Forgiveness and Justice: A Research Agenda for Social and Personality Psychology

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Pers Soc Psychol Rev 2003 7: 337
DOI: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0704_06

Personality and Social Psychology Review
2003, Vol. 7, No. 4, 337–348

Forgiveness and Justice: A Research Agenda for Social and Personality Psychology

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Forgiveness and related constructs (e.g., repentance, mercy, reconciliation) are ripe for study by social and personality psychologists, including those interested in justice. Current trends in social science, law, management, philosophy, and theology suggest a need to expand existing justice frameworks to incorporate alternatives or complements to retribution, including forgiveness and related processes. In this article, we raise five challenging empirical questions about forgiveness. For each question, we briefly review representative research, raise hypotheses, and suggest specific ways in which social and personality psychologists could make distinctive contributions.

The social psychological literature provides a rich theoretical and empirical base for studying perceptions of injustice. Historically, much of this literature has focused on identifying factors leading to perceived injustice, including inequities (e.g., Adams, 1965) and unfair procedures (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In terms of addressing how people respond to injustice, retributive impulses have received substantial attention (e.g., Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Darley, 2002; Hogan & Emler, 1981; Miller, 2000; Miller & Vidmar, 1981; Vidmar, 2002). Alternatives to retribution, such as forgiveness and related processes, are only beginning to receive empirical attention.

We are grateful for the support of the John Templeton Foundation to Everett Worthington (Grant 239) and Julie Exline (Grant 5039; Primary Investigator: Roy Baumeister). Peter Hill acknowledges support from A Campaign for Forgiveness Research (Grant 5076), as does Michael McCullough (Grant 5135). We also acknowledge the generous support of the Institute for Research on Psychology and Spirituality.

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The purpose of our article is to provide a review and research agenda on the interface between forgiveness and justice, with an emphasis on themes relevant to social and personality psychology. First, we give a snapshot of recent developments related to forgiveness in the fields of law, management, philosophy, theology, and psychology. As is evident from our review, psychological research on forgiveness is still in its infancy. In the second section of the article, we raise five challenging questions about forgiveness that stem from controversies in the various fields. Our aim is to briefly review representative research, raise hypotheses, and suggest specific ways in which social and personality psychologists might contribute to forgiveness research.

In approaching the topic of forgiveness, we note a tension between descriptive and prescriptive approaches. Much of the philosophical and theological work focuses on prescriptive issues such as the moral appropriateness of forgiveness, whereas empirical research is descriptive in its focus. In this article, we are not proposing a proforgiveness or antiforgiveness position. Rather, our aim is to suggest that empirical study of forgiveness is timely within social and personality psychology.

A Brief Overview of Forgiveness Scholarship in Various Fields

Although public commitment to retributive penalties remains strong in the United States (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997), other waves of theory and research suggest alternatives or complements to retribution. One such alternative is forgiveness. The emphasis on forgiveness appears to be part of a broader expansion of focus within fields such as law, management, philosophy, theology, and social science. We briefly consider some of these developments later.

Developments in the Field of Law

In recent U.S. history, retributive frameworks have predominated within the legal system. Retributive justice focuses on punishing offenders, but it does not always consider victim needs. There has thus been a need for justice procedures and philosophies that focus on victims, as demonstrated in the victim-advocacy movement. A major aim of the restorative justice movement is to preserve the rights and dignity of both victims and offenders (Bazemore, 1998; Braithwaite, 1989; Umbreit, 2001).

Traditional criminal justice models allow minimal interaction between victims and offenders. In contrast, restorative justice procedures often provide opportunities for offenders and victims to meet together in carefully supervised settings with trained mediators. (Sometimes such sessions replace regular sentencing, but by no means always.) In victim–offender conferences, offenders have opportunities to hear the victim's perspective, to apologize, to explain their actions, and to offer restitution, all of which can facilitate forgiveness by victims (Gehm, 1992; Peachey, 1992). Participants typically report high satisfaction with restorative procedures, although they are not used for all crimes (Umbreit, 2001). Restorative justice is most frequently used with juveniles, and usually for nonviolent crimes.

Discussions of forgiveness now appear in retributive frameworks as well. Recent legal writings explore how forgiveness relates to mercy (Brien, 1990; Duff, 1990; Feigenson, 2000; Murphy, 1988; Murphy & Hampton, 1988), pardon (Duff, 1990; Moore, 1989), and atonement (Garvey, 1999; Levine, 2000). Legal scholars suggest applications for forgiveness in criminal law (Bandes, 2000; Meyer, 2000; Nygaard, 1997), bankruptcy law (Gross, 1997), and political and international law (Helmick & Petersen, 2001; Minow, 1998; Shriver, 1995). Attesting to the growing interest in forgiveness within law, in 2000 the *Fordham Urban Law Journal* published an entire issue on the role of forgiveness in criminal, civil, and international law.

