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# Lack of Forgiveness of Parents and Intimate Partner Violence

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The University of Southern Mississippi

LACK OF FORGIVENESS OF PARENTS  
AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

by

Hannah Doucette

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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August 2015  
ABSTRACT

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This study examined whether there was an association between lack of forgiveness for adverse events/circumstances perpetrated by parents and intimate partner violence (IPV) in emerging adulthood. Participants were 208 (85.6% female) 18- and 19-year-old undergraduate students. Participants were asked to describe events/circumstances in which they felt hurt by their parents when they were growing up. They then answered questions related to the most hurtful event including items pertaining to forgiveness. Participants also answered questions about the perpetration and victimization of IPV in the past year. The forgiveness-IPV relation was observed primarily for physical injury. Findings indicated that revenge seeking and benevolence were associated with the perpetration and victimization of physical injury, whereas ruminating about the event/circumstance perpetrated by a parent was predictive of physical assault and injury victimization. Our findings provide some support for an association between forgiveness of parents and IPV. Directions for future research and potential clinical implications are discussed

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in romantic relationships is strikingly prevalent in the United States. In 2010, one in three women and one in four men in the United States reported experiencing some form of IPV in their lifetime, extending across all ethnicities (Black et al., 2011). Victims of such violence often experience fear, PTSD symptoms, and physical injury (Arias & Corso, 2005; Black et al., 2011). Victims of IPV are also at risk for poor general health and chronic disease (Coker et al., 2002) as well as mental health difficulties such as depression, panic, and substance misuse (Cerulli, Talbot, Tang, & Chaudron, 2011; Coker et al., 2002; Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005; Fletcher, 2010; Romito & Grassi, 2007).

Knowledge of factors that influence IPV is important for identifying possible targets of interventions designed to reduce the rates and diminish the negative impact of IPV. Exposure to adverse family circumstances during childhood and adolescence has consistently been associated with both the perpetration and victimization of IPV in adulthood (e.g., Andrews, Foster, Capaldi, & Hops, 2000; Franklin & Kercher, 2012; Lohman, Neppl, Senia, & Schofield, 2013; McKinney, Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Nelson, 2009; Stith et al., 2000). Forgiveness of parents for such occurrences may be one way to reduce the influence of family adversity on IPV for two reasons. First, youth often exhibit a range of negative response tendencies to family adversity (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000), which is problematic because these response tendencies can indirectly lead to IPV (Berzenski & Yates, 2010; Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; McNulty & Hellmuth, 2008; Ross, 2011; Volz & Kerig, 2010). Moreover, when parents are

responsible for the family adversity, through their actions and/or failures to act, these negative response tendencies tend to be particularly strong (Diamond, Diamond, & Levy, 2014). Therefore, it is possible that children and adolescents who display these negative responses related to childhood adversity, caused by a parent (e.g., avoidance of a parent, continued feelings of hurt), may be at greater risk for IPV than those who do not exhibit these tendencies. A relatively small but growing literature suggests that forgiveness is an important factor in diminishing negative response tendencies to aversive and hurtful experiences (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007; Orcutt, 2006). For this reason, forgiveness of parents for such events is potentially a useful way to reduce the influence of adverse family circumstances, thus lowering rates of IPV. Second, forgiveness of parents has been associated with a number of positive outcomes at both the individual and relationship level, which are related to better romantic relationship functioning and lower rates of IPV. It could, therefore, be the case that these positive outcomes from the forgiveness of parents reduce the risk of IPV. To date, only one study has considered forgiveness of parents in the context of IPV risk. The purpose of the present study was to expand upon the prior research in this area to further examine whether lack of forgiveness (i.e., continued negative response tendencies) for aversive circumstances/events perpetrated by parents is related to IPV in offspring.

#### Family of Origin Adversity and Intimate Partner Violence

Adversity within the family of origin, particularly for the action or lack of action of parents, has consistently been associated with IPV perpetration and victimization. For example, children and adolescents who have been abused and/or exposed to destructive interparental conflict have been shown to be at elevated risk for IPV (e.g., Foshee,



Benefield, Ennett, Bauman, & Suchindran, 2004; Jouriles, Mueller, Rosenfield, McDonald, & Dodson, 2012; Stith et al., 2000). Furthermore, neglect, parent psychopathology, maladaptive parenting, parent-child conflict and violence, problematic family communication, and other negative parent-child interactions have all been associated with IPV or romantic relationship conflict (Andrews, et al., 2000; Fritz, Slep, & O'Leary, 2012; Linder & Collins, 2005; Lohman, et al., 2013; Tyler, Brownridge, & Melander, 2011; Whitton et al., 2008). It is, therefore, quite essential to target adversity within the family of origin in an attempt to reduce rates of IPV. Youths' reactions to such events/circumstances may be one particularly important area of concentration.

#### Responses Tendencies to Family Adversity

Research indicates that youth exhibit a wide range of responses to family adversity, and that these can be most extreme when parents have some responsibility for the event/circumstance. One emotional response to adverse events committed by a parent is hurt, which can be more severe when experienced within the context of the parent-child relationship than within other close relationships (Feeney, 2005; Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). This feeling of hurt can have a number of ramifications for the individual on the receiving end. Emotional hurt in interpersonal relationships is often described as feeling devalued and rejected by the perpetrator in some implicit or explicit manner (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998). In fact, when people feel rejected, areas of the brain are activated in much the same way as when people are in physical pain (Eisenberger, 2012; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Rejection can be prompted by a lack of warmth and affection, indifference and neglect, or hostility and aggression (Rohner, 2008). This rejection can lead to feelings of anxiety and

insecurity, aggression, hostility, defensiveness, low self-esteem and self-adequacy, emotional instability, and a negative worldview (Rohner, 2008).

Feelings of hurt and rejection in the parent-child relationship can also be problematic for children's functioning in romantic relationships, particularly as it relates to IPV. For instance, rejected individuals have trouble trusting others and are more in-tune to additional experiences of hurt (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). Rejected individuals also have a tendency to perceive hostility and intentionality from benign interactions with significant others (Rohner et al., 2012). Likewise, sensitivity to rejection leads to expressions of hostility, aggression, and withdrawal following threats of rejection and has been directly linked with dating violence perpetration for girls and with dating violence perpetration and victimization for boys (Volz & Kerig, 2010).

