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# Attitudinal Ambivalence, Rumination, and Forgiveness of Partner Transgressions in Marriage

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*Although positive and negative attitudes toward a transgressor are related to increased and decreased forgiveness, respectively, prior research has failed to investigate forgiveness among those who feel both positively and negatively toward a transgressor. Therefore, the authors examined such ambivalence and its relationship to forgiveness. It was hypothesized that spouses with ambivalent attitudes toward their partner will be less forgiving of a partner transgression because such an event is likely to prime the negative component of their ambivalence. Because ruminating about a transgression also has the potential to prime the negative component of one's ambivalence, an interaction between rumination and ambivalence was predicted. Data from 87 married couples showed that greater attitudinal ambivalence toward the partner was associated with decreased forgiveness only when husbands and wives thought about the transgression frequently; ambivalence was not related to forgiveness in the absence of rumination. The implications of these findings for understanding forgiveness in marriage and for increasing forgiveness among married couples are discussed.*

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**Keywords:** marriage; forgiveness; transgression; ambivalence; rumination

**F**orgiveness, defined as a motivational transformation in which negative feelings decrease and positive feelings toward the transgressor increase, has been posited by a number of researchers to be beneficial both at the individual and relationship levels. At the individual level, forgiveness is related to decreases in anger, depression, and anxiety (Droll, 1985; Gassin, 1994; Trainer, 1981) as well as to increases in physical health (Strasser, 1984). At the relationship level, forgiveness may promote marital adjustment (Nelson, 1992; Woodman, 1991) and may have an effect on overall relationship satisfaction

(McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). Several studies have documented this forgiveness-satisfaction link (e.g., Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2001; Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998).

Given these benefits, a number of investigators have examined factors that influence forgiveness. For example, in their social-psychological model of determinants of forgiveness, McCullough et al. (1998) describe and classify different factors based on how proximal or distal they are to forgiveness. Operating more distally are factors at the relationship (e.g., level of intimacy, trust, and commitment) and personality levels (e.g., Agreeableness and Neuroticism); operating more proximally are social-cognitive factors. These factors are important because they directly impact the forgiveness process and are the mechanism through which more distal factors operate. They include affective empathy toward the transgressor, judgments of responsibility and blame, and rumination about the offense. Rumination is important (McCullough, 2000; Worthington & Wade, 1999) because individuals who frequently think about the event are less likely to forgive and as rumination lessens over time, people become more forgiving (McCullough et al., 1998).

The attitude one has toward a transgressor is another social-cognitive factor that appears to be important for forgiveness, although it has not received much

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attention. It is believed that having a favorable attitude toward the transgressor leads to increased forgiveness (McCullough, 2001), whereas having an unfavorable attitude decreases forgiveness. Research conducted by Bradfield and Aquino (1999) supports this belief. In their study, conducted in the workplace, they found that liking (or having a positive attitude toward) the transgressor makes forgiveness more likely. This finding is consistent with those that show transgressions committed by physically attractive individuals, compared to unattractive individuals, are evaluated less negatively and result in recommendations for less severe punishment (Dion, 1972; Efran, 1974).

Thus, attitude toward a transgressor appears to be a factor that may either increase or decrease forgiveness. However, research in this area is subject to an important limitation. Specifically, prior research has failed to take into consideration the fact that an individual may feel both positively and negatively toward an attitude object. This is important in light of the fact that the bipolar, unidimensional conceptualization of attitudes (i.e., positive-negative, good-bad, pro-con) has been questioned by findings indicating that positive and negative evaluations are relatively independent of each other (Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1997; Gardner & Cacioppo, 1995; Kaplan, 1972). Therefore, if a person feels both positively and negatively toward another, it becomes unclear as to whether he or she would forgive in response to a transgression. On one hand, having a positive attitude toward a transgressor increases the likelihood of forgiveness. On the other hand, having a negative attitude toward a transgressor decreases the likelihood of forgiveness. What happens, then, when one feels both positively and negatively toward a transgressor?

Because understanding such ambivalence in the context of marital relationships would bring us closer to better understanding how attitudes in marriage may affect important relational processes in the aftermath of partner transgressions, we explore ambivalence and forgiveness of partner transgressions in marriage.

