves, their partners, and their marriages; (b) the most psychological closeness and investment; (c) the least power-other; and (d) the highest levels of marital adjustment. Partners in Stage II of forgiveness obtained means for these variables that consistently fell between the scores for individuals in Stage I and the Stage III of forgiveness.

TABLE 3. Univariate Analyses of Variance for Level of Self Reported Forgiveness and Marital Functioning Variables

	Dependent Variable(s)	Source	*df*	*F*
	Global Self-Report Forgiveness	Stage	2	7.76****
		Error	101	
	Marital Adjustment (DAS)	Stage	3	8.06****
		Error	47.75	
Relationship-Dimensions	Investment	Stage	3	3.42*
		Error	49.89	
	Psychological Boundaries	Stage	3	8.78****
		Error	136	
	Power—Partner	Stage	3	5.96****
		Error	139	
Marital Assumptions	Assumptions—General Marriage	Stage	3	1.32
		Error	140	
	Assumptions—Partner	Stage	3	10.55****
		Error	140	
	Assumptions—Self	Stage	3	12.30****
		Error	140	

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

Furthermore, to test the differences between those persons who had to forgive their partners versus those who reported that they had never had to forgive their partners, planned comparisons between each of the three stage groups and the Forgiveness-Not-Applicable group (FNA) also were conducted. For more detailed information on these analyses, please contact the first author. In all of these comparisons, individuals in Stage I and Stage II of forgiveness reported poorer marital functioning than people in the FNA group. However, there were no significant differences between persons in the Stage III group and the FNA group, with one exception. Individuals in the Stage III group had significantly lower levels of Psychological Closeness than did people who reported that they never had to forgive their partners.

DISCUSSION

The general pattern of results offers preliminary validation of the investigators' measure of forgiveness. All subscales obtained adequate reliability, and a confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the hypothesized structure of the inventory provided a good statistical fit with the data. However, as the reliability analyses did require some reorganization of the original subscales, these results need replication in an additional sample to confirm this structure; consequently, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Another validational question posed by the current investigation was whether the inventory was consistent with individuals' global self-report ratings of forgiveness. The findings again provide preliminary support that the various experiences measured in the inventory do correspond in the predicted patterns with the degree to which people globally experience having forgiven their partners. More specifically, these findings indicate that persons who state that they have not forgiven their partners also acknowledge (a) a need to punish their partners, (b) cognitive confusion, and (c) emotional dysregulation, as indicated by their endorsing most highly the Stage I items relative to others in the sample. People who state that they have forgiven their partners to some degree endorse that they are searching for greater understanding of their partners and their relationships, as indicated by their highly endorsing the Stage II items, Finally, individuals who state globally that they have forgiven their partners a great deal primarily endorse items indicating that they have achieved balanced views of their partners and their relationships, are less blaming of their partners, experience more emotional control, and a desire to put what has happened behind them, as indicated by their highly endorsing the Stage III items.

Second, based upon the issues hypothesized to be central to the various stages of forgiveness, we anticipated that the inventory would be related to aspects of marital functioning in specific ways. In general, the findings were supportive of the predictions, offering more evidence of the measure's valid-

ity. As hypothesized, people classified by the inventory as being in Stage I reported: (a) less positive assumptions about themselves and their partners; (b) less psychological closeness with their partners; (c) less investment in their marriages; (d) greater feelings of powerlessness in their marriages; and (e) less marital adjustment. Compared to the Stage I and Stage II groups, people in the Stage III group reported (a) the most positive assumptions, (b) the greatest psychological closeness, (c) the most investment in their marriages, (d) a more equal balance of power in their marriages, and (e) greater marital adjustment. Consequently, level of forgiveness as measured by the Forgiveness Inventory appears to be related both to specific domains of disruption in marital functioning, as well as overall evaluations of the marriage. It is important to note that the scores for people in Stage II consistently fell between those of people in Stage I and people in Stage III, following a linear pattern of means, as would be expected in a stage-like process. Furthermore, as people were placed in these Stage groups on the basis of their reports of engaging in behavioral, affective, and cognitive processes hypothesized to be specific to that stage, these results may offer initial, albeit cross-sectional, support for both the authors' three stage model and other forgiveness stage theorists who outline stages involving these processes (e.g., Enright et al., 1991; Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Hargraves & Sells, 1997; Rosenak & Harnden, 1992; Rowe et al., 1989; Smedes 1984). However, it is important to note that these results do not definitively show temporal linkages between these hypothesized stage groups. Thus, it is not clear whether Stage II will always, or generally always, follow Stage I, or Stage III always follow Stage II. It may be that these results are simply different groups of people with different levels of forgiveness. Longitudinal research is needed to rule out that possibility; however, these results are theoretically consistent with the hypothesized stage model, justifying the investment in more longitudinal research.

Another question of interest was whether having experienced a relationship trauma and having gone through the forgiveness process to various degrees would leave some lasting negative impact on couples, as the trauma literature would indicate; As anticipated, individuals in the first and second stages of forgiveness were functioning consistently worse than individuals who never had to forgive their partners. On the other hand, people who had forgiven their partners (i.e., people in Stage III) overall described their relationship in very similar ways compared to people who had not had to forgive.

