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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORGIVENESS, IMAGINED  
INTERACTIONS, EMPATHY AND RELATIONAL SATISFACTION  
AMONG LONG-DISTANCE ROMANTIC COUPLES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by  
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December 2013

To my wife, Ann Marie, and my children, Michael and Anna Katherine,  
whose love, patience, and sacrifice are beyond measure.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Forgiveness is viewed as a major factor in maintaining healthy romantic relationships. But couples involved in long-distance relationships experience a different set of challenges than geographically-close couples when it comes to maintaining and enjoying satisfying and stable relationships. Many long-distance couples rely on increased empathy and intrapersonal communication – in the form of imagined interactions – to release tension, rehearse conversations, and review and analyze conflicts. While forgiveness has been studied extensively in a variety of interpersonal settings, it has not been explicitly studied in relation to the usage of imagined interactions or in maintaining long-distance relationships. Moreover, even though a correlation between empathy and forgiveness has long been established, the interplay between these two constructs and intrapersonal communication and relational satisfaction has not been explored. The overarching goal of this study is to bridge the theoretical and conceptual gaps between forgiveness theory, empathy, imagined interactions (Symbolic Interactionism/schema, script or cognitive theory), relational satisfaction and relational maintenance strategies (Dialectical Theory). This study sampled participants in either a long-distance or geographically close romantic relationship (n=181). Although proximity did not discriminate for forgiveness, imagined interactions (IIs), empathy, conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy or relational satisfaction, use of IIs did significantly predict forgiveness and relational satisfaction. Additionally, forgiveness and use of imagined interactions together significantly predicted relational satisfaction. Finally, IIs were shown to be positively correlated with empathy, a significant finding considering the lack of research into that area of the otherwise well developed field of IIs.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

After a long day of classes and work, Joe forgets his girlfriend's birthday and meets her for dinner later that night empty-handed. Upset, Joe's girlfriend says little throughout the meal, making him wonder what's gotten into her. As they are about to part ways and say "goodnight," Joe's girlfriend erupts in tears and then gives him a piece of her mind. Although he apologizes profusely, Joe must go weeks before she will forgive him for forgetting such an important event.

Jamal, on the other hand, lives and works in another state apart from his girlfriend. Except for major holidays, they rarely get to see each other. When they do get together, they try to stay positive and focus on fun or even trivial things to help them through the difficult time until they can be reunited. After a long day at class and work, Jamal also forgets to call his girlfriend to wish her a happy birthday. His girlfriend is angry and hurt, but instead of calling him to yell at him for being so thoughtless, she imagines giving him a thorough tongue-lashing, saying all the things she would say if he were there. Satisfied, she lets it roll off her back. After all, the relationship is under enough stress as it is because they rarely get to see each other. She figures adding more stress could only make things worse. It might even split them apart.

As we can see, romantic relationships are difficult and require many things to make them work successfully. A short list includes patience, passion, kindness, understanding, sympathy, love, humor, and closeness. But as this hypothetical birthday situation illustrates, forgiveness ranks very high on this list. Long-distance relationships magnify the need for forgiveness. Without the benefit of constant contact, romantic

partners lack the protective buffer enjoyed by those in close geographical proximity. As such, long-distance partners must learn to empathize with their significant others to maximize forgiveness. Because of the inherent stress placed on the relationship from long-distance separation, couples must – to borrow a phrase -- learn to “pick their battles.” Letting go takes on paramount importance. One way this can occur is through the use of imagined interactions. By dealing with conflicts intrapersonally instead of arguing over minor slights, couples in a long-distance relationship can reach forgiveness more easily. This is examined in this dissertation. In turn, they should enjoy more satisfying relationships. Indeed, research by Sahstein (2006a) reveals that long-distance couples tend to avoid conflicts when talking on the phone. Therefore, it is a face-saving mechanism to avoid long-distance arguing. Because they spend so much time apart, they feel a strong need to keep the conversations light and fun-filled. Conversely, arguing requires more time and energy in order to justify one’s claims or disagreements. Because of the limited time together, couples instead tend to focus on the positive aspects of the relationship (Sahlstein, 2006a). In addition to intrapersonal communication, in this dissertation we want to test if forgiveness is used as a relational maintenance technique by partners in long-distance relationships to mitigate the damaging effects of being apart. In doing so, we will also examine how empathy – a precursor to forgiveness – factors into this process. Research suggests women are better suited to handle the stresses of relationships. Marital theorists like Heavey, Layne and Christensen (1992) have speculated that men find conflict more intrinsically distressing than women do, and this is why men are more likely to withdraw from discussions involving conflict. This view has been criticized on the grounds that the person who demands and who withdraws may

vary according to which partner desires change (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1992). Because men in long-distance relationships might find it easier to avoid conflict with their partners than men in geographically close relationships, this dissertation seeks to analyze whether men in LDDR have greater relational satisfaction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Of course, all of this is to say, “how the theory goes.” Although communication scholars have examined romantic partnerships through the separate lenses of forgiveness, empathy, maintenance, long-distance vs. geographically-close relationships, imagined interactions, and satisfaction, none has studied directly the specific importance of forgiveness in long-distance relationships and how forgiveness might occur intrapersonally in the form of imagined interactions to facilitate the healing process and keep long-distance relationships viable. One study by Reys (2011) did examine how long-distance and geographically-close dating couples used different conflict management strategies, according to Peterson’s (1983) model. However, the results indicated no difference in the two types of couples’ use of conflict management strategies (Reys, 2011). Neither has any study attempted to pull together these disparate but similar areas of communication research – forgiveness, IIs, empathy, maintenance, satisfaction, and proximity differences -- in a comprehensive way. Toward that end, this study aims to answer some basic research questions: do partners in long-distance relationships practice more forgiveness than partners in geographically-close relationships? What is the relationship between forgiveness and imagined interactions in the process of maintaining long-distance relationships? Is empathy a necessary component the forgiveness process, and are those who employ it in a relationship more likely to forgive intrapersonally when

at a distance? Do those couples who practice forgiveness as a maintenance strategy have more satisfying relationships?

According to Dindia and Canary (1993), relational maintenance is necessary to keep relationships in a stable and satisfactory condition, and proactive maintenance may help relational partners fix problems that can break them up. Relational maintenance has been defined as couples using strategies both to maintain and to repair relationships (Dindia & Baxter, 1987). Because these two concepts are taken together, Emmers-Sommer (2003) argues it is hard to imagine how a relationship can be maintained in the absence of corrective maintenance because relational repair requires partners to engage in those behaviors that restore harmony.

### **Forgiveness**

This is where the importance of forgiveness and its cognitive components comes into play. According to Exline and Baumeister (2000), forgiveness and repentance can be viewed as either intrapsychic or interpersonal processes. From the victim's vantage point, the two are purely intrapsychic "that reflect psychological, emotional, and possibly spiritual changes within the individual," (Exline and Baumeister, 2000, p.134). The authors write, "We might think of forgiveness as a private decision to let go of bitter or vengeful attitudes. Similarly, we might think of repentance as a private attitude of contrition accompanied by a motive to avoid repeating the transgression," (Exline and Baumeister, 2000, p. 134).

Forgiveness, for the purpose of this study, is defined as "intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context" ( McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen, 2000, p.9). Consistent with research in

long-distance relationships, they are defined by those in them. Scholars have used both geographical measures such as distance and arbitrary measures such as state lines or city boundaries, but researchers have moved toward a self-styled description since one person's long-distance relationship is another's geographically close relationship.

Some instances dictate an intrapsychic understanding of forgiveness, such as when victims and perpetrators are not present or are separated by substantial distances. In these situations, Exline and Baumeister (2000) conclude that forgiveness and repentance must be confined to the "private realm," (p.134). Clearly, a conceptual link between forgiveness as a maintenance strategy exists with imagined interactions and long-distance relationships. Research has also established the importance of empathy in the success of relationships. Along with forgiveness, other relational maintenance strategies that promote satisfaction include conveying openness, being positive, assuring and supporting each other, communicating affection, spending time with important members of a partner's social network, and avoiding potentially negative topics or unfriendly behaviors. When dating or married couples are separated by long-distance, these strategies – especially avoiding negative topics and apologizing – might assume a more critical role to the survival of the relationship.

Using constructive conflict behaviors -- such as paraphrasing, avoiding personal attacks, and showing empathy toward one's partner -- can help to heal a relationship after hurtful episodes (Gottman, 1994). In long-distance relationships (LDRs), couples must engage in these behaviors without the benefit of frequent face-to-face interaction. But according to research by Guldner and Swensen (1995), the time LDR partners spent together had little bearing on the maintenance of the relationship. Furthermore, among

dating couples, Stafford and Reske (1990) discovered that the more time LDRs spent communicating face-to-face as opposed to other mediums, the less satisfied they were with the quality of communication and their relationship overall. Strikingly, the more couples spent time together, the more likely they were to break up. This coincides with Guldner and Swensens' research that indicated amount of talk and time spent together does not necessarily lead to satisfying relationships, intimacy, trust or commitment. Instead, these authors suggest that some other factors are at work to maintain the long-distance relationships. What role does forgiveness and empathy play in this missing component?

When couples do, in fact, find themselves spending time together, they put their best face forward. But when they are separated, they minimize conflict by avoiding sensitive topics or areas that could lead to arguments, choosing instead to fill their conversations with reassurances about the long-term viability of their partnership (Stafford, 2005). Certainly, the aggregated slights, hurts, oversights, and transgressions that accrue for LDRs do not simply vanish into thin air or evaporate over time. The question remains whether these couples are using an intrapersonal method like the cathartic function of imagined interactions to deal with these conflict topic areas to maintain satisfying relationships. Moreover, how does forgiveness and empathy factor into a long-distance couples' ability to deal with those inevitable conflicts that would stress the union to the breaking point if not managed effectively?

Some scholars insist that relationships are bound by interaction, that is, relationships exist only insofar as they produce physical or mediated encounters (Goffman, 1983; Rogers, 1998). Taking a cognitive approach, others like Stafford (2005)



contend that relationships go beyond co-presence and exist in the mental landscapes of the individuals in the partnership. Wilmot (1995) asserts that relationships are derived from previous communicative exchanges, and it is our mental images of them that creates reality for us. Kenny (1988) furthers this sentiment, writing that relationships are continued in our minds and constructed on an individual level in every type. “One’s affective feelings for or perception of a relationship with one’s spouse does not cease to exist simply because interaction is not occurring at a given moment,” (Stafford, 2005, p.6) Sillars (1998) contends that communication, relationships, and perceptions are the same phenomenon that are just viewed from different perspectives, ranging from mild parasocial relationships to delusional encounters with persons who do not exist. “...Relationships exist and are maintained not only in our minds, but also through culturally recognized structures and conventions,” (Stafford, 2005, p. 6).

### **Imagined Interactions**

Considering the highly cognitive aspect of relationships, especially in terms of the long-distance variety, it is logical to mention the well-explored field of imagined interactions (IIs). Imagined interactions are a type of daydreaming in which people have pretend conversations or encounters with actual people with whom they have real relations. In this way, imagined interactions are different than fantasy, which can occur between an individual and someone he or she has never met. Interestingly, few studies have merged the two communication areas of LDRs and II’s, despite the ostensible conceptual compatibility of both.

Romantic partners who find themselves separated by choice or circumstance can keep their love alive by thinking about it. Partners who find themselves in such

relationships report doing so (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). When people have conversations with their partners intrapersonally, they might rehearse future encounters that could potentially occur or replay old episodes that have already transpired. Sometimes, partners keep past conflicts alive by ruminating about or mulling over the hurtful incidents. Unresolved conflicts have been found to increase misunderstandings and to hamper communication between romantic partners (Gottman et al., 1976).

Imagined interactions (IIs) are a type of cognition in which individuals imagine themselves having a dialogue with others. These covert dialogues help people relive or rehearse conversations while anticipating new encounters (Honeycutt, 2004). “IIs can bring up a variety of emotions that depend on the outcome of the imagined conversation,” (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). By imagining conversations with partners, individuals can keep their relationships alive even when their significant other is not present. Relational partners can also use imagined interactions to form and maintain habitual scripts for a variety of scenarios (Honeycutt, 1993). As such, imagined interactions form the ebb and flow of most romances (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011).

IIs reflect a type of imagery in which communicators experience various message strategies with others. Put most simply, imagined interactions can be conceived as attempts to simulate real-life conversations with significant others within one’s mind. (Honeycutt, 1997). Imagined interactions may serve a variety of functions, including rehearsal, increasing self-understanding, and catharsis in the form of tension relief from anxiety-producing situations (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011).

How then, do relational partners separated by distance go about the business of forgiving each other, and are they more forgiving by virtue alone of their separation? The

present study aims to uncover these and other unanswered questions pertaining to forgiveness in an attempt to bridge the research gap in forgiveness, empathy, imagined interactions, long-distance relationships, and relational satisfaction.

Several reasons contribute to the importance of this research topic. Long-distance relationships are becoming more prevalent as all sorts of reasons force people into them: career moves, military engagement, incarceration, divorce, going to college or just growing up and moving away. Scores of people in the United States are in long-distance relationships with lovers, friends, parents, children, grandparents or others. Still, despite their prevalence in the modern culture, LDRs have garnered relatively little attention by communication scholars in comparison to geographically proximal relationships (Stafford, 2005).

In the last 16 years since Wood and Duck (1995) lamented the understudied communication phenomenon of LDRs, little has changed. However, with the resurgence in long-term military deployment and economic hardships that are forcing individuals into nomadic lifestyles, interest is starting to rekindle in this important area. To date, most research on LDDRs has focused on college-aged students. Perhaps this is because the population is conveniently situated to the researcher; however, some figures show that at any given time, as much as 50 percent of college students are in a LDDR, and as much as 75 percent of students have been involved in an LDDR at some time. In fact, Stafford, Merolla, and Castle (1994) suggest that LDDRs might be as common on college campuses as any other type of relationship.

By studying the importance of factors such as forgiveness, empathy, and imagined interactions toward the end of relational satisfaction, researchers can better

understand how partners struggling through difficult situations can maintain their relationships and keep their romance intact. Moreover, by emphasizing the importance of forgiveness, empathy, and using the conflict and catharsis function of imagined interactions, researchers and practitioners studying these issues can assist couples who are experiencing the tribulations caused by long-distance separation. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how forgiveness is used as a relational maintenance strategy among dating couples in long-distance and geographically close relationships. It also seeks to understand how empathy and the use of imagined interactions contribute to the forgiveness process, and how all of these contribute to relational satisfaction.

### **Preview of the Dissertation Chapters**

In accomplishing this task, a brief history of the development of forgiveness research and its close companion, empathy, will be reviewed in detail in chapter two, including defining characteristics of forgiveness and how it differs from forgetting or condoning. Subsequently, relational maintenance strategies, which include forgiveness and apologizing, will be discussed. This is followed by a discussion of LDR's, their pros, cons, problems, definitions, and methods of study. A discussion of imagined interactions and its functions, characteristics, and definitions will follow that, capped by a brief look at relational satisfaction, including its predictors. I will then propose hypotheses and research questions derived from the review of literature. Chapter 3 will review the methodology, including a description of the sample and instrumentation to be used in the study as well as a description of the independent and dependent variables. Chapter 4 will present the results of the hypothesis testing. The final chapter will include

a discussion of the results in terms of relational maintenance measured followed by appendices of instruments.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter reviews the scholarly literature on forgiveness, rumination, empathy, and long-distance relationships. Definitions of critical concepts are provided. Indeed, depending on whether a personality, process, or cognitive perspective is taken, there are multiple definitions for forgiveness.

#### **Forgiveness**

There are problems defining forgiveness because of the diverse definitions. Hence, it can be conceptualized as a multidimensional term. Some people consider forgiveness to involve letting go of something over time or releasing some aspect of something injurious (Sells and Hargrave, 1998). Scholars believe forgiveness is a process that unfolds and can take months or years to accomplish (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1996; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Hope, 1987). Some scholars (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1992) link forgiveness to mercy, and from this viewpoint, even though a transgressor's actions merit hate, his or her victim responds to the injurer with compassion. One inherent problem with showing mercy -- which is referred to in the New Testament as "turning the other cheek" -- argues Donnelly (1984), is that this type of forgiveness encourages repeat offending. Enright and his colleagues (1992) do not believe mercy requires the offender to repent or show remorse; instead, this can occur independently. Sells and Hargrave (1998) posit that two parties working out their differences is called reconciliation, and further the notion that forgiveness is an unconditionally merciful act that can occur wholly in the victim.

Forgiveness as an act of love occurs to increase chance that reconciliation will occur. In these instances, hurtful acts do not alter love commitments (Sells and Hargrave,

1998). Powers (1994) lays out two paths to forgiveness in his commentary on Enright's distinction between forgiveness and justice. In the first path, apology leads to forgiveness, and in the second path, forgiveness occurs without or before an apology. In the second form, according to Powers, the Golden Rule morality allies justice because people have developed by middle childhood the notion of reciprocity and understand the destructive potential of "tit for tat" exchanges. Powers (1994, p. 38) writes that forgiveness occurs expressly to restore relationships, adding that "acts of forgiveness that do not lead to reconciliation are...incomplete forgiveness."

Gordon, Baucom and Snyder (2005, p. 407) define forgiveness as "a process whereby partners pursue increased understanding of themselves, each other, and their relationship in order to free themselves from being dominated by negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors after experiencing a major interpersonal betrayal." The authors distinguish this notion of forgiveness from simply excusing or forgetting an injustice has occurred. Neither do the authors suggest an expectation of reconciliation between the partners. In their view, partners can split up, go their separate ways and do it without animosity, thus attaining forgiveness without getting back together. This is consistent with other scholarly assumptions about forgiveness and the role of reconciliation. Forgiveness should not be confused with condoning, accepting, forgetting, excusing, overlooking, or justifying (Worthington, 2005; Worthington and Drinkard, 2000). Gordon et al.'s (2005) model of forgiveness has three major components: a) a realistic view of the relationship; b) a release of being controlled by negative feelings toward the partner c) a decreased desire for revenge. This forgiveness process model also has three major stages: 1) impact; 2) a search for meaning; 3) recovery or moving on. These

stages represent various functions of imagined interactions (e.g., self-understanding, catharsis) discussed by Honeycutt (2003) in which people use mental imagery anticipating and reliving conversations in their mind.

In the impact stage, people recollect details about the injustice to try to comprehend what has happened. The forgiveness process reflects retroactive imagined interactions where people replay prior encounters in their mind. Intense emotions like anger, fear, rage and hurt often accompany this stage, and shock and disbelief are not uncommon, either. In the second stage, the meaning stage, victims try to piece together how the injustice happened and why. This stage reflects the self-understanding function of imagined interactions in which people imagine conversations in their minds in order understand what occurred in an encounter and the underlying motivation for behaviors (Honeycutt, 2003). In the final stage of Gordon et al.'s (2005) model, victims move on and let go of the emotional baggage accompanying the injustice. In doing so, the victims regain some control of their lives and are able to stop the hurt from controlling them. Similarly, Honeycutt (2003) discusses catharsis where imagined interactions help people relieve anxiety and reduce tension. It is at this stage that the forgiving party must decide whether to stay in the relationship or terminate it. Although the injustice is less severe, the authors caution that emotions like anger and hurt do not always disappear at this stage and can reoccur, albeit it less disruptively than before the act of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is defined by Thompson et al. (2005, p. 318) as "the framing of a perceived transgression such that one's responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequelae of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of the transgression, and therefore the object of forgiveness, may be oneself,



another person or persons, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone's control (e.g. an illness, fate, or a natural disaster)." After the offense, the victim works cognitively, emotionally or behaviorally to reframe the transgression in a more positive fashion while never condoning, pardoning or excusing the incident or the perpetrator. Instead, the authors suggest, "...forgiveness is a dialectical process through which people synthesize their prior assumptions and the reality of the transgression into a new understanding..." (p.318). Thompson et al. (2005) propose that forgivers may change either or both of two responses to transgression: valence and strength. Valence refers to the positive, negative or neutral affect of thoughts, feelings and behaviors while strength refers to the intensity and intrusiveness of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. These can vary due to different factors like the level of harm inflicted by the offender's transgression or the passage of time. For forgiveness to occur, valence must shift from negative to neutral or even positive but changing strength is not essential for forgiveness to occur.

Some researchers have argued that shedding anger and resentment is a key ingredient of forgiveness (McCullough, 2000; Worthington, Sandage, and Berry, 2000) and others have gone so far as to suggest that victims must develop a necessary feeling of positivity or even agape-style love (Worthington et al., 2000). However, some, including Thompson et al. (2005) and Tangney et al. (1999) argue that positive feelings need not occur for true forgiveness to occur. Generally, researchers do not lump condoning, excusing, and forgiving into the same category (Worthington, 2000), nor do they confuse it with pardoning, which has a legal connotation. One does not have to forego justice if he or she forgives (Worthington, 2000). Furthermore, according to Worthington and

Drinkard (2000), forgiveness and reconciliation are not mutually inclusive. That is, forgiveness is intrapersonal in that it can occur without the offender even realizing it or enjoying reconciliation, whereas reconciliation is inherently interpersonal but can occur without forgiveness ever happening.

Many scholars side with Enright and Coyle (1998), who say that forgiveness is something conceptually different than A) pardoning -- which is a legal term; B) condoning -- which suggests the offense was justifiable; C) excusing -- in which case the victim believes the offender had a valid explanation or cause for the transgression; D) forgetting -- the act of the offense slipping into distant memory; and E) denying, which is based around the victim's refusal to acknowledge harm has been inflicted (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Forgiveness is also considered conceptually separate from "reconciliation," which suggests the relationship has been restored. Thus, it seems, at times it is easier for scholars to agree what forgiveness is not rather than what it is. Many scholars consider this failure to achieve conceptual consensus a major fissure in the field of forgiveness research (Elder, 1998; Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Enright, Gassina, & Wu, 1992). McCullough et al. (1997) define forgiveness as prosocial changes toward an offending relationship partner. This begs the question of whether or not forgiveness requires a modicum of intimacy. For instance, does forgiveness occur as easily when the transgression is a stranger?

Forgiveness occurs when the victim allows the perpetrator to act trustworthy and reestablish the relationship. A critical second component of their conceptual definition hinges on the offender and the offended partner working together to improve the

relationship, primarily by addressing the violation openly (Hargrave & Sells, 1997). Some researchers (McCullough et al., 2000) claim that forgiveness unfolds in a stage-like sequence of events over time. Others, like Hargrave & Sells (1997), say intention and effort are critical components to forgiveness. Pingleton operationalized forgiveness as relinquishing the right to retaliate after being injured. He wrote that forgiveness: "recognizes, anticipates and attempts to mitigate against the *lex talionis*, or law of the talon -- the human organism's universal, almost reflexive propensity for retaliation and retribution in the face of hurt and pain at the hand of another. Thus, forgiveness can be understood as comprising the antithesis of the individual's natural and predictable response to violation and victimization."

