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Forgiving

Michael E. McCullough

Although forgiveness has a long and rich history in religious views of optimal human functioning (1), the capacity to forgive has been largely unexplored during the first century of scientific psychology (2). In the past decade, however, the concept of interpersonal forgiving has begun to receive sustained research attention from researchers in developmental psychology (e.g., 3, 4), social psychology (e.g., 5, 6, 7), and clinical/counseling psychology (e.g., 8, 9, 10). This emerging body of work has provided some initial clues about: (a) the nature of forgiveness; (b) the relevance of forgiveness to health, well-being, and relationships; and (c) the effectiveness of educational and clinical interventions for encouraging forgiveness. In the present chapter, I review this body of research.

What Is Forgiveness?

Before embarking on a discussion of the existing research on forgiving, it is useful to outline the psychological context in which forgiveness takes place, and also to define what I mean by the term "forgiving." What I will delineate here should not be mistaken for a consensual definition of forgiveness. Indeed, developing a definition of forgiveness upon which all researchers can agree has been one of the more difficult tasks in the field of forgiveness research in the last decade (2, 11). Nevertheless, the theorizing and research I have been conducting generally has followed the conceptual and definitional principles that I lay out in the present chapter.

The Social Context of Forgiveness

First, forgiving occurs in the context of an individual's perception that the action or actions of another person were noxious, harmful, immoral, or

unjust. These perceptions typically elicit emotional responses (e.g., anger or fear), motivational responses (e.g., desires to avoid the transgressor or harm the transgressor in kind), cognitive responses (e.g., hostility toward or loss of respect for the transgressor), or behavioral responses (e.g., avoidance or aggression) that would deteriorate good will toward the offender and social harmony.

To understand this psychological context, I believe we must look into humans' ancient past. I posit that it has been adaptive over the history of human development for humans to acquire two basic motivational responses to psychological and/or physical threat. The first of these motivational responses is the motivation to avoid the source of the threat. When attacked or otherwise threatened by another organism, animals are frequently motivated to avoid further contact with the offending organism. Behaviors that are apparently energized by the avoidance system include temporary behavioral withdrawal, ignoring, and the long-term disruption of prosocial interactions. The second of these motivational responses is the motivation to attack defensively or seek retribution against the source of the threat. Indeed, primatologists have documented that certain species of old world primates (including chimpanzees and perhaps macaques, as well as humans) coordinate retaliatory responses after having been victimized by another animal—sometimes even after considerable time has passed (e.g., 12).

As humans have grown cognitively more complex over many thousands of years, these two basic motivational systems have become increasingly sophisticated. The emergence and refinement of the sense of self and refinements in the use of language have widened the range of transgressors' actions that "victims" can perceive to be threatening or offensive. Whereas competing for sexual mates, food, or positions in social hierarchies might have been the primary social events that motivated our ancestors to avoid or seek revenge against aggressors, modern humans are capable of perceiving threat in a variety of more subtle social actions. In the context of ongoing relationships, for example, the subtlest glances or apparently innocent references can be interpreted as slights or forms of ridicule that challenge a person's self-worth or sense of acceptance from other persons, thereby eliciting motivations to avoid or seek revenge. Indeed, even words themselves (and their implications) can be perceived as threatening, whereas overt behaviors were probably the main threats that our ancestors recognized.

In response to these threats, then, people fundamentally are motivated to (a) avoid the source of threat; (b) retaliate against the source of threat; or (c) both. These distinct motivations, along with a motivation toward benevolence or positive interpersonal relations (which typically decreases when someone hurts, insults, or otherwise offends us), work in concert to create the psychological state that people refer to as "forgiveness."

Defining Forgiveness

Put succinctly, when a person forgives, he or she counteracts or modulates his or her motivations to avoid or seek revenge so that the probability of restoring prosocial and harmonious interpersonal relations is increased. When an offended relationship partner reports that he or she has *not* forgiven a relationship partner for a hurtful action, the offended partner's perception of the offense is posited to stimulate relationship-destructive levels of the two negative motivational states, that is, high motivation to avoid contact with the offending partner, and high motivation to seek revenge or see harm come to the offending partner. Conversely, when an offended relationship partner indicates that he or she *has* forgiven, his or her perceptions of the offense and offender no longer create motivations to avoid the offender and seek revenge. Rather, the victim experiences relationship-constructive transformations in these motivations and the return of constructive, positive motivations. Thus, forgiveness is not a motivation *per se*, but rather a complex of prosocial *changes* in one's basic interpersonal motivations following a serious interpersonal offense.

