The Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness: An Empirical-Phenomenological Investigation

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THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERPERSONAL FORGIVENESS: AN EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

by

Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Counselor Education
and Counseling Psychology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 2000
THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERPERSONAL FORGIVENESS: AN EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2000

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lived experience of interpersonal forgiveness of individuals (known as co-researchers) by employing the empirical-phenomenological method. This study aimed at identifying, understanding, and describing the general psychological meaning (Tesch, 1990) or the essences/structures (Moustakas, 1994) of the experience of the phenomenon through the protocols of these individuals. It was also a goal of this study to develop a psychological theory of interpersonal forgiveness.

A two-interview structure was conducted with eight individuals (three males and five females) who had forgiven their significant offending others. The first interview focused on the meaning and experience of interpersonal forgiveness, whereas the second was a reflection on the meaning and experience of interpersonal forgiveness. The protocols were analyzed in terms of their meaning units and themes. These meaning units and themes were integrated into textural descriptions of the experience of the phenomenon. Based on the reflection of the textural descriptions, the structural descriptions of the experience of the phenomenon were constructed. These meaning units, themes, and essences were integrated into a composite textural-structural description of the experience of the phenomenon.

The findings of this study were categorized into nine major relevant themes: (1) self-projection—temporality and spatiality, (2) existential meaning—a sense of
self, (3) prevalence of negative emotions, (4) meaning of the violation—self-other-
world relationship, (5) Gestalt concept of figure and ground, (6) presence (and 
nonpresence) of forgiveness, (7) forgiveness as an evolutionary process, (8) unselfish 
quality of forgiveness, and (9) philosophy and faith.

Five propositions have emerged from the findings of this study: (1) the 
decision to forgive is the most difficult hurdle in the process of forgiveness; (2) there 
is a movement from indecision to an initial decision to a concrete decision to forgive; 
(3) on the basis of existential spatiality, the presence of forgiveness may be 
inconclusive or conclusive; (4) during the forgiveness process, the self progresses 
from inauthenticity to authenticity; and (5) the evolution of forgiveness is contingent 
upon the transcendent self. A theory of forgiveness was constructed based on these 
propositions. One of the most significant implications revealed by these findings is 
that the experience of interpersonal forgiveness is a long, difficult, and complex 
process.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. John S. Geisler, my academic advisor and chairperson for my doctoral committee, for his invaluable guidance, insightful advice, and unrelenting support right from the inception of the study to the materialization of this dissertation. Also, my gratitude goes to Dr. Robert L. Betz and Dr. Dennis C. Simpson, my doctoral committee members, for their guidance and significant input.

I would like to convey my appreciation to my brother, Suffian, to whom I am most indebted for life. There are no words to describe my deepest emotions. Through him, I have come to value the significance of humility and simplicity in life. Also, my appreciation goes to my sister-in-law, Diana, for her encouragement and prayers.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to Ijah, with whom I shared my trials and tribulations during these laborious moments. Her confidence in me made it possible for me to complete this dissertation. Through her encouraging words, I learned that the journey to success does not have to be a lonely one. Her genuine interest in my well-being is a testimony to the meaning of a true friendship. My sincere thanks goes to Nolly and Siti for their keen interest in my welfare. Also, my appreciation goes to Candace Ross, Nancy Rosenau, and Rosemary Hakes, whose genuine and profound interest in the variety of human phenomena (though by a strange coincidence) brought us together, resulting in the formation of our clarity group. Their friendship will always be remembered and treasured.

Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

For decades, the term forgiveness has been reverently reserved for the field of theology. It is claimed that forgiveness is considered a religious concept (Gartner, 1988). Fitzgibbons (1986) mentions that mental health professionals have not used forgiveness in the treatment of anger, for instance, because of its over identification with religion. Too often, forgiveness has been ignored in therapy. Too often, therapists have been reluctant to mention or suggest the concept of forgiveness. In other words, there has been a defensive stance with regard to the topic of forgiveness. Pattison (1965) indicates that forgiveness has been considered as alien to psychotherapy. Forgiveness has been treated with benign neglect by psychologists (Halling, 1979). Still, the therapeutic value of forgiveness cannot be underestimated. Enright, Santos, and Al-Mabuk (1989) mention that forgiveness has been regarded as a “moral area” (p. 95). A review of the literature shows that there has been an increasing number of forgiveness studies in the last decade or so (Rowe & Halling, 1998). There is a growing interest in the phenomenon of forgiveness and its impact on clients’ overall well-being. The ability to forgive influences growth. Failure to forgive our parents, others, and ourselves may hinder our growth as persons (Halling, 1979). Halling (1979) further emphasizes that it is still unclear “why it is so difficult to forgive” (p. 193). Hence, efforts are much called for in order to understand this
phenomenon. Phillips and Osborne (1989) point out that many health care professionals are showing an interest in utilizing forgiveness as an essential component of the healing process. There have been some claims that forgiveness can be advantageous to clients in helping them to “release painful and debilitating negative affect” (Meek & McMinn, 1997, p. 55).

Individuals have a tendency to make intentional and unintentional mistakes throughout their lives. Many of the problems experienced by clients come in the form of conflictual or fractured relationships. Pingleton (1989) states that “the presenting problem that usually brings people to therapy is a generalized or circumscribed feeling of having been violated and/or victimized by others, oneself, the world, or even God” (p. 32). Psychological concepts such as projection, blame, guilt, and revenge frequently arise in therapy. These concepts represent aspects of forgiveness therapy (Phillips & Osborne, 1989). All these are indicators of conflictual or fractured relationships. Therapists will have to be aware of the possibility that these psychological concepts will keep resurfacing for as long as they do not deal with forgiveness. Perhaps one of the primary solutions to these relational problems is forgiveness. Stated differently, forgiveness serves as a resolution or closure to conflictual or fractured relationships. Hence, the concept of forgiveness cannot be separated from the development of positive relationships. Forgiveness is one of the most significant ingredients in any relationship. Fow (1988) mentions that “Forgiveness continues to be vital to the continuation of the interpersonal relationship and is expanded to encompass the well-being of the community” (p. 17). Fitzgibbons (1986) says that “Forgiveness frees others from their guilt, expedites the resolution of depressive episodes, and leads to a decrease in anxiety as anger is released” (p. 630).
The concept of forgiveness and the forgiveness intervention or process are central to therapy. It is true that forgiveness is not a comfortable issue with most individuals. It is expected that clients initially resist the forgiveness process (Pingleton, 1989). Clients' resistance to the forgiveness process may be characterized by "denial, projection, rationalization, repression, isolation, splitting" (Pingleton, 1989, p. 32). In doing so, clients avoid taking personal responsibility. However, Pingleton (1989) states that clients can work through this resistance by accepting, understanding, and recontextualizing the pain inflicted by the violation.

Statement of the Problem

This is a qualitative study, which investigated the lived experience of interpersonal forgiveness by using the empirical-phenomenological method. This study aimed at identifying, understanding, and describing the general psychological meaning (Tesch, 1990) of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness through the descriptive protocols of the co-researchers. It was a goal of this study to explicate the essences or structures (Moustakas, 1994) of interpersonal forgiveness. In the words of von Eckartsberg (1998a), this method aims at revealing "the essential general meaning structure" (p. 21) of a particular phenomenon. It was the goal of this study to generate a psychological theory of interpersonal forgiveness.

Since interpersonal forgiveness is a conscious phenomenon, it would be best captured by the empirical-phenomenological method. In the words of Keen (1975), lived experience is used "in understanding other people and what things mean to them" (p. 21). Giorgi (1970) points out that empirical means "based on experience" (p. 205). It is empirical because it is based "on factual data that are collected for the purpose of examination and explication" (von Eckartsberg, 1998b, p. 17). The
co-researchers' protocols should be systematically and rigorously interrogated “step-by-step to arrive at the structure of the experience” (Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979, p. 179). Hence, it is through this method that the researcher could capture a thorough account and essence of the phenomenon. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) indicate “there are conscious phenomena which cannot be dealt with adequately by means of the quantitative methods of experimental science” (p. 4). Giorgi (1970) argues that psychology has moved away from topics that are not easily researched by quantitative experimental methods. In this respect, Rowe and Halling (1998) state that “a topic as profound but resistant to simple definition and direct observation as forgiveness clearly falls within this category” (p. 228).

In order to gain access to the lived experience of interpersonal forgiveness, the co-researchers were interviewed. The researcher employed a two-interview structure and all interviews were guided by open-ended questions and dialogue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this empirical-phenomenological study was to investigate, understand, and describe the lived experience of interpersonal forgiveness of several individuals who had forgiven their significant offending others. This study aimed to highlight a description of the general structure, meanings, or essences of interpersonal forgiveness as experienced by these individuals. It was the purpose of this study to generate a psychological theory of interpersonal forgiveness.

Significance of the Study

This study may be significant in broadening therapists’ perceptions, knowledge, and awareness with regard to forgiveness, forgiveness intervention, and
particularly interpersonal forgiveness, as part of the counseling process. However, before the concept of forgiveness can be incorporated into therapy, it has to be clearly understood. It is important that therapists understand the dynamics that are involved with forgiveness. It is necessary to develop theory and intervention models with regard to forgiveness (DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993). It is hoped that this study will pave the way for the future development of appropriate and workable forgiveness interventions.

Forgiveness is essential in promoting the whole well-being of the forgiving person. There are numerous counseling approaches that therapists may use in helping clients resolve their problems. There are many kinds of interventions that have been developed to facilitate change in clients. Nonetheless, the term forgiveness has been granted significance in very few, if any, of these counseling approaches or interventions. Therapists may need to guide clients through this process in order to come to terms with themselves and others. This study will be able to provide some justification for incorporating forgiveness and its correlates into therapy. Therapists should consider the experience of forgiveness, forgiveness intervention, or process as an integral component of existing counseling approaches. Hence, this will justify the necessity for the therapists’ formal training in forgiveness. Consistent with the goal of preparing therapists with diversity issues, it is important that they receive appropriate teaching and training in forgiveness and its process. The incorporation of forgiveness in the curriculum or formal training will help to prepare for and contribute to therapists’ openness and flexibility.

The renewed interest in integrating forgiveness within the counseling process has a number of implications. First, forgiveness is one option to respond constructively to frustrated individuals and negative situations. Second, forgiveness
has a relational connotation. Forgiveness is recognized as integral to the healing of emotional and relational pain (Pingleton, 1989). It is common for individuals to undergo painful experiences in terms of hurting and being hurt within the context of close interpersonal relationships (Pingleton, 1989). Halling (1979) points out that forgiveness occurs in a relational context and is not necessarily the context “in which the wrong-doing originally occurred” (p. 204). He states “that it is not necessarily a matter of being forgiven by the specific person who was the victim of one’s wrong doing” (p. 204). In addition, individuals do not have to admit their faults or even be present in order to be forgiven (Halling, 1979). Third, forgiveness can no longer be treated as an easy task. The ability to forgive may require some serious work. Pingleton (1989) describes the forgiveness process as a complex phenomenon that consists of various dimensions of human experience such as “social, spiritual, volitional, cognitive, and emotional” (p. 27). Fourth, forgiveness should no longer be considered exclusively as a religious phenomenon.

Perhaps it would not be too presumptuous to state that many people do acknowledge the concept of forgiveness and its significance. To many, forgiveness has religious and cultural relevance. However, acknowledging the concept is not synonymous with its practice in everyday life. In this instance, forgiveness may only be granted a lip service. Too often, the personal experiences of individuals are ignored. On another level, individuals may not be embracing the concept because they are not aware of its psychological significance in their lives. This topic may have significance for those who are interested in forgiveness. Certainly, its wide applicability cannot be underestimated. This study may provide counselors with the means to guide clients (or interested individuals) to participate in the experiential component of forgiveness.
The discussion on the significance of this study is not complete without highlighting the research methodology itself. The methodology is conducive to providing an in-depth understanding of an individual's experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). The phenomenological research will render justification to therapists who believe that the experiences of events as experienced by clients are more important than the events themselves. Certainly, the results of phenomenological research will amplify the understanding of experiences, which in turn can have a direct impact on social action and public policy (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Apart from the above, this study will render the researcher an invaluable opportunity to empathetically understand the phenomenological world of the co-researchers. Without doubt, this study will provide the researcher with many learning points, because forgiveness is very significant in her religion and culture, respectively.

Research Question

What is the psychological structure of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness?

Theoretical Framework

Researchers should consider the use of theory in guiding their studies or framing questions (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) asserts that researchers who conduct phenomenological research will enter the field with a theoretical framework that is more philosophical in nature, instead of a social science orientation. The philosophical perspective illuminates "what will be studied and how it will be studied" (Creswell, 1998, p. 86). In other words, the phenomenological framework will dominate this section.
Phenomenological research aims at explicating "the essence, structure, or form of both human experience and human behavior" (Valle & King, 1978, p. 7). It strives to describe the meaning of a person's "immediate experience of concrete reality" (DeRobertis, 1996, p. 16). The human experience is referred to as intentional. The intentionality of experience refers to "acknowledging that experience is real; experience is a real means by which man relates to his world" (Colaizzi, 1973, p. 23). Moustakas (1994) describes intentionality as the internal experience of consciousness. He states that "the act of consciousness and the object of consciousness are intentionally related" (p. 28).

Phenomenologically oriented studies emphasize the textural description of an experience that refers to "what" appears or is being experienced (lived) and the structural description that refers to "how" the experience appears or is experienced (Moustakas, 1994). It is the task of phenomenologists to investigate "what a phenomenon is, its meaning, as well as how it occurs as a meaningful event for people within the concrete life-world of human affairs" (DeRobertis, 1996, p. 20).

The life-world refers to the world of everyday experience. Fuller (1990) describes the life-world as "the world of everyday meanings, the world of malls, tulips, and lakes" (p. 24). Certainly, phenomena are only understood "within the life-world context of our being-in-the-world" (DeRobertis, 1996, p. 18). It is imperative to understand that the human being is "always being in relation to things and other people" (DeRobertis, 1996, p. 18).

Valle and King (1978) mention the concept of "co-constitutionality" (p. 8) in order to describe the relationship between the individual and the world. By this notion, the individual has no existence apart from the world and vice versa. Valle and
King state, "Remove one and the notion of the other has no meaning. So it is with people and their world; if one is discarded, talk of the other is meaningless" (p. 8).

In conducting phenomenological research, it is necessary to abide by certain established principles that characterize it, namely, epoch, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. It is necessary for a researcher to engage in epoch, which is putting aside one's preconceptions about the phenomenon or the suspension of judgment (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990) before the interview begins. The data analysis process partly involves the phenomenological reduction and partly, the imaginative variation. Phenomenological reduction entails the elimination of any biases about the world. Moustakas (1994) mentions that phenomenological reduction is a process that is comprised of (a) prereflection, (b) reflection, and (c) reduction. Prereflection refers to describing "things just as they appear" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). The aim of reflection is to grasp the nature of the phenomenon in its entirety. Finally, reduction aims at describing the "texturally meaningful and essential" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 93) component of the phenomenon. Imaginative variation refers to a method of reflection, whereby the researcher looks at the different possibilities or manifestations of the experience.

In describing the phenomenon, it is necessary to move from the textural-structural description of the experience of each co-researcher to the composite (or general) textural-structural description of the experiences of all the co-researchers.
Definition of Terms

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is defined by Augsburger (1981) as a release from many negative emotions such as “fear, anger, suspicion, loneliness, alienation, mistrust” (p. 68). Forgiveness might result in the offended person joining with others (be in a relationship). Forgiveness involves the resolution of negative affect and judgment toward the offender without renouncing the right to the affect or judgment (Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992). The forgiving person’s perception toward the offender now changes to one of compassion, benevolence, and love while acknowledging that the offender has relinquished his or her right to them (Enright, Gassin, et al., 1992). Therefore, the forgiving person moves away from negative affect to one of positive affect.

Interpersonal Forgiveness

Interpersonal forgiveness is defined as one person forgiving another (Enright & Zell, 1989). One of the factors that might call for interpersonal forgiveness is that an individual has experienced a “deep long-lasting injury or hurt” (Enright & Zell, 1989, p. 53) from another person. Subkoviak et al. (1995) state that a forgiving person is one who has experienced a “deep hurt” (p. 642). The initial reaction of the offended person toward the offending person is described as a profound experience of injury or hurt. Fow (1996) mentions that the emotional response to an act, which is considered a violation, is either anger or hurt.
Phenomenology

Phenomenology has various characterizations, namely, "a method, a philosophy, and a theory" (Lancy, 1993, p. 9). Phenomenology aims at studying the "phenomena as experienced by conscious beings and it is a method for studying such phenomenon" (Giorgi, 1984, p. 14). Phenomenology entails a "careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life (the life-world), a description of ‘things’ (the essential structures of consciousness) as one experiences them" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 114). Among other things, experience (Schwandt, 1997) consists of perception, belief, memory, decision, feeling, judgment, evaluation, bodily action, and the like. Meanings are embedded in experience. Thus, the phenomenological descriptions of experiences require "turning from things to their meaning, from what is to the nature of what is" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 114).

Co-researcher(s)

With respect to phenomenological research, Polkinghorne (1989) states that there has been some effort to replace the term subject with "co-researcher, research partner, research collaborator, or co-author" (p. 47). Such replacement intends "to emphasize that phenomenological research interacts in a personal manner" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47) with the individuals who are willing to share their experience. Individuals are not to be treated or used as experimental objects by the researcher. Polkinghorne further adds, "Participants open their subjective experience to the researcher, but they are not ‘subjects’ of the researcher" (p. 47). According to Shertock (1998), the term co-researcher points to the fact “that the emergent
meaning is co-constituted by the description of the experiences and the interpretive process of the one seeking the prereflective structure of the experience” (p. 162).

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study aimed at investigating, understanding, and describing the meaning of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. The focus was on interpersonal forgiveness rather than divine forgiveness. In this study, the researcher examined all the possible essences or structures of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness.

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

The researcher obtained the approval of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) before she conducted this study (see Appendix A). In an effort to protect the co-researchers’ identity and confidentiality, the researcher used an anonymous identifying reference (that is, the letter “C” for co-researchers).
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Until recently, the topic of forgiveness had been strictly the domain of theology. It is only in the last decade or so that forgiveness had been granted a significant place in psychology and other disciplines. This section will review the literature on forgiveness from various perspectives, namely, theology, philosophy, and psychology (psychotherapy).

Forgiveness—Theological Perspectives

Christianity

In the New Testament of the Christian Bible, “to forgive” means the remittance of divine punishment and the restoration of harmony between the divine power and the formerly sinful person. In Christianity, interpersonal forgiveness is believed to materialize from the individual’s experience with forgiveness with God (Meek & McMinn, 1997).

The historical connection between forgiveness and Christian religion cannot be overlooked. Forgiveness has been the most critical concept in the Christian religion (Meek & McMinn, 1997). According to the Christian religion, people seek God’s forgiveness and without it, they “remain in a broken and isolated state” (Meek & McMinn, 1997, p. 51). The role of forgiveness in the Christian faith goes beyond religious ritual. In describing forgiveness, Meek and McMinn (1997) mention that “it
is a progression of healing where people are confronted with the grace and mercy of
God, despite their continual failure to deserve it” (p. 51). By being aware of their
own fallibility, humans learn to offer similar grace and mercy to others. The Bible
gives many directives and examples of the human obligation to forgive. Both the Old
and the New Testaments highlight the human capacity to forgive others. The
Christian religion supports the practice of forgiveness in the healing of emotional and
relational pain (Meek & McMinn, 1997). From the Christian theological point of
view, the process of forgiveness is associated with emotional and relational healing,
obedience toward God, and the ability to empathize and identify with the
humaness of another. Christian theology asserts that the consequences of
forgiveness are restorative in nature (Meek & McMinn, 1997). Meek and McMinn
claim that all humans are capable of intentionally or unintentionally offending others.

Zackrison (1992) discusses the sinful nature of humankind. When humans
commit acts of sin, they are acting in accordance with their sinful nature. Indubitably,
the universal need of the humankind “for grace and forgiveness appears repeatedly in
Scripture” (Zackrison, 1992, p. 150).

Wapnick (1985) describes forgiveness as a spiritual quest. Evidently, therapy
is seen as honoring this spiritual quest. Individuals bring to therapy the problem of
victimization, be it by others, the world, or God. Since therapists are considered a
threat to clients’ “cherished belief system” (Wapnick, 1985, p. 51), clients may attack
them by coming late to sessions or failing to keep up with payments. Hence, when
attacked, therapists should meet the clients’ attack without defense. This is because
therapists are looked upon as models for their clients. It is their responsibility to
exemplify their verbal teaching. In other words, their actions should match their
words.
Like their clients, therapists are prone to see themselves as victims. According to Wapnick (1985), therapy is aimed at helping both therapists and clients recognize that they are victims of themselves instead of each other (or others). Wapnick emphasizes that therapists and clients have the same need for forgiveness, which is a form of healing. It is interesting to note that mutual healing (Wapnick, 1985) takes place in therapy. In practicing therapy, therapists experience forgiveness.

It is emphasized that the task of therapists is to be “in” (Wapnick, 1985, p. 52) the roles (i.e., the roles of therapists) instead of being “of them” (p. 52). Wapnick (1985) claims that psychotherapy provides therapists with the opportunity to rectify the misperception “that they are the therapists or healers” (p. 53). Both therapists and their patients experience a need for forgiveness. According to Wapnick, “Indeed, it is the practice of therapy that gives us the chance to be forgiven” (p. 53). It is concluded that the role of therapist is to facilitate the spiritual learning about “Who the real Therapist is” (Wapnick, 1985, p. 53). Thus, therapy is only a means to an end.

Islam

The role of forgiveness in the lives of Muslims is very significant. Islam calls upon its followers to seek forgiveness from Allah (God) and also to seek it from and grant it to others. Muslims are called upon to extend genuine kindness to others. One example of human kindness is forgiveness. The Qur’an indicates that “A kind word with forgiveness is better than almsgiving followed by injury. Allah is Absolute, Clement” (The Cow 2: 263). The following verse illustrates: “Yet whoso doeth evil or wrongeth his own soul, then seeketh pardon of Allah, will find Allah Forgiving, Merciful” (Women 4: 110).
Even though Muslims may reciprocate the harm they suffer, the emphasis is on forgiveness. They would be better off by forgiving the offenders. Since it would be extremely difficult to reciprocate justly, forgiveness is the best option. The underlying point is that even in retaliation, it is necessary to consider the welfare of the offender. Retaliation should never occur haphazardly. The following verse indicates that

> And We prescribed for them therein: The life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds retaliation. But whoso forgoeth it (in the way of charity) it shall be expiation for him. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed: such are wrong-doers (The Table Spread 5: 45).

The message on forgiveness also includes its relationship with anger. The ability to control anger exemplifies an aspect of self-control. Thus, when Muslims are angered, they should be willing to forgive. The Qur'an points out that “those who shun the worst of sins and indecencies and, when they are wroth, forgive” (Counsel 42: 37).

Obeid (1988) states that Islam encourages its followers to forgive either intentional or unintentional harm. According to Obeid, even though Muslims may reciprocate the harm they suffer, it is better to extend forgiveness than to seek retribution. Islam does not force its followers to forgive others. To do so would only encourage Muslims to forgive others unwillingly. Instead, Muslims may choose retribution or the offering of forgiveness. There is a rationale behind such a choice. Choosing to forgive denotes a virtuous act that springs “from feelings of mercy toward the harmdoer” (Obeid, 1988, p. 163).
Forgiveness is an interpersonal (Kolnai, 1978) phenomenon. It presupposes an injury (or its equivalents) inflicted by a person against the other and that the latter's willingness or refusal to offer forgiveness.

An act of forgiveness may result in provoking or promoting an offender's "moral purification" (Kolnai, 1978, p. 220). It is highly likely that a forgiver pursues this kind of change in the offender. The pursuit of such aim or intention "is not the essence of forgiveness" (Kolnai, 1978, p. 220).

Condonation refers to a situation wherein a person is fully aware of the offender's misdeeds but deliberately gives up the retributive attitude. It is analogous to downgrading the retributive attitude to the point of moral disvalue (Kolnai, 1978). In condoning, it is almost like a person is looking for excuses for the offender's wrongful conduct. Admittedly, at times, condonation may be necessary, even though it is considered as immoralistic.

The offender's change of heart "constitutes the standard occasion" (Kolnai, 1978, p. 219) in exercising and demonstrating forgiveness. When a change of heart takes place, it becomes the duty of the individual to forgive the offender. However, genuine forgiveness does not entail "a dramatic and fundamental change of heart" (Kolnai, 1978, p. 219) on the part of the offender. Nevertheless, forgiveness is legitimate and virtuous when the forgiver, in forgiving the offender, hopes that the latter will experience a change of heart. The forgiver's hope for this change of heart renders the essence of forgiveness. Simultaneously, when a forgiver can accept the offender back "without exculpating him and without hoping for anything like a
thoroughgoing repentance on his part” (Kolnai, 1978, p. 222), this results in the essence of forgiveness.

Forgiveness (North, 1987) is defined as the overcoming of resentment without denying the right to it, and to regard the offender “with compassion, benevolence and love” (p. 502) even though he or she no longer deserves them. North (1987) claims that forgiving another does not come easily. Indisputably, it involves many complexities. Forgiveness does not necessitate a forgiver to disregard a wrongdoing. Blindness (North, 1987) to a wrongdoing is not considered forgiveness. Conversely, the blindness may be a form of moral weakness or a lack of character. While forgiveness is not contingent upon repentance and retribution, such factors may facilitate its development. Neither does it require that a person permanently allow a wrongdoing “to damage and distort” (North, 1987, p. 505) personal relationships. Thus, forgiveness is a way to heal the relationship with an offender. With the offering and acceptance of forgiveness, harmony is restored or resumed in communication.

Genuine forgiveness (North, 1987) is characterized by a change of heart or emotional response toward the offender. Such a change of heart is considered “the essence of forgiveness” (North, 1987, p. 503). Such a change of heart will naturally lead to certain external behavioral reactions toward the offender. However, it is claimed that in certain cases such as death (of the offender), a change of heart may or may not result in such external behavioral reactions.

Forgiveness incurs some risks on the forgiver’s part. This is because it entails the re-acceptance of the offender into the heart despite the infliction of pain. In the course of doing so, the forgiver’s trust or affection may be at risk since there is no certainty that the offender will reciprocate positively.
Philosophically, Neblett (1974) offers a different perspective on the nature or feature of forgiveness. Neblett disagrees with some of the ideals of forgiveness. While forgiving may necessitate the letting go of the ill-will and resentment toward the offender, the harboring of such feelings may not impede the granting of forgiveness. Forgiveness is legitimate even though ill-will and resentment still persist. Evidently, human relationships survive the strain in this manner.

For forgiveness to be considered as genuine, it does not have to be exclusively granted by the injured person. Neblett (1974) claims that circumstances such as unconsciousness or death may not warrant it possible for the injured person to grant forgiveness. By virtue of their positions and roles, judges and priests for instance, grant forgiveness to individuals even though they are not the victims of the offender. It is also possible for a spokesperson to grant forgiveness to an offender on behalf of a group of individuals who have been injured by the same person.

While advocating flexibility in the language of forgiveness, Neblett (1974) emphasizes that the complexities of forgiving behavior cannot be overlooked. In other words, forgiveness may be granted in a variety of ways. At one end of the continuum, forgiveness may be given through performatory utterances such as, "I forgive you" (Neblett, 1974, p. 269) or other linguistic gestures. At the other end of the continuum, it may be granted in silence, that is, without any verbal expressions.

Neblett (1974) also discusses the relationship between forgiveness and mercy. While withholding forgiveness can mean that a person chooses to be merciless, being merciful (in terms of not exacting punishment) can mean forgiving someone. With regard to the latter, granting mercy means granting forgiveness. According to Neblett, it is also possible to offer forgiveness without mercy. While morality does not demand human beings to be forgiving on the basis of "some specified ideal of
forgiveness” (Neblett, 1974, p. 273), they are required to forgive for a variety of reasons.

Downie (1965) puts forth the assumption that “readiness to forgive is a virtue” (p. 128), whereas the inability to do so, a vice. Another area of discussion includes the relationship between injury and forgiveness. It is claimed that forgiveness results from a belief that an injury has been inflicted. Without such a belief, there are no grounds for forgiveness. An attitude of genuine forgiveness is manifested in the ability to embrace a forgiving spirit, despite the infliction of injury.

Admittedly, there has been some moral and conceptual confusion between the concept of forgiveness and that of condonation and pardon. While condonation and pardon are synonymous, forgiveness is not condonation. Only officials in certain social position and roles have the right to pardon offenders. In pardoning, a person is concerned with offenses against some established rules. Unlike pardon, a person forgives on a personal level. In condoning, a person minimizes the injury and overlooks “the nature of the moral offence” (Downie, 1965, p. 131). When the injury is trivial, condonation is legitimate. However, at times, it is believed that condonation may be morally inappropriate.

Downie (1965) rejects the notion that the expression such as “[I forgive you]” (p. 131) is adequate to constitute forgiveness. Such expression should be followed by the exhibition of appropriate behavior. In the context of an injury, a person should embrace the attitude of “agape” (Downie, 1965, p. 133), which refers to a concern and respect for the dignity of persons. It is this attitude which becomes the forgiving spirit (mentioned earlier) that underlies genuine forgiveness.

Roberts (1995) distinguishes forgivingness from forgiveness. On the one hand, forgivingness refers to the disposition to give up the anger at an offender in
consideration of benevolence and harmony in relationship. On the other hand, forgiveness that is seen as an act or process involves the giving up of justified anger at an offender. It is necessary to point out that in giving up this anger, a person still retains the judgment (Roberts, 1995) aspect of it. In other words, the judgment with regard to the offender and offense still persists. Only anger is being consumed by the consideration of benevolence and harmony in relationship. Inevitably, forgivingness is essential for forgiveness to occur.

An inclination toward justified anger should not be negated or forsaken simply because a person is concerned with maintaining harmonious relationships. This means that forgivingness does not tolerate the compromise of integrity. Integrity is a requisite for forgivingness. Indeed, condonation, which is an excellent example of a compromise of integrity, is regarded as moral stupidity.

Forgiveness—Psychological (Psychotherapeutic) Perspectives

Enright, Gassin, et al. (1992) have developed a cognitive-developmental model of forgiveness. This model demonstrates “a developmental progression in people’s understanding of forgiveness” (Enright, Gassin, et al., 1992, p. 104). Forgiveness is developmental in nature and the willingness to forgive a serious offense increases with maturity. Understanding and empathy rendered to another person (in this case, an offender) portrays an element of maturity. In the first style of forgiveness (Revengeful), the motivation to forgive is due to the egocentric desire to seek revenge. In the second style of forgiveness (Conditional or Restitutional), the goal is restitution and compensation for offenses that have been inflicted. In the third style of forgiveness (Expectational), the motivation is social pressure such as rules and regulations in order to fulfill the expectations of others. This kind of forgiveness
is not due to inner motivation. The fourth style of forgiveness (Lawful Expectational) is characterized by social desirability. There is a preoccupation with what is fair, lawful, and appropriate. There is a great deal of external pressure to indulge in forgiveness. In the fifth style of forgiveness (Social Harmony), the motivation is to maintain social harmony and good relationships. This style differs from the previous styles of forgiveness. The reason is "that a certain condition must occur after forgiveness rather than before it" (Enright, Gassin, et al., 1992, p. 106). In the sixth style of forgiveness (Love), not only is there an interest in the well-being of others but also in fostering love and interpersonal harmony. Enright, Gassin, et al. state that "Only Style 6 captures the principle of unconditional moral love underlying forgiveness" (p. 106). Moral love is not forsaken because of the offense. Forgiveness is not based on any prerequisites to or benefits of forgiveness.

Following their exploration of the structural model and the process model of forgiveness, Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1994) proposed a cognitive structure or mechanism of forgiveness. Their proposition underscores that abstract identity instead of ideal reciprocity underlies forgiveness. To achieve their goal, Enright and The Human Development Study Group draw a distinction between their cognitive structure of forgiveness and Piaget's reciprocity model of forgiveness.

Enright and The Human Development Study Group's (1994) cognitive structure of forgiveness is comprised of the following elements: (a) abstract identity, (b) social unconditionality, (c) inherent equality, and (d) forgiveness. Abstract identity underscores a respect for the worthiness of all human beings. The key point is that by virtue of being human, all individuals have worth. Social unconditionality points to the conviction that individuals as human beings are not altered even though surface features like values and personal qualities change. Perhaps, one of the best
ways to capture the meaning of inherent equality is to insert the following statement: “We are equal as human beings” (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1994, p. 72). Hence, this moral principle emphasizes that all human beings are equal regardless of how they treat one another. In essence, it is this inherent equality which might lead to true forgiveness.

Piaget’s model of forgiveness has the following characteristics: (a) ideal reciprocity, (b) mutual respect, (c) equality, and (d) forgiveness. Ideal reciprocity refers to forgiving someone with the expectation of getting something in return. A person forgives the other with the hope of being treated in a forgiving way. Subsequently, it is this ideal reciprocity that paves the way for the social insight which emphasizes “the give-and-take of mutual respect” (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1994, p. 72) in interaction. This social insight in turn results in equality, an important moral principle, which characterizes this model. Forgiveness is granted because of an expectation of getting some kind of compensation, a means of achieving equality. As such, it is the attainment of equality that becomes the basis for forgiveness. People forgive others because they expect to be treated the same way.

The basic difference between these two models is that the reciprocity model necessitates some kind of compensation in order for forgiveness to occur, whereas the other does not. A true understanding and practice of forgiveness enables a person to view the world differently. In forgiving, the focus shifts from self to the other. True forgiveness means that a person forgives without expecting to get anything in return from the other. Forgiveness is offered because the other is valued as a worthy human being. When forgiveness becomes a goal, personal development may be enhanced. Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1994) conclude that
forgiveness may lead to the development of “community in the face of considerable injustice” (p. 78) and a philosophy that supports the prioritization of moral choices for the sake of community.

Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1996) mention 20 units (psychological variables) that characterize the process of forgiveness. Not every individual will go through all the 20 units. Some may skip certain units and may be able to arrive at forgiveness. In Unit 1, the offended persons need to recognize and examine their psychological defenses (e.g., denial). In Unit 2, the offended persons confront the anger. The goal is to enable them to release their anger. In Unit 3, when appropriate, the offended persons may admit shame on their part. Unit 4 refers to the offended persons’ awareness with regard to their emotional investment in the event (cathexis). In Unit 5, the offended persons continue to cognitively rehearse the offense. In Unit 6, the offended persons compare themselves with the offenders. Unit 7 refers to the offended persons’ awareness regarding a permanent change caused by the injury. In Unit 8, the offended persons realize the possibility of an altered worldview, whereupon they view the world as unjust. Subsequently, in Unit 9, the offended persons experience a change of heart toward the offenders. In Unit 10, the offended persons are willing to consider forgiving the offenders. Unit 11 refers to the commitment of the offended persons to forgive their offenders. In Unit 12, the offended persons engage in reframing. Here, they attempt to view the offenders differently by taking into account their developmental history, pressures at the time of committing the injury, and their “underlying humanity” (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996, p. 110). In Unit 13, the offended persons develop empathy toward the offenders. At this point, the offended persons often renounce the idea of revenge. Unit 14 refers to the emergence of compassion on the part of the
offended persons toward the offenders. Unit 15 refers to the offended persons' readiness to accept or absorb the pain. In Unit 16, the offended persons find new meaning in the injury and the forgiveness process. In Unit 17, the offended persons realize that they are not perfect and that they had experienced the need for forgiveness in the past. In Unit 18, the offended persons are aware that they are not experiencing the forgiveness process alone. Unit 19 refers to the offended persons finding a new purpose in life. In Unit 20, the offended persons are aware of a decrease in negative affect and the possibility of an increase in positive affect toward the offenders.

Pattison (1989) examines the psychodynamics and psychopathology of forgiveness and also presents “a systematic model of forgiveness” (p. 162) which is grounded in existential concepts. The role of forgiveness in the development of personality cannot be overlooked. The ambivalence of the child-parent relationship tends to produce fear and guilt in a child. In this case, the child seeks forgiveness in order to let go of “the guilt of infantile gratification” (Pattison, 1989, p. 163). Pattison refers this as “a punitive model of forgiveness, which is not forgiveness at all” (p. 163). According to this model, guilt is resolved by punishment instead of forgiveness. Since the punitive model of forgiveness is founded on superego morality, a person will never consider reconciliation of a relationship. In the punitive model of forgiveness (or also known as the I-It model), the child’s parent is looked upon as an object and “only the self exists” (Pattison, 1989, p. 175).

As children mature, they learn to appreciate and “develop relationships with their parents as persons” (Pattison, 1989, p. 163). The motivating factor for the resolution of guilt is the deprivation of parental love. At this juncture, forgiveness entails “reconciliation in the I-Thou of love” (Pattison, 1989, p. 163). To put it
another way, the reconciliation model of forgiveness is characterized by the
reestablishment of the I-Thou relationship. Pattison (1989) considers forgiveness as
"the completed act of reconciliation" (p. 164) which occurs between two individuals,
the forgiver and the forgiven. The process of forgiveness consists of six steps:
(1) guilt, (2) confession, (3) remorse, (4) restitution, (5) mutual acceptance, and
(6) reconciliation.

According to this systematic model of forgiveness, the offender goes through
Steps 1 through 4 alone. However, at Step 5 and 6 (mutual acceptance and
reconciliation, respectively), the process of forgiveness includes the forgiver. The
punitive model of forgiveness is an exemplification of a failure to resolve the neurotic
guilt. Pattison (1989) states that such failure hinders the ability to face existential
guilt either psychologically or theologically. Conversely, the failure to resolve
"existential psychological guilt or ontological theological guilt" (Pattison, 1989,
p. 176) causes a person to be fixated in neurotic guilt. Typically, the punitive model
of forgiveness is found in neurosis and psychosis.

Smedes (1984) points out that the process of forgiveness consists of four
stages, namely, (1) hurting, (2) hating, (3) healing, and (4) coming together. To begin
with (at the first stage), a person experiences the hurt that has been inflicted by
another. Such hurt or pain is described as "personal, unfair, and deep" (Smedes,
1984, p. 5). On the basis of this "three-dimensional pain" (Smedes, 1984, p. 5), it is
impossible to forget it. At the second stage, there is hatred toward the wrongdoer.
Such hatred is described as a natural response to the infliction of hurt or pain. Such
hatred may be passive or aggressive. Smedes emphasizes that if hatred is not curbed,
it can become malignant. As hatred toward the wrongdoer escalates, so does the
hurt. Harboring such hatred will prevent a person from wishing the best for the
wrongdoer. Smedes differentiates between hate and anger. Accordingly, it is hate instead of anger, which calls for healing. On the one hand, anger denotes that a person is alive and healthy. On the other hand, hate signifies that a person is sick or unhealthy and needs healing. At the third stage, there is an attempt at healing by viewing the wrongdoer differently or with a new insight. This new insight in turn will lead to a new feeling toward the wrongdoer. Forgiving the wrongdoer is likened to performing “spiritual surgery inside your soul” (Smedes, 1984, p. 27). The fourth stage of the forgiveness process is coming together. Here, both parties need to utilize their energy in order to rekindle or heal the broken relationship. Hopefully, such efforts will bring about “an honest coming together” (Smedes, 1984, p. 32) between the forgiver and the wrongdoer. Having released the feeling of hatred, the forgiver has no desire to seek revenge. Subsequently, the forgiver welcomes the wrongdoer back into his or her life. It is only when the wrongdoer comes with honesty or truthfulness that reconciliation can materialize. Recognizing and taking responsibility for the wrongdoing would contribute to such honesty or truthfulness. Otherwise, the forgiver will need to heal alone without the wrongdoer.