Finally, one additional result should be noted. Although no significant gender differences were found among individuals reporting a betrayal, significantly more women than men reported experiencing a betrayal in an interpersonal relationship. It is unclear at this time why this difference occurs. At least two explanations are likely. First, because women are socialized to be more relationally focused than men (e.g., Markus & Oyserman,

1989), they may be more attuned in their relationships and more affected by violations of their relationship standards than men. Second, it is possible that men are more reluctant to report or acknowledge hurt or betrayal than women. Thoresen reported a similar finding in his research on forgiveness and physical illness; he stated that he had no difficulty recruiting women to participate in his forgiveness studies, but he was unable to recruit men until he changed the group label from "forgiveness" to "grudge-management" (Thoresen, April 2000). However, it appears that, regardless of gender, once an individual acknowledges a betrayal, then that person will likely have similar experiences of shock, searching for meaning, and moving on. It will be important to replicate and explore possible gender differences more thoroughly in future research.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY AND NEED FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As noted earlier, these findings are based upon cross-sectional data as opposed to longitudinal data; therefore, the findings do not conclusively confirm that individuals in current "stages" of forgiveness have proceeded through the prior stages. Longitudinal research is needed to establish the movement through stages; the current investigators are now pursuing such efforts. Furthermore, these results are unable to provide evidence regarding cause and effect. The findings do not demonstrate that the forgiveness process leads to improvement in assumptions, marital adjustment, or other aspects of relationship functioning. Thus, it may be that individuals who have positive assumptions about their marriage, and/or individuals who experience a high level of marital adjustment, are better prepared to forgive their partners. Additional research is clearly needed to clarify these issues.

Furthermore, a potential problem with these results is that they are based upon new measures. As previously stated, this was considered necessary in order to assess more precisely the constructs being studied. However, the measures all had good face validity and directly asked about the behaviors and cognitions of interest. Moreover, the use of these new measures may provide a more rigorous test of the model in that these results were still significant despite the potential for measurement error However, additional work with other measures of forgiveness would be desirable in future research. Additionally, this sample was primarily white and middle class, and the low response rate, while consistent with other similar research methodologies, raises the difficult issue of selection bias. However, this problem is not unique to this study, but is a problem plaguing most researchers who recruit from the community. Still, the inventory should be validated with a more diverse sample and other recruitment strategies should be considered, such as advertising directly for persons experiencing betrayals, and establishing connections with community leaders in traditionally lower income

and ethnically diverse neighborhoods to aid in increasing their population's willingness to participate in research. However, the current strategy did allow for a diversity of betrayal experiences, and the direct letters and phone calls may have encouraged people to participate who would not normally respond to an advertisement.

Finally, further development of the forgiveness model itself is necessary. At present, the model focuses on the person who has been betrayed; further investigation is needed to understand the role of the person being forgiven. The dyadic interactions of the two persons engaged in the forgiveness process have yet to be explored empirically, which also is of importance. Other areas for exploration that are strongly needed would be to examine in more detail whether, or how, this process differs according to gender, ethnicity, or types of betrayals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL APPLICATION

The findings from the current investigation offer support for both the forgiveness model and the trauma metaphor. Several clinical implications follow from these results, although they must be viewed as preliminary given the cross-sectional nature of the study. In particular, given the limited nature of this sample, these findings must be viewed with caution when considering populations other than Caucasian and college educated individuals. However, a series of replicated case studies based upon this model with clients of varying income levels has received some degree of empirical support and clinical success (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2002). Clinicians can anticipate that for many clients grappling with the forgiveness process, there will be a great deal of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral disruption. The use of the trauma metaphor might be particularly helpful to clients dealing with betrayals. We have found in our own practices that this explanation has helped couples to understand more fully why their lives and relationships may feel so "crazy" immediately after the betrayal. It also helps the participating partner experience more empathy for the injured partner's emotional behaviors following the discovery of the betrayal. However, the clinician should also be aware that this empathy might heighten the participating partner's guilt or own negative affect. (See Gordon & Baucom, 1999, for a more extensive treatment of these issues.)

The findings also indicate that goals of treatment would be best when tailored to the injured partners' current experience of the forgiveness process, which could be assessed through use of this measure. In the first "stage," in which the injured partner is experiencing shock and emotional/psychological dysregulation, interventions would include creating a sense of predictability in the couple's life to establish emotional and physical safety for both persons. In addition, the violated assumptions model and these current

findings regarding power and psychological closeness suggests that these are issues that are important for the clinician to assess in these couples. Explorations of how their beliefs and expectancies of their relationships have changed as a result of the betrayal is critical in order to detect what questions must be answered or challenged in the second stage, the meaning phase, of forgiveness and recovery (See Gordon & Baucom (1999) for a more extensive treatment of these issues). These findings also suggest that other couples, such as Stage II clients for whom dysregulation is less of an issue, may require assistance in coming to a deeper understanding of the issues and motivations that led to the betrayal. Finally, for couples who are in the third "stage" of the process, these results indicate that the clinician would focus on helping the couple identify what steps they would need to take in order to move into the future. A discussion of the importance of ending attempts at retaliation and letting go of intense negative feelings toward the partner should be included in this process.

