

Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing  
Victim-to-Perpetrator Forgiveness

*by*

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## Abstract

Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing

Victim-to-Perpetrator Forgiveness

by Payton Katherine Reese McPhee

Although the concept of forgiveness has been well-researched across various disciplines, there remains a significant lack of research examining forgiveness within the criminal context. Experiencing a criminal offence is unique, in comparison to an everyday transgression, given the vast array of psychological and physical consequences that can arise following victimization. As a result, the present study aimed to explore the influencing factors of forgiveness between an individual who experienced violent victimization and the individual who committed the crime. An exploration of attitudes toward restorative justice was also conducted. Results indicated that strength of religious faith and cultural orientation may influence forgiveness toward an individual who caused harm, while cultural orientation and empathic concern were found to predict attitudes toward restorative justice. Results from this research have broad implications for theory (i.e., developing robust forgiveness models), policy (i.e., informing restorative justice and victim services), and practice (i.e., developing effective intervention strategies).

*Keywords:* forgiveness, restorative justice, victimization, violent crime, mental health

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## Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing Victim-to-Perpetrator Forgiveness

How can one forgive the unforgiveable? Many people likely cannot conceive forgiving an individual who has caused immense harm that arises from criminal victimization, and many individuals who are victimized often manifest similar beliefs. For example, Carol de Delley, the mother of Tim Maclean who was stabbed, beheaded, and cannibalized while traveling on a Greyhound bus in 2008, often speaks publicly about her anger, resentment, and disdain toward the man who murdered her son (Russel, 2017). However, not all victimized individuals address their hurt and harm through resentment. In 1991, 11-year-old Jaycee Dugard was kidnapped while walking to the bus stop, and was subsequently held captive for 18 years. Following her rescue in 2012, Jaycee discussed her forgiveness for her captor to a local news outlet. She described her forgiveness as being a result of her need to move on and focus on more important things in life (ABC News, 2012). Similarly, following the sentencing hearing for the man who murdered her 19-year old son in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2019, Dale Adams expressed forgiveness stating, *“if you don't forgive, you're full of rage, you're full of anger, you carry that around. It's like you have the act or that person on your back, so they're walking everywhere you go, and that exudes out of you. I don't want that...”* (Frisko, 2022). Similar stories of forgiveness can be heard across the continent. In discussing the Ulvade school shooting which took the life of his niece, Adrian Alonzo stated, *“I forgive him. As powerful as that, I forgive him... I am filled with anger, but I feel no hatred towards him”* (Bash & Sharpe, 2022).

Forgiveness is a research topic that has been widely explored across many disciplines, however one area of research yet to be fully explored involves an investigation of the role of forgiveness in the criminal context. Notably, forgiveness within the criminal context is quite

unique in comparison to forgiveness of a minor transgression. While minor transgressions, such as lying to one's parents, can be seen as breaking common codes of social conduct, criminally victimizing another individual involves an abolition of societal rules, moral codes, and legal boundaries (Eaton et al., 2022). In fact, researchers across disciplines have found that more severe transgressions are more difficult to forgive (Boon & Sulsky, 1997), which indicates that the process of forgiving an individual who has criminally offended can be much more challenging than forgiving a friend for betraying trust, for example. In addition, the consequences and aftermath of a criminal victimization are generally more severe, traumatic, and difficult to overcome (Fincham et al., 2005). Individuals who are victimized by a criminal offence can experience physical injury at the time of the offence, and often suffer from extensive and prolonged effects which can hinder their mental health (Boudreaux et al., 1998; Freeman & Smith, 2014; Kilpatrick & Acierno, 2003), wellbeing (Koss et al., 1991; Tan & Haining, 2016), and physical health (Britt, 2001; Koss et al., 1991) years after the offence has taken place. Lastly, individuals who are victimized by a criminal offence often suffer from feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame for the offence that took place. While self-hate and guilt can prevail as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (Symonds, 2010), women who have been victimized by domestic violence (Williams, 2021), individuals previously held as prisoners of war (Urlic & Simunkovic, 2009), and those who have experienced a sexual assault (Vidal & Petrak, 2007) can experience prolonged feelings of guilt and shame following their victimization which further exemplifies the psychological distress that can be suffered following victimization.

As a result of such lasting effects of victimization, there is a distinct need to provide victimized individuals with strategies and practices that can help promote recovery. This requires a deeper understanding of the processes involved in victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness. While this



area remains relatively under-researched, previous literature has supported the concept of forgiveness between victim and offender as one method for relieving the prolonged suffering felt following victimization (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Umbreit & Vos, 2000; Williamson & Gonzales, 2007). Despite these benefits, little is known about the pathways to forgiveness and how some victimized individuals may be capable of forgiveness while others may not. As a result, the present study aims to explore the nature of forgiveness within a criminal context in order to best understand the factors and mechanisms which influence victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness.

### **Defining Forgiveness**

To understand forgiveness in the context of victims and perpetrators, it is first necessary to understand what forgiveness is. Although a seemingly simple concept, the definition of forgiveness varies between and within disciplines. In psychology alone, there are dozens of definitions for this broad concept (e.g., see Wade & Worthington, 2005) although many involve the concept of overcoming and/or letting go of resentment toward a transgressor (i.e., Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hart & Shapiro, 2002) and releasing negative emotions, behaviors, and cognitions (i.e., Rye & Pargament, 2002). The complexity of forgiveness also stems from the misunderstanding of what this concept entails. Many researchers have begun to accept that forgiveness is not synonymous with pardoning, condoning, forgetting, excusing, denying, or reconciliation (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Freedman, 1998), however the general population often mistakes these concepts as being interchangeable with forgiveness.

In addition, rather than attempting to define forgiveness on its own, researchers have opted to explain forgiveness through the concept of unforgiveness (Worthington et al., 2007). Unforgiveness generally involves ruminating about a transgression in a bitter, resentful, angry,

and/or depressed manner, while achieving forgiveness is said to require a reduction in unforgiveness. Nevertheless, there are still acts which involve a reduction in unforgiveness and yet still do not produce an outcome of forgiveness, which further lends itself to the complexity of forgiving. Despite the fact that justifying a transgression, excusing an event, seeing justice be done, condoning an action, and reconciliation may result in a reduction of unforgiveness toward a transgressor, these actions generally do not involve true forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2001).

### **Theoretical Aspects of Forgiveness**

Although explaining forgiveness can be a challenging feat, previous researchers have proposed several models and theories to help shape our understanding of why and how forgiveness is granted to a transgressor. Many of the predominant proposed models and theories encompass a multifaceted view of forgiveness that aims to incorporate various aspects of the self.

#### ***Grudge Theory (Baumeister et al., 1998)***

Baumeister and colleagues (1998) postulated a theory which explains when and why forgiveness and/or holding a grudge is chosen by an individual who incurred a transgression. The researchers note that forgiveness can occur on two different dimensions: a) the inner, intrapsychic dimension involving the victim's emotional state, and b) the interpersonal dimension involving the behavioral expressions of forgiveness or unforgiveness. A combination of these two dimensions can be present together, individually, or neither may be present at all, thus creating a matrix of forgiveness possibilities including no forgiveness, silent forgiveness, hollow forgiveness, or full forgiveness (described below).

No forgiveness occurs when there is no intrapsychic or interpersonal forgiveness. As a result, the individual has not internally forgiven the transgressor and they do not behave as

though they have forgiven. In this scenario, both parties are aware that the individual has not forgiven. Silent forgiveness involves a positive intrapsychic state (i.e., forgiveness has been achieved internally) but no interpersonal act has occurred (i.e., the transgressor was not informed of the forgiveness). Silent forgiveness occurs when the individual feels forgiveness for the transgressor but does not behave in a manner that would suggest they have forgiven, which can allow for the victim to move past the transgression while the transgressor remains uninformed of the forgiveness. In direct contrast, hollow forgiveness occurs when there is an interpersonal act (i.e., behavioral suggestions that the individual has forgiven) but positive changes to the intrapsychic state are not present (i.e., the individual has not truly internally and emotionally forgiven the transgressor). In this case, since the individual expresses behavioral suggestions that they have forgiven the transgressor even though they have not truly forgiven, very few benefits are provided to the victim and this type of forgiveness is likely to occur when the social norms expect forgiveness. This forgiveness outcome often creates a harboring of emotions for the victim and can create an internal battle of trying to match forgiving behaviors with their internal state of unforgiveness. Finally, when the victim expresses forgiveness to the perpetrator and their inner feelings match this interpersonal act, full forgiveness is achieved. In short, forgiveness can present itself across four distinct domains involving a combination of the presence of internal forgiveness, as well as the presence of behavioral expressions of forgiveness (Baumeister et al., 1998).

Each combination creates different advantages and disadvantages in terms of both forgiving and deciding to hold a grudge (Baumeister et al., 1998). In turn, grudge theory postulates that there are costs and benefits to both forgiving and holding a grudge and deciding which route to take depends on whether the benefits outweigh the costs. For example, choosing

to hold a grudge can have many benefits. If a victim seeks material rewards from the perpetrator, aims to prevent the transgression from reoccurring in the future, wants to maintain their pride, or is seeking revenge, then it may be more beneficial to hold a grudge than to forgive (Baumeister et al., 1998). As well, if a transgression occurred recently, and the victim continues to harbor resentment and anger, it may be of benefit to not forgive the transgressor. In contrast, holding a grudge may also contain costs, such as the negative affect that may come along with being unforgiving, damaging of relationships, and diminished opportunities for happiness. (Baumeister et al., 1998).

Overall, the costs of holding a grudge are mainly intrapsychic, whereas the benefits of holding a grudge are interpersonal (Baumeister et al., 1998). Because of this, the authors suggest that when full forgiveness cannot be achieved, it is best to strive for intrapsychic forgiveness, rather than interpersonal forgiveness, in order to ease the internal hurt, anger, and resentment that often follow a transgression. However, the transgressor's attitudes can alter these costs and benefits and further sway a decision of forgiveness or grudge-holding. For example, if the perpetrator is unwilling to acknowledge their actions, refuses to apologize, and/or will not offer to rectify any damages, then the victim may benefit from holding a grudge more than they would forgiving the transgressor. In contrast, if the transgressor makes amends, apologizes, and strives to mend the relationship, then the victim may see the costs of holding a grudge outweigh the benefits.

In short, Baumeister et al. (1998) suggest that the nature of forgiving or holding a grudge is a complex makeup of intrapsychic and interpersonal forgiveness, the costs and benefits of holding a grudge, as well as the perpetrator's attitudes and actions. The authors suggest that a

comprehensive review of these factors is what allows individuals to decide whether they will forgive their transgressor.

***Stress and Coping Model of Forgiveness (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Strelan & Covic 2006)***

Despite the use of the above-mentioned theory, researchers have struggled to connect it to coherent theoretical grounding and noted that many theories within forgiveness research lack empirical validation (Strelan & Covic, 2006). Furthermore, given that forgiveness is a multifaceted concept, and given that forgiveness lacks an agreed upon definition and goal, difficulties for postulating robust theories remain. Nevertheless, researchers have suggested that the stress and coping model from Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides a strong theoretical perspective of forgiveness that can unify existing research and fill the gaps of previous theories (Strelan & Covic, 2006).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as the thoughts and behaviors that are utilized to identify and manage internal and external stressors. The extent to which an individual views an event or situation as stressful is determined by two interrelated, but separate appraisals. In the primary appraisal, individuals assess a situation and initially determine it to be, a) irrelevant (i.e., irrelevant to their wellbeing, the individual does not have stake in outcome, etc.); b) benign-positive (i.e., only a good outcome can occur from the situation); c) stressful. Situations that are initially appraised as being stressful can then be further categorized into, a) threat (i.e., potential for harm or loss); b) challenged (i.e., potential for growth or gain); c) harm-loss (i.e., an injury has already occurred).

Next, individuals engage in a secondary appraisal of the situation which involves an appraisal of their own psychological, physical, social, and material resources available to deal with the stressful situation, which initiates the coping process. The coping process can involve a

combination or single use of problem-focused coping (i.e., planning, taking action, etc.) and emotion-focused coping (i.e., ruminating, reintegration, venting emotions, etc.). Problem-focused coping tends to be used in situations perceived as changeable, and can help to reduce the prominence of the threat, whereas emotion-focused coping is often used when situations are perceived as not amenable to change and can reduce emotional stress responses and distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Building upon the stress and coping theory, Strelan and Covic (2006) postulated that forgiveness is analogous to coping and there is a distinct relationship between the forgiveness process and the coping process, thus allowing forgiveness to mesh into the stress and coping theory put forth by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The researchers believe that forgiveness can follow the stress and coping model as a result of the following analogies: a) the forgiveness process is also a reaction to a stressor; b) the forgiveness process also involves primary and secondary appraisals; c) coping strategies inherently describe how people forgive; d) forgiveness and coping can be future-oriented; e) forgiveness is also an intrapersonal and interpersonal process; and f) forgiveness is also a dynamic, everchanging process.

Summing, Strelan and Covic (2006) extended the stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to integrate forgiveness as a method to illustrate how forgiveness can follow a similar pathway of coping. The researchers describe coping and forgiveness as being analogous which allows the forgiveness process to mirror that of the coping process. Currently, researchers have generally begun to adopt the stress and coping model of forgiveness to theorize the pathway of forgiveness.

## **Benefits of Forgiveness**

Prior to 1980, very little research was conducted to explore forgiveness in any capacity (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Although Emerson (1964) claimed to find a link between emotional adjustment and forgiveness, scientifically sound research on the benefits to forgiveness did not reemerge until the 1990s (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). At this time, the research on forgiveness climaxed and introduced intriguing findings regarding the benefits that forgiveness can offer individuals.

Previous research regarding mental health and forgiveness indicate that forgiving is linked to greater global mental health (Berry & Worthington, 2001), increased hope (Rye et al., 2000), elevated self-esteem, decreased anxiety and depression (Hebl & Enright, 1993), decreased feelings of grief (Coyle & Enright, 1997), and heightened life satisfaction (Toussaint et al., 2001). More recent research also suggests that forgiving is linked to elevated levels of self-acceptance and perceptions of increased competency to deal with challenges (Raj et al., 2016).

In a survey of American adults over the age of 65, those who expressed having previously forgiven someone who has harmed them reported less depressed affect, lower levels of death anxiety, and decreased somatic symptoms (Krause & Ellison, 2003). Similarly, forgiveness has been linked to vitality (Green et al., 2012) and lower levels of suicidal behavior (Hirsch et al., 2011) among undergraduate students. Children as young as six years old have also exhibited benefits to their mental health as a result of forgiveness. After conducting forgiveness intervention workshops with first and third grade children in the United States and Northern Ireland, researchers found that the children's anger and psychological depressive symptoms decreased significantly more than students in a control group who did not participate in a forgiveness intervention workshop (Enright et al., 2007).

Similar to mental health, harboring unforgiveness or granting forgiveness to individuals who have wronged us has acute, and lasting, effects on our wellbeing (Akhtar et al., 2017; Gull & Rana, 2013; Wulandari & Megawati, 2020). When exploring the perceived effects of forgiveness for real life transgressions on mental wellbeing, Akhtar et al. (2017) found that harboring unforgiveness creates barriers to psychological and social growth. Their findings noted that forgiveness was shown to have a strong relationship with the perceived mental wellbeing of participants, positive relations with others, spiritual growth, a sense of empowerment, as well as a sense of meaning and purpose within their lives (Akhtar et al., 2017). Correlations have also been found between forgiveness and social support network size, satisfaction with support network (Green et al., 2012), self-rated health, life satisfaction (Webb et al., 2010), subjective wellbeing, and spiritual wellbeing (Wulandari & Megawati, 2020).

Moreover, benefits of forgiveness have also begun to be explored in relation to physical health. Overall, unforgiveness has consistently been deemed as “health-eroding”, whereas forgiveness is characterized as “health-enhancing” (Thoresen et al., 1999; Williams & Williams, 1993), which helps to illustrate the physical health effects of these processes. The health-eroding aspects of unforgiveness come from the responses and emotions that underlie this process (i.e., anger, disgust, resentment, hostility, etc.) which have been continuously linked to negative physical health outcomes, such as premature death, cardiovascular issues, and increased allostatic load (i.e., the cumulative effects of chronic stress on mental and physical health, “general wear and tear” of the body) (Witvliet et al., 2001). Similarly, the hormonal patterns that are seen during unforgiveness are consistent, and indistinguishable, from the hormonal patterns of stress-related negative emotions, and those who do not forgive often display higher blood



pressure, heightened levels of muscle tension, and higher mean arterial pressure (Worthington et al., 2005).

To illustrate these physiological effects of forgiveness, Witvliet and colleagues (2001) arranged for participants to imagine a real-life offender and were instructed to respond to this individual in a variety of forgiving and/or unforgiving ways while the researchers examined their emotional and physiological responses. During the unforgiving imagery trials, participants displayed higher blood pressure, heart rate, skin conductance, more negative emotions, and less perceived control over the situation (Witvliet et al., 2001). Interestingly, the researchers also found that when no imagery was shown following the unforgiving imagery trials, the negative responses were sustained, suggesting that the effects of unforgiveness are continuous and do not dissipate quickly. In contrast, during the forgiving imagery trials, participants indicated less physiological stress, higher levels of positive emotions, and a greater feeling of having control over the situation.

Finally, the benefits which can be obtained through forgiveness can be dependent on the motivation behind choosing to forgive. While surveying co-workers within a workplace, Cox et al. (2012) found that when participants forgave another individual due to the lack of an alternative solution, or because of a requirement from a higher power, they were more likely to report high levels of stress. In contrast, those who forgave a transgressor out of a moral motivation were likely to report the lowest stress levels of the sample. Similarly, researchers have found that those who forgave due to obligation displayed more anger-related emotions and greater blood pressure increases than those who forgave for honest motivations (Huang & Enright, 2000). These findings suggest that, although granting forgiveness does offer benefits to physical health, the motivations behind forgiveness are also a crucial component.