Rosenak and Harnden (1992) have developed four stages of forgiveness: (1) hurt, (2) anger, (3) information gathering, and (4) forgiveness (resolution). These authors believe that a therapist should be knowledgeable about these stages in order to determine the direction in therapy. Rosenak and Harnden delineate eight factors that may affect a person’s ability to forgive. Four of these factors relate to the offended party and the other four relate to the offender. With respect to the former (the offended party), these factors are: (1) a committed relationship with the offender, (2) the ego-strength of the offended party, (3) a cognitive decision to forgive the offender, and (4) personal history or experience with forgiveness. With
respect to the latter (the offender), the factors are: (1) the severity of the offense, (2) the offender admits the offense, (3) the intention to hurt the offended party (intentionality), and (4) the frequency of the offense.

Forgiveness cannot be equated with reconciliation (Enright & Zell, 1989). It may result from forgiveness. However, it does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two totally different responses. Enright and Zell (1989) indicate “Forgiveness is an inner response; reconciliation is a behavioral coming together” (p. 54). Reconciliation depends on whether the offender will repeat the offense or destructive behavior.

Thompson (1983) states that some Wesleyans may experience difficulty in acknowledging the existence of their “struggles, darkness, and emotional tangles” (p. 81). In other words, Wesleyans need to work through “the dark side, the anger, anxiety, fear, guilty, and unforgiveness” (Thompson, 1983, p. 84). These are emotional realities and neglecting them may result in emotional instability. It is only by working through the emotional realities that individuals become healthy.

Forgiveness, apart from love, should be considered as relational (Thompson, 1983). The inability to forgive results in the fragmentation of the individual. Inevitably, forgiveness is a struggle. The ability to forgive requires a tremendous amount of healing. At this juncture, the five stages of death and dying developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross are significant in dealing with forgiveness. These stages were adapted to forgiveness by Dennis Lin and Matthew Lin (as cited in Thompson, 1983). Thompson (1983) suggests that these stages should be used to gain insights into forgiveness. The five stages are: (1) denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining, (4) depression, and (5) acceptance.
The first stage is denial and this is considered healthy, when at a particular given moment, the individual cannot cope with a reality. In this case, rejecting such reality is legitimate until the individual is able or ready to deal with the hurtful reality. It is necessary for the individual to become aware of whatever that has been repressed (or denied) and deal with it. The second stage is characterized by anger that is directed at others. The ability to feel angry allows a person to identify the hurt and subsequently, to heal in a healthy manner. In bargaining, which is the third stage, a person sets up certain conditions, which should be fulfilled before the offender is forgiven. The fourth stage is characterized by depression. Here, anger is turned inward and self-blame prevails. The fifth stage is acceptance. At this point, a person looks forward to growing from the hurt.

Forgiveness can bring immense relief to individuals (Israeloff, 1997). It goes beyond a passive acceptance of an apology. Forgiveness is a positive healing element both for the person being forgiven and the forgiver. Israeloff (1997) mentions that forgiveness can be conveyed differently, be it in words or gestures.

Israeloff (1997) asserts that the teaching of forgiveness to children should start early. The seeds of forgiveness can be nourished in children by emphasizing the language of emotions (Israeloff, 1997). It is necessary for children to identify and recognize their own feelings. In doing so, children will be able to identify and recognize how others feel. Children should learn to recognize that their behaviors can have both a positive and negative impact on others. In other words, they can either hurt or make others feel good. The recognition of children's abilities to make others feel good will sway them toward forgiveness.

It is interesting to note that forgiveness (true forgiveness) cannot be equated with justice (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995). In fact, forgiveness goes beyond
justice. Justice entails some element of reciprocity, whereas forgiveness may be granted without any hope or demand for anything in return. Al-Mabuk et al. (1995) state that “forgiveness is an unconditional gift given to one who does not deserve it” (p. 428). Forgiveness is a process whereby a person ceases being resentful toward someone or pardons someone (Fitzgibbons, 1986). Forgiveness can be referred to as a person’s intellectual or emotional decision to release anger. Fitzgibbons (1986) mentions that the forgiveness process consists of the intellectual forgiveness and emotional forgiveness. Intellectual forgiveness precedes emotional forgiveness. It is crucial that clients spend some amount of time and energy at the former level. A person who experiences emotional forgiveness genuinely “feels like forgiving another” (Fitzgibbons, 1986, p. 630).

Benson (1992) has pointed out two significant elements of forgiveness: (1) the cessation of resentment, and (2) renouncing an intention to punish. Offended persons have to recognize the resentment and anger and to confront past events honestly (Benson, 1992). It is necessary for offended persons to be in touch with their resentment and anger instead of denying or repressing these elements. Benson mentions that there are clients who believe that they “must honor and forgive their parents” (p. 191) without dealing and accepting the reality of their parents’ shortcomings. This type of forgiveness is described as false forgiveness (Benson, 1992). It is necessary that in order to forgive, offended persons need to admit their suffering and hurt before they can start blaming others (for their suffering and hurt). Mature forgiveness calls for an integration of both the “good and bad aspects of self and other” (Benson, 1992, p. 79). In other words, the offended persons are realistic enough in bringing together not only their negative and positive experiences but also those of the offenders. Such attempt indicates an absence of bias and narcissism. The
offended persons are not only interested in their own experience but also the experience of the offenders.

Mitchell (1995) discusses the importance of the act of forgiveness in healing conflicts in interpersonal relationships, particularly, familial relationships. It is emphasized that a person who is involved in the conflictual relationship demonstrates attitudes and behaviors that call for forgiveness.

The stages of doing or being good (Mitchell, 1995) include (a) preconventional, (b) conventional, and (c) postconventional. At the preconventional stage, a person may be motivated to be good to another in order to avoid punishment or in exchange of the other being good to self. At the conventional stage, the motivation to be good may be triggered by the need to avoid social censure, to gain the acceptance of others, or simply to perform a civic duty. Finally, at the postconventional stage, there is an inclination to recognize the value of society and appreciating the dignity and equality of mankind. Forgiveness is a form of doing or being good to another. A person who is at the postconventional level, is inclined to find joy in offering or receiving forgiveness. Unfortunately, it is claimed that the adults’ motivations to be good are often driven either by preconventional or conventional motivations. Mitchell (1995) states that “many never reach a postconventional level” (p. 26).

In her discussion, Mitchell (1995) highlights some important elements of forgiveness. First, there is an occurrence of a hurtful behavior by a person. Second, there is the recognition and admission of hurt on the part of the injured person without retaliating or accusing the wrongdoer. Third, there is the offer of forgiveness by the injured person without letting the wrongdoer know about it. Fourth, under certain circumstances, the wrongdoer may not recognize or admit the hurtful
behavior. Nevertheless, it is possible to manifest resentment or hostility by accusing the other of being unfair or partial. In response to such accusation, it may be necessary to justify a person’s position or decision with the hope of making peace with the other.

Mitchell (1995) states that the act of forgiveness does not alleviate the consequences of the hurtful behavior. Bearing these consequences allows a person to be responsible and mature. The injured person is encouraged to wait for the wrongdoer to seek forgiveness as it paves the way for “a mutual interest in forgiveness and acceptance” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 28), which are necessary in genuinely restoring the relationship. Often, given this scenario, the injured person finds it easy to forgive the wrongdoer.

Rowe et al. (1989) conducted a study on forgiving another using a method known as dialogal phenomenology. The dialogue or “open and ongoing conversation” (Rowe et al., 1989, p. 233) occurred on two levels: (1) among six researchers, and (2) between these researchers and the phenomenon of forgiving another. The dialogal method involves a dynamic process. Every step of the study was based on dialogue beginning from the definition of procedures, sharing of tasks, and interpretation of data. During the dialogue, the researchers shared their experiences with forgiving another, questioned their biases, and discussed data obtained from interviews and written descriptions. One distinctive feature of this study was the on-going interaction between the researchers and the phenomenon. In addition, the dialogue among the researchers exemplified a genuine collaboration in investigating the phenomenon.

In this study, the focus was on one dimension of forgiveness, that is the hurt being inflicted by someone in the context of a personal relationship. The study
revealed that forgiving another is a process, which starts with the perception that a person has been injured by another and ends in reconciliation. Such a reconciliation may be psychological rather than face-to-face. According to Rowe et al. (1989), forgiveness is not only confined to interpersonal experience but also that of spiritual or transpersonal. In other words, the experience of forgiveness transcends the personal relationship with the person who inflicted the hurt. Forgiveness is called upon when the integrity of a person's life has been fundamentally disrupted by someone else. Thus, forgiveness is warranted when a violation of identity has occurred. A preoccupation with the injury characterizes the continuous experience of hurt. The initial hurt frequently comes with anger. Besides anger, there is a desire to seek "revenge or retribution" (Rowe et al., 1989, p. 240). Frequently, before healing can take place, some criteria may have to be fulfilled. These include acknowledging responsibility and asking for an apology. Often, along with the apology, comes a desire for the offender to change. In forgiving, there is more understanding of "the other person, oneself, and the world" (Rowe et al., 1989, p. 242). In addition, there is a shift in the pattern of relationship among these three factors.

Hargrave (1994) developed a theoretical framework of forgiveness as a therapeutic intervention in family therapy. The work of forgiveness in families can be broadly categorized as exonerating and forgiving. Subsequently, each category has two stations. Hargrave states that "Exonerating has two stations of insight and understanding, whereas forgiving has two stations of giving the opportunity for compensation and the overt act of forgiving" (p. 341). Hargrave asserts that the four stations of forgiveness should not be regarded as stages and that they do not take place in an orderly manner. Rather, they are intertwined and individuals may move back and forth between these stations in relationships.
Insight, which is the first station of forgiveness, enables "a person to objectify the mechanisms of family pain that have caused the relational damage" (Hargrave, 1994, p. 342). It is significant that an individual or family, while in the midst of working through forgiveness, becomes aware of the transactions, be it verbal or non-verbal, which help to perpetuate the pain, hurt, or injustice.

Understanding, which is the second station of forgiveness frees the wrongdoer from blame. Understanding is synonymous with identification with the wrongdoer. In this case, the victim tries to understand "the wrongdoer's position, limitations, and development" (Hargrave, 1994, p. 343) and, consequently, recognizes that every human being is fallible. Such understanding eliminates the condemnation and blame.

The third station of forgiveness is giving the opportunity for compensation. In this case, the wrongdoer is given the chance to prove that he or she will not repeat the wrongdoing and the victim enables the wrongdoer to reestablish the love and trust in the relationship.

The fourth station of forgiveness, which is the overt act of forgiving, calls for overtly raising the subject of forgiving "between the innocent victim of family violation and the perpetrator of the violation" (Hargrave, 1994, p. 346). It is necessary to directly confront the family pain experienced by the victims. Such confrontation can pave the way for "acts of compassion, courage, and commitment between family members" (Hargrave, 1994, p. 346).

A psychotherapeutic intervention aimed at achieving forgiveness was conducted and explored in a group of elderly females (Hebl & Enright, 1993). These elderly females with a mean age of 74.5 were randomly assigned to two groups. The experimental group had 13 participants; the control group had 11 (two dropped out...
because of health reasons). The participants in the experimental group were given a forgiveness treatment model developed by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1991). The control group was involved with discussions relating to various issues. The concept of forgiveness was not specified in the second group. Both groups met for eight sessions and were facilitated by the same therapist. Three pretests (the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory [Adult Form; CSEI], the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory [STAI], and the Beck Depression Inventory) were administered to the elderly females. The Psychological Profile of Forgiveness scale and the Willingness to Forgive scale (plus the three inventories already mentioned) were given as posttests. The results of the study showed that the elderly females in the experimental group demonstrated a stronger pattern of forgiveness. Based on their self-reports, these elderly females showed cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes. It is claimed that the intervention was pervasive and successful in bringing about the convergence toward forgiveness.

One study examined a sample of 167 clinical practitioners (DiBlasio, 1992) with regard to the use of forgiveness in clinical practice. These therapists, who were all based in Maryland, were certified members of the American Association of Marital and Family Therapists (AAMFT). The results of this study showed that the therapists who were either at or beyond mid-life had a positive impression of forgiveness. The older therapists were more open to clients’ religious issues compared to the younger therapists. In addition, these older therapists had “a stronger development of forgiveness techniques” (DiBlasio, 1992, p. 184) compared to the younger therapists.

Phillips and Osborne (1989) conducted a phenomenological study to examine the experiences of cancer patients. These cancer patients (or co-researchers) participated in a “forgiveness therapy” program (Phillips & Osborne, 1989, p. 239), a
group therapy program that was developed by the first author. Consistent with its
goal, the group therapy program incorporated a number of forgiveness concepts. The
aim of this approach was to demonstrate that forgiveness generates a change in the
clients' perspective in terms of the absence of the basis for "condemnation of oneself,
another person or a thing" (Phillips & Osborne, 1989, p. 239). The therapy group
consisted of two men and three women. These individuals who had cancer and who
were either in remission or on maintenance therapy volunteered to participate in the
program. All of them went through the six therapy sessions with each session running
2½ hours. In the first session, the participants were exposed to a mini-lecture on the
interrelatedness of the mind-body-spirit from the holistic perspective. The participants
also participated in a relaxation exercise, which was then followed by a group
discussion pertaining to the positive effects of the exercise, their diseases, and
psychological experiences. The second session was comprised of a mini-lecture on
forgiveness. At this point, there was an emphasis on the significance of the
participants' responsibility "for their own reconciliatory processes" (Phillips &
Osborne, 1989, p. 240). Following a relaxation exercise, the participants were
engaged in visualization exercises. Such exercises were geared toward the
overcoming of resentment, the imagination of a beautiful and serene place and the
means of communicating with an inner advisor, and the letting go of hurt and anger,
respectively. The third session was less formal than the previous meetings. With the
mini-lectures aside, the participants were given the chance to share their experiences
in therapy. Also, an affirmation exercise was introduced. The last three sessions were
primarily group-oriented. Among other things, participants dealt with the
confrontation of imminent death, "the meaning of being a forgiving person" (Phillips
& Osborne, 1989, p. 240), and the understanding of the reciprocity of the self-other
relationships. The results of the study showed that the cancer patients were able to experience the therapeutic value of forgiveness through the forgiveness therapy. This study showed that the flip side of self-forgiveness is forgiveness of others.

Strasser (1984) explored the relationship of general forgiveness and forgiveness type (role-expected, expedient, and intrinsic) to reported health of elderly individuals. In her study, Strasser used purposive sampling in order to ascertain the representativeness of the sample. Fifty-nine participants who were 62 years of age or older and who were living in two residential centers participated in this study. Their participation was based on their ability to hear and respond to questions and their willingness to participate. One of the assumptions in Strasser’s study was that, to a certain extent, most people are forgiving. Based on her nursing experience, Strasser has witnessed the association between “illness, stress, anger and guilt” (p. 9) and “lack of forgiveness and an absent process of dialogue with the unforgiven” (p. 9). One significant message from Strasser’s study is that it is necessary for an angry individual to engage in a process of forgiveness. Strasser’s study showed that these elderly individuals who obtained high scores in the general forgiveness scale reported better physical health compared to those with lower scores. Nineteen elderly individuals of the 59 participants did not identify a painful life event that involved a significant person. Therefore, the general forgiveness questions were not addressed to them.

Trainer (1981) describes three types of forgiveness, namely, role-expected, expedient, and intrinsic forgiveness. Role-expected forgiveness refers to the granting of forgiveness for the sake of fulfilling “the expectations of self and others” (Trainer, 1981, p. 43). In doing so, individuals are not able to work through their emotions such as hurt, loss, and fear. Despite the growing resentment, they are not aware of it.
Expedient forgiveness is offered to another in an attempt to convey “the superior power and status” (Trainer, 1981, p. 43) of the offended individuals. In this instance, forgiveness is offered as a means to an end. By controlling their anger, for example, these offended individuals inhibit their hostility. Intrinsic forgiveness is offered on the basis of a decision to disengage from hostility and the cessation of hostile behaviors and feelings toward the offender. Intrinsic forgiveness, which is referred to as a process, is not a response to either internal compulsions or external demands. Stated differently, intrinsic forgiveness is extended in an effort to comply with a sense of integrity or an ethical belief regarding the responsibility to treat the offender humanly. Trainer mentions that there are “degrees of intrinsic forgiveness” (p. 43). Even though the hostile behaviors or impulses are not completely eradicated, it is possible to attain intrinsic forgiveness.

Fow (1988) conducted a study on the lived experience of forgiving others using the empirical-phenomenological research methodology. The goal of the study was to develop “a general, empirically derived theory of forgiving another person which can serve to link and integrate existing understandings of the phenomenon” (Fow, 1988, p. 5). A heterogeneous sample of six subjects was used in this study. These six subjects were requested to describe in writing, a situation in which they had forgiven another person. Subsequently, these subjects were interviewed for an elaboration of their written descriptions by using noninterpretive questions. These elaborated descriptions were analyzed by highlighting common constituents and variations, which constituted a general structure of forgiveness. The findings of Fow’s study showed that forgiving another stemmed from the individual’s experience of the violation as unresolved. According to Fow, the state of unresolution is “centered primarily in the experience of the self rather than in the relationship with
the other” (p. 93). The findings of this study also showed that forgiveness was the consequence of the transformation of the meaning of the violation. Transformation refers to the cognitive and affective components, which are necessary in resolving the experience of the violation. Fow mentions the role of identification in forgiveness. Forgiving another emerged from the individual’s effort in understanding the other differently. In this case, the forgiving person made an effort to understand the context in which the other acted. Fow asserts that “identification is not the only way in which the meaning of a violation is transformed” (p. 104). The findings of this study emphasized the conceptualization of “forgiving as a process rather than as an isolated act” (Fow, 1988, p. 108). The study also showed that forgiving another was not contingent upon the participation of other. In this instance, the forgiver might not experience forgiveness “as clearly, or as being complete” (Fow, 1988, p. 109).

In summary, the relevance of interpersonal forgiveness in many disciplines, namely, theology, philosophy, and psychology (including psychotherapy), cannot be underestimated. It is true that the phenomenon of interpersonal forgiveness has been examined or studied by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, more effort should be geared toward understanding the phenomenon in terms of how it was lived and experienced by individuals.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter covers the following areas: the research design; interview guides; selection of co-researchers; field procedures; pilot study; data collection, data processing (transcription, analysis, and integration); findings and implications of the study; feedback from the co-researchers; methodological assumptions; and limitations.

Research Design

In this qualitative study, the researcher employed the phenomenological method, which provides “detailed, in-depth descriptions of psychological phenomena” (Fow, 1996, p. 220). The phenomenological method was useful in describing the lived experiences of the co-researchers. There are various types of phenomenological methods. In this case, the researcher was interested in using the empirical-phenomenological method, which refers to the understanding of the general psychological meaning of a particular human experience by utilizing the descriptive protocols (Tesch, 1990) of the co-researchers. Through the empirical-phenomenological method, the researcher was open to every perceivable dimension of the phenomenon under study. In describing this method, Moustakas (1994) states that it “involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13).
Moustakas (1994) mentions two descriptive levels that characterize the empirical-phenomenological approach. Level I refers to the original data that is made up of naive descriptions obtained by utilizing open-ended questions and dialogue. Level II refers to the researcher's description of the structures of the experience through reflective analysis and interpretation of the participants' story.

The empirical-phenomenological method involves a progression from individual descriptions to general or universal meanings, or essences of the experience. The individual textural-structural description, also referred to as the situated structure (von Eckartsberg, 1998a) of the phenomenon, indicates the specific situation or experience as presented by the individual co-researchers. Such experience is presented in concrete terms. The composite textural-structural description, also known as the general structure (von Eckartsberg, 1998a) of the phenomenon, refers to the universal essences or structure present in all the descriptive protocols.

Interview Guides

In phenomenological research, it is important that questions are framed (Polkinghorne, 1989) appropriately. This is to facilitate co-researchers to report their experiences instead of giving worldly depictions. In this study, the researcher had used a series of interview guides: A—the meaning of interpersonal forgiveness, B—the experience of interpersonal experience, and C—a reflection on the meaning of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Both interview guides A and B were used in the first interview. Interview guide C was used in the second interview. These interview guides were utilized in an attempt to attain the meaning and essences of the experience of the phenomenon. These interview guides helped to ensure that the research question would be appropriately answered.
Selection of Co-researchers

In keeping with the phenomenological language and perspective, the term co-researcher(s) has been used. Sampling, in the qualitative approach, aims at addressing the research questions, increasing the depth of the data, and unraveling multiple realities (Miller & Crabtree, 1992). Typically, qualitative sampling "focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Patton (1990) states that qualitative sampling is concerned with information-richness. According to Patton, "The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 169). Information-rich cases can be defined as "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Phenomenologically based studies have shown a considerable variation in the number of co-researchers. Polkinghorne (1989) states that the number may range from 3 (co-researchers) to 325 written descriptions.

In this study, the researcher employed one type of purposeful sampling—snowball or chain sampling (Kuzel, 1992). The snowball or chain sampling refers to identifying "cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Kuzel, 1992, p. 38). Hence, the primary factor in the selection of co-researchers is that they had experienced interpersonal forgiveness. In addition, the researcher observed certain criteria, which include the following:

1. The co-researchers were willing and able to share and relate their experiences.

2. The co-researchers were men and women who had forgiven a person (other than themselves) in the past.
3. The co-researchers' age was 25 years and above.

4. The co-researchers were not in the process of grieving over a person's death so as to not confound their experience of forgiveness with grieving.

5. Individuals who were currently being treated for diagnosed mental disorder as defined by *DSM-IV* were excluded as co-researchers.

Eight co-researchers were selected for this study: three males and five females. The males were 29, 58, and 61 years of age; the females were 26, 35, 36, 38, and 50 years of age. Except for one male co-researcher, all were married. Except for one Black female, all of the co-researchers were White. Among the co-researchers, seven were Christians (two were Lutherans, one was a Presbyterian, one was a Baptist) and one co-researcher requested that his religious affiliation not be disclosed.

The researcher contacted a chapel at one of the local universities and a list of religious organizations was obtained. Subsequently, the researcher contacted the various religious organizations (by phone and personal visits) in her effort to recruit volunteers (co-researchers). In addition, the researcher gave a number of advertising flyers to identified individuals (whose names appeared in the listing mentioned above) so that they could distribute them to other individuals, who, to their best knowledge, had experienced the phenomenon. The advertisement addressed the conditions of participation (see Appendix B). Individuals (out of a total of 10, 8 were recruited) who were interested in participating in the study had to undergo a pre-interview with the researcher. The goal was three-fold: (1) to collect some basic and pertinent information (such as the demographic information; see Appendix C) regarding the individuals, (2) to collect information with regard to the experience of the individual with interpersonal forgiveness (see Appendix D), and (3) to discuss the nature and purpose of the study. The pre-interview was necessary in order to screen for
appropriate co-researchers. During these pre-interviews, the researcher addressed certain criteria related to the selection of co-researchers. Once all the criteria were met, these individuals were recruited as co-researchers and letters of invitation were issued to them (see Appendix E). Following their recruitment, an informed consent (Moustakas, 1994) was obtained from every co-researcher (see Appendix F).

Pilot Study.

In describing a pilot study, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state, "The idea is not to get data per se, but to learn about your research process, interview schedule, observation techniques, and yourself" (p. 30). A pilot study will allow the researcher to ascertain the clarity and appropriateness (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) of the interview questions. It is through the pilot study that the researcher will become aware of the "practical aspects of establishing access, making contact, and conducting the interview" (Seidman, 1998, p. 32).

The researcher had conducted a pilot study, which involved one individual. The interview guides (see Appendices G, H, I) were piloted for clarity and understanding. Following the pilot study, the interview guides were modified. Such modification was necessary to avoid any double meanings, inappropriate words, or phrases and to increase clarity and understanding. In addition, the pilot study had raised the researcher's awareness with regard to the importance of making the questions more personal (in terms of language) for the co-researchers.
In this study, the researcher conducted the study based on the following guidelines: collection of data through interviews, transcription of interviews, analysis, and integration of data.

Seidman (1998) suggests the use of a three-interview series. The underlying point is that the meaning of an experience cannot be separated from its context. Seidman delineates the task of each interview: (1) the first aims at establishing the context of the co-researchers' experience, (2) the second facilitates the co-researchers' reconstruction of the details of their experience, and (3) the third calls upon the co-researchers to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Seidman suggests that since each interview will have its own focus, the interviewer should not digress from the purpose and focus of the respective interviews. The strength of the nature of the interviews is that each interview helps to set the stage for the next interview.

In trying to fulfill the phenomenological quest, the researcher used a two-interview structure. In this study, the tasks of the first and second interviews were collapsed into one. The first interview covered two main components: (1) the meaning of interpersonal forgiveness, and (2) the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. The second interview focused on the co-researchers' reflection on the meaning of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Each interview ran for about 1 hr 30 min. There was no specified length of time between the two interviews. All the co-researchers were interviewed individually by the researcher.

The in-depth phenomenological interviews were semistructured. Semistructured interviews refer to "guided, concentrated, focused, and open-ended
communication events” (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 16), which are reconstructed by the researcher and co-researcher(s). Open-ended questions and dialogue characterized the interviews and these were audiotaped. According to Miller and Crabtree (1992), “Behavior and conversations are best recorded” (p. 17).

In this study, the researcher utilized Moustakas’ (1994) modification of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen’s method of analysis of phenomenological data. The main processes that characterize the phenomenological method include epoch, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. The first stage in the phenomenological process is called “epoch” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Epoch or bracketing (Creswell, 1998) is a process that necessitates the researcher to set aside all preconceived experience and prejudgments in order to create a conducive and an unbiased atmosphere and rapport for the interview (Moustakas, 1994). Since the researcher is the tool for the study, it is essential that this person is not prejudiced when conducting the study. Miller and Crabtree (1992) state that individuals who adopt the phenomenological methodology “use the self as an experiencing interpreter” (p. 24). All the three aforementioned processes are necessary in the analysis of the phenomenological data. While it is true that the three terms, namely, epoch, bracketing, and phenomenological reduction are synonymous (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990), it is necessary to mention that the phenomenological reduction consists of a number of specified tasks. Before these tasks are listed, a definition of phenomenological reduction is in order. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) state:

It is a common mode of expression to speak of reducing a complex problem to its basic elements. This reduction involves a narrowing of attention to what is essential in the problem while disregarding or ignoring the superfluous and accidental. What one ignores when performing the phenomenological reduction is his previous prejudice about the world. By narrowing his attention to what is essential, he hopefully will discover the rational principles
necessary for an understanding of the thing (or phenomenon) under investigation. (p. 26)

The list of tasks that fall under the phenomenological reduction are as follows: (a) bracketing the topic or question, (b) horizontalization, (c) delimited horizons or meanings, (d) clustering the invariant horizons into themes, and (e) individual textural descriptions (the integration of invariant meanings and themes). The researcher completed these tasks following the transcription of the interviews.

Imaginative variation is defined as the “possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97–98). The list of tasks that fall under imaginative variation are as follows: (a) varying the possible meanings and perspectives of the dynamics of the experience, (b) constructing a list of structural qualities of the experience, (c) clustering structural qualities into themes, (d) using universal structures or qualities as themes, and (e) constructing individual structural descriptions (the integration of structural qualities and universal themes). Following the researcher’s transcription of the interviews, she had to edit the protocols (verbatim transcripts) in an attempt to eliminate unnecessary expressions. In the case of disjointed statements, the researcher had used dotted lines to achieve smoothness or to connect the statements. Also, for the sake of protecting the co-researchers’ identity and confidentiality, the researcher used the letter “C” (for co-researcher) in the protocols. Even the significant offending others were identified with their initials. In honoring the request of one particular co-researcher, the name of the country where he once worked was identified as “A.”
Before the researcher began reading the data (verbatim transcripts), she tried to identify and disengage from her preconceptions. The researcher considered every statement from the verbatim transcript that had significance in describing the experience. This method is called horizontalization (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). To begin with, every statement was considered to have equal value. Only the horizons that represented “the invariant constituents of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) were documented. Invariant horizons or meaning units are not repetitive or overlapping statements. Once the irrelevant statements were omitted, the researcher connected and clustered all invariant horizons into themes. At this juncture, the researcher shifted from the co-researchers’ verbatim transcripts to the formulation of meanings based on the researcher’s creative insight (Colaizzi, 1978). In other words, the researcher transformed the invariant horizons or meaning units into psychological language (Polkinghorne, 1989). Besides looking for the invariant horizons, meaningful segments or units of the transcribed data that were either exclusive in nature or related to the purpose of the study (Miller & Crabtree, 1992) were also documented.

With these invariant meanings and themes, the researcher constructed for each co-researcher a coherent textural description of the phenomenon. At this stage, the focus was on the “what” of the experience of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) says that the task is to look for “the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness” (p. 34). It was necessary for the researcher to reflect on the description of the co-researcher’s textural experience. Subsequently, with this reflection and the use of imaginative variation, the researcher constructed a structural description for the co-researcher. A structural description of an experience refers to “how” the co-researcher experienced the phenomenon. It refers to: (a) the underlying
dynamics of an experience, (b) the conditions or forces that have evoked the experience, and (c) ways and means whereby thoughts and feelings associated with the experience emerged.

The researcher continued to engage (where necessary) in the psychological language until the structural description was completed. The point is to make the psychological language exhaustive.

The next step required the researcher to construct for the co-researcher the textural-structural (integrated) description of the meanings and essences of his or her experience. The researcher repeated the same procedure for each co-researcher.

Finally, the researcher focused on the construction of “a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121), which depicted a description of the group experience. In other words, this refers to the essential general meaning structure or the essence of the phenomenon (or the findings of this study).

Findings and Implications of the Study

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings of the study, which is the composite textural-structural description of the experience of the phenomenon. In addition, the researcher related these findings to relevant literature. The phenomenological methodology is one of many qualitative traditions. Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to bear in mind that she was operating within the qualitative realm and therefore needed to be sensitive to the qualitative research process. Newman and Benz (1998) describe a schema for qualitative research process. Generally, qualitative research operates in the following sequence: (a) collecting, interpreting, absorbing, and experiencing data; (b) analyzing data;
(c) drawing conclusions; (d) creating hypotheses (propositions in the context of this study); and (e) developing theory. Subsequently, this empirical-phenomenological research process (see Figure 1) incorporates the last two components of the schema. With respect to the development of theory, the phenomenological analysis of this study aimed at clarifying and developing "psychological concepts on phenomenological grounds" (Fuller, 1990, p. 34). Giorgi (1979) mentions one type of theory, which refers to the creation of "comprehensive or synthetic terms" (p. 69). In creating these terms or concepts, the emphasis should be on "their meaningful content" (Giorgi, 1979, p. 68) and their essential relationship to the phenomenon they strive to represent. From the emerging propositions and theory, the researcher moved on to the implications of the study.

Feedback From the Co-researchers

The co-researchers were given an opportunity to read and check their individual meanings/essences or textural-structural descriptions of the experience of the phenomenon. According to Colaizzi (1978), the final validating step in the phenomenological data analysis is to return to the co-researchers in order to compare the descriptive results with their experiences. Following this task, the researcher incorporated any aspects of the co-researchers' meanings/essences of their experiences that might have been omitted and any relevant new data that might surface during the extended interviews. In addition, meanings/essences of the experiences or words that were considered as inappropriate by the co-researchers were changed or omitted (see Appendix J).
Figure 1. Highlights of the Research Process.
Methodological Assumptions

The literature on forgiveness shows that most research on forgiveness has employed the quantitative approach. The need for such efforts cannot be understated. However, forgiveness should be examined in many ways. There should be a balance between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, the researcher believes that forgiveness is introspective and reflective in nature. The meaning and the experience of forgiveness can be best captured through the phenomenological method compared to the quantitative approach. It is the goal of natural scientific research to generate the kind of knowledge that permits the prediction and control of the topic under investigation. On the contrary, phenomenological research intends to provide "a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like for someone to experience something" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 58). Certainly, the results of phenomenological research will amplify the understanding of experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989).

One of the characteristics of in-depth phenomenological interviewing is that it is interactive (between the researcher and co-researchers). The researcher must establish rapport with the co-researchers. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), "In qualitative research, rapport is a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism that primarily serves the interest of the researcher" (p. 94). The phenomenological interview entails an interpersonal engagement (Polkinghorne, 1989) between the researcher and co-researchers.

Since the phenomenological approach is concerned with the exploration of the meaning of an experience, human behavior is best studied, explored, and understood in the context of people's lives as well as in the context of the particular
experience. The two-interview structure had enabled the researcher and co-researchers to reach the desired experience and to put it in context. A “one-shot” interview might not be able to capture the desired experience and meaning. The co-researchers needed to enter into their inner worlds or frames of reference. Some amount of time, energy, and preparation were required for the co-researchers to do so. The researcher believes that the two-interview structure had provided the co-researchers with an opportunity to enter into their inner worlds. Another important factor that was present in the two-interview structure was the researcher-co-researcher interaction.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the qualitative approach (and therefore of the phenomenological methodology) concerns the inability to make any generalizations. The outcome of this study cannot be generalized to other situations and experiences. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) mention that “only tentative explanations for one time and place are possible” (p. 12). While generalizations are not possible, this particular study provides “a deeper understanding of experience from the perspectives of the participants” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 44).

Another limitation of the qualitative approach revolves around the issue of the replication of findings. Since the “social world is always being constructed” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145), it is impossible to replicate the findings. This means that the contexts, experiences, and meanings of the same phenomenon (interpersonal forgiveness) may vary across studies.

Another limitation concerns the exhaustiveness of the questions used as the interview guides. There might be a possibility that the researcher had not covered
other pertinent questions pertaining to the experience of the phenomenon. Hence, a
revision or expansion of these questions may be necessary.

In addition, it is possible that the researcher had not covered all possibilities in
terms of the meanings/essences as required by imaginative variation (one of the steps
in the empirical-phenomenological method).
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings of this empirical-phenomenological study are the composite
textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience of
interpersonal forgiveness. Initially, the researcher derived the meaning units and
themes, respectively, from the individual protocols. Subsequently, these meaning
units and themes have been integrated into a textural description of the experience of
the phenomenon. The textural description emphasizes the “what” of the experience or
the appearance of the phenomenon. By reflecting on the textural description, the
researcher has constructed a structural description of the experience of the
phenomenon. The structural description illuminates the “how,” the hidden aspect, or
the essence of such experience. The researcher has integrated the meanings and
essences of all the protocols of the co-researchers into the composite textural-
structural description of the experience of the phenomenon. Accordingly, the findings
of this study have (or the experience of interpersonal forgiveness has) been
categorized into nine major relevant themes: (1) self-projection—temporality and
spatiality, (2) existential meaning—a sense of self, (3) prevalence of negative
emotions, (4) meaning of the violation—self-other-world relationship, (5) Gestalt
corcept of figure and ground, (6) presence (and nonpresence) of forgiveness,
(7) forgiveness as an evolutionary process, (8) unselfish quality of forgiveness, and
(9) philosophy and faith. The composite textural-structural description of the
phenomenon will be presented under the appropriate themes.
Self-Projection—Temporality and Spatiality

Being consumed with diverse but interrelated negative emotions, there was the feeling of being trapped on the inside, hence, the closing in of the inner world and personal space. One negative emotion compounded the other, giving way to a circular movement of negative emotions. With all the negative emotions put together, it would be impossible not to feel vulnerable and if allowed to escalate, could lead to a sense of psychological disintegration. The presence of these negative emotions blocked the inner flow or mobility of positive energy, thus denying self of its sense of fluidity, its sense of inner freedom. Being immersed in the past, the emotional experience of the violation was lived in the present moment, making the future impenetrable, hopeless, and without certainty. Since the smooth transition of negative energy to positive energy seemed hopeless, what remained was a current sense of hopelessness. Though temporary in nature, this hopelessness seemed to have its stubborn permanence. It was such hopelessness that aroused the idea of forgiveness. Slowly, forgiveness and its meaning or variations of its meaning began to pierce its way into the questioning self. While some elements of forgiveness ran through the mind such as acknowledging the wrongdoing, canceling a psychological debt, letting go of the issue, not vindictively harping on the issue, or giving up revenge, the apprehension of the subject matter was still fuzzy. Although there was a desire to be relieved from the antagonistic experiencing of the violation, the constant dwelling on or preoccupation with the violation hampered movement toward internal freedom. By continuously dwelling on the violation, it became amplified, thus making it bigger than the context within which it was originally embodied. If allowed to persist, the mind could blow the issue out of proportion, thus losing sight of what was previously
or presently, or futuristically important. When this happened, self became overwhelmed. In certain cases, physical reactions took place: loss of concentration, a major illness, lack of sleep, or loss of appetite. Typically, some of these psychosomatic reactions ceased to exist with the eventual materialization of forgiveness. At a higher level, the relationship to the world might be characterized by a loss of zest for life. For some, sympathy or compassion, or empathy toward others prematurely existed, hence, welcoming the idea of forgiveness to permeate into the overwhelmed self.