Other reactions to adverse events within the family of origin include children's display of emotional reactivity and difficulty regulating emotions (Buehler, Lange, & Franck, 2007; Davies & Cummings, 1998). According to Cook, Buehler, and Blair (2002), emotional reactivity refers to the "arousal and dysregulation of emotions including fear, distress, preoccupation with a stressor, and an inability to calm oneself down in response to an interpersonal stressor" (p. 341), whereas emotional dysregulation refers to a lack of understanding of emotion in which one has an inability to control impulses and behaviors when experiencing emotion and an inability to modulate emotions in a situationally appropriate manner (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). These are long term issues that can result in children's future difficulty with flexibility and adaptivity in social situations, prompting them to react inappropriately in such occurrences (Ramani, Brownell, & Campbell, 2010).

Davies and Cummings' (1994) emotional security theory (EST) further highlights children's responses to aversive events within the family of origin. EST proposes that children respond to a negative family environment by using a variety of coping strategies in attempt to diminish threat to the self and to preserve a sense of security (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Davies & Forman, 2002). Building upon attachment theory, children respond to family conflict using secure, preoccupied, or avoidant methods to increase a sense of security. EST similarly contends with attachment theory, the importance of establishing emotional security for children, yet extends upon attachment theories by emphasizing the relevance of security within other family dynamics. As such, while appropriate for the interactions between parents and children, EST can also be applied to the emotional insecurity children may experience following conflict between parents or other family members (Davies, Winter, & Cicchetti, 2006). Most commonly, children respond securely, which is constructive, flexible, and well-regulated. Children who respond securely retain their view that their parent(s) is worthy of commitment and supportive - despite family adversity (Finnegan, Hodges, & Perry, 1996; Forman & Davies, 2005). In contrast, preoccupied responses are characterized by worry, vigilance, and rumination (Davies & Forman, 2002; Davies, Forman, Rasi, & Stevens, 2002; Forman & Davies, 2005). Preoccupied response tendencies are also linked with high emotional reactivity and hostile representations of relationships, as well as impulses to avoid or intervene in conflict (Cummings, Koss, & Davies, 2014; Davies & Forman, 2002). Lastly, avoidant responses are disengaged and dismissive. They are characterized by an inhibition of distress and an attempt to minimize exposure to the negativity or importance of family (Cummings et al., 2014; Davies & Forman, 2002). Children who

utilize maladaptive response tendencies to maintain a sense of security often experience psychological dysfunction and difficulty regulating their emotions and interacting with others (Cummings, Cheung, & Davies, 2013; Davies & Forman, 2002).

Prolonging the emotional security system by continuing to exhibit insecure response tendencies, which utilizes a number of psychobiological resources, places individuals at risk for other interpersonal difficulties by leaving fewer resources available to cope with additional threats, challenges, and stressors (Cummings, et al., 2013; Cummings & Davies, 2010). Furthermore, those who utilize preoccupied and avoidant response strategies are unlikely to achieve emotional security following an adverse event, especially compared to those who respond securely. Additional risks for those who engage in insecure tendencies include future emotional reactivity, emotional and psychological maladjustment, and involvement in marital conflict, which are all associated with emotional insecurity during childhood (Cummings, et al., 2013; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Importantly, emotional dysregulation (e.g., Berzenski & Yates, 2010; McNulty & Hellmuth, 2008; Ross, 2011), psychological dysfunction (e.g., Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Chase, Treboux, & O'Leary, 2002), and romantic relationship conflict (Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008) are linked with IPV.

Consistent with this established research, adverse events/circumstances within the family of origin may be related to IPV due to the implications of children's negative response tendencies (i.e., hurt/rejection, preoccupation, and avoidance) to such events on IPV. Modifying the response tendencies that children exhibit in reaction to adversity perpetrated by a parent could, therefore, be a target for IPV intervention. It is proposed that fostering forgiveness may be one such manner in which to do so.

## Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an important factor in repairing or diminishing the damage caused by aversive events/circumstances perpetrated by another person (Fincham et al., 2007; Orcutt, 2006). In fact, many of the response tendencies to family adversity, captured by the emotional security theory, overlap, or coincide, with the conceptualization of forgiveness. To this regard, forgiveness has been depicted as a shift in a victim's response tendencies related to an adverse event (i.e., a reduction in negative responses and an increase in positive responses). These response tendencies are often conceptualized as interpersonal. Specifically, interpersonal response tendencies of forgiveness include a decrease in revenge seeking and avoidance (i.e., negative responses) and an increase in goodwill and benevolence (i.e., positive responses) toward a perpetrator (Fincham, 2000; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998).

Responses to adverse events can also include intrapersonal tendencies, yet a shift in intrapersonal tendencies is not incorporated into all conceptualizations of forgiveness. Examples of intrapersonal tendencies that may be important to consider in the context of forgiveness are changes in the victim's cognitions, such as rumination, and feelings, such as hurt. Rumination refers to the excessive focus or replaying of past events in the mind and involves a negative focus on the event and the perpetrator (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991, 2000). Rumination is quite common and damaging following an aversive interpersonal event, particularly for those who are reported as exceptionally hurtful, and is more likely to occur as the severity of an event increases (Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2005). Rumination has also been found to prevent, or postpone, a shift in interpersonal response

tendencies (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007a; Worthington & Wade, 1999) as well as to maintain negative mood states following an interpersonal offense (McCullough et al., 2007a; Worthington & Wade, 1999). Moreover, as noted, the feeling of hurt is a common intrapersonal response following adverse events within the family. When hurt is prolonged, or has yet to subside, it seems unlikely that a victim would demonstrate a shift in his/her interpersonal responses from negative (i.e., avoidance and revenge seeking) to positive (benevolence). Rather, it might be expected that the hurt from the event would need to lessen, at least moderately, for this shift to occur. Consistent with this view, Williamson, Gonzales, Fernandez, and Williams (2014) propose a concept of forgiveness aversion, in which deterrents toward forgiveness are considered. One of the aversions to forgiveness proposed by Williamson and colleagues (2014) includes unreadiness, which the authors classify as the process of “undergoing too much emotional turmoil to honestly forgive” (p. 380). With this idea in mind, incorporating a reduction of hurt into conceptualizations of forgiveness is likely quite important following aversive events, especially those perpetrated by parents, which have been reported to elicit strong feelings of hurt. We will focus on both interpersonal (avoidance, revenge seeking, and benevolence) and intrapersonal (rumination and continued hurt) aspects of forgiveness for these reasons.

Based upon these definitions of forgiveness, youth who retain a range of negative response tendencies to adverse events can be conceptualized as demonstrating a lack of forgiveness. The indirect associations that have been established between negative response tendencies to adverse events perpetrated by parents and IPV are one reason why it is hypothesized that a lack of forgiveness of parents will be associated with IPV.