## **Correlates of Forgiveness**

Throughout the decades of research within this field, intriguing findings have emerged which have postulated the benefits of forgiveness. However, further research has expanded beyond the benefits of forgiveness to gain a more holistic view of what factors influence forgiveness. Of the research that exists, the most common factors that have been linked to being involved with granting forgiveness include demographic characteristics and personality (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1996; McCullough et al., 2001; Shepherd & Belicki, 2008), religiosity/spirituality (Davis & Smith, 1999; Rokeach, 1973), and culture (Hook, 2007; Hook et al., 2009).

### ***Demographic Characteristics and Personality***

Demographic variables such as age (Cheng & Yim, 2008; Ghaemmaghami et al., 2011; Toussaint et al., 2001) and gender (Ghaemmaghami et al., 2011; Finkel et al., 2002) have been explored in relation to forgiveness, although the strength and validity of these influences tends to remain unclear. For example, while several researchers have found that women tend to be more forgiving than men (i.e., Finkel et al., 2002; Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2008), others have found the opposite (Hanson, 1996) or no statistically significant difference (Enright & Zell, 1989). However, a more recent meta-analysis has found that, on average, women tend to be more forgiving than men (Miller et al., 2008). In addition, it is generally agreed that the ability and willingness to forgive increases with age (Allemand, 2008; Mullet & Girard, 2000), which can be further understood by the socioemotional development across the lifespan (Birditt et al., 2005). For example, outward expression of anger, thoughts of revenge, and harboring angry emotions tends to decrease with age (Phillips et al., 2006). However, although the findings for demographic characteristics are mixed regarding their influence on forgiveness, the prominent

focus of the correlates of forgiveness have shifted toward exploring personality and personality traits.

When examining what constitutes a forgiving personality, agreeableness is often cited (McCullough et al., 2001). Agreeableness is characterized by empathy, care, and compassion, and those who score high in agreeableness have been shown to also score high in forgiveness, and low on vengefulness. Additionally, many of the lower order factor variables of agreeableness are reflective of factors which promote forgiveness, such as being less exploitative, more empathetic, having higher levels of moral responsibility, and having a greater tendency to aid those who have wronged them (Ashton et al., 1998). In contrast, low agreeableness has been related to harboring revenge intentions and “getting even” following the onset of a transgression (Lee & Ashton, 2012). Of all personality correlates that have been linked to forgiveness, agreeableness has been most recognized (i.e., McCullough et al., 2001; Neto, 2007; Shepherd & Belicki, 2008).

Additionally, several other personality traits have emerged within the literature as being correlated with forgiving tendencies. For instance, emotionality, a trait which is characterized by emotional attachment to others, empathy, and anxiety (Lee & Ashton, 2009) has been shown to be linked with a propensity to forgive, where those who are high in emotionality are more likely to forgive following a transgression. Similarly, honesty-humility, a facet of the HEXACO Model of Personality, which is characterized by sincerity and fairness, has been found to be highly related to forgiveness (Perugini, 2003; Shepherd & Belicki, 2008). Given that honesty-humility is conceptualized as a trait that assumes self-governance over the exploitation of others, the extreme negative pole of the honesty-humility can be illustrated by deceitfulness and entitlement (Lee & Ashton, 2016). In fact, when exploring the HEXACO domains and their predictivity of

how one would respond to a hypothetical transgression, Lee and Ashton (2016) found that low honesty-humility was shown to correlate with an intention to premeditate and commit vengeful acts in retaliation against a transgression.

Empathy has also been found to be a forgiveness-prone trait (Cunningham, 1985; Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1996; McCullough et al., 1997). It has been suggested that empathy mediates the relationship between apology and forgiveness whereby empathy is altered through an apology which further influences the effect of forgiveness (McCullough, 1997). In fact, researchers developed a pyramid of forgiveness which denotes the necessary steps in order to achieve and maintain forgiveness (Worthington, 1998). According to this pyramid, the second step in achieving forgiveness is empathy, thus suggesting the important role that this trait has in the forgiveness process.

Further, specific cognitive, emotional, and psychological processes may also play a role in granting forgiveness following a transgression. For example, high levels of self-esteem, (Tangney et al., 1999), less ruminative behaviors (Metts & Cupach, 1998), and a strong ability to understand the perspectives of others (Rizkalla et al., 2008) have also been shown to be connected to being able to forgive.

### ***Religiosity/Spirituality***

In many ways, forgiveness is deeply rooted in religious concepts and beliefs, which creates a strong connection between religiosity and forgiveness. This connection can be explained in various ways; however, the main reason is that almost all religions involve the teachings and practices of forgiveness.

Several surveys from the early days of forgiveness research help to illustrate the effect that religion has on forgiveness. Davis and Smith (1999) found that, 80% of polled Americans

noted that their religious beliefs “often”, “almost always”, or “always” helped them to forgive others and themselves. Similarly, when studying American adults who take part in religiously oriented groups, Wuthnow (2000) found that 61% reported that being a member of the group was what allowed them to forgive a transgressor, and 71% indicated that participation in such group allowed for self-healing following a transgression. Moreover, while exploring several interconnected hypotheses, Krause (2018) found that individuals who have more spiritual support are humbler, and those who are more humble tend to be more forgiving.

Further, as one of the first studies to examine forgiveness and religion, Rokeach (1973) asked participants to complete religious and forgiveness measures, and they were also given a set of personal values, which participants were asked to rank in terms of each value’s level of priority within their lives. The results show that those who self-reported greater frequencies of church attendance, higher levels of religiousness, and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for religious involvement placed “forgivingness” as a higher priority among their values compared to those with lower scores on religious measures. As well, Shoemaker and Bolt (1977), while conducting a similar study among Christians, found that “forgivingness” was aggregately ranked second out of eighteen values, when participants were asked to rank the values based on which are most ideal for Christians to have (“loving” was the only value aggregately rated higher). The results from both studies indicate that while religious individuals tend to be more forgiving than non-religious individuals, they also place a high value on forgiveness.

Lastly, Escher (2013) proposed that, “a person who has internalized a belief system in which forgiveness is of moral necessity, is further socialized into practices that promote forgiving, and has internalized other beliefs and practices that facilitate forgiveness will likely have a propensity to forgive, provided that other entities with causal powers do not interfere” (p.

103). This suggests that although religion influences one's forgiveness, the process of continuing practices of forgiveness and taking part in such processes is also an important determinant.

Overall, individuals who are religious tend to place a higher value on forgiveness and tend to forgive more often than nonreligious individuals (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). These populations of religious individuals also report having higher motivation to forgive, working harder to forgive, and having fewer reasons to be resentful or to seek revenge (Gorsuch and Hao, 1993), suggesting the strongly connected relationship between these two concepts.

### ***Culture***

Our culture, and the beliefs and motivations of such, shape who we are and how we react to various aspects of our everyday lives. Culture influences how we perceive and interpret certain experiences, and the same holds true for how different cultures understand forgiveness.

Broadly, identifying with an individualistic versus collectivistic culture can affect one's forgiveness pathway. Individualistic cultures are characterized by individualism, which involves prioritizing the self over a societal group (Kagitcibasi, 1997). In contrast, collectivism places high value on the needs of a collective group rather than the individual. For example, in individualistic cultures, forgiveness is often motivated by a pursuit and a desire for personal peace, whereas individuals from collectivistic societies are often motivated to forgive to promote and maintain group harmony (Hook et al., 2007). In individualistic cultures, people tend to seek justice following a transgression, which leads to a forgiveness motivation of restoring justice or healing internally, whereas in collectivistic cultures, there is an emphasis of positive interpersonal relations. Individuals from collectivistic cultures are more likely to avoid conflict and minimize any outward expression of unforgiveness and will likely choose forgiveness to reestablish social harmony (Hook et al., 2009).

In a similar vein, it has been suggested that the influence of culture has a bidirectional relationship with religion, where a country's history of religion often shapes their cultural narratives, and vice versa (Cohen et al., 2016). As a result, this bidirectional influence may further solidify beliefs regarding forgiveness given that their culture and religion can often promote similar goals. As an example, Japanese individuals (representing a collectivistic society) may generally forgive as means of maintaining social harmony because of their cultural expectations, however this also may be pushed by their prominent religions of Buddhism and Shintoism.

To explore the differences in the conceptualization of forgiveness between American and Japanese individuals, Joo et al. (2019) found distinct differences. Participants from Japan, which is commonly viewed as a collectivistic culture, described forgiveness as a means for harmony and described a more decisional form of forgiveness, whereas Americans, who generally follow an individualistic cultural orientation, described a more emotional form of forgiveness that emphasized the feelings of themselves rather than a harmonious social structure. These results illustrate the complexities of forgiveness across cultures and the importance of understanding that each culture perceives this concept differently.

Further, an individual's culture can influence their approach versus avoidant motivations and affect the way they decide to resolve conflict (Ho & Fung, 2011). For example, Elliot et al. (2012) found that individuals from collectivistic cultures adopted more avoidant motivations than those from individualistic cultures, which may create barriers for such populations to grant forgiveness effectively. In addition, one's culture can affect causal attributions that are made following a transgression (Fincham, 2000), and their emotional regulation abilities (Butler et al., 2007), which can all affect the forgivingness.

## **Victim-to-Perpetrator Forgiveness**

Despite the plethora of extant forgiveness research, one area of forgiveness that remains relatively under-researched is forgiveness that is granted from an individual who has experienced victimization toward the individual who has committed the criminal act. Although seemingly similar, violently victimized individuals are tasked with navigating a pathway that is far different from that of someone granting forgiveness for a general transgression.

To illustrate the vast topic of victim to perpetrator forgiveness, in 2019, there were approximately 2.6 million incidents of self-reported violent victimization in Canada with youth, women, sexual minorities, and Indigenous individuals having the highest risk for victimization (Statistics Canada, 2021). Of the 2.6 million incidents of self-reported violent victimization in Canada in 2019, 16% noted they were experiencing three or more long-term psychological consequences that were indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Moreover, many individuals who experience victimization are shown to have significantly higher outpatient and physician visits (Koss et al., 1991; Tan & Haining, 2016), increased chance of receiving mental health diagnoses (Tan & Haining, 2016), heightened risk of substance and alcohol abuse (Kilpatrick & Acierno, 2003), increased rates of acute and lifetime post-traumatic stress disorder (Boudreaux et al., 1998; Kilpatrick & Acierno, 2003), greater levels of social isolation (Boudreaux et al., 1998), heightened risk of revictimization, and greater risk of criminal offending (Falshaw et al., 1996; Plummer & Cossins, 2018; Zimmerman et al., 2017). Violent victimization has also been shown to be correlated with an increase in rates of suicide ideation and attempts. Although dated, Kilpatrick et al. (1985) found that while 19.2% of sexual assault victims had attempted suicide, the prevalence within the non-victimized sample was 2.2%. Finally, while exploring psychological distress following criminal victimization,



Norris and Kaniasty (1994) found that, although symptoms were shown to improve between three and nine months following a criminal offence, no improvement was observed past the nine-month mark, thus showcasing the vast duration in which psychological distress may occur.

***Intrapersonal Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Violent Crime (Field et al., 2013)***

As a result of the contextual and consequential differences between being betrayed by a known individual and being violently victimized, researchers have postulated that forgiveness that is granted from a victimized individual to a perpetrator follows a unique pathway that cannot be modeled or explained by previous theories of forgiveness (Field et al., 2013). Through a series of semi-structured interviews with victims of serious violent offences, Field et al. (2013) used a grounded theory approach to develop a model of forgiveness that reflects the forgiveness process for victims of violent crime. The researchers suggest that the forgiveness model for victims follows four steps: a) developing self-awareness, b) letting go of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, c) perspective-taking of the offender, and d) moving on from the offence.

The forgiveness process begins with developing self-awareness (Field et al., 2013). This phase involves a realization of the profound impact the offence has caused, and continues to cause, on an individual's life, wellbeing, and health. The researchers describe this phase as being “spontaneous”, suggesting that this awareness is achieved over time without the need for direct intervention. Next, the forgiveness process requires a release of negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In this phase, individuals are required to let go of negative cognitions and behaviors they hold regarding the offence that victimized them. Two participants within the study described this phase as “*being able to lay aside your own hurt...decision to not be a victim anymore*” and “*undoing those shackles of fear*” (p. 241). Third, following an increase in self-awareness and a reduction in negative cognitions, individuals must then engage in perspective-

taking of the perpetrator. This often allows individuals to view the offence through a wider lens and participants often showed greater consideration of the offender's life history in influencing his criminal trajectory. In short, this stage often leads to an understanding of the offender as a human being, rather than a predator, and viewing the offender as a victim of circumstance, as well. Lastly, the individual can then navigate moving on from the offence while recognizing and accepting what occurred.

Overall, the Intrapersonal Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Violent Crime, as proposed by Field et al. (2013), differs from that of previous models of forgiveness in several ways. Mainly, while the majority of other notable models of forgiveness emphasize the interpersonal aspect of forgiving, and developing positive regard for a transgressor, the Intrapersonal Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Violent Crime relies on a more intrapersonal approach. Rather than developing positive regard for an individual who has caused harm, the Intrapersonal Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Violent Crime suggests that forgiveness is, instead, a response to the negative psychological effects of the victimization as a method to enhance wellbeing and quality of life. In short, forgiveness toward a perpetrator is rooted in self-forgiveness and acceptance.

### ***Restorative Justice and Victim to Perpetrator Forgiveness***

Although the extant literature on victim to perpetrator forgiveness is relatively small, one of the greatest contributions to this program of research involves restorative justice. Similar to the above-mentioned theory, restorative justice is a practice which helps provide the necessary resources and environment for victims to appropriately address a criminal offence that targeted them, and often for those who have offended to take accountability and engage in reparation (Federal Provincial Territorial Ministers of Justice and Public Safety, 2018). Importantly,

restorative justice acts as an umbrella term to describe practices that differ from that of mainstream punitive administrations of justice which aim to reestablish equality within society (Llewellyn & Howse, 1999). In essence, restorative justice values the importance of responding to the harms and effects of wrongdoings on relationships at all levels (i.e., individual, community, national, etc.), rather than maintaining a sole focus of punishment for wrongdoing (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014). These practices can prevail in various formats, with some examples being community conferencing, community justice forums, healing lodges, peacemaking circles, and accountability programs (Canadian Resource Center for Victims of Violent Crime, 2022).

Although restorative justice acts as an umbrella term for various practices that promote accountability and reparation, the simple mediation/mediated dialogue format of restorative justice is one that is often explored in regard to forgiveness. Simple mediation, or mediated dialogue, generally involves the facilitation of reconciliation, remediation, and understanding between victim and perpetrator (Daly, 2016; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2013; Menkel-Meadow, 2007; Zehr & Mika, 2017). These practices act as a method for victims to face a perpetrator and address many of the unresolved negative emotions, cognitions, and beliefs which they have held since the offence as a means of moving on and reconciling with their past (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Simple mediation provides the opportunity for forgiveness, although this is not a required pathway, nor is forgiveness required to engage in these restorative practices (Armour & Umbreit, 2007). However, researchers have found that forgiveness discussions are involved in a large portion of accounts of victim-offender mediation (Armour & Umbreit, 2007), thus suggesting the strong connection between these practices and forgiveness. It has been shown that, although not required, forgiveness within mediation-based restorative justice practices can help release the

victimized individual from the negative power of the crime (Zehr, 1990), restore peace of mind (Van Strokkom, 2002), and positively contribute to mental and physical health (Coyle & Enright, 1997).

Furthermore, restorative justice research involving real-life interactions between victim and perpetrator through mediated dialogue have noted intriguing results (i.e., Flaten, 1996; Umbreit, 1989; Umbreit, 1998). Research has found that both parties involved in mediated dialogue often benefit from the process, specifically through speaking about the offense, impact of the crime, and developing a plan for restoring losses and mitigating harm (Roberts, 1995). In one study, participants noted that their involvement in restorative justice programming allowed their voice to finally be heard, allowed them to see the perpetrator as a person rather than a monster, they no longer felt powerless, and felt more at peace, less suicidal, and less angry (Roberts, 1995). Expanding upon these results, Umbreit and Vos (2000) conducted mediated dialogue sessions between the surviving family members of a victim of a homicide offence and the perpetrator who resided on Death Row in the United States. Overall, the main themes of the study indicate that the family members felt cleansed of the offence, at peace, ready to move on with their lives, as well as an increased levels of empathy and feelings of grief for the perpetrator. Notably, each family member within the study indicated that the dialogue helped them reach a state of forgiveness or brought them closer to being able to forgive (Umbreit & Vos, 2000).

Additional research has found that those who have criminally offended were 6.9 times more likely to apologize to the victimized individual in restorative justice interactions than in court, and victimized individuals 2.6 times more likely to forgive the offender in these scenarios (Poulson, 2000). Notably, Umbreit and Coates (1992) found that 9 out of 10 violent offenders

within their study listed apologizing as one of the four most important steps when involved in mediational restorative justice practices.

Lastly, victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness, as well as restorative justice efforts, have been shown to benefit the offender and the public, mainly through self-forgiveness processes and desistance (Suzuki & Jenkins, 2022). Studies from the United Kingdom and Belgium have found that within a sample of individuals who had offended, both adults and youth, those who engaged in restorative justice noted that the process allowed for a conscious understanding of their wrongdoing (Lauwaert & Aertsen, 2016), as well as fostering agency, altering negative mindsets, and shifting their self-identity away from crime (Claes & Shapland, 2016). Of course, a conversation does not change other aspects of an individual's life which may have influenced their involvement in the criminal justice system (e.g., financial problems, poor social support, trauma), however these findings remain substantial. Nevertheless, it has been noted that restorative justice and victim to perpetrator forgiveness should have a primary purpose to the victimized person and their wellbeing, with a secondary benefit involving desistance (Robinson & Shapland, 2008).

### **Correlates/Barriers of Victim to Perpetrator Forgiveness**

In many ways, forgiveness toward an individual who has criminally offended is not easy, and many barriers remain in place. For example, research has shown that evidence of reparative efforts (Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Koutsos et al., 2008), seeing justice be served (Tripp et al., 2007), and time (McCullough et al., 2003) are correlates of forgiveness in these scenarios, and lack of such factors can present as barriers to forgiveness.