Existential Meaning—A Sense of Self

Growing out of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness, the co-researchers came to the conclusion that it is difficult for humans to forgive. While recognizing that humans are selfish and revengeful by nature, self could not bear to withhold forgiveness. To not forgive would have been more costly than to forgive and to not forgive meant that self was still living in and reliving the past to the point of losing the essence of living. The need to live a meaningful and an enjoyable life kept resurfacing, implying that life must be appreciated and its meaning lived. As a consequence of the injustice, the original closeness, meaning, or essence of the relationship was lost. There was a loss of self-esteem or a sense of self. Besides, there was a loss of the original trust, respect, care, and love that characterized the relationship of the past. By not living in the moment, the historical time seemed unrelenting, hence, creating an existential discrepancy between the moment and the future. Living in the existential discrepancy had denied the co-researchers of the familiar meaning and pattern of existence with the consequence of not living life to its fullest. Unable to bear the existential discrepancy or to live life half-heartedly, there
was a movement toward closing the existential discrepancy by seeking a more meaningful existence. By not forgiving, the negative energy continued to expand within self, eventually, denying a healthy productivity. Thus, coming from the perspective of a victim and a loser, forgiving others was a personal sacrifice. While pride or self-respect seemed to have been given up with the granting of forgiveness, in actuality, more self-respect was earned through it. Unwittingly, by granting forgiveness, self-respect was restored either to its previous position or to a higher level. Through the process of grieving, healing, and forgiveness, a recovery of self was experienced, opening up the opportunity of valuing or appreciating self in relation to others or others in relation to self. With forgiveness as a form of empowerment and a source of power, there was a struggle to release self from the cruel grip of historical time. While forgiveness was empowering because it restored the ability to make a decision and to control the situation, it also turned out to be a source of power in terms of the presence of retrospection, reflection, mindfulness, and insight. Upon reflection, the experience of interpersonal forgiveness helped to develop inner qualities, indicating a growing awareness with self. As the real self was given a chance to live through the experience of the phenomenon, an integrated self or a sense of wholeness was regained. Consequently, a new and healthy concept of self developed—one very unfamiliar to the evolving self. The emergence of this new aspect of self and its valuing contributed to the solidification of forgiveness. Maturity and personal achievement, which were an outgrowth of the lived and laborious experience of the phenomenon, became a sense of pride.
Prevalence of Negative Emotions

Interpersonal forgiveness evolved as a result of a traumatic or devastating experience of a violation of a relationship by a significant other. The violation may have presented itself as a breach of trust or commitment, or disregard for the care, love, or respect for the co-researchers. Generally, the meaning of the violation transcended its actual form, its actual weight, and its actual dimension, no matter how trivial or severe. Natural to the human disposition, the co-researchers reacted to the violation with intense anger and hurt. Frequently, anger and hurt gave way to other accompanying emotions such as bitterness, sadness, depression, disappointment, frustration, helplessness, confusion, tension, guilt, or self-pity. Being angry caused an awareness of the possibility that the anger could become destructive. On the surface, anger was a shield to protect self, an emotion that gave inner strength to live in the experience of the violation. In certain cases, hatred, revenge, and being out of touch with reality persisted for sometime. Releasing anger and hurt was synonymous with letting go of vengeance or the need to exact punishment. By living and prolonging the anger, the potential of seeing reality or what actually transpired was denied. Without anger, there might be a possibility of immediately coming into contact with the pain that evolved from the emotional injury, thus making it unbearable to contain the meaning of the violation within self. Left unattended, pain could give way to feeling weak internally. Like a pendulum, the act of vacillating between intense anger and self-pity eventuated in emotional exhaustion. No longer remained captive or being in bondage to the negative emotions, there was the question of the logic of it all, the sensibility, or insensibility of it all and the stupidity.
inherent in the emotional turmoil. The absence of inner peace and peace with the offender meant the presence of unhappiness with self, the offender, and the world.

**Meaning of the Violation—Self-Other-World Relationship**

Psychological separation from others and the ability to separate self from the situation contributed to appraising or evaluating the situation wisely and objectively. To disengage self from the situation was to view it from a new unbiased perspective. To a certain point, as self took on part of the blame, guilt sprang up, thus restraining self from continuously blaming others for the wrongdoing. As the co-researchers were able to identify themselves as fallible human beings, the imperfection of others became a constant reminder of the imperfection of self. The self-other comparison gave way to the notion that self was not superior to others and subsequently, was helpful in facilitating or solidifying forgiveness. The nonsuperior self paved the way for the emerging humbleness, eliminating the possibility of the inferiority-superiority dualism either within self or between self and others. In the midst of personalizing and assuming part of the responsibility in creating the violation of the relationship, the co-researchers could no longer push out of consciousness that self and others were responsible for co-constituting the violation. Being disturbed by the presence of conscience, forgiving others was an attempt to set the conscience free from guilt. While others’ attitude or reaction, or true repentance would have speeded up the process of forgiveness, its absence did not deter forgiving. Since no reciprocity was required, forgiveness could be one-sided. Up to a certain point, there was an acceptance of reality or the state of the affairs as part of the effort to differentiate the significance of the relationship from the issue. As self became more convinced of the complementary responsibility, a sense of fairness emerged. With some of the hostile
or excruciating emotional barriers removed, there were efforts toward understanding
the situation by re-evaluating self and others realistically, by not getting enmeshed
with others, and by not taking responsibility for others, thus putting things in their
respective places. In reality, the context and meaning of the violation remained
faithfully constant, a quality that paved the way for the reconstruction of self, others,
and the self-other relationship. While retrospection, reflection, and deep analysis were
notable tools in understanding the situation, the prevailing mode was to process and
analyze the situation from a win-win perspective, a way of ensuring that self and
others benefitted from forgiveness. An acceptance of the change in self, others, and
the self-other relationship emerged concomitantly with the redefinition of self, others,
and the worldview. For many, a change in the nature and meaning of the self-other
relationship occurred, leading to a reestablishment of the relationship with others
with a new attitude.

Gestalt Concept of Figure and Ground

Positive emotions superseded negative emotions, particularly anger and hurt,
as these receded into the remote dimension of consciousness. Such process that was
synonymous with the Gestalt concept of figure and ground provided self with new
energy, a new meaning to existence. Despite the granting of forgiveness, the residue
of negative emotions still lingered, reflecting the apparent impossibility of forgiveness
to remove all negative emotions. Being aware of the difference, there was a
recognition that these negative emotions were devoid of detriment either to self or
others. Paradoxically, the co-researchers experienced an absence of hostility
regardless of the lingering negative emotions. In the case of a breach of trust, distrust
and skepticism toward others still remained.
Presence (and Nonpresence) of Forgiveness

Since there was no direct control over the entire process of forgiveness or its evolution, the constant justification and solidification of forgiveness occurred. As self unfolded itself in the process of grieving and healing, so did forgiveness. Being bothered by the question of whether others had really been forgiven, the self was constantly seeking assurance through the act, gesture, or sign of forgiveness. At times, the question with regard to the substance of forgiveness emerged, wondering whether it contained its deserving quality. A metamorphosis of the substance of forgiveness occurred in the light of continual evaluation of self in relation to others. Often, the substance of forgiveness became questionable as it moved back and forth between presence and nonpresence. In its presence, there was a full or partial awareness of forgiveness, no matter how momentary its point of contact. But there was another side of forgiveness that caused dissatisfaction within self. Forgiveness, in its nonpresence and elusiveness, resulted in slipping away from assurance, thus pronouncing its absence, denying that it was ever present. Again, it was necessary to revisit the idea that its elusive nonpresence could not be equated with its absolute nonpresence, its nonexistence. With the emergence of more positive emotions, forgiving others became more real, more solidified. As patience, commitment, determination, tolerance, and endurance persisted, self grew into forgiveness. With the passage of time, forgiveness developed through the on-going process of justifying and solidifying. At the same time, personal “space” was appreciated for self-reflection and internalization of forgiveness, thus making it real within self. While there was an appreciation of the process of forgiveness, it was never a comfortable journey.

Coming to terms with self, others, and the self-other relationship was a prerequisite
to forgiveness. Coming to terms with self meant that the co-researchers had to come
to terms with or heal their emotional injury, a task that was experienced with
difficulty. In dealing with the emotional injury, it was necessary to confront,
reconnect with, or feel the emotions, meaning reliving the emotional injury. Partly,
the difficulty in returning to the emotional injury was attributed to the intensity of the
emotions and the tendency of not sharing, disclosing, or verbalizing the emotional
experience. In certain cases, there was fear in reconnecting with the hurt and feeling
its intensity. While there was a parallel forward movement between letting go of the
issues and that of the emotions, there were also parallel processes between healing
and the solidifying of forgiveness.

Forgiveness as an Evolutionary Process

As a phenomenon, interpersonal forgiveness was experienced as a long,
complex, evolutionary process. The struggle with and continuous questioning of the
decision to forgive indicated that it was never a one-time decision. Having made a
decision, there was constant reference to the rationality of the decision, disqualifying
and qualifying it. While the decision to forgive was experienced as a conscious entity,
there was an awareness that such a decision was not forgiveness in itself. In taking
time to reach such a decision with the potential of forgiveness setting in, there was a
consciousness with regard to the outflow of mental, emotional, and spiritual energy.
Since the initial decision was still inconclusive, oscillation between decision and
indecision occurred. Even after making such a decision, doubt, or hesitation lingered
for an indefinite moment, thus giving rise to ambivalence. With the presence of the
annoying self-talk, it was unavoidable not to go through the tedious mental debate to
arrive at the concrete decision to forgive others. If allowed to prevail, the negative
self-talk would be detrimental to self in terms of magnifying the unfairness of forgiveness due to the injustice or the wrongdoing and the deserving right to emotions. The back and forth movement between wanting to forgive and not forgive illustrated that making the choice or deciding to forgive constituted the most difficult hurdle in the process of forgiveness. By not succumbing to the power and persuasiveness of negative self-talk, eventually, rationality prevailed. Once the decision became clear, it served as a threshold of the process of forgiveness, unfolding other significant discoveries, like the granting and blessings of forgiveness. Once the decision found its foothold, self began to move toward malleability. The common affective states associated with the experience of the phenomenon include self-fulfillment, extreme happiness, satisfaction, inner peace (mental and emotional) or inner harmony, compassion, sympathy, empathy, contentment, relief from psychological burden, a sense of lightness, a sense of freedom, inner beauty, and spiritual uplift. Forgiveness that was either verbalized or implied, gave way to clarity, wonder, and a sense of extraordinariness or rareness surrounding the ability to forgive others. Caught by surprise with the blessings of forgiveness, positive emotions kept unfolding within self in terms of one positive emotion leading to another.

Unselfish Quality of Forgiveness

On the subconscious level, there was a concern not only with genuine forgiveness but rather, with the difficulty in arriving at genuine forgiveness. Such difficulty was evidenced in the search for a harmony between cognitive and affective states. While it took time for the mind to grasp the idea of forgiveness, it took a while for it to settle in the heart, giving way to a more natural feeling. In the beginning, it
was impossible not to indulge in self-absorption, a psychological mode of operation that did not warrant the granting of forgiveness and even if it were granted, it would have been on the basis of self-centeredness. To forgive others for the sake of self-centeredness meant selfishness or egotism, an unproductive quality to be dispensed with over time. Gradually, there was a progression from self-absorption (or self-centeredness) to a genuine concern for others, thus resulting in the unconditionality of forgiveness. The co-researchers did not try to change or transform others neither did they strive to control others nor did they impose any needs or values on others as a precondition for forgiveness. Unable to tolerate and live with an awareness that others feel guilty, there were attempts to understand others’ frame of mind, hence, situating the meaning of forgiveness in the well-being of self and others. In no time, the blessings of forgiving others on the basis of unconditional and universal responses (care, concern, love, respect, etc.) were reflected back to the forgiving self.

**Philosophy and Faith**

 Forgiveness was experienced as an extension of faith, spirituality, philosophy of life, and unconditionality. While in certain cases, a combination of these factors formed the basis of forgiveness, generally, co-researchers forgave others on the basis of humanity. Aside from being driven by the desire to become a worthwhile human beings, forgiving others could be a form of gratitude, tenderness, or compensation. By virtue of faith or philosophical outlook, not forgiving would be likened to failure in doing what was right or virtuous. In the eyes of faith, for example, the violation of the relationship or the emotional injury was far from insurmountable. Being intolerable of or uncomfortable with the idea of a discrepancy between religious or philosophical outlook and practice, there was movement toward an irresistible
congruence. With the fruition of forgiveness, the co-researchers had lived up to their faith or philosophy and consequently, congruence emerged within self. Partly, congruence gave meaning to existence. The experiencing of the phenomenon had provided the co-researchers with a profound understanding of its value for health, growth, or human life. In many instances, the co-researchers said that God's forgiveness to them had inspired forgiveness for others. While seeking comfort and strength in the divine power, self prayed for the ability to forgive. Since forgiveness seemed beyond reach at the human level, it would not have materialized without the divine intervention, without the divine strength. To a certain extent, the worn-out self had depleted its human capacity in handling the negative emotions, thus calling upon the divine intervention to expand it for the sake of emotional or psychological survival. By surrendering to God, some of the negative emotions were alleviated, resulting in the acceptance of the events and ordeals as destiny. In an effort to complete the circle, the acceptance of destiny helped to further dissipate some of the negative emotions. The path of forgiveness that was likened to a spiritual cleansing of self was taken and explored in order to make peace with self, others, and God. Eventually, the experiencing of inner harmony led to interpersonal harmony.
The purpose of this chapter is to discuss major themes from the findings of the study. As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study are the composite textural-structural description of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. As such, the composite textural-structural description has been categorized into nine major relevant themes. Relevant literature will be used to support and enhance the discussion. Following the discussion, the conclusion, hypotheses (a theory of forgiveness), and implications of this study as well as recommendations for further research will be presented.

Discussion of Major Themes

Self-Projection—Temporality and Spatiality

A discussion of these findings would not be complete without reviewing and relating to Heidegger’s (1927/1962) first major work (*Being and Time*) that is concerned with the meaning of human existence. Heidegger’s (1927/1962) popular concept, Dasein, may be interpreted in many ways. Literally speaking, Dasein means “there-being” (Mulhall, 1996, p. 14) or “‘being-there’” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 69) or “Being-human” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. xi). As Blitz (1981) puts it, Dasein is a term used to refer to “man in relation to his Being” (p. 33). Stewart and Mickunas (1990) emphasize that Dasein refers to human reality being situated in the world. In
other words, man is defined by his actions that take place in the world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger emphasized the understanding of man in terms of finitude, historicality, temporality, and spatiality. Human finitude can be understood in terms of mortality. Every moment of existence is marked by the possibility of death or mortality. Being reminded of the possibility of death has its positive point. As Mulhall (1996) puts it, “Accordingly, human beings cannot authentically confront their concrete moments of existential choice unless they grasp the full complexity or depth of their finitude” (p. 138). Human finitude means that death must be faced. By understanding the impossibility of life and choice at any moment, it is possible not only to appreciate the presence of choice but also to make the best choice. Dasein’s historicality is properly understood in terms of its existential-temporal conditions for the possibility of having its own history. Dasein’s historicality revolves around the possibility of its own unification or connectedness through a sequence of the past, present, and future. Dasein has a historical existence in light of its “ability to explore the past” (Mulhall, 1996, p. 166). There is no doubt that historicality can be described as openness to the world, which is contingent upon openness to time.

Dasein’s existence is experienced in the context of temporality and spatiality. Temporality represents the basic structure of existence in terms of “Being-in-the-world-transcending” (Koenig, 1992, p. 119). Ontologically, temporality or “the horizon of time” (Mulhall, 1996, p. 19) is the ground in which to understand Dasein and the meaning of Being. Temporality encompasses the past, present and the future. Dasein’s openness to time is imperative for its existence and movement toward authenticity. The fundamentality of time is viewed in relation to Being-in-the-world. From the Heideggerian point of view, Dasein’s spatial existence is based on its temporality. Spatiality refers to the “notion of space to our conception of the world”
Spatiality leads to “the uncovering of space within-the-world” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 419). However, Dasein does not occupy space in the same manner as an item of equipment. While the objective space is important to existence, it is in the existential space that there is openness to all possibilities. Blitz (1981) postulates that man’s existence revolves around his possibilities. Fuller (1990) explains that “Meanings, the self, and other people are in the existential space of possibility, where there is neither objective inside nor objective outside, in the existential space of being possible open to the possibilities of meaning” (p. 61). It is only in existential space that meanings and Dasein surpass themselves and subsequently, “commune with one another” (Fuller, 1990, p. 63). How is it that Dasein is spatial? Heidegger (1927/1962) describes Dasein as “spiritual” (p. 419), a quality that permits it to be spatial. Thus, Dasein is distinguished from “any extended corporeal Thing” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 419) by its spatiality. Dasein’s spatiality is characterized by directionality and de-severance (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Whenever an entity becomes a concern of Dasein, it becomes de-severing and subsequently, it is such concern that gives the entity its directionality or “directedness into a world” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 143). De-severance refers to “making the remoteness of something disappear” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 139). Suffice it to say, that both directionality and de-severance are determined in advance by a particular concern. Closeness to a certain entity is not to be understood in terms of measurable or objective distance. It is Dasein’s concern that determines the remoteness and closeness of an entity. In other words, an entity is close by whenever it falls within the reach of what is essentially available for circumspection. Dreyfus (1991) says that what determines the nearness of an entity is Dasein’s interest.
On the one hand, interpersonal forgiveness is consistent with the notion of spatiality. For the co-researchers, forgiveness in terms of the self-other relationship, became their concern. The preoccupation with forgiveness also meant the preoccupation with self in relation to others or others in relation to self. On the other hand, the experience of interpersonal forgiveness is consistent with the notion of temporality or “self-projection in the world” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 121). By virtue of being conscious of both time and space, the co-researchers became very uncomfortable with living in the past experience of the violation. Whether conscious or otherwise, there was an internal need to move forward into the future. The constant dwelling on the issue symbolized “living in the past experience” of the violation. By focusing attention to the past experience, they were not living in or appreciating the present moment. By not living or appreciating the present moment, they were unable to proceed into the future with optimism. Forward movement, whether physical or psychological, was hindered by the presence of an emotional weight or burden. This emotional weight might be intense anger or gnawing pain or guilt. Suddenly, personal or life space was narrowed. Clearly, these co-researchers discovered the deep meaning and significance of forgiveness in light of their existential characteristics, namely, spatiality and temporality.

In discussing temporality and spatiality, the concept of the lived-body cannot be overlooked. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) remark that the lived-body is not only the center of experience or orientation to the world but also the source of essential needs. To understand consciousness is to understand the lived-body. One cannot be understood without the other (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). The experience of consciousness can only be related to the world by means of the lived-body. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) note that “the lived-body is also the means by which
consciousness experiences the world and the means by which it is situated in space and time” (p. 98). It is through the lived-body that consciousness can be materialized in the world. Hence, there is an intimate connection between the lived-body and consciousness. Forgiveness, as an object of consciousness, would not have materialized if the lived-body did not experience intense negative emotions like anger and hurt and psychosomatic reactions like disturbed sleep and loss of appetite. These negative emotions and psychosomatic reactions, which were blockages to the lived-body and consciousness, triggered the need for interpersonal forgiveness.

Existential Meaning—A Sense of Self

It is useful to understand the context or circumstance that calls for forgiveness. Often, a violation of a relationship is not just a break or conflict in the relationship. A violation of a relationship cuts deep into the psychological realm of the relationship. The co-researchers’ sense of self was affected by the experience of the violation and emotional injury. Their sense of wholeness became disintegrated. A disintegration of a sense of self, whether mild, moderate or severe, is a psychological loss. Brandsma (1982) notes that “the loss is experienced as a diminishment of the self in terms of esteem, possessions, a dream, or one’s sense of adequacy” (p. 41). For the co-researchers, such loss also encompassed their sense of fairness, self-respect and integrity. Brandsma emphasizes that “the situation is one wherein a person experiences a violation of his/her sense of fairness” (p. 40). Pingleton (1997) notes that forgiving is necessary whenever there is “a violation of one’s sense of fairness or justice, or a loss of love” (p. 409). Trainer (1981) mentions that one of the steps in the process of intrinsic forgiveness is the restoration of the offended individuals’ “sense of self-worth” (p. 45). The individuals who are no longer
incapacitated by the hurt are not "under the power of the reduced definition of self implied by the injury/insult" (Trainer, 1981, p. 45). There is no doubt that a "diminished self" leads to an increased awareness with regard to one's limitations. One co-researcher had been sexually abused. In this case, her childhood innocence could never be revived. It was lost forever. Her childhood innocence was her possession, her dream. The absence of this childhood innocence had diminished her self-esteem and sense of adequacy. While she was able to restore her self-esteem during her adult life, the painful memory of the past still remained. While she had forgiven her offender, she could not trust him again. The inability to trust her offender represents a psychological loss. While she could have compassion for her offender, she would always be reminded of the ordeal. The painful memory would stay with her for the rest of her life. For this co-researcher, the painful memory was a motivation to appreciate the possibility of eternal life. Implicitly, the painful memory might be a kind of psychological loss. In another instance, one co-researcher was deceived by a long-time friend. Despite his forgiveness, the co-researcher could not trust his offender again. The inability to trust other again is a psychological loss. The inability to trust again had affected the quality of self-other relationship. The point is that one loss had led to another.

It is interesting to note that by experiencing the loss or losses, the co-researchers became aware of the nature of the self-other relationship. They became aware of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of emotional needs, emotional attachments, vulnerability, dependency, and projections. Such concepts are in line with the idea put forth by Brandsma (1982) when he stated "the violatee is potentially brought closer to awareness of various needs or feelings, some of the most important of which are dependency, vulnerability, and adequacy" (p. 41).
The findings of this study support the notion that forgiveness is not a natural human disposition. While forgiveness may not be a natural human disposition, it is still a human potential. Essentially, the human potential is related to the existential meaning or a sense of self. The development of the human potential forms a basis for procreation of meaning or a sense of self. As such, the ability to make a decision or to struggle with decision-making is part of the human potential. Even after making such a decision, the co-researchers struggled to maintain these decisions to forgive. Even the granting of forgiveness needed constant justification and solidification. In other words, the co-researchers struggled with the justification and solidification of forgiveness. Clearly, such scenarios illustrate that the discovery of the human potential or the opening of a new possibility involved difficulty. The decision to forgive, for instance, had given way to a new dimension of the human experience, namely, forgiveness, which was unfamiliar to self and must be accepted over time. Hence, the co-researchers may need to expand the human horizon in order to discover their possibilities. In this case, the ability to forgive must be “cultivated, acquired, or developed within one’s personality structure” (Pingleton, 1997, p. 406).

The findings of this study show that forgiveness is a choice. There was a gradual movement from “forced forgiveness” to one of option. Initially, there might have been pressure to forgive the offenders in an effort to experience freedom from negative emotions. However, the co-researchers were reluctant to forgive others on the basis of self-pressure. The more the co-researchers felt pressured to forgive, the more they shied away from it. The idea is that they should not tamper with the process of forgiveness. By inflicting pressure on self, the process of forgiveness was being tampered with. However, by letting the process of forgiveness evolve naturally, forgiveness became an option. Once it became an option, they were freed of self-
pressure. Having the choice to forgive other is consistent with the existential philosophy that is "to exist as a person is to choose freely" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 66). On the one hand, freedom is situated in a context that involves the past, present, and future (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). On the other hand, freedom comes in the form of the responsibility in making choices and taking actions. To put it another way, there is freedom to determine future possibilities. The findings of this study illustrate the ability and perseverance of the co-researchers to move from one time frame to another. To be able to live in the present, they must accept, and subsequently let go of the experience of the past. To be able to penetrate into the future, they must live in the present accompanied by a new perspective of the past. For the co-researchers, such choice or freedom of movement, which originated within themselves, was devoid of any negative connotations. According to Stewart and Mickunas (1990), "It is not freedom in a negative sense as "freedom from . . ." but a positive freedom toward a multiplicity of possibilities" (p. 66). Without freedom of movement, the search for existential meaning or a sense of self through all the possibilities will be retarded. To have freedom of movement means to be able to engage in a boundless exploration of self in an effort to bring meaning to existence. In the context of this study, these possibilities might include the following: physical reconciliation; psychological reconciliation; positive emotions or psychological states; more meaningful and healthy relationships; strengthened faith or philosophical outlook; formulation of values; reinforcement of values; increased self-esteem or self-enhancement; valuing of self; and self-identity. In short, all these possibilities could accrue from forgiving others.

The association between forgiving and the search for identity cannot be underestimated. As mentioned earlier, forgiving is looked upon as one of the
possibilities of life. The search for self-identity is considered as one of the possibilities of life. In fact, it is one of the predominant possibilities of human life. As such, human beings are always in search of these possibilities. In moving toward forgiveness or in embracing forgiveness, the co-researchers discovered or nurtured their identity. By definition, the search for identity refers to “the drive toward a self which transcends every contingent state of its development and which remains unaltered in its essence through such changes” (Tillich, 1967, p. 235). By discovering one dimension of possibilities in terms of forgiveness, the co-researchers had actualized a component of self, which is part of its essence. While the search for self-identity might not have been the primary goal of these individuals, its discovery in light of forgiveness signified a movement toward the essence of self. To have an identity means to discover or actualize the essence of self. To a certain extent, an individual is always situated in an environment of other human beings. However, Dasein has the capacity to find its authentic self or genuine individuality in spite of the state of its everydayness that is the they-self (Mulhall, 1996).

Transcendence is one of the salient features of empirical-phenomenology. Koenig (1992) points out that the need for transcendence means the presence of an existential dissatisfaction, which arises from “the need to be as oneself” (p. 65). Accordingly, transcendence may take the form of a relationship to self and to what is beyond self (Koenig, 1992). In the context of this study, it was within the power of the co-researchers to deal with their emotions. Such ability was a manifestation of a relationship with self. Stated differently, they could relate with themselves. However, it was not within the power of the co-researchers to constitute the experience of forgiveness. The ability to do so “comes from beyond this power” (Koenig, 1992,
p. 66), which indicates a relationship to what is beyond the self. In other words, the experience of forgiveness transcends the co-researchers’ personal limits. As mentioned earlier, interpersonal forgiveness was experienced as a long evolutionary process. For the co-researchers, forgiving the offenders did not materialize instantaneously. They seemed to have no control over the flow, smoothness, pace, or duration of the process. Indeed, they did not bring about forgiveness per se. The decision to forgive, for instance, was not forgiveness itself. It only opened up the possibility of forgiveness. Even an act of forgiveness might not carry the true meaning of forgiveness at the time of its occurrence. Often, the true meaning of forgiveness entered the heart after some mental and emotional fluctuation. Once the true meaning of forgiveness had taken shape, it was necessary to reinforce its meaning. The truth is that the co-researchers could not hasten the pace of "making sense" out of every aspect of the experience of forgiveness. Neither could they expedite the internalization of the meaning of the lived experience. Nor could they simplify the process of experiencing the phenomenon. However, while the co-researchers seemingly had no direct control over the constitution of the experience of forgiveness, it was through their direct efforts in moving toward forgiveness, which partially contributed to its actualization.

In this study, the empirical-phenomenological method highlights the nature of transcendence. As such, the researcher has drawn the structural component from the textural descriptions of co-researchers’ experiences of the phenomenon. This structural component refers to the essence of the experience. In arriving at the essence of the experience, the researcher has moved from what appears immediately to what is hidden reflectively. Koenig (1992) describes transcendence as follows:
Rather it refers to the structure of lived experience and refers to what is most intimate to lived experience. However, the meaning of experience is transformed at the level of transcendence. It is no longer the ordinary meaning of experience, that which is lived at the level of our immediate and immanent presence in the objective world of everyday existence. (p. 66)

Admittedly, a sense of self is regained through the meaning of the experience. A person’s performance of intentional acts “are bound together by the unity of a meaning” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 73). Being human is a mystery. Fortunately, by virtue of everyday experiences, humans come into contact with their mysteries. As each experience reveals and crystallizes the human potential, there is a progression from the unknown or remote self to a recognized or definite self. According to Koenig (1992), “The mystery of Being is one with the experience of presence, the structure of experience which has the power to reveal me to myself and make me more fully myself” (p. 78). The experience of interpersonal forgiveness is only an aspect of human experiences. Without doubt, forgiving the offenders is considered as a human potential. By experiencing various emotions such as anger, hurt, disappointment, and guilt, the co-researchers realized the presence and extent of their vulnerability. By experiencing the indecision to forgive, the co-researchers acknowledged the fluctuation between self-absorption and orientation toward the offenders. By experiencing the phenomenon of forgiveness, the co-researchers had the opportunity to challenge and tap their reservoir of inner qualities such as patience, commitment, determination, endurance and tolerance. By experiencing the phenomenon, the co-researchers discovered the human potential of forgiving others. As such, once the potentiality became an actuality, they achieved a sense of wholeness.

Meaning making is crucial to the human experience and existence. The co-researchers derived meaning from their relationship to their experiences, their selves,
and their offenders. By experiencing the phenomenon, the co-researchers learned about Being-in-the-world, which is described as the essence of a human being or the human condition or “the fundamental situation of man” (Koenig, 1992, p. 101). Being-in-the-world is defined as the situatedness of human reality in the context of the concrete world. In other words, a human being is defined by his or her actions in the world. Since the experience of consciousness would not be possible without the world, Being-in-the-world means to experience human consciousness, which refers to “being-with, a lived experience of presence” (Koenig, 1992, p. 101). Thus, for the co-researchers, to experience the phenomenon meant to experience human consciousness.

The human experience is also defined by openness to others or Being-together-with-the-Other (the experience of intersubjectivity) (Koenig, 1992). Due to the relational nature of the phenomenon, the co-researchers became concerned with Being-together-with-the-Other. Certainly, the experience of intersubjectivity is significant in the formulation of the meaning of experiencing and existence in this world. No one lives in a vacuum. To be human is to live in a social context. Intersubjectivity points to the co-existence of self and others in the world. Intersubjectivity paves the way for a sense of community. The inclination toward a sense of community is recognized as a possibility in human beings (Moustakas, 1994). For many of the co-researchers, the underlying (and perhaps, unconscious) motivation to forgive others could be attributed to a valuing of a sense of community. Psychologically, these individuals could not adequately function without relational peace with others. It was the valuing of the relational peace that contributed to a sense of community. Forgiveness was a means of restoring the relational peace between self and other. A word of caution is in order. While many of the co-
researchers physically and psychologically reconciled with offending others, there
was more emphasis on psychological reconciliation. Even though they might have
reconciled with the offending others, they might not choose to be physically near the
others too often.

Stewart and Mickunas (1990) posit that Dasein has two modes of existence:
authentic and inauthentic. Individuals have the choice to live authentically or
inauthentically. Blitz (1981) points out that “any capacities or potentialities,
therefore, are always grasped as modes of my Being, as possibilities, and they are
those potentialities in their very disclosure of possibilities, including themselves as
possibilities” (p. 47). While experiencing the two modes of existence, the task is to
overcome the inauthentic existence in favor of authenticity. An individual who is
situated “in a context filled with opinions, unfounded and unwarranted claims”
(Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 70) is forced to live a partially inauthentic existence.
For those who lead an inauthentic existence, the “mode of temporality is the past”
(Koenig, 1992, p. 119). Inauthenticity is properly understood in terms of a disclosure
of Being not as it is (not being what the self could be). On the contrary, authenticity
is characterized by the disclosure of “Being as it is” (Blitz, 1981, p. 48) and the
maintenance of self in this possibility throughout one’s disclosure. One who strives to
be authentic will not be influenced by the views of others and the distractions of
materiality (Mulhall, 1996). As Blitz (1981) puts it, “Therefore, I always have myself
as something to decide, and have always made some decision” (p. 45). This statement
holds true for the co-researchers in this study in the sense that forgiving others was
their choice or decision. Hope (1987) states that “forgiveness, then, refers to a
voluntary act, a decision, a choice made about how a person deals with the past”
(p. 240). Since forgiveness is considered a choice, one should not be forced to
forgive (Enright, Gassin, et al., 1992). To have such choices means to have an intellectual and emotional freedom. Despite their struggle to arrive at such a decision, the co-researchers did so willingly. Having arrived at a concrete decision to forgive, these individuals experienced an element of authenticity. A quality of Dasein that cannot be ignored is its resoluteness. Such resoluteness directs Dasein's movement toward its authentic self. Dasein's resoluteness in potentiating its authentic self does not detach it from its world (Heidegger, 1927/1962). With resoluteness, Dasein returns to its place in its world and to its relationships with entities and others in an effort to unravel its own possibilities (Mulhall, 1996).

Indeed, human beings are always concerned with the following question: How best to live one's life? Definitely, this question brings to mind that there is an inclination to make meaningful meaning of life. Accordingly, all areas of life that contribute meaningful meaning to life point toward authenticity. As such, there are phenomenological dimensions that pave the way for authenticity. Among other things, these phenomenological dimensions include conscience; existential guilt; sanctification; philosophy; and the search for identity.

Prevalence of Negative Emotions

Interpersonal forgiveness is a significant feature of a relationship. Inevitably, the quality of a relationship influences one's ability or inclination to forgive. A violation or an injury to a relationship with a significant other, be it a friend or family member(s), will be more hurtful than an insignificant person. Pingleton (1997) states that

It is a fundamental axiom of human existence that everyone experiences pain, trauma, and suffering in life, which typically occurs within the rubric of one's closest interpersonal relationships. Forgiveness then, is necessitated whenever
one sustains a violation of one’s sense of fairness or injustice or experiences a deprivation of love. (p. 404)

Anger is a natural response to the experience of a violation of a relationship. The findings of this study reveal that the co-researchers experienced an array of emotions ranging from negative to positive. For the most part, anger was a powerful emotion in the lived experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Anger, definitely had a debilitating effect on the co-researchers. The co-researchers in this study mentioned that forgiving the offenders was partly triggered by anger and the discomfort of experiencing it. Fitzgibbons (1986) describes anger as “a strong feeling of displeasure and antagonism aroused by a sense of injury or wrong” (p. 629). Prior to forgiving others, the nature of the anger might be explosive, energetic, or spontaneous. While in anger, the focus would be on others instead of on self. Depending on the nature of the situation and the psychological make-up of the forgiver, anger may precede hurt or hurt may be experienced before anger. It is important to note that these two emotions accompany one another. It is possible for an initial hurt to occur concurrently with anger (Rowe et al., 1989). In other circumstances, “anger becomes an issue later” (Rowe et al., 1989, p. 240). Up to a certain point, it is necessary to deal with anger and hurt. It is possible to lose sight of reality by continually holding on to anger and hurt. Constant dwelling on the issue can distort rationality. A person who is angry or hurt, will naturally focus on the negative aspects of the other. This disposition only helps to magnify negative emotions. Such disposition tends to negate any positive qualities in other. To continue to nurse negative emotions will encourage them to grow and expand within self. North (1987) says that

We all know how a small stinging wound may be coaxed to grow out of all proportion by reverting to it in one’s thoughts, feeding and nourishing it by recalling many other slights and careless remarks that have happened in the past. (p. 506)
For these co-researchers, being angry was one thing. Being preoccupied with being angry was another. Such preoccupation helped to sustain anger and its longevity. Inevitably, longevity led to aggravation. Subsequently, the aggravation emerged in various physical manifestations such as psychosomatic reactions difficulty in sleeping, a protruding vein, loss of appetite, and irritation.

Fow's (1988) research distinctively emphasized the relevance of forgiving to authenticity. Basically, Heidegger's ontological framework was applied in order to understand the movement toward forgiving. In Fow's research, the unresolution was experienced as blocking existence that necessitated the need for movement toward regaining choice. From the existential point of view, forgiving is a movement toward transforming mood or "state-of-mind" (Fow, 1988, p. 99). Being angry and the meaning of being angry are preconditions for forgiving. Being angry and the meaning of being angry constitute an inauthentic mode of existence. Anger blocks existence in terms of precluding movement toward the future. As such, this researcher agrees with Fow's discussion of anger as a mood. According to Blitz (1981), the states of mind refer to "the ontological ground of what is familiar to each of us as our moods: they are moods understood in their possibility of disclosing man in his Being" (p. 71). Moods color Dasein's existence and subsequently, determine its comprehension of the world. Dasein is always affected by a particular mood. Since moods are considered a feature of Dasein's existence, they are part and parcel of Being-in-the-world. Mulhall (1996) points out that moods are the "subjective responses to a world that is in itself essentially devoid of significance" (p. 77). It is possible to overcome or transform a prevailing mood by establishing a new mood but on condition that the prevailing mood permits it.
Anger, if sustained for too long, may result in a superior-inferior position between the forgiver and forgiven. Being angry means that a person is in the mode of making judgments toward other or wishing to exact punishment or even looking down on other. In doing so, the person who is angry (which is a reaction to an offense) inadvertently, assumes a higher position than that of other. Ultimately, being angry puts the person in the same position as the offending other who is equally guilty of an offense.

Meaning of the Violation—Self-Other-World Relationship

The researcher believes that it is worthy to discuss the self-other relationship on the basis of the relational self (Trembley, 1996). As such, self in relation to significant others goes through psychological processes, namely, attachment, separation and differentiation, and integration. Indeed, there is a multitude of attachment-holding experiences. Prior to the forgiving experience, unhealthy attachment-holding experiences were not uncommon among the co-researchers. Some of the co-researchers, for example, had encountered inadequate attachment-holding experiences with their offending significant others. Such unhealthy attachment-holding experiences had negative repercussions with the offended individuals. As Trembley (1996) puts it, “If the attachment seeking is hooked up with not good enough holding, the experiences that are available for internalization are about being unloved for one’s true self and about relating being risky, uncomfortable, and not secure” (p. 49). Having gone through such unfavorable attachment-holding scenarios, these co-researchers needed to either modify their relationships or to experience healthier relationships. The relational ordeal had reawakened their consciousness in terms of the need for a redefinition or a new definition of self-other
relationships. The relational ordeal had starkly revealed the imbalance or unhealthiness of self-other relationships. By being too attached to offending significant others, the co-researchers could easily feel vulnerable in times of a relational discord, contradiction, or conflict. By being too dependent (for attention, care, love, respect, or recognition) on offending others, emotional freedom was at stake. Suffice it to say that autonomy was also at stake. While it was appropriate to be concerned about what transpired between self and others, the constant rumination or dwelling and unfolding of emotional energy diffused the relational boundary. However, through the lived experience of forgiveness, the self becomes more separated and differentiated and subsequently, becomes much less invested in the past relationship with an offending significant other but rather more focused on self-development. Underlying this self-development is the loosening of the emotional bonding in terms of separation and differentiation with internalized representations of the disturbed object relations (Trembley, 1996). As the co-researchers experienced self-development, it was necessary to obtain a consistent psychological or emotional support from a significant other, be it the offending other or a nonoffending other, or a therapist. Following the processes of separation and differentiation, a person could integrate a new relational balance between separation and inclusion (Trembley, 1996). Such integration means the acquirement of a new definition of self, others, and relating. By recognizing the truth in the old meanings, it is possible to acknowledge the necessity of acquiring new meanings as an effort to engender a change to life experience. Consequently, in the case of reconciliation, many of the co-researchers tried to maintain a healthy emotional relationship with the offending others. While the offending others were significant in the co-researchers' life-world, the co-researchers did not have to take them back completely. By taking them back completely, the co-
researchers could lose their sense of self or identity. In other words, by being too enmeshed in the situation, they could experience a diffusion and confusion of identity. One co-researcher had been absorbing her parents’ pain to the point of personalizing it as her own. Such personalization or internalization prevented her from realizing her true feelings. Such personalization or internalization aggravated her personal condition. She could not avoid feeling overwhelmed by the experience of the violation. Perhaps by not personalizing or internalizing the pain of her significant others, she would not have prolonged her own pain. In short, some physical and/or psychological distance, in particular, would help to facilitate the reestablishment of this healthy emotional self-other relationship.

One of the amplified themes of Fow’s (1988) research revolved around forgiving others as a result of the transformation of the meaning of the violation. Such transformation of meaning occurred when the forgiving person attempted to understand or view the offender differently. Fow emphasized the significant role of cognition or “active understanding” (p. 104) in forgiveness. As such, identification seemed to be only one of the ways of understanding other.

