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# Self-Construal and Forgiveness Revisited: Examining the Motivations for Forgiving Others

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**Self-construal and forgiveness revisited: Examining the motivations for forgiving others**

by

**Jennifer L. L. Major**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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**ABSTRACT**

Evidence suggests that self-construal influences an individual's perspective on granting forgiveness to an offender. However, there is still a lack of understanding of the intricacies of the relationships between self-construal, forgiveness, and forgiveness motivations. The current study examined the relationship between self-construal, particularly relational self-construal, and individuals' engagement in either emotional or decisional forgiveness. In addition, I sought to understand the relationship between forgiveness behaviors and individuals' motivations for forgiving offenders for offenses. The primary results were: 1) that relational self-construal was significantly correlated with decisional forgiveness; 2) that individuals high in relational self-construal were more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness than emotional forgiveness; and 3) that individuals who are higher in relational self-construal were more likely to endorse relationship-themed motivations for forgiveness.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

--Mahatma Gandhi

Since 1998 the study of forgiveness has flourished, resulting in over 30,000 publications related to forgiveness targeted towards the general public (Witvliet, 2014). Between 1998 and 2013 over 2,000 peer-reviewed articles and dissertations have been accessible through PsycINFO, the American Psychological Association's (APA) publication database. Because of the increase of forgiveness research, we now have a much better understanding of the many facets and benefits of forgiveness. For example, research has uncovered the correlates of the likelihood to forgive (Rye et al., 2001); dispositional and situational factors related to forgiveness (Davis, Worthington, Hook, & Hill, 2013); the efficacy of forgiveness interventions (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014); various ways to understand and define forgiveness (Freedman, 1998; Kearns & Fincham, 2004) and associations between physical and psychological well-being and forgiveness (Lawler et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2014).

Despite this considerable expansion in the knowledge base of forgiveness, there is still much that is not known. One specific area that has not received much attention is the motivations for forgiving another person. Several suggestions have been made and some initial research has offered empirical evidence for why people forgive (e.g., altruistic reasons; Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004), but there is no systematic body of knowledge in this area. One potentially important motivator might be connected to the way people view themselves. For those who understand their self-concepts as foundationally informed by the important



relationships they hold, forgiveness may be motivated more by an act of relational (and thereby self) harmony.

The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of forgiveness and self-construal, a potentially important variable in understanding the underlying motivations to engage in forgiveness. First, I will review the development and refinement of the definition of forgiveness. Second, I will focus on defining self-construal and its importance in deepening the understanding of forgiveness and possible motivations to engage in forgiveness. Third, there will be a review of the current knowledge of the motivations that people have to engage in forgiveness. These motivations include living up to a religious obligation to maintaining social harmony to achieving personal well-being. Finally, I will close with results from the current study on the relationships between self-construal, forgiveness, and motivations for forgiving others.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past 20 to 25 years, the scientific study of forgiveness has grown dramatically (Witvliet, 2014; Worthington, 2005). The increase in forgiveness as a science is exhibited through the significant increase in peer-reviewed research articles, books, special issues of journals, edited scholarly volumes, and many conference presentations and proceedings (Witvliet, 2014). However, forgiveness is not a new construct that has only existed since the 1990's. Forgiveness and discussions about forgiveness have long been occurring in philosophy and theology circles (Davis et al., 2013; Watkins et al., 2011). Despite the longstanding discussion and scholarship on forgiveness and the growing empirical base, defining forgiveness, even just within psychology, is no easy matter (Hook et al., 2012a; Kearns & Fincham, 2004; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000).

#### **Brief Review of Forgiveness Definitions**

A review of the forgiveness literature suggests that researchers have examined and perceived forgiveness from many different focal points. For instance, Luskin (2002 in Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou, & Moore, 2007) described forgiveness from a lifespan perspective in which one is in the process of making peace with life, while simultaneously acknowledging and understanding that life includes hurts and unpleasant experiences. In a similar vein, other descriptions focus on letting go of negative emotions towards an offender and noting their humanity or ability to make mistakes (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, in Freedman, 1998). These understandings of forgiveness include crucial aspects in interpersonal conflicts and hurts: the reminder that offenses are likely to occur in

life and that forgiveness can be achieved to the degree that the victim understands and has some empathy for the offender.

In addition, some researchers have highlighted a person's disposition towards forgiving another for wrongdoings, or trait forgivingness (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001; Thompson et al. 2005; Toussaint & Friedman, 2009). Trait forgivingness is defined as the tendency for a person to forgive others across situations and over time (Davis et al., 2013). In contrast, other researchers have focused on state forgiveness, which is the process of forgiveness after a specific wrongdoing has taken place (Eaton, Struthers, & Santelli, 2006). In other words, state forgiveness focuses more on the present than trait forgivingness, which includes past behaviors. The focus is on the degree of forgiveness a person has in regard to a specific offense (e.g. partner being late for a dinner date).

In spite of there being no single definition of forgiveness, there are central factors of forgiveness that are agreed upon by researchers. Many researchers have suggested that forgiveness is a prosocial change towards an offender, which includes the decrease in negative thoughts, motivations, emotions, and behaviors towards the offender (Davis et al., 2013; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; McCullough et al., 2000). Enright and the Human Development Study Group's (1991) definition of forgiveness closely aligns with these central factors. They proposed that forgiveness occurs when a victim of an unjust, deep, personal offense relinquishes their feelings of resentment towards the offender.

Similar to Enright and colleagues' (1991) definition of forgiveness, Worthington, Hook, Utsey, Williams, and Neil (2007) also highlighted a change in the thoughts, feelings and behaviors towards an offender in defining forgiveness. Yet, Worthington and

collaborators (2007) appear to separate the central factors of forgiveness into two different types of forgiveness, decisional and emotional forgiveness. Decisional forgiveness is defined as the intention to forgive a wrongdoer for an offense and to resist an unforgiving stance. In other words, decisional forgiveness is one's conscious choice to change their behavior towards another person (Watkins et al., 2015; Worthington et al., 2007). In contrast, emotional forgiveness not only includes changing one's behavior but includes a shift in emotions and cognitions towards the wrongdoer (Watkins et al., 2015; Worthington, 2005; Worthington, et al., 2007).

Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis, and Burnette (2012b) incorporated parts of decisional and emotional forgiveness with knowledge of individualism and collectivism in order to describe the concept of collectivistic forgiveness. Collectivistic forgiveness is a person's decision to forgive based on motivations to maintain social harmony and occurs within contexts that value relational repair and reconciliation (Hook, Worthington, & Utsey, 2009; Hook et al., 2012b). The researchers sought to understand the relations between a person's self-construal—relatedness to or uniqueness from others—and forgiveness. Including a person's self-construal in the study of forgiveness is a step towards trying to pinpoint whether one engages in decisional or emotional forgiveness. The work done by Hook and colleagues (2009; 2012b) is very important to future research in the forgiveness field and will be reviewed in more detail later in this paper.

### **Differentiating Forgiveness from Related Constructs**

Just as researchers have worked to define what forgiveness is, much has also been said about what forgiveness is not. First, forgiveness is not reconciliation (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Freedman, 1998; Hook et al., 2012a). Reconciliation occurs between two

or more people, including both the person who was hurt and the offending person (Freedman, 1998). With reconciliation there is a development or reestablishment of trust. Freedman (1998) noted that in regards to forgiveness, a person might forgive something that happened in the past but might not ever trust the offending person again. Related to this, some researchers have argued that it can even be unsafe to reconcile with an offender (Freedman, 1998; Lamb & Murphy, 2002). For instance, in abusive relationships one may not be physically or emotionally safe remaining in a relationship with an offender. Additionally, there are some cases in which one cannot reconcile with another, such as in the case of an absent or deceased parent. However, in such cases a victim can still forgive. Furthermore, forgiveness is not excusing the offender from the wrongdoing that they engaged in (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Freedman, 1998; Hook et al., 2012a). Forgiving an offense does not make it legitimate or excusable. In fact, to forgive another, one must first make the claim that there was some hurt, offense, or injustice that occurred; otherwise, there is nothing to forgive.

