

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF UNFORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Unforgiveness and forgiveness are distinct. One cannot forgive unless unforgiveness has occurred, but one might reduce unforgiveness by many ways—only one of which is forgiveness. We present a model intended to further assist and guide subsequent empirical exploration. The model explains the personal, relationship, and environmental factors that lead people to either unforgiveness or forgiveness. Related areas are reviewed to stimulate as yet unexplored research and clinical efforts related to forgiveness. Clinical protocols for promoting forgiveness in enrichment, preventative, and therapeutic contexts are described.

In recent years, articles have appeared on how people forgive others who have hurt or offended them (for annotated bibliography, see McCullough, Exline, & Baumeister, 1998). Despite suggestions that forgiveness is more than the reduction of unforgiveness (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991; Worthington, 1999), most scholars have treated it as the opposite of unforgiveness, and measured it by detecting reductions in anger, bitterness, hostility, revenge motivation, avoidance, and the like (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). In intervention studies to promote forgiveness, it is assumed that forgiveness can be inferred through the reduction of unforgiveness. In the everyday world, though, this assumption is untenable. As an extreme example, if an offended man killed a transgressor, his motivations regarding further revenge against or avoidance of the offender would be zero, hence there would be no unforgiveness. Yet, no forgiveness would have occurred. Thus, for

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naturally occurring social interactions, it is crucial to define forgiveness distinctly from unforgiveness.

We define unforgiveness as a "cold" emotion involving resentment, bitterness, and perhaps hatred, along with the motivated avoidance of or retaliation against a transgressor. In contrast, forgiveness is a victim's internal choice (either unconscious or deliberate) to relinquish unforgiveness and to seek reconciliation with the offender if safe, prudent, and possible to do so. We hypothesize that this choice to forgive is facilitated by events that produce an emotional state, such as empathy, humor, or love, that competes with the cold emotion of unforgiveness. Thus, forgiveness is one way to reduce unforgiveness. There are numerous ways other than forgiveness, however, by which a person can reduce or avoid unforgiveness—including retaliating; successfully exacting revenge; seeking social, natural, or political justice; or, employing psychological defenses such as projection, denial, and the like. Forgiveness can be contrasted with reconciliation, which is the restoration of relationship trust where it has been violated (Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1994; Freedman, 1998; Worthington & Drinkard, *in press*). Forgiveness is also not the same as conflict resolution. People might resolve conflicts and not forgive or they might forgive even though they have not resolved conflicts.

Most forgiveness involves forgiving a person with whom the forgiver continues to interact (e.g., spouses, children, other family members, co-workers, friends, and acquaintances). Yet much research has investigated forgiveness in relationships that have ceased—by incest survivors (Freedman & Enright, 1996), elderly women of past offenders (Hebl & Enright, 1993), and parents of their adolescent suicide victims (Al-Mabuk & Downs, 1996). While these latter events clearly are important to forgive, the importance and relevance of forgiveness within ongoing relationships must not be overlooked.

Researchers promoting forgiveness either have examined a single incident (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997) or have ignored the ongoing interpersonal process (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Ripley & Worthington, 1999). Some scholars have written about the exchange of multiple transgressions or interpersonal context within which forgiveness and reconciliation occur (e.g., Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998; DiBlasio, 1998; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1996; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998), but have not systematized how people transact around transgressions. In the present article, we attempt such an exposition. Understanding transactions around forgiveness can make forgiveness and reconciliation (either or both) more or less likely

and can help to elucidate the subtle and complicated unforgiveness and forgiveness processes.

Few researchers exploring forgiveness have drawn from or integrated relevant social psychological literature into their understanding of unforgiveness and forgiveness (for some who have, see Baumeister et al., 1998; McCullough, Exline, & Baumeister, 1998; McCullough et al., 1997). As can be discerned from McCullough, Exline, and Baumeister's (1998) annotated bibliography of research relevant to forgiveness, many social psychological writers have addressed issues relevant to this concept without ever expressly referring to forgiveness *per se*. In the present article, we will reason that counseling, clinical, and psychoeducational interventions can be improved by (a) understanding forgiveness transactions and (b) using and making explicit the accumulated social psychological literature about such transactions. We suggest a model for such forgiveness transactions, draw upon relevant social psychological literature, and recommend elements that clinicians can use to promote interpersonal forgiveness.

## **A MODEL FOR UNFORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS WITHIN ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS**

Our model seeks to explain the occurrences surrounding a negative relational event (see Figure 1). It is intended to be recursive but is displayed as a flow chart to facilitate discussion. Transgressions occur in context of an emotionally valenced relationship—one that is affectively charged. Potentially harmful events are perceived and emotionally reacted to. The victim reacts interpersonally—either actively or passively—providing two pathways. If the victim reacts actively, the reaction might be negative (retaliation or avoidance) or positive (pro-relationship behavior). The offender will respond negatively (leading to rumination and unforgiveness) or positively (leading to an emotionally dissonant event and forgiveness). If an interpersonally passive response is made, the victim might react negatively by ruminating and becoming unforgiving. Or the victim might react positively and experience an emotionally dissonant event which, if resolved, leads to forgiveness. Unforgiveness or forgiveness will either reinforce or mitigate existing attributions about the relationship, which can affect relationship valence. Below, we discuss each aspect of the model.

### **CONTEXT**

The context within which an event occurs is of primary importance. That context includes (a) the personal context of the partners, (b) the valence

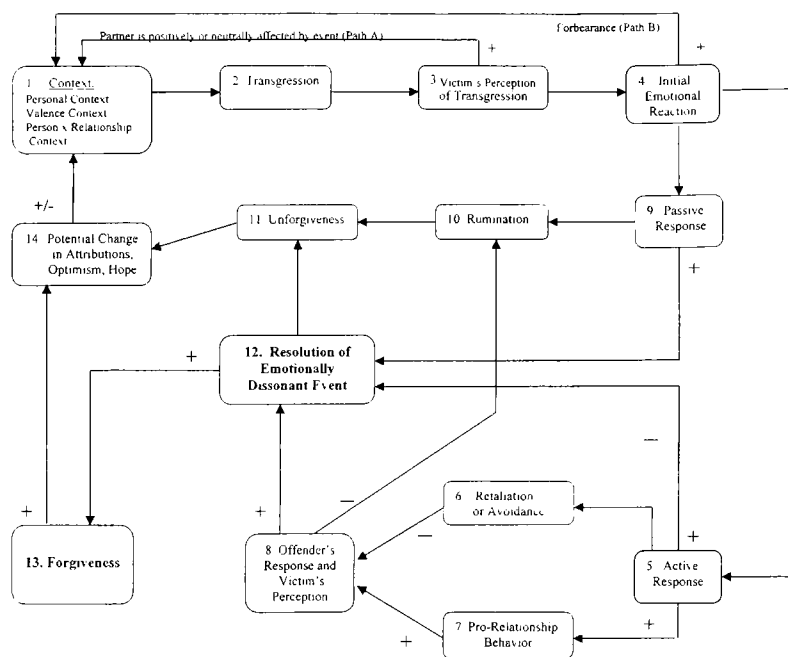


FIGURE 1. Interpersonal process of forgiveness and unforgiveness

Note. Valence of an act for the future positive stability of the relationship presented by an algebraic sign (+ or -) or zero.

of the relationship, and (c) interactions between the personal context and the relationship.