Forgiveness is a "willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her," (Enright & Coyle, 1998, pp. 46-47). An overriding theme prevails in all the aforementioned definitions: "When people forgive, their responses toward (in other words, what they think of, feel about, want to do, or actually do to) people who have offended them become more positive and less negative. Although a specific interpersonal offense (or series of offenses) caused by a specific person (or groups of persons) once elicited negative thoughts, feelings, motivations, or behavior directed toward the offender, those responses have become more prosocial over time," (McCullough et al., 2000, p.9). Therefore, the authors propose to define forgiveness once and for all as "intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context," (p.9).

According to Thoresen, Harris, and Luskin (2000), no gold standard definition of forgiveness currently exists. However, the authors offer a working version for interpersonal-based forgiveness in which victims decide to reduce negative thoughts, affect and behavior and begin to understand better the offender and the transgression. It is important to note that in this definition, the offender's awareness or participation is not even necessary; the victim can unilaterally forgive without the other's knowledge or without their even seeking repentance. Primarily, the forgiver changes his or her thoughts, feelings, behaviors, etc., when forgiveness occurs. While being psychological in nature, that is occurring intrapersonally, forgiveness contains an interpersonal element as well, which is why McCullough et al. prefer to call forgiveness a "psychosocial construct," (2000, p.9). This intrapersonal origin suggests a process that is occurring in the person's mind and thoughts, whether through explicit awareness and intent -- or not.

Scholars do not have a common definition for forgiveness (Worthington, 1998b). Thirty research labs were funded by the John Templeton Foundation in the late 1990's to conduct scientific research on forgiveness (Worthington, 1998b). It is apparent from these efforts that the multidisciplinary study of forgiveness is here to stay for the immediate future (McCullough, Pargament, & Thorensen, 2000).

**Process Models of Forgiveness.** Researchers have used three distinct approaches when studying the procedural changes that occur during the forgiveness process (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000). These are 1) descriptions based on clinical experience; 2) phenomenological studies; 3) research aimed at providing empirical support for specific theories and hypotheses related to forgiveness. The first approach revolved around anecdotal insights from patients in therapy. The second approach builds models from the

accounts of forgiveness as understood by those who have achieved it. According to Malcolm and Greenberg (2000), prior to the early 1990's there was little, if any, published empirical research on forgiveness but a large body of anecdotal and case study reports. McCullough et al. (1997, p. 5) painted a bleak picture of empirical research on forgiveness, writing that the body of extant material has been a "literature of theories with data." Since 1993, research findings have offered empirical support for multiple theories and hypotheses about forgiveness. In multiple studies, forgiveness has been shown that it can be encouraged through psychoeducational interventions (e.g. see McCullough & Worthington, 1995; Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000). Malcolm and Greenberg (2000) and McCullough and Worthington (1995) point out that empirical forgiveness studies have suffered because of the self-selection process. It is difficult to know whether people participating in empirical studies are motivated to forgive in comparable ways to those seeking clinical counseling. "As a result, most empirical investigations of forgiveness to date are limited in their ability to improve our understanding of how forgiveness unfolds as a process of change within individual psychotherapy," (Malcolm and Greenberg, 2000, p.183). Enright, Freedman, and Rique (1998) developed a four-phase process model for forgiveness.

The first phase is uncovering, that is self-awareness and self-interrogation. The second phase is decision-making, which entails deciding to undergo the work of offering forgiveness. The third phase is the work of reframing or coming to understand the perpetrator in his context. The fourth and final stage is outcome or deepening, which results in achieving a new sense of meaning, purpose or identity.

The first phase, uncovering, requires personal insight and what Enright, Freedman and Rique call self-interrogation. In imagined interaction literature, this relates to the self-understanding function. The third phase of the four-phase process, reframing, is "built on a base of empathy" but does not, however, excuse the offense or exonerate the wrongdoer (Landman, 2002, p. 236). Based on this constructual integration, it seems the relationship between forgiveness, empathy and imagined interactions in the process of relational satisfaction warrants further investigation. In those instances in which forgiveness must occur at a distance and with the offending partner absent, as occurs in long-distance relationships (LDRs), how do the catharsis, self-understanding and relational maintenance functions of imagined interactions situate within this constellation of variables?

The third phase of the four-phase process, reframing, is "built on a base of empathy" but does not, however, excuse the offense or exonerate the wrongdoer (Landman, 2002, p. 236). "To forgive, one must have the capacity to identify with others and view them as more than simply an extension of oneself. One must be able to feel a modicum of social interest, a willingness to admit a personal role in relationships dysfunction, and genuine concern and empathy for others to be motivated for reconciliation," (Emmons, 2000, p.166-167).

Multiple scholars have studied and written about the strong link between forgiveness and empathy (e.g., Cunningham, 1985; Fitzgibbons, 1986; McCullough, 1997). In addition to McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal's (1997) empathy-model of forgiveness, McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, and Worthington (1997) posit a causal link between empathy and forgiveness.

Intrapsychically, forgiveness and condoning are different. Condoning occurs when a person refuses to acknowledge a hurt, or that a relational debt exists. Forgiveness not only requires the victim to acknowledge the hurt, it requires him or her to exonerate the offender (McCullough, Sandage, & Worthington, 1997; Exline & Baumeister, 2000).

The problem many times is that the forgiver expresses it implicitly. "Instead of openly discussing the transgression incident, framing it as a debt, and telling perpetrators that they are being released from the debt, victims may choose means of expression that are less confrontational or direct," (Exline & Baumeister, 2000, p. 145). As the authors point out, the victim might forgive privately, but interpersonally, their actions seem to condone, minimize or justify (2000).

**Willingness to Forgive.** Although some people forgive more easily than others (Waldron & Kelley, 2008), some researchers posit that willingness to forgive is more trait-like (Hebl & Enright, 1993). However, forgiveness has not displayed a strong correlational link with the "Big 5" personality traits -- neuroticism, extraversion-introversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). In one study of 147 college students, forgiving individuals were more agreeable and extraverted and less neurotic (hostile), but the reported associations were modest (Ross et al, 2004). People's willingness to forgive (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Darby & Schlenker, 1982) has social-cognitive explanations (i.e., offender's perceived responsibility; motives; intentionality; and the severity of the offense).

Invoking Gottman (1993), McCullough et al. (1986b) link the motivational system behind people's forgiveness response to two negative affective states: a) feelings of hurt or perceived attack; and b) righteous indignation. In the former, people who feel

attacked or hurt are motivated to avoid their offender, either physically or psychologically, or both. In the latter, the victim wishes to seek revenge or see harm occur to the offender. Together, these two motivations combine to create the psychological state known as forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1986b). If victims still wish to avoid the perpetrator or to see harm come to him or her after an incident, then forgiveness has not occurred, according to this theoretical model. "Conversely, when an offended relationship partner indicates that he or she has forgiven, his or her perceptions of the offense and offender no longer create motivations to avoid the offender and seek revenge," (McCullough et al., 1986b, p. 1587).

Accommodation and willingness to sacrifice are two constructive relationship occurrences that can happen in close relationships, and both are similar to forgiveness in this sense. Accommodation occurs when persons in a close relationship forgo or mitigate destructive responses after a painful behavioral episode with a partner. Foregoing immediate self-interest to help the relationship is called willingness to sacrifice, and together with accommodation and forgiveness, the three are very similar in that in each, a relationship partner transforms himself or herself to both refrain from negative actions and increase positive actions for the sake of the relationship (McCullough et al., 1998b, McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997).

In their 2003 study, Wade and Worthington showed experimentally that people can reduce unforgiveness without actually forgiving entirely; as a result, the authors define two types of forgiveness: decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness (Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005). By engaging in decisional forgiveness, one intentionally bypasses revenge and avoidance and exonerates the wrongdoer. In contrast to decisional



forgiveness, one replaces the negative emotions that accompany victimization with positive emotions instead. The authors suggest that emotional forgiveness, which reduces uncomfortable emotions and might yield more positivity toward the offender, usually happens most often in close relationships and not distal relationships.

Some social units like families, marriages, etc. may forgive each other more readily and to a greater extent, flowing from their higher intimacy, trust, or commitment (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Roloff and Janiszewski (1989) looked at people's willingness to forgive by testing 120 undergraduate students' reaction to denied favors and requests. Participants focused on a target -- a classmate, friend, stranger, etc. -- chosen randomly, and imagined asking them to borrow resources or requesting favors. The authors found that people are more forgiving of intimates when the request is a big one, but they are less forgiving when intimates turn down small requests or favors. Putting pressure on a close intimate over a large favor could hurt the relationship (Roloff, & Janiszewski, 1989). This could suggest relational closeness and willingness to forgive are intertwined; furthermore, since expensive request denials are more readily forgiven because of the strain to the relationship, as opposed to quick forgiveness of small transgressions, it could be that intimates are more likely to overlook transgressions than small ones because of the same relational pressures.

People find relationships more satisfying as their willingness to accommodate -- that is, to react constructively while tempering destructive behavior (Rusbult et al., 1991). People don't accommodate with everyone because of the level of self-sacrifice; it is related to mutual perspective taking, high commitment, greater investment and higher psychological femininity. This is a major study that shows accommodation and

forgiveness are linked conceptually and might shed light on how intimates forgive each other. In the case of long-distance relationships, it might suggest that those in committed long-distance relationships are more forgiving because their level of commitment is higher and their amount of emotional investment is greater. That women forgive easier than men is still unclear in the literature as different scholars have come to drastically different conclusions.

**Transgressions: Severity and Reactions of Forgiveness.** Transgressions are affronts to people's expectations or assumptions of how the world ought to be and how its human inhabitants ought to behave in it (Thompson et al., 2005). Judgment, blame and willingness to forgive are based on the severity, intentionality, and availability of an offense (Boon, & Sulsky, 1997). These factors can affect how victims of a transgression assess blame and rate their willingness to forgive. Apparently, people use a complex set of strategies for making these judgments.

"When people experience transgressions, they typically develop negative thoughts (e.g. 'This has ruined my life'), feelings (e.g., anger), or behaviors (e.g. seeking revenge) related to the transgressor, transgression or associated outcomes that reflect how they are responding (cognitively, affectively, or behaviorally) to the transgression" (Thompson et al, 2005, p. 317). Committed by one or both partners, transgressions are deliberately harmful acts that can include betrayal, abuse, infidelity, public humiliation, violence, or rude, disrespectful behavior that makes one partner feel devalued, incompetent and inferior (Harvey, 2004).

In some cases, such as infidelity or emotional betrayal, transgressions can erode the relationship covenant, according to Hargrave (1994). We are more likely to confess

and apologize when we feel guilty, and therefore we are less likely to repeat hurtful transgressions (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995). Close relationships, according to Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton (1995), can be improved when guilt is employed. The guilty party is more likely to amend his or her mistakes when this occurs. Using guilt is tricky, however, because even though it can restore justice to the victim, sometimes the perpetrator of the slight can view this as a manipulative act that attempts to control them.

The greater the transgression, the harder it is to forgive. For minor infractions, couples let things slide easier; however, when the offense is serious, forgiveness becomes more difficult and often dependent on certain conditions being set by the victim and met by the offender (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). When partners experience serious infractions, they can begin to doubt the viability of the relationship (Worthington & Wade, 1999) and might seek to bypass communicating and just end the partnership (Waldron & Kelley, 2005).

Mild offenses create smaller justice gaps than severe offenses (Worthington, 2003), and the bigger the offense, the harder it is for people to forgive an injustice (Boon & Sulsky, 1997). According to Rusbult and Van Lange (2003), a transgression occurs when a perpetrator inflicts harm by knowingly deviating from the norms that govern the relationship. They define norms as the rules that partners are inclined to follow in a given relationship (2003). The authors suggest that following a significant transgression, both parties must work diligently toward reconciliation, which requires over a length of time much sustained energy, motivation, and goodwill. Because of this, Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) assert that many couples have a hard time reconciling because of the costly

investments required. Still, they argue that couples can manage to reconcile even after relationship-shattering transgressions because forgiveness is not an all-or-nothing proposition.

People's dispositions, the nature of the transgression, and the quality and closeness of the relationship have all been shown to moderate victim's reactions to offenses (Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005). Victims who show low levels of empathy and external locus of control tend to exhibit harsher reactions and seek revenge more (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). Severe transgressions that show disrespect for the relationship or seem like they were committed deliberately also rate greater vengeance responses, hostility and anxiety, and transgressions are reacted to most negatively immediately after they occur (McCullough et al., 2003).

Most importantly for this study, severe transgressions also increase avoidance among victims. Transgressions that occur in highly committed relationships also tend to elicit less negative responses than low-commitment relationships (Rusbult et al., 2005). Finally, those victims who show greater insight and understanding, higher agreeableness, and who are more tolerant of deviation also show more forgiveness (Brown, 2003; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Rusbult et al. 2005). In terms of imagined interactions, self-understanding could help lead to greater empathy and forgiveness.

**Rumination and the Intrapersonal Nature of Forgiveness.** Focusing on the victims of transgressions and their explanations of the cause and consequences of forgiveness, many social scientists approach the concept as an intrapersonal phenomenon (Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005). But as these authors point out, it is also important to study it from an interpersonal viewpoint, especially when the victim and his

or her offender enjoy an ongoing relationship that is likely to continue. Because the health of ongoing relationships contributes to the overall well-being of the parties involved, those people in close relationships might be more motivated to fix their problems, and in doing so, this requires an interpersonal process through which both parties contribute reparations. Forgiveness has been shown to correlate negatively with rumination, vengeance, hostility and to predict satisfaction with life, anger, anxiety, and depression while accounting for unique variance in relationship satisfaction (Thompson et al., 2005).

By and large, forgiveness has been characterized by scholars as an intrapersonal process, one that involves some sort of cognitive, behavioral or emotional change (Pargament, McCullough, & Thoresen, 2000). This change does not even require the offender to be living. Most of the intrapersonal research has revolved around three main issues: the predictors of forgiveness, the consequences of forgiveness, and the processes of forgiveness. By contrast, viewing forgiveness as an interpersonal process requires the relationship rather than the victim to be the main unit of analysis. From this vantage point, "how offenders affect victims, how victims affect offenders, and how each partner contributes to the character of their relationship are all important objects of study from the interpersonal point of view," (Pargament, McCullough, & Thoresen, 2000, p.302).

Trust, benevolence, lack of anger and desire for revenge are all concepts included in the intrapersonal aspect of forgiveness (Cunningham, 1985, 1992; The Enright & Human Development Study Group, 1991). The more people keep conflict alive through rumination, the less likely they are to achieve forgiveness. As a cognitive variable, rumination has been shown to perpetuate psychological distress following interpersonal

conflicts (Greenberg, 1995) and to cause people to act aggressively when they have been insulted or humiliated (Collins & Bell, 1997). According to McCullough et al. (1998b, p.1587), "...it would seem that rumination over intrusive thoughts, images, and affects related to the interpersonal offense would maintain people's distress regarding the offense, and, quite possibly, maintain their motivations to avoid contact with and seek revenge against their offenders."

Although the severity of the offense and whether or not an apology is offered can determine forgiveness, even more distal variables are determinants. Some of these, argue McCullough et al. (1998b), are shaped heavily by Kelley and Thibault's (1978) interdependence theory. For instance, the closer the partners are emotionally, the more likely they are to forgive each other. In the personality literature, emotional stability has been measured in terms of the Big 5 trait of neuroticism defined as tendency to experience negative emotional states. Individuals who score high on neuroticism are more likely than the average to experience such feelings as anxiety, anger, guilt, and depressed mood. Individuals who score low in neuroticism are more emotionally stable and less reactive to stress (Matthews & Deary, 1998). Karney and Bradbury (1995, 1997) found that a striking diversity of personality factors have been examined for their association with relational satisfaction (56 traits in all). However, the most consistent finding across all of the studies was that neuroticism is linked to more negative marital outcomes.

Those relationships that are high in satisfaction, closeness, and commitment (Nelson, 1993; Roloff & Janiszewski, 1989) are more likely to involve partners who are willing to forgive. McCullough et al. (1998b) posit that forgiving is linked to relational

satisfaction in seven ways: 1) Partners in close relationships have invested more resources and have more to lose so they are more likely to forgive. 2) The long-term outlook shared by partners in close relationships might help them overlook minor grievances. 3) In high-quality relationships, the mutual interests of both partners converge, making forgiveness more conducive. 4) Satisfied couples tend to have collectivistic outlooks that help facilitate positive relational behavior, even those behaviors that come at the expense of one's own self interests. 5) Partners with a substantial history together can rationalize the behaviors of their offending partner, seeing motivations and justifications that make empathy easier to induce. 6) In higher quality relationships, some hurts can be reinterpreted as having been absorbed for the good of the victim. In other words, a victim may feel he or she needed to hear something told straight, no matter how injurious to self-esteem. 7) Lastly, partners in high-quality relationships apologize sooner and more often, a critical component in a victim's decision to grant forgiveness. Confessions and apologies are more common-place when the emotional stakes are greater (Tangney, Miller, Flicker,& Barlow, 1996).

Just as variables like empathy and agreeableness can foster forgiveness, some variables like anxiety, depression, hostility, anger and rumination can inhibit forgiveness (Barber, Maltby & Macaskill, 2005; Worthington et al., 2000). Rumination, which involves dwelling on negative aspects in life, has been shown to be negatively correlated with forgiveness (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, Johnson, 2001). Research by Yamhure-Thompson and Snyder (2003) suggests that forgiving people ruminate less than non-forgiving people, and people who can learn to ruminate less experience more forgiveness toward others (McCullough et al., 1998b). Barber, Maltby and Macaskill

(2005) examined the relationship between anger rumination and forgiveness in terms of forgiving oneself and dealing with revenge thoughts when forgiving others. They found broad support for the hypothesis that forgiveness would be negatively associated with anger rumination, which is consistent with other findings about anger and rumination and their effect on forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998b; Weiner et al., 1991). The authors (p. 259) write: "...thoughts regarding revenge and getting even may be uppermost in individual minds when they choose not to forgive.

Continuing to hold angry memories and to ruminate on them acts as a barrier to forgiveness...some individuals may continue to have long-living fantasies of revenge when the conflict is long over. Getting back at that person and thoughts and daydreams of a violent nature may inhibit the likelihood of that forgiving the transgressor in these individuals." Sukhodolsky, Golub, and Cromwell (2001) proposed a four-factor model of anger rumination: 1) anger afterthoughts (e.g. involving the person maintaining thoughts and re-imagining episodes in their mind); 2) Angry memories (e.g. involving constantly dwelling on past injustices); 3) revenge fantasies (e.g. daydreaming about how to retaliate against transgressors); 4) Understanding of causes (e.g. people dwelling on reasons they were treated badly and their analysis on why the events occurred). This four-factor model is analogous to several functions and characteristics of Imagined Interactions including retroactivity, conflict-linkage, and understanding.

Although many scholars view forgiveness from a victim-centered, intrapersonal conceptualization, McCullough et al. (2005) argue that this approach is entirely unhelpful in studying those relationships that were highly committed prior to the transgression and expect to continue. They also inject the perpetrator into the equation, giving him or her



equal if not greater importance in the overall calculus. Because the perpetrator's actions will either promote or impede prosocial transformation and forgiveness, it is imperative that the offender offer amends for his or her actions, through heart-felt apology and actual contrition. The interpersonal nature of this transformation, the authors assert, is crucial.

For instance, the victim can develop empathy when the perpetrator discusses the offense apologetically. This can help to facilitate a positive emotional state or point out extenuating circumstances, they argue. Second, McCullough et al. (2005) point out that making amends cools off the situation and repays partial debts. "When a perpetrator responds to the victim's righteous indignation with heartfelt apology rather than anger and defensiveness, the victim experiences superior immediate outcomes, which should inhibit the victim's tendency toward vengeance and hostility," (McCullough et al., 2005, p. 198). Baumeister et al. (1995) posits that by admitting guilt and by reassuring the victim the offense will never reoccur, the perpetrator improves future relational opportunities. Through this interpersonal process of amend-making, victims should have an easier time forgiving. Therefore, I ask the question of whether forgiving can occur intrapersonally through imagined interactions or does it require real-world, face-to-face interaction between two people interpersonally: the victim and the offender?

**Measuring Forgiveness.** Offense-specific forgiveness with single-item self-report measures have been used extensively for about 20 years, but in the 1980's researchers started using offense-specific multi-item measures (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). The Wade's Forgiveness Scale (Wade, 1987) was an 81-item self-report measure assessing nine dimensions of forgiveness. This measure spawned McCullough et al.'s (1998) 12-item scale -- the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory

(TRIM). This self-report measure assesses two negative motivational elements -- avoidance-seeking and revenge-seeking. According to McCullough et al. (1998), forgiveness occurs as these two interpersonal motivations -- avoidance and revenge -- are reduced. These two TRIM subscales are highly correlated with relational satisfaction, empathy and rumination, as well as closeness, apology, and commitment. It is the first three -- relational satisfaction, empathy, and rumination -- that are of interest in the present study. The TRIM inventory shows good convergent and discriminant validity, internal consistency, and a theoretically specified two-factor structure (McCullough et al., 1998a).

No measures currently exist that assess whether an offender perceives he or she has been forgiven. "Given the essentially interpersonal nature of the concept of forgiveness, this seems like a tremendous oversight in the development of measures of forgiveness. Such measures would be relevant to (1) understanding the impact of forgiveness on the offender and (2) necessary for studying offense-specific forgiveness at the dyadic rather than simply the individual level," (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000, pp.69-70). Forgiveness measures at the dyadic level are concerned with a person's general tendency to forgive a relationship partner. Using questions like -- "Does this husband tend to seek forgiveness when he offends his wife?" -- these are less specific than situation-based offense-specific measurements (McCullough, Hoyt, and Rachal, 2000). The Hargrave and Sells (1997) Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale (IRRS) is the only tool available for assessing forgiveness at the dyadic level. With 44 "yes-no" questions, the measure seeks to assess the level of forgiveness experienced by a victim who has been offended by a particular family member or partner.

