Part Four

CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AND FORGIVENESS

Chapter Twelve

Forgiveness and Relational Repair

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Many social scientists conceptualize forgiveness as an *intra*personal phenomenon, adopting victim-focused explanations of its causes and consequences. For example, some empirical work has examined the precise cognitive and affective processes by which victims come to forgive those who have perpetrated acts of violence against them; other work has examined the circumstances under which it is beneficial for a victim to forgive such offenses (for a review, see McCullough, 2001). This is well and good—a victim-focused approach may be entirely suitable in settings wherein victim and perpetrator have neither a past nor a future with one another, because in temporally bounded, fundamentally ahistoric settings, the forgiveness process essentially rests on the victim's capacity to "heal the self" and move on.

However, in settings wherein victim and perpetrator have a past and (potentially) a future with one another—that is, in ongoing relationships—there is much to be gained by adopting an *inter*personal conceptualization of forgiveness. To begin with, we note the obvious: We live our lives in relationships. In comparison to time spent with strangers, we spend more time with people with whom we have some sort of relationship, whether as spouse, parent, friend, or co-worker. In comparison to interactions with strangers, interactions with relational partners are more important to us, are more central to our identities and values, and have a greater impact on our physical and psychological well-being (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Also, many transgressions come about within ongoing relationships, and those transgressions are consequential—we have a stake in addressing and resolving them. Moreover, in ongoing relationships, the forgiveness process itself is inherently interpersonal—it is a process to which both victim *and* perpetrator contribute. In this broad context, it is self-evident that understanding forgiveness rests on questions larger than how victims forgive and whether this is a good thing; we must also understand when, how, and why forgiveness is good for relationships.

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The goal of this chapter is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding forgiveness and relational repair. We begin by introducing key tenets of interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), discussing concepts and principles that are central to analyzing transgression, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Then we use this framework to (a) analyze victim and perpetrator reactions to transgressions, (b) describe forgiveness as a temporally extended phenomenon that rests on the character of victim–perpetrator interaction, and (c) discuss personal and relational processes that are relevant to understanding reconciliation and relational repair. We also consider the relevance of this theoretical framework for clinical and applied interventions, and conclude with suggestions regarding future theoretical and empirical work regarding forgiveness and relational repair.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING FORGIVENESS

Transgressions and Norms.   From an interdependence perspective, a *transgression* is an incident in which a perpetrator is perceived (by the victim and perhaps by the perpetrator as well) to have knowingly departed from the norms that govern their relationship, thereby harming the victim. *Norms* are rule-based inclinations to respond in a specified manner to specified types of interpersonal situation (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003)—that is, partners implicitly or explicitly agree that under certain circumstances, some courses of action are mandated (e.g., always "being on one another's side"), whereas other courses of action are forbidden (e.g., extra-relationship romantic involvement). Although norms may initially be established as a simple matter of convenience—for example, as rules by which partners may coordinate specific types of interaction—over time, such rules often "take on the characteristics of a moral obligation" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 128).

In light of the fact that transgressions cause victims harm and violate moral obligations, it is not surprising that such incidents instigate a rather potent constellation of victim and perpetrator cognition, affect, and behavior. This signature constellation is characterized by victim vengeance and perpetrator guilt—a pattern of response that can be seen as functionally adaptive (at least in the short run), in that such inclinations provide some measure of reassurance that a transgression will not recur. Indeed, it has been argued that among social animals—for whom mutual cooperation and rule adherence have tremendous functional value—there may be an underlying, evolutionary basis for tendencies toward vengeance and guilt (Ridley, 1996).

Forgiveness and the Transformation Process.   Moving beyond this potent constellation of victim and perpetrator negativity rests on victim forgiveness, which entails "granting pardon," or "canceling a debt." Consistent with other interpersonal conceptualizations (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997), we define *forgiveness* as the victim's willingness to resume pretransgression interaction tendencies—the willingness to forego grudge and vengeance, instead coming to behave toward the perpetrator in a positive and constructive manner

(Rusbult, Kumashiro, Finkel, & Wildschut, 2002). We propose that forgiveness rests on a psychological transformation of the transgression situation. Given that victims experience powerful, gut-level impulses toward vengeance, to make way for forgiveness, these destructive impulses must be tempered. *Transformation* describes the process by which a victim takes broader considerations into account than the transgression per se, including not only concern for the perpetrator and relationship but also broader norms or values. The individual's immediate, gut-level impulses are termed *given preferences*; the psychologically transformed preferences that directly guide behavior are termed *effective preferences* (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

How is victim motivation transformed from righteous indignation and craving for vengeance to willingness to entertain the possibility of forgiveness? Prosocial transformation comes about via changes in the victim's cognitive and emotional experiences: The victim essentially thinks through the causes and implications of the transgression, developing a more benevolent, less blameful understanding of the event (e.g., identifying extenuating circumstances, acknowledging personal culpability). More or less concurrent with such cognitive activity, the victim undergoes a critical affective shift, moving (sometimes slowly) from fury and antagonism to compassion and caring for the perpetrator.[1]

The process by which benevolence replaces blame and compassion replaces antagonism is not necessarily (or typically) an immediate, unilateral response on the part of victims. To begin with, the transformation process itself typically takes some time. It is important to note that perpetrators, too, play a role in promoting (vs. impeding) the victim's prosocial transformation. If perpetrators behave badly—for example, by reacting in a defensive manner, minimizing the severity of a transgression, denying responsibility for it, or offering insincere apology—the transformation process and forgiveness become very effortful and psychologically threatening for victims. Defensive maneuvers on the part of perpetrators to some degree are understandable in that victims and perpetrators often have differing perspectives on transgressions, and perpetrators feel the need to justify their behavior not only to victims but also to themselves. In contrast, when perpetrators exhibit genuine remorse, it becomes easier for victims to undergo the sorts of cognitive and affective tempering upon which prosocial transformation rests.