*Forgiveness of Parents and Intimate Partner Violence.* Thus far, only one study, of which we are aware, has investigated whether children's forgiveness of parents is influential for children's IPV in young adulthood. Rivera and Fincham (2015) examined whether forgiveness of maternal transgressions mediated the link between exposure to parental IPV and child perpetration and victimization of dating violence. The authors found that forgiveness of a current maternal transgression did, in fact, mediate the relationship between mother and father perpetrated IPV and perpetration of dating violence, as well as the relationship between mother perpetrated IPV and victimization of dating violence. However, this study measured the child's tendency to forgive his/her mother for transgressions in general – as opposed to forgiveness of the interparental violence itself, or of a significantly hurtful transgression (i.e., forgiveness was not tied to a specific event). Furthermore, the study did not gather data regarding forgiveness of the father. Despite the limitations of this study, the results suggest that forgiveness of parents may in fact serve an important role in the formation of healthy romantic relationship behaviors, particularly as it relates to IPV. However, additional research is clearly needed.

*Forgiveness of Parents and Individual and Relationship Outcomes.* The second reason we hypothesized a relation between forgiveness of parents and IPV is that forgiveness of parents has been related to a range of individual and relationship outcomes that have been associated with IPV. In particular, results have shown that forgiveness of parents is associated with parent-child relationship closeness, family cohesiveness and expressiveness, low anxious and dependent attachment, low parent-child conflict, improved psychological functioning, and life satisfaction (Maio, Thomas, Fincham, &

Carnelley, 2008; Toussaint & Jorgensen, 2008). Over time, forgiveness of parents was also found to predict greater emotional stability, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Maio et al., 2008). Another study that focused on adult-children's troubled ruminations about their parents revealed that ruminations were associated with low self-esteem, lack of purpose in life, poor life satisfaction, psychological distress, and romantic relationship problems (Schwartz & Finley, 2010). Studies that have assessed the effects of forgiveness-based interventions geared toward forgiveness of parents have also displayed positive outcomes. Short-term improvements, such as attachment security and psychological well-being (Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2013), as well as increases in hope and self-esteem and decreases in anxiety and depression (Freedman & Knupp, 2003), have also been documented.

In line with our hypothesis, many of these outcomes have been linked with romantic relationship functioning and/or IPV. Positive parent-child relations (e.g., Crockett & Randall, 2006) and agreeableness, and conscientiousness (e.g., Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010) are associated with better romantic relationship functioning and satisfaction, whereas insecure attachment (Alexander, 2009; Allison, Bartholomew, Mayseless, & Dutton, 2008; Dutton, Starzomski, Saunders, & Bartholomew, 1994; Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005; Oka, Sandberg, Bradford, & Brown, 2014) and family functioning (e.g., Fritz et al., 2012; Linder & Collins, 2005; Lohmnan et al., 2013) are linked to IPV. Moreover, as previously noted, both emotional dysregulation (e.g., Berzenski & Yates, 2010; McNulty & Hellmuth, 2008; Ross, 2011) and psychological dysfunction (e.g., Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Chase et al., 2002) increase risk for IPV. It is therefore possible that those who experience the



positive outcomes that result from forgiveness of a parent following an adverse event, may be at less risk for IPV.

### Current Study and Hypotheses

The present study was designed to examine whether forgiveness of parents would be associated with both perpetration and victimization of IPV. In particular, we hypothesized that interpersonal tendencies (i.e., avoidance and revenge seeking) and intrapersonal tendencies (i.e., rumination and continued feelings of hurt) of forgiveness would be positively associated with the occurrence of IPV. Conversely, the interpersonal tendency of benevolence was expected to be negatively associated with IPV. Further, we expected that forgiveness of parents would predict IPV while controlling for the gender of the participant, participant relationship status, and participant reports of maternal and paternal relationship quality. Because only one study (Rivera & Fincham, 2015) has been conducted thus far concerning this topic, assumptions were not made regarding the specific categories of IPV (i.e., physical assault, injury, sexual coercion, or psychological aggression) that may or may not be related to forgiveness.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### Participants and Procedures

Participants included 18- and 19-year old undergraduate students attending a university in the Southern region of the U.S. They were recruited through the Department of Psychology research subject pool. Specifically, a notice was posted on the department's subject pool that provided a brief description of the study. Participants who signed up for the study were provided a link to the consent form on Qualtrics, a secure, online platform used for the collection of questionnaire-based data. Once participants reviewed the online consent form and agreed to participate, they were assigned a research number. The study was approved by the USM Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participants who consented to the study were asked to complete several short answer questions and several self-report questionnaires. Specifically, participants were first asked to recall events/circumstances in which they felt wronged or hurt by a parent/primary caregiver (i.e., an adverse event) and to identify the event/circumstance in which they felt most wronged or hurt, as well as their age at the time the event/circumstance occurred. They were then asked to answer questions related to forgiveness for the most hurtful event/circumstance and to complete several measures of psychosocial functioning. Finally, participants were asked whether they are currently, or have ever been, in a serious romantic relationship. If yes, participants were then asked to answer questions related to the occurrence of IPV with their current or most recent romantic partner.

Five hundred forty-seven (547) individuals started the online survey. A number of criteria were used to select the sample for this study. The number of participants that

were excluded from the study based on each criterion is provided in Table 1. First, three validity questions were embedded in the survey items. The questions were inserted across study questionnaires and instructed participants to mark a specific response option (e.g., please mark “agree” for this question). Participants who responded correctly to 2 of the 3 validity questions were included in the study. Next, individuals were included in the study if they described a hurtful event perpetrated by a parent/guardian, indicated that event was hurtful at the time that it occurred, and that the event occurred prior to age 18. To indicate whether the event was hurtful at the time that it occurred, participants responded to the following question, “When it happened, the event/circumstance was hurtful and caused me emotional pain,” using a 6-point Likert scale. Individuals who responded “somewhat agree” to “strongly agree” to this statement (i.e., a response of 4, 5, or 6 on the Likert scale) were included in the study. Furthermore, to be included in this study, participants also had to indicate that they had been in a romantic relationship at some point in their lives.

The final sample included 209 participants (179 female). Sixty-six percent of the sample was 19 years old. The following racial backgrounds were reported for the sample: 63.6% White, 30.6% Black, 2.4% Asian or Pacific Island, and 3.4% other. The majority of participants (59.3%,  $n = 124$ ) reported currently being in a romantic relationship. Of those who reported being in a current romantic relationship, 91.1% reported being in an exclusive dating relationship, 3.2% reported being engaged, 4% reported being in a dating relationship but seeing other people, and 2% reported being married, or did not respond. Of those who were single and reporting on their most recent romantic relationship, 92.9% reported that the relationship was an exclusive dating

relationship, 6% reported that the relationship was a dating relationship, but they were seeing other people, and 1.2% reported being engaged.