Similarly, the co-researchers in the present study did attempt to understand the offending others from a different perspective. However, in doing so, the original meaning of the violation still persisted. In other words, while they tried to expand their perspective in terms of considering the developmental history of offending others or identifying with the fallibility of offending others, the original meaning of the violation was not transformed. This revelation is consistent with Roberts’ (1995) philosophical description of forgiveness whereby a person does not abandon “correct judgment about the severity of the offense and the culpability of the offender” (p. 289). Literally speaking, to abandon correct judgments about the severity of an
offense would mean to transform the original meaning of such an offense. Likewise, to forgo correct judgments about the culpability of offending others would be synonymous with transforming the original description or presentation of offending others. There is no doubt that in certain traumatic cases, meanings and descriptions remain constant. Perhaps, it would be accurate to say that in these traumatic circumstances, meanings and descriptions should remain constant. It is important to bear in mind that individuals should not compromise their integrity (Roberts, 1995). By abandoning a correct judgment, they are compromising their integrity. Roberts explains that it is possible to release anger and yet maintain a correct judgment pertaining to the severity of the offense and the culpability of others. Such a possibility is due to “a certain looseness of fit between the judgments that constitute the cognitive content of an emotion, and the emotion itself” (Roberts, 1995, p. 289). To maintain a correct judgment means to be wary of the presence of any distorting or irrational reactions toward the meaning of the wrongdoing. Such distortion or irrationality, if unchecked, would certainly have a debilitating effect on relationships with others. North (1987) postulates that “What is annulled in the act of forgiveness is not the crime itself but the distorting effect that this wrong has upon one’s relations with the wrongdoer and perhaps with others” (p. 500). A word of caution is called for at this point. While there were no transformations of the original meanings of the violations, a transformation of self in relation to the meanings of the violations and a transformation of the meanings of relationships with offending others did occur. To put it another way, a transformation of self in relation to the meanings of the violations refers to how individuals, by virtue of self-expansion, relate to the meanings of the violations (without changing the meanings of the violations). Before forgiving, the co-researchers could not live with or tolerate the meanings of the
violations. Due to their limited inner capacity, they could not incorporate such meanings. However, with the passage of time and the expansion of self in particular, they were able to live with the meanings of the violations. The relationship between choice and the expansion of self cannot be overlooked. The expansion of self refers to the discovery and actualization of positive inner qualities. Clearly, the co-researchers had expanded their selves by choice. As North (1987) puts it, forgiveness entails the overcoming of resentment not by denying oneself the right to the resentment but rather "by endeavouring to view the wrongdoer with compassion, benevolence and love while recognizing that he has wilfully [sic] abandoned his right to them" (p. 502). As such, the term "endeavouring" has a flavor of "choice." With respect to the co-researchers, their expansion of selves comprised compassion, mercy, empathy, benevolence, unconditional love and humanity. While they had no control over the evolution of these qualities, they were willing or had chosen to expand their selves. By adopting an attitude of benevolence, for instance, these individuals progressed from an inability to live with the meaning of the violation to an ability to do so. Therefore, self in relation to the meaning of the violation became less intense or less intimidated and self in relation to the meaning of the violation became more thoughtful or insightful. By going through such transformation, they became more receptive or open to the meaning of the violation. They were able to relate positively with the negative meaning of such violation. Evidently, even after forgiving, these individuals still experienced the residue of negative emotions. If indeed a transformation of the meaning of the violation had occurred, then these individuals would not have experienced the residue of negative emotions. In other words, they would have been freed from these negative emotions following forgiveness. Paradoxically, in the process of maintaining the original meaning of the
violation, they were inclined to find positive meaning in it. The findings of this study illustrate that the co-researchers experienced a transformation of the meaning of their relationship with the offending others. This transformation of meaning either pointed toward an enhancement of the relationship (and at the same time keeping a safe physical and psychological distance) or a dissolution of the original relationships while maintaining cordial but sporadic acquaintances.

Rowe et al. (1989) explained that “the critical dimension of forgiving is that one experiences a shift in one’s understanding of, and relationship to, the other person, oneself, and the world” (p. 242). Thus, the experience of forgiveness necessitates the opening up to self, offending others and the world differently. For individuals to reclaim their selves, they are required to adopt a larger perspective. A shift in perspective occurs when the victim-victimizer relationship is altered. Individuals should no longer be the object of the offenders’ actions. Instead, a person should “return to oneself” (Rowe et al., 1989, p. 242). Hope (1987) mentions that forgiving offending others can be seen as a reframing of a worldview. In short, a shift in perspective includes the broadening of alternatives. As such, the presence of alternatives necessitates the reinstatement of choices into a person’s life.

The co-researchers in this study were able to identify with the fallibility of their offenders. In part, forgiveness evolved by virtue of such identification. Cunningham (1985) asserts that “humility is characterized by an awareness of one’s need for forgiveness in light of one’s own imperfections, vulnerabilities and tendencies towards meanness and insensitivity” (p. 144). The co-researchers also experienced humility in the form of sympathy and empathy toward the offenders. The experience of sympathy and empathy after the act of forgiveness helped to justify and solidify it. Cunningham points out that “humility enables a person to perceive the
offender from a perspective of empathy and an openness towards understanding and compassion” (p. 144).

Koenig (1992) emphasizes that “openness to the other person is at the same time authentic intimacy with oneself and the experiential awareness of Being” (p. 79). By being open to offending others and to the experiences of the phenomena, the co-researchers expanded their self-awareness. Moustakas (1994) posits that “the method through which the Other becomes accessible to me is that of empathy, a thereness-for-me of others” (p. 37). In the current study, individuals were able to empathize with others by allowing themselves to engage in retrospection, reflection and analysis. By engaging in these activities, they began to understand the developmental history of others. By understanding the developmental history or predicament of others, the sense of unfairness that engulfed the violation began to diminish. Suddenly, there was hesitation in putting all the blame on others. Accordingly, the more the co-researchers understood the developmental history of others, the more justified and solidified the act of forgiveness became.

In one way or another, the co-researchers were able to revive the sense of fairness. As such, the sense of fairness was revived through: (a) identification with others as fallible human beings, (b) reframing or understanding the developmental history or personal orientation of others, and (c) attitudinal changes on the part of others. In some cases, the revival of the sense of fairness paved the way for reconciliation with others. In these instances, the quality of the reconciliations improved and relationships between co-researchers and others were filled with warmth. As care and love escalated, the valuing of others increased. In other cases, the original relationship between individuals was terminated. While a person might be psychologically reconciled with offending other, physical communication was either
nonexistent or sporadic. While one co-researcher ended up with a divorce, other co-
researchers chose to communicate sporadically with their offenders. In this instance,
caution, distrust, and skepticism characterized the reconciliation.

Stewart and Mickunas (1990) note that “the social context in which one finds
himself is also part of one’s being-in-the world” (p. 67). Thus, the co-researchers had
partially derived their meaning of existence by being with others who had represented
an aspect of their social world. At one point in time, the co-existence of self and the
offending other had resulted in the co-constitution of the relational issue. Such co-
constitution might be physical or psychological in nature. The co-researchers would
not have experienced the phenomenon without the presence of others who had
caused an emotional injury. If the co-researchers were unaware of what offending
others had done, the emotional injury would have amounted to nothing or it would
have gone unnoticed. By experiencing the violation, the co-researchers came to
realize the extent of their freedom and limitations. Stewart and Mickunas point out
that “to be with other persons is at the same time to become aware of one’s freedom
as well as its limitation, in that one must constantly take the other individual into
account” (p. 67). One case in point is the philosophical stance or faith held by the co-
researchers. The experience of interpersonal forgiveness had compelled the co-
researchers to examine their steadfastness or perseverance in upholding their
philosophical stance or faith in relation to others. The experience was a challenge to
what they believed in. Having a philosophical stance or faith alone was not good
enough. The absence of inner congruence, for example, affected the freedom. The
absence of inner congruence closed the possibilities, thus creating a limitation.
Without this congruence, hypocrisy, and confusion set in. Without this congruence,
part of the meaning of being and existence was lost. Such discovery was only
possible by taking others into consideration. The fact that co-researchers and others had existed together in the past would not justify the overlooking of their history and intersubjectivity. One co-researcher was concerned with abiding by what he preached to others, particularly, with respect to forgiveness. In his case, he had been preaching or encouraging others to forgive without experiencing the intricacies or “twists and turns” of the phenomenon. Before the experience, he was not aware of the struggle, complexity, or difficulty that characterized the phenomenon. For this co-researcher, the experience was meaningful in teaching him about the underlying principle of “preaching” that is congruence between the person who teaches bible studies and the subject matter. In a nutshell, this co-researcher’s philosophical stance or faith had been challenged in the context of the self-other relationship or intersubjectivity.

While a person could ignore the physical presence of offending other either in the case of reconciliation or nonreconciliation, it might not be possible to be oblivious to the historical experience of the phenomenon. Since the historical experience was co-constituted by the co-researchers and others, the former learned intersubjectively. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) postulate that “for one discovers his own authentic humanity only by recognizing the humanity of others” (p. 67). Individuals learn about their humanity from others. They learn vicariously from the strengths and weaknesses of others. The humanity of others serves as a basis for a movement toward developing an authentic self. In the case of dissimilarity between the co-researchers and others, the dissimilarity might serve as a platform to move toward adjustment or change. In this instance, individuals learned through the mistakes of others. They became more human through the inhumanity of others. They became sympathetic and compassionate through the lack of sympathy and compassion on the part of others.
There might be a possibility that individuals became forgiving through the unforgiving nature of others.

The findings of this study show that forgiving was a means of clearing the conscience. It was a motivation for granting forgiveness. As such, the presence of guilt for not doing what is "right" can be uncomfortable for human beings. Even though forgiving others may not be a natural disposition, the presence of such conscience may be imperative in monitoring the movement toward forgiveness. It is likely that such conscience may not be influenced by the attitude of others. For example, the co-researchers did not wait for the offenders to seek their forgiveness. While a change in the attitude of the offenders might have a positive input to forgiveness, the co-researchers did not have to witness it per se. The offenders did not have to demonstrate any self-improvements prior to forgiveness. Regardless of their attitude and self-presentations, the co-researchers still granted their forgiveness. Regardless of whether these offenders were aware of and accepted the forgiveness, the co-researchers still extended it to them. Mitchell (1995) postulates that "often in relationships, the one violated is ready to forgive even before the violator recognizes the need for or has the desire to be forgiven" (p. 28). The main point is that these co-researchers simply needed to clear their conscience through forgiveness. By withholding forgiveness, the co-researchers would not be freed of their conscience. By withholding forgiveness, the co-researchers would not be actualizing their human potential. The presence of conscience helped to facilitate their movement toward actualizing their human potential. As such, the preceding discussion can be narrowed down to what Koenig (1992) describes as "the call of conscience (towards-being-one-self)" (p. 116). Conscience is a resolution to existential dread (Koenig, 1992). Conscience allows Dasein to open up to itself so that it can be its authentic self.
Conscience signifies the movement from inauthenticity to freedom. Dasein can either choose to succumb to the call of conscience or disregard it. The possibilities of Dasein are not only “what can be, but they are also what can not be” (Koenig, 1992, p. 115). Accordingly, Dasein experiences guilt when it cannot potentiate itself. In choosing to have conscience, Dasein “becomes free for its own guilt as well as for its own potentiality for Being” (Koenig, 1992, p. 115).

A simple guilt that is grounded in a relationship can transform into an existential guilt. This notion holds true for the co-researchers in this study. As such, guilt was not confined to how they felt about themselves or how they felt about offending others. Rather, it surpassed the intrapersonal or interpersonal dimension. Generally, guilt affects a person’s mode of existence. From the existential point of view, guilt deprives a person of an authentic existence. However, while guilt leads to such deprivation, it also serves as a vehicle to an authentic existence.

Gestalt Concept of Figure and Ground

For the co-researchers, the presence and effects of the negative emotions signified an unfinished situation that called for a psychological completion or closure. The awareness pertaining to the presence and effects of these negative emotions paved the way for the emergence of a significant or urgent need, which became the figure and subsequently, organized a person's behavior until such need was fulfilled. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) support the notion that “Gestalt formation always accompanies awareness” (p. ix). At any given moment, the co-researchers experienced a pronounced need to achieve closure. As such, their need centered on developing positive emotions or psychological states that would eventually justify
their psychological completion. In prioritizing their well-being, the co-researchers experienced a change of “felt need.”

Human beings find meaning in negative and positive experiences, thoughts, and emotions. The affective experiences of the co-researchers may be described in terms of the recession of a major component of negative emotions or psychological states and the emergence of positive emotions or psychological states, a process that resembles the gestalt concept of figure and ground. The findings of this study illustrate that the co-researchers could not avoid experiencing their negative emotions. However, such experiencing had its blessings. By feeling the negative emotions successively, they inadvertently gauged the limitation of their embodiment of emotions. In other words, they could hold out to their emotions up to a certain point. By feeling the intensity of these negative emotions, they realized how devastating the emotions could be to self. By being overwhelmed with such negative emotions, they needed to take action toward an internal psychological change. In this case, a sense of defeat could be a driving force toward this internal change. The positive emotions would not have emerged without experiencing the negative emotions. It was the negative emotions that provided the ground or framework upon which the positive emotions could emerge. Stated differently, the negative emotions eventually acted as the ground that provided the outline or context to the figure, that is, the positive emotions. The appreciation of the positive emotions would not have been possible by losing sight of the once intolerable presence of negative emotions. Again, while appreciating the presence of positive emotions, individuals could not ignore the recession of a major component of the negative emotions. Evidently, the co-researchers found meaning in the positive emotions or psychological states such as self-fulfillment, amazement, extreme happiness, inner peace, contentment, and relief.
Somewhere in the process of experiencing interpersonal forgiveness, these positive emotions or psychological states that evolved as figure provided a significant “whole” meaning of the experience for these individuals. In short, they experienced a gestalt or “meaningful organized whole” (Perls et al., 1951, p. ix). Fuller (1990) explains that “figure is what stands forth as a whole of meaning, the unity of a gestalt’s moments as these signify and express one another in their roles in the whole” (p. 84).

It is imperative to bear in mind that while the meaning of these positive emotions was rooted in the experience of the negative emotions, the co-researchers chose to act in a positive manner. It was the presence of these negative emotions that rendered definition and meaning to the positive emotions. In other words, the definition and meaning of the positive emotions were an extension of the definition and meaning of the negative emotions. Such is the relationship between the figure and ground or between the negative and positive emotions. Koffka (1935) mentions that “the figure depends for its characteristics upon the ground on which it appears. The ground serves as a framework in which the figure is suspended and thereby determines the figure” (p. 184).

At any time, the residue of the negative emotions might resurface, thus becoming figural again and pushing the existing positive emotions into the ground. The possibility of this occurrence cannot be denied. By triggering the memory, the negative emotions could become active again (even though not detrimental to self or offending others). Obviously, there is a dynamic interplay between figure and ground (Perls et al., 1951). In the case of the co-researcher who was sexually abused, every time she heard about someone being molested, her mind would drift back to her fateful past. Realizing that her negative emotions could be energized again, she would quickly shift her focus. The point is that an experience, once experienced, will always
remain in memory. An experience, once experienced, can be lived and relived both mentally and emotionally. Indubitably, this is a clear example of the continuous interchange of figure and ground with regard to the emotional experience of the phenomenon. The elasticity of the formation of figure and ground is a manifestation of well-being. The continuous emerging and receding of the dominance of needs functions well in healthy individuals. It was the absence of rigidity or fixation or repression on the part of the co-researchers that made it possible for the positive emotions or psychological states to emerge.

As stated earlier, the meaning of the co-researchers’ positive emotions or psychological states was partly triggered by that of negative emotions or psychological states. As they discovered the meaning of the positive emotions, such meaning in turn were reflected back to the meaning of the negative emotions, thus illuminating the meanings of the latter. While positive emotions emit their own meaning, individuals cannot be oblivious to the way the two different or opposing dimensions of human emotions or psychological states converge as a meaning. To ignore this convergence of meaning is to disregard a significant gestalt quality in the formation of meaning.

Presence (and Nonpresence) of Forgiveness

One of the prominent concerns of the co-researchers revolved around the “presence” of forgiveness. While they had forgiven offending others, they were bothered by the intermittent presence of forgiveness within themselves. It is true that at the time of forgiving others, forgiveness was present. In other words, the self concretely felt its presence. However, there were moments when the self lost touch with the concrete presence of forgiveness in the here and now. Instinctively, the
co-researchers were compelled to describe the presence of forgiveness as being “present before.” Being conscious of its presence as being “present before,” they became anxious about its intermittently nonpresence in the present moment. Simultaneously, they began to wonder whether the forgiveness that was “present before” was genuine. The point is that these individuals who had forgiven their offending others were not able to experience the presence of forgiveness at all times and with the same degree of concreteness. Nonetheless, does it mean that because of its intermittent presence within self, forgiveness should be considered as null and void? Does it mean that because of its intermittent presence within self, forgiveness should be interpreted as false forgiveness? Somehow, the word “elusive” comes to mind. Somehow, its intermittent presence points to the elusive nature of forgiveness. One of the reasons for the “elusive” nature of the presence of forgiveness is the presence of the residue of negative emotions. Despite their forgiveness, the co-researchers still experienced some of these emotions, especially when triggered by certain circumstances. Evidently, these negative emotions underline the idea that there is no “clean-cut” emotional or psychological transformation. The individuals’ experience with the residue of negative emotions is consistent with the nature of being human. It is difficult (if not impossible) to totally wipe out a negative emotion or to completely supersede a negative emotion with a positive emotion. Traces of these negative emotions are likely to linger either for sometime or for an indefinite period of time or forever. Nevertheless, the presence of these negative emotions should not disqualify forgiveness. Such revelation is not at odds with Neblett’s (1974) philosophical perspective with regard to the nature of forgiveness. Neblett does not agree with the ideals of forgiveness. To say that forgiveness is only legitimate when the ill-will and resentment have vanished is to hold on to the ideals of
forgiveness. Even though it is desirable to let go of the ill-will and resentment toward the offenders, the harboring of these feelings may not be a deterrence to forgiveness (Neblett, 1974). As such, the presence of some of these negative emotions is consistent with Unit 20 of the psychological processes outlined by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1996). Unit 20, which is categorized under the outcome phase, refers to the awareness of a decrease in negative affect and probably, an increase in positive affect. Therefore, Unit 20 highlights the point that negative affect is still present despite attempts at forgiving others.

Another reason for the "elusive" nature of the presence of forgiveness points to the concept of existential spatiality. Dasein has its existential spatiality, which is revealed through its object of concern. As such, existential spatiality may be understood in terms of dis-stance that has the quality of removing the remoteness of things or entities. Dreyfus (1991) states that through dis-stance, it is possible to experience "degrees of nearness and remoteness, accessibility and inaccessibility" (p. 131). Based on the Heideggerian notion, it is possible to encounter things or entities as present in terms of nearness to or remoteness from self. A person may encounter things or entities as present in terms of availability or unavailability to self. The degree of availability of things or entities (in this case, forgiveness) is synonymous with the nearness of a person's object of concern. To think of interpersonal forgiveness is to think of self in relation to offending others. Existentially, to think of the presence of interpersonal forgiveness is to think of the nearness of self to or remoteness of self from offending others. The nearness of self to offending others might contribute to the presence of forgiveness within self. It is such nearness that maintains and justifies its presence. It is such nearness that renders its felt sense. Contrariwise, the remoteness of self from other might underscore the
intermittent presence of forgiveness even though it was extended to others. As Fuller (1990) puts it, “We bring close what we care about, things in which we have a stake, whether in their positive or negative character” (p. 72). The closeness or remoteness of existential spatiality is determined by the direction of the preoccupation of the moment (Fuller, 1990). A person becomes preoccupied with things that matter to self at the moment. The preoccupation with things means the preoccupation with their meanings. The preoccupation with self in relation to others in the context of forgiveness means the preoccupation with the meaning of self and the meaning of others as well as the meaning of self in relation to others and vice versa. Ultimately, a person discovers the location of such meaning in existential spatiality through the preoccupation and familiarity with it. The location of such meaning might either seem close to or remote from self.

Forgiveness as an Evolutionary Process

It is interesting to note that every co-researcher came into contact with forgiveness through a long evolutionary process. However, it cannot be assumed that every co-researcher experienced exactly similar evolutionary processes. Factors such as the severity of the relational injury, complexity of emotions, intensity of the emotional injury, prior knowledge on forgiveness or the victim’s psychological composition are significant in determining its evolution. North (1987) says that “forgiveness need not, perhaps even cannot, be instantaneous, for it takes time to heal the wounds of estrangement and to restore the free-flowing trust and affection which once existed” (p. 505). Thus, the evolutionary nature of forgiveness negates the notion of instant forgiveness. According to Cunningham (1985),
I hesitate to describe the process of forgiving as I have come to understand it because I fear that the process will be perceived as a mechanistic ritual which can be prescribed or followed as a computer program that always produces desired and measured results. (pp. 143–144)

Forgiving others is constitutive of many psychological processes (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996). However, these psychological processes or units do not have to be followed rigidly or step-by-step before forgiveness can materialize. To some degree, the co-researchers experienced similar psychological processes. As such, the psychological processes have been divided into their appropriate phases, namely, the uncovering phase, decision phase, work phase and outcome phase (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996).

Generally, the co-researchers experienced the uncovering phase in terms of the willingness to recognize their emotions and the intensity of such emotions. For the most part, the common emotions that characterized this phase consisted of intense anger and gnawing pain. Apart from being angry with and hurt by what offending others had done, they were not able or willing to disclose such emotions to the offending others. Implicitly, while the co-researchers desired the offending others to recognize their emotional sufferings or reactions, still, they feared exposing their true emotions for the sake of not wanting to hurt others or aggravate the situation. Without the offending others’ recognition, anger and pain kept escalating, thus magnifying the meaning of the injustice. In this context, the co-researchers could easily interpret the escalation of emotions as “getting out of control.” In reality, these emotions were not getting out of control but rather were growing into their full-blown capacity. Over time, as anger and pain escalated, individuals began to feel guilty about having such emotions, particularly, the anger. Accordingly, once guilt appeared there was an urgent need to act. Such guilt began to diffuse the intensity of
anger and pain. Now, guilt became a motivating factor to reduce the intensity of such emotions. As the co-researchers moved from anger to pain to guilt (or from pain to anger to guilt), they had denied themselves of the need to be truly in touch and "stay" with the emotions. Undeniably, they must be willing to feel the emotions and let these emotions unfold to their fullest capacity. To avoid the emotions means to avoid feeling them. Such avoidance might come in various manifestations such as staying away from the original scene of the violation, displacing the anger, and writing a letter of forgiveness instead of coming face-to-face with others. One co-researcher, who had been sexually abused by her brother, discovered that she had repressed her anger toward him. She experienced a sudden upsurge of anger while watching a movie on child abuse. As far as possible, this individual tried to stay away from her family environment.

Evidently, the co-researchers in this study experienced difficulty in arriving at the decision to forgive. The decision phase (as experienced by these co-researchers) was characterized by tedious mental debate (particularly with reference to negative self-talk), struggle, fluctuation, hesitation, and emotionality. The tendency to fluctuate between wanting to forgive or not forgive was common among all co-researchers. While the decision phase was described as the most difficult hurdle to overcome, it served as a threshold of the process of interpersonal forgiveness. Once the decision phase was reached, other endeavors such as communicating with the offending others and the act of forgiveness itself, unfolded naturally and without much difficulty. As such, the mental debate revolved around the following issues: the injustice or unfairness of the wrongdoing, regret over the occurrence of the violation, the inclination to undo what had transpired, and the deservingness or nondeservingness of forgiveness. In discussing the decision stage in the process of
forgiveness, Walters (1984) states that “the difficult part of forgiving is not doing it, but becoming willing to do it” (p. 369).

Generally, a person lingered at the decision phase for an indefinite period of time. The decision phase is described as the intellectual component of forgiveness. Fitzgibbons (1998) explains that “I call this the cognitive level because the person decides to forgive, thinks it is good to do, but as yet does not feel compassion or love toward the offending one” (p. 65). At this juncture, this researcher believes that such compassion or love toward the offending other is nonexistent because a person has not dealt with negative emotions. Even though the decision phase may seem to be an intellectual component of forgiveness, it is still diffused with emotionality. Perhaps, it would be accurate to say that while a person is in the midst of deciding to forgive, the emotions or chain of emotions are still being uncovered. While it is human nature to avoid feeling negative emotions, efforts must be made to uncover or come into contact with them. Human emotions take time to crystallize. As a person tries to reach a decision to forgive another, the uncovering of and the subsequent struggle with negative emotions, particularly, anger and pain, hamper the movement toward such decision. As long as the decision phase is imbued with strong negative emotions, a person will not be able to come to a definite decision to forgive. It takes time to finalize such a decision. As mentioned earlier, the decision to forgive is regarded as an intellectual component of forgiveness. However, in the context of this study, this researcher intends to disclose another aspect of such a decision. There was a gradual movement from an initial decision, which was completely cognitive or intellectual, to a genuine or concrete decision that was composed of both cognitive and affective meaning. A decision to forgive must still come from the heart. A decision to forgive requires an affective component. Without this affective meaning, such decision lacks
vitality, urgency or immediacy, and a sense of wholeness. At this juncture, it is appropriate to draw a parallel between the aforementioned “affective meaning” and Unit 9 (A Change of Heart) of the decision phase (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996). A change of heart refers to a change in “emotional perception and reactions towards the wrongdoer” (North, 1987, p. 504). It should be emphasized that such a change of heart facilitates the external gestures from the offended person to the offender. A change of heart is “the essence of forgiveness” (North, 1987, p. 503).

Briefly, the work phase (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996) includes the following: reframing, empathy, compassion, acceptance, and the absorption of pain. As a reminder, there is no clear-cut progression from one phase to another. Once the co-researchers had “decided” to forgive, they began to experience more or less similar psychological processes. Some of them had “prematurely” experienced empathy and compassion. Hence, for these individuals, there was a reinforcement of affective components.

The rest of the psychological processes or units constitute the outcome phase. The findings of this present study illustrate that the co-researchers were constantly engaging in the justification and solidification of forgiveness. Despite their decision to forgive and the experience of empathy and compassion, these individuals struggled to justify and solidify their forgiveness. Some of the processes experienced by these individuals were consistent with the units in the outcome phase. Unit 16 (Finding Meaning in the Offense and in the Process of Forgiveness) was a common but noticeable experience for the co-researchers. For these individuals, the “meaning” in the offense and in the forgiving process might include the following: a reminder of imperfection in terms of fallibility and culpability; the prioritization of values (for
example, between humanity and materials); self-discovery in terms of sympathy, compassion, empathy, love, patience, commitment, or endurance; the test of theory (or knowledge) and practice; and the possibility of forgiveness. The findings of this study are also consistent with Unit 19 (A New Purpose in Life). Having discovered or encountered the blessings of forgiveness, the co-researchers aspired to be more forgiving individuals. They were determined not to put off forgiveness in the future. In fact, these co-researchers looked forward to a shorter process of forgiveness if it needed to take place again. For these individuals, the blessings of forgiveness had unfolded unexpectedly. Essentially, there was anticipation to find psychological peace with the offending others, spiritual peace with God, and inner peace within self. However, in anticipating peace, there was no awareness with regard to what the outcome of forgiveness might be. Basically, in the hope of finding peace, there was no idea of what that peace meant or what that peace felt like. There was no awareness with regard to what the experiential characteristics of peace might be. For these co-researchers, the discovery of the explicit and implicit meanings of peace was considered as one of the significant blessings of forgiveness. In addition, in the midst of finding peace, the unfolding of the other correlates of peace came as a surprise. Such correlates include self-fulfillment, amazement, extreme happiness, satisfaction, a sense of lightness, and a sense of freedom to mention a few. These correlates can be regarded as a category of the potentialities or possibilities of forgiveness. Lundeen (1989) notes that “forgiveness enriches the future with genuinely new possibilities, opportunities that we had no right to expect. When forgiveness is in the picture, all of life has wondrous potential for change, for growth, for renewal” (p. 191). The more the blessings, the more justified the forgiveness. The more the blessings, the more solidified the forgiveness. In the final analysis, the justification of forgiveness might
be symbolized by the absence of regrets with regard to forgiving the offending others. The solidification of forgiveness might take the form of a sense of completeness or wholeness, substance, and presence.

According to North (1987), forgiveness is the outcome of a change of heart, which is experienced in the light of the active mental and emotional endeavor. A change of heart can come about when a person tries “to replace bad thoughts with good, bitterness and anger with compassion and affection” (North, 1987, p. 506). A person does not immediately experience a change of heart. On the contrary, it emerges slowly. Instant forgiveness symbolizes a moral weakness on the part of self. Despite its difficulty, a person is encouraged to appreciate the wrongdoing. Such appreciation is a precondition for a genuine change of heart. By being too eager to forgive, a person avoids being too deeply upset with the wrongdoing. Such eagerness cannot be equated with or taken for granted as a genuine change of heart.

**Unselfish Quality of Forgiveness**

For many, the process of forgiving was characterized by a gradual progression from selfishness to unselfishness. In the beginning, the co-researchers were more concerned with the experience of injustice or unfairness. For as long as this sense of injustice or unfairness prevailed or had a controlling effect, these individuals were reluctant to forgive. The infliction of injustice upon the self did not justify the granting of forgiveness. There was this notion that by forgiving, they would be doing more injustice to self. At this point, even if they decided to forgive, they would do so for the sake of self or well-being. In other words, they would be forgiving in the best interest of self without any due consideration for the offending others. While such self-absorption was understandable or normal, these
co-researchers experienced a shift in their foci. The thought of forgiving others for the sake of self was disturbing or discomforting. Implicitly, such disturbance or discomfort was triggered by the recognition of selfishness. From the existential point of view, to be selfish is to be inauthentic. For these co-researchers, there was a desire (whether conscious or unconscious) to move toward authenticity. In this case, to be authentic was to be unselfish. To move toward authenticity meant to move toward unselfishness. Forgiveness should be granted for the sake of the well-being of the offenders. Some of these individuals were not willing to see or let their offenders live in misery or feel guilty. Such unwillingness indicated an interest in the well-being of others.

The findings of this study are consistent with the cognitive structure of forgiveness as advocated by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1994). The cognitive structure of forgiveness encompasses the following: (a) abstract identity, (b) social unconditionality, (c) inherent quality, and (d) forgiveness. Essentially, the cognitive structure of forgiveness emphasizes a respect for the worthiness of human beings, the unaltered quality of human beings despite changes in surface features, and the equality of human beings.

Therefore, the findings of this study are not in agreement with Piaget's reciprocity model of forgiveness as presented by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1994). The co-researchers were amazed by their ability to extend unconditional care and love to the offending others. Such unconditionality served as a basis for forgiveness, thus qualifying it as unconditional. Contrary to Piaget's reciprocity model of forgiveness, these individuals extended their forgiveness without expecting reciprocity from the offending others. While reciprocity on the part of others might have spurred forgiveness, it was not an essential factor. Such
unconditionality is in accordance with Style 6 (Forgiveness as Love) of the cognitive-developmental model of forgiveness that was proposed by Enright, Gassin, et al. (1992). Individuals are not only driven toward forgiveness on the basis of an interest in the well-being of others, but also for the sake of fostering love and interpersonal harmony. In this case, the co-researchers had not forsaken their moral love because of the violation.

North (1987) points out that “one might even say that forgiveness is an unconditional response to the wrongdoer, for there is something unforgiving in the demand for guarantees” (p. 505). It is amazing that in forgiving, the co-researchers did not make any demands on their offenders. While they wished that their offenders would recognize their wrongdoing, the co-researchers did not harass them about it. While they hoped that their offenders would have learned from the relational experience, the co-researchers did not seek an apology from them. One co-researcher, for instance, made a financial contribution to his offender just for the sake and pleasure of helping out.

The notion that self is not superior to the offending others may be best exemplified by the cognitive structure of forgiveness that was proposed by Enright and The Human Development Study Group (1994). The cognitive structure of forgiveness points to a respect for the worthiness of human beings, unaltered value of human beings, and the equality of human beings. Despite the violation of relationships, the co-researchers still respected the worthiness of their offenders as human beings. The change of surface features such as the breach of trust or commitment, or disregard for love and respect on the part of the offenders did not alter their value as human beings. Regardless of how the offenders treated the co-researchers, forgiveness was granted in the light of appreciating the equality of
human beings. Implicitly, the quality being human is not diminished by the violation of the relationship, no matter how severe it might be.

**Philosophy and Faith**

Philosophy has a significant role in existential life. For some of the co-researchers, their philosophy structured their orientation or directionality toward forgiveness. There is a similarity between philosophy and the inner movement of a person's personality (Koenig, 1992). Philosophy is likened to an existential movement. Koenig (1992) postulates that "philosophy is a way of life" (p. 55). It is through philosophy that a person returns to oneself. Philosophy provides meaning in life. Philosophy helps to nurture the self. It is through philosophy that a person aims for wholeness. Philosophy is a way of relating most intimately to self. To think philosophically is to think existentially. As Koenig (1992) puts it, "Through philosophy the human personality becomes open to the fundamental dispositions of human fulfillment, hope and commitment and flexibility" (p. 55). Take human fulfillment, for instance. Philosophy provides a person with a direction to achieve human fulfillment in terms of a spiritual illumination (Koenig, 1992). A person who is in search of a philosophical truth will go through some kind of a spiritual experience. Philosophical truth is grounded in the inner meaning of such spiritual experience. This spiritual experience indicates that philosophy transcends the limits of consciousness for as long as this consciousness is solely rooted in the objective world. Koenig mentions that "to philosophize is to transcend" (p. 59). The co-researchers in this study were driven toward forgiveness by their philosophical stance or view toward life. Forgiveness was one philosophical thought or philosophical truth. In the light of the spiritual experience, these individuals discovered forgiveness as a philosophical
truth. To have a philosophy is one thing. To live by it is another. Forgiveness, in
terms of a philosophical thought, had removed some barriers to existence. To the co-
researchers, forgiveness provided some degree of freedom in relation to existence.
Koenig describes philosophical thinking as “one with the unblocked and free
movement of existence towards its own self-fulfillment” (p. 62).

This researcher believes that there is a fine line of demarcation between
philosophy and faith. Both share a common ground that is the spiritual experience.
Both have a transcendent quality. In the light of this transcendence, a person is able
to create meaning for existence. Philosophy and faith, which provides existential
guidance, constitute the belief system. Another point of convergence is that
philosophy and faith attempt to promote well-being. It is very likely that a philosophy
may be transformed into a faith (if this happens to fall within the religious
parameters) and a faith being experienced as a philosophy.

Spirituality is one of the dominant concepts that emerged from the findings of
this study. For the co-researchers, the experience of interpersonal forgiveness could
not be separated from the emphasis on and significance of spirituality. One had
experienced spirituality through interpersonal forgiveness. There was a notion among
the co-researchers that an unforgiving attitude toward others jeopardizes a peaceful
relationship with God. For many, forgiving was looked upon as a spiritual uplift or
spiritual restoration. Cunningham (1985) emphasizes that “forgiving is a process
whereby one is restored in a relationship with God that gracefully comes as a
harmony with life and a renewed courage to be vital and live in risk” (p. 149).

The relevance and significance of God’s forgiveness to human life cannot be
overlooked. Lundeen (1989) states that “stressing forgiveness makes God, as
ultimate context, a personal and caring reality in whom human life has place and
meaning” (p. 191). Indisputably, God or the divine power serves as a source of human power, purpose, and meaning. The meaning of human life, for instance, is embedded in the divine power. As Lundeen puts it, this divine power “sustains, renews, and preserves” (p. 181) the meaning of human life. The findings of this study show that for many, God’s forgiveness was a motivation, an inspiration, or a paragon of virtue. This is consistent with the description of forgiveness emphasized by Meek and McMinn (1997) whereby, “It is a progression of healing where people are confronted with the grace and mercy of God, despite their continual failure to deserve it” (p. 51). Since forgiving was difficult, the prevailing notion was that it would have been impossible for many of the co-researchers to forgive without God’s grace or intervention. Human forgiveness is the outgrowth of divine forgiveness (Lundeen, 1989). It is not within the human power to “make up for the sense of loss and guilt” (Lundeen, 1989, p. 180) that result from decisions, mistakes, or successes. While humans have the potential to forgive, they still need to turn to God for the strength to do so. Lundeen explains that “when God is seen as the forgiving One, a broader horizon is offered. Our perspective is deepened. God’s forgiveness introduces new strength for our forgiving initiatives” (p. 192). This researcher believes that the “potential” to forgive denotes the notion of transcendence. Stated differently, before such potential becomes a reality, humans experience their limits in terms of strength, capacity, or power. This in turn limits the human experience. However, by invoking God’s help or by praying to God, the human capacity is expanded. Accordingly, forgiving widens the breadth of human experience. Lundeen expresses “the very possibility of forgiveness changes the character of reality, the shape and limits of human experience” (p. 180). Eternal life or eternity had been a predominant goal among the co-researchers. Therefore, their intentions, behaviors, or
activities would point toward eternity. In this context, forgiving others was considered as a form of responsibility to God. Meek and McMinn (1997) postulate that obedience toward God is associated with the process of forgiveness. The point is that, in moving toward eternity as the final destination, a person has to take “God as the ground and goal of all human endeavor” (Lundeen, 1989, p. 191).

Tillich (1951) notes that “God’s omnipresence overcomes the anxiety of not having a space for self. It provides the courage to accept the insecurities and anxieties of spatial existence” (p. 278). There is no doubt that anxiety and insecurity characterized the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Anger, pain, sadness, and guilt to mention a few, come under the rubrics of anxiety and insecurity, respectively. Somewhere in the process of experiencing the phenomenon, the co-researchers felt that their personal space or freedom was violated by the presence of negative emotions. The “smothering” of these negative emotions could be equated with losing space. Accordingly, the loss of space could intensify anxiety and insecurity. Over time, endurance in going through life would diminish. However, the trust in and resignation to the divine power provided a resolution to the human predicament. Tillich (1951) expresses “only that is divine which gives the courage to endure the anxiety of temporal existence” (p. 274).

Conclusion

The lived experience of interpersonal forgiveness, which is characterized by its delicate textures and structures or explicit and implicit themes, was best captured by the phenomenological method. There is no doubt that forgiveness is part and parcel of human existence. Since it is an aspect of human existence, it is an existential issue for humans. In other words, interpersonal forgiveness as a phenomenon falls
naturally within the existential realm. By virtue of the phenomenological method, it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of forgiveness in terms of its textures, structures, causality, dynamics, or complexity.