Relational Repair.   Of course, perpetrator apology and victim forgiveness do not automatically yield *reconciliation*, defined as the resumption of pretransgression relationship status. From an interdependence perspective, the two most important considerations in understanding reconciliation center on restoring *commitment*, defined as the extent to which each partner intends to persist in the relationship, feels psychologically attached to it, and exhibits long-term orientation toward it; and *trust*, defined as the strength of each partner's conviction that the other can be counted on to behave in a benevolent manner. Commitment reliably motivates prosocial acts, such as accommodation and sacrifice; trust is based on each person's perception that the other is willing to engage in such prosocial acts (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001). Thus, trust represents conviction regarding the strength of a partner's commitment.

Reconciling following a significant transgression entails mutual investment, whereby both partners exert significant, coordinated effort to achieve a desired end state—restored couple functioning (Kelley et al., 2003). To progress toward reconciliation, each partner must enact prosocial behaviors during interaction, and each must sustain the energy and motivation to do so over an extended period of time. For example, the victim must exhibit considerable good will, setting aside blame and demonstrating willingness to begin afresh with a clean slate; the perpetrator must exhibit mature acceptance of responsibility and enact repeated acts of amends to "repay his or her debt." The partners may also need to *renegotiate the norms* that govern their relationship, resolving conflicting views on what constitutes a transgression, clarifying the terms of amends and forgiveness, or specifying the consequences of future transgressions.[2] Such behaviors are not always easy, especially in the wake of an emotionally charged transgression. Accordingly, many couples experience a rough road to reconciliation, in that the investments required of each person tend to be costly or effortful. For example, the perpetrator may be tempted to justify his or her actions by blaming the victim for the transgression; the victim may be tempted to reject the perpetrator's apology and insist on retribution. Such lapses represent serious setbacks, making it more challenging for each partner to opt for prosocial, reconciliation-facilitating behaviors in subsequent interactions.

Following relationship-shattering transgressions, does complete reconciliation ever really come about, or does a powerful transgression forever leave its stamp on a relationship? Can perpetrators offer sufficient amends to assuage their feelings of guilt, or does the sense of indebtedness persistently color perpetrator-victim interactions? Do victims readily recover faith in their partners' reliability and good will, or is it simply too difficult to abandon transgression-relevant anxiety? We suggest that forgiveness and reconciliation are not all-or-nothing propositions and that in many instances—particularly among resilient and resourceful partners, and in relationships with strong pretransgression circumstances—reconciliation can come about even in the wake of relationship-shattering transgressions.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

As noted earlier, we believe that interdependence theory is a very useful means of conceptualizing forgiveness as an inherently interpersonal phenomenon. Accordingly, in the following pages we make use of this theoretical framework in reviewing the empirical literature regarding (a) reactions to transgressions, (b) the forgiveness process, and (c) relational repair. Throughout this review, we refer readers to information presented in Table 12.1, which includes summary information regarding participants, methods, and findings for studies that examine transgressions, forgiveness, or reconciliation in a relational context (i.e., transgressions in ongoing relationships). At the same time, in reviewing the empirical literature, we also cite findings from nonrelational studies that are relevant to a given issue (these nonrelational studies are not listed in Table 12.1).[3]

TABLE 12.1. Empirical Research Regarding Reactions to Transgressions, the Forgiveness Process, and Relational Repair

Reference	Method	Participants	Transgressors	Results
			Reactions to transgressions	
Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton (1995)	St 1 Narratives St 2 Narratives	Undergraduates Undergraduates	Not specified (reports as perpetrator)	Transgressions against close partners ↔ greater perpetrator guilt. Perpetrator interpersonal neglect, unfulfilled obligations, selfish actions ↔ greater perpetrator guilt. Guilt ↔ greater perpetrator confession, apology, changes in behavior.
Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman (1990)	St 1 Narratives	Undergraduates	Not specified (reports as both victim, perpetrator)	Compared with perpetrators, victims regard transgressions as more arbitrary, incomprehensible, gratuitous. Victims perceive more continuing harm, lasting damage, long-term consequences. Perpetrators regard victims' reactions as excessive.
Feldman, Cauffman, Jensen, & Arnett (2000)	St 1 Scenario study	Undergraduates	Relational partners (50% DP, 50% FP)	Low tolerance of deviation, high self-restraint ↔ transgressions judged more harshly, as less acceptable.
Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon (2002)	St 2 Survey	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Commitment ↔ more positive immediate and delayed victim cognition and behavior, more negative immediate victim emotion but more positive delayed emotion.
Kowalski, Walker, Wilkinson, Queen, & Sharpe (2003)	St 1 Narratives	Undergraduates	Relational partners (23% RP, 37% FP)	Compared with perpetrators, victims describe transgressions as more aversive, perceive more negative consequences, rate self less blameful and partner more blameful. Perpetrators report more guilt.
Leary, Springer, Negel, Amsell, & Evans (1998)	St 1 Narratives	Undergraduates	Relational partners (32% DP, 39% FP)	Transgressions ↔ victim hurt, anxiety, anger, hostility. Relational devaluation, responsibility attributions ↔ greater victim distress. Compared with perpetrators, victims report greater perpetrator responsibility, relational harm, erosion of trust.
Smolen & Spiegel (1987)	St 1 Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	Provocative perpetrator behavior ↔ lower couple adjustment. Provocation-adjustment association stronger among men with low internal locus of control.

