

**The Impact of Empathy, Coping, and Cultural Differences on the Process of Forgiveness**

by

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## Abstract

The primary focus of this research was on decisional forgiveness following a traumatic experience. The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to examine the impact of empathy, coping skills, and the role culture plays in an individual's decision to forgive. The exploration of what may impact forgiveness will lend itself useful to helping counselors and counselors-in-training have a better understanding of how forgiveness can be used as an intervention in counseling.

An evaluation, utilizing three survey instruments, was used to compare males and females of varying range of ethnicities, ages, and religious or spiritual backgrounds. Demographic questions were used to collect cultural differences without capturing any identifying data of the participants. The resulting data was used to explore how cultural differences, empathy and coping may impact the process of forgiveness. The study was a modified methodology adaptation of a previous study entitled *Empathy, Selfism, and Coping as Elements of Psychology of Forgiveness: A Preliminary Study* by Varda Konstam, William Holmes, and Bethany Levine (2003). The current study proposed to expand on the existing research by exploring the relationship between one's ability to cope and the capacity of empathy as essentials or even prerequisites to the decision to forgive. The goal to exploring the differences among people and how this may impact the psychology of forgiveness is that it will aide in conceptualizing the many intricate facets of forgiveness.

Potential cultural differences data was collected through demographic questions as the end of the survey. The cultural differences for purposes of this study were gender, age, race/ethnicity, and religiosity/spirituality. The potential for a more diverse sample was greater through an anonymous online survey method design. This method did collect a broader range of diversity among the 158 participants. While the data did not support a significant relationship between coping and decisional forgiveness, other research has supported that coping skills are beneficial to the process of forgiveness. The sample size and diversity may also have been a limitation to these findings

As anticipated by the researcher, empathy did emerge as having a statistical significance and positive relationship with decisional forgiveness. The data that surfaced through this research may lend itself useful to counselors and counselors-in-training having a greater understanding for decisional forgiveness and potential impacts. Furthermore, the data may aid in contextualization of forgiveness and assist counselor educators with teaching the essential tools and interventions of forgiveness. The limitations of this study and implications for future research are discussed.

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## List of Abbreviations

CBT	Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
RAINN	Rape Abuse & Incest National Network
IPS	Information-Processing Strategies
DF	Decisional Forgiveness
DFS	Decisional Forgiveness Scale
TTM	The Trans-Theoretical Model
R/CID	Racial/Cultural Identity Model
SDPTS	Self -Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
DC	Decisional Forgiveness
DFS	Decisional Forgiveness Scale
DV	Dependent Variable
IV	Independent Variable
EFS	Emotional Forgiveness Scale
TRIM	Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivation Scale
IRB	Internal Review Board
LOI	Letter of Information

## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

For at least the past three decades, there has been an increasing interest in the construct of forgiveness and on how the paradigm of forgiveness relates to promoting healing in the counseling practice setting (Worthington & Wade, 1999). The word forgiveness often evokes an array of sometimes false assumptions in individuals simply because they don't understand what forgiveness is. There are a number of assumptions an individual may have regarding the meaning of forgiveness, such as moral obligation to forgive, thoughts about whether one is obliged to forgive even if the offender is not apologetic, and whether forgiveness requires blind trust of the offender going forward (Enright, 2008). However, if forgiveness is a prerequisite for mental health healing and maintaining the resolution, then specifically counselors and counselors-in-training, in particular, need to understand what forgiveness is, what makes it a viable option, and how the process occurs before utilizing forgiveness as a counseling intervention. In the existing literature there remains considerable ambiguity regarding the definition of forgiveness, how forgiveness occurs, and how forgiveness in counseling incorporates or differentiates from theological and religious views on forgiveness (Bedell, 2002). The consequences of the ambiguous definition and purpose negate the use of forgiveness as a clearly defined counseling intervention. Even before a counselor or counselor-in-training can utilize forgiveness as an intervention for change, he or she should first understand common misconceptions for forgiveness in order to foster readiness and facilitate beneficial change. Furthermore, it is

imperative for the counselor and counselor-in-training to understand what prerequisites or predictors increase the likelihood for forgiveness to be a viable option in the counseling setting. In addition, what developmental and cultural impacts influence the likelihood of the choice to forgive (Denton & Martin, 1998; Enright & Enrique, 2000, 2004). The psychological definition of forgiveness being used for this research is best summarized by Enright and Enrique (2000, 2004) who stated that, “Forgiveness is a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who has unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her” (pg. 3). An expanded definition that encapsulates the interpersonal constructs necessary in order for forgiveness to occur is:

A moral response involves the following major domains of human development: positive emotions (e.g., feelings of empathy), negative emotions (e.g., feelings of anger and resentment), positive behaviors (e.g., altruism), and negative behaviors (e.g., revenge-seeking) and, finally, positive (e.g., he/she is a good person) or negative (e.g., condemnation) thoughts toward the offending person. (Enright & Enrique, 2000, 2004, pg. 3)

With a working definition centralized for the counseling setting, it is also important to understand what type of grievances that would benefit from promoting forgiveness as an agent of change in the healing process.

The philosophy behind forgiveness can be a challenge to conceptualize and understand, let alone achieve. An individual may indeed achieve forgiveness without evidenced-based counseling. However, the focus of this research is to emphasize a counseling setting perspective. This allows for a fundamental understanding of the intricate tentacles of forgiveness and to

promote the need for a model which can be individualized to meet the needs of counselors and counselors-in-training, counseling educators, researchers, faculty, and clients. Because counselors and counselors-in-training provide the most direct care to individuals in counseling, the focus of this research is a proposal to explore the impacts of empathy, coping skills, and the differences among people in an attempt to provide a clearer understanding of the process of forgiveness. Currently counselors and counselors-in-training may become overwhelmed in the classroom and in the field of how to conceptualize forgiveness. Counselors and counselors-in-training may be unclear to how best to explain what forgiveness entails as well as how to best incorporate forgiveness as an agent for change in the counseling setting. If a counselor and counselor-in-training were able to conceptualize what impediments in the development of self, including one's coping skills, empathy or cultural impacts, they could then potentially address hurdles for an individualized treatment plan for the client. A working model is needed for which the framework includes an individual's competency in the coming to awareness process of forgiveness achieved through one's self development to include lifespan, morale, and identity development. This forgiveness model's structure would benefit from attention to how the individual's coping and empathy skills progress throughout these developments. Conceptualization for a working model would allow for individualization through cultural impacts on forgiveness. This research focused on exploring variables that may impact forgiveness as a foundation for future research and to support the need for a concise integrative model for forgiveness as an intervention in the counseling setting. Clients would benefit from an individualized approach to an intervention which could be adapted and used across diagnoses and theoretical orientations. This encompassing view of how the capacity to forgive occurs within an individual will serve the counselor and counselor-in-training by providing a greater

understanding of how, for example, two individuals, while experiencing a similar trauma or betrayal, may react or respond vastly different than the other. Therefore, the most beneficial approach is to explore each individual's perspective of reality (comprised of their world view, current coping skills, and capacity for empathy to assess readiness for change). There are no shortages of egregious and traumatic acts of one individual on another that may be advantageous to seek counseling. Counselors and counselors-in-training may be educated on effects of trauma, and what symptoms may accompany trauma, but may lack awareness or understanding of how forgiveness can be used as an intervention.

### **Prevalence and Risks Associated with Psychological Trauma and Forgiveness**

Trauma may occur and be interpreted in a variety of manners which may require an individual to seek counseling even long after an event occurred. Psychological trauma can result in a "fundamental reorganization of the mind and brain managed perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think" (Van der Kolk, 2015, p. 559). Psychological trauma is characterized as an experience that is "traumatic if it is (1) sudden, unexpected, or non-normative, (2) exceeds the individual's perceived ability to meet its demands, and (3) disrupts the individual's frame of reference and other psychological needs and related schemas" (McCann, 1990, p. 10).

Van der Kolk (2015) articulated that home should be a safe haven and that our country is populated by enlightened, civilized people. However, everyday incidents of betrayal and violence disconfirm this theory. The focus of this research explored interpersonal transgressions of trauma or betrayal inflicted by another. In our current society, almost every individual is impacted directly or indirectly by tragedies, betrayal of trust, crime, abuse, and many other egregious impacts. It is estimated that 25 percent of service members who serve in war zones



will develop serious post-traumatic stress (Van der Kolk, 2015). Complications for service members may include difficulty related to actions they may have been required to complete or trauma experienced through loss. Even more egregious is the war many battle at home every day. Van der Kolk (2015) postulated that based on statistics for every service member serving in a war zone, there are ten children endangered in their own homes. More than half of the 12 million women who have been victims of rape are under the age of 15 and over three million children in the United States are reported as victims of child abuse and neglect (Van der Kolk, 2015).

Psychological trauma distorts how one trusts and may even interrupt and alter self-development. Forgiveness serves as a tool for working with trauma clients who have experienced what is too often the unthinkable (Klatt & Enright, 2009; McCann, 1999; Salazar & Cadto, 2008). Consider that divorce rates are at an all-time high, with 40–50 percent of first-time marriages ending in divorce; subsequent marriage divorce rates are even higher (Marriage and Divorce, 2016). Divorce is often the result when one or both parties exceed the limits of what they are capable of forgiving, such as infidelity and other betrayals of trust. According to the United States 2011 Census, it was noted that divorce rates are even higher in the southern states, and it is suggested the higher volume may be influenced by economic, educational, and cultural differences (Divorce Rates Highest in the South, 2011). In addition to examining coping skills and empathy, there is an increase in value for examining cultural differences in terms of forgiveness.

Another area of importance where forgiveness often impacts recovery is in incidents of physical trauma by another. Every 107 seconds in the United States an individual is sexually assaulted, equaling 293,000 a year, with an estimated over 68 percent of sexual assaults that are

not reported (Sexual, Abuse & Incest National Network [RAINN] Statistics, n.d.). To further complicate one's ability to forgive is the gravity of the betrayal by someone they know and trust. The perceived lack of legal justice or accountability for the perpetrator's egregious acts can further complicate a survivor's process of forgiveness. The trust one bestows in personal relationships can be shattered and complications exacerbated by lack of trust in relationships that may increase in incidents of sexual assault. The Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) (2016) reports that 4 out of 5 assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. However, of those reported, 98 percent of rapists will never spend a day in jail/prison (Sexual Abuse & Incest National Network RAINN, 2016), adding to the complications for justice and further encumbering the forgiveness process.

Family and friends grieving the loss of a murdered loved one can commonly attest to the difficulty to forgive which impedes the grief process. In recent statistics, over 14,000 people are murdered each year, and that number is actually down from 10–20 years ago when the numbers were much higher (United States Crime Rates 1960-2014, 2014). Van der Kolk (2015) postulated that experiencing any one of these traumatic betrayal of trust events may make it difficult to engage in current and future intimate relationships.

These are only a few of the harrowing and traumatic events that occur in our society on a daily basis affecting individuals either directly or indirectly through a loved one. Therefore, therapeutic interventions and restorative coping skills involving the act of forgiveness subsequent to such incidents are crucial in order to reduce negative emotions and maladaptive coping methods. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand what impacts may increase/decrease the likelihood for decisional forgiveness in order to conceptualize necessary predictors for

achieving such forgiveness, understanding how these impacts vary through a person's development, and to gain an awareness of how culture impacts and influences this paradigm.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Factors which may impact decisional forgiveness include an individual's capacity for empathy and active coping skills, which are impacted by developmental and cultural differences related to gender, age, and religiosity/spirituality (Davis, 1983; Enright & Zell, 1989; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Counseling literature supports that when the paradigm of forgiveness is used as an agent of change, there is an individual and relational improvement in the counseling setting (Ferch, 1998). While forgiveness can occur outside the counseling setting, many clients lack social support. Self-development and culture define and shape personal coping skills, which include maturity, engagement, readiness, and an understanding of real- versus pseudo-forgiveness among other challenges (Ferch, 1998). The counselor's and counselor-in-training's role is to recognize obstacles and impediments, provide appropriate beneficial interventions, and promote change and healing. A concise contextual understanding by the counselor is paramount well before an intervention model can be implemented in treatment planning.

Forgiveness serves as counseling resource in the counseling setting (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). This counseling resource supports in decreasing interpersonal conflict (Worthington, 2005). In doing so, this counseling resource, increases the likelihood of a healthy relational development (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Forgiveness has been shown to be beneficial across a variety of cultural differences (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Forgiveness includes "a reduction of negative (and perhaps an increase in positive) cognition, emotions, and motivations toward an offender, and these changes often lead to positive behavioral changes"

(Davis, Hook, Tongeren, DeBlaere, Rice, & Worthington Jr., 2015, pg. 281). Research in understanding what constructs are needed for forgiveness to occur and understanding the act of forgiveness itself will aid counselors and counselors-in-training in defining and incorporating forgiveness as an intervention to optimize change and growth in the counseling setting. Research has focused on what constructs are necessary in order for forgiveness to be a viable choice in counseling interventions (Denton, 1998). For example, identifying what character strengths and coping skills that are necessary for “healthy relational development” to occur, and what populations are more likely to achieve forgiveness (Jeter & Brannon, 2015). Research on self-development through lifespan and the developmental processes of identity as well as morale development provides a framework of how and when character strengths, such as coping and empathy skills, evolve. By taking what we already know in these areas, coupled with exploration of what cultural impacts influences the decision to forgive may aid in a greater contextualized understanding of forgiveness.

Because each individual is different exploring how these differences in the self-developmental process has the potential to increase understanding of an individual’s ability and capacity for forgiveness. Exploring these differences in gender, race, and age may hold the key to connecting how an individual’s self-development process and the individual’s culture impact the likelihood forgiveness will be achieved. One cultural impact is how forgiveness is conceptualized across varying faith-based value populations and how this affects the counseling process. Comparatively, when used as a counseling intervention in the secular world, how is forgiveness differentiated from theology? Forgiveness has long been associated with religion (Ferch, 1998). Ferch (1998) postulated that religion provides the foundation for which the role of forgiveness is

understood in counseling specific theory and interventions. For the purposes of this research, forgiveness is contextualized in the counseling process, which may be influenced by cultural impacts such as religiosity/spirituality or faith-based religious belief systems.

Research in forgiveness has faced numerous difficulties. The existing literature on forgiveness varies in perspectives related to the definition, measurement concerns, how the process of forgiveness occurs, optimal interventions, and diversity and cultural concerns among others (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Other factors associated with forgiveness include interpersonal and intra-personal components of how an individual relates to another or coping skills.

For the counselor's and the client's benefits, it is important to understand the relationship between two people, as well as how the client perceives and reacts to situations. Relational-forgiveness is vital because it is critical to the coping skills related to dating, marriage, child/parent relationships, casual friendships, professional relationships, and others (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Enright & Rique, 2000). A client's coping and conflict resolution skills, as well as levels of empathy, impact the ability to forgive. Currently, obscurity exists regarding the necessary coping skills needed for the individual process of forgiveness.

An added complication of ambiguity and obscurity, if a client chooses and achieves forgiveness toward the injuring party, does not necessarily equate to reconciliation (Baskins & Enright, 2004). This is another common misconception that sometimes impedes the capacity for forgiveness. Reconciliation for this context requires that two people mutually trust that the grievance has been resolved (Baskins & Enright,

2004). In another context, clients have often confused that choosing forgiveness equates to excusing or condoning the actions of another. In a relationship, the coping skills of the individual determines whether or not to let go of the resentment and offer benevolence, even when forgiveness appears unjustified (Baskin & Enright, 2004). The level of empathy has been attributed to the capacity to forgive in these and other situations (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Empathy is impacted by an individual's worldview, which is comprised by cultural and self -developmental differences.

*The world exists as you perceive it. It's not what you see, but how you see it. It is not what you hear, but how you hear it. It is not what you feel, but how you feel it. – Rumi.*

Intricate self-developmental and cultural components impact how a client may perceive their own reality.

Among these considerations is the empathetic capacity and abilities of the client. Empathy, although subjective, plays a pivotal role in a client's expectations of what forgiveness is, as well as the expectations of desired outcomes. Research has indicated that there are various critical key implications of forgiveness that are related to expectations of outcomes achieved by the individual process. Baskin and Enright (2004) stated that even though an individual may forgive, they may not forget. This is explained by the fact that people tend to reflect over traumatic events long after the incident or situation (Ferch, 1998). Personal traumatic experiences are described in the literature, and include, but are not limited to, painful incidents of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse (Ferch, 1998). Examples of these experiences include extra-marital affairs followed by distrust, discord, and conflict within relationships (Ferch, 1998). In addition to a client's strengths or deficits in coping skills, the impacting level of

empathy may explain how two individuals faced with similar grievances may navigate the forgiveness process entirely differently and/or never achieve the desired outcome.

Intricacies of a client's coping skills with an emphasis on empathy are complicated and can be singularly confounding. However, consider where a collective group of individuals, which includes uniquely self-developmentally and culturally-impacted world views, come together, tasked with achieving the same goal. Group settings provide a unique insight to varying perspectives based on cultural and self-developmental differences. While sometimes challenging, this insight could be beneficial to each client within the group by allowing multiple viewpoints to similar situations.

A contextual understanding of forgiveness by the counselor or counselor-in-training is paramount in order to facilitate the collective group process. Balancing and maintaining appropriate boundaries between intermingled self-developmental and cultural identities, as well as each client's expected outcome of the group, can significantly impact the process of forgiveness (Wenzel & Okimot, 2015). Consideration of a client's relational coping skills and complexities of forgiveness should be considered when forming a group in order to increase trust in the group process. Wenzel and Okimot (2015) argued that current research "lacks consideration of forgiveness as a decision or act, and how this act may play a role in the formation of more positive, conciliatory intergroup attitudes" (pg. 656). Rather than "seeing (or measuring) forgiveness as individual-level sentiments and a mere outcome of social-cognitive and emotional processes, we can conceptualize intergroup forgiveness as a course of action that a group decides to take" (Wenzel & Okimot, 2015, pg. 656 ). If a model for these "individual sentiments" pertaining to utilizing forgiveness as an intervention were recognized, then further research could support differentiation between an individual's coping skills, cultural and self -

developmental differences, and the impact of these differences on the group process of forgiveness (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2015, pg 656)..

Consider, in a group counseling setting, what individual characteristics must be present that contribute to affecting other members of the forgiving group? Moreover, what conditions contribute to a communal decision to forgive outgroup members, and is it necessary to have a succinct decision of all members? What impacts the group member's perceptions, emotions, and sentiments towards the outgroup? In addition, if a group collectively decides they want to forgive the outgroup for acts that harmed the in-group, how does this evolve and what is the anticipated outcome among the members if some members abstain? Also consider, a question to ask in future research is that even if a group or an individual does decide to forgive, what constitutes as authentic forgiveness, as opposed to inauthentic forgiveness, within the group?

While some clients may report having achieved forgiveness towards another, they can still harbor the same maladaptive emotions and behaviors associated with the original state of the unforgiven. According to some researchers, the choice to forgive is not necessarily an immediate decision but rather involves a journey of overcoming emotional difficulties and self-preservation (Ferch, 1998). Current research increases rather than reduces the ambiguity in the debate of whether forgiveness occurs within the relationship or within the individual. Despite the obscurity of what forgiveness looks like, most researchers agree that forgiveness is not forgetting, pardoning, condoning, avoiding conflict resolution, and/or negating or minimizing the offense which occurred (Enright & Zell, 1989; Worthington & Wade, 1999).

### **Implications of Not Forgiving**

While forgiveness does not equate to pardoning, the implications and therefore importance for an individual to achieve true and authentic forgiveness includes the maladaptive



emotions and subsequent behaviors associated with the failure to achieve forgiveness. Possible implications of being the betrayed party are that the individual may experience a myriad of “unpleasant emotions, including depression, anger, self-reproach and jealousy” (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002, p. 209). For these reasons, among others, forgiveness becomes a powerful potential agent of change that, when implemented as a counseling intervention tool, can span across various theoretical approaches, diagnoses, and increase self-efficacy for clients experiencing debilitating emotions and behaviors.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to extend the previous literature and research pertaining to the process of forgiveness by exploring how variables such as interpersonal coping skills, levels of empathy, and how cultural differences impact the process of forgiveness. Currently, counselors-in-training and counselors may receive training where key elements to cultural and self-developmental differences regarding forgiveness are missing or require additional research. Additionally, training may vary and appear steeped in ambiguity of what forgiveness is, what is necessary for forgiveness to occur, as well as what authentic forgiveness looks like. This could lead to counselors and counselors-in-training becoming overwhelmed with more questions than answers for a concise model for how to utilize forgiveness as an intervention tool in the counseling process. Thus, an important intervention tool, with the potential for serving as an agent for change, may be obscurely or inefficiently used in a client’s treatment plan. Precisely what is absent in current research and classroom education for new counselors is an integrated model to (a) conceptualize and describe the coming-to-awareness process of forgiveness which encapsulates the client’s unique cultural interpretation of the egregious event, person, or circumstances; and (b) choose culturally appropriate interventions. This research sought to

demystify self -developmental and cultural impacts on the coming awareness process and ability to achieve of forgiveness. A clearer understanding will help aid in future research for counselors and counselors-in- training to develop and utilize appropriate and beneficial individualized interventions to facilitate the process of forgiveness.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study sought to provide new knowledge and insight on the utilization of forgiveness as an intervention in the counseling setting, illuminate influencing impacts such as empathy and coping skills, and support and further existing research on cultural impacts on the process of forgiveness. Multiple research studies have argued for the need of supporting research regarding forgiveness as an intervention due to the ambiguity of definition and a lack of a concise model which includes self-development and cultural impacts. The data from this research may provide a clearer conceptualization of what forgiveness is and eliminate confusion surrounding common misconceptions of counselors, counselors-in-training, and clients alike. The data exploration sought to be a part of the clarification process for future research to construct a model framework including the self-development and cultural impacts.

