FORGIVING IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

How to maintain relatedness in the context of being harmed by an intimate other poses a particular challenge. Forgiveness provides a way of meeting this challenge as it removes the barrier to relatedness caused by a transgression. This article therefore offers an analysis of forgiveness and how it can be studied in close relationships. The chapter concludes by discussing avenues of future research and practice.

FORGIVING IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Humans harm each other and humans are social animals. Acceptance of these two assumptions results in the challenge addressed in this article - how to maintain relatedness with fellow humans in the face of being harmed by them. In particular, we address the most difficult of these challenges – how to maintain relatedness in the face of a clearly unacceptable behavior by one's partner. Forgiveness is one widely disseminated strategy for meeting this challenge. We are well aware that this problem, and the proposal that forgiveness offers a solution to the problem, has a long history, and that by drawing upon that history we avail ourselves of a critical intellectual resource. At the same time, we believe recent developments in psychology can help illuminate the context of forgiveness and so advance the reintroduction of forgiveness to the close relationship context. Our dual goal is to illustrate both the way things are, by examining the connections uncovered in psychological investigations, and to illustrate potential useful possibilities, by advancing theory. In neither case do we claim to provide a critical analysis of the way things "should be." Given the strong, inherent, connections to morality and religious belief implicit in any treatment of forgiveness, this latter point needs to be made explicitly.

This challenge of dealing with the conflict between being harmed by others yet wanting to be with others, is most acute, and most important, in close relationships. In these relationships we voluntarily make ourselves most vulnerable to another human being by linking the realization of our needs, aspirations, and hopes to the goodwill of a relationship partner. Rendering ourselves vulnerable is a double-edged sword. It makes possible the profound sense of well being that can be experienced in close relationships. At the same time, the imperfection of any partner means that hurt or injury is inevitable, and when it occurs, the hurt is particularly poignant precisely because we have made ourselves vulnerable. In the face of such injury, negative feelings (e.g., anger, resentment, disappointment) towards the partner are common. Motivation to withdraw or avoid the source of harm, or perhaps even a desire to retaliate or seek revenge, are also typical. Thus, partner injury constitutes a breach or rupture in the relationship that produces estrangement. How do relationships recover following injury of one partner by the other? What brings about reconciliation between partners and facilitates restoration of the relationship. In an attempt to answer such questions, this article examines the role of forgiveness in close relationships.

FROM ASSUMPTIONS TO CORE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

The two assumptions articulated earlier serve as the foundation for the analysis that is to follow. Each points to core constructs that are woven in the fabric of close relationships and of human existence. The inevitability of harm, and the need to avoid harm, points to the fundamental importance of attributing responsibility for the harm. Responsibility attributions are adaptive because they allow us to predict and potentially avoid future harm; when a particular object is viewed as having produced harm, it may be adaptive to avoid that object in the future. How partners determine responsibility for relationship events has yielded important insights into relationship functioning and remains a fruitful area of inquiry across a number of different laboratories (for a review see Fincham, 2001). But it has become increasingly apparent that attributing responsibility is merely the first response in a longer chain of responses.

What follows is indicated by the second assumption concerning our social nature as human beings. We cannot flourish in isolation. Rather, we may do better economically and emotionally

if we maintain highly integrated patterns of relatedness with others. So, just as it is adaptive to determine responsibility for harm, it is often equally adaptive to forgive those who harm us for this is a primary mechanism whereby we lay the foundation for re-establishing social relatedness.[1]

In the next section we examine whether relationship maintenance and repair strategies that have already been identified embody what is meant by forgiveness even though discussions of these strategies do not use this term. This is important both because it may help us avoid the reinvention of terms and constructs already used in the study of close relationships and because it helps establish conceptual boundaries between forgiveness and other constructs useful in understanding close relationships. Building on this exercise, the third section of the article offers a detailed analysis of forgiveness. In particular, we examine forgiveness from the standpoint of a two-dimensional goal structure and draws out the implications for identification of "types" of forgiveness. The fourth section provides an organizational framework for understanding forgiveness in close relationships. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the implications of our analysis for research and practice.

Is forgiveness different from other relationship maintenance/repair strategies?

In order to distinguish forgiving from related relationship maintenance and repair strategies a preliminary description of forgiveness is needed.

Preliminary Analysis of Forgiveness

What does it mean to forgive? This question is addressed more fully later. In the present context it suffices to describe only some necessary conditions for forgiveness to occur. For p to forgive o logically requires p to be conscious of being injured/wronged by o. Without injury there is nothing to forgive. However, following Downie (1971), it is also necessary for p to believe that the injury was intentionally or, at a minimum, negligently inflicted although the level of responsibility for the injury will vary according to which of these two criteria is met (see Heider's, 1958, levels of responsibility). In other words, criteria used in social institutions (e.g., law; see Hart & Honore, 1959), in everyday life (see Fincham & Jaspars, 1980), and in logical analysis (see Shaver, 1985) to infer responsibility must be met. When injury could not be foreseen and was not intended there is again nothing to forgive. Thus, the prototypical case of forgiveness occurs in full knowledge that the transgressor is responsible for the injury, that he or she thereby forfeits any right to the victim's sympathy, affection or trust, and that the victim has a right to feel resentful, to disassociate from the transgressor, and perhaps to exact retribution.

Relevant Relationship Maintenance and Repair Strategies

Motivated Perception of the Partner?
Relationship researchers clearly recognize that the less than ideal behavior of intimates towards each other poses a challenge for relationships. One response has been a fruitful line of work on motivated, cognitive biases (e.g., Buunk & Van Yperen, 1991; Johnson & Rusbult,

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[1] Unlike many analyses of forgiveness (e.g., Downie, 1965; Horsburgh, 1974),we are not arguing for its importance on the grounds that humans are moral agents and we ought to forgive because it is a moral virtue. This is another, but separate, argument for forgiveness.

1989; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996; Simpson, Gangestad & Lerma, 1990; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). These biases shape mental representations of the partner allowing him or her to be seen in the most positive light. It can be argued that this line of research documents a relationship maintenance strategy that obviates the need for forgiveness; perception of negativity in the partner is avoided or, if it is perceived, is downplayed.

Acceptance?

Notwithstanding such motivated cognition, intimates often do see significant fault in their partners and, there is a substantial literature on couple therapy (see Halford & Markman, 1997). A new research-based couple therapy incorporates the concept of *acceptance* that may appear similar to forgiveness (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996). The core feature of acceptance based interventions is that the context that makes behavior problematic, rather than the behavior itself, is the target of change. This appears similar to forgiveness as both philosophers and psychotherapists note that forgiveness is facilitated by viewing injurious partner behavior in a new light (e.g., North, 1998; Worthington, 1998a). But when acceptance occurs what "was offensive or blameworthy is seen as understandable, tolerable, or even a valuable, though at times unpleasant, difference" (Koerner, Jacobson & Christensen, 1994). This is perhaps closer to condoning (viewing the behavior as justified) or excusing (there is a defensible reason for the behavior) partner behavior than it is to forgiving it. Condoning or excusing the behavior result in there no longer being a culpable offense and hence the question of forgiveness does not logically arise. Moreover, as will soon be apparent, the partner's commitment to behavioral change, either explicitly or implicitly through apology, facilitates forgiveness. In contrast, acceptance implies that "change on the part of the perpetrator is no longer necessary" (Christensen, Jacobson & Babcock, 1995). In short, acceptance can be applied to circumstances that do not meet the necessary conditions that make forgiveness relevant. Likewise, forgiveness may be applied in situations that would seem inappropriate for acceptance.

Accomodation?

Perhaps the closest construct to forgiveness in the close relationship literature is *accommodation* or the willingness to respond to potentially destructive partner behavior by inhibiting "tendencies to react destructively" and instead to "engage in constructive reactions" (Rusbult, Verette, et al., 1991, p. 53). Considerable progress has been made in understanding the determinants and dynamics of this interaction pattern (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1996; Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriage & Cox, 1998). For example, relationship commitment predicts accommodation and its effect is mediated by a meaning analysis in which partners "discern the reasons for an event" (Rusbult et al., 1996, p. 79). However, demonstrating that "reasons for the event" (operationalized as benign attributions and positive emotional reactions) are the proximal determinant of accommodation is valuable but does not speak directly to the issue of forgiveness. For instance, accommodation might occur because potentially destructive partner behavior is construed in such a way that its destructive nature is ignored, overlooked, or downplayed or, when fully recognized, is condoned or excused. Under these circumstances, forgiveness is not a relevant concern. Although Fletcher, Thomas and Durrant (1999) have demonstrated the utility of distinguishing cognitive accommodation (benign cognitions and emotions) from behavioral accommodation (absence of negative emotion or cognition in subsequent responses), this does not alter the status of accommodation vis-à-vis forgiveness. In sum, as with acceptance,

accommodation cannot be equated with forgiveness because it can occur when the necessary conditions for forgiveness are not met as well as when they are met.

The brief analysis offered above does not exhaust the variety of maintenance and repair strategies in close relationship research but it suffices to demonstrate that forgiveness has not played a central role in such research. This, however, does not negate its centrality for understanding close relationships and social life more broadly. Rather, forgiveness is like attribution, woven into the fabric of human existence but rarely recognized as such.