TABLE 12.1. Empirical Research Regarding Reactions to Transgressions, the Forgiveness Process, and Relational Repair *(cont.)*

Reference	Method	Participants	Transgressors	Results
Zechmeister & Romero (2002)	St 1 Narratives	Community sample	Relational partners (19% RP, 34% FP)	Compared with perpetrators, victims perceive transgression as continuing to exert negative effects. Victim empathy ↔ benign victim interpretations of transgressions, greater forgiveness. Perpetrator empathy ↔ less perpetrator self-forgiveness.
Forgiveness process				
Brown (2003)	St 2 Survey	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Victim perspective taking, agreeableness, positive attitude toward forgiveness ↔ greater victim forgiveness. Victim depression, neuroticism, vengeance motivation, number of transgressions recalled ↔ lesser victim forgiveness.
	St 2 Survey	Undergraduates	Relational partners	
	St 4 Survey	Undergraduates	Not specified	
Fincham & Beach (2002)	St 1 Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	Wife psychological aggression ↔ lesser husband forgiveness (St 1). Husband psychological aggression ↔ greater wife retaliation (St 1). Partner psychological aggression ↔ greater retaliation (St 2). Partner constructive communication ↔ greater forgiveness.
	St 2 Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	
Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon (2002)	St 1 Experiment	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Commitment prime → greater victim forgiveness (absence of destructive reactions).
	St 2 Survey	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Commitment ↔ more positive immediate and delayed victim cognition and behavior, more negative immediate victim emotion but more positive delayed emotion.
	St 3 Interaction records	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Commitment ↔ greater victim forgiveness (positive cognition, emotion, behavior).
Hannon (2001)	St 1 Survey	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Pretransgression trust, commitment ↔ greater victim forgiveness, perpetrator amends.
Hannon, Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro (2004)	St 1 Survey	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Perpetrator amends ↔ greater victim forgiveness. Both amends and forgiveness account for unique variance in resolving transgression incidents.
	St 2 Interaction records	Undergraduates	Dating partners	
	St 3 Observational	Community sample	Marital partners	Effective resolution is associated with enhanced couple well-being.

Study		Method	Sample	Participants (relationship type)	Findings
Hargrave & Sells (1997)	St 1	Scale development	Community sample	Relational partners (type not specified)	Opportunity for perpetrator compensation, victim insight, victim understanding ↔ greater victim forgiveness.
McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson (2001)	St 1	Longitudinal	Undergraduates	Relational partners (type not specified)	Victim vengefulness ↔ lesser victim forgiveness, greater rumination, greater negative affectivity, lower life satisfaction, lower agreeableness, greater neuroticism.
	St 2	Survey	Undergraduates	Not specified	
McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang (2003)	St 1	Longitudinal	Undergraduates	Relational partners (43% DP, 39% FP)	Transgressions ↔ victim avoidance, revenge motivation. Lesser transgression severity, greater victim empathy ↔ greater victim trend forgiveness. Lesser victim responsibility attributions, greater empathy ↔ greater victim temporary forgiveness.
	St 2	Longitudinal	Undergraduates	Relational partners (42% DP, 39% FP)	
McCullough & Hoyt (2002)	St 1	Survey	Undergraduates	Relational partners (33% RP, 67% FP)	Transgression severity, victim neuroticism ↔ lesser victim forgiveness (benevolence, avoidance, revenge). Victim agreeableness ↔ greater victim forgiveness.
	St 2	Survey	Undergraduates	Relational partners (50% FP)	
McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight (1998)	St 3	Survey	Undergraduates	Dating partners	Couple adjustment/commitment, victim empathy, perpetrator apology ↔ greater victim forgiveness (benevolence, avoidance, revenge). Victim rumination ↔ lesser victim forgiveness.
	St 4	Survey	Undergraduates	Relational partners (49% DP, 21% FP)	
McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal (1997)	St 2	Intervention	Undergraduates	Relational partners (32% DP, 21% FP)	Victim empathy intervention → greater victim empathy, forgiveness (compared with forgiveness-only intervention and wait-list control group).
Rusbult, Davis, Finkel, Hannon, & Olsen (2004)	Sts 1–2	Experiments	Undergraduates, Community sample	Dating partners (1), Marital partners (2)	Compared with later victim reactions, immediate reactions to transgressions are more angry, blameful, vengeful, destructive. Compared with later victim reactions, immediate reactions are less forgiving.
	Sts 3–4	Surveys	Undergraduates, Community sample	Dating partners (1), Marital partners (2)	Forgiveness rests on a transformation process.

