

19. FORGIVENESS AND MERCY

■ *Anyone who has seen the image did not soon forget it. In 1972, at the height of the Vietnam War, the village of Trang Bang was pummeled by an American air raid. An Associated Press photographer captured the image of a 9-year-old Vietnamese girl named Phan Thi Kim Phuc, moments after she and several other children fled the village. The Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph shows Kim Phuc running from her devastated village, naked, screaming in agony, her arms held up and away from her body. During the raid, Kim Phuc and her family sought shelter in a pagoda, but after it became unsafe to stay there, Kim ran into the street, where she encountered the falling napalm, which covered most of her body. She tore off her clothes seeking relief. Kim Phuc's napalm burns were so extensive that few people expected her to survive.*

An American soldier named John Plummer had set up the air strike on Trang Bang after being assured twice that there were no civilians in the area. Plummer did not realize the full extent of the civilian casualties that ensued in the bombing until seeing the now-famous photograph of Kim Phuc. Plummer said that the photo, which went on to become a famous symbol for the horrors of war, and his own guilt haunted him unrelentingly for years. Although he wanted desperately to tell Kim Phuc how sorry he was for the devastation that his actions had created, including the scars on her body and in her memory, he had no way of doing so. He could not bring himself to return to Vietnam and seriously doubted that she had even survived the attack.

But nearly 25 years later, after extensive plastic surgery, marriage, and a successful relocation to Canada, Kim Phuc was alive and raising a family. In 1996, Plummer—himself now a minister in the United Methodist Church—learned that Kim Phuc would be speaking at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He was sure to be there on the day she spoke.

In Kim Phuc's address to the several thousand people who had assembled, she said that if she could ever meet the pilot of the plane responsible for dropping the napalm on her village, she would tell him that she forgives him and that she hoped they could work together in the future. Plummer managed to get word to Kim Phuc that he was indeed there and that he wanted to meet her. Over the course of two meetings that very day, Plummer tearfully related his profound guilt and remorse for the bombing. Kim Phuc assured him that she had forgiven him, that she was ready to move on, and that she hoped they could become friends and even partners in working together for peace.

They now have become friends. To one reporter who followed the story, Plummer said of Kim Phuc, "She is the closest thing to a saint I have ever met." ■

■ Consensual Definition

Forgiveness represents a suite of prosocial changes that occur within an individual who has been offended or damaged by a relationship partner (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000a). When people forgive, their basic motivations or action tendencies regarding the transgressor become more positive (e.g., benevolent, kind, generous) and less negative (e.g., vengeful, avoidant). It is useful to distinguish between forgivingness, which is a readiness or proneness to forgive (R. C. Roberts, 1995), and forgiveness, which can be thought of as psychological changes vis-à-vis a specific transgressor and a specific transgression. Forgiveness can be considered a specialized form of mercy, which is a more general concept reflecting kindness, compassion, or leniency toward (a) a transgressor, (b) someone over whom one has power or authority, or (c) someone in great distress (see Gove et al., 1966).

Individuals with a strong disposition to forgive would endorse statements such as the following:

- When someone hurts my feelings, I manage to get over it fairly quickly.
- I don't hold a grudge for very long.
- When people make me angry, I am usually able to get over my bad feelings toward them.
- Seeking revenge doesn't help people to solve their problems.
- I think it is important to do what I can to mend my relationships with people who have hurt or betrayed me in the past.
- I am not the type of person to harm someone simply because he or she harmed me.
- I am not the type of person who spends hours thinking of how to get even with people who have done bad things to me.

■ Theoretical Traditions

Although forgiveness is by no means a strictly religious virtue, its strongest historical and philosophical roots are within religious soil. As is the case with many traditional Western virtues, forgiveness has figured prominently in both Jewish and Christian understandings of what it means to live a life in harmony with others. However, most of the world's major religions advocate for a worldview that affirms the value of forgiveness, although these religious conceptions of forgiveness differ in many of the particulars. In describing the stances of five of the world's major religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism), we draw heavily on several recent reviews (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Rye et al., 2000; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, in press).