Developments in Management Settings

Scholars in management and organizational psychology have also begun to study forgiveness. Organizational psychologists have conducted substantial theoretical and empirical work on justice issues (for reviews, see Cropanzano, 2001; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenberg & Cropanzano, 2001), including studies of retribution and revenge (e.g., Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2002).

Researchers have recently broadened their attention to study positive processes in organizations (e.g., Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). Some of this work relates to forgiveness. For example, scholars have examined how apologies help to avert lawsuits (Cohen, 2000). Others have studied forgiveness within workplace relationships (Aquino, Grover, Goldman, & Folger, in press; Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999) and as a collective process in organizations (Bright, 2002).

Developments Within Philosophy

Ethicists and legal philosophers have engaged in lively debate about the nature and moral value of forgiveness (e.g., Derrida, 2001; Govier, 2002; Holmgren, 1993; Morris, 1988; Murphy, 1988, 2002; Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Neu, 2002; North, 1987, 1998; Richards, 1988; Yandell, 1998). Much of this writing addresses prescriptive issues, with the aim of identifying conditions under which forgiveness is morally appropriate. Some cautionary writings suggest that forgiveness—particularly if offered hastily—might disrespect both victims and perpetrators (e.g., Murphy, 1988, 2002). Other writings promote forgiveness as a virtue (e.g., Adams, 1991; Holmgren, 1993; Morris, 1988; North, 1987, 1998). Philosophical analyses of forgiveness find their place alongside related writings on the moral value of retribution and revenge (French, 2001; Moore, 1987; Murphy, 2000).

Developments Within Theological and Religious Frameworks

Because forgiveness is a core issue within many religious systems, the study of forgiveness from theological and religious perspectives is clearly not new. Yet in the past two decades, scholars from various fields have taken steps to articulate how forgiveness is viewed within various major faith traditions. Rye and colleagues (2000) have compared Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu perspectives on forgiveness. Essays in *The Sunflower* (Wiesenthal, 1998) reflect a wide range of religious views. Other works focus on specific religious traditions such as Judaism (Dorff, 1998; Levine, 2000; Schimmel, 2002) and Christianity (Floristán & Duquoc, 1986; Jones, 1995; Smedes,

1984, 1996; Yancey, 1997). Religious systems often differ in their prescriptions about when to forgive. For example, many Jews view repentance and atonement as prerequisites for forgiveness (Dorff, 1998; Levine, 2000; Prager essay in Wiesenthal, 1998; Schimmel, 2002), whereas Christians commonly believe that forgiveness should be unconditional (Jeffress, 2000; Rye et al., 2000; Smedes, 1996).

Developments Within Psychology

Empirically oriented psychologists have recently taken an interest in forgiveness (for reviews, see Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright & North, 1998; McCullough, Exline, & Baumeister, 1998; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 1998a). Although few forgiveness studies existed before 1990, research increased when the John Templeton Foundation sponsored a 1997 initiative to fund scientific study of forgiveness.

In contrast to the prescriptive thrust of much of the philosophical and theological work on forgiveness (i.e., "Is forgiveness rational? Is it moral?"), the empirical work is descriptive (i.e., "What are the predictors and consequences of forgiveness?"). Many of the forgiveness studies and articles to date have emphasized potential benefits of forgiving. For example, a number of studies emphasize potential benefits of forgiveness for mental health (e.g., Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996) and physical health (e.g., Witvliet, Ludwig, & van der Laan, 2001), and other studies document positive associations between adjustment and the disposition to forgive others (e.g., Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001; Tangney, Boone, Dearing, & Reinsmith, 2002).

Although some psychologists have theorized about potential costs of forgiveness (e.g., Affinito, 1999; Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998; Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Haaken, 2002; Lamb, 2002), few empirical studies examine such costs. Preliminary data suggest that people occasionally regret decisions to forgive (Exline, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001). Such regret appears especially likely when (a) some resentment continues to linger, (b) forgiveness brings costs to self-interest, (c) forgivers report low religiosity, and (d) forgivers report high narcissistic entitlement. Another scenario-based study suggested that willingness to forgive one's romantic partner for a violent act may be associated with greater likelihood of staying in the relationship (Katz, Street, & Arias, 1997). There is also some evidence that a propensity to forgive the self easily may be associated with externalizing forms of psychopathology (Tangney et al., 2002). Although each of these studies suggests potential costs surrounding forgiveness, empirical research remains sparse.