*Personal Context of the Partners.* Some personality characteristics are particularly likely to influence how one deals with potentially harmful relationship events. Of the "big five," Worthington (1998a) and McCullough (in press) have hypothesized that agreeableness is particularly important for forgiveness because it influences and is influenced by the person's affiliative and attachment needs. (McCullough [in press] also suggests that neuroticism might affect forgiveness, but there is less consensus than with agreeableness.) Emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1989-90) might affect whether people forgive. Pride (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998), guilt-proneness, and shame-proneness (Tangney, 1995) may be involved because they reflect how people deal with transgressions. Besides personality, other aspects of personal context are important. A person's religious commitment (Worthington,

1988) and beliefs (Dorff, 1998; Marty, 1998) might affect the situations in which a person transacts, response to controlling social norms (Milgram, 1974), and how much a person values forgiveness (Rokeach, 1973).

*Emotional Valence of the Relationship.* Ongoing relationships develop a positive or negative emotional *valence*, which is a person's emotional generalization toward the relationship (see Figure 1, box 1). The occurrence of an event perceived to be either positive or negative will affect the perception of that valence. Negative events, such as transgressions, make a positive relationship less positive, transform it to negative, or confirm a person's negative view of an already negative relationship. Positive events act in the opposite direction. Gottman (1994) suggests that changes in perception of relationship valence from positive to negative (and possibly vice versa) happen discontinuously in most cases. That is, for example, people do not slide smoothly from seeing a marriage as good to neutral to bad. Instead, negative events can mount up until one transgression can be like the straw that broke the camel's back. Attributions shift dramatically, and important relationship-related values might be questioned (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Once a relationship is defined as negative, those attributions and values color how subsequent events are perceived and responded to with a blackness of pessimism.

*The Interaction of Personal Context and Relationship Valence.* Within one relationship, people might behave in grossly different ways than in another relationship. A man might react with consistent, angry hostility at work and with loving kindness at home. One particular relationship-specific disposition that might be important to whether unforgiveness or forgiveness characterizes a relationship is willingness to sacrifice for the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997).

Relationship context is crucial to understanding whether unforgiveness and eventually forgiveness might occur after a transgression. Personal context, relationship valence, and their interaction affect the ways people process transgressions (Lipkus & Bissonnette, 1996). As we will describe, how transgressions are experienced and resolved will in turn affect the relationship valence between two individuals.

## TRANSGRESSION

Transgressions (Figure 1, box 2) are acts that (a) wrong or morally offend one's partner or (b) inflict psychological or physical pain or injury. Transgressions are *objectively* wrong or injurious (objective at least to the extent that observers would agree that offense or injury had occurred). Transgressions are particularly destructive when they are repeated,

heavily charged with negative emotion, severe, and unaccompanied by transgressor guilt or apology.

### VICTIM'S PERCEPTION OF EVENTS

Perception of transgressions (Figure 1, box 3) is important. Potentially harmful events must pass through the perceptual lenses of the partner. This is the first point in the flow chart where the emotional direction can take different pathways. For example, the partner may perceive an ambiguously negative comment as humorous and respond with laughter or indifference, avoiding the unforgiveness cycle and restoring stability to the relationship (Figure 1, path A). Or, the partner may perceive the comment as a personal attack and respond defensively. Perception motivates an individual's response.

### INITIAL EMOTIONAL REACTION

If the partner does not perceive the transgression as benign, he or she will react emotionally (Figure 1, box 4). If a person perceives the transgression as *offensive*—that is, as violating his or her moral norms—the person will likely react in anger. Anger potentiates aggression or retaliation as well as lingering hostility toward the offender. Anger also might trigger active and passive coping mechanisms (Kassinove, 1995). Worthington (1998a) has theorized that experiencing what is perceived as a *hurtful* act can produce fear. Fear will produce avoidance or, that failing, defensive fighting and anger. If neither avoidance nor anger ameliorates the threat, the person might become depressed. Note that anger is possible regardless of whether an offense or a hurt occurs.

The initial emotion creates another choice point in the process. The victim can act to reduce unforgiveness, with either an active or passive interpersonal response (Worthington, 1998a). Unforgiveness can be reduced in several ways that do not involve forgiving (Figure 1, path B). Forbearance is a pro-relationship action to release the negative feelings and desire for revenge, and it is similar to acceptance (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996). Psychological defenses such as denying, projecting, or minimizing also can reduce unforgiveness. Seeing justice done or actively seeking justice can also reduce unforgiveness. What distinguishes these responses from active and passive interpersonal responses is the almost immediate return to relationship valence without discussion, apology, confession, or other offense-focused interaction with the partner. In addition, these responses reflect the victim's belief (correct or not) that the relationship with the offender is well.

## INTERPERSONALLY ACTIVE RESPONSES

*Two Types of Active Responses.* The injured person can respond to initial anger, fear or a mixture of the two with an interpersonally active response. Active responses (Figure 1, box 5) are relationship-enhancing or relationship-destructive external actions aimed at dealing with the event interpersonally.

One example is immediate retaliation (e.g., yelling, name calling, inflicting a similar hurt, etc.; Figure 1, box 6). Contrary to common wisdom, research suggests that such venting is not usually helpful and may feed distress (Kubany, Bauer, Muraoka, Richard, & Read, 1995).

Another common active response is constructive relationship behavior (Figure 1, box 7), which is aimed at communicating the interpersonal injury so as not to harm the relationship. In response to anger-eliciting events, constructive responses have been found to be almost as likely as aggressive responses (Averill, 1982).

*Victim's Perception of Transgressor's Response.* Because active responses make the transgressor aware of the victim's emotional reaction, the transgressor usually responds. The victim monitors carefully the offender's response as either relationship accommodating or destructive, thereby influencing eventual forgiveness or unforgiveness (Figure 1, box 8). If the offender's reaction is perceived as "soft" and accommodating, events should move toward forgiveness. If the offender's response is "hard" (e.g., denies wrongdoing, vows to continue harmful action), then the initial perceived hurt will be reinforced, with subsequent possible stimulation of active reprisal or drawing the victim into passive responses of rumination (described below). As the model illustrates, a negative response by the offender is likely to reinforce the victim's perceived hurt.

## INTERPERSONALLY PASSIVE RESPONSES

The passive response (Figure 1, box 9) is another way that the victim can respond to an initial emotion. "Passive" refers to the interpersonal, although it might be active cognitive or intrapsychic coping (Pargament & Rye, 1998). Passive responses include affects, behaviors, or thoughts that are not communicated directly to the offender—including stonewalling (Gottman, 1994), passive-aggressive acts, brooding reticence, internalization of blame, resignation from lack of hope (Snyder, 1994), silent forgiveness, (Baumeister et al., 1998) and rumination (Caprara, 1986).

Because interpersonally passive responses do not deal directly with the transgression, partners are unlikely to achieve a speedy resolution. Over time, the victim might ruminate about the event (Figure 1, box 10).

Through rumination, the hot emotions of anger and fear, like forged steel, cool and harden into unforgiveness (Figure 1, box 11). The cold emotional unforgiveness complex includes bitterness, resentment, and hatred, and it motivates avoidance of the transgressor or revenge (McCullough et al., 1997). Unlike the hot emotions, the cold emotions do not burn out easily with time. Unless an intervening event is powerful enough to change the rumination and break the cold-emotion cycle, the cold unforgiveness emotion has a staying power that can affect a relationship for years.