TABLE 12.1. Empirical Research Regarding Reactions to Transgressions, the Forgiveness Process, and Relational Repair *(cont.)*

Reference	Method		Participants	Transgressors	Results
Relational repair					
Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia (2002)	St 1	Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	Benign victim attributions ↔ greater victim forgiveness ↔ greater marital quality. Attributions–forgiveness association stronger among women. Empathy–forgiveness association stronger among men.
Fincham, Beach, & Davila (2004)	St 1	Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	Male retaliation ↔ lesser resolution (report by women). Female benevolence ↔ greater resolution (report by men). Male avoidance ↔ lesser resolution (report by women).
	St 2	Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	
Gordon & Baucom (2003)	St 1	Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	Victim forgiveness ↔ greater marital adjustment, more positive beliefs about marriage.
Holeman (2003)	St 1	Qualitative study	Clinical sample	Marital partners	Relationship with God ↔ greater couple resolution, reconciliation.
Karremans & Van Lange (2004)	St 1	Experiment	Undergraduates	Not specified	Victim forgiveness → greater victim willingness to accommodate, willingness to sacrifice, cooperative behavior. Effects evident independent of commitment to relationship. Forgiveness restores (rather than enhances) pro-relationship motivation.
	St 2	Survey	Undergraduates	Relational partners (type not specified)	
	St 3	Experiment	Undergraduates	Not specified	
Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer (2003)	St 4	Survey	Community sample	Marital partners	Victim forgiveness ↔ greater victim life satisfaction, primarily in high-commitment relationships.

Note: For Method column, Survey = cross-sectional survey study, Longitudinal = longitudinal study. For Transgressors column, for Relational partners only, we indicate the proportion of transgressions that were committed by DP = dating partners, FP = friends, MP = marital partners, and RP = romantic partners. For Results column, → = causal impact demonstrated, ↔ = association demonstrated.

Reactions to Transgressions

In introducing our theoretical assumptions, we noted that transgressions entail victim harm and represent norm violations, and therefore instigate a rather potent constellation of victim and perpetrator cognition, affect, and behavior. Indeed, the empirical literature reveals that following transgressions, victims experience diverse negative emotions, including anxiety, hurt, sadness, anger, and hostility (Leary, Springer, Negel, Amsell, & Evans, 1998; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Rusbult, Davis, Finkel, Hannon, & Olsen, 2004; see reactions to transgressions in Table 12.1). Victims also develop negative patterns of cognition, including confusion regarding the event and its implications, tendencies to review transgression-relevant events obsessively, and inclinations toward blameful attributions (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Rusbult et al., 2004). Finally, victims adopt negative behavioral tendencies, including avoidance of the perpetrator, holding of a grudge or vengeance seeking, and demands for atonement or retribution (Kremer & Stephens, 1983; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Rusbult et al., 2004).

Victim reactions have been shown to be moderated by personal dispositions, properties of transgressions, and characteristics of the victim-perpetrator relationship. Reactions tend to be harsher, more hostile, and more vengeful among victims with low empathy, low tolerance of deviation, high self-restraint, and external locus of control (Feldman, Cauffman, Jensen, & Arnett, 2000; McCullough et al., 2003; Smolen & Spiegel, 1987). Reactions also vary as a function of the nature of transgressions: Victims experience greater anxiety, avoidance, hostility, and desire for vengeance in response to more severe transgressions, transgressions that imply relational devaluation, and transgressions that are perceived to be deliberate and controllable. Also, reactions tend to be stronger immediately following a transgression than at a later time (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; McCullough et al., 2003). Finally, victim reactions vary as a function of the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship—cognitive and behavioral reactions tend to be less negative in highly committed relationships (although committed victims' immediate emotional reactions tend to be *more* negative than their later emotional reactions; Finkel et al., 2002).

The empirical literature also reveals findings that are consistent with our assumptions regarding perpetrator behavior. Perpetrators experience guilt and remorse when they commit transgressions by behaving selfishly, neglecting their partners, or otherwise violating relational obligations (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996). Typically, feelings of guilt induce patterns of perpetrator affect, cognition, and behavior that are conducive to promoting victim forgiveness. For example, perpetrator guilt is associated with displays of sadness and remorse, thoughts centering on concern for the victim, and inclinations toward confession, apology, and amends.

However, victims and perpetrators do not always construe transgressions similarly. Research using narrative techniques has revealed that in comparison with perpetrators, victims experience greater distress; regard perpetrator behavior as more

arbitrary, incomprehensible, and gratuitous; attribute responsibility more to the perpetrator than to the self; describe the transgression as more severe; and report that the transgression exerted more damaging and enduring effects on the relationship (Baumeister et al., 1990; Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992; Kowalski, Walker, Wilkinson, Queen, & Sharpe, 2003; Leary et al., 1998; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Perpetrators experience greater guilt than victims but also tend to regard victims' reactions as somewhat excessive and out of line with the magnitude of the transgression (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kowalski et al., 2003). Such findings suggest that when posttransgression interaction reveals victim hostility, blame, and vengeance seeking that implies culpability beyond what the perpetrator perceives is appropriate (e.g., when victims fail to account for extenuating circumstances), perpetrators exhibit defensive maneuvers. Under such circumstances, perpetrators deflect blame, cognitively justify transgressions (to others and to themselves), and become reluctant to offer amends commensurate with what victims believe is owed. Thus, and consistent with our theoretical framework, transgressions are problematic interdependence dilemmas. On the basis of victims' and perpetrators' initial reactions, the road to forgiveness would appear to be a difficult one.

