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# Forgiveness of In-group Offenders in Christian Congregations

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Running head: FORGIVENESS OF IN-GROUP OFFENDERS IN CHRISTIAN  
CONGREGATIONS

**Forgiveness of In-group Offenders in Christian Congregations**

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### **Abstract**

Religious communities, like other communities, are ripe for interpersonal offenses. We examined the degree to which group identification predicted forgiveness of an in-group offender. We examined the effects of a victim's perception of his or her religious group identification as a state-specific personal variable on forgiveness by integrating Social Identity Theory into a model of Relational Spirituality (Davis, Hook, & Worthington, 2008) to help explain victim's responses to transgressions within a religious context. Data were collected from members of Christian congregations from the mid-west region of the United States (Study 1,  $N = 63$ ), and college students belonging to Christian congregations (Study 2,  $N = 376$ ). Regression analyses demonstrated that even after statistically controlling for many religious and transgression-related variables, group identification with a congregation still predicted variance in revenge and benevolence toward an in-group offender after a transgression. Additionally, mediation analyses suggest group identification as one mechanism through which trait forgivingness relates to forgiveness of specific offenses. We discuss the importance of group identity in forgiving other in-group members in a religious community.

(174 words)

**Key words:** forgiveness, spirituality, religion, in-group offender, social identity

### **Forgiveness of In-group Offenders in Christian Congregations**

Imagine the following scenario. Megan and Lou attend the same local congregation that you attend. They have each attended the congregation for about five years, although they differ in the degree to which they feel like they identify with the church congregation. Whereas Lou highly values forgiveness and strongly identifies as a member of the congregation, Megan does not necessarily think forgiveness is central to her faith and is only minimally invested in group. A disagreement ensues concerning the annual leader affirmation and appointing process. John is nominated for a leadership position and, in a hasty vote, receives a majority vote to be appointed to the leadership team. Megan and Lou do not support John as a leader. They do not believe that John meets the necessary criteria to function as an example to the rest of the congregation. Furthermore, they attribute this vote mostly to the senior member of the leadership team, David, whom they believe moved the nomination through to a vote by “playing politics.” In fact, both Megan and Lou consider this vote an offense against congregational members.

Megan is infuriated with David’s decision to support John. She interprets this action as violating her beliefs in what is Sacred—namely, her interpretation of Scriptural verses describing characteristics of a duly elected congregational leader. She never shares her frustration with others in the congregation and slowly develops feelings of unforgiveness towards David. Megan does not feel a strong conviction to offer forgiveness. She questions if the values of the congregation align with her own and, eventually stops attending the congregation. Lou is also disappointed in the team’s decision to support John. However, Lou believes that forgiveness is required of Christians and does not want to harbor a grudge. He decides to approach David to discuss the leadership team’s decision. At this meeting, Lou expresses his concerns and learns about David’s reasons for supporting John, developing some understanding of the team’s decision. Lou’s unforgiveness towards David lessens, and he remains active in the congregation.

What may have prompted Megan and Lou to react to a perceived offense so differently? What factors may have influenced their thoughts and behavior towards David? What role does identification with a group play in forgiveness within the context of religious communities? The current studies seek to provide some answers to these questions.

### **Forgiveness as a Moral Response (in a Religious Setting)**

According to research conducted by the Gallup Organization on Religion and Public Life in 2010 (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/151760/christianity-remains-dominant-religion-united-states.aspx>), 78% of adults in the United States identified themselves as Christians and approximately 44% of Americans attended religious services weekly. As religious affiliation and participation appear to be such an integral part of the identity of many Americans, the absence of research on the interrelations between church affiliation, social identity, and forgiveness is a significant gap in the research literature. In the present research, we begin to remedy the gap through two studies that examine an individual's willingness to forgive offenses based on their self-perception of affiliation with a congregation, which we consider *group identification*.

Forgiveness has long been understood within a moral and/or religious context (Rye, Pargament, Ali, Beck, Dorff, Hallisey et al., 2000), and it has gained substantial popularity in the past 30 years as a subject of scientific inquiry (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). However, studies considering the intersection of religiosity/spirituality and forgiveness, which independently are thoroughly researched areas, comprise only a subset of the literature on forgiveness (1120 of 3066 records on PsycINFO; accessed February 23, 2013). Given that many of these studies involve religion or spirituality measured with a single item in demographic questionnaires and are seldom analyzed, little is known about how religious or spiritual individuals actually forgive

offenders (for a review and meta-analysis, see Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, in press). Early studies found significant relationships between trait forgivingness (one's tendency to forgive) with church affiliation and attendance (Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usai, Neto, & Shafighi, 2003). However, researchers found inconsistent links between these categorical religious variables and forgiveness of specific offenses. Thus, psychologists called for different methodological approaches to more appropriately assess the variables involved in these offense situations (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005).

Since that time, a different approach to studying forgiveness emerged which changed the focus from categorical religious variables to state-specific spiritual relationships (Davis, Hook, & Worthington, 2008). This change of focus found that these relationships influence offense-specific forgiveness (Davis et al., 2008; Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, 2009; Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, & Green, 2009; Davis, D. E., Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Jennings, 2010; Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, Jennings, & Norton, 2010). These studies were generated from a model of relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008) that was developed from Shults and Sandage's (2006) original concept of *relational spirituality*. They defined relational spirituality as "ways of relating to the sacred" (Shults & Sandage, 2006, p. 61). The concept of relational spirituality asserts that spirituality is only relevant in the context of relationships (Shults & Sandage, 2006). The model of relational spirituality, therefore, considers offense-relevant relationships from the victim's point of view.

The study of state-specific relational variables in the context of specific offenses supports the apparent relationship between Christian's self-reported disposition to forgive and forgiveness of actual offenders (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, & Worthington, 2012). However, researchers have not investigated how the level of identification with a religious community that values

forgiveness may affect *whom* and *how* Christians forgive. According to social identity theory, individuals see themselves as connected to various social groups at different levels: One's level of perceived connection is posited to affect their thoughts, feelings, and behavior in groups (Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999). Viewing an offense through the lens of social identity theory provides the study of forgiveness rich potential for more detailed understanding of social and state-specific factors that affect forgiveness of offenders who are within one's identified group. We propose that group identification, one aspect of social identity theory, affects forgiveness of in-group offenders. More specifically, we propose that individuals who are likely to forgive (i.e., high in dispositional proclivity to offer forgiveness) may translate this predilection into a stronger identification with their (offending) in-group as a means of facilitating forgiveness. We thus explore the theoretical bases for this perspective in the following sections.