Five Challenging Questions About Forgiveness

Controversy surrounds the topic of forgiveness. Some scholars clearly advocate forgiveness (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), and media attention to the topic often reflects this tone of advocacy. Other scholars take a more skeptical view, suggesting that forgiveness can sometimes be dangerous, unwise, or morally inappropriate (e.g., Affinito, 1999; Lamb & Murphy, 2002; Murphy, 2000; Wiesenthal, 1998). Although empirical science cannot evaluate the moral value of forgiveness, psychologists can make important contributions to the interdisciplinary dialogue. First, however, psychologists need to face some theoretical, conceptual, and empirical challenges. We now introduce five of these major challenges and phrase each one as a question.

What Does Forgiveness Mean?

Although controversy surrounds the definition of forgiveness (Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopolous, & Freedman, 1992), psychologists generally agree about some core elements of forgiveness. For example, most psychologists agree that forgiveness does not imply forgetting, condoning, or excusing offenses, and forgiveness does not necessarily imply reconciliation, trust, or release from legal accountability. Instead, many psychologists contend that forgiveness involves a conscious decision—while acknowledging the seriousness of the wrong—to release or forego bitterness and vengeance (e.g., Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998). Forgiveness is sometimes described as an altruistic gift (e.g., Enright et al., 1998; Smedes, 1984; Worthington, 1998b), one given freely in spite of not being deserved by offenders.

One controversial aspect of the forgiveness definition deals with whether forgiveness requires positive feelings toward offenders, or whether the absence of negative feelings is sufficient (e.g., Enright et al., 1998; Richards, 2002). McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang (2003) examined linear changes in people's avoidance, revenge, and benevolence motivations over several weeks following an interpersonal transgression, modeling those within-person changes as smooth linear trajectories. They found that offended parties typically experienced gradual reductions in avoidance and revenge motivations toward offenders over time. However, the longitudinal trajectory of the typical person's benevolence toward his or her transgressor had a nonsignificant rate of linear change; that is, offended parties (on average) did not appear to become more benevolent toward offenders over time. Although some people did show increased benevolence, this was not the typical pattern. If offended parties gradually become less vengeful and less avoidant—but not neces-

sarily more benevolent—toward their offenders, does their reduction in negative motivations constitute forgiveness? Scholars have not yet resolved this issue.

Another problem is that popular understandings of forgiveness do not always conform to definitions developed by theorists, as revealed in one large-scale opinion study (Jeffress, 2000). Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of 1,002 American adults. Participants rated the accuracy of a series of statements about forgiveness, where response categories were as follows: *very accurate*, *somewhat accurate*, *not too accurate*, *not at all accurate*, and *not sure*. One statement emphasized release from consequences: "If you really forgive someone, you would want that person to be released from the consequences of their actions." Many respondents reported that this statement was either very accurate (28%) or somewhat accurate (32%). Another statement emphasized reconciliation: "If you genuinely forgive someone, you should rebuild your relationship with that person." The majority of respondents saw this statement as either very accurate (35%) or somewhat accurate (38%). A third statement emphasized forgetting: "If you have really forgiven someone, you should be able to forget what they have done to you." Again, the majority saw this statement as either very accurate (32%) or somewhat accurate (34%). These results suggest that in spite of scholarly attempts to precisely define forgiveness, many people believe that forgiving implies forgetting, reconciliation, or the removal of negative consequences—which might include removal of punishments and sanctions.

From a justice perspective, it would be informative to see how forgiveness unfolds in legal settings, where one could study the natural interplay between forgiveness-related processes and justice processes. Anecdotal accounts suggest that tension surrounds the issue of forgiveness in legal settings (Dickey, 1998; Lerman, 2000). For example, Umbreit (2001) has argued that the term *forgiveness* should not be used in restorative justice settings, to avoid creating pressure or unrealistic expectations for participants. Pressure to forgive could create a form of procedural injustice.

Other conceptual problems arise when forgiveness issues arise in collective or intergroup contexts as opposed to dyadic contexts. Scholars have discussed collective and intergroup forgiveness as it relates to peacemaking (Helmick & Peterson, 2001; McLernon, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2002; Shriver, 1995; Thomas & Garrod, 2002) and organizational behavior (Bright, 2002). Intergroup forgiveness should differ in important ways from dyadic forgiveness. Offenses against collectives are likely to be seen as especially severe (Tyler et al., 1997), a factor that should impede forgiveness. There may be substantial disagreement within offended groups about whether to forgive. Also, victims may find forgiveness especially difficult if they cannot identify individual offenders, which is often the case in intergroup conflict (Thomas & Garrod, 2002). Empirical assessments of intergroup forgiveness would complement existing work, most of which has been theoretical or qualitative.