One of the most relevant correlates/barriers of forgiveness within the criminal context is the presence of an apology and/or reparative efforts (i.e., Koutsos et al., 2008). Forgiveness

toward a perpetrator can allow for fewer negative emotions, less judgement, and more favorable impressions toward the individual who caused harm (Ohbuchi et al., 1989). Similarly, experiencing reparative efforts has been shown to increase forgiveness and reduce unforgiveness (i.e., Witvliet et al., 2008; David & Choi, 2009; Strelan et al., 2016).

Witvliet et al. (2020) found that when a perpetrator, within an experimental study, provided a thorough apology and showcased restitutorial efforts, the victimized individuals experienced a decrease in unforgiving emotions, increased levels of empathy toward the other party, and increased levels of forgiveness. Similarly, it was found that the individuals who experienced victimization elicited more empathy and forgiveness, when the perpetrator was willingly held accountable for their actions compared to if they were involuntarily apprehended (Witvliet et al., 2020).

Other similar research has shown that when forgiveness is granted to a perpetrator when forgiveness is not deserved (i.e., the perpetrator did not try to make amends or apologize), the wellbeing of the individual who was victimized is equivalent to if they did not forgive at all, suggesting that forgiveness benefits wellbeing only when it is deserved (Strelan et al., 2016). Researchers have found that if an apology is low in responsibility-taking (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003) or is insensitive to the needs of the victimized individual (Lazare, 2004), then forgiveness is unlikely to be achieved.

Futhermore, justice may also act as a correlate of forgiveness, however the conceptualization of justice is often unique to each person. For instance, justice for one person may involve criminal apprehension, but it can also be a personal feeling of justice that does not include the legal system (Worthington, 2003). Nevertheless, the gap between the outcomes desired by the victim after an offence versus the outcomes that are perceived to be reality is

termed the *injustice gap*. If there is a large injustice gap (i.e., a severe transgression occurred and no justice was taken), then forgiving will be more challenging or less appealing.

It is proposed that justice must happen first for forgiveness and reconciliation to be achieved (Tripp et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that those who experience victimization can feel secure in justice being done when one of the following occurs: a) the victim takes revenge, b) the perpetrator is punished, or c) the perpetrator repents for their actions. When one of these justice outcomes occurs, prior to forgiveness being granted, the likelihood of forgiveness increases and the likelihood of revenge and hostility decreases (Tripp et al., 2007). Further, various other studies have supported the idea of justice promoting, rather than obstructing, the path to forgiveness (i.e., Karremans & Van Lange, 2005; Strelan et al., 2011).

Finally, famous idioms such as, “time heals all wounds” and “forgiveness takes time” are directly indicative of the lengthy process involved in healing, recovering and offering forgiveness. In knowing this, forgiveness has been shown to be directly related to the amount of time that has passed since the offence has occurred, which allows for time to be a correlate of achieving forgiveness. Researchers have postulated that forgiveness follows a logarithmic model (McCullough et al., 2010) where forgiveness increases overtime, and then tapers off to a steady level. In short, over time the offence will likely become less prominent in the lives of those who experienced victimization and their willingness to ruminate on the event often becomes less prevalent.

To summarize, forgiving an individual who has criminally offended is a complex and challenging feat that involves several factors and variables. In their study on forgiveness of those who have experienced sexual assault, Cooney et al. (2011) identified five main themes for why primary victims of sexual offences forgive: i) the benefits of forgiveness, ii) self-forgiveness, iii)

perspective taking, iv) offender behavior, and v) passage of time. As well, Jenkins (2009) postulated that the mediating factors of a) strength of relationship with the offender; b) religious or spiritual worldview; c) apology; d) offender accountability; and e) face-to-face meeting with the offender create conditions favorable for the emergence of forgiveness.

### **The Present Study**

Although decades of research have explored the concept of forgiveness in relation to its benefits and antecedents, little research has explored forgiveness through the lens of the criminal justice system, and therefore, forgiveness within these contexts is less understood. As a result, using an online mixed methods survey, the present study aimed to determine which factors influence victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness in the hopes of creating a greater understanding of forgiveness within the criminal context.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The present study aimed to explore the following: What factors among individuals who have been violent victimized influence the ability to forgive a perpetrator? Based on a comprehensive literature review, the following hypotheses were formed:

H1: Forgiveness will be highly related to attitudes toward restorative justice, where those who score high in forgiveness will be more likely to have more positive attitudes toward restorative justice.

H2: Certain personality traits, such as honesty-humility, agreeableness, and emotionality, will positively influence forgiveness of a perpetrator, whereby those who score higher in these traits will be more likely to forgive their perpetrator and hold more positive attitudes toward restorative justice approaches.



H3: Exhibiting a high degree of religious faith will positively influence forgiveness of a perpetrator and attitudes toward restorative justice.

H4: Being connected with a collectivistic cultural orientation will positively influence forgiveness of a perpetrator, whereby these individuals will be more likely to forgive and have more positive attitudes toward restorative justice techniques.

H5: Exhibiting high levels of empathy and perspective-taking will positively impact the likelihood of exhibiting forgiveness toward a perpetrator, whereby these individuals will be more likely to forgive and will have more positive attitudes toward restorative justice.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

To be eligible for participation, individuals were required to be over 18 years of age, be a Canadian citizen or Permanent Resident, and self-identify as a victim of a violent crime. For this study, violent crime was operationally defined as any crime which involves use, or threat of use, of force against a person or property, which includes, but is not limited to, assault, robbery, attempted murder, kidnapping, sexual assault, as described in the Criminal Code (1985).

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, Saint Mary's University's research participant pool, and through community assistance programs that tailor to individuals who have been criminally victimized and/or places where victim services are provided (i.e., Victim Services, shelters, crisis centers, etc.). Participants who were recruited through the Saint Mary's University research participant pool were compensated with 0.50 bonus points towards an eligible psychology class, while those who participated through Amazon's Mechanical Turk were compensated with \$3.50 USD (plus an additional \$0.50 for correctly answering the attention check). Finally, participants recruited through relevant support

organizations and social media were entered into a draw to win one of two \$25 Amazon gift cards.

An a priori power analysis was conducted to determine the required sample size for the present study. Using GPower, it was indicated that a sample size of 103 would be required to find a medium strength effect with the value of power being .80. A total of 130 participants were recruited for the present study, with most participating through Saint Mary's University's research pool ( $n = 55$ ) and Amazon's Mechanical Turk ( $n = 44$ ). The remaining participants were recruited through community assistance programs ( $n = 31$ ). After reviewing the data, one response was discarded from the final data set for selecting "I do not consent" after viewing the informed consent form, and nine responses were removed for failing to meet the eligibility criteria for participation. An additional 12 responses were omitted from the dataset for responding to less than 15% of the survey (i.e., failing to progress past the demographic questions). After removing these responses, the final data set contained 108 participants.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 66 with a mean age of 30.62 ( $SD = 12.06$ ). The majority of the sample reported their gender as female (75%  $n = 81$ ), with the remainder identifying as male (21.3%,  $n = 23$ ), nonbinary (2.8%,  $n = 3$ ), or gender fluid (0.9%,  $n = 1$ ). Thirty-one participants (28.7%) identified as being a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Using a select all question, participants most commonly identified as White (80.6%,  $n = 87$ ) with participants of Indigenous/Aboriginal heritage (10.2%,  $n = 11$ ) being the second-most identified with group. Smaller portions of the sample identified as being African Canadian (5.6%,  $n = 6$ ), South Asian (3.7%,  $n = 4$ ), and Middle Eastern (3.7%,  $n = 4$ ). The largest group of participants noted that they had some post-secondary education (42.6%,  $n = 46$ ), while 25% ( $n = 27$ ) of participants indicated they had a bachelor's degree. Smaller groups were found to have

completed a college degree or specialized training (16.7%,  $n = 18$ ), had a high school diploma (7.4%,  $n = 8$ ), or held a graduate-level degree (6.5%,  $n = 7$ ). A near majority of the sample was employed full-time (44.4%,  $n = 48$ ), with others having a part-time source of employment (28.7%,  $n = 31$ ) or no employment source (26.9%,  $n = 29$ ).

## **Measures**

### ***Demographic and Victimization Contextual Information Questionnaire***

A demographic questionnaire was included in the survey to address demographic characteristics of the participants such as their age, gender/sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity/race, education, and employment level (Appendix C). The demographic questionnaire also included several brief short-answer, open-ended questions which addressed situational and contextual information regarding the crime that was committed against the participant and their forgiveness levels. As an example, this questionnaire included questions regarding the type of crime committed against the participant, how long ago the crime took place, their relationship to the perpetrator, whether an apology/compensation was granted to them, and whether they feel they have forgiven the individual.

### ***The HEXACO Model of Personality (Lee & Ashton, 2018)***

The 100-item HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised (HEXACO-PI-R; Lee & Ashton, 2018; Appendix D) assesses six domains of personality: Honesty–humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. For the present study, only honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness were used. Each item is measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The HEXACO-PI-R has previously demonstrated strong internal reliability with factor-level reliability being within the .80s (Lee & Ashton, 2018). Example statement items included in the

HEXACO-PI-R are: “*I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large*” (to assess honesty-humility), “*I sometimes can't help worrying about little things*” (to assess emotionality), and, “*I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me*” (to assess agreeableness). Sub scores for each domain illustrate the strength of each trait within each participant. Subscales of the HEXACO were shown to have good internal consistency within the current sample with honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness having an internal consistency of .811, .798, and .835, respectively.

***The Forgiveness Scale (Rye, 1998)***

The Forgiveness Scale (Appendix E) was designed to measure forgiving attitudes (cognitive, behavioral, and affective) toward a particular offender. Two subscales are present within this scale, with one scale measuring forgiveness based on having an absence of negative emotions toward a specific individual who has caused harm. The second subscale measures forgiveness based on having positive emotions toward the individual. This scale contains 15 items and is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Example statement items included in The Forgiveness Scale include: “*I feel resentment toward the person who wronged me*” and “*I hope the person who wronged me is treated fairly by others in the future*”. In previous research Cronbach’s alpha for the entire scale was .87 and the test-retest reliability showed to be .80 (Rye et al., 2001). For the present sample, the entire scale showed to have an internal consistency of .894. Within the subscales, absence of negative emotions was found to have an internal consistency of .887, while the subscale which measures the presence of positive emotions was noted to have an internal consistency of .840.

***The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale (Rye, 1998)***

The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale (Appendix F) explores hypothetical wrongdoings to assess the likelihood that individuals would be able to forgive a transgressor if they were involved in the scenario. Example hypothetical wrongdoings included in The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale include: *“A friend borrows your most valued possession, and then loses it. The friend refuses to replace it. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?”* This scale utilizes a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (extremely likely) with higher scores illustrating a higher willingness/disposition to forgive. In previous research Cronbach’s alpha for the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale was .85 and test-retest reliability was .81 (Rye et al., 2001). High internal consistency was found within the current sample for this scale ( $\alpha = .853$ ).

***Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale (Taylor & Bailey, 2022)***

The Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale (RJAS) (Appendix G) measures a five-factor structure of attitudes toward alternative restorative sanctions, as well as the usefulness of approaches that emphasize unity, inclusion, and community-building. This scale contains 20 items to assess the following five domains: a) empathic understanding (i.e., *“People should empathize with others, even if the person has caused harm”*); b) harm and needs (i.e., *“It is important to understand the needs of offenders that are connected to the harm they caused”*); c) restoration processes (i.e., *“It is important for offenders and victims to engage in face-to-face dialogue”*); d) accountability (i.e., *“Acknowledging ones wrongdoing is important”*); and e) community engagement (i.e., *“I believe victims of harm need the community’s support in order to heal”*). In previous research the RJAS has been shown to have good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and total RJAS scores were significant and positively related to restorative orientations,  $r =$

.46 (Taylor & Bailey, 2022). Within the current sample, the scale demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .866$ ).

***The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997)***

The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSORF; see Appendix H) is a 10-item scale that was developed by at Santa Clara University and Stanford University School of Medicine to quickly assess strength of religious faith (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). The SCSORF is measured on a 4-point Likert scale which ranges from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Once coded accordingly, this scale provides an overall score for strength of religiosity ranging from “low faith” to “high faith”. Example statement items included in the SCSORF include: “*I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life*” and “*My faith impacts many of my decisions*”. This scale has indicated strong internal reliability for university student samples (Cronbach’s alpha = .94), high school student samples (Cronbach’s alpha = .96) and community samples (Cronbach’s alpha = .97; Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). Within the current sample, the scale demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha = .977$ ).

***The Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism II Scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)***

The Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism II (see Appendix I) scale is a 16-item scale designed to measure the following four dimensions of collectivism and individualism: a) vertical collectivism, b) vertical individualism, c) horizontal collectivism, and d) horizontal individualism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Vertical collectivism involves seeing the self as a part of a collective and being willing to accept hierarchy and inequality within that collective while vertical individualism involves seeing the self as fully autonomous but recognizing that inequality will exist among individuals and accepting this inequality. In

contrast, horizontal collectivism is defined as seeing the self as part of a collective but perceiving all the members of that collective as equal and horizontal individualism is characterized by seeing the self as fully autonomous and believing that equality between individuals is the ideal. Overall, vertical orientation promotes equality, whereas horizontal orientation promotes hierarchy.

This scale was adapted from the original Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale which was created by Singelis et al. (1995). The revised version of the scale is measured on a 9-point Likert scale which ranges from “Never” or “Definitely No” to “Always” or “Definitely Yes”. Example statements items included in this scale include: “*I'd rather depend on myself than others*” and “*Competition is the law of nature*”. Once coded accordingly, the items are summed up separately to create a vertical collectivism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and horizontal individualism score. This scale was shown to have good divergent and convergent validity. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .778$ ), with three of the subscales also demonstrating good internal consistency (vertical collectivism,  $\alpha = .640$ ; horizontal collectivism,  $\alpha = .730$ , horizontal individualism,  $\alpha = .670$ ). However, vertical individualism was shown to have lower internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha value of .537.

***The Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern Scale (taken from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index; Davis, 1980)***

The Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern Scale (see Appendix J) are two of four subscales within the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, which is a scale that offers a multidimensional approach to assess empathy. The additional two subscales of fantasy and personal distress were omitted from this study. The perspective taking subscale measures the

reported tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others in everyday life (i.e., *“I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision”*), and the empathetic concern subscale assesses “other-oriented” feelings of empathy and concern for others (i.e., *“Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems”*). This scale contained 14 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me well) to 5 (describes me very well). In previous research Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .70 to .78 (Davis, 1980), and further reports of reliabilities of the scale confirmed these figures with Baldner and McGinley (2014) finding an alpha of .75 and .80 for the perspective taking and empathic concern subscales, respectively. Within the current sample, Cronbach’s alpha indicated the internal consistency for the perspective-taking subscale was .726 and empathic concern showed an internal consistency of .840.

## **Procedure**

Prior to the collection of data, research ethics approval was obtained from Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board. The present study consisted of a mixed methods design online survey containing demographic and contextual questions, as well as eight scales (The HEXACO Model of Personality, The Forgiveness Scale, The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale, Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale, The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire, The Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism II Scale, and The Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern Scale). Prior to commencement of the survey, participants completed an informed consent form, as well as a debriefing form following completion of the survey. The survey took approximately twenty-five minutes to complete, and participants were informed of their right to stop participation at any time and their ability to skip questions they did not wish to answer.



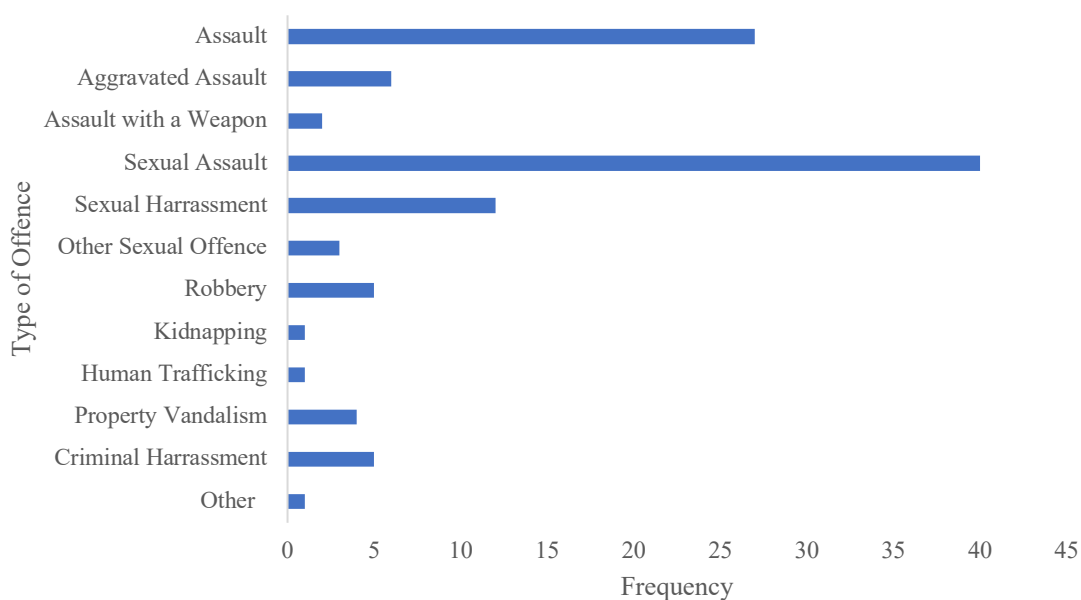
## Results

### Victimization Characteristics

The present study aimed to explore factors involved in influencing forgiveness (or lack thereof) among individuals who have experienced a violent criminal offence. Participants were asked to select all crimes they had experienced in their lifetime from a list of violent offences. The average number of violent offences experienced by a participant was 2.79 ( $SD = 1.92$ ), with results ranging from one to eleven offences experienced. Participants most commonly selected having experienced assault ( $n = 63$ ), sexual assault ( $n = 59$ ), sexual harassment ( $n = 57$ ), and criminal harassment ( $n = 28$ ). Given that individuals may experience more than one instance of victimization in their lifetime, participants were asked to think of the most salient offence that has happened to them (i.e, the most recent offence, the most impactful, etc.) throughout the questionnaire. Figure 1 depicts these responses. The most common experience participants chose to share their story about involved sexual assault (37.0%,  $n = 40$ ), followed by assault (25.0%,  $n = 27$ ), and sexual harassment (11.1%,  $n = 12$ ). Notably, one participant did not choose to indicate which offence was most salient to them.