In the present studies, we investigate possible forgiving and non-forgiving responses to offenses committed by fellow members of a religious community in order to begin investigating whom and how (American) Christians forgive others. In this case, we study attendees of Christian church congregations. We propose that a congregant's social identity, specifically his or her group identification with a congregation, highly affects the congregant's response to an in-group offender. Namely, the more one values forgiveness, the more likely one will identify with a church congregation (a group that shares the value of forgiveness) as a means to facilitate forgiveness of an in-group offender, and thus, the more one's responses to a particular offense will be forgiving, rather than revengeful or avoidant, for an offender who is also a member of the church congregation (and thus a fellow in-group member). We also integrate this state-specific person-variable of group identification into the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness as a process through which forgiveness occurs.



We explore the relationships in this model in the next section. However, we hasten to define several key terms that are used throughout the present article in order to better understand this particular theory. A *victim* is self-identified as someone who believes his or her boundaries have been violated by an *offense*. (Offense, transgression, and perceived hurt are used interchangeably.) *Forgiveness* is one possible response to such a hurt. Forgiveness involves a release of negative feelings, thoughts, and motives towards the offender, and possible development of positive feelings, thoughts, and motives towards the offender (McCullough et al., 1998). *Unforgiveness* is an emotional (e.g., bitterness, hatred, anger, resentment) and motivational (e.g., revenge, avoidance) state that develops over time if negative feelings build up towards the offender.

### **Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness**

We use a theory of relational spirituality and forgiveness to investigate the effects of an offense on a victim who identifies as religious and/or spiritual (Davis et al., 2008). Davis, Hook, and Worthington (2008) presented a model of relational spirituality and forgiveness to understand how a religious victim may view an offense by adding a Sacred dimension as an overarching reference point (see Figure 1). The model of relational spirituality and forgiveness posits that a victim's forgiveness, revenge, or grudge-holding in response to an offense can be predicted by variables related to the victim, offender, and transgression. These are all relationships present within the state-specific social context of the offense. Furthermore, this model asserts that accounting for what the victim considers to be sacred allows for more precise prediction of the victim's response to an offense.

Victims will consider their relationship to the offender (victim-offender relationship; VO), their relationship to the offense/transgression (VT), the relationship between the offender

and transgression (OT), their relationship to the Sacred (SV), the offender's relationship to the Sacred (SO), and the relationship between the transgression and the Sacred (ST). Most people view deity as the most sacred object of spirituality, yet the most sacred object could for particular people or groups represent humanity, nature, or the cosmos (Worthington, 2009). Regardless of what an individual identifies as the Sacred, relational spirituality involves the relationships of victim, offender, and transgression with at least one spiritual object outside the individual.

In this model, the transgression and relationship with the offender may hold spiritual meaning for the victim (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005). When the transgression is interpreted as spiritually significant, such as a desecration that the person considers to violate something sacred, the victim may experience strong emotional reactions. Many acts might be perceived to be desecrations. In Christian theology, some examples might be improper sexual relationships (desecrating the marriage bond) or physical acts (desecrating the body, referred to as the temple of the Holy Spirit). The relational spirituality and forgiveness model hypothesizes that in response to the spiritual appraisal of the transgression, positive moral emotions—such as love, empathy, and mercy—are likely to lead to forgiveness whereas negative moral emotions—such as anger and disgust—make forgiveness difficult (Davis et al., 2009). Therefore, the nature of the religious victim's appraisal, whether morally positive or negative, will influence the likelihood of forgiveness of the transgressor.

Adding consideration of the Sacred to the elements related to forgiveness suggests that relationships will play a role in predicting the victim's response (Shults & Sandage, 2006). For example, the perception that the Sacred is just and might enact divine justice on behalf of the victim might predispose the victim to believe that less immediate justice is necessary because the Sacred will ultimately judge (and perhaps punish or condemn) the offender. One might even

sanctify forgiveness itself (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, & Worthington, 2012) by imbuing forgiveness with sacred meaning, which affects whether a person forgives. If the victim feels attachment to the Sacred (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002), commitment to one's religion (Witvliet, Hinze, & Worthington, 2008; Worthington et al., 2003), dedication to the Sacred (Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Van Tongeren, 2009), relational engagement with the Sacred (Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, Jennings, & Norton, 2010), the experience of comfort from God (Wood, Worthington, Exline, Yali, Aten, & McMinn, 2010), or spiritual humility in the presence of the Sacred (Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Jennings, 2010), then that person might believe that his or her relationship provides special care or dispensation relative to one who feels unattached, uncommitted, not dedicated, and not spiritually humble in reference to the Sacred.

Similarly, the relationship of the transgression to the Sacred is important (Pargament et al., 2005), as is the victim's evaluation of the similarity of his or her relationship with the Sacred to the offender's relationship with the Sacred (Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, Green, & Jennings, 2009). These potential relationships have been further elucidated in a variety of theoretical approaches (Worthington, 2009; Worthington, Davis, Hook, Gartner, & Jennings, 2009; Worthington et al., 2010).

### **Social Identity Theory, Group Identification and Relational Spirituality**

One state-specific person variable likely related to forgiveness is the degree to which a person identifies with a religious congregation to which she or he and the offender belong. We address the effect of this identification using *social identity theory* (Tajfel, 1978). The effects of social identity have been demonstrated in a variety of settings, ranging from the laboratory-constructed minimal group paradigms (Turner, 1975) to real life group categorizations

(Dimmock, & Gucciardi, 2008; Henry et al., 1999). *Social identity* refers to broad social categorizations in one's life, such as gender, and role as a parent. *Group identification* is at the individual-level, describing a person's level of identification with a particular identified social group, versus *group identity* referring to characteristics that describe and define a group (Henry et al., 1999). Whereas social identity indicates a categorization, group identification refers to an internal process of a group member (Henry et al.). Henry and colleagues differentiate these variables, as researchers are often concerned with social identity when considering intergroup relations. However, the process of group identification occurs separate from regard of out-group members. A group member is affected by cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors within a group and, thus, the member's level of group identification concerns only in-group relations. Group identification is considered a process, or state-specific variable, as social interactions within a group continuously occur and affect an individual's level of identification with the group at any given time.