## A PATH TOWARD FORGIVENESS

*An Event Emotionally Dissonant With Unforgiveness.* If partners (victim and offender) are to regain a positively valenced relationship, the victim needs to experience an emotion-arousing event that is incongruent with the cold emotion of unforgiveness (Worthington, 1998a; Figure 1, box 12). Such events would include receiving a reasonable explanation, seeing restorative or punitive justice done, pondering good relational memories, sharing humor, or expressing love. These events create positive, "warm" emotions such as empathy, compassion, humility, liking, humor, and loving, which, in turn, cause emotional dissonance with the victim's cold unforgiveness.

*Resolution of the Emotional Dissonance.* Once an emotionally dissonant event creates affective and cognitive incongruencies, the victim strives for balance so as to reconcile the dissonant emotions (Figure 1, box 12). This can be accomplished through somatic, cognitive, or environmental predominance of one emotion.

First, resolution of emotional dissonance can occur because emotional experience involves multiple somatic systems. For instance, facial muscles provide feedback to working memory about one's emotional state (Izard, 1992). Facial muscles activated by fear, anger, and unforgiveness differ from those activated by empathy, compassion, humility, liking, and love.

Other dissonant sources of information to working memory (such as somatic or biochemical feedback) also are stimulated by dissonant emotions (see Worthington, 1998a, for a discussion).

Second, emotional dissonance can be resolved through willful cognition by rejecting or accepting the recently induced positive affect. Rejecting the positive affect is accomplished by focusing on the original hurt and the initial emotional reaction it created, ruminating about it, and indulging unforgiving emotions. Accepting the positive affect is accomplished by focusing on the positive feelings and changes in perceptions of the transgression.

Third, resolution of emotional dissonance can occur through external cir-



cumstances involving the power of situations. Thus, the power of partners' interpersonal interactions can overshadow either somatic or cognitive cues. Emotional dissonance can be resolved by moving back to unforgiveness (Figure 1, box 11) or toward forgiveness (Figure 1, box 13).

*Forgiveness.* Forgiveness is an internal choice to forego avoidance or revenge and to seek conciliation or reconciliation. It is facilitated by events that produce an emotional state that is incongruent with unforgiveness. The positive resolution of this emotional dissonance reduces rumination and desire for revenge or avoidance. Yet, forgiveness, similar to the present process model, is recursive. The victim may "arrive" at genuine forgiveness one day, only to resume rumination the next. Achieving forgiveness, particularly for an egregious harm, often must be repeated. In addition, the emotionally dissonant events that initiate forgiveness may occur at any temporal point in the development of unforgiveness.

*Consequences of Forgiveness.* If forgiveness is granted, several consequences ensue. With increasing forgiveness, unforgiveness declines and the motivation to have a good relationship increases. Whether reconciliation occurs will depend on whether it is safe, prudent, and possible to act. Other things change as a consequence of forgiveness (Figure 1, box 14). In positively valenced relationships, attributions become more globally positive and stable. In negatively valenced relationships, attributions become less globally negative and stable. The forgiver becomes more optimistic about the relationship and the future (Scheier & Carver, 1992; Seligman, 1990); both the forgiven and the forgiver may become more hopeful (Snyder, 1994). In subsequent sections, we review research from literatures that bear on this model, and draw implications for interventions in clinical and psychoeducational settings.

## CONNECTING THE MODEL TO SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

### METHOD

We reviewed the articles in McCullough, Exline, and Baumeister's (1998) annotated bibliography on research related to forgiveness. Articles and chapters pertinent to social and clinical psychology were aggregated according to subfields (e.g., attribution, emotional intelligence, accounts, interventions, etc.), which were grouped within one of the elements of our model. For a summary of the correspondence of the elements of the model to the subfields, see Table 1.

The literature within each subfield of Table 1 was expanded using the following methods. PsychInfo was consulted (1978–1998) using keywords—forgiveness, unforgiveness, guilt, shame, attributions, accounts, anger, accommodation, hope, emotional intelligence, empathy,

TABLE 1. The Correspondence of Elements of Our Model to the Literatures Reviewed

Personal Attributes of Participants	Big Five Emotional Intelligence Empathy Narcissism Pride Guilt and Shame Guilt-and Shame-proneness Religion
Relationship-Specific Personality Attributes	Relationship Valence Willingness to Sacrifice Commitment
Potentially Harmful Events	Accounts (Type of offenses)
Perception of Events (either partner's)	High Sensory Sensitivity Sensitivity to Rejection
Initial Emotional Reaction	Trait Anger
Interpersonally Active Responses	
Active Retaliation or Revenge	Revenge/Retaliation
Active Pro-Relationship Behavior	Accommodation
Perception of Offender's Response	Offering and Responding to Accounts
Interpersonally Passive Responses	
Rumination	Rumination—Dissipation/Distraction
Emotionally Dissonant Event	Empathy Apology Humility
Consequences of Unforgiveness or Forgiveness	Attributional Processes, Optimism, Hope

transgression, and grudge. Citations in reference lists of relevant articles were examined. Social Science Citation Index was consulted to identify citations of classic articles. Journals most likely to publish research relevant to forgiveness were identified: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *Counseling and Values*, and *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*. All 1998 issues of these journals were perused to locate relevant articles that were not in the data bases or reference lists.

For inclusion in the review, articles or chapters had to (a) report results of an empirical study or make a significant theoretical contribution, (b) specifically relate to the topic of forgiveness as judged by the authors, and (c) rely heavily on concepts and theories from the fields of social or clinical psychology. We do not comprehensively review each subfield.<sup>1</sup>

1. For a detailed table with an entrée to some of the most representative forgiveness-related studies organized by subfield, please write or e-mail the senior author.

## CONTEXT

In the present section, we briefly review existing empirical research on some of the aspects of the context of transgression (see Figure 1, box 1). Namely, we examine some personal attributes and relationship-specific attributes.

### PERSONAL CONTEXT

*Big Five.* Several theoreticians have suggested that agreeableness should be expected to be related to forgiveness (Ashton, Paunonen, Helmes, & Jackson, 1998; McCullough, in press; Worthington, 1998a). McCullough (in press) argued that agreeableness is related to the attachment–affiliation motivational axis. As yet, no data have been published that support this contention; however, in our lab, we have found support for this agreeableness-dispositional forgiveness correlation using undergraduate samples (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, & O'Connor, 1999). McCullough (in press) also has argued that neuroticism might be related to lack of forgiveness.

*Emotional Intelligence.* Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to understand one's own and others' emotional states, to actively regulate emotions in oneself and others, and to utilize emotion in decision making, planning, and motivating action (Salovey & Mayer, 1989–90). People with high emotional intelligence can discern interpersonal situations and control their behavior to promote positive social interactions. High emotional intelligence should predict fewer interactions that result in unforgiveness, and quicker resolution of difficult interpersonal dilemmas, such as those involving unforgiveness. People high in emotional intelligence are hypothesized to have a wide range of strategies for resolving unforgiveness—forgiveness being one of those—and those strategies come into play when the person is transgressed against or is the transgressor. We have hypothesized that underlying forgiveness is an *emotionally* dissonant event. Thus, a victim's ability to forgive will be influenced partially by his or her ability to comprehend and successfully resolve incompatible emotions, which is the core of the hypothesized construct of emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is also important from the transgressor's perspective. Emotionally intelligent individuals who transgress against others are hypothesized to have a greater capacity to understand their victims' emotional states. By perceiving anger, fear, or sadness in the victim, an astute transgressor can apologize, make amends, or discuss the problem with the victim. Transgressors unaware of their victims' emotional state would be less likely to address the transgression. In cases of

inadvertent transgressions, this capability is indispensable for preventing unforgiveness. No reported studies to date have investigated the relationship between forgiveness and emotional intelligence, but a few studies suggest a connection (Mayer, DiPaulo, & Salovey, 1990).