The Forgiveness Process

Forgiveness Rests on Prosocial Motives.   Our interdependence-based analysis suggests that forgiveness should be conceptualized as a psychological transformation of the transgression, such that the victim's powerful impulse toward vengeance is tempered, thereby clearing the way for forgiveness. We describe this process as a prosocial transformation whereby the victim takes broader considerations into account than the transgression per se (e.g., concern for the partner, prosocial norms or values). Consistent with this claim, a variety of prosocial dispositions have been shown to be associated with forgiveness. For example, victims are more forgiving to the extent that they attempt to "walk in their partners' shoes," exhibiting greater empathy and more pronounced tendencies toward perspective taking (Brown, 2003; Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; McCullough et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 1997; see forgiveness process in Table 12.1). Greater forgiveness is also evident among victims who score higher in agreeableness, are more tolerant of deviation, and exhibit greater insight and understanding (Brown, 2003; Feldman et al., 2000; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). In addition, victims tend to be *less* forgiving when they possess dispositions or values that *interfere* with compassionate orientation toward others—for example, to the extent that they score higher in depression, neuroticism, negative affectivity, and vengeance motivation (Brown, 2003; McCullough et al., 2001, 2003; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Thus, it would appear that prosocial transformation and forgiveness are promoted to the extent that victims (a) possess the ability and inclination to see the world through others' eyes (empathy, perspective taking), (b) possess dispositions or values that al-

low them to "make themselves open" to alternative points of view (agreeableness, tolerance, understanding), and (c) do *not* dedicate undue energy to their personal interests and concerns (do *not* exhibit undue entitlement, narcissism, neuroticism, negative affectivity, vengeance motivation).

Forgiveness Rests on Prosocial Cognition and Affect. Our interdependence-based analysis also outlines the means by which prosocial transformation takes place via changes in the victim's cognitive and emotional state. Specifically, we suggest that the victim thinks through the causes and implications of the transgression, develops a more benevolent and less blameful understanding of the event, and (concurrently) develops increased compassion and caring for the perpetrator. Consistent with this point of view, victim mental processes appear to play a central role in promoting (vs. impeding) forgiveness. Victims are less likely to forgive to the extent that they exhibit greater rumination and recall a greater number of prior transgressions, and are more likely to forgive to the extent that they develop more benign attributions regarding the causes of the perpetrator's actions (Brown, 2003; Fincham et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 2001, 2003). In addition, it appears that in highly committed relationships, victims experience stronger prosocial motivation, which yields more benign attributions and benevolent affect, and in turn promotes positive behavior and enhanced forgiveness (Finkel et al., 2002). Moreover—and not surprising—victims find it easier to develop benign interpretations and experience benevolent affect in response to transgressions that are less severe and that do not imply relational devaluation (Leary et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 2003; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002).

Forgiveness Takes Time. Our interdependence-based framework also suggests that the forgiveness process is not necessarily (or usually) immediate. Interestingly, whereas most (or all) theoretical analyses imply that forgiveness is a *process* that involves prosocial *change* in victim orientation, most empirical investigations of this process examine forgiveness at a single point in time (see chapter 7 by McCullough & Root). In a landmark paper, McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang (2003) presented a thought experiment to demonstrate why such single-assessment methods are inadequate to capture the forgiveness process. We are asked to imagine Alan and Bill, each of whose partners committed a transgression on Day 0. On a vengeance-seeking scale, Alan scores 4.0 in vengeance seeking on Day 0 and scores 3.1 on Day 35, whereas Bill scores 3.1 in vengeance seeking on Day 0 and scores 3.1 on Day 35. Who is more forgiving? Three conclusions are plausible: (a) Bill is more forgiving, because on Day 0 he is less vengeful than Alan (3.1 vs. 4.0), (b) the two are equally forgiving, because on Day 35 they exhibit equal vengeance seeking (3.1 vs. 3.1), or (c) Alan is more forgiving, because he exhibits a greater decline over time in vengeance seeking (4.0 to 3.1) than does Bill (3.1 to 3.1). McCullough and his colleagues (2003) propose that the third conclusion is correct and suggest that forgiveness should be measured in terms of change over time in prosocial motivation. Based on this analysis, forgiveness is argued to include two components: forbearance, which describes the degree to which a victim *initially*

exhibits forgiveness; and trend forgiveness, which describes the degree to which a victim becomes increasingly forgiving over time.[4] These authors also present empirical evidence demonstrating that both components account for unique variance in forgiveness and that the two components may sometimes be shaped by differing causes.