### **Self-Construal**

The second main topic of the present project is self-construal, or the way one perceives the self in relation to others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) sought to answer the question of how people see themselves and how those perceptions differ through cross-cultural research. The two wished to gain a better understanding of the cultural differences in how people define themselves. Specifically, they studied the differences between how Japanese and American people define and make meaning of the self (Cross, Hardin & Gercek-Swing, 2011). Through comparing and contrasting the self-construals of Americans

and Japanese, two types of self-construal were proposed, independent and interdependent self-construal (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

### **Independent Self-Construal**

Independent self-construal is the tendency for a person to perceive the self to be a unique individual and separate from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Cross et al., 2011). Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested a person with an independent self-construal would describe the self in terms of their individuality or uniqueness and internal traits or characteristics that are stable across time. They would compare themselves to others as a way to measure their uniqueness or individuality. Asserting their uniqueness or individuality is a factor in their sense of self-esteem. In regards to interpersonal relationships, a person with an independent self-construal would likely assess in what ways a relationship with another would benefit them (e.g., emotional support; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Cross et al., 2011). This does not mean that a person with independent self-construal is using the other person for their own gain, but that the person will reflect on how they would be personally affected by engaging in a particular relationship. Lastly, an individual's maturity is defined by being consistent in their presentation across time and situations and engaging in assertive communication with others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Cross et al., 2011).

### **Interdependent Self-Construal**

In contrast to independent self-construal, interdependent self-construal is the extent to which a person perceives the self to be connected to others and defined by the relationships they have with others. When asked to describe themselves, individuals would highlight relationships and group memberships (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Cross et al., 2011). In contrast to those with independent self-construal, those with interdependent self-construal

would use others to define the self and compare whether or not they are fulfilling the obligations they have to their groups and relationships. A mark of an individual's maturity would be the ability to be able to effectively manage their behaviors to respond to the needs of various situations, and to regulate their emotional expression for the sake of maintaining group and relationship harmony (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Cross et al., 2011).

Subsequently, after additional research on forgiveness was conducted, researchers realized that there are actually two components of interdependent self-construal (Cross et al., 2011; Kashima, Yamaguchi, Kim, Choi, Gelfand, & Yuki, 1995): collective-interdependent self-construal and relational-interdependent self-construal.

Collective-interdependent self-construal or collective self-construal emphasizes one's membership within a larger collective or group (e.g., Democrat, Atheist; Cross et al., 2011). However, relational-interdependent-self-construal (often shortened to relational self-construal) is the tendency for a person to define the self in term of their close, dyadic relationships with others (e.g., mother, colleague, partner/spouse; Cross, Bacon & Morris, 2000). Although both relational self-construal and collective self-construal appear to be similar ideas, they are two distinct constructs (Cross et al., 2011; Kashima et al., 1995). It is important to note that relational self-construal focuses on a person's construal of close, dyadic relationships and collective self-construal highlights a person's construal of herself through group membership, connection with others and the pursuit of group goals over individual goals (Cross, et al., 2011). One reason for studying the two self-construals separately is to make sense of gender differences in regards to relational self-construal within America (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002); it has been found that women in America are likely

to be more concerned for, attend to, and build their identity from close relationships than do American men (Cross et al., 2011; Cross et al., 2002; Kashima et al., 1995).

### **Self-Construal, Cognition and Motivation**

Because self-construal is a considerable factor in the development of self-perception, meaning-making, and sense of identity, it is unsurprising that self-construal would be related to both cognition and motivations. Below I review the research related to the concepts.

**Self-construal influence on cognition.** Reviewing the influence of self-construal on cognitions, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that individuals who have an interdependent self-construal are more likely to attend to others and social contexts than those who do not have an interdependent self-construal. Consequently, this influences the cognitions of individuals with interdependent self-construal in three ways. First, individuals with an interdependent self-construal are likely to hold more complex representations of others compared to those with an independent self-construal (see also Cross et al., 2011). Second, those with interdependent self-construal are more likely to incorporate social context into their representations of others than those with independent self-construal. Third, self-construal would likely affect non-social cognitive processes, meaning that individuals with interdependent self-construal are more likely to consider their social role within a relationship with an interviewer. Thus, they are more likely to be concerned about how their responses are perceived by the interviewer than those with independent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Cross, Morris and Gore (2002) conducted several studies indicating that self-construal influences an individual's information processing. The first study found that individuals who score high in relational self-construal were more likely to respond positively



to relationship-oriented terms on an Implicit Associations Test (IAT) task than those who scored lower on relational self-construal (Cross, 2009; Cross et al., 2002). In the second study, individuals higher in self-construal were found to have denser cognitive organization of both positive and negative relational terms than individuals lower in self-construal (Cross, 2009; Cross et al., 2002). Those higher in relational self-construal were also more likely to see positive aspects of relationships linked with non-relationship terms than those lower in relational self-construal (Cross, 2009; Cross et al., 2002). Cross and colleagues (2002) believe that these results suggest that individuals with higher relational self-construal may be more likely to process information about relationships than those who are lower in relational self-construal.

In the third study, the researchers analyzed an individual's attendance to others and social contexts. Individuals who were higher in relational self-construal were more likely to remember relationship-related information about a target person than individuals who were lower in relational self-construal (Cross, 2009; Cross et al., 2002). Results of the fourth study showed that individuals who scored high on relational self-construal were more likely to cognitively cluster information about others in terms of their relationships than individuals who scored low on relational self-construal (Cross, 2009; Cross et al., 2002). Lastly, the fifth and sixth studies found that those higher in relational self-construal were more likely to perceive themselves as more similar to a close friend than those lower in relational self-construal (Cross et al., 2002). In addition, individuals higher in relational self-construal were more likely to recall relational information than individuals lower in relational self-construal (Cross et al., 2002).

**Self-construal on motivations.** Markus and Kitayama (1991) also had several suggestions about how self-construal affects an individual's motivation. They suggested that individuals with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to be motivated by socially-oriented goals than individuals with independent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The researchers suggested this motivation is rooted more in a need to fulfill social roles within relationships than a need for social acceptance. Additionally, Markus and Kitayama (1991) believe that both individuals with independent and interdependent self-construals are active agents in the pursuit of their goals. However, individuals' self-construals will influence how they pursue their goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The researchers propose that motives, such as self-enhancement, mean different things for those with independent and interdependent self-construals. In other words, the meaning of self-enhancement will be grounded in the characteristics and values of an individual's self-construal. For example, those who have an independent self-construal are more likely to define self-enhancement that reflect a desire to show one's unique individuality (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, individuals with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to define self-enhancement in terms of the ability to fit in socially. Lastly, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that those who have an interdependent self-construal are less likely to try and resolve cognitive dissonance compared to those with independent self-construal. This is because maturity of an individual with interdependent self-construal is the ability to maintain one's composure and refrain from expressing negative feelings or attitudes in order to maintain social harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Conversely, for those with independent self-construal, a sign of maturity is the ability to assertively communicate their thoughts and feelings with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

### **Differentiating Self-Construal from Related Constructs**

Self-construal researchers have asserted that it is important to differentiate between independent and interdependent self-construals, and individualism and collectivism, respectively (Cross et al., 2011). When comparing and contrasting the self-construal of people from different countries and cultures it is assumed that if a person is a member of a culture labeled as individualistic, then he or she has an independent self-construal. However, theoretically every person has the potential for both independent and interdependent self-construals when born (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The culture an individual is exposed to influences the person's development and expression of self-construal. For example, American women have been found to have greater relational self-construal even though they live within an individualistic society (Cross et al., 2011; Cross et al., 2002; Kashima et al., 1995). Researchers believe that gender roles and gender socialization are reasons for this focus on close relationships. In addition, Hook et al. (2012b) studied a southeastern United States university sample and found a significant relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness. Yes, individualistic cultures are likely to have a majority of people who have independent self-construal and similarly, collectivistic cultures are likely to have a majority of people who have an interdependent self-construal (Cross et al., 2011). Nonetheless, self-construal is in reference to an individual and not a culture (Cross et al., 2011).

### **Forgiveness and Self-Construal**

In their 2012 article Hook and colleagues sought to analyze the links between collective self-construal (Hook and colleagues used the term "collectivistic self-construal", their term for collective self-construal), reconciliation, and forgiveness in a U.S. college

sample. They found a significant relationship between collective self-construal and views of what forgiveness is, such that people who were higher in collective self-construal were more likely to perceive forgiveness as an interpersonal rather than an intrapersonal process (Hook et al. 2012b). Additionally, greater collective self-construal was significantly correlated with greater decisional forgiveness but not emotional forgiveness (Hook et al., 2012b). In other words, individuals who are higher in collective self-construal may be more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness than those lower in collective self-construal.

