Chapter Thirteen

"'Til Lack of Forgiveness Doth Us Part": Forgiveness and Marriage

Frank D. Fincham
Julie H. Hall
Steven R.H. Beach

Because those we love are paradoxically the ones we are most likely to hurt, it is critical to understand forgiveness in close relationships. Indeed, spouses report that the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to marital longevity and marital satisfaction (Fenell, 1993), and marital therapists note that forgiveness is a challenging but necessary part of the healing process for major relationship transgressions such as infidelity (Gordon & Baucom, 1999). Likewise, forgiveness of everyday hurts may contribute to relationship strength in numerous ways (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004). This chapter explores forgiveness as it operates within the context of marriage, considering the existing research that has been done in this area as well as identifying promising directions for future research. We also address how forgiveness can be applied in interventions with individual couples and groups of couples within the community. Finally, we discuss our theoretical perspectives on the forgiveness field as a whole. Before embarking on this exploration, we first make explicit our theoretical assumptions about the construct of forgiveness.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Notwithstanding the lack of a consensual definition of forgiveness, common to most definitions is the idea of a freely chosen motivational transformation in which the desire to seek revenge and to avoid contact with the transgressor is lessened, a process sometimes described as an altruistic gift (e.g., Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Worthington, 2001). However, recent studies of marital forgiveness have challenged

this assumption of a unidimensional motivational change, questioning the notion that forgiveness is limited to a decrease in negative motivation (Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham et al., 2004). There is emerging evidence that forgiveness also entails a positive motivational state that forms the foundation for approach, or conciliatory, behavior. It is therefore important to consider both positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness, because the presence of positive motivation cannot be inferred from the absence of negative motivation. We also distinguish our definition of forgiveness from constructs such as denial (unwillingness to perceive the injury), condoning (removes the offense and hence need for forgiveness), pardon (granted only by a representative of society, such as a judge), forgetting (removes awareness of offense from consciousness; to forgive is more than not thinking about the offense) and reconciliation (restores a relationship and is therefore a dyadic process). In sum, we assume forgiveness constitutes a transformation in motivation toward a transgressor that comprises both positive and negative dimensions (for details see Fincham & Beach, 2001).

What Do We Know About Forgiveness in Marriage?

Despite a burgeoning literature on forgiveness, relatively little is known about how forgiveness operates in marriage. It is evident that general theoretical accounts of forgiveness may not apply to forgiveness in marriage, because the forgiveness process may have different antecedents, correlates, or consequences in marital relationships than in other relationships. This has led some researchers to cite the lack of integration of forgiveness theory and marriage theory as one of the most significant problems in the current forgiveness literature (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000). In Table 13.1, we summarize existing research on forgiveness in marriage. It can be seen that forgiveness has a number of correlates in marriage, including relationship and life satisfaction, intimacy, attributions, and affect, and that it predicts psychological aggression, marital conflict, and behavior toward the spouse after a transgression.

Critique. Although important first steps have recently been taken in the exploration of marital forgiveness, several limitations of this research are evident. One major shortcoming is the tendency, also found in forgiveness research more generally, to obtain data on forgiveness and its correlates from a single source. Even when obtained from both spouses, data tend to be analyzed separately by spouse. Both of these circumstances fail to take into account interdependence between spouses. It is undoubtedly important to explore how a husband's forgiveness relates to his reports of marital quality, communication, and so on. However, it is equally important to assess how husbands' forgiveness is related to wives' perceptions of these same relationship variables. It is therefore important to include both spouses in the same analysis and to examine cross-spouse effects. This approach is illustrated in a recent study in which wives' benevolent motivation predicted husbands' reports of better conflict resolution, and husbands' retaliation and avoidance predicted wives' reports of poorer

TABLE 13.1. Studies That Have Investigated Forgiveness in Married Couples

Study and source	Sample type and description	Findings
Alvaro (2001) Dissertation	Community; 46 married couples in a forgiveness intervention or a control group	Positive associations with marital satisfaction, communication, emotional intimacy, and intellectual intimacy. A forgiveness-based intervention was shown to enhance each of these four variables.
Burchard, et al. (2003) Journal	Community; 20 newlywed couples assigned to 1 of 2 marital enrichment programs or a control group	Trait forgiveness positively associated with quality of life, and couples in the forgiveness-based condition showed a marginally significant increase in quality of life.
Fincham (2000) Journal	Community; 71 British couples in third year of marriage	Negative associations with conflict-promoting responsibility attributions and positive associations with communication behavior and marital quality. Forgiveness fully mediated relation between responsibility attributions and communication behavior when controlling for marital quality. Forgiveness also predicted retaliatory and conciliatory responses to partner injury when controlling for marital quality, hurt, and time.
Fincham & Beach (2002) Journal	Community Study 1: 44 British couples in the first year of marriage	Negative dimension of forgiveness positively associated with aggression and negatively associated with marital satisfaction. Positive dimension of forgiveness positively associated with marital satisfaction for Hs. Hs' positive forgiveness was negatively related to Ws' aggression and positively related to Ws' satisfaction. Hs' willingness to forgive predicted Ws' psychological aggression, controlling for marital satisfaction. Ws' retaliation predicted Hs' psychological aggression after controlling for satisfaction.
	Study 2: 66 British couples	A two-factor model of forgiveness was supported, and the negative and positive dimensions of forgiveness showed similar associations with marital variables as in Study 1. Negative forgiveness inversely associated with communication, whereas positive forgiveness was positively related to communication. Spousal negative forgiveness was positively related to the partner's psychological aggression and negative forgiveness, and negatively related to the partner's satisfaction, communication, and positive forgiveness.