#### ATTITUDINAL AMBIVALENCE AND PARTNER TRANSGRESSIONS

When an individual simultaneously holds favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward someone or something, they are said to have an ambivalent attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Kaplan, 1972; Katz & Hass, 1988). Research and theory posit that attitudes consist of two components, feelings and beliefs (Trafimow & Sheeran, 1998; Zanna & Rempel, 1988), and that ambivalence can occur within each of the components (i.e., intracomponent ambivalence) or between each of the components (i.e., intercomponent ambivalence; MacDonald &

Zanna, 1998; Maio, Esses, & Bell, 1997; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995).

Individuals can feel ambivalent toward any attitude object, including a person or social group, controversial issues, food products, and behaviors. For example, studies have been conducted on ambivalence toward African Americans (e.g., Katz & Hass, 1988), women (e.g., Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997), parents (e.g., Maio, Fincham, & Lycett, 2000), mandatory AIDS testing and euthanasia (Thompson et al., 1995), coffee and pizza (Maio et al., 1997), and the expression of emotions (King, 1993; King & Emmons, 1991). The research conducted by King and colleagues is worth noting because it examines ambivalence (toward expressing emotions) within the context of romantic relationships and suggests that such ambivalence is important for relationship quality.

When individuals hold an ambivalent attitude, they tend to process information regarding the attitude object more carefully (Jonas, Diehl, & Bromer, 1997; Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996). In so doing, they may resolve their ambivalence (believed to create psychological tension, which is unpleasant; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957) by obtaining information that helps them become either favorable or unfavorable toward the attitude object. In addition, when individuals possess an ambivalent attitude, either the positive or the negative dimension may be primed depending on the situational context. If the context is positive, one who is ambivalent about a group will have their positive feelings and beliefs primed and will in turn respond more favorably. If the context is negative, the negative feelings and beliefs will be primed and the ambivalent individual will respond unfavorably. For example, Katz and Hass (1988) found that in response to priming pro-Black sentiments in a sample of White college students, participants gave stronger endorsements on a humanitarianism-egalitarianism scale that emphasized the democratic ideals of equality, social justice, and concern for others' well-being. Bell and Esses (1997) examined ambivalence toward Native peoples in a sample of Canadians and found that inducing a positive mood state led to more favorable attitudes toward the Native peoples than when a negative mood state was induced. Thus, priming led ambivalent individuals to respond in ways that were consistent with the situational context.

Given these findings, one can hypothesize that in marriage, the occurrence of a negative event such as a transgression is likely to prime the negative components of an individual's ambivalent attitude toward his or her partner. Likewise, recalling such behavior, an instance where one's partner behaved negatively, is likely to activate and make more salient the negative feelings and beliefs that comprise the negative component of an

ambivalent attitude. This, in turn, could make forgiveness less likely. From this perspective, one could hypothesize that in the face of transgressions, individuals who are ambivalent toward their partners will be less forgiving.

#### THE INTERPLAY OF AMBIVALENCE AND RUMINATION

An alternative hypothesis is suggested by the observation that there is a continuous interplay among factors relevant to forgiveness (e.g., Worthington & Wade, 1999). One factor potentially relevant to the impact of ambivalence on forgiveness is rumination. Ruminating about a transgression means that the individual is mulling the offense over in his or her mind (Caprara, 1986). Engaging in such a thought process is likely to chronically prime the negative component of an individual's ambivalence. This leads to the hypothesis that there will be a significant interaction between ambivalence and rumination on forgiveness, such that ambivalent individuals who ruminate about the transgression are least likely to forgive the transgression.

#### CURRENT INVESTIGATION

The current investigation examined how ambivalence toward one's partner is related to forgiveness of partner transgressions. We hypothesized that individuals who are more ambivalent toward partners would be less forgiving of a partner transgression because the transgression would serve to prime the negative components of an individual's ambivalence (the negative feelings and beliefs that an individual has of their partner). We also hypothesized that ambivalence would interact with ruminating about a transgression, such that individuals who are more ambivalent toward their partner and who engage in more frequent rumination will be especially less likely to forgive because ruminating about the transgression will serve to chronically prime their negative beliefs and feelings.