The idea that forgiveness can be understood exclusively in terms of something as simplistic as "motivational change" is not accepted unanimously by forgiveness researchers (e.g., 2,11). Nevertheless, the motivations to avoid and to seek revenge against an aggressor are both common and apparently basic to human functioning, so I believe that a motivational definition is both theoretically and empirically useful. Moreover, locating forgiveness at the motivational level, rather than at the level of overt behaviors, accommodates the fact that many people who would claim to have forgiven someone who has harmed them might not behave in any particularly prosocial way toward the transgressor. Rather, by invoking a motivational definition, I simply am suggesting that someone who forgives has experienced a reduced *potential* for avoidant and vengeful behavior (and an increased potential for benevolent behavior), which might or might not be expressed overtly.

One implication of this conceptualization is that forgiving can be viewed as a prosocial phenomenon with similarities to other prosocial psychological changes. Social and developmental psychology are full of examples of such prosocial changes. The well-established link between empathy and helping is a prime example. Because of empathy, we can come to care for a stranger's welfare and then intervene to promote his or her welfare (e.g., 13). In the psychology of close relationships, such prosocial psychological phenomena include accommodation (14), which is the inhibition of destructive responses and the enacting of constructive responses following a partner's destructive interpersonal behavior. Another prosocial process is willingness to sacrifice (15), which is "the propensity to forego immediate self-interest to promote the well-being of a partner or relationship" (15, p. 1374). What forgiving, empathy-motivated helping, accommodation, and willingness to sacrifice have in common is that a person acts in a manner

that often has a personal cost (e.g., psychological effort, relinquishment of one's righteous indignation and, potentially, a loss of face) *to produce a benefit for another person or a relationship*. In the case of forgiving, one's negative interpersonal motivations are being transformed so that prosocial motivations toward the transgressor can emerge or reemerge.

Understanding Avoidance and Revenge Motivations

Understanding the avoidance system and the revenge system—as well as the factors that interfere with and enhance them—are crucial for learning how forgiveness operates.

The Avoidance System Individual differences in the functioning of the avoidance system are related to individual differences in the disposition to experience negative affect (i.e., neuroticism) and perhaps also in the disposition to be agreeable in social interactions (i.e., agreeableness). Negative affectivity or neuroticism involves emotional instability and a broad range of negative affects, including anxiety, sadness, irritability, and nervous tension (16). Neuroticism also involves a tendency to view ambiguous stimuli in a negative and threatening light. Some scholars have suggested that people high in neuroticism direct their attention differentially to negative stimuli (see 17 for review). Agreeableness is a prosocial orientation toward others that includes such qualities as altruism, kindness, and trust. People low in agreeableness have greater amounts of conflict with peers, assert more power during conflict, and have difficulties in relational closeness and commitment (18, 19), as well as empathy deficits (see, e.g., 20). It also is worth noting that adjectives such as “forgiving” (and “vengeful”) often are used as prototypical descriptions of the agreeable (or disagreeable) person (e.g., 21, 22).

Aside from the contribution of personality factors to people's motivations to avoid individuals who have offended or harmed them, avoidance motivations appear to be sensitive to the relational and situational context in which an offense occurs. In a recent study (17), we presented participants with a series of eight real-life and fictional scenarios in which they had been (or were to imagine that they had been) offended by a relationship partner (i.e., a same-sex friend or an opposite-sex friend). For example, one real-life scenario instructed participants to think about the worst thing that a close friend had ever done to them. One fictional scenario asked participants to imagine that a close friend of the opposite sex had betrayed a confidence in a way that had humiliating consequences for the participant.

In response to each of the eight scenarios, participants completed the Avoidance and Revenge scales of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; 6). These scales are self-report measures that assess people's motivations to avoid and seek revenge against specific per-

sons who have transgressed against them. We used variance components analyses to examine the extent to which responses to the offenses could be attributed to stable individual differences, the additive effects of various aspects of the scenarios; and error or other factors not modeled. These analyses were similar to standard analyses of variance (ANOVA), but the goal in variance components analyses is to estimate the amount of variance that can be attributed to each term in the model rather than to determine the statistical significance of the model's terms. Individual differences accounted for a considerable amount of the variability in people's avoidance scores (i.e., 18–37% in historical scenarios and 14–15% in fictional scenarios), but by no means did individual differences explain the lion's share of the variance in people's responses.