(continues)

TABLE 13.1. Studies That Have Investigated Forgiveness in Married Couples *(continued)*

Study and source	Sample type and description	Findings
		Spousal positive forgiveness was positively related to the partner's satisfaction, communication, and positive forgiveness. Spousal positive forgiveness was negatively related to the other partner's aggression. The two forgiveness dimensions accounted for significant variance in satisfaction. However, positive dimension accounted for unique variance in Ws' satisfaction, whereas the negative dimension accounted for unique variance in Hs' satisfaction.
Fincham, Beach, & Davila (2004) Journal	Community Study 1: 52 British couples in their third year of marriage	A two-factor model of forgiveness was supported, in which the positive and negative dimensions were moderately and inversely related. For Hs only, the negative dimension was positively associated with ineffective conflict resolution and negatively associated with own marital satisfaction and Ws' satisfaction. For both spouses, the positive dimension of forgiveness was negatively related to ineffective conflict resolution and positively associated with own marital satisfaction. Hs' retaliatory impulses predicted Ws' reports of ineffective conflict resolution after controlling for marital satisfaction. Ws' benevolence negatively predicted Hs' reported ineffective conflict resolution.
	Study 2: 96 American couples from long-term marriages	A three-factor model (i.e., benevolence, retaliation, avoidance) of forgiveness was supported. A pattern of correlations similar to those in Study 1 was found. Hs' avoidance predicted Ws' reported ineffective conflict resolution, even after controlling for marital satisfaction. Ws' benevolence negatively predicted Hs' reported ineffective conflict resolution.
Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia (2002) Journal	Community Italian Hs (n = 79) and Ws (n = 92) from long-term marriages	Positive associations with marital quality, benign attributions, and emotional empathy, and inverse association with negative affective reactions. Responsibility attributions, negative affective reactions, and emotional empathy directly predicted forgiveness. Responsibility attributions were more predictive of forgiveness for Ws, whereas emotional empathy was a better predictor of forgiveness in Hs. Marital quality facilitated forgiveness indirectly through attributions but did not account for unique variance in forgiveness.

Gordon & Baucom (2003) Journal	Community; 107 married couples	Spouses were grouped into three stages of forgiveness. Groups differed in global ratings of forgiveness; spouses in Stage 1 report the least forgiveness, least positive marital assumptions, and lowest marital satisfaction, whereas spouses in Stage 3 report the highest levels of these variables. In terms of psychological closeness, spouses in Stage 1 scored lowest, and those in Stage 3 scored highest. This pattern was reversed for perceptions of partners' power in the marriage.
Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila (in press) Journal	Community Study 1: 96 American couples in long-term marriages	Spouses concurred on how likely they were to forgive their child. Hs and Ws showed variability in their unique willingness to forgive and perceptions of being forgiven by their spouse, beyond the variance accounted for by actor or partner effects. Reactions to spouse transgressions were determined largely by relationship-specific factors, rather than individual tendencies toward forgiveness or forgivability. Same pattern was found for perceived forgiveness by one's spouse for one's own transgressions. Ineffective arguing accounted for significant variance in these relationship effects, for both forgiveness and perceived forgiveness.
	Study 2: 79 British couples in long-term marriages	Parents did not concur on how likely they were to forgive their child. As in Study 1, Hs and Ws showed variability in their unique willingness to forgive and perceptions of being forgiven by their spouse, beyond the variance accounted for actor/partner effects. Again, reactions to spouse transgressions determined largely by relationship-specific factors, rather than individual tendencies toward forgiveness or forgivability. The same pattern was found for perceived forgiveness by one's spouse for one's own transgressions. After controlling for transgression severity and closeness, trust accounted for significant variance in these relationship effects for forgiveness, but only for Ws' forgiveness of Hs. In terms of perceived forgiveness, trust and closeness predicted significant variance in Ws' ratings of being forgiven by their Hs.
Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila (2004) Journal	College and community Study 1: 184 undergraduates in dating relationships	Positive associations with model of self, model of other, and relationship satisfaction. Models of self and other predicted the tendency to forgive, and there was a significant interaction between these two predictors. For individuals with more negative models of self, there was no relationship between model of other and the

(continues)

TABLE 13.1. Studies That Have Investigated Forgiveness in Married Couples *(continued)*