Interpersonal forgiveness was experienced as a complex evolutionary process by the co-researchers in this study. For the co-researchers, the decisions to forgive did not come easily. In fact, such decisions were considered as the most difficult hurdle to cross over. Accordingly, once this hurdle was successfully overcome, they experienced the rest of the process of forgiveness with less difficulty. Being “less difficult” still denotes the notion of difficulty. Even after they had forgiven their offenders, they still needed to continuously work on justifying and solidifying the forgiveness. There was a concurrent movement between the development of self and the justification and solidification of forgiveness.

Obviously, they moved toward forgiving by virtue of the temporality and spatiality of self. As such, temporality and spatiality have a transcendent quality. The preceding discussion has underlined the idea of being inauthentic or authentic. The movement toward forgiving symbolized authenticity. From the findings, it is clear that the co-researchers could not live with discrepancies. Such discrepancies might occur between the following: self and self (internal disharmony); self and others (interpersonal disharmony); and self and God/philosophy (disharmony between belief and practice). In an extreme situation, such discrepancies might exist in the context of self-other-God-philosophy. If the discrepancies were allowed to take its root within self, there might be an orientation toward an inauthentic mode of existence. Consequently, forgiving the offenders would not have materialized. However, the co-researchers strived to surpass such inauthenticity. Despite the difficulty involved in
finding the way toward authenticity, they were greeted by an amazing or
indescribable success.

As pointed out earlier, for these co-researchers, interpersonal forgiveness was
not merely confined to the situation between self and others. In fact, it extended to
their relationship with God. Forgiveness, as an aspect of human existence, gives
meaning to life. From the findings, the co-researchers became preoccupied with the
redefinition of self, others, and the relationship. Such redefinition was necessary in
order to view forgiveness from an unbiased perspective. Essentially, the experience of
interpersonal forgiveness was placed within the larger existential realm. In other
words, the co-researchers were inclined to search for their partial meaning of
existence through forgiveness. By itself (without the existential backdrop), the
interpersonal forgiveness might not carry much weight. Without a focus on existence,
forgiveness and its experience might have been ignored. As such, the meaning of the
experience and its presence became pronounced by placing forgiveness within a
larger existential realm. Forgiveness had derived its meaning from the meaning of
existence. The experience of the phenomenon was described as “profound” in the
light of this existential meaning.

It is useful to highlight the fact that after forgiving their offenders, the co-
researchers still experienced some residue of negative emotions. Such revelation
emphasizes the notion that there is no such thing as a “clean-cut” emotional or
psychological transformation. Still, the presence of some residue of these negative
emotions should not negate the granting of forgiveness. Neither should it deny the
presence of forgiveness. Nor should it alter the meaning of such forgiveness. The
point is that the presence of these negative emotions is a reminder of the nature of
human beings. Such presence also reinforces the reality of human beings. Stated differently, it gives a realistic description of human beings.

For these co-researchers, the experience of interpersonal forgiveness was something new. Due to the lack of experience or unfamiliarity with the experience of the phenomenon, co-researchers became concerned about the inconclusiveness viz a viz the conclusiveness of forgiveness. After forgiving offending others, the co-researchers often felt as though the forgiveness was inconclusive. Such inconclusiveness raised intermittent doubts about the wholeness of forgiveness. The inconclusiveness of forgiveness was explicated by the concept of existential spatiality in terms of remoteness or closeness; the orientation of the preoccupation of the moment; and the preoccupation and familiarity with the meanings of entities.

Propositions: A Theory of Forgiveness

The development of a theory is one of the prominent features of qualitative research. Since the phenomenological method falls under the aegis of qualitative research, there is no exception to the rule. Some significant propositions have emerged from the findings of this study that are pertinent to the development of a tentative theory of forgiveness. These propositions are as follows:

1. The decision to forgive is the most difficult hurdle in the process of forgiveness.

2. There is a movement from indecision to an initial decision to a concrete decision to forgive.

3. On the basis of existential spatiality, the presence of forgiveness may be inconclusive or conclusive.
4. During the forgiveness process, the self progresses from inauthenticity to authenticity.

5. The evolution of forgiveness is contingent upon the transcendent self. The evolutionary process of forgiveness unfolds concomitantly with a movement toward an authentic mode of existence. Basically, forgiveness represents authenticity. Every decision.choice, every intention and every act of a human being originates from the self. Simply put, forgiveness originates from the self. The inclination to forgive arises within self. In other words, the self develops or structures forgiveness in a certain positive direction. As the self grows into awareness and maturity by virtue of its transcendent quality, so does forgiveness. Evidently, forgiveness is a by-product of the transcendent self. As the self transcends in terms of temporality (or horizon of time) and spatiality, so does the evolution or unfolding of forgiveness. As the self unfolds naturally and authentically, so does the evolution of forgiveness.

As the self moves from inauthenticity to authenticity, the presence of forgiveness is felt consistently, in terms of inconclusiveness or conclusiveness. Evidently, the meaning of forgiveness does not stand by itself. Since forgiveness is situated in the context of self-other relationships, its meaning cannot be separated from the human context. Thus, the meaning of forgiveness is structured or embedded within self-other relationships. The meaning of self-other relationships is derived from a larger context—existential spatiality. Existentially, an individual may either feel close to or remote from other. Such closeness or remoteness will determine the inconclusive or conclusive presence of forgiveness. This closeness or remoteness, which may be described as “location,” depends on the orientation of the preoccupation of the moment. It is useful to bear in mind that this closeness or
remoteness cannot be equated with a physical reconciliation. As such, forgiveness may either lead to reconciliation or nonreconciliation. To state it differently, forgiveness is not contingent upon reconciliation. With respect to this theory, there is the need to steer away from the notion of physical reconciliation or nonreconciliation. While a physical reconciliation could be one of the best resolutions of a relationship, it is not the essence of forgiveness. What matters is the psychological and existential reconciliation. Psychological, and most importantly, existential reconciliation, can be attained outside of the context of a physical reconciliation. In the final analysis, the meaning of existence becomes significant. Hence, existential reconciliation makes a partial contribution to the construction of one’s meaning of existence.

The self is the center of all decision-making. Hence, it is the center of all choices. Before the evolution of forgiveness, there is a state of indecision. This state of indecision gradually (but with difficulty) gives way to an initial decision to forgive. With the passage of time and with great effort, one attains a concrete decision to forgive. Such concrete decision is a reservoir of continuous motivation for the materialization of forgiveness. Once forgiveness is materialized, more effort is required to justify and solidify its extension, materialization, and presence.

Implications

One of the most significant messages revealed by these findings is that the experience of interpersonal forgiveness is a long, difficult, and complex process. There is no way to simplify the process of forgiveness. Such difficulty and complexity dispel the notion of the simplicity of the process. To state it differently, it is impossible to simplify the process of forgiveness. The process of forgiveness cannot be simplified either for the sake of time, energy, or well-being of a human being. Such
simplification will have a negative impact on the process of forgiveness. Eventually, the so-called forgiveness that accrues from the simplified process may not even be true forgiveness. Every aspect of the process of forgiveness must be experienced. Every aspect of its difficulty and complexity must be dealt with satisfactorily.

As mentioned previously, the decision to forgive was the most difficult hurdle in the process of forgiveness. From indecision, there was a movement toward an initial decision to forgive. Despite the initial (or inconclusive) decision, there was still a need to reinforce such decision. Undeniably, there was difficulty in arriving at a concrete decision to forgive. Without this concrete decision, the inception of forgiveness would be impossible. The implication is that the decision-making is characterized by “stages.” The presence of these “stages” indicates the difficulty in decision-making. The process of cognitive forgiveness is predominantly characterized by a decision to forgive (Fitzgibbons, 1998). Accordingly, Fitzgibbons (1998) asserts that “for most people the forgiveness process begins on this cognitive level and usually remains on that level for a period of time” (p. 65). Such statement implies that decision-making is difficult and time-consuming. Somehow, there is the notion of “struggle” that is being experienced on this level.

It is obvious from the findings that the experience of interpersonal forgiveness is “transcendent” in nature. Forgiveness transcends one’s personal limits. It surpasses the self-other relationship. Rowe et al. (1989) underscored the idea that forgiveness transcends the personal relationship with the one who inflicted the hurt. It even transcends the human boundary, extending it to God. Such transcendence naturally contributes to the difficulty and complexity of the process of forgiveness. Again, the notion of simplicity is not applicable at all.
It is important to note that forgiveness is one of the issues related to human existence. Lundeen (1989) posits that “a person who takes the initiative to forgive another demonstrates a truth that runs into the very depth of being” (p. 187). Basically, human existence is complex. Forgiveness when located within a larger existential context is truly complicated. The presence of a network of operating forces underlying the experience of forgiveness cannot be denied.

The foregoing discussion naturally points to further implications for professional helpers, particularly, counselors. There is no doubt that interpersonal forgiveness is a pivotal component in therapy. One of the significant tasks of therapy is the provision of psychological healing. As such, forgiveness therapy represents a psychological intervention (Phillips & Osborne, 1989). The process of forgiveness should be an essential component of the psychological healing process (Hope, 1987). Whenever there is a significant relational or an interpersonal conflict, the counselor should expect forgiveness to surface. However, caution must be taken whenever the counselor raises or touches upon the issue of forgiveness in therapy. The emphasis is on the choice and willingness of the client to be oriented toward forgiveness. It is important for the counselor to acquaint the client with the difficulty and complexity of forgiveness. Such orientation is necessary for the preparation of the client’s mental set and expectations. If indeed the client is not ready to go through such a process, the counselor should respect the client’s choice. This is because the client’s choice and willingness will help to lift some of the pressure from the process.

The phenomenon of forgiveness is utterly complex. Such complexity necessitates deep or expansive knowledge and experience pertaining to forgiveness on the part of the professional helper. Being knowledgeable about forgiveness is not enough. Knowledge is incomplete without experience. For a counselor to be effective
in therapy, he or she must possess both knowledge and experience pertaining to the process of interpersonal forgiveness and its close association or involvement with other disciplines such as philosophy, spirituality, religion, and phenomenology. A counselor who works on the basis of his or her theoretical knowledge alone (without experiencing the process of forgiveness) might unjustly deny the client of appropriate guidance or professionalism.

Another implication points to the counselors’ training and professionalism. It is necessary to review the training and education of counselors. The curriculum of counselors should be revised to include the dimension of interpersonal forgiveness. Interpersonal forgiveness should be incorporated into the formal training of counselors. No longer confined to the responsibility and expertise of “religious” counselors, interpersonal forgiveness should become the domain of those who are truly interested in relaying it as a way of life. The exclusion of interpersonal forgiveness from the curriculum would affect the “wholeness” of counselors’ professionalism.

Thus, counselors should adopt the phenomenological method of arriving at meanings and essences in order to deeply and accurately understand the experience of clients. First, counselors are required to understand the experience of the client. Secondly, counselors need to utilize such understanding to raise the client's own consciousness pertaining to an experience. Often, clients are not even aware of the meanings and essences of their experiences. As Moustakas (1994) puts it, “Whether one is perceiving, remembering, judging, or imagining, there are common threads in one’s intentional experience of something. At the same time, there are unique meanings in each of these modes or acts of experience” (p. 71). Additionally, such
exploration entails an effort toward making relevant connections with the various disciplines, for example, philosophy or phenomenology, or spirituality.

The undertaking of the process of interpersonal forgiveness depends on the “length” of therapy practiced by the helping professionals. The process of interpersonal forgiveness, being long, difficult, and complex, is truly at odds with the concept of brief therapy. Enright, Gassin, et al. (1992) emphasize that “Forgiveness takes time and can be a long, difficult journey” (p. 101). By virtue of the structure of brief therapy, there is no way whereby it can entertain the process of interpersonal forgiveness in the most effective manner.

The findings of this study tend to refute the use of rigid “standard sessions.” It is necessary to dispense with the notion of a typical “standard sessions” for all clients. By adopting “standard sessions,” a client might be denied of his or her unique, human disposition and personal lived experience of forgiveness. The literature indicates a vast collection of forgiveness processes/models/interventions. Again, counselors have to be cautious when adopting any particular forgiveness process, for example, Smedes’ (1984) process of forgiveness and Pattison’s (1989) reconciliation model of forgiveness, which emphasize reconciliation between an offended person and the offender. The point is that a client cannot be compelled to reestablish a relationship with the offender in the light of a particular forgiveness process. Flexibility should be the prevailing motto in therapy.

Knowledge is founded on experience. Without experience, there is no real knowledge. While knowledge is a derivation of experience, it takes experience to confirm knowledge, which then leads to the formulation of further knowledge. Without experience, knowledge is not challenged or tested. An unchallenged knowledge is devoid of truth. An unchallenged knowledge is equivalent to
knowledge without experience. As such, experience without its essence is meaningless. This is because the meaning of experience revolves around its essence. Experience and essence are intertwined eternally. Essentially, one has to return to the self (Moustakas, 1994) in order to gain access to the experience of a phenomenon and its essence. Indeed, whatever that appears in one’s consciousness is known as the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Knowledge, which is grounded in the essence of experience, is meaningful knowledge. It is the discovery of such meaningful knowledge that attributes to the expansion and development of knowledge. It is through the expansion and development of knowledge that one gains in-depth understanding of interpersonal forgiveness. In the end, such understanding paves the way for the enhancement of the quality of knowledge. The enhancement of the quality of knowledge all boils down to the phenomenological investigation of experience of the phenomenon. As Moustakas (1994) puts it, “In a broad sense that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge. Phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis of all knowledge” (p. 26).

Recommendations for Further Research

More research should be oriented toward the investigation of the lived experience of forgiveness. Through the phenomenological investigation, many detailed and salient features of the experience of the phenomenon would come to light. By emphasizing the empirical/quantitative research method, for instance, many of these details and features would be regretfully overlooked. True to its name and description, phenomenology is one of the best ways to gain understanding of a human being. It is possible to gain accessibility to the inner world or inner experiencing of a
human being through phenomenology. It is possible to reach the most remote aspects of the human experience through phenomenology.

As a reminder, every human experience has its own uniqueness or idiosyncrasies. For this study, the researcher recruited co-researchers (offended individuals) who had experienced offending issues, such as sexual abuse, a breach of trust, or disrespect for self. It would be interesting to examine the phenomenon as experienced by individuals with similar issues (e.g., sexual abuse). Such investigation would lead to further insights into the hidden structures of the experience. The question might be: Is there (or is there not) a synchronicity of structures across all experiences with the same issue? Such discovery is necessary to further enhance the understanding of the experience of the phenomenon. This does not mean that the discovery would qualify the description of the experience of the phenomenon as "complete." For as long as there is human life, there is no "final" description of an experience. Indeed, the discovery would be a reinforcement of the notion of the "richness" of any particular human experience.

Since the human experience takes the characterization of stages or phases, it would be useful to investigate the experience of a particular stage or phase. Therefore, instead of investigating the experience of the phenomenon in its entirety, the focus should be upon one aspect of it. Such an endeavor would ascertain more depth with regard to the understanding of the experience of a stage or phase. Based on the findings of this study, the decision to forgive has been discovered to be the most difficult hurdle to surpass. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should be solely focused on the experience of arriving at the concrete decision to forgive. As implied previously, even the decision-making itself is marked by various stages, ranging from an initial or inconclusive decision to a concrete decision. Future
research should also give emphasis to the phenomenological investigation of the transitions from one phase to another in the process of forgiveness. As such, the findings of this study do not indicate any smooth transition between phases (for example, between concrete decision and the act or granting of forgiveness). As one phase is an outgrowth of the other, the former acts as a point of reference in terms of clarification and justification. The back and forth movement between phases is a typical scenario.
Appendix A

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval

124
Date: 7 May 1999

To: John Geisler, Principal Investigator
    Halimatun Mokhtar, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 99-04-16

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness: An Empirical-Phenomenological Investigation" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 7 May 2000
Individuals (males and females) who are between 25 and 65 years of age are welcome to participate in a research project on the experience of interpersonal forgiveness (the individual has forgiven someone). One of the primary criteria for participating in this research is that individuals have experienced interpersonal forgiveness with one significant person. A pre-interview will be held in order to determine whether individuals meet certain criteria to participate in this research. The date and location for this pre-interview will be determined later. Individuals who meet these criteria will go through two separate interviews on their experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Individuals who are interested in participating may contact or leave messages (your name and telephone number) for:

Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar
Western Michigan University
Telephone no.: 616 387-5668
Appendix C

Pre-Interview Guide: Demographic Information
Pre-Interview Guide: Demographic Information

1. Name:

2. Gender:

3. Age:

4. Marital Status:

5. Race:

6. Ethnicity:

7. Occupation:

8. Education:

9. Religion:
Appendix D

Pre-Interview Guide: Experience With Interpersonal Forgiveness
Pre-Interview Guide: Experience with Interpersonal Forgiveness

1. Have you had any experience with interpersonal forgiveness?

2. Did the experience involve a significant person in your life?

3. When did this particular experience occur?

4. Was it a significant experience for you?

5. Are you experiencing grief or going through a grieving process (related to someone's death, be it family member(s) or friend(s), and etc.) at the moment?

6. Currently, are you attending counseling?

7. Currently, are you being treated for diagnosed disorder as defined by DSM-IV?
Appendix E

Letter of Invitation to Participate in a Dissertation Research Project
Letter of Invitation to Participate in a Dissertation Research Project

Date:

Dear:

I would like to thank you for your interest and participation in my dissertation research entitled "The experience of interpersonal forgiveness: An empirical-phenomenological investigation." This research is conducted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Ph.D. degree in Counselor Education at the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology, Western Michigan University.

Since this dissertation research is qualitative in nature, I intend to explore in-depth your experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Hopefully, your detailed descriptions of your unique experiences will help me understand the meanings or essences of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. In trying to gain access to your experiences, you will be required to recall incidences, situations, or events whereby you experienced interpersonal forgiveness. In doing so, it is important that you describe your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, reactions, and reflections pertinent to the experience itself.

Your participation in this research will provide valuable information on this topic. I would like to highlight again some important points that I had mentioned to you and also to secure your signature on the consent document that is attached herewith. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may withdraw from this research at any time without penalty.

Once again, I greatly appreciate your willingness to share your experience and your commitment to my research in terms of time and effort. If you have any questions or concerns with regard to this research, please feel free to contact me (the student investigator) at 387-5668 or Dr. John S. Geisler (the principal investigator) at 387-5110.

Dr. John S. Geisler
Principal Investigator/Date

Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar
Student Investigator/Date
Appendix F

Consent Document for Participation in the Dissertation Research Project
Western Michigan University  
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology  
The Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness: An Empirical-Phenomenological Investigation  
Dr. John S. Geisler, Principal Investigator  
Halimatun Halaliah Mokhtar, Student Investigator  

I have been invited to participate in a dissertation research project entitled “The experience of interpersonal forgiveness: An empirical-phenomenological investigation.” This research intends to explore in-depth the experience of interpersonal forgiveness. It is conducted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the student investigator’s Ph.D. degree in Counselor Education at the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology, Western Michigan University.  

I will be interviewed between May and July 1999. There will be two separate interviews, each running approximately 1 hr 30 min. I will be required to read the transcribed interview protocols and the results of the analysis of data in order to provide necessary feedback. All interviews will be audiotaped.  

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or additional treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise stated in this consent form. If any problems or discomforts should arise in the course of participating in this research, particularly, due to the contents of the interviews, the student investigator will refer me to the appropriate counseling agency. I will be responsible for the cost of therapy if I choose to seek it.  

I may benefit from this study by becoming more aware of the meaning of interpersonal forgiveness. By sharing my experience, I may help to disseminate knowledge and inculcate awareness with regard to the importance of interpersonal forgiveness in everyday life.  

All of the information collected from me is confidential. All audiotapes, transcriptions of interviews and analyzed data in the form of printed texts and diskettes will be retained for three years at the department.  

Since participation is voluntary, I may withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice or penalty or effect on my relationship with Western Michigan University. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Dr. John S. Geisler, the principal investigator (616 387-5110) or Halimatun Halaliah.
Mokhtar, the student investigator (616 387–5668). I may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616 387–8293) or the Vice President for Research (616 387–8298) if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by an approval stamp in the corner of both pages of the document. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not show an approval stamp.

I agree that we will discuss the date, time, and location for the interviews. Also, I am willing to meet with the student investigator in an extended interview to provide necessary feedback to the transcribed interview protocols and the results of the analysis of data.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or the student investigator had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

_____________________________     ____________________
Signature                              Date

Consent obtained by:

Initials of Student Investigator     ____________________
                                          Date
Appendix G

Interview Guide: Meaning of Interpersonal Forgiveness
Interview Guide: Meaning of Interpersonal Forgiveness

Questions

Before the Pilot Study
1. Do you have one significant person whom you have learned to forgive?

2. What is the meaning of interpersonal forgiveness?

3. Has forgiveness been a significant part/element of your life?

4. How do you make sense of interpersonal forgiveness?

5. What is the role of interpersonal forgiveness (in this case, forgiving another person) in your life?

6. How did interpersonal forgiveness come about?

After the Pilot Study
1. Do you have one significant person whom you have forgiven?

2. What is your meaning of forgiving someone?

3. What is your understanding of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?

4. What is the role of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone) in your life?

5. Is interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone) significant in your life?

6. How did interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone) come about for you?
Appendix H

Interview Guide: Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness
Interview Guide: Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

Questions

Before the Pilot Study
1. How would you describe your experience of interpersonal forgiveness?
2. What do you experience when you forgive someone?
3. How do you experience interpersonal forgiveness?
4. What kinds of thoughts do you have when you forgive someone?
5. What kinds of feelings do you experience when you forgive someone?
6. What are your thoughts on your experience of interpersonal forgiveness?
7. How is your relationship with the person who once offended you?

After the Pilot Study
1. How would you describe your experience of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
2. What did you experience in forgiving someone?
3. How did you experience interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
4. What kinds of thoughts did you have when you forgave someone?
5. What kinds of feelings did you experience when you forgave someone?
6. What are your thoughts on your experience of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
7. How do you know you have forgiven someone?
8. How is your relationship with the person whom you have forgiven?
Appendix I

Interview Guide: Reflection on the Meaning of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness
Interview Guide: Reflection on the Meaning of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

Questions

Before the Pilot Study

1. What does it mean for you to be a forgiving person?
2. What is the meaning of your experience of interpersonal forgiveness?
3. Do you experience changes in your thoughts following the experience of interpersonal forgiveness?
4. Do you experience changes in your feelings following the experience of interpersonal forgiveness?
5. Do you experience bodily reactions following the experience of interpersonal forgiveness?

After the Pilot Study

1. What does it mean to be a forgiving person?
2. What is the meaning of your experience of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
3. What have you learned from your experience of forgiving someone?
4. Do you experience changes in your thoughts following your experience of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
5. Do you experience changes in feelings following your experience of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
6. Do you experience any bodily reactions following your experience of interpersonal forgiveness (forgiving someone)?
Appendix J

Changes in the Textural-Structural Descriptions of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness Based on the Feedback From the Co-researchers
Changes in the Textural-Structural Descriptions of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness Based on the Feedback From the Co-researchers

1a. “Sleeping was a nightmare in itself” (Structural description—before feedback)

1b. “Obviously, C could no longer enjoy his sleep, as it was getting increasingly difficult” (Structural description—after feedback)

2a. “C admits that the distance between them” (Textural description—before feedback)

2b. “The geographical distance between them” (Textural description—after feedback)

3a. “the idea of running for” (Textural description—before feedback)

3b. “the idea of being a candidate for” (Textural description—after feedback)

4a. “It was a difficult decision for C to let go of the whole idea” (Textural description—before feedback)

4b. “Such a decision, which was difficult to let go of, had a negative impact on C’s relationship with other” (Textural description—after feedback)

5a. “without any emotional support” (Textural description—before feedback)

5b. “devoid of significant emotional support” (Textural description—after feedback)

6a. “still had the passion for other” (Textural description—before feedback)

6b. “still maintained a passion for other” (Textural description—after feedback)

7a. “the most difficult part of his life” (Textural description—before feedback)

7b. “the most difficult part of his life to date” (Textural description—after feedback)

8a. “an immense awareness of self” (Structural description—before feedback)

8b. “a growing awareness of self” (Structural description—after feedback)

9a. “to pay for” (Textural description—before feedback)

9b. “to easily pay for” (Textural description—after feedback)

10. “Self in relation to time matures” (Structural description—omitted)
11a. “inability to control the situation with other” (Textural description—before feedback)

11b. “inability to manage the dynamics of his relationship with other” (Textural description—after feedback)

12a. “puts an end to all internal sufferings” (Structural description—before feedback)

12b. “puts an end to internal sufferings” (Structural description—after feedback)

13a. “a very valuable and rare experience” (Textural description—before feedback)

13b. “a very valuable, extraordinary experience, which stood out for self” (Textural description—after feedback)

14a. “Self is very thoughtful or mindful of” (Textural description—before feedback)

14b. “Currently, C is mindful of” (Textural description—after feedback)

15a. “the mind and soul to function” (Textural description—before feedback)

15b. “the mind to function” (Textural description—after feedback)

16. “C regrets it” (Structural description—omitted)

17a. “Even though it was difficult for C to accept the divorce, he stood by other throughout the divorce process” (Textural description—before feedback)

17b. “While C had wished that other and his ex-wife would get a divorce, when it materialized, C felt guilty about having such a wish, especially after he saw how it affected other” (Textural description—after feedback)

18. “At times, death might be a probable solution to all her pain” (Structural description—omitted)
Appendix K

Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness of the Co-researchers
Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

For C, the experience of interpersonal forgiveness was triggered by a need to resolve the strained relationship with a significant other, her mother-in-law. Forgiveness was defined in terms of acknowledging the wrongdoing, canceling a psychological debt, abandoning C's intention to seek revenge, and letting go of the past. Even though it would be natural to retaliate and bear a grudge, C was inclined to thwart her need to do so. To forgive was to treat other more humanly, an indication of a valuing of self in relation to other and the relationship itself. Such valuing could come about only by having the ability to differentiate the relationship from the violation, from the conflict. Certainly, forgiveness might not have come about if C had put herself above everything else, if she had chosen to be selfish.

The letting go of the feelings of hurt and pain, which was a prerequisite to forgiveness, necessitated that C deal with these feelings before forgiving other. To forgive meant to give up C's pride, a psychological state that was experienced in terms of not demanding an apology from other. Not making a decision to forgive other made C feel very weak on the inside and a total loser as a person. Not making a decision to forgive other left C without a direction, a condition that warranted decision-making in order to regain some dignity. By actually experiencing the positive outcomes of forgiveness, C's decision to forgive was reinforced. In the beginning, forgiveness seemed more like a moral obligation instead of a personal choice, a condition that left C feeling uncomfortable. For C, her Christian upbringing was a constant reminder of the role of forgiveness in relationships. Besides being adamant about upholding her religious teachings, C was inspired to achieve congruence between who she was and what she believed in. Certainly, such congruence contributed meaning to self or meaning to C's existence.

Self, in relation to time, had experienced some form of development in terms of reflection, internalization, and prayers that helped to personalize the process of forgiveness. By virtue of such personalization, C felt that the forgiveness was genuine and, consequently, became comfortable with it. Without being aware of a similar need for change on the part of other, C still offered her forgiveness, which in turn paved the way for an initiation of change. By not making any demands for other to redeem, C felt weak and simultaneously had to wriggle with pain at the thought of treating self badly. Still, when others did not give their moral support, the weak feeling was reinforced and, like a pendulum, this weak feeling oscillated within self. Forgiveness was expressed in a letter, despite the fact that C was unaware of how other might respond to it. Seeking forgiveness was closely related to forgiving. Even though C recognized that she and other were responsible for what happened, she justified her forgiveness by focusing on herself instead of other. In forgiving other, C had fulfilled her responsibility, and by not blaming other, C justified her forgiveness. C did not expect other to seek forgiveness due to a different upbringing and the indication of a wrongdoing. To complete the cycle of forgiveness, C not only extended but also sought forgiveness. To feel complete, C would have to forgive and seek forgiveness.
By becoming aware of her own wrongdoing, C's negative feelings gradually dissipated and reconciliation to the situation occurred. Since C was partly to blame, part of her feelings turned into guilt. Before, only other was guilty, but now, both were equally guilty. C needed to protect her sense of self from the danger of constantly dwelling on her strong negative feelings. C is intolerant of unresolved issues and feels incomplete whenever she offends another, a situation that causes discomfort within self. Again, to feel complete, C had to put closure on the unfinished business, disqualifying an inclination toward any defiant reactions toward other. If the self had chosen to act otherwise, the situation would have been aggravated. Admittedly, C was inclined to react defiantly toward other. However, rationally, such defiance would have placed C in the same situation with other, that is, equally guilty of an offense.

Realistic reevaluation of self, other, and the situation occurred in the process of forgiveness, which made it possible for recalling memories of happy times spent, particularly with other. Forgiveness was not only the threshold of happy memories but also the threshold of the process of forgiveness. It was the threshold that was extremely difficult to reach and cross over. C tried to identify and understand factors like her own personality and insecurity of other in creating the conflict. By engaging in a mental debate, the self experienced a change in emotional energy that eventuated in forgiveness becoming an option. Definitely, forgiveness was not a one-time decision. C had to immerse herself in the long process of mental debate that essentially made up the initial but critical and tedious part of the process of forgiveness. Time, inner strength, and focus were significant factors for such mental debate to occur. Above all, the mental debate was a solitary or lonely journey, because others did not lend their support, and naturally C felt discouraged. During this time, C tried to put things in their right perspective, which meant seeing the truth with difficulty, with a struggle. To every action there was a reaction, a sequence and consequences. Once C succeeded in crossing the threshold, other things became more manageable, and gradually things began to fall into their respective places. Once an option, there was no longer resentment in forgiving, thus reinforcing the malleability of self.

C had found strength in forgiveness, a means of reconciling significant others related to self. C struggled with the decision to forgive other, a task very unfamiliar to self since this was the first time whereby the need for forgiveness was critical. It seemed as though forgiveness was merely confined to self and other, but in reality it was like a web, touching every significant other in the picture, touching God. Forgiveness was like a small seed, growing and branching out into many directions, touching every familiar human life known to self. For C, forgiveness was experienced as a spiritual restoration.

There was fear in C with regard to how others might react to the whole idea of forgiveness, a discomforting situation created by the fact that others still considered forgiveness as an enigma. While forgiveness should be an integral component of relationships, still, others did not welcome it. For C, the process of forgiveness began with a conscious decision of wanting to forgive, only to be concretized through her conscientious effort. Thus, in wanting to forgive, C was already deciding to forgive, even though it was still flimsy in terms of its
concreteness. As C was not convinced with her decision, she moved back and forth between wanting to forgive and giving the forgiveness. Simultaneously, like a tug of war, C was being pulled into two opposite directions, to forgive or not to forgive, a situation known as ambivalence. To forgive other necessitated a redefinition of self and worldview, and the ability to exercise one's belief. Having to redefine self and worldview was a scary situation for C, more or less similar to the inability to forgive other. For C, an inability to forgive denoted the presence of serious existential discrepancies, a precondition for a redefinition of self and worldview.

C resorted to forgiveness because relationships and peace were at stake. Once forgiveness was offered, C experienced multiple blessings, which include overcoming negative feelings, breaking the vicious circle of misinterpretation, relieving self, and reestablishing relationships.

Following forgiveness, C's faith and relationship with God and significant others were reinforced, a process that made it possible for the transformation of the once immature and ignorant self, the development of a consciousness with regard to the significance of forgiveness. Taking this critical experience as a fundamental point of reference, as a foundation for self, future forgiveness looks encouraging. Maturity emerged in the light of constructing the structures of forgiveness within self, embedding it deeply into the remote self.

For C, to forgive other was to gain control of the painful and overwhelming situation. While not extending forgiveness meant to lose control of the situation, extending it was to regain self-control.

It was necessary to find time and a peaceful environment in order to think about forgiveness and to experience profound transformation. While time healed, it was still necessary to make time or room for contemplation, for transformation. In the midst of experiencing turmoil on the inside, peace and serenity should characterize the context for such contemplation. Without peace and serenity, self would experience suffocation. By disengaging self from the situation, C could view the situation with a new, unbiased perspective.

C felt that other had openly expressed contempt toward her. Before forgiving other, C's emotional energy was dysfunctional in terms of pain, anger, aggression, and self-pity. However, by thinking about forgiveness, the pain, anger, aggression, and self-pity were gradually transformed into gentleness, which in turn helped to solidify the forgiveness itself. C's mind was powerful in terms of the thought of forgiveness alone could help to shape her positive emotional energy; hence, the more positive the energy, the more solidified the forgiveness. Forgiveness, being described as a consciousness, would not have materialized without awareness, without consciousness. By not focusing on negative feelings, C was able to get in touch with other positive aspects of self. Through the process of figure and ground, the positive aspects of self superseded negative feelings, a precondition for self-integration. Again, forgiveness would not have materialized without submitting to God, hence, there was a reinforcement of the self and making the impossible possible. There is this notion that forgiveness at the human level is beyond reach, within the realm of God. Therefore, submission to God is necessary to make human forgiveness possible, to
make it a reality. Following forgiveness, C experienced a spiritual uplift, a sense of freedom, relief, and lightness.

Besides wanting to forgive, C also needed to seek forgiveness; both were equally difficult to do. To accomplish this would mean to put self and other on the same psychological level, a win-win situation. The decision to forgive should not only come from the mind but also the heart, and the congruence between the two components of self would generate a meaningful and heartfelt forgiveness. The emergence of C's positive qualities, like patience and gentleness, enabled her to see the good in other, which then generated inner peace within self. Forgiveness was justified and reinforced by considering the good points in other, by being concerned about her well-being, and by offering it for the sake of peace and reconciliation. Describing self as stronger than before, C felt extremely happy and satisfied with her experience of interpersonal forgiveness. For C, forgiveness, being the symbol of care, respect, and security for other, had inspired her attitudinal change toward other. Definitely, the relational dynamics between self and other had taken a new, positive turn, which was a pronouncement of the importance of interpersonal forgiveness. The inability to forgive would be a personal setback and a hindrance to other social relationships. For C, to forgive was to be able to go beyond the issue and hurt and to enable others to be part of her life again. Believing that forgiveness is a sacrifice and following her survival of the most critical relationship, C becomes hopeful of other relationships.

Following forgiveness, C felt joyful with the turn of events between herself and other, with the unfolding of possibilities between them. By being aware of human flaws, C anticipates forgiving other in future. Since C would become more vulnerable in a meaningful relationship, forgiveness in turn would become difficult and complex. Following forgiveness, C experienced a positive outlook toward life and felt positive about herself, about her accomplishment. In general, C admires those who could forgive, which is an inspiration for self. Consequently, the self is now described as forgiving, loving, caring, strong, and determined. In C's case, positive thinking led to positive feelings, a process that had enhanced her self-respect.

By being in touch with experiencing, C was able to identify the presence and intensity of negative feelings and elucidate anger as the dominant component within self. By being in touch with C's inner experiencing, she realized the extent of her capacity in handling her negative feelings, the limitation of her human capacity. With this realization, C turned to God, the source of power. Following forgiveness, C experienced inner beauty, a sense of rareness, spiritual grace, and a sense of empowerment. For C, forgiveness had brought out the best in her in terms of tapping her very remote and rare human qualities. Partly, it was the inner struggles and the endurance to go through the long and winding journey which rendered meaningful meaning to C's forgiveness.

From C's perspective, forgiveness was a natural process. Patience, commitment, and determination were important factors in order to live through the experience of forgiveness. C allowed herself to go through the natural process of feeling her anger, fear, and hurt, which was an appropriate way of dealing with her negative feelings. In addition, self-analysis was necessary to confront the negative
feelings. Definitely, the forgiveness process was initiated to break the vicious circle between C and other.

Forgiveness was extended in the best interest of all parties involved, a dissipation of any element of selfishness, a relief from any personal interest. To forgive other for the sake of self symbolized selfishness, a quality that caused uneasiness to self and one to be dispensed with. For C, forgiveness must be extended for the sake of other and significant others in her life.

Before the conflict was resolved, C’s anger and stress were manifested by her psychosomatic reactions, particularly loss of appetite and a protruding vein on her forehead. C had experienced tremendous psychological and physical changes in terms of the psychological pressure transforming into physical manifestations. By compounding C’s negative feelings, the psychosomatic reactions developed and food was not important anymore. C’s protruding vein was a metaphor for the swelling of feelings on the inside. C realized that she had to stop this ordeal, otherwise, her physical condition might deteriorate. Prior to forgiving other, C experienced emotional pressure and was forced to bottle it up. Even though this emotional pressure was unbearable, C could not let it out for the sake of not wanting to aggravate the situation. While other aspects of C’s daily activities were being interrupted by the conflict, she still slept soundly. Prior to forgiving other, C was overwhelmed with everything, very irritable, constantly worrying unnecessarily, and losing touch with reality. For C, her forgiveness was a means of overcoming her pessimism, indulgence in self-pity, and helplessness. Obviously, not forgiving other would be more painful than forgiving. There is no doubt, C’s experience of interpersonal forgiveness is positive, and she encourages others to take the initiative to seek or give forgiveness.
Co-researcher 2

Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

C and other, a long-time friend, quit their jobs at the factory and went into business together. With the exception of their skills, neither did not have any basic knowledge of business. Initially, C and other struggled with their business. However, with a turn of events in the 5th year, C and other decided to venture into profit-sharing, whereby C used his skills while other staked his money. Having learned from other employees about the great deal of profit generated from the business, C was hurt and later confronted other about it. Unfortunately, other was not honest with C and owed C a large sum of money. C was angry at the thought of being deceived by other. Such an act was a manifestation of the betrayal of their long-standing friendship, a denial of respect for C that resulted in his anger and hurt. The other employees had also been cheated in terms of not getting their profits as promised. As C failed to get his fair share of the profits, he was forced to settle for a smaller amount of money. Not only did C lose his money but also his sense of pride, as other reacted condescendingly toward him and left him with no choice but to accept the meager amount of money.

Being angry and disappointed with other, whom he trusted all this while, C decided to dissolve their partnership. This breach of trust meant a great deal to C, because he had never questioned the honesty or integrity of other. Since C had been too trusting of other, this made it all the more painful for him. C’s anger was overwhelming to the point of disturbing his sleep, night after night, which resulted in his feeling stupid about having to go through such ordeal. C could no longer contain his anger, which gushed through his system uncontrollably and unceasingly to the extent of robbing him of his deep sleep. Obviously, C could no longer enjoy his sleep, as it was getting increasingly difficult. With the ordeal becoming intolerable and the self experiencing a pressure from the inside to take action for the sake of sanity, C had to deal with his anger.