Table 1

*Selection of Participants*

Criteria for Participant Selection	# of Participants Excluded
Responded correctly to validation questions <sup>a</sup>	119
Identified an adverse event committed by a parent/caregiver	50
Identified an adverse event committed by a parent/caregiver that was hurtful at the time it occurred <sup>b</sup>	47
Reported that the adverse event occurred at least one year ago or prior to age 18	51
Reported being in or having been in a serious romantic relationship	68
Completed the Conflict Tactics Scale	3

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Participants that did not respond to at least 2 out of 3 validation questions correctly; <sup>b</sup>Participants that responded with a 4 or above on a 6-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” to the question “When it happened, the event/circumstance was hurtful and caused me emotional pain”

### Measures

*Hurtful event.* As noted above, participants were asked to respond to the following item: “Please think about times when you were growing up when you felt wronged or hurt by a parent or primary caregiver. These could have been events or circumstances in which you were wronged or hurt by something a parent or primary caregiver *did, said, or failed to do*. Importantly, you *don’t* have to feel wronged or hurt by the event or circumstance *now*. Please explain one event or circumstance in which you were wronged or hurt by parent or primary caregiver when you were growing up.” Participants were given the option to report up to three events and were asked to choose which of the reported events they felt was the most difficult. With this event/circumstance in mind, participants also responded to the following question: “When it happened, the event/circumstance was

hurtful and caused me emotional pain.” Response options for this question were on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

*Relationship Satisfaction.* Relationship satisfaction with parents was measured using a 4-item modified version of the *Couples Satisfaction Index* (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007).

Sample items include, “How rewarding is your relationship with your mom/maternal caregiver (father/paternal caregiver)?” and “Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship with your mother/maternal caregiver (father/paternal caregiver).” When used to assess romantic relationship satisfaction, the 4-item CSI has been shown to have an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .94$ . Strong convergent validity has also been established between the CSI and other measures of relationship satisfaction, as well as with anchor scales (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Because all of the items from the measure were not on the same metric,  $z$ -score values were created for each item, and the mean of the  $z$ -scores were used to create an overall value of relationship satisfaction with mothers and fathers, independently. Within this sample, the CSI for maternal relationship satisfaction resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .95, whereas the CSI for paternal relationship satisfaction resulted in a Cronbach’s alpha of .97.

*Forgiveness.* Interpersonal tendencies of forgiveness (i.e., avoidance, revenge seeking, and benevolence) were measured using the 18-item *Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory* (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998). “I’ll make my parent/caregiver pay” is an example of a revenge item; “I cut off the relationship with my parent/caregiver” is an example of an avoidance item; “Despite what my parent/caregiver did, I want us to have a positive relationship again” is an example of a benevolence item. Alphas for each scale of this measure have been between  $\alpha = .83$  and  $\alpha = .94$

(Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004; Wade & Worthington, 2003). Evidence of convergent and discriminate validity has previously been established (McCullough et al. 1998; 2001). The internal consistencies for each scale within this sample were between .82 and .95. Intrapersonal response tendencies of forgiveness (i.e., rumination and feelings of continued hurt) were measured using the 8-item Intrusion Scale of the *Impact of Event Scale - Revised* (IES-R; Weiss & Marmar, 1997) for rumination and using participants' responses to three items created for the purposes of this study for continued hurt. Sample items from the Intrusion scale from the IES include, "I thought about the event/circumstance when I didn't mean to" and "Any reminder brought back feelings about the event/circumstance." The intrusion subscale of the IES-R has commonly been used in other research assessing rumination's relation with interpersonal transgressions and forgiveness (McCullough, et al., 2007a; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005). The internal consistency scores of the intrusion subscale within this area of study have been between  $\alpha = .86$  and  $\alpha = .94$  (Briere, 1997; McCullough et al., 2007a, 2007b; Paleari et al., 2005). Within the forgiveness literature, test-retest reliability coefficients for this scale were between .24 and .82 (McCullough et al., 2007b). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .94 in this study. The three items used to measure feelings of continued hurt included, "I still have a lot of negative feelings about the event/circumstance in which my parent/caregiver hurt me," "I still have a lot of painful memories about the event/circumstance in which my parent/caregiver hurt me," and "I am still hurt by the event/circumstance." All three items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses from all three items were

averaged to create a final score of continued hurt. The scale produced an internal consistency value of .93.

*Intimate Partner Violence.* Intimate partner violence behaviors with a current or most recent romantic partner within the past year were measured using the *Conflict Tactics Scale, Revised – Short Form* (CTS2-SF; Straus & Douglas, 2004). The 20-item measure uses an 8-point Likert scale that assesses how many times a behavior of intimate partner violence has occurred – ranging from once in the past year to more than 20 times in the past year. Participants also have the option to choose “not in the past year” or “this has never happened.” Four scales from the measure were used for this study: physical assault, injury, sexual coercion, and psychological aggression. Each scale consists of two items – one representing moderate severity and one representing greater severity. The physical assault scale ranges from pushing or slapping to punching or beating up. The injury scale ranges from leaving a bruise or small cut to requiring a doctor’s visit, and the sexual coercion scale ranges from insisting upon sex when unwanted to forcing sex using physical means or a weapon. Lastly, the psychological aggression scale ranges from swearing or yelling to threatening.

Following the scoring recommendations of Straus and Douglas (2004), each item was dummy coded into dichotomous values. An individual was determined to have engaged in the IPV (i.e., physical assault, injury, sexual coercion, and psychological aggression), if they endorsed either the moderate or severe item, or both as occurring in the last year. Each scale measures both perpetration and victimization. The CTS2-SF has strong concurrent validity with the CTS2, with correlations ranging between .77 to .89 for the scales of perpetration and correlations ranging between .65 and .94 for the

scales of victimization (Straus & Douglas, 2004). A Cronbach's alpha of .83 has been reported in another recent study (Fincher et al., 2015). Within this sample, the Cronbach's alpha ranged from .41 to .71 for the perpetration scales and from .32 to .74 for the victimization scales.