Conceptual clarification is also needed regarding the construct of *self-forgiveness* and how it relates to justice concerns. One early study (Mauger et al., 1992) used self-reports, therapist ratings, and peer ratings to assess correlates of self-forgiveness in 237 Christian counseling clients. Difficulty forgiving the self was associated with lower self-esteem and greater depression, anxiety, and anger. Yet other research using a scenario-based trait measure of self-forgiveness paints a different picture, suggesting that a propensity to forgive the self is associated with narcissism and low empathic concern (Tangney et al., 2002). A third study using narrative methods suggested that relative to those who did not forgive themselves, self-forgivers reported less regret, self-blame, and guilt, along with better relationships with their victims; however, there was also some suggestion that self-forgivers minimized their wrongdoing (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002).

To help reconcile these findings on self-forgiveness, it seems crucial to understand how participants define self-forgiveness (see Flanigan, 1996, for various definitions). If self-forgiveness entails excusing one's offenses and thus curtails remorse or repentance, one could easily argue that self-forgiveness perpetuates injustice. However, if self-forgiveness refers to a more deliberate process involving full acknowledgment of wrongdoing (particularly to offended parties), then it becomes easier to see how forgiving the self could be socially adaptive. Although philosophers have addressed these conceptual subtleties regarding self-forgiveness (e.g., Care, 2002; Holmgren, 2002; Murphy, 2002; North, 1998), empirical research on the topic remains limited.

In short, forgiveness experiences may not align neatly with definitions and conceptual categories proposed by theorists. The basic construct of forgiveness deserves more empirical attention. More research is needed on lay forgiveness definitions and the naturalistic processes involved in forgiveness of self, other individuals, and groups.

Does Forgiveness Invite or Deter Repeated Offenses?

Ideally, offenders will appreciate expressions of forgiveness. Assuming that they acknowledge some responsibility for wrongdoing, perpetrators may feel grateful to receive forgiveness—especially if forgiveness seems undeserved. The resulting feelings of gratitude (or perhaps guilt) at being overbenefited may motivate offenders to reciprocate goodwill through improved behavior and reparations. Some data support this view. In a laboratory experiment by Kelln and Ellard (1999), male undergraduates were led to believe that

they had unintentionally broken a piece of laboratory equipment. They then received forgiveness, retribution, both responses, or neither response from the experimenter. After telling participants that the study was completed, the experimenter asked participants for a favor that involved delivering materials to various offices on campus. Consistent with an equity interpretation (Adams, 1965), participants who received forgiveness alone showed greatest compliance with this request, whereas those who received retribution showed the least compliance.

Yet expressions of forgiveness might also impede justice. Philosophers suggest that interpersonal offenses lower a victim's status relative to the status of the offender (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). Apologies, restitution, and punishment can all help to humble offenders and restore status to the offended party. In the absence of such status-leveling events, one might argue that an inequitable state exists in which offenders are overbenefited (Adams, 1965). As discussed by Tyler and colleagues (1997), offenders may be eager to reduce inequity in purely cognitive ways—by downplaying their guilt, minimizing their offenses, or blaming their victims (see also Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Philosophers have contended that if offenders receive premature expressions of forgiveness, they are spared the moral pressure that might otherwise motivate repentance (Holmgren, 1993, 2002; Murphy, 1988; Murphy & Hampton, 1988). Empirical tests of the aforementioned ideas could be attempted via the lenses of equity theory or social comparison theory.

Psychologists have argued that communicating forgiveness is risky when forgiven offenders are untrustworthy, particularly if they wield power over their forgivers (e.g., Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Lamb, 2002). If offenders are motivated to exploit and have power to do so, communicated forgiveness might endanger forgivers—particularly if forgiveness is accompanied by reconciliation attempts. Common examples involve physical abuse victims who try to reconcile with their abusers (Lamb, 2002). Forgiveness advocates are careful to distinguish forgiveness from trust. However, to the extent that forgiving implies generosity of spirit toward an offender, this positive attitude might lead forgivers to overlook potential danger from untrustworthy offenders. For example, in one recent study (Katz et al., 1997), undergraduate women in dating relationships responded to hypothetical scenarios involving aggression from their romantic partners. Self-reported intentions to forgive the violent acts were positively associated with intentions to stay in the relationship. Staying in such a relationship could increase the risk of future harm.

In terms of encouraging repeated offenses, the method of communicating forgiveness should be important. If people express forgiveness in unassertive ways and do not set limits with offenders, they might appear to be condoning or excusing offenses, which could increase the risk of future victimization (Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Hargrave, 2001; Holmgren, 2002). On the other hand, assertive and direct attempts to communicate forgiveness might backfire as well. For example, saying, "I forgive you" to offenders who deny blame might yield contempt or defensive attacks in response. Relationship factors are likely to be important in communicated forgiveness, with close, trusting relationships making communicated forgiveness more frequent and less risky.

In summary, some empirical evidence demonstrates that perpetrators can respond positively to expressions of forgiveness. However, theoretical work and preliminary empirical data suggest potential risks of communicated forgiveness. Relationship contexts and the means used to communicate forgiveness are likely to be important variables.