Statistics report that egregious acts are committed every day by an individual(s) against a fellow individual(s) (Sexual, Abuse & Incest National Network [RAINN] Statistics, n.d.). These acts include crimes related to murder, sexual assault, incest, and robbery to name a few (Sexual Abuse & Incest National Network RAINN, 2016). Further acts requiring forgiveness include adultery and other forms of relational betrayals leading to the breakdown of friendships, professional, and personal relationships. Current divorce statistics report that 40–50 percent of first-time marriages will end in divorce, and subsequent marriage divorce rates are even higher (Divorce-Rates, 2011). The current interpersonal crisis climate for which we live in indicates a

prodigious need for additional or at best enhanced models of change. Forgiveness provides promise of hope for such models of change.

The preliminary study, for which this research will be based, was conducted by Konstam, Holmes, and Levine (2003), and showed promising insight to understanding how constructs such as empathy and coping skills could impact or impede the process of forgiveness. In this study cultural impacts were also noted such as age, gender, race/ethnicity and spirituality/religioucity. For the past three decades' forgiveness has been studied in multiple disciplines and found to have beneficial results when applied. Research in the counseling profession, while discussing forgiveness as an intervention, has led to few models of an intervention. The models which were supported through research indicated cultural differences, but few models included the cultural and self -development inclusion. Current research also discussed a variety of approaches to treating symptoms associated with the lack of forgiveness by using interventions from the theoretical frameworks of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy CBT, Mindfulness, and Existenalism.

Circumstances and life altering events are almost unmistakably certain to happen to each and every individual. Everyday there are reports of crimes related to murder, sexual assault, incest, and robbery to name a few (Sexual Abuse & Incest National Network RAINN, 2016) for which a client could have lifelong affects from the psychological trauma. Betrayals of trust in intimate relationships requiring forgiveness include infidelity, cheating, and lying among others. Failure to forgive, regardless if the offending party is apologetic makes it difficult to not only sustain that relationship but possibly any relationships to come be they friendships, professional, and personal relationships. For these reasons and others, it is no wonder that 40–50 percent of first-time marriages will end in divorce, and subsequent marriage divorce rates are even higher that (Divorce-Rates, 2011).

The preliminary study, Empathy, Selfism, and Coping as Elements of the Psychology of Forgiveness: A Preliminary Study (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003) for which this research is based upon noted in the limitations of study a lack of diversity. This study sought to illuminate cultural differences in diversity between participants and demonstrate the importance of including cultural impacts into any future model of forgiveness. The previous study indicated findings related to cultural differences including gender and age (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). The results suggested that older women were more inclined to be forgiving in contrast to older men (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). This research sought to include a design method which could capture data which may provide further clarification for why this may be true and provided a catalyst for future research. The previous study suggested they could not report a consistent pattern related to gender and forgiveness (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). The data from this research did not obtain support for a more consistent pattern or relationship however, possible limitations to explain this further are discussed in the limitations and Chapter 4. The goal of this research was to build upon the previous study by furthering research support in areas the author suggested and aid in the current literature to provide additional clarity to the process of forgiveness. This research has the potential to lend itself useful to future research support for a multicultural model and implementation of forgiveness as an intervention.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The generalizability of the findings in this study could still be limited due to homogeneity related to the sample. Qualtrics provided an extensive access to a considerably larger diverse population than the normal pool of accessible participants through college courses. The panel participants, although anonymous, were compensated for completing surveys by Qualtrics. This may be a limitation as panel participants may have been inclined to complete a survey for which

they may not have met the criterion for eligibility and authentic responses. The previous research for which the study was based upon was also limited in diversity. The current study did expand the number of sample populations and diversity.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions of terms for this study are offered for clarification:

**Coping** skills are the Inter/Intrapersonal skills in which “ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus, 1993, p. 237). The definition can be simplified as cognitive and behavioral inter and intra- personal skills to manage psychological stress (Lazarus, 1993).

**Cultural identity** includes “religion, rites of passage, language, dietary habits and leisure activities. Religious rituals and beliefs, even if not followed as an adult, make up a key component of an individual’s cultural identity. Religion can preserve values within the community and foster a sense of belonging. Rites of passage are important in the development of an individual’s cultural identity; following these rites or rituals is bound to influence the degree to which an individual will be accepted within the cultural group” (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 4).

**Culture** is defined as “the vast structure of behavior, ideas, attitudes, values, habits, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies, and practices peculiar to a particular group of people which provide them with a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality” (Nobles, 20006, p. 71).

**Decisional forgiveness** is defined as the behavioral intention of eliminating revenge and avoidance and potentially restore interaction if the risk of future harm can be prevented

(Worthington, & Wade, 1999, as summarized in Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, & Fernández-Capo, 2015).

**Diversity** refers to differences such as “race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and physical ability or disability became associated with these defining characteristics” (Sue, et al., 1998, p. 21).

**Empathy** is the “physiological experience of feeling what another person is feeling and the cognitive processing of the experience” (Gerdes, 2011, p. 233).

**Ethnicity** is a part of social identity. “Ethnic groups are composed of people who may or may not share the same race but do share common cultural characteristics, including history, beliefs, values, food and entertainment preferences, religion and language” (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21).

**Forgiveness**, for the purposes of this study, is defined as an individual’s process to eliminate resentment and resolve conflict within the individual without necessary reconciliation with the person inflicting the injury (Baskin & Enright, 2004, 79).

**Identity** is the “totality of one’s perception of self, or how we as individuals view ourselves as unique from others” (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21).

**Intentional forgiveness** refers to “the “choice” for the sake of self in which the individual makes a decision to work through debilitating emotions and let go resentment and need for revenge (Ferch, 1998, p 261).

**Interpersonal transgression** is “a class of interpersonal stressors in which people perceive that another person has harmed them in a way that they consider both painful and morally wrong” (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006, p. 887).

**Psychological trauma** is an experience that is “traumatic if it is (1) sudden, unexpected, or non-normative, (2) exceeds the individual’s perceived ability to meet its demands, and (3) disrupts the individual’s frame of reference and other psychological needs and related schemas” (McCann, 1990, p. 10).

**Religions/Religiosity** is “related but distinct from spirituality and is defined as a person’s search for the sacred that occurs within a tradition and community in which there is agreement about what is believed and practiced” (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington Jr, 2012, p. 256).

**Social identity** can be thought of as “the culturally defined personality characteristics, which are ascribed to social roles, such as the role of being a father, mother, friend, employer, employee, etc.” (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21).

**Spirituality** is defined as “a person’s search for a sense of closeness or connection with the sacred” (Davis, Hook, Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington, 2012, p. 256). The sacred is “whatever a person considers to be set apart from the ordinary and thus deserving of veneration, such as God, the divine, or ultimate reality” (Davis, Hook, Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington, 2012, p. 256).

**Transgression** includes emotional or physical pain or injury and are described according to duration and severity (Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010, p,232).

### **Summary**

This chapter included an overview of the current gaps and challenges encompassing research related to the process of forgiveness as an intervention in a counseling setting. The ambiguity is related to definition, measures, intervention models, and understanding how forgiveness occurs and is achieved. Forgiveness has been viewed for centuries as the healing that

can occur in relationships between people, and more distinctively in the religious context as occurring between the individual and their god (DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993). The intent of this research was not to negate or minimize the benefits of forgiveness in the theological sense, but to differentiate the use of forgiveness and as a clinical counseling intervention.

In the current and previous research, conceptualization related to forgiveness was used to understand coping in the family relationships and viewed as a part of Christianity culture primarily, and hence lacks in diversity (Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010). Current research is still lacking regarding forgiveness in secular journals and in counseling practice (Bedell, 2002; DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003).

Collectively, what is lacking and/or ambiguous in current counselor training programs and counselor continuing education is a solid model of what is necessary to achieve forgiveness and what that process looks like based on the culturally impacted expectations of the individual. Currently, counselors-in-training who receive information from classroom discussion or during field site experiences regarding forgiveness as an intervention or goal in a counseling session may be overwhelmed and lack the framework to help organize the information. Conversely, they may obtain little information or formal training for how to prepare them for effective work with individuals who may benefit from intervention and goals of forgiveness. This research aimed to aid in developing a supporting framework whereupon a working model can be developed resulting from future research to (a) conceptualize and describe the coming-to-awareness process experienced by a client following that client's unique cultural interpretation of an egregious event, person, or circumstances; and (b) choose a culturally appropriate intervention. This research aimed to demystify the cultural impacts on the becoming aware process of forgiveness and what constructs may be necessary for the individual's decision to forgive.





## CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The process of forgiveness has been promoted as a beneficial intervention for treating a wide range of inter- and intra-personal problems, referred to as coping skills throughout this research (Denton & Martin, 1998). Enright (2008), summarized the process of forgiveness as reducing or eliminating the negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviors directed at the offender and replacing these with positive feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. More questions arise making forgiveness a convoluted and complicated issue. The client may inherently and culturally have emotional and moral assumptions which may prevent or impede the process. For example, feelings of having a moral obligation to forgive, thoughts about whether one is obliged to forgive if the offender is not apologetic, and whether forgiveness requires oblivious trust of the offender in the future (Enright, 2008). Therefore, the acceptance and usage of this intervention have been clouded by weak empirical support (Pingleton, 1998).

Current research supports the use of forgiveness and the benefits for counselors and counselors-in-training, as well as clients when utilized as an agent of change. West (2001) summarized Richards and Bergin's (1997) research that suggested the overall desired benefits of forgiveness as an intervention in counseling included "(a) positive changes in affective well-being, (b) improvements in physical and mental health, (c) restoration of a sense of personal power, and (d) reconciliation between the offended and the offender" (p. 416). The client's goals may include one or all of the associated areas. However, challenges arise when the client's

coping strategies, empathy skills, and cultural differences impact the process of forgiveness. While research has been conducted for years on forgiveness and the subsequent utilization of forgiveness both in the religious and secular context, further research is needed to understand what challenges must be addressed before forgiveness is an option. For example, consider that current research indicates a positive relationship between forgiveness, age, and gender (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). However, what constructs influence women or older individuals to being more likely to forgive? This research explored many layers that comprise the makeup of an individual's identity and sought to provide a contextual conceptualisation framework for increasing the understanding for what may be beneficial or even necessary for forgiveness to occur. This requires conceptualizing how coping and empathy skills, cultural differences such as age, gender, and religiosity or spirituality impacts which may lend itself to predict or preclude the likelihood for forgiveness by an individual.

In terms of existing knowledge, since the late 1980s, interest in how the process of forgiveness can be beneficial to the helping profession and differentiated from its religious foundation has increased (Ferch, 1998). Forgiveness has garnered increasing respect from counselors and counselors-in-training, though further empirical research is needed to support research data indicating that forgiveness has the potential to improve personal wellbeing and intra-personal relationships (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). An increase in personal well-being and inter/intra-personal skills are discussed on numerous occasions throughout earlier and present empirical research and literature reflecting the benefits of forgiveness as a counseling intervention (Aschleman, 1996; Baskins & Enright, 2004; Charzynska, 2015; Enright, 2008; Ferch, 1998).

Research in forgiveness has continued to gain notoriety in the counseling setting as an intervention and as a research interest since the latter 1980s and shows benefit in improving the personal well-being and coping strategies for individual and other relationships (Ferch, 1998; Gerdes, 2011; West, 2001). Forgiveness was originally conceptualized as requiring two people, with at least one of them having experienced a profound and prolonged injury that was either psychological, emotional, physical, or morally erroneous in nature (Denton & Martin, 1998). Denton and Martin (1998) further explained that forgiveness is the process in which the person who has been injured relinquishes the anger, resentment, anxiety, or other emotions resulting from that injury (1998). Denton and Martin (1998) stated that in doing so, the individual does not wish for revenge. Ambiguity of forgiveness often confuses clients and may impede the process of “letting go”. Denton and Martin (1998) did argue that forgiveness does not mean forgetting and certainly does not infer wishful thinking such as “forgive and forget” (pg. 253). Therefore, the process does not entail erasure of the incident and memory of its occurrence, but rather focuses on how one copes or perspective moving forward.

Research on the benefits of forgiveness and how the process occurs, while evolving, reflects consistently how a client’s assumptions affect the process and outcome. In early research, Lapsley (1966), based on a psychoanalytic view and a two-step model, suggested working away from the black and white perspective as good versus bad behaviors when promoting the concept of forgiveness (Denton & Martin, 2000). Good versus bad is largely a perspective, and two-step models which disallow for necessary areas in between. Forgiveness models have focused on the overall outcome and have negated in a large part of the contextual views of the underlying psychological and cultural factors which impact the ability to forgive (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003).

## Early Models of Forgiveness

As research in forgiveness continued, different types of forgiveness emerged. Forgiveness as an intervention has been treated as a one-dimensional construct, limited to the forgiveness of others (Charzyn'ska, 2015). The characteristics of forgiveness include “different methods (e.g., offering, seeking, and feeling) and targets (self, others, deity, and community)” Charzyn'ska, 2015, p. 1934).

Early models included Al-Mabuk, Dedrick, and Vanderah (1998) who developed the “Attribution Retraining” model (Al- Mabuk, Dedrick, & Vanderah, 1998). This intervention is

a cognitive restructuring process designed to alter the client's ‘internal dialogue’ and the meaning attributed to an injury. Through this reframing, clients challenge their own myths and expectations and come to view offenders (such as parents who have withheld love) in a more realistic light (Walton, 2005, p. 197).

While acknowledging the potential impact, it's also necessary to understand that certain psychological trauma does necessarily reorganize the cognitive structure of how an individual processes perception (Van der Kolk, 2015). The researcher explored cultural differences and what may influence these differences which could be pivotal in the cognitive restructuring process.

Earlier models also included the Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991) (Walton, 2005, p. 197). The model is a rigid systematic 17-step process which begins by “confronting anger and moves on to admitting shame, becoming aware of the offence, and gaining insight into the victim's altered world view because of the offense (Walton, 2005, p. 197). Then the client gains new insight leading to “a change of heart.” There is a commitment to

forgive, a reframing of the wrong, and finally empathy toward the offender (Walton, 2005, p. 197). This model, while focusing on eliminating debilitating emotions associated with unforgiveness such as anger and shame, also draws importance to other constructs necessary for forgiveness to occur such as empathy and coping skills. This earlier model provides a replicable model which focuses on facilitating growth through accessing coping skills and empathy while focusing on the cognitive processes alone. This cognitive intervention model however, may disallow for impediments of the cognitive and over all self-development of an individual's identity and the cultural impacts to the process.

As forgiveness as an intervention grew and progressed, Walton (2005) proposed contextualizing forgiveness in the counseling setting as combining interrelated interventions such as cognitive restructuring, assertiveness behavioral based training, as well as Solution Focused Therapy but also argued for the need of additional forgiveness model. Walton developed a model for which an apology is recognized as pre-requisite to forgiveness, but the model also proposed that healing that comes with forgiveness is not dependent on an apology by the offender (Walton, 2005). Walton (2005) proposed the use of a nonlinear 5 step conceptualization of an apology from the offender designed to empower victim to survivor mentality when working with clients whom had been sexually assaulted. The goal (Walton, 2005) is to provide a model for which a client is able to move from victim to survivor hence accomplishing for themselves what would be accomplished if the offender were truly contrite and sincerely apologized (pg. 202). This model proposes conceptualizing that the offender:

1. Recognizes the offense
2. Sorrow for the offense
3. Disclose

4. Avoid the offending behavior
5. Make restitution. (Walton, 2005, p. 202)

This model lends itself to incorporate further contextualization of the self-development and cultural differences of an individual. The approach centers around new meanings the client may construct for themselves moving from victim to survivor. This model is less structured but provides a basis for continuing research and building upon this model utilizing perhaps an Existential theory approach among other theory lenses.

### **Implications and Consequences for Not Forgiving**

Much like the early models the focus of this research, the researcher focused on the act of or the offering of forgiveness towards the offender. As a part of understanding why forgiveness as an intervention is crucial to the healing process, one must examine the possible complications and in some cases lifelong and generational effects of not forgiving. Enright (2008), a leading researcher in forgiveness, argued that, based on extensive research data indicating that clients who do not forgive remain trapped in feelings of anger which can carry lifelong and even generational affects. Trauma, and therefore unresolved trauma, affects the entire being—body, mind, and brain (Van der Kolk, 2015). The stress hormones of affected individuals are prone to being elevated much longer, spike quickly and disproportionately in response to even mildly stressful stimuli (Van der Kolk, 2015). Trauma, if not relinquished or resolved, can result in the reorganization of how the mind and brain process perceptions, changing what we think about, how we think about it, and even the ability to think (Van der Kolk, 2015). Forgiveness is considered essential to eliminating debilitating thoughts and repairing these processes (Aschleman, 1996; Davis & Hook, et al., 2015; Klatt & Enright, 2009; McCullough, Worthington Jr.; Rachal, 1997). Debilitating emotions, such as anger, anxiety, and hostility,

which may linger as a result of not forgiving, are associated with health risks and attribute to high blood pressure and heart disease (Enright, 2008). Continued emotional anger causes breakdowns in relationships, including friendships, marriages, parent-child relationships, and others. Virginia Satir, who studied family dysfunction, argued that the maladaptive feelings, emotions, and behaviors of one member of a relationship can lead to the illness of another (Satir, 1988). Not only can the affects of not achieving forgiveness impact the client's emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and health, but they can also contribute to relational and even generational dysfunction and decline (Satir, 1988). Before forgiveness can be achieved, the decision to forgive must be a choice as well as the readiness of the client for change. Understanding the process of change is essential to conceptualizing where and how the decision and choice to forgive is made.

### **Stages of Change**

During the process of making a "choice" or "decision" to forgive, it is also essential to assess client readiness in the process. First, a contextual understanding of the stages to change will assist counselors and counselors-in-training to assess client readiness to forgive. A client's readiness may be continuum or circular in nature. The counselor's insight is critical in addressing resistance and clarifying misconceptions and thereby supporting the change process. Assessing the motivation of the client's readiness or impediment in the process assists counselors and counselors-in-training in conceptualizing what is necessary for the process to continue (Davis & Hook, 2015). The Trans-Theoretical Model of Change (TTM), a theoretical model of behavioral change explained originally by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983), postulates five key stages of change. The TTM is a model of intentional change focusing on the decision making of the individual (DiClemente, 2012). The stages of change in the TTM are:



1. Pre-contemplation
2. Contemplation
3. Preparation
4. Action
5. Maintenance (DiClemente, 2012).

The first three stages certainly have their own benefits and merits, especially pertaining to the decision to forgive and understanding what forgiveness accurately means and purpose for the client's healing. The action phase is the time where the process of forgiveness can continue and the individual may execute the decision to forgive. In the action phase, suggested interventions for a client include promoting self-efficacy for problem-solving skills (DiClemente, 2012). This supports a need for the current research which explored how coping styles may impact and what may be beneficial or even necessary to proceed to and through the action phase and for maintaining achieved results in the process of forgiveness.

### **Intentional Forgiveness**

Within the stages of change the intent or choice to forgive must be determined in client readiness. Clients may struggle with ambiguity of definition of forgiveness as well as base a decision to conditionally extend forgiveness if the offender offers contrition. Research on forgiveness has evolved to no longer require both the individuals (the offended and offender) mutual agreement to reconcile in order for the process of forgiveness to occur (Enright, 2008; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; Ligoski, 2011) among others. For purposes of this study, the focus was on intentional forgiveness without conditions of actions of the offender. Intentional forgiveness involves a choice and does not include the elimination of memories but rather to work through debilitating emotions associated with the memories (Ferch, 1998). How many

times have you heard the expression “forgive and forget”? Intentional forgiving is used as counseling intervention that is directed, mediated, and processed by the counselor and is consciously, purposely, and willingly chosen by the client (Ferch, 1998). Ferch stated that intentional forgiveness is the “deliberate decision to work through the debilitating emotions and choose mutual respect” (Ferch, 1998, p. 263). Intentional forgiveness is beneficial for physical and emotional betrayals or traumas. In order for this process to occur, the offender does not have to be present as intentional forgiveness is about the “choice for the sake of self and includes a balance of mercy and justice made both autonomy and mutual responsibility within the realm of the individual and family” (Ferch, 1998, p. 263).

