The Doormat Effect:
When Forgiving Erodes Self-Respect and Self-Concept Clarity

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We build on principles from interdependence theory and evolutionary psychology to propose that forgiving bolsters one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator but that forgiving diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has not. Study 1 employed a longitudinal design to demonstrate that the association of marital forgiveness with trajectories of self-respect over the first 5 years of marriage depends on the spouse's dispositional tendency to indicate that the partner will be safe and valued (i.e., agreeableness). Studies 2 and 3 employed experimental procedures to demonstrate that the effects of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depend on the perpetrator's event-specific indication that the victim will be safe and valued (i.e., amends). Study 4 employed a longitudinal design to demonstrate that the association of forgiveness with subsequent self-respect and self-concept clarity similarly depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has made amends. These studies reveal that, under some circumstances, forgiveness negatively impacts the self.

Keywords: betrayal, forgiveness, amends, self-respect, self-concept clarity

Evolution favors the organisms that can be vengeful when it's necessary, that can forgive when it's necessary, and that have the wisdom to know the difference. (McCullough, 2008, p. 87)

As indicated by this quotation, McCullough (2008) recently argued that humans have evolved to realize the wisdom of forgiving under some circumstances but not forgiving under others. He contended that individuals who forgive all the time—especially when forgiving runs counter to their "forgiveness instinct"—will "quickly become everybody's doormat" (p. 87). The crux of being a doormat is the feeling that one has not adhered to one's principles and has not stood up for oneself, and such feelings are likely to co-occur with diminished certainty about oneself (see Steele, 1988). As such, forgiving when doing so opposes one's forgiveness instinct may erode one's *self-respect* (i.e., the extent to which one perceives the self as a principled person worthy of honor and high regard; Kumashiro, Finkel, & Rusbult, 2002) and *self-concept clarity* (i.e., the extent to which one has clearly defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable self-beliefs; Campbell et al., 1996).

The view that forgiving can cause one to feel like a human doormat has a long tradition in Western thought and in psychological theorizing. For example, Nietzsche (1887/1996) argued that forgiving an unpaid betrayal reflects personal weakness. Similarly, forgiveness researchers have theorized that hasty and uncritical forgiveness (a) violates respect for the moral order and for oneself (Murphy, 2005; Murphy & Hampton, 1988), (b) indicates an inability to assert one's right to a just resolution (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991), and (c) may lead to regret that one did not stand up for one's rights (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998). Even authors of pop psychology books advise readers to withhold forgiveness at times, lest they become a doormat (e.g., Namka, 2000; Safer, 2000). Because failing to stand up for oneself is likely to decrease one's respect for oneself and one's sense of certainty about oneself and one's values, forgiving can sometimes diminish one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. To date, however, these ideas have existed

only at the level of theory; supporting empirical evidence has been lacking.

We designed the present work to fill this gap. Specifically, we tested the hypothesis that the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator, such that forgiving (a) bolsters one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator acts in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued but (b) diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator does not.

Consequences and Correlates of Forgiveness

The proposition that forgiving sometimes diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity contrasts with the numerous positive consequences of forgiveness outlined in previous research. In fact, the extant forgiveness literature may give the impression that forgiveness is a panacea for one's mental and physical health and one's relationships (e.g., Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hall & Fincham, 2006; Lawler et al., 2003; McCullough, Orsulak, Brandon, & Akers, 2007; Orcutt, 2006; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005; Reed & Enright, 2006; Tsang, McCullough, & Fincham, 2006). For instance, in a daily diary study, increased levels of forgiveness on one day predicted greater satisfaction with life and positive affect the next day (Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008). Participants in an experiment who visualized themselves granting forgiveness experienced less reactivity in skin conductance, heart rate, and blood pressure than did those who imagined nursing a grudge (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). In a longitudinal study, wives' forgiveness predicted husbands' reports of better conflict resolution 12 months later, controlling for initial levels of conflict resolution (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007).

In contrast to the well-documented positive side of forgiveness, the potential negative side of forgiveness has received little attention (Fincham, 2009; Kearns & Fincham, 2004). In fact, we are aware of only one piece of empirical evidence showing that forgiveness ever has negative consequences. McNulty (2008) demonstrated that although individuals whose spouses rarely behaved negatively experienced more stable marital satisfaction over the first 2 years of marriage to the extent that they were more forgiving, individuals whose spouses frequently behaved negatively experienced sharper declines in marital satisfaction to the extent that they were more forgiving. This study showed that (a) under some circumstances forgiveness yields negative consequences for the forgiver and (b) whether forgiving yields positive or negative consequences depends on the perpetrator's behavior. The next section reviews our theoretical rationale for why the effect of forgiving on self-respect and self-concept clarity may similarly depend on the extent to which the perpetrator acts in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator.

Applying Interdependence Theory and Evolutionary Psychology to Betrayals and Their Aftermath

Victims of interpersonal betrayals often feel devalued (Scobie & Scobie, 1998) and uncertain about themselves (Eaton, Struthers, & Santelli, 2006). To understand the conditions under which forgiv-

ing either restores or further erodes self-respect and self-concept clarity, one must understand the factors involved in the decision to forgive. Interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991) provides a framework for understanding this decision (see Finkel & Rusbult, 2008). Following a betrayal, victims often experience sadness and anger (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989), which may lead them to either avoid their perpetrators or seek revenge (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Leary, Springer, Negal, Ansell, & Evans, 1998; McCullough et al., 1998). Thus, although being forgiven is typically beneficial for perpetrators and the relationship between victims and perpetrators, forgiving is frequently antithetical to victims' gut-level behavioral preferences, leading victims to experience conflicting behavioral preferences. In interdependence theory terminology, such immediate, self-oriented inclinations are termed *given preferences*. But given preferences do not necessarily guide behavior; *effective preferences* guide behavior. And effective preferences may diverge from given preferences due to *transformation of motivation*—the process through which individuals transform their given preferences by considering their long-term relationship goals, personal values, and concerns for the other person's well-being. Accordingly, through prorelationship transformation of motivation, victims may depart from their given preference of not forgiving and, instead, act on their effective preference by forgiving.