Are Certain Offenses or Persons Unforgivable?

Most empirical forgiveness research emphasizes common offenses such as relationship betrayals, often among college students. Forgiveness may be a much thornier issue in cases involving severe injuries, especially those involving criminal intent and substantial, lingering costs for victims (e.g., financial devastation; permanent physical disability or disfigurement). Consider atrocities—offenses of such magnitude that they are viewed as crimes against society or humanity, not just the person harmed. Examples include genocide (Minow, 1998; Staub, 1999; Wiesenthal, 1998), serial killing, physical and sexual abuse of young children, and other acts involving severe harm of defenseless people (e.g., cheating the elderly of their life savings). Such offenses are likely to generate a sense of moral outrage from society.

Many scholars contend that people can only forgive those who have directly harmed them (e.g., Enright, Freedman, et al., 1998). Yet it seems important to consider how third parties may play a role in the forgiveness process. Consider the case of murder. Although the direct target of harm is now dead, murder can be viewed as a crime against loved ones and, more broadly, society and even humanity. Many people have some stake in the matter, and the issue of forgiveness may be relevant for them. This may be particularly true for family members of murder victims (Armour, 2002).

It is easy to see how third-party forgiveness could pose risks, particularly in the case of atrocities. One risk is disloyalty or disrespect to the person who was harmed. A recent experiment suggested that when people imagine a loved one suffering an interpersonal offense, they expect to feel principled anger on behalf of the loved one—particularly if they feel protective to-

ward him or her (Exline, 2002). To forgive in such cases might seem like betrayal, especially if the victim is unwilling to forgive (see McLernon et al., 2002, for an application to peacemaking in Ireland). Furthermore, forgiving might seem to betray both victims and society if it results in decreased attention to atrocities.

Another caveat is that some individuals find it morally wrong to forgive certain offenses, including murder. For example, many Jews believe that it is impossible to atone for murder (e.g., Wiesenthal, 1998). Murdered victims can never grant forgiveness, leaving offenders in an unforgiven state.

Alternatively, some individuals contend that all offenses should be considered forgivable. As discussed earlier, forgiveness theorists typically distinguish forgiveness from condoning, excusing, legal pardon, reconciliation, and forgetting—distinctions that are obviously crucial in the case of atrocities. With such conceptual clarifications usually given, some scholars have written in favor of unconditional forgiveness. Support for unconditional forgiveness appears in Buddhist and Christian teachings (Rye et al., 2000; Wiesenthal, 1998), for example. However, even when writers endorse unconditional forgiveness, their arguments typically include some attempt to hold perpetrators accountable. Many Christian writings on forgiveness include warnings against "cheap grace" (Bonhoeffer, 1937/1963; Jones, 1995; Rye et al., 2000; Yancey, 1997), which refers to demonstrations of forgiveness or mercy not associated with any repentance or change of life on the part of offenders. Also, according to reincarnation beliefs within Buddhism and Hinduism, offenses committed in this life lead to negative consequences in subsequent lives (e.g., Ricard essay in Wiesenthal, 1998; Rye et al., 2000).

To the best of our knowledge, there have not been any quantitative attempts to examine offenses perceived as unforgivable. Flanigan (1992) conducted a qualitative study of individuals who self-identified as having an "unforgivable" injury. Flanigan concluded that unforgivable injuries typically involve shattered assumptions about personal control, justice, self-worth, or the goodness of others. Although studies have examined shattered assumptions in the wake of trauma (Janoff–Bulman, 1992), more research is needed to see whether shattered assumptions cause people to rate offenses as unforgivable.

In addition to the factors mentioned earlier, what other factors might cause offenses to be labeled unforgivable? One idea comes from the literature on demonization (e.g., Baumeister, 1997; Ellard, Miller, Baumle, & Olson, 2002; Opotow, 1990). Perpetrators viewed as thoroughly evil and unredeemable may be viewed as unforgivable—particularly if forgiveness involves cultivating benevolence toward perpetrators rather than simply forswearing negative motivations. A related hypothesis comes from the literature on empathy, humility, and forgiveness (Exline, Bushman, Faber, & Phillips, 2000; McCullough et al.; 1997, McCullough, Rachal et al., 1998; Sandage, 1999; Worthington, 1998b): People may find it extraordinarily difficult to empathize with perpetrators of heinous crimes. To the extent that empathy enables forgiveness, an inability to relate to a crime might cause people to label it unforgivable. In a different vein, the emotion of disgust often prompts intense, visceral reactions as well as moralization responses (e.g., Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997). Disgust might also deter empathic responses. One might thus speculate that crimes that arouse disgust (e.g., brutal murders, bizarre sexual behaviors) would be more likely to be rated unforgivable.

