The Relation of the Expression of Offense to Forgiving

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The Relation of the Expression of Offense to Forgiving

Laura Grace Hall

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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December 2010
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Forgiveness is an essential component of relationship growth and healing, with academic, professional, and public interest in research and writing on the topic continually increasing over the past two decades. Indignation is endemic to interpersonal offense, and a key component of the forgiveness process; few, however, have written about the potentially facilitative role that it may play. Disparate conceptualizations of indignation among researchers and therapists may impede therapeutic progress, individually and interpersonally. This study presents a review of social science literature on forgiveness and a new model of the emotional response to offense that positions corrective, protective indignation on a continuum between two contrasting manifestations of destructive anger that reflect distortions in underlying views of self, other, and relationship. The study also includes the results of a statistical analysis of the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale (IFS) administered to a group of relational therapists ($N = 98$) gauging their professional judgment of the acceptability of indignation as a component of forgiveness as a facilitative emotion in the overall process of forgiveness. Overall, therapists expressed a strong belief in the compatibility of indignation and forgiveness. As a psychometric instrument, the IFS displayed multidimensionality, with items loading onto four subscales. Of the demographic characteristics, only the number of hours therapists’ worked per week affected their views on indignation and forgiveness, with greater professional involvement leading to more favorable views of indignation in therapy for infidelity. Professional interest combined with a lack of theoretical and practical literature on these topics indicates that marriage therapists and scholars are prepared for continued research and model development on the role of constructive indignation in forgiveness.

Keywords: offense, indignation, anger, forgiving, forgiveness, treatment acceptability
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to numerous associates, friends, and family members who have supported me during my journey as a graduate student. To friends who have cheered me on, prayed for me, and helped with childcare, I thank you for the integral role you have played in my completion of this degree.

To the faculty and secretary of the department of Marriage and Family Therapy, for forbearance and generosity you have shown me as student on a non-traditional trajectory. I thank you for continually extending the opportunity to complete my work.

To Dr. Mark Butler, for ceaseless support and encouragement over the past eight years as I have worked as your teaching assistant and graduate student. The absolute positive regard and faith that you have always conveyed to me as a scholar, clinician, and associate have been central to my progress. I am humbled and forever changed as a person because of the privilege of working under your guidance.

I also express my profound appreciation to my family for their understanding and zealous support. To my loving mother and father whose enthusiasm for my education has been inspiring and contagious. To my dear eternal companion Brian, for your confidence in my abilities and tolerance for the imbalance in our lives over the past few months, and to my precious sons Felix and Ezra for your sweet temperaments and unconditional love. You, family, are my deepest source of joy, and the inspiration for my efforts to meaningfully contribute to this field.

Finally, I am everlastingly indebted to my Father in Heaven for the opportunity He has given me to grow in light and truth, and for the privilege of taking part in a small portion of His work by strengthening marriages and families.
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Introduction: The Relation of the Expression of Offense to Forgiving

“If we are to forgive, our resentment is to be overcome, not by denying ourselves the right to resentment, but by endeavoring to view the wrongdoer with compassion, benevolence, and with love while recognizing that he has willfully abandoned his right to them” (North, 1987, p. 502).

Humans are inherently social beings. We long for and find great fulfillment in social connections and attachment bonds in intimate relationships. Unfortunately, profound differences complicate the realization of our longing for connection, as offenses or injuries arise over time in relationships. Without a means of healing our relationships following these disruptions, deep lasting connections likely could not be enjoyed. Clearly, a means of relationship repair is fundamental to the development of meaningful, long-term social connections. Forgiveness, broadly, is just such a device.

Forgiveness has been defined as “a process that involves a change in emotion and attitude regarding an offender… [which is] intentional and voluntary… and [which] results in decreased motivation to retaliate” (APA, 2006, p. 5). Forgiveness enables intimate connections and enduring relationships despite interpersonal differences and offenses.

Since relationship healing is such a vital component of enduring social connections, social scientists and therapists need to understand the process and components of forgiveness. Researchers also need to understand the concomitant or parallel experiences that may help or hinder, catalyze or obstruct forgiveness. One of these important parallel experiences is indignation: the negative feelings related to one’s perception of having been wronged. Indignation is the common, if not universal, emotional response to offense or injury, and it most often portrayed in social science research as inhibitory to the process of forgiveness. This paper
puts forth a new model that examines the paradoxically helpful, facilitative role that indignation can play in forgiveness, as well as the results of a survey of therapists examining their opinions on this matter in the context of marital infidelity.

This thesis, therefore, consists of three components. First, the review of literature examines the history of writings in the social sciences related to forgiveness as a mechanism for personal healing and relationship repair. This portion of the thesis examines the development of forgiveness as a topic of study in academia, differing conceptualizations of forgiveness and its components, and literature on indignation as it relates to the process of forgiveness. The second part of the thesis delineates a new model of indignation as a component of forgiveness. This bifurcated model of the emotional response to offense or injury places constructive indignation at the center of a continuum of a victim’s views of self and other, and destructive anger at either end. It presents two contrasting pathways of indignation in the forgiveness process, and their respective negative and positive outcomes for the person, the relationship, and the possibility of forgiveness. The third section consists of results of a survey administered to a group of relational therapists gauging their views on the role that they feel indignation may play in marital therapy with clients dealing with issues relating to infidelity. The significance of these findings is discussed. These three important perspectives shed light on forgiveness and the helpful role that properly balanced indignation can play in that process.

**Review of the Literature**

Attachment bonds and intimate relationships bring meaning and fulfillment to our lives. In striving for intimate connection, our human frailties and the simple reality of our diverse individual personalities mean that offenses will come. Hence, repair processes and mechanisms are essential for there to be the possibility of deep, enduring relationships. Forgiveness has been
conceptualized and long understood as a fundamental component of both personal and relationship growth and healing, as well as a relationship repair mechanism critical to the long-term viability of social systems and intimate connections.

Forgiveness: Tradition, Religion, and Therapy

Throughout history, many of the world’s great religious leaders, philosophers—and more recently—psychologists, have grappled with the concept of forgiveness and sought to delineate its phenomenological, psychological, ecological, and spiritual profile, processes, and outcomes. Because of its fundamental role in interpersonal and societal well-being, many of the world’s great religious and political leaders have extolled the virtues of forgiveness. The sacred texts of religions in many cultures contain numerous teachings from prophets, wise leaders, and deity on the importance of forgiveness (see Rye et al., 2000). As such, forgiveness is a fundamental component of the social and religious values of many cultures (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Paloutzian & Clark, 2005). In many ways, these philosophies provide a foundation for modern-day traditions and practices relating to concepts associated with forgiveness including apology, reconciliation, justice, and mercy.

Due largely to its historical connection to religion, however, the concept of forgiveness received little systematic attention from scholars in the early years of social science research. On the dearth of research on the topic, Enright and North (1998) point to the fact that forgiveness and other matters with religious overtones seem to have been neglected throughout all of academia, not just the social sciences. They suggest that this is due to strong links between forgiveness and religious belief, and to the social sciences’ aversion to religious matters (Gorsuch, 1988). Additionally, McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) point out that in an era when scientific psychology relied on the analysis of observable behaviors, difficulties
naturally arose in gathering reliable data on the topic, due to its intrinsic intrapersonal nature.

Social scientists did not begin to formally develop theories about the process of forgiveness until relatively recently. From the earliest years of practice, however, relational therapists have regularly encountered the challenge of working with couples and families where severe attachment violation, betrayal, or trauma threatened to permanently disrupt or disintegrate the marital or family system. A pragmatic focus on using mechanisms that work to heal these rifts led therapists to willingly consider many viable relationship repair processes—regardless of whether their epistemological roots stem from tradition, the empirical sciences, or religion.

Further, many therapists observe that the long-term sustainability of relationships depends on some process facilitating forbearance in relationships, given that offenses come and differences arise over time. Additionally, cursory research readily reveals that forgiveness is a cross-cultural phenomenon, and that forgiveness ethics are manifest across the pantheon of world religions and philosophies (see Dalai Lama & Chan; McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2005; Rye, et al., 2000). Social scientists and therapists began to develop the basic understanding that forgiveness is a highly culturally and religiously compatible construct. Consequently, discussion of forgiveness work and the use of forgiveness intervention as a part of the healing strategy in relational therapy has come to be viewed not as representing a proselytizing of religion, but rather as an implementation of a universal relationship repair mechanism (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Schumaker, 1992).

Thus, out of the crucible of necessary therapy work, scholarly attention to forgiveness process and forgiveness intervention has gradually taken root. As scholars have developed theories relating to the utility of forgiveness from a pragmatic perspective, forgiveness has become as much a secular and humanistic concept as it had been a religious one. Concerns about
its roots in religious faith were largely dismissed as researchers and theorists have developed a body of literature on forgiveness, and a sustained focus on the process and components of forgiveness has since ensued.

**An Overview of the History of Research on Forgiveness**

Although much of the research on the topic of forgiveness in the field of scientific psychology has taken place in the past three decades, this literature has not materialized ex nihilo. The history of research on forgiveness in psychology and the social sciences can be divided into two distinct periods: 1930 to the mid-1980s, and the mid-1980s to the present.

**Early research—1930 through the mid-1980s.** During the first period, from 1930 to the mid-1980s, the few papers that were published on the topic of forgiveness were mainly theoretical in nature. Behn (1932) and Piaget (1948) discussed their perspectives on the developmental nature of the ability to forgive. Litwinski (1945) described the affective structure of the capacity for interpersonal forgiveness in an early article on the relationship between hatred and forgiving. Fritz Heider (1958) also touched on the topic in his book, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*, in which he listed a number of attribution principles that underlie the desire for revenge after an interpersonal transgression. He described forgiveness as an individual’s choice to “forgo vengeful behavior,” and theorized that it was “an implicit expression of the victim’s self-worth or an attempt to be faithful to an ethical standard” (p. 269), but he did not elaborate further on the matter.