Judaism

The notion that God is capable of forgiving people of their sins was one of the features that distinguished Hebrew religion from the other religions among which Judaism first arose (Klassen, 1966). Correspondingly, followers of Judaism forgive because they believe that God has forgiven them and because God commands them to forgive their transgressors in turn. Forgiveness can be defined as the removal or cancellation of a transgression or debt so that a transgressor becomes a candidate for a restored relationship with the offended party or parties (Rye et al., 2000). Yet forgiveness is not an obligatory action in all circumstances. In Jewish thought, forgiveness is frequently paired with repentance, or *teshuvah* (which means "return"), on the part of the transgressor. Through *teshuvah*, the transgressor expresses sincere remorse, offers compensation to the victim, and resolves to behave differently in the future. When a transgressor does repent, the victim is morally required to forgive.

Christianity

Christianity, like Judaism, elevated the notion of forgiveness to a foundational point of doctrine. Unlike Judaism, however, Christianity has embraced the idea that forgiveness is not necessarily conditional upon the transgressor's repentance. Christian theology typically distinguishes forgiveness from reconciliation, which is the restoration of the broken relationship. In this tradition, complete reconciliation between victim and transgressor is not possible unless the victim forgives.

Islam

God's ability to forgive all sins is a foundational belief in Islam also. One of Allah's appellations is Al-Ghafoor, or the Forgiving One (Rye et al., 2000). Islam

emphasizes that people should forgive so that they might receive forgiveness from Allah for their own sins, and also so that they might achieve happiness. Nonetheless, Islam permits revenge if it is equal to the harm done by the transgressor. However, because it is often difficult to tell when the scales have been balanced through revenge, forgiveness is frequently seen as a superior alternative that does not lead to the lingering animosities between individuals and clans that characterized the world in which Islam was founded. When one is seeking revenge, one might overstep the boundaries and thus offend Allah. As in Christianity, Islam does not hold that forgiveness is contingent upon the repentance of the transgressor (Rye et al., 2000).

Buddhism

Although there is no Buddhist concept that corresponds directly to the Western notion of forgiveness, two virtues that may approximate forgiveness—*forbearance* and *compassion*—do receive high praise within Buddhist thought and are central to Buddhist practice (Rye et al., 2000). Within Buddhism, these traits emerge from an emphasis on easing the suffering of others—even the suffering of people who deserve punishment because of their wrong actions. *Forbearance* comprises tolerating a transgression and relinquishing one's resentment toward the transgressor. *Compassion* motivates people to ease the suffering of others and can, of course, even be directed toward a transgressor so that he or she is viewed with tenderness rather than with anger. Although Buddhism is a nontheistic religion, it presumes that the universe is governed by *karma*—"the law of moral cause-and-effect" (Rye et al., 2000, p. 28) dictating that good actions produce good outcomes and evil actions produce evil outcomes. Because of *karma*, holding on to one's resentment and lack of compassion may cause one to be viewed resentfully and with a lack of compassion by others in the future; thus, it is in one's best interests to be forbearing and compassionate. The exercise of forbearance and compassion is not predicated on any remorse or repentance on the part of the transgressor.

Hinduism

Hindu treatises on righteousness (the *dharma sastras*) discuss forgiveness along with other virtues such as duty, forbearance, compassion, and patience (Rye et al., 2000). As in Buddhism, the law of *karma* is relevant to the Hindu concept of forgiveness. Though some Hindu traditions are nontheistic, versions of Hinduism that do incorporate belief in a supreme being or beings also provide examples of divine forgiveness for believers to follow. Prayers to Varuna in the *Rig Veda*, for instance, demonstrate this deity's eagerness to forgive people who humbly admit their sins. Other sacred writings teach that the goddess Sri or Lakshmi is inclined to forgive even in the absence of repentance. Regarding

human-to-human relations, however, Hindu teaching is fairly realistic, expecting that people would only forgive a transgressor who was contrite and repentant. Although there is no definitive teaching in Hinduism regarding the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation, Hindu teachings acknowledge that repentance and forgiveness are both important precursors to the complete restoration of relationships that have been damaged by a transgression.