### **Decision to Forgive**

Once the choice and understanding of intentional forgiveness is made then an individual may be ready to progress through the stages of change. Counselor’s and counselor-in-training’s conceptualization of where in the change process or insight to obstacles blocking the client’s healing may increase the ability to facilitate the counseling process and improves the likelihood for the client’s ability to forgive and maintain progress. In precontemplation, contemplation, and even preparation stage, the decision to forgive is necessary to move forward. The counselor’s role is to facilitate a non-judgmental environment in which the client does not feel coerced or pressured to forgive. Once the client has the autonomy to make the choice to forgive then the client is free to choose to take action or not, forgive or not to forgive. The decision to forgive and therefore change involves:

committing to apply energy and effort to regulate negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors until unforgiving emotions (e.g., hurt, resentment, bitterness) are substantially reduced. Indeed, for severe offenses, victims decide to forgive without knowing how

much energy, effort, or time will be required, or if forgiveness is even possible. (Davis & Hook, 2015, p. 281).

Baskin and Enright (2004) proposed that there are important factors in the decision to forgive. The client must first decide that there is a desire or cognitive recognition of the need to move from a position of bitterness to one of not letting the resentment control the situation (Baskins & Enright, 2004). Understanding the foundation for the process of change, as well as examining the motivations and willingness of a client, relates not only to the overall outcome in the process, but also what is necessary in order to achieve forgiveness. Research supports an understanding of what constructs are needed for forgiveness to occur and understanding the act of forgiveness itself will aid researchers, counselors, and counselors-in-training to conceptualize interventions to optimize change and growth in the counseling setting (Davis & Hook, 2015; Klatt & Enright, 2009; West, 2001).

### **Empathy and Forgiveness**

Other key considerations to conceptualizing the forgiveness process, beyond the decision for intentional forgiveness and the readiness for change, involve the individual's development of empathy and coping skills. Research suggests that there is a positive relationship between empathy and forgiveness (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Ulus (2015) argued that, in recent years," perceptions of differences in culture have increased while inter-personal relationships within societies have decreased, thereby creating a need for combinations of forgiveness and empathy to be brought to the forefront" (p. 98). In current society "dissent in politics, religion, morality, while steeped in diversity, increases the divide and therefore a breakdown in societal relationships" (Ulas, 2015, p, 98). Research supports that there is a "relevant relation between individuals' forgiveness levels and their empathetic behaviors and the

importance of these two concepts” (Ulas, 2015, p. 98). Ulas (2015) further postulated that the most beneficial manner of reducing maladaptive emotions of revenge while increasing forgiveness is to ensure that the client has the capacity for empathy.

Likewise, Toussaint and Webb (2005), who studied the gender differences in the relationship between empathy and forgiveness, suggested that women have a higher sense of empathy in the inter-gender comparison. Research supported that women tend to be culturally stimulated to be empathetic and they are trained to have an empathetic tendency by their parents (Klein & Hodges, 2001). Women reportedly achieve higher scores in the empathetic tendency measurements compared to men (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). This also supports cultural impacts such as gender on the capacity of empathy in the process of forgiveness.

### **Coping and Forgiveness**

The relationship between coping and forgiveness, according to Konstam, Holmes, and Levine (2003), is one that has not been fully explored. Coping is defined as “ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the results of the person” (Lazarus, 1993, p. 237). Lazarus (1993) postulated that the concept of coping in the counseling setting originated between the 1960s and 1970s, and originated within the psychoanalytic interest in terms of defenses and characteristic style for managing threat. Research indicates that “coping styles comprise a combination of intra- and inter-individual coping, and can thus be contextualized by both “state and trait aspects, state representing instability (flux) or change, trait representing stability, or consistency across diverse conditions” (Lazarus, 1993, p. 236). These “diverse conditions” may be best explained within the development of an individual throughout the course of one’s life span.

### **Self Identity Developmental Process**

As mentioned earlier in the existing forgiveness models, empathy and coping skills were identified as prerequisites to forgiveness. A conceptualization of a client's self-development can be essential in understanding where challenges may incur or inhibit the clients course to forgiveness. Empathy and coping skills evolve within these self-developmental processes and interchangeably culture impacts a client's progression through life span, cognitive, cultural, social and socioemotional development.

Klatt and Enright (2009) argued that the theoretical connections between developmental frameworks and forgiveness should receive more scholarly attention. The benefit of the current study was to provide scholars, educators, counselors, and counselors-in-training counseling with what Klatt and Enright (2009) suggested as needed; a comprehensive developmental perspective of forgiveness and the impact on an individual's life. The research suggests that "psychological well-being" is an overall composite of well-being, general life happiness, general life satisfaction, and self-esteem (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016). Findings suggest that acting forgivingly, toward at least a close inter-personal relationship, increased levels of psychological well-being, but not necessarily in non-close relationships (i.e., friends vs. non-friends) (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016). Conceptualizing an individual's life span development may provide the link to a better understanding for improving an individual's well-being and inter-personal relationships following an act of betrayal or traumatic event.

### **Lifespan Development and Forgiveness**

Lifespan developments encapsulates all the processes of a client's self identity development and includes where and how empathy and coping skills develop. Developmental

progress also describes how an individual develops over the course of one's lifespan. Cultural influences of each stage could impede or promote the process of forgiveness.

### **Childhood and Adolescents**

Consider that for children and adolescents, the decision and ability to forgive may be directly impacted by parental and other adult influences (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016). This would impact a child's decision and choice for intentional forgiveness. Children and adolescents may not have the independent necessary coping strategies to conceptualize not only an offense or act of betrayal, but also how to respond to interpersonal conflict (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016). Coping skills and levels of empathy are modeled by parents and influenced by culture at this particular stage of development. According to our "functional perspective on forgiveness, forgiveness should be associated with well-being, particularly during stages in which friendships are most important, such as in early childhood and adolescence when children start to untie their parental bonds and increasingly focus on relationships with peers" (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016, p. 14).

Children, as well as adolescents, can decide whether or not to forgive in personal relationships; however, this often happens on impulse and in a retaliatory manner (Klatt & Enright, 2009; Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016). Identifying methods of alternative coping skills to manage offenses can have a positive impact on children and adolescents individually, as well as a positive impact in their interpersonal relations (Davis & Hook, 2015; Klatt & Enright, 2009; Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016). A child may not be entirely capable of forgiveness (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016) without the development of empathy and the coping skills essential for making the decision to forgive.

## **Adulthood**

The middle and late lifespan age has been a neglected area of research, as most data on forgiveness studies have mostly been conducted with college-aged students. Studies are often based on data provided by college students (Krause, 2016). Krause (2016) summarized that, based on research: College student samples are problematic because research reveals that religious involvement and the willingness to forgive others increase significantly with age (Krause, 2008, pg. 128). As a result of this argument, Krause (2016) postulated that findings based on college-age students were not definitively representative of all life span stages.

However, Hirsh, Webb, and Jeglic (2011) offered a counter argument and support for continued research in the lifespan age and developmental stage of college age, young adulthood population. Research has indicated that depression and suicide are “significant public health concerns for college-age young adults” for which “meaning based characteristics, such as forgiveness, a voluntary coping process involving offering, feeling, or seeking a change from negative to positive cognitions, behaviors, and affect toward a transgressor, may buffer such poor mental health outcomes” (Hirsh, Webb, & Jeglic, 2011, p. 1). Suicide is the “second leading cause of death for young adults, and about 1,100 college students die by suicide each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Alarming numbers reported as far back as 2009, reported that “6.4% to 9.5% of college students seriously consider suicide, and 1.3% to 1.5% made a suicide attempt in the last school year” (Hirsh, Webb, & Jeglic, 2011, p. 1). Hirsh, Webb, and Jeglic (2011) postulated that while further research is needed to support findings, their research yielded a positive relationship between higher levels of forgiveness of others and was directly related to lower levels of suicidal behavior. One in 10 Americans take

antidepressants leading Van der Kolk (2014) to observe that if antidepressants alone were truly as effective as first believed, depression should now be a minor part of our society.

While depression is relevant to the high risk of suicide in college age adults, the link between depression and forgiveness has not been fully explored. However, the finding of one such study suggests that “the lack of forgiveness is related to depressive symptoms, which indicate psychological maladjustment” while it was also noted that “the causal nature of this relationship cannot be established” in that particular study (Chung, 2016, p. 580). More research is needed for a model which can be replicated in research while including the cultural component to account for specific populations such at risk college age adults and other critical lifespan development stages.

### **Cognitive Development**

Perhaps the “psychological maladjustment” related to the “lack of forgiveness” in Chung’s (2016) research can be further conceptualized by exploring cognitive development within the lifespan development model (Chung, 2016). Piaget articulated a theory that children progress through four stages in order to construct an understanding of their world (Santrock, 2011). The noted processes that underlie the cognitive construction are organization and adaptation in order to make sense of an individual’s experience (Santrock, 2011). This development and/or impediment throughout the stages of cognitive development may affect how an individual experiences and processes trauma or betrayal. Therefore, a client’s cognitive development is important to the forgiveness process as well as the development of empathy and coping skills. Encompassed in the cognitive development is an individual’s moral development.



## **Moral Development**

Within an individual's lifespan development and cognitive development, moral development and reasoning should occur. The level in which the client has achieved, may directly impact the capacity to forgive. Lawrence Kohlberg theorized a moral development model in which to understand this process. As summarized by Barger (2000), the first level of moral development occurs in early childhood thinking and is generally found at the elementary school level in which one begins to learn to behave accordingly to societal socially acceptable norms. The second stage of moral development is categorized by a view that the correct behavior means acting in one's own best interests and seeking the approval of others (Barger, 2000). The third level of Kohlberg's model, which few individuals are said to achieve, is characterized as achieving a high level of social empathy and a sincere interest in the welfare of others (Barger, 2000). The client's current stage of lifespan, cognitive, and moral development, including the development of empathy and coping skills, are directly impacted by culture and hence may impact the probability of forgiveness. The ability to be empathetic which includes compassion towards others is correlated in research to the capacity to forgive (Krause & Ellison, 2003).

## **Psycho-Socio-Emotional Identity Development**

Socio-emotional development begins in infancy, but is more pronounced to the emotions important to forgiveness as the continuum ability to form meaningful relationships in childhood and progress throughout the lifespan stages. Adolescence is characterized the by the self-identity, as well as spiritual/religious identity development (Santrock, 2011). Adolescence begin to fully form self-concept and identity development independently from parents; however, it is shaped by cultural impacts and cultural development stages. Self-concept refers to the specific domains in

which these evaluations are made, which include academic, athletic, appearance, and so on (Santrock, 2011). Identity development is characterized by how an individual chooses one's occupation, political stance, spiritual beliefs, marital status and attraction to one particular sex or another, motivation for achievement and intellectual identity, personality characteristics including likes and dislikes, ethnic identity, and one's body image (Santrock, 2011). Identity is the "totality of one's perception of self, or how we as individuals view ourselves as unique from others" (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21). Adolescents develop skills and ability to process information independent of parents. The coping skills and perspective interactively begin to form the individual's worldview. Social identity can be thought of as the culturally defined personality characteristics, which are ascribed to social roles, such as the role of being a father, mother, friend, employer, employee, etc. (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21). The social refinement is impacted by culture and how the client processes trauma or betrayal is beginning to shape. By late childhood and early adolescence, an individual begins to develop self-esteem, which is a global evaluation of how we view ourselves (Santrock, 2011). These social-emotional and psychosocial development evolvments in the adolescent life span stage are a critical area when conceptualizing a model for forgiveness since the empathy and coping skills, are forming. Interruptions in any of these lifespan stages may impede a client's readiness and ability to forgive.

### **Cultural Identity Development**

As a part of socio-emotional development cultural identity is formed. Cultural identity is important to the process of forgiveness and perspectives of the client, and how they process an experience of a psychological trauma or betrayal. Interpersonal skills, empathy and coping skills, are interchangeably part of the cultural development process.

Cultural identity includes:

religion, rites of passage, language, dietary habits and leisure activities. Religious rituals and beliefs, even if not followed as an adult, make up a key component of an individual's cultural identity. Religion can preserve values within the community and foster a sense of belonging. Rites of passage are important in the development of an individual's cultural identity; following these rites or rituals is bound to influence the degree to which an individual will be accepted within the cultural group. (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21)

### **Spiritual, Religious, and Faith-Based Values Identity Development**

Religiosity and spirituality are cultural impacts and as individual evolves through the socio-emotional identity development, cultural identity develops within. The decisions of importance of one's views correlate to the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness has long been steeped by religious and spiritually cultural impacts. An individual in late adolescence or emerging adulthood begins to grapple with their own religious and/or spirituality choices and views to answer questions such as "Is there a God or a higher power?" (Santrock, 2011).

Within the contextualization of all the before mentioned integrative identity developments, exists religiosity and spirituality views (or the lack thereof) on forgiveness. Religion/ religiosity is "related but distinct from spirituality and is defined as a person's search for the sacred that occurs within a tradition and community in which there is agreement about what is believed and practiced" (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington Jr., 2012, p. 256). Spirituality is defined as "a person's search for a sense of closeness or connection with the sacred" (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington Jr., 2012, p. 256). The sacred is "whatever a person considers to be set apart from the ordinary and thus deserving of

eneration, such as God, the divine, or ultimate reality” (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington Jr., 2012, p. 256).

Religion and spirituality has important overtones and influential themes which may dictate how and when an individual is willing to make the choice to forgive. Religions have set precedence in empirical literature and are mainly focused on Christianity beliefs (Bedell, 2002). The basis of Christianity holds that forgiveness is the pardoning or letting go of an offense (Bedell, 2002). The victim is expected to be compassionate and extend grace to the offender in order to restore the injured relationship (Bedell, 2002). Bedell (2002) referred to the parable of the prodigal son in the bible as an example of this.

In addition to Christianity, forgiveness is a key component in many other religious and spiritual beliefs including Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. In Judaism, forgiveness is conceptualized as a morale gesture toward the offender, with the intent placed on maintaining the injured party’s moral virtuous standing (Newman, 2013). Two contrasting views exemplify the struggle of a client’s personal choice to forgive or not to forgive. One view in Judaism is that forgiveness is conditional based on the offender’s apology and the other unconditional obligation to forgive (Newman, 2013).

In Arab and Islamic culture, Muslims subscribe to the teachings of Allah and the Qur’an and Hadith.

Muslims are encouraged to forgive others, even if the appropriate response to a wrong would be an equivalent wrong. The believers are those who “avoid major sins and acts of indecency and when they are angry they forgive” (Q. 42:37). The reward for evil is evil, but the rewards for forgiveness and restitution are given by Allah (Q. 42:40). It is better to be patient and endure, forgiving wrongs, than to injure another after having given

charity (Q. 2:263). Though retaliation and proportional revenge would be compensation, there is always the danger of overdoing it and turning the victim into an offender (Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2015, p. 480).

In the research conducted by Krause, Neal, and Ellison (2003), the authors argued that spirituality played an important role in the capacity to forgive. They found that individuals who believed that a higher being had forgiven them were more inclined to forgive others themselves (Krause & Ellison, 2003). The intent of this research was not to negate or minimize the benefits of forgiveness in the theological sense, but to differentiate the use of forgiveness as a clinical counseling intervention. The common theme observed across theological and clinically based utilization in therapy is the right of the individual to forgive and the motivation behind the act of forgiveness. Religiosity of an individual is an important cultural influence that is included when observing the secular clinical counseling context of forgiveness.

### **Ethnic Identity Development**

Ethnic identity development is a part of social and cultural identity development in which an “enduring aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group, along with the attitudes and feelings related to that membership (Santrock, 2011, p. 385). Ethnic groups are “composed of people who may or may not share the same race but do share common cultural characteristics, including history, beliefs, values, food and entertainment preferences, religion and language. Ethnicity typically incorporates both race and culture” (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21). Similar to Piaget’s (1954) theory of cognitive development, Sue and Sue (2003) developed a cultural and ethnic model to explain the continuum process of cultural and ethnic identity development. Salazar and Casto (2008) summarized Sue and Sue’s Racial/Cultural

Identity Development (R/CID) model which describes five stages of development. According to this model, each stage is

“experienced by members of oppressed groups as they move toward greater understanding of self and others: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. Associated with each stage are groups of attitudes and beliefs that characterize individuals at this level of the identity development process”(Salazar & Casto, 2008, p. 84).

This model coincides with the stages of change and how the inner workings of an individual’s ecosystem affect their worldview. A client’s worldview impacts and sometimes impedes coping skills and level of empathy, which may then inherently affect the ability to forgive.

Salazar and Casto (2008), who utilized Sue and Sue’s R/CID in research, argued that when it comes to different sexes, culture and ethnicity play a role in how cultural violence is defined for example. The social norms of a particular culture or ethnicity may force beliefs on others (Salazar & Casto, 2008). The forgiveness process may become further complicated related to imposed social norms ascribed to certain ethnicities, race, or other cultural identities.

Conflicting messages of privilege and oppression could impact empathy, coping skills, and thwart forgiveness. Cultural views towards assault often includes cultural impacts in perspectives of sexism, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, and rape (Salazar & Casto, 2008). Cultural norms of power and privilege may define these violent acts as typically perpetrated by boys and men but sometimes women, and may be perceived as status quo (Salazar & Casto, 2008). How does an individual refute social norms related to cultural impacts on their social, emotional, and psycho-social development and other strong identity development processes to understand what forgiveness is and how to achieve forgiveness?

Possibly a model to aid in the conceptualization of how individuals may evolve through the White identity development is best explained by the most cited Helms's White racial identity model (Sue, et al., 1998). This model assumes that racism is:

an intimate and central part of being a White American. Helms conceptualizes a general two-phase process (Phase 1: Abandonment of Racism and Phase; Phase 2: Defining a Nonracist White Identity with six specific racial identity statuses equally distributed in the two: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy (Sue D. W., 1998, p. 47).

Helm's model provides a model for contextualizing ethnic identity development and the fluidity of the process. The model also calls to importance the interrelated coping skills involved throughout the development process. The various phases of the model provide a contextualization for how empathy and forgiveness may be impacted during the expected eventual evolvment. In part what makes Helm's model so important is:

the concetulaization of derivation of "defenses," "protective strategies," or what Helms (1995) formally labels information- processing strategies (IPS), which White people use to avoid or assuage anxiety and discomfort around the issue of race (Sue D. W., 1998). Each status has a dominant IPS associated with it: Contact = obliviousness or denial, Disintegration = suppression and ambivalence, Reintegration = selective perception and negative out-group distortion, Pseudo-independence = reshaping reality and selective perception, Immersion/emersion = hypervigilance and reshaping and Autonomy = flexibility and complexity. Understanding these strategic reactions is important for White American identity development, for understanding the barriers that must be overcome to

move to another status, and for potentially developing effective training or clinical strategies (Sue, et al., 1998, p. 54).

See Table 1 for a complete description of each stage of the White Racial Identity Development Stages (Sue, et al., 1998).



Table 1

*White Racial Identity Development Statuses* (Sue D. W., 1998)

White Racial Identity Status	Predominant Features
Contact	Professed obliviousness to issues of race. May state that he/she is “color blind.” Information Processing Strategy: Obliviousness
Disintegration	Increasing discomfort as person becomes aware of societal racism and personal benefits of unearned privilege. Information Processing Strategy: Suppression and ambivalence.
Reintegration	Explicit belief in White superiority. Disengages from cross-racial contacts. Information Processing Strategy: Selective perception and negative outgroup distortion.
Pseudo-Independence	Strongly held intellectualized views about racism. Wants to help Blacks better themselves. Information Processing Strategy: Reshaping reality and selective perception.
Immersion-Emersion	Growing awareness of positive aspects of whiteness. Seeks out other Whites attempting to forge a non-racist identity. Information Processing Strategy: Hyper vigilance and reshaping.
Autonomy	Seeks out and values diversity. Believes that he/she has something to offer and something to learn. Information Processing Strategy: Flexibility and complexity.

*Note.* Descriptions of the White Racial Identity Statuses and information processing strategies are based on Helms (1990, 1995).

### **Process of Forgiveness**

In clinical research, Worthington, Diblasio, and Jennings (2010) postulated how the development of forgiveness occurs. First, it begins during the appraisal of transgression that is, the stressors that require the victim to make changes (Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010, p. 232). According to Worthington, Jennings, and DiBlasio, transgressions violate a client’s psychological and/or physical boundaries. Transgressions are further explained to include

emotional or physical pain or injury and are described according to duration and severity (Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010).

Next in the development of forgiveness is that of coping responses. Worthington, Jennings, and DiBlasio (2010) stated that individuals can cope with the transgressions by attempting to restore fairness, which includes judicial, criminal, political, and/or social means (p. 232). Additionally, individuals may search for a sense of personal justice by soliciting an apology or compensation (p. 232). Another method of coping may include relinquishing control of justice to a higher power (Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010).

The last stage in the development of forgiveness is the actual choice of forgiving in order to resolve the injustice (Worthington, Jennings & DiBlasio, 2010). Forgiveness is then broken down in terms of two distinct types: emotional forgiveness and decisional forgiveness (p. 232). These terms are further explained in Worthington (2003, 2006a; Worthington, Jennings, & DiBlasio, 2010). For the purposes of this study, an overview of forgiveness and the process of forgiveness is reviewed for understanding the emphasis on how additional variables impact that process.