As the foregoing interdependence analysis demonstrates, betrayals create social dilemmas in which victims face conflicting behavioral inclinations. How might these dilemmas be resolved? That is, will victims act on their gut-level given preferences and not forgive, or will they act on their transformed effective preferences and forgive? Moreover, what are the consequences of victims' responses on their self-respect and self-concept clarity? Evolutionary psychologists assert that most decision-making mechanisms used to resolve social dilemmas include flexible "if–then" rules, which lead people to respond conditionally on the basis of aspects of the situation (e.g., Buss, 2004; Krebs, 2008). Forgiveness appears to be a conditional adaptation that has preserved valuable relationships and thereby promoted survival in human history (McCullough, 2008). McCullough (2008) explained that forgiveness is adaptive when victims believe that (a) a continued relationship with their perpetrators may be valuable in the future and (b) their perpetrators are unlikely to harm them again. Thus, the forgiveness instinct to which McCullough referred should incline victims to forgive conditionally, on the basis of the following if–then rule: If perpetrators signal that a continued relationship will be safe and valuable for their victims, then forgive; if perpetrators do not signal that a continued relationship will be safe and valuable for their victims, then do not forgive. Because those who forgive when doing so opposes their forgiveness instinct "quickly become everybody's doormat" (McCullough, 2008; p. 87), to the extent that individuals adhere to this if–then rule, they should experience high self-respect and self-concept clarity, but to the extent that they do not adhere to this rule, they should experience low self-respect and self-concept clarity.

How might victims decide whether they will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with their perpetrators? At a dispositional level, one way perpetrators can signal that victims will be safe and valued in a continued relationship is by being high in agreeableness. Indeed, people high in agreeableness act in a proso-

cial, constructive manner during interpersonal conflicts (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001) and are likely to seek forgiveness (Chiaramello, Sastre, & Mullet, 2008)—that is, to accept responsibility for and make reparation after committing a betrayal (Sandage, Worthington, Hight, & Berry, 2000). At the event-specific level, a related way perpetrators can signal that these conditions will be met is by making amends (McCullough, 2008), which may include accepting responsibility, offering sincere apology, and making genuine atonement (Hannon, Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, in press). Indeed, research examining lay views of forgiveness indicates that perpetrators' remorse, apology, and admission of wrongdoing, as well as victims' acceptance of perpetrators' apology are central features of the forgiveness process (Friesen & Fletcher, 2007; Kearns & Fincham, 2004). When asked to list reasons for offering forgiveness to an offender, one out of five respondents spontaneously cited perpetrator remorse or apology. When asked to list reasons for withholding forgiveness from an offender, one out of four respondents spontaneously cited lack of perpetrator remorse and apology (Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004). It follows, then, that victims who maintain relationships with agreeable perpetrators or perpetrators who make amends for their betrayals are more likely to be safe and valued in those relationships than are victims who maintain relationships with disagreeable perpetrators or perpetrators who do not make amends.

Hypotheses and Research Overview

On the basis of this review, our primary hypothesis is that the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator. This primary hypothesis, which takes the form of an interaction effect, can be divided into two subhypotheses, which take the form of simple effects in opposite directions.

First, when the perpetrator tends to act in an agreeable manner or has made amends, the victim may perceive the perpetrator as unlikely to repeat the offense and the relationship with the perpetrator as valuable; we propose that forgiving bolsters one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued. This subhypothesis, which we label *the bolstering effect,* aligns with the vast literature demonstrating the positive consequences and correlates of forgiveness.

Second, when the perpetrator tends to act in a disagreeable manner or has not made amends, the victim may perceive the perpetrator as likely to repeat the offense and the relationship with the perpetrator as costly; we propose that forgiving diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has not acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued. This subhypothesis, which we label *the doormat effect*, represents the most novel feature of the present work insofar as it identifies circumstances under which forgiveness negatively impacts the self.

We conducted four studies to test these hypotheses. Study 1 was a 5-year longitudinal study of recently married couples in which participants completed measures of (a) forgiveness and agreeableness at Time 1 and (b) self-respect at 6-month intervals throughout the study. This study provided a preliminary test of our ideas by using available data to examine whether the association between forgiveness and trajectories of self-respect over time depends on partners' agreeableness. We extended Study 1 by examining in Studies 2–4 whether the effect of forgiveness on both self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator made amends. Study 2 was an experiment in which participants' perceptions of their own forgiveness and a close relationship partner's amends for an actual betrayal were manipulated, and Study 3 was an experiment in which participants read a scenario that described a partner's betrayal, and then forgiveness and amends were manipulated. In both of these experiments, we tested whether the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator made amends. Study 4 was a 6-month longitudinal study in which participants in dating relationships reported partner betrayals, including the extent to which they forgave and the extent to which their partner made amends. This study extended Studies 2 and 3 by examining whether the association of forgiveness with self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the level of amends made for naturally occurring betrayals. Finally, because garnering statistically significant simple effects in opposite directions in every study is a tall order, we evaluated the big picture by reporting meta-analyses of the bolstering and doormat subhypotheses to determine whether these effects were statistically significant across Studies 2–4.

Study 1

Study 1 was a longitudinal study of newlywed couples. Both agreeableness and partners' tendency to forgive their spouse were assessed at the first wave. Over the first 5 years of marriage, participants reported their level of self-respect approximately every six to eight months. These assessments allowed us to examine whether the association between marital forgiveness and the trajectory of self-respect over time depends on the spouse's tendency to act in a prosocial manner, such that forgiveness predicts increasing levels of self-respect over time for those whose partner is agreeable but decreasing levels of self-respect over time for those whose partner is not.

Method

Participants. The 72 heterosexual couples ($N = 144$) examined in Study 1 were involved in a larger study of marital development. All participants were first-time married couples assessed within 6 months after their wedding ($M = 3.2$ months, $SD = 1.6$). Participants were recruited from a north-central Ohio community through two methods. The first method was to place advertisements in community newspapers and bridal shops, offering up to $410 to couples willing to participate in the study. The second method was to review the applications of couples who had applied for marriage licenses in several nearby counties where marriage licenses are available to the public and contain data on spouses' ages, whether this is their first marriage, and the date of the wedding. Couples who were eligible for the study on the basis of these criteria were sent letters offering them up to $410 to participate in the study. Those responding to either method of solicitation were screened in a telephone interview to determine eligibility

according to the following criteria: (a) this was the first marriage for each partner, (b) the couple had been married less than 6 months, (c) each partner was at least 18 years of age, (d) each partner spoke English and had completed at least 10 years of education (to ensure comprehension of the questionnaires), and (e) the couple had no immediate plans to move away from the area.

On average, husbands were 24.9 years old ($SD = 4.4$) and had completed 14.2 years of education ($SD = 2.5$). Seventy-four percent were employed full time, and 11% were full-time students. The median income group membership reported by husbands was $15,001 to $20,000 per year. Among husbands, 93% were Caucasian, 4% African American, and 3% other. On average, wives were 23.5 years old ($SD = 3.8$) and had completed 14.7 years of education ($SD = 2.2$). Forty-nine percent were employed full time, and 26% were full-time students. The median income group membership reported by wives was $10,001 to $15,000 per year. Among wives, 96% were Caucasian and 4% African American.

Measures.