Study and source	Sample type and description	Findings
		tendency to forgive. However, model of other predicted a greater tendency to forgive among those with more positive models of self. Tendency to forgive also predicted relationship satisfaction and partially mediated the association between model of other and relationship satisfaction.
	Study 2: 96 couples in long-term marriages	Tendency to forgive and actual forgiveness were positively associated with one another and to model of self, model of other, and relationship satisfaction. Hs' marital satisfaction was positively associated with Ws' tendency to forgive, and Ws' models of self and other were positively related to Hs' forgiveness. Models of self and other predicted the tendency to forgive, but there was a significant interaction between these two predictors for Ws only. For Ws with more negative models of self, there was no relationship between model of other and the tendency to forgive. However, model of other predicted a greater tendency to forgive among those with more positive models of self. Tendency to forgive also predicted marital satisfaction. Tendency to forgive partially mediated the association between model of other and marital satisfaction for Hs, and partially mediated the association between model of self and marital satisfaction for both spouses. The tendency to forgive predicted actual forgiveness of a transgression. However, for Hs there was an interaction such that the tendency to forgive predicted actual forgiveness only for high-severity events.
Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila (2005) Journal	Community; 87 couples in long-term marriages	Forgiveness positively associated with marital satisfaction and negatively related to rumination and ambivalence. There was a significant interaction between ambivalence and rumination, even after controlling for marital quality and event severity. For spouses who ruminated frequently, increased ambivalence was associated with lower forgiveness. There was no relationship between ambivalence and forgiveness for individuals who did not ruminate.
Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer (2003) Journal	Community; 119 married couples	Partner-specific forgiveness was positively associated with life satisfaction, and this association was stronger than the association between general forgiveness and life satisfaction. Partner-specific and general forgiveness were positively related, as were spouses' reports of partner-specific forgiveness.

Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham (2005) Journal	Community; 198 married couples in Italy assessed at two points separated by a 6-month interval	Rumination and empathy independently predicted concurrent unforgiveness and benevolence. Unforgiveness and benevolence concurrently affected marital quality. The rumination → unforgiveness → marital quality path was stronger for Ws than for Hs, whereas the empathy → benevolence path was stronger for Hs than for Ws. Marital quality at Time 1 influenced unforgiveness and benevolence 6 months later via Time 2 rumination. Unforgiveness and benevolence at Time 1 influenced marital quality 6 months later through the mediation of Time 1 marital quality, Time 2 unforgiveness, benevolence, and rumination.
Rackley (1993) Dissertation	Community; 170 married individuals	Forgiveness significantly predicted marital adjustment.
Ripley & Worthington (2002) Journal	Community; 43 married couples assigned to one of two marital enrichment programs or a control group	Forgiveness was positively associated with marital satisfaction and communication. Couples in the forgiveness-based group showed a greater improvement in communication at follow-up than couples in the control group but did not differ from couples in the hope-focused group. The three treatment groups did not differ in terms of marital quality or forgiveness at post and follow-up.
Sells, Giordano, & King (2002) Journal	Clinical; 5 married couples seeking therapy	At posttreatment, forgiveness skills had increased, with gains for subscales of insight, trust, and overt forgiveness. However, at follow-up, gains were maintained only for trust.
Vaughan (2001) Dissertation	Community; 20 newly married couples assigned to a control group or 1 of 2 marital enrichment programs*	Trait forgiveness was positively associated with religious commitment and Time 2 marital satisfaction. Religious commitment and trait forgiveness predicted marital satisfaction at posttreatment. Forgiveness accounted for most of the variance. However, marital satisfaction declined slightly in the forgiveness treatment group.
Woodman (1992) Dissertation	Community; 84 married individuals	Positive association with marital adjustment.

Note: H = husband, W = wife

* The same sample used by Burchard et al. (2003).

conflict resolution (Fincham et al., 2004). However, this study did not investigate interactional behavior between husbands and wives, and thus does not tell us how these associations between forgiveness dimensions and conflict resolution were overtly manifested in couples' exchanges.

A second methodological challenge involves differentiating forgiveness from potentially overlapping constructs, such as marital quality. The marital literature is brimming with constructs and measures that unknowingly tap into the same domain (see Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). As a result, the field is strewn with an unknown number of tautological findings owing to content overlap in the operations used to assess purportedly different constructs. In light of this observation, it is encouraging that some recent studies have found associations between forgiveness and other relationship constructs when controlling for marital quality, suggesting that forgiveness is a unique and informative process (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham et al., 2004).

Third, despite emerging evidence of the bidimensional nature of forgiveness, few studies have considered both positive and negative aspects of forgiveness. This will be crucial to enhancing our understanding of marital forgiveness, because these dimensions have different correlates and perform differently for husbands and wives (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham et al., 2004). Having identified three important methodological limitations of the current marital forgiveness literature, we are now in a position to offer specific recommendations about how to address these challenges. Although these recommendations are framed in the context of marriage, they can easily be extended to forgiveness in other dyads or to forgiveness research in general.

METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that forgiveness within marriage represents a process involving both spouses, one of the first steps to improving research is to obtain data from each partner and to examine how both self-reported and partner-reported forgiveness relate to other marital processes. As has been highlighted thus far, the determinants, correlates, and consequences of forgiveness appear to be different among husbands and wives. Further, obtaining data from both partners will allow consideration of how one spouses' forgiveness affects the other spouse and how it affects relationship-level variables. Implicit in this recommendation is the need to examine spousal interactions to assess the behaviors that might facilitate one spouse's forgiveness of the other. Such assessment may include self-report in which both partners maintain a diary and complete daily measures for several weeks following a transgression within the marriage. However, there is also a great need to move beyond self-reports and to supplement these measures with other sources of information, such as observational data. For example, partners might be asked to reenact a recent conflict centered around an unforgiven transgression, as well as one pertaining to a forgiven offense, in order to contrast the behavioral patterns that characterize these interactions. Regardless of the approach

taken, we must broaden the scope of our research to consider both partners' perspectives, as well as cross-spousal effects.