C was aware of the discrepancy between his behavior and other. Initially, C was not inclined to forgive other, thus the creation of a discrepancy between self and faith. As a Christian, C was bothered by his inability to forgive other, a symbol of failure in fulfilling his responsibility as a Christian or a responsible human being. Implicitly, C’s meaning of existence was rooted in his faith. Being aware of his reluctance to forgive other, C kept on remembering the constantly cited biblical verse on forgiveness. There is no doubt that the concept of forgiveness had been instilled in C during his childhood. Knowing such a concept is one thing, but applying it is another. By becoming a Christian, the role of forgiveness had become more distinct and significant in C’s life, and he began to question his inability to forgive other and, at the same time, he felt it was wrong not to offer forgiveness. For C, God’s forgiveness served as a paragon of virtue and it became an inspiration to abide by his Christian belief. Regardless of other’s awareness or admission of own wrongdoing, C still extended his forgiveness to him. For C, forgiveness could be one-sided, a situation that depicted his genuineness in wanting to forgive other. Following C’s
decision, he could work comfortably with other again, and he has kind feelings toward other.

For C, he could forgive other with the strength from God. Struggling with forgiving other, C could not absolutely rely on his human power, a precondition for the divine intervention. By virtue of this intervention, C expanded his human power to offer forgiveness. For C, forgiveness was a recent phenomenon. All this while C never realized that other had deceived him. Once he discovered the deception prior to forgiving other, C could not tolerate going to work and hated his workplace.

Admittedly, C could not tolerate being angry with other. Somehow, C found it difficult to explain what actually inspired him to forgive other. One thing for sure, C could no longer sleep at night. Somehow, there was a mixture of clarity, abstraction, and wonder that engulfed C's forgiveness. C was more concerned about being deceived by other than losing his money, and the thought of being deceived had stirred his anger.

From C's perspective, the meaning of forgiveness was understood in terms of his willingness to overlook the wrongdoing of other, not to hold him responsible, and to reestablish the relationship with a new attitude. Partly, C was able to extend forgiveness by recognizing that other had a different perspective on life. By understanding other's frame of mind, C began to tolerate the experience of the violation, a precondition for forgiveness.

C admits that it was not easy to free other from blame or wrongdoing. Prior to forgiveness, C constantly reminded himself of the decision to forgive other and that he was serving God instead of other. Initially, confused with indecision or hesitation, C oscillated between wanting to forgive and not forgiving. Being with or working for other become tolerable when C put God above everything else; therefore, his intolerance of other was concealed through his reverence toward God. Believing that something had transpired between himself and God, still C was unable to describe this exchange of energy. By identifying himself with the sinful nature of human beings and, subsequently, by seeking God's forgiveness, C experienced peace in his heart. C has no trouble sleeping and going to work now, and his attitude toward other has changed for the better. Reading a parable in the Bible inspired and reinforced C's decision to forgive other. C admits that he must take responsibility for his own wrongdoing and that he is not perfect and needs forgiveness from others. Thus, C had the ability to recognize that self and other were responsible for co-constituting the situation.

Not being able to trust other again, C's relationship with other cannot be the same as before. Having experienced the violation, C no longer sees any credibility and integrity in other. Inevitably, even after forgiving other, C is doubtful of other's motives and actions, an apparently good enough reason for not taking other back in totality. At the same time, C admits that he has a sense of responsibility with regard to the welfare of other employees. For C, there is still a sense of loyalty to his friendship with other, the kind of loyalty that preserves the meaningful value of his friendship.
Definitely, C's experience in forgiving other had an effect on his relationship with his wife. Forgiving other had facilitated C's ability to extend forgiveness to his wife. Generally, forgiveness, as a consciousness, comes with age and maturity and cannot be learned instantaneously. Instead, forgiveness must be experienced as a process. C's experience with forgiveness had taught him the need to evaluate significant relationships and to re-appraise things, as well as to see the accurate picture. C's constant evaluation and re-evaluation of relationships indicates his unique and true value. Consequently, when relationship is valued in itself, C is able to put things in their right perspective.

C and other employees used to talk about their anger toward other, a historical situation and behavior that were not acceptable to self. Although C considered the verbalization or sharing of anger with others as legitimate, his conscience and guilt pricked him, an experience that he resented. While C felt contemptuous toward other, despite what other did, C never hated him. Contrariwise, C considered other his long-time friend, a valid reason for plunging into deep hurt the moment other deceived him. In the midst of believing that other used to like him, C questioned the nature of his friendship with other. Somehow, C and other had lost the compatibility they once experienced, and their incompatibility became more pronounced as the dynamics of their friendship changed.

C confronted other about what happened and, consequently, other was angry about it. Despite what happened, C has compassion for other. C considers himself better off than other because he is free from all the pressure of work and looks forward to his retirement next year. After forgiving other, C is able to see and appreciate the positive aspects of his experience with other. C believes he will be fine and feels less guilty for being angry with other. There were times when C's wife could see his anger and he became unhappy when she pointed this out to him. There was resistance on C's part to admit to himself and his wife that his anger was affecting their relationship. For C, this was a manifestation of his loss of self-control. Somehow, there was a difference between admitting to self and his significant other in terms of whatever weakness known to self should not be disclosed to his significant other.

Certainly, C appreciated the entire experience and accepted it as his destiny. For C, it was God's way of making him a better person. Thus, by accepting the experience as his destiny or test from God, it was easy for C to appreciate every part of his experience and ordeal. It was a path that C must go through in order to become a better person. It was a path that C must endure to spiritually cleanse himself. After forgiving other, C reestablished their friendship with a new outlook and attitude, a situation made possible by the redefinition or reconstruction of the meaning of his friendship with other. Somehow, C could no longer use the old meaning of friendship, which was based on trust. Today, C is making friendly efforts to convince other that he is no longer angry with him. Even though before his forgiveness C could not communicate with other, still it is difficult to re-establish this relationship. C's experience has compelled him to be cautious with self in relation to other and other in relation to self. Partly, this difficulty might be attributed to no indication on the part of other to recognize his wrongdoing and therefore make amends. Obviously, the need for resolution of friendship was one-sided, since C was
not aware of whether other had any perceptions of C’s wrongdoing or whether other had even contemplated on the event and what transpired between them.

Through C’s experience, he learned that he could forgive someone. However, C advises against taking a long time to come up with such decision, since an early decision to offer forgiveness will definitely eliminate all the unnecessary turmoil. In the process of making his decision to forgive, C placed other above self. For C, forgiveness was neither self-centered nor selfish. As such, forgiveness was not merely about self; it was about self in relation to other, and thus an indication of the consideration of self and other. To harbor ill will against other would be to hurt self or to allow self, instead of other, to suffer from the consequences. To be victimized is one thing; to continue to be a victim is another. Currently, C has peace of mind and, subsequently, is able to sleep soundly. Forgiveness enabled self to make peace with self, which resulted in inner harmony, which, in turn, led to interpersonal harmony. With both internal and external harmony, certainly the self felt settled. In realizing that anger could affect other relationships, C wants to set an example for other employees to learn to forgive other. C not only hopes that forgiveness can be learned vicariously but also wishes to share his triumph with others. Going back to historical time, C was aware that his anger with other had affected his relationship with his wife in terms of being unpleasant to her, which was a displacement of anger. C had allowed his anger to affect his joviality, an indication of a denial of his deserving right to it. While C is able to socialize with other employees now, he regrets investing in unnecessary energy in the past. Life would be more difficult if C did not forgive other. By allowing self to be consumed with the negative energy, C overlooked the priority of utilizing his positive energy.

Forgiveness began with a conscious decision, one that entailed a considerable amount of energy within self. Certainly, such a decision made it possible for the intention to forgive other to grow into full consciousness. In forgiving other, C was tapping his best potential, that is, forgiving other willingly. C valued peace in his heart and believed forgiving other was good for self and other. Without a doubt, forgiveness contributed to the well-being of self and other.

C felt like a hypocrite if he did not forgive other, an inner experience that was triggered by a belief that there must be congruence between his teachings and his personhood. Since this hypocrisy was part of C’s inner struggle, he had to deal with it in order to forgive other. Even though others were not aware of C’s inner struggle, he could not hide his hypocrisy or self from God. By putting his relationship with God above everything else, C felt stupid about being angry with other. In moving toward harmony with God, C could not harbor any negative feelings or ill will against other. Initially, C did not only doubt his ability to forgive other, but also his decision to do so. Definitely, C struggled with the decision to forgive other and even questioned the logic of it all. For C, his ability to forgive other still intrigues him. Without C’s prayer to God, without God’s grace, such ability might not have come about, thus an absence of the impossible. For C, forgiveness is not a natural inclination of human beings because it is more natural for human beings to be angry, retaliate, and seek revenge. Certainly, C needed to initiate change before turning to God for help. For C, thinking about forgiveness was the first step in the process of
forgiveness, followed by the decision to forgive. Still, C needed tolerance or strength to concretize not only the decision but also the forgiveness itself.

Today, C is friendly toward other and is able to communicate with him without hostility, a familiar scenario of the old days. C is able to share his views about the business with other, cooperate with him, and help him to consider the different aspects of business. For C, his forgiveness was a representation of his care for other. To not forgive other would be to hurt self or to allow the gnawing pain to persist within self intolerably, a sign of reliving the experience of the violation. Before forgiveness, self was looked upon as a loser, since every aspect of self was affected, including that aspect that was related to God. Yet, C’s relationship with God should be reflected through his relationship with other. A revival of one aspect of self would lead to a revival of another aspect of self. C is aware that he has a positive attitude toward other now and will continue to nurture himself with regard to forgiveness. Realizing that it is foolish not to forgive, C looks forward to forgiving others in future, thus an embeddedness of the ability to forgive and a demonstration of a sense of urgency about further developing this ability. In expressing C’s care for other, there is no longer intention to hurt other. C admits that the nature of his relationship with other has changed; even the meaning and nature of C’s friendship with other has changed. C feels there is mutual distrust between him and other. Even though there is no indication from other to seek forgiveness or admit any wrongdoing, still C tries to understand the inability of other to seek forgiveness.

The decision to forgive other constituted the most difficult hurdle in the process of forgiveness, one that was almost denied by C’s inclination to be unforgiving toward other. While C recognizes that he had the right to be angry, having the right to be angry is one thing, while allowing anger to control self is another. Looking back, C finds it amusing and yet regards himself as stupid to indulge in self-infliction.

By giving forgiveness, C regards himself better than other. C admits it was not good to bottle up his anger. In forgiving other, C appeared to be giving in to other and might seem to be a loser. On the contrary, by not withholding forgiveness, C appeared to be the winner. Hence, there was a sense of losing C’s pride when he forgave other; yet, at the same time, being egotistical would not make him a winner. C describes himself as loving and kind now, devoid of any intentions to put self above other in terms of being a better person, a humbling of self in the description of self in relation to other. C’s forgiveness unleashed his positive qualities, an illustration of his self-development. C gives the best to his work now, an indication that he is not selfish in giving his best potential to other and the business.

others can communicate better with C and he is a happier person now. For C, the ability to forgive was a reflection of a divine quality, a special and rare quality, which illuminated the light of the uncommonality of forgiveness. After forgiving other, C could move on with his life instead of being obsessed with the event or withholding anger by withholding forgiveness. Certainly, forgiveness had unleashed the negative energy, which was trapped within self.
C believes that forgiveness was a choice, which was experienced by the self with difficulty. Indeed, making the decision to forgive was the threshold of the process of forgiveness. Before forgiveness, C felt guilty not forgiving other, which, in turn, made him uncomfortable, a psychological state that was aggravated by the experiencing of an internal chain of negative feelings. C believes that God had granted him a forgiving spirit to forgive other, a factor that paved the way for peace with God or spiritual restoration.

C had stopped worrying about not being able to forgive other, which resulted in a peace of mind. Besides forgiving other, C finds it easier to extend his forgiveness to the wife of other, who is also involved in the business. C believes that he will always be dealing with forgiveness in the future. Being people-oriented, C values his relationship with others and feels sorry for other and his wife because they are money-minded. For C, forgiveness was a reflection of his philosophy of life.

C learned that he could not change everything and had to accept the things that were beyond his control. C could control only himself and his actions, and any attempts to do the impossible would only frustrate self. The acceptance of whatever that self could change would help to release the tension or stress. The experience had taught C to be more aware of himself and his surroundings and helped him to conclude that he had grown wiser with the experience or that it had been a good teacher to self. Before forgiving other, C describes himself as naive and humiliated because he had allowed other to use him. In an effort not to disclose self, C’s anger had shielded the humiliation to his self-esteem. Fortunately, C survived the ordeal with a considerable degree of endurance.

C realizes that business does not contribute to the development of his self-esteem but, rather, he develops it by being a people-oriented person, a quality that he has been endowed or blessed with. Among other things, C describes himself as creative, a quality that did not gain the appreciation of other, and was thus a disappointment to self. In retrospect, C was angry with other because his self-esteem was enormously affected by what happened. C describes himself as the same person as before, appreciating or valuing the love of others more than money. For C, people are more important than materials, a value that has not been altered by his fated experience. Despite what happened, C did not lose his sense of self. Partly, C’s ability to forgive was triggered by his awareness with regard to what he valued, an important component of his sense of self. Today, C is able to resume his normal ways with a certain degree of contentment.

The experience of interpersonal forgiveness has encouraged C to reevaluate his previous personal issues with others, to engage in a task called self-analysis. C wishes that the other employees would forgive other, too. C admits that he has extended his heartfelt forgiveness to other and no longer feels comfortable in belittling other in conversations with the other employees. For C, his forgiveness is genuine, a quality that forbids him to enjoy participating in conversations behind other’s back. By not being enmeshed in the situation, C can see things objectively now that he is no longer emotionally laden with anger.
C had experienced a complicated and unbalanced relationship with a significant other that is his ex-wife, with whom he was deeply and passionately in love. Historically, their marriage was prompted by C’s new employment in A, a foreign country unfamiliar to both C and other. Certainly, C and other were aware of the imminent difficulty that other would encounter in A. After their first year in A, it was decided that other should resume her professional life in the United States. The geographical distance between them had taken its toll on their relationship, on the essence of their relationship. Before the geographical separation, C’s three children by a former marriage had visited the couple in A, and other, who was not fond of them, was not supportive. After completing his second year, C came back to the United States and tried to build a new life with other. Accordingly, C applied for a very important position with the Boy Scouts of America in Dallas, Texas. Unfortunately, other, being disagreeable with the Texas mentality, was not supportive of C and his plans and refused to relocate. C was deeply hurt by other, who maintained an uncompromising attitude and simultaneously was not interested in holding serious or in-depth discussions with him, an indication of her inconsiderateness or disrespect for his professional need or even the relationship itself. C had to abandon the idea of being a candidate for the position of national public relations director with the organization because of other. Such a decision, which was difficult to let go of, had a negative impact on C’s relationship with other. Besides indifference in the relationship, there was a lack of emotional support from other. With the passage of time, C was able to understand his experience with other by putting it into a proper perspective, by identifying significant psychological concepts. Part of C’s problems with other stemmed from the fear of relationship, fear of his success, and commitment on the part of other. C was quite hurt by the behavior of other. In spite of C’s attempt to come to a compromise with other, the latter did not acknowledge it. In addition, other did not recognize C’s emotional support and professional sacrifice. Certainly, the position with the Boy Scouts of America meant a great deal to C. In the midst of experiencing much pain and frustration, still C tried to understand other’s psychological position.

C could no longer live with other in an environment devoid of significant emotional support, a situation that gave way to his decision about taking care of his emotional health. The decision to do so was a difficult one since C still maintained a passion for other. Admittedly, this passion for other was related to C’s personal need, which indicated its irrational and unhealthy nature. While the passion had its negative connotation, C’s need for emotional connection and mutual support was healthy. For C, the continuation of his passion for other signified the fulfillment of his personal need, thus implying that the more irrational and unhealthy C’s passion for other, the more intense his personal need. C attributes forgiveness to learning a great deal about his relationship with other, his unhealthy needs, and projections on to other. The dynamics of C’s relationship with other had unraveled his personal, psychological weaknesses. Partly, though unconsciously, the understanding of these psychological weaknesses had paved the way for C’s ability to forgive other. Being bitterly
disappointed with other for not meeting his personal needs, C chose to adopt a new way of connecting with his emotional needs, a new healthy way of fulfilling his emotional needs. For C, such disappointment had opened up other possibilities, other blessings. Describing his marriage or relationship with other as the most difficult part of his life to date, still C and other tried to maintain their friendship following the divorce.

The identification of C’s input into the frustrating situation had contributed to another realization; that is, both had co-constituted it, thus an elimination of part of the blame from other. Apart from receiving professional counseling in order to understand self, other, and their relationship, C was also reading about human relationships and the like. Admittedly, C experienced pain throughout the process of understanding self, other, the relationship, and the divorce. Through counseling and reading about human relationships, C was able to get in touch with his inner and remote self, which in turn led to a growing awareness of self, other, and the dynamics of their relationship. These endeavors helped to strip C’s defenses down, which then resulted in his ability to demarcate his psychological position and that of other. Such demarcation helped to remove any confusion of needs and roles as well as projection on C’s part. Through counseling and reading about human relationships, C experienced the process of healing. By the same token, C learned about the unhealthy projection of his needs on to other, a psychological state to be dealt with by separating self from other, by not completely blaming other for what had transpired. Consequently, by taking part of the blame for what happened, C was able to forgive other for her imperfection, which was a reflection of the imperfection of self. Certainly, the ability to separate self from other in terms of emotional detachment generated self-fulfillment. Taking this emotional detachment as a sign of healthy living, C no longer was dependent on other for his emotional fulfillment, a condition that permitted him to nurture self. In a way, forgiveness served as a gratitude to other since without other and without experiencing the pain, C would not have discovered the negative aspects of self. Even though forgiveness was experienced as a process, C was aware of the moment when it was clear and rewarding to self. Forgiveness, being a lovely pivotal moment, had crystallized into C’s awareness.

Following their divorce, C and other received an announcement about a spiritual retreat conducted by a Hindu swami in Ohio, and since other did not have the money to easily pay for her fee, C offered to do so on her behalf. By contributing financially to other, C was unaware that it was a symbolic gesture of forgiveness. Through this financial contribution, C let go of the sense of loss that he had experienced in his relationship with other. Through his financial contribution, C released his expectations, blame, and judgment of other. For C, forgiveness was not about what other could do for self, but rather what self could do for other, which was a symbol of unselfishness. Unaware of the meaning of his financial contribution at the time, the experience of forgiveness had come unexpectedly. Forgiveness, which was inherent in the act of contributing financially to other, was an extension of C’s friendship. Evidently, C’s financial contribution denoted the ultimate point of the healing process, which was a precondition for forgiveness, which in turn was described as a beautiful healing moment. C’s act of friendship was very rewarding in the sense that the meaning of the act of friendship changed from the conscious to the subconscious level. Since C had no other ulterior motives, helping other financially.
was purely based on a good intention; thus, it indicated that C did not finance other to make self feel good. Instead, it was done purely for the sake of other, which signified C's genuine consideration for the welfare of other. It was only over time and upon reflection that the financial contribution was defined as an act of forgiveness whereupon C let go of all his expectations of other.

Emotional fairness, which should form the basis for forgiveness, would eliminate unnecessary blaming or projection and eventually make it easier to forgive. The presence of emotional fairness would hinder one from having high expectations of another or setting another up for failure, which in turn would necessitate forgiveness in order to free another of such failure. Viewing forgiveness as an option, C had chosen to forgive other by means of his generous financial gesture. Implicitly, the thought of having the choice to forgive had empowered self. Evidently, C could offer forgiveness, an experience that was rewarding to self in terms of opening up other possibilities, other benefits, or blessings of forgiveness. C's attitude of success, which meant judging the situation justly and wisely or processing and analyzing the situation from a win-win perspective, was associated with his ability to forgive other. Processing and analyzing the situation from a win-lose perspective would have aggravated it, thus leaving C and other in an unfavorable situation.

Admittedly, C did not take a long time to forgive other. Forgiveness with its inherent value evolved not only as personal power but also as a source of power in the sense that self has become more thoughtful or mindful now. By being thoughtful, C enriches his life in terms of gaining insights into things. Thoughtfulness, considered as an important element in forgiveness, is one of the many ways to speed up forgiveness. Certainly, thoughtfulness is a form of maturity. Apart from forgiving other, C was able to forgive himself, which indicated that forgiving other was related to forgiving self. By forgiving other, C acquired a new level of maturity, a sense of empowerment, and an ability to differentiate self from other and the situation. While forgiveness had generated the new discovery of self, such discovery and its valuing had solidified the forgiveness. Due to his inability to manage the dynamics of his relationship with other, C experienced sadness. Subsequently, C needed to let go of the relationship, which was considered as a valued possession. At the time it was not within C's power to control things, and by letting go of the need to do so, he regained control. By forgiving other, C came to terms with his situation, which meant that he took charge of self. No doubt, forgiveness had empowered C; still, he was regretful about what happened.

Forgiveness, being the sensible and right thing to do, gave C an opportunity not only to free himself from the negative and positive expectations of other, but also to experience a clean emotional break. For C, having experienced an emotional burden, the emergence or presence of forgiveness had brought about a sense of lightness. No doubt, other is no longer significant in C's current life; still, he is friendly toward other.

Within a week from the moment C made his financial contribution and following his interpretation or redefinition of such act, C experienced forgiveness toward other. For C, forgiveness, experienced as a moment of consciousness, was meaningful or insightful. By being supportive of other, by not expecting any
reciprocity, C had extended his genuine forgiveness. The experience of interpersonal forgiveness described as a traumatic and pivotal phase of C’s psychological or emotional life, had not only challenged his psychological make-up but also illuminated psychological meaning for self.

In spite of the great deal of pain caused by other, following his forgiveness, C was neutral toward other. Such neutrality, which indicated an absence of hatred toward other, emerged over time. For C, hating other would be synonymous with hating a significant part of self. No longer with other, C appreciated the time spent together. In retrospect, forgiving other was a big leap, a significant development, and a learning experience for C. Without experiencing forgiveness, C’s ability to forgive other would not have materialized in full consciousness. In essence, the experience of forgiveness had provided C with a profound understanding of the value of forgiveness, the value of letting go, and the association between the value of forgiveness and that of letting go. Forgiving other did not come easy since C had to undergo a mental struggle described as part of the process of forgiveness.

Upon reflection, C believes that the ability to forgive is an inherent aspect of self that needs nurturing. Without constant or persistent nurturing, this ability might not develop. Forgiveness, being a catalyst for personal health and growth, has encouraged C not to fear it in terms of believing in its value and developing his ability to forgive others. Certainly, forgiveness always takes place in the context of relationships and, subsequently, complex relationships have more pitfalls.

Forgiveness, considered as a natural outcome of C’s relationship with other, came from his heart. The thought of forgiveness did not emerge at the time of C’s financial contribution, which implied that it was not sought out for its own sake; it was never a motivation. Essentially, the absence of such thought or motivation had enhanced the value of forgiveness. Through the readiness or willingness to contribute financially to other, C not only extended his genuine forgiveness but also procured self-respect. C trusted his gut feelings with regard to forgiveness being the right and healthy act, which then gave way to the enhancement of his dignity. Having stumbled upon forgiveness, C encouraged it to develop through his frame of mind or thoughtfulness, which in turn opened up the possibility for him to learn about self, to gain insight into his psychological make-up and the extent of his humanity. Being freed from his guardedness and suspicion, C felt more self-actualized, authentic, or more his own person. For C, forgiveness was a threshold of expanding his real self in the sense of freeing it from a few inhibitions. By getting in touch with his real self, with his possibilities, C experienced a general feeling of contentment.

Apart from forgiveness, there was a possibility that C’s meditation might have concomitantly contributed to his sense of freedom or relief. Forgiveness, which was appropriate for self and other, had evolved in light of C’s care for the well-being of self and other.

Before forgiving other, unpleasant feelings and tension were strongly present within self. For C, the internal struggle, which continued for some time, was manifested by the energy being pulled in all directions—mentally, emotionally, and physically. Since C’s guardedness consumed more energy, forgiveness was a means
of releasing the need to be protective of self in relation to other, who was no longer a threat to self. Forgiveness, considered as a protection in itself or a shield for self in relation to other, had the power to reduce the consumption of inner energy in terms of neutralizing the tension within self. Without such neutrality, a sense of emotional exhaustion would prevail as C kept on stretching his inner energy. Going back to the historical situation between C and other, he had exercised caution in her presence, an indication that he was more concerned about being hurt by her. By not being careful with other, C would be inflicted with more pain or hurt, which he could no longer tolerate.

Being vulnerable at a certain point in his relationship with other, C had to protect himself from more trauma, both real and imagined. No longer able to tolerate the psychological trauma, C kept other at a distance. Forgiving other, described as a dramatic experience, had dissipated the trauma and put an end to internal sufferings. Certainly, C had grown out of the trauma, an indication that in the absence of pretenses, the real self evolved gradually. Time, being a significant factor, had changed the dynamics between self and other. As C became more comfortable with the new emergence of self, other was no longer the focus of his life. Following a positive transformation of energy, the self became energized and life was more fulfilling. Inspired by the experience of the positive effects of forgiveness, C believes that it would be easier to forgive others in future. C had discovered the significance of not creating circumstances that might call for a dramatic experience of forgiveness. By forgiving small instances, the dramatic experience of forgiveness can be eliminated. By assuming individual responsibility and incorporating interpersonal forgiveness into everyday activities, forgiving would no longer be a formidable and a last-minute task.

Having gone through the complicated experience with other, C developed emotionally, a testimony to his new maturity. Forgiveness, described as a product of maturity, should be a component of all relationships. Since it would be more costly not to forgive in terms of the persistence of the pain, it would be better to forgive. The ability to let go of C’s need to manage the situation implied that he was able to control his unhealthy needs, resulting in an evolution of joy within self. Forgiving other was a very valuable, extraordinary experience, which stood out for self.

Going back to historical time, C had engaged in an internal dialogue or self-talk that, if allowed to persist, would have detrimental effects on self. Such disclosure indicated that C was conscious of the different components and functions of his mental processes. Currently, C is mindful of the irresistible presence of the internal dialogue, its power and dynamics in an effort to protect self from its influence. Certainly, the negative aspects of the self-talk are destructive to others in general and to self in particular. Partly, C had learned from the experience of interpersonal forgiveness that the thoughtful component of self should take control of the overall mental processes in an attempt to avoid aggravating relationships.

Unaware of what to expect from forgiving other, self was imbued with joy and, subsequently, appreciative of its after effect. While joy lingered on after the point of contact with forgiveness, the self encountered more positive feelings and experiences. The positive effects of joy were experienced in terms of providing self
with motivating energy, enabling the mind to function for the good of self, and allowing self to attain internal harmony. One positive feeling gave way to another, which implied a vicious circle of internal positive energy. For C, joy was the best indicator of mental, emotional, and physical health. Joy, with the exception of being experienced as a pure feeling, was beyond description. For C, joy had evolved from the intersection of universal care and love for other and self. In essence, such universal care and love were rooted in forgiveness.

For C, the unselfish act, which was the financial contribution to other, left its reflection on his well-being. The unselfishness, which symbolized a universal truth, would influence C’s future actions and reactions. The experience of interpersonal forgiveness had a spiritual connotation in terms of enhancing C’s well-being. Religion and spirituality, being interrelated, constitute the basis for the human potential, one of which is forgiveness. Since spirituality can be attained only through experience, the best way to learn about forgiveness is through experiencing. Through his acts of forgiveness, C learned about his spiritual nature. For C, forgiveness was predominantly an extension of his spirituality, which was enhanced through his good deed.

Describing forgiveness as rewarding, C encourages others to forgive. Forgiveness as a complex issue has to be approached with a moderate attitude, which is a factor for reducing its complexity. Forgiveness, considered as a complicated experience in terms of its tediousness and dynamics, had benefited C in terms of knowledge and experience. Certainly, the decision to forgive other constituted the most difficult aspect of the process of forgiveness. To arrive at the decision to forgive other meant to go through a process of analyzing and scrutinizing the situation, other, and self. In the process of arriving at this decision, C had to deal with his negative feelings, particularly pain or hurt, which seemed to be in the way between self and the decision. While interpersonal forgiveness is mystical in its experience and description, it should not be feared. Instead, it should be practiced with ease or comfort.
After her divorce, C’s sister (or other) and her children returned from Germany and stayed with C and her family. Following her counseling sessions, other believed that her entire family had abandoned her. Being angry with her family members, other and her children later left C’s home and this brought relief to C, because she could not tolerate living with an angry person. The unfounded accusation of other stirred much confusion within C, who had been supportive of and helpful toward other and, subsequently, they became distant from one another. For C, it was not fair for other to point a finger at her, to blame her for other’s unhappiness. From C’s perspective, forgiveness was a means of relieving her of the anger with other, a means of rescuing herself from being angry. Up to a certain point, C’s anger was closely related to the anger of other, in the sense that the intensity of her anger varied with that of other.

Certainly, other had experienced a traumatic divorce, a cause for much anger within her to the point of displacing it to her sister. For C, forgiveness meant that whatever happened between self and other was not important anymore. In understanding what other had gone through, forgiveness began to set in, and C was no longer being bothered by what happened. At the same time, C did not have the energy to be angry with other and realized she was not responsible to tell other what was right and wrong. By being aware of the extent of her responsibility, C could let go of the need to be responsible for other. As the self experienced a sense of exhaustion, the need to let go of anger and the dominance of such need prevailed. Obviously, anger consumed energy and caused exhaustion, a process that encouraged C to wash her hands of other, to let go of her sense of responsibility for the sake of other’s well-being.

C, who did not believe that she could bring about forgiveness, had discovered it through a natural course or process. In C’s case, by not making forgiveness her goal and by dealing with her anger, forgiveness unfolded itself. However, if C had made forgiveness her goal, she might not have discovered it. Currently, C is freed from anger, and a sense of emotional freedom prevails. Appreciating the importance of the future, C looks forward to building a new life with optimism. Since C was consumed with loss and grief, forgiveness did not materialize instantaneously. The break in C’s relationship with other meant the loss of closeness and a meaningful relationship. Forgiveness, being a process, could only materialize after C had allowed herself to experience the loss and grief as part of a natural human response.

With the passage of time, C was able to differentiate the relationship from the issue and this gave way to her appreciation of their relationship, regardless of the anger of other. Even though the nature of C’s relationship with other fluctuated, C was no longer worried about it and accepted the inconsistency of other, as well as the nature of their relationship. Recognizing that the anger of other had nothing to do with her, C disconnected herself from such anger. By having the ability to separate
self from the issue of other, C became sensible and subsequently regained her sense of self.

For C, the meaning of forgiveness was based on a book that she had read. For C, forgiveness was not about a power issue; it meant to let go of power to give or withhold it. For forgiveness to materialize, C had to let go of her anger. Such a process was consistent with C's belief that she could not bring about forgiveness; she could not make it happen. Rather, she discovered it by going through the processes of grieving and forgiveness.

For C, relationships are a matter of choice. By choosing to maintain her relationship with other, by focusing on the importance of the relationship, forgiveness began to set in. Generally, forgiveness, which is founded on love, a precondition for its evolution, is understood as the reestablishment of relationships or reconciliation. For C, love enables her to value the person above everything else. Certainly, when some criteria are present, C is able to forgive. C believes in the on-going process of accepting one another, which means accepting the personhood of one another.

C believes in making apologies and will not hesitate in admitting that she is wrong. Following the healing of other and self, the two sisters were able to communicate again, to reconcile with and value one another and the relationship. It was the healing on both sides that gave the opportunity for forgiveness to find its way into self. Before forgiveness, C had to protect and separate herself and her family in order to avoid the anger of other. Apart from physical separation, a psychological separation was necessary to protect C and her family from being affected by the anger of other. Certainly, self in relation to other or other in relation to self was highly valued. In going through the healing process, C let go of her grief over the loss of her close and meaningful relationship with other. Coming to terms with the loss of the close and meaningful relationship was imperative for the discovery of forgiveness. C believes that as they grow older, there might be ways whereby she and other could have a better relationship. Certainly, the nature and meaning of either this closeness or the relationship will change as they mature. Despite whatever change that will be encountered, the sense of closeness, the meaning of closeness will be maintained. Realizing that she and other did not have to blame one another anymore, C stopped blaming her for the loss of their closeness and meaningful relationship, a precondition for experiencing the process of grieving. Essentially, self, other, and the rest of the family members had grown out of the experience. On C's part, understanding what other had gone through was one of the factors that had given way to forgiveness. Being hurt by what happened, C had to allow herself to go through the grieving process, to grieve over what was experienced in togetherness in the past, and to recover her sense of self. For C, one of the ingredients of forgiveness was to become aware of the fact that the anger of other had nothing to do with her, to acquire the ability to separate self from what other was going through.

Forgiveness had provided C with a sense of freedom, a recovery from grief. Following forgiveness, C no longer personalized the anger of other or the issue; thus, she experienced freedom from all unnecessary worries or rumination, a termination of the outflow of personal energy. Certainly, forgiveness was not only the payoff of grieving but also its closure.
C and other have developed a more normal relationship in terms of an absence of strain or tension and the presence of respect and caution. For C, the little time she and other spend together is considered as quality time, not to be tainted by focusing her energy on the issue with other. By transforming her negative energy to grace for other, by letting go of her emotional issues, and by engaging in the process of recovery, C transcended the violation of the sibling relationship. For C, recovery was a means of piecing together every aspect of self or rebuilding self in order to regain a sense of wholeness. Once the grieving aspect of self was healed, it reconnected with other aspects of self, hence an attainment of a sense of wholeness. As an act of caution, C will never allow herself to be attached to other again in order to maintain her sense of wholeness. While C is independent of other, she is able to conform to an internal need for attachment with her other siblings. While C is differentiated from other, she is able to reach out to her other ablings. In differentiating self from other, C acquired a new and healthy concept of self, which, in turn, paved the way for the unfolding of other possibilities, such as new and meaningful relationships. So, the failure experienced in one significant, close, and meaningful relationship became the foundation for success in other relationships. For C, forgiveness meant that she could let go of other and that other could be herself. Without trying to change other, without aspiring to control other, C avoided imposing any needs or values on other. Generally, C believes that grieving, as a way of experiencing loss and as a prerequisite to coming to terms with loss, is essential to one’s well-being or to building a new life. For C, the grieving process was a transition for self to move on to a new phase of life without losing sight of the previous experience. For C, forgiveness was the acceptance of reality, an acceptance of what happened between self and other and, ultimately, an acceptance of the change in self, other, and their relationship.

The issue between self and other seemed overwhelming when C constantly dwelled on it, a process that illuminated the power of the mind in terms of encouraging the issue to be blown out of proportion or out of its realistic boundaries. For C, forgiveness was a matter of decision, a matter of choosing to let go of the issue or to not allow it to be overwhelming to self. In C’s case, she discovered forgiveness following her decision to forgive other. On the contrary, C would not have discovered forgiveness if she had not decided to forgive other. While the decision to forgive was not forgiveness in itself, such decision had left the door open to the possibility of forgiveness or the possibility of the discovery of forgiveness. The movement from one dimension to another occurred gradually and temporally. Certainly, there was a close relationship between letting go of the issue and the discovery of forgiveness. For C, certain relationships do not deserve reconciliation, a condition that denies the need for forgiveness. Reconciling to the relationship did not necessitate the acceptance of the issue or what transpired between self and other, but rather the evolution of forgiveness. Reconciliation, as a means of moving into the future, does not have to be verbalized in order to have its effect on another. By recognizing that her issue with other was not important anymore, C began to illuminate the significance of their relationship. By focusing on the issue, C would not only ruin her relationship with other, but also her life. By allowing herself to be preoccupied with the issue, C could have lost sight of what was important, that is, the relationship itself.
Being emotionally and deeply wounded by the loss of the close and meaningful relationship with other, C took time to experience the healing process. For C, even forgiveness could not restore her relationship with other to its previous nature in terms of its context, structure, and substance. Even forgiveness could not restore the relationship to the previous psychological level. The inability to revive the essence of their relationship had generated a sense of helplessness in self. Realizing that there were other issues that were more important than her issue with other, C aspired to continue her relationship. C believes that she and other could learn from their experience and, subsequently, to integrate it into their lives. By making the best of their experience and the integration of the meaning of the experience, life would be more meaningful to both self and other. For C, the discovery of forgiveness, which came as a surprise, made her feel good on the inside. After wasting much time and energy over her issue with other, C’s life is now characterized by enjoyment, freedom, and happiness.

C believes that human beings are responsible for creating the blessings in their lives. Essentially, the blessings of life are a procreation of the mental and emotional attitude of human beings. Being a religious person, C’s view toward life is greatly shaped by her faith. C believes that life is about decision making and that one can choose to make life worthwhile, to live life fruitfully or positively. Before forgiveness, C’s preoccupation with the issue hindered her from appreciating the beauty of nature. Before forgiveness, C experienced disharmony and unhappiness. However, these psychological states were superseded by harmony and happiness, which made it easier for her to appreciate the beauty of nature, the beauty of human life.

C believes that one must be willing to go through the healing process and, as a result of such belief, permitted self to go through it. Accordingly, C felt good about her experience with the healing process, with her endurance. Indeed, the violation of the relationship was experienced as an injury to self. For C, even a physical wound needs to heal naturally, a reflection of a similar process for a psychological wound. Without going through this healing process, forgiveness would not have been discovered and experienced. Certainly, the emotional injury was the most difficult aspect of self to heal, since one could not tamper with the process of healing.

By not earnestly focusing on the issue and by insisting on its insignificance, forgiveness materialized in the light of C’s awareness with regard to her need to forgive other. At the same time, self must be freed from its guardedness in order for forgiveness to evolve. In being conscious of her decision to forgive other, C had control over the decision-making. While C had control over such decision, she had no control over the entire process of forgiveness or the evolution of forgiveness. C believes that forgiveness is not a lesson to be taught. Instead, forgiveness, in terms of both knowledge and experience, can materialize when one is willing to forgive. While forgiveness can be imparted in the form of knowledge, one has to experience the process of forgiveness to discover its explicit and implicit meaning. In choosing life as her philosophy, C was able to accept other with her weaknesses. In an effort to remain healthy, it was necessary for C to maintain some psychological distance from other. For C, to be in this mode of survival meant that she could live up to her philosophy. Today, C and other celebrate most of the holidays together. In the midst
of her contentment with her present relationship with other, C is able to recognize that self, other, and others are fallible. It was this recognition of fallibility or imperfection that necessitated forgiveness toward self and other. The ability to forgive others or other would be a reflection of the ability to forgive self. However, being aware of the fact that humans are fallible, still C has a high expectation of those who are important in her life.

For C, both the processes of healing and forgiveness were time-consuming; both processes involved some amount of struggle within self and other. Now, C felt settled and could express her standpoint to other. Unmoved by the challenge from other, C could express her views honestly. As a result of the outcome of her honest expression, C experienced a good feeling. In accepting the challenge from other without feeling upset, self, in relation to other, had stood a firm ground. Simultaneously, C also struggled with the grieving process, which, in the absence of any smoothness, was likened to an emotional agitation.