Of note, individuals have multiple social identities (e.g., romantic partner, employee, member of a community) and can vary in degree of expression of these varying identities. To be sure, contextual effects (such as priming) may increase the salience, and endorsement, of a particular social identity. Similarly, the prioritization of values (a different type of priming or heightened accessibility of one's cherished ideals) may affect one's group identification. For example, students who strongly cherish their studiousness or academic ability may increase their identification with their prestigious college. Similarly, individuals who highly value a particular virtue (such as forgiveness) may increase their identification with an in-group that has committed an offense as a means through which to facilitate the expression of that virtue. That is, it should be easier to forgive members of an in-group to which one is highly committed and with which

one strongly identifies rather than a group that is peripherally important or largely irrelevant to one's self-concept.

There is a gap in the literature concerning how an individual deals with an offense committed by another in-group member in real life situations. Social identity theory has recently been applied to intra-group processes (Postmes & Jetten, 2006), including examining the cognitive dissonance created by in-group norm violations (Glasford, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Glasford, Pratto, & Dovidio, 2008). Researchers have also considered how crime is punished differentially for in-group and out-group members (Gollwitzer & Kelley, 2010). However, these norm violations and crimes were artificially created in laboratory experiments. There has been one published study examining secondhand forgiveness for out-group offenders transgressing against a participant's in-group member (Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008). Thus far, no published research has investigated how a person's level of group identification affects forgiveness processes following an offense by a transgressor within the group. Given that people who are highly identified with a group might spend a considerable amount of time and emotional investment with in-group members, this is an important omission.

According to social identity theory, individuals identify with salient social groups (and people within them), categorizing and identifying themselves with groups that further establish their self-images (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals also favor members of their in-group (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Individuals who highly identify with a given group will go to greater lengths to affirm their identity, despite in-group violators challenging that identity (Glasford et al., 2009). These findings indicate that individuals who identify with a particular group are motivated to retain that group membership and sense of group identity. Thus, we extend the logic to posit that if a group is an integral part

of a person's identity, the person will be motivated to offer greater forgiveness to individuals who are viewed as part of their (spiritual/religious) group, even when having been offended by the in-group member.

We relate this theorizing to our original example offense scenario. Consider the scenario based on the model of relational spirituality (see Figure 1). Within this model, we consider Lou (the victim) and relevant relationships from his perspective (with the offender, transgression, and sacred). He will assess his current relationship with David (the offender), the appointing of John (the offense), and how he views these persons and event related to God (what he sees as the sacred). Also, Lou can be described on a variety of important and relevant personal dimensions which affect those relationships, such as his tendency to be forgiving. Importantly, Lou's personal commitment to and identification with the congregation also affects his forgiveness processes. Other personal variables (victim characteristics) also may affect Lou's relational appraisals and forgiveness such as his tendency to forgive others. We hypothesize that his self-construal as a forgiving person relates to his identification as a committed member of the congregation, a group that values forgiveness. Valuing that membership is a salient personal variable that increases his chance of enacting his value of forgiveness to a specific offense.

### **The Role of Religious Group Identity in Relational Spirituality Appraisals**

According to the model of relational spirituality, religious and/or spiritual victims assess relationships relevant to an offense context that include the offender, transgression, and Sacred (Davis et al., 2008). These relationships exist within a social context that elicit various intrapersonal processes (e.g., group identification). One purpose of the current studies is to further investigate the forgiveness process of religious victims by including assessment of the victim's relationship to a relevant social group as a feature of their

forgiveness process that occurs within a particular social context of the offense. When an offense occurs within a religious community, the relationships relevant to a victim will include other in-group members and, *as the victim identifies with a religious group*, he or she is expected to assess the offense, offender and self in reference to the Sacred (Davis et al., 2008) more forgivingly. Drawing from this theorizing regarding relational spirituality, we propose that the degree to which one shares a common in-group identification with an offender will predict the amount of forgiveness and unforgiveness experienced following an offense by someone within one's religious congregation. Additionally, we propose that part of the relation between valuing forgiveness and granting forgiveness of a particular offense occurs via group identification with a religious group. That is, group identification may be the mechanism through which dispositional forgivingness is translated into intra-group forgiveness with these particular religious settings.

Research has found that state-specific variables predict offense-specific forgiveness more strongly than traits (Davis et al., 2008; McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Trait forgivingness is also related to offense-specific forgiveness, though it is likely less strongly (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington, 2012). In the current studies, we investigate the process of being offended and (possibly) forgiving within Christian congregations, as forgiveness is considered by many Christians as a command of this religion (Rye et al., 2000). Thus, individuals who highly value forgiveness (i.e., high trait forgivingness) and identify as Christian are likely to highly identify with their group that shares this value, such as a local church congregation. We propose that trait forgivingness, or highly valuing forgiving, contributes to an individual identifying with a Christian

congregation. In turn, high identification with a congregation contributes to forgiveness of specific offenses.

### **Hypothesis and Overview of Studies**

Our overarching hypothesis was that identification with an in-group at the time of an offense would be positively and strongly related to forgiveness of an in-group offender—even after accounting for variance explained by other measures within the forgiveness and relational spirituality model. We tested this central hypothesis in two studies. Based on previous research that shows forgiveness develops over time (McCullough, Root-Luna, Berry, Tabak, & Bono, 2010) and group identification may deteriorate if the offense is central to one's cherished beliefs and relationships sour, we inquired about in-group identification prior to the offense and at the time of assessment. Study 1 tested whether there is a positive relationship between group identification at these two points and forgiveness (Hypothesis 1).

In Study 2, we tested three hypotheses. First, we attempted to replicate the findings of Study 1, which would confirm the overarching hypothesis that in-group identification is related to greater forgiveness (Hypothesis 1). Second, we hypothesized that group identification accounts for unique variance above and beyond the other variables in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness (Hypothesis 2). Accordingly, we tested the strength of the relationship between in-group identification with forgiveness while using the full model of forgiveness and relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008) by statistically controlling for the other model variables and examining the unique predictive power of group-identification on forgiveness. Third, we hypothesized that the connection between personal disposition to forgive (i.e., trait forgivingness) and actual forgiveness of within-



congregation offenders will be mediated by identification with a congregation (Hypothesis 3).

### **Study 1 (Pilot Study)**

We theorized that the religious victim's group identification with a church congregation would affect the relational assessments in the model of relational spirituality. We anticipated that group identification is likely to be salient to the victim as identity with a group is activated when in-group behavior violates personal values (Glasford et al., 2009). Thus, we drew participants from several Christian congregations in an internet survey. To participate, participants had to have been offended or hurt by someone in their congregation in the past. Participants were recruited by a contact within each congregation and were emailed a link through which they completed a brief online survey. We tested Hypothesis 1: A victim's identification with a congregation is positively related to forgiveness and negatively related to unforgiveness toward an offender within the congregation group after an offense.