In response to the potential conceptual overlap between relationship constructs, we must be vigilant in constructing forgiveness measures to ensure that we do not include items that tap related constructs, such as communication, because this overlap would overestimate associations between forgiveness and other interpersonal processes within marriage. As noted, this problem has plagued the assessment of marital quality (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1987), leading some researchers in this field to suggest that global measures of marital satisfaction are the most appropriate way to capture an individual's overall sentiment toward the marriage (see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Fincham & Beach, in press). Perhaps we can avoid similar item/construct overlap by heeding this advice and focusing on global ratings of the extent to which one has forgiven one's partner. However, global measures are appropriate only when a researcher is seeking to measure forgiveness as an overall judgment and are less useful when information is sought about specific dimensions of forgiveness. Whether assessing marital forgiveness at a global or specific level, the most important guideline is that we maintain the conceptual clarity that will distinguish forgiveness from other marital processes.

Our third methodological recommendation pertains to the assessment of forgiveness as a bidimensional process. The positive (i.e., approach) and negative (i.e., avoidance) dimensions of forgiveness represent distinct motivational systems (Gray, 1987) and must be measured separately. Work by McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang (2003) suggests that the temporal unfolding of avoidant, retaliatory, and benevolent motivation can take several forms, underscoring the need to assess all three forms at various levels. Within the context of marriage, positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness appear to operate differently for husbands and wives, indicating that the determinants and consequences of forgiveness may differ across spouses. In addition, the negative and positive dimensions of forgiveness may themselves have different determinants, correlates, and consequences. Finally, this simple two-dimensional scheme also allows us to distinguish among four types of forgiveness, as shown in Table 13.2 (see also Fincham & Beach, 2001). In short, bidimensional assessment is necessary to furthering our understanding of marital forgiveness.

Our final recommendation does not concern forgiveness per se but instead stems from an important observation about relationship research. Weiss (1980) coined the term *sentiment override* to describe the hypothesis that spouses respond noncontingently

TABLE 13.2. Forgiveness Typology Resulting from Bidimensional Concept of Forgiveness

Dimension		Positive	
		High	Low
Negative	High	Ambivalent forgiveness	Nonforgiveness
	Low	Complete forgiveness	Detached forgiveness

to partner behavior or questions about the marriage. In other words, partners simply respond to each other or research questions in terms of their dominant feelings or sentiments about the relationship, and this is reflected "in as many tests as one chooses to administer" (Weiss & Heyman, 1990, p. 92). As a result, measures of constructs such as forgiveness *in the context of a relationship* can serve as proxy indices of relationship satisfaction and thereby give rise to tautological findings. This has prompted at least one marital researcher to assert that attempts to explain variance in relationship satisfaction using self-reports are "invalid from a scientific standpoint" (Gottman, 1990, p. 79).

We do not agree with this conclusion but instead suggest a solution to this problem. Simply stated, we propose that a test of "surplus conceptual value" be passed whenever a construct is assessed via self-report in relationships. This test can be provided by controlling statistically the relationship satisfaction of both partners whenever two relationship variables are investigated, lest any association between them simply reflect their status as proxies of relationship satisfaction. A conceptually similar test can easily be applied to experimental research on relationship variables. With this test applied, forgiveness has been found to be related to marital processes (see Fincham et al., 2004).

NEW RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

We now turn to identify needed areas of basic research, including the need to study (a) different levels of forgiveness (i.e., for a specific transgression vs. repeated transgressions and for major transgressions vs. less serious transgressions), (b) the temporal unfolding of forgiveness in marriage and the way in which it relates to level of forgiveness called for, (c) the communication of forgiveness among intimates, (d) the causal relations among forgiveness and its correlates in marriage, and (e) self-forgiveness for the perpetration of transgressions against the partner. After exploring each of these areas, we consider implications for clinical and applied interventions.

Basic Research

Different Levels of Forgiveness. Although most marital forgiveness research has studied specific offenses, transgressions in marriage can also be considered at the dyadic level. Dyadic forgiveness represents a person's general tendency to forgive offenses within a particular relationship (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000). This level of forgiveness is likely characterized by different predictors and correlates than is offense-specific forgiveness, making it important to assess the association between dyadic forgiveness and offense-specific forgiveness. Similarly, when exploring different levels of forgiveness, it is necessary to compare specific and repeated transgressions. For example, a husband trying to forgive his wife for her one-time infidelity likely

experiences a different forgiveness process than a partner faced with his wife's fourth affair. How does the trangressional history of a relationship influence the forgiveness of subsequent offenses within that relationship? Do past transgressions influence the forgiveness of subsequent offenses only when the wrongdoing is similar in nature, severity, or proximity to a past offense?

Chronic transgressions must also be considered, such as long-standing patterns of emotional neglect. How do spouses forgive one another for hurts that are endured day after day? Such questions cannot be answered by examining forgiveness at the offense-specific level; we must move beyond single transgressions to consider the various patterns of wrongdoing in marriage. This entails considering not only major transgressions but also fairly minor offenses. When looking at forgiveness in nondistressed, long-term marriages, researchers are more likely to encounter minor transgressions than major offenses, such as infidelity and physical abuse. It will be important to explore how the marital forgiveness process differs, depending on both the pattern and the severity of the transgressions.