TOWARDS A MORE COMPLETE ACCOUNT OF FORGIVENESS

Because forgiveness is a construct woven into the fabric of our society it's the very familiarity has important consequences. First, everyone is a lay expert on forgiveness and can potentially gather data on their (expert) analysis of forgiveness. Second, our lay expertise often allows us to communicate about forgiveness without being aware that we may have different referents for the term or even an unclear referent. Third, unarticulated assumptions that we share about forgiveness may obscure understanding and hinder research.

As a result it behooves us to be very precise about the nature of forgiveness because vagueness about this basic concept can strip empirical work of is value. With the recent proliferation of publications on forgiveness, there is a real danger of this happening. This is because forgiveness is often confused with related constructs (Freedman, 1998) and is used to refer to, among other things, actions, processes, states, and dispositions. Not surprisingly, leading scholars have expressed concern about the need for conceptual/definitional clarity (e.g., Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998; Worthington, 1998b).

We therefore offer a conceptual analysis of forgiveness recognizing that it does not, ipso facto, constitute a psychological account in the absence of supportive empirical data. Although people in everyday life may not make some of the logical distinctions offered, logical analysis nonetheless provides a useful foundation for psychological research.

A More Complete Analysis of Forgiveness

As we move towards a more complete analysis for forgiveness, it is important to be clear about the referent for the analysis.

Forgiveness is an Interpersonal Construct
Forgiveness is inherently interpersonal; in the paradigmatic case p forgives o for the harm o did to p. The interpersonal nature of forgiveness is well captured by North's (1998) statements that it is "outward-looking and other-directed" (p. 19) and that forgiveness annuls "not the crime itself but the distorting effect that this wrong has upon one's relations with the wrongdoer and perhaps with others" (North, 1987, p. 500). In common usage, however, forgiveness is also used in reference to the self. Here the forgiver and forgiven are one, the self has often not been the victim of injurious behavior, and we most often talk about *not* forgiving, rather than forgiving, oneself (Horsburgh, 1974). Although they share some features in common, it is not clear whether self-forgiveness and the forgiveness of others can be explained using the same theoretical elements (see Smedslund, 1991 for a contrary position). In any event, self-forgiveness is not a

referent of the current analysis. Similarly, forgiving on behalf of a third party who suffered harm, particularly as a group member who did not personally experience harm inflicted on the group, is also not addressed even though it is important at philosophical (e.g., Benn, 1996) and practical levels (e.g., in relation to the holocaust, post-apartheid South Africa). In short, the referent for the current analysis of forgiveness is the paradigmatic case in which *p* forgives *o* for harm inflicted by *o* on *p*.

Forgiveness is Distinct from Reconciliation and Reunion
Although forgiveness has relationship restorative potential, it is distinct from reconciliation or relationship reunion. Reconciliation involves the restoration of violated trust and requires the good will of both partners. Thus, reconciliation entails forgiveness (or acceptance and accommodation) but forgiveness does not necessarily entail reconciliation. Similarly, where harm-doing has resulted in the break up of a relationship, forgiveness may, though it need not, lead to reunion but reunion, unlike reconciliation, does not necessarily entail forgiveness (or any other mechanism to reduce the perceived harm inflicted by the other). Partners might reunite for a variety of reasons (e.g., loneliness, financial hardship), and reunion may be facilitated by processes that appear similar to forgiveness (e.g., the dissipation over time of negative feelings generated by the harm-doing) but which do not constitute forgiveness. In sum, forgiveness removes the barrier to relatedness but other factors (e.g., likelihood of further harm, the harm-doer's reaction to the victim's forgiveness) determine whether a relationship ensues and what specific form the relationship takes. With the referent specified and the relation to reconciliation and reunion clarified, we are in a now position to consider some core characteristics of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is Something that Individuals Do
The distinctions drawn in the last paragraph are possible because reconciliation and reunion are characteristics of dyads or groups, whereas individuals manifest forgiveness. Even though forgiveness is inherently interpersonal and has effects that may extend far beyond the forgiver, it is a property of the individual. Moreover, forgiveness does not depend on anything external to the individual, though it may be facilitated by external factors (e.g., the harm-doer's repentance or apology, see Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Enright, Santos & Al-Mubak, 1989; McCullough, Worthington & Rachel, 1997; North, 1987; Weiner et al., 1991). There is the philosophical question of whether some harmful acts are so heinous that forgiveness is impossible but this question is predicated on moral assumptions. In principle, a victim can choose to forgive any harm. Whether it is a wise decision, or a morally appropriate one, is another matter.

Forgiveness Requires Blameworthy Behavior
Implicit in the construct of forgiveness is the implication that the behavior was wrong and not merely hurtful. For example, if a partner behaved in a manner that was disappointing, perhaps by failing to become something hoped for, or by doing things not hoped for, forgiveness would not be an appropriate construct. Couples may sometimes inappropriately blame their partners in such circumstances and think that forgiveness is the only possible approach to reconciliation. However, because such behaviors can not be said to be "wrong," and because there is unlikely to be a social consensus supporting the idea that such behaviors are wrong, there is no starting imbalance between the partners that entitles one party to feel aggrieved relative to the other. At a practical level, forgiveness is unlikely to be sought by the "offending" party in such

circumstances and offers of forgiveness are less likely to be accepted, rendering forgiveness an ineffective strategy for initiating relationship repair in these circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, such behaviors are not likely to be seen by the perpetrator as reflecting intent. Hence an offer of forgiveness is likely to be rejected by the target because it implies a level of culpability that he or she does not feel.

The degree of hurt experienced by *o* has both normative and idiosyncratic elements. The normative element can be viewed as societally supported or sanctioned - the idiosyncratic element is no less important, but may prove malleable in ways that are not true of the societally sanctioned portion of the hurt. Thus, for example, *p* might feel quite hurt by *o*'s failure to remember an important anniversary. Most of *p*'s peers would be expected to respond similarly. However, *p* may become aware that his/her own response is a little more extreme than most. This is not helpful in itself (it still hurts just as much), however, it may raise the possibility that *p* is contributing to the hurt in some way and that there may be ways to take care of him or herself and so hurt less. If *p* mitigates the harm in this way, it should reduce the difficulty of forgiveness. In this manner initial efforts to change p's stance from complete blame of the partner to recognition of his or her own role can facilitate forgiveness. In a similar vein, seeing oneself as at least partially to blame for the initial transgression is likely to make forgiving easier.

Forgiveness is Intentional, Unconditional and Superogatory

Forgiving is intentional. Because forgiving is intentional, any spontaneous dissipation of resentment and ill-will over time due to distraction or forgetting or changing context does not constitute forgiveness. Rather forgiveness occurs with *p*'s full knowledge that he or she has a right to feel negatively towards *o* and that *o* has no right to expect *p*'s sympathy. In choosing to forgive, *p* gives up the right to anger and resentment and steps down from a position of moral superiority vis-à-vis *o* brought about by *o*'s action. However, *p* does *not* give up the right to protect him or herself from future occurrences of the injurious behavior; whether *p* wishes to continue an existing relationship with *o*, and what form that relationship might take, may be predicated on judgments about future harm. This observation is inconsistent with the view that forgiveness restores a relationship to its state prior to the injury which, if it were logically possible, would merely re-create the exact conditions that led to the injury and therefore facilitate its re-occurrence. Forgiving is not equivalent to denial, forgetting or foolishness. There is therefore nothing inconsistent in choosing to forgive a spouse and, at the same time, choosing to end the marriage.

Forgiving is also unconditional. Conditions that influence forgiveness (e.g., transgressor confession, apology) are not necessary conditions for it to occur even though they may facilitate forgiveness. However, these conditions may be particularly important for reconciliation and the subsequent course of the relationship. To forgive is also supererogatory, at least in secular Western culture where there is no requirement that a victim forgive a transgressor. Indeed, failure to forgive may be seen as quite understandable even though, at the same time, the ability to forgive may be admired. This feature of forgiveness is not found in some religious and cultural traditions where there is a duty to forgive, one that is often governed by specific (religious) laws and/or cultural rituals (cf. Dorff, 1998). In any event, it is the intentional, unconditional and superogatory nature of forgiveness that underpins its characterization as a gift or altruistic act (e.g., Enright & Coyle, 1998; North, 1987; Worthington, 1998a).

*Forgiveness is Manifest in Affect, Cognition **and** Overt Behavior*

As Enright has consistently pointed out (e.g., Enright & Human Development Study Group, 1991; Enright et al., 1998), forgiveness involves affective, cognitive and behavioral systems. Differential emphasis is given to the three systems across different accounts of forgiveness, perhaps reflecting different emphases across religious and cultural views of forgiveness. For example, Jewish tradition focuses on the behaviors involved in forgiveness and "harbors the hope that the feelings …will ultimately follow along" (Dorff, 1998) whereas a Christian perspective accords changed feelings a more central role (see Marty, 1998). Does according behavior a central role preclude forgiving harm doers to whom we do not have access, such as a dead parent? No. Our changed behavior might be manifest in a variety of specific acts (e.g., visiting the grave of the parent, displaying a photograph of them in the home), in the way we talk about the absent person, and so on.