The remainder of the variance was distributed among effects due to (a) offense severity; (b) relationships in which the offense occurred; (c) the two-way interactions involving individual differences, offense severity, and type of relationship in which the offense occurred; and (d) error and other factors not modeled. With the exception of the main effect of offense severity among the fictional offense scenarios (which accounted for 54% of the variance in people's avoidance motivations), each of these additional terms accounted for less than 10% of the variance in people's avoidance responses. Nevertheless, the main finding of interest from these analyses is that although people demonstrated individual differences in their motivations to avoid their offenders, these differences among persons are probably not the most important factor driving people's avoidance motivations in any given offense situation. In other words, to lump people into those who are "avoidant" and those who are not "avoidant" would be a highly error-laden enterprise with limited value for predicting who would be avoidant in the context of a novel interpersonal offense. Thus, avoidance motivations also are strongly influenced by offense severity, characteristics of the relationships in which the offenses occur, and other factors that we have not yet isolated.

The Revenge System The second motivational system intrinsic to forgiveness is the revenge system. Among the personality dimensions in the Big Five taxonomy, agreeableness appears to be the trait with the most relevance to the operation of the revenge system (23, 24). Specifically, people who are highly agreeable tend to be considerably less motivated to seek revenge against transgressors (17).

In contrast to the avoidance system, which appears to be mostly under the control of social and relational factors, individual differences are apparently the primary determinant of whether an individual will be motivated to seek revenge in response to a specific interpersonal offense. In the previously described McCullough and Hoyt study (17), in which we conducted variance components analyses, stable differences among persons explained the largest proportion of the variance in people's revenge responses across a variety of offense scenarios. For historical offenses, indi-

vidual differences among persons explained 32–60% of the variability; for fictional scenarios, individual differences among persons explained 32–48% of the variability. Smaller amounts of additional variance were explained by other factors. In other words, it does seem meaningful to conclude that some people are simply more vengeful than others (see also 25). However, the revenge system, like the avoidance system, also appears to be highly sensitive to contextual aspects of the offense and the relationship in which the offense occurs.

Longitudinal Course of Avoidance and Revenge

As discussed previously, I believe that the avoidance and the revenge systems are two very old motivations that underlie much of primates' responses to threats and transgressions that they have received. Even so, it appears that many primates have a need to reconcile following conflict (12, 26). Because of the innately social nature of primates' lives, the motivations to avoid and seek revenge are frequently juxtaposed against a strong motivation to maintain a positive set of relations with others. Indeed, Baumeister and Leary (27) reviewed a massive amount of evidence suggesting that humans also have a foundational need for at least a few positive, supportive interpersonal relationships (27).

Either via the motivation to maintain positive human relationships or processes such as habituation or extinction, people's motivations to avoid or seek revenge from transgressors should subside over time for many (if not most) interpersonal transgressions. However, in analyses we conducted as part of a study of people who had been offended by another person in the previous several weeks, we did not find any evidence of a general trend toward reductions in avoidance and revenge motivations during an eight-week longitudinal follow-up (25).

It is hard to know what to make of this counterintuitive null result. The measurement of avoidance and revenge was adequate (i.e., internal consistency reliabilities were approximately $\alpha = .90$ for both administrations and people's avoidance and revenge scores were correlated at $r = .50$ and $.47$ across administrations, as we have found in other research). Inadequate statistical power could have been a problem (indeed, people's mean scores *did* decrease over time, although not significantly so). Also, failure to measure individuals during the time periods during which their motivations were changing could have been an issue (a common dilemma in longitudinal research; see 28). What we *did* find, however, was that individual differences in how people's motivations changed over time—particularly their motivations to seek revenge—were related to individual differences in vengefulness. People high in dispositional vengefulness were not only more motivated to seek revenge against specific offenders cross-sectionally, but also slower to reduce those revenge motivations over time.

Determinants of Forgiveness

Aside from individual differences, such as a disposition toward revenge, that might explain why some people seem to experience reductions in their avoidance and/or revenge motivations over time, researchers have isolated a number of psychological variables that seem to be associated with people's capabilities of forgiving. These include (a) cognitive and emotional processes such as empathy, perspective-taking, rumination, and suppression; (b) relationship qualities such as closeness, adjustment, and commitment; and (c) apology.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking Empathy and perspective-taking are important facilitators of many prosocial human activities, including willingness to help others (e.g., 13), and apparently, forgiving. Cross-sectionally, the extent to which someone feels empathic affect toward an offender and understands the cognitive perspective of the offender are highly correlated with measures of forgiving (7, 29) and measures of avoidance and revenge motivations, in particular (6).