Furthermore, trait forgivingness mediated the relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness (Hook et al., 2012b). The researchers believed that because individuals who are higher in collective self-construal likely grew up within a culture that emphasized social harmony as a value, they are more likely to develop a disposition to forgiving others for wrongdoings (Hook et al., 2012b). Other researchers have also found support for culture influencing the development of trait forgivingness over time (Fu, Watkins, & Hui, 2004; Hill, Allemand, & Heffernan, 2013; Watkins et al., 2011). In addition, trait forgivingness has been found to be significantly related to state forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Wade, & Worthington, 2003). The mediation effect found in the Hook et al. (2012b) study supports the hypothesis that a collective self-construal influences an individual's level of trait forgivingness, which affects their engagement in decisional forgiveness for a specific offense.

Fehr and Gelfand (2010) conducted a study with 175 undergraduate students assessing relationships between self-construal, apologies, and forgiveness. First, the researchers sought to examine how an individual's self-construal may be related to the individual's beliefs of the specific components a good apology entails. The results showed

that individuals with higher levels of independent self-construal were significantly more likely to believe that a good apology should include an offer of compensation for the offense. Conversely, individuals with higher levels of relational self-construal were more likely to believe that a good apology entails an expression of empathy. Individuals who were higher in collective self-construal were more likely to believe that a good apology includes an acknowledgement of a violated rule or norm (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010).

Additionally, Fehr and Gelfand (2010) assessed how an individual's self-construal and the offender's apology behaviors related to the degree of forgiveness the offended person experienced. Results showed that individuals with independent self-construal were more likely to forgive an offender when offered compensation (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). Individuals higher in relational self-construal were more likely to forgive when an offender expressed empathy for the offense (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). Lastly, those higher in collective self-construal were more likely to forgive an offender when an offender acknowledged a violated rule or norm (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). The results from this study suggest that self-construal is related to an individual's expectations in regards to an apology for an offense and their degree of forgiveness.

These results reflect suggestions by Markus and Kitayama (1991) about the effects of self-construal on motivation and thus, behavior. Although individuals across all three self-construals engaged in forgiveness, they did so for different reasons. For example, individuals higher in independent self-construal expected compensation (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). They showed concern for their autonomy and personal rights as an individual (Bresnahan, Levine, & Chiu, 2004; Cross et al., 2011; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Those

participants with relational and collective self-construals also forgave, but they did so more in response to expressed empathy and the acknowledgement of a violated norm, respectively.

These results were generally supported by a study of 221 undergraduate students from Nepal. In this study, Watkins and colleagues (2011) found a significant positive correlation between collectivism and decisional forgiveness (Watkins et al., 2011). Similar to the results of Hook et al. (2012b), those who were higher in collectivism were also more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness. The researchers then used decisional and emotional forgiveness levels to predict conciliatory behaviors, desires to avoid the offender, and desires to seek revenge against the offender. For conciliatory behaviors and avoidance, both decisional and emotional forgiveness were significant predictors. However, for desires to seek revenge, only decisional forgiveness predicted the outcome, such that those with greater decisional forgiveness reported fewer desires to seek revenge. This further supports the relationship between a more collectivistic style and making a decision to forgive. Furthermore, those who engage in decisional forgiveness appear to show fewer motivations to seek revenge. Despite these supportive findings, this study did not examine self-construal generally and there was no parallel for relational self-construal specifically.

For the current study it was important to examine how self-construal relates to decisional and emotional forgiveness. Research has supported that those who are higher in collective self-construal (Hook et al., 2012b) and collectivism (Watkins et al., 2011) are more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness. However, there is little known about how relational self-construal relates to the engagement in either emotional or decisional forgiveness. In the proposed study, I seek to fill the gaps in the literature to achieve a fuller

understanding of the relationship between self-construal and emotional and decisional forgiveness.

### **Motivations to Forgive**

On October 2, 2006 tragedy struck an Amish school near Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (PA). Ten lives were taken when, Charles Carl Roberts IV- a member of the local community- shot and killed ten Amish school girls who were between the ages of 6 and 13 years, before ending his own life (“Amish School Shooting”, 2015). Like any tragedy of this nature, many people across the nation—especially those from the local Amish community—were shocked and saddened by the loss of life. However, instead of having the vengeful reaction so many expected, there were many reports of the Amish community sharing words and attitudes of forgiveness towards the Roberts family for his actions (“Amish School Shooting”, 2015). Many praised this Amish community for their display of grace, kindness and forgiveness. The local Amish community was looked upon as a role model for forgiveness and how we as people should attempt to handle offenses and wrongs committed. So why did the Amish forgive Roberts for such a heinous act? Why does a person forgive an offender in general?

Although researchers have highlighted forgiveness as being a prosocial process or having prosocial motives (Davis et al., 2013; Fehr et al., 2010; McCullough et al., 2000), there are few published studies that cover the underlying motivations for why a person chooses to forgive or not forgive an offender. Takada and Ohbuchi (2002; 2004) constructed a measure of forgiveness motives and conducted a preliminary content analysis on a list of 60 different cognitive strategies to forgive a partner derived from research previously conducted with married couples (Cloke, 1993). The content analysis resulted in a list of eight

dimensions reflecting participant motivations to forgive: sympathy, consideration, maintenance of relationships, need for acceptance, guilt reduction, protection of identity, maintenance of social harmony, and general reciprocity (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2002; 2004). The researchers grouped the original eight dimensions into three broader categories based on theoretical reasoning. The three larger categories of forgiveness motives are: altruistic motives, egocentric motives and normative motives (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004).

An altruistic motive reflects sympathy, benevolence, consideration, or concern for the offender's welfare by the victim (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004). Two of the original eight dimensions, sympathy and consideration for the wrongdoer were sorted into this category by the collaborators. Conversely, an egocentric motive reflects an intent based on personal interests. These personal interests include the following four original dimensions: maintaining a personal relationship with the offender; needing acceptance from others; reducing guilt in relation to maintaining feelings of revenge against the offender; and protecting positive self-view or identity (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004). Lastly, the researchers proposed that a normative motive is based on the need for the victim to forgive an offender because of the victim's perceived expectation from others to forgive. Within this category Takada and Ohbuchi (2004) included the dimensions of maintenance of social harmony and general reciprocity.

Takada and Ohbuchi (2004) assessed the associations between motives to forgive and relationship closeness with 206 Japanese college students. The researchers found that individuals who reported they were close to the offender were more forgiving than those who reported they were not close to the offender. Additionally, individuals in close relationships



ranked sympathy, maintenance of relationships, and protection of identity motives higher than those in non-close relationships as important reasons to forgive.

Although it is important to note that there may be important cultural differences between this study's sample and United States (U.S.) samples, the three forgiveness motives appear to connect well with other forgiveness motives reported in forgiveness studies with U.S. based samples. For example, Covert and Johnson (2009) studied 97 Mid-Atlantic Christian university students in order to analyze the relations between motivations to forgive and religious commitment associated with those motivations. Results showed the four top-reported motivations to forgive were: relational reasons, religious reasons, desire for well-being, and feelings of sorrow for or understanding with the offender (Covert & Johnson, 2009). Each motivational theme had several subthemes. Religious reasons included any motive related to spirituality or religion (Covert & Johnson, 2009). The relational reasons theme included three subthemes of: a desire of reconciliation, love, and closeness of the relationship before the transgression (Covert & Johnson, 2009). Desire of well-being included: emotional wellbeing, physical wellbeing, and a desire to avoid being controlled by the offender (Covert & Johnson, 2009). Lastly, the feelings of sorrow for, or understanding with the offender included: empathy, and the victim had been forgiven by the offender in the past (Covert & Johnson, 2009).

In another study of forgiveness motives in the U.S., 279 undergraduate students and middle aged adults reported why they would chose to forgive an offender (Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004). The undergraduate participants reported the importance of the relationship, the sake of personal health and happiness, and having been forgiven for a past offense as the top reasons they would forgive an offender (Younger et al., 2004). The

community sample of middle aged participants endorsed the sake of happiness and personal health, religious or spiritual beliefs, and having been forgiven for a past offense as the top reasons they would forgive (Younger et al., 2004).