Most forgiveness-related constructs assess the phenomenon on a singular level, that is, the unit of analysis is the individual instead of the dyad, the family, the community, etc. (McCullough, Hoyt and Rachal, 2000). McCullough et al. (2000) suggest using a helpful 3x2x4 taxonomy to view the available forgiveness instruments along three dimensions, the first of which is called "specificity" and according to McCullough and Worthington (1999) has three levels of existing measurement: 1) offense-specific 2) dyadic 3) dispositional. The second dimension can be called "direction" of measurement, and the third dimension is "method" of assessment. I will deal with each dimension in order. Within the "specificity" dimension, offense-specific measures examine the extent to which a person has forgiven someone for a specific offense, as the name would imply. Dyadic measures of forgiveness, on the other hand, look at the aggregated forgiveness responses across multiple offenses in a relationship.

As such, dyadic measures are more general and global than offense-specific measures. Lastly, dispositional forgiveness measures examine a person's tendency to forgive across multiple interpersonal offenses occurring in a host of different relationships. "Thus, dispositional measures of forgiveness represent (at least in theory) a sort of weighted mean of a person's offense-specific forgiveness responses summed across multiple offenses and multiple relationships" (McCullough, Hoyt and Rachal, 2000, p.66). The second dimension deals with the direction of measurement, that is, whether the forgiveness is flowing from the victim or whether it is being sought by the transgressor. Most directional measures examine the point of view of the victim and the literature on those who seek forgiveness after committing a transgression remains slight. Finally, the dimension of method refers to the manner in which forgiveness is assessed.

The four possible ways are self-report, in which the offended person reports the extent to which he or she forgives the offender; the partner-report, in which the offending relationship partner report how much forgiveness, if any, has been extended from their victimized partner; the outside observer report, in which a clinician or other third part can determine the extent of forgiveness conferred on behalf of the offender; and finally, measures of constructive or destructive behaviors that do not rely on verbal or written reports can be used to infer the extent to which a victim forgives an offender. Thus, the 3x2x4 taxonomy breaks down as such: 3(offense-specific; dyadic; dispositional) x 2(victim forgiveness; transgressor forgiveness) x 4(self-report; partner-report; outside-observer report; constructive-destructive behavior measures).

For the purpose of this study, I am most interested in offense-specific forgiveness and dyadic forgiveness but not dispositional forgiveness. This is because I am trying to discover how being separated by long-distances and time-periods affects forgiveness. Theoretically, dispositional traits should remain static regardless of whether couples are together are apart. I am also interested in victim-directed forgiveness, that is, to what extent does the offended partner in the relationship award or extend forgiveness based on their geographical status. Lastly, I am interested in using the self-report and the partner-report because it is important to test whether partners both forgive and gain forgiveness based on their geographical status. Therefore, using a self-report about their willingness to forgive situationally (offense-specific) and across a series of offenses (dyadic) is equally as important as their partner-report, in which they assess the extent of forgiveness granted to them for offenses by their own partner.

The victim's perspective has been the focal point of most forgiveness research (DeShea, 2008). Contrary to trait forgiveness scales, which assess the stability of forgiveness as a global characteristic, state forgiveness scales are analogous to camera snapshots that grab a singular moment. According to DeShea (2008), most state forgiveness scales have reliable data, except for Hargrave and Sells' (1997) Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale (IRRS). DeShea attributes these low reliability estimates to the fact that dichotomous categories (e.g., "Yes, I believe that most of the time" vs. "No, I have difficulty believing this") reduce variability. Therefore, I have chosen to replace the forced-choice bivariate format with a Likert-type response scale to increase variability and thus enhance potential alpha.

Subkoviak and colleagues validated the 60-item Enright Forgiveness Inventory and correlated it with anxiety, depression, religiosity, and social desirability. Looking at 394 participants, half college students and half same-gendered parents of the college students, researchers had the subjects recall the most recent slight that considered deep, unfair and hurtful by someone. The EFI was negatively correlated with anxiety. The study highlights the importance of looking at the depth of hurt caused by a transgression. Religiously affiliated people were slightly more likely to forgive.

According to Sells and Hargrave (1998), acceptable reliability and validity are found in only three of the many questionnaires regarding forgiveness. These are the Enright Forgiveness Scale (EFS) (Subkoviak, 1992), the Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale (IRRS) (Hargrave and Sells, 1997), and the Forgiveness of Self (FOS) and Forgiveness of Others (FOO) scales. It is the second, Hargrave and Sells' IRRS scale, that will be used for the purposes of the present study. The IRRS scale measures levels of

pain (rage, shame, control and chaos) and the forgiveness process (insight, understanding, giving opportunity for forgiveness, and overt forgiveness).

## **Empathy**

Empathy and forgiveness have been studied in terms of conflict and marriage and family by numerous authors (Matta, 2006). In terms of constructive and destructive conflict behaviors, empathy, along with other techniques like paraphrasing and avoiding personal attacks, have been found to be beneficial to marriages (Gottman, 1994).

McCullough and Worthington (1995) have used educational lectures on how empathy helps develop forgiveness in their therapy sessions. The researchers have encouraged victims to take another's perspective by putting themselves in their offenders' shoes.

Worthington (2006) suggests that this technique could be employed by victims to substitute emotions for their problems, leading to increased healing.

A study by McCullough et al. (1997) found that participants who received empathy intervention training versus decision-based intervention forgave their offenders more. Furthermore, they found that regardless of treatment method, the participants who experienced the most powerful changes in empathy also experienced the most profound levels of forgiveness. In those personal relationships in which conflict is constant and chronic, therapy might not help those people achieve forgiveness because the "ongoing conflict is so powerful that recent events tend to undo benefits...immediately" (Malcolm and Greenberg, 2000, p. 242).

One definition of empathy (Emmons, 2008, p.180) casts it "as an active effort to understand another person's perception of an interpersonal event as if one were that other person, rather than judging the other person's behavior from the perspective of one's own

experience of that event." Empathy is defined by a person's ability to share emotions equally with another. In common vernacular, empathy simply connotes a positive or desirable trait, according to Nathanson (2003); however, it is synonymous and more aptly akin to caring for and identifying with others and showing sympathy with them. Although there is little scholarly consensus about empathy's meaning, it has long been thought to contribute to people's abilities to understand, predict, experience and relate to others' behaviors feelings, attitudes and intentions; as such, empathy can be defined broadly as a construct that contributes to interpersonal sensitivity and social competence (Losoya and Eisenberg, 2001).

The cognitive perspective defines empathy in the aforementioned way, and this perspective-taking approach suggests a process that involves accessing relevant information from memory or making mental associations between one person's emotional state and one's own prior experience (Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, and Knight, 1991; Losoya and Eisenberg, 2001). Losoya and Eisenberg (2001, p. 22-23) define empathy as "a state of emotional arousal that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's affective state and which is similar to, or congruent with, what the other person is feeling..."

There are three types of definitions of empathy, as identified by Levenson and Ruef (1991). In the first type of definition, empathy refers to knowing what another person is feeling. In the second type of definition, empathy refers to actually feeling similar feelings as another person. Finally, the third type of definition refers to the communicative aspect of empathy, in which the person knows and feels the feelings of another person and responds compassionately. From this, the researchers distilled the

meaning of empathy to be one's ability to accurately detect another's emotion. They do not, however, go so far as to include the communication aspect, which involves communicating compassion.

Empathy and sympathy are different constructs (Gruen & Mendelsohn, 1986; Wispe, 1986). Sympathy and personal distress can be distinguished conceptually from pure empathy (Batson, 1991). An emotional response based on apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state, sympathy involves a person wishing to alleviate another's distress (Losoya and Eisenberg, 2001). Therefore, sympathy is not usually associated with happiness or joy, but pain and suffering instead. According to Eisenberg, Shea, et al. (1991), sympathy can flow from empathy, or it can be a sole product of mental initiatives like perspective-taking or schematic linkages from a person's own memory.

However, in most studies to date, empathy, sympathy, and personal distress have been examined jointly, combining the constructs conceptually. This has made it hard for researchers to establish associations between empathy-related responding and other variables (Losoya and Eisenberg, 2001).

**Relation to Forgiveness.** Empathy, along with understanding, plays a critical role in the healing process of forgiveness (Enright and North, 1998). A victim's ability to empathize or identify with the transgressor is a large component of his or her ability to forgive (Rowe et al., 1989). This empathy -- and thereby forgiveness -- occurs, Rowe et al. posit, because the injured party begins to see the offender as a human being capable of making mistakes the same way the victim can make mistakes. As such, the victim understands that forgiveness is warranted because under similar circumstances, not only



could they have committed such an offense, but that they would like forgiveness, too. Rowe et al. suggests that to the victim experiencing empathy and forgiveness, a sense of unity between the victim and the offender can even develop in his or her mind. Inference is the bridge between insight and empathy, according to Hart (1999). Only when we recognize how we felt in a similar situation can we assume how someone must be feeling in his or her own situation.

Malcolm, DeCourville, and Belicki (2008) distinguish between victims' creating elaborate stories that try explaining their offender's actions and victims' actually taking the offender's perspective. The former simply creates a fictional framework that exonerates the offender from guilt, whereas the latter leads to the type of true empathic understanding that can produce real forgiveness. Worthington (1998a) suspects that the development of empathy is one of four areas leading to forgiveness in an individual, along with the person's personality, the characteristics of the relationship prior to the offense, and whether or not an apology or confession occurred after the offense.

McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) studied the causal role empathy played to promote forgiveness using one cross-sectional survey and one controlled field experiment. Using structural equation modeling, the researchers found that empathy positively mediates apology and forgiving. Results suggested that empathy has a central part to play in forgiveness. Although previous experiments have found positive relationships between empathy and forgiveness, Worthington (2006) suggests that McCullough et al.'s (1997) necessary-but-not-sufficient argument may fail to account for the actual variance and that other emotions beside empathy could be leading to forgiveness.

Worthington (2006) notes that empathy has been long-established as a crucial component of forgiveness, and empathy can be conceptualized as both a state (Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen) or a trait (Davis 1996). In Worthington's (1998a) Pyramid Model of Forgiveness, there are three steps to achieving forgiveness. The first step involves recalling the hurt. At this phase, the victim experiences the fear associated with classically conditioned fear -- that is, the fear-response system is engaged each time the victim sees or thinks about the offender. Overcoming the mechanics of the fear conditioning is a critical step in the Pyramid Model.

In a clinical setting, the offense/fear is recalled and elaborated in a supportive, nonhurtful atmosphere. Each time this occurs, extinction follows until the fear response is mitigated, but not fully extinguished. The second step of Worthington's Pyramid Model seeks to induce states of empathy and humility in the victim, making forgiveness likelier. This entails the victim speculating about what the offender might have been thinking or feeling during the hurtful event; recalling good experiences with the offender; and actively imagining interaction with the offender during more pleasant times. Worthington (1998a) suggests that by inducing empathy to affect as much positive emotional feedback as possible, the emotion and experience of forgiveness necessarily changes. Step three of the Pyramid Model requires giving an "altruistic gift." McCullough, Worthington and Rachal, 1997) have shown that empathy mediates forgiveness, which the researchers describe as an act of altruism. People forgive to the extent that they empathize with the offender.

In Enright and Fitzgibbon's (2000) 20-step process model for forgiveness, empathy and compassion play a critical role, coming in at step 13. The authors call

empathy "morally neutral" (p. 82) and that when a victim takes the perspective of the offender, he or she can "use this new information for good or ill" (p. 82). According to Enright and Fitzgibbon (2000), compassion is a moral emotion because its ultimate goal is the well-being or improvement of another person. They do point out, however, that empathy -- the morally neutral component -- can lead to compassion, which in turn can lead to forgiveness.

**Empathy as Trait and State.** One of the most enduring predictors of forgiveness is empathy, and increased forgiveness has been shown across a variety of studies and numerous scenarios (Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001; McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998; Wade & Worthington, 2003) to related to both trait empathy (having a forgiving personality) and state empathy (showing empathy for the transgressor). State forgiveness was positively correlated with empathic concern and perspective-taking, even in imagined scenarios of serious physical or emotional injury, but not personal distress. Belicki, Rourke, and McCarthy (2008) suggest that personal distress and empathic concern are at polar odds with each other, and given that people in distress will seek to escape the situation, forgiveness is not needed nor wanted when the victim can simply avoid the offender.

Lawler-Rowe and Reed (2008) found that those individuals with more forgiving personalities also experienced less depression and anxiety, while event-related forgiveness was associated with less depression, anxiety, and rumination. From their studies of trait forgiveness and event-related forgiveness and women's health issues, the authors concluded that a forgiving personality, "whether at 22 or 92 years of age, is associated with a life well-lived," (2008, p.87). Forgiving women, according to Lawler-

Rowe and Reed, are healthier, do not get upset as easily when recalling past conflicts, exhibit less stress and more spirituality, and they have better, more satisfying relationships with others.

**Methodology and Measurement Scales.** Losoya and Eisenberg (2001) recommend a multi-method approach when studying empathy. In addition to physiological and facial-gestural measures, they suggest the use of self-reports. Of the latter type, there are numerous measures that have asked participants what he or she was feeling in a particular empathy-inducing context. "Such methods are easy and relatively quick to administer and have the potential to provide differentiated measures of vicarious emotional responding," (Losoya & Eisenberg, 2001). Questionnaires are another quick and straightforward method, but these have typically been used to measure dispositional and not situational empathy related responding.

Two important and often-used scales offer a conceptual comparison: the Mehrabian and Epstein Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy (1972) scale and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) by Davis (1983). Mehrabian and Epstein's scale taps into multiple areas, looking at empathy globally. These areas include empathy, sympathy, personal distress, emotional contagion and other constructs. Davis' measure has just four subscales: sympathy, (e.g., "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me"); personal distress (e.g., "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me"); perspective-taking (e.g., "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how they look from their perspective"); and fantasy empathy (i.e., vicarious responding to characters in books or films; (e.g., "When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were

happening to me). According to Losoya and Eisenberg (2001), these scales or modifications have been used successfully in a variety of contexts and with various age and sex groups.

Riggio and Riggio (2001) remind that self-report measures of empathy are rarely challenged because all of the measures treat empathy as a personality dimension.

However, they argue that it very well may be the case that empathy simply represents the personality manifestation of the skill or ability of interpersonal sensitivity. Another scale that targets the affective side of empathy is the Mehrabian and Epstein scale (1972), which uses 33 items to gauge a person's empathic tendencies, including emotional contagion and emotional responses at the extremes.

**Empathy, Rumination, and Imagined Interactions.** Honeycutt (2003) posits that we better understand others and feel a stronger sense of shared experience when we daydream about interactions with that person. The positive association between empathy and perspective-taking was shown by Klinger (1990) in studies of high-school students who were asked to listen to dramatic, emotional recordings of people describing their emotions. Those students who reported daydreaming while listening to the recordings also reported more empathy toward the subjects. Constantly focusing on past offenses can hurt the body as well as the mind. Luskin (2001) points out that continually dwelling on problems and grievances keeps the body under constant stress. This can have long-term negative consequences to a person's overall well-being and health. Instead of ruminating about these hurts, Luskin (2001) offers the alternative practice of experiencing love, gratitude and forgiveness, which promotes healing and well-being.

Researchers have found evidence to support empathy's mediating role between receiving apologies and forgiving motivations (McCullough, Worthington and Rachal 1997; McCullough et al. 1998). In two subsequent studies, McCullough et al. (1997, 1998) discovered that participants who forgave transgressors did so in a linear fashion, that is, the amount of forgiveness increased in proportion to the empathy experienced. In the team's 1998 study of 134 students who were asked to forgive someone who had previously hurt them, how close the offender was to the victim prior to the transgression positively related to the amount of rumination the victim experienced. Rumination and revenge-seeking were positively associated in the study; however, avoidance of the partner and rumination were not. In the 1997 study, 134 students (131 females, 108 males) completed two Likert items about a specific offense -- a) a 5-point item indicating the degree to which the offense hurt them and a 6-point item indicating how wrong they believed the offense to be; b) two 5-point Likert items measuring the degree to which their offenders apologized and attempted to explain their hurtful behavior; and c) an 8-item empathy scale (e.g. Fulzt, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, and Varney, 1986). The main results of the 1997 study showed the well-established relationship between apology and forgiving is likely to partially mediated by empathy.

This appears incongruous at first glance but makes sense when considered through the lens of II's and conflict-linkage theory (Honeycutt, 2004). According to McCullough et al., the closer two people are in a relationship, the more the victim will ruminate about the transgression and the offender. But revenge-seeking and rumination are also co-varying, which means the victim is thinking of getting even more with someone that they are close to than with someone they are not very close to. Perhaps

victims are keeping the conflict alive by replaying the transgression and reliving the offense over and over, all while scheming of ways to "settle the score." Empathy plays an integral role in the process of forgiveness, according to Malcolm and Greenberg (2000). Developing empathy for the offender is the fourth stage in the five-stage process of forgiveness developed by the researchers. Only after this empathy has developed can the aggrieved person construct a new narrative between the victim and the transgressor.

Malcolm and Greenberg (2000) point out that this process often occurs in psychotherapy when victims conduct imaginary conversations with an empty chair, airing their emotions -- sadness, anger, fear, etc. In doing so, the authors write, people gain insight into their own feelings and develop a better understanding of the perspective of the non-present offender. This imaginary conversation, thus, leads to empathy, and this empathy leads to forgiveness.

In the next section, we will summarize the expansive extant literature on relational satisfaction before suggesting a conceptual model linking empathy, forgiveness, and imagined interactions.

### **Relational Satisfaction**

If a person has positive experiences with another individual, he or she will be satisfied with that relationship, to varying degrees (Gaines & Agnew, 2003). When people have their relationship standards met or surpassed, they are more satisfied than when these standards are not achieved (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Drawing on interdependence theory, which suggests that an individual's outcomes are the rewards minus the costs incurred by the interaction, Rusbult (1980) developed an investment

model that proposes a person will commit to a relationship in relation to the extent of his or her satisfaction with the relationship.

Satisfaction in a relationship can both precede relational maintenance strategies, or it can be a relational outcome (Stafford, 2003). In studies of married couples (Holman & Brock, 1986; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990), satisfaction consistently results from positive, constructive communication. Furthermore, less satisfied couples spend less time communicating and engage in less positive communication than do satisfied couples (White, 1983; Zuo, 1992). A study by Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1996) found that wives were more positive, open, and assuring when they and their husbands reported higher levels of satisfaction.

**Relational Maintenance and Relational Satisfaction.** Successfully maintaining relationships has been linked to several positive outcomes, including relational satisfaction and longevity (Canary & Stafford, 1992; 1993; Duck, 1994; Guerrero, Eloy, & Wabnik, 1993; Vangelisti & Huston, 1994). Yet, these studies are based primarily on couples who are living together, including marital partners and close intimates.

According to Dindia and Canary (1993), relational maintenance is necessary to keep relationships in a stable and satisfactory condition, and proactive maintenance may help relational partners circumvent problems that can lead to relational dissolution. Social scientists have identified a number of relational maintenance behaviors that range from everyday routines (such as sharing tasks or engaging in joint activities) to more strategic behaviors (such as intentionally calling a friend to provide support for some crisis he or she is facing) in everyday communication (Canary & Stafford, 1992; 1994; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993). These strategies also include conveying openness or



willingness to communicate with a partner, being positive during interaction, assuring and supporting each other, communicating affection, spending time with important members of a partner's social network, and avoiding potentially negative topics or unfriendly behaviors.

**Relational Satisfaction and LDRs.** Relevant to this study, at least three studies (Guldner & Swensen, 1995; Govaerts and Dixon, 1988); and Stafford & Reske, 1990) on geographically close relationships (GCRs) and long-distance relationships (LDRs) showed that romantic partners in close proximity had no obvious advantage in terms of satisfaction, and at least one (Stafford & Reske, 1990) showed that LDRs expressed more satisfaction and commitment than their GCR counterparts. The authors indicated this could be the result of “idealization,” which can occur when separated couples put their relationship and their partners on a pedestal in lieu of actual physical interaction.

Two studies (Holt & Stone, 1988; Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990) did contradict the larger body of studies that show no advantage for commitment in GCRs over LDRs. One (Holt & Stone, 1988) discovered that partners rated their relationships as less satisfying the longer and further they were away from each other, and another (Rindfuss & Stephen, 1990) found that military couples living apart at the time the study was conducted were more likely after three years to be divorced; however, as Stafford (2003) points out, the divorce rate for military couples is higher than the general population and this should be factored into the generalizability of this study. Along with satisfaction and commitment, trust has been given more attention among LDR studies than in GCR studies and has shown to be an important factor in relational maintenance (Canary & Stafford, 1993) and relational quality (Canary & Cupach, 1988).

Therefore, as displayed in Figure 1, a conceptual link exists between both imagined interactions and empathy and imagined interactions and forgiveness, with empathy serving as the bridge between the two constructs.

In their investigation of the link between empathy and forgiveness, Malcolm and Greenberg (2000) write of a client who imagined her mother, the source of the offense and the target of her anger, sitting in a chair across from her in the psychotherapists' office. During an imagined conversation with her mother, the client began to see her mother's possible point of view, and as a result, empathy ensued. The authors expressed intrigue at the client's imaginings that the offender, her mother, took responsibility for the offense and expressly absolving the client from guilt and blame. "Should it be found that most successful forgiveness processes include this step, future refinements of the model will need to include a component of 'taking responsibility' on the part of the imagined significant other," (Malcolm and Greenberg, 2000, p.198). Clearly, the conceptual link between empathy, forgiveness, and imagined interactions becomes clearer in light of the authors' assertion.

Moreover, the client while having the imagined interaction with the mother could enhance empathy and facilitate forgiveness with the mother if the understanding, relational maintenance, conflict-linkage, and catharsis functions were utilized (Honeycutt, 2003). Additionally, two theorems of imagined interaction conflict-linkage theory support this case study; Theorem 1: Recurring conflict is maintained through retroactive and proactive imagined interactions.