Modern Traditions

Most modern scholars and scientists agree on several points about forgiveness. First, they concur with Enright and Coyle (1998) that forgiveness should be distinguished from pardon, condonation, excusing, forgetting, and denial. Moreover, most scholars stress that the term *forgiveness* should be kept distinct from *reconciliation*, the former being reserved for “the restoration of trust in an interpersonal relationship through mutual trustworthy behaviors” (Worthington & Drinkard, 2000, p. 93).

Still, scholars continue to disagree somewhat regarding the essence of what forgiveness is (Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, & Zungu-Dirwayi, 2000; Scobie & Scobie, 1998), although these differences are perhaps smaller than often portrayed. What unites the many definitions of forgiveness is intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is set within a specific interpersonal context (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000b). In other words, forgiveness involves positive social psychological changes within an individual vis-à-vis an interpersonal transgression and the transgressor who committed it. When people forgive, then, psychological responses whose referent is the transgression or transgressor become more positive (i.e., benevolent) and less negative (i.e., malevolent). Nonetheless, scholars have worked out the specifics in slightly different ways.

Enright and colleagues (e.g., Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992) defined “genuine forgiveness” following philosopher J. North (1987), who proposed that forgiveness occurs when an individual who has incurred an interpersonal transgression is able to “view the wrongdoer with compassion, benevolence, and love while recognizing that he [sic] has willfully abandoned his right to them” (p. 502). Three general points regarding Enright’s approach are worth noting. First, Enright’s developmental theorizing emphasizes that reasoning about the use of forgiveness appears to mature as people age, with the lowest levels of maturity reflecting the idea that forgiveness is appropriate only after revenge has been obtained or after restitution has been made (Enright, 1994; Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989). As people’s moral reasoning develops, their reasoning about forgiveness becomes oriented toward viewing forgiveness as an unconditional gift given to transgressors based on the belief in the innate value of all persons.

Second, Enright has emphasized that forgiveness is a process that takes place within multiple psychological systems. Forgiveness can be said to have occurred,

in this view, when a person has improved his or her feelings, thoughts, and behaviors regarding an interpersonal transgressor. What is implied here is that emotional or even cognitive change on the part of a victim does not reflect complete forgiveness in the absence of improved behaviors regarding the transgressor. Third, Enright has advocated the use of stage-sequential thinking for understanding how an individual comes to forgive a transgressor. In one of the more recent iterations of this process model, Enright and Coyle (1998) identified 20 “units” that, they hypothesize, must occur for a person to forgive. This model has been used largely in the context of psychotherapy research.

McCullough and colleagues have worked with a more circumscribed definition of forgiveness. They have defined forgiveness as motivational changes whereby a person becomes less motivated toward revenge and avoidance of a transgressor, and simultaneously more benevolent toward the transgressor (McCullough, 2001; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998). Obviously, transgression recipients who experience these motivational changes would probably be more likely to behave toward their transgressors with more benevolence and less malevolence, but not in all cases (McCullough, 2001).

McCullough and colleagues have demonstrated the importance of empathy as a determinant of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998) and have developed conceptual tools for modeling forgiveness mathematically on the basis of time-series data (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). However, McCullough et al.’s main contribution to a scientific understanding of the disposition to forgive is found in the work of McCullough and Hoyt (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000; Tsang et al., in press). These researchers have conceptualized the capacity to forgive as the product of stable individual differences among persons that are reflected consistently (but weakly) in their forgiveness responses to individual transgressions. They have shown that measures of the disposition to forgive are improved considerably when based on people’s reactions to multiple transgressions. Aggregating responses to multiple transgressions causes transgression-specific and relationship-specific determinants of people’s responses to individual transgressions to cancel out, leaving essentially “pure” estimates of their personality-based propensity to forgive.