Marital forgiveness. We developed a measure of marital forgiveness modeled after a validated measure of more general forgiveness: the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001). At the first wave, spouses read a series of five vignettes, each of which asked them to imagine themselves in a situation that described their spouse transgressing against them (snapping at and insulting the self, failing to mail some important papers for the self, making a mess of the house, being careless with money, and lying about inappropriate behaviors with someone of the other sex). After imagining themselves in each situation, they reported whether they would "feel forgiveness" and whether they would "express forgiveness" on a scale ranging from 1 (*definitely no*) to 7 (*definitely yes*). Spouses' responses to these 10 items were summed to create one scale that could range between 10 (indicating they would definitely not feel or express forgiveness for any of the betrayals) and 70 (indicating they would definitely feel and express forgiveness for all of the betrayals). The measure demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$).

Partner agreeableness. Also at the first wave, spouses completed the Agreeableness subscale of the Big Five Personality Inventory (Goldberg, 1999). This instrument consists of 10 statements with which participants reported their extent of agreement on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating a greater degree of agreeableness (e.g., "I take time out for others," "I feel little concern for others" [reversed]). Internal consistency was adequate ($\alpha = .80$).

Self-respect. Self-respect was assessed at each wave of data collection using one item from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965): "I wish I could have more respect for myself," which was rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Responses to this item were reversed-scored; thus, higher scores indicate less desire to have more respect for oneself than one currently has and, therefore, reflect greater levels of self-respect.[1]

Self-esteem. Given that the self-respect measure was drawn from a measure designed to assess self-esteem, and given our interest in predicting self-respect independent of self-esteem, we used the remaining nine items of the RSES at each wave of data collection to control for self-esteem in auxiliary analyses (see Kumashiro et al., 2002). As was the case with the self-respect item

described above, participants responded to these items on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Internal consistency of these nine items was strong ($\alpha = .86$).

Procedure. Spouses were mailed a packet of questionnaires to complete at home and bring with them to a scheduled appointment. This packet included a consent form; self-report measures of forgiveness, agreeableness, self-respect, and self-esteem; and a letter instructing couples to complete all questionnaires independently of one another. Couples were paid $60 for participating in this phase of the study.

At 6- to 8-month intervals subsequent to the initial assessment, couples were recontacted by phone and mailed the same questionnaires that assessed self-respect and self-esteem at the first wave, along with postage-paid return envelopes and a letter of instruction reminding couples to complete forms independently of one another. After completing each phase, couples were mailed a check for $50 for participating. This procedure was used at every 6- to 8-month interval with two exceptions: (a) self-respect and self-esteem were not assessed at Wave 4 and (b) no data collection occurred at Wave 5 (i.e., participants did not provide any data in the year between Wave 4 and Wave 6). Thus, the current investigation is based on nine waves but on only seven assessments of self-respect across approximately the first five years of marriage.

Analysis strategy. We conducted growth curve analyses (cf. Singer & Willett, 2003) to assess the associations of forgiveness and partner agreeableness with linear self-respect trajectories over time. These linear trajectories consisted of (a) an intercept term, defined as the model-implied self-respect score at the first wave, and (b) a slope term, defined as the model-implied linear change in self-respect over time, with each unit of time corresponding to a 6-month interval. We simultaneously entered forgiveness, partner agreeableness, time, and their interaction terms to predict the trajectory of self-respect. The specific growth-curve model was

$$SResp_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Forg_i) + \beta_2(Agree_j) + \beta_3(Time_t)$$
$$+ \beta_4(Forg_i \times Agree_j) + \beta_5(Forg_i \times Time_t)$$
$$+ \beta_6(Agree_j \times Time_t) + \beta_7(Forg_i \times Agree_j \times Time_t) + r_{it},$$

where $SResp_{it}$ is the self-respect score for individual i at time t, $Forg_i$ is the marital forgiveness score for individual i, $Agree_j$ is the agreeableness score for spouse j, $Time_t$ is the wave of assessment (time was scored as 0 for the first wave, 1 for the second, . . ., and 8 for the final [ninth] wave), and r_{it} is a residual component in the self-respect score for individual i at time t. For the primary analyses, all variables except time were standardized around their grand mean ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$). To calculate standardized regression coefficients, we ran a second set of analyses in which time was also standardized. In all analyses, we allowed intercept terms to

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[1] Notably, this item is slightly different from the items used to assess self-respect in the following studies. In a separate study, 138 Northwestern University undergraduates completed the RSES and the self-respect item used in Study 2. The self-respect item extracted from the RSES in Study 1 (reverse-scored) was strongly correlated with the self-respect item used in Study 2, $r(137) = .58$, $p < .001$. This correlation is quite high, especially given that it involves one-item measures. Thus, the self-respect item we extracted from the RSES in Study 1 does not seem to measure something different from the self-respect measures used in Studies 2–4.

vary randomly within partner across time (at Level 2) and within couple across partners (at Level 3), and we allowed slopes to vary randomly at Level 2 as long as the model converged and the slope demonstrated significant random variability.

Results

Levels of self-respect at study entry. Although our primary goal in Study 1 was to examine the associations of forgiveness and partner agreeableness with changes in self-respect over time, we also explored whether forgiveness, partner agreeableness, or their interaction predicted participants' level of self-respect at study entry. To the extent that agreeable spouses tend to act in a prosocial manner indicating that their partner is safe and valued in the relationship, and to the extent that newlywed couples have experienced enough betrayals for forgiveness of these betrayals to have a lasting effect on victims' self-respect, participants' marital forgiveness and their spouses' agreeableness may interact to predict participants' self-respect at study entry. Specifically, greater forgiveness may be associated with higher self-respect at study entry for participants whose spouse is high in agreeableness but with lower self-respect at study entry for participants whose spouse is low in agreeableness. If, on the other hand, newlywed couples have not experienced enough betrayals for forgiveness of these betrayals to have a lasting effect on victims' self-respect, then participants' marital forgiveness and their spouses' agreeableness may not interact to predict this pattern of self-respect at study entry. When predicting self-respect at study entry using the statistical model reported in the equation in the previous section, only the main effects of forgiveness and partner agreeableness were significant ($\beta = .16$), $t(297) = 2.49$, $p = .01$, and ($\beta = .13$), $t(297) = 2.94$, $p = .05$, respectively. Thus, at study entry, a greater tendency to forgive one's spouse and having a more agreeable spouse predicted higher self-respect. However, marital forgiveness and spouse agreeableness did not interact to predict self-respect at study entry ($\beta = .06$), $t(297) = 0.98$, $p = .33$. (There were no significant main or interaction effects of gender in any study, so these and all subsequent analyses collapse across gender.)