*Empathy.* Dispositional empathy (Davis, 1996) is hypothesized to be related to both a forgiving personality and to forgiveness of particular transgressions. McCullough (in press) has hypothesized that a state of empathy (Levenson & Reuf, 1991) activates a person's affiliative-attachment motivational axis. When people have a disposition toward empathy, states of empathy with a transgressor are more likely after a transgression. While no reported investigations have linked dispositional empathy to forgiveness, two studies have shown that states of empathy mediate the apology-forgiveness connection—either partially (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997) or completely (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998).

*Narcissism.* Any personality disposition related to impairments in empathy should be expected to inhibit forgiveness. Any personality disposition related to enhancements in empathy should be expected to enhance forgiveness. Narcissism has been linked with reductions of empathy (see Davis, 1996). Emmons (1999) therefore has made a strong case that narcissism should be expected to impair forgiveness. Sandage, Worthington, Hight, and Berry (1999) have found narcissism to be negatively related to *seeking* forgiveness, even after controlling for religion, age, and developmental level of reasoning about forgiveness.

*Pride.* Pride has been theorized to hamper forgiveness and to encourage grudge-holding in a desire to save face (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998). In addition, prideful people might more easily sustain an injury or offense and have a more difficult time forgiving because they have more offenses to forgive. Research has not yet addressed these speculations directly.

*Guilt and Shame.* Guilt and shame have been used interchangeably to describe the same affective experience (Kaufman, 1991). Empirical research, however, reveals that guilt and shame can be distinguished as separate interpersonal and intrapsychic experiences (see Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994, for a thorough review). For example, Tangney, Miller, Flicker, and Barlow (1996) have described shame and guilt as negative affective states that result from perceived moral shortcomings. Shame results when the individual attributes failure to internal, global, and permanent characteristics, with the conclusion that "I am bad." In contrast, guilt ensues from a focus on the specific behavior—"I did something bad"—and does not have negative con-

sequences for self-image (Tangney, 1995). Because transgressions are often moral violations, guilt and shame are relevant to how both perpetrator and victim act.

The differences between shame and guilt have many implications for forgiveness. Based on our model, we hypothesize that experiences eliciting shame in transgressor, victim, or both will be more likely to lead to unforgiveness than will experiences that elicit guilt. Shame experiences are more likely to result in a transgressor's unwillingness to confess, the desire to self-protect, and the tendency to feel isolated. Shame-proneness also will result in relationship-destructive responses to anger, thus increasing anger-anger interpersonal exchanges that reduce the chances of positive, emotionally dissonant events. Each of these factors will discourage forgiveness and healthy rapprochement by making emotionally dissonant events less likely, and keeping the partners emotionally (and possibly physically) separate. Experiences resulting in guilt, on the other hand, encourage forgiveness. When feeling guilty, as opposed to shameful, the perpetrator is more likely to make amends, offer an apology, and repair the relationship. Thus, guilt provides opportunities for emotionally dissonant events, making forgiveness more likely.

*Religion.* Another personal attribute that should influence unforgiveness and forgiveness is religious involvement. While all major religions advocate interpersonal forgiveness (see Thoresen, Luskin, & Harris, 1998), not all value divine forgiveness. For instance, in Hinduism and Buddhism, the strict law of unyielding justice, karma, makes divine forgiveness moot (Shriver, 1998). Some religions value interpersonal forgiveness more than others (Dorff, 1998; Marty, 1998). Christianity's central tenet is forgiveness (Marty, 1998); thus, highly religiously committed Christians are expected to exhibit high rates of forgiveness and low rates of unforgiveness.

Many empirical investigations and theoretical articles have reported a link between religious involvement and espousing forgiveness (see McCullough & Worthington, in press, for a review). That religiously involved individuals rate forgiveness as an important value (Rokeach, 1973) suggests that they may bring open minds to forgiveness situations as well as a willingness to forgive. In addition, most religions also provide a ritual for being forgiven, which includes the act of forgiving others.

*Understanding Why Certain Personal Attributes Might Affect Forgiveness.* We would embed our theorizing in Leary's (1957) interpersonal circle. Leary hypothesized that interactions could be characterized by two orthogonal dimensions—affiliation and power. Emotional intelligence seems to involve how people deal with both affiliation and power, so it

might be treated as a "master skill." Dispositions that predispose people toward affiliative interactions include dispositional empathy and narcissism. Those that predispose people more toward power-related interactions involve pride, shame, guilt, shame-proneness, and guilt-proneness. Finally, for highly religious people, religious commitment might affect forgiveness, but religion has both affiliative and power or control dimensions.

## RELATIONSHIP-SPECIFIC PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES

*Valence of the Relationship.* Few reported studies have examined the effect of the emotional valence of the relationship on forgiveness. One notable exception is by McCullough, Rachal, et al. (1998), who surveyed university students about the relationship in which a transgression had occurred. Results revealed that relationship closeness predicted eventual reconciliation.

*Willingness to Sacrifice for the Relationship.* In interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), when two partners' desires or needs are at odds, their differences can be resolved in many ways—through use of power; through pursuing separate agendas; or, through being willing to sacrifice some of their desires, plans, goals, or needs for the good of the relationship. Willingness to sacrifice for a relationship (instead of pursuing self-enhancing behavior at the expense of the relationship) is hypothesized to avoid some of the damage to a relationship from a transgression. For example, if a transgression occurs, the willingness to sacrifice is thought to exert little effect on whether unforgiveness develops. If unforgiveness does develop, though, people highly willing to sacrifice for the relationship are expected to be more likely to ask for and grant forgiveness. Both seeking and granting forgiveness are costly. They involve sacrifice. Research on willingness to sacrifice has shown that it is predicted by relationship commitment, longevity, and adjustment (Van Lange et al., 1997).

*Commitment.* Rusbult and her colleagues have found that accommodation (i.e., relational maintenance and repair) is more likely in committed than in uncommitted relationships (Rusbult, Bissonette, Arriaga, & Cox, in press; Van Lange et al., 1997). The more strongly that people are committed to their relationship, the more they are hypothesized to be more willing to seek, grant, and transact beneficially (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998). Moreover, greater commitment is related to dyadic adjustment (Rusbult et al., in press), cognitive interdependence (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), willingness to sacrifice (Van Lange et al., 1997), and other variables.

## TRANSGRESSIONS

*Understanding Accounts.* Certain acts frequently are perceived in ways that move people toward or away from unforgiveness. Thus, type of act is hypothesized to be important to discerning whether forgiveness is ultimately likely. Research has considered various types of transgressions (Figure 1, box 2). Gonzales, Manning, and Haugen (1992) describe offenses by categorizing them along a “blameworthiness continuum” (p. 958). They describe offenses as being either (a) observed, (b) accidental, (c) caused by negligence (passive or active), or (d) unjustifiably intended. Observed offenses carry minimal (if any) responsibility for the bystander; still, through empathy with the victim an observer could develop unforgiveness for the transgressor. Accidental offenses are usually considered more blameworthy than are observed offenses, and yet, are often easily forgiven. Offenses due to negligence—classified as either passive or active—are caused by individuals who are expected to have foreseen (and, thus, avoided) the negative consequences their actions caused. Passive negligence is failing to do what should be done; active negligence is engaging in unsafe behavior that leads directly to the transgression. Passive negligence is usually viewed as less blameworthy than active negligence. Offenses that are caused by negligence carry more responsibility than do the previous two; however, what one does *not* do is usually subject to alternative explanations. When one is uncertain about the cause of a transgression, one is more cautious about blame. Finally, unjustifiably intended offenses are the most onerous, blameworthy, and difficult to forgive (Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992).