### **Cultural Differences and Impacts**

Lifespan stages and the development of coping skills and empathy are affected by socio-cultural contexts and diversity (Santrock, 2011), and thus affect an individual's capacity to forgive. Constructs impacting forgiveness include coping styles, gender, age, spirituality, and other cultural factors (Davis, 1983; Enright & Zell, 1989; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Specifically for this research, the researcher chose to focus on how cultural impacts of age, gender, spirituality/religiosity, and race/ethnicity impacts the process of forgiveness. How an individual develops throughout lifespan within the contextual cognitive, socio-emotional, pscho-

social, religiosity/spirituality, cultural , and ethnic indentity deveopment processses shapes an individual's worldview and certainly these processes are not only continuous, but also fluid in many ways as indivuals may change their beliefs and acriptions over their lifespan. These evolving processses incorporate an individual's scope of empathy and coping skills and the impact of these interchangeable influences on the process of forgiveness.

## **Race**

Variables to these processes that typically remain consistent throughout an individual's life span include race, gender, and chronological age. Race, unlike ethnicity, is "based on biologic constructs, such as sharing certain physical attributes" (Bhugra & Becker, 2005, p. 21). As Davis, et al. (2015) reinterated, there is a definite "gap in the forgiveness literature regarding race-related offenses (Davis, et al., 2015, p. 45). Addressing this gap is important for understanding and addressing the complexities of perspective on race and how this may affect the process of forgiveness. While this was not the entirity of the purpose for this research, providing contextualization of how race and racial discrimination may have an impact within the forgiveness process will benefiet counselor's and counsleors-in-training. The ability to increase the understanding of the multicutlural impacts requires additional supports in research as well as an integrative forgiveness model which would include insight on potential impacts of race/ethnicity. McFarland, Smith, Toussaint, and Thomas (2015) discussed how research findings suggest that forgiveness of others was protective of health for Blacks but not Whites, and forgiveness was positively associated with self-reported health over time (p. 66). These researchers also found a relationship between race, neighborhood and ability to forgive (McFarland, Smith, Toussaint, & Thomas, 2015, p. 66). These findings support the propensity of cultural impacts on race/ethnicity and forgiveness and how the intertwinement cannot be

separated within the contextualization of forgiveness. The researchers also reiterated that forgiveness has a positive relationship with forgiveness of any race (McFarland, Smith, Toussaint, & Thomas, 2015). There is also additional support that “forgiveness may be associated with more mature racial/ethnic identity” (Davis, et al., 2015). This reflects differentiation between individuals age groups and other cultural variables which may impact the decision to forgive.

## **Gender**

Toussaint and Webb (2005) emphasized the impact of empathy in promoting forgiveness. In their research the data indicated there were gender differences between empathy and forgiveness. The researchers postulated that women did tend to have higher levels of empathy in comparison with men. However, data also indicated that empathy and forgiveness was positively correlated for men but not in women Toussaint and Webb (2005). Thus, in this particular research, indicating empathy increases the likelihood for forgiveness in men but not necessarily in women. The researchers further postulated that the data did not provide an explanation to the nature and magnitude for these differences Toussaint and Webb (2005). This supports the need for additional research in the relationship between gender, empathy, and forgiveness in order to understand gender differences in forgiveness.

Research findings have supported women and forgiveness are more positively related as opposed to men and forgiveness in certain circumstances (Charzyn'ska, 2015; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002). Thus, an understanding of the underlying socio-emotional constructs, such as the role of empathy and coping skills combined, are needed to explore this further. Research observing empathy, coping, and cultural impacts on the process of forgiveness has been fragmented in current literature. In existing literature the need

manifests for considering that these constructs may be intertwined and in order to understand the process of forgiveness, first a more contextual understanding may lend itself useful to counselors and counselors-in-training.

### **Integrating Coping and Empathy on Forgiveness**

Evidenced-based research supports the either/or relationship between coping skills (Aschleman, 1996; Charzyn'ska, 2015; Lazuras, 1993; McCullough, Worthington Jr, & Rachal, 1997; Salazar & Cadto, 2008) and empathy (Gerdes, 2011; Ligoski, 2011; Lazuras, 1993; Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Ulas, 2015) with forgiveness. However, only a few researchers have examined how these concepts together impact the ability to forgive (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; Lazuras, 1993). According to Toussaint and Webb (2005), a common limitation in the ability of individuals to relate to one another is the increase in propensity for negative emotions, behaviors, and cognitive processes within interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships are deeply impacted by the individuals coping skills; therefore, a lack of appropriate coping skills and empathy can lead to impaired social functioning (Toussaint & Webb, 2005).

Coping and empathy levels are important prerequisites to intentional forgiveness. According to Ferch (1998), clients often experience debilitating emotions such as anxiety, depression, or other associated symptoms such as sleeping difficulties, appetite changes, and lack of motivation (Ferch, 1998). Coping is how the individual responds and processes the injury and the emotions experienced as result of injury, as well as motivation for change. Empathy is a vital element in coping and in the facilitation of overcoming destructive responses following a significant interpersonal offense (McCullough, Worthington Jr., & Rachal, 1997). McCullough,

Worthington, and Rachal (1997) hypothesized that “empathy mediates relationships between dispositional or environmental variables and their causal effects on forgiving” (p. 323).

Research supports the argument that there are remarkable differences in the ability to forgive in women and men (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002). Results of research conducted with women and men regarding the likelihood forgiveness would be extended in the event of a sexual and/or emotional infidelity (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002). Results supported that men, compared to women, are less likely to forgive a sexual infidelity than an emotional affair (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002), thus indicating that men differentiate sexual and emotional affairs and deem sexual affairs as more difficult to forgive. In research conducted by Wal, Karreman, and Cillessen (2016), the findings were significantly different in gender. Results in the study conducted by Konstam, Holmes, and Levine (2003) indicated that women, in general, were more inclined to be forgiving. There was also an increased propensity in the positive relationship between forgiveness and positive well-being in adolescent girls (Wal, Karreman, & Cillessen, 2016).

Research data has supported gender differences such as in the research by Konstam, Holmes, and Levine (2003) where the relationship indicated that women were more inclined to be forgiving. However there is another argument to gender differences. Consider that the same researchers acknowledged that based on their analysis of previous research, this finding was not necessarily supported (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). This extent of contextualization in the process of forgiveness requires further research to support current data and or differentiate impacting factors which may allow one gender to be more forgiving than another. The data also indicated that older individuals, regardless of sex, were more apt to be forgiving (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003).

## **Chronological Age Periods**

### **Late Childhood and Adolescence**

The period spanning adolescence and late childhood is a critical time for socioemotional changes which are affected by socio-culture. While Vygotsky (more) and Piaget (less) disagree to the level of emphasis in late childhood, they both agree that by the stage of adolescence, the emphasis is strong (Santrock, 2011). Late childhood and adolescence is also a critical time for the development of emotions, morale reasoning, and peer relationships (Santrock, 2011).

Research on adolescence and forgiveness has indicated various impacts on lifespan development. For example, Klatt and Enright (2009), supported research that indicated that with youth forgiveness can reduce hostile racial bias, delinquent behavior and self-reported aggression. Forgiveness was also shown to improve attitudes toward parents and teachers and improve parent–adolescent interactions (Klatt & Enright, 2009). In an age development process, where peer relationships shape and impact an adolescent’s opinion, the influences of those peers closest to the adolescent impacts the views and capacity to forgive. Gender identity and gender roles also develop and impact a client’s expectations, while culture prescribes perspective (Santrock, 2011). Adolescence is also the span within an individual’s lifetime in which an individual begins to develop their sexual identity (Santrock, 2011). This is important as its relates to coping skills, level of empathy, and forgiveness as the adolescent begins to navigate learning to regulate intimacy and understanding of their sexual orientation. The culture of an individual is interwoven in this process. Additionally, an important separation of adolescence from adulthood that happens during this stage is adolescent egocentrism, a concept developed by David Elkin (1976), which suggests that there is a heightened level of self-consciousness (Santrock, 2011). The two concepts of egocentrism include when an adolescent perceives that others are as

interested in them as they are in themselves, and that the adolescent is unique and invincible (Santrock, 2011). This is relevant to forgiveness as these perspectives can affect emotional regulation and information processing (Santrock, 2011). Emotional regulation and information processing determine empathy and readiness for forgiveness, as well as the coping skills to accurately process the perceived grievances and actual betrayals of another.

### **Early, Middle, and Late Adulthood**

An interesting distinction from adolescence and adulthood is the emergence of reflective and relative thinking, which thus signals the move away from the adolescent polarization—good/bad, right/wrong, or we/they (Santrock, 2011). Complexities of culture create a circular momentum of impact with reflective and relative reasoning. Interconsequentially, adulthood involves the complexity of emotions to include love and intimacy in interpersonal relationships and bonds (Santrock, 2011).

Research has indicated that the willingness to forgive others increases significantly with age (Steiner, Allemand, & McCullough, 2012). In a recent study of 451 participants aged 20–83, the researchers argued, based on data, that age is positively related to forgiveness (Steiner, et al., 2012). The study supported other constructs such as interpersonal skills, which also has an impact on the capacity to forgive, while the study also indicated that age was negatively related to transgression frequency and intensity (Steiner, et al., 2012). In another study focusing on forgiveness and intrapersonal skills in late adulthood, the researchers also focused on the factors that influence the process of forgiveness (Krause & Ellison, 2003). The researchers argued that in the population in which the average age was 74.5, there was a positive relationship in age and forgiveness, and also fewer negative interpersonal/intrapersonal challenges (Krause & Ellison, 2003). These studies and others indicate the likelihood that forgiveness will increase with age,



but also that other influences impact the forgiveness process as an individual navigates through their lifespan.

### **Implications for the Use of Forgiveness and Case Studies**

In a recent study by Wal, Karreman, and Cillessen (2016), the researchers argued that there was a positive association between forgiveness and psychological well-being. It was found that individuals often seek therapy following a betrayal or transgression committed against them that they may be experiencing negative emotions, cognitions, and behaviors surrounding a traumatic event or betrayal among others. Furthermore, individuals may achieve forgiveness without counseling; however, many individuals lack the social supports, cognitions, readiness, and ability to achieve and maintain a resolution, and are thus unable to move through the forgiveness process, with some individuals reporting feeling “stuck”. Utilizing forgiveness as an intervention in research has been shown as supporting an individual to move past the debilitating encompassing emotional toil. Forgiveness can be beneficial across a myriad of circumstances to include an individual’s self medicating through substance abuse (Charzyn’ska, 2015), as well as relational challenges such as divorce and separation (Aschleman, 1996).

In research conducted by Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman (2006), 128 women and 55 men participated in a study in which multiple regression analyses revealed that “higher forgiveness and lower vengefulness were associated with greater psychological health (lower depressive aspects and higher life satisfaction)” (Ysseldyk & Matheson, 2006, p. 1573). This supports the importance of examining how coping skills become essential to the process of forgiveness. A reduction in vengefulness suggests empathy levels for the client may be necessary for decsional forgiveness.

Coping and empathy skills are often put to the test in infidelity cases where at least one partner has betrayed the other. Aschleman (1996) in a cross-longitudinal study of women, argued that the resulting data supported that women who forgave their partners as opposed to those who did not, reported a greater sense of self-acceptance, purpose in life, as well as a reduction of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Aschleman, 1996). While this study focused on the overall outcome of forgiveness, the purpose of the current research was to continue the examination of what the necessary prerequisites for the process to occur. Possible benefits which may be derived from this include supporting the need for a concise model of forgiveness, which includes an encompassing conceptualization of individuals traits and states. In doing so, a concise model may assist to improve efficiency and benefit the outcomes for forgiveness in the counseling setting.

### **Forgiveness Interventions in Counseling**

In two separate meta-analysis of forgiveness intervention in the counseling setting conducted by Wade (2014) and colleagues, data supported that utilization of theoretically grounded forgiveness interventions to be beneficial as an agent of change. Research supported that clients seek counseling to cope with past offenses and counseling facilitated the process to achieve resolution in the form of forgiveness (Wade & Hoyt, 2014). Meta-analysis data results supported that forgiveness intervention treatments resulted in “greater changes in depression, anxiety, and hope than no-treatment conditions” (Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 154).

Forgiveness was defined earlier as action for “reducing anger, bitterness, and vengeful rumination”; for many clients, the simple reduction or elimination of negative thoughts and feelings would be considered a counseling success (Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 154). However, for counselors and counselors-in-training conceptualization, forgiveness as a therapeutic

intervention includes more than elimination of negative emotions and maladaptive coping skills. This philosophy correlates with “positive psychotherapy perspective that seeks to attend to and develop strengths rather than just minimize problems” (Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 154). Therefore, the promotion of forgiveness as a counseling technique is more than simply reducing negative thoughts and feelings but also includes helping clients move in a more positive and restoration of optimal equilibrium (Wade & Hoyt, 2014).

### **Concise Counseling Forgiveness Interventions**

As discussed earlier, several theoretical forgiveness models have been developed to promote forgiveness (Wade & Hoyt, 2014). Leading researchers in the field of forgiveness have developed models that have led the way for investigating the efficacy of these interventions. Enright’s treatment model contains 20 steps (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) which are offered in four distinct phases:

1. Uncovering (negative feelings about the offense)
2. Decision (to pursue forgiveness for a specific instance)
3. Work (toward understanding the offending person)
4. Discovery (of unanticipated positive outcomes and empathy for the offending person)

(Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 156).

These four phases closely resemble the stages of change and accessing client readiness in the process for achieving resolution in the process of forgiveness. For example, the “work “phase would coincide with the “action” phase of the stages of change (DiClemente, 2012). The work or action phase includes several smaller steps within them such as:

1. clients work toward understanding the offender
2. developing compassion

3. accepting/absorbing the pain
4. considering giving a gift of forgiveness to the offender (Enright, 2001 as summarized in Wade & Hoyt, 2014).

The efficacy of the Enright model (2001) has been shown to be beneficial as an agent of change with a diversity of clients to include: adult incest survivors (Freedman & Enright, 1996), parents who have adopted special needs children (Baskin, Rhody, Schoolmeesters, & Ellington, 2011), and inpatients struggling with alcohol and drug addiction (Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004 in Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 157).

The other primary model used, according to Wade and Hoyt (2014), is Worthington's (2001) REACH Forgiveness Model. Each letter in the acronym REACH represents a major component in the forgiveness process. In the first step of this model, participants:

1. recall (R) the hurt they experienced and the emotions associated with it.
2. work to empathize (E) with their offender, take another's perspective, and consider factors that may have contributed to their offender's actions. This is done without condoning the other's actions or invalidating the often-strong feelings the offended person has as a response.
3. explore the idea that forgiveness can be seen as an altruistic (A) gift to the offender. Participants learn that forgiveness can be freely given or legitimately withheld and recall times when others forgave them.
4. make a commitment (C) to forgive. This includes committing to the forgiveness that one has already achieved as well as committing to work toward more forgiveness, knowing that it is a process that often takes time to fully mature.

5. seek to hold (H) onto or maintain their forgiveness through times of uncertainty or a return of anger and bitterness (e.g., if they get hurt again in a similar way (Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 157).

Research analysis of the REACH model in a separate study yielded marked benefits related to use of this concise forgiveness intervention model to participants. Benefits included increase in the achievability of forgiveness, hope, and self-esteem, and a number of reductions such as anxiety and depression symptoms (Wade & Hoyt, 2014). The benefit of using a model provides an understanding of forgiveness through which the process “unfolds over time through a series of developmental steps” (Wade & Hoyt, 2014, p. 158). However, the cognitive based approaches leave little direct insight of cultural and underlying psychological influences.

Remarkably, what is missing in these two models and other existing models is the contextualization of an individual’s self- identity process and what role culture plays in achieving forgiveness. While there is an abundance of support for how empathy and coping are essentials for the process (Gerdes, 2011; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; Lazuras, 1993; Ligoski, 2011; Ulas, 2015), research is lacking for an inclusive model for understanding the inner workings of forgiveness and what may be necessary for decisional to occur in the first place. A conceptualization of how empathy and coping skills evolve or even regress in some incidents of self identity development following a psychological trauma or betrayal would be beneficial for counselors and counselors-in-training and their ability to serve the individual clients. By observing how culture impacts the perspective of the individual throughout the self development process may provide a beneficial insight to a client’s reaction to trauma.

Specifically, Wade and colleagues, leading researchers in forgiveness, argued that the study of forgiveness would be furthered by a means to help counselors and counselors-in-

training understand what clients would benefit most from these interventions (Wade & Hoyt, 2014). Wade and colleagues (2014) specifically suggested:

examining how to best serve ‘minorities’ (racial/ethnic, religious, sexual orientation) could be especially valuable to understand potential interactions between social justice, advocacy, and forgiveness intervention efforts. For example, researchers might examine interventions that help lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender clients forgive experiences of discrimination in a way that promotes their individual mental health but does not limit their motivation to work for social change and to seek justice for themselves and others (p. 168).

The basis of this research sought to provide just that. A conceptualization of not only how the process of forgiveness is beneficial but also the importance for the inclusion and understanding of the intricate intertwinement of impacting variables such as empathy, coping skills, and cultural differences on decisional forgiveness.

### **Summary**

Individuals may become victims of psychological harm and arguably may be “an inevitable consequence of daily interpersonal routines. If unforgiveness surrounding these offenses is not sufficiently managed and becomes chronic in nature, then victims of offense may suffer from preventable physical, mental, relational, and spiritual impairment” (Harper, et al., 2014, p. 1167). For the purposes of this research, the focus of forgiveness was not on the offended, definition utilised does not require two people, and does not necessarily require the reconciliation of the damaged relationship. For this reason, “forgive and forget” is replaced with “forgive and remember” (Ferch, 1998, p. 264). This research may provide a contextualization for not only what forgiveness is and includes but also support what forgiveness is not. Thereby

answering the call for extending research to provide clarification and reduce ambiguity in current research. Extension of conversation on what may be necessary for decisional forgiveness is beneficial for counselors and counselors-in-training understanding and by extension utilization of forgiveness a viable option in the counseling setting.

While models related to the process of forgiveness have evolved as well a continuation of research supporting what may be necessary for decisional forgiveness, the researcher sought to address current gaps. Currently various variables have emerged and have been empirically supported independently of each other and may lack the contextualization related to the complexities involved in what may determine an individual's decision to forgive. For these reasons among other a call for further exploration for what makes the supported variables necessary and interdependent to the process. Within the current research there still remains ambiguity related to the use of forgiveness including the definition, concepts, models, and measures among others (Denton & Martin, 1998; Enright & Zell, 1989; Ferch, 1998). The focus of this research was on examining and extending the contextualisation and relationship of fundamental elements such as empathy, coping skills, and cultural differences on the process of forgiveness.. Chapter 3 details how the study's research design and methodology sought to do so.

## CHAPTER III. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the procedures that were used in conducting this research study. The study was designed to explore the impact of empathy, coping, and cultural differences on the process of forgiveness. A review of the problem, with detailed research questions to be studied, instrumentation, sample participant selection and description, variables, data collection procedures, and data analysis are presented.

### **Review of the Problem**

The process of forgiveness is often convoluted. Counselors and counselors-in-training may find the process, while potentially necessary for change, overwhelmingly daunting to understand and therefore challenging to implement as a counseling intervention. While counselors may show increasing knowledge for “what forgiveness is not and what it is. The word ‘forgiveness’ is increasingly understood to be inadequate to describe the inter-relational experiences of forgiving (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012). Foundationally, for purposes of this research, forgiveness involves the intentional decision to forgive and what that decision entails. Potential impacts for forgiveness include an individual’s empathy, coping skills, and cultural differences related to gender, age, ethnicity/race, and religiosity/spirituality (Davis, 1983; Enright & Zell, 1989; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). The plight of this research was to explore the aforementioned variables and their relationship to decisional forgiveness. In doing so, the data which emerged or lack of findings discussed in this research may help to stimulate



future research in order to provide a clearer understanding for the delivery process of forgiveness in the counseling setting.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions to explore impacts in this study are:

1. Does race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality, coping, and empathy impact the decision to forgive?
  - 1.1 Do/does cultural differences of race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, and religiosity/spirituality impact decisional forgiveness?
  - 1.2 Do/does coping skills impact decisional forgiveness?
  - 1.3 Do/does empathy impact decisional forgiveness?

Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the research questions and applied methodology.