Although there has not been much research conducted on motivations to forgive, the previously reviewed studies have provided a foundation to continue to build upon. The previous research has found several reasons why a victim may forgive an offender. However, it appears that several motivations are constant across studies: religious or spiritual motives, relational or social harmony, and personal health and well-being.

### **Religious and Spiritual**

Recall the 2006 shooting at an Amish school near Lancaster County, PA. Following this tragic event, the media repeatedly posed the question: Why did the Amish forgive Charles Roberts for his offenses? Religion is listed as a major factor in why the Amish forgave Roberts for his actions (“Amish School Shooting,” 2015). Amish beliefs are based on Jesus’ teachings in the Bible (“Amish Grace and Forgiveness,” 2015). Within these teachings an individual is expected to engage in the act of forgiveness. Based on the teachings of the Christian scriptures, Christianity contains strong messages about forgiveness. For example, one verse in the Christian New Testament states, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15; New International Version). For Christians, this verse exemplifies how important it is for a person to forgive another in order to be forgiven by God. In fact, many Christian writers teach that forgive is a mandate by God (Rye et al., 2000), regardless of the response from the offender (e.g., “turn ... the other cheek,” Matthew 5:39; New International Version).

In addition to Christianity, there are other organized religions that have teachings about forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2000). For example, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam (among others) have perspectives on forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2000), although the beliefs about forgiveness are not the same across these religions (Cohen; 2015 McCullough et al., 2000). For example, within Judaism there are unforgivable offenses (Cohen, 2015) and specific rules or standards by which forgiveness should be granted (McCullough et al., 2000). In the Torah, Jewish individuals are demanded to forgive when an offender apologizes and have no responsibility to forgive when they do not (McCullough et al., 2000). Research has shown that individuals who endorsed religious reasons to forgive are also higher in religious commitment (Covert & Johnson, 2009). Examples such the Amish community's response to tragedy showcase how great of an influence religion or religiosity may have on one's behavior and motivations. Cohen (2015) suggests that religion shapes individuals moral judgment and is indicative of how individuals and groups manage relationships. Cohen also asserts that religion may mold an individual's self-construal.

### **Relational or Social Harmony**

In addition to personal values influenced by religion or spirituality, living within societies and interacting within various social groups influences one's view and engagement in forgiveness. Those who value relationship harmony may be very motivated to forgive. In this case, the main motivation to forgive would be to maintain relationship harmony, to cope with ruptures in the relationship, and to stay connected to one's social network.

This motivation may also have a cultural component to it. Hui and Bond (2009) studied 145 Chinese (Hong Kong) and American undergraduate students and found that not only was there a significant positive relationship with forgiving a transgressor and a person's

motivation to maintain a relationship, but that relationship fell along cultural lines. Specifically, Chinese students were more likely to try and maintain a relationship and forgive the offender and less motivated to retaliate (Hui and Bond, 2009). Similarly, forgiveness within close relationships has been shown to be associated with greater commitment, relational quality, satisfaction, intimacy and decreased conflict (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2005; 2010; 2011). There is research that has linked greater forgiveness with greater relationship satisfaction (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Allemand et al., 2007). Younger and researchers (2004) also found that people are more likely to forgive when the relationship is important to the person because they wish to preserve the relationship.

### **Personal Health or Well-being**

Some people focus on the many physical health and mental well-being benefits to forgiving another person. This is a third main motivation to forgive: to experience personal relief from the pain of an offense. Research indicates that this may not be an unfounded motivation to forgive, because forgiveness has many physical and mental health benefits. Researchers have found that those who are more likely to engage in forgiveness also experienced lower levels of depression, anxiety, negative thoughts and lower blood pressure (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Lawler et al., 2005; Wade et al., 2004).

In one study of 108 undergraduate students, Lawler and colleagues (Lawler et al., 2003) administered two interviews in which participants were asked about instances of betrayal- one with a friend/partner and another with a parent. The investigators measured the physiological reactivity, stress, hostility, and forgiveness levels for each participant. Some of the stress, hostility, and physiological measures included measurements of blood pressure, physical symptoms (e.g. joint stiffness, headaches, etc.), heart rate, skin conductance, and

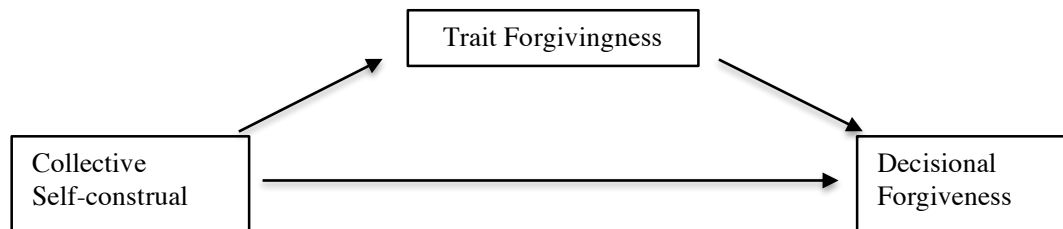
forehead electromyography (EMG), a measure of electrical activity produced by skeletal muscles. The results showed connections between levels of forgiveness and physiological reactivity. When the researchers controlled for gender, higher levels of both trait and state forgiveness were associated with lower levels of diastolic blood pressure and heart rate (Lawler et al., 2003). In addition, women with higher state forgiveness were found to have lower levels of systolic blood pressure and mean arterial pressure than women who scored lower on state forgiveness (Lawler et al., 2003). Men with lower levels of trait forgiveness were found to have higher diastolic blood pressure and mean arterial pressure levels than men with higher levels of trait forgiveness. Plus, participants who were more forgiving—higher in trait forgiveness—showed greater frontal EMG recovery than participants who were less forgiving.

### **The Present Study: Overview and Hypotheses**

The purpose of this current study was to continue exploring the relationship between self-construal and forgiveness, and to explore the motivations that people have to forgive another person. This research study reassessed the relationship between self-construal and forgiveness by: a) replicating the procedures and statistical analyses in the Hook et al. (2012b) study on collective self-construal and forgiveness; and b) extending the research study by adding relational self-construal and motivations to forgive into the study procedures and analyses. The general expectations include finding similar results to the one's reported by Hook et al. (2012b), which would provide further support for the relationship between forgiveness and or collective self-construal, extend the findings to independent and relational self-construal, and connect different motivations to forgive with decisional and emotional forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 1:** Collective self-construal will be significantly correlated with decisional forgiveness. Furthermore, the correlation between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness will be stronger than the relationship between collective self-construal and emotional forgiveness.

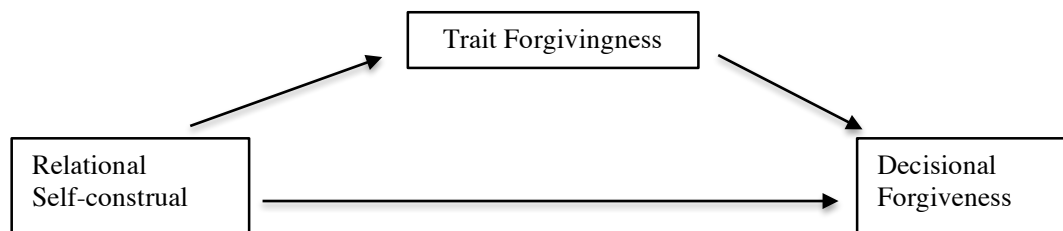
**Hypothesis 2:** The relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness will be mediated by trait forgivingness.



*Figure 1.* Hypothesized mediation model for trait forgivingness mediating the relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 3:** Relational self-construal will be significantly correlated with decisional forgiveness. Furthermore, the correlation between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness will be stronger than the relationship between relational self-construal and emotional forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 4:** The relationship between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness will be mediated by trait forgivingness.



*Figure 2.* Hypothesized mediation model for trait forgivingness mediating the relationship between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 5:** Participants who are higher in relational and collective self-construals will be more likely to endorse relational-themed motives to forgive (i.e., social harmony motivations).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Participants

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology and communication studies courses during the fall semester of 2015 at Iowa State University. Data were collected from a total of 295 participants. (Although 312 participants started the study, 10 of these were excluded because they only completing the informed consent form and no questionnaires and 7 were excluded because they completed the survey twice. Only the second attempt at the questionnaire was removed from the dataset).