## PERCEPTION OF EVENTS

*Highly Sensitive Persons (HSP).* Whether and how one perceives a transgression affects response to the transgression (see Figure 1, box 3). Highly sensitive individuals report sensitivity to (or intolerance of) emotions, situations, environments, or other people (Aron & Aron, 1997). Highly sensitive people are likely to perceive more pain or offense from an interpersonal transgression than are less sensitive people. The increased reaction may make forgiveness more difficult and thus less likely. In addition, if highly sensitive people consistently react more strongly to transgressions, they may be more attuned to transgression-related cues (e.g., a partner’s subtle, irritated tone) and thus perceive transgressions more often than low sensitivity individuals do. Frequently perceiving minor transgressions can make individuals and

their partners less willing to work at forgiveness and can exhaust not only the individuals, but the relationship as well. For all of these reasons, high sensory sensitivity is expected to be related to unforgiveness.

On the other hand, it is unclear *how* high sensory sensitivity might be related to unforgiveness or forgiveness. High sensory sensitivity might reduce the likelihood of forgiveness. Highly sensitive people might be focused on the impact of sensory stimuli on themselves, which might suggest that high sensitivity might be related to unforgiveness. Individuals with high sensory sensitivity are more likely to be introverted (Aron & Aron, 1997); they may thus avoid social interactions that could lead to an emotionally dissonant event (e.g., empathy) and forgiveness. Alternatively, high sensory sensitivity might also be related to increased experiences of empathy, love, or reconciliation. A highly sensitive person might be more likely to sense contrition and regret in an offender and to empathize with an offender's perspective. Likewise, an offender might be more likely to empathize with a victim's pain or sense of moral outrage, and thus to engage in relationship maintenance or repair strategies or to confess, apologize, and seek forgiveness. It is unclear which tendency might predominate and for whom. Research to date has not directly addressed the relationship between high sensory sensitivity and forgiveness.

*Sensitivity to Rejection.* Sensitivity to rejection is the anxious preoccupation with the potential that one's romantic partner may leave, stop loving one, or find a more attractive partner (Downey & Feldman, 1996). People sensitive to interpersonal rejection might be more likely to interpret negative interpersonal events as offensive or harmful. They also might engage anger- and fear-related attempts to prevent rejection. Some of those efforts might promote actual rejection by the partner, while others might promote forgiveness and reconciliation. Thus, people highly sensitive to rejection are hypothesized to be higher in unforgiveness. The effect of high sensitivity to rejection on forgiveness is uncertain and awaits empirical investigation.

## INITIAL EMOTIONAL REACTION

Transgressions provoke emotional responses (Figure 1, box 4). How people respond depends on (a) relationship context, (b) event characteristics, (c) personality dispositions, and (d) immediately subsequent interactions that might mitigate or exaggerate the emotion. Degree of emotional reactivity might be related to both unforgiveness and forgiveness. Trait anger (Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane, 1983) or trait fear are the most relevant personality dispositions for emotional experience and expression that are relevant for developing unforgiveness.



## INTERPERSONALLY ACTIVE RESPONSES

*Active Retaliation or Revenge.* There is a limited literature investigating retaliation and revenge (Figure 1, box 6). Retaliation is an immediate response to a transgression that seeks to equalize both parties' negative experiences or perhaps also inflict punitive damages. Revenge is generally considered to be a time-deferred, calculated retaliation born of unforgiveness. Retaliation has been studied within the aggression literature (for a review see Berkowitz, 1993). Information regarding mitigating circumstances of a received offense was thought to reduce retaliation for an interpersonal offense. Because unforgiveness is a "cold" emotion, the study of retaliation is not as applicable to the study of unforgiveness as is the study of revenge. Surprisingly, however, the empirical study of revenge and its predictors and mediators has been infrequent.

*Accommodation.* Accommodation is an individual's choice to respond constructively to a partner's harmful or destructive behavior. Accommodation describes all pro-relationship behaviors that occur following a transgression (e.g., refraining from yelling back, responding with compassion). Accommodation occurs when the victim weighs the consequences of retaliation versus pro-relationship behavior and chooses a pro-relationship response (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994).

Accommodation is usually a relatively immediate response to a transgression. However, some accommodation might occur at protracted times from the initial transgression. In examining accommodation, researchers have focused primarily on the personal and interpersonal factors that predict accommodation (Rusbult et al., in press; Rusbult et al., 1991). Many relationship factors have been identified with the willingness to accommodate. For example, Rusbult and colleagues (1991) identified five major relationship factors related to willingness to accommodate: satisfaction with the relationship, greater investment in the relationship, greater commitment to the relationship, less satisfaction with alternative relationships, and normative support.

## PERCEPTION OF TRANSGRESSOR'S RESPONSE

*Accounts.* While the blameworthiness of an event affects the outcome (described above), the type of account that a transgressor gives also is important in influencing the victim's response. Accounts are the responses that an individual or group offers to explain, justify, or otherwise mitigate the negative effects of a transgression. The offering of accounts and the victim's response to accounts comprise much of the content of transactions around forgiveness. Extant models of interven-

tion have neglected accounts (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; McCullough et al., 1997).

Accounts that an offender may offer have been classified as either refusals, justifications, excuses, or concessions (Gonzales et al., 1992). Refusals deny any causal role in the interpersonal injury and its consequences, and reject another's right to call into question the refuser's integrity or blameworthiness. Justifications admit to wrongdoing but accept no responsibility for the transgression. Excuses, admit to wrongdoing and take responsibility for the transgression to some degree, but often include mitigating circumstances in an effort to reduce personal blame. Concessions are admissions of wrongdoing that take responsibility for the consequences of the transgression and seek to make amends.

*Factors Affecting Accounts.* The blameworthiness for an event is one factor that affects the type of account given. For example, a person who accidentally bumps into someone else is likely to make a concession or excuse. Someone who intentionally pushes someone will likely offer a justification or refusal. In addition, increased blameworthiness has been related to an increase in lying (Gonzales et al., 1992), which is considered a refusal.

Also, increasing the severity of an event leads transgressors to accept less responsibility through the accounts that they give (Gonzales et al., 1992). People often are unwilling to accept the full burden of severe offenses. Thus, as severity increases, justifications and refusals are more likely. Social status of the transgressor also interacts with the type of offense to produce different accounts. In one study, participants of lower status accepted more responsibility for a low-consequence situation than did higher status participants, but in high-consequence situations status was not a factor (Gonzales, Peterson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990).