Table 2

*Research Questions and Applied Methodology*

Research Question	Variable	Definition	Instrument	Analysis
1. Does race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality, coping, and empathy impact the decision to forgive?	<p>Dependent variables</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cultural impacts</li> <li>2. Coping</li> <li>3. Empathy</li> </ol> <p>Each of these DV impacts on the Independent Variable Decisional Forgiveness</p>	<p><b>Decisional forgiveness</b> is defined as the behavioral intention of eliminating revenge and avoidance and potentially restore interaction if the risk of future harm can be prevented (Worthington E. L Jr., Wade, N. G, 1999 as summarized in Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, &amp; Fernández-Capo, 2015).</p>	<p>Decisional Forgiveness Scale 8 items 2 subscales</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Descriptive correlation between DV Decisional forgiveness &amp; IV empathy. Multiple Regression</li> <li>2. Descriptive correlation between DV Decisional forgiveness and IV Coping. Multiple Regression</li> </ol>
1.1 Do/does cultural differences race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality	<p>Dependent Variable</p> <p>Cultural Impacts</p> <p>i.e. Diversity</p>	<p><b>Diversity</b> refers to differences such as “race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and physical ability or disability became associated with these defining characteristics” (Sue, et al., 1998, p. 21).</p>	<p>Demographic Questionnaire</p>	<p>Factorial ANOVA</p> <p>Comparing the IV impacting variables of cultural differences with DV – Decisional Forgiveness.</p>

Research Question	Variable	Definition	Instrument	Analysis
				for one DV variable outcome of cultural impacts using demographics. Regression analysis between IV Cultural Impacts and DV variable Decision to Forgive.
1.3 Do/does empathy impact decisional forgiveness?	Empathy	The cognitive and behavioral inter and intra personal skills manage psychological stress (Lazarus, 1993).	SDPTS 13	Regression Analysis between IV Empathy and DV Decisional Forgiveness.
1.2 Do/does coping skills impact decisional forgiveness?	Coping	The cognitive and behavioral inter and intra personal skills manage psychological stress (Lazarus, 1993).	Brief COPE 18 items 9 subscales of 2 items each	Regression Analysis between IV coping and DV decisional forgiveness. To examine casual correlation.

## **Instrumentation**

The three instruments and a demographic questionnaire that make up the survey are 1) Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007); 2) Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale SDPTS (Long, 1990); and 3) the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

### **Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS)**

The instrument being used to explore decisional based forgiveness is the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, et al., 2007).

**Variable.** Decisional forgiveness.

**Description.** The original version of the DFS was developed as part of a master's thesis (Hook, 2007), and results from that thesis and other independent studies were reported as part of the Positive Psychology Summit (Worthington et al., 2007). A sample of N=679 undergraduates was split into samples of n=5400 (sample 1A), n=179 (sample 1B), and n=100 (sample 1C), and a new sample of N=298 (sample 2) was then collected. Each item was rated from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Two components were found for the DFS (Prosocial Intentions and Inhibition of Harmful Intentions;  $r=.40$ ) (Hook, 2007). Therefore, after additional research, the current DFS resulted from a division of the original instrument into two four-item subscales. One measures Prosocial Intentions; the other, Inhibition of Harmful Intentions (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012). The brief measure is comprised of N=eight Likert scale questions with 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012).

The DFS is designed to assess the extent to which “one has made a decision to forgive an offender and behave differently toward the person” (Worthington, et al., 2014, p. 484). As

discussed previously the choice and the decision are critical prerequisites to the process of change and therefore forgiveness.

**Validity and reliability.** According to Worthington et al. (2012), the DFS shows evidence of internal consistency and temporal stability. The DFS also shows evidence of construct and discriminant validity.

**Scoring.** There are eight questions and two subscales of four questions. Scores range from Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 to Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. Scoring is achieved through reverse code of questions 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 (User Manual for Inquisit's Decisional Forgiveness Scale, n.d.). The first subscale assesses Prosocial Intention in subscale items: 2, 3, 5, 7, the lower the score, the fewer harmful intentions. For the second subscale, Inhibition of Harmful Intention, subscale items: 1, 4, 6, and 8, the lower the score, the fewer intentions are prosocial (User Manual for Inquisit's Decisional Forgiveness Scale, n.d.)

**Samples.** Worthington et al. (2007a) examined the psychometric properties of the DFS and the EFS using the thesis samples (Hook, 2007), plus independent samples of students who participated in (a) a scenario study ( $N=100$ ); (b) an ego depletion task ( $N=100$ ); and (c) an implicit measure test ( $N=562$ ). Other data supports a positive relationship of DFS and EFS scores to diastolic and systolic blood pressure, mean arterial pressure, heart rate, and salivary cortisol in adult women (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012).

**Reliability internal consistency.** Cronbach alpha coefficients for the DFS ranged from .80 to .83, and EFS ranged from .69 to .83 (Worthington et al., 2007).

**Test/retest.** Both DFS ( $r=5.73$ ) and EFS scores ( $r=5.73$ ) were relatively stable over three weeks (Worthington et al., 2007a; Worthington, et al., 2014, p. 484).

**Validity convergent/concurrent.** Worthington et al. (2007a) reported a positive correlation of the DFS with the TRIM\_B7 ( $r = .68$  and correlated with several dispositional measures of forgiveness like the Rye Forgiveness Likelihood Scale)  $r = .44$ ). and trait Forgiveness Scale ( $r=.46$ ) (Worthington, 2007, p. 485). During additional research the DFS was shown to provide a psychometrically sound method for assessing the decision to forgive and provide a counseling to access longitudinally changes in this process (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012).

The coefficient alphas for the DFS and subscales were .83 (95% CI = .80-.85) for the full scale, .78 (95% CI = .75-.82) for Prosocial Intentions, and .83 (95% CI = .80-.86) for Inhibition of Harmful Intentions. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the subscale inter-correlation. Prosocial Intentions was moderately correlated with Inhibition of Harmful Intentions,  $r(397) = .46, p < .01$  (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012, p. 11).

**Criterion/predictive validity** evidence has been adduced using an implicit measures test (Worthington et al., 2007). Scores on the DFS were consonant with the condition, and reaction times were correlated with scores on the DFS. (Worthington, et al., 2014, p. 486)

**Results and comments.** Studies suggest that the DFS measures a decision to forgive and might be related to what people often mean when they say they have forgiven an offender; they often mean they intend to act more positively toward the person (Worthington, et al., 2014, p. 487). The DFS has been translated into Korean and used with samples from North Korea (Park, 2012) and South Korea (Chong, 2010) according to (Worthington, et al., 2014, p. 487). By doing so, the translatability of the DFS shows potential for diversity and utilization of this measure across various cultures (Long, 1990; Poole, 2011).

### **Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPTS)**

**Description.** To measure empathy, the Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPTS), was used to measure both the psychological perspective-taking and the empathetic tendency of survey participants as used in dissertations to study forgiveness and empathy following an interpersonal transgression (Poole, 2011). The Self Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPS) was developed by psychologist Edgar C. J. Long (1990) and measured a person's empathy levels through the use of 13 items answered on a 7point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) (Poole, 2011, p. 44). As discussed by Poole (2011), "perspective taking was thought to be the 'cognitive dimension' of empathy that varied depending on the relationship or situation" (p.44). Another way of looking at this is that empathy levels varies dependent on variables which may impact the capacity to see the other individual's perspective. The total score is obtained by summing all items (score range=0–52). The greater the score is indicative of a greater dyadic perspective taking reflecting a higher level of empathy (Peloquin & Lafontaine, p. 150).

**Reliability.** As reported in Poole (2011) research, according to Long (1990) the SDPT demonstrated high reliability in the past ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 2.48$ ), and an even higher reliability was noted in this study ( $\alpha = .94$ ,  $M = 5.61$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) (pg. 45). In addition, additional research showed Long's SDPS had an average reliability of .89 when sampled among married couples, as well as college students (Poole, 2011, p. 58).

### **COPE Inventory**

The COPE Inventory was developed for the purpose of understanding and measuring coping skills (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) and the Brief version was added in 1997 (Carver, 1997). The full version COPE Inventory is a multidimensional coping inventory to

assess the different ways in which people respond to stress. The full version COPE contains five scales (of four items each) measure conceptually distinct aspects of problem-focused coping (active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking of instrumental social support). The original five scales (of four items each) measure aspects of what might be viewed as emotion-focused coping (seeking of emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, turning to religion); and three scales measuring coping responses that arguably are less useful (focus on and venting of emotions, behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement) (COPE Inventory, n.d.). More specifically the composite subscales, measuring emotion-focused, problem-focused, and dysfunctional coping have proved useful in clinical research and have content validity (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008, p. 848).

### **The Brief Cope**

While this research is utilizing the Brief version of COPE, the full version's "Cronbach's alpha for the 15 scales of COPE ranged from .37 to .93. With the exception of mental disengagement, the remainder of the alphas were all above .59, with the majority above .70. The average alpha was .79" (COPE Inventory, n.d.).

The Brief COPE omits 2 scales of the 16 subscales in the unabbreviated COPE and condenses items in subscales to 2 items per scale, and then adds one scale (Carver, 1997). The Brief COPE retains the substructure of the full version through the composite subscales measuring emotion-focused, problem-focused, and dysfunctional coping have proved useful in clinical research and have content validity (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008, p. 498). The more abbreviated version, the Brief Cope was created in response to the challenge of completing the lengthier version by earlier samples who reported item redundancy and length of time needed



to complete the full assessment (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012). The Brief Cope version still has 2 items per subscale. Scales are computed as follows (with no reversals of coding):

Self-distraction, items 1 and 19

Active coping, items 2 and 7

Denial, items 3 and 8

Substance use, items 4 and 11

Use of emotional support, items 5 and 15

Use of instrumental support, items 10 and 23

Behavioral disengagement, items 6 and 16

Venting, items 9 and 21

Positive reframing, items 12 and 17

Planning, items 14 and 25

Humor, items 18 and 28

Acceptance, items 20 and 24

Religion, items 22 and 27

Self-blame, items 13 and 26 (Carver, 2013, p. 2).

The previous factor analyses, item clarity and meaningfulness to the patients in a previous study were used as deciding factors of condensed version (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012).

The author (Charles S. Carver) and rights of Brief COPE allow for omissions of questions as need pertaining to research needs. “You are welcome to use all scales of the Brief COPE, or to choose selected scales for use. Feel free as well to adapt the language for whatever time scale you are interested in” (<http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/ccarver/sc1COPE.html>).

Hence, with permissions to omit certain subscales the researcher evaluated specific subscales not

directly related to this specific research and using these subscales would potentially factor in other constructs. The omitted subscales include the subscales Self-Distraction, Substance Use, Behavioral Disengagement, Venting, and, Self-Blame. The current Brief COPE for this research purposes include 18 items comprised of nine subscales of two items each. The 18 item condensed version for this research purpose is as follows.

Active coping, items 2 and 7

Denial, items 3 and 8

Use of emotional support, items 5 and 15

Use of instrumental support, items 10 and 23

Positive reframing, items 12 and 17

Planning, items 14 and 25

Humor, items 18 and 28

Acceptance, items 20 and 24

Religion, items 22 and 27 (Carver, 2013, p. 2).

The subscales omitted by the researcher and were considered not specific to this research. Validity of the Brief Cope is supported in research (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008). While the subscales were reduced and the item numbers were reduced, the structure of the Brief Cope remains. The validity of the three composite subscales measuring focus on the problem by examining the emotion-focused problems and the current dysfunctional coping styles indicated in the research conducted by Cooper, Katona, and Livingston (2008). The research examined through a confirmatory factor analysis and supported validity for the three-factor structure in the research data; consistency “with a three-factor structure with model adequacy indices indicating a model with a fairly good fit (root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), 0.063;

comparative fit index (CFI), 0.818; and coefficient of determination (CD) 0.829” (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008, p. 838). The research examined psychometric properties of these subscales.

**Reliability and Validity.** Over the span of two years, one hundred twenty-five family members of an individual with Alzheimer's disease completed the Brief COPE in which internal consistencies were supported for emotion-focused, problem-focused, and dysfunctional subscales ( $\alpha = .72, .84, .75$ ). Test-retest reliability over a year was demonstrated for emotion-focused, problem-focused, and dysfunctional subscales among caregivers in whom burden scores did not change significantly ( $r = .58, r = .72, r = 0.68; p < .001$ ). Change in burden score over 2 years correlated with change in problem-focused and dysfunctional ( $r = .33, r = .32; p < .01$ ) subscales, indicating sensitivity to change, but not with change on the emotion-focused scale. Change in emotion-focused coping correlated with change in problem-focused and dysfunctional coping ( $r = .40, r = .26; p < .05$ ). Regression analyses indicated convergent and concurrent validity: emotion-focused coping was predicted by secure attachment ( $\beta = .23$ ) and by problem-focused coping ( $\beta = .68$ ); dysfunctional coping by burden ( $\beta = .36$ ) and less secure attachment ( $\beta = -.25$ ) and problem-focused coping ( $\beta = .31$ ; all  $p < .05$ ). The model predicting problem-focused coping included avoidant attachment ( $\beta = .22; p = .014$ ), social support ( $\beta = .10; p = 0.25$ ), care recipient activities of daily living impairment ( $\beta = .12; p = .14$ ) and less secure attachment ( $\beta = -.25; p = .011$ ) and emotion-focused ( $\beta = .53; p < .001$ ) and dysfunctional coping ( $\beta = .25, p = .006$ ) (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008, p. 838). Research supporting these composite subscales indicate a potential for benefit for possible interventions focused on a change in coping skills (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008).

### **Demographic Questionnaire**

A questionnaire utilizing a combination of multiple choice and fill in the blanks type questions, was used to capture diversity in participants. A total of four, non-identifying questions were requested of each participant with an option for nondisclosure of the participants to any or all of the four demographic questions. The four questions pertain to capturing (1) gender, (2) age, (3) race/ethnicity, and (4) religiosity/spirituality for which each participant identifies with most.

### **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 19 (SPSS)**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 19 (SPSS) was used to store and analyze data. The data obtained is stored and will be kept confidentially in the researcher's personal possession, is protected with anti-virus software and is password protected.

The aforementioned three instruments and a demographic questionnaire that make up the survey that were used for this study were 1) **Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS)** (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007); 2) **Self -Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale SDPTS** (Long, 1990); and 3) **The Brief COPE Inventory** (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

1. **Decisional Forgiveness Scale (Forgiveness):** Comprised of 8 items 2 subscales
2. **Self -Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (Empathy):** Comprised of 13 items
3. **Brief COPE:** Comprised of 18 items including 9 subscales with two questions per each scale
4. **Demographic Questionnaire:** Comprised of 4 items.

The totaled number of items for each participant to complete is 39 items encompassing 12 subscales followed by 4 items of the demographic questionnaire for a grand total of 43 items. The instrument items, with the exception of the demographic questionnaire, are comprised of

Likert Scale questions ranging from 1–4 pts and 1–7 points and were broken up into manageable sections in the online survey to reduce risk of non-completion by the participants.

### **Participants**

One Hundred and fifty-eight participants were anonymously recruited through Qualtrics Survey Method (Qualtrics, 2017). For this study, in order to be eligible to participate, participants were required to be age 19 or older. Through Qualtrics Survey method, potential participants were asked preliminary questions as a part of the informed consent to ascertain if the individual is eligible to participate. Potential participants were tasked to indicate that they are age 19 or older and if they believe they have ever been or were the victim of an interpersonal transgression in which they believed caused them stress or difficulty dealing with. These two preliminary questions were required for each participant to proceed and both preliminary questions were required as “yes” for participation. Individuals who answered “no” to one or both were thanked for their time and eliminated as potential participants. All 158 participants agreed they met the requirements for eligibility and consented via the online letter of information.

### **Procedures**

Prior to conducting research, a pilot study was conducted. During this pilot study the Qualtrics design survey was in in “preview mode” only and a link was sent to selected professionals in the counseling and counseling educators field. These professional were selected on criteria of having experience in working with clients and more specifically have worked with clients seeking forgiveness. These professionals were asked to preview the survey for design flaws, recommendations, and estimated time that they recommended a participant would take to complete the survey. The experts consisted of faculty (scholar) and practitioners in areas related to teaching and counseling: trauma, addictions and multicultural competencies connected to

providing therapeutic interventions to families and individuals who may seek counseling for finding a resolution through forgiveness. The purpose of the pilot study was to accurately assess and receive expert reviewed feedback regarding the content and face validity, the survey's conceptual framework, and design of online survey. The participants were asked to review the Letter of Information (Appendix A), preview the survey instruments via the Qualtrics online survey method (Appendix B.), and review the Sample of Qualtrics Recruitment Email Notification that was used by Qualtrics (Appendix C). The participants of the pilot study were asked to write a letter of support for the research to be conducted as well as any recommendations for proceeding. In all, six professionals responded in the pilot study. See Appendix D for their letters of support. These letters of support were included as a part of the Internal Review Board application for research approval. Approval to proceed was obtained from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office of Research Compliance for Human Subjects. The IRB Exemption Approval Email is provided in (Appendix E). The anticipated timeline for completion for the preliminary data collection was between 30–45 days and was met within 30 days.

Listed and included in Appendix C is the empirical-tested and deemed reliable survey tools used to assess forgiveness, empathy, and coping skills. As Poole (2001) indicated a “potential design flaw in any survey method involves the inclusion of leading questions, which can be alleviated by selecting formerly-used survey tools with well-tested correlations, proven inter-coder reliability, and valid measures of the topic” (pg. 41). In addition, except where mentioned by proven instruments, forgiveness was not indicated as a desired outcome in informed consent, demographic or instrument instructions. Throughout the online survey, participants were asked to think about one specific incident or situation in which they believe

they experienced an interpersonal transgression or betrayal by another and answer a series of statements, grouped into topic areas. Participants provided numeric answers corresponding to a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) to each statement.

Participants were recruited through Qualtrics Survey Panels. The participants, received an email containing a link for the anonymous survey link. A sample of the participant recruitment email is provided in Appendix B. Participants were directed to the survey link where they were asked to read informed consent information in the Letter of Information (see Appendix A), and consent to eligibility of the preliminary questions. Once the participant consented to the Letter on Information, they were prompted to complete information through the research design. Participants who previously agreed they met criteria for study through answering “yes” to both preliminary questions confirmed the 159 participants were of age 19 or older for age of consent and whether they believed they have experienced an interpersonal transgression by another individual. Upon completing preliminary questions and agreeing to informed consent, participants were asked to answer a total of 39 Likert scale questions, and four demographic items which were grouped by topic for purposes of assessing variables by the researcher pertaining to forgiveness, empathy, and coping skills. There were no leading questions in instructions for each block the survey design indicating forgiveness as a goal of the study. The total, including the 4 demographic questions, was 43 items for participants to complete. One hundred percent of the 158 participants reported on the survey that they were 19 and older. Due to the simplicity of selecting a number from Likert scale for the 39 questions, the selection of multiple choice options for demographic information, and feedback from pilot study, it was anticipated that the total time commitment necessary for completion was approximately 25 minutes. Per survey results the average time of completion was much less at an average of

nine minutes. This may have accounted for by the panels were comprised of individuals who routinely completed surveys for compensation. Participants were informed that they may elect the option to opt out of any questions or to exit the survey at any time while completing the questionnaire, because of the potential stress related to recalling a psychological trauma or betrayal while completing the survey. Within the survey's Letter of Information, details for 24/7 availability should they experience any adverse reactions related to recalling difficult or traumatic experiences. A link and phone number to the 24/7 suicide prevention hotline <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or by calling 1-800-273- 8255 was provided. The IRB Approved Letter of Information is provided in Appendix A.

### **Participant Recruitment**

Participant recruitment method was designed by the researcher and approved by Auburn University Internal Review Board (IRB) to be executed through a Qualtrics Survey Panel which is a secure online research site (Qualtrics, 2017). The approved IRB email is located in Appendix E. Appendix B includes a sample of the recruitment email that potential participants received through Qualtrics. This design was to ensure complete anonymity of participants as well as to reach a broader, more diverse, population span of participants. The target population for recruitment for this research was only limited to a request for individuals: (a) over age 19, and (b) those meeting eligibility of the preliminary question regarding having experienced a transpersonal transgression with which they feel they may have experienced difficulty. A diversity of ages (beyond 19), ethnicities, gender, and religiosity/spirituality was desired but not specifically targeted. Per Qualtrics (2017), each panel has its own method of recruitment, though all are similar. Typically, respondents via Qualtrics can choose to join a panel through a double opt-in process (Qualtrics, 2017). Upon registration, respondents provide basic data about



themselves, including demographic information, hobbies, interests, etc. (Qualtrics, 2017).

Whenever a survey is created that that individual would qualify for, based on the information they have given, they are notified via email and invited to participate in the survey for a given incentive. The email invitation is nonsuggestive and generic, with no specifics as to the topic of the survey itself. Respondents were informed that they may qualify for a survey, supplied with a link, and instructed to follow the link if they would like to potentially participate in the study for which Qualtrics agreed to provide incentive for completion of the survey by the potential participant. Respondents were also told the estimated duration of the survey. Incentives are set and determined by Qualtrics and are typically given on a point system. Those points Qualtrics explained can be pooled and later redeemed in the form of gift cards, sky miles, credit for online games, etc. (Qualtrics, 2017).