Temporal Unfolding of Forgiveness. There is the temptation to identify forgiving with a specific statement of forgiveness or an overt act of forgiveness (e.g., Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998). However, the verb form *to forgive* is not performative but instead signals that a decision to forgive has occurred. It therefore sets in motion a process with a presumed endpoint that may be sudden or may be slowly achieved (for a more complete analysis, see Fincham, 2000).

This creates particular challenges in ongoing relationships. Consider the spouse who offers a verbal statement of forgiveness. As indicated, such a statement does not constitute forgiveness per se 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 partner is likely to experience the statement as performative and be puzzled, annoyed, or angry when incompletely resolved feelings of resentment about the transgression intrude on subsequent discourse or behavior in the relationship. Thus, the words *I forgive you* can signal the beginning of a process for the spouse but be seen as the end of the matter by the partner, who may be only too willing to put the transgression in the past and act as though it never happened. The timing of such a verbalization and where the spouse stands with regard to our typology of forgiveness are likely to be particularly important. For example, the verbalization may have a different impact, depending on whether the spouse offering it is seen to be ambivalent versus detached.

Communication of Forgiveness. Kelley (1998) was among the first to recognize the importance of exploring how forgiveness is expressed between individuals in daily interactions and found that victims used three strategies to communicate forgiveness to an offender. Direct strategies involved overtly granting forgiveness, whereas indirect strategies included more subtle expressions of forgiveness. In the third group of

strategies, forgiveness was conditional and was granted only with certain stipulations. These three types of strategies also characterized the offenders' attempts to seek forgiveness. Although these communication techniques capture the general expression of forgiveness, research has yet to explore forgiveness transactions specifically within the context of marriage. It will be informative to compare partners' communication strategies and their perceptions of being forgiven by the other spouse. Similarly, certain ways of expressing forgiveness may be more adaptive and may be associated with or predictive of healthy relationships.

Such research is important because communication of forgiveness can easily be bungled or abused. First, genuinely motivated attempts to tell the partner that he or she is forgiven can easily be seen as a put-down or a form of retaliation if unskillfully executed. Thus, they can lead to conflict and might themselves end up being a source of hurt. Second, the transgressor is likely motivated to see forgiven behavior as condoned behavior if the spouse does not explicitly and clearly communicate that the transgression and the hurt it has caused are unacceptable. Because victims experience greater loss than transgressors feel they gain from the transgression, this communication requires some skill to avoid being seen as an overreaction 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.

Causal Relations. The paucity of longitudinal or experimental research on marital forgiveness renders it difficult to draw any conclusions about the causal relationships between forgiveness and its correlates in marriage. For example, although there is a robust association between forgiveness and marital satisfaction in cross-sectional studies, forgiveness may enhance marital satisfaction, marital satisfaction may promote forgiveness, or these constructs may be reciprocally related. This ambiguity also characterizes the associations that have been found between forgiveness and marital communication, conflict resolution, intimacy, and psychological aggression. Future research is needed to identify causal relations between specific forgiveness dimensions and other relationship variables.

Self-Forgiveness. The topic of self-forgiveness has been largely neglected by marital research, as well as by the general forgiveness literature. Self-forgiveness is necessary when one has behaved in a way that he or she acknowledges as wrong and accepts responsibility for such behavior (Dillon, 2001; Holmgren, 1998). We conceptualize self-forgiveness as a set of motivational changes whereby one becomes decreasingly motivated to avoid stimuli associated with the offense, decreasingly motivated to retaliate against the self (e.g., punish the self, engage in self-destructive behaviors etc.), and increasingly motivated to act benevolently toward the self. Self-forgiveness plays an interesting role in marriage. Spouses must frequently deal with having behaved hurtfully to their partners. The victimized spouse's behavior may play an important part in facilitating the perpetrator's self-forgiveness; it has been hypothesized that being granted forgiveness by the victim may promote self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham,

2004). In this respect, the interplay between interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness in marriage has yet to be explored. Further, although attributions and conciliatory behavior have been proposed as variables that may promote self-forgiveness, there may also be unique relationship-level processes in marriage that facilitate self-forgiveness.

Implications for Clinical and Applied Interventions

In recent years, forgiveness-based psychoeducation and intervention programs have become more prominent in the marital literature (e.g., Burchard et al., 2003; Gordon et al., 2000; Ripley & Worthington, 2002). However, most interventions have focused on facilitating forgiveness by increasing empathy for the offender. Increased empathy may have a direct effect on retaliatory impulses by making the transgressor more understandable. However, we are not aware of any forgiveness interventions that have focused specifically on increasing benevolence motivations. Given the likely divergence of influences on the positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness, this oversight seems striking. At best, it appears that forgiveness interventions may not be capitalizing on all possible means of enhancing forgiveness. At worst, it may be that a dimension has been overlooked that could be critical for long-term outcomes in marriage.