In addition, empathy appears to mediate the well-established effect of apologies on people's willingness to forgive their offenders. That is, people appear to forgive apologetic offenders, in large part, because the apology itself helps people feel more empathic toward the offenders (6, 7). Also, the link between attributional processes and intentions to retaliate against someone appear to be mediated partially by empathy (30). Moreover, interventions for encouraging forgiveness appear to work, in part, through enhancing the offended person's empathy for the offender, as well as his or her ability to adopt the cognitive perspective of the offender (6). Indeed, empathy is, as far as I am aware, the only psychological construct that researchers have shown to facilitate forgiveness for specific real-life transgressions when manipulated experimentally (6, 31).

Rumination and Suppression The more that people ruminate about an offense they have incurred, the more difficult forgiving the offense appears to be. Intrusive rumination about the offense (i.e., being troubled by thoughts, affects, and images about the offense) and attempts to suppress those ruminations are related (in cross-sectional designs) to higher levels of avoidance and revenge motivations (6, 25). Longitudinal changes in rumination and suppression also are correlated with longitudinal changes in forgiveness, so that people who become less ruminative and suppressive also appear to become more forgiving (6, 25). Thus, rumination might play an important role in perpetuating *interpersonal* distress following interpersonal events, just as it appears to perpetuate psychological distress in general (32, 33). This conclusion is consistent with conclusions of other researchers who have examined rumination as a dispositional variable (e.g., 34): People who have trouble extinguishing ruminative thoughts in general also have a more difficult time forgiving.

Relational Closeness, Commitment, and Satisfaction In discussing the variables that influence the avoidance and revenge systems earlier in this chapter, I noted the importance of relational factors. One of the most important relational factors is relational quality. Specifically, people are most likely to forgive in relationships that are characterized by closeness, commitment, and satisfaction. Based on their results, several researchers (35, 36, 37, 38) have noted that relationship partners more readily forgive one another for interpersonal offenses in relationships that are characterized by closeness, commitment, and satisfaction (but see also 37 for evidence that people are actually *less* likely to forgive in intimate relationships if the offense is the refusal of a relatively low-cost favor).

The link between relationship closeness/commitment/satisfaction and forgiveness is probably quite robust. We recently studied over 100 couples who reported on the extent to which they had forgiven their partner for two different offenses (the worst thing their partner had ever done to them, and the most recent serious thing that their partner had done to them). Both the forgivers' and their partners' self-reported degree of closeness/commitment/satisfaction were related to forgivers' degree of forgiveness in the context of both offenses. Moreover, in a follow-up study, we found that the closeness-forgiveness relationship was mediated, in part, by a greater willingness of offending relationship partners to apologize, and a greater capacity for offended relationship partners to empathize with their offenders (6). Therefore, empathy and apology may serve as psychological bridges between relationship closeness and forgiving.

Apology A final variable that seems to have great import for forgiveness is the extent to which the offender makes sincere apologies or expressions of remorse (6, 7, 34, 39, 40). This robust link, of course, would probably be predicted by many general theories, including theories of reality negotiation (e.g., 41) and attributional theories (e.g., 30). Sincere apologies and expressions of remorse might be the most potent factors under the offender's control for influencing the likelihood that an offended relationship partner will forgive the offender. The effects of apologies on forgiving appear largely to be mediated by empathy (6, 7). In other words, people are willing to forgive apologetic offenders because such apologies and expressions of contrition appear to produce empathy for the offender.

Is Forgiving *Really* That Good? Is Revenge *Really* That Bad?

Thus far in this chapter I have addressed only theoretical issues related to the basic nature of forgiveness and its personality and social determinants. However, a major impetus for research on interpersonal forgiving has been the prospect that forgiving might contribute to beneficial personal and interpersonal outcomes. To date, several researchers have examined the as-

sociation of forgiving with measures of psychological well-being, health, and relational well-being. Their preliminary results appear to be consistent with the generally held assumption that forgiving is, in general, linked with better adjustment and well-being, whereas seeking revenge is, in general, associated with worse adjustment and well-being.

Links with Psychological Well-Being

Dispositional Evidence Based on initial evidence, it appears that people who are more forgiving and less vengeful tend to have slightly higher degrees of well-being. Using a nationally representative sample, for instance, Poloma and Gallup (42) found that people who reported higher use of forgiveness as a strategy for coping with interpersonal offenses (along with other constructive coping strategies such as praying for the offender, trying to discuss the matter with the person, or attempting to do something nice for the offender) had higher scores on a single-item measure of life satisfaction ($r = .16$). Similarly, Mauger et al. (43) found that people's scores on a multiitem self-report measure of their tendency to forgive others was correlated at $r = .16$ with scores on the MMPI depression subscale (with positive scores indicating a negative association of forgiving and depressive symptoms).