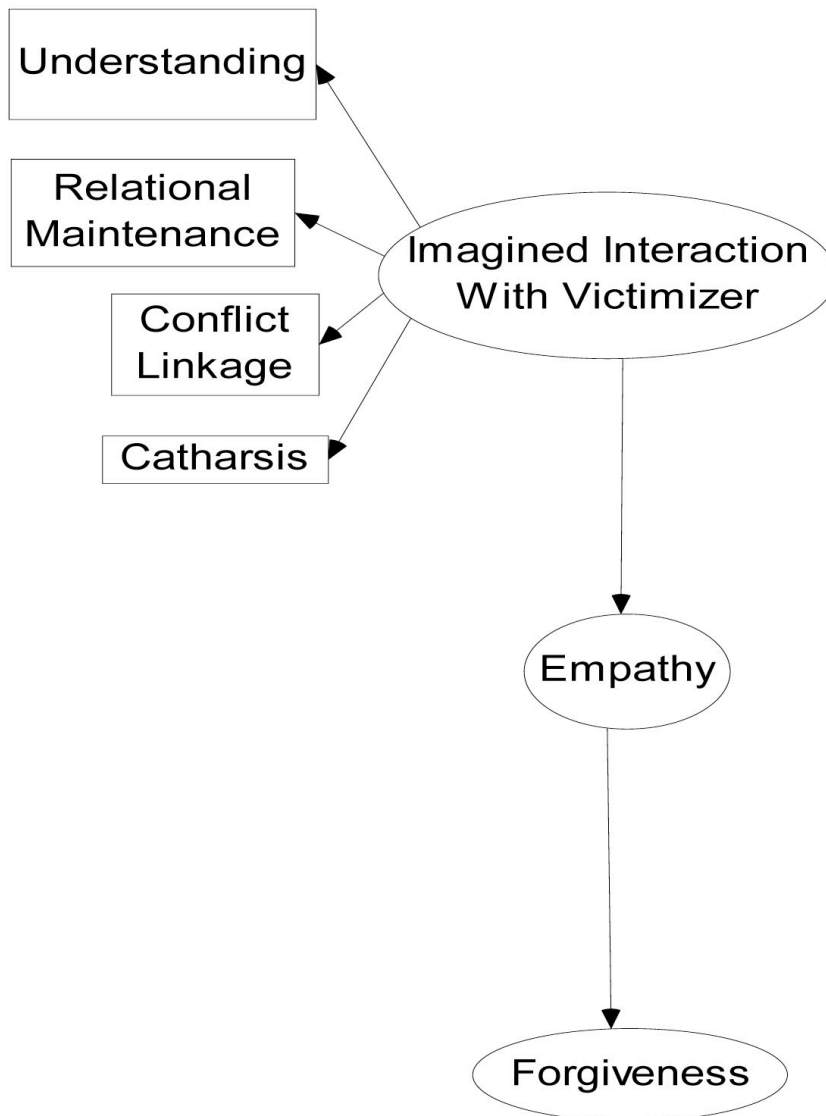


Figure 1: Relationship between Imagined Interactions, Empathy, and Forgiveness

Theorem 2: The current mood of the individual is associated with whether or not his or her imagined interactions are positive or negative. The better a person's mood, the more positive his or her imagined interactions (Honeycutt, 2004; 2010).

**Links between Empathy, Forgiveness, Avoidance and LDRs.** Lawler-Row and Reed (2008) distinguish between the perspective-taking aspect of empathy and several emotional processes. Perspective-taking means understanding another's point of view.

When empathy is experienced as an emotional process, three things can occur with this perspective-taking. First, a person might feel vicariously the emotion the target is feeling. Second, "a person may also feel concern and compassion for a distressed person, an experience that has been called empathic concern, or sympathy, or other-oriented concern," (p.167). Third, the person may feel a more self-oriented distress like anxiety caused by the emotions of the other. People who experience empathic concern, according to Lawler-Row and Reed (2008), behave more altruistically -- even when avoiding or fleeing the situation is possible. Eisenberg et al. (1994) established that those experiencing personal distress will often try to escape the situation, and if they do act altruistically, it is merely because they have cannot escape and have no alternative and do it simply in the hopes of mitigating their personal distress levels.

Perspective-taking, empathic concern, personal distress and forgiveness have not been studied extensively; instead most studies have simply looked at emotional forms of empathy and its relationship to forgiveness (Lawler-Row and Reed, 2008). A study by Konstam et al. (2001) has shown empathic concern and perspective-taking to be associated with state forgiveness. Lawler-Row and Reed (2008) point out the need for more studies in this area, as the data suggests that personal distress and empathic concern pull in opposite directions. The present study aims to answer, among other questions, how forgiveness works in long-distance relationships.

As Lawler-Row and Reed (2008, p.169) write: "Given that the preferred response of people experiencing personal distress is to escape the situation, forgiveness becomes neither necessary nor desirable if the offender can be avoided. Future research could examine the possibility that those inclined to experience personal distress in a context

that encourages empathy with someone who has hurt them would, in the first instance, try to avoid that person (and not be forgiving); however, if avoidance is not possible, they may be more likely to express forgiveness to the offender."

### **Relational Maintenance**

People maintain relationships by communicating, and as long as they do so, these relationships are expected to continue. Other than in cases of death, if the relationship stops it is because people stop communicating altogether. This is not the case when there is just some intermittent lull in the relationship. Even when relationships are temporarily dormant, enjoying no physical contact, they still exist in some basic form (Sigman, 1991). As Dindia (2003) illustrates, "...to maintain a relationship, one must maintain communication" (p. 1). On a related note, to maintain a quality relationship, individuals in a relationship must practice quality communication: this is central to its overall health. However, relational satisfaction and relational maintenance are not the same thing; Dindia (2003) eloquently points this out when she writes, "One can maintain a dissatisfying relationship," (p. 3).

**Definitions of Relational Maintenance.** Similar to forgiveness, scholars cannot agree on a single definition of "relational maintenance," and what is meant by what is maintained can be at least four different things – the type, form, level or stage of the relationship (Dindia, 2000). As long as it does not end, a relationship can change, grow or shrink, and whatever state it is continued in defines relational maintenance (Dindia & Canary, 1993). But as some scholars have noted (Burgoon & Hale, 1984; Dindia & Canary, 1993), a more fitting description is that the relationship is continued in a stable state that is, enjoying a high level of intimacy and closeness. Similarly, those

relationships enjoying stable states have corresponding relational satisfaction, and therefore relational satisfaction stands to reason as the best operational and conceptual definition of relational maintenance (Dindia, 2000).

Because the forces pulling a relationship apart are stronger than those keeping it together, Stafford and Canary (1994) suggested the following: “All relationships require maintenance behaviors or else they deteriorate” (p.7). Several options exist to do this, and Levinger (1965) posed three ways for marriages to become more stable: 1) increase the attractiveness of the relationship 2) decrease the attractiveness of alternate relationships 3) strengthen the barriers against breakup. How strong couples make these barriers will determine the likelihood of avoiding breakup (Attridge, 1994).

**Typologies.** Since Braiker and Kelley (1979) first developed a measure of maintenance behaviors based of of Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) Interdependence Theory, scholars have developed four typologies of relationship maintenance strategies (Bell, Daly & Gonzalez, 1987; Dindia and Baxter, 1987; Stafford and Canary, 2001). At least five relational maintenance strategies have been identified by Stafford and Canary (1991), taken from reports of married and dating couples. The factors are as follows: 1) positivity (being positive and cheerful); openness (using self-disclosure and open discussion about the relationship); assurances (stressing commitment, showing love, and demonstrating faithfulness); network (spending time with common friends and affiliations); and sharing tasks (sharing household chores).

In subsequent research, Canary and Stafford (1992) discovered in one study the frequency with which these tasks occur: assurances were ranked highest and openness was ranked last. Sharing tasks, social networks and positivity filled out the middle ranks,

respectively. Follow-up studies by Ragsdale (1996) and Dainton and Stafford (1993) found sharing tasks to occur most frequently, and openness consistently ranked last. This suggests that self-disclosing and opening up about the relationship is an overrated maintenance behavior (Dindia, 2000). Unlike Dindia and Baxter's (1987) open-ended measure, which asks participants to list what they do to maintain a relationship, Stafford and Canary's (1991) measure is closed-ended. Consequently, it has come to dominate the typologies found in the extant literature on relational maintenance (Dindia, 2000). Additionally, Stafford and Canary's measure relies on the definition regarding maintaining relational satisfaction, which is the focus of most scholarly activity on the subject.

**7-Factor Relational Maintenance Model.** Based on equity theory, Canary and Stafford (1992) developed five factors of relational maintenance: positivity, assurances, openness, sharing tasks, and social networks. Building on this program, Canary, Stafford, Hause, and Wallace (1993) also examined the maintenance behaviors of friends and relatives as well as romantic partners. From these studies, they added a mediated mode and two prosocial categories (joint activities and humor) and two negative social aspects (avoidance and antisocial behaviors). An important behavior Canary et al. (1993) developed from these refined efforts was conflict management.

Examples of this behavior are partners apologizing when they are wrong, cooperating in how they handle disagreements, and being patient and forgiving of their other partner. Stafford et al. (2000) continued this path to identify routine behaviors and developed a 7-factor measure. It identified the original five measures but also split two of them into separate categories. Openness splintered into a separate category called advice,

and positivity broke into two factors, one pertaining to partners' remaining upbeat and positive and the other factor dealing with handling conflicts, namely cooperating in disagreements and apologizing when necessary to keep the peace.

Although most scholars studying marriage and romance have used satisfaction as the most frequent outcome variable, some, like Stafford and Canary, contend that different relational characteristics may be related to various maintenance behaviors. Furthermore, most studies have examined the link between the five original maintenance behaviors and commitment, liking, control mutuality, and relational satisfaction (Stafford, 2003).

**Relational Repair after a Transgression.** Since people typically treat their close relational partners worse than complete strangers or casual acquaintances, scholars have been interested in how couples repair their relationships after a transgression (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Emmers-Sommer, 2003). A multitude of factors can contribute to relational demise, including learning negative things about a partner, lack of spontaneity, loss of personal gains, exclusion, etc. (for a complete summary, see Miller 1997). As Emmers-Sommer (2003) points out, a truism exists stating, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." But if a couple takes this approach, ignoring the ongoing maintenance of the relationship will likely lead to the need for repair at some point.

In their definition of the concept, which this author adopts, Roloff and Cloven (1994) assert that relational maintenance is "the individual or joint approaches intimates take to limit the relational harm that may result from prior or future conflicts and transgressions (p.27)." Because their conceptualization incorporates partners' efforts to rectify past problems and to engage in preventative measures to keep the relationship



running smoothly, this study will operate under the auspices of this definition. As we will point out in subsequent sections, forgiveness and the use of certain functions of imagined interactions could conceivably be employed by couples, especially those in long-distance relationships, to ensure a harmonious union.

Relational commitment, alternatives to the relationship, and satisfaction all dictate the strategy of repair a person will take after a transgression, on both sides of the equation. Partners will likely leave the relationship if they experience low investment, low satisfaction, and high quality alternatives (Rusbult, 1987). Partners who lack satisfaction and investment but do not have quality alternatives will likely neglect their relationship. Conversely, partners who experience high levels of satisfaction and investment but low quality alternatives will show loyalty; however, as Rusbult showed, those who have high satisfaction, high investment and high quality of alternatives will most likely respond to transgression by giving voice to their dissatisfaction.

The type of relationship can also have a bearing on the repair strategy employed. Close personal relationships are more likely to use an integrative strategy – that is, discussing the issue in a constructive manner – than to use avoidance strategies. Less close relationships, like college roommates, might be more inclined to avoid conflict (Emmers-Sommer, 1999; Sillars, 1980). Whether or not this holds true in long-distance relationships, in which avoidance is easier to achieve by virtue of geographical separation, remains an open question and will be discussed in a subsequent section.

Research by Gottman (1994) showed that some relational repair strategies are more effective than others, namely voicing feelings in a constructive manner. Going a different route, Emmers and Canary (1996) used an uncertainty reduction perspective to

examine whether couples would use an interactive, active or passive strategy. Interactive strategies involve engaging the partner directly; active strategies involve gaining knowledge from a third party or putting the partner in a certain situation in an effort to glean information; and a passive strategy involves observing the partner. A fourth category was added called “assumed acceptance” to incorporate those partners who made no attempt to reduce the uncertainty but simply accepted it instead. Emmers and Canary (1996) found that when the goal was repair after a transgression, romantic couples most often engaged in relational talk. In a study by Courtright, Millar, Rogers, and Bagarozzi (1990), spouses suffering marital problems that chose to engage in direct talks and negotiations repaired their relationships. Those spouses who avoided talking and decreased their involvement were more likely to end their marriages.

As Emmers-Sommer (2003) puts it, the prescription for a happy, healthy relationship appears simple: “Be nice to your partner to maintain your relationship, and if you transgress, engage in prosocial, communicative behaviors to repair the relationship,” (p. 199). Repeatedly, research has shown that being positive, talking about the relationship positively and engaging in direct, open communication can positively enhance a relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Dindia, 1989; Dindia & Baxter, 1997; Emmers-Sommer, 1999; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

However, relationships are complex, and prescriptions are never that easy. In the next section, we thoroughly discuss long-distance relationships before turning our attention to how geographically separated couples use forgiveness and intrapersonal communication (i.e. imagined interactions) to cope with the pressures and stresses of maintaining a healthy, happy relationship in the absence of physical contact.

## **Long-Distance Relationships (LDRs)**

Although long-distance relationships (LDRs) are becoming increasingly commonplace in the United States, most studies on relational maintenance have examined geographically-close relationships (Aylor, 2003), hereafter referred to as GCRs. However, with the burgeoning phenomenon of extended military deployment, the economic realities of commuting long-distances to jobs and the prevalence of college students dating over long distances, LDRs warrant further consideration. It is the latter subject population -- college-aged dating partners -- that are of particular interest to this study and to whom we will reference henceforth. As many as 3.5 million Americans report to being in a long-distance relationship (Stafford, 2010). Changes in the way our economy, our technology, and our notions of home-life are structured have contributed to this trend.

In a report of the 1998 Employee Relocation Council, about 10 percent of all couples wind up in a long-distance relationship after switching jobs, and employers said they expected to continue to see job transfers increase (Armour, 1998). A number of scholars (e.g. Dellman-Jenkins, Bernard-Paulucci, & Rushing, 1993; Knox, 1992; Stafford, Daly, and Reske, 1987) have focused on college students in long-distance relationships and found that at least one quarter to about 40 percent report being in one. This number is even higher when factoring in first-year students, who often leave behind high-school sweethearts who either stay at home or attend another school.

**Theoretical Orientations for LDRs.** Although a few theories have been applied to relational maintenance, these have not extended to LDRs, leading Stafford (2005, p. 17) to conclude, "...most research on LDRs has been atheoretical." With that in mind, we

will briefly describe the four major theoretical approaches applied to relational maintenance and the minimal effort made by researchers to apply them to LDR studies. We will then argue for the need for grounding future LDR research in a theoretical framework. The first theory that gained a sustained application to relational maintenance studies was social exchange theory (Kelley & Thibault, 1978), which posits that people develop, cultivate and end relationships based on an internal calculation of costs versus rewards. A variation of this, derived from Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) concept of interdependence, is Rusbult's investment model (1980, 1983). This model argues that people compare their relationships and judge them as satisfactory based on expectations forged from previous relationships and perceptions of their possible alternatives. The second theoretical perspective is Gottman's (e.g. Gottman & Levenson, 2002) behavioral approach, which follows from attribution theory. In this perspective, people view their partner's actions through a stable lens derived from what they perceive to be consistent internal traits. In the third perspective, Duck ( e.g. Duck, 1988, 1994a, 1994b) uses symbolic interactionism to base his assertion that relationships are maintained through everyday talk. He proffers that anything people do to keep their relationship running well can be considered maintenance. Continuing relationships ultimately requires making sense of them (Masuda & Duck, 2000).

Prior research provides contrasting perspectives as physical separation is identified as promoting both relational termination and relational stability. Relationships are said to be contingent on shared meaning (Duck, 1994a) and one presumption of many communication scholars is that meaning is emergent in joint interaction (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996). Mundane, day-to-day, face-to-face (F-to-F) interaction is believed to be

integral for fostering and maintaining interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic ties (Duck & Pittman, 1994). Everyday talk's privileged position is evidenced in Tracy's (2002) discussion of rhetorical and cultural perspectives of relationships wherein she situates the "little stuff" of routine conversation as "the basic ingredients for building and maintaining relationships" (p. 188). Duck (1994) argued that everyday talk is the essence of relationships, providing evidence of partners' "psychological geography" (p. 11). Through everyday talk, partners check out one another's lusts, desires, and attitudes; announce their values; reveal the structure of their concerns; uncover their attachment styles; and otherwise discourse freely on a multitude of topics that both openly and subtly reveal their own, and give clues to other people's, meaning. (p. 11).

Evidence appears to validate the importance of everyday talk: The nature and sheer frequency of romantic partners' day-to-day communication has been linked to positive relational characteristics (e.g., Vangelisti, 2002). Yet in contradiction of these findings, research on long-distance dating relationships (LDRs) reveals that LDR partners often report higher quality relationships than those in geographically close dating relationships (GCRs), despite LDR partners' relatively limited day-to-day FtF interaction (Stafford, 2005). According to Stafford (2005), Duck has spurred the study of relational maintenance more than any other scholar.

However, for the present study, it is the fourth perspective – dialectical theory – that is of most interest. In relationships, inevitable tensions, whether internal or external, push and pull partners in different directions. This results in constant change (Montgomery, 1993). "These tensions are in a constant state of dynamic flux and cannot be resolved; they are managed. Several means of coping with these forces have been

suggested such as alternating from one extreme to the other or attempting to ignore the tension,” (Stafford, 2005, p. 21). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) contend that the best way to manage tensions in interpersonal relationships is to reframe it, thinking about the conflict or issue in such a way as to minimize it or make it seem like something other than conflict.

Stafford (2005) suggests at least four different theories that lend themselves to the study of LDRs, but are not applicable to the present study. These are attachment theory, family solidarity theory, family life span theory, and systems theory. Instead, we will focus on the social cognitive approach, which mandates physical interaction between relational partners as well as mental constructions. Knapp, Daly, Albada, and Miller (2000, p. 15) posit that social cognitive approaches to communication can be divided in two, between “understanding the interrelationships of social cognition and social behavior and understanding the formation and organization of social cognition.” Stafford (2005) contends that both of these domains pertain to LDRs. “...some place more emphasis on the reciprocal nature of thought and communicative behavior; others place more emphasis on how individuals perceive and organize information,” (p. 26).

**LDRs: Definitions and Characteristics.** At least three schools of thought exist when considering the unique nature of LDRs. In the first approach, researchers have established a minimum number of miles necessary to create a physical barrier between partners, but these figures have differed considerably. Some scholars (Carpenter & Knox, 1986) have picked the cutoff of 100 miles or more, while others (Schwebel, Dunn, Moss & Renner, 1992) have settled on 50 miles. A second school of thought has used geographical markers, like different towns or cities or even state lines, to distinguish

LDRs from GCRs (Canary, 1993, Helgeson, 1994, Stephen, 1986). A third and final school of thought, which this author endorses, allows respondents to determine whether they are in an LDR or not. Considering the highly variable and subjective nature of relationships, it is wise to enlist this approach because self-definition “is based on respondents’ definitions, and their own sense of reality in dating situations,” (Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1993, p. 213). Additionally, as Aylor (2003) points out, respondents often cannot accurately determine the number of miles that separate them from their partner, and a strictly applied definition based on solely the criteria of physical distance fails to encompass all relationships. Therefore, some scholars have asked respondents a question like the following one (e.g. Dainton & Aylor, 2001).

“A geographically-close relationship is one in which partners are able to see each other, if they choose, face-to-face most days. A long-distance relationship is one in which both partners are not able to see each other, face-to-face, most days. Would you consider your relationship a distance relationship?”

Stafford (2005, p. 7) offers a cogent description of long-distance relationships that will be endorsed for the purposes of this study throughout: “Relationships are considered to be long distance when communication opportunities are restricted (in the view of the individuals involved) because of geographic parameters and the individuals within the relationship have expectations of a continued close connection.” Long-distance relationships’ logical outgrowth from relational maintenance follows in a definition by Stafford and Canary (1991, p. 220): Maintenance behaviors serve to sustain “the nature of the relationship to the actor’s satisfaction.” Stafford (2005) contends that those couples in LDRs want the same things for their relationship as their GCR counterparts:

satisfaction, liking, commitment, and trust, among other things. The author also points out that LDRs are stressful and depressing for the relational partners. Therefore, those LDRs that stay together for an unspecified length and enjoy positive features such as satisfaction are considered to be successful LDRs.

**Assumptions about LDRs.** People in close relationships in the United States are expected to engage in frequent face-to-face (FtF) interaction, which is considered the ideal form of communication in intimate relationships (O'Sullivan, 2000). Despite the intrapersonal nature of relationships, talking daily is important for partners to establish the foundation upon which mental recreations can be built (Duck & Pittman, 1994). Studies have repeatedly highlighted the importance of daily conversation and small talk in the overall health and satisfaction of relationships (Richmond, 1995; Vangelisti & Banski, 1993; Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991). Additionally, spending time together is another important element of maintaining relationships (Dainton & Stafford, 1993).

Another common assumption about relationships is that people need to be physically close to maintain one (Stafford, 2005). Certainly, more face-to-face interaction is possible when relational partners enjoy living nearby or under the same roof. From this flows the third common assumption, that families and romantic partners are supposed to live together. According to Fitzpatrick and Caughlin (2002), a nuclear family by definition is one that shares a residence, and culturally we do not expect nuclear families, or romantic partners, for that matter, to live far apart for any extended period of time. Of course, this inevitability occurs because of economic demands, such as when a family member gets a job in another city, state, or country. The fourth and final assumption is that close relationships require a high level of shared meaning and understanding. In



families, this manifests itself in terms of high congruence and high agreement (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004), and in individuals this fusion of meanings (VanderVoort & Duck, 2000) corresponds with relational closeness (Sillar, 1998).

In light of these cultural assumptions about maintaining relationships, it is understandable why social science researchers have argued that long-distance dating relationships (LDRs) are “fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity” (Lydon, Pierce, & O’Regan, 1997, p. 105), and long-distance partners experience difficulty meeting each other’s needs (Le & Agnew, 2001). In short, “a majority of both lay people and researchers believe that long-distance relationships (LDRs) usually fail” (Guldner & Swenson, 1995, p. 314).

But despite the apparent pessimism regarding the maintenance of LDRs, they have been found to be as stable (Van Horn et al., 1997), or more stable, than geographically close dating relationships (GCRs) (Stafford & Merolla, 2007; Stafford & Reske, 1990; Stephen, 1986). Stafford (2005, p.30) states bluntly that LDRs “simply do not seem to be as inherently or uniformly problematic as some have claimed,” (e.g. Guldner, 1996). These types of relationships might even confer benefits (Guldner, 1996; Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford et al., 2004) including increased career focus, better academic performance, and increased stamina and rest. The dialectical theory, as purported by Sahlstein (2004), comes into play here. Separated partners have reported feeling rejuvenated when they are reunited with their loved ones, as well as reporting feeling depressed when they part again. However, Sahlstein reports that participants in the 2004 study expressed joy and anticipation of seeing their partners again, completing the cycle.