Gender also affects the accounts offered for a transgression. As transgressors, women create more complex accounts and use concessions more often than men (Gonzales et al., 1992). In addition, women give more verbal and behavioral offers of help than men when in a low-status situation (Gonzales et al., 1990). Many women perhaps expect that they will be accepted and the relationship will be restored if they admit guilt. In contrast, men tend to lie and offer more limited concessions than women (Gonzales, Haugen, & Manning, 1994). As victims, women are more willing to accept transgressor accounts and rate the consequences of the transgression as less severe than are men (Gonzales et al., 1994). Women make less negative judgments, are more willing to accept the accounts of offenders, and offer more honest, thorough and self-damaging accounts for their misdeeds than do males.

*Responses to Accounts.* The victim's perception of the transgressor's account is crucial to forgiveness or unforgiveness. The less severe the

transgression, the greater likelihood of a simple account and acceptance of responsibility, which we hypothesize will lead more often to forgiveness. Accounts that take responsibility for the transgression and seek to make amends will encourage an emotionally dissonant event and restore justice and fairness within the relationship. However, severe transgressions limit simple accounts and responsibility taking. These incidents, which paradoxically require more deliberate consideration of forgiveness, will reduce the chances for forgiveness.

### INTERPERSONALLY PASSIVE RESPONSES

*Rumination Versus Dissipation or Distraction.* Rumination makes unforgiveness more likely and forgiveness less likely (Figure 1, boxes 10 and 11). Caprara and his colleagues have investigated the cognitive aspects of rumination related to aggression (Caprara, 1986). Caprara (1986) theorized that aggressive responses to transgressions depend on which of two cognitive processes is employed. Dissipation, which he describes as the ability to release the anger and frustration caused by a perceived harm, makes aggression less likely. Rumination, which is mulling a situation or offense over in one's mind, was theorized to lead to a greater desire for revenge and more aggression than dissipation does.

Caprara and colleagues (1985a) developed a scale to measure dissipation and rumination. They used this scale in four experiments to determine whether participants' level of dissipation or rumination was related to aggressive behavior (Caprara, Coluzzi, Mazzotti, Renzi, & Zelli, 1985b). Rumination has also been found to affect depression (Lyubomirsky, Caldwell, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991) as well as aggression. Ruminating thoughts in Nolen-Hoeksema's conceptualization are little different than Caprara's (1986) concept; however, distraction differs from Caprara's (1986) concept of dissipation. Distraction is the conscious effort to focus mental energy away from negative cognition, and toward positive mental activities.

Rumination about a depressed mood has been found to increase the depressed mood rather than reduce it (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). These findings about rumination related to depressed mood are important for understanding more factors that might facilitate or impede forgiveness. If a victim of an interpersonal transgression responds with sadness and then ruminates not only about the transgression but about the depressed mood as well, forgiveness will likely be difficult. Depression will reduce the victim's energy level and make the hard work of forgiveness less likely. Hopelessness about the situation or the relationship may accompany the depressed mood and create less motivation for the individual

to forgive because he or she reasons that the relationship is doomed anyway.

Rumination may also make forgiveness more difficult by increasing recall of negative memories of past hurt, pain, offense, or relationship difficulty (Lyubomirsky et al., 1998). These negative memories may reduce chances for forgiveness by causing the victim (a) to think it unsafe to forgive (i.e., "it will only happen again"), (b) be more unforgiving (i.e., "look at all he or she has done to me in the past"), or (c) to be overwhelmed by the number of events that need to be forgiven (i.e., "it is impossible even to recall the many transgressions, so forgiveness is impossible"). Such thoughts deflect attention from the present transgression.

### EMOTIONALLY DISSONANT EVENT

*Empathy.* Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the cognitive and affective experiences of another and feel with him or her, without necessarily experiencing the situations. Empathy has been firmly linked with the ability to forgive both theoretically (McCullough, in press; Worthington, 1998a) and empirically (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 1997). These researchers have found an empathy-based intervention to produce more forgiveness than did an intervention promoting forgiveness to obtain personal benefits of health and happiness. They found that people in either intervention who forgave more were higher in empathy for the transgressor (McCullough et al., 1997). Both trait empathy (Davis, 1996) and states of empathy (Levenson & Ruef, 1991) may affect forgiveness. Empathy is the ability to understand and feel the cognitive and affective experiences of another, without necessarily having to experience the situations. This ability has been firmly linked with the ability to forgive. McCullough and his colleagues (1995; 1997; 1998) have developed a research program that has empirically established the strong relationship between empathy and forgiveness (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998; McCullough & Worthington, 1995; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). The presence of empathy for others is therefore an important area related to forgiveness. Fortunately, research suggests that people are fairly good at empathy, at both an affective and a physiological level (Levenson & Ruef, 1991).

*Apology.* Another concept related to the development of an emotionally dissonant event is an apology, or an expressed regret, for an offense. Research has linked offering an apology, expressing remorse, and conveying regret to improved judgments of hypothetical offenders by children (Darby & Schlenker, 1982) and by adults (Ohbuchi, Kameda, &

Agarie, 1989). This improved judgment is hypothesized to be related to the development of more positive affect for the offender, potentially stimulating emotional dissonance.

*Humility.* Humility is hypothesized to be a crucial intrapsychic component of forgiveness (Sandage, 1997, in press-a, in press-b; Tangney, 1999). Worthington (1998b) theorized that humility assists the forgiveness process by enabling a humble victim to remember incidents in the past in which she or he might have transgressed against another (either the perpetrator or a different person). Humility is not merely the absence of pride or narcissism (John & Robins, 1994; Robins & John, 1997). Humility is the cognitive-affective experience of avoiding self-focus by supplanting it with other-focus (see Emmons, 1999). Humility is seeing oneself in a truthful light, realizing that one could have been (and in the past probably was) a transgressor, and choosing to respond based on commonalities (i.e., "I too have harmed others") rather than differences (i.e., "Look what *you* did to me"). Humility, like forgiveness, does not condone transgressions against others. Rather, it places appropriate blame on the transgressor, and then remembers times when equal blame was (or should have been) placed on oneself. To date, little research has investigated the relationship between humility and forgiveness. Both dispositional humility and states of humility are likely implicated in forgiveness.

## FORGIVENESS

To the extent that emotionally dissonant events can be experienced while considering the event that provoked unforgiveness, we hypothesize that forgiveness is likely. Such forgiveness would depend on the relative emotional, cognitive, and physiological impacts generated by the unforgiveness versus emotionally dissonant experiences. Therefore, the balance of type and intensity of competing *emotions* might explain whether forgiveness occurs. For example, one might understand forgiveness using a counter-conditioning metaphor, much like systematic desensitization (Wolpe, 1958). Whether forgiveness occurs also would depend on the *cognitive* associations of event-related stimuli with the emotionally dissonant experiences. Or one might understand it as a complex emotional reaction involving multiple *physical* systems (LeDoux, 1996). Powerful experiences of forgiveness can make the emotion of unforgiveness less likely by replacing unforgiving reactions with forgiving reactions. We are claiming a primacy of emotion (and all of its affective, cognitive, and physical concomitants), but we suspect that such a claim is hard (if not impossible) to prove, as is witnessed by years of controversy over emotional primacy.

## CONSEQUENCES OF UNFORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS

*Attributional Processes.* Attributions are causes that an individual ascribes in response to a negative (most frequently) or positive event. Attributional processes affect, motivate, and alter interpersonal unforgiveness and forgiveness at many points. For example, in response to a transgression, the victim's perception of the event, interpretation of the transgressor's account, type of active response that the victim makes (retaliation versus pro-relationship behavior), whether a victim responds positively or negatively to an emotionally dissonant event, and expectations of giving or receiving forgiveness will be affected by the type of attributions made and by the partner's attributional style.