These hypotheses were tested in a sample of long-term married couples. Because of the documented positive association between relationship satisfaction and forgiveness (e.g., Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2001; Fincham et al., 2002), it is important to test the above hypotheses independently of relationship satisfaction. Similarly, the negative association between transgression severity and forgiveness (e.g., Girard & Mullet, 1997; Worthington, 1998) means that transgression severity cannot be ignored in testing our hypotheses. As a consequence, we controlled statistically both relationship satisfaction and transgression severity. Finally, given that several studies have documented the association between rumination and affective problems such as

depression (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker, & Larson, 1994), we statistically controlled for current depressive symptoms in our study.

#### Method

##### PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Participants were 87 married couples from the greater Buffalo area who were participating with their adolescent daughters in an ongoing study of family relationships. Families were recruited through a local middle school. Letters were mailed to families of eighth-grade daughters at a local school. Families were instructed to return a postage paid postcard if they were interested in participating. Thirty-one families were recruited in this manner and the remainder were recruited through advertisements in the local media. Interested families were asked to call the project. All interested families were screened to determine whether they met the eligibility criteria used for the study. Eligibility criteria included being an intact family with an eighth-grade daughter and the ability to read and comprehend questionnaires and to participate in computer tasks. Families whose members had severe learning disabilities that would impair their performance were excluded. Husbands were 43.3 years old on average ( $SD = 4.5$ ) and predominantly Caucasian (97%). Forty-four percent reported graduating high school and 52% reported a college or postgraduate education. Wives were 41.1 years old on average ( $SD = 4.8$ ) and predominantly Caucasian (98%). Thirty-nine percent reported graduating high school and 53% reported a college or postgraduate education. Median family income was in the range of \$51,000 to \$60,000.

Participants and their families attended a laboratory session at the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York. During this time, husbands and wives first completed questionnaires assessing attitudinal ambivalence toward their partners and marital satisfaction. Then, each partner was interviewed to assess a time within the last 6 months when they felt upset, angry, or hurt because of something their husband or wife did or did not do. After providing a detailed, open-ended account of the event, individuals were asked to rate how much they thought about the transgression after it was committed, how much hurt they experienced when the transgression occurred, and the extent to which they forgave their partner. Participants then completed a questionnaire assessing current depressive symptoms. Families were paid \$75 for their participation.

##### MEASURES

*Attitudinal ambivalence.* Attitudinal ambivalence was assessed using an open-ended measure assessing participants' beliefs and feelings about their partner (see Maio

et al., 2000). Beliefs were elicited by asking participants to list as many characteristics of their partner that they could think of and space was provided for up to 10 items to be listed. Participants were then asked to rate the extent to which each characteristic was positive or negative using a 7-point scale from -3 to +3 by placing plus signs (+) or minus signs (-) next to each characteristic. If a characteristic was believed to be extremely positive, participants were asked to place three plus signs next to it; quite positive, two plus signs; slightly positive, one plus sign. If a characteristic was believed to be extremely negative, participants were asked to place three minus signs next to it; quite negative, two minus signs; slightly negative, one minus sign. If a characteristic was considered neither positive nor negative, participants were asked to assign that characteristic a 0. The procedure for assessing feelings about one's partner was similar. On a separate page, participants were asked to list the feelings and emotions they have for their partner (up to 10). They were then asked to ascribe plusses, minuses, or 0, based on whether they felt the feelings and beliefs to be positive, negative, or neutral using the same rating scale as with beliefs about their partner.

The ratings for beliefs and feelings were used to compute both intracomponent and intercomponent ambivalence. Recall that intracomponent ambivalence occurs when an individual has both positive and negative beliefs (or feelings) about an attitude object. Therefore, to calculate intracomponent ambivalence, the positive ratings for beliefs (feelings) were summed together and the negative ratings for beliefs (feelings) were summed together to determine the extent to which there is positivity and negativity within each attitude component. Ambivalence for each component (beliefs and feelings) was then calculated using a formula developed by Bell, Esses, and Maio (1996) for use with open-ended measures (see also Bell & Esses, 1997). Specifically, participants' intracomponent ambivalence for feelings and beliefs was calculated as  $P + |N| - 2 \times |P + N| + 30$ , where  $P$  is the sum of the positive ratings,  $N$  is the sum of the negative ratings, and 30 is a constant added to prevent negative scores (Bell et al., 1996; Maio et al., 1996, 2000). We then averaged the intracomponent ambivalence obtained for beliefs and feelings to form one overall intracomponent score (Maio et al., 2000).