Despite the strengths of this analysis—and despite our rather wholehearted endorsement of this general approach—we propose that the McCullough et al. (2003) forbearance construct conflates two distinct processes that we term *restraint* and *forbearance*. From an interdependence perspective, restraint (one aspect of psychological transformation) transpires in the seconds immediately following a transgression and entails overriding gut-level impulses toward vengeance; whereas forbearance (a second aspect of transformation) transpires in the minutes and hours following a transgression, rests on relatively conscious and active meaning analysis (including both cognitive and affective events), and entails developing increased prosocial orientation (the latter roughly parallels the analysis of McCullough et al., 2003). The third process in our three-stage model is *extended forgiveness*, which roughly parallels trend forgiveness, except that this stage spans a period from several hours following a transgression to several days or months following a transgression.[5]

Why is it important to distinguish between restraint and forbearance? Our analysis suggests that victims' gut-level impulses tend to be hostile and vengeful. Thus, to understand fully how far a victim has progressed toward forgiveness, it is important to assess victims' immediate impulses (i.e., given preferences)—their cognition, affect, and behavioral impulses *immediately following* a transgression (i.e., within minutes or seconds; McCullough et al. [2003] assessed forgiveness several days or weeks following a transgression). From a theoretical point of view, gut-level, given impulses are the logical starting point for analysis, in that these behavioral preferences are a close approximation of the character of the interpersonal situation in which victim and perpetrator find themselves. Moreover, human mental processes can be very fast—close to instantaneous. Thus, some portion of the psychological tempering that transpires following a transgression will take place in the seconds and minutes following the victim's initial perception of a transgression. This is particularly true in ongoing relationships, in that partners with a history (and perhaps a future) with one another have adapted to one another over the course of prior interactions; they have developed assumptions and beliefs about one another; and they have shaped one another's dispositions, values, and behavioral tendencies. In short, they have developed habitual patterns of response (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Thus, to ascertain how far a victim has progressed toward forgiveness (i.e., to track the transformation process), we must tap into gut-level impulses; to tap into gut-level impulses, it is necessary to assess truly immediate reactions to transgressions.

Rusbult et al. (2004) presented two sets of studies to support their three-stage model of forgiveness. First, they conducted two studies (of dating and marital relations) to demonstrate that the forgiveness process begins within seconds (not days) following a transgression. Participants listened to a tape recording that presented hypothetical (yet common) transgressions (e.g., "your partner lies to you about some-

thing important"). For each transgression, they confronted a forced choice between a constructive (forgiving) reaction and a destructive (vengeful) reaction. Participants were given either 7 or 14 s to read and respond to the forced-choice options. In comparison with participants in the plentiful reaction time condition (14 s), those in the limited reaction time condition (7 s) were 50% more likely to select vengeful, retaliatory reactions. These findings support the claim that the forgiveness process (restraint, in particular) begins within seconds of experiencing a transgression.

In a second set of studies (of dating and marital relations), participants were asked to recall a prior transgression committed by their partners, to vividly bring that incident to mind, and to provide descriptions of their reactions at three points in time—the responses they considered enacting immediately following the transgression, the reactions they actually enacted immediately following the transgression, and the reactions they enacted at a later time. Consistent with our interdependence-based analysis, participants exhibit significant increases over time in forgiveness. It is important to note that different variables predict responses across the three stages:

1. Restraint is predicted by the severity of a transgression but not by empathy or commitment (in support of the claim that preferences at this stage are essentially "given" by the transgression situation).
2. Forbearance is predicted by restraint tendencies but not by severity or empathy (among married individuals, habit, as embodied in commitment level, is also a significant predictor).
3. Extended forgiveness is predicted by commitment level but not by severity or forbearance (among dating individuals, meaning analysis, as embodied in empathy, is also a significant predictor).

The slight differences in findings for dating versus marital relationships are attributable to strength of habit. Married individuals have stronger histories, or stronger commitment-driven tendencies; dating individuals lack such habit, so forgiveness is a more extended process that rests on empathy as well as commitment.

Forgiveness is Interpersonal.   As noted earlier, much of the existing work regarding forgiveness has been victim-centered, emphasizing the *intra*personal processes by which victims come to forgive perpetrators (Freedman, 1998; Kremer & Stephens, 1983). We suggest that whereas this approach may be entirely suitable in settings wherein victim and offender have neither a past nor a future with one another, it is a less suitable orientation for understanding forgiveness in ongoing relationships. We suggest that perpetrators, too, may play a role in promoting (or impeding) prosocial transformation and forgiveness. In this regard, we define *amends* as the perpetrator's inclination to accept responsibility for a transgression, offering sincere apology and genuine atonement.

Why should perpetrator amends promote forgiveness? First, amends may exert beneficial effects on victim cognition and emotion, thereby enhancing the probability

of prosocial victim transformation. For example, by discussing the incident in a concerned and apologetic manner, the perpetrator may help the victim develop feelings of empathy, thereby promoting a more positive emotional state, or may identify extenuating circumstances, thereby promoting less malevolent attributions regarding the perpetrator's motives (Fincham et al., 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). Second, amends may yield superior immediate outcomes for the victim, providing partial debt repayment and thereby "cooling" the interaction: When a perpetrator responds to the victim's righteous indignation with heartfelt apology rather than anger and defensiveness, the victim experiences superior immediate outcomes, which should inhibit the victim's tendency toward vengeance and hostility. Third, by admitting guilt and accepting personal responsibility, the perpetrator improves future interaction opportunities (i.e., helps to create "a better future") in that heartfelt amends acknowledges the existence of a debt that the perpetrator wishes to repay (making it easier for the victim to move toward renewed trust) and provides reassurance that the transgression will not recur (Baumeister et al., 1995). Thus, in the wake of perpetrator amends, the victim should find it less psychologically costly—less risky or humiliating—to offer the healing hand of forgiveness.