Bradbury and Fincham (1990) reviewed and summarized the findings of many studies investigating attributions in marriages. They found that marital satisfaction was associated with many attributional patterns. In response to negative events, troubled couples, relative to untroubled couples, (a) make more global attributions, (b) place more blame on the partner, (c) ascribe more negative intent to the partner, and (d) believe more often that negative events are caused by the partner's selfish concerns. Nondistressed spouses, relative to distressed spouses, make attributions that give their partners more benefit of the doubt when negative events occur.

Other research has examined the remembered information from which offenders, victims, and observers make attributions. Stillwell and Baumeister (1997) examined the amount and type of participants' recall when taking either an offender, victim, or observer perspective. All participants were instructed to remember as much of a story of offense and its aftermath as they could. Those participants who heard the story while thinking of themselves as observers of the situation remembered facts more accurately than did people who heard the story from either the victim or the perpetrator perspective. The victim and perpetrator perspectives did not differ in the amount of remembered information but did differ in the type of information they remembered (or mis-remembered) from the narrative. "Victims" remembered and added information that supported their perspective, and they forgot information that supported the perpetrator's perspective. For example, victims recalled the consequences of the offense and the commitment that the perpetrator broke, more than did people in the perpetrator condition. "Perpetrators" remembered information that supported their perspective, such as mitigating circumstances (Stillwell, & Baumeister, 1997).

Other research also supports this discrepancy between perspectives of people who are victims and perpetrators. In another study investigating victim and perpetrator perspectives (Baumeister et al., 1990), 63 under-

graduate college students wrote narratives of times when they were both a victim and a perpetrator of an interpersonal offense. Perpetrator stories, as compared to victim stories, showed more happy endings, less negative consequences, less relationship damage, and more apologies. In addition, perpetrators attributed their offenses to situational factors more often than did victims (McGraw, 1987). Victim stories, however, evidenced more confusion over perpetrator motives, less perpetrator regret, and less perpetrator acknowledgment of wrongdoing (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). Thus, faulty recall typically occurs in remembering transgressions. Attributions based on faulty recall will also vary between observers, perpetrators, and victims. Those attributions influence people's willingness and ability to seek, grant, and accept forgiveness.

*Optimism.* Optimism has been defined by some researchers as an attributional process (Sethi & Seligman, 1994). In this conceptualization, optimism is the tendency to attribute life events to more positive and less despairing causes. In one study, Sethi and Seligman (1994) analyzed the relationship between level of religion and optimism. Participants from theologically fundamentalistic religions were more optimistic than were those from moderate religions, who in turn were more optimistic than those from liberal religions.

Other researchers have focused more on optimism as a stable personality factor that generates positive expectancies about the future (Chang, 1998; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Scheier and Carver (1985) theorized that an increased ability to solve difficulties through problem-focused coping would be related to optimistic personality. That hypothesis has been empirically supported (Chang, 1998).

An optimistic view of a relationship and oneself in that relationship (whether measured by attributions or by general personality factors) is expected to influence whether forgiveness will occur. The tendency to view life optimistically will assist a person to make less permanent and damaging attributions of his or her offending partner. Optimism also will assist the victim to view the relationship with positive expectancies. Less directly, optimism is hypothesized to facilitate forgiveness to the degree that it facilitates positive coping and problem solving (Chang, 1998). Optimism will assist both the victim and transgressor to approach a transgression with better skills for resolving it. To date, the relationship between optimism and forgiveness has not been investigated empirically.

*Hope.* Snyder and colleagues (1991) have defined hope as "a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed determination) and (b) pathways (planning of ways to meet goals)" (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 571). Snyder and his colleagues have developed and validated scales for state hope (State Hope Scale; Snyder et al., 1996) and trait hope (Hope Scale; Snyder et al., 1991). In addition,

Snyder and his colleagues (1991, 1996) have identified some features of higher-hope people. People of higher hope tend to set higher goals for themselves than do lower-hope individuals, and yet do not perceive that their goals are more difficult to attain (Snyder et al., 1991). Higher-hope individuals also exhibit greater certainty that they will accomplish their goals (Snyder et al., 1991), and have been observed to perform better on a verbal task than their lower-hope counterparts (Snyder et al., 1996).

Hope is hypothesized to exert a significant influence on forgiveness. Like attributions, hope interacts with many factors to influence unforgiveness or forgiveness at many points. Hope, for instance, may be an important factor in overall dyadic satisfaction, which will influence valence of the relationship, which is related to forgiveness. Hope also may have a substantial role in helping to overcome relationship adversity through encouraging perseverance, as well as "letting-go" when it is appropriate (Snyder, in press). Forgiveness also may contribute to the state hopefulness in a partner or relationship (see Snyder, Cheavens, & Simpson, 1997). For example, one partner who holds bitterness and unforgiveness toward the other may lack hope in the relationship's future. The reduced level of hope could then affect future forgiveness situations, encouraging the partner toward unforgiveness. Unfortunately, research on hope as applied to forgiveness is in its infancy (Snyder et al., 1999). The above questions remain theoretical suggestions until empirical investigations can address these issues.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

Our model of forgiveness has a firm foundation in the social psychological literature. However, only a few aspects of the model—usually those related to the individual experience of forgiveness and not those related to transactions around forgiveness—have been incorporated in interventions to promote forgiveness (for a review and meta-analysis, see Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, in press). That significant omission makes most extant interventions (e.g., by Enright and colleagues; McCullough-Worthington and colleagues; Thoresen and colleagues; and Pargament & Rye, 1998) of questionable utility when applied to dyads. For example, in a recent study, Ripley and Worthington (1999) used a couple-enrichment intervention with married couples from the community to promote better marriages and more forgiveness of an index event. They found little evidence of effectiveness. They attributed that result to using an empathy-based approach to teaching about the experience of forgiveness but ignoring transactions around forgiveness. With an ongoing dyad, the transactions around forgiveness are of extreme importance.



We therefore conclude the present review with an examination of interventions focused on helping people with interpersonal difficulties. We draw from the foregoing review to suggest areas that need to be considered in designing effective interventions.

*Romantic Dyads.* A model of unforgiveness and forgiveness most likely would have its greatest impact in the area of counseling couples, using (a) premarital psychoeducation, (b) neomarital psychoeducation (with newly married couples), (c) relationship enrichment programs, or (d) therapy. Couples (married and other similar dyads) often seek couple intervention wanting to learn about their personalities, improve their interactions, prevent relationship distress, resolve problems, and mitigate existing distress. In Table 2, we suggest the relative importance of each activity for each type of intervention with couples.

**Learning about personalities:** Many couples enjoy learning about their personalities. Witness the popularity of approaches that use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Briggs & Myers, 1984) or Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis Instrument (Taylor & Morrison, 1977) with couples. Also note the popularity of Gray's (1992) *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* materials. As noted in Table 2, such personality-based interventions are typically psychoeducational. We suggest that seminar materials could be developed to inform people about personality constructs related to forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Improving interactions:** Improving interactions between partners is important at almost every level of intervention—from premarital psychoeducation to therapy. Programs such as the Couple Communication Program (Miller, Wackman, Nunnally, & Miller, 1988), the Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994), and Relationship Enhancement (Guerney, 1978) have been successful. Such programs could be supplemented by coaching couples about how to reconcile after disagreements or breeches of trust. An intervenor could include material about requesting, giving, and responding to accounts. In addition, partners could be coached to increase interactions that are emotionally dissonant to unforgiveness.