**Figure 1**

*Frequencies of Criminal Offences Participants Chose to Discuss*



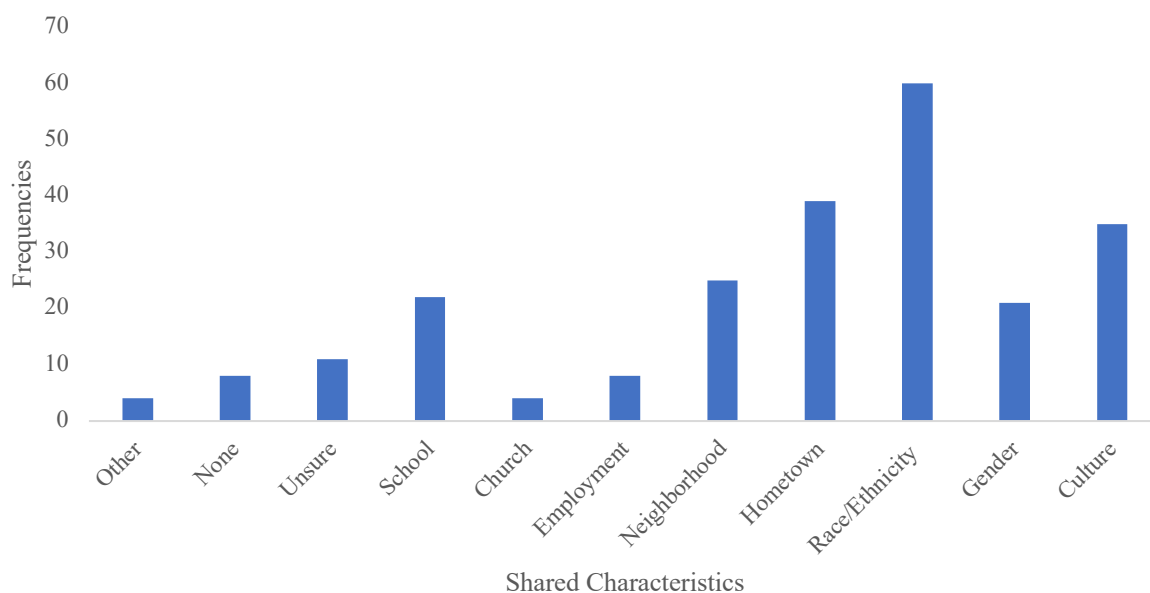
Results showed that the majority of participants opted to discuss a distant offence, rather than one that occurred recently. The largest proportion of participants chose to discuss an offence that took place between three and five years ago (31.5%,  $n = 34$ ), with 19.4% of participants ( $n = 21$ ) discussing a crime from between six and ten years ago. In comparing both extremes, 21.3% of participants ( $n = 23$ ) shared their experiences of a crime that occurred over 10 years ago, and 13.0% ( $n = 14$ ) detailed the events from a recent offence (i.e., less than one year).

The present study also explored relationships between participants and the individual who committed an offence against them. Overall, participants detailed having differing relationships with the perpetrator where 31.5% ( $n = 34$ ) indicated a stranger victimized them,

24.1% ( $n = 26$ ) noted being victimized by a family member, 23.1% ( $n = 25$ ) were offended against by a friend, and 20.4% ( $n = 22$ ) involved an acquaintance. To better understand the social identity and social categorization structure (e.g., in-group and out-group) of the relationship between the participants and the perpetrator, a select all question was presented to identify any shared characteristics between the two parties. Figure 2 denotes these results. Main results from this question indicated that race ( $n = 60$ ), hometown ( $n = 39$ ), culture ( $n = 35$ ), neighborhood ( $n = 25$ ), and school ( $n = 22$ ) were among the most selected shared characteristics. Of note, only eight individuals (7.4%) indicated that they did not share any common characteristics with the person who harmed them.

**Figure 2**

*Shared Characteristics Between Participants and the Individual Who Harmed Them*



Notably, a large majority of participants indicated that the individual who offended against them did not receive any criminal sanctions (i.e., fine, probation, incarceration, etc.) for their actions (77.8%,  $n = 84$ ), whereas only 16.7% ( $n = 18$ ) did face judicial repercussions. Of

those who indicated that the perpetrator faced criminal sanctions, receiving a criminal charge (38.9%,  $n = 7$ ) was the most reported.

As mentioned previously, individuals who experience victimization can be faced with an injustice gap (Worthington, 2003), which describes the gap between the outcomes a victim desires after an offence versus the outcomes that are perceived to be reality. If there is a large injustice gap, then forgiving will be more challenging. To explore this concept, participants were prompted to share their feelings regarding the repercussions the perpetrator faced, and a large majority of those who responded to the question indicated that they wished more action had been taken against the individual who had harmed them (60.0%,  $n = 57$ ). Further, many participants shared having negative experiences with the police, social services, and the legal system, often describing instances of victim-blaming and miscarriages of justice, which contributed to the perpetrator evading legal repercussions. The quotes below help to illustrate these concerns from participants:

*“I feel it was very unfair. The person had nothing happen to them. I was questioned as if I was the one who committed the crime, and discriminated against being an Indigenous woman. The police officers told me to my face that I was lying and that I am a crisis. I was alone at 16 in the room with the officers without my mother. This person who did this to me was sent out free” (P#20)*

And,

*“They faced no repercussions and justice was not served, the only reason it happened was a result of the courts, social services, and officers not taking my claims of abuse in the house seriously which resulted in living in an abusive home for 10 years” (P#40)*

In addition, participants indicated that their own lack of understanding of their rights and the legal system had played a role in their decision to not report the crime, thus leading to the perpetrator receiving little (if any) repercussions. Participants indicated that their age at the time of the offence, feelings of powerlessness and fear, lack of knowledge of their rights, and anxiousness to navigate the legal system were root contributors to their decision to not pursue charges. One participant noted, *“I wish I was brave enough to report it”* (P#43), while another wrote, *“He did not receive any repercussions as I did not charge him, I was 16-17 and an addict, didn't think I could”* (P#55). Similarly, another participant described how psychological barriers and distrust with the legal system can impact reporting, by stating, *“I just didn't even want to have to think about him & it would have been such a long process of having to relive it that still probably wouldn't have turned out in my favor”* (P#77).

### **Forgiveness (Or Lack Thereof)**

A majority of participants (72.2%,  $n = 78$ ) indicated that they did not receive an apology or actions of remorse from the other party following the offence, compared to 12.0% ( $n = 13$ ) who did. Participants were also shown to be generally unforgiving toward the individual who harmed them. Using a 7-point Likert scale to indicate their forgiveness level (1= not at all; 7 = completely), an average score of 3.53 ( $SD = 1.99$ ) was found. At either end of the spectrum, the majority of participants indicated having not at all forgiven (41.7%,  $n = 45$ ) whereas the smallest group was represented in the category of having completely forgiven (4.6%,  $n = 5$ ). Furthermore, when analyzing the sum scores for the forgiveness measures, results indicated that participants had generally less forgiving tendencies as shown by the total sample average score of 23.00 ( $SD = 7.63$ ) on the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale (Rye, 1998). Sum scores for this scale range from 10 to 50 with higher scores indicating a greater general tendency to forgive someone for a

hypothetical wrongdoing. Similarly, the Forgiveness Scale (which ranges from 15 to 75; Rye, 1998), measures forgiveness toward a specific individual, and results showed a sum score of 42.79 ( $SD = 12.82$ ), which helps to further illustrate the relatively low-moderate forgiveness attitudes within the sample.

Participants were also asked several questions related to their forgiveness and influence from their close others. Rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), participants generally believed that they have personal control over whether they forgive someone ( $M = 5.65$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ), although they indicated that it was not easy to forgive the person who offended against them ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ). Similarly, participants noted that people close to them generally tend to be forgiving people ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ), yet the people close to them did not think that the participant should grant forgiveness to the individual who harmed them ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ).

The means and standard deviations of self-rated forgiveness across demographic variables are presented in Table 1. Additionally, it was found that being a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, receiving an apology, the type of offence the participant experienced, and the number of total offences experienced across the lifetime significantly affected self-reported forgiveness levels. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in forgiveness between those who do ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) and do not ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ), identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community,  $t(104) = 2.18$ ,  $p = .019$ , with participants who do not identify within this community reporting greater forgiveness levels toward the person who harmed them.

### **Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Rated Forgiveness Across Demographic Variables*

---

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>		
Female	3.40	1.97
Male	4.13	2.07
Non-binary	3.00	1.73
Gender Fluid	2.00	_.a
<b>Member of 2SLGBTQ+*</b>		
Yes	2.87	1.69
No	3.79	2.08
<b>Highest Education Completed</b>		
Less Than Grade 10	2.00	_.a
High School	3.88	1.81
Some University or College	3.30	1.94
College or Diploma	3.61	1.91
Bachelor's Degree	3.52	1.99
Some Post Baccalaureate	7.00	_.a
Graduate Degree	4.14	2.73
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Full Time	3.65	2.02
Part Time	2.97	1.78
Not Employed	3.93	2.09
<b>How Many Offences Experienced*</b>		
1	3.79	1.897
2	4.04	2.285
3	2.69	1.517
4	3.44	2.242
5	4.00	2.160
6	5.33	1.528
7+	2.17	.408
<b>Most Salient Offence*</b>		
Assault	4.70	2.28
Aggravated Assault	4.33	2.07
Assault with a Weapon	2.00	_.a
Sexual Assault	2.90	1.65
Sexual Harassment	3.25	1.91
Other Sexual Offence	3.33	2.31
Robbery	3.80	1.79
Kidnapping	2.00	_.a
Human Trafficking	2.00	_.a
Property Vandalism	3.25	1.89

Criminal Harassment	3.40	1.95
How Long Ago Offence Took Place		
Less Than 6 Months Ago	2.87	1.55
Less Than 1 Year Ago	3.67	1.37
1-2 Years Ago	3.94	1.77
3-5 Years Ago	3.41	1.99
6-10 Years Ago	3.62	2.33
11-20 Years Ago	3.30	1.70
20+ Years Ago	3.69	2.53
Relationship to Perpetrator		
Family	4.12	2.34
Friend	3.16	1.86
Acquaintance	3.09	1.48
Stranger	3.62	2.06
Unsure	4.00	-. <sup>a</sup>
Perpetrator Faced Sanctions		
Yes	3.56	1.98
No	3.51	2.05
Unsure	3.67	1.21
Apology*		
Received Apology	4.46	1.76
Did Not Receive Apology	3.31	1.94
Unsure	5.14	1.77
Not Applicable	2.90	2.08

*Note.* Mean ranges from 1 (no forgiveness) to 7 (complete forgiveness).

<sup>a</sup> = group contained less than three participants and therefore no standard deviation was calculated.

\* $p < .05$

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess whether religiosity mediated the relationship between 2SLGBTQ+ involvement and self-rated levels of forgiveness. First, it was found that being a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community was negatively associated with self-rated forgiveness levels ( $\beta = -.951, t = -2.240, p = .027$ ). It was also found that being a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community was negatively related to religiosity ( $\beta = -9.002, t = -3.259, p = .002$ ). Lastly, results indicated that the mediator, religiosity, was associated with self-rated forgiveness ( $\beta = .063, t = 4.545, p < .001$ ). Because both the a-path and b-path were significant, mediation analyses were tested using the bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence



estimates. Results of the mediation analysis confirmed the mediating role of religiosity in the relation between 2SLGBTQ+ involvement and self-rated forgiveness levels ( $\beta = -.5708$ ; CI =  $-.980$  to  $-.233$ ). In addition, results indicated that the direct effect of 2SLGBTQ+ on self-rated forgiveness levels became nonsignificant ( $\beta = -.381$ ,  $t = -.9322$ ,  $p = .354$ ) when controlling for religiosity, thus suggesting full mediation. Of note, age, gender, number of offences experienced, and type of offence experienced were also analyzed as potential mediators of 2SLGBTQ+ status and forgiveness, however significant results were not found.

A one-way ANOVA was also conducted to explore the effect of crime type on self-reported forgiveness levels. Of note, only one respondent was present within each of the following groups and were therefore omitted from the ANOVA analyses: kidnapping and human trafficking. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in self-reported forgiveness levels between at least two of the crime types ( $F(7, 94) = [2.22]$ ,  $p = .039$ ). Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean of self-reported forgiveness was significantly different between those who shared their experiences of assault versus sexual assault ( $p = .007$ , 95% C.I. =  $[.31, 3.30]$ ), with those who experienced assault reporting higher forgiveness levels than those who experienced sexual assault.

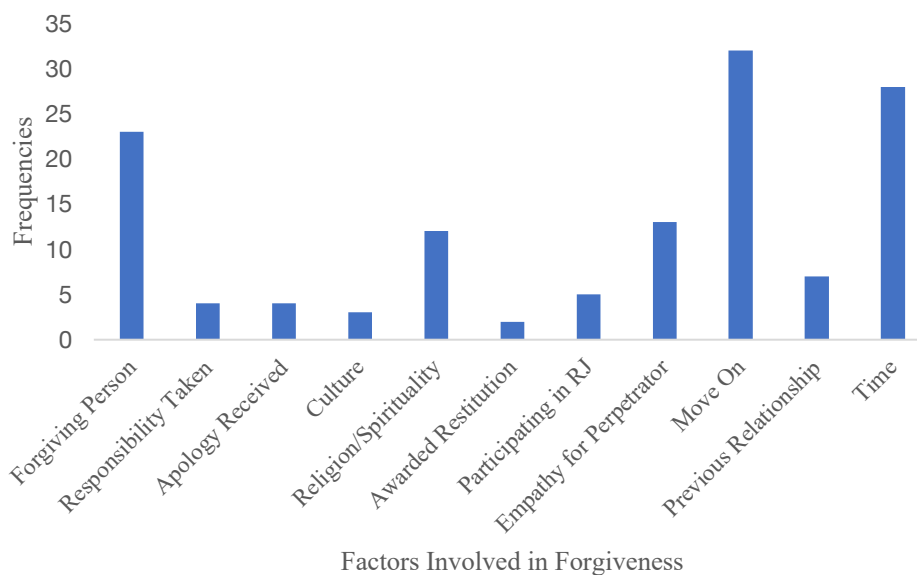
An additional one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in self-reported forgiveness levels in at least two groups of whether the participant received an apology from the perpetrator, ( $F(3, 104) = [3.36]$ ,  $p = .022$ ). However, a post hoc Tukey test did not illustrate significant differences between the groups, suggesting that there is evidence of a difference between groups, but pair-wise tests could not detect this. In following, an ANOVA was conducted to explore whether participants differed significantly in their self-reported forgiveness depending on how many offences they have experienced within their

lifetime. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated the variances were not homogeneous ( $p < .001$ ), and therefore, a Welch ANOVA test was used which found evidence for a statistically significant difference among the groups,  $F_w(6,101) = 5.87, p = .002$ . No other significant results were found when comparing the means of scores from demographic and victimization contextual information (i.e., age, gender, education level, etc.).

Finally, participants were asked to indicate factors that were involved in their decisions to forgive the person who offended against them. This was first analyzed through a multi-select question. It was found that a desire to move forward ( $n = 32$ ), time ( $n = 28$ ), being a generally forgiving person ( $n = 23$ ), empathy for the perpetrator ( $n = 13$ ), and religiosity ( $n = 12$ ) were most commonly cited by participants. These results are further illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Reasons for Forgiving the Individual Who Offended Against Them*



In addition, participants were given the opportunity to describe their reasoning for forgiving, or withholding forgiveness, in an open-ended response format. In contrast to the above multi-select question that was restricted for only the participants who had indicated that they had

reached a state of forgiveness, this open-ended question included self-reported descriptions from all participants. The results were qualitatively analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis where codes and themes were developed and revised through a continuous process of reviewing the data. Reflexive elements were incorporated throughout the coding process to identify and mitigate research bias. Analyses of codes used an inductive approach to find commonalities in data without determining a priori themes. First, the author familiarized themselves with the data by reading through the responses and making any necessary notes about initial ideas/thoughts. After becoming familiarized with the data, it was determined that sentences and entire responses would be the units of code for the present study given that many of the responses were lengthy and detailed.

Initial codes were developed and analyzed using NVivo12, a computer software for qualitative data analysis. A complete coding method was used, rather than a selective coding method, allowing for the inclusion of all relevant information in the sample. Using this method, multiple codes may have been applied to a single unit of data, if appropriate. Given that much of the data was easily interpretable, semantic codes were most often used, however some codes did require interpretation and, therefore, the use of latent codes. Following the generation of initial codes, the data was collated by grouping together codes of a similar nature to form preliminary themes which resulted in the creation of seven broad themes. Then, the themes were further developed and refined to ensure they were representative of the data and were descriptive of patterns that were found. Finally, themes were further refined, defined, and named which resulted in four final themes: i) *For Me, Not Them*; ii) *Time Heals All Wounds*; iii) *Forgiveness is Earned*; and iv) *Barriers to Forgiveness*.