Participant ages ranged from 18 to 28 years of age ( $M= 19.22$ ,  $SD= 1.41$ ); three participants did not indicate age (1.0%). One-hundred sixty-two participants identified as female (55.1%) and 132 participants identified as male (44.9%); one participant did not indicate gender. Regarding relationship status, 294 indicated that they were single (99.7%) and one participant indicated that they were married (0.3%), with 133 participants (45.1%) currently in a romantic relationship and 160 not in a relationship (54.2%); two participants did not indicate if they were in a current romantic relationship (0.7%). In regards to the racial/ethnic make-up of the participants, 232 self-identified as European American/Caucasian (79.5%), 26 identified as Asian American/Asian (8.9%), 16 identified as African American/Black (5.5%), 9 identified as Multiracial/Biracial (3.1%), 8 identified as Hispanic/Latinx American (2.7%), and one identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.3%); three participants did not self-identify a race/ethnicity (1.0%).

When asked to indicate their religious affiliation, 81 identified as non-religious (27.5%), 77 identified as Catholic (26.1%), 57 identified as Christian with no specific



denomination (19.3%), 56 identified as Protestant (19.0%), 7 identified as Non-denominational (2.4%), 3 identified as Muslim (1.0%), 4 identified as Buddhist (1.4%), 2 identified as Jewish (0.7%), 3 identified as unsure of their religious affiliation (1.0%), 2 identified as spiritual with no specific affiliation with a religious group (0.7%), one identified as Sikh (0.3%), and one participant did not indicate a religious affiliation.

### **Procedures**

Participants from undergraduate introductory psychology and communication studies courses volunteered for the study through SONA, Iowa State University's online research study sign-up system. Participants received a small amount of course credit in exchange for participating in this study. The participants accessed and completed the study online through the Qualtrics online survey system. The online survey included an online consent form that outlined the study procedures and participant rights. Following similar procedures to the Hook et al. (2012b) study, participants recalled a time when someone hurt or offended them and wrote a summary of the transgression. See Appendix A for more information about the frequencies and types of offenses reported by participants. Participants also completed several instruments to measure self-construal, forgiveness, and other study variables. Trait and state measures were counterbalanced across participants. Trait measures included the self-construal scales and trait forgivingness measures. The state measures included measures assessing motivations of forgiveness, decisional and emotional forgiveness. One-hundred and fifty-four participants were presented the state measures first (52.2%) and 141 were presented the trait measures first (47.8%).

## Measures

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, current marital status, race/ethnicity, first language, and religious affiliation.

**Self-reported transgression.** Participants were asked to reflect on the most serious offense they had experienced in the past 6 months and write a brief narrative of the specific offense. On a scale of 1 to 5 (*1 = not at all hurtful, 5 = extremely hurtful*), participants indicated how hurtful the wrongdoing was perceived to be. The participants completed a one-item scale that assessed the level of relationship closeness with the offender before the transgression occurred (*1 = not very close, 5 = very close*). Participants also estimated the amount of time (in months) that had passed since the wrongdoing initially happened.

**Collective self-construal.** The Interdependent subscale of the Self-Construal Scale (SCS; Singelis, 1994) assessed the degree of collectivist self-construal for each participant. The Interdependent subscale of the SCS is comprised of 12 items that measure a person's general tendency to view herself or himself as interdependent with others (e.g., "My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me."). Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*). The internal consistency of the Interdependent subscale in the present study (Cronbach's alpha) was .78.

**Relational self-construal.** Participants completed the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (RISC; Cross et al., 2000) to assess their levels of relational self-construal. The RISC has a total of 11 items that measure a person's tendency to define oneself based on one's close relationships. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agree with each statement on a scale from 1 to 7 (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 =*

*strongly agree*). An example of an item states: “When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends or family also.” Cronbach’s alpha for the RISC in the present study was .87.

**Trait forgiveness.** To assess the level of trait forgiveness for each participant, the Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS: Berry, Worthington, O’Connor, Parrott & Wade, 2005) was administered. Participants rated the ten items on a scale from 1 to 5 (*1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree*) to determine their tendency to forgive offenders over time and across situations. For example, “I can usually forgive and forget an insult.” The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the TFS was .79.

**Decisional forgiveness.** To assess the level of decisional forgiveness for the transgression the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (DFS: Worthington et al., 2007) was given. The scale has eight items that measure the extent to which they have made a choice to forgive a person for a specific offense (e.g. “If I see him or her, I will act friendly.”). Due to an error participants were presented with seven of the eight scale items. The following item was omitted from the scale: “I will try to get back at him or her.” Participants rated their agreement with each item on a scale of 1 to 5 (*1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree*). The overall scale had an internal consistency of .74<sup>1</sup> in the present study.

**Emotional forgiveness.** The Emotional Forgiveness Scale (EFS: Worthington et al., 2007) was administered to measure the extent to which participants have engaged in emotional forgiveness for the specific self-reported transgression. In other words, the scale measures the extent to which participants feel forgiving and are at peace with the offense (e.g. “I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her.”). Participants indicate their

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<sup>1</sup> Hook et al., (2012b) had a Cronbach’s alpha of .80 for the full DFS scale

agreement with the eight statements using a 5-point scale ( $1 = \textit{strongly disagree}$  to  $5 = \textit{strongly agree}$ ). The full scale had an internal consistency of .77 in the present study.

**Assessment of forgiveness motivations.** Participants were asked to rank a list of possible motivations someone may have for forgiving an offender (e.g. “To release the negative experience of bitterness.”). Participants ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 ( $1 = \textit{not at all true}$  to  $5 = \textit{extremely true}$ ) their agreement with each statement, or how true each statement was for them in general. Additionally, participants ranked the most important motivation for them to forgive (in general).

Because there are no existing scales of reasons to forgive another person, I created the item for this scale based on previous research on motivations to forgive (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004; Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004). After data were collected, I conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the items to measure reasons why people forgive others. I conducted an EFA with principal axis factoring with a Varimax rotation. The EFA indicated that three factors should be retained, based on the eigenvalue  $> 1$  rule. In order for items to be loaded on to a factor, they had to meet minimum criteria of having a primary factor loading of at least .40 and a cross-loading of less than .30. Items 5, 6, 7 and 8 loaded on Factor 1, which indicated religious and spiritual motivations for forgiving others (e.g., “Others in my religious faith expect it of me.”). Items 1, 3, and 4 loaded on Factor 2, which indicated personal wellbeing as motivation for forgiving others (e.g., “To maintain my own peace of mind.”). Items 9, 10, and 12 loaded on Factor 3, which indicated relational-themed motivations to forgive others (e.g., “Because I do not want to lose important relationships.”). Two items did not load on any of these factors (i.e. avoid physical illness and I have been forgiven in the past). Because my analyses with reasons to forgive is still at an early phase, I

decided to retain these two items as stand-alone measures of reasons to forgive. The items within each factor were compiled into individual scales reflecting religious and spiritual, personal wellbeing, and relational-themed motivations to forgive others. Factor loadings for each item can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

*Factor Loadings Based on a Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation for 12 Items Assessing Motivations for Forgiving an Individual for an Offense*

	Factor		
	1 (Religious/Spiritual Motives)	2 (Personal Well-being Motives)	3 (Relational- themed Motives)
5. Because my religious beliefs encourage me to.	.88	.14	.02
6. Others in my religious faith expect it of me.	.87	.09	-.04
7. God (or my higher power) has commanded me to forgive.	.88	.07	.05
8. To avoid the guilt of not adhering to my spiritual beliefs	.83	.03	.03
1. To maintain my own peace of mind.	.08	.74	.22
3. To release the negative experience of bitterness.	.03	.78	.25
4. Because I wish to maintain my happiness.	.03	.73	.27
9. Because I don't want to lose important relationships.	-.01	.05	.92
10. Because I would rather get along with others than be in conflict.	-.05	.24	.54
12. Because I care about the person who hurt me.	-.02	.17	.61
2. To avoid physical illness.	.25	.35	.01
11. Because I have been forgiven by someone in the past.	.15	.23	.40

*Note. Rotation converged in 4 iterations. Items are numbered in the order in which they were presented to participants.*

## CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the study variables. The results are displayed in Table 2. A total of three participants did not complete all of the survey measures. Two participants did not summarize a recent hurt or offense, and did not complete any of the scales measuring emotional or decisional forgiveness. One of these two participants also did not complete the questions related to motivation to forgive others. The third participant did summarize a recent hurt and completed items measuring motivations to forgive others. However, this participant did not complete any of the scales measuring emotional or decisional forgiveness.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables.*

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Collective Self-Construal	295	5.1	0.7	2.3-6.9
Relational Self-Construal	295	5.2	0.9	1.7-7.0
Emotional Forgiveness	292	3.0	0.8	1.0-4.9
Decisional Forgiveness	292	3.8	0.7	1.7-5.0
Trait Forgivingness	295	3.4	0.6	1.6-5.0
Closeness prior to offense	291	4.0	1.25	1.0-5.0
Hurtfulness of the offense	292	4.1	0.9	1.0-5.0

### **Power Analysis**

I conducted a sensitivity power analysis to determine what effect size the current study could detect, given the sample size ( $n = 292$ ), alpha at .05, power at .80, and two predictors of decisional forgiveness (i.e. trait forgivingness and collective self-construal). Using G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), I tested the effect size that could be detected on a t-test of a single predictor in a multiple regression with two predictors. Given the parameters above, my study was nearly powerful enough to find a small effect ( $f^2 = .027$ , with .02 considered a small effect).