The behavioral element of forgiveness bears emphasis because of recent groundbreaking empirical and theoretical research. At the empirical level, forgiveness has been studied as a "set of motivational changes" (McCullough et al., 1997, p. 321; see also McCullough et al., 1998). However, motivational changes (for decreased estrangement and increased conciliation) cannot constitute forgiveness in the absence of concomitant behavioral change; it would be peculiar indeed to assert that *p* had forgiven *o* if *p* continued to treat *o* adversely or, even in the absence of negative behavior towards *o*, reacted positively to *o*'s misfortune. This is implicitly recognized in the measure of forgiveness to emerge from McCullough and colleagues' research in that at least 5 of the 12 items are reports of behavior (e.g., "I avoid him/her," see McCullough et al., 1998). At the theoretical level, Baumeister, Exline and Sommer (1998) offer an interesting analysis of forgiveness that distinguishes "intrapsychic state" (defined as the cessation of anger and resentment) from "interpersonal act" and define combinations of these two elements as giving rise to particular forms of forgiveness. Thus, "silent forgiveness" involves overcoming resentment and anger but no interpersonal act whereas "hollow forgiveness" involves behavior but no transformation in the negative motivational orientation to the partner. The analysis is a useful one as it draws attention to interpersonal interactions concerning forgiveness, an area of inquiry that has received little attention and that is therefore considered in detail in a later section ("Interpersonal behavior following the wrongdoing").

Forgiveness is Not an Act But a Process

Given the above account of forgiveness behavior, there is the temptation to identify such behavior with a specific statement of forgiveness or an overt act of forgiveness (e.g. Hargave & Sells, 1997; Baumeister et al., 1998). This temptation should be avoided as it is likely to produce confusion. Here is why. The verb "to forgive" is not performative. So, for example, to say "I promise" is to make a promise even in the absence of any intention to do what is promised. But to say "I forgive you" does not thereby constitute forgiveness even if one fully intends to forgive the person addressed. As Hornsburgh (1974) points out, the phrase "I'll try to forgive you" is sufficient evidence to support this argument as "to try" cannot be used in conjunction with any performative verb (e.g., "I'll try to promise"). By extension, a specific act does not constitute forgiveness though it might well be the first sign that *p* has made a decision to forgive *o*.

This analysis is not simply an exercise in semantics because it uncovers something important about forgiveness – forgiveness is not achieved immediately. Rather, the decision to forgive starts a difficult process that involves conquering negative feelings and acting with good-will towards

someone who has done us harm. It is this process, set in motion by a decision to forgive, that makes statements like "I'm trying to forgive you" meaningful.

At the same time, forgiveness is a process that is presumed to have an end point. That end point may be sudden or it may be slowly achieved. But at some point forgiveness is more or less fully realized. The two steps in this process, initiating forgiveness and only later fully achieving it have the potential to set up interesting dynamics in an ongoing relationship that are explored in the next section of the article.

*Forgiveness Involves Negative **and** Positive Dimensions*

Forgiveness is not achieved simply by relinquishing a negative motivational state vis-à-vis-the harm-doer. Overcoming the resentment, anger, retaliatory impulses and so on of unforgiveness reflects only one of two dimensions of forgiveness. As Holmgren (1993) notes, "In reaching a state of genuine forgiveness the victim extends an attitude of real goodwill towards the offender as a person" (p. 34). Downie (1971) characterizes the positive dimension of forgiveness as "the attitude of respect which should always characterize interpersonal behavior" (p. 149). Forgiveness thus entails a positive motivational state towards the harm-doer.

One can conceptualize the negative dimension of forgiveness as overcoming an avoidance goal and thereby removing the barrier caused by the injury. But lack of an avoidance goal is not equivalent to having an approach goal. The positive dimension of forgiveness provides the motivational foundation for approach behavior. Perhaps because avoidance goals have an inherent primacy, measurement of forgiveness has focused on its negative dimension (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998) and a great deal of what has been learned about forgiveness rests on inferences made from the absence of a negative motivational orientation towards the harm-doer.

Distinguishing positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness is important for at least two reasons. First, the tendency to impose a bipolar structure on constructs in social science is also evident in the forgiveness literature. But forgiveness cannot be understood completely by studying unforgiveness, just as marital quality cannot be fully understood by the study of marital distress or optimism by the study of learned helplessness (Fincham , 2000). Second, negative and positive dimensions of forgiveness may have different determinants, correlates and consequences. For example, it can be hypothesized that negative and positive dimensions predict avoidance/revenge and conciliatory behaviors, respectively. The forgoing analysis suggests that forgiveness may be characterized along two dimensions, each of which may range from high to low. We explore the implications of this analysis in the next section.

Four Types of Forgiveness

Expanding upon the two dimensional structure hypothesized above, and incorporating the distinction between shifts in motivation and behavior, forgiveness may be roughly described as falling into four categories, with each category having associated motivational and behavioral characteristics. Although we do not wish to imply discontinuities along the positive and negative dimensions described, there is considerable heuristic value in identifying and discussing "types" of forgiveness. Most importantly, the types may form recognizable prototypes that have clinical utility. In addition, forgiveness may be found to have natural points of discontinuity that render a "typology" particularly appropriate.

Nonforgiveness

Assuming that an individual has made an attempt to forgive, they may experience change on neither, one, or both dimensions of forgiveness. If they make no progress on either dimension, one might characterize them as being in a state of non-forgiveness. This state of non-forgiveness is likely to be associated with little change in the behavior directed toward the partner. That is, after an attempt at forgiveness the individual finds that they are no more motivated to approach the partner and no less motivated to avoid or punish the partner. In addition, they may have directed no additional positive behavior and no less negative behavior toward the partner. Such an individual is unlikely to characterize him/herself as having "forgiven," and if they do it is more likely to represent an example of dissimulation or self-deception. A theoretically important exception would occur if the individual had made a firm decision to attempt to move along one or both dimensions of forgiveness. In this case, saying s/he had forgiven would have the character of a promissory note or intention, but would be free of any other change.

A sub-variety of non-forgiveness would be represented by individuals who have experienced no change in positive or negative motivations toward the partner, but who have taken behavioral steps toward forgiveness, either by engaging in some positive interaction or refraining from avoidance and retribution. In such cases, an individual's self-characterization as having forgiven may be either self-deception or promissory. In the former case, one might characterize the forgiveness as "hollow." In the later case, one might view the individual as being at a very early, but potentially productive stage of the forgiveness process. Hollow forgiveness may be particularly difficult to resolve because the individual may assert that he or she has satisfied the requirements of forgiveness and may see little need to continue any process of forgiveness. Promissory forgiveness, on the other hand, suggests an openness to continued change in motivations toward the partner.

Ambivalent Forgiveness

If the individual attempts to forgive and makes progress only on the dimension of positive motivation toward and positive interaction with the partner, and no progress on the negative dimension of punishing behavior, this might be called ambivalent forgiveness. Ambivalence is a particularly interesting psychological state which may have unique psychological characteristics (see Fincham et al., 1997). In the case of forgiveness, an individual might find that after an attempt at forgiveness he or she is more motivated to approach the partner positively, perhaps experiencing more warm or tender feelings, but they may experience no change on the number or severity of negative emotional responses to the partner. The individual in this case could honestly report forgiving the partner, at least in part, but they may be more likely to say, "I'm trying to forgive." The presence of strong negative emotional reactions is likely to prompt reflection and result in the self-assessment that the forgiveness process is not complete. Indeed, the negative feelings associated with ambivalent forgiveness may be useful for the overall forgiveness process because they encourage the injured party to continue working toward forgiveness and prevent premature closure.

Detached Forgiveness

If an individual makes progress only in reducing negative or punitive responses to the partner but not in positive, approach responses this might be characterized as "detached" forgiveness. After an attempt at forgiveness a partner might find that s/he is less motivated to punish and avoid, but not more motivated to engage the partner. This might lead the individual to sincerely

say they have forgiven the other, and experience a sense of closure. Because the lack of positive motivation and positive interactions may not have the same perceptual salience as the presence of negative motivations and negative interactions, detached forgiveness is a potential stopping point in the forgiveness process. For situations in which no reconciliation is anticipated or desired, detached forgiveness may also be sufficient to produce psychological benefits for the hurt individual. An example might be the "detachment with love" strategy recommend in ALANON for family members of alcoholics. This strategy may be particularly useful when the goal of the intervention is to help the individual release anger and bitter resentment that is experienced as a burden, but reconciliation is not a desirable or possible goal. At the same time, it would not be ideal if the individual hopes for the relationship to continue. If the relationship is to continue, "detached" forgiveness might lead the partners to have little emotional engagement with each other – resulting in a devitalized relationship. The absence of positives might be expected to set the stage for deteriorating satisfaction with the relationship. Thus, an inability to engage the partner positively severely limits the potential benefits of the relationship and threatens the stability of the relationship over the longer term. This analysis suggests that "detached" forgiveness may not be a desirable early target when there is an expectation that the partners may eventually reconcile but may be a desirable goal when the partners are not expected to reconcile.