***Theme 1: For Me, Not Them***

As much of the literature has noted, specifically within the Intrapersonal Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Violent Crime (Field et al., 2013), oftentimes individuals who are victimized grant forgiveness as a vehicle to achieve greater mental health and wellbeing. This understanding was highly prevalent within responses from participants where they discussed that their reasoning for forgiving the person who caused harm stemmed from their desire to find inner peace and help themselves, rather than forgiving to aid the other individual. Notably, many participants indicated that their forgiveness was a result of needing to move on, a desire to eliminate bitterness inside them, and as a means to continue their individual growth. For example, one participant wrote, *“It harms myself more not to forgive”* (P#68). In addition, another participant’s response, encapsulates the idea that forgiveness may take many forms, but it is ultimately an opportunity to progress past the offence that occurred:

*“Forgiving the perpetrator was the first part of the process when I began to unpack everything as an adult 20+ years later. The second step was realizing that I was blaming myself and gaslighting myself... and forgiveness was the only way to fix this”* (P#76)

Additionally, many participant responses within this theme described their forgiveness as a method for releasing any power that the perpetrator held over them. For some people who experience victimization, it can feel as though their power, resilience, and autonomy is taken from them after the offence (Frieze et al., 1987; Janff-Bulan et al., 1983; Schumann & Walton, 2022). As a result, individuals may burrow in a state of loneliness and shame that can feel suffocating. Participants within this theme described how their forgiveness helped to re-gain their power:

*“I think that when dealing with traumatic situations in general, getting "hung up" on them can do more damage long-term- and I personally believe forgiving someone shows that they don't have "power" over your feelings- and I didn't want to give him anymore of that” (P#31).*

### ***Theme 2: Time Heals All Wounds***

The second theme within this topic revolves around the concept of time and its role in promoting an environment that leads to forgiveness. Within this theme, participants described time as a factor influencing their forgiveness in three distinct ways. First, participants noted that the passage of time allows for individuals to fully process their victimization and to develop an understanding of the events they endured. This passage of time can help facilitate healing. One participant wrote:

*“At the time, I did not realize I was being physically abused. I know I was being punched repeatedly in the head. It was only well into adulthood, and after a childhood friend pointed this out, that I realized I was physically abused. With time, the psychological wounds have healed.”(P#72)*

However, the opposite may also be true, as many participants noted that not enough time has passed for them to be able to forgive, *“This has happened within the month so not enough time has passed for me to fully process” (P#9).*

In contrast to the above, rather than detailing how time can allow for healing, many participants also suggested that time can simply provide an avenue for the event to become less salient and troubling, which can act as a method to forgiveness. For example, one participant wrote, *“I don't think about it a lot and when I do I feel pretty disconnected from what happened.*

*I don't know if this is a coping mechanism but it doesn't really bother me to speak about it anymore.” (P#86).*

Lastly, participants within this theme indicated that time plays a role in their forgiveness as a result of aging, with several participants noting their forgiveness was a result of their own aging, or as a result of the perpetrator's old age. Participants also indicated that their own old age had contributed to memory loss which, in turn, has led them to a place of forgiveness. In addition, one participant wrote *“He was an old man and was facing some health issues...”* (P#71), suggesting that forgiveness may be sought as a gift to the perpetrator to ease their wellbeing in old age. Notably, forgiveness has been suggested to follow a logarithmic model where forgiveness increases with time, eventually tapering off into a steady level (McCullough et al., 2010), and further research has shown that those who are older in age are generally more forgiving than younger adults (Cheng & Yim, 2008; Steiner et al., 2011). This theme reflects that of the extant literature.

### ***Theme 3: Forgiveness is Earned***

A third theme within the responses was called ‘Forgiveness is Earned’. As described in the literature on forgiveness, receiving an apology (Koutsos et al., 2008; Witvliet et al., 2020), making reparative efforts (Witvliet et al., 2020), and showing remorse (Davis & Gold, 2011; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2015) can be highly effective in promoting forgiveness among individuals who have been harmed. In addition, similar research has shown that wellbeing is positively influenced only when the forgiveness is deserved by the individual who caused harm (Strelan et al., 2016). This was highlighted in the responses from participants where they indicated that their forgiveness (or lack thereof) was based on actions of the other individual and whether they believe that they deserved to be forgiven.

For example, one participant wrote, *“He has never apologized or done anything to be worthy of forgiveness...”* (P#78), thus suggesting that forgiveness is earned through the showing of reparative efforts. Another participant noted, *“From what I’ve heard, including at the time she was cautioned, the woman did not show any remorse for her actions, so I’m not in a place to forgive her”* (P#53), indicating that their forgiveness is hindered by the perpetrator’s lack of empathy and display of callousness. In contrast, other participants described instances of the perpetrator earning their forgiveness successfully, with one participant stating, *“[I forgave] because I seen how he grew from therapy and after realizing what he had done had hurt us”* (P#35).

The extant literature also suggests that the context, voluntariness, and strength of apologies and reparative efforts are important factors to consider, whereby researchers have found that if an apology is low in responsibility-taking (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003) or is insensitive to the needs of the victim (Lazare, 2004), then forgiveness is unlikely to be achieved. These findings were also complemented by the present study where participants described the importance of genuineness in their ability to forgive:

*“I did not forgive the perpetrator because his intentions were not to genuinely apologize to me for his actions. Rather, he was more focused on looking more respectable and mature to his friends/peers for seeking to apologize and wanted me to accept his apology so he could move on and never have to think about the hurt he caused after the fact.”*

(P#77)

#### ***Theme 4: Barriers to Forgiveness***

Finally, the last theme created highlighted the idea that there are many barriers to forgiveness that inhibit one’s willingness and interest in forgiving the person who has caused

harm. Within this theme, two main ideas were found. First, participants indicated that the characteristics of the offence contributed to their inability to forgive. For example, many responses noted that their inability to forgive was reflected by the severity of the offence, if the offence was repetitive, if the harm was intentional, their age at the time of the offence, and the perpetrator's position of power/trust. For example, responses such as, *"He did it multiple times. I was also a child where he was 40."* (P#34), *"I was only a child (ages 8-11) and he ripped my family apart"* (P#22), and *"He violated my body while I was unconscious. This is unforgivable to me"* (P#37), illustrate how certain offences and scenarios lend themselves to being deemed as unforgivable. With some research indicating that offence intensity and frequency can affect forgiveness attitudes (Steiner et al., 2011) the responses from participants in the present study contribute to the extant literature.

Secondly, this theme highlighted the extreme psychological and physical consequences that individuals who have been victimized are forced to endure for an extended period of time following an offence. The lasting psychological harm that results from victimization has been highly documented within the extant literature health (Boudreaux et al., 1998; Britt, 2001; Freeman & Smith, 2014; Tan & Haining, 2016) and participants within the present study noted that these consequences and experiences can shape their willingness to forgive. One participant wrote,

*"...I have never seen the individual so much as acknowledge the assault occurred, let alone does he have the capacity to understand the harms still experienced from his actions. I live with PTSD, and I experience him daily, having not seen him in a year. I know his reality does not look like that"* (P#26).



Evidently, participants believed that their psychological state and wellbeing directly hindered their ability to forgive, which contrasts the first theme which encompassed participants who felt that forgiveness was the key to greater mental wellbeing. It is clear that not all individuals who experience victimization feel as though forgiveness is the solution. Another participant wrote, “*Six people violated my human rights and didn't care if I was dead or alive*” (P#5), describing the immense weight and suffering that can be caused after experiencing a criminal offence. In fact, some participants described a constant psychological grappling of trying to rationalize and understand their experiences. These psychological struggles can be illustrated by the quote below:

*“I didn't even realize what it was until a couple years later, I just felt sick every time I thought of it so I stopped thinking about it and pushed it down for so long. I've been struggling with it after revisiting it in therapy a few weeks ago. I don't know if I'll ever forgive, but it just never should have happened because it's caused so much strain in my life.”* (P#25).

Altogether, it is apparent that participants within the sample perceived forgiveness, and navigated their experiences with victimization, in unique ways. While some participants shared their experiences on why they have forgiven the person who has offended against them, many participants also described barriers which inhibited their forgiveness. Undoubtedly, the qualitative responses from the present study help to illustrate the various factors that are involved in the forgiveness process following criminal victimization.

### **Bivariate Correlations**

Bivariate correlations were used to analyze the association between all continuous variables and are illustrated in Table 2 below. Age was found to be positively correlated to

strength of religious faith ( $r = .270; p = .006$ ) and negatively correlated to horizontal collectivism ( $r = -.276, p = .004$ ). Having an absence of negative emotions toward the offender was found to be positively correlated with a presence of positive emotions toward the perpetrator ( $r = .452; p < .001$ ), attitudes toward restorative justice ( $r = .318; p = .001$ ), and negatively related to vertical individualism ( $r = -.292; p = .003$ ). The presence of positive emotions toward the individual who caused victimization was found to be positively correlated with likelihood to forgive ( $r = .449; p < .001$ ), attitudes toward restorative justice ( $r = .374; p < .001$ ), religious faith ( $r = .536; p < .001$ ), while also having a negative relationship with horizontal individualism ( $r = -.219; p = .023$ ). Likelihood to forgive was found to be positively correlated with attitudes toward restorative justice ( $r = .275; p = .005$ ), religious faith ( $r = .291; p = .003$ ), and agreeableness ( $r = .232; p = .023$ ). In addition, positive correlations were found between attitudes toward restorative justice and empathic concern ( $r = .447; p < .001$ ), perspective-taking ( $r = .240; p = .016$ ), horizontal collectivism ( $r = .337; p < .001$ ), and vertical collectivism ( $r = .204; p = .042$ ). Strength of religious faith showed a significant negative correlation with horizontal individualism ( $r = -.286; p = .003$ ).

Perspective-taking was positively correlated with empathic concern ( $r = .515; p < .001$ ), honesty-humility ( $r = .290; p = .005$ ), agreeableness ( $r = .390; p < .001$ ), and horizontal collectivism ( $r = .399; p < .001$ ). There was a significant negative correlation found between perspective-taking and vertical individualism ( $r = -.200; p = .041$ ). For empathic concern, results showed positive correlations with honesty-humility ( $r = .436; p < .001$ ), emotionality ( $r = .586; p < .001$ ), and horizontal collectivism ( $r = .542; p < .001$ ), as well as a negative relationship with vertical individualism ( $r = -.355; p < .001$ ).

A positive correlation was found between honesty-humility and agreeableness ( $r = .287$ ;  $p = .005$ ), and a negative correlation was present for honesty-humility and vertical individualism ( $r = -.522$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Agreeableness elicited a negative relationship with vertical individualism ( $r = -.280$ ;  $p = .006$ ). Finally, horizontal individualism indicated to have a significant positive relationship with vertical individualism ( $r = .305$ ;  $p = .006$ ), horizontal collectivism ( $r = .244$ ;  $p = .011$ ), and vertical collectivism ( $r = .455$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Vertical individualism ( $r = .373$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and horizontal collectivism ( $r = .226$ ;  $p = .021$ ) were also both found to be positively correlated to vertical collectivism.

**Table 2***Bivariate Correlations of Continuous Variables*

VAR	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 <b>Age</b>	30.62	12.06														
2 <b>TFS N</b>	31.82	9.82	.076													
3 <b>TFS P</b>	10.99	4.88	.149	<b>.452**</b>												
4 <b>TFLS</b>	23.00	7.63	-.034	.158	<b>.449**</b>											
5 <b>RJAS</b>	70.43	12.51	.052	<b>.318**</b>	<b>.374**</b>	<b>.275**</b>										
6 <b>SCSRF</b>	22.26	13.41	<b>.270**</b>	.131	<b>.536**</b>	<b>.291**</b>	.091									
7 <b>PT</b>	25.76	4.68	-.080	.047	-.059	.001	<b>.240*</b>	-.160								
8 <b>EC</b>	27.76	5.46	-.081	.021	-.012	-.020	<b>.447**</b>	-.064	<b>.515**</b>							
9 <b>HH</b>	56.44	9.91	.121	.166	.046	-.031	.159	.079	<b>.290**</b>	<b>.436**</b>						
10 <b>EM</b>	57.00	9.22	-.107	-.173	-.116	-.135	.104	.031	.174	<b>.586**</b>	.153					
11 <b>AG</b>	46.11	9.66	.084	.133	.159	<b>.232*</b>	.154	.101	<b>.390**</b>	.177	<b>.287**</b>	-.032				
12 <b>HI</b>	27.99	5.35	-.100	.047	<b>-.219*</b>	-.077	.184	<b>-.286**</b>	.050	.117	.027	-.140	-.120			
13 <b>VI</b>	18.74	6.43	-.167	<b>-.292**</b>	-.153	-.134	-.144	-.084	<b>-.200*</b>	<b>-.355**</b>	<b>-.522**</b>	-.129	<b>-.280**</b>	<b>.305**</b>		
14 <b>HC</b>	26.44	5.49	<b>-.276**</b>	.026	-.009	.077	<b>.337**</b>	-.164	<b>.399**</b>	<b>.542**</b>	.172	.157	.053	<b>.244*</b>	-.008	
15 <b>VC</b>	23.53	6.14	.003	-.098	-.008	-.060	<b>.204*</b>	.051	.149	.041	.008	-.130	.006	<b>.455**</b>	<b>.373**</b>	<b>-.226*</b>

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed), \*\*Correlation is significant at the .001 level (two-tailed)

TFS N, TFS P = The Forgiveness Scale (N = sum score for Absence of Negative Emotions subscale, P = sum score for Presence of Positive Emotions subscale)

TFLS = The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale

RJAS = The Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale

SCSRF = The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Scale

PT, EC = Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern Scale (taken from Interpersonal Reactivity Index)

HH = Honesty-humility (subscale of HEXACO-100)

EM = Emotionality (subscale of HEXACO-100)

AG = Agreeableness (subscale of HEXACO-100)

HI = Horizontal Individualism (subscale of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale)

VI = Vertical Individualism (subscale of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale)

HC = Horizontal Collectivism (subscale of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale)

VC = Vertical Collectivism (subscale of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale)

### ***Hypothesis 1***

Results from the above bivariate correlation table support the first hypothesis of the present study. It was hypothesized that forgiveness would be related to attitudes toward restorative justice, where those who score high in forgiveness will be more likely to have more positive attitudes toward restorative justice. As shown above, having an absence of negative emotions for a specific individual, holding positive emotions toward the individual, and general tendency to forgive were all significantly positively correlated to attitudes toward restorative justice at the  $p = .001$  level. This suggests that those who elicit higher levels of forgiveness toward an individual who has offended, and/or higher levels of general trait forgiveness, hold more positive views toward restorative justice.

### **Regression Analyses**

#### ***Hypothesis 2***

Several multiple regressions were conducted to explore whether honesty-humility, agreeableness, and emotionality significantly predicted forgiveness and attitudes toward restorative justice. First, a multiple regression using the three HEXACO facets as predictor variables explored whether honesty-humility, agreeableness, and emotionality predicted having positive emotions toward an offender and no significant results were found ( $R^2 = .038$ ;  $F^2(3, 88) = 1.16$ ,  $p = .329$ ). Results indicated that none of the three predictor variables (honesty-humility,  $\beta = .010$ ,  $p = .850$ ; emotionality,  $\beta = -.061$ ,  $p = .282$ ; agreeableness,  $\beta = .075$ ,  $p = .176$ ) significantly predicted the presence of positive feelings toward an offender within the model. Similarly, non-significant results were found when investigating the predictivity of the HEXACO facets on absence of negative emotions toward an offender ( $R^2 = .071$ ;  $F^2(3, 87) =$

2.202,  $p = .094$ ; honesty-humility,  $\beta = .179$ ,  $p = .103$ ; emotionality,  $\beta = -.212$ ,  $p = .061$ ; agreeableness,  $\beta = .056$ ,  $p = .614$ ).

Again, the model was not found to be significant when exploring the predictivity of honesty-humility, emotionality, and agreeableness with general likelihood to forgive ( $R^2 = .077$ ;  $F^2(3, 88) = 2.433$ ,  $p = .070$ ). However, agreeableness was found to be a significant positive predictor within the model ( $\beta = .200$ ,  $p = .021$ ), although honesty-humility ( $\beta = -.066$ ,  $p = .429$ ) and emotionality ( $\beta = -.094$ ,  $p = .279$ ) were not. These findings suggest that agreeableness has a role in predicting general likelihood to forgive within the presented model. Finally, when exploring attitudes toward restorative justice, the model failed to find significance ( $R^2 = .046$ ;  $F^2(3, 84) = 1.356$ ,  $p = .262$ ).

### ***Hypothesis 3***

Simple linear regressions were used to test if religious faith significantly predicted forgiveness toward an offender, tendency to forgive, and attitudes toward restorative justice. First, a regression was conducted to explore whether religiosity significantly predicted having positive feelings toward an offender, and the overall regression was statistically significant ( $F^2(1, 104) = 41.894$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .287, indicating that religious faith explained approximately 30% of the variance in having positive feelings toward an offender. These results are depicted in Table 3. Next, religiosity was also regressed against a variable measuring general likelihood to forgive and these results are shown in Table 4. Statistically significant results were found, ( $F^2(1, 103) = 9.562$ ,  $p = .003$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .085. These results indicate that religious faith explained 8.5% of the variance in general likelihood to forgive.

**Table 3**

*Linear Regression Results for Predictivity of Religiosity on Positive Feelings Toward Perpetrator*

	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	6.605	.788	5.042	8.168	< .001
Religious Faith	.197	.030	.136	.257	< .001

*Note.* N = 106, CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit

**Table 4**

*Linear Regression Results for Predictivity of Religiosity on General Likelihood to Forgive*

	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	19.297	1.399	16.522	22.071	< .001
Religious Faith	.167	.054	.060	.274	.003

*Note.* N = 105, CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit

However, upon exploring the predictivity of religiosity on an absence of negative feelings toward an individual who caused harm, no significance was found ( $R^2 = .017$ ;  $F^2(1, 102) = .1793$ ,  $p = .183$ ). A similar non-significant result was found for religiosity and attitudes toward restorative justice ( $R^2 = .008$ ,  $F^2(1, 100) = .841$ ,  $p = .361$ ).

#### ***Hypothesis 4***

Several multiple regressions were conducted to explore whether horizontal/vertical collectivism/individualism significantly predicted forgiveness and attitudes toward restorative justice. First, using the subscales of the The Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and

Collectivism II Scale as the predictor variables, and measuring positive emotions toward an offender as an outcome variable, no significant results were found ( $R^2 = .074$ ,  $F^2(4, 100) = 1.990$ ,  $p = .102$ ). Similarly, no significant results were found when exploring the predictivity of the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism II subscales on general likelihood to forgive ( $R^2 = .029$ ,  $F^2(4, 99) = .735$ ,  $p = .570$ ).