In summary, there is virtually no research on factors that might induce people to categorize offenses as unforgivable. In addition to factors associated with offense severity, it may be useful to assess religious beliefs, ability to empathize, and the presence of visceral emotional responses such as disgust.

What Motives Underlie Forgiveness?

In the interdisciplinary debate about forgiveness, scholars often contend that the moral value of forgiveness depends on the motives underlying it. Many philosophers describe forgiveness as a virtue or strength (e.g., Adams, 1991; Holmgren, 1993; Morris, 1988; North, 1987, 1998). When serious injustices are not repaired, forgiveness requires transcending natural impulses toward revenge and hatred. Forgiving in such cases is likely to be strenuous, requiring considerable self-control. In this vein, some have proposed that forgiving deep hurts requires an advanced level of moral development (e.g., Enright, Santos, & Al–Mabuk, 1989). Yet baser motives sometimes underlie decisions to forgive, making forgiveness appear more like a vice than a virtue. Some people might forgive because they fear confrontation or want to avoid facing their own anger, a concern raised by clinicians (Haaken, 2002; Lamb, 2002). Philosophers have suggested that forgiveness sometimes stems from desires for personal ease or comfort, with such lazy or selfish impulses overshadowing higher goals such as the maintenance of self-respect or justice (Murphy, 2002; Neu, 2002). Using this logic, one might agree with Nietzsche (1887/1996) that forgiveness reflects weakness.

These debates, combined with the dearth of research on motives for forgiveness, suggest challenges for empirically oriented psychologists. Although scientists cannot arbitrate morals, it might be possible for psychologists to pinpoint motives underlying forgiveness and to assess the prevalence of the various motives. It would also be useful to see whether specific motives underlying forgiveness might have meaningful effects on outcomes. One recent study demonstrated that, when compared to those who forgave out

of a sense of religious obligation, individuals who forgave out of love for the offender showed less elevation in systolic and diastolic blood pressure when recalling the event (Huang & Enright, 2000).

What factors might predict how people prioritize proforgiveness motives relative to other motives? At a trait level, research suggests that people vary in the priority they assign to various types of virtues. As shown by Worthington, Berry, and Parrott (2001), some people assign high value to what the authors term *warmth-based virtues* such as compassion, empathy, and altruism. Others assign higher value to so-called *conscientiousness-based virtues* such as responsibility, honesty, accountability, and duty. In many situations, warmth-based virtues and conscientiousness-based virtues should complement each other. For example, if offenders sincerely repent and repair all damages, forgiving may seem both compassionate and conscientious. Yet these virtues might clash in cases of serious, uncompensated injustices: One might hypothesize that warmth-based virtues would motivate forgiveness or mercy, whereas conscientiousness-based virtues would motivate the pursuit of repayment, punishment, or civil justice.

To the extent that forgiveness facilitates relationship repair, it should be more likely when offended parties assign high value to relational goals. In committed, interdependent relationships, actions that protect the relationship should take precedence over purely self-protective aims. Consistent with this reasoning, one set of studies (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998) demonstrated that greater relationship closeness and commitment prior to an interpersonal offense predicted greater forgiveness. Another series of studies using priming techniques, interaction records, and survey data demonstrated that relationship commitment strongly predicts forgiveness (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). Other research suggests a positive association between marital quality and forgiveness—an association mediated by empathy and benign attributions (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002). A tendency to place relational goals above individual goals also occurs in collectivist cultures, in which individual priorities typically reflect concern about one's ingroup. We thus predict that members of collectivist cultures would assign high value to forgiveness—but predominantly toward ingroup members.

In contrast, any factor that makes individualistic, self-protective concerns salient should decrease the priority assigned to forgiveness. Self-protective concerns might be more likely when victims deal with scarce resources (Hogan & Emler, 1981) or with exploitative offenders. Also, some individuals are more self-protective than others at a trait level. For example, narcissists are preoccupied with advancing and protecting their personal interests. Studies suggest that narcissism correlates negatively with seeking forgiveness (Sandage, Worthington, Hight, & Berry, 2000), granting forgiveness (Exline et al., 2000; Tangney et al., 2002), and perceiving interpersonal harm (McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Mooney, 2003).

Social influence processes might also affect forgiveness-related motives. People might choose to forgive (or to withhold forgiveness) to comply with external or internalized demands of parents, therapists, or religious or governmental authorities. Decisions about whether to forgive might also reflect conformity to group norms, which could press toward or against forgiveness. For example, empirical evidence suggests that a "culture of honor" exists among Southern men in the United States, in which retaliation is viewed as an acceptable response to insults (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Similar motives to defend honor may predominate in other groups as well, such as street gangs or militant patriotic groups. Such norms should make forgiveness less likely, especially in the case of offenses against the whole group.