Modest empirical works were also published, in an attempt to illuminate different aspects of forgiveness. In a number of systematic investigations into the nature of human values, Milton Rokeach (1967; 1973) mentioned forgiveness repeatedly and found that it was a key value that individuals were striving to develop. Forgiveness was also one of the topics of a limited amount
of theoretical and empirical attention from Tedeschi and others (see; Gahagan & Tedeschi, 1968; Horai, Lindskold, Gahagan, & Tedeschi, 1969; and Jones, Steele, Gahagan, & Tedeschi, 1968) who conceptualized forgiveness in simplistic terms, describing it as “a cooperative response following a competitive response,” using research gathered from observations of individuals participating in the Prisoner’s Dilemma Game (Jones, Steele, Gahagan, & Tedeschi, 1968).

Additionally, social psychologists published a number of important papers prior to 1980 describing the role that forgiveness and reconciliation might play in helping people to achieve mental and spiritual health (e.g., Angyal, 1952; Beaven, 1951; Bonell, 1950; Johnson, 1947; Rusk, 1950).

**Modern research— the mid-1980s to the present.** While faith-based reflection on forgiveness and indignation is millennia old, and while laypersons have pondered and applied forgiveness and anger in various ways in their close relationships throughout history, a scientific study of forgiveness has only begun relatively recently. The proliferation of research on forgiveness began in earnest in the 1980s when social scientists truly began a systematic, sustained effort to study forgiveness both empirically and theoretically.

**Empirical research.** Much of the empirical literature on forgiveness that has been published during the last thirty years falls into three main categories: theory-validating research (e.g., Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1992; Gassin, 1998; Hargrave & Sells, 1997), research on its association with other behaviors (e.g., DiBlasio & Benda, 1991; Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, & Gassin, 1995; Weiner et al., 1991), and process- and outcome-focused research (e.g., Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Darby & Schlenker, 1982; DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993; Fagenson & Cooper, 1987; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl &
Social scientists investigated these topics primarily through interviews, observations, and field experiments, though some studies used laboratory or randomized experimentation. They measured forgiveness and related concepts in an effort to assess the construct and delineate its phenomenological, psychological, ecological, and spiritual profile, processes, and outcomes (see McCullough & Worthington, 1995; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). As researchers deepened their interest in the topic of forgiveness, they developed increasingly sophisticated instruments to measure forgiveness and concepts related to it. Measures of forgiveness have evolved from single-question self-report assessments (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982) to offense-specific multi-item measures that were still self-report in nature (e.g. McCullough, et al., 1998; Park & Enright, 1997; Subkoviak et al., 1995; Trainer, 1984) to behavioral measures (e.g., Bushman & Bauermeister, 1998; Caprara, Coluzzi, Mazzotti, Renzi, & Zelli, 1985; Kremer & Stevens, 1983).

One particularly prolific area of research, which highlights the intersection of psychology and the other areas of overall well-being, is the relationship between forgiveness and health. Although health is a multidimensional construct and is difficult to define, it has been described by the World Health Organization as “a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1948). Using the measures described above, social scientists have begun to anecdotally document forgiveness’s utility and the many benefits it brings, both relationally and personally, in terms of increased physical, psychological, social, and spiritual welfare (Nelson, 1992; Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000). Research has shown a significant correlation between forgiveness and every aspect of health, including physical well-being (see Huang & Enright, 2001; Mayo Clinic Health Letter, 2005; Strasser,

**Theoretical scholarship.** In addition to empirical research on the topic, social scientists have focused considerable energy constructing theories related to the process of forgiveness. Researchers are influenced considerably by their background, training, and personal preferences with regards to therapeutic practice. In the past thirty years, researchers from a number of different schools of thought in the realm of family therapy have delineated models and theoretical frameworks for interventions using forgiveness in some way, including family systems theory (see Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984; Hargrave, 1994; Sells & Hargrave, 1998), psychodynamic perspectives (see Bonar, 1989; Kaufman, 1984; Todd, 1985); and cognitive perspectives (see Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Gassin & Enright, 1995; North, 1987; Power, 1994). Although the theorists differ considerably in the specific ways they define and utilize forgiveness, major themes emerge when they are compared. Sells and Hargrave (1998) note six themes: (a) an injury or violation with subsequent emotional/physical pain, (b) the violation results in a broken/fragmented relationship, (c) perpetuation of injury is halted, (d) a cognitive process is pursued where the painful event of action is understood or reframed within a fuller context, (e) a release or letting go of justifiable emotion and retaliation related to the event, and (f) a renegotiation of the relationship (p. 28).
The issues and matters of debate that still exist among the different schools of thought regarding the practical application of theories about forgiveness will doubtless continue to be examined by social scientists as they further expand the body of scientific literature.

Through theoretical and empirical research, social scientists have successfully challenged the supposition that an activity with a religious history is inapplicable to the mainstream (see DiBlasio & Benda, 1991; Hope, 1987; McCullough & Worthington, 1994; McMinn & Rhoads, 1996; Shontz & Rosenak, 1988). These researchers have expanded the scope of forgiveness well beyond the sphere of religion and brought it into the realm of academia and therapy. Evidence of this progress can be found not only in the growing number of empirical journal articles, but also in the convening of several national and international conferences, the production of several edited collections devoted to forgiveness (e.g., Enright & North, 1998; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 1998), and in the establishment of several academic and philanthropic foundations dedicated to stimulating interest and funding scientific research on the topic of forgiveness (Holden, 1999). With national interest in the topic, strong financial support, and innumerable research teams, social scientists may well be entering a golden era of forgiveness research (McCullough, 2001).

**Conceptualizing Forgiveness**

Therapeutic use of forgiveness intervention requires careful conceptualization of the definition of the term, and an identification and exploration of the vital components of the process. Beginning in the mid-1980s, when social scientists began to focus earnestly on the topic, practitioners identified this as a concern for the field. Authors began to put forth definitions of forgiveness, develop models of the process, and explore the various components of forgiveness. Although many authors mention indignation in relation to forgiveness, it is almost
always in a negative light, with an exclusive focus on its destructive, inhibitory effects. Further research is needed on this important topic, as social scientists have yet to explore the useful role that initial indignation might play in the process of forgiveness.

**Definition of forgiveness.** Ancient and modern writings contain numerous depictions of the benefits of forgiveness and tragedies caused by refusal to forgive, but few definitions. In modern philosophy, a number of articles have been published examining the challenge of defining forgiveness (see Elder, 1998; Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Pingleton, 1989; Sells & Hargrave, 1998; Worthington, 1998), highlighting the diversity of conceptualizations of the term and related concepts. Indeed, a number of researchers interpret the lack of consensus in definition to be one of the most pernicious problems in the field today (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Elder, 1998; Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992). Butler, Dahlin, and Fife’s (2002) research showed that the terms used to define and describe forgiveness significantly affect its acceptability as a viable course of treatment among therapists.

Though no “gold standard” definition of forgiveness exists (Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000), theorists and researchers for the most part agree with Enright and Coyle’s (1998) assertion that forgiveness is different from pardoning (a legal concept); condoning (which involves justifying the offense); justifying or excusing (which implies that a transgression was committed because of extenuating circumstances or in some way deserved); forgetting (which implies that the memory of a transgression has faded or left conscious awareness); and denial (which implies an unwillingness or inability to perceive the injuries one has incurred) (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Forgiveness is also more than accepting what happened, ceasing to be angry, or a simple freedom from negative emotion (Enright, 2001). Most scholars
also agree that forgiveness is distinct from reconciliation which, Freedman (1998) notes, could imply or dictate the restoration of a still-fractured relationship, and which may or may not be appropriate in a given situation.

Defining the concept of forgiveness, however, requires an understanding of not only which concepts are distinct from forgiveness, but also the concepts that are included. McCullough and Witvliet (2002) recommend differentiating among three senses in which the term is used: as a response, as a personality disposition, and as a characteristic of social units. This thesis focuses specifically on forgiveness as a response.

As a response, forgiveness may be understood as “a prosocial change in a victim’s thoughts, emotions, and/or behaviors toward a blameworthy transgressor” (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002, p. 447). A number of social scientists offer similar conceptualizations (e.g., McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Scobie & Scobie, 1998), emphasizing the common feature that when people forgive, their responses—that is, what they feel and think about, what they do, or how they behave—toward people who have offended or injured them become less negative and more positive and prosocial over time (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000).

Another nearly ubiquitous feature of forgiveness as a response is that it involves some aspect of releasing or letting go over time. The release may focus on indignation (Davenport, 1991; Fitzgibbons, 1986), revenge (Cloke, 1993), shame (Halling, 1994), record of wrongs (BiBlasio, 1992), or resentment (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1996; North, 1987). Sells and Hargrave (1998) note that “the component of time or forgiveness as an unfolding process taking months and possibly years to achieve [is] a fundamental component emphasized by most” (p. 23; see also Cunningham, 1985; Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1996; Fitzgibbons, 1996; Hargrave, 1994; Hope, 1987; Hunter, 1978; Kaufman, 1984; Kirkup,
Among descriptions of the process of forgiveness, Joanna North’s (1987) is particularly noteworthy:

When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts (p. 502).

This conceptualization of forgiveness highlights its processual nature; forgiveness is work that begins with resentment and pain. Since the offense was unfair and will continue to be unfair, the victim has a right to the natural feelings of indignation. Forgiveness requires the acquiescence of something to which the victim has a right—namely, indignation and resentment.

Undoubtedly, social scientists’ conceptualization of forgiveness will continue to evolve, particularly as researchers move forward in the development of models of the forgiveness process, and in their understanding of the components of forgiveness.

**Models of Forgiveness**

Theories and models of human behavior are important for understanding the behavior (Strong, 1991a, 1991b); as such, social scientists have developed a number of models of forgiveness, with a particular proliferation in publication over the past two decades. These models differ in theoretical context, length, complexity, desired outcome, target group, and content. Models of forgiveness have been based on psychodynamic (Brandsma, 1982; Lapsley, 1966; Montville, 1989; Pingleton, 1989, 1993; Wapnick, 1985), Jungian (Todd, 1985), existential (Pattison, 1965, 1989), ego object relations (Gartner, 1988), and cognitive theories. These models are dispersed throughout a variety of professional publications, including peer-reviewed academic and religious journals, scholarly and professional books, conference
proceedings, association publications (e.g., APA, 2006), and popular literature. They vary in quality and utility, and most are in the early stages of development in the sense that they are based primarily on the authors’ personal experiences.