The disposition toward vengeance manifests an opposite pattern. Caprara and his colleagues (e.g., 44, 45) have found that people's scores on a measure of tendencies to retaliate after aggression are positively related to negative affect and neuroticism. Similarly, we (25) found that highly vengeful people (measured with a subset of items from Mauger et al.'s (43) Forgivenness of Others Scale) had significantly lower life satisfaction and higher negative affect. Also, Poloma and Gallup (42) reported that those who "try to get even" or "hold a resentment" are slightly lower in life satisfaction ($r = -.14$).

I infer from these results that people who are dispositionally more forgiving (or less vengeful) appear to have slightly less negative affect and slightly higher satisfaction with life. However, we should not mistake these observations for causal data; rather, these initial findings provide only modest initial evidence that a substantive, causal relationship between the disposition to forgive and psychological well-being might exist.

Offense-Specific Evidence In addition to the dispositional evidence cited already in the present chapter, researchers also have begun to examine the relationship between forgiving individual offenders and various measures of psychological well-being (e.g., 25, 46, 47, 48, 49). For example, Aschleman (46) conducted a cross-sectional survey of 30 divorced or permanently separated mothers with children aged 10 to 13. Each mother completed the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (48) to indicate the extent to which she had forgiven the child's father for any offenses that the father had committed against her. In addition, mothers completed self-report measures of well-being, depressive symptoms, and anxiety symptoms. The extent to which

mothers had forgiven the fathers was positively related to several measures of well-being, including self-acceptance and purpose in life. Also, forgiving was inversely related to self-reported anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Weinberg (50) examined how various strategies for coping with the unnatural death of a loved one influenced survivors' overall adjustment to the death. Weinberg surveyed a group of adults who had experienced the death of a loved one. A subset of these respondents blamed a third person for the unnatural death. Among respondents who blamed a third person for the death, those who reported that they "thought about or sought revenge" reported significantly lower scores on a single-item measure of adjustment than did respondents who blamed a third person for the death but did not report seeking revenge.

These cross-sectional relationships between forgiving a specific offender and adjustment, of course, do not provide persuasive evidence that causal processes are at work. Indeed, the only longitudinal research on the subject casts some doubt on whether forgiving has a causal influence on subsequent adjustment. As discussed earlier in this chapter, we (25) conducted an eight-week longitudinal study involving approximately sixty undergraduate students who had been injured by another person in the previous two months. At the baseline assessment, participants completed the TRIM Inventory (6), as well as a measure of the extent to which they ruminated about the offense and attempted to suppress their ruminative cognitions about the offense. They also completed a measure of life satisfaction. Eight weeks later, participants completed the same instruments again.

We did not find strong evidence for causal association between forgiving and well-being in either cross-sectional or longitudinal analyses. In cross-sectional analyses, we found that people who had high motivations to avoid and seek revenge against their offenders had lower satisfaction with life (although the relationships were not significant; $r_s = -.20$ and $-.11$). In longitudinal analyses, however, we found little evidence that people who became more forgiving over the eight-week time period became any more satisfied with their lives (r_s of residualized change scores = $-.04$ and $-.13$). Because subjective well-being (like other measures of mental health or psychological distress) is probably influenced by a host of psychosocial factors, people's responses to individual offenses that they have incurred might not have very robust effects on their subjective well-being. Thus, whether forgiving actually *promotes* psychological well-being remains very much in question at the time of this writing.

Other explanations exist for why some researchers find links between measures of forgiving and measures of psychological well-being and adjustment. The vagaries of sampling error might be responsible in part for the inconsistencies (51). Substantive explanations include the possibility that the forgiving-adjustment association might occur only among people who have encountered specific types of offenses. For example, forgiveness might be relevant for psychological well-being only when forgiveness is being used to buffer people against particularly stressful interpersonal of-

fenses (48). The respondents in the McCullough et al. (25) study were forgiving interpersonal offenses that, although perhaps more severe than normal, certainly represented the types of offenses that one might expect to incur in the course of an average year of college life (e.g., a relationship break-up, sexual infidelity in a romantic relationship, a racial slur). Conversely, Aschleman's (46) and Trainer's (49) participants had experienced separation and/or divorce—exceptionally severe life events. Perhaps the links of forgiving and adjustment are apparent only in the context of such serious life events. Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, Gassin, Freedman, Olson, and Sarinopoulos (48) suggested the related possibility that forgiveness might be most relevant for psychological well-being when it is used to buffer people against interpersonal offenses that have occurred in the context of certain types of relationships (e.g., spousal, romantic, and family relationships), but not in others. From such explanations we can infer that forgiveness may not exert a “main effect” on mental health, but rather might interact with relationship type, perceived stressfulness of the offense, or some other property of offenses to influence mental health and well-being. To date, researchers have emphasized the “main effects” of forgiveness, so in the future researchers need to examine interactions with relationship type or offense severity to shed more light on how forgiveness might influence mental health and well-being.