However, it was found that the subscales of the culture scale significantly predicted the absence of negative emotions toward an offender ( $R^2 = .116$ ,  $F^2(4, 98) = 3.229$ ,  $p = .016$ ), with vertical individualism emerging as a significant negative predictor within the model ( $\beta = -.528$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This significant result is shown in Table 5. Significant results also emerged when exploring the predictivity of the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism II subscales on attitudes toward restorative justice ( $R^2 = .200$ ,  $F^2(4, 95) = 5.928$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Within this model, horizontal collectivism emerged as a positive predictor of attitudes toward restorative justice ( $\beta = .575$ ,  $p = .009$ ), whereas vertical individualism was found to be a negative predictor ( $\beta = -.549$ ,  $p = .006$ ). These results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 5**

*Linear Regression Results for Predictivity of Cultural Subscales on Absence of Negative Emotions*

	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	34.848	6.196	22.552	47.144	< .001
HI	.304	.200	-.093	.701	.132
VI	-.528	.161	-.847	-.209	.001
HC	-.005	.176	-.354	.345	.978
VC	-.065	.181	-.424	.294	.721



*Note.* N = 103, HI = Horizontal Individualism, VI = Vertical Individualism, HC = Horizontal Collectivism, HI = Horizontal Individualism, CI = confidence interval, *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit

**Table 6**

*Linear Regression Results for Predictivity of Cultural Subscales on Attitudes Toward Restorative Justice*

	Estimate	SE	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Intercept	47.595	7.520	32.665	62.525	< .001
HI	.310	.245	-.176	.795	.209
VI	-.549	.197	-.940	-.159	.006
HC	.575	.215	.148	1.001	.009
VC	.369	.217	-.063	.800	.093

*Note.* N = 100, HI = Horizontal Individualism, VI = Vertical Individualism, HC = Horizontal Collectivism, HI = Horizontal Individualism, CI = confidence interval, *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit

### ***Hypothesis 5***

Finally, to explore the predictivity of empathic concern and perspective-taking on forgiveness and restorative justice techniques, several multiple regression analyses were conducted using sum scores for the Empathic Concern and Perspective-Taking subscales as predictor variables. Interestingly, results indicated that empathic concern and perspective taking did not have a significant predictive relationship with having an absence of negative feelings toward a perpetrator ( $R^2 = .002$ ,  $F^2(2, 101) = .111$ ,  $p = .895$ ), holding positive emotions toward a perpetrator ( $R^2 = .004$ ,  $F^2(2, 103) = .202$ ,  $p = .817$ ), or on general likelihood to forgive ( $R^2 = .001$ ,  $F^2(2, 102) = .030$ ,  $p = .970$ ). However, significant results, at the  $p < .001$ , level were found

when examining the predictivity of perspective-taking and empathic concern on attitudes toward restorative justice. Within the model, only empathic concern emerged as a significant positive predictor of attitudes toward restorative justice ( $\beta = 1.007, p < .001$ ), although an  $R^2$  value of .200 indicated that the predictor variable explained approximately 20% of the variance within attitudes toward restorative justice. These results are displayed in Table 7 below.

**Table 7**

*Regression Table for Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern on RJ Attitudes*

	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Intercept	60.654	4.900	50.930	70.377	< .001
Perspective Taking	.032	.276	-.516	.579	.909
Empathic Concern	1.007	.241	.528	1.487	< .001

*Note.* N = 101, CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit

## Discussion

The present study aimed to add to the literature on forgiveness and victimization by exploring the factors that play a role in granting, or withholding, forgiveness from an individual who has committed a violent criminal offence. In addition, the present study explored how the same factors may influence attitudes toward restorative justice.

Within the extant literature, it is suggested that reparative efforts (Koutsos et al., 2008; Ohbuchi et al., 1989), the passage of time (McCullough et al., 2003), and seeing justice be served (Tripp et al., 2007) can influence forgiveness toward an individual who has caused harm, and the present study mirrored many of these extant findings. Qualitative results, which explored participants' reasonings for forgiveness (or lack thereof), as well as participant feelings about the

repercussions received by the perpetrator, highlighted similar themes found within the literature. In the third theme, *Forgiveness is Earned*, many participants shared their thoughts about how the lack of reparative efforts, genuinity, and remorsefulness, directly influenced their decision to withhold forgiveness. Similarly, theme two, *Time Heals All Wounds*, encompassed the idea that time can allow victimized individuals to come to terms with their experience, can allow for healing, and can influence forgiveness through the aging of the parties involved. Lastly, qualitative results, which explored the repercussions received by the perpetrator, noted that a large majority did not see justice be served to the individual they believed should have received sanctions. Within this theme, many participants indicated that this lack of repercussions directly influenced their inability to forgive.

Furthermore, in analysing the descriptive results, it was found that being a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, receiving an apology, the type of offence the participant experienced, and the number of total offences experienced across the lifetime significantly affected self-reported forgiveness levels. First, although there was no known literature found exploring the differences in forgiveness between those who are, and those who are not, a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, it was found that this relationship was fully mediated by religiosity, thus suggesting that the relationship between 2SLGBTQ+ status and forgiveness levels does not exist without the presence of religiosity. Previous literature has noted the challenging relationship that 2SLGBTQ+ individuals often have with religion, and although religious affiliations may vary in their acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, religion has historically promoted stigma and ostracization of these groups (Schope & Eliason, 2000). Furthermore, it has been found that 2SLGBTQ+ individuals often face identity conflict if involved in Christian religious practices (Barton, 2010; Murr, 2013; Super & Jacobson, 2011), and Beagan and Hattie

(2015) found that many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals leave formal religious groups as a result of their experiences with identity conflict, differing world views, and lack of acceptance. Altogether, the findings of the present study may suggest that decreased religious involvement within these groups contributes to their lower levels of self-rated forgiveness toward a transgressor.

Regarding the effect of an apology on forgiveness, previous research has found support for the findings of the present study, where receiving an apology has been previously shown to positively influence one's forgiveness (David & Choi, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Koutsos et al., 2008; Strelan et al., 2016; Witvliet et al., 2020). In addition, it has been postulated that an apology-forgiveness cycle exists within conflict resolution scenarios, and restorative justice procedures, where four cycles may occur: *i*) apology facilitating forgiveness; *ii*) apology without forgiveness; *iii*) forgiveness promoting apology; and *iv*) forgiveness without apology (Suzuki & Jenkins, 2023). From this, the strong connection between forgiveness and apology can be understood where they can influence the existence of the other.

Finally, previous research has also supported the idea that offence severity impacts forgiveness levels, as found in the present study (Gerlsma & Lugtmeyer, 2018; Pearce et al., 2018; Riek, 2010). Petersen et al. (2012) found that the more severe an experience of a criminal offence was, the more intense a victimized individual's response should be. In addition, although the pathway to forgiveness is unique to all, it is generally understood that offence severity influences forgiveness given that the severity of an offence can betray trust (Fincham et al., 2005), dismantle feelings of power and control (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), and disrupt one's sense of belonging (Schumann & Walton, 2022) which causes greater difficulties in being able to forgive. Furthermore, with greater perceived crime severity and prolonged victimization, the

feelings of anger, resentment, and contempt are generally more prevalent (Rozin et al., 1999) which further lead to additional barriers of forgiveness.

Nonetheless, as expected, the present study found that forgiveness toward an individual who has caused harm (both having positive emotions and an absence of negative emotions) and general tendency to forgive was positively correlated with attitudes toward restorative justice. This finding reflects the current literature (Blyth, 2016; Witvliet et al., 2008), and solidifies that definition of restorative justice that is often described to be rooted in forgiveness-like behaviours (Armour & Umbreit, 2007; Daly, 2016; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2013).

### **Personality**

The present study hypothesized that three facets of the HEXCO Model of Personality (honesty-humility, agreeableness, emotionality; Lee & Ashton, 2018) would be positively predictive of forgiveness and attitudes toward restorative justice, however, little evidence was found to support this hypothesis. Much of the extant literature on forgiveness and personality has explored forgiveness in a general sense, rather than from a criminological perspective, which could explain the findings from the present study. The only significant result that was found within the analyses for the HEXACO facets and forgiveness was agreeableness emerging as a significant predictor for general tendency to forgive, which is reflected by previous research on the topic which has found similar positive relationships between the two constructs (Brose et al., 2005; Neto, 2007; Strelan, 2007). Of note, agreeableness is cited as the most common personality trait that influences tendency to forgive (McCullough et al., 2001), which helps to support this finding of the present study.

Despite this, no other significant results were found among personality variables and forgiveness toward an offender or attitudes toward restorative justice. Although certain

personality traits have been shown to influence a general tendency to forgive, within the literature and the present study, perhaps they are less powerful in scenarios of forgiveness that involve a perpetrator of a criminal offence. In fact, although research has explored forgiveness and personality, few studies have explored the effect of personality on forgiveness within a specific situation (Koutsos et al., 2008). Of the few studies existing within this body of literature, the results have been mixed (Eaton et al., 2006, Hoyt et al., 2005, McCullough and Worthington, 1999). Explanations for such findings may be that when exploring scenario-based circumstances, it is likely that situation-specific factors (i.e., crime severity, relationship with perpetrator, etc.) may predict forgiveness better than personality-level determinants (Koutsos et al., 2008). Notably, within the present study, the absence of negative, and presence of positive, emotions toward a specific individual, were measured by prompting participants to think about their experience with victimization and to respond based on their feelings toward the individual who has caused harm. Undoubtedly, the scenario-based format of the present study may lend itself as an explanation for why personality showed little effect. Perhaps, when measuring forgiveness in the criminal context, the many extrinsic and situation-specific variables that arise are more salient predictors of forgiveness than one's personality.

In regard to restorative justice attitudes, to our knowledge, there has been no empirical research that has explored the relationship between the personality of a victimized individual and attitudes toward restorative justice, and therefore, the non-significant results between these two constructs found in the present study may act as the first addition to this body of literature.

### **Religiosity**

To explore the predictivity of religiosity on forgiveness and attitudes toward restorative justice, it was hypothesized that exhibiting a high degree of religious faith would positively

influence forgiveness of a perpetrator and attitudes toward restorative justice. As expected, strength of religious faith was significantly positively correlated with, and positively predicted, forgiveness toward a specific individual (presence of positive emotions) and general tendency to forgive. These findings are in line with the present literature which has found that religiosity is strongly related to the disposition to forgive others (Bedell, 2022; Fox & Thomas, 2008; Roberts, 1995)

All major religions have structures that promote forgiveness in some shape or form, and these religions often view forgiveness as an important value, generally encouraging emotions of compassion and empathy for others (Tsang et al., 2005). In fact, researchers have found that religiosity is a stronger determinant of forgiveness than the specific religion an individual is involved with (Fox & Thomas, 2008), suggesting that involvement in any religion, in any capacity, is what strongly influences forgiveness. In addition, researchers have found that individuals with greater religious involvement showed greater tendencies to forgive someone who has caused them harm (Poloma & Gallup, 1991), have greater motivation to forgive and work harder to achieve forgiveness (Gorsuch & Hao, 1993). Altogether, it is evident that religiosity, and the values that religion often upholds, significantly contributes to a tendency to forgive others and to hold positive emotions toward individuals who have caused harm.

In contrast to the results of previous studies described above, no significant results were found for the relationship, and predictivity, of religiosity on an absence of negative feelings toward a specific individual, as well as for attitudes toward restorative justice. Although interesting, the reasoning for religiosity not being related to an absence of negative emotions toward an offender may be explained by the above description of religion and its specific teachings. For example, Christianity is the most prominent religion in Canada (where the sample

for the present study was collected from). Some main beliefs within the Christian church are to love thy neighbor, love one's enemies, grant forgiveness to those who have caused harm, to ask God for forgiveness, repent for one's sins, and the idea that Jesus forgives his people (Boxter, 2003). In understanding the broad ideas that are taught within the Christian church, the non-significant results from the present study may be more understood. Individuals who are highly religious, and follow Christian philosophy, may be more willing to express positive emotions to those who have caused harm (rather than exhibiting an absence of negative emotions) as a result of their spiritual instruction to love one's enemy and to grant forgiveness, and as a result of their belief in repentance. In this perspective, the teachings within divisions of Christian theology likely contribute to individuals expressing positive emotions toward an offender, rather than an absence of negative emotions.

Finally, the non-significant results between religiosity and restorative justice are intriguing given the evident connection between restorative justice and forgiveness, and the prominent connection between forgiveness and religion. However, these results may be explained by the longstanding belief that fundamentalist religions are an underlying contributor to punitive policies. In general, there is support for the idea that fundamentalist Christians in the United States support punitive practices and harsher sentences as a result of their devotion to a strict moral and ethical compass (Cook & Powell, 2003; Grasmick et al., 1993; Unnever et al., 2005). In general, it has been found that individuals who follow a rigid approach to religion may view their higher power as one who dispenses justice and therefore, they must abide by judicial decision making (Unnever et al., 2005). In contrast, individuals who are more conservative in their approach to religion often tend to be less supportive of "get tough" policies and harsh sentences.



Furthermore, Cook and Powell (2003) explored the beliefs of 30 Christian participants on crime policies in the United States in relation to their religion. Within this research, it was found that 10 participants held vengeful mentalities that were in favor of increasing criminal punishments, introducing more torturous executions for those on Death Row, and advocating for longer sentences for all. Six participants believed in retribution and justice (i.e., “an eye for an eye”), and expressed that they would be more accepting of penal mistakes (i.e., innocent people going to prison) if that meant that more guilty offenders were behind bars. In contrast to these negative perceptions of criminal policies, only six participants believed in the “value of life” through maintaining a non-punitive mentality. And, within the groups who expressed anti-rehabilitative/restorative attitudes, an underlying concept of religion was often mentioned by participants, whereas this was very rarely mentioned among those who expressed more rehabilitative views. Altogether, although interesting, the findings of the present study may be in line with this previous literature which explains why a relationship was not found between restorative justice attitudes and religiosity.

### **Cultural Orientation**

In regard to culture and its relationship with forgiveness, it was hypothesized that culture, specifically having a collectivistic orientation, would positively influence forgiveness toward an individual who has caused harm, general tendency to forgive, and attitudes toward restorative justice. Overall, individuals who come from collectivistic cultural orientations are often motivated and driven by behaviours that will promote and maintain group harmony, whereas individualistic peoples view decision-making as a solely personal process.

As a result of an understanding of the general processes of individualistic and collectivistic cultural orientations, the significant results within this hypothesis make sense.

Vertical individualism was found to be negatively predictive of an absence of negative emotions toward an offender. In other words, scoring high in vertical individualism was found to be predictive of being less forgiving of an individual who has caused harm. Simply, individualistic individuals, following an ideology of being completely autonomous and focused on personal (rather than societal) wellbeing, are more likely to be unforgiving toward a perpetrator likely because they do not have rigid expectations from their community regarding how they should behave and submit to societal stressors. Instead, these individuals often make decisions that benefit themselves, without having to take into account the expectations and perspectives of others, which can explain why they would be generally less forgiving. This is supported by a plethora of extant research which has found that individualistic peoples are generally unforgiving and/or less forgiving than those within collectivistic cultures (e.g., Huwaë & Schaafsma, 2019; Kadiangndu et al., 2001). In addition, the defining difference between horizontal and vertical cultural orientation is the emphasis on equality versus hierarchy. While vertical cultural orientations value hierarchy in society, horizontal cultural orientations value equality, which can explain the findings of the current study. With less of a belief in equality, it can be understood that these individuals may view violent perpetrators as being lower on the societal hierarchy and are therefore less deserving of forgiveness.

Additionally, horizontal collectivism was found to positively predict attitudes toward restorative justice, while vertical individualism was found to negatively predict these attitudes. Within the extant research, Hook (2007) found that individuals from collectivistic cultures conceptualize forgiveness in the context of reconciliation, social harmony, and repairing of relationships. Importantly, restorative justice is generally founded on similar concepts of reparation, remediation, and reconciliation (Daly, 2016; Johnstone & Van Ness, 2013; Menkel-

Meadow, 2007; Zehr & Mika, 2017) which helps to explain the close connection between restorative justice and horizontal collectivism values. In addition, the emphasis of equality versus hierarchy may also explain why horizontal collectivism, and not vertical collectivism, was found to positively predict attitudes toward restorative justice as a result of the high value placed on all members of society being equal. In contrast, given the norms of individualism, and the value of societal hierarchy that is evident within vertical cultures, it makes sense that individuals from this cultural orientation would not hold supportive views of restorative justice.

### **Empathic Concern and Perspective-Taking**

For the fifth hypothesis, it was expected that empathic concern and perspective-taking would positively impact the likelihood of exhibiting forgiveness toward an individual who has caused harm, having a general tendency to forgive, as well as positively influencing attitudes toward restorative justice. The results from the present study revealed that the multi-regression model of empathy and perspective-taking on attitudes toward restorative justice was significant at the  $p < .001$  level with empathic concern emerging as a significant predictor within the model. Creators of the Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale (Taylor & Bailey, 2022) encourage users of the scale to analyze the sum score, despite there being five internal subscales within the scale itself. Of these subscales, one is defined as empathic understanding, which mirrors the definition of empathic concern that was used within the present study. As a result, it is understandable why a relationship emerged between attitudes toward restorative justice and empathic concern given the close relationship between the two constructs.

However, perspective-taking was not found to be a significant predictor of restorative justice attitudes within the present study, which is intriguing given that empathy *and* perspective-taking are core principles of restorative justice (Taylor & Bailey, 2022; Warden, 2018). Within

the foundational study which created the Attitudes Toward Restorative Justice Scale (Taylor & Bailey, 2022), the researchers found that the relationship between restorative justice attitudes and the empathic concern and perspective-taking subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) showed to be statistically significant, although the effects were quite small. Furthermore, empathy is not easily defined, and although the Interpersonal Reactivity Index maintains the idea that empathic concern and perspective-taking can together create a measure of empathy, researchers have begun to argue for the disassociation of empathy and perspective-taking given that there is evidence that these two processes are unique and therefore should not be categorized together under an umbrella-term of empathy (Stietz et al., 2019). If so, perhaps the ability to take the perspective of others is simply not strong enough on its own to predict attitudes toward restorative justice and may have been conflated by empathy itself.