Trajectory of self-respect over time. To test our hypotheses, we simultaneously entered forgiveness, partner agreeableness, time, and their interaction terms to predict the trajectory of self-respect, controlling for the effects on the intercept reported in the previous section. The three-way interaction between forgiveness, partner agreeableness, and time was significant ($\beta = .09$), $t(297) = 2.65$, $p = .009$. Therefore, we examined the trajectories of self-respect separately for participants who reported low (1 *SD* below the mean) and high (1 *SD* above the mean) levels of marital forgiveness using simple effects tests (Aiken & West, 1991). For low forgiveness individuals, the simple two-way interaction between time and agreeableness was not significant ($\beta = -.05$), $t(296) = -0.88$, $p = .38$. For high forgiveness individuals, the simple two-way interaction between time and agreeableness was significant ($\beta = .12$), $t(297) = 2.95$, $p = .004$, indicating that the trajectory of self-respect depended on partner agreeableness for high forgiveness individuals. Simple slopes tests revealed that high forgiveness individuals whose spouse was high in agreeableness (1 *SD* above the mean) experienced near-significant increases in self-respect over time ($\beta = .12$), $t(68) = 1.84$, $p = .07$ (see the

dashed line in Figure 1). In contrast, high forgiveness individuals whose spouse was low in agreeableness (1 *SD* below the mean) experienced significant decreases in self-respect over time ($\beta = -.13$), $t(68) = -2.03$, $p = .05$ (see the solid line in Figure 1).[2]

Discussion

In Study 1, we examined the associations of marital forgiveness and spouse agreeableness with trajectories of self-respect over the first 5 years of marriage. Our primary hypothesis received strong support: For participants who tend to forgive their spouse, the trajectory of self-respect over time depended on the spouse's level of agreeableness. The bolstering effect subhypothesis was supported in that, for high forgiveness individuals whose spouse was high in agreeableness, there was a near-significant trend such that greater forgiveness predicted bolstered self-respect over time. The doormat effect subhypothesis was fully supported in that, for high forgiveness individuals whose spouse was low in agreeableness, greater forgiveness predicted significantly diminished self-respect over time.

Despite its strength in demonstrating the longitudinal changes in self-respect among a sample of recently married adults, Study 1 has important limitations. First, although Study 1's longitudinal design suggests that victim forgiveness and partner behavior caused the observed changes in self-respect over time, it remains important to garner experimental evidence demonstrating these causal effects. Second, Study 1 included a measure of only one of the two dependent variables of interest. Third, although Study 1 shows that the association of the tendency to forgive one's spouse with changes in self-respect over time depends on one's spouse's agreeableness, it did not examine whether a perpetrator's amends moderate this association in the same manner as partner agreeableness does. We designed Study 2 to address these limitations.

Study 2

In Study 2, we presented participants with false feedback regarding (a) the extent to which the participant forgave a real-life

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[2] Given that the self-respect item was embedded in a self-esteem scale, we conducted auxiliary analyses in which we predicted the one-item measure of self-respect while controlling for the mean of the remaining nine items of the RSES. The three-way interaction effect between forgiveness, partner agreeableness, and time remained significant ($\beta = .09$), $t(297) = 2.67$, $p = .008$. Paralleling the primary analyses, for low forgiveness individuals, the simple two-way interaction between time and agreeableness was not significant ($\beta = -.06$), $t(296) = -1.04$, $p = .30$, but for high forgiveness individuals, the simple two-way interaction was significant ($\beta = .12$), $t(297) = 2.78$, $p = .006$. Although the predicted means were in the expected direction, high forgiveness individuals whose spouse was high in agreeableness did not experience significant increases in self-respect over time ($\beta = .10$), $t(68) = 1.48$, $p = .14$. In contrast, high forgiveness individuals whose spouse was low in agreeableness experienced significant decreases in self-respect over time ($\beta = -.14$), $t(68) = -2.19$, $p = .03$.

We conducted another set of auxiliary analyses in which we replicated the primary analyses, but predicting self-esteem (as assessed with the remaining nine items of the RSES) rather than self-respect. The three-way interaction effect between forgiveness, partner agreeableness, and time was not significant ($\beta = -.004$), $t(297) = -0.10$, $p = .92$, indicating that spouse agreeableness did not moderate the association between marital forgiveness and trajectories of self-esteem.
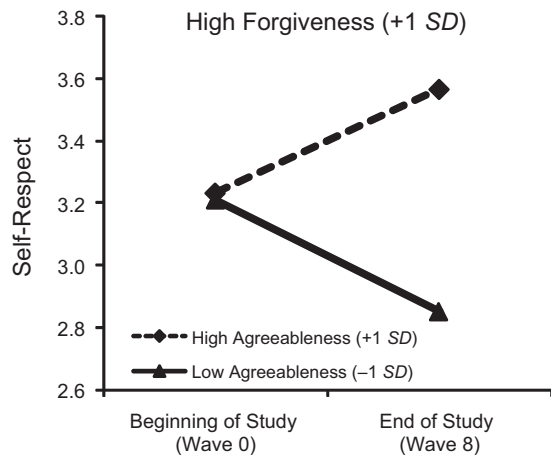
Figure 1. Study 1: Predicting the trajectory of self-respect from partner agreeableness for high forgiveness individuals.

perpetrator for a betrayal they had actually experienced and (b) the extent to which the perpetrator made amends for this betrayal. By manipulating participants' perceptions of forgiveness and amends, we were able to test whether the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator, such that forgiveness bolsters self-respect and self-concept clarity when the perpetrator has made strong amends but diminishes self-respect and self-concept clarity when the perpetrator has made only weak amends.

Method

Participants. Forty-nine Northwestern University undergraduates (27 women) participated in Study 2. Five participants' data were excluded due to suspicion (see Suspicion Check and Descriptive Analyses subsection of the Results section). The remaining 44 participants (24 women) were 19.7 years of age on average ($SD =$ 1.8), and 61% were Caucasian, 5% African American, 23% Asian American, 5% Hispanic, and 7% other. Participants received partial fulfillment of a course requirement in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. Participants received instructions via computers in individual cubicles. Participants were asked to recall an incident in which a close other did something that hurt, angered, or upset them. They were instructed to select a recent, relatively severe, and unresolved incident. After describing the incident, participants were asked to type in the first name of the perpetrator, indicate their relationship to the perpetrator, and report how long ago the incident occurred. Then participants answered questions concerning the extent to which the perpetrator made amends for the betrayal (e.g., "<Perpetrator> made amends for his/her behavior") on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). (<*Perpetrator*> indicates that the perpetrator's first name, which the participant had previously typed in, was inserted.)

Manipulation of forgiveness. After answering these questions, participants read about the "forgiveness test," which they were told would assess the extent to which they had forgiven the

perpetrator. In reality, the forgiveness test was used only to provide participants with false feedback regarding the extent to which they had forgiven the perpetrator. We adapted this forgiveness manipulation from Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, and Kluwer (2003). The forgiveness test instructions indicated that past research has shown that people have difficulty indicating the extent to which they have forgiven a perpetrator but that the forgiveness test is a reliable and valid test that assesses the degree to which a person has done so.