Ultimately it is hoped that a clearer, empirically based understanding of the process of forgiveness will provide both clinicians and researchers alike with a better guide to what helps couples negotiate this difficult process. The currently described model is intended to provide one perspective for understanding this most important phenomenon.

REFERENCES

Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., Parrot, L. III, O'Connor, L. E., & Wade, N. G. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (TNTF). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27,* 1277–1290.

Boon, S. D., & Sulsky, L. M. (1997). Attributions of blame and forgiveness in romantic relationships: A policy-capturing study. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 12(1),* 19–44.

Carels, R., Coop, K. L., & Baucom, D. H. (1994). [Assumptions Scale]. Unpublished measure. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Carey, M. P., Spector, I. P., Lantinga, L. J., & Krauss, D. J. (1993). Reliability of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. *Psychological Assessment, 5,* 238–240.

Coop, K. L., & Baucom, D. H. (1994). [The Forgiveness Inventory]. Unpublished measure. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Daiuto, A., & Baucom, D. H. (1994). [The Relationship Dimensions Profile]. Unpublished measure. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Davila, J., Bradbury, T. N., Cohan, C. L., & Tochluk, S. (1997). Marital functioning and depressive symptoms: Evidence for a stress generation model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73,* 849–86l.

Enright, R. D., and the Human Development Study Group. (1991). The moral development of forgiveness. In W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development, 1,* 123–152. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Floyd, F. J., &Widaman, K. F. (1995). Factor analysis in the development and refinement of clinical assessment instruments. *Psychological Assessment, 7,* 285–299.

Foa, E. B., Keane, T. M., & Friedman, M. J. (2000). *Effective treatments for PTSD: Practice guidelines from the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies.* New York: Guilford Press.

Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1999). A forgiveness-based intervention for addressing extramarital affairs. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 6,* 382–399.

Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1998). Understanding betrayals in marriage: A synthesized model of forgiveness. *Family Process, 37(4),* 425–450.

Gordon, K. C., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (2000). The use of forgiveness in marital therapy. In M. E. McCullough, K. Pargament, & C. Thoresen, (Eds.), *Frontiers of Forgiving,* pp. New York: Guilford Press.

Gordon, K. C., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (2002). *Preliminary validation for a multi-theoretical forgiveness-based intervention for addressing extramarital affairs.* Manuscript under review.

Hargrave, T. D., & Sells, J. N. (1997). The development of a forgiveness scale. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 23,* 41–63.

Horowitz, M. J. (1985). Disasters and psychological responses to stress. *Psychiatric Annals, 15(3),* 161–167.

Horowitz, M. J., Stinson, C., & Field, N. (1991). Natural disasters and stress response syndromes. *Psychiatric Annals, 21(9)* 556–562.

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1989). Assumptive worlds and the stress of traumatic events: Applications of the schema construct. *Social Cognition, 7,* 113–136.

Markus, H., & Oyserman, D. (1989). Gender and thought: The role of the self-concept. In M. Crawford & M. Hamilton (Eds.), *Gender and thought* (pp. 100–127). New York: Springer-Verlag.

McCann, I. L., Sakheim, D. K., & Abrahamson, D. J. (1988). Trauma and victimization: A model of psychological adaptation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 16,* 531–594.

McCullough, M. E., Worthington, E. L., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73,* 321–336.

McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Brown, S. W., & Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75,* 1586–1603.

Resick, P. A., & Calhoun, K. S. (2001). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In D. H. Barlow (Ed.), *Clinical Handbook of Psychological Disorders, 3rd Edition,* (pp. 60–113). New York: Guilford Press.

Rosenak, C. M., & Harnden, G. M. (1992). Forgiveness in the psychotherapeutic process: Clinical applications. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 11,* 188–197.

Rowe, J. O., Halling, S., Davies, E., Leifer, M., Powers, D., & van Bronkhorst, J. (1989). The psychology of forgiving another: A dialogal research approach. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience,* (pp. 233–244). New York: Plenum Press.

Schlenker, B. R., & Darby, B. W. (1982). The use of apologies in social predicaments. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 44(3),* 271–278.

Sharpley, C. F., & Cross, D. G. (1982). A psychometric evaluation of the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 44,* 739–741.

Smedes, L. B. (1984). *Forgive and forget healing the hurts we don't deserve.* New York: Harper and Row.

Spanier, G. B.. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 38,* 15–28.

Thoresen, C. (April, 2000). *Forgiveness and Health.* Symposium presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Behavioral Medicine in Nashville, TN.

Worthington, E. L. (1998). An empathy-humility-commitment model of forgiveness applied within family dyads. *Journal of Family Therapy, 20,* 59–76.

Worthington, E. L., & DiBlasio, F. A. (1990). Promoting mutual forgiveness in the fractured relationship. *Psychotherapy, 27,* 219–223.