### **Preliminary Analyses**

I conducted several initial tests to determine the adequacy of the data. First, I conducted a series of independent samples t-tests to compare the order in which participants received the state and trait measures. The dependent variables in these analyses were relational self-construal, collective self-construal, trait forgivingness, emotional forgiveness, and decisional forgiveness. None of the t-tests were significant, indicating that for all of these variables, the means were similar regardless of the order in which participants completed the state and trait measures. Second, I examined the main study variables for normality, assessing for skewness, kurtosis, and any outliers (defined as 3 standard deviations greater than the mean). I utilized SPSS to generate the statistics for skewness and kurtosis for each dependent variable. I divided each static by its standard error and used a cutoff of  $\pm 2.56$  (Rose, Spinks, & Canhoto, 2014) to determine if the variables were normally distributed. The dependent variables were determined to be normally distributed, with the exception of relational self-construal. I then visually inspected the histogram for relation self-construal. Although the distribution is positively skewed, there is still a range of high



and low values. Therefore, I moved forward with using the data for relational self-construal in the remaining statistical analyses.

### **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1.** For hypothesis 1 I predicted a correlation larger than zero would exist between collective self-construal (CSC) and decisional forgiveness (DF). Furthermore, the association between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness was predicated to be stronger than the correlation between collective self-construal and emotional forgiveness. Results from data analysis indicated no significant correlation between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness,  $r(290) = .11, p = .06$ . Similarly, the correlation between collective self-construal and emotional forgiveness was also found to be not significant,  $r(290) = .05, p = .36$ . Because neither of these correlations was larger than zero, I did not run a test of dependent correlations to compare the two correlations. The bivariate correlations of the scales are displayed in Table 3

**Hypothesis 2.** For hypothesis 2 I predicted that the relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgives would be mediated by trait forgivingness. The PROCESS procedure (Hayes, 2012) for SPSS was utilized to conduct the mediation analyses for this study. The total effect of collectivist self-construal on decisional forgiveness was .11,  $SE = .06, p = .06, 95\% CIs [-.004, .22]$ , which is not significant. Despite this nonsignificant relationship between CSC and DF, we proceeded with the mediation analysis because there is reason to believe that despite a low or non-significant direct effect, other variables may still

Table 3

*Summary of Intercorrelations for Self-construal, Forgiveness, and Motivations to Forgive*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Collective SC	--											
2. Relational SC	.55**	--										
3. Trait Forgivingness	.22**	.23**	--									
4. Emotional Forgiveness	.05	.03	.38**	--								
5. Decisional Forgiveness	.11	.15*	.46**	.64**	--							
6. Religious/Spiritual Motivations	.12*	.02	.08	.07	-.01	--						
7. Personal Well-being Motivations	.26**	.43**	.37**	.15*	.29**	.14*	--					
8. Relational-themed Motivations	.17**	.41**	.30**	.31**	.36**	.00	.42**	--				
9. Avoid physical illness	.23**	.11	.03	-.03	.03	.28**	.33**	.06	--			
10. Forgiven in the past	.14*	.24**	.18**	.11	.13*	.18**	.31**	.40**	.19**	--		
11. Relationship closeness prior to the offense	.09	.22**	.13*	.26**	.30**	.05	.30**	.28**	.17**	.15*	--	
12. Hurtfulness of the offense	.10	.15*	-.09	-.14	.01	.01	.15*	.02	.09	.10	.36**	--

*Note. Note.* The first five variables are motivations to forgive, with the first three being the new scales created for this study and the fourth and fifth variables being single-items. SC = Self-construal. \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$

mediate between those variables (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). The direct effect of collective self-construal on decisional forgiveness with trait forgivingness in the model is .01,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .83$ , 95% CIs [-.09, .11]. The indirect effect of relational self-construal on decisional forgiveness through trait forgivingness is .09,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CIs [.04, .15]. See Table 4 for more information. These results suggest that although there is not a significant direct relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness, these two variables are related to trait forgivingness, providing support for the hypothesis that collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness are mediated by trait forgivingness.

**Hypothesis 3.** For hypothesis 3 I predicted that relational self-construal would be significantly correlated with decisional forgiveness. Furthermore, the correlation between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness will be stronger than the relationship between relational self-construal and emotional forgiveness. The correlation between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness was significant,  $r(290) = .15$ ,  $p = .01$ . In contrast the correlation between relational self-construal and emotional forgiveness was not significant,  $r(290) = .03$ ,  $p = .57$ . A test of dependent correlations determined that there was a significant difference between the correlation for relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness and the correlation between relational self-construal and emotional forgiveness,  $\Delta r = .12$ ,  $t(291) = 2.45$ ,  $p = .02$ . This suggests that the relationship between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness is stronger than the relationship between relational self-construal and emotional forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 4.** For hypothesis 4 I predicted that the relationship between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness would be mediated by trait forgivingness. To analyze the potential mediation effect of trait forgivingness, I used the PROCESS procedure

for SPSS (Hayes, 2012). Results indicated that trait forgiveness fully mediated the relationship between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness. The total effect of relational self-construal on decisional forgiveness is  $.12$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p = .01$ , 95% CIs  $[.03, .22]$ . The direct effect of relational self-construal on decisional forgiveness with trait forgiveness in the model is  $.04$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .41$ , 95% CI  $[-.05, .12]$ . The indirect effect of relational self-construal on decisional forgiveness through trait forgiveness is  $.09$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CIs  $[.04, .13]$ . This indicates that although relational self-construal is related to decisional forgiveness, this relationship is fully mediated by trait forgiveness.

**Hypothesis 5.** For hypothesis 5 I predicted that participants who are higher in relational and collective self-construals will be more likely to endorse relational-themed motives to forgive (i.e. social harmony motivations). To test this hypothesis, I first conducted bivariate correlations among the variables (See Table 3).

In order to determine if participants who endorsed relational self-construal are more likely to report relational-themed forgiveness motivations than either religious/spiritual motivations or personal well-being motivations, I conducted two tests comparing dependent correlations. The first test compared the correlation for relational self-construal and relational-themed motives, and the correlation between relational self-construal and religious and spiritual motives,  $\Delta r = .22$ ,  $t(291) = 2.89$ ,  $p = .004$ . This result means that the correlation for relational self-construal and relational-themed motives is stronger than the correlation between relational self-construal and religious and spiritual motives. Thus, greater relational self-construal was more strongly related to greater endorsement of relational motives to forgive than greater religious/spiritual motives to forgive. In contrast, a second test of

Table 4  
*Magnitude and Statistical Significance of the Indirect Effects of Self-construal on the Decisional Forgiveness*

Predictor Variable	Mediator Variable (s)	Outcome Variable	$\beta$ Standardized Indirect Effect	SE of Indirect Effect <sup>a</sup>	95% CI Mean Indirect Effect <sup>a</sup> (Lower, Upper)
Collective Self-construal →	Trait Forgivingness→	Decisional Forgiveness	.10*	.03	.04, .15
Relational Self-construal →	Trait Forgivingness→	Decisional Forgiveness	.09*	.02	.04, .13

<sup>a</sup> These values based on unstandardized path coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$

dependent correlations determined that there was no significant difference between the correlation for relational self-construal and relational-themed motives, and the correlation between relational self-construal and personal well-being motives,  $t(291) = -.31, p = .76$ .