Unfortunately, few empirical studies have examined how perpetrator behavior affects the forgiveness process. Narrative studies of guilt experiences suggest that guilt-inducing incidents are more likely to involve close partners than strangers or acquaintances and that the experience of guilt frequently motivates acts of amends (apology, confession, behavior change; Baumeister et al., 1995). Experimental research suggests that perpetrator apology promotes victim forgiveness, at least in the context of stranger interactions (Gonzales et al., 1992; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991). Finally, studies of ongoing relationships—relationships in which partners have a past and a future with one another—have revealed the following:

1. Perpetrators are more likely to offer amends in relationships characterized by strong pretransgression trust and commitment (Hannon, 2001).
2. When victims perceive that perpetrators seek to "cancel" the negative consequences of their actions and communicate in a positive manner, forgiveness is more probable (Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998).
3. During conversations regarding transgression incidents, perpetrator amends promote increases over time in levels of victim forgiveness (Hannon, Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2004).

Relational Repair

There is no guarantee that perpetrator amends and victim forgiveness will necessarily yield reconciliation. Even in the event of complete forgiveness, one or both partners may find that they continue to monitor one another's actions carefully, interact in an unnatural manner, or find it difficult to recover pretransgression levels of trust.

Thus, to understand the aftermath of transgressions fully, it is important to examine not only forgiveness but also reconciliation, or the successful resumption of pretransgression relationship status. Earlier, we suggested that two key issues in reconciliation are commitment and trust (on the part of both partners): Were commitment and trust of sufficient strength prior to the transgression to provide a solid basis for reconciliation? and, Can commitment and trust be recovered following a transgression? We also proposed that reconciliation entails mutual investment whereby both partners exert significant, coordinated effort to achieve restored couple functioning (e.g., setting aside blame, offering repeated acts of amends, renegotiating couple norms). Reconciliation does not necessarily mean that a relationship does not change or that conditions revert fully to "the way it was before." Depending on the nature and severity of a transgression, a relationship may return to its pretransgression state or may move forward with new norms and expectations.

Relatively little research has been oriented toward studying the reconciliation process. The few studies that have examined posttransgression relational circumstances have revealed that later couple well-being (e.g., marital quality, dyadic adjustment) is promoted by the sorts of victim and perpetrator behaviors discussed earlier. On the victim's part, couple well-being is promoted by empathy, benign attributions regarding the transgression, "letting go" of hurt feelings, and forgiveness; on the perpetrator's part, couple well-being is promoted by apology, amends, and promises not to repeat the transgression (Fincham et al., 2002; Gordon & Baucom, 2003; see relational repair in Table 12.1). Research regarding relational repair has also demonstrated that male partners' retaliation is negatively associated with conflict resolution and that female partners' benevolence is positively associated with conflict resolution; that is, wives' forgiveness promotes conflict resolution, whereas their husbands' unforgiveness impairs conflict resolution (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004). Finally, it appears that forgiveness indeed helps couples move toward reconciliation, in that following forgiveness, victims recover their inclinations to engage in a wide range of prosocial relationship-maintenance behaviors, including accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, and other cooperative, prosocial acts (this work did not examine perpetrators' postforgiveness behavior; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Collectively, these findings suggest that in the wake of transgression, both partners' actions have important implications for future couple well-being.

Although transgressions tend to be very upsetting and potentially quite harmful, it is important to recognize that such incidents can also be highly diagnostic (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). In the aftermath of transgression, the manner in which partners comport themselves provides meaningful information that would not be evident during periods of "smooth sailing"—information about each person's dispositions, values, and motives, as well as their probable future behavior. For example, if perpetrators promise that the transgression will not recur, apologize for causing pain, and work to "repay their debt," victims have reason to believe that perpetrators value the relationship and are committed to relational norms. Similarly, if victims listen to the "other side of the story" and accept perpetrator apology, perpetrators gain important

information about how the victim responds to conflict. Conciliatory behavior of this sort may do much to reduce uncertainty, assuage anxiety, and increase intimacy; such behavior may also enhance the couple's ability to deal with stressful situations and may reduce the likelihood of further transgressions. Therefore, in the wake of serious transgressions, it is not surprising that in comparison with couples who have not yet achieved forgiveness, those who report forgiveness also report higher levels of marital adjustment (Gordon & Baucom, 2003). Moreover, it appears that reconciliation-relevant behaviors (e.g., victim forgiveness) are associated with later life satisfaction, particularly in the context of highly committed relationships (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003). Thus—and consistent with our interdependence theoretic analysis—it would appear that "reconciliation is worth it," particularly to the extent that "a relationship is worth it."

RELEVANCE FOR CLINICAL INTERVENTIONS

What are the implications of an interdependence-based analysis for clinical interventions? We are gratified that the implications of our analysis align well with existing interventions of demonstrated utility. To begin with, it should be clear that for transgressions committed in the context of ongoing relationships, interventions must be conjoint—interventions that are oriented toward just one partner are unlikely to be maximally effective. At present, the most prominent conjoint techniques are those involving both behavioral and cognitive interventions—for example, integrative behavior therapy, emotion-focused couple therapy, and insight-oriented couple therapy (Baucom & Epstein, 1990). Behavioral interventions should include skills training and exercises designed to increase rates of constructive interpersonal acts centering on victim restraint (e.g., controlling the impulse to lash out when hurt, reducing the frequency of hostile accusations), perpetrator amends (e.g., offering genuine apology, engaging in heartfelt amends), and couple reconciliation (e.g., sustained, coordinated investments toward the goal of restoring mutual trust). Such interventions might be augmented by constructive renegotiation of the norms that govern a relationship—how does each partner interpret "the rules," what constitutes reasonable "debt repayment" on the part of a perpetrator, and what are the consequences of future transgressions? For example, although one transgression of a specified type might eventually be forgivable, a second such transgression would not be.