Such theoretical conjecture combined with the lack of empirical validation led McCullough et al. (1998) to express the view that “the literature published on forgiveness [had] historically been a literature without much data” (p. 1587). In the same vein, these authors stated earlier that “practitioners in the field are likely to be frustrated by the lack of clarity in the models of forgiveness that are available for directing scientific and applied work” (McCullough & Worthington, 1994, p. 3). Indeed, with the exception of Robert Enright’s (2001) process model of forgiveness, it is unlikely that current models of forgiveness have guided empirical research or clinical practice to any appreciable extent. The maturation of the science and application of interpersonal forgiveness is quite possibly being hindered by a deficiency of adequate, scientifically validated models.

Recognizing this lack of synergy, coordination, meta-analysis, and cohesion among models, a number of scholars have recently published studies reviewing, classifying, and critiquing the literature on models of the topic (see Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulos, & Freedman, 1992; McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Sells & Hargrave, 1998). These analyses are helpful for their overviews of the variety of conceptualizations of forgiveness, as well as for the authors’ recommendations of how researchers in the social sciences can move forward in the continued process of theory development, refinement, and validation.

In their review and critique of literature on forgiveness, McCullough and Worthington (1994) identified four categories of models: (1) those based on established psychological theories, (2) those that describe the tasks involved in the process of forgiveness, (3) those based
on a moral development framework, and (4) “typologies” of forgiveness (pp. 2-3). This study focuses on the process of forgiveness generally, not as a process precisely defined in any one psychological or developmental framework.

While models that describe forgiveness as a process vary widely in content, number of stages, and sequence, significant similarities exist among models. The stages and tasks discussed in models of the process of forgiveness can be divided into four stages: (a) recognition of the offense, (b) commitment or decision to forgive, (c) cognitive or emotive activity, and (d) behavioral action (McCullough & Worthington, 1994). Indignation plays an important role in the first three stages of forgiveness thus conceptualized. How indignation is conceptualized, however, determines whether social scientists view indignation as helpful and facilitative to the forgiveness process, or merely inhibitory and contrary—a despicable emotion to be overcome as quickly as possible.

**Components of the Forgiveness Process**

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of forgiveness, social scientists have written about indignation and other components of the forgiveness process, as well as the interconnection between these components. This advancement has been facilitated by simultaneous development of increasingly complex instruments and measures used to study forgiveness and the factors associated with it, including self-report measures that operationalize forgiveness as a response (see McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000), offense-specific measures (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998; Subkoviak et al., 1995; Trainer, 1984), dispositional and personality measures (see McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2001), as well as a measure to assess forgiveness as an attribute of social units or relationships (i.e., Hargrave & Sells, 1997).

In addition to advances in data collection, several researchers have used sophisticated data analysis methods to examine the interrelatedness of various forgiveness-related concepts and model components. For example, Walker and Gorsuch (2004) used factor analysis to identify the underlying subscales used in various stepwise, process models of forgiveness. The sixteen models used in their study were distilled down to four subscales, one of these being *hurt and indignation*. Fehr, Gelfand, and Nag (2010) meta-analyzed results from 175 studies on forgiveness to examine the correlates of interpersonal forgiveness. Based on their findings, they proposed a tripartite typology of cognitions, affect, and constraints following the offense, with each consisting of situational and dispositional components, including indignation, for a total of 22 distinct subscales. Other analyses have similarly found indignation to be an important concept in relation to forgiveness (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008; Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008; Wade et al., 2005).

In these models, indignation is highlighted as an important emotion in forgiveness.
Malcolm and Greenberg (2000) note that, “without exception, everyone who writes about forgiveness in the face of deep, personal hurt acknowledges that strong emotions such as indignation and sadness are endemic to the forgiveness process” (p. 197). However, indignation is grouped with such traits as hostility, vengeance, and rumination, and is portrayed as inhibitory to forgiveness (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008; Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008; Wade et al., 2005). Indignation is most often conceptualized as needing to be released and overcome so that the real work of forgiveness can commence—not utilized as an intrinsic part of the forgiveness process. In other literature, indignation is viewed as an antithetical alternative to forgiving; the client may chose to continue to feel indignation or to pursue forgiveness. In other words, with a few notable exceptions (as in the majority of models that currently exist in interpersonal theory), indignation is seen as fundamentally incompatible with forgiveness.

Exceptions to this standard view of indignation are found in Enright’s (2001) process model of forgiveness and Malcolm and Greenberg’s task-analytic process model of forgiveness (Greenberg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2010). The authors of both of these models affirm that in situations of interpersonal offense, victims have a right to feelings of indignation, and recognize that this emotion can play a role in the earliest stage of forgiveness by helping the victim identify and understand his or her injury. Enright (2001) admonishes clinicians to “remember that anger can be healthy. Anger can motivate [clients] to take action, to right wrongs, to stand up and face problems, and to fight for their self-esteem” (p. 104). Similarly, Greenberg, Warwar, and Malcolm (2010) note that “facilitating forgiveness requires an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of emotions such as resentment and hatred toward the offender [and]… in-session expressions of adaptive anger at violation” (p. 30). Although the authors of these models allow for the client’s
negative emotions following offense, they do not explore the roots of indignation any further, nor do they discuss the specific personal and relational benefits that these feelings may bring to the client throughout the forgiveness process.

**Forgiveness as a Component of Therapy for Marital Infidelity**

Indignation and forgiveness are especially relevant subscales in the context of therapy with couples in the aftermath of an extramarital affair. Infidelity in a marriage has many causes, can take many different forms—from flirtation, to a one-night stand, to an ongoing alternate relationship that involves deep deception—and can be interpreted by individuals and couples in different ways. It is frequently perceived as a severe threat to adult love relationships, as it represents a partner’s flagrant betrayal of a fundamental component of the typical marital relationship: exclusivity. Infidelity is one of the most common precursors to relational therapy (Glass, 2002), yet is also one of the most difficult problems to treat (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997)—ostensibly because it is often as much a wound as it is a symptom of other problems in the marriage.

Therapists from every school of thought assist couples dealing with issues related to infidelity, though the most common approaches are traditional behavioral couple therapy, integrative behavioral couple therapy, and emotionally focused therapy. Traditional behavioral couple therapy has received particularly strong empirical support from numerous controlled research studies and metaanalysis (Hahlweg & Markman, 1988; Shadish & Baldwin, 2003, 2005), though new research strongly supports integrative behavioral cognitive therapy and emotionally focused therapy as similarly efficacious (Baucom, Shoham, Meuser, Daiuto, & Stickle, 1998; Baucom, Gordon, Snyder, Atkins, Christensen, 2006; Kessel, Moon, & Atkins, 2007).
Notwithstanding this variation, therapy for infidelity issues most often consists of a multi-stage repair process, although theories and methods differ in terminology, content, and prescribed order of stages. Along with an assessment of issues related to the affair and their causes, changes in destructive attitudes and behavior patterns, and a resolution of bitterness and hostility, forgiveness is a common end-goal of therapy following an extramarital affair (Bagarozzi, 2008; Dupree, White, Olsen, & Lafleur, 2007).

Indignation is also a common, if not universal, component of infidelity therapy. Fife, Weeks, and Gambescia (2007) note that “few events in a couple’s relationship will create as much emotional turmoil as infidelity” (p. 73). Individuals wounded by their partners’ unfaithful behavior report feeling a spectrum of emotions including intense bitterness, disbelief, sorrow, shame, avoidance, emotional numbing, and depression (Abrahms-Spring, 1996; Butler, Rodriguez, Roper, & Feinauer, 2010; Glass & Wright, 1997; Lusterman, 1998; Moultrup, 1990; Snyder, Gordon & Baucom, 2004). Although all models of therapy for infidelity recognize the existence of deep, abiding indignation, none offer conceptualizations of how to utilize these strong emotions to help initiate beneficial processes. Rather, forgiveness in the context of infidelity is posited as a process that begins once the indignation is sufficiently quelled (Emmons, 2000, Subotnik, 2007; Worthington, 1998, Worthington & Wade, 1999). Clearly, further research is needed in order to understand the benefits clients’ constructive indignation can bring to therapy when dealing with issues related to infidelity.

**Expression of Offense as a Vital Component of Forgiveness**

Practitioners and scholars have substantiated the centuries-old perception that forgiveness is useful in relationship healing. However, it is readily understood that with an interpersonal offense for which forgiveness is a powerful healing balm, the fact of offense or injury assures
that there will be significant indignation. Davenport (1991) notes, “ideally, anger is a call to corrective action, a signal that an injury has been done and that something either in the outside world or within the self needs to be righted,” and that indignation has a self-affirming root to it; it is a protest that in effect says, “Don’t do this to me!” (p. 140). When indignation is lacking altogether, it is a cause for concern and can be a signal of depression and resignation. When indignation is permitted—and even encouraged—it can function as a facilitative emotion in the overall process of forgiveness. While absolution from bitterness, resentment, and desire for revenge remains the goal in therapy, the client is given plenty of time and emotional space to process the full breadth of pain and hurt associated with the offense. In situations of interpersonal offense, indignation serves important functions: it aids the victim both in coming to terms with an injury and in realigning boundaries to prevent further harm. Researchers agree that indignation is an appropriate reaction to an interpersonal transgression (Freud, 1963; Maltz & Holman, 1987; Perls, 1969), and that in proper context and proportion it signals a healthy psyche (Haber, 1991; Frijda, 1986; Greenberg & Paivio, 1997; Lazarus, 1991; Malcolm, Warwar, & Greenberg, 2005; Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000; Rowe et al., 1989). Indignation, therefore, is understood to be the proper concomitant emotional response to relational offense or injury.

However, therapists also observe that indignation, or at least some types of indignation, clearly foreclose on forbearance or forgiveness (Allred, 1999; Barber, Maltby, & Macaskill, 2005; Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, & Wade, 2001; Forgays, Forgays, & Spielberger, 1991; Lawler-Row, Kerremans, Scott, Edlis-Matityahou, Edwards, 2008; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Spielberger, 1988; Sukhodolsky, Golub, & Cromwell, 2001; Wilkowski & Robinson, 2007). Given the significant associations between offense, indignation, and forgiveness, it is important to understand the relationships between these concepts. Indignation,
especially, needs to be carefully conceptualized and understood, as the term is used liberally throughout the social sciences to signify a wide variety of dispositional and situational traits.