Likewise, I conducted two tests to compare dependent correlations to determine if participants who endorse greater collectivism would be more likely to endorse relational-themed motivations to forgive than religious/spiritual or personal well-being motivations. A test of dependent correlations determined that there was no significant difference between the correlation for collective self-construal and relational-themed motives, and the correlation between collective self-construal and religious and spiritual motives,  $t(291) = 0.61, p = .54$ . Similarly, test of dependent correlations determined that there was no significant difference between the correlation for collective self-construal and relational-themed motives, and the correlation between collective self-construal and religious and personal well-being motives,  $t(291) = 1.47, p = .14$ .

## CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

In the present study I assessed the relationship between an individual's self-construal, level of trait forgivingness, and their engagement in decisional or emotional forgiveness for a specific offense. Results show that there is a significant relationship between relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness. However, results did not show a significant association between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness. Despite this non-significant relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness, results suggest that an individual's self-construal likely has some impact on one's engagement in forgiveness. In addition, trait forgivingness was shown to mediate the relationship between decisional forgiveness and both collective and relational self-construals. Partially supporting my hypotheses, it appears that individuals with self-construals that are more relational tend to be more likely to engage in decisional forgiveness, that is be more likely to make specific, deliberate, and volitional efforts to forgive others who hurt them, even when they may not be feeling very forgiving.

### **Interdependent Self-Construals and Decisional Forgiveness**

In this study, I predicted that interdependent self-construals would be significantly related to decisional forgiveness. These predictions were based on research conducted by Hook and colleagues (2012b), in which the authors found significant results supporting this hypothesis. It is believed that in order to maintain relationships and social harmony, those with collective and relational self-construals would be more likely to engage in forgiveness (Hook, Worthington, & Utsey, 2009; Hook et al. 2012a; Hook et al. 2012b). Results of the present study provide partial support for this. A significant relationship was found between

relational self-construal and decisional forgiveness. However, there was only a marginally significant relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness.

Although the correlation between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness was not significant, this correlation was similar to the correlation found by Hook and colleagues (2012b). It is likely that these two correlations (.11 in the present study and .15 in Hook et al.) would have overlapping 95% confidence intervals. The two studies suggest that the true effect size for collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness for the U.S. population is likely to be in this range. Perhaps an increase in sample size, and greater racial and ethnic diversity among the study participants would increase the chance of these results being significant in the future. There may be differences in collective construal among those of European and minority backgrounds. However, the majority of individuals from this sample were of European descent. Therefore, we cannot be sure that the non-significant correlation is not in part due to a lack of diversity within the sample.

### **Trait Forgivingness as a Mediator**

Trait forgivingness is believed to develop across an individual's lifespan and increase with age (McCullough & vanOyen Witvliet, 2002; Younger, Piferi, Jobe & Lawler, 2004). Due to this lifespan development, it is also believed that the environment, and cultures that an individual is exposed to will impact the development of trait forgivingness (Hill, Allemand, & Heffernan, 2013; Hook et al. 2012b). Previous research conducted by Hook and colleagues (2012b) supports a relationship between self-construal and trait forgivingness. There is also research significantly associating trait forgivingness with state forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Wade, & Worthington, 2003). Because of this, I hypothesized that trait forgivingness would mediate the relationship between self-construal



and decisional forgiveness. Results of my study support trait forgivingness mediating the relationship between relational-themed self-construals and decisional forgiveness, as well as the relationship between collective self-construal and decisional forgiveness. This is in line with what Hook et al. (2012) found in their research. Our study, therefore, corroborated their findings and lend more support to the idea that more relational and collective self-construals may increase one's disposition to forgive. Then, in turn, that greater dispositional forgiveness increases the likelihood that people will make a decision to forgive someone who has hurt them.

### **Self-Construal and Motivations to Forgive Others**

In addition to studying the impact of self-construal on the engagement of forgiveness behaviors, I wanted to study the possible relationship between self-construal and an individual's motivation to forgive an offender. I hypothesized that those who are high in interdependent self-construal would be more likely to endorse more relational-themed motivations to forgive. Markus & Kitayama (1991) suggested that individuals with an interdependent self-construal are more likely to be motivated by socially-oriented goals than individuals with independent self-construal. Results of this study support the hypothesis that those who have higher relational self-construal are more likely to endorse more relational-themed motivations, such as "...I rather get along with others than be in conflict" when forgiving an offender.

### **Limitations**

The present study is helpful in gaining a better understanding of the relationships between self-construal, forgiveness, and motivations for forgiving others. However, there are several limitations to this study. One limitation is a lack of sufficient power to detect a

small effect size. A power sensitivity analysis determined this study could detect a medium effect size, and an effect approaching a small size. Therefore, there is a possibility that some of my hypotheses may have only been partially supported because of this lack of power to detect a small effect. An increase in sample size may help to improve the power of future studies. Another limitation was an overall lack of racial and ethnic diversity among sample participants. The majority of the study participants were of European descent, which means that there is a chance for cross-culture differences that may not been detectable. Similarly, the participants were all from a large Midwestern university in the U.S. Many of the university students are local to the state; there may be regional cultural influences related to social engagement that have not be accounted for in this study. Collecting data from participants in other regions in the country would allow for testing of whether there are regional differences in the results or not. The majority of the sample self-identified as Christian, therefore, there may be bias in regards to endorsement of spiritual/religious forgiveness motivations. In the future, studies with more religious and spiritual diversity would be helpful. Another possible limitation is that I assumed that participants are consciously aware of their motivations to forgive and can describe those motivations to someone else. My data is therefore limited by the degree to which participants could identify and report their true motivations to forgive. It may be that many of the reasons why people engage forgiveness, or withhold it, are hidden from their own awareness. Finally, there is also no established scale to measure motivations to forgive. Therefore, I created my own scale. Although Exploratory Factor Analysis indicated that the items loaded on the factors I had intended to create, there is no substantial validity data to support this scale.

## **Implications**

The findings of this research may be important to both research and clinical practice. In regards to research, understanding the role of self-construal on forgiveness can better help to design future research studies on forgiveness. For instance, researchers can further investigate additional mediator effects on forgiveness and possible moderator effects. More information gathered about potential mediators and moderators can lead to the improvement of current forgiveness interventions, and the development of new interventions. In addition, results from this study may help to inform us of the overall forgiveness process for an individual forgiving an offender for a hurt.

Clinical application of the research can help in providing more effective and research informed therapy interventions to support individuals who are seeking to forgive another individual. If a clinician can assess for an individual's self-construal, formally or informally, the clinician may be better able to help a client navigate the process of forgiving a person for an offense. For, example if a person has a more relational self-construal, they may be highly motivated to make a decision to forgive, especially, in circumstances where social harmony and other relational issues are concerned. However, this might create conflict for the client who had very low emotional forgiveness. Helping clients to understand the differences and navigate the complex social, emotional, and cognitive processes involved in forgiveness process could significantly improve therapy (Wade, Bailey, & Shaffer, 2005).

In order to build upon the current research and gain further knowledge, researchers can study other possible themes for motivation in addition to relational-themed, spiritual/religious, and personal well-being motives. Previous research and this study may have not captured all of the motivations themes for interpersonal forgiveness. In addition,

other researchers replicating the present study to determine if the same motives are found is important for supporting that these are indeed motives for forgiving another for an offense. In addition, future studies can include additional ways to detect motivations of forgiveness. For instance, perhaps asking questions that tap into these motivations to forgive without explicitly asking about them would help to add validity to the current findings.

Developing an experimental study to assess the relationships between self-construal, forgiveness, and motivations for forgiving others would also be beneficial. The research conducted on these topics has been cross-sectional so far. An experimental study will likely increase the internal validity of the study and provide some support for a causal order to these variables. In addition, experimental designs could be conducted to examine the motivations in more detail. There may not be simply one primary motivation to forgive used by an individual. Perhaps, there are different types of motivations to forgive that are activated by different types of relationships (e.g. friend vs. partner) or different hurts (e.g. betrayal vs. dishonesty). An experimental study may allow for a better understanding of these nuanced differences.