Recall that intercomponent ambivalence occurs when there is conflict between each of the attitude components (i.e., one has positive beliefs and negative feelings, or vice versa). As such, the positive and negative ratings for feelings were summed together and the positive and negative ratings for beliefs were summed together ( $P + N$ ) to compute an overall net score for feelings and beliefs. Intercomponent ambivalence was then computed using the following formula:  $|B| + |F| - 2 \times |B + F| +$

60, where  $B$  is the net belief rating,  $F$  is the net feeling rating, and 60 is a constant added to avoid negative scores (see Maio et al., 1997, 2000). To place the intercomponent scores on the same scale as the intracomponent scores, the intercomponent scores were then divided by 2 (Maio et al., 2000).

The formulae for calculating intra- and intercomponent ambivalence assess the extent to which there is conflict both within and between attitude dimensions, respectively: positivity versus negativity for the assessment of intracomponent ambivalence, feelings versus beliefs for the assessment of intercomponent ambivalence. Of importance, the ambivalence scores calculated using these formulae possess three desirable measurement properties of an ambivalence index (see Breckler, 1994; Maio et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 1995): (a) ambivalence scores decrease when the smaller dimension is held constant and the larger dimension becomes increasingly more polarized, (b) ambivalence scores increase when the larger dimension is held constant and the value of the smaller dimension increases, and (c) when dimension scores are equivalent, ambivalence increases as the dimension scores increase.

Because intracomponent and intercomponent ambivalence were strongly correlated with each other for both husbands and wives ( $r = .87$  for husbands,  $r = .92$  for wives,  $p < .01$ ), the two were averaged to form a total ambivalence score for husbands and wives (Maio et al., 2000).

*Marital satisfaction.* Marital satisfaction was assessed with the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959). The MAT is a 15-item self-report questionnaire that asks individuals to evaluate several dimensions of their marital functioning, including the extent to which they confide in their partner, the amount of leisure time spent together, and the extent to which the individual and their partner agree on important issues in marriage, such as friends, sex relations, and family finances. This widely used measure of marital satisfaction has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity and has been shown to discriminate between distressed and nondistressed spouses (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

*Rumination and transgression severity.* Rumination about the transgression after it occurred was assessed by asking respondents to rate how frequently they have thought about the transgression since it occurred on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*I have not thought about the event since it happened*) to 6 (*I think about the event constantly*). An additional item was used to assess how much hurt they experienced when the transgression occurred. Hurt was indicated on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*very little hurt*) to 9 (*most hurt ever felt*). Higher scores indicated greater rumination and hurt, respectively.

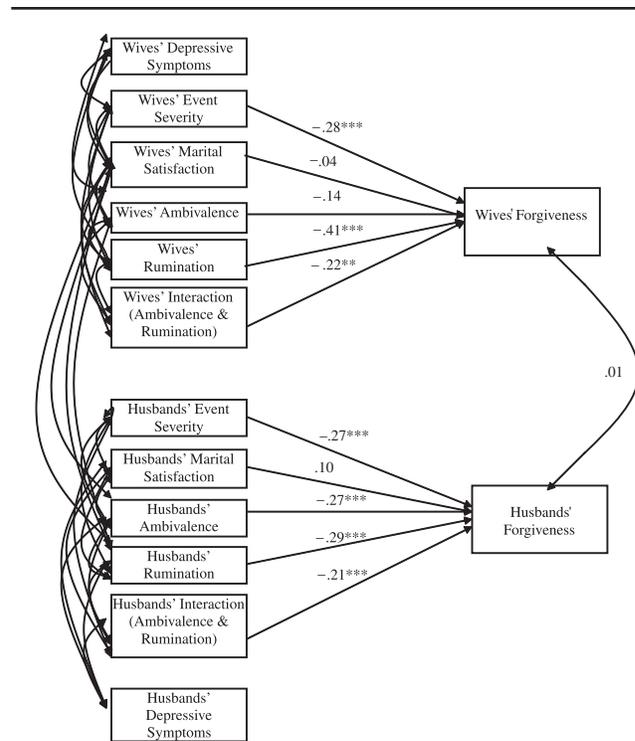
**Forgiveness.** Forgiveness was assessed using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998). The TRIM is an 11-item self-report measure assessing an individual's reactions to a specific partner transgression. The TRIM consists of items reflecting revenge (e.g., "I held a grudge for a long time"), avoidance (e.g., "I kept my distance for a long time"), and forgiveness (e.g., "I forgave him or her pretty easily"). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agree with each of the items based on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Given that forgiveness is believed to encompass both a decrease in revenge and avoidance toward the transgressor as well as an increase in forgiveness toward the transgressor (McCullough et al., 1997), responses to the items from the three dimensions were summed to form an overall forgiveness score. Higher scores indicated greater forgiveness. The TRIM has good psychometric properties, including adequate validity and temporal stability (McCullough et al., 1998). In the current study, the TRIM had Cronbach's alphas of .88 for husbands and .90 for wives.