Moreover, the present study did not find significant predictivity of empathy or perspective-taking on having positive emotions toward an individual who caused harm, a lack of negative emotions toward this individual, or general tendency to forgive. One explanation for these findings could be in the way the constructs were measured. To assess empathy/perspective-taking, there are many validated scales that can be used, as is true for forgiveness. There are many different options for scales when assessing these constructs and this may have played a role in not reaching significance given that the specific scales that were chosen for the present study may not have been the most appropriate for comparison. For instance, empathic concern and perspective-taking, as defined by Davis (1980), is wholly other-oriented. Empathic concern is defined as ‘being warm and compassionate toward others’ while perspective-taking is defined as ‘being able to see things from another person’s point of view’ (Davis, 1980). In addition, when looking at empathy in a broader lens, researchers have defined it as ‘the ability to

appropriately respond to another person, often evidenced by a heightened awareness of feelings and the use of “I” statements, which conveys the impact of such feelings’ (Côté & Hodgins, 1990). In contrast, while forgiveness *can* reflect other-oriented motivations, such as altruism or empathy, it is most commonly viewed as a self-oriented act (i.e., to make oneself feel better, to decrease personal bitterness, etc.; Root, 2008). The scales used within the present study to explore forgiveness were highly self-oriented, where prompts within the scale were largely directed to the participants’ personal beliefs and attitudes toward a specific individual rather than illustrating an other-oriented view. For example, the Forgiveness Scale (Rye, 1998) asks participants to respond to the questionnaire while thinking about a specific individual who has caused mistreatment or harm to the participant, thus illustrating a highly personalized measurement. As a result, given that the empathic concern and perspective-taking scales were measuring unique perspectives in comparison to the forgiveness scales, this could help explain why no significant results were found. In a similar vein, this may help to further explain the significant results discussed above given that The Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale (Taylor & Bailey, 2022) offers a depersonalized evaluation of attitudes toward restorative justice that are much more similar to other-oriented empathy. Overall, the use of the chosen empathy scale, in combination with the forgiveness scales, may have contributed to the non-significant results that were found.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The present study certainly helps to add to the literature by expanding knowledge and research regarding victimization, forgiveness, and attitudes toward restorative justice. Presently, research exploring forgiveness in a criminal context exists, yet represents only a small body of literature. As a result, the present study helped to expand this area of research by exploring

various concepts that are present within general forgiveness research in an attempt to understand their value and influence within a criminal context. In addition, the qualitative and quantitative nature allowed the present study to blossom into a well-rounded and wholesome description of the experiences faced by those who have been victimized by violent crime by using validated measures as well as allowing participants to share their thoughts in their own words. Lastly, a strength of the present study is the breadth of recruitment, which spanned across Canada, helping to allow for the research to be as generalizable to the Canadian population as possible.

Nevertheless, several limitations remain regarding the present study. Firstly, the online self-report format of the present study brings challenges that are present in every study of this format, however, it also created additional barriers that were unique to this study. It is likely that some eligible participants would have been excluded from participating given the known association between victimization and socioeconomic status (Aaltonen, 2013; Aaltonen et al., 2012; Berzofsky et al., 2014; McIntyre & Spatz Widom, 2011). For instance, some individuals may have been interested in participating but did not have access to a computer, Wi-Fi, or an email account. Additionally, literacy could have also affected the number of individuals who would have participated but could not. Individuals also may have been wary to participate given the immeasurable vulnerability that is required to discuss such a traumatic experience with a stranger in an online format.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

Undoubtedly, the present study provides an avenue for research that has yet to be fully explored. The present study can pave the way for more research to be conducted on this topic and for a greater understanding to be sought regarding the influencing factors of forgiveness

between those who have been violently criminally victimized and those who have criminally offended. Together, this can allow for broad implications for policy practice, and theory.

To better explore this topic, future research may wish to conduct qualitative interview-style research with individuals who have experienced violent victimization as a means to gain a greater understanding of their interpretations of their pathway to, or away from, forgiveness. With such rich qualitative interview data, a broader and more in-depth view of forgiveness may be achieved. In addition, longitudinal studies would be an excellent source of information to explore how forgiveness changes over time. Previous researchers have hypothesized that forgiveness follows a logarithmic pattern over time (McCullough et al., 2010), and this could be further explored for forgiveness in the criminal context. Further research may also wish to explore the influence of interventions (i.e., restorative justice, psychological intervention, etc.) on forgiveness, perhaps by recruiting participants who have participated in such practices.

From this research, as well as from future research that may be conducted, more robust models of forgiveness within the criminal context may be developed. Given that the present research integrates biological, social, and psychological factors, future research on the topic could allow for current forgiveness models to be adapted to create a more holistic structure of forgiveness. Furthermore, results from the present research may help to inform restorative justice policies, victim services, and legal/judicial reformation. With this, restorative justice practices may be refined to design programs that promote more meaningful reconciliation, and victim services programs may be adapted to create programs and counselling services that help victims navigate their trauma in a constructive and individualistic manner. As for legal/judicial reform, forgiveness may be introduced into sentencing procedures as a mitigating factor to consider.

Finally, there are therapies and programs in place that help guide victims through the recovery process via forgiveness (Akhtar & Barlow, 2018; Enright and The Human Development Study Group, 1996; Worthington, 2001), however it remains unclear how effective such forgiveness therapies are (Wade & Meyer, 2009), with some research findings positive effects (i.e., Baskin & Enright, 2004; Lundahl et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2005) and others finding no significant effect (i.e., Wade et al., 2013; Wade & Meyer, 2009). Moreover, the mechanisms guiding the success of restorative justice programs also remain unclear. Although many studies have cited the effectiveness of restorative justice, there lacks a concrete understanding of why these programs are effective and why positive outcomes arise (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015). As a result, the present study, and other accompanying future research, may help to develop therapeutic practices, community and educational programs, as well as adequate training for service-deliverers that are evidence-based, and that are more powerful and effective than what is currently available to this population.

### **Conclusion**

Altogether, the present study aimed to explore the influencing factors of forgiveness between an individual who experienced violent victimization and the individual who committed the crime. The present study also explored the connection between forgiveness and restorative justice, and whether the explored factors contribute to attitudes toward restorative justice. Results indicated that agreeableness, as well as strength of religious faith, were significant positive predictors of general tendency to forgive others, and religiosity was also found to be a significant positive predictor of holding positive emotions toward an individual who has caused harm. Having a collectivistic cultural orientation showed positive influence in attitudes toward restorative justice, and those from individualistic cultures were found to have less positive



attitudes toward these practices. Vertical individualism was shown to be negatively predictive of having an absence of negative emotions toward a perpetrator. Finally, empathy was highlighted as a significant predictor of attitudes toward restorative justice. Results from this research have broad implications for theory (i.e., developing a robust forgiveness model), policy (i.e., informing/reforming restorative justice practices and victim services), and practice (i.e., developing effective intervention strategies).

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Informed Consent Form (SONA and General Public)

#### Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing Victim-to-Perpetrator

#### Forgiveness

Saint Mary's University REB # ??

Research Team:

Principal Student Researcher: Payton McPhee

Faculty Researcher: Dr. Marguerite Ternes

Contact: [Payton.McPhee@smu.ca](mailto:Payton.McPhee@smu.ca) [Meg.Ternes@smu.ca](mailto:Meg.Ternes@smu.ca)

#### **Introduction**

We welcome you to participate in our research study. The present study aims to examine the factors that influence victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness. That is, we are interested in learning more about the mechanisms behind the ability/decision for victims to grant forgiveness toward an individual who has committed a violent crime against them. This research is being conducted to fulfill the principal student researcher's Master's thesis.

#### **Purpose and Rationale**

Victimization is an ever-present issue and oftentimes the road to recovery and healing is one that is long and winding. Research suggests that granting a perpetrator forgiveness can offer fruitful benefits to victims by enhancing their wellbeing, mental health, and physical health. The aim of the present study is to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that play a role in granting forgiveness to a perpetrator and we hope that this research will allow for a broad conceptualization of how victims can be supported through this difficult journey. The results from this study may allow for the development and implementation of resources and programs that support victims on their recovery and healing process through the promotion of forgiveness. We are looking for participants to share their experiences and beliefs regarding granting forgiveness toward an individual who has committed a criminal act against them.

#### **Who Is Eligible?**

You are eligible to participate in this study if you meet the following criteria:

1. You are over 18 years of age
2. You permanently reside Canada
3. Self-identify as being a victim of a violent crime

#### **Procedure**

If you wish to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire which will take approximately 25 minutes. Your participation in this study is completely

confidential and voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any of the questions and/or to leave the questionnaire at any time, for any reason.

### **What are the potential risks of this research?**

This survey focuses on forgiveness toward a perpetrator and participants will be asked to recall a time in their lives when they experienced a criminal, violent offence. As these topics can be emotional for some, there is a potential of psychological or emotional risk such as sadness, discomfort, flashbacks, stress, anxiety, etc. If you think that these topics will be upsetting for you, we suggest that you do not participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate in our study, you have an option to decline, skip questions you are not comfortable in answering, or withdraw at any time without negative consequences. All survey responses will be confidential, and private. This means that only members of the research team will know your responses and no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Should you experience any negative outcomes as a result of this study, please reach out to Dr. Meg Ternes by phone (902-420-5853) or by email ([meg.ternes@smu.ca](mailto:meg.ternes@smu.ca)) immediately. For Saint Mary's University Students, you have access to the Counselling Centre at (902) 420-5615. There are also mental health services available through the Nova Scotia Health Authority (referral needed from a physician). Finally, if you are in crisis, please contact the Mobile Crisis Telephone Line (902) 429-8167, call 911, or attend your local emergency department. Here is a list of additional mental health resources for all participants in the study:

#### **SMU Counselling Centre**

1-902-420-5615

#### **Crisis Services**

1833-456-4566

#### **Centre for Suicide Prevention**

1-833-456-4566

#### **Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime**

1-877-232-2610 or <https://crcvc.ca/>

### **What will be done with my information?**

If you choose to complete the study, it will be conducted via Qualtrics, a platform server located in Canada. The data will be stored on a cloud-based password-protected server and/or on password protected computers. We plan on keeping the data for as long as we think we may need it, and at least five years after the results are published. Only members of the research team will have access to the data, but we may share the data with other scholars or journal editors.

Once all the data is collected and analyzed for this project, we plan on sharing this information with the research community through conferences, presentations, and academic papers. We expect to share our results by Summer 2024.

### **Compensation**

Participants will either be compensated with a) .50 bonus points if they are registered in a SONA-eligible psychology class at Saint Mary's University or b) entry into a draw to win one of two \$25 Amazon gift cards.

### **Can I withdraw from this study?**

If you do not wish to participate in our study, you have an option to decline, skip questions you are not comfortable in answering, or withdraw at any time without negative consequences. To do so, simply click "choose not to answer" on any remaining survey questions to skip to the end, and then click the button "withdraw from this study" that is located at the end of the survey. The Debriefing Form at the end of the survey will provide you with information and resources that you may need should you feel negative affect, sadness, anxiousness, etc. If you choose to withdraw from this study, we will remove your data from our dataset and it will not be used for further analyses.

### **Participant's Rights and Protections**

This research has been reviewed and cleared by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters you may contact the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at [ethics@smu.ca](mailto:ethics@smu.ca) or (902)420-5728.

### **Need More Information**

If you would like to hear more about this research study prior to participating, you may reach out to one of the main researchers for more information:

Payton McPhee: [Payton.McPhee@smu.ca](mailto:Payton.McPhee@smu.ca)

Dr. Marguerite Ternes: [Meg.Ternes@smu.ca](mailto:Meg.Ternes@smu.ca)

### **Participant Agreement:**

- I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.*
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.*
- I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.*

**[Click] I consent to participate in this study**

**[Click] I do not consent and do not wish to participate**

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form (Amazon MTurk)

### Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing Victim-to-Perpetrator

#### Forgiveness

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Research Team:

Principal Student Researcher: Payton McPhee

Faculty Researcher: Dr. Marguerite Ternes

Contact: [Payton.McPhee@smu.ca](mailto:Payton.McPhee@smu.ca) [Meg.Ternes@smu.ca](mailto:Meg.Ternes@smu.ca)

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### **What are the potential risks of this research?**

This survey focuses on forgiveness toward a perpetrator and participants will be asked to recall a time in their lives when they experienced a criminal, violent offence. As these topics can be emotional for some, there is a potential of psychological or emotional risk such as sadness, discomfort, flashbacks, stress, anxiety, etc. If you think that these topics will be upsetting for you, we suggest that you do not participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate in our study, you have an option to decline, skip questions you are not comfortable in answering, or withdraw at any time without negative consequences. All survey responses will be confidential, and private. This means that only members of the research team will know your responses and no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Should you experience any negative outcomes as a result of this study, please reach out to Dr. Meg Ternes by phone (902-420-5853) or by email ([meg.ternes@smu.ca](mailto:meg.ternes@smu.ca)) immediately. For Saint Mary's University Students, you have access to the Counselling Centre at (902) 420-5615. There are also mental health services available through the Nova Scotia Health Authority (referral needed from a physician). Finally, if you are in crisis, please contact the Mobile Crisis Telephone Line (902) 429-8167, call 911, or attend your local emergency department. Here is a list of additional mental health resources for all participants in the study:

#### **SMU Counselling Centre**

1-902-420-5615

#### **Crisis Services**

1833-456-4566

#### **Centre for Suicide Prevention**

1-833-456-4566

#### **Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime**

1-877-232-2610 or <https://crcvc.ca/>

### **What will be done with my information?**

If you choose to complete the study, it will be conducted via Qualtrics, a platform server located in Canada. The data will be stored on a cloud-based password-protected server and/or on password protected computers. We plan on keeping the data for as long as we think we may need it, and at least five years after the results are published. Only members of the research team will have access to the data, but we may share the data with other scholars or journal editors.

Once all the data is collected and analyzed for this project, we plan on sharing this information with the research community through conferences, presentations, and academic papers. We expect to share our results by Summer 2024.

### **Compensation**

Participants who become involved in this study through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk will be compensated with \$3.50 USD and an additional \$0.50 USD for correctly answering attention checks.

### **Can I withdraw from this study?**

If you do not wish to participate in our study, you have an option to decline, skip questions you are not comfortable in answering, or withdraw at any time without negative consequences. To do so, simply click "choose not to answer" on any remaining survey questions to skip to the end, and then click the button “withdraw from this study” that is located at the end of the survey. The Debriefing Form at the end of the survey will provide you with information and resources that you may need should you feel negative affect, sadness, anxiousness, etc. If you choose to withdraw from this study, we will remove your data from our dataset and it will not be used for further analyses.

### **Participant’s Rights and Protections**

This research has been reviewed and cleared by the Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters you may contact the Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board at [ethics@smu.ca](mailto:ethics@smu.ca) or (902)420-5728.

### **Need More Information**

If you would like to hear more about this research study prior to participating, you may reach out to one of the main researchers for more information:

Payton McPhee: [Payton.McPhee@smu.ca](mailto:Payton.McPhee@smu.ca)

Dr. Marguerite Ternes: [Meg.Ternes@smu.ca](mailto:Meg.Ternes@smu.ca)

### **Participant Agreement:**

- I understand what this study is about, appreciate the risks and benefits, and that by consenting I agree to take part in this research study and do not waive any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.*
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can end my participation at any time without penalty.*
- I have had adequate time to think about the research study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.*

**[Click] I consent to participate in this study**

**[Click] I do not consent and do not wish to participate**

### Appendix C: Demographic and Victimization Contextual Information Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to what fits for you.

Are you a Canadian citizen or Permanent Resident of Canada?

Yes

No

A violent crime is defined as “the use, or threat of use, of force against a person or property”. Based on this definition, do you consider yourself to have been victimized by a violent crime (whether reported or unreported)?

Yes

No

What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_

With what ethnicity do you identify? If desired, please use the text boxes to provide more details

Black, African descent, African Nova Scotian

South Asian

Southeast Asian

East Asian

White, European descent and/or Acadian

Indigenous and/or Aboriginal

Middle Eastern and/or North African

Hispanic, Latinoa/Latino/Latinx, Central American and/or South American

Mixed ethnicity

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer not to say

Do you identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+?

Yes

No

Not sure

Prefer not to answer

How do you identify?

Female

Male

Nonbinary

Gender fluid

Transgender Male

Transgender Female

Unsure

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer not to say



Highest level of education completed:

- Less than grade 10
- High school
- Some College or University
- College or specialized diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Some post-baccalaureate
- Graduate degree (post-baccalaureate)

Employment:

- Full-time
- Part-time
- None

Which of the following violent offences did you experience?

- Assault (any intentional application of force, directly or indirectly, to another person without their consent)
- Aggravated Assault (any type of assault which wounds, maims, disfigures, or endangers life)
- Assault with a Weapon (any type of assault where the perpetrator carries, uses, or threatens to use a weapon)
- Sexual Assault (all unwanted sexual activity; sexual activity in which both parties have not consented)
- Sexual Harassment (any unwanted comment, gesture, or action that is sexual in nature, but did not involve any unwanted physical sexual contact)
- Other Sexual Offence (i.e., exploitation/distribution/production of pornography, voyeurism, exhibitionism, etc.)
- Robbery (the theft or extortion of property with the use of a weapon, violence or threats of violence)
- Break and Enter (breaking into or out of a place and committing or intending to commit an indictable offence in such place)
- Home Invasion (an act of breaking and entering which occurs when people are inside the dwelling)
- Arson (intentionally or recklessly causing damage by fire or explosion to any type of property or structure)
- Kidnapping (taking a person and physically holding them in some location against their will, often for a ransom)
- Human Trafficking (the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour)
- Property vandalism (the act of destroying or damaging property)

Criminal Harassment (harassing behaviour such as stalking including repeatedly following, communicating with or watching over one's dwelling home)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Think of the most salient offence that you have experienced from the list above. You may choose the most recent offence that you have experienced, the most impactful, etc. Please only pick one offence to discuss throughout this survey.

Please indicate below which offence you have chosen to discuss throughout the survey.

Assault (any intentional application of force, directly or indirectly, to another person without their consent)

Aggravated Assault (any type of assault which wounds, maims, disfigures, or endangers life)

Assault with a Weapon (any type of assault where the perpetrator carries, uses, or threatens to use a weapon)

Sexual Assault (all unwanted sexual activity; sexual activity in which both parties have not consented)

Sexual Harassment (any unwanted comment, gesture, or action that is sexual in nature, but did not involve any unwanted physical sexual contact)

Other Sexual Offence (i.e., exploitation/distribution/production of pornography, voyeurism, exhibitionism, etc.)