**State Anger vs. Trait Anger**

Many researchers have recognized that indignation is a complex emotion and that contrasting typologies of indignation, or anger, exist (Allen & Haccoun, 1976; Anestis, Anestis, Selby, & Joiner 2009; Garcia, 1995; Sanford, 2005). Although researchers have documented many of the behavioral characteristics associated with different types of anger (Deffenbacher, Oetting, Lynch, & Morris, 1996; Ghanizadeh, 2008; Greene, Coles, & Johnson, 1994; Kubany, Bauer, Pangilinan, & Muraoka, 1995; and Ramírez & Andreu, 2006), few have offered descriptions of the interpersonal processes associated with either helpful, constructive indignation or harmful, destructive anger. One conceptualization of typologies of indignation that has received theoretical and empirical attention from psychological researchers is the theory of state anger and trait anger, which has been developed over the course of the past three decades.

In an effort to refine and clarify the nature of indignation as a psychological construct, Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, and Crane (1983) adapted and applied trait-state anxiety theory (Spielberger, 1966, 1972) to the concept of indignation, or anger and developed scales for measuring state and trait anger (Spielberger, 1988) and anger expressions (Spielberger, Krasner, & Solomon, 1988). These researchers use the term *state anger* to refer to a transitory emotional-physiological condition consisting of subjective feelings of anger and activation of the autonomic nervous system, either at a particular moment or over a short period of time. State anger can vary in intensity, and may fluctuate over time as a function of perceived affronts, injustice, and frustration. It may be most closely associated with constructive indignation in that it is temporary
and functional in nature. *Trait anger*, on the other hand, refers to a relatively stable, or chronic, personality dimension of anger proneness, and a tendency to perceive situations negatively and react angrily. Individuals high in trait anger experience more visceral responses to negative situations and express more hostility. They remain upset for longer periods of time and experience a decrease in overall physical well-being (Deffenbacher, 1992). Although researchers have found a strong negative correlation between trait anger and the propensity to forgive, and a weaker negative correlation between state anger and forgiveness (see Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, & Wade, 2001; Brown, 2003; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), none have further investigated the matter, or theorized about the intrapsychic or phenomenological roots of state and trait anger.

Social scientists recognize that indignation can take many forms, that it can have many psychological and emotional components, that it precipitates a wide variety of behaviors, and that it is associated with a number of physiological, emotional, and interpersonal characteristics. Researchers have not, however, studied the etiological roots of the different typologies of indignation, nor have they cataloged the associated feelings, relationship effects, or eventual outcomes. The next section of this thesis delineates a new model of indignation as a response to interpersonal offense.

**A Bifurcated Model of Emotional Response to Interpersonal Offense**

When interpersonal offense or injury occurs, it is natural, proper, and necessary for the individual to take offense. Taking offense, however, can play out along two very different processual pathways, with very different personal and relational outcomes. One pathway may be termed retributive anger, the other, corrective indignation. These contrasting forms of indignation may be conceptualized as existing along a continuum representing the balance
between a focus on self and others, where constructive indignation represents the correctly balanced middle ground. In this conceptualization, destructive anger exists at either end of the continuum, and represents, on the one hand, an extreme, amplified, and overly-inflated view of self, and on the other hand, a similarly warped view of others. This new model of constructive or destructive anger as a response to interpersonal offense is based on personal communication with Dr. Mark H. Butler between the years of 2005 and 2010, and on related, unpublished materials (Butler, 2005). Figure 1 diagrams this model.
### The Intrapsychic and Interpersonal Expression of Anger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenological Portrait</th>
<th>Destructive Anger</th>
<th>Constructive Indignation</th>
<th>Destructive Anger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense of Self, Others, and Relationship in Which it Arises</strong></td>
<td>Collapsed sense of self, inflated sense of others, dependency orientation in relationships.</td>
<td>Balanced humanistic appreciation of the worth of self, others, and enduring relationships. A conviction of the intrinsic worth and innate goodness of self, others, and relationship.</td>
<td>Inflated sense of self, collapsed sense of others, indifference concerning relationships. Self-will allowed to supersede others’ desires, well-being, and agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Quality or Nature</strong></td>
<td>Destructive anger turned inward is rooted and anchored in a profoundly and perversely diminished sense of self, typically the result of profound soul-deep abuse/injury/trauma, often during childhood, when self-concept is initially formed.</td>
<td>Constructive indignation is spiritual, rooted and anchored in love—a sense of the worth and commitment to the well-being of self, others, and relationships. Constructive indignation arises from perceived injury or threat to self, others, and relationship.</td>
<td>Destructive anger turned outward is interpersonally hostile, and is rooted and anchored in an exaggerated sense of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Spiritual Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Personal shame.</td>
<td>Personal and others worth, love, meekness.</td>
<td>Personal aggrandizement, self-will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associated Feelings</strong></td>
<td>Self-loathing, fear, dependency, despair, depression, unworthiness</td>
<td>Hurt, indignation, love, concern, sadness, sorrow, yearning, compassion, forgiving heart, easy to be entreated</td>
<td>Hostility, enmity, anger, spite, bitterness, revenge, vindictiveness, malevolence, antagonism, hatred, arrogance, self-will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristic Behavior</strong></td>
<td>When another’s actions hurt or offend, the person blames self: “I deserved it”. They engage in self-condemnation and experience self-loathing that they are “so bad” that such hurt happens to them. They heap more hurt upon themselves.</td>
<td>When another’s actions hurt or offend, the person lovingly and truthfully expresses the hurt, invites and facilitates repentance, including his or her own, and seeks reconciliation. Self, others, and relationship are all strengthened and grow.</td>
<td>When another’s actions hurt or offend, the person builds up self, attacks others, and destroys relationships. They lash out, counterattack, pursue retribution, and return in kind. They are stubborn, obstinate, and slow to be entreated, appeased, or to forgive. When another opposes self/will, they use anger to threaten, intimidate, and coerce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Effects</strong></td>
<td>Withdrawal, distancing, isolation, alienation.</td>
<td>Closeness, intimacy, unity, affection, contentment, peace.</td>
<td>Attack, distancing, isolation, alienation,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* From “The Intrapsychic Experience and Interpersonal Expression of Anger,” by M. H. Butler, 2005, Unpublished manuscript, Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT. Copyright 2005 Mark H. Butler.
**Retributive anger.** Retributive anger is destructive in nature and arises at either end of a continuum of distorted perspectives on either self or others and relationships (see Figure 1). Retributive anger that is self-destructive is in essence anger turned inward. It is typically the result of profound, soul-deep abuse/injury/trauma, which often occurred during childhood, when self-concept is initially formed. The distorted orientation that results from such abuse leads the victim to develop a collapsed sense of self, an inflated sense of others, and a dependency on relationships—the hallmarks of retributive anger turned inward. Anger of this typology manifests itself in feelings of self-loathing, fear, despondency, despair, depression, and unworthiness. When another’s actions hurt or offend, the person blames themselves, thinking they deserved the offense. They engage in self-condemnation and experience self-loathing that they are “bad” enough that such hurt happens to them. Relationally, these feelings and behaviors lead to withdrawal, distancing, isolation, and alienation. Additionally, this anger leads victims’ spiritual orientation to be characterized by personal shame, worthlessness, and a sense of apathy. The net result of the self-punishment of retributive anger turned inward is a destruction of self and relationships.

At the other end of the continuum lies other-destructive retributive anger, which is essentially anger turned outward. This type of anger is interpersonally hostile and is rooted and anchored in an exaggerated sense of self. It arises from the resulting inflated ego, collapsed sense of others, and indifference concerning relationships. Etiologically it has its roots in a real or perceived injustice that has become amplified over time as a result of rumination. Self-will and self-interest eclipse others’ desires, well-being, and agency. Individuals are absorbed by hostility, enmity, anger, spite, bitterness, revenge, vindictiveness, malevolence, antagonism, hatred, arrogance, and extreme self-will. When another’s actions hurt or offend, the person builds up
self, attacks others, and destroys relationships. They lash out, counterattack, pursue retribution, and return in kind. They are stubborn, obstinate, and slow to be entreated, appease, or to forgive. When another opposes his or her self-will, they will use anger to threaten, intimidate, bully, and coerce. Other-focused retributive anger is manifest in attempts to set things straight or balance the ledger through punitive responses that retribute suffering and equalize or amplify injury. It is a sort of reverse restitution anchored in punishment; it finds satisfaction in the suffering of others. Relationally, these aggressive, attacking behaviors result in distance, isolation, and alienation. Spiritually, individuals who harbor feelings of anger that are other-focused develop a sense of personal aggrandizement and supreme self-interest. The feelings, perspectives, behavior patterns, and relentless pursuit of self-will that characterize this type of anger result in the disintegration of relationships and in the destruction of others, and ultimately, self.

**Corrective, protective indignation.** In contrast to either form of destructive anger, corrective indignation represents a balanced view of self and others. Corrective indignation is self-protective and seeks to build up others and relationships. It is indignation turned to healing. Constructive indignation is spiritual and is rooted and anchored in love—a sense of the worth and commitment to the well-being of self, others, and relationships. Constructive indignation arises from perceived injury or threat not only to self, but also to others, or to relationships. It represents a balanced humanistic appreciation of the worth of self, others, and interpersonal connections. It is a manifestation of the conviction of the intrinsic worth and innate goodness of humankind. When interpersonal injury arises, this temperate view allows the individual to experience feelings of hurt, indignation, sadness, sorrow, concern, and even love, while retaining a sense of compassion, yearning for resolution, an easiness to be entreated, and a desire to work toward forgiveness. When another’s actions hurt or offend, the person lovingly and truthfully
expresses the hurt, invites and facilitates repentance, including his or her own, and seeks reconciliation. Self, others, and relationship are all strengthened and developed. Relationally, the personal and interpersonal honesty central to constructive indignation leads to closeness, intimacy, unity, affection, contentment, and peace. Spiritually, it breeds meekness, love, faith, and an optimistic view of self and others, including deity. Corrective indignation in the face of personal injury, therefore, represents a balanced, objective view of the relationship between the offense and self and others, and functions as a catalyst for the personal growth and relationship repair that can come through the forgiveness process.