Complete Forgiveness
If an individual makes progress on both dimensions, they might characterize themselves as having forgiven or being in the process of forgiveness. This type of forgiveness would be "complete forgiveness" in which there is change on both positive and negative dimensions and change both in motivation toward the partner as well as in behavior directed toward the partner. It is this "type" of forgiveness that would be most likely to be associated with reconciliation and relationship repair following a transgression.

Because the victim role is defined by an event that occurred in the past it is primarily one of looking back. To the extent that the victim maintains a focus on the past, it is hypothesized that the negative dimension of forgiveness will remain salient. Yet the victim at some point needs to look to the future and it is at this juncture that the positive dimension of forgiveness is likely to become salient. Holman and Silver (1998) have noted that the forward versus backward orientation of victims is one of the defining criteria of whether they are coping or adjusting well. Accordingly, we believe that a future orientation is necessary for complete forgiveness to occur.

Conclusion

As evidenced by this brief analysis, forgiveness is a complex construct. It is firmly rooted in historical traditions, religious teachings and cultural values that shape our existence. The unique configurations of these specific elements that each reader brings to bear on the foregoing analysis will no doubt lead to potential disagreement with it. This is to be welcomed. The intent has not been to offer a definitive or complete analysis of forgiveness. Nor have we attempted to describe lay conceptions of forgiveness, a worthwhile task but one that is perhaps best addressed through empirical research. Rather, we have tried to identify, describe and distinguish logically among some elements of forgiveness and specify how forgiveness differs from related constructs with the intent of offering a sufficiently clear analysis to inform future research. The analysis may be erroneous but that is less consequential than its clarity for science is advanced more by error than by confusion. Attempting to capture completely the essence of a construct as rich as forgiveness is a humbling experience. Fortunately its successful accomplishment may not be necessary for, as

Smede (1998) so insightfully observes, "reality is always more prickly and awkward than our definitions of it" (p. 350). It is therefore time to turn to the "reality" of forgiveness in close relationships.

FORGIVENESS IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of forgiveness in close relationships is illustrated by the finding that among couples married for 20 years or more spouses rate that the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness as one of the most important factors contributing to marital longevity and satisfaction (Fenell, 1993). Worthington (1998b) shows that forgiveness accounts for variance in current relationship closeness after relationship length, pre-transgression closeness, characteristics of the hurt (impact and depth) and events since hurt (apology and time since transgression) are entered into the regression equation. Thus, forgiving does appear to promote reconciliation (closeness). In this section we offer a preliminary framework for understanding forgiveness in close relationships using as a starting point the attribution of responsibility.

Responsibility Attribution Influences Forgiveness

Using a married couple as an example, in both responsibility attribution and forgiving one is concerned with the link between spouse and partner injury. Unlike the forgiveness literature, which appears to assume that such a link exists and pays minimal attention to the nature of the link, the responsibility attribution literature is replete with philosophical, legal, and psychological analyses of how such a link is established. So, for example, criminal responsibility requires a mental element (guilty mind or *mens rea*), and a physical element, an act or omission (*actus reus*), which links the act to the injury. This alerts us to the obvious, and seemingly trivial, fact that the spouse → partner injury link is not direct but occurs through an act or omission. Hence, what is at issue is the sequence, Spouse → Act/Omission → Partner injury.

Already this highlights a crucial element in forgiveness (e.g., North, 1987; Smedes, 1998), distinguishing the spouse from his/her act (cf. St. Augustine's dictum, "Hate the sin, love the sinner"). As the injured partner sees beyond the transgression, and appreciates the person behind the act (their inherent worth, positive qualities and flawed humanness) forgiveness is accordingly facilitated. Not surprisingly, this distinction is particularly emphasized in clinical writings on forgiveness (e.g., Enright, et al., 1998; Worthington, 1998a). Here the process seems to parallel that which underlies motivated cognition in the more general case of dealing with negative partner characteristics (Murray & Holmes, in press).

But analysis of responsibility goes further by reminding us that both the link between spouse and act and act and injury can vary in strength and hence each will impact the link between spouse and partner injury. Recognition of levels or degrees of responsibility are embodied in social institutions (e.g., the law) as well as psychological theory (e.g., Heider's levels of responsibility). Hence, the spouse → partner injury link for which forgiveness occurs may vary in strength from very weak to very strong. Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that the degree of responsibility will influence forgiving; all else being equal, forgiving will be easier as degree of responsibility decreases. So, for example, it will be easier to forgive injury that was foreseeable but unintended than injury that was intended.

It follows that many of the factors that influence responsibility attribution will be relevant for understanding forgiveness. This is not to imply that such factors have the same effects on responsibility and forgiveness. For example, Boon and Sulsky (1997) have already shown that in romantic relationships intentionality is weighted heavily for both judgments of blame and forgiveness whereas avoidability of a trust violation seems relatively more important for blame but severity of the violation seems relatively more important for forgiveness. Nonetheless, identification of factors influencing responsibility attributions as important for forgiving opens up an area of inquiry that is likely to be especially important for clinical intervention. Al-Babuk, Dedrick and Vanderah (1998) recognize this and have already explored the value of attribution retraining in forgiveness therapy. Unfortunately their analysis is grounded in basic research on causal attribution and pays little attention to attributions in close relationships. To the extent that further work focuses on attribution processes in close relationships and on responsibility attribution, rather than casual attribution (which may or may not lead to responsibility), it should prove increasingly fruitful.

Although many factors influence attributed responsibility, the degree of harm produced by an action is so fundamental that its implications for forgiveness require attention.[5] These are examined in the next section before identifying several broad classes of variables that are likely to influence forgiveness.

The Perceived Nature of Injury

Consider, for example, *p* who interrupts his or her partner, *o*, during a dinner party conversation with friends. In one scenario, *o* may experience momentary annoyance at being embarrassed in front of friends but simply "let it go." Trivial harm is not the proper subject of forgiveness; *p* may be held responsible for producing the harm but *o* may choose simply to forget or overlook such harm precisely because it is trivial. In an imperfect world we all experience minor harms and even though they result from culpable behavior, viewing them as requiring forgiveness is likely to be seen as over-reactive. Rather, the harm must matter.

Now consider two scenarios where the same interruption does matter. In the first scenario its execution includes a subtle put down (e., "Wait, I've had lots of experience here and I can give examples to show you are right"). Two levels of outcome can occur – the immediate humiliation in front of friends and injury to *o*'s self image.

Injury to Self Image

It can be hypothesized that where *o* perceives harm to his or her self image, forgiveness will be more difficult than when no such harm is perceived. It has long been argued that a major function of revenge and vengeance is restoration of self esteem (see Kim, 1999). Early on, for example, Westermarck (1912) noted that retaliation serves "to enhance the `self-feeling' which has been lowered or degraded by the injury suffered" (p. 23). Where *o*'s self image has been injured, forgoing this mechanism of restoring self esteem makes forgiveness relatively harder. The implications of perceived injury for forgiveness can also be hypothesized to vary as a function of *o*'s self esteem. At low levels of self esteem, the injury might be less consequential for forgiveness because the harm may be seen as consistent with *o*'s view of what she or he deserves and hence any request for forgiveness may be more easily honored. Conversely, at high levels of self esteem forgiveness may also be relatively easier because *o* is less likely to

experience such injury even though he or she recognizes the implications of *p*'s behavior for the self image. At intermediate levels of self esteem, where self-image may be most fragile, forgiveness may be hardest because injury is most keenly felt.

Moral Injury

In a second scenario where harm matters an added dimension to the injury is again apparent. This time the interruption is accompanied by explicit derogation and name calling (e.g., "Wait, this is the voice of ignorance. Typical you stupid ass. I have lots of experience to show you are wrong"). It is not difficult to imagine *o* responding to *p*'s behavior with righteous indignation and powerful urges to retaliate making forgiveness correspondingly harder. Is this simply a function of more intense injury? Although more intense harm no doubt makes forgiveness harder, it is the perceived injustice of the harm that gives life and staying power to unforgiveness. Indeed, Heider (1958) argues that indignation occurs because "the objective order has been slighted" and the harm "ought not have happened and is against objective requiredness" (p. 264). As a result we care a great deal about moral injury (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). It can therefore be hypothesized that injury perceived in moral terms will be relatively harder to forgive than injury that is not perceived in such terms.

Determinants of Injury

A challenge for understanding forgiveness in close relationships is that the determinants of perceived injury may not be immediately apparent. Consider the original scenario where *p* simply interrupted *o*, a seemingly trivial offense, but this time *o* is deeply hurt. Is this an inappropriate response? It might be if this was an isolated incident. But the hurt becomes quite understandable when we learn that, in the context of a prior similar incident, *p* had undertaken to refrain from such behavior. Or similarly, it would be understandable if this interruption turns out to be the last in a series of such incidents. It is also understandable without a history of prior interruptions. We do not need prior behaviors that are topographically similar to understand the hurt because the interruption is also symbolic; it communicates *p*'s view of *o* as someone who counts less that *p*. Thus, any functionally similar, prior behavior lends greater significance to the interruption.