Links with Physiological Measures

Forgiving appears to be associated with several physiological parameters. Witvliet, Ludwig, Chamberlain, Thompson, and Ahmad (52), for example, examined the physiological effects of four types of mental strategies for coping with interpersonal offenses: (a) focusing on the hurt; (b) nursing a grudge; (c) empathizing with the offender's human qualities; and (d) forgiving. Participants completed laboratory trials during which they were instructed to recall a specific offense as they engaged in each of these four types of imagery. During the trials, Witvliet and her colleagues measured participants' heart rates, diastolic blood pressure, arterial pressure, and skin conductance. Although all four imagery conditions led to increases in heart rate and blood pressure, there were significant differences such that participants in the forgiving imagery conditions (i.e., empathizing and forgiving) manifested lower heart rate, diastolic blood pressure, and mean arterial blood pressure than did participants in the unforgiving imagery conditions (i.e., focusing on the hurt and nursing a grudge). The physiological data were consistent with respondents' self-reported affects during the imagery sessions. During the trials in which participants were instructed to focus on the hurt or nurse a grudge, they reported that their imagery was more negative than when they were empathizing or forgiving. Whether the physiological effects associated with forgiveness imagery actually lead to clinically significant changes in physical health remains to be investigated. However, several teams of investigators are examining currently the links

of forgiving to physiological indicators of emotion and health, so hopefully we will see answers to these questions in the coming years.

Links with Relational Well-Being

People who can forgive their transgressors also are more likely to restore positive relations with their transgressors. Conversely, it is probably true that people who cannot forgive exhaust and then abandon their relationships at a quicker rate than do forgiving relationship partners. Because the lack of positive, supportive relationships has been linked to nearly every psychological and physical malaise from suicide to immunosuppression (27), forgiveness might be associated with mental and physical well-being by helping people maintain stable, supportive relationships.

Indeed, researchers have reported a variety of associations between forgiving and relational well-being. As mentioned earlier, researchers have found positive correlations between forgiveness and self-reported relational closeness and adjustment (35, 36, 38). We (6) also found that forgiving not only occurs more frequently in the context of satisfactory, committed, close relationships, but also that forgiving appears to help people restore relational closeness following interpersonal transgressions.

In another study, Holeman and Myers (53) reported an important link between forgiving and relational well-being. Using a sample of 63 married women who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse, Holeman and Myers found that women who reported high scores on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (i.e., who had forgiven the people who had sexually abused them) had higher marital adjustment than did respondents who reported low scores on the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (i.e., who had not forgiven the people who had sexually abused them). Holeman and Myers' (53) results are important because they are consistent with the view that people who can forgive in one relationship (in this case, a perpetrator of sexual abuse) also might reap social benefits in other relationships (in this case, their marriages).

In another study, Kelln and Ellard (5) instructed participants to complete a laboratory task in which they were working with a piece of seemingly fragile electronic equipment. In reality, however, the task was a bogus one, as was the "fragile apparatus." Participants later were led to believe that they had severely damaged the equipment. The independent variable was the experimenter's (actually a confederate's) response to the damaged equipment. The experimenter either (a) did nothing in response to the breakage; (b) sought retribution by reneging on a previous arrangement to pay the participant \$4 for participating; (c) both reneged on the arrangement to pay and offered a verbal gesture of forgiveness to the participant; or (d) only made a verbal expression of forgiveness. In a fifth (control) condition, the participants were not led to believe that they had broken the equipment.

The dependent variable was the number of envelopes that respondents offered to distribute around campus for the experimenter as part of an un-

related task. Kelln and Ellard found significant differences among experimental groups, with participants in the "forgiveness only" condition indicating a willingness to deliver twice as many envelopes ($M = 18.08$ envelopes, $SD = 4.35$) as did participants who received (a) no intervention ($M = 9.13$ envelopes, $SD = 5.89$), (b) retribution and forgiveness ($M = 9.27$ envelopes, $SD = 5.38$), or (c) retribution only ($M = 7.29$ envelopes, $SD = 6.33$). The "forgiveness only" participants also volunteered to deliver considerably more envelopes than did participants who completed the bogus laboratory task without being led to believe that they had broken the equipment. Thus, participants who were forgiven were willing to do considerably more work on behalf of the completely forgiving experimenter than they were for the experimenter in any of the other conditions.