Lastly, future studies could be conducted to improve the study of self-construal in forgiveness. Now that we have some support that self-construal is indeed related to engaging in forgiveness behaviors, it may be very helpful to see in what situations, specific types of self-construal are primed for people. Previous research supports that an individual's perception of themselves as more independent or interdependent can be manipulated by priming interdependent versus independent themes via completing simple tasks and reading stories (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Choi, Connor, Wason, & Kahn, 2016). Within certain contexts that an individual's self-construal is influenced, there is a possibility that their

engagement in forgiveness may be indirectly impacted. Additionally, assessing the effect of possible in-group versus out-group effects on the engagement and motives for forgiveness behaviors may be important. Past research has found significant associations between interdependent self-construal and pro-social behaviors (Skarmeas, & Shabbir, 2011; Winterich, & Barone, 2011). However, there has also been research that supports that this prosocial behavior is more likely to be towards an individual within the same group as the giver (Duclos, & Barasch, 2014). Based on these results, it may be expected that those with interdependent self-construals may be more forgiving towards those of the same group or relationship dyad than those who are not.

### **Conclusion**

The role of self-construal in understanding the process of forgiveness is important. Self-construal provides understanding to both trait forgivingness and state forgiveness (i.e., decisional and emotional forgiveness). The present study results help to support self-construal as a construct that likely proceeds the development of trait forgivingness, which then impact's an individual's in-the-moment engagement in forgiveness of a transgressor. Researching and broadening the field's understanding of self-construal has the potential to change how researchers approach future forgiveness research. Additionally, these findings may impact the way in which clinicians approach forgiveness interventions.

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## APPENDIX A

## CATEGORIES OF PARTICIPANT SELF-REPORTED HURTS AND OFFENSES

Category of Hurt or Offense	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Bullying/Abuse	63	21.4
Betrayal	62	21.0
Rejection/Humiliation	48	16.3
Break-ups/Infidelity	46	15.6
Friend Conflict	8	6.1
Family Conflict	9	3.1
Discrimination	7	2.4
Other	28	9.5
Did not report an hurt or offense	14	4.7

*Note.*  $N=295$ . Total of percentages is not 100 because of rounding. Hurts or offenses included in the 'Other' category did not criteria to be included in another specific category (e.g. family conflict).

**APPENDIX B**  
STUDY MEASURES

Demographics

1. Your Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Your Age: \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your current marital status? (circle one) Single Married Separated Divorced  
Widowed
5. What is your Ethnicity/Race? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your religious affiliation? (for example, Baptist, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim,  
Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, None . . .)
- 

Identify a Hurt or Offense

Please think of someone who has *deeply hurt or offended you*. Without writing the name, write yourself a brief description of what the person did to hurt or offend you. (Note: if the person has done many things, it is important to recall one *specific* event on which you focus. Please choose the most troublesome event you can recall.) Write a short description below (2 to 4 sentences) to remind yourself of the event. **NOTE: When you are asked to refer to a transgression in completing the following questionnaires in this packet, THIS hurt or offense immediately described below is the transgression that you will rate.**

Please rate the hurtfulness of the offense, using the scale below. Circle your answer.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all hurtful				Extremely hurtful

Please estimate the time in months since the offense occurred.

The offense occurred \_\_\_\_\_ months ago.

How close was the relationship between you and the person who hurt you prior to the hurt?

1	2	3	4	5
Not very close				Very close

## Self-Construal Scale

DIRECTIONS: This scale consists of a number of statements that describe different feelings or behaviors. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. Use the following scale to record your answers.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = moderately disagree
- 3 = somewhat disagree
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = somewhat agree
- 6 = moderately agree
- 7 = strongly agree

1. \_\_\_ I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact.
2. \_\_\_ It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group.
3. \_\_\_ My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me.
4. \_\_\_ I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor.
5. \_\_\_ I respect people who are modest about themselves.
6. \_\_\_ I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in.
7. \_\_\_ I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments.
8. \_\_\_ I should take into consideration my parent's advice when making education/career plans.
9. \_\_\_ It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group.
10. \_\_\_ I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I'm not happy with the group.
11. \_\_\_ If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible.
12. \_\_\_ Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument.
13. \_\_\_ I'd rather say "No" directly than risk being misunderstood.
14. \_\_\_ Speaking up during a class is not a problem for me.
15. \_\_\_ Having a lively imagination is important to me.
16. \_\_\_ I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards.
17. \_\_\_ I am the same person at home that I am at school.
18. \_\_\_ Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me.
19. \_\_\_ I act the same way no matter who I am with.
20. \_\_\_ I feel comfortable using someone's first name soon after I meet them, even when they are much older than I am.
21. \_\_\_ I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met.
22. \_\_\_ I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.
23. \_\_\_ My personal identity independent of others is very important to me.
24. \_\_\_ I value being in good health above everything.



## Relational Self-Construal Scale

Listed below are a number of statements about various attitudes and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; we are simply interested in how you think about yourself. In the space next to each statement, please write the number that indicates the extent to which you **agree or disagree** with each of these statements, using the following scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = moderately disagree
- 3 = somewhat disagree
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = somewhat agree
- 6 = moderately agree
- 7 = strongly agree

Please circle the number that best represents your response.

1. My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am.
2. When I feel very close to someone, it often feels to me like that person is an important part of who I am.
3. Overall, my close relationships have very little to do with how I feel about myself.
4. I think one of the most important parts of who I am can be captured by looking at my close friends and understanding who they are.
5. When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends or family also.
6. When I establish a close friendship with someone, I usually develop a strong sense of identification with that person.
7. If a person hurts someone close to me, I feel hurt as well.
8. My close relationships are unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
9. My sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as close friends.
10. In general, my close relationships are an important part of my self-image.
11. I usually feel a strong sense of pride when someone close to me has an important accomplishment.

### Trait forgivingness Scale

**DIRECTIONS:** Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below by using the following scale:

- 5 = Strongly Agree  
 4 = Mildly Agree  
 3 = Agree and Disagree Equally  
 2 = Mildly Disagree  
 1 = Strongly Disagree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People close to me probably think I hold a grudge too long.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I can forgive a friend for almost anything.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 3. If someone treats me badly, I treat him or her the same.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I try to forgive others even when they don't feel guilty for what they did.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I can usually forgive and forget an insult.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I feel bitter about many of my relationships.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Even after I forgive someone, things often come back to me that I resent.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 8. There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I have always forgiven those who have hurt me.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I am a forgiving person.

### Decisional Forgiveness Scale

**Think of your current intentions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

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

## Emotional Forgiveness Scale

**Think of your current emotions toward the person who hurt you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
1. I care about him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I'm bitter about what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I feel sympathy toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I'm mad about what happened.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I like him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I resent what he or she did to me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I feel love toward him or her.	SD	D	N	A	SA

## Reasons for Forgiveness

**DIRECTIONS:** Listed below are common reasons an individual may have for forgiving someone for *deeply hurting or offending them*. Please rate the degree to which each of these statements are true for you: 1 = not at all true to 5 = extremely true

In general, I am motivated to forgive others...

To maintain my own peace of mind.	1	2	3	4	5
To avoid physical illness.	1	2	3	4	5
To release the negative experience of bitterness.	1	2	3	4	5
Because I wish to maintain my happiness	1	2	3	4	5
Because my religious beliefs encourage me to.	1	2	3	4	5
Others in my religious faith expect it of me.	1	2	3	4	5
God (or my higher power) has commanded me to forgive.	1	2	3	4	5
To avoid the guilt of not adhering to my spiritual beliefs	1	2	3	4	5
Because I don't want to lose important relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
Because I would rather get along with others than be in conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
Because I have been forgiven by someone in the past	1	2	3	4	5
Because I care about the person who hurt me	1	2	3	4	5

Other: please fill in.

1      2      3      4      5

Of the items listed, which of these is the most important motivation to forgive (in general across situations). \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
1138 Pearson Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
515 294-4566  
FAX 515 294-4267

**Date:** 9/17/2015

**To:** Jennifer L.L. Major  
W112 Lagomarcino Hall

**CC:** Dr. Nathaniel Wade  
W112 Lagomarcino

**From:** Office for Responsible Research

**Title:** Motivations for Forgiving Others

**IRB ID:** 15-480

**Approval Date:** 9/16/2015      **Date for Continuing Review:** 9/15/2017

**Submission Type:** New      **Review Type:** Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- **Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study**, when documented consent is required.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. **Approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.