Being merely being responsible for the decision to forgive other, C exercises caution in stating that she had given forgiveness. To say that C had forgiven other would be to claim that she was responsible for the process of forgiveness or bringing about forgiveness per se. In acknowledging that her human capacity was limited, C could not take on the responsibility for the evolution of forgiveness. C likened the process of healing to the process of forgiveness in terms of not controlling it or not thinking of the product of such process. Instead, C had allowed herself to immerse in the process without being conscious of the attainment of a product. While C could not bring about her healing, her participation in such a process was defined by her inclination toward it. Since the inclination toward healing was embedded within her system, to a certain extent, by following some essential procedures, healing and, thereafter, forgiveness materialized. Obviously, while C did not directly materialize healing or forgiveness, her direct participation in the process had facilitated it. Essentially, accurate judgment of the issues or situations and the willingness to allow others to be imperfect humans are factors that would facilitate the evolution of interpersonal forgiveness. To accept the imperfections of others is to accept the imperfections of self and, ultimately, to accept the fact that life is not perfect. C believes in acknowledging an offense in the presence of another or in a heart-to-heart talk with another. Certainly, a heart-to-heart talk would symbolize care and concern. Interpersonal forgiveness, once materialized, can be either verbalized or not verbalized. Since forgiveness was experienced as a process, the willingness to await its evolution or patience was a necessity. For C, it was worthwhile to let go of the issue, since it consumed much of her psychic energy, both mentally and emotionally. In forgiving, C replenished her depleting psychic energy. For C, age is reckoned as a factor that has changed her perspectives toward things and the world. Simultaneously, age is also a factor that underlies C’s acquisition of the ability to put things in their proper perspectives. In C’s case, maturity, which was attributed to age, had opened up the possibility of the discovery of forgiveness. For C, forgiveness was not experienced as a moment but rather as a long process that entailed her willingness and endurance. While forgiveness had crystallized through its own process, the process itself had solidified the forgiveness.
By accurately assessing the situation, C experienced a change in her feelings. As one goes through each phase of a relationship, certain things might gain or lose their significance. Developmentally, as C and other progress from one phase to another in their relationship, certain values change.

Since C's anger, resentment, and grief had consumed so much of her energy, the process of forgiveness was a means of releasing these emotions, of freeing self from the tremendous emotional energy. C expresses her existential understanding with regard to fear and grief that surrounds death. For C, fear surrounded her forgiveness in terms of parting with the familiar past and accepting the present situation. Having lost her sense of familiarity, still C was open to other possibilities or to unfamiliarity. Admittedly, C did not hate other. By hating and by not forgiving other, C would still be connected to other and the issue. By hating and maintaining a nonforgiving attitude, C would be experiencing the past, reliving its significant historical details. In a way, the discovery of forgiveness had encouraged C to maintain an emotional detachment from other in order to experience serenity. As C acquired a new perspective on self and other, all blaming stopped and empathy prevailed. In realizing that other was no longer the focus of her love, C experienced a shift in the meaning of her relationship with other, which signified a shift in the psychological position between self and other. Even though C and other are not as close as before, C makes room for the possibility of their closeness in future, which indicates that the sibling relationship will never be broken.

Following forgiveness, C became more relaxed and experienced a psychic peace. For C, anger and a nonforgiving attitude not only would consume more energy but also would generate a physiological reaction toward other and the situation, thus indicating that other and the situation had affected self in various ways. While losing interest in the issue or not harping on the issue was equated with the presence of forgiveness, it did not mean that the memory of the issue would not persist through time. Since forgiveness was a means of controlling situations or self in particular, C felt good about experiencing it. Admittedly, C could not afford to waste her time over unnecessary anxiety and suffering, a psychological experience to be deterred by C's willingness to take control of situations or of self. For C, it would be easier to forgive than not to forgive, a task that depicts the possibility of human beings growing into forgiveness. Time was an important factor, be it for healing and forgiveness to take place, or for self to enter the process of forgiveness, which is considered as another phase of a natural development. For C, another factor that helped to facilitate forgiveness is that she has had a very rich life or a deep appreciation and love of life. No longer wounded by what happened, C believed that forgiveness was a means of remedying it. As C's wound faded away, forgiveness crystallized and solidified, which ultimately contributed to a healthy life. From C's point of view, there is no doubt that it is healthy to be a forgiving person.
Co-researcher 5

Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

For C, interpersonal forgiveness evolved from the experience of the violation of a relationship between himself and a significant other, his father. C's parents were divorced when he was about 13 years old. When C's mother remarried, other moved in with C and his two siblings. Subsequently, other met a young woman who later moved into their home, a situation unwelcome by C and the other siblings. Since C and the other siblings were skeptical about the woman's motive toward other, they resisted such relationship. However, other married the woman, despite being warned about her sexual motive instead of true love. As there were attempts by the woman to separate other from his children, the latter never felt welcome in the house; hence, there was a strain and a break in their close relationship. C, being the oldest in the family, was mostly hit by the whole situation. As expected, things did not work out for the newlywed couple, and divorce ensued after 6 months of marriage. While C had wished that other and his ex-wife would get a divorce, when it materialized, C felt guilty about having such a wish, especially after he saw how it affected other. When other sought out C's help, the latter stood by him throughout the divorce process. For C, the whole experience, considered as emotionally challenging, had personal significance or meaning for him. Indeed, C's relationship with other was seriously injured to the point of rejecting one another, which led to a psychological separation and a contamination of their love and care. For C, it was painful to go through the entire experience and particularly the psychological separation from other.

From C's perspective, forgiveness involves a situation where one person perceives that someone has committed a wrongdoing against him or her and has the ability to reconcile his or her feelings to the offender and the issue. Since forgiveness involved many interrelated factors, it could not be considered as an isolated experience; thus, it was impossible to look at one factor without considering the other. Being aware of all the dynamics involved in the experience, C described forgiveness as thorough and justified. Certainly, interpersonal forgiveness was experienced as a long process, thus negating the notion of instantaneous forgiveness. As the feeling of being unsettled with forgiveness still prevailed, C kept on questioning or doubting its justification, its clear-cut or concrete nature. Triggered by the belief that there was more to forgiveness, the self was constantly concerned with its substance and quality, with its justification. For C, certain criteria must be met before he could forgive other; one of these involved the offender explaining the rational for the wrongdoing.

Forgiveness not only enabled C to come to terms with himself, but also to be at peace with the injustice or wrongdoing. As the self reconciled, inner harmony was experienced. The materialization of forgiveness entailed the understanding of the motives of the offense and the analysis of the offender. Even though through his actions and gestures C had forgiven his father, he could not forget the experience. C was doubtful not only of the purposefulness of the wrongdoing, but also the position of other in the situation, an indication of the possibility that he did not commit it.
intentionally. Indeed, C was reluctant to quickly blame or implicate other, which implied the difficulty in believing that he might be capable of such wrongdoing, hence, an exemplification of rationalization. If this were the case, then being in the position to forgive other was not comfortable to C in terms of its selfishness, his undeserving right to do so. Being concerned with the virtuous quality of forgiveness, C was constantly evaluating himself in relation to other and the situation.

Partly, forgiveness was attributed to C’s identification, analysis, and justification of his feelings with regard to the wrongdoing, a process that demonstrated their intertwinement. By going through such process, C was able to differentiate between what and how he felt, a factor imperative to the justification, to the validation of feelings. Indeed, C had interpreted the wrongdoing and analyzed the offender in his effort to understand the issue, to come to terms with it. Communication with other, considered as the most basic element, was necessary in an attempt to understand the entire experience, to come to terms with it. Due to the presence of strong emotions within self, it was difficult for C to gain an accurate understanding of the experience. Certainly, in the process of forgiving, C had to deal with his emotions. For C, his real intentions were conveyed to other through his actions rather than words. With the passage of time, the issue is no longer salient and there is peace with self now. C felt that he and other had found some stability, similar to what they had prior to the experience of the violation. Being pleased with such stability, C was overcome with nostalgia, a longing for the restoration of what he and other had lost between them.

C regretted that other, who claimed that he had learned from the situation, did not previously choose to listen to the children. C and the other siblings were concerned about the unsociability, selfishness, and shadiness of the woman whom other was about to marry. The fact that other had put the woman with a poor character above the interest of his children was agonizing and absurd to C. With the presence of intense animosity between C and the woman, the former was blamed for creating problems. While C had hoped that other and his wife would break up their marriage vows, he felt guilty about having such intention. As the situation was becoming destructive to C’s well-being, he removed himself physically and emotionally from the couple. Indeed, C became remorseful when other changed his view about having the children at home, which was suggestive of a change of value with regard to an emotional attachment with them.

Before forgiveness could materialize, C had to reconnect with his emotions, feel the pain, and analyze self in relation to his emotions and to other. The experience of the violation was considered as a diversion in C’s relationship with other. The fact that C had not forgiven his parents for divorcing had its impact on other’s second marriage and divorce in terms of intensifying C’s frustration, a psychological state that must be recognized and dealt with. From C’s perspective, other kept on making unnecessary mistakes and caused a lot of pain to him in particular. C was inclined to speak in very convoluted terms, an indication of the intricacies of his emotions in the sense that one emotion led to another.

After forgiving other, C had made some comments to him. However, C, who considered these comments as not justifying his forgiveness, was not pleased about
doing so. C is still reflecting on his experience with other, a process that might have stemmed from his frustration. For C, it is disturbing to know that he is being controlled by this psychological state, which seems to linger within self. Certainly, it took subsequent events to solidify forgiveness. While it is not pleasant to deal with the consequences of the experience of the violation, C and other are in the process of dealing with them now. Being ambivalent about his need to control other individuals, C differentiated the need to control from the need to influence. While C felt guilty about having such inclination, he justified the need to influence as his care for other individuals. In the midst of experiencing such guilt, it might have facilitated C’s inclination to forgive other. C, who was partly to be blamed for trying to influence other, interpreted such attempt as a kind of selfishness, which escalated his sense of guilt. Before forgiveness materialized, C had to assess the following: his actions, the actions of other, his feeling of hurt, and other’s feeling of hurt. Although C had treated other badly, he sensed that he had been forgiven. By admitting his responsibility, other helped to facilitate C’s forgiveness, a situation that generated satisfaction and a peace of mind to the latter. Obviously, there was a mutual exchange of forgiveness between C and other, an indication that both were responsible for what happened. For the sake of attaining a sense of peace, C indulged in self-exploration, a process that called for the consideration of forgiveness from all sides: self to other, other to self, and self to self. Obviously, the need to forgive self seemed to be the foundation for and acceptance of other kinds of forgiveness that is from self to other or other to self.

When other and his ex-wife divorced, C felt that he had been vindicated; thus, his thoughts and actions were justified. Apart from the necessity to mutually verbalize the acknowledgment of responsibility, C and other should continue to reinforce the moral lessons from their experience. Being concerned with true forgiveness, C is always questioning the quality of his forgiveness, a process that implies the difficulty in arriving at true and solid forgiveness or in finalizing forgiveness. Indeed, by virtue of C’s evaluation of self in relation to other, the quality or meaning of his forgiveness keeps on changing. Being aware of the physical quality of forgiveness, such an act was not a one-time event. The fact that other had disregarded his children’s welfare and happiness indicated his irresponsibility, a factor that hurt C.

For C, the process of forgiveness began by the offender acknowledging the wrongdoing, whereupon the offended person would respond, an opportunity for the latter to express himself. The process of acknowledging the wrongdoing on the part of other, considered an attempt to rectify it, not only encouraged C to admit his own mistakes, but also released his hurt. C had to go back and forth in the process of understanding what each person had committed and experienced, an indication of seeking fairness. Over time, by witnessing the response of other, C regained the trust and confidence in him, which then helped to solidify the forgiveness. While C had forgiven other, still he questions the conclusive nature of his forgiveness. Somewhere within C there is an element of skepticism with regard to other, which implied that forgiveness would be complete or whole if the latter would not repeat his mistakes in the future. Since there is an inclination to go back to the attitude of not forgiving other, reassurance from him was essential in the process of solidifying forgiveness.
Following the incident with other, C, who believed that it would not be healthy to block his emotions, learned to do so in an attempt to avoid unnecessary situations whereby he needed to forgive others and protect himself from emotional pain. The experience had tremendously affected C emotionally or psychologically in terms of raising his fear about being hurt again. Being overwhelmed by the incident, considered a learning experience, C transformed his psychological make-up as a form of self-protection. For C, the process of forgiveness was lived with discomfort, which might be an attribution of his internalization of and experience with emotional pain.

While forgiving other had been in C’s subconscious until the question was raised, he felt ambivalent about it. C, who strived for a clearly defined or concrete forgiveness, described his experience of interpersonal forgiveness as one of numbness. Apart from being aware that things were improving, C was in touch with what was going on within him. Prior to forgiveness, C experienced anger and frustration toward other and blamed the latter for what had transpired. Being concerned with the clear presence of forgiveness, C claimed that he had never thought of the idea of forgiving other. For C, the idea just did not come up because of his preoccupation with a tug of war inside of him. C moved back and forth between self and other in an attempt to comprehend and justify the need to blame the latter, the frustration, and anger, a process that signified his sense of responsibility. Certainly, before forgiveness could materialize, it was necessary to deal with his other emotions and the need to blame other.

Forgiveness, being a healing process, required reconciliation between the self and the issue. Such reconciliation or coming to terms with the issue, considered as a difficult task, was synonymous with the process of healing. In an effort to justify self, other, and the situation, both individuals must engage in a dialogue as part of the process of forgiveness. Indeed, the dialogue was reckoned as a point of closure in the process of forgiveness, which seemed too lengthy. The characterization of forgiveness in terms of its presence and nonpresence or the absence of its distinct entity became a concern for C, who desired to capture its strong or convincing presence.

In realizing that other was hurting, C became emotionally distraught, a condition that opened up the possibility of empathizing with other, of conveying much care and love to him. In the midst of utilizing the opportunity to verbally blame other for what happened, C could feel the emotional attachment, similar to the one that existed before. Even in the most difficult moment, the emotional attachment between C and other had never been broken. Indeed, C and other had experienced difficulty in expressing their emotions; however, the presence of the emotional attachment had generated a sense of relief within self. C’s ability to communicate better with other and vice versa indicated that both were making efforts to reconcile to the situation.

With his pride in the way, C did not want to acknowledge the perspective of other, that is, he had learned some lessons from this particular experience. No doubt forgiving other was difficult, yet it almost seemed a natural thing to do, a task that produced a great deal of satisfaction, contentment, and comfort within self. It was hurtful to see what other had experienced following his divorce, a situation
unpredicted by C. Triggered by a realization that he had played a major role in the situation, C experienced guilt and shame for what he had done. While other had stressed that his problem and subsequent divorce had nothing to do with C, the latter was upset with his input. Somehow, C was not convinced with the confirmation from other, with the absence of blame, an indication that he was as equally guilty as other and his ex-wife. Spurred by the intense guilt toward other, C perceived that the latter was blaming him for the situation. In feeling guilty and remorseful about his interference with other’s relationship with his ex-wife, C learned to humble himself before other and, therefore, to offer his forgiveness. In forgiving other, C was projecting his own need of forgiveness, of the significance of clearing his conscience. As a consequence of his self-reflection, C believed that he might need forgiveness from other instead of the reverse. Such belief indicated that C still needed to overcome his feelings of guilt and shame about his selfishness and nasty thoughts with respect to other and his ex-wife. On the basis of these feelings, other deserved to be forgiven. In considering himself as a person with morality, C felt the need to compensate for his own wrongdoing through forgiveness.

The process of forgiveness, described as energy consuming, was complicated and unorganized or messy. C, who had experienced interpersonal forgiveness subconsciously, qualified it through subsequent positive encounters with other. Reconciliation with self, other, and the issue, being the salient element of forgiveness, had entailed C going through the mental, emotional, and spiritual struggle. The incident, described as devastating, had caused intense anger and frustration within self. For C, the disorganization and subconscious nature of the process of forgiveness tended to undervalue the quality of forgiveness. While C really values forgiveness now, he is reluctant to be in a position where he has to offer it to others, an indication that he is uncomfortable with it.

C needed to clear his conscience, a process that necessitated that he come to terms with self. In trying to live up to his moral standards, C could not tolerate the idea that he might have inflicted discomfort or pain on other, or that other was dissatisfied with him. By virtue of the significant nature of the relationship, C would take great efforts to reconcile to the problem and subsequently reestablish the relationship. Indeed, C’s interaction with other had taken a positive turn in terms of bringing them closer. Even though C’s issue with other was a sad chapter in his life, the former had unexpectedly grown from the experience of the violation. While C is no longer obsessed with the issue, the memories will always stay with him.

Even though C and other are closer now, they still maintain a professional and distant relationship. C is less critical toward other and prefers to distant himself in order not to be emotionally attached to him. While being conscious of his deep love and care for other, C prefers not to be emotional or to easily blow things out of proportion. In an effort not to cross the boundary, C now chooses to be an observer instead of a full participant. For fear of unnecessarily stepping on other, C is always checking himself in relation to other, mindful of the way he relates with him.

From C’s perspective, a forgiving person will take into consideration the feelings of others, an indication of unselfishness. However, in C’s case, forgiveness could be selfish in terms of not informing other that he had been forgiven. For
forgiveness to have its desired effect, other needed to know about its presence, which was an opportunity to stir certain reactions on both sides.

Before forgiveness materialized, the problem had to be rectified. Such rectification, which was necessary for reconciliation with other, might be in the form of admitting wrongdoing, being remorseful of wrongdoing, attempting not to repeat the wrongdoing, and improving one's attitude. Other needed to understand how the problem was created in an attempt to rectify it. Understanding the problem meant learning about the problem, self, and other, which in turn led to insights. From C's perspective, there is improvement in his relationship with other in terms of being more understanding of one another now. While reconciliation with the problem had taken a considerable amount of time, there was give and take between C and other, an indication of flexibility.

Indeed, it took a long time for C to come to the decision to forgive other. While C could live with the mistakes made by other, he had chosen not to continue to jeopardize the father-son relationship. Forgiveness became meaningful when everyone who was significantly and directly related to the issue participated in the process of reconciliation. From C's point of view, the more extensive the experience, the more meaningful the forgiveness.

It was C's pride that discouraged him from verbalizing his forgiveness to other. While not verbalizing the forgiveness was considered as selfish, C regarded the mental process of forgiving other or of reconciling to the actions of other as unselfish. As part of C's attempt to justify self, the willingness to consider the actions of other in the first place was not selfish. For C, forgiveness was manifested through his willingness to communicate with other and the nature of the communication itself. By himself, C tried to make an evaluation or judgment about the whole situation, a process that he reckoned as the essence of forgiveness.

If C had verbalized his forgiveness to other, it would have been for the fulfillment of an inner request within self. In an effort to avoid this situation for the sake of unselfishness and fairness, C had expressed his forgiveness indirectly through his actions. From C's perspective, a critical situation might call for a more extreme nature of forgiveness, an indication of the various levels of forgiveness, running from mild to extreme. Part of the complexity of forgiving other was attributed to C's need to express his hurt and frustration, which in turn would help to set boundaries between them. Having gone through the ordeal, C is in a better position to offer forgiveness in the future. Self-reflection, considered as a major element of forgiveness, was much appreciated by C, a process that opened up other insights, other possibilities. Through self-reflection, C learned about the meaning of endurance and true love. Despite having experienced the difficulty in arriving at the decision to forgive other, C is more convinced with the quality of his forgiveness. C was relieved when other acknowledged his implied forgiveness. Since in one way or another, C's implied forgiveness was triggered by his guilt, there was a sense of relief when other acknowledged it.

While C was aware of his role in forgiving other, he was in need of other's forgiveness, a situation that raised some degree of confusion within self in terms of
the priority of forgiving either from self to other or other to self. Instead of being emotional, C chose to rationalize and therefore justify his forgiveness to other through his actions. Following his attainment of some insights into the situation and the forgiveness process, C questioned his position to forgive other, an implication of his confusion or self-doubt. Triggered by guilt, C was bothered by the fact that he was concerned with what other had done to him instead of what he did to other, an indication of a misplaced priority. Somehow, C found it difficult to convince himself that he had done the right thing with regard to other and his ex-wife, a situation that forced him to constantly replay the events, the role of self, and other in his mind. Due to the alleviation of his emotions, C gained the ability to objectively appraise the situation. Partially, C's emotions had caused much of the complexity, and without some of these in the way, his forgiveness toward other became more pronounced. In an effort to preserve his integrity and emotional stability, C became concerned with the well-being of other, which necessitated the evaluation of his misplaced priority.

While C had manipulated other in response to the manipulation of the woman, he was concerned with the inability or insensitivity of other to detect any manipulations. Indeed, C had capitalized on other's insensitivity or weakness to his advantage. Triggered by his guilt and the understanding of the personal quality of other, empathy and sympathy emerged. For C, forgiveness had not been his main focus. In an attempt to counteract his judgmental and vindictive nature that seemed to disqualify the forgiveness, C had to constantly remind self that he had forgiven other.

Currently, besides peace, coldness exists between C and other, an indication that both need to work toward the revival of warmth between them. For both, their coldness, which implies the fear of stepping on a wrong footing, is a means of self-protection. Since the relationship with other has reached its plateau, C feels more stable and secure with it. While the affection for other is not lost, for fear of being hurt again, for fear of losing his sense of comfort or emotional stability, C is reluctant to resume their close engagement in terms of not being too emotionally attached to him. While C understood the life history and emotional needs of other, he was frustrated with his lifestyle. By coming to Western, C found inner peace, which was considered as a symbol of his forgiveness. Describing himself as being more objective and in control of himself, C still has to deal with the after effect of the experience of the violation. Since C feels ambivalent about being at home; he keeps moving back and forth with the idea of coming home. Being concerned about other not having a sense of peace and a goal in life, and in an effort to compensate for what he had done, C believes that he has to be a pillar of strength for him.

Following his forgiveness, C began to appreciate the physical expression such as kissing on the cheek and hugging with other, the gestures that he was not comfortable with before. To a certain extent, C wants to keep track with what goes on in other's life, which is a reflection of his care and concern for him. By allowing his feelings to build up inside of him, it would be possible for C to be revengeful toward other, a situation he tried to counteract. The experience with other, described as critical, had impacted C in many ways, one of which revolved around the inhibition of the natural development of warmth within self, a factor that greatly concerned him. C, who is constantly reminding himself that other might repeat his mistakes, is
ambivalent about having this warmth. While C is aware of the fact that the absence of this quality might affect his relationships with others, he is afraid of its presence and losing it again. As C could not tolerate the idea of experiencing a break in his relationship with other, he learned to disengage himself from the feeling of warmth toward him, a conditioning that seemed to protect self. At the same time, C is afraid that such conditioning is not about self-protection but rather about losing faith in this realm of feeling, about not being able to have a meaningful relationship with other. In his determination to develop this meaningful relationship, it would be possible to break away from such conditioning, to restore the warmth between them. C tries to keep away from family gatherings in an effort not to remind himself of the past experience or to disturb himself emotionally.

Sporadically, C would go back to his past experience with other, a process that would raise his anger again. Even though C had forgiven other, the anger still lingers within him, which is suggestive of an incomplete resolution of his emotion. Apart from being haunted by the painful memory, it is difficult to let go of anger and the past experience. While living in the past is unhealthy, there is a need to punish other for what he had done to the family. For C, his regret and sadness about the whole issue keeps reappearing through reflection and circumstances concerning the family that are very emotional. The re-experiencing of these feelings indicates that part of self has not come to terms with the issue, an indication of an internal turmoil being locked inside of self, of not fully accepting the incident. Since the acceptance of the incident is a prerequisite to letting go of the issue, it is imperative to truly accept the incident. Upon reflecting his past experience, C’s unhappiness would set in, a psychological state he tries to camouflage through his pretension. Whenever C is exhausted or when his defenses are low, C would be unhappy. For C, his big regret is that the incident should not have occurred in the first place, an indication of the need to undo everything.

C never expected that the experience of interpersonal forgiveness would involve many interrelated psychological thoughts and concepts. Forgiveness, being a process characterized by complex and extensive psychological experience, had unraveled C’s inner turmoil. Certainly, C is disturbed by this extensiveness and, at times, doubts whether he had really forgiven other, a reflection of the inconsistencies between his thoughts and actions. Indeed, through the process of sharing his experience, C discovered the extensiveness of forgiveness and the interplay between the internal dynamics of forgiveness and self: C learned to redefine his meaning of interpersonal forgiveness throughout the process of sharing his experience. As C relived and re-experienced the incident with other, a new definition of interpersonal forgiveness emerged; thus, a change of perception occurred. By virtue of reflection and retrospection, C has become more insightful, more aware of the dynamics of forgiveness and its correlates. Inspired by his self-enhancement, C is inclined to reevaluate his interpersonal forgiveness in an attempt to ascertain its substance, nature, and quality.

With a basic understanding of forgiveness from Sunday school and religious sermons, C affirmed that his experience of forgiveness seemed to have a degree of congruence with such understanding. While his basic understanding had instilled the notion that forgiveness should be conclusive, C’s first-hand experience had proved
the reverse. Following his experience of forgiveness, C was able to distinguish forgiveness in minor experiences from that of major experiences. From C's perspective, even with minor experiences, it would be difficult to arrive at conclusive forgiveness. Obviously, there is still the feeling of unfinished business, the feeling of wanting to tie loose ends. Certainly, there are significant lessons to be learned from the experience of interpersonal forgiveness; one of these is the elimination of unnecessary pressure in terms of striving for perfection and adhering to C's high expectations. Implicitly, in the light of such elimination, the process of forgiveness might not be too tedious.
Co-researcher 6

Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

One of the most traumatic events that C had ever experienced in her life was her parents’ divorce. Inclined toward suicide, her parents had turned to C, who, being the eldest daughter, had no choice but to support and be a pillar of strength for them. From C’s perspective, the violation of the daughter-parent relationship was characterized by mixed emotions, namely, anger and hurt or pain. While C was angry with her parents for the fact that they terminated their marriage and for putting her in a painful, difficult situation, she was very hurt by their actions. Outwardly, C had put up a front for the sake of her parents, yet, underneath the veil of strength, she was a mess and felt helpless. In no time, the divorce had a bad effect on C’s health. Being caught between two significant others, C could no longer hold out and was losing control of the situation. C’s parents tried to work things out, but to no avail. Despite the negative outcome, it was some consolation that her parents tried to save their marriage. Unable to save her parents’ marital bond, C experienced deterioration in her physical health, a situation that might arise from the possibility of the development of serious psychosomatic reactions to the whole event. For C, not being able to fix things for her parents or her inability to resolve the situation might be interpreted as a personal failure. Since the issue was beyond her control, the letting go of the need to take control eased some of C’s emotional burden. C believes that her mom’s pregnancy with her had triggered her parents’ marriage that spanned for 27 years, a historical time to be valued. C regretted that this marriage could not survive beyond this frame of time.

Love, understanding, and faith, being the basis for C’s forgiveness, had enabled her to place herself in her parents’ situations and see their perspectives. Recognizing her need for spiritual support or guidance, C had met with a pastor to talk things over, to help strengthen self. The fact that no one is infallible encouraged C to adjust her expectations. Up to a certain point, there was a need to be in control, but the moment C was able to let go of her need to do so, she was freed from her emotional pressure. In addition, such experiencing came about once C realized that her parents were no longer hurting and that they did not intentionally hurt her. Being happy with her new emotional experience and with the gradual letting go of the need to be in control, C’s forgiveness developed. Realizing that her parents could not live up to her expectations and that they had the right to decide what was best for them, C adjusted her own expectations. Describing herself as fallible and knowing that God had forgiven her, it was C’s turn to forgive her parents. Being in need of forgiveness, C did not regard herself superior to her parents or others. Indeed, by not forgiving, C would have been stuck with her parents’ issue, a situation that would have denied self of a sense of freedom.

For C, it was stressful to be unable to bring about change, a psychological factor that gave way to more disappointment with self. The divorce had put a lot of stress on C’s own marriage in terms of temporarily denying her the ability to conceive. Despite the stress and the overlooking of her own marriage during the trying moments, C’s marriage survived, and her forgiveness materialized gradually.
Realizing that both her parents were at fault, C did not take sides. Over time, as C’s parents regained control over their lives, they survived the trauma. By witnessing her parents’ will to live a new life, C’s perspective changed, which then facilitated her forgiveness. For C, she needed to visit the pastor in order to restore her stability, to come to terms with the issue. Certainly, there was a close connection between C’s stability and her forgiveness. In making the decision that she should not be responsible for her parents’ lives, the unnecessary burden was removed from self.

Recognizing that her dad had not been expressive with her, C was glad that he needed her in order to survive the trauma. Admittedly, the divorce had greatly affected C to the point of experiencing emotional turmoil. Eventually, it was too much for C to handle the situation and depression set in, a psychological condition that she tried to hide from her parents by putting up a façade. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, C’s façade was breaking down.

Since it would be beyond her imagination not to forgive her parents, it was natural for her to forgive them, an ability that had brought about gladness within self. Recognizing that it would not have been her nature to be angry with anyone, C would only be hurting her parents by not forgiving them. C believes in the reciprocal nature of forgiveness and wants to live a meaningful and an enjoyable life. Looking back, C admitted that she was able to offer help to her parents concurrently with the process of forgiveness. With the realization that she did not have to please anyone, C dared to take a stand and voiced her opinion. As C’s anger dissipated, she became more in touch with her love for her parents and was able to arrest her unhealthy need for recognition from them. Encouraged by her belief that what might have worked for her might not have worked for her parents, C wanted the best for them. C’s relationship with her father changed concurrently with the emergence of her forgiveness, which, in turn, gave her the courage to speak her mind. In no time, C’s parents respected her views, which had a positive effect on self in terms of boosting her self-esteem.

For C, it was such a difficult experience that, at times, she did not want to live, yet she had to be strong for her parents, two brothers, and, above all, herself. Metaphorically, like a sponge, C was absorbing everybody’s pain, yet there was a limit to her capacity in absorbing the pain. With her husband by her side, C was not alone and was grateful that he was very supportive of her throughout the ordeal. At least there was one person to whom C could turn for comfort. Looking back, by God’s design, the experience was one that C could handle, resulting in an expression of her deep appreciation for the historical experience that had helped to build her character. By accepting the painful experience and realizing its positive aspects, C’s forgiveness developed further. Since C could not tolerate being revengeful, not forgiving her parents would only hurt self. C had much to lose if she did not forgive her parents; hence, forgiveness was described as a turning point in her life, a symbol of her deep unconditional love for them. For C, it was not worthwhile to hold on to bitterness. Partly, C’s health conditions were responsible in changing her perspectives toward life, opening up the possibility of everything being more meaningful, transforming her into a more forgiving person.

For C, forgiveness was a means of letting go of any grudges against her parents. Philosophically, C had loved her parents for who they were back then, the
unconditional love that had inspired self to forgive them. Admittedly, it was difficult for C to love and forgive her parents unconditionally, yet she succeeded in materializing such unconditional love and forgiveness. Being aware of the pain, bitterness, anger, and disappointment toward her parents, C questioned the values instilled by them, who, in her eyes, did not live up to such values. To C, her parents had failed her, a factor that raised her doubts about her respect for them. Certainly, it was quite difficult for C to accept the change in her parents’ lives.

Looking back, there were times when C did not feel that she had experienced unconditional love from her parents. It meant a lot to C to hear her father voice his love to her, an expression that, up to this point, was never heard. The fact that C’s dad needed her during the bad times implied his love for her, which helped to facilitate the forgiveness.

One of the difficulties in forgiving her parents was the presence of C’s pride, a psychological state that must be overcome before forgiveness could actualize. As a form of emotional security, C had held on to her pride, which was wounded the moment her parents divorced. Seemingly, in forgiving her parents, C might have lost her self-respect, yet, in reality, she had regained more self-respect through forgiveness. Even though it had taken C a long time to forgive her parents, the divorce and the experience with forgiveness had helped her to grow into a better person. While recognizing that certain things were not within her parents’ power to control, just knowing that they had tried their best to make things work had given way to her ability to forgive them. C’s own stability was being affected by her parents’ stability, which, in turn, facilitated her forgiveness. Once C regained her own stability, she was able to analyze the situation and the role of everyone involved, which then made it necessary and timely to let go of the issue, to set the boundaries, and to live her life. Obviously, forgiveness was a threshold of a new life that opened up many unknown possibilities. Up to a certain point, C deserved to be angry and had the right not to forgive her parents. Turning to God, C prayed for the ability to forgive them, an indication that forgiveness was a great struggle, an overwhelming scenario. Again turning to God, C prayed for her parents’ stability and happiness. Eventually, by letting go of the idea of wanting her parents to reconcile, forgiveness materialized.

By counting her blessings, C began to look at the bigger picture in an attempt not to focus only on the negative qualities, but also to appreciate the fact that her parents had their positive points. Partly, forgiveness would not have been possible without C’s supportive husband, who had helped her to unwind. Indeed, C had matured with the experience of interpersonal forgiveness.

Regrettably, by taking in everybody’s pain, and instead of letting go of it sooner, C thought that she could make everybody happy. In reality, C’s actions only aggravated the situation to the point that she could no longer absorb the pain. Following her experience with this gnawing pain, C had no option but to terminate the continuous absorption of such pain. While holding on to her pain, before relieving it, C lost her zest for life. However, once C let go of this pain, she was more in control of her life. The longer C held on to her pain, the more difficult it was to forgive her parents. With the realization that there should be a balance between her
ups and downs, C's life has become more meaningful. Admittedly, C was responsible for her pain in terms of allowing everybody to lean on her. In helping her parents, C was fulfilling her unmet needs, which was considered as her unhealthy input to the issue. To a certain point, C could not blame anyone, as self was equally guilty as her significant others. By forgiving her parents, C was able to live her life and restore her identity.

C's willingness to forgive and the forgiveness itself had materialized through her prayers. Without the willingness to do so, without seeking God's help, it would be almost impossible to forgive. Besides her own need and will to forgive her parents, C felt that God had guided her to do so. In recognizing that her parents did not mean to hurt her and in appreciating their innocence, C could not take the issue personally.

Not wanting to waste her life away by being depressed with the whole issue, C chose to forgive her parents. Indeed, C was pleased with her ability to forgive them, a unique way of coming out of her depression, which opened up the possibility of experiencing happiness, contentment, and joy. Before forgiving, C was consumed with bitterness and anger, which denied her of happiness or of her ability to appreciate life, which at that point became meaningless. For C, a change of attitude could come about only after she had accepted her fate. One of the outcomes of C's experience was that she had earned her deserving respect from her parents, a factor that helped to solidify or justify forgiveness. C made a decision to build her life again, to not put her life on hold any longer. For C, it helps to have a goal in life.

Following her forgiveness, C felt much sympathy and pity toward her parents. For C, it was important to have a separate identity and not to repeat the mistakes made by her parents. Since her parents were victims of their own innocence and follies, their failure became the basis for C's success. C felt good in doing the right thing, in forgiving her parents, an experience that brought about a sense of pride within self. Through her forgiveness, C unveiled her warmth toward her parents. Although C's parents are still leaning on her, she is in control of her life now, which signifies her personal strength. Prior to forgiving, C, being immensely devastated by her parents' divorce, had withdrawn from familiar faces and subsequently allowed self to drown in the sea of depression. As the depression escalated over time, C chose to wallow in self-pity.

Having gone through all kinds of experiences, C looks forward to life now. Admittedly, the entire experience had many positive qualities, one of which concerned C's capability to love and forgive her parents on an unconditional basis. Since the idea of a broken home or disintegrated family was horrifying and embarrassing to C, she became concerned with people's impression of her and her family. Certainly, friendships were uprooted, meaning that there was a loss of familiarity and, therefore, a sense of security. With the historical experience behind her, C believes that she would be in a better position to help others who might be experiencing similar situations. Following the challenge of her strength and other inner qualities, C is determined to endure any future trials. Indeed, the divorce had a negative impact on C, affecting her self-image, her self-esteem. Indeed, C has had many struggles in her life, and each struggle has its own blessings. By forgiving her parents, C had fulfilled her duty to God. Resignation to God's will and destiny was
C’s motto in life, her meaning of existence. To a large extent, faith, being the wellspring of the seeds of humanity, had not only shaped C’s forgiveness but gave her contentment.

As C’s love for her parents prevailed, she did not bear any animosity toward them. As C does not want to have any unresolved issues, forgiveness is becoming part of her lifestyle now. Being freed from any emotional burden, C believes that her parents knew through her gestures that she had forgiven them. C had refrained from telling her parents about her entire ordeal, an indication that she had no intention to hurt them with her disclosure, but rather to allow her love for them to escalate. With the passage of time, C verbalized her forgiveness to her parents.

C, being a firm believer in Christianity, finds that forgiveness is very significant in life. For C, it was difficult to let go of anger, a prerequisite to forgiveness, which, in turn, had given way to better and healthy living for her and her parents. By not forgiving her parents, C felt guilty, a psychological state that she could not live with, which had precipitated the need to clear her conscience, a way to feel good on the inside. For C, forgiveness must come from the heart, a situation made possible following her experience with much internal turmoil. Not wanting to be selfish in terms of forgiving her parents for the sake of self or pleasing self, C had forgiven them on the basis of her love for them, which was a reflection of her love for self. As part of the process of valuing her relationship with her parents, C was able to identify with their fallibility.

There was a concurrent shift of energy within self in terms of the letting go of anger and pain, the evolution of forgiveness, the subsidence of anxiety, and, eventually, the emergence of peace. Since her parents deserved the best in life, forgiveness was C’s best gift to them. In recognizing God as the superior power, the self was inspired to forgive, which then transformed the negative energy to positive energy.

Thinking that she deserved to be upset and angry, which was considered as a natural response to the violation of the relationship, C did not forgive her parents immediately, which was a means of coming to terms with these emotions. Before forgiveness, anger and pain had gripped C to the point of gradually losing touch with her personality. In recognition of a need to stop the anger and pain from growing into her personality, C confronted her emotions, a process that led to the alleviation of pain in particular. By forgiving her parents, C had lived up to her ability, a reason for describing self as a forgiving person. Forgiveness, being a virtue, had materialized through the recognition of each person’s right to his or her identity, a respect for different personalities. Since it was out of character for C to hold on to grudges for too long, forgiveness was the best option.

With her parents’ divorce as a backdrop, C became skeptical and irrational about her own marriage. Being overwhelmed with assumptions, C decided to regain self-control through forgiveness, a process that salvaged her from the feeling of uselessness. In choosing to be inactive, C felt very weak. Prior to forgiving, being predominantly preoccupied with the issue, C experienced a loss of concentration and her work was affected. For C, her pain and depression terminated the pleasure of
sleeping. Following her forgiveness, C catapulted to extreme happiness, and a new sense of self unfolded. Even after C had forgiven her significant others, traces of these emotions lingered. Spurred by the recognition of her limitations and that she was responsible merely for her life, C had taken control of self, which, if denied, might have greatly affected her marriage. As part of C’s appreciation of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness, she is looking forward to learning a great deal about it. Despite its difficulty, it is C’s dream to be able to forgive immediately.
Co-researcher 7

Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness

For C, the violation of trust and relationship was experienced with a significant other, her older stepson, who had wrecked her first new car that she had bought with cash. Certainly, C had a sense of pride in buying her first new car with her own money. C and her husband had allowed other to drive her car to school. For other, there had been a previous accident when he was driving C’s car. Within a couple of months, other was involved in this fateful event, and this time, he totally wrecked the car. Fortunately for other, nobody was hurt or injured. For C, the recurring negligence of other, which implied his unawareness with regard to the significance of the car, upset her. Since the car was beyond repair, C and her husband had to sell it to a junk dealer for a very small sum of money; hence, C experienced a great loss in terms of a significant possession, money, and pride. Naturally, having lost the car, a sense of despair prevailed within self. With no insurance to cover the loss of the car, other had only to pay for the tow.