### **Method**

**Participants.** Participants ( $N = 63$ ; 28 females, 14 males, and 21 who did not report sex) included members of at least 10 Christian congregations across the Midwestern part of the United States. Ages of participants (reported by age category) ranged from 18 to over 65; median category was 36-45 ( $SD = 1.66$ ), with 25 who did not report age. The ethnicity of the sample appeared rather homogeneous, 21 did not report ethnicity (61.9% Caucasian, 3.2% African-American/Black, 1.6% Latino/a, 1.6% multiracial).

### **Individual difference measures.**

**Demographic questionnaire.** A demographic questionnaire included single-item questions concerning age, sex, ethnicity, and frequency of church attendance. Age was measured in ranges (18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, and over 65).

**Group identification (Henry et al., 1999).** Participants indicated their rating of their degree of group identification (with the congregation) at two separate times: both retrospectively prior to the offense and at the present time by completing the Arrow-Carini Group Identification Scale 2.0 (Henry et al., 1999). The scale assesses a person's identification with a defined social group (in this case, their congregation) with 12 items, divided into three correlated subscales: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. An example item is, "I see this group as part of who I am." Items are rated on a 7-point rating scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. In the present study, we used a slightly adapted measure, which replaced "group" with "congregation." Following advice of Arrow and Carini, we did not differentiate the four-item correlated subscales from each other. For the full 12-item scale in the current study, estimated internal consistency for self-reported retrospective group identification (prior to the offense) was  $\alpha = .78$  and for present group identification was  $\alpha = .81$ .

**Victim-transgression relationship: Hurtfulness assessment and time.** Participants recalled a relatively severe transgression by someone in their congregation. After they wrote a short description of the event, they completed single items to assess their perception of hurtfulness of the transgression and time since the transgression occurred. Hurtfulness was measured on a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *very little hurt* to 5 = *large amount of hurt*. Participants were also asked to specify the length of time since the transgression occurred. Time since the offense was measured in months.

***Victim-transgression relationship: Unforgiving and benevolent motivations (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998).*** To assess residual unforgiving motivations for the transgression identified above, participants completed the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998). The TRIM assesses unforgiving motivations on a 12-item scale of avoidance motivations (TRIM-A; 7 items;  $\alpha = .94$ ) and revenge motivations (TRIM-R; 5 items;  $\alpha = .66$ ). Participants rated items on a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Higher scores on the TRIM-A and TRIM-R subscales indicate higher levels of unforgiving motives. Participants also indicated their degree of forgiveness, as measured by the TRIM-Benevolence scale (TRIM-B;  $\alpha = .89$ ). The TRIM-B consists of six items that measure the victim's benevolent motivations towards the transgressor (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Higher scores on the TRIM-B indicate more positive motivations to act benevolently toward the offender, which is thought to be an indicator of forgiveness of others.

**Procedure.** Participants were recruited by announcements of the study in weekly bulletins distributed in church congregations within the Midwestern portion of the United States. Interested participants submitted their personal email addresses to a contact person within the congregation, and an electronic link was emailed to them to complete the survey online. Participants first identified and described an interpersonal transgression from an offender within their identified church congregation and their subsequent forgiving or unforgiving motivations.

## **Results**

Means, standard deviations, alphas, and intercorrelations for all variables are reported in Table 1. Data were checked for normality, outliers, and missing values, and all conformed to statistical guidelines (i.e., normally distributed, no outliers, no excessive missing data). As predicted in Hypothesis 1, greater group identification prior to the offense was related to

significantly lower avoidance motivations ( $r = -.36, p = .009$ ), and greater benevolence motivations ( $r = .41, p = .003$ ), as well as lower (but non-significantly so) revenge motivations ( $r = -.23, p = .113$ ). Thus, in support of Hypothesis 1, the greater the victim's level of group identification prior to the offense, the greater forgiveness (i.e., as indicated by less unforgiving motivations and greater forgiving motivations) he or she demonstrated toward the offender. However, current group identification was not significantly related to benevolence or unforgiving motivations towards the offender, which may reflect the continuously changing nature of one's group identification with an interacting group of individuals, like a church congregation (Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999). Current group identification may not be strongly related to a past offense which has been forgiven, which suggests that group identification may be a *process* through which one offers forgiveness.

## **Discussion**

In this small pilot study, we provided initial support for Hypothesis 1. We found that group identification with a congregation prior to an offense was related to less avoidant and greater benevolent motivations toward an in-group offender. These relationships were in the expected directions with higher group identification being associated with lower avoidance and higher benevolence. The association between in-group identification and revenge motivations was not significant and may be due to a small sample size ( $N = 63$ ) and restricted range of scores on TRIM-R. However, these results warranted further investigation of level of group identification as a person-variable that affects the appraisals within the model of relational spirituality and subsequent forgiveness of offenses (see Figure 2; Davis et al., 2008). In subsequent analyses, we excluded consideration of group identification at the present time (after the offense) because it did not significantly relate to forgiving motivations when we tested it in

Study 1 and was not hypothesized to relate to forgiving or unforgiving motives towards a within-congregation offender (cf. McCullough et al., 2010).

Study 1 (the pilot study) had some limitations. First, the sample size was small. Second, the method of the study was limited by being cross-sectional data that involved retrospection—both of which reduced the conclusions possible to draw from the data. Nevertheless, Study 1 provided initial data that helped us design a more extensive and yet focused second study.

## **Study 2**

In Study 2, we expanded our research design to measure all relationships in the model of relational spirituality and forgiveness (as reflected in Figure 1), using a student sample in which participants self-identified as members of a Christian congregation and reported having been hurt or offended by someone within their congregation. In this second study, people did not have to self-identify to a fellow congregant, which likely increased our response rate.

We sought to determine whether the measure of group identification fits within the model of relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008) as a personal variable of the victim by determining whether it predicts forgiving and unforgiving motivations toward an in-group offender (Hypothesis 1). We also tested Hypothesis 2: Group identification with a congregation will be a significant predictor of forgiveness and will relate to offense-specific forgiveness even after controlling for measures of relational spirituality that have been studied in the past. We also tested Hypothesis 3: Group identification with a congregation is a mediating mechanism through which trait forgivingness predicts offense-specific forgiveness in the particular context of Christians forgiving a within-congregation offender.