Four important implications follow. First, and perhaps most important, forgiveness may not pertain to a particular transgression even when it appears to do so. Rather, the specific act forgiven may (knowingly or unknowingly) represent the accumulated hurts of numerous, functionally equivalent, prior acts. Second, the symbolic status of a given behavior is likely to be idiosyncratic to the partner/couple and supports the need for idiographic research in any complete analysis of forgiveness in close relationships. Third, *p* may be frequently reminded of the harm resulting from a specific act (e.g., an adulterous one night stand) by *o*'s behavior (e.g., his/her comment on the appearance of an opposite sex friend/stranger) because it can be viewed symbolically. As a consequence, ease of forgiving is likely to be influenced by the extent to which a broad range of behaviors can be interpreted as symbolic of the transgression, by p's proclivity to interpret *o*'s behavior as symbolic of the transgression, and by o's attempts to avoid behaving in ways that lend themselves to such interpretation. Finally, the partner's injurious behavior may be experienced as extremely hurtful when it is functionally or symbolically similar to hurts experienced in other close relationships (e.g., at the hands of parents, a past partner). Often the victim will be unaware of this source of the hurt, and may even be puzzled by his or her response.

Forgiveness in Context

The goal of this section is to consider forgiveness in context by outlining briefly several broad classes of variables that may influence its occurrence. This is done via discussion of selected exemplars of person, relationship, harm-doing event, and post event classes of variables that have received either little or no prior attention.

Person

A variety of person variables have been identified as relevant for forgiveness (e.g., Worthington, 1998a). For example, empathy mediates the well-established apology-forgiveness relation and an empathy promoting intervention increases forgiving (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998). Similarly, rumination predicts revenge (McCullough et al., 1997) while a favorable attitude towards revenge is associated with retaliatory behavior (Caprara, 1986; Stuckles & Goranson, 1992). In view of the strong link between forgiveness and religion, one might expect that being religious is associated with greater forgiveness. Religious affiliation has been found to relate to beliefs about forgiveness (e.g., Gorsuch et al., 1993; Subkoviak, Enright et al., 1995) but such findings do not link religion to actual forgiving. Formal religious affiliation is unlikely to predict forgiving as it is the centrality of religious beliefs and the attempt to live according to those beliefs that most likely predicts forgiveness. Meek et al. (1995) provide some indirect evidence to support this view in that intrinsic religiousness (religiousness reflecting faith as a "master motive" in one's life) was associated with willingness to confess as a perpetrator. Surprisingly, where the person stands vis-à-vis religion and how this relates to forgiveness awaits more thorough documentation.

Perhaps the most obvious person variable for understanding forgiveness is a possible disposition to forgive. Philosophical and theological discussions of forgiveness often make reference to forgiveness as an enduring attitude or "a forgiving disposition" (Downie, 1971, p. 149) yet there appears to have been only one attempt to measure forgiveness as a trait (Mauger, Perry et al., 1992). Interestingly, forgiveness of others and of self were only moderately correlated ($r = .37$), forgiveness of others was relatively more stable across a two week interval (.94 versus .67) and the two objects of forgiveness, self and other, had different factor loadings on subscales. Although these data are limited by a focus on unforgiveness, they nonetheless provide some data consistent with the view that forgiveness of others and of the self may reflect different processes. Other psychometric efforts in the field no doubt capture elements of a disposition to forgive but the tendency to construct measures in relation to a respondent-selected past injury means that responses may also reflect features of the incident selected. The importance of developing an individual difference measure of forgiveness is emphasized by the observation that along with theory development "the slow development of psychometric instruments to measure forgiving has also been a major barrier to scientific progress" (McCullough et al., 1998, p. 1601).

A final person variable considered is one that has not previously been mentioned in relation to forgiveness. It concerns the person's implicit theory of transgression, particularly the extent to which partner proneness to transgression is viewed as a fixed or malleable quality. Building on her earlier work on helplessness and mastery orientation in children, Dweck (1999) has marshaled a large body of evidence to illustrate that such behavioral patterns reflect different goal structures (performance vs. learning goals), which in turn, arise from implicit theories of intelligence (entity/fixed vs. incremental/fluid). In the present context, one can hypothesize that viewing

partner proneness to transgress as a fixed vs. malleable quality will influence motivation to forgive. Faced with the task of forgiving an important partner transgression that challenges the person's capacity to forgive, it can be hypothesized that the incremental theorist is more likely to forgive than the entity theorist. Dweck (1999), in discussing the extension of her analysis to social traits and to judgments about others, reports unpublished data to suggest that implicit theories of social traits are related to motivational orientation; entity theorists were more likely to have negative and aggressive feelings towards wrongdoers whereas incremental theorists were more oriented to educating and helping wrongdoers and, by implication, to forgiving them. An important task therefore is to examine the relative importance of theories of forgiveness and of social traits in predicting forgiveness.

It remains to note that some characteristics of persons can be examined as general traits and as characteristics of the person in relation to the partner. For example, one can distinguish a general disposition to forgive from a disposition to forgive the partner. It is a safe bet to assume that these two levels of forgiveness are related empirically. But as the association is unlikely to be perfect, one can hypothesize that characteristics of the person in relation to the partner are likely to be more powerful determinants of forgiving in the relationship.

Relationship

Relationship characteristics have also been identified as important for forgiving. Usually the characteristics are described in terms of relationship quality. McCullough et al. (1998) offer an impressive list of seven ways in which relationship quality is likely to be linked to forgiveness: (a) greater motivation to preserve relationships in which resources are invested and which provide resources; (b) a long-term orientation induced by high relationship quality; (c) a collectivist rather than individualistic orientation in high quality relationships; (d) greater merging of partner and self interests in good relationships; (e) greater access to partner's inner thoughts/feelings that provides resources for increased empathy; (f) greater ease, in the context of a high quality relationship, in interpreting partner injurious behavior as having a positive motivational element; and (g) the greater likelihood of confession and apology in committed relationships.

Empirical evidence is consistent with the hypothesized link between relationship quality and forgiveness but, unlike the more specific linkages outlined above, is usually limited to global indices of relationship quality (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998). Although the sparse evidence and use of omnibus measures of relationship quality is problematic (see Fincham & Bradbury, 1987), the robust association between relationship quality and attributions, combined with the strong link hypothesized between attributions and forgiving, suggests that the relationship quality-forgiveness association is likely to be robust and relatively strong. However, it is clearly the case that the more important empirical task is to identify the specific features of relationship quality that are important for forgiveness. Mc Cullough et al (1998) are to be commended for their efforts in this regard but, in view of longstanding problems in the conceptualization and measurement of relationship quality, the assumptions they make about relationship quality are open to question. This is not the context in which to analyze these assumptions about relationship quality (for an analysis see Fincham, Beach and Kemp-Fincham, 1997; for a variety of different views see ISSPR Bulletin, Spring, 1999). However, it is worth noting that a science of forgiveness in close relationships is being built on an important assumption, that relationship quality functions similarly across relationship type (e.g., employer-employee, friend, relative, spouse). In fact, data pertaining to forgiveness have been aggregated across a variety of relationships (e.g., Mc

Cullough et al., 1997, 1998, Studies 1, 2 and 4), a practice that may or may not prove to be empirically justified.

It remains to note a relationship characteristic that is likely to prove important for understanding forgiveness but that has not yet received attention in the forgiveness literature. The degree to which power is unequally distributed in the relationship is important because power differences are likely to influence forgiveness indirectly, through attributed responsibility (e.g., the acts of more powerful persons are more likely to be seen as expressions of their will and hence more culpable, Heider, 1958), and also directly. Indeed, one can conceptualize the context in which forgiving arises in terms of power; by definition, when p harms o, p exerts power over o. Retaliation and revenge can thus be seen as a means whereby o reasserts his or her power and status and abstention from retaliation/revenge can be seen as an acknowledgment of p's superior power in inflicting the harm. From this perspective one can hypothesize that where a clear power imbalance exists in a relationship, the more powerful partner is likely to find it harder to forgive.[6] Forgiving is made more difficult for them because their power makes revenge particularly viable and foregoing its use requires relinquishing, at least temporarily, their superior power. Conversely, the less powerful partner is likely to find it easier to forgive. Because of their power, revenge is less viable (and defeated revenge would only affirm their lower power) and the power implications of forgiving do not require adoption of a power role, however fleetingly, that is inconsistent with their usual power/status in the relationship. If this analysis is correct, and we assume marriages in Western culture still accord men greater power than women, one would expect wives to be more forgiving of their husbands than vice versa. Stated differently, one might predict husband forgiveness as being more consequential for the relationship.