Aylor (2003) contents that LDRs are qualitatively different from GCRs, which suffer no physical separation or lack face-to-face contact. At least three of the unique challenges partners face are of particular interest to this study. First, limited face-to-face time between partners leads to high expectations for quality encounters when they do get together (Rohlfing, 1995). Furthermore, Rohlfing, citing research by Westefeld and Liddell (1982), asserts that couples have a harder time assessing the degree and state of the relationship from a distance. Lastly, partners in distance relationships experience a more extreme range of emotions.

Despite this last fact, research into LDRs has shown that individuals within them enjoy the same or even greater levels of satisfaction, commitment and trust as do those in geographically close situations (e.g. Govaerts and Dixon, 1988; Guldner & Swensen, 1995, Stafford & Reske, 1990). In fact, if staying together as a couple is the benchmark for success, LDRs are at least as successful and probably more so than geographically close couples (Stephen, 1986). Similarly, Stafford and Reske (1989, 1990) found substantial stability in long-distance couples during a six month period in which 30 percent of geographically close couples split up while none of the LDRs did so. This jibes with the majority of research on GCRs that show a clear link between relational maintenance behaviors and stability, commitment, and relational satisfaction (e.g. Dainton, Stafford, & Canary, 1994; Lund, 1985; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Stafford and Canary (1991) went so far as to suggest that idealization could account for findings of theirs that showed individuals in LDRs reported being more “in love,” the operationalization for commitment and satisfaction, than those in GCRs.

Idealization occurs, they argue, because partners tend to see only the best side of their partners due to limited face-to-face interaction.

**Using Idealization to Maintain LDRs.** By their very nature, LDRs do not enjoy unlimited face-to-face conversations. This severely limits the scope of topics individuals can talk about. Because of this, they tend to steer away from conflict and stick to topics about love, intimacy, and the health and status of the relationship (Stephen, 1986). The author recommended individuals downplay the importance of daily talk and focus instead on using their limited conversational interactions to build their relationship up. This prescription was seconded by Guldner and Swenson (1995) when they argued that talk and time spent together does not equal relationship satisfaction, intimacy, trust or commitment. Instead, the authors attributed the success or failure of LDRs to “some other factor associated with even small amounts of time spent together,” (p. 320).

Stafford and Reske (1990), among others, contend that the nebulous component that keeps LDRs together is idealization. The idea is that because LDRs are limited in their face time, they can avoid unsightly realities. In geographically close relationships, partners cannot avoid the flaws in each other’s personalities or the structural imbalances in the union. In sum, the inability of LDRs to communicate at will works in their favor: if individuals cannot talk to each other about anything and everything, they have fewer chances to discover unpleasant truths about each other (Stafford, 2005). In addition to putting their best faces forward in face-to-face encounters, individuals in LDRs also avoid conflict and eschew negativity so they do not spoil valuable time together (Sahlstein, 2004; Stafford et al., 2004). Studies have shown that when partners are separated, they daydream about their significant others (Allen, 1990) and ruminate about

positive relational memories (Sahlstein, 2004). The question remains whether LDRs over-emphasize forgiveness on their road to idealization. Furthermore, do LDRs rely on intrapersonal mechanisms like imagined interactions to defuse conflict in the relationship? If so, it should be noted that Gottman and Krokoff (1989) suggest that couples who avoid conflict before getting married could be putting themselves at a risk of dissolution because they do not learn how to fight constructively. Worse still, LDRs who idealize the relationship might find they are incompatible when they finally come together because these overinflated images are impossible to maintain on a daily basis (Stafford, 2005).

**Coping Strategies of LDRs.** It is important to note at least two studies that have contradicted the established findings that LDRs are as happy and committed as their geographically close counterparts. Holt and Stone (1988) found a negative correlation between satisfaction and distance apart, and satisfaction and time between visits. This suggests the greater the number of miles and the longer the partners have to go before seeing each other again, the greater their dissatisfaction with the relationship. Similarly, in a longitudinal study Rindfuss and Stephen (1990) looked at a military population, which experiences a higher than average divorce rate, and found that couples who were geographically separated during the study were more likely to be divorced three years later. The high divorce rate among this group could sway the generalizability of this study, however (Aylor, 2003).

Communication scholars have examined the role of trust in long-distance relationships, although minimal work has been accomplished to date. In those studies that have focused on trust, it has been found to be an important relational characteristic

among those in LDRs. In studies by Canary and Cupach (1988) and Canary and Stafford (1993), trust predicts relational quality and is positively related to relational maintenance. While trust has enjoyed a minimal role in the examination of coping strategies for LDRs, forgiveness has had little, if any, examination. Stafford et al. (2000) found forgiveness to be a type of relational maintenance behavior, categorized under the rubric “conflict management,” but these studies were done in the context of geographically close couples.

Based on initial work that stemmed from workshops conducted by the Iowa State student YWCA and counseling services program, Westefeld and Liddell (1982) found nine strategies that couples used to maintain LDRs. Two of these strategies are of particular interest to this study (see Rohlfsing, 1995, for a complete list and discussion of Westefeld and Liddell’s strategies). The first strategy is being open and honest with their partner. The second strategy is focusing on positive aspects of LDRs. Building on this research, Holt and Stone (1988) and Wilmot and Carbaugh ((1986) conducted quantitative studies, from which Holt and Stone identified two effective strategies for maintaining LDRs: frequent visits and daydreaming about the partner (visualization). Conjuring images of interactions with their partners increased relational satisfaction among those with a “preference for visual or verbal response modes of cognitive processing,” (Holt and Stone, 1988, p. 137).

Wilmot and Carbaugh (1986) focused their research on coping behaviors, which are conceptually different from maintenance behaviors in that they are limited to the individual, where as couples as a unit engage in maintenance behaviors. They found that partners used the following coping strategies: self-development, independence, high levels of self-disclosure, and adopting a religion. Almost a decade later, Canary (1993)

asked romantic, platonic and family relationships “What are the communication behaviors that I use to maintain my various relationships?” From this, 10 maintenance strategies were categorized: positivity, openness, assurances, sharing tasks, social networks, joint activities, cards/letter/calls, avoidance, antisocial, and humor.

Canary’s study did not distinguish between LDRs and GCRs in terms of the frequency of use for each maintenance strategy. This is an important distinction because those couples in long distance relationships very well might tend toward more positivity because dwelling on negative events in an already strained relationship might damage it. Also, avoiding negative topics could also help keep the relationship safe. The question remains whether those couples in long-distance relationships must be more forgiving and more likely to avoid conflict than their geographically close counterparts. If so, the question then turns to whether or not these bottled up conflicts continue to fester inside the minds of the conflicted individuals, building relational dissatisfaction. Or is there some other intrapsychic mechanism that allows them to resolve them internally without bringing it the surface and possibly injuring the fragile long-distance relationship.

In the next two sections, we will discuss the concept of imagined interactions, followed by relational satisfaction.

### **Imagined Interactions**

Imagined interactions (IIs) are a type of social cognition involving mental dialogues that occur with significant others. Most IIs occur offline, in which the self is not in the physical presence of the interaction parties. Occasionally, they occur online, such as when having a heated argument with someone while anticipating ensuing lines of arguments and/or counter-arguments (Honeycutt, 2003). IIs are a type of mindful

daydreaming that tend to occur with romantic partners, friends, and relatives as opposed to total strangers (Honeycutt, 2003). Because imagined interactions can function as a type of plan for future behavior, the construct creates a window into individual's personality development by way of their internal talk. Imagined interactions have been linked to a host of communication behaviors, including catharsis, personal understanding and rehearsal for anticipated encounters (Honeycutt & Ford, 2001; Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1989).

Both behaviorally and cognitively, imagined interactions have been linked to maintaining relationships (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011), marital satisfaction (Honeycutt, 1995), and managing conflict when the relational partner is absent (Honeycutt, 1995). For example, individuals often ruminate about prior arguments and how these arguments were handled, as well as preparing for the next encounter. Hence, people have retroactive IIs in which prior conflicts are replayed in the mind as well as proactive IIs in order to prepare for upcoming conversations (Honeycutt, 2004). Since most IIs tend to occur with significant others, Honeycutt and Bryan (2011) proffer that many II episodes are linked and occur between actual face-to-face interaction, and as such, allow the partners to review and preview conversations. This will be discussed further in terms of conflict linkage theory later in this section.

**II Functions.** Six functions of imagined interactions have been identified by Honeycutt (2003): relational maintenance, conflict linkage and resolution, rehearsal, self-understanding, catharsis and compensation. The relational maintenance function allows individuals to use IIs as tools for continuing their relationships when circumstances prevent actual interaction. The memory structure approach to IIs suggests that they both

bring the relationship into existence and develop it as well (Honeycutt, 1995). The conflict linkage and resolution function as described by Honeycutt (2004) allows users of IIs to manage conflict constructively as well as dysfunctional uses resulting in long-standing conflict or even depression. Indeed, many individuals are caught in revenge states where they are absorbed with retaliation. While memories of conflict are re-experienced as retroactive IIs, some couples report they help deal with suppressed conflict that is not being openly discussed (Honeycutt, 1995; 2003).

Rehearsal is a major function of IIs. There are studies indicating how rehearsal helps in forensic competition (Gotcher & Honeycutt, 1991), facilitating goals in grade appeals involving teacher-student interaction (Berkos, Allen, & Plax, 2006), and planning for doctor-patient consultation (Bryant, 2008). Allen & Honeycutt (1998) have shown IIs to aid in the planning process, helping to reduce anxiety and increase speech fluency. Geographically separated couples (GSCs) use IIs to rehearse future interactions (Allen & Berkos, 2009). Furthermore, the rehearsal function helps people to make wise and helpful decisions by helping us explore the rewards and costs of choosing one course of action over another (Honeycutt, 2003).

In relation to individual identity, IIs can help people uncover differing aspects of the self. The self-discovery process has been discussed in terms of the self-understanding function as individuals have IIs to understand their attitudes and opinions on current events, political orientations, or values. Zagacki et al. (1992) found that IIs that provided increased self-understanding were also more likely to involve verbal imagery and more likely to star the self in the central role. LDR couples use IIs to increase self-understanding more than do couples that are together (Allen & Berkos, 2009). Helping



understand its function in regards to loneliness, this finding suggests that LDR couples have a greater need to develop better understanding of the relational situation before actual interaction because of the limits on real face time between partners.

A critical function of imagined interactions as recognized by Honeycutt (2003) is the ability to relieve stress and reduce uncertainty about another's actions. This function, catharsis, has been shown by Allen and Berkos (2009) to allow users of IIs to "get things off their chest," so to speak, when unacceptable emotional behaviors are inappropriate in certain live situations. Allen and Honeycutt (1997) have also shown the catharsis function reduces overall anxiety levels in users by allowing them to release certain emotional tensions.

Finally, the compensation function makes up for an individual's lack of actual interaction with a relational partner. McCann and Honeycutt (2006) demonstrate intercultural differences among Americans, Japanese, and the Thai in which the Thai feel emboldened in some of their IIs to say that things that they would not be able to articulate for fear of reprisals. Hence, the II compensates for cultural sanctions against speaking back to individuals of a higher status (e.g., parents, elders, supervisors). Additionally, Rosenblatt and Meyer (1986) have shown that IIs replace real interaction in clinical interventions when it is not possible for a client to talk with a therapist. Furthermore, instead of confronting actual loved ones and risk offending or driving them away, individuals may choose to have compensatory imagined interactions. This reduces the risk of relational damage due to hurtful messages (Honeycutt, 2003).

To summarize, IIs serve a variety of functions including relational maintenance as intrusive thinking occurs in which the partner is thought about outside of his/her

physical presence. (Honeycutt & Ford, 2001). IIs are used to manage conflict. Individuals relive old argument while simultaneously imagining statements for ensuing encounters. Hence, the argument may pick up where it left off from a prior interaction. Rehearsal and the planning of messages is important (Honeycutt, 2003). Individuals report how they prepare for important encounters and even think of various messages depending on the response of the interaction partner. In terms of understanding, IIs allow people to clarify their own thoughts and promote understanding of their own views. The catharsis function allows people to release feelings and vent feelings of frustration or joy. Finally, IIs may be used to compensate for the lack of actual conversations. These functions are not independent of each other. Some of them may occur simultaneously. For example, compensating for the lack of real interaction in a long-distance relationship may be used to keep the relationship alive as well as rehearsing what will be said at the next telephone conversation.

This study examines how dating partners use IIs to psychologically maintain long-distance relationships. IIs can help to achieve maintaining relationships by concentrating thought on relational scenes and partners (Honeycutt, 1991;1995; Honeycutt, 1999). Research among college students demonstrates that LDR couples use IIs as a means of maintaining their relationships (Allen & Berkos, 2008). Indications are that couples who are geographically separated experience increases in the number of IIs during times of separation and view their use as a coping strategy. This would seem to suggest that IIs are tools allowing individuals to continue their relationships when circumstances prevent actual interaction. The study's findings also suggest that LDR couples geographically separated experience increased understanding as a result of their

II usage, as well as greater use of IIs for rehearsal. Together these findings imply that IIs can and do serve a significant role in perpetuating relationships. While imagined interactions may create a relationship, they also shape it as it goes through certain stages of development. Individuals have expectations about what is likely to happen in different types of relationships based on memory and experience.

**Imagined Interactions and Conflict.** Pervasive conflict is common among many relational partners (Mallouk, 1981). Honeycutt and Bryan (2011) assert that romantic couples can keep conflict going even when they are not in each other's presence through the use of retroactive and proactive IIs. According to conflict linkage theory (Honeycutt, 2003, 2004), relational partners can bridge the gap between conflict episodes using IIs. This can occur when an individual uses retroactive IIs to review a hurtful encounter and then formulate a more forceful response to future encounters through the use of proactive IIs. This linkage of retroactive and proactive IIs keeps the conflict alive, even in the absence of the other partner (Honeycutt, 2003). Similarly, Cloven and Roloff (1991) showed that thinking about a relational problem more frequently increases the perceived severity of the issue. Called "rumination," repetitive and frequent thoughts about negative occurrences can undermine relational partners' ability to resolve conflicts (Lyubormirsky, Tucker, Caldwell, & Berg, 1999). A similar term for the same concept is "mulling," which Honeycutt describes as "...mentally reliving the argument repeatedly and involves the use of retroactive IIs (2003, p.73). Mulling over arguments and withdrawing after a conflict episode (Johnson & Roloff, 1998) have been shown to be negatively related to relational partners' perception that their conflict can be resolved. Walenfelsz and Hample (2010) found that people who believe conflict is good for their

relationships have more pleasant IIs. Conversely, the authors also discovered that individuals who find conflict stressful tend to have less pleasant IIs about arguing or fighting. Having pleasant IIs has been found to relate positively with relational satisfaction (Honeycutt & Wiemann, 1999). The authors contextual this finding thusly:

“This finding is important in terms of social cognition because it reveals that a common outcome of close relationships, relationship happiness, is reflected in the minds of individuals internally in the form of intrapersonal communication in which individuals imagine pleasant interactions with relational partners. Hence, communication occurs internally as well as dyadically.” (p. 79).

Now we will turn lastly to the topic of relational satisfaction before listing the proposed research questions and hypotheses for this study.

### **Rationale for Research Questions and Hypotheses**

As relationships continue to strain under the stresses of the modern world – college and job relocations, commuter marriages, military deployment, migration, etc. – the requisites for their health will continue to concern communication scholars. As noted earlier, over 3.5 million Americans report to being in a long-distance relationship (Stafford, 2010), and as much as 50 % of college students report being in one (Armour, 1998). Because healthy romantic relationships are so important to adults’ overall well-being, scholars should continue to study how being separated affects us.

Current research into LDDRs and GCDRs typically takes one of two paths, the “absence makes the heart grow fonder” path or the “out of sight, out of mind” path. Competing studies have both show LDDRs and GCDRs to have the upper-hand. Stafford and Merolla (2007) found that couples in LDDRs had better relationships and higher-quality communication while Van Horn et al. (1997) reported that GCDRs considered themselves more satisfied than their counterparts. Clearly, more research is warranted

here. Although there have been studies in LDDRs that examine a variety of topics such as reunions (Stafford & Merolla, 2007), media use (Dainton & Aylor, 2002), coping methods (Maguire & Kinney, 2010), relational maintenance (Merolla, 2010) and relational satisfaction (Sahlstein, 2006), only one study found in the current research project examined conflict management (Reys, 2011). Using the theoretical framework of Berger's Uncertainty Reduction Theory (1987) and Peterson's (1987) conflict management strategies model, Reys' study aimed to see whether couples with proximal differences used different conflict management styles. No differences were discovered.

Although ample research highlights the myriad concepts and connections between the variables of forgiveness, empathy, imagined interactions, relational maintenance, satisfaction, and proximity differences in relationships, none has attempted to understand the phenomena in a comprehensive way. The study by Reys (2011) indicated no difference exists in the style of conflict management strategies used by long-distance versus geographically-close couples. However, Reys' study used Peterson's (1983) conflict management strategies model, which limits couples' strategic options to five distinct categories – separation, domination, compromise, integrative agreement, and structural improvement. None of these categories deals explicitly with forgiveness. Neither do they allow for the catharsis function of imagined interactions, which might allow for angry individuals engaged in conflict to deal with the problem intrapersonally. The question then remains whether those couples in LDDRs use more forgiveness and imagined interactions to maintain healthy relationships than do GCDRs.

This is an important distinction between this study and Reys (2011), and the author of that study suggests that the reason no differences were found between the

conflict management styles of LDDRs and GCDRs is because they communicate differently *before* conflicts rather than *during* them.

“Thus, once couples have reached the point of engaging in conflict, LDDR and GCDR tendencies are basically the same, but what is different is their communication prior to engaging in the conflict, for example, their often limited communication and limited topic choices. Thus, one limitation of the current study is that it only measured conflict management strategies and did not focus on the differences in communication styles among partners in either LDDRs or GCDRs that lead to potentially help *avoid* conflict, and thus, the need for conflict management strategies. In order to fully understand conflict management styles between LDDRs and GCDRs it may be necessary to focus on communication practices and causes *prior* to the occurrence of conflict” (Reys, 2011, p. 31).

That is what this current research project intends to accomplish. Accordingly, the following research questions and hypotheses are submitted based on the prior research discussed at length in the previous sections.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

H1: Partners in long-distance relationships will be more forgiving than partners in geographically close relationships.

H2: Partners in long-distance relationships will use conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy more than partners in geographically-close relationships.

H3: Partners in long-distance relationships will have a greater use of imagined interactions than partners in a geographically-close relationship.

H4: Partners in long-distance relationships will exhibit more empathy/perspective taking than partners in a geographically-close relationship.

RQ1: Do forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy and the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management predict relational satisfaction?

RQ2: Will relational satisfaction differ between partners in long-distance relationships and partners in geographically-close relationships?

RQ3: What is the relationship between forgiveness and use of the relational maintenance strategy conflict management?

H5: The use of imagined interactions will predict a positive association with forgiveness.

RQ4: Do the functions of imagined interactions predict the relational maintenance strategy conflict management?

RQ5: What is the relationship between empathy and the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy?

RQ6: What is the relationship between the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy and relational satisfaction?

RQ7: What is the relationship between imagined interactions and empathy?

H6: Imagined interactions will positively predict relational satisfaction.

**Independent Variables: Proximity (LDR vs. GCC); Empathy; Imagined Interactions; Relational Maintenance Strategy (Conflict Management).**

**Dependent Variables: Forgiveness; Empathy; Imagined Interactions; Relational Satisfaction; Relational Maintenance Strategy (Conflict Management)**

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

#### **Overview**

In this chapter, I will describe the methods used for the current study, as well as detail the sampling technique and sample characteristics. Lastly, I will describe the survey instrument and report the reliabilities before discussing in detail the measurement of all variables.

#### **Sample**

**Recruitment.** I collected data from 181 participants taking undergraduate communication classes at two public universities in the southeastern United States. Students were awarded class credit for taking the survey. To participate, students had to either be currently in a romantic relationship, either long-distance or geographically close, or they had to have been in one during the last six months. IRB approval was sought from both schools, each of which exempted it from formal review.

For the purposes of this study, a long-distance romantic relationship was defined as :1) you and your significant other live at least 50 miles apart; 2) your relationship is characterized by little or no face-to-face contact; 3) your relationship may have started as geographically close and is presently long-distance. Likewise, a geographically close romantic relationship was defined as: 1) you and your romantic partner live less than 50 miles apart, and; 2) your relationship is characterized by frequent face-to-face contact.

**Sample Size and Statistical Power.** The survey was distributed online and the data collected using Survey Monkey. Wrench et al. (2008) recommend that as a general rule, a larger sample size should be used if you want to produce results that are more precise. Moreover, the researchers conclude that small sample sizes often make it



impossible for a statistical test to correctly detect when a null hypothesis should be rejected. In fact, too many researchers, they warn, “try to calculate complicated statistics based on very small sample sizes,” (Wrench et al., 2008, p.305). When dealing with sample sizes for non-random samples, they recommend the following:

Ideally, no sample should be smaller than 200. When a sample has 200 or more participants, the likelihood of finding statistically significant small differences and relationships increases, which decreases the incidence of Type II error...To increase the likelihood that a statistical test will be able to reject the null hypothesis when it should, a researcher should use appropriate statistical tests, use one-and two-tailed tests appropriately, and have a large sample. Power, when it is measured, exists on a continuum from 0 to 1. However, statistical power should never be lower than 0.8., or you risk the chance of missing actual relationships and differences that actually exist. (Wrench et al., 2008, p. 305)

Power, statistically speaking, is the odds of correctly identifying a difference or relationship when one truly exists. Based on the results from your statistical analysis, the researcher not only rejects the null hypothesis, but the null hypothesis that actually exists in the “real world” is rejected, too. Power, represented by  $1 - \beta$ , is the number of times out of 100 when there is a relationship or difference in a study and there is also a corresponding relationship or difference that exists in the real world. If your beta is equal to 0.05, then your power is  $1 - 0.05 = 0.95$  (Wrench et al., 2008).

It is important to note that beta and alpha (Type II risk and Type I risk) are inversely related. Increasing the stringency to correct for either error opens the researcher up for the possibility of committing the other type of error. According to Wrench et al. (2008), increasing the sample size lets a researcher accomplish both low alpha and high beta values. “To prevent both Type I and Type II errors, researchers are encouraged to recruit fairly large samples (at least 200 participants)” (Wrench et al., 2008, p. 310).

Because of time constraints, I was only able to recruit 181 participants. Although a sample size of 200 or more would have been optimal, there is at least one advantage to a small sample size. Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2006) posit that large sample sizes can detect even slight statistical relationships, which can be entirely meaningless. With a smaller sample size, any deviation from the null could suggest a more meaningful effect rather than a random and conceptually meaningless statistical fluctuation.