The forgiveness test was a version of the implicit association test developed by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998), which is designed to assess people's implicit associations between target categories (e.g., *black* and *white*, *pleasant* and *unpleasant*) by comparing their reaction times in blocks of trials. The target categories in the forgiveness test were (a) the perpetrator's first name and filler first names and (b) words with positive valence (e.g., *love, acceptance*) and words with negative valence (e.g., *hate, rejection*). For each block of trials, participants were instructed to identify each word that appeared on the computer screen by pressing keys corresponding to the categories presented at the top of the screen. Participants first completed practice trials for each pair of categories. Then they completed two blocks in which their task was to identify words from both pairs of categories at the same time. In one of these blocks, they were instructed to respond with the same key to positive words and the perpetrator's name. In the other, they were instructed to respond with the same key to negative words and the perpetrator's name.

After completing this task, participants read about the rationale of the forgiveness test, which was that when a person has largely forgiven a perpetrator associations between positive words and the name of the perpetrator are stronger than are associations between negative words and the name of the perpetrator. But when a person has not completely forgiven the perpetrator associations between negative words and the name of the perpetrator are stronger. Then it was explained that these associations can be measured through reaction times.

After reading about the forgiveness test, participants were randomly assigned to one of two forgiveness feedback conditions, supposedly on the basis of their reaction times in the forgiveness test. Participants in the high forgiveness condition were told they responded faster during the task in which they were asked to respond with the same key to positive words and the name of the perpetrator than in the task in which they were asked to respond with the same key to negative words and the name of the perpetrator. They went on to read, "As your reaction times reveal, the associations between the other person and positive words are stronger. On the basis of these results, it seems that you have largely forgiven <Perpetrator>." Participants in the low forgiveness condition were told they responded faster during the task in which they were asked to respond with the same key to negative words and the name of the perpetrator than in the task in which they were asked to respond with the same key to positive words and the name of the perpetrator. They went on to read, "As your reaction times reveal, the associations between the other person and negative words are stronger. On the basis of these results, it seems that you have not completely forgiven <Perpetrator>."

Manipulation of amends. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of two amends feedback conditions, supposedly on the basis of their responses to the questions concerning their

perpetrator's amends they had completed earlier in the experiment. All participants were told that the computer had compared their responses to the questions they answered at the beginning of the study with the responses of others who had previously participated in the study. Participants in the weak amends condition were told that, in comparison with others who previously participated in the study, their responses indicated that the extent to which their perpetrator had made amends was in the 17th percentile. Then they read, "This means that 17% of other perpetrators made less amends than <Perpetrator>, and 83% of other perpetrators made more amends than <Perpetrator>. According to these results, <Perpetrator> has made only weak amends." Participants in the strong amends condition were told that, in comparison with others who previously participated in the study, their responses indicated that the extent to which their perpetrator had made amends was in the 83rd percentile. Then they read, "This means that 83% of other perpetrators made less amends than <Perpetrator>, and 17% of other perpetrators made more amends than <Perpetrator>. According to these results, <Perpetrator> has made strong amends."

Assessment of self-respect and self-concept clarity. Following these manipulations, participants completed single-item measures of self-respect and self-concept clarity ("I have a lot of respect for myself" and "I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am," respectively). Both items were assessed on scales ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 9 (*agree strongly*).

Manipulation and suspicion checks. Finally, participants completed manipulation checks and were probed for suspicion regarding the forgiveness and amends feedback they received. First, participants were asked whether the forgiveness test had indicated that they had forgiven, that they had not forgiven, or that the test was inconclusive. They were also asked to report the extent to which they felt they had forgiven the perpetrator on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all forgiven*) to 9 (*completely forgiven*). Second, participants were asked to recall the degree to which their perpetrator had made amends compared with other perpetrators by reporting the percentile the computer had calculated. They were also asked to report the extent to which they felt the perpetrator had made amends on a scale from 1 (*very weak amends*) to 9 (*very strong amends*). To probe for suspicion, we asked participants what hypothesis they thought the study was trying to test and how they thought it was tested. Finally, participants were carefully debriefed to ensure they understood that the feedback they received about their own forgiveness and perpetrator amends was determined by random assignment and was unrelated to their reaction times and responses.

Results

Suspicion check and descriptive analyses. Five participants indicated that they thought the forgiveness and/or amends feedback may have been predetermined. These participants' data were excluded from further analysis, leaving a sample of 44 participants (although all hypothesis tests yielded identical conclusions in auxiliary analyses including these five participants' data). Participants reported betrayals committed by friends (50%), romantic partners (21%), family members (25%), and others (5%). The betrayals occurred an average of 3.5 months before participants participated in the study ($SD = 7.9$).

Manipulation checks. All participants correctly reported whether the forgiveness test indicated they had or had not forgiven the perpetrator. A between-subjects t test revealed that the forgiveness feedback manipulation was successful: Participants in the high forgiveness condition felt they had forgiven to a (marginally) greater extent ($M = 6.43$, $SD = 1.63$) than had those in the low forgiveness condition ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 2.28$), $t(42) = 1.86$, $p = .07$.

All participants correctly recalled the percentile indicating the extent to which the perpetrator made amends within 5 points (two participants in the strong amends condition reported that the perpetrator's amends were in the 87th rather than the 83rd percentile). A between-subjects t test also revealed that the amends feedback manipulation was successful: Participants in the strong amends condition felt the perpetrator had made (marginally) stronger amends ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.97$) than had those in the weak amends condition ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 2.20$), $t(42) = 1.65$, $p = .10$.

Hypothesis tests. To test our hypotheses, we conducted two analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with forgiveness and amends feedback conditions as the between-subjects factors and with self-respect and self-concept clarity, in turn, as the dependent variable. The results for self-respect showed that the two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends conditions was not significant, $F(1, 43) = 1.04$, $p = .31$, indicating that the effect of forgiveness on self-respect did not depend on whether the partner had made amends (see Panel A of Figure 2).