Robbery (the theft or extortion of property with the use of a weapon, violence or threats of violence)

Break and Enter (breaking into or out of a place and committing or intending to commit an indictable offence in such place)

Home Invasion (an act of breaking and entering which occurs when people are inside the dwelling)

Arson (intentionally or recklessly causing damage by fire or explosion to any type of property or structure)

Kidnapping (taking a person and physically holding them in some location against their will, often for a ransom)

Human Trafficking (the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour)

Property vandalism (the act of destroying or damaging property)

Criminal Harassment (harassing behaviour such as stalking including repeatedly following, communicating with or watching over one's dwelling home)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Optional: If you feel comfortable, I welcome you to describe your experiences/the events regarding victimization (open ended)

How long ago did this offence take place?

Less than 6 months ago

Less than 1 year ago

1 – 2 years ago

3 – 5 years ago

6 – 10 years ago

11 – 20 years ago

20+ years ago

What was your relationship with the individual who perpetrated this offence? If desired, please use the text boxes to provide more details about the relationship

Family: \_\_\_\_\_

Friend: \_\_\_\_\_

Acquaintance: \_\_\_\_\_

Stranger: \_\_\_\_\_

I am unsure who committed this offence: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you share any of the following characteristics with the individual who offended against you?

Culture

Gender

Race/ethnicity

Hometown

Neighborhood

Employment

Church

School

Unsure

No

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Did the perpetrator face any criminal sanctions (e.g., charge, fine, incarceration)?

Yes

No

Unsure

What criminal sanctions did the perpetrator face?

Charge



If someone was in the same situation, what advice would you give them regarding forgiveness/withholding forgiveness?

Please answer the following questions for what fits best for you.

**1 = strongly disagree. 2 = disagree. 3 = somewhat disagree 4 = neither agree not disagree 5 = somewhat agree 6 = agree 7 = strongly agree**

1. People that are important to me think/thought I should forgive the person who offended against me
2. People that are important to me tend to be forgiving
3. It is/was easy for me to forgive the person who offended against me
4. I have control over whether I forgive someone

### Appendix D: HEXACO 100-Item Model of Personality

**1 = strongly disagree. 2 = disagree. 3 = neutral. 4 = agree. 5 = strongly agree**

- 1 I would be quite bored by a visit to an art gallery.
- 2 I clean my office or home quite frequently.
- 3 I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me.
- 4 I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall.
- 5 I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions.
- 6 If I want something from a person I dislike, I will act very nicely toward that person in order to get it.
- 7 I'm interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries.
- 8 When working, I often set ambitious goals for myself.
- 9 People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.
- 10 I rarely express my opinions in group meetings.
- 11 I sometimes can't help worrying about little things.
- 12 If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars.
- 13 I would like a job that requires following a routine rather than being creative.
- 14 I often check my work over repeatedly to find any mistakes.
- 15 People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn.
- 16 I avoid making "small talk" with people.
- 17 When I suffer from a painful experience, I need someone to make me feel comfortable.
- 18 Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.
- 19 I think that paying attention to radical ideas is a waste of time.
- 20 I make decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought.
- 21 People think of me as someone who has a quick temper.
- 22 I am energetic nearly all the time.
- 23 I feel like crying when I see other people crying.
- 24 I am an ordinary person who is no better than others.
- 25 I wouldn't spend my time reading a book of poetry.
- 26 I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute.
- 27 My attitude toward people who have treated me badly is "forgive and forget".
- 28 I think that most people like some aspects of my personality.
- 29 I don't mind doing jobs that involve dangerous work.
- 30 I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.
- 31 I enjoy looking at maps of different places.

- 32 I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal.
- 33 I generally accept people's faults without complaining about them.
- 34 In social situations, I'm usually the one who makes the first move.
- 35 I worry a lot less than most people do.
- 36 I would be tempted to buy stolen property if I were financially tight.
- 37 I would enjoy creating a work of art, such as a novel, a song, or a painting.
- 38 When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details.
- 39 I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me.
- 40 I enjoy having lots of people around to talk with.
- 41 I can handle difficult situations without needing emotional support from anyone else.
- 42 I would like to live in a very expensive, high-class neighborhood.
- 43 I like people who have unconventional views.
- 44 I make a lot of mistakes because I don't think before I act.
- 45 I rarely feel anger, even when people treat me quite badly.
- 46 On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic.
- 47 When someone I know well is unhappy, I can almost feel that person's pain myself.
- 48 I wouldn't want people to treat me as though I were superior to them.
- 49 If I had the opportunity, I would like to attend a classical music concert.
- 50 People often joke with me about the messiness of my room or desk.
- 51 If someone has cheated me once, I will always feel suspicious of that person.
- 52 I feel that I am an unpopular person.
- 53 When it comes to physical danger, I am very fearful.
- 54 If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes.
- 55 I would be very bored by a book about the history of science and technology.
- 56 Often when I set a goal, I end up quitting without having reached it.
- 57 I tend to be lenient in judging other people.
- 58 When I'm in a group of people, I'm often the one who speaks on behalf of the group.
- 59 I rarely, if ever, have trouble sleeping due to stress or anxiety.
- 60 I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.
- 61 People have often told me that I have a good imagination.
- 62 I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time.
- 63 When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.
- 64 I prefer jobs that involve active social interaction to those that involve working alone.
- 65 Whenever I feel worried about something, I want to share my concern with another person.
- 66 I would like to be seen driving around in a very expensive car.

- 67 I think of myself as a somewhat eccentric person.
- 68 I don't allow my impulses to govern my behavior.
- 69 Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do.
- 70 People often tell me that I should try to cheer up.
- 71 I feel strong emotions when someone close to me is going away for a long time.
- 72 I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.
- 73 Sometimes I like to just watch the wind as it blows through the trees.
- 74 When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganized.
- 75 I find it hard to fully forgive someone who has done something mean to me.
- 76 I sometimes feel that I am a worthless person.
- 77 Even in an emergency I wouldn't feel like panicking.
- 78 I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
- 79 I've never really enjoyed looking through an encyclopedia.
- 80 I do only the minimum amount of work needed to get by.
- 81 Even when people make a lot of mistakes, I rarely say anything negative.
- 82 I tend to feel quite self-conscious when speaking in front of a group of people.
- 83 I get very anxious when waiting to hear about an important decision.
- 84 I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it.
- 85 I don't think of myself as the artistic or creative type.
- 86 People often call me a perfectionist.
- 87 I find it hard to compromise with people when I really think I'm right.
- 88 The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends.
- 89 I rarely discuss my problems with other people.
- 90 I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods.
- 91 I find it boring to discuss philosophy.
- 92 I prefer to do whatever comes to mind, rather than stick to a plan.
- 93 I find it hard to keep my temper when people insult me.
- 94 Most people are more upbeat and dynamic than I generally am.
- 95 I remain unemotional even in situations where most people get very sentimental.
- 96 I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.
- 97 I have sympathy for people who are less fortunate than I am.
- 98 I try to give generously to those in need.
- 99 It wouldn't bother me to harm someone I didn't like.
- 100 People see me as a hard-hearted person.



### Appendix E: The Forgiveness Scale (Rye, 1998)

Think of how you have responded to the person who has wronged or mistreated you. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can't stop thinking about how I was wronged by this person.	1	2	3	4	5
I wish for good things to happen to the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I spend time thinking about ways to get back at the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel resentful toward the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I avoid certain people and/or places because they remind me of the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I pray for the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
If I encountered the person who wronged me I would feel at peace.	1	2	3	4	5
This person's wrongful actions have kept me from enjoying life.	1	2	3	4	5
I have been able to let go of my anger toward the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I become depressed when I think of how I was mistreated by this person	1	2	3	4	5
I think that many of the emotional wounds related to this person's wrongful actions have healed.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel hatred whenever I think about the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I have compassion for the person who wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5
I think my life is ruined because of this person's wrongful actions.	1	2	3	4	5
I hope the person	1	2	3	4	5

who wronged me is treated fairly by others in the future.					
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### Appendix F: The Forgiveness Likelihood Scale (Rye, 1998)

Imagine the scenarios below happened to you. Based on the information provided, consider the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the person. Then, indicate the response that is most true for you.

1. You share something embarrassing about yourself to a friend who promises to keep the information confidential. However, the friend breaks his/her promise and proceeds to tell several people. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

Not at all Likely    Slightly Likely    Somewhat Slightly    Fairly Likely    Extremely Likely

2. One of your friends starts a nasty rumor about you that is not true. As a result, people begin treating you worse than they have in the past. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

Not at all Likely    Slightly Likely    Somewhat Slightly    Fairly Likely    Extremely Likely

3. Your significant other has just broken up with you, leaving you hurt and confused. You learn that the reason for the break up is that your significant other started dating a good friend of yours. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?

Not at all Likely    Slightly Likely    Somewhat Slightly    Fairly Likely    Extremely Likely

4. A family member humiliates you in front of others by sharing a story about you that you did not want anyone to know. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the family member?

Not at all Likely    Slightly Likely    Somewhat Slightly    Fairly Likely    Extremely Likely

5. Your significant other has a “one night stand” and becomes sexually involved with someone else. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?

Not at all Likely    Slightly Likely    Somewhat Slightly    Fairly Likely    Extremely Likely

6. Your friend has been talking about you behind your back. When you confront this person, he/she denies it, even though you know that he/she is lying. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

Not at all Likely    Slightly Likely    Somewhat Slightly    Fairly Likely    Extremely Likely

7. A friend borrows your most valued possession, and then loses it. The friend refuses to replace it. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

Not at all Likely   Slightly Likely   Somewhat Slightly   Fairly Likely   Extremely Likely

8. You tell an acquaintance about a job that you hope to be hired for. Without telling you, the acquaintance applies and gets the job for him/herself. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your acquaintance?

Not at all Likely   Slightly Likely   Somewhat Slightly   Fairly Likely   Extremely Likely

9. A stranger breaks into your house and steals a substantial sum of money from you. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the stranger?

Not at all Likely   Slightly Likely   Somewhat Slightly   Fairly Likely   Extremely Likely

10. You accept someone's offer to attend a formal dance. However, this person breaks their commitment to take you and goes to the event with someone who they find more attractive. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive this person?

Not at all Likely   Slightly Likely   Somewhat Slightly   Fairly Likely   Extremely Likely

**Appendix G: The Restorative Justice Attitudes Scale (Taylor & Bailey, 2022)**

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
It is important to empathize with individuals who have caused harm to others	1	2	3	4	5
It is important to show empathy toward offenders of wrongdoing	1	2	3	4	5
People should empathize with others, even if the person has caused harm	1	2	3	4	5
Showing support to offenders can be beneficial in helping the individual accept responsibility for their actions	1	2	3	4	5
It is important to understand the needs of offenders that are connected to the harm they caused	1	2	3	4	5
Offenders of wrongdoing have needs associated with the harm they caused that justice processes should address	1	2	3	4	5
There should be a greater emphasis on understanding those who cause harm	1	2	3	4	5
I believe there should be an equal concern toward healing the lives of both those who have been harmed and those who cause harm	1	2	3	4	5
Offenders of wrongdoing should work to restore relationships with those whom they hurt	1	2	3	4	5
Offenders of wrongdoing should repair relationships with those who have been harmed	1	2	3	4	5
It is important for offenders and victims to engage in face-to-face dialogue	1	2	3	4	5
Inclusive, collaborative processes between victims and offenders of wrongdoing are necessary to repair harm	1	2	3	4	5

It is important that offenders of wrongdoing accept responsibility for their actions	1	2	3	4	5
Acknowledging one's wrongdoing is important	1	2	3	4	5
I believe individuals should be encouraged to understand the impact of their harm	1	2	3	4	5
Truth-telling in the form of an admission of responsibility for what happened on the part of the person who caused the harm is important	1	2	3	4	5
Community members should have an active voice in defining justice for victims	1	2	3	4	5
Justice processes should be more inclusive of individuals within the community	1	2	3	4	5
I believe victims of harm need the community's support in order to heal	1	2	3	4	5
The community has a responsibility to help victims of harm address their needs	1	2	3	4	5

**Appendix H: The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante &  
Boccaccini, 1997)**

Please answer the following questions about religious faith using the scale below. Indicate the level of agreement (or disagreement) for each statement.

1 = strongly disagree    2 = disagree    3 = agree    4 = strongly agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. My religious faith is extremely important to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I pray daily.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I look to my faith as a source of inspiration.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I consider myself active in my faith or church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. My faith is an important part of who I am as a person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. My relationship with God is extremely important to me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I enjoy being around others who share my faith.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I look to my faith as a source of comfort.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. My faith impacts many of my decisions.

**Appendix I: The Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism II Scale (Triandis  
& Gelfand, 1998)**

Horizontal individualism items:

1. I'd rather depend on myself than others.
2. I rely on myself most of the time; I rarely rely on others.
3. I often do "my own thing."
4. My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.

Vertical individualism items:

1. It is important that I do my job better than others.
2. Winning is everything.
3. Competition is the law of nature.
4. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.

Horizontal collectivism items:

1. If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud.
2. The well-being of my coworkers is important to me.
3. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
4. I feel good when I cooperate with others.

Vertical collectivism items:

1. Parents and children must stay together as much as possible.
2. It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want.
3. Family members should stick together, no matter what sacrifices are required.
4. It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups.



**Appendix J: The Perspective Taking and Empathic Concern Scale (taken from  
Interpersonal Reactivity Index) (Davis, 1980)**

Read each of the following statements and rate how well each of them describes you. Please mark the box that corresponds to the number which applies to you for each item:

	<b>1. Does not describe me well</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5. Describes me well</b>
Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.	1	2	3	4	5
If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.	1	2	3	4	5
When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.	1	2	3	4	5
When I see people being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.	1	2	3	4	5
When I see people being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.	1	2	3	4	5
I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	1	2	3	4	5
I would describe myself as a pretty softhearted person.	1	2	3	4	5

Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.	1	2	3	4	5
Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.	1	2	3	4	5
I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix K: Debriefing Form (SONA and General Public)

### Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing Victim-to-Perpetrator

#### Forgiveness

Saint Mary's University REB # ??

Research Team:

Principal Student Researcher: Payton McPhee

Faculty Researcher: Dr. Marguerite Ternes

Contact: [Payton.McPhee@smu.ca](mailto:Payton.McPhee@smu.ca) [Meg.Ternes@smu.ca](mailto:Meg.Ternes@smu.ca)

We would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, this study aims to examine the factors that influence victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness. That is, we are interested in learning more about the mechanisms behind the ability/decision for victims to grant forgiveness toward an individual who has committed a crime against them. This study was conducted in completion of the principal student researcher's Master of Science thesis.

#### Your Data

Please note that your individual data will be kept secure and confidential. No personal identifiers will be attached to the data. Recorded data will be stored on a password protected laptop. All data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years before being destroyed. Once all data are collected, they will be analyzed and aggregate data (group statistics without any individual identifiers) will be reported publicly at conferences, in academic journals, and in presentations.

#### Compensation

To compensate for your appreciated participation, participants will be compensated with a) .50 bonus points toward an eligible psychology class, or b) entry into a draw to win one of two \$25 Amazon gift cards.

#### Questions, Concerns, Inquires, etc.

Once the data is collected and analyzed, we aim to share the final results through research publications, conferences, and workshops. For the privacy of all participants, only overall results, not the individual results, will be disclosed. If you would like additional information, have questions, or have any concerns, please reach out to the research team via the emails listed above. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, you will find a summary of the results by December 1, 2024 here:

<https://smu.ca/academics/summaries-of-completed-research.html>.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant, please feel free to contact the SMU Research Ethics Board at 902-420-5728 or [ethics@smu.ca](mailto:ethics@smu.ca).

#### Adverse Experiences

Should you experience any negative outcomes as a result of this study, please reach out to Dr. Meg Ternes by phone (902-420-5853) or by email ([meg.ternes@smu.ca](mailto:meg.ternes@smu.ca)) immediately.

For Saint Mary's University Students, you have access to the Counselling Centre at (902) 420-5615. There are also mental health services available through the Nova Scotia Health Authority (referral needed from a physician). Finally, if you are in crisis, please contact the Mobile Crisis Telephone Line (902) 429-8167, call 911, or attend your local emergency department. Here is a list of additional mental health resources for all participants in the study:

**SMU Counselling Centre**

1-902-420-5615

**Crisis Services**

1833-456-4566

**Centre for  
Suicide Prevention**

1-833-456-4566

**Canadian Resource Centre  
for Victims of Crime**1-877-232-2610 or <https://crevc.ca/>

Thank you for your participation!

## Appendix L: Debriefing Form (Amazon MTurk)

### Seeking Harmony After Harm: Exploring Factors Influencing Victim-to-Perpetrator

#### Forgiveness

Saint Mary's University REB # ??

Research Team:

Principal Student Researcher: Payton McPhee

Faculty Researcher: Dr. Marguerite Ternes

Contact: [Payton.McPhee@smu.ca](mailto:Payton.McPhee@smu.ca) [Meg.Ternes@smu.ca](mailto:Meg.Ternes@smu.ca)

We would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, this study aims to examine the factors that influence victim-to-perpetrator forgiveness. That is, we are interested in learning more about the mechanisms behind the ability/decision for victims to grant forgiveness toward an individual who has committed a crime against them. This study was conducted in completion of the principal student researcher's Master of Science thesis.

#### Your Data

Please note that your individual data will be kept secure and confidential. No personal identifiers will be attached to the data. Recorded data will be stored on a password protected laptop. All data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years before being destroyed. Once all data are collected, they will be analyzed and aggregate data (group statistics without any individual identifiers) will be reported publicly at conferences, in academic journals, and in presentations.

#### Compensation

To compensate for your appreciated participation, participants will be compensated with \$3.50 USD and an additional \$0.50 USD for correctly answering attention checks.

#### Questions, Concerns, Inquires, etc.

Once the data is collected and analyzed, we aim to share the final results through research publications, conferences, and workshops. For the privacy of all participants, only overall results, not the individual results, will be disclosed. If you would like additional information, have questions, or have any concerns, please reach out to the research team via the emails listed above. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, you will find a summary of the results by December 1, 2024 here:

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Thank you for your participation!