## CHAPTER III

## RESULTS

## Preliminary Analyses

Data were first screened following the procedures outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). First, each variable was inspected to ensure that values were within possible and plausible ranges. Next, descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations, ranges, skew, and kurtosis) for continuous variables were assessed (see Table 2). The revenge seeking variable, in particular, demonstrated significant skew and kurtosis. However, it was decided not to transform this variable. Given that respondents were reporting on forgiveness of their parents, it could be expected that few individuals would report revenge seeking behaviors toward their parent. Of each of the indicators of forgiveness, revenge seeking toward a parent was expected to be the least commonly endorsed behavior.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables*

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Range	Skew	Kurtosis
Relationship Satisfaction, Maternal <sup>a</sup>	.06	0.85	-2.59 - 0.91	-1.13	0.85
Relationship Satisfaction, Paternal <sup>a</sup>	-0.14	0.97	-1.72 – 1.16	-0.26	-1.23
Forgiveness (interpersonal)					
Avoidance	1.83	1.03	1.00 – 5.00	1.29	0.92
Revenge Seeking	1.36	0.53	1.00 – 4.20	2.07	5.49
Benevolence	3.90	0.84	1.17 – 5.00	-0.72	0.32
Forgiveness (intrapersonal)					
Rumination	1.55	0.77	1.00 – 5.00	1.71	2.85
Continued Hurt	2.43	1.27	1.00 - 5.00	0.40	-1.04

Note. <sup>a</sup> standardized scores

Next, we assessed the continuous variables for univariate outliers. Values that were three standard deviations above or below the mean were considered outliers. Using this criterion, several univariate outliers were identified. Upon closer inspection of each case, we decided to exclude one case based upon the case's extreme scores on all indicators of forgiveness, both positive and negative. As a result, the sample size was reduced to 208 participants (85.6% female). The remaining cases were determined to indicate plausible responses following an extreme experience of hurt.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Categorical Variables*

Variable	% (n)
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	85.6 (178)
Male	14.4 (30)
<i>Relationship Status</i>	
In a Relationship	59.6 (124)
Single	40.4 (84)
<i>Endorsement of Intimate Partner Violence</i>	
Perpetration of Physical Assault	26.4 (55)
Perpetration of Injury	15.4 (32)
Perpetration of Sexual Coercion	9.6 (20)
Perpetration of Psychological Aggression	68.3 (142)
Victimization of Physical Assault	20.7 (43)
Victimization of Injury	16.3 (34)
Victimization of Sexual Coercion	16.3 (34)
Victimization of Psychological Aggression	66.3 (138)

Lastly, the distribution of each of the dichotomous variables (i.e., gender, relationship status, and IPV behaviors) was assessed (see Table 3). All variables, except for perpetration of sexual coercion, were distributed such that there was at least a ratio of 90/10 between the two categories, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001).

Sexual coercion was endorsed by 9.6% of the sample. However, given the predominately female sample and the low frequency of this behavior perpetrated by women reported in other studies (e.g., Gamez-Guadix, Straus, & Hershberger, 2011; Hines & Saudino, 2003; Poitras & Lavoie, 1995), it was not expected that rates of this behavior would be particularly high within this sample. For this reason, we felt it was still appropriate to include this variable in our analyses.

The adverse events occurred at varying ages across the lifespan for the participants. Specifically, 12% reported the event occurred between the ages of 1 and 6, 32% between the ages of 7 and 12, and 45% between the ages of 13 and 18. Another 2% reported that the event occurred across ages 7 and 18, and 5% reported the event occurred throughout their entire lifetime. Less than 1% did not report an age that the event occurred. Of the participants who responded to the statement that the interpersonal transgression committed by their parent was hurtful and caused emotional pain at the time it occurred, 26.3% somewhat agreed with this statement, 33.5% agreed, and 40.2% strongly agreed. Interestingly, the majority of participants reported low levels of interpersonal negative response tendencies and high levels of interpersonal positive response tendencies, suggesting that most participants forgave their parent, according to the conceptualization of McCullough and colleagues (see Table 2). Consistent with the interpersonal response tendencies of forgiveness, the overall mean of rumination about the transgression was relatively low. Reports of continued hurt, however, are average, suggesting that participants reported greater feelings of continued hurt from the event/circumstance than compared to feelings of avoidance and revenge seeking or ruminative behaviors.

Avoidance and revenge seeking had a positive relationship with one another, and both were inversely related to benevolence, as was expected (see Table 4). The correlations among avoidance, revenge seeking, and benevolence were moderate to strong. Continued hurt, in particular, had a relatively strong, positive relation with avoidance and revenge seeking and a negative relation with benevolence. More specifically, those who reported experiencing high levels of continued hurt from the transgression also reported high levels of avoidance and revenge seeking and low levels of benevolence. Rumination was also related to avoidance and benevolence in the same directions as continued hurt.

The rates of perpetration and victimization of IPV behaviors can be seen in Table 3. The rates of perpetration and victimization were relatively equal within the sample. Perpetration and victimization of psychological aggression were the most prevalent (68.3% and 66.3%, respectively), whereas perpetration of sexual coercion (9.6%) and victimization of injury (16.3%) and sexual coercion (16.3%) were much less frequent.

Interestingly, gender of the participant and their relationship status were generally not related to forgiveness of parents or to IPV. However, as expected, relationship satisfaction with mothers and fathers was associated with the occurrence of forgiveness. More specifically, greater relationship satisfaction with parents tended to be associated with greater rates of forgiveness (e.g., higher levels of benevolence and lower levels of avoidance, revenge seeking, rumination, and continued hurt). However, despite the association established between the family relationships and romantic relationship, functioning in the existing literature (e.g., Crockett & Randall, 2006; Crowell, Treboux, & Brockmeyer, 2009), relationship satisfaction with parents was generally not related to

Table 4

*Correlations*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Gender	-																
2. Relationship Status	.05	-															
3. Relationship Satisfaction, Maternal	-.03	.06	-														
4. Relationship Satisfaction, Paternal	.03	.07	.15*	-													
5. Avoidance	-.02	-.01	-.32***	-.52***	-												
6. Revenge Seeking	-.04	-.07	-.16*	-.24**	.45***	-											
7. Benevolence	-.02	-.02	.21**	.42***	-.69***	-.34***	-										
8. Rumination	-.08	-.07	-.24***	-.17*	.31***	.22***	-.17*	-									
9. Continued Hurt	.06	-.02	-.32***	-.41***	.59***	.30***	-.42***	.52***	-								
10. Physical Assault (P)	.03	-.11	-.09	-.06	.02	.05	-.04	.15*	.04	-							
11. Injury (P)	-.02	-.08	-.09	-.10	.09	.25***	-.22**	.22***	.02	.41***	-						
12. Sexual Coercion (P)	-.19**	-.13	-.22**	-.05	.08	.11	-.07	.06	-.03	.21**	.36***	-					
13. Psychological Aggression (P)	-.07	-.06	-.01	-.05	.02	-.03	-.03	.10	.11	.39***	.26***	.12	-				
14. Physical Assault (V)	-.13	-.14*	-.14*	-.06	.09	.10	-.13	.25***	.10	.56***	.57***	.36***	.32***	-			
15. Injury (V)	-.00	-.17*	-.11	-.12	.13	.23**	-.25***	.28***	.06	.38***	.86***	.34***	.27***	.61***	-		
16. Sexual Coercion (V)	-.12	-.11	-.16*	-.11	.07	.10	.01	.09	.06	.38***	.35***	.61***	.22**	.42***	.30***	-	
17. Psychological Aggression (V)	-.12	-.07	-.01	-.11	.09	.02	-.06	.10	.09	.38***	.30***	.10	.83***	.36***	.32***	.26***	-