**Therapists’ Understanding of Indignation as it Relates to Forgiveness**

Comparatively little attention has been given by researchers to a bifurcated model of emotional response to offense and its potential relation to forgiveness, as either a barrier or a catalyst to forgiveness. Further, none have surveyed whether therapists commonly comprehend emotional response to offense and forgiveness in this kind of sophisticated way. Particularly given the reality that many faith-oriented clients view forgiveness as a spiritual issue and imperative, and also that in the context of faith anger is stereotypically viewed as a destructive and sinful emotion, an accurate view of constructive indignation and destructive anger is imperative. Indignation can be either a facilitative or a destructive response to interpersonal offense depending on the victim’s sense of self, other, and relationship. It is an emotion that may help or hinder the process of forgiveness, and as such has great bearing on the success of relational therapy focused on forgiveness. With such important implications for relational therapy, the next logical step in research into the role that indignation plays in forgiveness is to determine whether or not therapists are aware of the potential positive relation of corrective indignation to forgiveness, as well as the negative relation of hostile anger to forgiveness. This
research contributes to the necessary empirical foundation upon which future theory may be constructed.

**Summary**

**Research Questions**

This study explores the perspectives of a group of relational therapists on indignation as a component of the forgiveness process within the context of marital therapy for infidelity. It also examines the psychometric properties of the IFS. Additionally, it seeks to determine the nature of the relationship, if any, between the therapists’ opinions on the compatibility of indignation with forgiveness in infidelity therapy and a number of demographic items, including sex, race, personal association with an incidence of infidelity, age, number of hours worked per week, and percentage of therapy hours spent working with clients on issues related to marital infidelity.

The research questions which guide the investigation are as follows. First, do relational therapists generally agree or disagree that indignation is compatible with forgiveness as a part of marital therapy for infidelity? It is hypothesized that therapists overall will view indignation as compatible with forgiveness.

Second, what are the psychometric properties of the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale (IFS), a new measure? Are the items on the IFS internally consistent? Is the IFS unidimensional or multidimensional? It is hypothesized that the items on the IFS are intercorrelated and that, therefore, IFS will exhibit internal consistency. It is also hypothesized that the IFS will be found to be a multidimensional measure.

Third, what are the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the participants and their views on the different subscales of indignation as a component of the overall process of forgiveness? There is no theoretical basis to hypothesize differences in
therapists’ views on the relation between indignation and forgiving based on demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, race, personal association with an incidence of infidelity, age, hours worked per week, and percentage of therapy hours spent working with clients on issues related to marital infidelity). Hence, it is hypothesized that survey findings concerning therapists’ judgments will be generalizable to all therapists irrespective of demographic characteristics. As a routine exercise, however, analyses will be conducted to confirm whether these presumptions are appropriate, or, alternately to expose differences based on therapist demographics that dictates nuancing conclusions based on different demographic characteristics.

**Summary of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the topic of indignation as a component of the forgiveness process, particularly in the context of therapy for marital infidelity. This thesis presents three important perspectives on indignation as a component of the forgiveness process: the perspectives of clinicians and scholars who have published articles on forgiveness, the views of the author and Dr. Mark H. Butler by way of a new model of indignation as a component of the forgiveness process, and the opinion of a group of therapists on the matter as it relates to their current clinical practices. The viewpoints of a sample of relational therapists are presented in the form of the results and analysis of a survey of relational therapists that investigates the topic of indignation and its compatibility with forgiveness in the context of marital infidelity.

**Methodology**

**Design**

A descriptive survey design employing archival data was used to investigate therapists’ clinical judgment of the acceptability of indignation as a part of the broader forgiveness intervention process in couple therapy. Two research questions guided the investigation and
First, after exposure to a conceptualization of a catalyzing role that self-affirming, relationship-correcting indignation may play in forgiveness, will a majority of respondents express approval or disapproval of employing constructive indignation as a facilitative component of the broader process of forgiveness? Second, were there significant differences in expressed approval of self-affirming, relationship-correcting indignation as a catalyst to forgiveness with regards to any of the following characteristics: sex, age, years of therapeutic experience, or prior exposure to infidelity in one’s own relationship or the relationship of a close acquaintance?

**Participants**

Participants were clinical professionals who attended a national relational therapy conference and registered in advance to attend a session titled “Healing Wounds of Infidelity: Common Clinical Paradoxes.” Enrolled in the session were 180 human service professionals, and of this number, 148 participated in the session and returned completed survey questionnaires. Some of those who signed up in advance did not attend the session.

The response rate of 69.4% was calculated as the number who completed a questionnaire and consented to the use of their data, divided by the total number of persons who originally enrolled in the workshop. This response rate falls well above an acceptable benchmark for survey research (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine, 2004). Of the 148 completed surveys, 23 were eliminated because the respondent indicated their desire not to have their survey used in the study. Of the 125 remaining surveys, a further 27 were excluded because of missing data. Thus, altogether, 98 surveys were used in the data analysis. No revealing identifying information was included with the questionnaires, thereby protecting the confidentiality of the respondent’s answers.
Procedure

Presentation. Participants took part in a two-hour presentation that covered ethical dilemmas and clinical paradoxes confronted by therapists when working with couples where infidelity has occurred. The thematic domains covered in this presentation were: (a) the ethics of infidelity secrets; (b) the ethics and paradox of indignation as a catalyst to forgiving (c) the ethics and paradox of reconciliation; (d) the paradoxical restoration of trust; and (e) ethical complications and clinical paradoxes arising from non-parallel healing trajectories of the spouses. This study focused on the information covered during the second segment of the presentation in which the ethics and paradox of indignation and forgiving were discussed and measured. The written session outline and audio transcription of the instruction are available for limited research use upon request.

During the second segment of the presentation, participants were invited to consider the role that self-affirming and relationship-correcting indignation may play in a broader process of forgiveness intervention in the context of treatment for infidelity. The workshop included didactic instruction and small- and whole-group discussion. One third of the participants were asked to assume the role of an offending spouse, one-third the role of a non-offending spouse, and one-third the role of a third-party outsider. In relation to these systemic positions, participants were asked to answer the following questions: (1) “What happens to forgiving when constructive indignation is foreclosed—often in the name of forgiving?”, and (2) “What happens to forgiving when constructive indignation is allowed to do its work?” (Butler, 2005). Following a discussion of the paradoxically helpful influence of self-affirming and relationship-correcting indignation following infidelity, participants were asked to take five minutes to record their thoughts and reactions on the issue of by completing the short questionnaire, the Indignation and
Forgiveness Scale (IFS). The time required for this part of the workshop was approximately 45 minutes.

**Informed consent.** Prior to the presentation, and upon completion of the didactic and participatory portions of each theme, participants were informed that they would have the opportunity to share their professional voice and clinical judgment by filling out a five-page survey questionnaire (see Appendix A for the portion used in this study) with questions relating to each of the clinical paradoxes (listed above) related to treating couples flowing infidelity. Respondents also completed a demographic information sheet (see Appendix B). The assessments used in this study are the indignation and forgiveness portion of the questionnaire and the demographic form.

During the workshop, the presenter articulated that in addition to the instructional purpose of the reflection-promoting survey it can be useful for therapists to share their voice within the broader community of their profession. Therapists were invited to share their voice within the relational therapy profession by completing surveys, turning them in, and indicating consent for research publication of the aggregate findings.

Participants could opt-out of the additional and optional research use of this instructional exercise by not completing the survey or by not providing consent for its research use. Questionnaires that were incomplete or where consent for research use was declined were excluded from analyses.

**Instruments**

The Indignation and Forgiveness Scale (IFS) is one of five 7-point Likert scales that assessed therapists’ views on a number of paradoxical issues surrounding the treatment of infidelity. The IFS (Appendix A) consists of 13 items that measured therapists’ attitudes toward
the role that self-affirming and relationship-correcting indignation plays in the broader process of forgiveness. Because this questionnaire is a new measure, no reliability or validity data are available at this time.

To standardize scoring, items 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, and 13 were reverse-scored so that a higher score indicated a therapist’s clinical judgment that indignation is self-affirming and relationship-correcting and compatible with forgiveness while a lower score reflected a judgment that self-affirming and relationship-correcting indignation is not compatible with forgiveness. Items 3, 4, 7-10, and 12 already reflected this scoring pattern. Scores were then recoded from a 1 to 7 range to a -3 to +3 range, with negative scores indicating magnitude of disagreement, positive scores indicating magnitude of agreement, and zero scores indicating indecision or neutrality—thereby allowing for more intuitive interpretation of numerically presented results.

Responses to individual questions were used in summarizing attitudes towards specific aspects of indignation as it relates to forgiveness work in therapy. The overall IFS score for each participant was computed by simply summing the scores on the individual items; the group IFS score was computed by summing the group’s mean item responses. The overall score represents the aggregate degree to which respondent therapists agree that constructive indignation may play an important role as a catalyst to forgiveness work in couple therapy related to infidelity.

Respondents’ demographic information (e.g., sex, age, ethnicity, experience, years of and type of practice, non-professional acquaintance with infidelity, and so forth; see Appendix B) was also collected in order to discriminate findings based on relevant demographic differences.

Results

Using the archival data from the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale and accompanying demographic data, three sets of statistical tests were conducted. First, descriptive statistics were
calculated on the observable variables (the clinicians’ responses to the demographic questions and the thirteen items on the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale). Next, the factor analysis was conducted to determine how the items loaded onto subscales. Finally, further statistical tests were conducted using the extracted subscales and the demographic data to investigate between-groups differences.

**Analysis of Indignation and Forgiveness Scale and Demographic Items**

**Frequencies and descriptive statistics.** Descriptive statistics, including frequencies of each response, means, medians, modes, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis statistics, and standard error statistics for both skewness and kurtosis were calculated for each of the thirteen indignation and forgiveness items to reveal general therapist views of the compatibility of indignation and forgiveness in the context of therapy for marital infidelity. Table 1 displays mean scores, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis statistics, and standard error of skewness (SES) and standard error of kurtosis (SEK) statistics for each of the items on the IFS.