## **Method**

**Participants.** Participants ( $N = 376$ ; 256 females, 120 males) were undergraduate students at a large Mid-Atlantic university who participated as part of a course requirement or in exchange for a small amount of course credits. Students classified their age using the same seven categories as in Study 1. Age ranged from under 18 to over 65 (Median = 18-25;  $SD = 0.34$ ). The sample was ethnically diverse (46.0% Caucasian; 23.1% African American/Black; 13.8% Asian/Pacific Islander; 4.3% Latino/a; 0.8% Native American; 2.1% Other; and 8.1% multiracial). Six participants did not report ethnicity.

**Individual difference measures.**

**Demographic questionnaire.** The same demographic questionnaire as in Study 1 was used to assess participants' age, sex, ethnicity, and frequency of church attendance.

**Dispositional forgivingness (TFS; Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005).** The TFS is a 10-item instrument which measures tendency to forgive others across situations and time. Participants rate statements from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, that reflect an individual's tendency to forgive (e.g., "I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did"). In the present study,  $\alpha = .81$ .

**Religious commitment (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003).** The RCI-10 measures one's commitment to his or her religion. Items are non-sectarian, and they are rated on a 5-point rating scale from 1 = *not at all true of me* to 5 = *totally true of me*. Although the scale consists of two highly correlated subscales, the originators suggest that the RCI-10 can be treated as a single scale. Sample items are, "Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life" and "I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation." In the present study,  $\alpha = .91$ .

**Group identification (Henry et al., 1999).** The same scale was used as in Study 1 to assess the victim's level of identification with the congregation prior to the offense. In the present study,  $\alpha = .80$ .

**Relational spirituality measures.**

**Victim-Sacred relationship: Dedication to the Sacred scale. (DS; Davis et al. , 2009).** The 5-item DS Scale assesses people's relationships with what they personally define as Sacred. This relationship is seen as a state variable that can shift over time. An example item is, "My relationship with the Sacred is more important to me than almost anything else in my life." Items are rated on a 7-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. In the present study,  $\alpha = .92$ .

**Victim-offender relationship: Dyadic Adjustment Scale-7 (DAS – 7; Hunsley, Best, Lefebvre, & Vito, 2001).** The 7-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) was used to measure the victim-offender relationship as perceived by the victim prior to the offense. The DAS-7 contains three subscales: commitment, satisfaction, and closeness. The satisfaction subscale contains the question, "Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, in your relationship." This question is answered on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *Extremely Unhappy* to 7 = *Perfect*. In the present study,  $\alpha = .84$ .

**Transgression-Sacred relationship: Sacred Loss and Desecration scale (SLD; Pargament et al., 2005).** The SLD scale (23 items) measures the degree to which a victim appraises a transgression as a loss or desecration of something sacred (theistic and non-theistic). An example item is, "Something that was sacred to me was destroyed." Items are rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*. In the present study,  $\alpha = .97$ .

***Offender-Sacred relationship: Similarity of Offender’s Spirituality scale (SOS; Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, Green et al., 2009).*** The SOS scale is a 9-item measure of the victim’s appraisal of participants’ similarity to an offender. The scale has two correlated subscales: human similarity and spiritual similarity. Participants used a 7-point Likert scale from 0 = *Completely disagree* to 6 = *Completely agree* to rate their agreement with each item. Examples of items include, “Even though our bond as humans was broken, I knew we were both the same under the skin” for human similarity, and “I recalled how similar we were in fundamental values” for spiritual similarity. In the present study, estimated reliability for human similarity was  $\alpha = .79$ , and for spiritual similarity,  $\alpha = .84$ .

***Victim-transgression relationship: Unforgiving and benevolent motivations (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998).*** The same three subscales of the TRIM inventory—avoidance, revenge, and benevolence motives—were used to measure the VT relationship as in Study 1. In the present study, the alphas for the TRIM-A, TRIM-R, and TRIM-B were .88, .86, and .86, respectively.

***Hurtfulness assessment and time.*** The same single-item measures of time since offense and hurtfulness of offense were used as in Study 1. These single-item measures are typically used in research concerning forgiveness of a particular offense.

**Procedure.** Participants were recruited through an online study for undergraduates who self-identified as someone who attends a Christian congregation. Participants completed individual difference measures of trait forgivingness, religious commitment, and group identification. Then participants identified the most severe transgression in terms of having hurt feelings (see Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998) caused by someone currently in their same religious congregation they were attending or regularly attended back at their home.



Finally, participants completed the measures describing the relationships between themselves, the offender, and the transgression with the Sacred.

## **Results**

**Data screening.** Means, standard deviations, alphas and ranges for all variables are presented in Table 2. Data were checked for normality, outliers, and missing values, and all conformed to statistical guidelines (i.e., normally distributed, no outliers, no excessive missing data). The few missing data per variable (4.65% average of missing data per measure) were handled by pairwise deletion for correlations and mean replacement for regression analyses.

### **Testing Hypothesis 1: Relationship between group identification and forgiveness.**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that in-group identification would be positively correlated with offense-specific forgiveness. Intercorrelations of all scales are listed in Table 3. Due to the large number of intercorrelations we analyzed, we used a modified Bonferroni-corrected alpha of .001 to determine statistical significance of correlations. (*Note:* this correction only applies to correlations; all other analyses described below were tested at the standard .05 alpha level.) As predicted, group identification with a congregation prior to the offense was related to less avoidance ( $r = -.21, p < .001$ ), less revenge ( $r = -.30, p < .001$ ), and greater benevolence ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ) motivations toward an in-group offender. These findings replicated those of the first study and provided additional evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.

### **Testing Hypothesis 2: Incremental predictive power of group identification.**

Hypothesis 2 predicted that level of group identification of the victim prior to the offense would be related to unforgiving and benevolence motivations toward the offender even after removing the variance from all other relationship and offense variables in the forgiveness and relational spirituality model (Davis et al., 2008). To test this hypothesis, we conducted hierarchical

multiple regressions for each measure of forgiveness: avoidance, revenge, and benevolent motivations towards the offender. We entered all measures of relational spirituality in steps to remove all of their variance. Then, we entered group identification with the congregation prior to the offense as the final predictor variable in each equation.<sup>1</sup> Results are summarized from all three analyses in Table 4.

Avoidance motivations were significantly associated with trait forgivingness ( $\beta = -.31$ ), closeness to offender after the offense ( $\beta = -.21$ ) hurtfulness of the offense ( $\beta = .13$ ), sacred loss and desecration ( $\beta = .21$ ), and human similarity ( $\beta = -.24$ ); (final model,  $R^2 = .25$ ,  $F(10,365) = 12.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, after accounting for all the variance from the variables in the relational spirituality model, group identification prior to the offense failed to significantly predict avoidance motivations,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $p = .50$ ,  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t = -.67$ ,  $p = .50$  (see Table 4). This finding did not support Hypothesis 2, regarding avoidance motivations.