Much of what is known from psychological research on marital interaction can be fruitfully conceptualized in terms of relationship goals, particularly the "emergent" goals that characterize couples locked in destructive interactions (Fincham & Beach, 1999). In such interactions, couples commonly switch from the goals they profess on a day-to-day basis—that is, goals that are largely cooperative—to emergent goals that are adversarial in nature. For example, rather than focus on generating a solution to the problem at hand, couples locked in the destructive pattern of escalation may find themselves focused on beating their partners—or at least on not losing the argument to their partners. This sets the stage for couples to engage in negative behaviors, even when they "know better" and want to behave differently (in the heat of the moment, they simply fail to employ requisite skills; Worthington, 2003). In the context of past partner offenses, such emergent goals may lead to previously forgiven transgressions being used as ammunition in the escalating battle. Because of the power of emergent goals to disrupt marital interaction, communication skills and empathy for the partner may not be enough to ensure translation of partner forgiveness into a dyadic process that is helpful to the couple. In particular, if partners have been successful in reducing retaliatory goals, this need not protect them from the reemergence of retaliatory goals during conflict. It may be that benevolence motives are a better, or perhaps just an additional, protection against the reemergence of retaliatory motives during conflict. Likewise, it may be that benevolence motives are necessary for optimal conflict resolution in a dyadic context.

This framework suggests that current programs for facilitating forgiveness may not provide a complete answer to marital breakdown or relationship reconciliation, even

if they are relatively effective in promoting a reduction in retaliatory motives in the relatively calm, nonconflictual setting of the forgiveness group. As Fincham and Beach (1999) noted, the marital area has long been in need of an intervention that can modify problematic emergent goals. Similarly, it may be that a critical missing element in current forgiveness programs is something that will protect couples against the emergent retaliatory goals that may arise during the common, everyday conflict situations that characterize marriage. If so, current forgiveness interventions may prove to be of short-lived value with regard to relationship outcomes and may never fulfill their promise in the marital context. The key to enhanced longer term outcomes, therefore, is to find an intervention that will help partners recognize and respond effectively to their own emergent retaliatory goals. To be maximally effective, such an intervention should readily occur to the couple, require minimal reasoning, and have a calming effect on both parties. At the same time, if the intervention were able to prime partner forgiveness, this would be an especially important additional strength.

One possibility is to combine empathy for the partner with an intervention to enhance benevolence for the partner. Such a program might build on current forgiveness programs by adding a series of elements designed to promote benevolence. The first element of the benevolence intervention might focus on making the intellectual case for benevolence (e.g., the benefits that accrue from one's partner doing well). The intellectual case could set the stage for an emotional argument for benevolence (it provides opportunities for positive basking; it supports one's positive self-view; it provides an opportunity for personal spiritual growth). In turn, the emotional argument might set the stage for exploring with the partner the possible benefits of regular activities to express benevolence or cognitively to rehearse benevolent intentions toward the partner. Overall, the proposal to add benevolence training to current forgiveness interventions can be seen as combining forgiveness interventions with motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing helps clients overcome the ambivalence that prevents them from making positive changes in their lives (Miller & Rollnick, 2002), suggesting that it is well suited to the promotion of benevolence in the context of forgiveness interventions, because clients must overcome a negative motivational state toward the offender and replace it with positive motivation.

PERSONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIELD

In this section, we introduce three new theoretical viewpoints that have important implications for research on forgiveness.

The Phenomenology of Forgiveness: Concepts of Forgiveness Among Spouses

A fundamental distinction in family research is that between insider (family member) and outsider (scientific observer) perspectives. This distinction can be usefully

applied to thinking about the very definition of forgiveness. Most research on forgiveness reflects the outsider perspective because, even though it obtains subjective judgments of forgiveness, the questions asked about forgiveness are chosen a priori by the researcher. Even the few empirical attempts to develop empirically based definitions of forgiveness have been limited to "expert" judgments and, therefore, still reflect an outside perspective.

It is also important to understand the insider perspective and examine spouses' concepts of forgiveness and their understanding of what it means to forgive. Why? For a start, it is likely that how a spouse conceptualizes forgiveness will matter when attempting to understand the likelihood of forgiveness in specific circumstances. For instance, if a spouse believes that in order to forgive, he or she must literally forget the transgression and thereby place himself or herself at risk of future harm, he or she may be reluctant to forgive.

Understanding the phenomenology of forgiveness also has important implications for its measurement. Even psychometrically sophisticated measures of forgiveness (e.g., Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade et al., 2001), as well as many studies (e.g., Boon & Sulsky, 1997), rely on some form of the question, Have you forgiven? If we do not understand what people mean when they say they forgive or do not forgive, it is difficult to understand what these measures mean. Furthermore, an assumption in most measures of forgiveness is that what the investigator is measuring corresponds with the idea of forgiveness in the mind of the participant. An important step in forgiveness research is to describe what spouses mean whey they say they forgive or do not forgive and to compare these meanings to expert definitions of forgiveness.

Finally, understanding the phenomenology of forgiveness has the potential to advance forgiveness as a psychotherapeutic process. Understanding how people outside of the research community conceptualize and experience forgiveness may help researchers to develop improved psychoeducational and therapeutic techniques. For example, a wife may be unwilling to forgive her husband because of the fear of being viewed as weak or the fear of putting herself at an increased risk for future betrayals. Therefore, it is important to know how people think about forgiveness so that we can address any negative notions that they may have about it.

Implicit versus Explicit Forgiveness: A Polygraph for Forgiveness?