Qualtrics Online Survey is an online resource specializing as a platform for research. The researcher has control of research design and implementation. Qualtrics recruited the specified number of at least 150 participants as requested per researcher for the study. Although Qualtrics recruited participants who agree to complete research assessment for an incentive, the researcher provides no incentives directly to participants. The researcher did not have access to the identity of participants at any time. The identity of the respondents/participants remained confidential with limiting non-identifying information provided for purposes of capturing cultural diversity. Respondents were given a link through Qualtrics where they could be directed to a Letter of Information to the research study and subsequent informed consent to participation in the study. Participation in the research study is reiterated in the informed consent Letter of Information and participants are informed they may discontinue participation in the research study at any time. Appendix B shows an example of how the email notification appeared. The

incentive agreement for accepting and completing a research survey is strictly between Qualtrics and the panel respondents (Qualtrics, 2017). The anticipated cost for the researcher to utilize Qualtrics participant panel recruitment was nine dollars per participant for a research study with a duration estimate of 25 minutes which was paid by the researcher directly to Qualtrics. Qualtrics has a separate system for informing their participants of what incentives Qualtrics will pay them to participate.

Participating in the research was strictly voluntary, and the risks associated with this project were projected to be minimal. Upon IRB submission and review the IRB approved IRB Exemption status for this research design. As a part of the informed consent, once potential participants consented to participate in the online survey they were directed to the preliminary questions. These questions were designed to authenticate respondents were eligible for participation by indicating yes to both preliminary questions:

1. Are you age 19 or older?
2. Have you experienced a time when you feel you were the victim of an interpersonal transgression or betrayal in which believe caused or causes you stress in resolving?

Interpersonal transgression was defined as “a class of interpersonal stressors in which people perceive that another person has harmed them in a way that they consider both painful and morally wrong” (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006, p. 887). To minimize potential risks, participants were provided contact information for the researcher and for emergency counseling services within the informed consent portion of the survey in case questions or concerns arose before, during, or after completing the online survey (see Appendix A).

Once notified that the requested number of participants was met through Qualtrics, the researcher was able to access the data and downloaded data into a master database and analyzed in an aggregate manner using the computer software SPSS (Statistical Product for Social Sciences). The anticipation of this procedure design was to extend to and potentially capture diversity among participants such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, and spiritually/religioucity.

In order to protect the confidentiality of participants and their responses, results do not contain respondent's names and non-identifying information. Only the researcher has access to individual responses which do not contain the participants' identity. Non-identifying demographic information was collected through the researcher's Demographic Questionnaire. Any documents and materials related to research are kept in a password locked computer and paper in locked file cabinet assessable only to the researcher. Reports generated as a result of this study will be used only to collect data. Once data and study is completed the data will be erased and destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

A multiple regression and descriptive correlations were used to address the relationship between the independent variables of empathy and coping, and the dependent variable of forgiveness. Multiple regression will be used to strengthen causal inferences from observed associations between two or more variables in research (Salam, 2008). In addition, by using a multiple regression approach the anticipation was to examine data for which may predict a dependent variable based on the value of other independent variable's unique contribution to the process of forgiveness (Salam, 2008). Ultimately, a simple regression analysis was used in this research design to indicate correlation and how it allows the researcher to find the optimal combination of independent variables such as empathy and coping skills (Salam, 2008). This

approach's goal was to explore the impacting variables for understanding what relationships improve the probability of decisional forgiveness (Salam, 2008). There were a total 158 participants which were recruited through Qualtrics and the researcher did and does not have access to any identifying information of the participant for anonymity purposes.

Once the data was collected through the survey via Qualtrics, the data was then downloaded into SPSS software for analysis purposes. Descriptive correlations, regression models, ANOVA, and factorial ANOVA was used to examine the relationship between variables, decisional forgiveness and empathy and between decisional forgiveness and coping. A factorial ANOVA was used to look for differences of cultural impacts which included gender, race/ethnicity, age and spirituality/religiosity.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviews the method used in collecting data for this research study. An online survey was created and executed via the online survey method Qualtrics. A preliminary pilot study involving counseling scholar-practitioners. The online survey for this study was administered electronically to provide a simple and efficient way for participants to input responses to the 39 items used to assess decisional forgiveness, empathy, and coping skills, and an additional 4 demographic questions for a grand total of 43. This survey design was also designed to potentially access a broader diversity of the sample population. Participants were recruited via Qualtrics. Access to the survey was designed and implemented using an online service called Qualtrics (2017), and was restricted to invited participants for which are vetted through Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2017). Data collected was encrypted to ensure confidentiality of the participants and ensure the researcher's control of the data. Concluding data was

downloaded for statistical analysis. Participation was voluntary and included a Letter of Information specifying the right of the participant to exit the survey at any time.

The Qualtrics electronic survey was selected to save both time as suggested by Deutskens and colleagues (2006) and provide participant anonymity (Qualtrics, 2017). This method of recruitment was used to address the discussed limitation of the previous study from which this research was adapted (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). In the aforementioned study college aged students in a specific area was used as the sample population limiting diversity. The need to enter or re-enter data, a risk for data entry error, was reduced because data input was performed by participants as they answer the series of grouped questions (Poole, 2011). Participant's responses were downloaded from the Qualtrics website into the analysis software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), for data analysis (Qualtrics, n.d.). By administering the survey online participants were given availability to complete the survey at a time and location that was convenient to them, versus setting aside time and coming to a specific location to fill out a paper survey or participate in a face-to-face interview at a remote location (Poole, 2011). The online survey method saved time, and reserve natural resources such as trees as opposed to copying and mailing the survey instrument (Deutskens et al., 2006). This method reduced entry and re-entry error, and assisted with maintaining security of data collected. The results were analyzed to determine if the variables of empathy, coping skills, and cultural differences had any significant correlations to decisional forgiveness. Chapter 4 details the findings of the data analysis.

## CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

### Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to examine the impact of empathy, coping skills, and the potential role culture plays in a client's ability to forgive. The exploration of what may impact forgiveness may lend itself useful to increasing the contextualization understanding for counselors, and counselors-in-training and thereby lending insight for how forgiveness can best be used as an intervention in the counseling setting. An evaluation was used to compare males and females and a varying range of race/ethnicities, ages, and religious or spiritual identity backgrounds. Further evaluation was used to explore how empathy and coping may impact the process of forgiveness. The study was a modified methodology adaptation of a previous study entitled *Empathy, Selfism, and Coping as Elements of Psychology of Forgiveness: A Preliminary Study* by Varda Konstam, William Holmes, and Bethany Levine (2003). The current study proposed to expand on the existing research by exploring the relationship between one's ability to cope and the capacity of empathy as essentials or even prerequisites to the decision to forgive. The goal to exploring the differences among people and how this may impact the psychology of forgiveness is that it will aide in conceptualizing the many intricate facets of forgiveness. In doing so thus research sought to serve as a platform for furthering the conversation on a culturally competent model of forgiveness which addresses the multimedia's to an individual's self-development (how empathy and coping skills have evolved or became

disrupted) and the potential environmental impacts of culture. This will possibly advance not only understanding but cultural competency education provided by counselor educators teaching theoretical interventions to counseling students. Incorporating a contextual framework in which to order to be able to utilize forgiveness as a beneficial intervention as well as address possible impediments in the process.

Current literature related to forgiveness in the counseling field discusses a continued ambiguity of what forgiveness is and how best to use it in the counseling setting as suggested by scholars (Baskins & Enright, 2004; Davis & Hook, 2015; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). A conceptual model for treatment planning, utilizing forgiveness as an intervention, which can then be replicated in treatment are few and are still lacking the foundational contextualization and thereby understanding of what forgiveness looks like, and what is beneficial for increasing the likelihood of the decision to occur (Baskins & Enright, 2004; Bedell, 2002; Denton, 1998). The previously described purpose of this study and the briefly defined statement of the problem helped to give this research study the essential basis used to form the research questions.

1. Does race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality, coping, and empathy impact the decision to forgive?
  - 1.1 Do/does cultural differences (race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality impact decisional forgiveness?
  - 1.2 Do/does coping skills impact decisional forgiveness?
  - 1.3 Do/does empathy impact decisional forgiveness?

A descriptive quantitative research design was appropriate for this study because the descriptive approach could potentially educate by providing a more composite picture of what's being examined (Cherry, 2000). In this descriptive quantitative research study, the researcher

was interested in examining the frequency and association between variables, and determining any statistically significant differences. Therefore, descriptive statistics, multiple regression tests, and factorial ANOVA tests were used to analyze the data.

### **Description of the Participants**

There were 158 completed questionnaires submitted in this study, consisting of 51 males (32.28%), 98 females (62.03%), 4 (2.53%) individuals who “preferred not to say”, and 5 (3.16%) who identified as “other” who completed the survey. The design method via Qualtrics was to collect data of a minimum of 150 participants and notify researcher when 150 participants had completed the survey. Therefore, the response rate was 100 percent since all 150 surveys were completed and submitted. Qualtrics did collect data for an additional eight participants in the event some completed surveys were deemed unusable by the researcher. There were 2 incomplete surveys in which Qualtrics notated as defaulted participants that did not complete survey. Those participants’ responses were not included as defined in the survey data results. Participants were given the option to not continue should they chose for whatever reasons. The participant who wished to discontinue participation were instructed within the Letter of Information to exit the survey and data would not be recorded or included in the total number of participants. In two participant surveys, the participants omitted one survey item and submitted data to be recorded and hence utilized in data analysis. In this situation, for purposes of valuing the otherwise collected data, a neutral response was selected for these isolated omitted answers in the two incidents in order to maintain integrity and upholding accuracy of overall data snapshot.

Because the survey was anonymous, there was no way to contact or send messages to the participants who submitted incomplete questionnaires. Otherwise incomplete survey data was



not assessable nor included in the overall 158 participant's data results. It occurred to the researcher that if an individual encountered a system error or was unable to complete the survey, that they would restart the survey and recomplete it. Per Qualtrics and survey instructions participants had to complete the survey in its entirety and select submit in order for data to be collected as opposed to a forced exit which then did not submit and capture data for those participants.

The 158 participants included in this study consisted of a variety of age ranges. The age range group with the most participation was in the age group of 31–40 (27.8%), for a total of 44 participants. The next age group was 19–24 (19.6 %), totaling 31 participants. This group was closely followed by age group 41–50 (19%), with 30 participants. The age group 25–30 (13.9%), was comprised of 22 participants. The age group 51–60 (1.4%) included 18 participants. The smallest age group captured in survey results were 61 plus age group (7.6%). However, this group was closely related to the other age groups with 12 participants. One participant did not disclose age which was given as an option for demographic collection. Over half of the participants surveyed identified as female (62.03%) and a third identified as male (32.28%). The previously listed findings regarding age and gender are shown in Table 3 for age and gender is shown in Table 4.

Table 3

*Age Demographics*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	19–24	31	19.6	19.7	19.7
	25–30	22	13.9	14.0	14.0
	31–40	44	27.8	28.0	28.0
	41–50	30	19.0	19.1	19.1
	51–60	18	11.4	11.5	11.5
	61 +	12	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Total	157	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		158	100.0		

Table 4

*Gender Demographics*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	51	32.3	32.3	32.3
	Female	98	62.0	62.0	94.3
	Prefer Not to Say	4	2.5	2.5	96.8
	Other	5	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	158	100.0	100.0	

Among the 158 participants, 112 participants (70.9%) identified as Caucasian/White. The next largest group represented as African American/Black with 24 participants (15.2%). Individuals who identified their race or ethnicity as Latino or Hispanic totaled 10 participants (6.3 %). American Indian/or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Other were options as well with one individuals representing each but all combined represented less than 3 % of the 158 participants. Six participants identified as Other, one participant Preferred not to Say, and one participant opted to leave the item blank which was a given demographic information option. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level. A limitation of the previous study was the lack of diversity (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Table 5 shows the breakdown of the demographics for race/ethnicities.

Table 5

*Race/Ethnicity Demographics*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	White	112	70.9	71.3	71.3
	Black or African American	24	15.2	15.3	86.6
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	.6	.6	87.3
	Asian	2	1.3	1.3	88.5
	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	.6	.6	89.2
	Hispanic/Latino	10	6.3	6.4	95.5
	Prefer Not to Say	1	.6	.6	96.2
	Other	6	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	157	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		158	100.0		

Additional demographic and cultural impacting data was collected to capture spiritual/religious preferences with which the participants identified. Over half of the 158 participants (62.7%) reported identifying as Christians for a total of 99 participants. The next largest group reported having no spiritual or religious preference – 41 (25.9%). Jewish and Muslim, faith or value was represented as less than 2% of participants. However, 11 participants (7.0%) indicated Other and 4 participants (2.5%) referred not to say. For this data snapshot all

158 elected to answer this survey question. Table 6 breaks down the religiosity and spirituality data and Table 7 provides a snap shot of all demographic data.

Table 6

*Religiosity/Spirituality/ Demographics*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No Religious or Spiritual Preference	41	25.9	25.9	25.9
	Christianity	99	62.7	62.7	88.6
	Jewish	2	1.3	1.3	89.9
	Muslim	1	.6	.6	90.5
	Prefer Not to Say	4	2.5	2.5	93.0
	Other	11	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	158	100.0	100.0	

Table 7

*Overview of Participant Demographics and Cultural Differences*

		Religiosity				
		Gender	Race Ethnicity	Spirituality	Age	Age Groups
N	Valid	158	157	158	157	157
	Missing	0	1	0	1	1
Median		2.00	1.00	2.00	37.00	3.0000
Mode		2	1	2	19	3.00
Std. Deviation		.650	1.839	1.279	13.685	1.50626
Variance		.423	3.382	1.635	187.278	2.269
Range		3	7	5	56	5.00
Minimum		1	1	1	19	1.00
Maximum		4	8	6	75	6.00

Of the responding 158 participants, the mode was Caucasian females who were a medium age of 37 and identified as Christian faith based or oriented. See the previous Table 2 for additional conceptualization of how the research was analyzed.

**Data Analysis of Research Questions**

Regression analysis of the data was used to predict a dependent variable based on value of other independent variables unique contribution to the decision to forgive as impacted by empathy and coping skills (Salam, 2008). Ultimately, multiple regression analysis was used in this research design to indicate correlation and how it allows the researcher to find the optimal combination of independent variables such as empathy and coping skills (Salam, 2008). This approach sought to explain the impacting variables for understanding what factors provide an

optimal method to increase the likelihood of the dependent variable which is decisional forgiveness (Salam, 2008).

### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 asked, “Does race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality, coping, and empathy impact the decision to forgive?” Examining the data globally including how empathy impacts decisional forgiveness, how coping skills impacts decisional forgiveness and how cultural differences impacts decisional forgiveness gave the researcher the data to support the relationship of the variables. By observing the relationship of these variables collectively, the data indicated specific potential factors impacting decisional forgiveness. Results are broken down and discussed specifically and statistically significant in the research questions sub question data results. However, a collective data snapshot supports that cultural differences do impact decisional forgiveness, more specifically race and ethnicity. Unfortunately, the data did not statistically support that individuals with a greater level of coping skills increased the likelihood for decisional forgiveness but did support that there was a positive relationship between empathy and decisional forgiveness.

Table 8 provides instruments used in the design as well as possible ranges for reference. For example, a higher score on DFS indicates less likely to achieve decisional forgiveness; the greater the score on SDPT the increased likelihood for empathy; and higher score on Brief Cope indicates greater ability for healthier coping skills. Tables 9 and 10 provide a descriptive analysis and average scores for all 158 participants on the three instruments intended to capture frequency and associations between the variables. For additional reference of variables and conceptualization of how the analysis was conducted refer to Table 2 aforementioned.





Table 8

*Instruments and Ranges*

Instrument	Decreased capacity	Increased Capacity
DFS DF	56	8
SDPTS Empathy	13	91
Brief COPE Coping	18	126

Table 9

*Descriptive Data for DFS, SDPTS, and the Brief COPE*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score	29.8544	7.54758	158
Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale Score	35.5570	11.20708	158
Brief COPE Scale Score	41.9430	10.00668	158

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics for Correlations between Coping, Empathy, and Decisional Forgiveness*

	Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score	Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale Score	Brief COPE Scale Score
Pearson Correlation Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score	1.000	.248	-.154
Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale Score	.248	1.000	-.408
Brief COPE Scale Score	-.154	-.408	1.000

**Research Sub-Question 1.1**

Research sub-question 1.1 asked, “Do/does cultural differences (race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality impact decisional forgiveness?” The Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) asserts a lower the score is indicative of fewer harmful intentions and prosocial intentions and thereby an increased potential for decisional forgiveness (Worthington Jr., et al., 2012). A factorial ANOVA analysis was used to compare means across the four dependent cultural variables (race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality); and any significance to the independent variable of decisional forgiveness.

The factorial ANOVA was useful to test the dependent variables for any variance between the variables (Conduct and Interpret a factorial ANOVA, n.d.). The factorial ANOVA indicated there was no differences of significance across three (age, gender, religiosity/

spirituality) of the four cultural factors as they related to decisional forgiveness. Race/Ethnicity did emerge in the data as having statistical significant difference. A Bonferroni Post Hoc was used to conduct a separate comparison between factor levels. Specifically, a Bonferroni Post Hoc was used because it is sensitive enough to observe for any significant differences without being so overly sensitive that it detects subtle differences. The data from Post Hoc supported there was a significant relationship between race/ethnicity and decisional forgiveness. As Table 11 shows, all factors appear to be normally distributed with exception of race/ethnicity.

Table 11

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects*

[Dependent Variable: Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score]

Cultural Variables	df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	72	.954	.580	.453
Intercept	1	342.593	.000	.805
Race/Ethnicity	6	2.488	.029	.152
Age	5	1.715	.140	.094
Gender	3	2.152	.100	.072
Spirituality/Relig	5	.363	.873	.021
Race/eth * Age	9	.536	.844	.055
Race/eth * Gender	2	1.049	.355	.025
Race/eth * Sprit/Relig	2	.815	.446	.019
Age * Gender	6	.462	.834	.032
Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Age* * Spirit/Relig	9	.372	.945	.039
Gender * Spirit/Relig	4	.559	.693	.026
Race/eth * Age *	2	.138	.871	.003
Gender				
Race/Eth * Age *	2	.326	.723	.008
Spirit/Relig				

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Race/Eth * Gender *	0	–	–	.000
Spirit/Relig				
Age* Gender *	6	.370	.896	.026
Spirit/Relig				
Race/Eth * Age *	0	–	–	.000
Gender* Spirit/Relig				
R Squared = .453				
(Adjusted R Squared =				
-.022)				

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The data indicated a significant difference between decisional forgiveness and race/ethnicity. A Post Hoc test was performed in SPSS to further examine significances between the specified Races/Ethnicities and their relationship to decisional forgiveness. The Post Hoc supported the statistical significant relationship between decisional forgiveness and race/ethnicity ( $p < .05$  at .029).

Resulting data analysis provided the mean score for White (31.024) and Black (25.604) ethnicity presented with much higher scores on the Decisional Forgiveness Scale than other race/ethnicity. The race/ethnicity with the lowest DF score, was American Indian/Native Alaskans. However, the sample size for American Indian/Native Alaskans was less than 6% and therefore makes it difficult for generalizability. The research sample was largely comprised participants who identified as White (70%) and Black (15.2%) of the 156 sample population. The other race/ethnicity for those participants who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and those who Preferred Not Say

combined represented less than 10% of the sample. The effect size between groups was not significant. Having a larger sample size for future research may benefit in terms of effect size between race/ethnicities.

Further data analysis using a Pairwise Comparison showed the differential differences between each race/ethnicity. The emerging cultural data suggested participants who identified as Whites, whose scores on DFS were higher (31%), were also less likely to make the decision to forgive compared to other race/ethnicity indicated in the mean average of scores between groups.

### **Research Sub-Question 1.2**

Research sub-question 1.2 was, “Do/does coping skills impact decisional forgiveness?” The instruments used to examine coping was The Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) and the relationship to decisional forgiveness was examined by the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007). The mean score on the BriefCOPE was 41.9430. Higher scores suggest a greater ability to cope. The 158 participants scored a mean average on DFS was 29.8544 where the higher the score the less likely for decisional forgiveness. The p value was .053 indicating no significant relationship between coping and decisional forgiveness for coping and decisional forgiveness. Regression analysis was used to test if coping skills predicted participant’s likelihood for decisional forgiveness. The result of the regression did not indicate that coping skills explained increased likelihood for decisional forgiveness ( $F(3, 793) p < .05$  at .053. See Table 12 for means scores on each instrument. See Table 13 for statistical descriptive.