Revenge motivations were significantly associated with trait forgivingness ( $\beta = -.32$ ), church attendance ( $\beta = -.11$ ), dedication to the Sacred ( $\beta = -.17$ ), and Sacred loss and desecration ( $\beta = .31$ ); (final model,  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F(10,365) = 12.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Group identification prior to the offense significantly predicted revenge motivations above the effect of all other variables in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $t = -2.77$ ,  $p = .006$  (see Table 4). This finding supported Hypothesis 2.

Benevolence motivations were significantly associated with trait forgivingness ( $\beta = .38$ ), religious commitment ( $\beta = .23$ ), closeness to the offender after the offense ( $\beta = .22$ ), Sacred loss and desecration ( $\beta = -.18$ ), and human similarity ( $\beta = .30$ ); (final model,  $R^2 = .39$ ,  $F(10,365) = 23.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Group identification prior to the offense significantly predicted benevolent

motivations above the effect of all other variables in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t = 3.08$ ,  $p = .002$  (see Table 4). This finding provided additional support for Hypothesis 2.

**Testing Hypothesis 3: Mediation between trait forgivingness and outcome variables through group identification.** Hypothesis 3 stated that group identification with a congregation acted as the mechanism through which dispositional forgiveness predicted offense-specific forgiveness for religiously-identifying victims who have been offended within their congregation. To test for mediation, we used PROCESS (Hayes, 2012) to test the indirect effects from trait forgivingness to unforgiveness and forgiveness (TRIM-A, TRIM-R, and TRIM-B) via group identification, over 5,000 bootstrapping iterations. The PROCESS analyses confirmed that group identification significantly mediated the effect of trait forgivingness on avoidance (estimate of indirect effect =  $-.03$ , 95% CI =  $-.069/-.004$ ), revenge (estimate of indirect effect =  $-.04$ , 95% CI =  $-.063/-.004$ ), and benevolence (estimate of indirect effect =  $.07$ , 95% CI =  $.038/.105$ ). All parts of hypothesis 3 were supported (see Figure 2).

## Discussion

In Study 2, we provided moderate to strong support for all three hypotheses. Replicating the effects found in Study 1, we demonstrated in Study 2 that group identification significantly predicted revenge, avoidance, and benevolence motivations toward an in-group offender, supporting Hypothesis 1. We also found that the measure of group identification fit within the model of relational spirituality (Davis et al., 2008) as a state-specific victim-variable. Group identification with a congregation was a stronger predictor of benevolent and revenge motivations over and above measures of relational spirituality that have been studied in the past, though it did not predict avoidance motivations; thus, Study 2 provided mixed support for the second hypothesis. This suggests that people within a church, for example, are likely to reduce

vengeful motives and increase benevolent motives toward someone who is also an offending member of the same congregation depending on the degree to which they identify with a local congregation. However, avoidance did not appear affected—perhaps because it was difficult to avoid a congregational member that one must see at least weekly (on average) in a church service.

In Study 2, we provided strong support for Hypothesis 3. A victim's trait forgivingness indirectly affected offense-specific forgiveness through group identification with a congregation. Group identification partially mediated the relationship between trait forgivingness with avoidance, revenge, and benevolence. As such, while group identification was a mediator, trait forgivingness maintained a direct association with all measures of offense-specific forgiveness in this study. As we hypothesized, it seems that Christians who highly value forgiveness also find identifying with a congregation as an important part of their identity, and utilize this aspect of their identity to aid in forgiving specific offenses. Supporting Hypothesis 3, group identification seems to be one mechanism through which trait forgivingness is related to forgiveness of in-group offenders in congregations for a specific offense.

In the past, McCullough and Worthington (1999) demonstrated an empirical connection between religious beliefs and values and forgiveness. However, recent research has shown that this is a much more multidimensional and complex relationship than the original formulation (Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, in press; Worthington et al., 2010). We expanded upon some of that complexity. For example, in the testing of Hypothesis 2, we found that personal closeness to the offender related to reduced avoidance and increased benevolence. In addition, trait forgivingness was related to these same motivations and reduced revenge. Closeness to offender refers to relationship satisfaction and commitment, and is different from proximity

alone (see previous comment concerning avoidance persisting after an in-group congregational offense). Altogether, the results of Study 2 suggest that group identification is a significant predictor of whether an individual forgives an in-group offender, and may account for part of the effect of one's disposition to forgive an in-group offender, suggesting that one's group identity motivates interpersonal reactions to other members in the group, such as offering forgiveness.

### **General Discussion**

The scientific study of forgiveness has greatly expanded (for reviews and meta-analyses, see Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, in press; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010) in recent years. However, as a topic of study, many areas have remained unexamined. Researchers have found stronger relationships between offense-specific forgiveness and personal spiritual variables rather than mere religiosity (see Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, in press). The two studies we present here add to these findings. These are the first known studies to examine individuals' relational spirituality and forgivingness in reference to an offense committed by a group member.

In recent years, research has sought to identify how the mechanisms through which offense-specific forgiveness occurs are affected by personal spiritual variables. In Study 2, we included several relational spirituality measures that have been previously studied. We suggested that group identification is a stronger predictor of forgiveness than these other variables (Davis et al., 2008; Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington, 2012; Davis et al., 2010; Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Van Tongeren, 2009; Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, Green, & Jennings, 2009). We suspected that one's trait forgivingness may affect their group identification with the congregation, which, in turn, affects their forgiveness toward in-group offenders. We found a mediating relationship of group identification in regards to *how* trait forgivingness may lead to offense-specific forgiveness of in-group members.

Our current findings add to the body of literature examining how religious individuals forgive one another. The measure of present group identification with a congregation did not yield the same results. It seems that only group identification at the time of the offense affects subsequent forgiveness. This seems logical considering accumulated findings supporting strong relationships between state-specific measures just as McCullough and Worthington suggested (1999) and as has been confirmed through an examination of the time course of forgiveness processes (McCullough et al., 2010).