**Demographics and Characteristics.** Of the 181 participants, 59% were female and 41% were male, with a mean age of 21.5 years (range 18-46, SD=4.1), and 67% white and 25% African American. As for relational status, 66% considered themselves geographically close while 34% were in a long-distance relationship. Similarly, 37% lived more than 50 miles from their partner. About 40% of respondents said they see their partner at least each weekend or longer. While 94% of the respondents were dating, 6% were married. As for length of partnership, the mean was 2.3 years (28 months) with a mode of 1.3 years (15 months) ( $M=2.3$ ,  $Mo=1.3$ ,  $SD=Range\ 1-176$ ).

### **Survey Instrument**

All participants took an online survey designed to help explain how forgiveness, empathy, use of imagined interactions, and proximity to a romantic partner relate to relationship satisfaction. It was also designed to help determine if partners in long-distance relationships are relying on forgiveness and imagined interactions more than geographically-close couples and to help illuminate the connection between imagined interactions, forgiveness, and empathy, which is still an underdeveloped research question in the extant literature.

## **Measurement of Variables**

There are six variables of interest in this study. Five of the variables (relational distance – i.e. GCR vs. LDR; forgiveness; imagined interactions; relational maintenance strategies; and empathy) act as both predictor and criterion variables. One of the variables, relational satisfaction, acts as an outcome or dependent variable. Additionally, demographic information was collected including sex, race, age, length of relationship, frequency of visits, relationship status (i.e. married versus dating) and distance apart.

**LDR vs. GCR.** For the purposes of this study, a long-distance romantic relationship was defined as 1.) you and your significant other live at least 50 miles apart; 2.) your relationship is characterized by little or no face-to-face contact; 3.) your relationship may have started as geographically close and is presently long-distance. Likewise, a geographically close romantic relationship was defined as 1.) you and your partner live less than 50 miles apart; 2.) your relationship is characterized by frequent face-to-face contact; 3.) your relationship may have started as long-distance but is presently geographically close.

**Forgiveness.** To assess forgiveness at the dyadic level, I used a truncated version of Hargrave and Sells (1997) Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale (IRRS). The original consists of 44 yes-no questions designed to determine the extent to which a person who has experienced serious hurt from a specific family member 1.) continues to feel pain as a result of the offense and 2.) has forgiven the offending family member for the offenses that occurred in the past. There are two components to this scale, the Pain scale and the Forgiveness scale. The Pain scale consists of four subscales: shame, rage,

control, and chaos. The Forgiveness scale consists of four subscales: insight, understanding, giving the opportunity for compensation, and the overt act of forgiving. Internal consistencies for the Pain and Forgiveness scales surpassed .90. Although the original scale uses dichotomous answers, i.e. “Yes, I believe this is true or No, I believe this is false,” I have rearranged the scale to reflect a Likert-type 7-point scale ranging from YES! to NO! to reflect the same item responses throughout the 5-instrument survey. Moreover, the authors suggest that using another rating scale other than their initial 0 to 1 range might make for more meaningful interpretations (Hargrave and Sells, 1997). Results show that the IRRS has significant construct validity, strong reliability, successfully discriminates between clinical and nonclinical populations, and accurately measures the forgiveness framework.

For the purposes of this study, I used only the first 22 questions on the IRRS, which pertain to the “Forgiveness” dimension of the scale. There are four corresponding subscales in the “Forgiveness” dimension: Insight, Understanding, Giving the Opportunity for Compensation, and the Overt Act of Forgiving. Wherever applicable, wording was modified in the questions to reflect a relational partner (i.e. “my partner...”).

In the present study sample, reliability for the first subscale, “Overt Act of Forgiveness,” was  $\alpha = .81$ . Items in this subscale consisted of questions like “My partner has apologized to me for the pain he or she has caused in my life,” and “I believe my partner would not intentionally hurt me again because he or she is now trustworthy in our relationship.” Reliability for the second subscale, “Giving Opportunities for Compensation,” was  $\alpha = .78$ . Items in this subscale consisted of questions like “I believe

we are on the road to restoring our relationship” and “I have a current relationship with this person and feel little need to talk about the past hurt.” Reliability for the third subscale, “Insight,” was  $\alpha = .23$ . Items in this subscale consisted of questions like “I feel powerless over circumstances of our relationship when I’m with this person” and “I have difficulty stopping this person from causing me harm.” Reliability for the last subscale, “Understanding,” was  $\alpha = .42$ . Items in this subscale consisted of questions like “My partner has pain that has nothing to do with me,” and “I never seem to ‘win’ when it comes to relating to this person.”

The low reliability of the third subscale, Insight, could be from the misinterpretation of the word “pain” in two of the five questions. After eliminating these two questions, “I know how to effectively stop my partner from causing me pain” and “I understand why I feel pain from my partner,” the reliability of the remaining three items was a respectable  $\alpha = .73$ . According to Nunnally (1967), reliabilities over .70 are acceptable. Given that a minimum of at least three items are needed for reliability calculations, and the fact that three of the subscales were acceptably reliable with scores of Overt Act of Forgiveness (.81), Giving Opportunities for Compensation (.78) and Insight (.73), these three scales are included in the analyses. Because of the low reliability for Understanding (.42), it was not included in the analyses.

The three subscales (Overt Act of Forgiveness, Giving Opportunities for Compensation, and Insight) were calculated to form a composite scale, called Forgiveness Dimension. Low scores on this scale indicate high involvement, which means victims of an offense 1.) perceive themselves as successful in addressing injury

with the perpetrator and experience a greater sense of trust 2.) want to continue the relationship with the offender 3.) are able to identify and alter hurtful patterns.

**Imagined Interactions.** A modified version of the Survey of Imagined Interaction was used (Honeycutt; 2003; Honeycutt; 2008; Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1993). The SII is a multidimensional instrument that describes the concept of imagined interactions using visual “YES-NO” scales. A sample item measuring frequency of having imagined interactions is: “I have imagined interactions many times throughout the week.” (NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!).

The characteristics (or attributes) and functions may be measured in terms of overall usage as well as in specific contexts or the most recent II. As noted by Honeycutt (2010), it is important to contextualize items for specific research domains. This version of the SII has been modified to focus on specific interaction partners and is worded accordingly. (e.g., “Imagined interactions with my partner help me relieve tension and stress.”)

The six functions of imagined interactions are measured with a variety of items to determine how participants use them. For instance, the following subcategories, modified to highlight a specific situational partner, are measured on the 7-point Likert scale as such: 1.) Self-understanding: “Imagined interactions often help me to actually talk about feelings or problems later on with my partner.” 2.) Rehearsal: “Imagined interaction helps me plan what I am going to say for an anticipated encounter with my partner.” 3.) Catharsis: “Imagined interactions help me to reduce uncertainty about my partner’s actions and behaviors.” 4.) Conflict management: “I rarely replay old arguments with my partner in my mind.” 5.) Compensation: “Imagining talking to my partner substitutes for

the absence of real communication.” 6.) Relational maintenance: “I use imagined interactions to think about my partner.”

In addition to the six functions, an additional attributes/characteristic was examined -- frequency. Overall, there are eight attributes of IIs: (discrepancy, frequency, retroactivity, proactivity, valence, variety, specificity, and self-dominance). However, for the purposes of this study, only II Frequency was of particular interest.

From the present study sample, reliabilities for these attributes/characteristics and functions are as follows: Self-Understanding ( $\alpha = .87$ ), Rehearsal ( $\alpha = .83$ ), Catharsis ( $\alpha = .7$ ), Conflict Management ( $\alpha = .74$ ), Compensation ( $\alpha = .90$ ), Relational Maintenance ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and Frequency ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Relational Maintenance.** A modified version of Stafford et al.’s (2000) 31-question Relational Maintenance Strategies Measure (RMSM) was used to assess strategic relational maintenance. Originally, the scale worked off five original maintenance factors developed by Stafford and Canary (1991), with a subsequent measure adding two extra factors – conflict management (e.g., “I am patient and forgiving with my partner”) and advice (e.g., “I tell my partner what he or she should do about his or her problems”). The original five factors are positivity; openness; assurances; social network; sharing tasks. Each of these items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1-“totally disagree” to 7-“totally agree.” However, to achieve consistency in the survey, I have changed the answers to a 7-point scale indicating the same outcome, but using “NO!” to “YES!”

Of the six factors found in the RMSM, only one – conflict management – was of particular interest to this study. Five items with the statements (“I apologize when I am

wrong,” “I cooperate in how I handle disagreements,” “I listen to my partner and try not to judge,” “I am understanding,” and “I am patient and forgiving” showed a high reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ) in this study sample. These items were computed into a single variable, named RMSM Conflict Management.

**Empathy.** A modified version of Davis’ (1980) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) was used to measure participants’ empathy. Originally a 28-item instrument containing four subscales: perspective-taking; fantasy items; empathic concern items, and personal distress items, this shortened version in the present study only used five questions representing the perspective-taking dimension. Alpha reliability was high (.85) for the five items, measured with a 7-point scale from “NO!” to “YES!” The items include statements such as “I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both,” and “When I’m upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his shoes.”

**Relational Satisfaction.** Relational satisfaction was measured using a modified version of Norton’s (1983) Quality Marital Index in which reference to marital partners is replaced by simply referring to a more generic term, “partner”, e.g., “I really feel like part of a team with my partner.” Consistent with the other scales in this survey, this instrument measures responses on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (e.g. “NO! to YES!”). The instrument, which consists of five questions, also asks the participant to rate his or her happiness level in the relationship, with 1 being “very unhappy” and 7 being “very happy.” This scale has been shown to be highly reliable ( $\alpha = .95$ ) by Baxter (1990).



## **CHAPTER 4 RESULTS**

This chapter presents the results of the investigation. The first section describes the results of the research hypotheses. The second section describes the results of the research questions. Analysis for the present investigation was conducted using SPSS. Overall, results indicate low to moderate support for the hypotheses and research questions.

### **Preliminary Analyses**

Because of the high degree of conceptual similarity between some variables, multicollinearity was a concern at the outset. Multicollinearity occurs when there is a high degree of correlation between predictor variables, which makes it difficult to discern their individual effects on the outcome variable. Because multicollinearity occurs when two or more predictor variables contain much of the same information, this can lead to misleading or inaccurate results (Leech, Barrett & Morgan. 2005). “Multicollinearity may occur because several predictors, taken together, are related to some other predictors or set of predictors. For this reason, it is important to test for multicollinearity when doing multiple regression,” (Leech et al, 2005).

It is especially important to check for multicollinearity, according to Leech et al. (2005), when using a relatively large set of predictors, and/or if the researcher believes that there is some sort of conceptual or empirical reason to suspect a correlation between variables. “If variables are highly correlated (e.g. correlated at .50 or .60 and above), then one might decide to combine (aggregate) them into a composite variable or eliminate one or more of the highly correlated variables if the variables do not make a meaningful composite variable,” (Leech et al., 2005, pg. 91).

Occurrences of multicollinearity were checked using a regression analysis matrix. Variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance, which are the inverse of each other, was also checked. Variance inflation factors greater than 4.0 indicate multicollinearity problems. Tolerance is the strength of the linear relationship among predictor variables, and when researchers encounter tolerance scores less than 0.25, there may be problems with the data. If the Tolerance value is low ( $1-R^2$ ), then there is probably a problem with multicollinearity (Leech et al., 2005).

Using VIF and tolerance as formal multicollinearity diagnostics, I analyzed the variables: forgiveness, empathy, all six functions of imagined interactions, one attribute of imagined interactions (frequency), and relational satisfaction. Results indicate the possibility of minimal multicollinearity. Of the seven imagined interactions variables, four of them indicated slight tolerance issues. Since adjusted  $R^2$  was .39, then the acceptable Tolerance level would be about .61 ( $1-R^2$ ). This would indicate that II Understanding (.42), II Rehearsal (.43), II Relational Maintenance (.51), and II Frequency (.45) all had some variance overlap in the regression model. The II characteristics of Catharsis (.66), Conflict Management (.66), and Compensation (.75) had acceptable tolerance levels. Forgiveness (.68), Relational Maintenance Strategy/Conflict Management (.96), and Empathy/Perspective Taking (.82) each had acceptable Tolerance levels.

Hypotheses 1-4 were simultaneously tested together along with the first research group using a powerful, multivariate technique known as Fisher's linear discriminant analysis (Fisher, 1936). The idea is to discover a linear combination of variables that most discriminate between long-distance and geographically close partners.. The

resulting combination may be used as a linear classifier, or, more commonly, for dimensionality reduction before later classification. Discriminant analysis is closely related to ANOVA (analysis of variance) and regression analysis, which also attempt to express one dependent variable as a linear combination of other features or measurements. (McLachlan, 2004). In the other two methods however, the dependent variable is a numerical quantity, while for LDA it is a categorical variable.

#### **Hypothesis 1-Hypothesis 4**

None of the hypotheses were supported. The discriminant analysis did not reveal a significant function using the Wilks' Lambda criterion ( $\chi^2(4) = 3.94, p = .42$ , Wilks'  $\lambda = .975$ ). Additionally, independent t-tests were insignificant. The first hypothesis predicted that partners in long-distance relationships will be more forgiving than partners in geographically close relationships.

Hypothesis two predicted partners in long-distance relationships will use conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy more than partners in geographically-close relationships.

Hypothesis three predicted partners in long-distance relationships will have a greater use of imagined interactions than partners in a geographically-close relationship.

Hypothesis four predicted that partners in long-distance relationships will exhibit more empathy/perspective taking than partners in a geographically-close relationship. To summarize, the first four hypotheses revolving around the central research question, whether or not romantic partners forgive each other differently based on their proximity, were not supported.

## Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis five predicted that individuals' use of imagined interactions would positively predict forgiveness. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of the functions of Imagined Interactions (II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Relational Maintenance, II Catharsis, II Compensation, II Conflict Management) and the attribute/characteristic of II Frequency for predicting forgiveness. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations can be found in Table 1.1. This combination of variables significantly predicted forgiveness,  $F(7,149) = 9.25$ ,  $p < .001$ , with four of the seven variables significantly contributing to the prediction. The beta weights, presented in Table 1.2, suggest that II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Catharsis, and II Compensation contribute most to predicting forgiveness. The adjusted  $R^2$  value was .27, which indicates that 27%, or almost one-third, of the variance in forgiveness was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988), this is a moderate effect.

Table 1.1  
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for IIs and Forgiveness

### Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
ForgivenessDimension	4.9835	.99022	157
IIUnderstanding	4.9873	1.18376	157
IIRehearsal	5.0653	1.13056	157
IICatharsis	4.0318	1.66572	157
IIConflictMngmt	4.1465	1.30381	157
IICompensation	3.4236	1.07330	157
IIRelMaintenance	4.1990	1.27310	157
IIFrequency	4.3210	1.23988	157

Table 1.1 Continued

**Correlations**

		Forgive Dimension	II Under standig	II Rehea rsal	II Catharsis	IIConflict Mngmt	II Compen sation	IIRel Mainten ance	II Frequency
Pearson Correlation	ForgivenessDimension	1.000	.395	.095	.297	-.198	-.281	.101	.104
	IIUnderstanding	.395	1.000	.669	.153	.016	-.122	.390	.402
	IIRehearsal	.095	.669	1.000	.125	.153	.021	.401	.478
	IICatharsis	.297	.153	.125	1.000	-.487	-.237	-.015	-.027
	IIConflictMngmt	-.198	.016	.153	-.487	1.000	.161	.132	.231
	IICompensation	-.281	-.122	.021	-.237	.161	1.000	.257	.271
	IIRelMaintenance	.101	.390	.401	-.015	.132	.257	1.000	.700
	IIFrequency	.104	.402	.478	-.027	.231	.271	.700	1.000
Sig. (1- tailed)	ForgivenessDimension	.	.000	.117	.000	.007	.000	.104	.098
	IIUnderstanding	.000	.	.000	.028	.419	.064	.000	.000
	IIRehearsal	.117	.000	.	.060	.028	.397	.000	.000
	IICatharsis	.000	.028	.060	.	.000	.001	.424	.367
	IIConflictMngmt	.007	.419	.028	.000	.	.022	.050	.002
	IICompensation	.000	.064	.397	.001	.022	.	.001	.000
	IIRelMaintenance	.104	.000	.000	.424	.050	.001	.	.000
	IIFrequency	.098	.000	.000	.367	.002	.000	.000	.
N	ForgivenessDimension	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IIUnderstanding	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IIRehearsal	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IICatharsis	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IIConflictMngmt	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IICompensation	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IIRelMaintenance	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
	IIFrequency	157	157	157	157	157	157	157	157

Table 1.2  
Multiple regression model of Imagined Interactions and Forgiveness

Model  $(F(7, 149) = 9.25, p < .000, R^2 = .30)$

**Coefficients(a)**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.210	.522		8.060	.000		
	IIUnderstanding	.417	.081	.499	5.130	.000	.495	2.022
	IIRehearsal	-.268	.086	-.306	-3.104	.002	.481	2.079
	IICatharsis	.109	.049	.184	2.240	.027	.694	1.440
	IIConflictMngmt	-.050	.063	-.066	-.806	.422	.690	1.450
	IICompensation	-.179	.070	-.194	-2.542	.012	.808	1.238
	IIRelMaintenance	.007	.076	.009	.097	.923	.484	2.066
	IIFrequency	.092	.083	.116	1.117	.266	.436	2.292

a. Dependent Variable: ForgivenessDimension

## Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis six predicted that imagined interactions will positively predict relational satisfaction. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of these variables for predicting satisfied couples. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations can be found in Table 2.1 This combination of variables significantly predicted relational satisfaction,  $F(7, 155) = 7.77, p < .001$ , with four of the variables significantly contributing to the prediction. The beta weights, presented in table 2.2, suggest that II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Catharsis, and II Conflict Management contribute most to predicting relational satisfaction, with II Understanding (.42) carrying the largest load in the model. The adjusted R squared value was .23. This indicates that 23% of the variance in relational satisfaction was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988), this is a low to moderate effect.

Table 2.1

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for Imagined Interactions and Relational Satisfaction.

### Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
QMIScale	5.2270	1.09225	163
IIUnderstanding	4.9893	1.17107	163
IIRehearsal	5.0736	1.11939	163
IICatharsis	4.0736	1.66039	163
IIConflictMngmt	4.1166	1.30554	163
IICompensation	3.4356	1.07640	163
IIRelMaintenance	4.1764	1.27079	163
IIFrequency	4.3104	1.22104	163

### Correlations

		QMIScale	IIUnderst anding	IIRehearsal	IICatharsis	IIConflict Mngmt	IICompen sation	IIRel Maintenance	IIFrequency
Pearson Correlation	QMIScale	1.000	.249	-.037	.316	-.323	-.216	.005	-.084
	IIUnderstanding	.249	1.000	.660	.154	.023	-.105	.383	.401
	IIRehearsal	-.037	.660	1.000	.132	.129	.017	.384	.473
	IICatharsis	.316	.154	.132	1.000	-.491	-.232	-.039	-.037
	IIConflictMngmt	-.323	.023	.129	-.491	1.000	.172	.150	.231
	IICompensation	-.216	-.105	.017	-.232	.172	1.000	.268	.267
	IIRelMaintenance	.005	.383	.384	-.039	.150	.268	1.000	.697
	IIFrequency	-.084	.401	.473	-.037	.231	.267	.697	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	QMIScale	.	.001	.319	.000	.000	.003	.476	.144
	IIUnderstanding	.001	.	.000	.025	.384	.091	.000	.000
	IIRehearsal	.319	.000	.	.047	.051	.414	.000	.000
	IICatharsis	.000	.025	.047	.	.000	.001	.308	.321
	IIConflictMngmt	.000	.384	.051	.000	.	.014	.028	.001
	IICompensation	.003	.091	.414	.001	.014	.	.000	.000
	IIRelMaintenance	.476	.000	.000	.308	.028	.000	.	.000
	IIFrequency	.144	.000	.000	.321	.001	.000	.000	.
N	QMIScale	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IIUnderstanding	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IIRehearsal	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IICatharsis	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IIConflictMngmt	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IICompensation	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IIRelMaintenance	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163
	IIFrequency	163	163	163	163	163	163	163	163

Table 2.2

Multiple regression model of Imagined Interactions and Relational Satisfaction

Model (F(7, 155) = 7.77,  $p < .000$ ,  $R^2 = .26$ )

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta				Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	5.277	.580			9.098	.000		
IIUnderstanding	.393	.090	.422		4.365	.000	.512	1.954
IIRehearsal	-.294	.096	-.301		-3.080	.002	.499	2.006
IICatharsis	.119	.055	.181		2.182	.031	.696	1.437
IIConflictMngmt	-.151	.069	-.180		-2.178	.031	.698	1.433
IICompensation	-.092	.077	-.090		-1.184	.238	.820	1.219
IIRelMaintenance	.073	.085	.085		.854	.394	.487	2.052
IIFrequency	-.086	.093	-.097		-.928	.355	.442	2.263

a. Dependent Variable: QMIScale

**Research Question 1**

Research question one probed the relationship between forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy and the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management as a predictor of relational satisfaction. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of these variables for predicting satisfied couples. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations can be found in Table 3.1

Because the Tolerance levels for II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Relational Maintenance and II Frequency were all low enough to warrant suspicion of collinearity ( $< .06$ ), they were removed from the regression model. According to Leech et al., (2005), a researcher can eliminate one or more variables when it does not make sense conceptually to combine them.

Therefore, only II Catharsis, II Conflict Management, and II Compensation were used as predictors in the model. This adjusted combination of variables significantly



predicted relational satisfaction,  $F(7, 152) = 14.33$ ,  $p < .001$ , with two of the variables significantly contributing to the prediction. The beta weights, presented in table 3.2, suggest that forgiveness (.52) and II Conflict Management (-.17) contribute most to predicting relational satisfaction, with forgiveness carrying the largest load. The adjusted R squared value was .37. This indicates that 37% of the variance in relational satisfaction was explained by the model. This is a substantial effect (Cohen, 1988).