Kelln and Ellard interpreted this finding in the context of equity theory, arguing that the gift-like quality of forgiveness increased respondents' feelings of inequity, prompting them to restore equity by doing something kind for the experimenter. These findings also may be interpreted as evidence that people who are inclined to forgive their transgressors might engender greater social support from the forgiven transgressor than they might from any other response to the offense. Thus, forgiving appears to stimulate positive social interactions—even among people who hardly know each other.

If we can conclude that forgiving is "good" for relationships, then we also can surmise that revenge is "bad" for relationships. For example, people who use revenge as a problem-solving style encounter difficulty in maintaining friendships. To examine this possibility empirically, Rose and Asher (54) presented over 600 elementary schoolchildren with 30 conflict scenarios, in which they were instructed to place themselves in the shoes of the protagonist who had been insulted, injured, or frustrated by another child. Participants then were instructed to indicate what their goals would be in responding to the conflict. Among the six possible goals that respondents could choose was the goal of "trying to get back" at their friend. Rose and Asher used peer ratings to determine how many best friends each respondent had, how well each respondent was accepted by peers, and how hostile and positive each respondent was perceived to be by close friends. Endorsing revenge as a conflict resolution goal was negatively related to the quality of respondents' social relationships. The more frequently respondents reported that they would attempt to "get back" at their friends in the 30 conflict scenarios, the fewer best friends they had ($r = -.18$), the more hostile ($r = .25$) and less positive ($r = -.13$) their friends rated them to be, and the less they were accepted by their peers ($r = -.08$).

Can Forgiving Be a Maladaptive Coping Response?

Forgiveness might not be a good thing for all people in all circumstances. It is possible that in certain interpersonal situations, people who cope by forgiving might put themselves at risk for serious psychosocial problems (55). Also, some researchers suggest that forgiveness might be a marker for

relational disturbance in some relationships, including those characterized by physical abuse (56). In Katz et al.'s study, 145 undergraduate women in dating relationships completed a survey in which they indicated the extent to which they would blame themselves if their romantic partner physically abused them. Participants also indicated the likelihood that they would forgive their partners and the likelihood that they would terminate the abusive relationship. Katz et al. found that women who reported that they would blame themselves for the physical abuse would be more likely to stay in the relationship. They also found evidence that the association between self-blame and staying in the abusive relationship was mediated by the women's willingness to forgive the violent partners.

Therefore, it appeared that women who would blame themselves would be more likely to stay in the relationship precisely because they were more willing to forgive the partner for the physical abuse. It is not clear whether forgiving actually *causes* such perilous situations, but the possibility that forgiving too easily is a potential marker for relational peril should be investigated seriously. Conducting such investigations and acknowledging that forgiving could be a red flag for psychosocial distress also would help to bridge ideological gaps between therapists and researchers who advocate for the positive effects of forgiveness and those who warn against its potential dangers.

Helping People Cope by Helping Them Forgive: Educational and Therapeutic Interventions

Research on the use of forgiveness in clinical applications is growing. In recent years, a variety of group and individual interventions for encouraging people to forgive have been developed and tested. In many of these studies people have been encouraged to forgive based on the intervention program outlined by Enright (see, e.g., 11). Other clinical researchers have based their intervention studies on the theoretical work of McCullough and colleagues (e.g., 7, 31). Other researchers presently are launching evaluations of intervention programs.

In general, participants in such intervention programs appear to make strides in forgiving their transgressors as a result. Worthington, Sandage, and Berry (57) conducted a meta-analysis of data from 12 group intervention studies. They reported that these group interventions were generally effective, improving group members' forgiveness scores by 43% of a standard deviation (Cohen's $d = .43$). Among the eight intervention studies that involved six hours of client contact or more, group members' forgiveness scores were 76% of a standard deviation higher than were those of members of control groups (Cohen's $d = .76$). Thus, it appears that participation in short-term interventions (particularly those involving at least six hours of client contact) are at least moderately effective in helping people to forgive specific individuals who have harmed them.

Individual psychotherapy that includes forgiveness as a treatment goal also appears to be more efficacious than no-treatment control conditions. In two published studies (8, 9), researchers have investigated whether individual psychotherapy protocols based on forgiveness are effective in helping people forgive specific offenders, and whether these interventions yield improvements in psychological well-being. In these two studies, researchers randomly assigned participants to either a psychotherapy intervention designed to help them forgive a specific relationship partner or to a no-treatment control group. In both studies, participants in the forgiveness interventions forgave to a greater extent than did participants in the control conditions. Moreover, participants in the forgiveness interventions also experienced reductions in anxious and depressive symptoms relative to people in the control conditions.