Many adherents believe that Christian doctrine explicitly commands forgiveness, but past research has identified a discrepancy between doctrinal values and forgiveness of actual offenses (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). When offenses and relational variables are measured at the same level of specificity (state), this discrepancy lessens (Davis et al., 2012). In a recent review, Worthington, Greer, and their colleagues (2010) revisited the main questions considered in past research of religion and spirituality and forgiveness. They concluded that, in religious populations, it was still uncertain which relational variables influence offense-specific forgiveness. The present studies investigated a number of personal relational variables that might affect offense-specific forgiveness better than trait religiousness. Those relational variables are summarized within the model of forgiveness and relational spirituality, which has been investigated in at least six prior investigations and for which measures have been shown to be psychometrically sound and predictive of the major variables in the model (see Davis, D. E., Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Jennings, 2010; Davis, Hook, Worthington, Van Tongeren, Gartner, Jennings, & Norton, 2010; Davis, Worthington, Hook, Van Tongeren, & Green, 2009; Wood et al., 2010). In the present effort, group identification with a congregation was assessed as a state-specific victim variable (Davis et al., 2008). The present findings

supported further investigation into the relational variable of group identification with a congregation as a predictor of offense-specific forgiveness.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Although Study 1 surveyed a sample of adult congregants from various communities in the Mid-west—which provided some ecological validity for the effect of group identification with a congregation on forgiving a fellow congregant—the sample size was small, there were selection issues due to data collection being facilitated by a congregational member, and analyses were simple bivariate correlations and cross-sectional. Thus, the pilot study did not allow for a complete study of the model of relational spirituality. However, we rectified some limitations by surveying a larger sample in Study 2, though we used undergraduate college students and thus had a restricted age range. We also conducted a strictly online survey, eliminating any possibility of stigma in participant selection. Past research suggested assessing victim's responses to multiple offenses at multiple time points (see McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005). We see this as a fruitful avenue of future research and encourage longitudinal research designs. Only one such article has studied the model of forgiveness and relational spirituality as it unfolded over time thus far (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington, 2012).

The present findings support group identification with a Christian congregation as a state-specific victim-variable that varies in differing social contexts of an offense. Moreover, group identification was a significant predictor of unforgiving and forgiving motivations. Based on these findings, we propose the following research agenda for further investigation of these relationships: future researchers should (a) investigate in-group dynamics, such as leadership style, subgroups, and group norms surrounding conflict which may affect the offense-specific

relationships of the victim with offender, offense, and sacred; (b) study group identification with a larger religious body (i.e., the denomination; other religious congregations) and its relation to forgiveness of in-group offenders; (c) examine group identification with non-Christian religious organizations (i.e. Jewish synagogues, Buddhist temples); (d) assess forgiveness of an in-group member who is also the leader of the group for possible nuanced differences in the victim-offender relationship; (e) investigate a religious victim's forgiveness of an out-group offender for possible nuanced differences in the victim-offender relationship and impact of the level of group identification with the victim's congregation; (f) conduct forgiveness interventions with congregants who have unresolved hurt from a within-congregation offense and test level of group identification with change in forgiveness level post-intervention; and (g) develop and test congregation-level interventions to strengthen group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and determine whether such group-level interventions can affect forgiveness at the individual level.

## **Conclusion**

We began with an account of two offended congregants, Lou and Megan, who responded quite differently toward the perceived offender, David. Lou was a self-identified victim who highly valued forgiveness and thus, strongly identified with the local congregation. He saw the church group as part of what defined him and he considered it necessary to forgive David for the perceived offense. Megan attended the congregation regularly but did not adopt membership in this group as part of her identity. Megan also did not consider herself required to offer forgiveness to David for the perceived offense. Just as we presented in this hypothetical scenario, the present research suggests that Christians who highly value forgiveness are likely to strongly identify with a religious community that shares this value. This group identification appears to be one mechanism through which congregants forgive a within-congregation offender.



To the degree that victims value forgiving and feel that they share group similarity with an offender, they will likely experience forgiveness.

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**Footnote**

<sup>1</sup> In bivariate correlations, age, length of church membership, church status, gender and ethnicity did not significantly correlate with forgiveness variables and thus were excluded in subsequent analyses.

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and Intercorrelations for Variables in Study 1*

Variable	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5
1. Avoidance	17.38	7.74	7-35	(0.94)				
2. Revenge	6.5	1.98	5-13	0.41**	(0.66)			
3. Benevolence	23.07	4.57	12-30	-0.79**	-0.43**	(0.89)		
4. Group ID past	62.35	9.95	30-78	-0.36**	-0.23	0.41**	(0.78)	
5. Group ID present	61.63	11.44	32-79	-0.23	-0.19	0.25	0.78**	(0.81)

*Note.* N = 63. Group ID past = Arrow & Carini group identification scale, prior to the offense. Group ID present = Arrow & Carini group identification scale, at the time of assessment. Cronbach's alphas are listed in parentheses on the diagonal.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 2

*Psychometric Properties of the Major Study Measures*

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$
Criterion variables				
Hurtfulness	1-5	2.98	1.30	
Avoidance	7-35	20.54	6.48	.88
Revenge	5-25	9.75	4.10	.86
Benevolence	6-30	20.05	4.98	.86
Victim variables				
Church attendance	0-5	2.70	1.30	
Trait forgivingness	17-50	33.86	7.17	.81
Group ID past	26-81	53.37	8.61	.80
Transgression variable				
Time since offense	0-96	14.03	16.75	
Victim-Sacred variables				
Dedication to Sacred	5-35	24.35	8.06	.92
Religious commitment	10-50	30.09	9.07	.91
Offender-Sacred variable				
Human Similarity	0-24	13.07	5.34	.84
Spiritual Similarity	0-30	16.72	6.29	.79
Transgression-Sacred variable				
Sacred loss & desecration	23-115	48.41	22.62	.97
Victim-offender variables				
Closeness to Offender	0-34	15.85	6.10	.84

Note. Group ID past = group identification with the congregation prior to the offense.