Table 12

*Regression between Decisional Forgiveness and Coping*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score	29.8544	7.54758	158
Brief COPE Scale Score	41.9430	10.00668	158

Table 13

*Descriptive Statistics between Decisional Forgiveness and Coping***ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

		Sum of				
Model		Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	212.279	1	212.279	3.793	.053 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	8731.373	156	55.970		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8943.652</b>	<b>157</b>			

a. Dependent Variable: Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score

b. Predictors: (Constant) Brief COPE Scale Score

**Research Sub-Question 1.3**

Research sub-question 1.3 asked, “Do/does empathy impact decisional forgiveness?” To examine the relationship between empathy and decisional forgiveness the researcher used the Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPTS) (Long, 1990) and the DFS instruments. The higher the score indicated a greater ability to be empathetic to others while a lower score suggests otherwise. The mean score on the SDPT for the 158 participants were 35.5570. Using

Pearson Correlation and regression model the data supports there is a significant difference and supports that empathy does impact decisional forgiveness. The data indicated that when a participant's score of one assessment (SDPTS) went up meaning the participant had a greater propensity for empathy, the data also indicated that the participants score for the DFS went lower indicating a higher probability for decisional forgiveness (R squared = .061,  $p < .05$  at .002). The reverse is true as well indicating that empathy does predict likelihood of decisional forgiveness ( $p < .05$  at .002). Table 14, 15, and 16 show the descriptive statistic when observing for significant difference between DFS and the SDPTS. Table 16) reports the data on regression model which indicated that there is a strong relationship between empathy and decisional and forgiveness at  $P < .05$  at .002 and  $R = .248$ .  $F(1,156) = 10.19$ ,  $p = .002$ .

Table 14

*Descriptive Statistics of Mean Score of the DFS and the SDPTS*

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score	29.8544	7.54758	158
Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale Score	35.5570	11.20708	158

Table 15

*Regression Model*

**Model Summary**

					Change Statistics				
R		Adjusted R	Std. Error of the	R Square	F	Sig. F			
Model	R	Square	Square	Estimate	Change	Change	df1	df2	Change



1	.248 <sup>a</sup>	.061	.055	7.33587	.061	10.193	1	156	.002
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a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale Score

Table 16

*ANOVA indicating no difference in regression.*

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	548.521	1	548.521	10.193	.002 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	8395.131	156	53.815		
	Total	8943.652	157			

a. Dependent Variable: Decisional Forgiveness Scale Score

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale Score

**Summary**

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to examine the impact of empathy, coping skills, and the role culture may play in an individual’s ability to forgive. The research data did extend on the possible impacts of empathy, coping, and cultural differences on the process of forgiveness. The relationships were observed and hence discussed using descriptive analysis including regression and factorial ANOVA.

Of the 158 participants who responded to the anonymous Qualtrics online survey, the mode of respondents identified as White, females, of a medium age of 37, and identified as Christian faith based or oriented. The highest percentage of race/ethnicity was White which represented over half the number of the other race//ethnicity groups combined. Almost two-thirds of the participants identified as female. The largest age group was 31-40 with the smallest age group represented was the 61 and plus. Over half of the participants identified as

Christian for religiosity/spirituality. The other religiosity/spirituality groups were varied but when combined was less than 40 %.

When analyzed, only one (race/ethnicity) of the cultural differences observed indicated significant difference. As for the other three cultural differences (gender, age, and religiosity/spirituality), the cultural related data collected through demographics did not show a significant difference in relationship. The research data did however indicate that cultural differences ((race/ethnicity) does impact decisional forgiveness.

The research data did not indicate a significant difference between coping and decisional forgiveness. Unfortunately, the data did not support previous findings that have indicated a positive relationship between coping and the process of forgiveness (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). The limitations of the research may explain for the non-significance data. However, there was a significant difference observed between empathy and decisional forgiveness. Indicating that empathy has a positive impacting relationship on decisional forgiveness.

Overall the research data indicated that empathy and race/ethnicity did have a statistically measured impact on the process of forgiveness. When analyzed, the data indicated that there was a significant difference in race/ethnicity but not in the other three other cultural differences examined (age, gender, and religiosity/spirituality). The data indicated that participants who identified as White were less likely to make the decision to forgive followed by the next largest represented race/ethnicity (Blacks). While there was a significant difference, sample representation of participants who identified as a race/ethnicity other than White or Black was limited. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the research findings.



## CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

### Overview

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to examine the impact of empathy, coping skills, and the role culture plays in the process of an individual's ability to forgive. The goal of the researcher's exploration of what may impact forgiveness and aims to be useful in helping counselors and counselors-in-training have a better understanding of how forgiveness can be used as an effective intervention in counseling. Ultimately the data gleaned from this study will aid in the continued conversation surrounding the need for a culturally competent forgiveness model. This research sought to extend the current literature that perhaps is fragmented in terms of contextualizing the forgiveness process. The researcher sought to call attention to current literature gaps and continue to reduce ambiguity of what forgiveness is in efforts to provide a foundational conception of what may be necessary in order for the process of forgiveness to occur.

An evaluation was used to compare males and females and a varying range of ethnicities, ages, and religious or spiritual backgrounds. The study was a modified methodology adaptation of a previous study entitled *Empathy, Selfism, and Coping as Elements of Psychology of Forgiveness: A Preliminary Study* by Varda Konstam, William Holmes, and Bethany Levine (2003). The previous study suggested extending the population sample and one of the limitations noted was a lack of diversity. This study did extend the homogeneity of the sample population however, diversity among subgroups remained non-representative in some cases.

Current literature related to forgiveness in the counseling field focuses on existing ambiguity of what forgiveness is and how best to use it in the counseling setting as suggested by scholars (Baskins & Enright, 2004; Davis & Hook, 2015; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). A conceptual model for treatment planning, utilizing forgiveness as an intervention, which can then be replicated in treatment are few and are still lacking the foundational understanding of what forgiveness looks like; as well as what is beneficial for increasing the likelihood of the forgiveness decision to occur (Baskins & Enright, 2004; Bedell, 2002; Denton, 1998). The current study proposed to extend existing research by exploring the relationship between one's ability to cope and the capacity of empathy as variables, which could be supported in a co-occurring manner to increase the likelihood for a client to make the decision to forgive. Long before the treatment plan and sessions, understanding the strengths that the client currently possess is vital. This research study sought to illuminate what variables are significant to decisional forgiveness. In addition, in efforts to extend and elaborate on current research of forgiveness the researcher provided a contextual discussion for the complexities involved in the process of forgiveness. This may benefit counselors, and counselors-in-training for better understanding not only the process of forgiveness but also what may be necessary for decisional forgiveness to be a viable option in the counseling session. There is value, counseling professionals can draw from this study, the focus was on expanding the existing data on the impact of coping and empathy, while examining how the cultural makeup may also impact the process of forgiveness (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Exploring the differences among people and how this may impact the psychology of forgiveness will also aide in conceptualizing the many intricate facets of forgiveness including the decision to forgive.

The previously described purpose of this study and the briefly defined statement of the

problem helped to give this research study the essential basis used to form the research questions.

1. Does race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality, coping, and empathy impact the decision to forgive?
  - 1.1 Do/does cultural differences (race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality impact decisional forgiveness?
  - 1.2 Do/does coping skills impact decisional forgiveness?
  - 1.3 Do/does empathy impact decisional forgiveness?

A descriptive quantitative research design was appropriate for this study because the descriptive approach could potentially produce a clearer picture of a group as a whole or elucidate a composite picture (Cherry, 2000). In this descriptive quantitative research study, the researcher was interested in examining the frequency and association between variables, and determining any statistically significant differences. Therefore, descriptive statistics including regression, and factorial ANOVA tests were used to analyze the data.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The discussion of this quantitative descriptive study has been streamlined into subsections related to the respective research questions. The main research question inquires the global question of the collective associations between several variables to include cultural, coping skills, and empathy and decisional forgiveness. The sub-questions were further streamlined to the individual variables and explored the relationship between each independent variable and decisional forgiveness. In addition, the researcher observed limitations, implications for counseling practice and counselor education, as well as recommendations for future research were considered.

### **Research Question 1**

Research question 1 was, “Does race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality, coping, and empathy impact the decision to forgive?” The goal of this research question was to examine if empathy and coping skills were essential for decisional forgiveness as well as looking at how culture differences may affect decisional forgiveness. Based on the findings from this research, there was no statistically significant difference in how an individual copes and the decision to forgive. However, there was a strong significant difference in an individual’s level of empathy relative to decisional forgiveness. Research supported that the higher level of empathy for others was positively related to an increased probability for decisional forgiveness. Specific cultural differences were observed (age, gender, race/ethnicity, religiosity/spirituality). Of these race/ethnicity did emerge as having a significant relationship to decisional forgiveness. The other cultural factors of age, gender, and religiosity/spirituality did not indicate a statistical difference of impact through the factorial ANOVA. However, the predominant, at almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the 158 participants were age 31–40 (27.8%), for a total of 44 participants. Also, of the 158 participants almost 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s were female (98). The cultural differences data collected to capture religiosity/spirituality was also limited. Of the 158 participants, 112 participants (70.9%) identified as Caucasian. A broader diversity among the participants may have yielded different outcomes as certain sample populations were under-represented. However, the findings discovered have shed some additional light as to the impact empathy makes on the process of forgiveness as well as indicates that cultural factors do impact, even if only in these data findings of race/ethnicity, specifically. One of the main focus goals for conducting this study was to add to the literature on forgiveness and the importance to know more for counselors and counselor’s- in-training. As discussed

earlier, this main goal was discussed globally for collective variables impacting decisional forgiveness and then layered down to focus on each aspect of the main research question.

### **Research Sub-Question 1.1**

Research sub-question 1.1 was, “Do/does cultural differences (race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality impact decisional forgiveness?” The goal of research sub-question two was to examine which cultural differences collected in the demographic information of the 158 participants may impact decisional forgiveness. As discussed previously in the more global question of impacts on decisional forgiveness, race/ethnicity was the only one of the four examined cultural differences which was statistically significant. A factorial ANOVA analysis was used to observe for any differences across the four dependent cultural variables (race/ethnicity, chronological age, gender, religiosity/spirituality), and decisional forgiveness. Race/ethnicity did emerge in the data as having statistical significant difference. Therefore, a Post Hoc test was performed in SPSS to further examine any difference. Resulting data analysis provided the mean score for White (31.024) ethnicity and Black (25.604) ethnicity presented with much higher scores on the Decisional Forgiveness Scale than any other race/ethnicity groups. The race/ethnicity group with the lowest decisional forgiveness score was American Indian/Native Alaskan. The researcher considered the importance to note that outside of the White (31.024) and Black (25.604) race/ethnicity, other groups were less represented. There was only one participant who identified as American Indian/Native Alaskan and one who identified as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. However, the data collected indicated cultural differences should be explored in future research to examine how the cultural differences in ethnicity/race play a role in decisional forgiveness. By collecting a broader demographic of participants,



cultural differences which did not achieve statistical difference for this study, may prove beneficial to be explored further.

### **Research Sub-Question 1.2**

Research sub-question 1.2 asked, “Do/does coping skills impact decisional forgiveness?” The goal of examining this research question was designed to look for a relationship of interpersonal strengths of an individual and determine if those observed strengths could predict a relationship of having a higher ability to cope and decisional forgiveness. For this examination the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) and the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) were used. Through descriptive statistics, regression models and ANOVA data analysis there was not a statistical significance found. Impacting factors on this result may lie within the cultural differences. A more diverse demographic may produce additional findings. In addition, the researcher has considered that a change in the methodology design for future research may aid for observing various relationships. For example, examining the data collected within the specific subscales of the DFS and Brief Cope instruments may lend itself useful for understanding what coping skills may be more beneficial for decisional forgiveness. Since the Decisional Forgiveness Scale instruments is comprised of two subscales (Inhibition of Harmful Intentions and Prosocial Intentions) and the Brief Cope version used for the current research was comprised of 9, examination of the relationship between various coping skills and the intentions focused on in the DFS may lend insight to more sensitive or specific data. In previous research findings (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003), coping did have a positive correlation with the process of forgiveness.

### **Research Sub-Question 1.3**

Research sub-question 1.3 asked, “Do/does empathy impact decisional forgiveness?” Similarly, to the previous research question, the goal was to examine the relationship between an individual’s ability or level of empathy and impact decisional forgiveness. Just as in when examining coping, the researcher was observing for interpersonal strengths that may positively correlate with decisional forgiveness.

For this observation the Self-Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPTS (Long, 1990) and the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007) were used. Through descriptive statistics, regression models and ANOVA data analysis there was a strong positive correlation found ( $p < .05$  at .024). This suggests that the greater the capacity or ability for an individual to empathize with another may also be directly correlated with the individual’s increased likelihood for decisional forgiveness.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Counselors, Counselors-in-Training**

The data collected through the demographic questions did capture a range of individual cultural differences. However, of the 158 participants the majority fell into one particular group of each variable observed. While the other groups were represented, the numbers were scattered and underrepresented. The participants were largely comprised of Caucasian females (62%), with an average age of 37, and identified as Christian faith based. There was no significant difference captured between decisional forgiveness and the cultural impacts of age, gender, and religiosity/spirituality. However, the data did support a positive relationship between decisional forgiveness and race/ethnicity and between decisional forgiveness and empathy. The data in this present study did not support a relationship between decisional forgiveness and coping but it did lend useful to question whether cultural diversity was a factor. While cultural differences in age,

gender, religiosity/spirituality, and coping did not statically support an impact on decisional forgiveness, this finding was not evident in existing and previous research. This suggests a perhaps a larger more diverse sample may have different results. Because decisional forgiveness is a subjective variable, it may also be useful in future research to conduct a qualitative or mixed method measure as well.

Previous and existing research findings have indicated that age was positively related to forgiveness, a finding which was consistent with research reported in previous studies (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Previous research has indicated that individuals in latter life stages are more likely to forgive (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). In the present research study there was a less than 10 percent representation of the age group 61 and older (7.6%).

Another cultural difference this study sought to capture was through examining a diverse population of religiosity/spirituality. Religious and spiritual involvement has also been hypothesized to influence forgiveness (Bedell, 2002; Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, Gartner, & Worthington Jr, 2012; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2005). The present research did capture a significant differences in religiosity/spirituality but the predominant average by far was representative of a Christian orientation of faith (62.7%) with the next largest percentage of participants (25.9%) indicating they have no preferred religiosity/spirituality. The remaining religiosity/spirituality groups were vastly underrepresented.

In the present study statistical support was not found between coping and the process of forgiveness. While in previous and existing studies coping has been positively linked to the process of forgiveness (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Lazarus, 1993), it did not meet statistical difference in this study. The original study for which the present study was based, found a positive correlation between coping and decisional forgiveness even though their sample

size was much smaller and much less diverse (92 students in a large northeastern urban public university) (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). The researcher considered because the sample lacked diversity in the original study that the data could be representative of that specific sample. This suggests additional research with a diverse sample population would lend itself useful to strengthen Konstam, Holmes, and Levine's argument for the relationship between coping and forgiveness.

Gender has been a factor in other research findings in which gender impacted the process of forgiveness (Charzyn'ska, 2015). By way of the factorial ANOVA, that was conducted to see if there were any significant differences among the four cultural factors (age, gender, race/ethnicity, religiosity/spirituality), gender did not emerge as a significant factor.. This is in consideration that over half (62% 98 of the 158) of participants indentified as female while male and other gender indentification groups were underreprented. Other cultural or interpersonal strenghts may additionaly be factors and may provide benefiet to observe whether different populations of gender may have a statical relationship. .This current research did support previous findings that empathy has a postive relationship with the process of forgiveness Empathy (Gerdes, 2011; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003).

The cultural difference, which did emerge was race/ethnicity which was found to have statistical significance. Race/Ethnicity demonstrated a positive relationship to the process of forgiveness (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). In the current research study participants identifying as White had a significant difference in mean scores on decsional forgivness. Participants who indentified as White had a mean score that indicated the likelihod for decsioanal forgiveness was low. Americna Indian, according to this research, had the highest probablity of decisional forgiveness. However, there was a small sampling in each group outside of the White and Black

racial ethnicity group. Black (ethnic group) had the next lowest level of probability for decisional forgiveness. Mean scores for White were 31.024 and Black 25.604. The participant which indicated an American Indian/Native Alaskan ethnic group membership was had the lowest score indicating a higher probability for forgiveness however, the category was under-representative to generalize to this particular race/ethnicity.

When it comes to empathy there was a positive relationship supported as has also been found in the original study for which this research was based on (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003) and in other research (Gerdes, 2011). Empathy emerges as a strength-based interpersonal skill. Further research has the potential to identify how this can be used in the counseling setting, and to help educate how forgiveness can be beneficial in practice for counselors and counselors-in-training.

Implications of the study include benefits to counselors and counselors-in-training as well as counselor educators. With the current state of affairs, and the reported number of traumatic experiences rising, there is a growing need to expound upon helping the client heal. Forgiveness has been found in current literature as a potential beneficial outcome. The researcher has observed from existing literature that there is still a great deal of ambiguity of what forgiveness is, how it is best used as a counseling intervention, and what the desired outcome of treatment may look like. This research contextual discussion for the complexities involved in forgiveness may lend useful to further examination of the complexities. This research elaborated and provided contextualization for self-identity development, what may impede or enhance throughout the many facets and stages of lifespan development. For example, the present study specifically looks at decisional forgiveness. The decision to forgive is a part of the pre-contemplation stage of change (DiClemente, 2012). Identifying and accessing where a client may be in readiness for

change may lend itself useful to counselors and counselors-in-training using forgiveness as an intervention tool. Therefore, this research provides a unique view of the process of forgiveness. It examined factors that may impact the vital part of the forgiveness process; the decision to forgive. Whether or not the individual is ready to forgive, is willing to forgive, and what may be some challenges are all assessments that counselor and, counselors-in-training may conceptualize. While the results did not support existing data for cultural differences and coping, this data does provide a platform for a greater understanding of what forgiveness is and individual differences which may impact the process. The research also extended on current literature by addressing gaps and sought to reduce continued ambiguity on the process of forgiveness. The researcher provided a contextual discussion for the complexities involved in the process of forgiveness. This may benefit counselors, and counselors- in- training for better understanding not only the process of forgiveness but also what may be necessary for decisional forgiveness to be a viable option in the counseling session. Furthermore, this research may lend itself useful for providing a platform for a culturally competent model of forgiveness as an intervention. A cultural competent model of forgiveness may provide a blueprint for counselor educators to provide a sound delivery of not only what forgiveness is but how best to use as an intervention in the counseling setting by counselors and counselors-in-training. This will improve how counseling professionals utilize forgiveness as a counseling intervention.

Future steps for study include replicating the design and conducting additional research studies with a larger and more diverse sample population. Implications of doing so would be continued research on the process of forgiveness and how it can be more effectively used as a counseling tool.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The survey goal was reached in 3 days through procuring and utilizing Qualtrics services and use of Qualtrics anonymous panels. These panels enroll and agree through Qualtrics to complete surveys for which they qualify. They are compensated directly through Qualtrics for the surveys they complete. Longer surveys, like the one employed in this study, (estimated at approximately 25 minutes to complete), are compensated at a higher value. The researcher is not involved and unknowing of amount any Qualtrics panel participant received for participation in this study. The compensation, according to Qualtrics are typically gift cards, travel points, and not cash. The researcher considered that lengthier surveys may be more attractive to respondents but that there is no method by the researcher to validate authentic responses. Participation is based on a honor system and voluntary though Qualtrics uses this system to vet their panel of participants.

The second chief limitation, was although the Qualtrics survey method provided access to a much more diverse population sample, diversity among participants was still limited. The majority of the respondents were middle aged, White females who identified with a Christian faith orientation. A larger sample or more targeted sample population may yield different data results.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, for the population sampled, there is a positive relationship between empathy and decisional forgiveness. Data from this study also indicated that cultural impacts such as race/ethnicity does positively correlate with decisional forgiveness. Further research is needed to explore how empathy may impact decisional forgiveness. This research supports that there are impacts on decisional forgiveness. Therefore, exploration of additional, strength-based interpersonal skills could also be examined as a path to

understanding forgiveness as a therapeutic tool and increase the practice knowledge for counselors and counselors-in-training. Future research is needed to re-examine cultural differences which may indeed impact decisional forgiveness and a replication of the present study is needed with a larger and more diverse population sample.

Future research could prove beneficial by targeting specific participant populations who have identified with similar traumatic events. For example, traumatic experiences such as sexual assault, infidelity, targeted racism, tragic losses and others. Further research with groups who have obtained some form of counseling for healing purposes, and what approach they believed most beneficial for an increased likelihood for decisional forgiveness. Further research would provide a clearer understanding of what additional strength based variables may impact decisional forgiveness.

Further research is needed to support this current research finding or how change in the design could capture various cultural and interpersonal strengths that could impact decisional forgiveness. Suggested research may include a difference in design to use a qualitative or mixed measures approach. Since forgiveness is a subjective concept more data may be encapsulated. In doing so this would likely extend the contextualization of forgiveness and further benefit the counselors' and counselors-in-training's use of forgiveness in the counseling setting where forgiveness may be fostered as a viable option.

Finally, this research could also provide a platform for other counselors and counselors-in-training for understanding decisional forgiveness and to cultivate interest in the utilization of forgiveness as an intervention. In addition, it may also serve as a basis of exploration to further elucidate how and what increases the likelihood for decisional forgiveness. Future research on decisional forgiveness would provide opportunities for counselors and counselors-in-training to



collaborate and stimulate professional advocacy focused on healing. In so doing, we gradually move away from the shame and blame that keeps so many individuals who seek counseling, from being stuck and unable to move forward (Brown, 2012).