A common distinction in social cognition research is between explicit and implicit cognitive processes (e.g., memory, judgments, attitudes). Paralleling Shiffrin and Schneider's (1977) discussion of controlled (initiated deliberately and is effortful, slow, often verbalizable, and controllable) and automatic (fast, effortless, involuntary, ballistic, and involves no awareness) processing, explicit processes are something one can talk about or declare (e.g., "declarative memory"), whereas implicit processes en-

tail little or no ability to describe or become conscious of what one knows or thinks. What has this to do with forgiveness in marriage?

As any marital therapist can testify, marital interactions are often overlearned, unfold at an astonishing speed, and appear to proceed without much thought. This does not deny the importance of forgiveness for marital interactions; it simply suggests that the kind of deliberate and effortful judgments of forgiveness that we have studied thus far will provide an incomplete picture of its role. For example, it is not uncommon to come across a spouse who says and believes that he or she has forgiven the partner, only to discover that resentment or a desire for revenge is instigated by the slightest cue during interaction with the partner. If we are to understand how forgiveness in marriage influences marital interaction, we will also need to study forgiveness at this implicit level. Unlike explicit forgiveness that can be adopted quickly, implicit forgiveness, like any automatic process, requires extensive practice to develop.

There are numerous ways to assess implicit judgments but .space precludes their discussion here (for an example in marital research, see Fincham, Garnier, Gano-Phillips, & Osborne et al., 1995). Can assessment of forgiveness at the implicit level provide a polygraph test? Hardly. The subtitle of this section is an attention-focusing device more than anything else because it is quite common to find discrepancies between explicit and implicit measures. We expect this to be no different in the case of forgiveness. Indeed, one might expect the discrepancy to be particularly pronounced in this field because the explicit decision to forgive, as noted, sets in motion a process that may take a long time to complete.

There is, however, one sense in which we might take the polygraph notion seriously. That is, when a spouse shows forgiveness on both explicit and implicit measures, we might safely conclude that he or she has truly forgiven the partner. Conversely, discrepancy between the two measures is not diagnostic in that it cannot distinguish among cases that reflect the need for more work to be done to achieve complete forgiveness, socially desirable response on the explicit measure, and outright deception of the researcher or the self.

Forgiveness and Ambivalence

Implicit in the last section is the possibility that a spouse may experience ambivalence toward forgiving the partner or toward the partner more generally. Again, this can be assessed by asking the spouse explicitly about feelings of ambivalence, or it can be assessed implicitly. A recent study illustrates the relevance of ambivalence for understanding forgiveness in marriage. Kachadourian et al. (2005) used an open-ended listing of partner characteristics to assess ambivalence toward the partner and argue that that in marriage, the occurrence of a negative event such as a transgression is likely to prime the negative component of a spouse's ambivalence toward the partner. Moreover, ruminating about the transgression is likely to chronically prime this negative component of ambivalence, leading to the hypothesis that there should be an interaction between ambivalence and rumination on forgiveness. They found support

for this hypothesis: Greater ambivalence was associated with less forgiveness when the spouse ruminated about the transgression. However, for husbands and wives who did not think about the transgression frequently, the association between attitudinal ambivalence and forgiveness was not significant.

CONCLUSION

Forgiveness or a lack thereof appears to be essential in understanding satisfaction and relationship dynamics in marriage. Although much remains to be done in exploring its correlates, especially in exploring the causal connections between forgiveness and marital outcomes, it is clear that there are many connections and that these connections are consequential for many things, ranging from marital satisfaction to destructive arguments. Likewise, recent evidence indicates that the connections between forgiveness and marital outcomes do not depend on single source reports, overlap with global marital satisfaction, or item-overlap between measures. A remaining challenge for intervention research is to capitalize fully on the underlying structure of forgiveness. To the extent that forgiveness is comprised of two or more functionally distinct elements, current programs may not be capitalizing on the full potential of forgiveness interventions. Likewise, it will be important to continue to integrate research on forgiveness with basic research on other interpersonal processes, including the distinction between insider and outsider perspectives, implicit and explicit attitudes, and the sources and consequences of attitude ambivalence. By doing so, we will place our understanding of forgiveness on a firmer scientific footing and provide the foundation for continuing progress in forgiveness interventions.

REFERENCES

Alvaro, J. A. (2001). An interpersonal forgiveness and reconciliation intervention: The effect on marital intimacy. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 62*(3). (UMI 3011552).

Baumeister, R. F., Exline, J. J., & Sommer, K. L. (1998). The victim role, grudge theory, and two dimensions of forgiveness. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 79–106). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., Parrott, L., O'Connor, L. E, & Wade, N. G. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (TNTF). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27,* 1277–1290.

Bradbury, T.N., Fincham, F.D., & Beach, S.R.H. (2000). Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*, 964–980.

Boon, S. D., & Sulsky, L. M. (1997). Attributions of blame and forgiveness in romantic relationships: A policy-capturing study. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 12,* 19–44.

Burchard, G. A., Yarhouse, M. A., Kilian, M. K., Worthington, E. L., Berry, J. W., & Canter, D. E. (2003). A study of two marital enrichment programs and couples' quality of life. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 31,* 240–252.

Dillon, R. S. (2001). Self-forgiveness and self-respect. *Ethics, 112,* 53–83.