The results for self-concept clarity, however, showed that the two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was significant, $F(1, 43) = 6.50$, $p = .02$, indicating that the effect of forgiveness on self-concept clarity depends on whether the partner had made amends. Although the means were in the predicted direction, participants who were led to believe they had forgiven a perpetrator who made strong amends did not report significantly higher self-concept clarity ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 2.10$) than did those who were led to believe they had not forgiven a perpetrator who made strong amends ($M = 6.00$, $SD = 1.65$), $t(21) = 1.28$, $p = .22$ (see the dashed line in Panel B of Figure 2). In contrast, participants who were led to believe they had forgiven a perpetrator who made weak amends reported significantly lower self-concept clarity ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 2.32$) than did those who were led to believe they had not forgiven a perpetrator who made weak amends ($M = 7.45$, $SD = 1.86$), $t(19) = -2.25$, $p = .04$ (see the solid line in Panel B of Figure 2).[3]

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[3] In this study, the key Forgiveness × Amends interaction effect was significant in one of two analyses. To gain a better sense of the big picture, we conducted an additional analysis averaging the self-respect and self-concept clarity measures (which were correlated at $r = .45$) into a single composite measure. The two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was significant, $F(1, 43) = 4.86$, $p = .03$. Although the means were in the predicted direction, participants who were led to believe they had forgiven a perpetrator who made strong amends did not report significantly higher composite self-respect/self-concept clarity ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 1.61$) than did those who were led to believe they had not forgiven a perpetrator who made strong amends ($M = 6.38$, $SD = 1.65$), $t(21) = 0.92$, $p = .37$. In contrast, participants who were led to believe they had forgiven a perpetrator who made weak amends reported significantly lower composite self-respect/self-concept clarity ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 1.47$) than did those who were led to believe they had not forgiven a perpetrator who made weak amends ($M = 7.50$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(19) = 2.31$, $p = .03$.
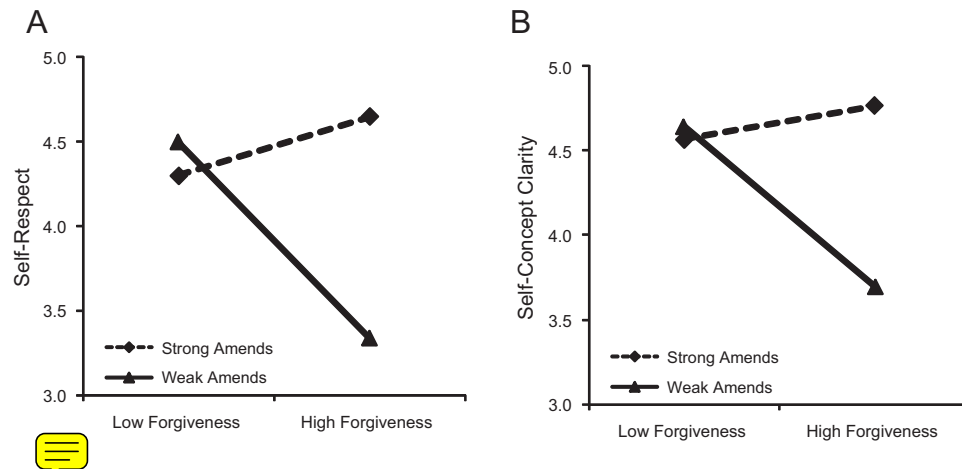
Figure 2. Study 2: The effects of forgiveness and amends on self-respect (Panel A) and self-concept clarity (Panel B).

Discussion

In Study 2, we used false feedback to manipulate participants' perceptions of their own forgiveness of, and perpetrators' amends made for, a recalled betrayal to examine the effects of forgiveness and amends on self-respect and self-concept clarity. Our hypotheses were not supported in the case of self-respect, although the descriptive patterns of self-respect were in the predicted directions. Our primary hypothesis received strong support in the case of self-concept clarity: The effect of forgiveness on self-concept clarity depended on whether the perpetrator had made amends. The bolstering effect subhypothesis received some support in that, although not statistically significant, there was a descriptive trend such that forgiving when one had received amends predicted bolstered self-concept clarity. The doormat effect subhypothesis was fully supported in that forgiving when one had not received amends caused significantly diminished self-concept clarity.

Study 2 extended Study 1 by examining the effects of experimentally manipulating participants' perceptions of their own forgiveness of, and perpetrators' amends made for, actual betrayals on both self-respect and self-concept clarity. Although allowing participants to report on a real-life betrayal of their choice has the advantage of covering a broad spectrum of betrayals, doing so has the disadvantage of losing experimental control. In addition, our key interaction effect did not reach statistical significance for one of our two dependent variables, and Studies 1 and 2 did not examine the role of betrayal distress. Highly distressing betrayals indicate that a continued relationship between the victim and perpetrator may not be safe and valuable for the victim to a greater extent than mildly distressing betrayals do. As such, we predict that amends made for highly distressing betrayals would more strongly moderate the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity than would amends made for mildly distressing betrayals. Study 3 was designed to (a) examine the causal effects of forgiveness and amends on self-respect and self-concept clarity with greater experimental control than was afforded in Study 2 and (b) explore the potential moderating role of betrayal distress on these effects.

Study 3

In Study 3, we used well-controlled hypothetical betrayal scenarios to examine the causal effects of forgiveness, amends, and betrayal distress on anticipated levels of self-respect and self-concept clarity. By manipulating forgiveness and amends in the scenarios, we were able to test whether the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator, such that forgiveness bolsters self-respect and self-concept clarity when one has received amends but diminishes self-respect and self-concept clarity when one has not received amends. By manipulating betrayal distress, we were also able to explore whether these effects are especially robust for highly distressing (relative to mildly distressing) betrayals.

Method

Participants. In this study, participants were 247 Northwestern University undergraduates (142 women, 6 who did not report gender). Participants were, on average, 18.7 years of age ($SD = 1.0$), and 61% were Caucasian, 4% African American, 19% Asian American, 3% Hispanic, 10% other, and 2% did not report race. Twenty-nine percent of participants were involved in romantic relationships, but there were no significant main effects ($ps > .70$) or interaction effects ($ps > .55$) of relationship status, so the analyses reported in the next sections collapse across this variable. Participants received partial fulfillment of a course requirement in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. Participants were instructed to imagine themselves as the victim of a recent trust betrayal by their romantic partner. Participants who were not currently involved in a romantic relationship were instructed to imagine that they were in such a relationship. The hypothetical betrayal scenarios included manipulations of forgiveness, amends, and betrayal distress, creating a 2 (forgiveness: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (amends: weak vs. strong) $\times$ 2 (distress: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight scenario condi-

tions. Specifically, participants imagined themselves in the following situation, which we adapted from Boon and Sulsky (1997; italics added to indicate words that changed, depending on the condition):

> In a recent conversation with your romantic partner, you discover that he/she has betrayed your trust by telling a mutual friend some very private details about your past—very intimate and personal details you had confided in him/her but in no one else. You were *mildly* [*extremely*] upset by this breach of privacy. Over the next few days, your partner *did not admit his/her mistake, did not apologize, and did not try at all to make up for it* [*admitted his/her mistake, apologized, and tried very hard to make up for it*]. After thinking about it, you decided *not to forgive* [*to forgive*] your partner for this.

After reading and imagining themselves in the betrayal scenario, participants completed single-item measures assessing the levels of self-respect and self-concept clarity they anticipated they would have if they had just gone through the described situation ("I would have a lot of respect for myself" and "I would have a clear sense of who I am and what I am," respectively). Both items were assessed on scales ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*).