Worthington and his colleagues have conceptualized forgiveness as a largely affective phenomenon (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Connor, & Wade, 2001). For instance, Worthington, Berry, and Parrott (2001) defined forgiveness as “the contamination or prevention of unforgiving emotions by experiencing strong, positive, love-based emotions as one recalls a transgression” (p. 109). The distinctive element to this definition is the notion that unforgiving emotions are undone or negated through experiencing love-based emotions (e.g., empathy, sympathy, or even romantic love). Importantly, forgiveness and unforgiveness are not envisioned as poles on a single continuum but as relatively independent adaptive systems. Like McCullough and colleagues, Worthington and colleagues assume that

these changes will frequently lead to behavioral changes (e.g., reconciliation), but the link between forgiveness and changed behavior is by no means a perfect one.

Because forgiveness and unforgiveness are viewed as distinct constructs with only a modest degree of overlap, Worthington et al. (2001) speculated that these constructs will possess distinct patterns of psychological and physiological correlates.

■ Measures

Researchers have developed many measures for assessing various aspects of forgiveness, including measures of transgression-specific forgiveness and the general disposition toward forgiveness. Here we focus on this latter set of measures. Space does not permit an exhaustive survey, so attention is limited to several measures that have been published in peer-reviewed journals and for which there is a growing body of evidence to support claims of construct validity (Table 19.1). However, many investigators are developing similar instruments that might eventually complement the existing measures in important ways.

It is important to note that measuring forgiveness at the dispositional level is no substitute for assessing the degree to which people forgive for specific transgressions (McCullough, Hoyt, et al., 2000). Many published measures that are not reviewed herein exist for assessing transgression-specific forgiveness (e.g., S. W. Brown, Gorsuch, Rosik, & Ridley, 2001; McCullough et al., 1998; Rye et al., 2001; Subkoviak et al., 1995).

Researchers will continue to develop measures of the disposition to forgive over the next several years, but even today there are published scenario measures (e.g., Berry et al., 2001; Rye et al., 2001); measures that employ self-descriptions that people endorse to describe their own personalities (e.g., Mauger et al., 1992; Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, & Girard, 1998); and even a measure for assessing reasoning about forgiveness (Enright et al., 1989). Peer-report measures (see Berry et al., 2001) have also been developed and should be included in future research because of their usefulness in concluding that forgiveness-related phenomena that are obtained using self-report measures are not due exclusively to mono-method bias. Other measures involving less obtrusive methods (e.g., perhaps, measurements involving the assessment of reaction times or other behavioral measures) would be most welcome additions to the existing suite of pencil-and-paper measures.

■ Correlates and Consequences

Forgiveness is associated with a variety of traits that are of value for personal and societal well-being. Forgiving people appear to be slightly lower in a vari-

TABLE 19.1 *Measures of Forgiveness**Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*

Rye et al. (2001)

This is a scenario-based instrument with 10 transgression scenarios. Participants read each scenario and picture themselves as the victim in each of them, and they then indicate their hypothetical likelihood of forgiving the transgression on a 5-point scale.

- Internal reliability: Cronbach's alpha = .85
- Test-retest reliability: 15-day test-retest $r = .81$
- Construct validity: Correlates positively with intrinsic religious motivation and religious well-being; correlates negatively with trait anger but is virtually uncorrelated with state anger; correlates weakly but positively with social desirability; correlates positively with people's self-reports of the extent to which they have forgiven a specific transgressor for a specific transgression

Forgiveness of Others Scale

Mauger et al. (1992)

This 15-item self-report scale assesses people's perceptions of themselves as forgiving (vs. vengeful). Items are rated in a true-false format. High scores indicate a high proneness to forgive, and low scores indicate proneness toward revenge.