Note. (P) = Perpetration; (V) = Victimization. \* ≤ .05, \*\* ≤ .01, \*\*\* ≤ .001

IPV, with the exception of relationship satisfaction with mothers, and perpetration and victimization of sexual coercion. Revenge seeking and benevolence were both correlated with the perpetration and victimization of injury such that higher levels of revenge seeking were associated with the occurrence of injury, whereas lower levels of benevolence were associated with the occurrence of injury. Continued hurt was not associated with any IPV behaviors. Rumination, however, was associated with the perpetration and victimization of physical assault and injury.

### Primary Analyses

The primary aim of this study was to identify whether forgiveness of parents for an adverse event experienced during childhood or adolescence was related to IPV within a romantic relationship in young adulthood. A series of hierarchical logistic regressions were conducted. Separate regression models were run for each response tendency of forgiveness (i.e., avoidance, revenge seeking, benevolence, rumination, and continued hurt) as the predictor variable. Gender of the participant, participant relationship status, and participant self-report of satisfaction with their mother and father, independently, were included as covariates in the first step of each model. In the second step of each model, the indices of forgiveness were entered. Each scale of IPV (i.e., physical assault, injury, sexual coercion, and psychological aggression), for both perpetration and victimization, were entered as outcome variables.

Prior to conducting the various analyses, the assumptions of logistic regression were checked. First, given the low correlations between each of the indicators of forgiveness (i.e., avoidance, revenge seeking, benevolence, rumination, and continued hurt) with each of the covariates (i.e., gender of the participant, relationship status, and

relationship satisfaction with mothers and fathers), we were not concerned with multicollinearity. Second, the assumption of linearity was assessed for each proposed model. Linearity of the log odds was assessed by running logistic regressions for each model, while including an interaction term of the independent variable and its log. Models with a significant interaction term were determined to be in violation of the assumption. Several models, primarily those including avoidance of a parent, violated the assumption. To deal with this violation, we transformed the avoidance variable into a categorical variable and reran the models. The transformed variable did not influence our results, so the variable was kept in its original form.

Next, the presence of influential cases on each model was considered. In particular, Cook's distance, leverage, and DFBeta values were used to assess data points that exerted an undue influence on each model. Next, residuals (i.e., standardized, studentized, and deviance) were analyzed to measure points for which the models fit poorly. The results showed that, overall, none of the data points exerted excess influence on any of the models. There were several data points for which the model did not appear to be a good fit. However, after closer inspection of the values across each variable in the given models, we did not feel that exclusion of cases was warranted.

Results related to regression analyses are reported in Table 5. The most consistent findings were related to perpetration and victimization of physical injury. Specifically, results revealed that benevolence toward a parent was a predictor of both physical injury perpetration,  $\chi^2(N = 208) = 11.29, p = .05$ , and physical injury victimization,  $\chi^2(N = 208) = 19.51, p < .01$ . The Nagelkerke pseudo  $R^2$ s indicated that benevolence accounted for approximately 9.2% of the total variance in injury perpetration, whereas benevolence accounted for approximately 15.2% of the variance in

injury victimization. Group classification for injury perpetration was moderately high with an overall prediction success rate of 84.1%. Additionally, there was a correct prediction rate of 99.4% for the absence of injury perpetration; however, there was a 0% prediction success rate for the presence of physical injury perpetration. For injury victimization, group classification was also moderately high with an overall prediction success rate of 84.6%. There was a correct prediction rate of 98.9% for the absence of injury victimization; however, as similar to the previous model, the model only correctly predicted the presence of injury victimization 11.8% of the time. Results indicate that for each one point increase in benevolence toward a parent, a child was 0.51 times less likely to be a perpetrator of IPV injury and .45 times less likely to be a victim of IPV injury within the past year.

Revenge seeking toward a parent was another aspect of interpersonal forgiveness that predicted IPV. More specifically, revenge seeking was a statistically significant predictor of injury perpetration,  $\chi^2 (N = 208) = 12.0, p = .03$ , and victimization,  $\chi^2 (N = 208) = 15.5, p = .01$ . The Nagelkerke *pseudo R*<sup>2</sup> indicated that revenge seeking accounted for approximately 9.8% of the total variance in perpetration of injury and 11.1% of the total variance in victimization of injury. Both models had a moderately high overall prediction success rate of 83.7% and 82.7%, respectively. More specifically, revenge seeking successfully predicted the absence of injury perpetration 98.3% of the time, but only successfully predicted the occurrence of injury perpetration 3.1% of the time. The model predicting the absence of injury victimization was also successful 98.3% of the time; however, there was only a 2.9% prediction success rate for the



Table 5

*Logistic Regressions*

	Intimate Partner Violence							
	Physical Assault		Injury		Sexual		Psychological	
	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR
	<b>Perpetration</b>							
<u>Step 1 (Covariates)</u>								
Gender	-.23 (.47)	0.80	.09 (.54)	1.10	1.52 (.56)	4.58**	.47 (.46)	1.59
Relationship Status	.47 (.32)	1.59	.41 (.39)	1.51	.81 (.51)	2.25	.22 (.31)	1.25
Maternal Relationship Satisfaction	-.19 (.18)	0.83	-.21 (.22)	0.81	-.80 (.26)	0.45**	-.00 (.18)	0.99
Paternal Relationship Satisfaction	-.10 (.17)	0.91	-.23 (.20)	0.79	-.01 (.27)	0.99	-.10 (.16)	0.90
<u>Step 2 (Forgiveness)</u>								
Interpersonal Response Tendencies								
Avoidance	-.09 (.19)	0.91	.10 (.21)	1.11	-.04 (.30)	0.97	-.03 (.18)	0.98
Revenge Seeking	.12 (.30)	1.13	.92 (.33)	2.51*	.35 (.41)	1.42	-.22 (.29)	0.80
Benevolence	-.03 (.21)	0.98	-.68 (.25)	0.51**	-.06 (.35)	0.95	-.04 (.20)	0.96
Intrapersonal Response Tendencies								
Rumination	.35 (.20)	1.42	.59 (.23)	1.80	-.07 (.32)	0.94	.31 (.23)	1.36
Continued Hurt	-.01 (.14)	0.98	-.11 (.18)	0.90	-.35 (.24)	0.70	.21 (.14)	1.24

Note.  $N = 208$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

Table 5 (continued).