**Depressive symptoms.** Depressive symptoms were assessed using the Inventory to Diagnose Depression (IDD; Zimmerman, Coryell, Corenthal, & Wilson, 1986). The IDD was originally designed to determine whether people met diagnostic criteria for depression, but it also provides a continuous index of symptom severity, which is computed by summing scores on each symptom item (higher scores = greater symptom severity). Scores can range from 0 to 88. The IDD has shown adequate reliability and validity in nonclinical samples. Participants were asked to report on their current levels of depressive symptoms. Both husbands and wives reported mild levels of symptoms (husbands:  $M = 6.02$ ,  $SD = 5.74$ ; wives:  $M = 6.67$ ,  $SD = 5.32$ ), which is not surprising given that this is a community sample.

### Results

Zero-order correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables in the analyses for husbands and wives are shown in Table 1. Replicating prior findings, both husbands' ( $r = .43$ ) and wives' ( $r = .29$ ) marital satisfaction correlated with forgiveness. Similarly, rumination was strongly associated with forgiveness for both husbands ( $r = -.50$ ) and wives ( $r = -.62$ ). Finally, the predicted association between ambivalence and forgiveness was obtained for husbands ( $r = -.51$ ) and wives ( $r = -.34$ ).

To test our hypothesis that there would be a significant interaction between ambivalence and rumination on forgiveness, structural equation modeling using Arbuckle's (1997) AMOS program (version 4.0) was used. For ease of interpretation, scores on the independent variables (ambivalence, rumination, marital satisfac-



**Figure 1** Relationship between attitudinal ambivalence, rumination, and forgiveness controlling for marital satisfaction, event severity, and depressive symptoms.

NOTE:  $\chi^2(14) = 9.63$ ,  $p = .79$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .00, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.00, numbers are standardized beta weights.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

tion, transgression severity, and depressive symptoms) were centered prior to conducting the analyses (see Aiken & West, 1991).

We first examined whether attitudinal ambivalence and rumination predict the tendency to forgive by testing a model that included husbands' and wives' ambivalence, rumination, and their interaction. Our model also included husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction, transgression severity, and depressive symptoms (see Figure 1). The model adequately fit the data,  $\chi^2(14) = 9.63$ ,  $p = .79$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .00, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.00. For husbands, although increased ambivalence and rumination predicted less forgiveness (ambivalence:  $B = -.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ; rumination:  $B = -.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ), these associations were qualified by a significant interaction ( $B = -.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For wives, only increased rumination predicted less forgiveness ( $B = -.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but again, this association was qualified by a significant interaction ( $B = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ).<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that the interactions for husbands and wives were significant even while controlling for marital satisfaction and event severity, two variables

TABLE 1: Zero-Order Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of All Variables in the Analyses for Husbands and Wives