Individual items on the IFS exhibited much more variability than the overall IFS. Mean scores for all of the individual items were greater than 1, and six items (2, 3, 7, and 10-12) had means greater than 2, indicating strong, positive views on indignation’s compatibility with forgiveness.

Skewness was calculated to assess the asymmetry of the curve. The SES statistics were obtained by dividing the skewness statistics by the skewness standard error statistic (.224 for all items). SES scores greater than +/- 2.00 are considered skewed to a significant degree.

Histograms of responses on every item on the IFS were extremely negatively skewed, with six items (2, 3, 7, 10, 11, and 12) displaying skewness ten standard errors of skewness below the mean. Significant, negative skew indicated that the tails on the left (negative response) sides of
the curves were longer than the right side, and that the bulk of the values (including the median) fell to the right of the mean. Overall skewness of the responses to the IFS items, therefore, signified strong positive agreement with the compatibility of indignation with forgiveness.

Kurtosis statistics were also calculated for each item to evaluate the peakness or flatness of the curve relative to a normal distribution curve. The SEK statistics were obtained by dividing the kurtosis statistics by the kurtosis standard error statistic (.483 for all items). SEK scores greater than +/- 2.00 differ from a normal distribution curve to a significant degree. Overall, participants’ responses to IFS items yielded greater variation in the SEK scores than in the SES scores. These histograms displayed extreme positive kurtosis on ten of the items (2-5, and 7-12), with seven of the items (2, 3, 7, and 9-12) displaying peakedness ten standard errors of kurtosis taller than a normal distribution, indicating leptokurtic (highly peaked) curves. Additionally, the high SES and SEK statistics for many of the items indicate the likely presence of a ceiling effect. This effect will be examined further in the discussion section.
Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Items on the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1*</td>
<td>The non-offending spouse’s anger over infidelity is sometimes constructive for the marriage relationship.</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2*</td>
<td>Forgiveness of an extramarital affair does not require the non-offending spouse to immediately stop acting with or feeling anger toward the offending spouse.</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>-2.58</td>
<td>7.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>Allowing the non-offending spouse to express anger over the offending spouse’s infidelity is important for relationship healing.</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>-2.95</td>
<td>9.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>Allowing the non-offending spouse to express anger over the offending spouse’s infidelity is important for the non-offending spouse’s healing.</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-2.16</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5*</td>
<td>Complete marital healing and forgiving regarding infidelity cannot take place without disclosure of anger.</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6*</td>
<td>Complete marital healing and forgiving regarding infidelity cannot take place without experience of anger.</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-1.18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 7</td>
<td>Constructive anger and its expression is generally helpful to relationship healing.</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>-2.76</td>
<td>11.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 8</td>
<td>In healing wounds of infidelity, some forms of anger are more effective and more important than others.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>-2.06</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9</td>
<td>Allowing anger to “do its work” of feedback and correcting relationships is a necessary part of marital therapy for infidelity.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-1.95</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10</td>
<td>It is important to allow the non-offending spouse to reveal his/her anger regarding infidelity.</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>-2.85</td>
<td>15.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11*</td>
<td>In healing wounds of infidelity, not all forms of anger are damaging and destructive.</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>-3.37</td>
<td>14.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12</td>
<td>In my marital therapy practice, I help the non-offending spouse to work through and express anger felt over infidelities.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>-2.60</td>
<td>10.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13*</td>
<td>In my marital therapy practice, I do not encourage the non-offending spouse to let go of anger because it is unproductive or destructive to healing.</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Items were reverse-scored. See Appendix A for original wording.
Descriptive statistical values (frequencies, means, medians, modes, and standard deviations) were also computed for each of the nominal scale demographic items. These demographic items included: age, number of years in practice, and percentage of clients presenting with infidelity issues. Frequencies of responses were tallied for sex, race, and whether or not someone close to the therapist had been significantly affected by an extramarital affair.

Of the 98 respondents, 62.2% (N = 61) were female while 29.6% (N = 29) were male (8.2% remain unknown). Most of the respondents were Caucasian (82.7%), 9.2% were African American, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, or other, with 8.2% not responding. The mean age of respondents was 46.34 years (SD =14.17) with the youngest being 22, and the oldest, 76. The therapists attending the presentation had been practicing an average of 13 years (SD =10.97), with a minimum of 0 years and a maximum of 43 years. The vast majority (81.6%) had a personal connection to an incident of infidelity, while 10.2% had no such connection, and 8.2% did not respond. Of the 80 therapists who revealed how many hours per week they worked, the mean was 18.85 hours (SD =14.32), with a minimum of 2, a maximum of 106, and a mode response of 10. Additionally, therapists spent a mean of 34% of their time with clients working on infidelity issues. The median percentage of hours spent with infidelity clients per week was “21-30%”, the mode response was “11-20%”, the standard deviation was 17.23, and replies represented the entire range of possible responses except for the highest bracket, from 0-10% to 81-90%, with 14 participants not responding. Demographically, the participants varied widely not only in age and years practicing therapy, but also in their level of involvement in therapy in general, and specifically in infidelity therapy.

Cronbach’s alpha for IFS. A Cronbach’s alpha was computed to determine the internal
consistency of the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale as a whole, and was found to be .707. This score is just above the cutoff of .700 of recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) for established measures and well above the threshold of .600 recommended for exploratory research. The lower and upper bounds of the 95% confidence interval are .614 and .785 respectively. Thus the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale, a new instrument, displayed moderate internal consistency.

**Factor analysis.** A factor analysis test was used to describe variability among the items on the IFS in terms of a smaller number of factors, or subscales. Direct oblimin rotation was used because some degree of correlation was expected between the subscales. The results of this test indicated that four factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1 could be extracted. Item 8 cross-loaded onto factors 1 and 3 (with loadings of .502 and -.471 respectively), and consequently was removed from further analysis. The subsequent factor analysis again produced four subscales with Eigenvalues greater than 1, this time with each of the remaining 12 items loading cleanly onto one of the four subscales. Table 2 displays the factor loadings and items that make up all four of the subscales extracted from the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale.
### Table 2

**Factors and Factor Loadings of IFS Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 2*</td>
<td>Forgiveness of an extramarital affair does not require the non-offending spouse to immediately stop acting with or feeling anger toward the offending spouse.</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5*</td>
<td>Complete marital healing and forgiving regarding infidelity cannot take place without disclosure of anger.</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6*</td>
<td>Complete marital healing and forgiving regarding infidelity cannot take place without experience of anger.</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 2: Expression subscale (alpha = .80)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 7</td>
<td>Constructive anger and its expression is generally helpful to relationship healing.</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9</td>
<td>Allowing anger to &quot;do its work&quot; of feedback and correcting relationships is a necessary part of marital therapy for infidelity.</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10</td>
<td>It is important to allow the non-offending spouse to reveal his/her anger regarding infidelity.</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11*</td>
<td>In healing wounds of infidelity, not all forms of anger are damaging and destructive.</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 3: Helpfulness subscale (alpha = .47)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1*</td>
<td>The non-offending spouse’s anger over infidelity is sometimes constructive for the marriage relationship.</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12</td>
<td>In my marital therapy practice, I help the non-offending spouse to work through and express anger felt over infidelities.</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13*</td>
<td>In my marital therapy practice, I do not encourage the non-offending spouse to let go of anger because it is unproductive or destructive to healing.</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Factor 3: Healing subscale (alpha = .84)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>Allowing the non-offending spouse to express anger over the offending spouse's infidelity is important for relationship healing.</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>Allowing the non-offending spouse to express anger over the offending spouse's infidelity is important for the non-offending spouse's healing.</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Items were reverse-scored. See Appendix A for original wording.*
**Essentiality.** The first factor had an Eigenvalue of 3.24 and accounted for 26.96% of the total variance. This factor is termed the essentiality subscale, because the individual items that comprise this subscale describe the participants’ beliefs about the essentiality of indignation in the forgiveness process: that complete forgiveness regarding infidelity cannot take place without the disclosure and experience of indignation. The Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale is .75, and the mean response for this item was 1.85 ($SD = 1.10$).

**Expression.** The second factor had an Eigenvalue of 1.96 and accounted for 16.30% of the total variance. This factor is termed the expression subscale, because the individual items that comprise this subscale investigate the participants’ beliefs about distinguishing between different types of indignation, and the importance of allowing the non-offending spouse to express indignation as a part of the forgiveness process. The Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale is .80, and the mean response was 2.19 ($SD = 0.77$).

**Helpfulness.** The third factor had an Eigenvalue of 1.45 and accounted for 12.11% of the total variance. This factor is termed the helpfulness subscale, because the individual items that comprise this subscale investigate the participants’ beliefs about the utility and helpfulness of indignation as a part of the forgiveness process in marital therapy. The mean response was 1.70 ($SD = 0.95$), and the Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale is .47, which indicates low overall subscale internal reliability. Potential reasons for this are discussed in the summary of the study.

**Healing.** The fourth factor had an Eigenvalue of 1.24 and accounted for 10.30% of the total variance. This factor is termed the healing subscale, because the individual items that comprise this subscale examine the participants’ beliefs about how helpful they think constructive indignation is in relationship healing, and for the non-offending spouse’s healing. The Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale is .84, and the mean response was 2.07 ($SD = 1.25$).
Construct subscales. Four construct subscales composed of a subset of items on the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale were formed based on the factor loadings from the factor analysis. Values for each subscale were computed for each participant by summing the responses to the items on each subscale and dividing by the number of items on the subscale to produce a mean scale score. These mean scores were used in further analysis to investigate between-groups differences on three demographic variables (sex, race, and participant’s personal association with an incidence of infidelity) based on the participants’ mean subscale scores on the four subscales of the IFS.