- Internal reliability: Cronbach's alpha = .79
- Test-retest reliability: 2-week test-retest $r = .94$
- Construct validity: People who score at the "forgiving" end of the scale tend to have low scores on all of the MMPI clinical scales; they also tend to be low in neuroticism, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms (Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001)

ety of negative affects, including anger, anxiety, depression, and hostility (Berry et al., 2001; Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001). Forgivers also tend to endorse socially desirable attitudes and behavior (Mauger et al., 1992; Rye et al., 2001), and self-ratings of the disposition to forgive correlate negatively with clinicians' ratings of hostility and passive-aggressive behavior.

People who score high on a dispositional measure of the tendency toward forgiveness or nonretaliation report themselves as willing to allocate more money in a joint allocation task to someone who had previously been rude, nasty, or inconsiderate toward them than do people who score lower on this measure (Ashton, Paunonen, Helmes, & Jackson, 1998). Interestingly, high scorers were not willing to allocate more money to a close friend than were people who scored lower on this measure, suggesting that self-reports of forgiveness tap specifically the tendency to respond to offenses with benevolence instead of malice.

Forgivingness Scale

Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, & Girard (1998)

This is a 38-item, 4-factor scale that assesses people's perceptions of their abilities to forgive across a variety of situations and circumstances. Items are rated on 7-point scales (ranging from disagree completely to agree completely). The four factors are (a) "Revenge vs. Forgiveness," (b) "Personal and Social Circumstances," (c) "Forgiveness Block," and (d) "Obstacles to Forgiveness."

- Internal reliability: not reported
- Test-retest reliability: not reported
- Construct validity: Factor 1 (Revenge vs. Forgiveness) was associated with age and gender (i.e., older adults and women are more inclined to forgiveness instead of revenge than are younger adults and men); people who frequently attend religious services and who believe in God score more forgiving on several subscales than do people who do not frequently attend religious services and who do not believe in God

Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTE)

Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade (2001)

This is a scenario-based instrument with five transgression scenarios. Participants read each scenario and picture themselves as the victim in each of them, and then indicate their hypothetical likelihood of forgiving the transgression on a 5-point scale.

- Internal reliability: alphas = approx. .79; Rasch Person R = approx. .82; Rasch Item R = approx. .99
 - Test-retest reliability: 8-week test-retest $r = .69$
 - Construct validity: correlates negatively with self-report measures of angry temperament, angry reactivity, hostility, angry rumination, and neuroticism; correlates positively with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extroversion; virtually uncorrelated with social desirability; correlation of self-ratings and ratings by romantic partner were $r = .60$
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Within the Big Five taxonomy, the disposition to forgive appears to be most strongly related to agreeableness and neuroticism (Ashton et al., 1998; Berry et al., 2001; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). For example, Ashton et al. (1998) found that a global self-report measure of the disposition to forgive was positively correlated with agreeableness and positively correlated with emotional stability (which is, essentially, a mirror image of neuroticism).

Currently, there is great theoretical interest in the possibility that the disposition to forgive (or, importantly, forgiveness for specific interpersonal transgressions) is causally involved in promoting mental and physical health or preventing mental and physical health problems (McCullough & Witvliet, 2001). Although the forgiveness-health hypothesis is appealing, the claims in support of this hypothesis are typically based on weak data (such as cross-sectional correlational evidence regarding the relations of measures of forgive-

ness with self-report measures of affect or well-being). No prospective or experimental evidence demonstrates that people who are highly prone to forgive (or less prone to revenge; see McCullough, Bellah, et al., 2001) are differentially prone to good health or well-being.