Harm-Doing Event

As a cursory perusal of case law shows, humans appear to have discovered an astonishing array of ways to harm each other and this is no less true in close relationships. The task then for understanding how the harm-doing event may influence forgiveness is to identify forgiveness-relevant characteristics of such events. As already noted, distinguishing among person, harmful act and injury, and specifying the linkages among them, is a fruitful starting point. In discussing the nature of the injury, I made a start in building on this foundation. Further elaboration is possible. For example, one could elaborate on the underlying view in that discussion that the degree of injury will influence forgiveness. Alternatively, one could distinguish further among the nonmoral bases (e.g., victims general relationship beliefs; nonconscious, conscious but noncommunicated beliefs, conscious and communicated beliefs; beliefs vs. standards; shared vs. divergent beliefs/standards of partners) that under-gird the victim's perception of wrongdoing. In a similar vein, various features of the act could be identified such as whether it was an omission or a commission. This may be significant in view of the feature-positive bias in which inferred attitude towards a stimulus is influenced more by the presence of behavior than its absence (Fazio, Sherman & Herr, 1982) and the fact that people are generally held more responsible for commissions than omissions (Fincham & Jaspars, 1980).

Proceeding along these lines is complicated by the fact that the injury is always inflicted in a particular context. Thus, the task can be seen to include identification of relevant situation characteristics and their functional significance for specific actions. Although the idea of identifying relevant characteristics of the harm-doing event for understanding forgiveness is a reasonable one, that task soon becomes complex and unwieldy and one can anticipate the identification of a large number of such characteristics. It is conceivable that many characteristics

might simply be proxies for each other. Our ability to examine the relative importance of only a limited number at any one time suggests that this approach is likely to end up being less than optimal.

Because so many properties of act and situation might influence forgiveness an important question is whether it is possible to capture these effects in terms of a few common underlying dimensions. Two such dimensions are proposed. First, Heider (1958, p. 267) argued that what is critical in retaliation is the need to address "the sources of o's actions...that most typically have reference to the way o looks upon p." In a similar manner, it can be hypothesized that the extent to which the partner's injurious act is not seen, or is no longer seen, to reflect the way the partner feels about the injured party (and numerous different factors could influence this judgment, including not only characteristics of the act and context in which it occurred, but also actions by the partner following the injury such as apology or conciliatory behavior), forgiveness is likely to be facilitated. Second, returning to a signpost from the responsibility attribution literature, the subjective probability of any partner in a relationship performing the injurious act given the situation, p(act/situation), can be hypothesized to influence forgiveness; the higher this estimate, the easier it will be to forgive. In a subjective probability model of responsibility attribution, Fincham and Jaspars (1983) identified this subjective probability as an important underlying dimension affecting people's reactions to harm-doing and suggested that it is analogous to the "reasonable person" standard found in many legal systems.

Interpersonal Behavior Following the Wrongdoing
What follows the harm-doing event is particularly important for forgiveness in close relationships as the partners typically, though not always, maintain some form of interdependence. Subsequent events can thus easily reinforce inferences drawn from the harm-doing event. This is perhaps starkest when the harm-doer inflicts the same injury or even a different injury. In either case, the task of forgiveness is potentially rendered more difficult as it may now pertain to forgiving multiple harm-doing events and, in the extreme case, to a hurtful relationship, rather than an event or set of events. The context in which repeated harm occurs is also likely to influence forgiveness. So, for instance, forgiving subsequent harm following o's attempt to ensure p is aware of the injury, or the extent of the injury, can be hypothesized to be less likely than in the absence of such attempts.

Discussion of the harmful event between partners might reveal differences in the meaning of the event. At the most fundamental level, the harm-doer may deny that his/her action is culpable and view o's hurt as an unreasonable or over-reactive response. All else being equal, forgiveness will be harder in this instance compared to the situation in which p allows that o's hurt is a reasonable response. Certainly if p's acknowledgement is accompanied by apology and/or a request for forgiveness, forgiveness will be correspondingly easier, because it is a clear indication that the view of o communicated by the harm-doing did not (or no longer) characterizes p's view of o. In fact, it is the repudiation of the view of o communicated by the wrongdoing that is critical for forgiveness. If not repudiated directly by p, dissociating p from the communication embodied in the act (e.g., it was an aberration and out of character, it reflected unusual levels of stress), will facilitate forgiveness while allowing the victim to maintain his/her self esteem.

The significance of post-harm doing interaction is emphasized by the fact that forgiveness is a process that occurs over time. As noted earlier, this creates particular challenges in ongoing relationships and can give rise to interesting relationship dynamics. Consider the situation where o offers a verbal statement of forgiveness. As indicated, such a statement is not performative and

more likely indicates the decision to try to forgive the partner. Even when worded as such (though in the normal course of events one expects "I forgive you" to occur more commonly than "I want to try and forgive you"), the harm-doer is likely to experience the statement as performative and be puzzled, annoyed or angry when incompletely resolved feelings of resentment about the harm-doing intrude upon subsequent discourse or behavior in the relationship. Thus, the words "I forgive you" can signal the beginning of a process for o but be seen as the end of the matter by p who is likely to be only too willing to put the transgression in the past and act as if it never happened. The timing of such a verbalization, and where o stands in regard to our typology of forgiveness is likely to be particularly important. For example, the verbalization may have a different impact depending on whether o is seen to be ambivalent, versus detached.

Statements of forgiveness are also important for another reason; they can be bungled or abused. First, genuinely motivated attempts to tell the partner that s/he is forgiven can easily be seen as a put down, a form of retaliation, and so on if unskillfully executed. Thus, they can lead to conflict and might themselves end up being a source of hurt. Second, p is likely motivated to see forgiven behavior as condoned behavior if o does not explicitly and clearly communicate that p's transgression and the hurt it has caused are unacceptable. Because of what Baumeister (1997) calls the "magnitude gap," o loses more than p gains from the transgression, this communication requires some skill to avoid it being seen as an over-reaction, and hence, a possible source of conflict. Third, statements of forgiveness may be abused. They can be used strategically to convey contempt, engage in one-upmanship, and so on.

To date, it is the harm-doer's behavior following the injurious event that has gained most attention. However, as should now be apparent, the victim's behavior following the event will also influence the ease with which, or even whether, forgiveness is accomplished. This leads to at least two important observations. First, because forgiveness is a process that the victim engages, it makes sense to talk about degrees of forgiveness where the referent is the accomplishment of forgiveness. Second, the particular manner in which the victim experiences the process of forgiveness may influence his or her behavior and thereby the accomplishment of forgiveness. For example, the extent of vacillation between, and duration of occupying, positions in the space defined by crossing positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness is likely to influence the victim's behavior. In short, how the victim responds to recurrent feelings of hurt, the subsequent inevitable hurts that result from a relationship with an imperfect partner, and so on is likely to be just as important for understanding forgiveness as the harm-doer's behavior following the injurious event.

Given the significance of both perpetrator and victim behavior following harm-doing, it behooves us to take note of Baumeister's intriguing conceptual and empirical work on the difference in perspectives between perpetrator and victim of harm-doing (e.g., Baumeister, Exline & Sommer, 1998; Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Baumeister has shown that perpetrator and victim encode and recall harm-doing events in self-serving ways. Victims tend to overlook details that facilitate forgiving (e.g., mitigating circumstances) and embellish their memories with details that make forgiving more difficult (e.g., recall greater suffering). These victim biases are accompanied by complementary transgressor advantaging distortions (e.g., embellishing mitigating circumstances). Such distortions by both victim and transgressor make the accomplishment of forgiveness in a close relationship particularly challenging. That is, in the usual course of events o has to cancel a debt that is bigger than one acknowledged by p. How this delicate process is negotiated can facilitate or impede

forgiveness. For example, if *p* challenges *o*'s view of the transgression instead of conveying that it does not truly reflect his/her regard for *o*, forgiveness is likely to be impeded. In fact, *p* may see *o's* reaction to the transgression as itself a wrongdoing (e.g., "put down") that, in turn, requires forgiveness. Should *p*act accordingly, *o* might feel doubly wronged and the couple could end up engaging in a chain of escalating, negative interaction. But such escalation is not inevitable.

Even if *p* does not separate him/herself from the symbolic communication embodied in the wrongdoing ("You are not worthy of better treatment"), forgiveness may be granted and can be especially powerful under these circumstances. This is precisely because *o* does not require *p* to prove him or herself a good person/partner by repudiating the wrong before granting forgiveness. Rather *o*'s forgiveness shows trust that *p* is a good person/partner and forgiveness itself may soften *p*'s heart and lead him/her to separate him/herself from the wrongdoing. This highlights the potential healing power of forgiveness for perpetrators as well as victims. Receiving forgiveness is an affirmation of the perpetrator's worth as a person despite his/her culpable action. This may enable the perpetrator to see him/her self as decent and worthy. The process described is especially likely in close relationships as past memories of *p* can persuade *o* of *p*'s decency despite the wrongdoing and the failure to repudiate it.

Coda

We offered an organizational framework, which together with the analyses identified in the previous section, might provide a foundation upon which to build a theory of forgiveness in close relationships. Although necessarily incomplete, the analysis offered is intended to provide sufficient material to inform research in this early stage of the scientific study of forgiveness. Indeed, the value of the analysis rests ultimately on its empirical and clinical utility. Before concluding the article, we therefore outline the empirical and clinical implications of our analysis

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Although this is not the context in which to develop a complete agenda for future research and practice we identify some way stations that might prove useful in facilitating a more complete research agenda.