Results

To test our hypotheses, we performed two sets of ANOVAs, with forgiveness, amends, and distress conditions as the between-subjects factors and with self-respect and self-concept clarity, in turn, as the dependent variable. To determine the results for self-respect, we conducted an initial analysis to explore whether the effects of forgiveness and amends on self-respect were especially robust for highly distressing (relative to mildly distressing) betrayals. The three-way interaction between forgiveness, amends, and distress was not significant, $F(1, 239) = 0.16$, $p = .69$, indicating that the effects of forgiveness and amends on self-respect were not moderated by betrayal distress. Therefore, we collapsed across distress conditions in the remaining analyses. The two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was significant, $F(1, 243) = 12.30$, $p = .001$, indicating that the effect of forgiveness on anticipated levels of self-respect depended on

whether the partner made amends. Although the means were in the predicted direction, participants who imagined offering forgiveness when their partner made amends did not report they would experience significantly higher anticipated self-respect ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.10$) than did those who imagined withholding forgiveness when their partner made amends ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.71$), $t(118) = 1.33$, $p = .19$ (see the dashed line in Panel A of Figure 3). In contrast, participants who imagined offering forgiveness when their partner did not make amends reported they would experience significantly lower self-respect ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 2.01$) than did those who imagined withholding forgiveness when their partner did not make amends ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.78$), $t(125) = -3.44$, $p = .001$ (see the solid line in Panel A of Figure 3).

To determine the results for self-concept clarity, we conducted an initial analysis to explore whether the effects of forgiveness and amends on self-concept clarity were especially robust for highly distressing (relative to mildly distressing) betrayals. The three-way interaction between forgiveness, amends, and distress was not significant, $F(1, 239) = 0.30$, $p = .59$, indicating that the effects of forgiveness and amends on self-concept clarity were not moderated by betrayal distress. Therefore, we collapsed across distress conditions in the remaining analyses. The two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was significant, $F(1, 243) = 8.93$, $p = .003$, indicating that the effect of forgiveness on anticipated levels of self-concept clarity depended on whether the partner made amends. Although the means were in the predicted direction, participants who imagined offering forgiveness when their partner made amends did not report they would experience significantly higher anticipated self-concept clarity ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.29$) than did those who imagined withholding forgiveness when their partner made amends ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.53$), $t(118) = 0.77$, $p = .44$ (see the dashed line in Panel B of Figure 3). In contrast, participants who imagined offering forgiveness when their partner did not make amends reported they would experience significantly lower self-concept clarity ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.71$) than did those who imagined withholding forgiveness when their partner did not make amends ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.47$), $t(125) = -3.36$, $p = .001$ (see the solid line in Panel B of Figure 3).
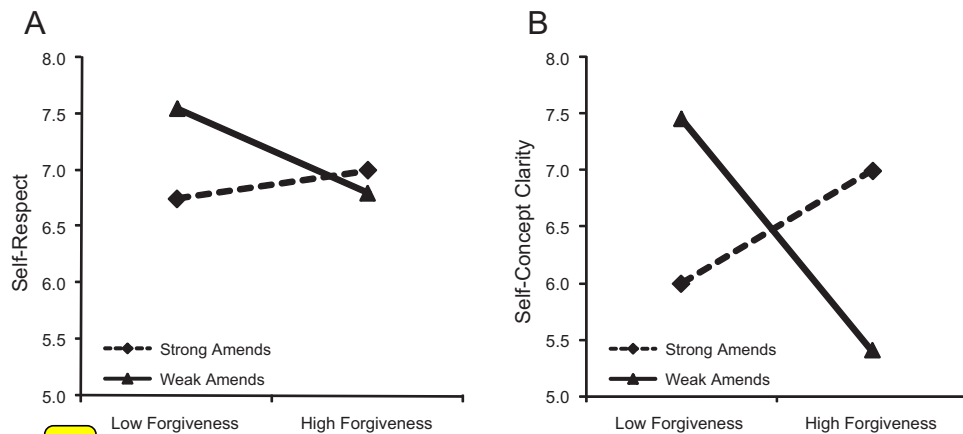

Figure 3. Study 3: The effects of forgiveness and amends on self-respect (Panel A) and self-concept clarity (Panel B).

Discussion

In Study 3, we used hypothetical betrayal scenarios to examine the effects of forgiveness and amends on anticipated levels of self-respect and self-concept clarity. Our primary hypothesis received strong support: The effect of forgiveness on anticipated self-respect and self-concept clarity depended on whether the perpetrator made amends. The bolstering effect subhypothesis received some support in that, although not statistically significant, there was a descriptive trend such that forgiving when one had received amends predicted bolstered anticipated self-respect and self-concept clarity. The doormat effect subhypothesis was fully supported in that forgiving when one had not received amends caused significantly diminished anticipated self-respect and self-concept clarity. We did not find evidence that these effects depended on the distress of the betrayal, perhaps due to the fact that all participants imagined themselves as the victim of an identical betrayal in which their romantic partner told a mutual friend "very intimate and personal details [the participant] had confided in [their partner] but in no one else." Our attempt to manipulate distress by instructing participants to imagine themselves as mildly or extremely upset may have been unsuccessful, because all participants may have viewed this betrayal as highly distressing. We revisit the potential moderating role of distress in Study 4.

Study 3 extended Study 2 by examining the effects of forgiveness and amends on anticipated levels of self-respect and self-concept clarity in response to well-controlled betrayal scenarios. Because forgiveness and amends were experimentally manipulated across scenarios, Study 3 established that forgiveness and amends caused the observed differences in anticipated levels of self-respect and self-concept clarity. At the same time, hypothetical scenarios with these manipulations may seem artificial, and participants' anticipated self-respect and self-concept clarity scores may reflect their theories of how they *should* view themselves in the described situation rather than how they actually *would* view themselves. Therefore, it remains important to examine associations between forgiveness, amends, self-respect, and self-concept clarity as they naturally occur following actual betrayals. We examined these associations and the potential moderating role of betrayal distress in Study 4.

Study 4

Study 4 was a 6-month, 14-wave longitudinal study in which participants reported every other week on (a) betrayals committed by their romantic partner, (b) their self-respect, and (c) their self-concept clarity. For each betrayal, participants reported its distress, the extent to which they forgave their partner, and the extent to which their partner made amends. By assessing forgiveness and amends, we were able to examine whether the association of forgiveness with self-respect and with self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator, such that greater forgiveness predicts bolstered self-respect and self-concept clarity when one has received strong amends from the perpetrator but diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity when one has received weak amends. By assessing betrayal distress, we were able to explore whether these associations are especially robust for highly distressing (relative to mildly distressing) betrayals.