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1. HAMB												
2. HRUM	.24*											
3. HTRIM	-.51**	-.50**										
4. HEVSEV	.19	.38**	-.50**									
5. HMAT	-.54**	-.34**	.43**	-.20								
6. HDEP	.17	.20	-.30**	.21	-.24*							
7. WAMB	.30**	-.05	-.01	-.13	-.26*	-.02						
8. WRUM	.12	.07	-.17	.06	-.14	.14	.30**					
9. WTRIM	-.18	-.13	.15	-.13	.11	-.05	-.34**	-.62**				
10. WEVSEV	.03	.08	-.07	.14	-.04	-.03	.17	.52**	-.52**			
11. WMAT	-.33**	-.17	.19	-.11	.43**	-.06	-.71**	-.35**	.29**	-.25*		
12. WDEP	.11	-.01	-.04	.05	-.13	-.05	.25*	.19	-.25*	.23*	-.31**	
<i>M</i>	21.14	2.37	56.56	4.74	115.32	6.02	20.13	2.48	55.10	5.84	118.22	6.67
<i>SD</i>	5.93	1.11	8.34	2.32	21.61	5.74	8.31	1.14	10.00	2.07	18.29	5.32

NOTE: H = husbands, W = wives, AMB = attitudinal ambivalence, RUM = rumination, TRIM = transgression related interpersonal motivations inventory, EVSEV = severity of the transgression, MAT = marital adjustment test, DEP = depressive symptoms.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

that have been shown in prior research to be related to forgiveness. In the context of this multivariate analysis, the paths from marital satisfaction to forgiveness were not significant for both husbands and wives (husbands:  $B = .10$ ,  $ns$ ; wives:  $B = -.04$ ,  $ns$ ). However, the paths from event severity to forgiveness were significant (husbands:  $B = -.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ; wives:  $B = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, the interaction between ambivalence and rumination also was significant for both husbands and wives even while controlling for current depressive symptoms, which has been shown in prior research to be associated with increased rumination. Thus, the interactive effects of rumination are not better accounted for by current depressive symptoms.

Four additional models were tested to probe the interactions (Aiken & West, 1991). The first included husbands' ambivalence, high rumination (1 *SD* above the mean), their interaction, event severity, and marital satisfaction, in addition to wives' ambivalence, rumination, their interaction, event severity, and marital satisfaction. The second included husbands' ambivalence, low rumination (1 *SD* below the mean), their interaction, event severity, and marital satisfaction, in addition to wives' ambivalence, rumination, their interaction, event severity, and marital satisfaction. Two similar models pertaining to wives' high and low in rumination also were examined.

Simple slopes tests revealed that for husbands and wives who frequently ruminate about a transgression, the more ambivalent they were toward their partners, the less forgiving they were of partner transgressions (husbands:  $B = -.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ; wives:  $B = -.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, for husbands and wives who do not ruminate about a transgression, there is no relationship between

ambivalence toward one's partner and forgiveness (husbands:  $B = -.05$ ,  $ns$ ; wives:  $B = .06$ ,  $ns$ ).

Because it can be argued that ambivalence scores might be related to number of beliefs and feelings listed by participants, we examined the association between ambivalence and the number of beliefs and feelings listed. Fewer beliefs and feelings about partners were associated with greater ambivalence for both husbands (beliefs:  $r = -.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ; feelings:  $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and wives (beliefs:  $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ; feelings:  $r = -.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Given that ambivalence was associated with the number of characteristics rated for both husbands and wives, we reexamined the hypothesized interaction between ambivalence and rumination on forgiveness, controlling for the number of feelings and beliefs listed. Structural equation modeling was used to test our original model, including as predictors the number of feelings and beliefs listed by husbands and wives. The model adequately fit the data,  $\chi^2(14) = 12.59$ ,  $p = .56$ , RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00. In addition, for both husbands and wives, the Ambivalence  $\times$  Rumination interaction was still significant (husbands:  $B = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ; wives:  $B = -.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, rumination and ambivalence interacted to predict forgiveness irrespective of the number of feelings and beliefs listed.

In sum, having an ambivalent attitude toward one's partner is related to forgiveness when partner transgressions occur but only when an individual frequently thinks about the transgression. When rumination is low, there is no relationship between attitudinal ambivalence and forgiveness.

#### Discussion

The current investigation explored the relationship between attitudinal ambivalence and forgiveness in mar-

riage. Because individuals who are ambivalent toward an attitude object will be more likely to respond negatively when their negative feelings are primed (i.e., Bell & Esses, 1997; Katz & Hass, 1988), we hypothesized that individuals who are ambivalent toward their partners will be less forgiving when their partners commit a transgression.