Descriptive statistics. Mean scores, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis statistics, and lower and upper bounds of a 95% confidence interval were calculated for each of the four subscales in order to understand the distribution of the responses on the items that loaded onto each of the four subscales of the IFS relative to a normal curve. These descriptive statistics are displayed on Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Subscales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>95% confidence interval of the difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentiality subscale</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression subscale</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>-3.32</td>
<td>20.60</td>
<td>20.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness subscale</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-1.05</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing subscale</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>-2.61</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlations between subscales. Direct oblimin rotation revealed the following correlations between subscales of the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale, listed on Table 4. None of the correlation coefficients are high enough to suggest overlap in subscales being measured.

This distinction further evidences the extraction of four distinct subscales.
Table 4

Subscale Correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Essentiality</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Helpfulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship of Demographic Variables to the IFS.

Independent samples $t$-tests, correlations, and a one-way ANOVA utilized the participants’ computed subscale scores as dependent variables to examine the relationship effects of various demographic independent variables, as reported by respondents on the demographic form that accompanied the IFS (see Appendix B). The means of these scores were used in further analyses to investigate differences in the mean scores of each of the subscales (essentiality, expression, helpfulness, and healing) between groups as determined by categorical demographic variables of sex, race, and personal association with an incidence of infidelity. The participants’ subscale scores were also correlated with the continuous quantitative demographic variables to see if patterns emerged based on the therapist age or number of hours worked per week. Finally, a one-way ANOVA was performed to determine the presence and nature of the relationship between the subscale scores and the percentage of a therapist’s clients who presented with issues relating to infidelity.

Independent samples $t$-tests of significance. Means of participants’ subscale scores were compared based on four independent variables: sex, race (Caucasian / other), and whether or not someone personally close to the therapist had experienced or been significantly affected by an extramarital affair (yes / no). There were no significant differences between groups for any of the four subscales. The results of these tests are displayed in Tables 5 through 7.
Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test for Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentiality</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-1.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Female N = 61, male N = 29

Table 6

Independent Samples T-Test of Significance for Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th></th>
<th>Other</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentiality</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Caucasian N = 81, other N = 9

Table 7

Independent Samples T-Test of Significance for Incident of Infidelity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentiality</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>-0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Yes N = 80, no N = 11

Correlations between subscales and demographic items. The participants’ mean subscale scores were correlated with two continuous quantitative demographic variables: age and number of hours worked per week.

Number of hours worked per week correlated significantly with the essentiality subscale, and with the expression subscale. This indicated that therapists who worked more hours were
also more likely to recognize the helpful role that indignation can play in the forgiveness process. The participants’ ages, however, did not correlate significantly with subscale scores. Table 8 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients for each of the correlations.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations between Age, Hours Worked, and Subscales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked / week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01.

One-way ANOVA for percentage of therapy treating infidelity. A one-way ANOVA was performed to investigate the relationship between the percentage of the therapist's clients who presented with issues related to infidelity, and the therapist’s score on each of the four subscales. For the purpose of the test, the 84 therapists were who responded to this item were divided into three groups of relative equal size: those for whom infidelity cases comprised 0-20% of their caseload (N = 30, 35.7%), 21-30% of their caseload (N = 21, 25%), and 31-100% of their caseload (N = 33, 39.4%). The mean subscale responses for these groups of therapists were compared. The percentage of hours that the therapist spent working with clients who presented matters related to marital infidelity did not significantly impact his or her responses to items loading onto the essentiality subscale [F (81,2) = 0.94; p < .40], the expression subscale [F (81,2) = 0.88; p < .42], the helpfulness subscale (F (81,2) = 0.21; p < .81), or the healing subscale (F (81,2) = 1.20; p < .31).

Discussion

This study presents and interprets the results of various statistical analyses performed on
archival data collected from a group of therapists who attended a presentation given by Dr. Mark H. Butler at the September 2004 annual conference of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy in Atlanta, Georgia, entitled, “Healing Wounds of Infidelity: Common Clinical Paradoxes”. This presentation covered ethical dilemmas and clinical paradoxes a therapist confronts when handling infidelity in therapy and included a discussion of the compatibility between indignation and forgiveness in therapy. As part of the presentation, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire, which contained the 13-question Indignation and Forgiveness Scale (see Appendix A) as well as a demographic form (see Appendix B), both of which were used in this study. Analysis of these data illuminates important incongruities between therapists’ opinions and current literature on indignation and forgiveness.

Summary of Results

Analysis of the data collected using the IFS was guided by two research questions. First, will relational therapists generally agree or disagree that indignation is compatible with forgiveness as a part of marital therapy for infidelity? Second, what are the psychometric properties of the IFS? Third, what are the relationships between the demographic variables and respondents scores on the subscales of the IFS?

Compatibility of indignation and forgiveness. Preliminary analysis of individual items on the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale provides evidence for a generally favorable view of indignation as a component of forgiveness in the context of infidelity therapy, with respondents’ overall mean IFS response being 1.95 ($SD = 0.59$), with a minimum respondent mean score of 0.31 and a maximum 3.00. Thus, the analysis of the IFS as a whole confirms that, in response to the first research question, therapists do indeed agree that indignation is compatible with forgiveness in the context of therapy dealing with the effects of an extramarital affair.
Throughout the literature review the intense emotions following interpersonal offense or injury have been conceptualized and termed *indignation*. However, the IFS used the word *anger* to describe this experience. Careful review of the workshop outline indicates that *anger* was used to indicate this experience by Dr. Mark H. Butler in his presentation “Healing Wounds of Infidelity: Common Clinical Paradoxes”. Hence, it is judged that respondents’ answers related primarily to the experience of constructive *indignation* and secondarily to the destructive, hostile *anger*. For purposes of interpretation of results of this study, therefore, it is assumed that respondents’ support for the *anger* discussed on the IFS indicates an espousal of indignation as a proper and necessary component of the overall process of therapy in the context of therapy for marital infidelity.

**Psychometric properties of the IFS.** In response to the second research question, the IFS overall exhibited high internal consistency as a measure of respondents’ professional judgment regarding the role of constructive indignation in the overall process of forgiveness in therapy for marital infidelity. A histogram of responses indicated a relatively normal distribution of mean IFS scores.

Analysis confirmed the multidimensionality of the IFS. When factor analyzed, the IFS loaded onto four subscales. Item 8 was dropped from further analysis due to cross loading. Items loading onto the essentiality, expression, and healing subscales exhibited good internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas of .75, .80, and .84 respectively, while the internal consistency of the helpfulness subscale was marginal (\(\alpha = .47\)).

The low Cronbach’s alpha of the helpfulness subscale reflects moderately low inter-item reliability for items 1, 12, and 13. The low internal consistency of this subscale may have been influenced by a number of factors. First, the low Cronbach’s alpha suggests that this subscale
taps into some of the complexities of measuring therapists’ views on the topics of indignation and forgiveness. Two out of the three items that load into this subscale deal with the therapist’s current practices regarding indignation in therapy: item 12, “in my marital therapy practice, I help the non-offending spouse to work through and express anger felt over infidelities”, and item 13, “in my marital therapy practice, I encourage the non-offending spouse to let go of anger because it is unproductive and destructive to healing”. (Item 13 was reverse-scored.) The nature of these questions require that therapists answer by referencing their own established behaviors regarding indignation in infidelity therapy, which were formed prior to their exposure to the presentation on the role that constructive indignation can play in forgiveness. In contrast, the other questions on the scale ask for their opinions on the topic without reference to their practices, in a way that does not distinguish between longstanding beliefs and new insights developed through exposure to the subject matter during the presentation. As a result, items 12 and 13 could possibly reflect the manner in which the therapists’ views on indignation and forgiveness in the context of infidelity changed in response to their participation in the presentation.

Another related explanation for the low Cronbach’s alpha could be that it reflects an existing discrepancy between the respondents’ beliefs and behaviors regarding the role of constructive indignation in the process of forgiveness in the context of therapy for infidelity. Most therapeutic models of forgiveness do not incorporate indignation or anger as a salient feature of therapy (see Augsburger, 1981, Benson, Cunningham, 1985, 1992; Hope, 1987; 1992, Loewen, 1970; Martin, 1953, Nelson, 1992; Rosenak & Harnden, 1992; Smedes, 1984; Thompson, 1983), except as a springboard for the true work of forgiveness, which is expected to take place after the client has released much of the negativity that has prevented forgiveness.
work from commencing. Among the few models that do incorporate a discussion of anger into the early stages of forgiveness (see Enright, 2001; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Enright and The Human Development Study Group, 1992, 1996; and Greenberg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2010) none offer specific conceptualization of the roots of the emotion or explanation of therapeutic interventions designed to harness the catalytic potential of constructive indignation. As such, it is possible that there were significant discrepancies between beliefs and current practices of the participants regarding indignation. This discrepancy would likely have caused their answers to items that reference their thoughts and opinions to exhibit incongruencies with items that reference their behaviors relative to the degree to which they reflect a positive view of the compatibility between indignation and forgiveness. The helpfulness subscale of the IFS contained two such items assessing therapists’ current practices. Since the scale did not have the capacity to take the intricacies associated with these items into account, the resulting low Cronbach’s alpha is likely a reflection of a subscale that is more complex and heterogeneous than the other three subscales.

An examination of the histograms of participants’ responses to individual IFS items and participants’ subscale scores revealed the likely occurrence of a ceiling effect in most cases. Histograms of items 2 though 9 and 11 through 13, as well as the histograms of the essentiality, expression, and healing constructs in particular evidenced a ceiling effect, indicating that the upper bounds of the respondents’ views may not have been able to be represented within the measure. These findings shed light on the strong views that many therapists hold regarding the compatibility of indignation and forgiveness in the context of infidelity, particularly concerning the vitality of its role in the forgiveness process, the utility and helpfulness of the non-offending spouse’s constructive indignation, and the importance of encouraging the non-offending spouse
to experience and express constructive indignation.

**Demographic differences.** There were no statistically significant differences between the mean subscale scores when the respondents were grouped by age, sex, race, and personal association with an incidence of infidelity. The percentage of a therapist’s clients who present issues related to infidelity did not significantly impact his or her responses to items that loaded onto any of the subscales. These results support the conclusion that, in response to the second research question, demographic characteristics of therapists do not significantly impact his or her views on the role that indignation plays in forgiveness.