Table 3.1

Means, standard deviations, and for Imagined Interactions, Forgiveness, Empathy, RM Conflict Management, and Relational Satisfaction

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
QMIScale	5.2610	1.09613	152
IIUnderstanding	4.9967	1.19255	152
IIRehearsal	5.0674	1.14473	152
IICatharsis	4.0526	1.67387	152
IIConflictMngmt	4.1096	1.30363	152
IICompensation	3.4474	1.05582	152
IIRelMaintenance	4.2188	1.23930	152
IIFrequency	4.3487	1.21000	152
ForgivenessDimension	5.0011	.98363	152
EMPPerspectiveTaking	4.9934	1.09627	152
RMSMConflictMngmt	4.1724	2.00992	152

**Research Question 2**

Research question two probed whether or not relational satisfaction will differ between partners in long-distance relationships and partners in geographically-close relationships. An independent t-test was conducted to determine if long-distance relationships (LDRs [  $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.21$  ] and geographically close relationships (GCRs [  $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.05$  ] differed in their reported levels of relational satisfaction. The t-

test was not significant)  $t(17) = 1.38, p > .05$ ) Thus, no statistically significant difference was found between LDRs and GCRs on the dependent variable relational satisfaction.

Table 3.2

Multiple regression model of Proximity (LDR vs. GCR), Imagined Interactions, Forgiveness, Empathy, RM Conflict Management, and Relational Satisfaction

Model  $(F(10, 141) = 10.74, p < .000, R^2 = .43)$

**Coefficients(a)**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.093	.742		4.168	.000		
	IIUnderstanding	.154	.090	.167	1.703	.091	.418	2.393
	IIRehearsal	-.127	.092	-.133	-1.375	.171	.434	2.307
	IICatharsis	.060	.051	.091	1.166	.246	.660	1.515
	IIConflictMngmt	-.106	.066	-.127	-1.624	.107	.663	1.509
	IICompensation	-.024	.076	-.023	-.318	.751	.746	1.340
	IIRelMaintenance	.049	.079	.056	.625	.533	.510	1.961
	IIFrequency	-.141	.085	-.155	-1.649	.101	.454	2.204
	ForgivenessDimension	.548	.085	.492	6.409	.000	.684	1.461
	EMPPerspectiveTaking	-.039	.070	-.039	-.561	.576	.822	1.217
	RMSMConflictMngmt	.044	.035	.081	1.246	.215	.958	1.044

a. Dependent Variable: QMIScale

### Research Question 3

Research question three tested for a relationship between forgiveness and use of the relational maintenance strategy conflict management. There was no significant correlation  $r(167) = -.006, p > .05$ .

### Research Question 4

Research question four probed if imagined interaction functions predicted conflict management. The answer is yes;  $F(6, 169) = 15.27, p < .001$  that accounted for 35% of the variance in the regression equation. Significant predictors were rehearsal ( $\beta = .20, p$

< .018) and IIs used for noncatharsis ( $\beta = -.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Hence, the more IIs were used for catharsis to relieve tension and anxiety, the less conflict management there was.

### **Research Question 5**

Research question five sought to test the relationship between empathy and the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy. The correlation was insignificant  $r(170) = .07$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### **Research Question 6**

Research question six tested the relationship between the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy and relational satisfaction. The correlation was insignificant  $r(174) = .06$ ,  $p > .05$ .

### **Research Question 7**

Research question seven tested whether a significant relationship exists between imagined interactions and empathy. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the linear best combination of the II Functions (Relational Maintenance, Catharsis, Conflict Management, Compensation, Understanding, Rehearsal) and the II Characteristic/Attribute of Frequency for predicting empathy. The means, standard deviations, and correlations can be found on Table 4.1. This combination of variables significantly predicted empathy/perspective-taking,  $F(7,151) = 4.64$ ,  $p < .000$ , with three of the seven variables significantly contributing to the prediction. The beta weights, presented in table 4.2, suggest that Rehearsal contributes most to predicting empathy, with Conflict Management and Compensation also contributing to this prediction. The adjusted R squared value was .14. This indicates that 14% of the variance in

empathy/perspective-taking was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988), this is a small effect.

Table 4.1

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for Imagined Interactions and Empathy

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
EMPPerspectiveTaking	4.9925	1.10508	159
IIUnderstanding	4.9796	1.17831	159
IIRehearsal	5.0472	1.16182	159
IICatharsis	4.0975	1.67774	159
IIConflictMngmt	4.0818	1.32949	159
IICompensation	3.4434	1.06881	159
IIRelMaintenance	4.1745	1.24517	159
IIFrequency	4.3195	1.19643	159

Table 4.2

Multiple regression model of Imagined Interactions and Empathy

Model (F(7, 151) = 4.64,  $p < .000$ ,  $R^2 = .18$ )

**Coefficients(a)**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.641	.628		7.385	.000		
	IIUnderstanding	-.003	.096	-.003	-.026	.979	.525	1.906
	IIRehearsal	.274	.098	.289	2.801	.006	.514	1.947
	IICatharsis	.048	.058	.073	.824	.411	.693	1.443
	IIConflictMngmt	-.169	.074	-.204	2.274	.024	.680	1.471
	IICompensation	-.177	.084	-.172	2.114	.036	.827	1.210
	IIRelMaintenance	.030	.092	.033	.322	.748	.508	1.967
	IIFrequency	-.009	.100	-.010	-.091	.928	.462	2.163

a. Dependent Variable: EMPPerspectiveTaking

## Summary

Of all the tests conducted for this research study, several primary outcome variables were of particular interest: forgiveness, relational satisfaction, and empathy/perspective-taking. Proximity (LDRs vs. GCRs) and imagined interactions served as the primary predictor variables, although forgiveness and the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management also served a role. As one of the central theoretical concepts in the study, forgiveness was studied as both an outcome and predictor variable. Out of the six hypotheses proffered in this study, two were supported, showing moderate effect sizes. Of the seven research questions, significance was found in one, with a small effect size.

In the following Table 5, a complete list of research questions and hypotheses are listed. It illustrates which ones were not supported, which ones were partially supported, and which ones were fully supported. It also lists the effect size, ranging from small to medium and even substantial effects.

In the next chapter, we will preview a discussion of the purpose of the study, including its primary focus and research problems. It will then discuss the results of investigation and unpack their meanings, putting it in context of future research possibilities while highlighting the obvious limitations of the present study.

Table 5

**TABLE OF FINDINGS FOR HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Hypothesis	Results
H1: Partners in LDRs will be more forgiving than partners in GCRs.	Not Supported
H2: Partners in LDRs will use conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy more than partners in GCRs.	Not Supported
H3: Partners in LDRs will have a greater use of imagined interactions than partners in a GCR.	Not Supported
H4: Partners in LDRs will exhibit more empathy/perspective taking than partners in a GCR.	Not Supported
H5: The use of IIs will predict a positive association with forgiveness.	Supported Moderate Effect
H6: IIs will positively predict relational satisfaction.	Supported Low/moderate Effect
RQ1: Do forgiveness, IIs, empathy and the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management predict relational satisfaction?	Supported Substantial Effect
RQ2: Will relational satisfaction differ between partners in LDRs and partners in GCRs?	Not Supported
RQ3: What is the relationship between forgiveness and use of the relational maintenance strategy conflict management?	Not Supported
RQ4: Do the functions of IIs predict the relational maintenance strategy conflict management?	Not Supported
RQ5: What is the relationship between empathy and the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy?	Not Supported
RQ6: What is the relationship between the use of conflict management and relational satisfaction?	Not Supported
RQ7: What is the relationship between IIs and empathy?	Supported Small Effect

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore and integrate research on long-distance relationships, forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy, relational maintenance strategies and relational satisfaction. The primary focus of this examination was to determine whether or not people in long-distance relationships were more forgiving than those in geographically close relationships. An important but secondary question was whether those in long-distance relationships used imagined interactions to achieve forgiveness, and thus, relational satisfaction.

This chapter will discuss the results of this investigation. The first section discusses the research findings and their implications. The second section points out some of this study's limitations, and the third sections makes recommendations for future research.

#### **Research Findings and Implications**

Although the major premise of the present research that romantic partners in long-distance relationships are more forgiving, empathetic, and use more imagined interactions and conflict management strategies was not supported, two of the six hypotheses put forth were supported. Additionally, three of the seven research questions were significant. In all, nearly half of the research questions and hypotheses rendered findings that can help shed some important light on the topic of long-distance relationships and the importance of forgiveness, empathy and imagined interactions.

The first set of hypotheses predicted that there would be a difference in the way that partners in long-distance relationships forgave, used conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy, used imagined interactions and exhibited empathy than

their geographically close counterparts. Table 5 from the previous chapter presents a summary of the hypotheses and indicates if they were supported, partially supported, or not supported. Regarding research questions, a brief summary of the findings is provided in parentheses. In particular, it was posited that LDRs would be more forgiving, manage conflict better, use more imagined interactions and be more empathetic. However, none of these assertions were supported in the statistical analysis.

Discriminant analysis was used to test whether the set of continuous independent variables of forgiveness, imagined interactions, conflict management (RMS), and empathy could predict the dependent variable, long-distance relationships vs. geographically close relationships (proximity). The discriminant analysis did not reveal a significant function. Moreover, independent t-tests were run between four separate dependent variables (forgiveness, imagined interactions, conflict management as relational maintenance strategy and empathy). Each of the t-tests was insignificant. Additionally, a supplemental binary logistic regression analysis revealed no significant predictors from this set of variables in predicting whether a person was in a long distance or close relationship.

That no difference between long-distance and geographically close couples existed in terms of forgiveness and imagined interactions, first and foremost, is surprising. McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen (2000) point to forgiveness' dual character, situated both within the realm of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication. "Both the intrapersonal and social aspects of forgiveness are 'real'; thus, to intrapersonally and interpersonally conceptualize forgiveness is an imminently reasonable thing to do," (McCullough et al., 2000, pg. 9).



Exline and Baumeister (2000, p.134) suggest that “in some situations, it may be appropriate to view forgiveness (and repentance) in these purely intrapsychic terms. For example, when interpersonal connections between victim and perpetrators are distant or absent, forgiveness and repentance may be confined to the private realm.” The authors further assert that in daily life, transgressions typically involve people who are in close or regular contact with each other. “How do these people ‘behave’ toward one another after incidents of transgressions, and what are the consequences and sources of their choices?” (Exline & Baumeister, 2000, p.134). Although the first four hypotheses of this study, which sought to answer the central question of whether forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy, and conflict management were processed differently between long-distance and close couples, were not supported, Exline and Baumeister’s previous considerations that forgiveness happens “in the private realm” provided some of the conceptual framework for the major research problem. In essence, the belief was that absent contact with their transgressor, victims would be more forgiving in order to keep their relationships running more smoothly. This would be facilitated through the use of imagined interactions, empathic perspective-taking, and conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy. In short, victims in LDRs would be more likely to forgive their partner in their mind, then continue to strive to seek the other person’s point of view and minimize conflict in an interpersonal, behavioral sense after the forgiveness occurred intrapsychically. However, this does not appear to be the case, at least from the findings in this particular sample set.

One possible reason why this sample did not distinguish between each other is because of the nature of forgiveness itself: it takes time. McCullough et al. (2000, p. 9)

remind us that "...forgiveness is developmental in nature..." It is quite possible that this sample set consists of too many college aged-students in relatively young relationships (i.e. the mean length of relationship in this study is 2.3 years. However, at least two relationships were more than 10 years, and these extreme scores can greatly influence the average or mean in this case.) That is to say that at the time of taking the study, forgiveness in the specific scenario in question as referenced from the survey might not have fully taken root. If it takes time to forgive someone, especially depending on the severity of the transgression, then many of the respondents might still be in the process of reaching the desired state. The process of forgiveness is usually divided into four phases: 1.) recognition of the injury to the self 2.) commitment to forgive 3.) cognitive and affective activity and 4.) behavioral action (Newberg, d'Aquilli, Newberg, & deMarici, 2000). Obviously, the second phase poses the largest stumbling block. Committing to forgive not only requires empathy and humility, it requires an absence of narcissism, the "natural enemy of empathy and humility" (Emmons, 2000, p. 164). I will argue later in this section that narcissism is the critical component missing from this research study.

Another reason no significant differences emerged between LDRs and GCRs could be the level of sophistication of the sample set in terms of romantic relationship skills. The mean age of respondents was 21.5 years, but likely younger given the skewed range of 18-46. Some studies have shown that adults are more likely to forgive than young adults or adolescents (Subkoviak et al., 1995). McCullough et al. (1998b) found that partners can rationalize the transgressions of their offending partners easier and justify their motivations when they share a substantial history with that partner. In other words, empathy and forgiveness are easier to induce when partners have more miles

behind them. A comparison of college-aged students with an older age group, complete with more years invested in their relationships, could potentially yield different results.

Yet another reason no disparity emerged between LDRs and GCRs in terms of forgiveness could be that the transgressions were not severe enough. Victim's reactions to offenses has been shown to be moderated by people's dispositions, the quality and closeness of the relationship, and the nature of the transgression. McCullough et al., (2003) found that people seek more vengeance when their transgressors show disrespect for the relationship or deliberately harm it.

Technology could also play a role in the lack of support for the first four hypotheses, especially hypothesis three, which predicted that LDRs would have a greater use of imagined interactions. Although 37% of the sample said they lived about 50 miles or more from their significant other, and about 40% saw their partners at least every weekend, these distances and durations could be mitigated by technological advances other than the telephone. These include instant messaging on computers, texting by cellphone, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and most importantly, Skype. The latter is a computer platform in which partners can communicate face-to-face in real time, matching voice with a digital image of the communicators. Although the study asked for length of time between face-to-face contact, it did not seek insight into the respondents level of media usage. This shortcoming will be developed more fully in the subsequent section dealing with the limitations of this study.

Hypothesis five predicted that individuals' use of imagined interactions would be positively associated with forgiveness. This was corroborated. Using multiple regression analysis, it was discovered that II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Catharsis, and II

Compensation each contribute to the model predicting forgiveness. About 27% of the variance was explained by this model, a moderate effect. This finding is a worthwhile contribution to the constellation of knowledge about imagined interactions, which have been associated with a host of communication behaviors, including catharsis, personal understanding and rehearsal for anticipated encounters ( Honeycutt, 2003; Honeycutt, Zagacki, & Edwards, 1989), loneliness, locus of control, communication satisfaction (Edwards, et al., 1988; Honeycutt, Edwards & Zagacki, 1989); communication competency and sensitivity (Honeycutt, Zagacki & Edwards, 1992), gender differences (Edwards, Honeycutt & Zagacki, 1989), Machiavellianism (Allen, 1990), task performance (Gotcher & Honeycutt, 1989), emotion (Zagacki, Edwards & Honeycutt, 1992), intercultural differences (Gendrin, 1991) and language acquisition (Allen, David & Kung, 1995).

The third step in McCullough and Worthington's four-step forgiveness model (1994) is "cognitive and affective activity." This is the intrapersonal bridge between recognizing injury to the self and committing to forgive and the outward behavioral manifestation of that decision in terms of interpersonal action. The third step, especially the cognitive component, fits nicely with II function of Understanding, which explained the most variance in the multiple regression model for this hypothesis. It seems that to forgive starts with a conscientious decision and then a psychological campaign to carry out that forgiveness in the form of behavioral action.

Part of the ability to forgive comes by way of the victim's increased understanding and realization that the offender is human and fallible, too, like the victim. Moreover, the victim might perceive that "the offender should be forgiven much the same

way that the injured person would want to be forgiven if the situation were reversed. In this approach, one might even consider that there is a sense of unity...between the forgiver and the offender, because both are perceived as being human.”

(Newberg, d'Aquilli, Newberg, & deMarici, 2000, p.104).

The II function of Catharsis, a critical function of imagined interactions as recognized by Honeycutt (2003), is the ability to relieve stress and reduce uncertainty about another's actions. Catharsis has been shown by Allen and Berkos (2009) to allow users of IIs to “get things off their chest,” so to speak, when unacceptable emotional behaviors are inappropriate in certain live situations. Allen and Honeycutt (1997) have also shown the catharsis function reduces overall anxiety levels in users by allowing them to release certain emotional tensions. Therefore, it is reasonable that II Catharsis significantly contributed to the model predicting forgiveness. If a person is able to blow off steam in his or her thoughts before confronting a transgressor, it is feasible that less damage is done to the relationship by way of unnecessary conflict. However, this held true across the sample in terms of imagined interactions and forgiveness; LDRs were no more forgiving than GCRs.

The sixth hypothesis stated that imagined interactions would positively predict relational satisfaction. A multiple regression using functions of imagined interactions as predictor variables did indeed contribute to this prediction. Namely, II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Catharsis and II Conflict Management combined to explain 23% of the variance in the model, considered a low to moderate effect. This finding is not surprising but is consistent with previous imagined interaction research. Both behaviorally and cognitively, imagined interactions have been linked to maintaining relationships

(Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001), marital satisfaction (Honeycutt, 1995), cognitive planning (Zagacki et al., 1992; Honeycutt, 1991), and managing conflict when the relational partner is absent (Honeycutt, 1995). It is worth pointing out that use of IIs positively predicted forgiveness (hypothesis five) and IIs positively predicted relational satisfaction (hypothesis six). Whether or not more forgiving individuals had more satisfying relationships was not directly tested, as this is a well-established link and was not the focus of the research project. However, a conceptual pattern emerges when we take these positive relationships as whole: the more IIs a person has, the more forgiving he or she is, and the more IIs a person has, the more satisfied he or she is with her relationship. It would thus seem that forgiveness and imagined interactions work in tandem (where forgiveness is necessary) to produce relational satisfaction. This is consistent with McCullough and Worthington's (1994) four-step process model of forgiveness, chiefly the third step in the process – cognitive and affective activity. It would seem then that imagined interactions have a logical home in the forgiveness model, and thus facilitate a critical step in the forgiveness process.

The first research question asked whether forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy and the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management could predict relational satisfaction. Using multiple regression and adjusting for multicollinearity between four variables (II Understanding, II Rehearsal, II Relational Maintenance, and II Frequency), the regression model significantly predicted relational satisfaction. However, it was only forgiveness and II Conflict Management carrying the explanatory load. But the two variables did combine to account for 37% of the variance, a substantial effect. Interestingly, the relationship with II Conflict Management was  $-.17$ , suggesting an

inverse relationship. This is taken to mean that those using fewer IIs for conflict management are more satisfied. Perhaps this is because dealing directly with conflicts in actual conversation or face-to-face episodes leads to increased healing or empathy, which can foster forgiveness. Thus, we can deduce that partners in romantic relationships who are more forgiving and have fewer IIs for conflict management are more likely to rate themselves as satisfied in the relationship, regardless of whether they are geographically close to their partners or separated by some distance.

In regards to the first research question, it is puzzling that proximity (LDR vs GCR) had no bearing in the predictive model on relational satisfaction. Holt and Stone (1998) discovered two strategies that have been shown to help maintain LDRs. The first is frequent visits, which may or may not be feasible. The second is visualizing, or “daydreaming about the partner,” which is obviously akin to using imagined interactions for compensation and other functions. Holt and Stone noted that relational satisfaction among partners was positively affected by visualizing, especially among those with a “preference for visual or verbal response modes of cognitive processing” (p.137).

The second research question asked whether or not relational satisfaction will differ between partners in LDRs vs. GCRs. No statistically significant difference was found. This is not surprising, since extant research shows that findings here are mixed. Although conventional wisdom would have it that romantic partners in LDRs suffer an inherent disadvantage, studies have shown that LDRs are consistently stable, committed and satisfied. In terms of satisfaction and commitment, Gulder and Swensen (1995) found no differences among LDRs and GCRs. The same holds true in at least one study of commuter marriages by Govaerts and Dixon (1988). At least two studies show

contradictory findings: the first, conducted by Stafford and Reske (1990), reported that LDRs rated themselves more committed and satisfied; another, conducted by Holt and Stone (1988), showed that distance apart and satisfaction were negatively correlated. In light of these scattered and sometimes contradictory findings, the outcome of this research question is not extraordinary.

Research question three asked whether or not a relationship between forgiveness and the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management existed. There was no significant correlation. This is puzzling because the questions in the RMSM for conflict management are forgiveness based. (i.e. “I apologize when I am wrong,” “I cooperate in how I handle disagreements,” “I listen to my partner and try not to judge,” “I am understanding,” and “I am patient and forgiving.”) The reliability for the conflict management variable was high ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Further research into this component of relational maintenance research strategies is warranted, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Research question four asked whether imagined interactions functions predicted the conflict management function of relational maintenance strategy. A multiple regression analysis showed it does. About 35% of the variance was explained by the predictors II Rehearsal, and II Catharsis, of which there existed a strong negative correlation ( $-.54$ ). This can be taken to mean that the more IIs are used for rehearsal, and the less IIs are used for catharsis to relieve tension and stress, then the more conflict management is used as a relational maintenance strategy. Conversely, in terms of II Catharsis alone, the more IIs were used for catharsis to relieve tension and stress, the less conflict management there was. This makes sense, ostensibly. One type of tension relief



occurs in behaviorally (conflict management) and the other occurs intrapersonally (II Catharsis).

Research question five asked whether a relationship existed between empathy and the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy. It did not. This is perplexing, especially considering at least two of the questions used in the 5-item RMSM conflict management strategy instrument share conceptual territory with empathy/perspective-taking. These two questions in particular are “I listen to my partner and try not to judge” and “I am understanding.” The deficiencies in the conflict management strategy instrument will be taken up in the subsequent section.

Research question six tested the relationship between the use of conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy and relational satisfaction. No significant correlation existed. Again, the shortcoming of the conflict management measure will be taken up subsequently.

Finally, research question seven asked whether a significant relationship exists between imagined interactions and empathy. It does. Using multiple regression, it was discovered that II Conflict Management and II Compensation contributed to the prediction, with II Rehearsal contributing most to predicting empathy. Although only 14% of the variance was explained by the model, considered a small effect, this finding is still important in the grand scope of II research because the role of empathy has not been substantially explored. These findings would suggest that rehearsal might help partners take the perspective of their romantic counterpart. One of the questions in the empathy measure is “when I’m upset at someone, I usually try to put myself in his place for a while.” Clearly, rehearsing potential scripts, some of which might include role-playing or

reversal, can help partners see the other side of the argument. Since empathy is a precursor to forgiveness, using imagined interactions for rehearsal could facilitate the process. It could even be that II Rehearsal is part of the cognitive activity occurring in the third step of McCullough and Worthington's (1994) four-step forgiveness model.

Although the major premise of this study was not upheld, multiple findings helped this study expand existing theory on long-distance relationships, forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy, relational maintenance strategies, and relational satisfaction. The next section discusses some of the study's limitations.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

Although this study was constructed comprehensively and used sound, reliable instruments that have been used in a wide range of successful communication studies, several limitations are clearly apparent here. The first limitation involves the sample set itself. Although the sample size ( $n=181$ ) is not egregiously problematic, a larger sample size could have helped detect even small differences. Ideally, no sample should contain less than 200 participants because when the study exceeds this mark, the "likelihood of finding statistically significant small differences and relationships increases; this decreases the incidence of Type II error..." (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, and McCroskey, 2013, p.337).