The current study also examined the role played by rumination because greater rumination is related to decreased forgiveness (i.e., McCullough, 2000, 2001; Worthington & Wade, 1999). Given that ruminating about a transgression also may prime the negative feelings and beliefs of an ambivalent attitude toward the partner, we hypothesized that rumination will interact with ambivalence, further decreasing the likelihood of forgiveness. Because transgression severity and marital satisfaction have been shown in prior research to be important for forgiveness, and because depressive symptoms have been shown in prior research to be associated with rumination, these variables were controlled in the current investigation.

Replicating prior results, we found an association between relationship satisfaction and forgiveness at the bivariate level, but this relationship did not emerge in our multivariate analyses emphasizing the importance of investigating potential determinants of forgiveness in a broader context. Similarly, the anticipated direct, inverse association between ambivalence toward the partner and forgiveness emerged at the bivariate level but decreased in the multivariate context. Rather, what we found for both husbands and wives was that degree of ambivalence toward the partner was related to decreased forgiveness when the partner committed a transgression only when individuals ruminated about the transgression.

These findings are consistent with prior research on attitudinal ambivalence in that it shows that when individuals hold both positive and negative feelings and beliefs toward an attitude object, either can be made dominant depending on the situation (Bell & Esses, 1997; Glick et al., 1997; Katz & Hass, 1988). When transgressions occur in relationships, they have the potential to prime the negative feelings and beliefs that an individual has toward their partner. Moreover, frequently thinking about the transgression after it has occurred also may have the potential to prime the negative attitudes that comprise part of one's ambivalence. Such priming can in turn affect the extent to which one will respond more or less favorably. The results showed that ambivalent individuals (who ruminated about the transgression) responded with decreased forgiveness, suggesting that the negative component of their ambivalence had been chronically primed.

When partners did not frequently think about the transgression, there was no relationship between ambivalence and forgiveness. At first glance, this may suggest that transgressions themselves are not enough to prime the negative component of an individual's ambivalence. However, the participants were asked about transgressions that occurred in the past, and because of this, the initial impact of the transgression may have lessened due to the passage of time or other intervening events. Had the transgressions occurred more recently (i.e., within the past day or week), the extent to which the ambivalent individual ruminated about the transgression might not have mattered for forgiveness.

These findings have a number of important implications. First, they add to the limited research on attitudes and forgiveness, highlighting the importance of taking into consideration both the positivity and negativity of one's feelings and beliefs toward another instead of examining how either one or the other relates to forgiveness. Second, our findings add to the growing list of factors that are important for forgiveness in marriage. Third, the findings highlight the importance of examining the extent to which forgiveness-relevant factors (e.g., ambivalence and rumination) interact with each other to predict increases or decreases in forgiveness (e.g., Worthington & Wade, 1999).

Given the important role that ambivalence plays in relation to forgiveness in marriage, future research might explore what gives rise to an ambivalent attitude toward the partner. One possibility is that a partner engages in high rates of both positive and negative behaviors, which contribute to the positive and negative feelings and beliefs that comprise one's ambivalence. Future research also might examine how ambivalence affects other important relational processes, such as conflict resolution. Because conflict has the potential to prime the negative components of an individual's ambivalence in the same manner as transgressions, such feelings and beliefs may contribute to ineffective conflict resolution strategies.

Future research also might explore what leads an individual to ruminate about a transgression. Our results show that transgression severity is one factor because more severe transgressions are associated with increased rumination. Another possibility could be the extent to which an individual is ambivalent toward their partner. Given that ambivalent individuals tend to process information more carefully (Jonas et al., 1997; Maio et al., 1996), rumination may be an attempt to resolve their ambivalence. Consistent with this line of reasoning, we found a significant correlation between ambivalence and rumination for both husbands and wives.