In summary, the study of forgiveness-related motives is in its infancy. It would be useful to pinpoint the various motives that underlie forgiveness, the consequences of the various motives, and the factors that predict how people prioritize proforgiveness motives relative to other motives. Theory and research on social influence, close relationships, altruistic or empathic concern, and self-interest could help to address these issues.

Do Factors That Influence Perceived Injustice Also Influence Forgiveness?

Interpersonal offenses can create what Worthington and colleagues have termed an *injustice gap* (e.g., Worthington, in press), in which there is a discrepancy between current outcomes and desired outcomes. For example, consider a case in which a man was robbed. Although the offender has been arrested, no further action has been taken. In such a situation, a desired outcome might include punishment for the offender, return of the stolen items, and an apology. The injustice gap results from the fact that these desired outcomes have not occurred.

The magnitude of the injustice gap should be proportional to the amount of unforgiveness that offended parties feel. To the extent that injustice creates stress or negative emotion, offended parties should be highly motivated to reduce the injustice gap (and thereby restore a sense of justice). They could use various tactics to accomplish this goal (Wade & Worthington, in press; Worthington, in press): They could improve their current outcomes by (a) seeking and receiving apologies or restitution, (b) seeing legal justice enacted, or (c) engaging in vigilante justice such as revenge or retaliation. They might also try to lower their desired outcomes (that is, they could reduce their ex-

pectations or demands) via techniques such as (a) accepting the transgression and moving on with life, (b) re-narrating the transgression or the offender's motives (e.g., by justifying or excusing the offense), or (c) appealing to divine justice.

Regardless of whether a sense of justice is restored, the offended party may try to forgive. However, it seems likely that the smaller the injustice gap, the easier it should be to forgive. Any factor that influences perceived injustice should thus influence a person's ability or willingness to forgive. Social psychologists have identified many predictors of perceived injustice (see, e.g., Tyler et al., 1997) and associated desires for retribution. Some of these factors have been evaluated as potential predictors of forgiveness as well. A brief overview of relevant research follows.

One well-established finding from the justice literature is that offenses receive harsher judgments when people perceive them as severe (e.g., Walster, 1966) and intentional (e.g., Darley & Huff, 1990; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). To the extent that severity and intentionality contribute to perceived injustice, they should make forgiveness more difficult. Boon and Sulsky (1997) examined the association between offense severity, intentionality, and forgiveness in a policy-capturing study. Participants read counterbalanced scenarios about a betrayal of trust in a romantic relationship. After each scenario, they rated their likelihood of forgiving the partner. Offense severity, intentionality, and avoidability were manipulated across the scenarios. Both severity and intentionality were negatively associated with participants' self-reported willingness to forgive. Other recent studies confirm that forgiveness is more difficult when offenses are severe (e.g., Bonach, 2001; Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Drinnon, 2001) and intentional (e.g., Gonzales, Haugen, & Manning, 1994; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002).

One way to reduce perceived injustice is to offer repayment via apologies, concessions, or more concrete forms of restitution. Retributive impulses typically decrease when offenders apologize (e.g., Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989). To the extent that apologies reduce perceived injustice, they should facilitate forgiveness. The positive association between apology and forgiveness is well established in the forgiveness literature. In one pioneering study, Darby and Schlenker (1982) conducted two scenario-based experiments with elementary- and middle-school students. They varied extent of apology on a within-subjects basis and found that more elaborate apologies led to greater forgiveness. Subsequent studies further establish a positive link between forgiveness and apology (e.g., Bottom et al., 2002; Cole, Yali, & Magyar, 2002; Drinnon, 2001; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Girard, Mullet, & Callahan, 2002; Lukasik, 2001; McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 1997). Expressions of remorse are closely related to apologies, and scenario-based research (Gold & Weiner, 2000) suggests that confessions yield greater forgiveness if they include clear communication of remorse (see also Gonzales et al., 1994; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991).

Going a step further, three studies by Witvliet, Worthington, Wade, and Berry (2002) examined the roles of apology and restitution on forgiveness. After picturing themselves as robbery victims, participants imagined receiving an apology, restitution, both, or neither on the day after the robbery. Two studies used self-report data, and the third added psychophysiological assessments of arousal (heart rate, mean arterial pressure, skin conductance, and muscular tension, at three facial sites). Results revealed that to the extent that victims imagined receiving some amount of personal justice (i.e., both a strong apology and restitution as compared to either one separately or to a weak apology), their responses suggested reduced grudges and more forgiveness. Namely, when victims received a strong apology from an offender (relative to no post-crime communication), they reported reduced revenge and avoidance motivations, less anger, less fear, and more forgiveness. They also experienced lower heart rate and lower muscular tension at the corrugator (brow muscle) and orbicularis oculi (near the eye) facial muscles. The same pattern of findings at about the same magnitude was observed for receiving a fair restitution. When both apology and restitution occurred, the same patterns occurred, but effect magnitudes were approximately doubled. Weak apologies had no effect. Thus, sincere apologies and restitution both appear to be independent means of reducing the injustice gap (and thus facilitating forgiveness).