	Intimate Partner Violence							
	Physical Assault		Injury		Sexual		Psychological	
	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR
	<b>Victimization</b>							
<u>Step 1 (Covariates)</u>								
Gender	.80 (.44)	2.22	-.03 (.54)	0.97	.78 (.48)	2.17	.78 (.49)	2.19
Relationship Status	.61 (.35)	1.85	0.85 (.39)	2.35	.52 (.39)	1.69	.25 (.31)	1.28
Maternal Relationship Satisfaction	-.37 (.20)	0.69	-0.25 (.21)	0.78	-.43 (.21)	0.65	.01 (.18)	1.01
Paternal Relationship Satisfaction	-.09 (.19)	0.92	-0.27 (.20)	0.76	-.22 (.21)	0.80	-.22 (.16)	0.80
<u>Step 2 (Forgiveness)</u>								
Interpersonal Response Tendencies								
Avoidance	.09 (.20)	1.10	.20 (.21)	1.22	-.07 (.23)	0.94	.12 (.18)	1.13
Revenge Seeking	.27 (.32)	1.30	.81 (.32)	2.24**	.24 (.34)	1.27	-.03 (.30)	0.97
Benevolence	-.35 (.24)	0.70	-.81 (.26)	0.45**	.31 (.28)	1.37	-.09 (.20)	0.92
Intrapersonal Response Tendencies								
Rumination	.58 (.22)	1.79**	.73 (.23)	2.07**	.09 (.24)	1.10	.25 (.22)	1.28
Continued Hurt	.13 (.16)	1.14	-.03 (.17)	0.98	-.02 (.17)	0.98	.14 (.14)	1.15

Note.  $N = 208$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

presence of injury victimization. The results suggest that for each one point increase in revenge seeking toward a parent, a child was 2.51 times more likely to engage in injury perpetration toward a partner and 2.24 times more likely to be a victim of injury perpetrated by a partner within the past year.

Interpersonal measures of forgiveness toward a parent were not significant predictors of any other IPV behaviors. For instance, avoidance was not significantly related to any IPV scale. Similarly, revenge seeking and benevolence were not associated with the perpetration or victimization of physical assault, sexual coercion, and psychological aggression.

In terms of intrapersonal response tendencies of forgiveness, rumination was the only significant predictor of IPV. In particular, rumination regarding the transgression was predictive of physical assault and injury victimization,  $\chi^2 (N = 208) = 17.83, p < .01$  and  $\chi^2 (N = 208) = 19.57, p < .01$ , respectively. The Nagelkerke *pseudo R*<sup>2</sup>s indicated that rumination accounted for approximately 13% and 15% of the total variance in victimization, respectively. Group classification using rumination as a predictor of physical assault victimization was moderately high with an overall prediction success rate of 79.3%. Similarly, group classification using rumination as a predictor of injury victimization was also high at a rate of 82.2%. The models correctly predicted the absence of victimization about 97% of the time; however, successful prediction of the presence of victimization was low for both models (9.3% and 5.9%, respectively). The models suggest that for each one point increase in rumination, a child is 1.79 times more likely to be a victim of physical assault and 2.07 times more likely to be a victim of injury perpetrated by their current or most recent partner within the past year.

Rumination, however, was not a significant predictor for any IPV perpetration, or for victimization of sexual coercion or psychological aggression. It should be noted, however, that the relation between rumination and injury perpetration was marginally significant. Contrary to our hypothesis, no relation was found between continued feelings of hurt and IPV.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

Intimate partner violence in the United States, particularly among adolescents and young adults, continues to be a public health concern (Olsen, Parra, & Bennett, 2010). Research consistently indicates that adverse family experiences are prominent risk factors for IPV. People who are unable to forgive their parents for adversity experienced during childhood and adolescence (i.e., continue to exhibit a range of negative responses related to those early experiences) could be at the highest risk for the perpetration and victimization of IPV. This study builds on the work of Rivera and Fincham (2015), which is the only other known study to examine the relation between parental forgiveness and IPV. Our study had several strengths. First, the focus was on forgiveness of a specific event/circumstance that was meaningful to the participant. Second, only individuals who indicated that the adverse circumstance caused them significant hurt/emotional pain were included. Third, several aspects of forgiveness were examined, including avoidance, revenge seeking, benevolence, rumination, and feelings of continued hurt. Fourth, in examining the relation between forgiveness of a parent and IPV, we statistically controlled for several factors including gender, current relationship status (i.e., in a relationship or single), and relationship satisfaction with their mother and father.

Our findings provide some support for an association between forgiveness of parents and the perpetration and victimization of IPV. The forgiveness-IPV relation was observed primarily for physical violence. Moreover, revenge seeking and benevolence were the only two dimensions of forgiveness related to both the perpetration and

victimization of injury. Taken together, these findings indicate that among individuals who were hurt by their parents, those who continued to want to punish their parent for the adverse circumstance, and/or did not feel goodwill toward their parent because of the circumstance were most likely to experience severe IPV (i.e., physical injury).

There are several possible explanations for these findings. Those who endorse high levels of vengefulness, which mirrors components of the preoccupied response tendency of EST, may also experience high levels of hostility and anger. And, chronic feelings of hostility and anger have been related to both the perpetration and victimization of IPV (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015). However, additional work is needed to examine the role of anger toward parents in the context of adverse circumstances, forgiveness, and IPV. Another possible explanation is that those individuals who experience high levels of revenge seeking and low levels of benevolence may not have strong emotional connections with their parents. A poor connection with parents may provide youth limited opportunities to develop critical psychosocial skills such as strategies for managing interpersonal conflict and regulating negative emotions, which have been reported to lead to violence in romantic relationships (e.g., Berzenski & Yates, 2010; McNulty & Hellmuth, 2008; Ross, 2011).

Findings from this study also indicated that continued rumination about the adverse circumstance was associated with being a victim of physical assault and physical injury, but not to the perpetration of either. These findings are consistent with the broader rumination literature and risk factors for IPV. For example, ruminating about a parent has previously been linked to romantic relationship problems, in addition to low self-esteem, poor life satisfaction, and psychological problems (Schwartz & Finley, 2010). The act of rumination, in general, has also been correlated with depression,

anxiety, and emotion regulation deficits (Flett, Madorsky, Hewitt, & Heisel, 2002; Nolen-Hoeksma, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Spasojevic & Alloy, 2001). Moreover, problem solving difficulties, increased stressful situations, and low expectations for the future have been found among those who tend to ruminate (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1995; Nolen-Hoeksma et al., 2008). Within EST, preoccupied responses to family conflict, of which rumination is a component, are linked with the development of internalizing symptoms (Cummings, Koss, & Davies, 2014). It could be that the negative consequences associated with rumination are risk factors specific to victimization rather than perpetration of IPV, which would support our results. Further investigation into this possibility is needed.