A day after the accident, C and other talked about the fateful event, whereby she expressed her feeling of hurt with regard to what he had done. As part of her expression, C was glad that no one was injured in the accident and that she valued other. Looking back, C considered the accident as a learning experience. During their conversation, C verbalized her forgiveness to other, a task that was made possible by her instantaneous decision to do so. Despite C’s initial verbalization of forgiveness to other, the thought of him not being responsible kept haunting her, an indication that she needed to come to terms with the whole idea of forgiveness, which, at this point, seemed difficult. Not taking heed from the previous accident, C really regretted allowing other to continue to drive. As such thoughts kept recurring, C had to constantly remind herself that other had been forgiven. Despite the initial forgiveness, it took time for the idea of forgiveness to settle in C’s mind, an indication that forgiving other was difficult. Despite its verbalization, there was an internal struggle within self, a process that delayed the settlement of forgiveness within C’s heart.

At the initial stage of her forgiveness, C struggled with the need to take revenge on or to punish other for what he had done. During this time, C had her doubts about letting other drive her other car, which was an indication of the absence of trust toward him. By not getting the permission to drive, other was paying for his wrongdoing, which was a kind of punishment. For C, such punishment could be considered as part of the process of forgiveness, a factor that might have been in her subconscious, which then led to the solidification of forgiveness. Since it meant a lot to C that other took the matter seriously, she wondered if he really felt sorry for what he had done. While the car was significant to C, other was fortunate because nobody was hurt. C and other had developed and matured through the experience of the violation, a process that had enabled her to be comfortable in letting him drive her other car. Looking back, C was aware that her response to other might have been influenced by some of her negative feelings toward her stepson’s mother. Such awareness helped to facilitate the development of C’s relationship with other and solidify her forgiveness. By understanding the background of other and the lack of
appreciation for other people's property, C could not totally blame him. Since forgiveness was understood in terms of not carrying a grudge, trusting other again, and developing a close relationship, C no longer harped on the issue, despite the fact that the car was a meaningful property. Based on other's history of driving, C came to a conclusion that other did not value or appreciate other people's property. Taking the most recent accident as the last straw, the negligence or irresponsibility of other seemed to challenge C's patience, which almost reached its breaking point.

As C realized that there was no point in being bitter and angry toward other, she decided not to inflate these negative emotions. Indeed, the more C focused on her emotions, the more she inflated them, a process that hindered her from enjoying life. Even though forgiving other was a matter of choice, following her initial decision to do so, C still struggled with the idea of forgiveness. Certainly, faith had played a significant role in terms of not being at peace with God or other people if C did not forgive other. For C, forgiving other, considered as a manifestation of her value, helped to preserve her relationship with God. Since procrastinating forgiveness would not be conducive to C's well-being, it would be better to forgive early. C analyzed the issue and the idea of forgiveness, a task that required deep analysis. While, to a certain extent, C deserved to be angry with other, it was necessary to make the initial decision to forgive him, which served as a constant reminder of her commitment. C could not tolerate the idea of not forgiving other, a psychological state that opened up the possibility of forgiveness. Since the idea of not forgiving other was intolerable, it must be dealt with by seeking God's help.

While it was inevitable not to have negative emotions, particularly the anger toward other, C's willingness and ability to give up her right to or let go of these emotions developed over time. For C, she had the choice of not letting go of these emotions, which would have denied the presence of forgiveness.

By disclosing that C appreciated other more than her wrecked car, by revealing his worthiness and giving him a chance to improve himself, more closeness and acceptance developed, which was a turning point in her relationship with him. For C, the more improvement in other, the more concretized her forgiveness. While the accident had stirred some emotions in C and other, it particularly opened up the possibility of developing positive emotions toward him. Forgiveness, which must come from the heart, not only generated happiness to C but also enabled her to move on. While C extended her forgiveness to other, the latter had to observe boundaries and rules of conduct, a process that benefitted both individuals over time. Implicitly, forgiveness was a form of tenderness, a symbol of care and concern for other.

Being sad and angry that other did not take good care of her car and being concerned about the possibility of an injury or death, it was difficult and uncomfortable for C to deal with her mixed emotions. In the process of forgiving other, C had to pacify her troubling thoughts and overcome her emotions. From C's perspective, forgiving other would have been easier if they had a closer relationship. For genuine forgiveness to materialize, both needed to have an open conversation in the sense of opening up the opportunity for C, in particular, to express her emotions. While there was a need to express her emotions, C struggled with the thought of revealing them to other. Indeed, C was concerned with putting herself in a vulnerable
position if other could not empathize with her. The true and deep repentance of other, which meant a lot to C, was understood as a symbol of care for her and her happiness. From C’s perspective, the true repentance of other was interpreted as his sense of respect for her, not only as a human being, but also as his stepmother. Subconsciously, such true repentance might be one of the contributing factors to the solidification of forgiveness. For C, it was necessary for other to recognize her emotions, such as pain, anger, resentment, and bitterness, which would imply his understanding of her predicament. Rejection from other, which would be defined as a failure to identify with her emotions or apathy, would only hurt C. For C, forgiveness, which served as a closure to the issue, was a means of moving forward with life, thus a sense of freedom from bitterness and anger.

Triggered by her belief that she did not truly own all possessions given by God, C kept reminding herself of the significance of people and relationships in eternity. Being the temporary owner of these possessions, C had to willingly let go of her right to her wrecked car. C’s belief about the significance of people, relationships, and forgiveness had paved the way for her to reach the initial decision to forgive other. From C’s point of view, forgiving other was bound to take place, an unavoidable experience. Following C’s recognition of the significance of resolving the issue for the sake of maintaining harmony in her family, she decided to overcome her feeling of hurt. C tried not to be an emotional person, a quality that helped to concretize the forgiveness. Despite not being an emotional person, C still struggled with her emotions. C was genuinely concerned about the well-being of other in the sense that she could not tolerate seeing him being miserable or feeling guilty in the absence of her forgiveness.

Not taking matters into her own hands, C had resigned the situation to God, who had given her the grace to forgive other. Appreciative of God’s grace, of the divine intervention, C extended her forgiveness to other, thus fulfilling her responsibility. Failure to fulfill such responsibility would mean defiance to the grace of God. From C’s philosophical perspective, it is the nature of a human to be selfish, an indication of the inability to forgive by himself or herself. Through the process of forgiveness, C experienced self-development in terms of the prioritization of her values on humanity, which, in turn, helped to solidify the forgiveness. The experience of interpersonal forgiveness, which could materialize only with God’s help, had reinforced C’s faith.

With the ability to see things more objectively, C is more considerate of other and his feelings now. For C, she took time to really consider what other had gone through, gradually moving from self-centeredness or self-absorption to a genuine consideration of other, which was an indication of genuine forgiveness. With the passage of time, C was convinced that her forgiveness was concrete in its nature. For C, one way to deal with her negative emotions was to express them to other, a task that produced satisfaction to self. While recognizing her right to be angry, C had chosen not to continue to do so. Even if other had chosen not to reconcile, C would not be discouraged from extending her forgiveness, which was a means of clearing her conscience. For C, the experience with other was destined to happen, one of God’s ways to make her a better person. C felt good about her experience of interpersonal forgiveness, which had enhanced her self-esteem. Being at peace with
herself now, C is aware of the significance of overlooking trivial matters. In experiencing forgiveness as a process, C moved from initial forgiveness to concrete forgiveness, a transformation that was made possible by dealing with her negative emotions, which later gave way to the gradual evolution of positive emotions toward other.

In an effort not to encourage her bitterness to grow in its intensity, C chose not to focus on it. From C's perspective, it would be easier to let the bitterness go while it was still at its infancy stage, hence a reflection of the role of the initial forgiveness in curbing it from escalating. While it was not productive to dwell on negative emotions, there was no clean-cut resolution of these emotions in the sense that forgiveness did not wipe them out. Such a process gave way to the notion that it was natural to have the residue of these negative emotions.

Over time, C was able to put herself in the place of other and understand his ordeal, and as her empathy prevailed, forgiveness appeared as a compensation for what he had gone through. Before forgiveness, C was torn between self-centeredness and her concern for other, a situation that caused ambivalence within self, which then made it difficult to forgive. Certainly, it was necessary to overcome self-centeredness in order to forgive and to extend care and concern to other. While C had forgiven other on the basis of her care and concern for him, unwittingly, it was also a reflection of her care and concern for self. In believing that God had wanted her to learn a valuable lesson, in resigning to destiny, C regretted being too concerned with her possessions in the past. With such consciousness, C respects other and wants the best for him now. Triggered by her new perspective in terms of valuing humanity more than things or possessions, C is more forgiving now.

While C would have been devoid of happiness if she did not forgive other, such an act helped to release her bitterness toward him. Before forgiveness, C, who was experiencing much anger and resentment toward other, tried to physically avoid him and vice versa, an uncomfortable situation for both. While being consumed with anger and resentment, C was nursing her hurt or pain. By bottling up these emotions, C aggravated her psychological composition, a situation that made it imperative to express them, to relieve her from some of the emotional burden. Once C decided to forgive other, she had to follow it through in an attempt to ensure its materialization. Such following through, described as a tedious process, required an inner strength.

In considering forgiveness as a religious obligation, C would have felt guilty if she had not performed it. Being appreciative of a harmonious family, the withholding of forgiveness would have made life difficult, not only for C but also the other family members. Not forgiving other would only strengthen the barrier between C and other, a situation to be overcome by sacrificing for the sake of the whole family. C had survived the experience of the violation with the help of her supportive and sympathetic husband, an indication that she could always rely on him, a means of lifting some of her pressure.

Time, being an important factor in the process of forgiving other, had witnessed a change of emotions on the part of C, a forward movement from internal turmoil to positive emotions. Prior to forgiveness, the self was torn between wanting...
to take revenge and giving it up, a situation that implied the need to see some element of fairness.

Even though C experiences peace and contentment now, at times C doubts her forgiveness, a reason for her to move back and forth in its process. C is constantly reassuring herself that she had forgiven other. At times, C still experiences a tug of war between her mind and feelings, a process that entails her to constantly reassure or rationalize self that other had been forgiven. Since the self is not familiar with forgiveness in terms of its experiencing, nature, and substance, C has yet to inculcate it as a way of life.
Since the age of 3, C's older brother had sexually abused her. For C, the abuse went on for about 5 years, an ordeal that was made possible by the absence of her mother, who was to be blamed for the historical experience, for the violation of the brother-sister relationship. Certainly, C was angry with her mother, who was always away from her nine children, a situation that prevented her from taking care of them, from being concerned about them. Many years later, C found out that other, who had taken advantage of their mother's absence, had also sexually abused her two other sisters. When C was about 9 years old, she became very angry with her brother and, not willing to endure the ordeal any longer, decided to stand up to him. At that point, feeling guilty about her vulnerability, C blamed herself and her mother for what happened. At the age of 16, C went through depression. Simultaneously, C was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Being obsessed with vengeance toward the family, C tried to commit suicide by taking her prescribed pills. Overcome by anger, C wanted her family to feel guilty about what happened, an opportunity to displace such anger to every member of the family. Apart from taking her pills, C had thought of shooting herself and other.

C's other brother had taught her Bible studies, an experience that had paved the way for her to become a Christian. Gradually, by going to church and reading the Bible, C's thoughts of suicide faded away. For C, having a religion or faith was the best experience for her in terms of learning to value eternal life, which provided an opportunity to fill the emptiness within self. As faith filled this void, life became more meaningful. Realizing that she had grown out of the experience and amazed with her development, C was eager to share her experience with other people. By recognizing her own fallibility, C was able to forgive other. Faith had a great impact on C's forgiveness and was a source of inspiration and strength in terms of constantly reminding self of God's forgiveness and that not forgiving other would be impossible.

C, a student at Western Michigan University, was required to watch a movie on child abuse in one of her classes. Through the movie, C became conscious of the fact that she was one of the many women who had experienced sexual abuse. Suddenly, C was no longer the sole victim of sexual abuse, no longer the odd one. For C, it was helpful to know that there were other victims of sexual abuse besides self, an experience no longer peculiar to self but rather shared by many. In the movie, the victim was encouraged to act out whatever she was experiencing. As a result of C's identification with the victim's emotion, her anger escalated immediately. C did not realize that she had been repressing her intense anger, which resurfaced in the light of the movie. While being forced to feel the anger, C needed to express it. Inspired by the movie, C wrote a letter to inform other that she forgave him for what he had done and that she still loved him. Despite the fact that other was an alcoholic and that he had been in and out of jail, C was able to forgive him on the basis of love and faith. In the letter, C mentioned God's punishment and advised other to turn over a new leaf, which were her manifestations of faith and love. Instead of living in the family environment, C was glad that she had stayed away from it, a choice that had
saved her from becoming an alcoholic, just like most of her other siblings. C had confronted her mother for being irresponsible toward her growing children, for not protecting her from harm or pain, for allowing her to be a helpless victim of circumstance. One of C’s regrets revolved around not having any good memories of her childhood. Having lost her childhood innocence, C went all out to protect her children from similar experiences, a task that required her to be a full-time housewife, which turned out to be the best option.

Since forgiveness did not mean forgetting the wrongdoing, C would always live with the experience or memory of the violation of the relationship. Following her forgiveness, C could hug other whenever they met, despite the fact that she would not be able to trust him again. For C, forgiveness meant that she did not vindictively harp on the issue in the presence of other, which was a manifestation of her unconditional love for him. Initially, C had wanted to treat other badly, an indication that her forgiveness was still emotionally laden with anger. Devoid of anger, forgiveness, which took the form of mercy toward other, eventually prevailed. Although other deserved the worst treatment or punishment, C was kind toward him and chose not to continuously dwell on the issue. By choosing not to beat herself up unnecessarily, C’s life became more productive, reinforcing her decision that it would be pointless to nurture the issue. Every time C came to know about other victims’ ordeals, memories of her own experience rekindled, and, consequently, anger and hurt easily resurfaced. For C, distrust and skepticism, if uncontrolled, could hinder the smooth flow of her inner energy. For as long as there is fear in connecting with the pain, fear in feeling the intensity of the pain, the self will never be freed from it. By constantly turning to God, C arrested some of her skepticism. For C, forgiving other had been immensely inspired by faith, by knowing that God had forgiven her, by recognizing that it was her responsibility to extend the forgiveness to others, including her perpetrator. Today, C does not often think about her past experience with other, which implies the presence of some lingering pain that is still inflicting self. Forgiveness, which did not remove all the negative feelings, was evidenced by her behavior toward other, by an ability to maintain her respect for him.

Before watching the movie, C was unaware of the presence of her immense anger, an indication that she was experiencing the numbness of emotions, a process that cut her off from feeling the intense anger and, therefore, the pain. Faith, being the basis of C’s life, had triggered her forgiveness. The sudden upsurge of anger had forced C to deal with it, a task that she was reluctant to confront. C was convinced that the movie was a divine call for her to confront her repressed anger and, therefore, to forgive other. Indeed, the movie was a means for C to experience a dose of personal therapy, whereby her identification with the victim acted as a catalyst to her emotions, particularly the anger, which eventually made its presence obvious and the need for forgiveness imperative. While taking pride in not having to seek a professional help to deal with the experience of the violation, the divine intervention had effected tremendous positive qualities in self, one of which was the acceptance of destiny, which was a symbol of C’s love for God.

Driven by intense anger and hatred toward other, C almost hired someone to kill him, a brutal intention that dominated her when she was about 13 years old. Living with other in the same house was unbearable, and seeing him only aggravated
C's emotions, a situation that led anger and hatred to culminate in viciousness. Being 10 years older than C, other, who had never been happy with his life, had tried to kill himself. Such an awareness had produced compassion to C. By recognizing her own failings, by accepting that self was not superior to other, C was drawn to forgiveness. Because revenge or punishment rested with God, C did not believe in withholding love and mercy. Not believing in beating herself up, C chose to deal with her bitterness in order to feel better. With the contentment in knowing that something good is in store for self, C hopes to convey the significance of spirituality and eternal life to her siblings.

After C was enrolled at Western Michigan University, she seldom went home, which was a picture of drugs, parties, alcoholism, and fights. Apart from these activities, the thought of other trying to kill C and her sister by setting fire to their bed kept C away from her home and its environment. For C, it was intolerable to be at home, a manifestation of her need to avoid other. Being very revengeful toward other, C had wanted him dead, a means of making up for her pain and loss of innocence, a means of regaining a sense of fairness. Forgiving other, which was based on faith, meant that C obliterated his debt to her.

With her ability to appreciate and love other as a human being, C experienced peace in her mind and heart, and thus a sense of freedom prevailed. Choosing not to be in bondage to her emotions, anger, bitterness, tension, and frustration slowly dissipated with forgiveness, a relief from C's psychological burden. For C, withholding forgiveness from other would not have made her a worthwhile person. Forgiveness, being a virtue and the right thing to do, was C's best option. Having earned the respect of other through her forgiveness, C regards herself as a better sister now. Before forgiveness, the presence of intense turmoil had denied C of her emotional peace. C tried to avoid confronting her emotions, which was a manifestation of fear and tediousness, and, if not dealt with, would seem unchallenged. Certainly, the movie had played a significant role in C's life in terms of precipitating confrontation and change.

In expressing her forgiveness in a letter, C experienced an outpouring of emotions. Following the painful and tearful experience, and with the gradual dissipation of anger and hatred, C felt pity toward other in terms of his choice of an unhealthy kind of life. For C, implicitly, her sympathy for other was camouflaging her self-pity. Other, described as a person in need of forgiveness, guidance, compassion, mercy, and love, and the black sheep of the family, had led a very lonely life. Since C could no longer nurse the hurt within self, she felt good about forgiving other, which indicated a progression from negative emotions to positive emotions. Forgiveness, which was granted for the sake of self and other, contributed to their well-being. Being thankful to God for the good that had come her way, C aspired to live a blessed life. For C, forgiveness was her gratitude for God's blessings, an extension of her empathy for other, a means of freeing him from guilt.

By forgiving other, C had overcome an obstacle to peace and happiness. For fear of not being able to control her emotions, for fear of breaking down, C chose to write other the letter instead of facing up to him. Although writing the letter was difficult, it relieved C from the painful experience in terms of enabling her to express
her thoughts, emotions, and repercussions with regard to what other had done to her.
Up to the point of forgiveness, C had lived with her repressed anger. In an attempt to
protect self, C numbed her emotions, especially the anger, which in actuality was
escalating. It was unbearable for C to live with the anger and hurt, a condition that
called for the release of such energy, which meant the letting go of vengeance,
synonymous with releasing anger, in particular. For C, the experience of the violation
of the relationship was extremely painful in terms of losing her childhood innocence.

For a long time, C did not trust her husband with their children, an implication
that she was not able to transcend her past experience. For C, the thought of her
husband molesting the children kept haunting her. There was a time when the image
of other appeared when C and her husband were having a physical relationship, an
indication that she was reliving the memory of the painful experience. Feeling dirty
and dishonorable, C just froze up. C’s letter to other had broken the ice between
them, making it possible for her to come face-to-face with him and opening up the
opportunity for him to ask for her tape player, which was then given as a gift. For C,
writing the letter to other was the first step in dealing with the issue. Admittedly, it
was not difficult for C to give the letter to other, who then read it but never discussed
it with her.

Certainly, God’s forgiveness had played a very significant role in forgiving
other. Without experiencing God’s forgiveness, without God’s help, C doubted
whether she could have forgiven other. Through the movie, God had awakened C’s
consciousness in terms of learning vicariously from it, which then gave way to her
forgiveness. By not going home to Detroit, by keeping herself busy with her children,
C managed to avoid dealing with her issue. However, by watching the movie, C was
compelled to confront her issue. From C’s perspective, by confronting herself and
disclosing to other, she had almost dealt with her pain. As the anger receded into the
background, C became more appreciative of herself and the experience. For C, the
experience helped to shape her character, enhanced her awareness with regard to self,
and opened up the possibility of developing her positive qualities.

C wishes to share with other victims her discovery about the possibility of
letting go of pain, guilt, and shame. Triggered by her compassion for the victims of
sexual abuse, C desires to ease their pain. Being a victim herself and with the ability
to resume a normal life, C has so much to offer to these victims. C used to question
God for what happened, for the unfairness of it all.

Without any sign of true repentance, there is no way that C could trust other.
Admittedly, the anger was destructive to C, both mentally and physically, a condition
that was overcome by her forgiving spirit. Before forgiveness, there was no peace
within self, which was a reflection of the absence of peace between self and other.
For C, forgiveness was inspired by the need to experience the fruits of the spirits
mentioned in the Bible, an indication of her deep value with regard to the significance
and enhancement of spirituality. Inevitably, C could no longer wallow in self-pity, a
situation that paved the way for the dissipation of anger and pain, which then led to
the materialization of forgiveness. Following forgiveness, C was no longer
compounding her anger and pain through her obsession with other; thus, she
experienced a freedom from the evil thoughts, feelings, and intentions toward him.
By becoming a Christian, C was aware of the change in her attitude and perspectives. For C, faith in God had brought peace to self, which in turn led to peace with others. Having described forgiveness as a consequence of peace with God, C was pleased with herself for complying with God’s call for forgiveness.

No longer consumed with self-pity, C intends to reach out to other victims of sexual abuse. Underneath C’s affection for others lies her deep compassion, which is a sign of healing, suggestive of her genuine forgiveness. Despite being victimized, C’s compassion is an invaluable gift to others. From C’s perspective, others in need of professional help in order to change his lifestyle, an exemplification of her compassionate understanding of him. Before forgiveness, anger and bitterness smothered and crushed C on the inside. Being obsessed with vengeance toward others, there was a constant need to see him tortured or killed, a manifestation of the fact that C was a prisoner of her emotions to the point of losing touch with reality. In acknowledging the nature of human beings in terms of selfishness and revengefulness and in an attempt to control her emotions, C surrendered to God. While recognizing the right to be angry, it would not be productive to remain angry for too long, a line echoed by a biblical verse. Indeed, the self is no different from other in terms of being fallible humans, who are always in need of forgiveness from God and other human beings. Taking pride in her ability to sympathize and empathize with others, C believes that God had healed her pain, a suggestion of her inability to single-handedly overcome her pain. While it is natural to remember the past experience, C does not dwell on it, an exemplification of the ability to differentiate one from the other. In recognizing that others in dire need of help, respect, compassion, and love from others, in placing self in his situation, forgiveness attained its concreteness. Having lived through the experience of the violation and subsequently having learned about the significance, meaning, and blessings of forgiveness, C is inclined to be a peacemaker. With religion and spirituality as her foundation, there is purpose in C’s life. In the process of aspiring to live up to her faith, life has more substance and meaning.

Apart from the sexual abuse, C’s dysfunctional family environment had also triggered her intention to commit suicide. As C would only continue to victimize self by maintaining the anger, bitterness, and revenge, she needed to let go of this negative energy in an attempt to lead a happy life. C was pleased with herself for taking the initiative to forgive others, for overcoming the impossibility of forgiving him. Even though the ability to forgive others seemed like a dream, it was a manifestation of C’s personal achievement, a cause for her happiness and amazement. Before forgiveness, C had experienced anger and pain, the emotions that gave way to her guilt for holding on to those emotions. For C, such guilt became a motivating factor for her to be different from others in terms of extending forgiveness, despite his undeservingness and its absurdity in the eyes of other people. Certainly, C has a lifetime goal, which is to tell other people about her whole experience and the significance of God and faith.
Appendix L

Composite Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness of the Co-researchers
Composite Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Interpersonal Forgiveness of the Co-Researchers

Interpersonal forgiveness evolved as a result of a traumatic or devastating experience of a violation of a relationship by a significant other. The violation may have presented itself as a breach of trust or commitment, or disregard for the care, love, or respect for the co-researchers. Generally, the meaning of the violation transcended its actual form, its actual weight, and its actual dimension, no matter how trivial or severe. Natural to the human disposition, the co-researchers reacted to the violation with intense anger and hurt. Frequently, anger and hurt gave way to other accompanying emotions such as bitterness, sadness, depression, disappointment, frustration, helplessness, confusion, tension, guilt, or self-pity. Being angry caused an awareness of the possibility that the anger could become destructive. On the surface, anger was a shield to protect self, an emotion that gave inner strength to live in the experience of the violation. In certain cases, hatred, revenge, and being out of touch with reality persisted for sometime. Releasing anger and hurt was synonymous with letting go of vengeance or the need to exact punishment. By living and prolonging the anger, the potential of seeing reality or what actually transpired was denied. Without anger, there might be a possibility of immediately coming into contact with the pain that evolved from the emotional injury, thus, making it unbearable to contain the meaning of the violation within self. Left unattended, pain could give way to feeling weak internally. Like a pendulum, the act of vacillating between intense anger and self-pity eventuated in emotional exhaustion. No longer remained captive or being in bondage to the negative emotions, there was the question of the logic of it all, the sensibility, or insensibility of it all and the stupidity inherent in the emotional turmoil. The absence of inner peace and peace with the offender meant the presence of unhappiness with self, the offender, and the world. Being consumed with diverse but interrelated negative emotions, there was the feeling of being trapped on the inside, hence, the closing in of the inner world and personal space. One negative emotion compounded the other, giving way to a circular movement of negative emotions. With all the negative emotions put together, it would be impossible not to feel vulnerable and if allowed to escalate, could lead to a sense of psychological disintegration. The presence of these negative emotions blocked the inner flow or mobility of positive energy, thus, denying self of its sense of fluidity, its sense of inner freedom. Being immersed in the past, the emotional experience of the violation was lived in the present moment, making the future impenetrable, hopeless, and without certainty. Since the smooth transition of negative energy to positive energy seemed hopeless, what remained was a current sense of hopelessness. Though temporary in nature, this hopelessness seemed to have its stubborn permanence. It was such hopelessness that aroused the idea of forgiveness. Slowly, forgiveness and its meaning or variations of its meaning began to pierce its way into the questioning self. While some elements of forgiveness ran through the mind such as acknowledging the wrongdoing, canceling a psychological debt, letting go of the issue, not vindictively harping on the issue, or giving up revenge, the apprehension of the subject matter was still fuzzy. Although there was a desire to be relieved from the antagonistic experiencing of the violation, the constant dwelling on or preoccupation with the violation hampered movement toward internal freedom. By
continuously dwelling on the violation, it became amplified, thus, making it bigger than the context within which it was originally embodied. If allowed to persist, the mind could blow the issue out of proportion, thus, losing sight of what was previously or presently, or futuristically important. When this happened, self became overwhelmed. In certain cases, physical reactions took place: loss of concentration, a major illness, lack of sleep, or loss of appetite. Typically, some of these psychosomatic reactions ceased to exist with the eventual materialization of forgiveness. At a higher level, the relationship to the world might be characterized by a loss of zest for life. For some, sympathy or compassion, or empathy toward others prematurely existed, hence, welcoming the idea of forgiveness to permeate into the overwhelmed self.

As a phenomenon, interpersonal forgiveness was experienced as a long, complex, evolutionary process. The struggle with and continuous questioning of the decision to forgive indicated that it was never a one-time decision. Having made a decision, there was constant reference to the rationality of the decision, disqualifying and qualifying it. While the decision to forgive was experienced as a conscious entity, there was an awareness that such a decision was not forgiveness in itself. In taking time to reach such a decision with the potential of forgiveness setting in, there was a consciousness with regard to the outflow of mental, emotional, and spiritual energy. Since the initial decision was still inconclusive, oscillation between decision and indecision occurred. Even after making such a decision, doubt, or hesitation lingered for an indefinite moment, thus, giving rise to ambivalence. With the presence of the annoying self-talk, it was unavoidable not to go through the tedious mental debate to arrive at the concrete decision to forgive others. If allowed to prevail, the negative self-talk would be detrimental to self in terms of magnifying the unfairness of forgiveness due to the injustice or the wrongdoing and the deserving right to emotions. The back and forth movement between wanting to forgive and not forgive illustrated that making the choice or deciding to forgive constituted the most difficult hurdle in the process of forgiveness. By not succumbing to the power and persuasiveness of negative self-talk, eventually, rationality prevailed. Once the decision became clear, it served as a threshold of the process of forgiveness, unfolding other significant discoveries, like the granting and blessings of forgiveness. Once the decision found its foothold, self began to move toward malleability. The common affective states associated with the experience of the phenomenon include self-fulfillment, extreme happiness, satisfaction, inner peace (mental and emotional) or inner harmony, compassion, sympathy, empathy, contentment, relief from psychological burden, a sense of lightness, a sense of freedom, inner beauty, and spiritual uplift. Forgiveness that was either verbalized or implied, gave way to clarity, wonder, and a sense of extraordinariness or rareness surrounding the ability to forgive others. Caught by surprise with the blessings of forgiveness, positive emotions kept unfolding within self in terms of one positive emotion leading to another. Positive emotions superseded negative emotions, particularly, anger and hurt, as these receded into the remote dimension of consciousness. Such process that was synonymous with the Gestalt concept of figure and ground provided self with new energy, a new meaning to existence. Despite the granting of forgiveness, the residue of negative emotions still lingered, reflecting the apparent impossibility of forgiveness to remove all negative emotions. Being aware of the difference, there was a recognition that these negative emotions were devoid of detriment either to self or
others. Paradoxically, the co-researchers experienced an absence of hostility regardless of the lingering negative emotions. In the case of a breach of trust, distrust and skepticism toward others still remained.

Since there was no direct control over the entire process of forgiveness or its evolution, the constant justification and solidification of forgiveness occurred. As self unfolded itself in the process of grieving and healing, so did forgiveness. Being bothered by the question of whether others had really been forgiven, the self was constantly seeking assurance through the act, gesture, or sign of forgiveness. At times, the question with regard to the substance of forgiveness emerged, wondering whether it contained its deserving quality. A metamorphosis of the substance of forgiveness occurred in the light of continual evaluation of self in relation to others. Often, the substance of forgiveness became questionable as it moved back and forth between presence and nonpresence. In its presence, there was a full or partial awareness of forgiveness, no matter how momentary its point of contact. But there was another side of forgiveness that caused dissatisfaction within self. Forgiveness, in its nonpresence and elusiveness, resulted in slipping away from assurance, thus, pronouncing its absence, denying that it was ever present. Again, it was necessary to revisit the idea that its elusive nonpresence could not be equated with its absolute nonpresence, its nonexistence. With the emergence of more positive emotions, forgiving others became more real, more solidified. As patience, commitment, determination, tolerance, and endurance persisted, self grew into forgiveness. With the passage of time, forgiveness developed through the on-going process of justifying and solidifying. At the same time, personal "space" was appreciated for self-reflection and internalization of forgiveness, thus, making it real within self. While there was an appreciation of the process of forgiveness, it was never a comfortable journey. Coming to terms with self, others, and the self-other relationship was a prerequisite to forgiveness. Coming to terms with self meant that the co-researchers had to come to terms with or heal their emotional injury, a task that was experienced with difficulty. In dealing with the emotional injury, it was necessary to confront, reconnect with, or feel the emotions, meaning reliving the emotional injury. Partly, the difficulty in returning to the emotional injury was attributed to the intensity of the emotions and the tendency of not sharing, disclosing, or verbalizing the emotional experience. In certain cases, there was fear in reconnecting with the hurt and feeling its intensity. While there was a parallel forward movement between letting go of the issues and that of the emotions, there were also parallel processes between healing and the solidifying of forgiveness.

Psychological separation from others and the ability to separate self from the situation contributed to appraising or evaluating the situation wisely and objectively. To disengage self from the situation was to view it from a new unbiased perspective. To a certain point, as self took on part of the blame, guilt sprang up, thus, restraining self from continuously blaming others for the wrongdoing. As the co-researchers were able to identify themselves as fallible human beings, the imperfection of others became a constant reminder of the imperfection of self. The self-other comparison gave way to the notion that self was not superior to others and subsequently, was helpful in facilitating or solidifying forgiveness. The nonsuperior self paved the way for the emerging humbleness, eliminating the possibility of the inferiority-superiority dualism either within self or between self and others. In the midst of personalizing
and assuming part of the responsibility in creating the violation of the relationship, the co-researchers could no longer push out of consciousness that self and others were responsible for co-constituting the violation. Being disturbed by the presence of conscience, forgiving others was an attempt to set the conscience free from guilt. While others’ attitude or reaction, or true repentance would have speeded up the process of forgiveness, its absence did not deter forgiving. Since no reciprocity was required, forgiveness could be one-sided. Up to a certain point, there was an acceptance of reality or the state of the affairs as part of the effort to differentiate the significance of the relationship from the issue. As self became more convinced of the complementary responsibility, a sense of fairness emerged. With some of the hostile or excruciating emotional barriers removed, there were efforts toward understanding the situation by re-evaluating self and others realistically, by not getting enmeshed with others, and by not taking responsibility for others, thus, putting things in their respective places. In reality, the context and meaning of the violation remained faithfully constant, a quality that paved the way for the reconstruction of self, others, and the self-other relationship. While retrospection, reflection, and deep analysis were notable tools in understanding the situation, the prevailing mode was to process and analyze the situation from a win-win perspective, a way of ensuring that self and others benefitted from forgiveness. An acceptance of the change in self, others, and the self-other relationship emerged concomitantly with the redefinition of self, others, and the worldview. For many, a change in the nature and meaning of the self-other relationship occurred, leading to a reestablishment of the relationship with others with a new attitude.

On the subconscious level, there was a concern not only with genuine forgiveness but rather, with the difficulty in arriving at genuine forgiveness. Such difficulty was evidenced in the search for a harmony between cognitive and affective states. While it took time for the mind to grasp the idea of forgiveness, it took a while for it to settle in the heart, giving way to a more natural feeling. In the beginning, it was impossible not to indulge in self-absorption, a psychological mode of operation that did not warrant the granting of forgiveness and even if it were granted, it would have been on the basis of self-centeredness. To forgive others for the sake of self-centeredness meant selfishness or egotism, an unproductive quality to be dispensed with over time. Gradually, there was a progression from self-absorption (or self-centeredness) to a genuine concern for others, thus, resulting in the unconditionality of forgiveness. The co-researchers did not try to change or transform others neither did they strive to control others nor did they impose any needs or values on others as a precondition for forgiveness. Unable to tolerate and live with an awareness that others feel guilty, there were attempts to understand others’ frame of mind, hence, situating the meaning of forgiveness in the well-being of self and others. In no time, the blessings of forgiving others on the basis of unconditional and universal responses (care, concern, love, respect, and etc) were reflected back to the forgiving self.

Forgiveness was experienced as an extension of faith, spirituality, philosophy of life, and unconditionality. While in certain cases, a combination of these factors formed the basis of forgiveness, generally, co-researchers forgave others on the basis of humanity. Aside from being driven by the desire to become a worthwhile human beings, forgiving others could be a form of gratitude, tenderness, or compensation. By virtue of faith or philosophical outlook, not forgiving would be likened to failure...
in doing what was right or virtuous. In the eyes of faith, for example, the violation of
the relationship or the emotional injury was far from insurmountable. Being
intolerable of or uncomfortable with the idea of a discrepancy between religious or
philosophical outlook and practice, there was movement toward an irresistible
congruence. With the fruition of forgiveness, the co-researchers had lived up to their
faith or philosophy and consequently, congruence emerged within self. Partly,
congruence gave meaning to existence. The experiencing of the phenomenon had
provided the co-researchers with a profound understanding of its value for health,
growth, or human life. In many instances, the co-researchers said that God's
forgiveness to them had inspired forgiveness for others. While seeking comfort and
strength in the divine power, self prayed for the ability to forgive. Since forgiveness
seemed beyond reach at the human level, it would not have materialized without the
divine intervention, without the divine strength. To a certain extent, the worn-out self
had depleted its human capacity in handling the negative emotions, thus, calling upon
the divine intervention to expand it for the sake of emotional or psychological
survival. By surrendering to God, some of the negative emotions were alleviated,
resulting in the acceptance of the events and ordeals as destiny. In an effort to
complete the circle, the acceptance of destiny helped to further dissipate some of the
negative emotions. The path of forgiveness that was likened to a spiritual cleansing of
self was taken and explored in order to make peace with self, others, and God.
Eventually, the experiencing of inner harmony led to interpersonal harmony.

Growing out of the experience of interpersonal forgiveness, the co-
researchers came to the conclusion that it is not natural for humans to forgive. While
recognizing that humans are selfish and revengeful by nature, self could not bear to
withhold forgiveness. To not forgive would have been more costly than to forgive
and to not forgive meant that self was still living in and reliving the past to the point
of losing the essence of living. The need to live a meaningful and an enjoyable life
kept resurfacing, implying that life must be appreciated and its meaning lived. As a
consequence of the injustice, the original closeness, meaning, or essence of the
relationship was lost. There was a loss of self-esteem or a sense of self. Besides, there
was a loss of the original trust, respect, care, and love that characterized the
relationship of the past. By not living in the moment, the historical time seemed
unrelenting, hence, creating an existential discrepancy between the moment and the
future. Living in the existential discrepancy had denied the co-researchers of the
familiar meaning and pattern of existence with the consequence of not living life to its
fullest. Unable to bear the existential discrepancy or to live life half-heartedly, there
was a movement toward closing the existential discrepancy by seeking a more
meaningful existence. By not forgiving, the negative energy continued to expand
within self, eventually, denying a healthy productivity. Thus, coming from the
perspective of a victim and a loser, forgiving others was a personal sacrifice. While
pride or self-respect seemed to have been given up with the granting of forgiveness,
in actuality, more self-respect was earned through it. Unwittingly, by granting
forgiveness, self-respect was restored either to its previous position or to a higher
level. Through the process of grieving, healing, and forgiveness, a recovery of self
was experienced, opening up the opportunity of valuing or appreciating self in
relation to others or others in relation to self. With forgiveness as a form of
empowerment and a source of power, there was a struggle to release self from the
cruel grip of historical time. While forgiveness was empowering because it restored
the ability to make a decision and to control the situation, it also turned out to be a
source of power in terms of the presence of retrospection, reflection, mindfulness,
and insight. Upon reflection, the experience of interpersonal forgiveness helped to
develop inner qualities, indicating a growing awareness with self. As the real self was
given a chance to live through the experience of the phenomenon, an integrated self
or a sense of wholeness was regain. Consequently, a new and healthy concept of
self developed—one very unfamiliar to the evolving self. The emergence of this new
aspect of self and its valuing contributed to the solidification of forgiveness. Maturity
and personal achievement, which were an outgrowth of the lived and laborious
experience of the phenomenon, became a sense of pride.
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