In support of the forgiveness–health hypothesis, people also frequently cite intervention research in which treatments designed to promote forgiveness have been compared with no-treatment control groups (see later section, “Deliberate Interventions”). The finding that psychosocial treatments work better than nothing at all is one of the most robust and well-accepted findings in all of psychology (Lipsey & Wilson, 1993), so studies that demonstrate that forgiveness treatments work in comparison with no-treatment controls give us very little reason to believe that forgiveness per se causes health and well-being. The field sorely needs high-quality prospective studies or experiments in which the unique effects of forgiveness (above and beyond the robust effects of psychosocial interventions in general) on health can be detected. In conducting these studies, it is important that researchers control for other likely personality traits (e.g., the Big Five) that may be responsible for the apparent relationship between measures of forgiveness and measures of well-being. Witvliet, Ludwig, and Vander Laan’s (2001) intriguing study showed that forgiveness can influence short-term markers for sympathetic nervous system arousal. This finding may give some important clues regarding possible long-term effects of forgiveness on health.

■ Development

Enright et al. (1989) specifically situated their theory of how people reason about forgiveness within a developmental framework. Specifically, they posited that reasoning about forgiveness would develop along the same trajectory as did Kohlbergian justice reasoning. Their preliminary work confirmed that individuals’ level of Kohlbergian reasoning concerning justice was highly correlated with their level of reasoning about forgiveness according to Enright et al.’s developmental model. Enright (1994) also elaborated a Piagetian account of how reasoning concerning forgiveness develops as a function of general cognitive development.

Empirical research has confirmed that willingness to forgive varies as a function of age, with young children generally being least willing to forgive and older adults being most willing (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Enright et al., 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Mullet et al., 1998; for a review, see Mullet & Girard, 2000). However, longitudinal studies are needed to confirm that these cross-sectional age differences truly reflect a developmental process rather than simply cohort effects.

■ Enabling and Inhibiting Factors

People who experience empathic affect for their transgressors and who adopt the cognitive perspective of their transgressors tend to forgive specific transgressors more readily than do people who do not experience empathy or engage in perspective taking (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998, 2003). The personality-based capacities for empathy and perspective taking seem to be derivatives of agreeableness; thus, highly agreeable people (see earlier section on “Correlates and Consequences”) might obtain their “advantage” because of the relative ease with which they experience empathy for others. Conversely, ruminating about the offense appears to put people at a considerable disadvantage in forgiving (McCullough, Bellah, et al., 2001). Because the tendency to ruminate is identified most closely with the neuroticism dimension of the Big Five, people low in neuroticism might be prone to forgive because of their tendency not to ruminate about negative events they encounter.

Attributions and appraisals regarding the transgression and transgressor also influence the extent to which people forgive particular transgressions. People tend not to forgive transgressions that they perceived to be intentionally committed and that have severe consequences (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001). The effects of attributions of intentionality on forgiveness may be mediated partially by the effects of intentionality attributions on empathy (i.e., when transgressions are viewed as unintentional, it is easier to empathize with the transgressor; McCullough et al., 2003), but these social-cognitive variables probably have a variety of reciprocal influences on one another.

Apologies also promote forgiveness (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; McCullough et al., 1997, 1998). By and large, the effects of apology appear to be indirect. Victims develop greater empathy for apologetic transgressors (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998) and apologies appear to cause reductions in offenders' negative affect regarding their transgressors (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989). Also, victims form more generous impressions of apologetic transgressions (Ohbuchi et al., 1989).

Finally, forgiveness may be influenced by characteristics of the relationship in which the transgression occurs. Studies have shown that partners are more willing to forgive one another for transgressions if their relationship is characterized by high satisfaction, commitment, and closeness (E. J. Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). The fact that forgiveness is associated with relationship factors like satisfaction, commitment, and closeness suggests that the dynamics of forgiveness may be different for different types of relationships. We would not expect people to forgive perfect strangers in the same way that they forgive the most intimate of relationship partners.

However, we know very little about how the dynamics of forgiveness vary within different types of relationships (Fincham, 2000).