Even when apologies and restitution are absent, offended parties may use other tools to reduce perceived injustice. Empathizing with the offender is one possibility. Studies using structural equation modeling demonstrate that empathy is a robust predictor of forgiveness, mediating the link between apology and forgiveness either partially (McCullough et al., 1997) or fully (McCullough, Rachal, et al., 1998). Seeing one's own capability for similar misdeeds is another predictor of forgiveness, as shown in correlational work and scenario-based priming studies (Exline et al., 2000). Admitting one's own propensity for wrongdoing could reduce the injustice gap by helping offended parties to see themselves as less innocent and their offenders as less evil. There should be many other cognitive means of reducing perceived injustice as well, such as telling a different narrative about the offense or imagining how justice will occur in the afterlife (e.g., Wade & Worthington, in press). More data are needed to evaluate how such strategies relate to forgiveness.

Even if reframing processes reduce perceived injustice, such processes may require substantial effort from offended parties—especially in the case of serious, lingering injustices. The notion that forgiveness takes ef-

fort might be fruitfully examined through a self-regulation framework. For example, recent research suggests that self-control is a limited resource (e.g., Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Forgiveness might deplete self-control reserves when it requires elaborate rationalizations, anger suppression, or other attempts to bring about justice. On the other hand, successful forgiveness—or a habit of being forgiving—might replenish or protect self-control reserves by reducing the amount of anger to be regulated (see Catanese, Exline, & Baumeister, 2001, for preliminary data).

In summary, existing research suggests that forgiveness is likely to be easier when steps have been taken (either behaviorally or cognitively) to reduce perceived injustice. However, relatively few studies directly address the link between justice-related responses and forgiveness. Also, more research is needed to delineate and compare the various means of reducing perceived injustice.

Final Thoughts

Forgiveness raises important issues for victims, perpetrators, and the broader society. Although situational factors can make forgiveness more or less likely, the ultimate decision about whether to forgive lies in the hands of the offended party. Forgiveness is often difficult, especially when harm is severe and offenders are unrepentant. We have discussed a number of ways in which forgiveness could bring both benefits and risks for forgivers. By choosing to forgive, individuals can set aside potentially destructive feelings such as bitterness and hatred. Yet some have argued that principled feelings of resentment can be beneficial; in fact, it might actually be dangerous or morally remiss to set them aside (e.g., Murphy, 1988). Expressions of forgiveness, although often facilitating reconciliation, might also create risks for offended parties (e.g., Exline & Baumeister, 2000). When considering how forgiveness unfolds for victims, the motivations underlying forgiveness decisions become important. Do people forgive to release themselves from discomfort, or do their decisions reflect more principled motives? Are such distinctions about motives important, in terms of predicting outcomes for forgivers or offenders? These challenging questions merit further attention.

One might also consider the ways in which being forgiven can affect perpetrators. If people communicate forgiveness without setting limits, an exploitative perpetrator might view it as a license to harm again. Yet there is some evidence that perpetrators will actually behave better if they are forgiven as opposed to not forgiven (Kelln & Ellard, 1999). Also, the issue of whether certain crimes might be designated unforgivable has clear implications for perpetrators: What is it like to be repeatedly refused forgiveness? How do perpetrators respond, affectively and behaviorally, when they see themselves as having committed unforgivable acts? The dynamics of self-forgiveness, seeking forgiveness, and receiving forgiveness need more exploration.

Forgiveness can also be viewed from the perspective of society. Victims and perpetrators are not always individuals; they can also be collectives. Even in the dyadic case, rule violations can be framed as offenses against society. Punishment of rule breakers can be a powerful tool for reasserting social standards as well as order, safety, and equity in the wake of offense (Miller & Vidmar, 1981). The impulse to punish can be strong even when people do not stand to gain directly by punishing offenders (e.g., Folger, 2001; Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee, 2002). Yet many people believe that in cases of authentic forgiveness, forgivers should want to release offenders from the consequences of their actions (Jeffress, 2000). Thus, although most scholars clearly distinguish forgiveness from pardon, lay definitions and everyday experiences of forgiveness blur the distinction. When forgiveness is accompanied by reduced punishment for lawbreakers, it raises issues that stretch beyond the interpersonal domain into the societal domain.

In conclusion, the time may be ripe for social and personality psychologists to examine forgiveness, including the interface between forgiveness and justice. Empirical questions about forgiveness reflect many perspectives relevant to social and personality psychology, including self-related, interpersonal, and intergroup approaches. We believe that social and personality psychologists have unique theoretical frameworks and empirical techniques to address the many unanswered questions about forgiveness.

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