Table 3

*Intercorrelations of Variables in Study 2*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Criterion Variables</b>														
1. Hurtfulness	-													
2. Avoidance	.22***	-												
3. Revenge	.11	.44***	-											
4. Benevolence	-.07	-.60***	-.46***	-										
<b>Victim Variables</b>														
5. Church Attendance	.08	-.11	-.20***	.21***	-									
6. Trait Forgivingness	-.01	-.32***	-.33***	.39***	.30***	-								
7. Group Identification	-.02	-.21***	-.30***	.41***	.43***	.30***	-							
<b>Transgression Variable</b>														
8. Time Since Offense	-.06	-.03	-.05	-.01	-.18***	-.07	-.08	-						
<b>Victim-Sacred Variables</b>														
9. Dedication to Sacred	.09	-.16	-.23***	.30***	.35***	.29***	.45***	-.08	-					
10. Religious Commitment	.08	-.12	-.12	.38***	.43***	.30***	.48***	-.19***	.60***	-				
<b>Offender-Sacred Variable</b>														
11. Human Similarity	.04	-.34***	-.23***	.52***	.23***	.26***	.21***	-.10	.38***	.37***				
12. Spiritual Similarity	.07	-.21***	-.18***	.38***	.24***	.16	.27***	-.16	.40***	.38***	.63***	-		
<b>Transgression-Sacred Variable</b>														
13. Sacred Loss and Desecration	.32***	.33***	.42***	-.28***	-.16	-.28***	-.23***	-.06	-.17	-.07	-.11	-.14	-	
<b>Victim-Offender Variable</b>														
14. Closeness to Offender	-.07	-.30***	-.03	.38***	.09	.14	.24***	-.19	.14	.21***	.44***	.44***	.06	-

*Note.* Closeness to Offender refers to Dyadic Adjustment Scale-7 item version.

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

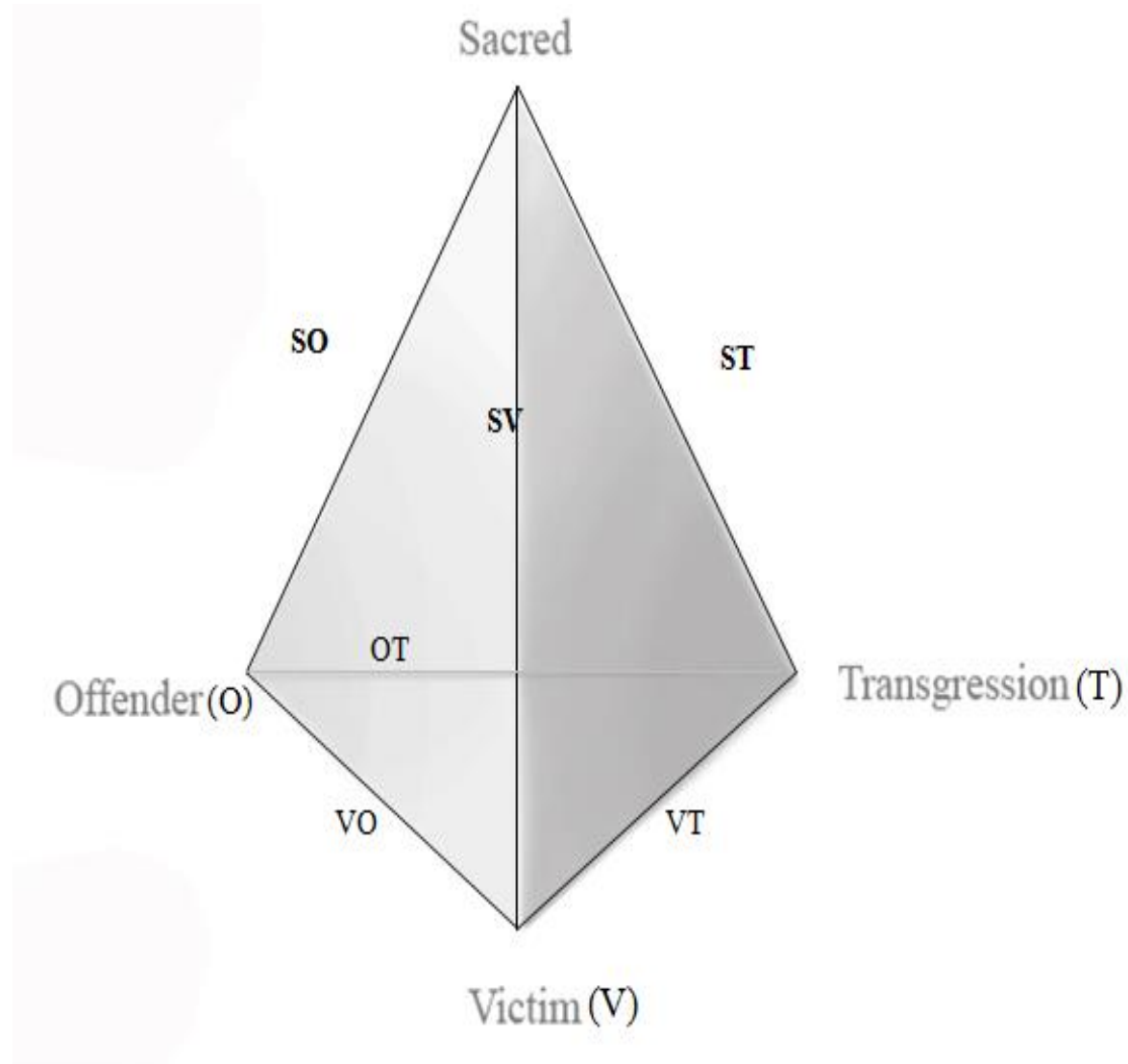
Table 4

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Unforgiving and Forgiving Motivations Towards the Offender Accounting for Variables in the Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness Model and then Testing Incremental Prediction of Group Identification (Study 2)*

Predictor	Avoidance		Revenge		Benevolence	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>	.10***		.10***		.14***	
Trait forgivingness		-.31***		-.32***		.38***
<b>Step 2</b>	.00		.03**		.08***	
Church attendance		-.01		-.11*		-.02
Religious commitment		-.03		.10		.23***
Dedication to the Sacred		.00		-.17**		.09
<b>Step 3</b>	.04***		.00		.05***	
Closeness to offender		-.21***		-.02		.22***
<b>Step 4</b>	.08***		.10***		.04***	
Hurtfulness		.13**		.01		-.01
Time since offense		-.06		-.05		.07
Sacred loss & desecration		.21***		.31***		-.18***
<b>Step 5</b>	.03***		.01		.07***	
Human Similarity		-.24***		-.11		.30***
Spiritual similarity		.04		-.01		.01
<b>Step 6</b>	.00		.02**		.02**	
Past Group Identification		-.03		-.16**		.17***
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.25***		.26***		.39***	

Note. Beta weights are reported for individual variables in each step of the hierarchical regression. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .  $N = 376$ .

**Figure 1.** Spiritual Appraisals of Relationship in Model of Relational Spirituality and Forgiveness.



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

**Figure 2.** Mediation analyses in Study 2: In-group identification mediates the effects of trait forgiveness on unforgiveness (avoidance, revenge) and forgiveness (benevolence) motivations.