The major premise of this study posited that those romantic partners in long-distance relationships would be more forgiving, use more imagined interactions, be more empathetic, and use conflict management more as a relational maintenance strategy than their counterparts in geographically close relationships. These four assertions did not prove true. As mentioned previously in this chapter, part of the reason could be the

maturity level of the participants and their commitment toward their relationships. Since adults have been shown to be more forgiving than young adults or adolescents, a better cross-section of participants in terms of age and maturity could have yielded different results.

The role of mediated communication and social media, to be more precise, was not fully accounted for in this study. Facebook (2013) is the most-trafficked social media site in the world, according to its own web site (November 2013). Further more, college students are its most ardent and frequent users (Mack, Behler, Roberts, & Rimland, 2007). Prensky (2001) and Tapscott (1998) have deemed the generation born between 1980 and 1994 as “Digital Natives” and the “Net Generation,” respectively. These days, college-aged youth are “surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Livingstone (2008) points out that the line between being dialed in and not being dialed in to technology is so thin that we can no longer imagine our everyday lives without some kind of digital interaction.

Since young adults use technology more in the maintenance of their relationships (i.e. Skype and Facebook), this fact could have buffered the effect of forgiveness. In other words, more mature couples, especially those under the strain of long-distances, might be more forgiving than younger couples and use imagined interactions for catharsis, rehearsal, maintenance, compensation, etc. because they are not as reliant on technology. These media might create a sense of “togetherness” that obviates the need for a “go with the flow,” empathetic/perspective-taking philosophy. In short, technology might create a digitized platform for conflict that does not exist in more mature relationships.

It may very well be that the “relational stakes” here are not adequate enough to generate the findings initially expected in the first four hypotheses. If the relational partners are in short-term, non-committed relationships that do not require the same type of “kid gloving” those in long-term, long-distance relationships might require, then the findings in the present study are understandable.

Another weakness of the study was the length of the questionnaire. Although the whole survey only took about 20-30 minutes online, the redundant nature of some of the questions could have created participant fatigue. Some of the variables shared conceptual overlap, which could have hurt the reliabilities of some of the measures.

Although these limitations hampered the present study, they do not mean that long-distance relationships, forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy, relational maintenance strategies and relational satisfaction are not relevant topics of future research. With more and more couples opting to enter long-distance arrangements, whether because of school, military deployment, job displacement or some other reason, the topic looks to remain relevant for the foreseeable future. The next section of this chapter presents some possible suggestions for future research endeavors regarding these communication concepts and variables.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study provided valuable information about the role of forgiveness, imagined interactions, empathy, relational maintenance strategies, and relational satisfaction among long-distance romantic relationships. It provided empirical evidence that imagined interactions and forgiveness share conceptual territory. As the process of forgiveness has a solid intrapersonal component, imagined interactions could prove to be an important

link in this communication phenomenon. This study also showed that forgiveness and imagined interactions, chiefly the conflict management function, when taken together can predict relational satisfaction. Lastly, this study showed empirical evidence that imagined interactions and empathy share a positive relationship. This evidence should be developed more fully since it has theoretical and practical value.

In light of the conflicting body of research on long-distance relationships, they should continue to be investigated. Future studies should consider the age and commitment level of the partners in the relationship, as these have been shown to have bearing on relational satisfaction and longevity. Also, future studies should explore the role that mediated communication plays in maintaining LDRs. It may very well be that forgiveness did not differ between LDRs and GCRs in the present study because couples in LDRs are not under as much “stress and strain” as we might imagine. That is because they are able to communicate by phone, computer, and myriad social networks in a way that alleviates the stress of long-term separation. In sum, maybe LDRs are not so fragile after all, and forgiveness is no more necessary to the health and survival of LDRs than any other type of relationship.

Regardless, forgiveness still needs more studying. It has also been shown to discriminate among age-level, with adults being more forgiving. Therefore, forgiveness should be investigated to determine whether or not non-committed, younger adults in long-distance relationships would differ from committed adults in long-distance relationships in terms of forgiveness. Theoretically, it would make sense that the more time one has put into a relationship, the more forgiving and empathetic one would be, especially in long-distance scenarios.

When considering forgiveness, one personality trait goes hand in glove with it: narcissism. However, narcissism did not fit into the scope of this investigation. Recently, Honeycutt, Pence and Gearhart (2013) found that frequency, being dominant while having an imagined interaction, and ruminating about conflict predicted covert narcissism, which is a type of narcissism defined as hypersensitivity to criticism and overcompensating with inflated self exaggeration. They also found significant associations between lack of compensation, relational maintenance, and covert narcissism. Given these results, it is noted that some researchers have called the narcissism, the enemy of forgiveness (Worthington, 1998). Although it has many definitions, narcissism can be conceptualized as “self-admiration that is characterized by tendencies toward grandiose ideas, exhibitionism, and defensiveness in response to criticism; interpersonal relationships that are characterized by feelings of entitlement, exploitativeness, and a lack of empathy” (Raskin & Terry, 1988, p.896). Narcissism is negatively associated with empathy (Emmons, 2000). Given empathy’s strong correlation with forgiveness, and the evidence in the present study that it is positively related to imagined interactions, understanding narcissism’s impact on both could shed light on the entire communication constellation.

Imagined interactions should continue to be investigated in light of the findings here associating it with forgiveness and empathy. It is no surprise that both forgiveness and empathy played an explanatory role with IIs, given that both have intrapsychic components. Although only one of the characteristics of imagined interactions – frequency – was used in this study, the other five characteristics could be explored in terms of forgiveness and empathy. Imagined interactions could also be explored in terms

of its association with the relational maintenance strategy of conflict management. The two shared a significant negative relationship and should be investigated in future studies. Apparently, if a romantic partner is using IIs cathartically to relieve tension and anxiety, then he or she is relying less on conflict management as a behavioral method for maintaining the relationship. Whether this holds true across a variety of relationships, not just long-distance and geographically close, remains to be seen.

Finally, relational satisfaction should continue to be explored. Although its correlates are well known, much remains to be uncovered regarding this important variable. Future research could explore the role of media usage, imagined interactions, forgiveness, narcissism, empathy and proximity (LDRs vs. GCRs).

In conclusion, this study provided support for the predictive association between imagined interactions and forgiveness, and the role each plays in relational satisfaction. It also showed the relationships that exist between IIs and conflict management as a relational maintenance strategy, as well as the positive relationship between IIs and empathy. Because of these findings alone, future research should continue to explore these general directions.

Long-distance relationships face many of the same challenges all romantic relationships face. But they also face unique challenges. Practicing forgiveness, which has been shown to have myriad beneficial outcomes for all types of relationships, is critical for maintaining satisfying romantic relationships. Communication scholars should also continue investigating this communication concept and its relation to interpersonal processes such as imagined interactions, empathy and conflict management/perspective-taking.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey Tool

#### *Forgiveness and Imagined Interactions in Long-Distance Romantic Relationships*

We would like you to participate in a study about forgiveness and the use of imagined interactions in long-distance romantic relationships. This questionnaire should take no more than 30-45 minutes to finish.

If you agree to participate, you will be completing this questionnaire for Ph.D. candidate Christopher Mapp. The survey will ask questions about how grant forgiveness and handle conflict in your romantic relationship. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Of course, your answers to the questionnaire will be confidential and completely anonymous. The only way someone would know your responses to the answers on this survey would be if you yourself shared them with someone else. To remove any doubt about the anonymity and safety of completing these questions, all survey information will be destroyed after the study has been completed.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort involved with participating in this study. You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this study. Results from this study will help researchers further understand forgiveness and the use of imagined interactions among long-distance romantic relationship partners.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. By completing the questionnaire, you will be signifying your consent to participate in this project. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Louisiana State University's Institutional Review Board at 225-578-8692.

Sincerely,

Christopher Mapp  
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Dr. James Honeycutt  
Department of Communication  
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This is a study about how couples use forgiveness and imagined interactions in long-distance relationships. You will be asked to think about your current romantic partner and complete this questionnaire in reference to your relationship with him or her. These questions will focus on various elements of forgiveness, empathy, imagined interactions and relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Please do not discuss the questions or share your answers with your romantic partner until after you have completed the questionnaire. The information you provide will help researchers to better understand forgiveness and imagined interactions in long-distance romantic relationships.

Thank you for your participation!

### Romantic Partner

Please think about your long-distance partner. A long-distance romantic relationship has at least one or more of the following characteristics:

1. You and your romantic partner live at least 50 miles apart.
2. Your relationship is characterized by little or no face-to-face contact.
3. Because of the distance between you and your partner, you cannot see each other as often as you'd like.
4. Your relationship may have started as geographically close and is presently long-distance. In this case, your relationship would count as long-distance.

If you do not have a long-distance romantic partner, then DO NOT continue this survey. Only individuals age 18 or older can take this survey.

### Romantic Partner

Please think about your geographically close romantic partner. A geographically close romantic relationship has the following characteristics:

1. You and your romantic partner live less than 50 miles apart.
2. Your relationship is characterized by frequent face-to-face contact.

If you do not have a geographically-close romantic partner, then DO NOT continue this survey. Only individuals age 18 or older can take this survey.

### About yourself

1. Sex:                      Male                      Female

2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which best describes your level of education?

\_\_\_\_\_ High school degree or equivalency

\_\_\_\_\_ Pursuing undergraduate degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Earned undergraduate degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Pursuing MA/PhD/Professional Degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Earned Graduate/Professional Degree

4. Race:

\_\_\_\_\_ White

\_\_\_\_\_ Black/African-American

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian/Pacific Islander

\_\_\_\_\_ Native American

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

5. How long have you been dating your romantic partner?

\_\_\_\_\_ Years

\_\_\_\_\_ Months

6. How far do you live from your romantic partner?

\_\_\_\_\_ Miles

### Relational Maintenance Strategies Measure

Instructions: Indicate the extent to which each of the following statements accurately reflects the way that you maintain your relationships. Do not indicate agreement with things that you think you should do, or with things you did at one time but no longer do. That is, think about everyday things you actually do in your relationship right now. Remember that much of what you do to maintain your relationship can involve mundane or routine aspects of day-to-day life.

Please read each item carefully and try to answer it as honestly as possible.

YES! = very strong agreement

NO! = very strong disagreement

YES = strong agreement

NO = strong disagreement

yes = agreement

no = disagreement

? = neither agreement or disagreement

1. I say "I love you."

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

2. I show my love for my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

3. I imply that our relationship has a future.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

4. I tell my partner how much s/he means to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

5. I talk about our plans for the future.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

6. I stress my commitment to him/her.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

7. I show him/her how much he/she means to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

8. I talk about future events (having children or anniversaries or retirement, etc.)

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

9. I encourage my partner to share his/her feelings with me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

10. I simply tell my partner how I feel about the relationship

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

11. I talk about my fears.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

12. I disclose what I need or want from the relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

13. I like to have periodic talks about our relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

14. I am open about my feelings.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

15. I talk about where we stand.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

16. I apologize when I am wrong.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

17. I cooperate in how I handle disagreements.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

18. I listen to my partner and try not to judge.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

19. I am understanding.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

20. I am patient and forgiving with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

21. I help equally with the tasks that need to be done.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

22. I offer to do things that aren't "my" responsibility.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

23. I do my fair share of the work we have to do.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

24. I perform my household responsibilities.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

25. I do not shirk my responsibilities.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

26. I act cheerful and positive around him/her.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

27. I try to be upbeat when we are together.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

28. I tell my partner what I think s/he should do about her/his problems.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

29. I give him/her my opinion on things going on in his/her life.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

30. I like to spend time with our same friends.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

31. I focus on common friends and affiliations.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

## Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale

*Directions:* In any relationship, it is possible for people to experience hurts that can lead to emotional pain. In some cases, these hurts can be severe and long lasting. This scale is designed to measure:

- some of the emotions and behaviors that you feel and exhibit toward the person who caused you hurt
- some of the feelings you have about yourself
- some of the ways you act in other situations and relationships

Since each person is unique, there are no right or wrong answers. Just try to respond as honestly as you can. Please respond to every statement.

Rate the following statements as they apply to you and your long-distance partner who hurt you or distressed you. Even though many people may have caused you hurt, keep just this one particular person in mind when answering the statements. If you do not have a current relationship with the person who caused you hurt, answer the statements as you remember when you were involved with the person.

After reading each statement, check the answer that best describes the way you feel or act.

Please read each item carefully and try to answer it as honestly as possible.

YES! = very strong agreement

NO! = very strong disagreement

YES = strong agreement

NO = strong disagreement

yes = agreement

no = disagreement

? = neither agreement or disagreement

1. My partner has apologized to me for the pain he or she has caused in my life.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

2. I believe we are on the road to restoring our relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

3. I have a current relationship with this person and feel little need to talk about the past hurt.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!



4. I believe my partner would not intentionally hurt me again because he or she is now trustworthy in our relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

5. The only way I can deal with this relationship is to keep my distance from my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

6. My relationship with my partner has improved gradually over time by just being together and having mostly good times.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

7. I feel powerless over circumstances of our relationship when I'm with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

8. I have difficulty stopping my partner from causing me hurt.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

9. My partner has pain that has nothing to do with me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

10. Things are not completely resolved in our relationship, but it is getting better.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

11. I have trouble sorting out my emotions with regard to my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

12. My partner acknowledges that he or she has done things wrong in the past concerning our relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

13. I never seem to "win" when it comes to relating to my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

14. When my partner is cruel to me, it has more to do with his or her problems than it does with me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

15. For the most part, I deserve the things that have happened to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

16. I know how to effectively stop my partner from causing me pain.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

17. My partner has taken responsibility for causing me pain.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

18. I understand why I feel pain from this my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

19. Our relationship is improving a little each time we are together.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

20. If I had come from my partner's background, I might do some harmful things to people.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

21. When I talked to my partner about the damage he or she caused, he or she accepted responsibility.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

22. I believe that our relationship is making progress and someday may be totally healed.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

23. My partner causes me to feel so angry, I cannot think.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

24. I feel responsible for what my partner did to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

## Empathy Questionnaire

Instructions: After reading each statement, check the answer that best describes the way you feel or act.

Please read each item carefully and try to answer it as honestly as possible.

YES! = very strong agreement

NO! = very strong disagreement

YES = strong agreement

NO = strong disagreement

yes = agreement

no = disagreement

? = neither agreement or disagreement

1. When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

2. I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

3. I am usually objective when I watch a movie or play and I don't often get completely caught up in it.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

4. After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

5. I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

6. Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

7. When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

8. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

9. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

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

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

11. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

12. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

13. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

14. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his/her shoes" for a while.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

15. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

16. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

17. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

18. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

19. Sometimes I don't feel sorry for other people when they are having problems.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

20. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

21. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

22. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

23. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

24. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

25. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

26. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

27. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

28. I tend to lose control during emergencies.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

## Survey of Imagined Interactions (SII)

### Description of Imagined Interactions

Imagined interactions are “mental” interactions we have with others who are not physically present. People may have imagined conversations that occur in self-controlled daydreams or while the mind wanders. Sometimes they may occur after a real interaction has taken place. Imagined interactions may be brief or long. They may be ambiguous or detailed. They may address a number of topics or examine one topic exclusively. The interactions may be one-sided where the person imagining the discussion does most of the talking, or they may be more interactive where both persons take an active part in the conversation. With your help, we can better understand the characteristics and functions of imagined interactions. Thank you for your participation.

-----

Following are a few items asking you about your experiences with imagined interactions with others. Please read each item carefully and try to answer it as honestly as possible.

YES! = very strong agreement

NO! = very strong disagreement

YES = strong agreement

NO = strong disagreement

yes = agreement

no = disagreement

? = neither agreement or disagreement

### Functions of IIs

#### Self-Understanding

1. Imagined interactions often help me to actually talk about feelings or problems later on with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

2. The imagined interaction helped me understand my partner better in relation to me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

3. Imagined interaction helps me understand myself better in term of my relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

4. The imagined interaction helps me in clarifying my thoughts and feelings with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

#### Rehearsal

5. Imagined interaction helps me plan what I am going to say for an anticipated encounter with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

6. I have imagined interactions before entering a situation with my partner when I know he or she will be evaluating or judging me.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

7. Imagined interactions make me feel more confident and relaxed before I actually talk with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

8. I have imagined interactions to practice what I am actually going to say to my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

#### Catharsis

9. Imagined interactions with my partner help me relieve tension and stress.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

10. Imagined interactions help me to reduce uncertainty about my partner's actions and behaviors.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

\*11. By thinking about important conversations with my partner, it actually increases tension, anxiety, and stress.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

\*12. Imagined interactions make me feel nervous and tense when thinking about what my partner will say.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

### Conflict Management

13. My imagined interactions usually involve conflicts or arguments with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

\*14. I rarely replay old arguments with my long-distance partner in my mind.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

15. I often cannot get negative imagined interactions “out of mind” when I’m angry at my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

16. Imagined interactions help me manage conflict with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

17. It is sometimes hard to forget old arguments with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

18.. It is sometimes hard for me to “forgive and forget” prior arguments with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

### Compensation

19. Imagining talking to my partner substitutes for the absence of real communication.



NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

20. Imagined interactions can be used to substitute for real conversations with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

21. Imagined interactions may be used to compensate for the lack of real, face-to-face communication with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

\*22. It is rare for me to imagine talking with my partner outside of his or her physical presence because I believe in the saying, "Out of sight, out of mind.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

#### Relational Maintenance

23. I use imagined interactions to think about my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

24. Imagined interactions help keep my relationship with my partner alive.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

25. Imagined interactions are important in thinking about my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

26. Imagined interactions help me maintain a close bond with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

#### Characteristics of IIs

##### Frequency

27. I have imagined interactions with my partner many times throughout the week.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

28. I frequently have imagined interactions about my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

29. I rarely imagine myself interacting with someone else beside my partner.\*

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

30. I often have imagined interactions with my partner throughout the day.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

## QMI

Approximately, how long have you known your long-distance partner? \_\_\_\_\_ (years and/or months)

Relational Status: (Note, please check all that apply)

☐ Nonexclusive dating (Both of us feel free to date others as well)

☐ Exclusively seeing only each other

☐ Engaged ☐ Married ☐ Divorced (How many times? \_\_\_\_ ) ☐ Separated

On the scale below, indicate the point which best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered, in your relationship if you are currently involved in a relationship or were previously involved in a relationship that has ended within the past 6 months. If both apply to you, then think of the current relationship.

1. My partner and I have (had) a good relationship.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

2. I really feel (felt) like part of a team with my partner.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

3. My relationship with my partner makes (made) me happy.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

4. My relationship with my partner is (was) very stable.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

5. Our relationship is (was) strong.

NO! NO no ? yes YES YES!

6. We will probably still be together (circle the appropriate answer):

More than:

1 month from now      6 months from now      1 year from now

2 years from now      5 years from now

7. In all honesty, how confident are you in the above answer?

<u>Not confident</u>			<u>Average</u>		<u>Confident</u>	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

*Thank you for your participation in this study!*

We appreciate your time and input in completing this questionnaire.

The information you have provided will help researchers to better understand forgiveness and the use of imagined interactions in long-distance romantic relationships.

**Also, if you would pass this survey link on to your romantic partner, or anyone else you know who is in a long-distance romantic relationship, that would be most helpful and greatly appreciated!**

If you have any questions, please let the researchers know.

## Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board  
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– Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item24737.html>

– A Complete Application includes All of the Following:

(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.

(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)

(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

\*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.

(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)

(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)

(F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Christopher Mapp

Rank: Doctoral candidate

Dept: Communication

Ph: 318-342-5454

E-mail: cmapp1@tigers.lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each  
\*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Dr. James Honeycutt

IRB# <u>E8288</u>	LSU Proposal # _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Complete Application
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORGIVENESS, IMAGINED INTERACTIONS,  
EMPATHY AND RELATIONAL SATISFACTION AMONG LONG-DISTANCE  
ROMANTIC COUPLES

Study Exempted By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Exemption Expires: 4/28/2016

4) Proposal? (yes or no) ☒ yes

If Yes, LSU Proposal Number \_\_\_\_\_

Also, if YES, either

☒ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) | Communication students

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Christopher Mapp

Date 4-23-13

(no per signatures)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Exempted _____	Category/Paragraph <u>2</u>
Reviewer <u>Mathews</u>	Signature <u>[Signature]</u> Date <u>4/29/13</u>



# The University of Louisiana at Monroe

## Institutional Review Board

### Notice of Determination for Projects using Human Subjects

Protocol ID#: 456 - 2013

Principal Investigator: Christopher Mapp

Collaborator(s):

Project Title: The Relationship between Forgiveness, Imagined Interactions, Empathy and Relational Satisfaction Among Long-Distance Romantic Couples

Date Approved: 4/20/2013

Expiration Date:

- 
- ☒ 1) In accordance with the ULM Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, the ULM Institutional Review Board reviewed and APPROVED this project on the above date. Note: The project is subject to continuing review and any conditions listed in the comments section below.
- ☐ a. This project has received FULL COMMITTEE REVIEW.
- ☒ b. This project has received EXPEDITED REVIEW.
- ☒ c. This project is EXEMPT based on the following part and section(s) of the ULM Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects:

Exempt: According to ULM Institutional Review Board Handbook Section III.B.3

- ☐ 2) In accordance with the ULM Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, the ULM Institutional Review Board reviewed this project and has determined that this project does not meet IRB standards and is therefore DEFICIENT for the reasons listed in the comments section below.

Comments:

This project's "APPROVED" start date is determined according to the date listed above in this notification. Any research conducted, prior to this date, must cease and all data collected destroyed.

Thank you for your submission. Please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research if you require any further assistance.

Connie Smith, Pharm. D.  
Chair, ULM's IRB

cc: PI's Department Head  
IRB protocol file

Monday, June 24, 2013

## VITA

Christopher Michael Mapp, Sr. was born in Hattiesburg, MS in 1972. He is currently an assistant professor of communication at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, where he teaches mass communication, journalism, interpersonal communication, and graduate research methods. In addition to working as a screenwriter for Hollywood Casting and Film in Los Angeles, CA, he has worked as a sports writer and a PR practitioner at a major university. Mapp has two bachelors degrees – journalism and political science – and a master's degree in public relations.

He is blessed with a loving wife, Ann Marie, a son, Michael, and a daughter, Anna Katherine. At the completion of this dissertation, he will finally finish a journey that has separated him from his family for 8 years. That sojourn has taught him more on the subject of long-distance relationships than any research study ever could.