■ Gender, Cross-National, and Cross-Cultural Aspects

The best research to date suggests that men and women are not substantially different in their propensity to forgive (Berry et al., 2001).

Although cross-cultural research on forgiveness is limited, the available evidence indicates that cultural factors clearly influence how forgiveness is understood to operate and the factors that motivate it. People from non-Western cultures construe forgiveness according to different cultural considerations than do people from Western cultures (Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2001; Temoshok & Chandra, 2000). Using examples from Hmong culture, Sandage et al. (2001) illustrated how a culture based on collectivism, hierarchical social relations, a spirituality involving animism and ancestor worship, and third-party mediation leads to very different understandings of how transgressions create harm, the circumstances under which people should be forgiven, and who has the moral authority to forgive (see also Temoshok & Chandra, 2000).

Relatedly, people from individualist cultures may be motivated to forgive by different factors than are people from collectivist cultures. People from collectivist cultures are motivated to forgive by concern about maintaining positive relationships with others and about maintaining social norms regarding how a victim should respond, whereas people from individualist cultures are more motivated by the desire to maintain a favorable self-identity or to fulfill abstract moral principles (e.g., justice; Takaku et al., 2001).

Takaku et al. (2001) found a slight tendency for Japanese students to be less forgiving in response to a hypothetical transgression than were American students. Berry et al. (2001) also found, using Rasch scaling methods, that European Americans scored significantly higher on their Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF) than did Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans, with African Americans scoring no higher or lower than did any of the other groups. Ironically, despite possible ethnic differences in the disposition to forgive, differences in willingness to forgive as a function of religious differences may be slight. In a study of Lebanese people from six religious groups (Shiite, Sunni, Druze, Catholic, Maronite, and Orthodox), Azar and Mullet (2001) found no group differences in willingness to forgive across a variety of transgression situations. Similarly, Heim and Rye (2001) found that Jews and Christians from the American Midwest did not have significantly different propensities to forgive across a variety of situations (although Jews tended to believe more strongly that forgiveness does not obviate the need for criminal prosecution and that forgiveness should be predicated on contrition from the transgressor). These initial findings notwithstanding, more research is needed

on how culture shapes people's understandings of what forgiveness is and when it is appropriate.

■ Deliberate Interventions

Psychologists have developed methods for encouraging forgiveness in individual psychotherapy (for reviews see Enright & Coyle, 1998; Kaminer et al., 2000; Malcom & Greenberg, 2000; McCullough & Worthington, 1994); marital therapy (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000); and psychoeducational groups (see Worthington et al., 2000; Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000). Research has begun to accumulate on many of these intervention methods.

Interventions for encouraging forgiveness based on Enright's 20-unit process model are more effective than waiting list control conditions in encouraging forgiveness with several client populations (Enright & Coyle, 1998). Enright's intervention program is also typically superior to no-treatment control conditions at reducing negative affective states such as anger and anxiety, and at increasing positive states like hope. However, Malcom and Greenberg (2000) explain that we should be cautious in concluding that the efficacy of such interventions constitutes evidence for the clinical potency of forgiveness *per se* because these intervention effects have yet to be unbundled completely from the general effects of psychotherapy.

Enright's process model has also been applied with success to psychoeducational interventions administered to college students (e.g., Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995). Other approaches to encouraging forgiveness through psychoeducational groups have been based, for example, on the promotion of empathy (McCullough et al., 1997). Yet other brief psychoeducational interventions for encouraging forgiveness in group interventions appear to be effective as well (see Worthington, Kuru, et al., 2000; Worthington, Sandage, et al., 2000).