Research

We identify two issues for future investigation that have the potential to facilitate both conceptual development and advance understanding of how forgiving occurs. First, we discuss the issue of whether or not forgiving occurs as a discrete event, leading to a point of discontinuity in the forgiveness process, or whether forgiving represents a gradual, continuous process. Second, we discuss the issue of whether forgiveness can be placed within a goal theoretic framework, providing new suggestions about the forgiving process and potential points of intervention.

Typology or Continuum?

Are there are natural points of discontinuity in the forgiveness process? The answer to this question is central to determining the potential clinical utility of a "typology" of forgiveness. If there are natural points of discontinuity, this would suggest that clinical interventions need to

focus on helping individuals find ways to move past the point of discontinuity. Once past the point of discontinuity it would be expected that changes would become increasingly self-maintained and self-sustaining. Accordingly, we now briefly address the problem of establishing discontinuity.

Taxometrics is the best available method to address the question of "types" versus continua. On the one hand, we might assume that forgiveness directed toward the partner reflects only a continuously distributed variable with all levels of gradation represented relatively equally. This assumption would lead us to expect that "complete" forgiveness of a partner is just one point, albiet an extreme point," along a continuum of forgiveness. Persons who report both positive and negative motivational transformation following a process of forgiveness are, by this view, just further along in the process of forgiveness than those who report movement along only one dimension or who report only small changes. Alternatively, we might hypothesize that, past a certain point, movement along the underlying positive and negative dimensions reflects a qualitative rather than merely a quantitative shift. As such, it might reflect a discontinuous change in correlates and maintaining variables. In this case, we would expect that "forgiveness" would be a structurally discrete entity, and should be treated as a distinct "type" of state rather than as quantitative shifts only. Accordingly, both theoretical formulations of forgiveness and clinical interventions directed at facilitating forgiveness may be influenced by the outcome of taxometric analysis.

Whether or not forgiveness comprises discrete types exist can not be settled by appeals to clustering algorithms. Clustering algorithms are potentially useful descriptive tools, but seldom yield consistent results, there is often no way to determine the appropriate number of clusters, and most methods will uncover clusters even if the underlying latent structure is dimensional (e.g. Grove and Andreasen, 1989; Meehl, 1979). In contrast, Meehl's taxonometric approach is robust with regard to violations of underlying assumptions, incorporates multiple tests to identify faulty conclusions, and has been tested in numerous Monte Carlo studies (e.g. Meehl & Yonce, 1996; Waller & Meehl, 1998). Accordingly, it is a well-known method and has a good track record in applications to several forms of psychopathology (e.g. Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1994; Trull, Widiger, & Guthrie, 1990).

If taxometric examination of forgiveness measures yielded curves that were relatively flat, this would support a dimensional interpretation, (i.e. that persons displaying more forgiveness were quantitatively, but not qualitiatively different than persons displaying less forgiveness along a particular dimension). Conversely, if the functions resulting from taxonometric analyses yielded curves with a prominent elevation this would indicated a taxonic solution (i.e. that persons displaying forgiveness beyond a certain point are behaving in a qualitatively different manner than those displaying less forgiveness). If evidence of a point of discontinuity is found, this strongly supports and informs current efforts to better define a typology of forgiveness for clinical and research purposes.

As currently formulated, our four-fold typology of forgiveness suggests that there may be points of discontinuity along each of the underlying positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness. Alternatively, it is possible that discontinuity is present for only one (or perhaps for neither) of the dimensions. Finding evidence of discontinuity sets the stage for identification of the "point of discontinuity" and so a more intensive investigation of the transition between a state of "non-forgiveness" and a state of "forgiveness." If there is a point of discontinuity, better understanding the events which may need to occur to facilitate the transition from one state to another.

Toward a Goal Theoretic Framework

It is likely that individuals will ask for help with forgiveness only if they feel stuck in some level of ambivalence. That is, persons who are not interested in forgiveness and are in a state of non-forgiveness, or people who have completed either a detached or complete forgiveness of the partner would be unlikely to seek help in changing their condition. This suggests that from a clinical perspective, it is most critical to understand ambivalent forgiveness (i.e., forgiveness associated with positive and negative feelings toward the partner). In this situation there is likely to be a confusing array of motives that distress and puzzle the individual interested in forgiving a partner. Advances in understanding ambivalent forgiveness may follow most rapidly if we adopt a goal theoretic perspective that allows us to better account for the sudden, and seemingly unpredictable shifts in mood and behavior that may occur for such individuals. We hypothesize that automatic activation of self-defensive goals may be a prominent part of ambivalent forgiveness. If so, placing ambivalent forgiveness within a goal theoretic framework has the potential to help make understandable the confusing set of behaviors that are so distressing for persons in this group.

Three general observations about a goal theoretic framework are relevant here (Carver & Scheir 1998). First, successful movement away from an avoidance goal most likely produces a different type of affect (relief) than movement toward an approach goal (elation), allowing one to distinguish their effect if one uses a two-dimensional affect system. Second, the approach and avoidance systems are likely to be physiologically distinct, perhaps with approach goals reflecting activity in the behavioral approach system and avoidance reflecting activity in the behavioral inhibition system (Gray 1987). Because underlying activity in these two systems appears to influence tendencies to learn avoidance and approach goals (Corr et al 1997), some individual difference variables may influence spouses' weighting of different goal types. Third, avoidance goals appear to have an inherent primacy, perhaps reflected in the common tendency for negative behavior to be relatively more salient than positive behavior in dyadic interaction. These very simple considerations suggest several potential areas of interest with regard to examining ambivalent forgiveness. In particular, this framework suggests different emotions may be associated with different dimensions of forgiveness, that individual differences in anxiety proneness or behavioral approach may influence the ease of forgiveness, and that self-defensive goals may have primacy over or pre-empt a wide range of approach goals. Each of these points deserves theoretical and empirical attention.

Different Emotions

To the extent that different emotions are associated with self-defensive goals this could be a help to individuals trying to better understand their own behavior. Perhaps one prototypical situation might involve the aggrieved partner beginning to feel closer to the offending partner, only to be flooded with negative emotion. To the extent that attacking the partner or getting away from the partner was associated with some feeling of relief, this would be consistent with the hypothesis that it was serving an avoidance goal. In particular, one might suspect that feeling closer to the partner triggered the goal of avoiding harm to the self-image.

Individual Differences

The extent that the person seeking help with forgiveness is high on anxiety proneness (or perhaps anxious attachment), one might expect greater difficulty in overcoming avoidance goals

in general. According to the current analysis, this should lead to greater difficulty with forgiveness, and should predispose the individual to ambivalent forgiveness. Recognition of this source of vulnerability might be comforting to individuals who are struggling to forgive, but cannot bring themselves to do so.

Self-Defensive Goals are Primary

The automaticity of self-defensive goals, and the ease with which they can be elicited and maintained allows them to play an important role in ambivalent forgiveness. It may often happen that ambivalent forgiveness arises, in part, because movement toward the partner (i.e. movement on the positive dimension of forgiveness) is sufficient to activate a self-protective response. This could happen, for example, if a romantic interchange with the partner activated images of the partner engaging in the original transgression. Because this image may be associated with feelings of humiliation and belittlement, it represents a "feared self" to be avoided. Once elicited, such a "feared self" may be quite powerful in organizing behavior and eliciting congruent emotion. Accordingly, the partner attempting to forgive may feel trapped into choosing either ambivalent or detached forgiveness. It is currently not known how common such problems are. However, given the ease with which such a dynamic could arise in romantic relationships, one suspects it may be rather common.

What can be done? Our goal analysis highlights three innovative points of intervention for forgiveness programs. First, if automatic, self-defensive, avoidance goals are a primary source of ambivalent forgiveness, it is important to give partners struggling with forgiveness a way to recognize when they are getting defensive and provide them with an alternative to attacking. Recent work suggests that self-protective mechanisms may be interchangeable (e.g. Tesser et al 1996) and so it may be possible to provide methods of self-protection that do not involve negative behavior toward the partner. For example, helping partners substitute workable 'self-enhancement' strategies for 'partner-attacking' reactions might help them get through the initial impulse to direct anger at the partner and so allow positive interactions to occur without eliciting waves of negative emotion and partner attack.

A second possible point of intervention in ambivalent forgiveness is sensitivity to threat. A goal perspective suggests that there are particular 'feared selves' (e.g. Markus & Nurius 1986) that motivate defensive behavior. If so, the areas represented by feared selves represent areas of vulnerability for destructive interaction. In the context of forgiveness, identification of such feared selves may be simplified because one can assume the relevant feared self is somehow related to the partner's transgression. Once identified, it should be possible to design exposure-based interventions that reduce the power of sensitivity to the "feared self," and so reduce the potency of negative reactions to positive partner behavior. Alternatively, awareness of points of vulnerability might allow couples to successfully deal with such issues when they arise.