Although most of the demographic attributes do not influence a therapist’s view of indignation in forgiveness, one aspect of his or her professional practice qualities does. The results indicate that of the four subscales extracted from the Indignation and Forgiveness Survey, two varied significantly based on characteristics associated with the number of hours that a therapist works per week. The more time clinicians spend in the therapy room, the greater his or her likelihood to view indignation as an essential component of forgiveness. Also, therapists who worked more hours were also more likely to recognize the utility of allowing the non-offending spouse to express indignation as a part of the forgiveness process.

Current literature on forgiveness and therapy for infidelity does not mention how, or why, the amount of time therapist spends working with clients would be related to their opinions on the components of models of forgiveness or healing wounds of infidelity. Research also revealed a dearth of information on the ways in which a therapist’s experiences in general impact his or her philosophical views and use of therapeutic techniques. Knowledge gained through clinical experience, and time itself, likely do affect a therapist’s ideologies as well as their likelihood to subscribe to particular theories, models, and modes of intervention. For example, over time, and
with increased exposure to the complexities of issues that families are facing when they request therapeutic intervention, therapists may tend to regress away from clearly segregated philosophies toward views that are more common.

Clearly, further research is needed in order to understand the nature of the interaction between experience and professional convictions. Likewise, continued theory development on the topics reviewed in this study, as well and research on its potential and realized impact would likely substantiate the benefits that a clear, concise model of the application of constructive indignation to the forgiveness process could bring to relational therapists, and their deserving clients.

**Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study is limited primarily by the nature of the group of research study participants. The questionnaire was administered as part of the teaching pedagogy of a presentation and was intended to enhance the learning and participation of those attending. Since the respondents were a convenience sample of therapists attending a professional conference, the results of the study are not applicable to the larger population of relational therapists in the way they would be if the questionnaire had been administered to a random sample of therapists. Specifically, therapists attending a conference may differ from those who do not in important ways.

Additionally, since no pre-test was administered, it is impossible to tell the degree to which the presentation directly affected the responses of the participants, or what viewpoints the participants held prior to the presentation, although, as previously noted, as items 12 and 13 reflect therapists’ practices concerning issues indignation and forgiveness, they may provide some indication of the effects of the presentation.

In addition to the weaknesses that stem from the context of the study and the participants
in the study, the questionnaire itself was likely not able to fully capture the upper bounds of the therapists’ support for indignation as a component of forgiveness, as many of the items exhibited a ceiling effect. If the Indignation and Forgiveness Scale were used again in future research, a broader Likert scale could be used to offer more response choices to participants, which would help to increase variability among answers for those who strongly agree and disagree with items. This change would likely result in answers that were more normal in distribution, and thus better suited to statistical analysis.

In relation to the complexities associated with item 12 and 13 on the IFS, additional items could be added to the IFS to assess the degree to which a therapist perceives their current professional practices to be incongruent with their beliefs regarding the role that constructive indignation can play in the forgiveness process in therapy for infidelity. These questions could possibly be used to explore the complexities that affected the inter-item reliability of the items that loaded onto the helpfulness subscale in this study. The implications of the responses could also be used to assess a new dimension of indignation as a part of forgiveness, one that might reflect a therapist’s interest in additional information on these topics, particularly their practical applications in the therapy room.

In order to further research the role that indignation plays in the forgiveness process, it would also be helpful to construct a model of forgiveness that incorporates Dr. Mark H. Butler’s conceptualization of the intrapsychic expression and interpersonal experience of indignation into the early stages of relationship repair. Empirical validation of this model would then substantiate the helpful role that indignation can play in the process of forgiveness.

Therapists’ opinions regarding forgiveness and the role that constructive indignation plays in infidelity therapy should be further investigated in order to understand more about their
opinions on the matter. Do therapists facilitate the experience and expression of indignation more than current models of forgiveness would suggest? If not, what are the barriers to clinicians’ confident orchestration of constructive expressions of indignation as a component of marital therapy? In addition to continued research into therapists’ perspectives and practices, researchers could survey clients to understand their varied experiences in infidelity therapy. It would be helpful to understand whether clients whose indignation is validated report better intrapersonal and relational therapy outcomes. By continuing to build models and investigate clinical practices related to relationship repair, researchers could contribute to the further development of a body of literature about these important topics.

Clinical Implications

Forgiveness is a vital component for the maintenance of meaningful social connections, which allows friends, siblings, children, parents, and spouses to correct the offenses and repair the breaches in understanding that inevitably occur in their relationships. Forgiveness gives an individual who has allowed mistakes, misunderstandings, and selfishness to derail his or her pursuit of relationship actualization a fresh opportunity to realign intentions with actions. The need for this ongoing process of repair is vital in the intensely intimate marital relationship, particularly in the context of a severe attachment threat such as marital infidelity.

Marriage almost always implies emotional primacy and sexual exclusivity. An affair violates both of these tenets, shattering the trust and threatening the worth of the offended spouse. Social scientists and clinicians acknowledge the inextricable presence of indignation in the forgiveness process during time of severe marital distress and attachment threat, such as in the aftermath of an affair. Most models of the process of forgiveness include mention of indignation as a salient feature (see Baskin & Enright, 2004; Davenport, 1991; Enright & The
Human Development Study Group, 1996; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008; Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008; Wade et al., 2005); however, it is most often regarded as an undesirable emotion that is incompatible with and inhibitory to the real work of forgiveness. A few models of forgiveness do distinguish typologies of anger or indignation, and regard adaptive the emotion as functional in coming to terms with injuries. Enright’s (2001) process model of forgiveness and Malcolm and Greenberg’s task-analytic process model of forgiveness (Greenberg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2010) incorporate indignation into the first phase of the process of forgiveness. Neither of these models, however, discusses the intrapersonal, phenomenological characteristics of the different typologies of indignation, nor do they discuss the therapeutic processes that may harness the power of indignation to catalyze forgiveness.

The new, bifurcated model of the intrapsychic experience and interpersonal expression of indignation, developed by Dr. Mark H. Butler, holds tremendous potential as a tool to help clinicians conceptualize differing typologies of indignation, recognize indignation’s phenomenological roots, and understand how to channel clients’ emotions constructively in therapy in order to allow their indignation to catalyze the initial steps of the forgiveness process. In this manner, indignation need no longer be viewed as a disruptive, peripheral emotion. In proper context and measure, it can be embraced by clinicians as a fundamental component of a journey through the forgiveness process that validates the clients and strengthens their relationships.

Conclusions

Knowing that clients may experience not only relationship growth and healing, but also enhanced psychological, social, spiritual, and even physical well-being, researchers and
clinicians have become increasingly interested in the topic of forgiveness. Professionals are clearly not in agreement as to the role that indignation can or should play in therapy. Corrective indignation, rather than retributive anger, can play a most helpful role in the clients’ forgiveness. Relatively little attention has been given to this bifurcated model of the emotional response to offense and its potential relation to forgiveness, either as a barrier or catalyst to forgiveness. Further, until now, none have surveyed whether therapists commonly comprehend emotional response to offense in this manner.

This study found that therapists’ beliefs regarding indignation as a component of the forgiveness process are not significantly related to their demographic characteristics, with the exception that greater professional involvement yields a more favorable view of the necessity of incorporating their clients’ indignation into the therapy sessions in order to facilitate complete and lasting forgiveness. As such it is likely that theories and models build upon the conceptualization of a continuum representing balanced views of self, others, and relationships, with a contrasting manifestation of destructive anger at either end, and corrective, protective indignation at the center would be acceptable to many relational therapists. The results of this study evidence strong agreement among relational therapists regarding their confidence that constructive indignation can play a facilitative role in the marital therapy as they seek to help their clients heal from the wounds of infidelity and establish their relationships anew on principles of trust, honesty, and unfailing commitment to one another and to complete fidelity.
References


Butler, M. H. (2005). *The Intrapsychic Experience and Interpersonal Expression of Anger*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.


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Appendix A: The Indignation and Forgiveness Scale

1 Strongly Disagree  2 Disagree  3 Somewhat Disagree  4 Undecided  5 Somewhat Agree  6 Agree  7 Strongly Agree

1. The non-offending spouse’s anger over infidelity is generally destructive to the marriage relationship.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. Forgiveness of an extramarital affair requires the non-offending spouse to immediately stop acting with or feeling anger toward the offending spouse.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Allowing the non-offending spouse to express anger over the offending spouse’s infidelity is important for relationship healing.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Allowing the non-offending spouse to express anger over the offending spouse’s infidelity is important for the non-offending spouse’s healing.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Complete marital healing and forgiving regarding infidelity can take place without disclosure of anger.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Complete marital healing and forgiving regarding infidelity can take place without experience of anger.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Constructive anger and its expression are generally helpful to relationship healing.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. In healing wounds of infidelity, some forms of anger are more effective and more important than others.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Allowing anger to “do its work” of feedback and correcting relationships is a necessary part of marital therapy for infidelity.

10. It is important to allow the non-offending spouse to reveal his/her anger regarding infidelity.

11. In healing wounds of infidelity, all forms of anger are damaging and destructive.

12. In my marital therapy practice, I help the non-offending spouse to work through and express anger felt over infidelities.

13. In my marital therapy practice, I encourage the non-offending spouse to let go of anger because it is unproductive and destructive to healing.

Additional Comments:

Thank you for sharing your professional voice on this issue. This information will be used in a future professional publication and/or presentation. Responses are confidential, and completion and submission of the form constitute consent to participate. If you do not wish to participate, please return the blank questionnaire for response rate calculation.
Appendix B: Demographic Form

1. Your gender: Male Female

2. Your age: ______________

3. Your race: ______________

4. Your degree: Area of degree: _____________________________
   Bachelor’s degree
   Master’s degree
   Doctoral degree

5. Years you have been practicing: ______________

6. Type of practice
   Private Church/pastoral counseling
   Community agency Other: _____________________________

7. Location of practice (city): _____________________________

8. In your practice, approximately what percentage of your clients present issues related to extramarital affairs or infidelity?
   0-10%  11-20%  21-30%  31-40%  41-50%
   51-60%  61-70%  71-80%  81-90%  91-100%

9. Approximately how many clients do you see per week? ____________

10. Someone personally close to me has experienced or been significantly affected by an extramarital affair or other infidelity.
    Yes No