**Preventing distress:** Preventing distress is thought to be most relevant to couples who are newly married or who have well-functioning relationships but seek enrichment. Premarital couples often are too idealistic about their relationship to benefit by preventive interventions, and couples in therapy are more focused on ameliorating current distress than on preventing further distress. Interventions that show people how to experience forgiveness are likely to help couples prevent distress. Such programs might include adaptations of those by Enright and colleagues, Worthington (see Ripley & Worthington, 1999; Worthington, 1998a), McCullough (1997), Pargament and Rye (1998), and Thoresen,

TABLE 2. The Hypothetical Importance of Each of Five Activities for Each of Four Types of Couple Intervention

	Learn About Personality <sup>a</sup>	Improve Interaction <sup>b</sup>	Prevent Distress <sup>c</sup>	Resolve Problems <sup>d</sup>	Mitigate Chronic Distress <sup>e</sup>
Premarital	***	**	*	+	+
Neomarital	**	**	**	+	+
Enrichment	**	***	**	**	*
Therapy	+	**	*	**	***

Note. <sup>a</sup>Context variable (psychoeducation about personality and relationship-specific personality characteristics).

<sup>b</sup>Transactions around forgiveness (giving and responding to accounts, engaging in emotionally dissonant events).

<sup>c</sup>Preventive actions (positive perceptions of events, controlling initial emotional reactions to events, stifle retaliation and revenge, active pro-relationship behavior, reduce rumination, attend to attributional consequences).

<sup>d</sup>Problem resolution (use conflict-resolution interventions not covered in the current article).

<sup>e</sup>Dealing with chronic distress (conflict-resolution interventions, training in transactions around forgiveness [see b above], reduce rumination, create emotionally dissonant events).

\*\*\*Extremely important

\*\*Important

\*Somewhat important

+Not Usually important.

Luskin, and Harris (1998). In addition, couples can be taught to modify negative attributions (see Baucom & Epstein, 1990), reduce rumination, stifle retaliation and revenge, and engage in pro-relationship behavior.

**Resolving problems:** Well functioning couples must be able to resolve problems if they develop. Gottman (1994) has found that about one-third of the well-functioning couples have many problems, about one-third have few problems, and the remaining one-third have some problems. Conflict-resolution, communication, and problem-solving interventions can help partners resolve problems. Little from the literature related to forgiveness, with the possible exception of accommodation, is likely to be of much help with problem resolution.

**Reducing chronic distress:** Finally, couples might be taught to reduce chronic distress—though this is probably apropos only for couples in therapy. In addition to a couple therapist's favorite approach, partners might be taught to (a) modify their transactions around forgiveness (see the accounts literature, see also Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990), (b) confess and forgive past transgressions (see extant interventions to promote forgiveness), (c) reduce rumination, (d) modify emotional reactions to provocations, and (e) change destructive attributions.

Intervenorers at all levels could train couples to modify their perceptions of events and to cultivate a willingness to sacrifice for the relationship (while not becoming "doormats"). Intervenorers could encourage

clients to eschew retaliation and revenge, focus on accommodation strategies and on promoting commitment, ask gently for accounts, and give accounts that do not justify or excuse harms. Therapists could also point out that partners should avoid excessive rumination, cultivate empathy and humility, apologize readily and sincerely, modify global, stable, and dispositional attributions, and foster optimism and hope.

*Family-Based Dyads.* Interventions often are needed with dyads considered at-risk for disruption. At-risk dyads might include (a) single parents and their children, (b) couples in poverty, (c) "mid-life" and "empty-nest" couples, (d) cohabiting couples, (e) separated couples, (f) divorced parents who are both involved in parenting, and (g) parents of children with a variety of childhood emotional or psychological disorders. The current model could be used to assist these couples (and their families) to deal effectively with interpersonal hurts. The stress associated with being "at-risk" makes handling interpersonal injuries more difficult. Thus, a systematic program to help couples overcome potentially harmful events would help mitigate some problems leading to separation and family dissolution (Worthington, 1998b).

In family therapy, many issues involve dyadic interaction. Transactions around forgiveness might be especially pertinent. Furthermore, issues of unforgiveness frequently arise for past transgressions. Use of established interventions to promote forgiveness can be helpful. Hepp-Dax (1996) has even modified Enright's approach for use with fifth-grade inner-city school children.

*Individual Psychotherapy.* Clients in individual therapy may have a history of interpersonal hurt and unforgiveness that affects their progress in therapy. In fact, unforgiveness may be a primary counseling issue. These situations might include clients (a) struggling with past physical or sexual abuse (e.g., Freedman & Enright, 1996), (b) dealing with unfaithful partners, (c) addressing abandonment by mother, father, or spouse, (d) feeling unloved (Al-Mabuk et al., 1995), or (e) experiencing violations of trust (see Coyle & Enright, 1997).

On the other hand, interpersonal transgressions and unforgiveness may be related to the primary diagnosis, but not be the main focus of therapy. For example, (a) clients experiencing depression may also have complicating unforgiveness toward a spouse or parent, or (b) adolescents being treated for anxiety may have perceived injuries from teachers or parents that are aggravating the anxiety. In such situations, forgiveness may facilitate treatment of the primary disorder. Whether forgiveness is the primary or secondary issue, forgiveness therapy and education based on an empirically sound model could be a helpful adjunct to more traditional approaches to helping the individuals in these situations.

*Group Psychotherapy.* Group psychotherapy, which often focuses on clients with interpersonal problems, might incorporate much of the information offered in the present article. Conceivably, a group could be organized around an issue, such as anger management, physical abuse, or sexual abuse, in which issues of unforgiveness and forgiveness are prominent. Forgiving or engaging in transactions about forgiveness could be discussed as a psychoeducational module or within the flow of a process group.

## CONCLUSION

Social psychology contributes to understanding unforgiveness and forgiveness by aiding in understanding (a) the interpersonal transactions that surround transgressions, (b) the ways those interactions stem from and affect the intrapsychic factors involved in forgiving and reconciling, and (c) experiences of forgiveness (or lingering unforgiveness). We suggest that there is a continual interplay among people's (a) personal attributes (e.g., agreeableness, neuroticism, emotional intelligence, pride, shame-proneness, religion, sensory and interpersonal sensitivity, and habitual ways of perceiving and responding emotionally to events), (b) intrapersonal experiences (e.g., shame, guilt, state empathy), and (c) the ways they act (emotionally or calmly; in self-sacrificial or self-serving ways; through retaliation, revenge, or avoidance; by harshly or adroitly demanding explanations for transgressions; in providing relationship-destructive or enhancing accounts for actions; and in dealing with proffered accounts clumsily or graciously). The personal internal experience-social interplay in turn influences people's cognitive rumination about transgressions, rumination about conversations involving forgiveness or guilt, attributions of causality, optimism, and hope. The personal internal experiences-social-cognition complex influences people's strategies for dealing with transgressions and for seeking (or not seeking) experiences of empathy, humility, and forgiveness.

We suggest that intervenors who address issues related to unforgiveness and forgiveness—especially in dyadic interactions—might draw profitably from the developing social psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness to inform the content of their interventions to change personalities, situations, cognition, emotional experience, or interpersonal transactions. To date, the accumulated social and clinical psychological literatures related to forgiveness have not been integrated.

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