The third component of a minimal intervention might focus on shifting the "theory" of partner transgression that is guiding the ambivalent partners reactions. That is, we might help couples learn that partners can change and develop, thereby helping them shift to an 'incremental theory' of partner behavior rather than an 'entity' theory (see Dweck 1996, Knee 1998 for complementary discussions). An incremental orientation is linked to learning goals and allows for failure and disappointments whereas an entity orientation is linked to performance goals leading to an ongoing focus on interactional behavior as 'diagnostic' of relationship well being. Inappropriate negative attributions for partner behavior and very low efficacy expectations might indicate such entity oriented thinking. Once detected, an entity orientation could be addressed

didactically as it is when couples are encouraged to adopt a 'problem solving attitude.' Alternatively, it might be addressed indirectly through metaphor or humor designed to activate alternative frameworks for interpreting spouse behavior. However, because it is important that couples be able to self-regulate the tendency to reach entity oriented conclusions, indirect interventions would need to be sufficiently memorable that they could be called upon in later conflict situations.

Practice: Dealing with the Scope of the Problem

Interest in forgiveness among social scientists has mushroomed in the 1990s stimulated largely by concern about facilitating forgiveness in counseling/therapy. In this section we present a perspective on facilitating forgiveness that differs from the traditional ones presented to date. In particular, we examine the possibility that it might be possible to deal with forgiveness at a more general level than is typically allowed if one adopts a couple therapy approach.

Facilitating Forgiveness: Is a Public Health Model Possible?
We take it as axiomatic that whatever interventions are found to be useful in facilitating forgiveness, the likely need for services will overwhelm the ability of traditional mental health providers to respond. At the same time, one might argue that because of the nature of transgressions (i.e. I was wronged - I am not the one with the problem), many persons in need of help with the process of forgiveness may be reluctant to ask for help. As a result, it is important to consider whether the conceptualization of forgiveness provided above could be implemented within a framework that allows individuals to seek help without labeling themselves as "the problem" and that would be potentially accessible to a large number of potential users. The intervention we envisage, therefore, is one that could be administered with guidance from paraprofessionals in the community and in a self-help format. Persons desiring more individually tailored help could then opt into a more intensive process. We envision the process as having three main stages: screening (including orientation and goal clarification), initiating the forgiveness process, and maintenance.

Getting Started: Is this Program for you?
Whatever the format, the first component of the intervention would (a) screen out participants for whom the intervention is not appropriate and (b) help potential participants understand what is and is not offered by the intervention. Because we view forgiveness as involving movement along two dimensions (avoidance and approach), and because we view the ease of forgiveness as being determined in part by explanations and degree of injury to self-evaluation, these dimensions seem particularly important to monitor in future investigations of forgiveness.

Following initial screening, potential participants would get an orientation to the forgiveness process. To start, they would be asked to write a brief statement of what it is they wish to achieve from participating in the program. This exercise helps clarify for the participant what it is they are looking for and sets the stage for the two remaining elements of this first component of the program: a guided evaluation of whether the program is likely to be able to meet their needs and basic education about what forgiving another does and does not entail. After outlining the key elements of the program, the final component of the orientation would be to provide participants with a model of forgiveness that describes forgiveness as an act of strength and courage, but one

that is often difficult and may take time. This may be a critical element of the intervention because persons who do not forgive from a position of strength may not forgive in a way that is helpful to them or to their relationship with the partner. Accordingly, a brief educational element would be an important final aspect of the orientation.

Initiating the Forgiveness Process

Because we conceptualize the avoidance dimension of couple conflict as behaving much like anxiety, we draw upon the anxiety literature for ideas about a potential approach for decreasing avoidance problems in the context of forgiving the partner. Accordingly, we propose that one key element of the program might be designed to help the participant write about the transgression and the hurt it engendered. Participants would be encouraged to include details about sensations, thoughts, and feelings they may have had at the time. One goal of the exercise is to have participants confront directly any aspect of the event that might otherwise be avoided and so serve as a reason to continue avoiding the partner. Exposure therapies have been very successful in dealing with other patterns of avoidance and a writing format is common in such approaches (e.g., Calhoun & Resick, 1993).

Because simply thinking about or ruminating over the hurt may be iatrogenic (Worthington, Sandage & Berry, 2000), a goal throughout the intervention is to facilitate writing that will prompt use of positive emotion words. Thus, in the context of embracing their right to better treatment, respondents are encouraged to highlight positive feeling about the self. In a similar vein, they are asked to write about the constructive ways in which they have coped with the transgression and the feelings that their coping has engendered. The elicitation of positive emotion is not only important because of the research on trauma; it is also important to ameliorate the fact that, by definition, transgressions denigrate the worth of the victim, and repairing injury to self-image is likely to be an important part of being able to forgive.

Although positive feelings about the self are important, in the context of relationships, positive feelings about the partner are also relevant. The next writing task addresses this issue. An important part of laying the groundwork for forgiveness is to (a) weaken the link between partner and the injury they caused and (b) to induce the victim to see the partner as a whole person and not just someone who transgressed against them. Weakening the link between partner and injury involves altering (but not severing) attributed responsibility. Attributed responsibility involves linking the partner to their action and linking their action to the injury (partner→act→injury; see Fincham & Jaspars, 1980).

Weakening of the link between partner and act is addressed by asking the participant to write about the reasons for the partner's action assuming reasonable motives on the part of the partner. How did the partner view the situation and what was s/he thinking and feeling? How did the partner's experiences in life (e.g. in past relationships) influence his/her behavior? Weakening the second link between partner act and injury is addressed by asking participants to write down as many possible outcomes, both foreseen and unforeseen, of the partner's action as they can imagine. The victim is also asked to write about what s/he brings to the situation, particularly thoughts/past experiences that may not be known to the partner or recently communicated to him/her, that make the act especially hurtful to the victim.

Finally, in preparing the ground for forgiveness, it is important for the victim to see the partner as a whole person. A final exercise in this component of the program is therefore to write about the partner first from the perspective of a friend or acquaintance who admires or likes the partner, and then to write about positive experiences with the partner. The victim is also prompted

to develop a list of the partner's strengths and weaknesses. To ensure some balance, they can start with a weakness and be instructed that they should not add another until they have identified an initial strength and to continue in similar vein until the list is completed.

To facilitate the emergence of a forgiveness orientation, the issue of forgiveness again needs to be addressed explicitly along with what it does and does not mean to forgive. Here the victim's own humanity is important. S/he is asked to write about events when s/he hurt another and was grateful to be forgiven by the victim. What was it like to know that the victim has been hurt by his/her action? And how did the victim's forgiveness alter these feelings? If participants cannot identify actual events, they can be asked to imagine whether they might have hurt, or are likely to ever hurt, someone without knowing about the harm that they caused. How would that feel? And what if they were to learn about the consequences of their action? And then how would it feel to be forgiven for what they did? The goal here is to help participants experience the ease with which they could occupy the role of perpetrator and how forgiveness not only liberates them from their own negative affect but also lays the groundwork, in conferring a gift on the perpetrator, for relationship reconciliation if that is a desired and prudent goal.

The next step is to actually commit to forgiving. In one intervention program, this takes the form of writing a letter of forgiveness as if the victim were going to send it to the perpetrator, by having the victim write a certificate stating the date of forgiveness, and by having the victim make a public statement about forgiving (Worthington, 1998a). With the cautions that forgiveness is not granted on a given date (it is ongoing; only the decision to forgive can occur on a given date) and that a public commitment should only involve a trusted friend or confidant, we see considerable merit in incorporating such processes in our proposed intervention. Our certificate would be carefully crafted to help inoculate the participant from relapse by including statements that recognize the ongoing nature of the process and the steps that will be taken when the inevitable relapses occur in the process. This brings us to the final component of the intervention concerning persistence in the effort to forgive.

Keeping Going: Forgiveness Calls for Persistence

The final component of the intervention is primarily future oriented in that it encourages writing about challenges to forgiveness. Thus, participants write about how they might react when they re-experience negative feelings and hurt associated with the transgression following their commitment to forgive. The idea is to plan for such lapses to mitigate their impact and to allow for further education about forgiveness (e.g., that periodic thoughts and feelings about the transgression are normative and are not the same as unforgiveness, that emotions cannot be ended though a decisions to end them but they can nonetheless be controlled when they occur).

Two further written exercises are likely to be a particularly important. The first requires participants to write about what they have learned through experiencing the transgression and is designed for them to find meaning in what they have suffered. This builds on prior writing exercises and is designed to help the person develop a coherent narrative about their experience, something that is known to be beneficial in responses to traumatic events (Esterling et al., 1999). A second, related exercise is to write about the changes they have experienced as a function of the decision to forgive, a task that is designed to reinforce forgiving in drawing attention to the release from (often persistent) negative affect.

Strengths and Limitations of Proposed Intervention

Two important strengths of the proposed intervention are its flexibility in both the mode of delivery (print media and electronic media) and adaptability to participant need (progress can be determined by responses to critical questions), its cost effectiveness, it similarity to a process that occurs naturally (keeping a journal), its potential to be adapted to and delivered through community organizations, and its ease of evaluation (especially if delivered electronically).

CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the fundamental challenge of how to retain relatedness with a close other and suggested that it can be met through forgiveness. It therefore offered a conceptual analysis of forgiveness and distinguished forgiveness from related constructs. Forgiveness is a repair mechanism that is particularly important in close relationships and an organizational framework for its study in such relationships was outlined. Finally, the implications of our analyses for research and practice were briefly highlighted.

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