Cognitive interventions should be oriented toward promoting the sorts of benevolent, partner-oriented mental events (cognitive and affective) upon which prosocial transformation rests. To begin with, interventions should address problematic beliefs or expectations. For example, the victim may believe that a transgression is indicative of a complete lack of respect on the part of the perpetrator, or the perpetrator may believe that a victim's impulse toward vengeance reflects excessive sensitivity or irrationality. Moreover, interventions should address the attributions partners form about one another's actions—for example, guiding victims away from stable, global, internal

attributions regarding the causes of transgressions and toward attributions that recognize extenuating factors and possible personal culpability. Indeed, interventions oriented toward enhancing empathy and perspective taking presumably are beneficial because they inhibit distress-maintaining attributions and promote relatively benevolent cognition and affect, thereby paving the way for prosocial transformation and forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997). Finally, cognitive interventions should address the core, prosocial motives upon which forgiveness, amends, and reconciliation rest. For example, couples could be encouraged to recognize and acknowledge the extent of their reliance on one another, thereby priming underlying commitment; couples could be encouraged to recall and acknowledge one another's prior acts of benevolence, thereby priming underlying trust.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIELD

Our interdependence-based analysis has numerous implications for the manner in which social scientists conceptualize and empirically examine forgiveness. We limit our comments to two implications that we believe are particularly important. First, we believe it is critical to conceptualize forgiveness as a process that rests on a fundamental, psychological transformation of the transgression situation. As such, we can learn much about forgiveness by attending to the micro-level mental events that transpire following transgressions. For example, precisely how do victims manage to restrain their gut-level impulses toward vengeance, what sorts of dispositional and situational factors influence the exercise of restraint, and precisely how does the exercise of restraint affect perpetrators? What cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendencies—on the part of both victim and perpetrator—most effectively and reliably promote forgiveness, and do key tendencies operate similarly in promoting both short-term and long-term benevolence (i.e., do parallel factors promote both forbearance and extended forgiveness)? At present, very few theoretical, methodological, or statistical models incorporate such features.

Second, and importantly, we return to the assertion advanced at the beginning of this chapter. We believe that although the traditional, victim-focused approach may be informative as a means of characterizing forgiveness in fundamentally ahistoric settings (following transgressions committed by strangers, e.g., hit-and-run drivers), such an approach is quite limited as a means of understanding forgiveness in ongoing relationships. Given that many consequential transgressions are committed by those who are closest to us, we have argued that scientists should adopt an inherently interpersonal approach to understanding forgiveness—an approach that examines the critical roles played by both victim *and* perpetrator. Thus, we call for further theoretical and empirical work regarding the relatively understudied, inherently interpersonal aspects of forgiveness, particularly the roles of perpetrator behavior in promoting forgiveness and of both victim and perpetrator in bringing about reconciliation and relational repair.
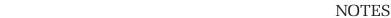
CONCLUSIONS

Our goals in this chapter were twofold. First, we sought to underscore the impediments to forgiveness—thereby illuminating the psychological challenges of this process—by highlighting the fundamental human tendency of victims to react to norm violations with righteous indignation and vengeful impulses (as well as the fundamental human tendency of perpetrators to defend and justify their actions). We argued that the concept of psychological transformation provides a good means of characterizing the process by which individuals find their way to genuine forgiveness (as well as to heartfelt amends). We also suggested that a more carefully articulated model of this process may be warranted. We proposed a three-stage model of forgiveness, including restraint, forbearance, and extended forgiveness. Second—and hand in hand with our first goal—we sought to promote an essentially interpersonal characterization of forgiveness in the context of ongoing relationships, emphasizing the critical roles played by both victim and perpetrator in promoting (vs. impeding) forgiveness and relational repair. We believe that interdependence theory provides a very useful set of concepts and principles for understanding these phenomena—a set of concepts that not only illuminate our scientific understanding of these phenomena but also suggest why certain types of clinical interventions are most likely to be effective.

NOTES

1. Of course, the transformation process may also become relatively automatic. Over the course of extended involvement, partners may develop habitual tendencies toward specific types of transformation, such that psychological transformation comes about with little or no mediation by mental events (e.g., strong commitment or high trust may automatically instigate prosocial transformation).

2. Importantly, renegotiation may help reintroduce the sense of predictability and controllability that was shattered by the transgression, promoting restored commitment and trust.

3. In light of the fact that the forgiveness literature is growing dramatically, this review should be regarded as selective rather than comprehensive.

4. These authors also describe a third component, termed *temporary forgiveness*. We will not discuss this component because it is irrelevant to the concerns of this chapter.

5. Moreover, in discussing both forbearance and extended forgiveness, we highlight the fact that critical interpersonal events may transpire during the latter two stages—interpersonal events that may play a crucial role in shaping the forgiveness process, including perpetrator confession, apology, or amends. We return to this point later.

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