Other researchers have found that psychoeducational interventions can be effective in reducing vengefulness—even among people for whom vengefulness has been a chronic and serious problem. For example, Holbrook (58) examined the efficacy of a cognitive-behavioral training group in reducing vengeful thoughts and attitudes among 26 male prison inmates who had a history of reactive aggression (i.e., violence motivated by the desire to retaliate). Holbrook found that inmates' scores on a measure of beliefs and attitudes about revenge significantly decreased from the beginning to the end of the training sessions. These results provide a basis for hope that even individuals who have entrenched, serious problems with vengefulness might benefit from interventions designed to reduce their vengefulness.

Forgiveness at the Societal Level

In this chapter, I have focused almost exclusively on the nature and consequences of forgiving for individuals and relationships. Another aspect that has not received the attention that it merits is how forgiveness might exert influences at the societal level. This is unfortunate because—as I am sure that nearly everyone who reads this chapter would agree—it would be more pleasant to live in a society where people were quick to forgive and slow to retaliate.

Indeed, the problems associated with the lack of forgiveness at a societal level eventually will hit almost everyone. Nearly one-half of all interpersonal delinquency in student samples (e.g., a serious fight at work or school, hurting someone badly enough to require medical attention, etc.) is motivated by anger and revenge (59). Also, people who endorse vengeance have higher levels of retaliatory behavior in the laboratory, on the highways, and in their personal lives (60, 61, 62). The desire for vengeance is frequently cited as a motive for many destructive interpersonal behaviors, including homicide, suicide, rape, arson, shoplifting, and adultery. Put simply, a substantial amount of human misery can be attributed to people's difficulties

in modulating their revenge motivations. As researchers continue to address the nature and consequences of forgiveness at the level of the individual and relationships, we also would be well advised to direct effort at developing strategies for helping society to become a more forgiving place.

Conclusions

After more than nearly a century of scientific psychology, researchers finally have begun to give sustained attention to the concept of forgiveness, how it operates, and how it affects people's lives. In this chapter, I have discussed these initial empirical and theoretical contributions in the context of my own theorizing about the nature of forgiveness. I have proposed that the capacity to forgive is best understood as a motivational phenomenon: When people forgive, they reduce their motivations to seek revenge against (and to maintain relational breaches with) people who have damaged them, thereby allowing prosocial motivations to emerge or reemerge.

The capacity for the motivational transformations that I call "forgiving" appears to be related to a variety of psychological factors, including (a) individual differences; (b) aspects of the situation in which the interpersonal offense takes place; (c) qualities of the offended person's relationship to the offender; and (d) apology. The disposition to avoid one's offenders appears to be stronger in people who are high in neuroticism and low in agreeableness, and the disposition to seek revenge against one's offenders appears stronger in people who are low in agreeableness. Empathy for one's offender, and the related cognitive perspective-taking, appear to reduce both avoidance and revenge motivations. Cognitive rumination about the offense and, ironically, attempts to suppress those ruminations, appear to inhibit forgiving. People are more forgiving in close and committed relationships than they are in distant and less committed ones. Finally, providing believable accounts, excuses, and apologies, as well as expressions of genuine remorse, are reliable means by which transgressors can increase their likelihoods of being forgiven.

Forgiving appears to be related positively, albeit weakly, to many measures of mental health and well-being. To date, however, there is not compelling evidence that these associations are robust or causal. Based on initial evidence, it appears that forgiving is related to lower levels of physiological arousal. Additionally, people who readily forgive individuals who have harmed them appear to experience more positive relationships. Individual and group interventions for promoting forgiveness and reducing revenge appear to be moderately effective and might even help people to make improvements in their mental health and well-being. In light of the concern that forgiveness might not be salutary in all relationships, and that it might even be a risk factor in some relationships, future clinical researchers should devote attention to determining the types of clients, relation-

ships, and transgressions that can be treated effectively by forgiveness interventions, and those for which forgiveness interventions would be ineffective or harmful for one or more of the parties involved.

Over the last decade, many investigators have entered the field of forgiveness research. I would surmise that at least fifty different research groups worldwide currently are conducting empirical research on forgiveness. If each of these research teams publishes only one study on forgiveness, this practically will double the fund of scientific information that we have about forgiveness currently—a situation that will render this chapter's findings obsolete. I will gladly welcome such obsolescence because it will signal that science is truly making progress in understanding forgiveness. Indeed, there is ample reason for hope that the next decade will be a golden era for forgiveness research.

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