Our findings also indicated that lack of forgiveness was not related to the perpetration or victimization of sexual coercion or psychological aggression. This may be due to the low percentage of participants who endorsed sexual coercion and, conversely, to the high percentage of participants who endorsed psychological aggression. Within this sample, sexual coercion, particularly perpetration among women, was a low frequency event. As such, we may not have had enough power to detect an effect, if one does exist. On the other hand, perpetration and victimization of psychological aggression were largely prevalent – occurring in almost 70% of the sample. This suggests that psychological aggression may be a rather typical behavior among this age group, and thus may be less likely to be influenced by family of origin factors such as forgiveness of parents.

It was surprising that the continued hurt and avoidance dimensions of forgiveness were not related to any measure of IPV. Although speculative, it may be the case that

revenge seeking and rumination are more extreme and less common responses to hurt, making them more unique predictors of future IPV. Indeed, the avoidance and continued hurt variables demonstrated the greatest variability compared to the other predictor variables. It may also be the case that feelings of hostility or anger, which are likely to be present among those displaying revenge seeking and ruminative tendencies, as opposed to feelings of low self-esteem and insecurity, which are consistent with tendencies of avoidance and hurt, place an individual at greater risk for IPV. Furthermore, proponents of EST have speculated that the response tendency of avoidance to adverse events, which has considerable overlap with the conceptualization of avoidance in the forgiveness literature, may actually be an adaptive response to such situations (Davies & Forman, 2002). The dismissive and dissociative behaviors of an avoidant response may help to protect the child against further destruction and distress that can be damaging in the long run (Cole, Michael, & Teti, 1994; Davies & Forman, 2002). If this is the case, those children who responded with avoidance may have diminished the influence of the event itself, thus lowering the importance of family adversity on IPV risk.

#### Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, this study was exploratory in nature, given the paucity of research in this particular area. Thus, the possible mechanisms through which forgiveness of parents for adverse events influences IPV were not directly observed within the context of this study. Next steps for this area of research should therefore include investigation of possible moderators and mediators (e.g., outcomes associated with response tendencies or forgiveness of parents) to determine whether our rationalizations for the current findings are accurate. Second, this



study is limited by its cross-sectional design. As such, it is possible that IPV involvement influences forgiveness of parents as opposed to forgiveness of parents influencing IPV involvement. If this is the case, it could be that negative outcomes associated with IPV (e.g., internalizing symptoms, PTSD) exacerbate the perception of adverse family circumstances when they occur, thus making them harder to forgive. However, in an attempt to control for this possibility, we employed methods to ensure that only participants who reported that the adverse event occurred prior to the past year were included in the study.

Third, this study included only participants who were between the ages of 18 and 19, from an undergraduate college sample, and located in the Southern region of the U.S. Therefore, the sample is not highly representative of the population at large, and thus results may not be easily applied to the general public. However, rates of IPV are disproportionately high among young women (Catalano, 2012), particularly for those on college campuses (Fifth & Pacific Companies, Inc., 2010; Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000; Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). Furthermore, individuals within this age range are likely to have more contact with their parents than older individuals, which may make forgiveness of parents particularly salient for this age group. Fourth, due to a concern of overburdening study participants while completing the survey, this study used the CTS2-SF to measure IPV. However, the CTS2-SF is reported to have a lower sensitivity than the popularly used CTS2 (Straus & Douglas, 2004), which may have influenced the prevalence reported for each IPV scale. It is also important to note that the Cronbach alphas for the perpetration and victimization of psychological aggression were exceptionally low within this sample (i.e., .41 and .31, respectively), which is another

downfall of our use of the CTS2-SF. Moreover, as previously mentioned, few participants endorsed perpetration of sexual coercion. Although it is likely that this may be a function of the predominately female sample and overall low rates of this behavior among females (e.g., Gamez-Guadix, Straus, & Hershberger, 2011; Hines & Saudino, 2003; Poitras & Lavoie, 1995), we may not have had the power to assess whether a relationship exists between forgiveness of a parent and the perpetration of sexual coercion.

#### Future Directions

This study represents only one of two that have examined the relation between forgiveness of parents and IPV, so additional work in this area is clearly needed. Consistent with this goal, focus should be placed on investigating the role of avoidance of a parent and feelings of continued hurt, especially given our null findings. Moreover, although an indicator of the quality of the parent-child relationship (i.e., children's self-reported relationship satisfaction with mother and father, independently) was included in each model, further investigation into the impact that hurtful events within the family of origin have on the parent-child relationship itself is also likely to be useful.

Furthermore, while we did ask participants to indicate their rates of forgiveness relative to the most hurtful offense committed by their parent, we did not measure whether forgiveness of certain types of offenses (e.g., interparental violence vs. degrading comments) were more or less influential on IPV. It may be the case that forgiveness for specific types of offenses is more or less relevant than others, and this possibility should be considered in future studies. Likewise, it may also be important to determine whether forgiveness of a parent has different implications, depending on which

parent (i.e., mother versus father) is the recipient of forgiveness. Lastly, we chose to account for event severity by including in our sample only those participants who reported that they “somewhat agreed” to “strongly agreed” that the adverse event was hurtful at the time that it occurred, rather than including severity into the model as a covariate. Future research may wish to assess more directly the role that event severity may play in the relationship between forgiveness of parents and IPV.

If future research continues to demonstrate a relation between forgiveness of parents and IPV, forgiveness of parents may be a useful target of interventions for clients with a history of IPV, or who may be deemed at risk for IPV. Furthermore, integrating a forgiveness component into already established IPV interventions may strengthen outcomes. The development of these types of interventions may benefit from a better understanding of factors that facilitate forgiveness of parents. For example, do emotional socialization strategies, known to influence children’s psychosocial adjustment (e.g., parent responses to children’s negative emotions), increase the likelihood that youth will forgive their parents for adverse family circumstance?

## APPENDIX A

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION



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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001 ☐ Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 |  
www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board

**NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14020402

PROJECT TITLE: Forgiveness in Close Relationships

PROJECT TYPE: New Project

RESEARCHER(S): Hannah Doucette

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Psychology

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 02/04/2014 to 02/03/2015

**Michael Madson, Ph.D.**  
**Institutional Review Board**

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