One of the key factors that accounts for these various interventions' potency is simply the length of the treatment (Worthington, Sandage, et al., 2000). Interventions involving 6 or more hours of client contact are considerably more efficacious than are interventions involving only 1 or 2 hours of client contact. On the basis of this fact, Worthington, Sandage, et al. argued convincingly that intervention researchers should plan on interventions of at least 6 hours (and perhaps more) to facilitate clinically significant changes in forgiveness. In addition, they recommended that the interventions be conducted across several weeks, rather than in one or two long sessions, to obtain maximum effects.

Does forgiveness *per se* make a substantial and unique contribution to the promotion of mental and/or physical health? The current intervention studies do not yield convincing answers, and more studies that compare forgiveness

treatments to no-treatment control groups are unlikely to improve matters because the general effects of psychosocial interventions irrespective of content are already known to be quite strong. Questions regarding the unique contributions of forgiveness to intervention efforts could be addressed through one or more large, multicomponent intervention trials. Ideally, such an intervention study would examine whether a sample of individuals with a serious forgiveness-related problem (and concomitant mental and/or physical health problems) who completed a forgiveness-based intervention actually improved more than did people who completed an empirically verified treatment (e.g., a fully manualized form of cognitive-behavioral therapy) and an active (*not* waiting-list) control group. Ideally, investigators would assess not only participants' forgiveness and the relevant indices of mental or physical health but also the psychological mediators through which such interventions are purported to exert their effects. Assuming that the forgiveness interventions were found to be more efficacious at (a) encouraging forgiveness and (b) promoting health, investigators could proceed to conduct mediational analyses to determine whether forgiveness accounted for the differential efficacy of the forgiveness interventions.

■ What Is Not Known?

Several important issues merit sustained empirical attention:

- We lack a good understanding of how basic personality processes produce a propensity to forgive, and how people who possess this personality-based proneness to forgive differ from less forgiving people in how they think about and respond to specific transgressions (McCullough, 2001).
- Given the strong links of measures of the disposition to forgive with the agreeableness and neuroticism constructs within the Big Five taxonomy, it is important to investigate whether the propensity to forgive correlates with other psychological variables in a nontrivial fashion when the Big Five are controlled statistically.
- What are the relative strengths and shortcomings of the existing measures of the disposition to forgive? Some of these tools are probably superior to others in some applications.
- Because forgiveness, by definition, is a change process, it necessarily unfolds across some amount of time (even presumably rare cases of forgiveness that seem to occur instantaneously unfold over some amount of time, even if it is relatively quick). However, the temporal dynamics of forgiveness have not been adequately explored (see McCullough et al., 2003).
- It would be good to know whether isolated instances of forgiveness are causally linked to health and well-being, and if so, through which psychosocial and physiological pathways these effects occur.

- More work is needed on how the disposition to forgive may influence the strength and quality of ongoing family and community relations.
- Finally, many forgiveness theorists have proposed elaborate and dynamic psychological processes as the substrates for forgiveness. Almost without exception, such propositions about these dynamic processes languish as untested assumptions, which probably allows some models to remain unnecessarily elaborate and, in some cases, just plain wrong. Theoretical diversity is good for a new research area, but articulating the most important of these basic assumptions and then testing them rigorously would bring more coherence to a field that is already off to an ambitious start.

■ Must-Read Articles and Books

- Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., Parrott, L., O'Connor, L. E., & Wade, N. G. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 1277–1290.
- Enright, R. D. (1994). Piaget on the moral development of forgiveness: Identity or reciprocity? *Human Development*, 37, 63–80.
- Enright, R. D., & Coyle, C. T. (1998). Researching the process model of forgiveness within psychological interventions. In E. L. Worthington (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 139–161). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Enright, R. D., Gassin, L. A., & Wu, C. (1992). Forgiveness: A developmental view. *Journal of Moral Education*, 21, 99–114.
- McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. T. (Eds.). (2000). *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Witvliet, C. V., Ludwig, T. E., & Vander Laan, K. L. (2001). Granting forgiveness or harboring grudges: Implications for emotion, physiology, and health. *Psychological Science*, 12, 117–123.