Enright, R. D., Freedman, S., & Rique, J. (1998). The psychology of interpersonal forgiveness. In R. D. Enright, & J. North (Eds.), *Exploring forgiveness* (pp. 46–62). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Fenell, D. (1993). Characteristics of long-term first marriages. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 15,* 446–460.

Fincham, F. D. (2000). The kiss of the porcupines: From attributing responsibility to forgiving. *Personal Relationships, 7,* 1–23.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (in press). Relationship satisfaction. In D. Perlman, & A. Vangelisti (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (1999). Marital conflict: Implications for working with couples. *Annual Review of Psychology, 50*, 47–77.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2001). Forgiving in close relationships. *Advances in Psychology Research, 7*, 163–198.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: Implications for psychological aggression and constructive communication. *Personal Relationships, 9,* 239–251.

Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R., & Davila, J. (2004). Forgiveness and conflict resolution in marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18,* 72–81.

Fincham, F. D., & Bradbury, T. N. (1987). The assessment of marital quality: A reevaluation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49,* 797–809.

Fincham, F. D., Garnier, P. C., Gano-Phillips, S,, & Osborne, L. N. (1995). Pre-interaction expectations, marital satisfaction and accessibility: A new look at sentiment override. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *9*, 3–14.

Fincham, F. D., Paleari, G., & Regalia, C. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: The role of relationship quality, attributions and empathy. *Personal Relationships, 9,* 27–37.

Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1999). A multitheoretical intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 6,* 382–399.

Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (2003). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a measure based on a model of recovery from a marital betrayal. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 31*, 179–199.

Gordon, K. C., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (2000). The use of forgiveness in marital therapy. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 203–227). New York: Guilford Press.

Gottman, J.M. (1990). How marriages change. In G.R. Patterson (Ed.), *Depression and aggression in family interaction* (pp. 75–102). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gray, J. A. (1987). *The psychology of fear and stress.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (in press). Self-forgiveness: The stepchild of forgiveness research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology.*

Holmgren, M. R. (1998). Self-forgiveness and responsible moral agency. *Journal of Value Inquiry, 32,* 75–91.

Hoyt, W. T., Fincham, F. D., McCullough, M. E., Maio, G., & Davila, J. (in press). Responses to interpersonal transgressions in families: Forgivingness, forgivability, and relationship-specific effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.*

Kachadourian, L. K., Fincham, F. D., & Davila, J. (2004). The tendency to forgive in dating and married couples: The role of attachment and relationship satisfaction. *Personal Relationships, 11,* 373–393.

Kachadourian, L. K., Fincham, F. D., & Davila, J. (2005). Attitudinal ambivalence, rumination and forgiveness of partner transgressions in marriage. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31,* 334–342.

Karremans, J. C., Van Lange, P. A., Ouwerkerk, J. W., & Kluwer, E. S. (2003). When forgiving enhances psychological well-being: The role of interpersonal commitment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84,* 1011–1026.

Kelley, D. (1998). The communication of forgiveness. *Communication Studies, 49,* 1–17.

McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. (2003). Forgiveness, forbearance, and time: The temporal unfolding of transgression-related interpersonal motivations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84,* 540–557.

McCullough, M. E., Hoyt, W. T., & Rachal, K. C. (2000). What we know (and need to know) about assessing forgiveness constructs. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 65–90). New York: Guilford Press.

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational interviewing.* New York: Guilford Press.

Paleari, F. G., Regalia, C., & Fincham, F. D. (2005). Marital quality, empathy, and rumination: A longitudinal analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, 368–378.

Rackley, J. V. (1993). The relationships of marital satisfaction, forgiveness, and religiosity. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 54*(4). (UMI 9319792).

Ripley, J. S., & Worthington, E. L. (2002). Hope-focused and forgiveness-based group interventions to promote marital enrichment. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 80,* 452–463.

Sells, J. N., Giordano, F. G., & King, L. (2002). A pilot study in marital group therapy: Process and outcome. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families, 10,* 156–166.

Shiffrin, R. M., & Schneider, W. (1977). Controlled and automatic human information processing. II. Perceptual learning, automatic attending, and a general theory. *Psychological Review, 84*, 127–190.

Vaughan, L. (2001). The relationship between marital satisfaction levels associated with participation in the FREE (forgiveness and reconciliation through experiencing empathy) and hope-focused marital enrichment program. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 62*(2). (UMI 3004950).

Weiss, R. L. (1980). Strategic behavioral marital therapy: Toward a model for assessment and intervention. In J. P. Vincent (Ed.), *Advances in family intervention, assessment and theory* (Vol. 1, pp. 229–271). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Weiss, R. L., & Heyman, R. E. (1990). Observation of marital interaction. In F. D. Fincham, & T. N. Bradbury (Eds.), *The psychology of marriage* (pp. 87–117). New York: Guilford Press.

Woodman, T. (1992). The role of forgiveness in marital adjustment. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 53*(4). (UMI 9225999).

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2001) Unforgiveness, forgiveness, and reconciliation and their implications for societal interventions. In R. G. Helmick, & R. L Petersen (Eds.), *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Religion, public policy, and conflict transformation* (pp. 161–182). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2003). Hope focused marriage: Recommendations for researchers, clinicians, and church workers. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 3*, 231–239.