Future research also might explore whether ambivalent individuals will be as forgiving as those who are not

ambivalent but who hold primarily negative feelings and beliefs toward their partners. Although ruminating about a transgression will prime the negative attitudes that an ambivalent individual has, it is unclear whether the mere existence of positive attitudes (although not necessarily primed) acts as some sort of buffer to make forgiveness a little more likely. Future research also might explore individuals who feel indifferent toward their partner (defined as feeling neither positive nor negative toward an attitude object; Kaplan, 1972) because it is unclear whether these individuals will be less likely to forgive in the face of partner transgressions, especially if they ruminate about a transgression. Such research would help to shed additional light on the role of attitudes and forgiveness in marriage.

Finally, future research also might examine whether ambivalence and rumination mediate the relation between more distal factors (e.g., those at the relationship level) and forgiveness. For example, individuals who are more trusting in their relationship may be more forgiving because they may be less likely to perceive a transgression as severe and in turn might be less likely to ruminate about a transgression, resulting in increased forgiveness. In addition, they may be more likely to forgive because they may be more likely to have a favorable attitude toward their partner (i.e., will be less ambivalent toward their partner), resulting in increased forgiveness. Research examining such hypotheses might shed light on the mechanisms through which more distal factors operate on forgiveness.

The findings of the current study may have important implications for forgiveness-promoting interventions. Because ruminating about a transgression is related to decreased forgiveness in ambivalent individuals, future research might explore the effect of recalling positive behaviors, instead of negative behaviors (i.e., transgressions), that one's partner has engaged in, among individuals who have an ambivalent attitude toward their partner. Such "positive rumination" might prime the positive feelings and beliefs that an individual has of his or her partner, which in turn might lead to increased forgiveness, instead of decreased forgiveness. If so, such recall could be a useful technique to use when trying to promote forgiveness of partner transgressions, especially when working with ambivalent individuals. This would complement forgiveness interventions that focus on increasing a victim's empathy toward the transgressor, which has been shown to increase forgiveness (i.e., McCullough et al., 1997), in addition to interventions that focus on attribution retraining, which is also important for forgiveness (i.e., Al-Mabuk, Dedrick, & Vanderah, 1998).

The current findings are limited by a number of considerations. One is the use of retrospective reports of

transgressions. Certain events that follow transgressions may be important for forgiveness (i.e., the extent to which an apology was offered by the transgressor) and could affect the extent to which an individual thought about the transgression. In addition, such events could affect the attitude one has toward their partner, which in turn would affect how ambivalent they are. Another consideration concerns the cross-sectional nature of the current investigation, which prohibits statements regarding directions of effect. For example, it may not necessarily be that ambivalence, when combined with rumination, leads to decreased forgiveness; rather, decreased forgiveness could lead an individual to feel ambivalent toward their partner because the negative feelings and beliefs aroused by decreased forgiveness combine with preexisting positive feelings and beliefs to create ambivalence.

These limitations notwithstanding, the current study highlights the role of attitudes and forgiveness in marriage and shows how attitudes can interact with rumination to predict forgiveness of partner transgressions. This research adds to the growing literature on factors important for forgiveness in marriage and to research on attitudinal ambivalence, which until fairly recently, has not been examined in the context of romantic relationships.

#### NOTE

1. To ensure that our results did not simply reflect the presence of negative attitudes toward the partner, we tested our original model, controlling for the overall negative attitude that one has toward his or her partner. The summed score from two ratings was used to assess negative attitude ("Considering only the negative feelings you have toward your spouse, and ignoring the positive ones, how negative are these feelings"; "Thinking of only the negative qualities of your spouse, and ignoring their positive qualities, how negative are these qualities"; each item was rated on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 = *not at all negative* to 10 = *extremely negative*, and the two responses were summed). These items were modeled after those used by Kaplan (1972) and subsequent researchers to assess the negative dimension of attitudes.

Structural equation modeling revealed that the model adequately fit the data,  $\chi^2(16) = 15.32, p = .50$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .00, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1.00. In addition, for both husbands and wives, the Ambivalence  $\times$  Rumination interaction was still significant (husbands:  $B = -.21, p < .01$ ; wives:  $B = -.22, p < .01$ ). Thus, rumination and ambivalence interact to predict forgiveness even after controlling for the overall negative attitude that one has toward his or her partner, suggesting that it is the presence of both the positive and negative attitudes, and not simply negative attitudes alone, that accounts for the significant interaction of ambivalence and rumination on forgiveness.

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