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Information



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF  
SPECIAL EDUCATION, REHABILITATION, AND COUNSELING

### **Information Letter**

For participation in Research Study entitled

### **The Impact of Empathy, Coping, and Cultural Differences on the Process of Forgiveness**

You are invited to participate in a research study for participants who meet the following criteria: individuals who are the 19 years and older, and indicate that they have experienced a time when they have felt they were the victim of an interpersonal transgression or betrayal and has created stress in resolving. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of empathy, coping skills, and the role culture plays in an individual's ability to forgive. And more specifically; a) to examine any differences between those who have a higher level of empathy or lower level in the decision to forgive, b) to observe differences in coping levels on the decision to forgive and c) notate possible cultural differences such as race, sex, age, and religiosity/spirituality which may impact the decision to forgive. This inquiry is worthy of examination due to the growing number of individuals affected by trauma, related to interpersonal grievances which include divorce, assault, infidelity, and theft among others (Marriage and Divorce, 2016; RAINN, 2016), and the need for counseling interventions to assist those injured parties with rehabilitation (McCann, 1990).

This study is being conducted for dissertation purposes by Tonia M. Goodrich, LPC -MHSP; who is a doctoral student at Auburn University, under the dissertation committee led by my advisor Chippewa Thomas, Ph.D. in the Auburn University Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling (SERC).

You have been selected as a possible participant because you have indicated you meet the previously described criteria for participation in this study. Your total time commitment will approximately be 25 minutes to complete this survey. You have the right to select one answer for each survey question or to decline by skipping any question you do not wish to answer. However, the more information you choose to provide assists our research efforts in understanding your self-reported perceptions related to empathy, coping, and the decision to forgive. Each brief survey will have the specific instructions provided. Once you have completed the last question, please click the submit button to complete and submit your survey responses. The information received will be gathered via the internet to Qualtrics Survey System, which has a secure password and firewall protected server. All information is kept anonymous and does not have any identifying information about you that can link you or your responses directly to this survey.

The risks associated with participating in this study may include: the possibility of recanting past traumatic experiences, which may have occurred. To minimize the risks of any damaging, discomfoting memories, or recall effect a participant may experience with this research study, we request that you access our resource page via link, <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or call 1-800-273- 8255. Here you will find resources which van be utilized 24/7 to contact local mental health professionals, nationwide, or contact numbers to various crisis hotlines. You are responsible for any costs associated with services provided by any medical or mental health professionals.

There is no cost to you to participate in this research study and any compensation will be provided for participating in this research study to you directly based on your agreement with Qualtrics. However, if you participate in this study, you can expect to have your perspectives represented by this research study regarding the impacts on the decision to forgive. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

If you change your mind about participating while completing the online study, you can at any time withdraw by exiting the survey and refraining from submitting your survey. Your participation is completely voluntary and all information is anonymous as does not capture any self-identifying information. Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill educational requirements, publications in a professional journal, and/or presentations at professional meeting, etc.

If you may have any questions about this study, please contact Tonia Goodrich at [tmg0010@tigermail.auburn.edu](mailto:tmg0010@tigermail.auburn.edu) or (931) 220-2213 or Dr. Chippewa Thomas at [thoma07@auburn.edu](mailto:thoma07@auburn.edu) or (334) 844-5701.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 8445966 or e-mail at [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu) or [IRBChair@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBChair@auburn.edu).

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP AS A RECORD OF OUR INFORMATION LETTER. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, COOPERATION, AND PARTICIPATION IN ASSISTING OUR RESEARCH EFFORTS.

\_\_\_\_\_ Tonia Goodrich \_\_\_\_\_ Date 12/01/2017 \_\_\_\_\_

Tonia M. Goodrich, LPC-MHSP Student Principal Researcher/Investigator  
The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 01/26/2018 to ---. Protocol # 17-499-EX 1801 \_\_\_\_\_

Consent



- I agree to the terms of participation
- No thank you
- 

Q1

Are you 19 years or older?



- yes
- no
- 

Q2

Have you experienced a time when you felt/feel you were the victim of an interpersonal transgression or betrayal in which you believed/believe caused/causes you stress in resolving?



- yes
- no
- 

EXT

If you answered NO to ONE or BOTH the researchers thank you for your interest and time in checking out this survey. However, at this time and for purposes of the current study, please exit survey.



If you answered yes to BOTH please select NEXT to begin your participation. Thank you again.

## APPENDIX B

### Sample of Qualtrics Recruitment Email Notification





Opportunity

Hi ,  
**You have an opportunity waiting!**

**Topic:**  
**Incentive:** \$ in e-Rewards® Currency

**Length:** minutes

**LET'S BEGIN**

**Details:**

We value your opinions!

– Your e-Rewards Team

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL EMAIL INVITATION TO A SURVEY LOOK LIKE?

A New Survey is Available

Hi Katy,

Someone wants to know what you think...



145 SB  
Award Value

25 min  
Time to Complete

This survey won't be available for long. Act now if you're interested.

[Take Your Survey](#)

Can't open the link? You can copy the link below into your browser:

<http://s.cini.com/Survey/Start?4f0c8c1-6383-92fb-c88d-fed740c5b71ddd>

After successfully completing this survey, it may take up to 5 business days to receive SBs in your account

If you cannot participate in this survey we would appreciate it if you could decline participation in this survey by clicking on the following link\*: [Decline survey](#)

For any concerns or questions regarding your survey please contact: [surveysupport@swagbucks.com](mailto:surveysupport@swagbucks.com).

To make sure our emails do not get sent to you Junk/SPAM inbox, please add [surveys@swagbucks.com](mailto:surveys@swagbucks.com) to your contacts list or address book.

Thank you in advance!

qualtrics.

To find out more, call 02 8310 8031.

## APPENDIX C

### Instruments

Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, & Neil, 2007)

Self -Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale SDPTS (Long, 1990).

The Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989)

Demographic Questionnaire

DECISIONAL FORGIVENESS SCALE (DFS) (Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, &  
Neil, 2007) Decisional Forgiveness

Directions: Think of your current intentions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements to which S" Strongly Disagree" does NOT describe you very well and "Completely Agree" describes you very well? Select the box that is the best description of yourself.

- 1 Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3, Somewhat disagree      4. Neither disagree or Agree  
5.. Somewhat agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

1. I intend to try to hurt him or her in the same way he or she hurt me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Il will not try to help him or her if he or she needs something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. If I see him or her, I will act friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I will try to get back at him or her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I will try to act toward him or her in the same way I did before he or she hurt me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. If there is an opportunity to get back at him or her, I will take it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I will not talk with him or her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I will not seek revenge upon him or her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Decisional Forgiveness

Directions: Think of your current intentions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree in which "Strongly Agree" describes you very well or "Completely Disagree" describes you very well? Select one degree that is the best description of yourself.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I intend to try to hurt him or her in the same way he or she hurt me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will not try to help him or	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
friendly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will try to get back at him or her.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will try to act toward him or her in the same way I did before he or she hurt me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If there is an opportunity to get back at him or her, I will take it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not talk with him or her.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will not seek revenge upon him or her.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Look & Feel](#)
[Survey Flow](#)
[Survey Options](#)
[Tools](#)
[Collaborate](#)

Self -Dyadic Perspective-Taking Scale (SDPTS (Long, 1990) Empathy

Think about your friendships IN GENERAL. How well do the following questions describe your behavior and actions with your friends overall, where "Strongly Disagree" does NOT describe you very well and "Completely Agree" describes you very well? Select the box that is the best description of yourself.

- 1 Strongly disagree    2. Disagree    3, Somewhat disagree    4. Neither disagree or Agree  
5.. Somewhat agree    6. Agree    7. Strongly agree

1 I am good at understanding other people's problems.

2 I not only listen to my friends, but I understand what they are saying, and seem to know where they are coming from.

3 I very often seem to know how my friends feel.

4 I am able to sense or realize what my friends are feeling.

5 Before criticizing my friends, I try to imagine how I would feel in their place.

6 I always know exactly what my friends mean.

7 I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.

8 In my relationship with my friends I believe that there are two sides to every question, and I try to look and think about both sides.

9 I try to look at my friend's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

10 Even if my friends have difficulty in saying something, I usually understand what they mean.

11 When I'm upset with my friend, I usually try to put myself in his/her shoes for a while.



12 I usually do not understand the full meaning of what my friends are saying to me.

13 I am able to appreciate exactly how the things my friends experience feels to them.

The Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) Coping Skills

Think about your friendships IN GENERAL. How well do the following questions describe your behavior and actions with your friends overall, where "Strongly Agree" best describes you to "Strongly Disagree" is that is the best description of yourself. Choose option in range in which describes you best.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am good at understanding other people's problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I not only listen to my friends, but I understand what they are saying, and seem to know where they are coming from.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I very often seem to know how my friends feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to sense or realize what my friends are feeling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Before criticizing my friends, I try to imagine how I would feel in their place.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I always know exactly what my friends mean.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In my relationship with my friends I believe that there are two sides to every	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Look & Feel  Survey Flow  Survey Options  Tools  Collaborate

side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

Even if my friends have difficulty in saying something, I usually understand what they mean.

When I'm upset with my friend, I usually try to put myself in his/her shoes for a while.

I usually do not understand the full meaning of what my friends are saying to me.

I am able to appreciate exactly how the things my friends experience feels to them.



## The Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989)

These items deal with ways you've been coping with the stress in your life since you found out you were going to have to have this operation. There are many ways to try to deal with problems. These items ask what you've been doing to cope with this one. Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but I'm interested in how you've tried to deal with it. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. I want to know to what extent you've been doing what the item says. How much or how frequently. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not—just whether or not you're doing it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree    I haven't been doing this at all
- 2 = Somewhat Disagree    I've been doing this a little bit
- 3 = Somewhat Agree    I've been doing this a medium amount
- 4 = Strongly Agree    I've been doing this a lot

1. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.
2. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."
3. I've been getting emotional support from others.
4. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.
5. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.
6. I've been getting help and advice from other people.
7. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
8. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.
9. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.
10. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.
11. I've been looking for something good in what is happening.
12. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
13. I've been expressing my negative feelings.
14. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
15. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
16. I've been learning to live with it.
17. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
18. I've been praying or meditating



▼ Brief COPE



There are many ways to try to deal with problems. These items ask what you've been doing to cope with your interpersonal grievance. Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but I'm interested in how you've tried to deal with it.

Each item says something about a particular way of coping. Please answer to what extent you've been doing what the item says. How much or how frequently. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not—just whether or not you're doing it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

Click to write Label 1

	I haven't been doing this at all	I've been doing this a little bit	I've been doing this a medium amount	I've been doing this a lot
1. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I've been getting emotional support from others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I've been getting help and advice from other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I've been getting help and advice from other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I've been trying to come ...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

attempt to cope.

- 10. I've been looking for something good in what is happening
- 11. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
- 12. I've been expressing my negative feelings.
- 13. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs
- 14. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
- 16. I've been learning to live with it.
- 17. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
- 18. I've been praying or meditating.

	-	-	-	-
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Demographic Questionnaire

Please select the appropriate option for the following questions

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What race/ethnicity do you identify most with?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino
- Prefer not to say
- Other Race \_\_\_\_\_

4 Do you identify with a spiritual or religious faith based value system? If yes which do you identify with most?

- No religious or spiritual preference
- Christianity
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Prefer not to say
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

This concludes the instrument research questions.

As a valued participant in the research project you retain the right to answer all or none of the demographic questions or choose items you wish to respond to. The following four questions are designed to capture cultural aspects of your individuality but in no way provide identifying information of the participant.

Please select the appropriate option for the following questions

---

What is your gender?





- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

---

What is your age?

---

What race/ethnicity do you identify most with?

 & Feel  Survey Flow  Survey Options  Tools  Collaborate

- 
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - Asian
  - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - Hispanic or Latino
  - Prefer not to say
  - Other

---

Do you identify with a spiritual or religious faith based value system? If yes which do you identify with most?

- No religious or spiritual preference
- Christianity
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Tonia Goodrich at [tmg0010@tigermail.auburn.edu](mailto:tmg0010@tigermail.auburn.edu) or (931) 220-2213 or Dr. Chippewa Thomas at [thoma07@auburn.edu](mailto:thoma07@auburn.edu) or (334) 844-5701.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 8445966 or e-mail at [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu) or [IRBChair@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBChair@auburn.edu).

Should you feel you experiences any problematic mental health issues as the result of this survey please contact mental health services in your local area. For r immediate situations please dial 911 in cases of emergencies or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255.

## APPENDIX D

### Letters of Support from Pilot Study

LANIER COUNSELING  
Stacey Lanier, LPC/MHSP  
5505 Edmondson Pike Ste. 203  
Nashville, TN 37211  
(615) 502-2129

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October 20, 2017

Tonia Goodrich  
Auburn University  
College of Education

Dear Ms. Goodrich

It was with great pride and pleasure that I read your dissertation questions, survey and letter of intent. In my view, your instrument appears to be appropriate to answer the research question you have posed. Your survey exhibits high face and content validity.

I wholeheartedly endorse this dissertation, as it will greatly add to the body of research and knowledge toward the understanding of forgiveness. It is my belief that this is a groundbreaking research agenda, and will serve as a major contribution to counseling literature.

Sincerely,

*Stacey Lanier*  
Stacey M. Lanier, LPC-MHSP  
CEO Lanier Counseling and Consulting

12/28/2017



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR

MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH  
SECRETARY

CLAUDIA B. HORN, M.S.  
SENIOR DIRECTOR

TARA K. MYERS  
DIVISION DIRECTOR

Whom it May Concern,

It is without reservation that I endorse the advancement of Tonia Goodrich's research agenda. It is my belief that Ms. Goodrich's work will serve as a major contribution to the field of counseling. As a practicing Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, I routinely work with individuals, teenagers as well as adults, who experience congenital and/or acquired disabilities. Difficulty navigating the forgiveness process tends to be a recurring theme for clients and, quite often, their immediate families, respectively, as well.

Current literature does not support the need for understanding forgiveness and, more importantly, how to forgiveness can be utilized as an intervention. This study has important implications for theory, research, and practice. I believe Tonia's research has the potential to help foster an understanding of the benefits of forgiveness, thus promoting healing and improving interpersonal relationships

The instrument appears sound regarding face and content validity. The instrument and specific items align beautifully to address research questions. Overall, the instrument items are concise and the estimated time of completion is 15-30 minutes.

Most sincerely,

Scarlett Currington, M.Ed, CRC  
Rehabilitation Counselor II  
200 Enola Road  
Morganton, NC 28655

WWW.NCDHHS.GOV • WWW.NCDHHS.GOV/DVRS  
TEL. 828-433-2423 • FAX 828 433-2477  
LOCATION: 200 ENOLA ROAD • MORGANTON, NC 28655  
AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER



# MERCER UNIVERSITY

---

Penfield College  
Department of Counseling  
Atlanta Campus

October 29, 2017

Ms. Tonia Goodrich  
Auburn University  
College of Education

Dear Ms. Goodrich,

After reviewing your dissertation letter of intent and survey research questions, it appears that your topic addresses an important issue of which you have gathered a volume of literature. Your research questions are well thought out and relevant to the topic of trauma and forgiveness as well as ongoing cultural concerns. It is my pleasure to endorse and support you in gathering research and in moving forward with your doctoral progress. I wish you the best on your research and academic journey.

Sincerely,



Sarah J. Littlebear, PhD, LPC  
Adjunct Professor  
Clinical Mental Health Counseling

Phenix City Campus

One University Place  
Phenix City,  
Alabama  
36869

334-297-1007  
334-448-5205 FAX

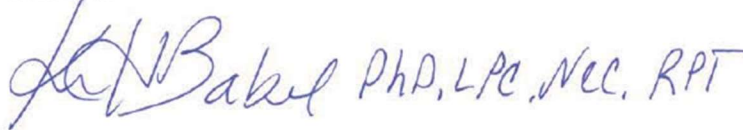
October 18, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

Per the request of Tonia Goodrich, I have thoroughly reviewed and examined her Pilot Study entitled, "The Impact of Empathy, Coping, and Cultural Differences on the process of Forgiveness". In my professional view, this survey appears to have a solid design and should yield results that support the research questions that were posed by the primary researcher. The topic is applicable to current events, theory and practice. This research will support the field of counselor education, clinicians and improve the paucity of literature on the topic of forgiveness.

I endorse the gathering of data, on this topic through this specific measure, at this stage of her dissertation research. Should you need further assistance, please contact me at 334-448-5243

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature in blue ink: Korinne H. Babel PhD, LPC, NCC, RPT

Korinne H. Babel Ph.D., LPC, NCC, Registered Play Therapist  
Assistant Professor- Counseling, Rehabilitation and Interpreter Training  
College of Education





**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
3BCT, EMBEDDED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINIC  
101<sup>ST</sup> AIRBORNE DIVISION (AIR ASSAULT)  
FORT CAMPBELL, KY 42223

22 October 2017

Letter of endorsement for the research of Ms. Tonia Goodrich

To Whom it May Concern,

I am honored to endorse the research that has been presented by Ms. Tonia Goodrich. As a practicing Clinical Social Worker for 15 years I recognize the benefits of her research, and value the contribution to the field of clinical counseling. As a Embedded Clinical Social Worker, I work daily with soldiers who suffer from PTSD, depression, anxiety, and relational difficulties. Soldiers are trained to perform their assigned tasks without hesitation, and without reservation, yet often become "stuck" on the very principals associated with forgiveness; be it to others, or themselves.

While conducting literature reviews to address the principals of forgiveness for my patients I found that the current literature does not identify the need for understanding forgiveness. I believe that this study will not only enhance clinical practices and applications related to forgiveness, but will also enhance the advancement related to theory and research.

Completing the survey questions are succinct and address the research questions clearly. Completion of the online survey was completed in 15 minutes, and was not difficult to respond to, given the complexity of forgiveness.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Marion", is written over a large, light-colored oval scribble.

Robert Marion, MSSA, LISW-S  
3rd BCT, Embedded Behavioral Health  
Fort Campbell, KY 42223  
270-798-5179 or 5822



*A Community Mental Health / Developmental Disabilities / Addictive Diseases Program*

*Administrative Offices  
2100 Comer Avenue  
P.O. Box 5328  
Columbus, GA 31906*

*PHONE: (706) 596-5583  
FAX: (706) 596-5589*

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October 27, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I endorse the research that has been presented by Ms. Tonia Goodrich. I endorse the advancement of Ms. Goodrich's research agenda. As a practicing Professional Counselor and Marriage & Family Therapist I believe that her research will be a valuable contribution to the field of counseling. In working with individuals, couples and families it has been my experience that forgiveness and managing the forgiveness process is a recurring theme.

Current literature does not identify the need to understand forgiveness and the principles of forgiveness, and how this information and these principles can be utilized as interventions. I believe that this study has important implications for research, theory and practice. Ms. Goodrich's research has the potential to advance the understanding of forgiveness, and how forgiveness could be applied to potentially promote healing and improve relationships.

The instrument appears sound. The survey items clearly address the research questions. The survey items are concise. Estimated completion time of the online survey is 15 to 30 minutes.

Respectfully,

Jean D. Wade, M.Ed, LPC, LMFT, MAC  
Day Services Coordinator  
1727 Boxwood Place  
Columbus GA 31907  
706-569-0727

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APPENDIX E

IRB Exemption Approval Email

**From:** "IRB Administration" <[irbadmin@auburn.edu](mailto:irbadmin@auburn.edu)>  
**To:** "Tonia Goodrich" <[tmg0010@tigermail.auburn.edu](mailto:tmg0010@tigermail.auburn.edu)>  
**Cc:** "Chippewa Thomas" <[thoma07@auburn.edu](mailto:thoma07@auburn.edu)>  
**Subject:** Approval, Exempt Protocol #17-499 EX 1801

Use [IRBsubmit@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBsubmit@auburn.edu) for protocol-related submissions and [IRBadmin@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBadmin@auburn.edu) for questions and information.

The IRB only accepts forms posted at <https://cws.auburn.edu/vpr/compliance/humansubjects/?Forms> and submitted electronically.

Dear Tonia,

Your protocol entitled " The Impact of Empathy, Coping, and Cultural Differences on the Process of Forgiveness" has been approved by the IRB as "Exempt" under federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Official notice:

This e-mail serves as official notice that your protocol has been approved. A formal approval letter will not be sent unless you notify us that you need one. By accepting this approval, you also accept your responsibilities associated with this approval. Details of your responsibilities are attached. Please print and retain.

Electronic Information Letter:

A copy of your approved protocol is attached. However, you still need *to add the following IRB approval information to your information letter(s):* **"The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use on January 26, 2018. Protocol #17-499 EX 1801"**

You must use the updated document(s) to consent participants. *Please forward the actual electronic letter(s) with a live link so that we may print a final copy for our files.*

When you have completed all research activities, have no plans to collect additional data and have destroyed all identifiable information as approved by the IRB, please notify this office via e-mail. A final report is no longer required for Exempt protocols.

If you have any questions, please let us know.

Best wishes for success with your research!

IRB Admin

Office of Research Compliance

115 Ramsay Hall

Auburn University, AL 36849

334-844-5966