Method

Participants and recruitment. Sixty-nine Northwestern University undergraduates (35 women) were recruited via flyers posted around campus to participate in a 6-month longitudinal study of dating processes. Each participant was (a) a first-year undergraduate at Northwestern University, (b) involved in a dating relationship of at least 2 months in duration, (c) between 17 and 19 years of age, (d) a native English speaker, and (e) the only member of a given couple to participate in the study. The data set included the prebreakup waves of data collection for the 26 participants who broke up with their romantic partner during the course of the study. Eleven participants did not report experiencing any partner betrayals during the course of the study. These participants were excluded from all analyses, leaving a final sample of 58 participants (32 women), most of whom were 18 years of age at the beginning of the study (9% were 17, 79% were 18, 12% were 19) and had been involved with their dating partners for an average of 13.3 months ($SD = 10.4$). Among the participants, 76% were Caucasian, 2% African American, 10% Asian American, 3% Hispanic, and 9% other. Participants were paid $100 if they completed all parts of the study and a prorated amount if they missed some online questionnaires. All 69 participants completed the study, and 67 of them completed at least 12 of the 14 online questionnaires.

Procedure and materials. The present study was part of a larger investigation of dating processes that involved 14 biweekly online questionnaires over 6 months, each lasting 10–15 min. Unless otherwise noted, all items were assessed on scales ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). On each biweekly online questionnaire, participants reported their self-respect and self-concept clarity with single-item measures ("I respect myself" and "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am"). Later in the online session, participants who were currently romantically involved answered "yes" or "no" to the following question: "Has your partner done anything over the past two weeks that was upsetting to you?" Participants who answered "no" moved on to an unrelated set of questions. Those who answered "yes" provided a brief description of the betrayal and then responded to several additional questions about it. Participants completed single-item measures assessing forgiveness ("I have forgiven my partner for this behavior"), amends ("My partner tried to make amends to me for this upsetting behavior"), and betrayal distress ("This behavior was highly distressing to me").

Analysis strategy. Data for Study 4 had a two-level structure wherein measures assessed on each of the online questionnaires (Level 1) were nested within each participant (Level 2). For example, a participant who reported three upsetting incidents provided three different associations between distress, forgiveness, amends, self-respect, and self-concept clarity. Because these nested observations violate the ordinary least squares regression assumption of independence, we used multilevel data analytic strategies (cf. Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) that researchers have adapted for analyzing diary data (e.g., Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Nezlek, 2001). Multilevel modeling approaches provide unbiased hypothesis tests by simultaneously examining variance associated with each level of nesting. All variables were standardized ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$) prior to data analysis. On average, participants reported 3.38 ($SD = 2.65$) betrayals during the course of the study; following standard conventions (see Kenny, Mannetti,

Pierro, Livi, & Kashy, 2002) for circumstances in which there are few Level 1 observations (betrayal incidents in the present report) nested within the Level 2 unit (participant), we allowed intercept terms to vary randomly and treated slope terms as fixed in all analyses.

Results

To test our hypotheses, we performed two sets of multilevel regression analyses, predicting self-respect and self-concept clarity, in turn, from forgiveness, amends, and betrayal distress. To determine the results for self-respect, we conducted an initial analysis to explore whether the associations between forgiveness, amends, and self-respect are especially robust for highly distressing (relative to mildly distressing) betrayals. The three-way interaction between forgiveness, amends, and distress was significant (β = .11), $t(112)$ = 2.20, p = .03. Therefore, we examined mildly distressing (1 SD below the mean) and highly distressing (1 SD above the mean) betrayals separately with simple effects tests (Aiken & West, 1991). For mildly distressing betrayals, the simple two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was not significant (β = –.10), $t(112)$ = –1.15, p = .25. For highly distressing betrayals, the simple two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was significant (β = .12), $t(112)$ = 2.07, p = .04, indicating that the association between forgiveness and self-respect depended on the extent to which the partner made amends for highly distressing betrayals. Increasing levels of forgiveness predicted nearly significantly bolstered self-respect when the partner made strong amends (1 SD above the mean) for highly distressing betrayals (β = .19), $t(112)$ = 1.86, p = .07 (see the dashed line in Panel A of Figure 4). In contrast, although the predicted means were in the expected direction, increasing levels of forgiveness did not predict significantly diminished self-respect when the partner made weak amends (1 SD below the mean) for highly distressing betrayals (β = –.05), $t(112)$ = –0.53, p = .59 (see the solid line in Panel A of Figure 4).

To determine the results for self-concept clarity, we conducted an initial exploratory analysis to determine whether the associations between forgiveness, amends, and self-concept clarity are especially robust for highly distressing (relative to mildly distressing) betrayals. The three-way interaction between distress, forgiveness, and amends was significant (β = .13), $t(112)$ = 2.49, p = .01. Accordingly, we examined mildly distressing (1 SD below the mean) and highly distressing (1 SD above the mean) betrayals separately. For mildly distressing betrayals, the simple two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was not significant (β = –.06), $t(112)$ = –0.65, p = .52. For highly distressing betrayals, the simple two-way interaction between forgiveness and amends was significant (β = .20), $t(112)$ = 3.26, p = .002, indicating that the association between forgiveness and self-concept clarity depended on the extent to which the partner made amends for highly distressing betrayals. Increasing levels of forgiveness predicted significantly bolstered self-concept clarity when the partner made strong amends (1 SD above the mean) for highly distressing betrayals (β = .27), $t(112)$ = 2.55, p = .01 (see the dashed line in Panel B of Figure 4). In contrast, although the predicted means were in the expected direction, increasing levels of forgiveness did not predict significantly diminished self-concept clarity when the partner made weak amends (1 SD below the

mean) for highly distressing betrayals (β = –.13), $t(112)$ = –1.22, p = .22 (see the solid line in Panel B of Figure 4).[4]

Discussion

In Study 4, we examined the associations between forgiveness, amends, betrayal distress, self-respect, and self-concept clarity following naturally occurring betrayals in ongoing romantic relationships. Our primary hypothesis received strong support for highly distressing betrayals: The associations of forgiveness with self-respect and self-concept clarity depended on the extent to which the partner made amends. The bolstering effect hypothesis was supported in that forgiving when the partner made strong amends for a highly distressing betrayal was associated with nearly significantly bolstered self-respect and with significantly bolstered self-concept clarity. The doormat effect hypothesis received some support in that, although not statistically significant, there was a descriptive trend such that forgiving when the partner made weak amends for a highly distressing betrayal was associated with diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity.

Study 4 complemented Studies 2 and 3 by examining prospective reports of forgiveness, amends, self-respect, and self-concept clarity following actual betrayals in ongoing relationships. It also extended Study 3 by reexamining the moderating role of betrayal distress, this time with betrayals that actually varied in distress. Unlike the results in Study 3, which suggested that distress might not moderate the effects of forgiveness and amends on anticipated self-respect and self-concept clarity in hypothetical scenarios, the results in Study 4 showed that forgiveness and amends predicted self-respect and self-concept clarity for highly distressing, but not for mildly distressing, naturally occurring betrayals. Further investigation of the moderating role of betrayal distress remains an important direction for future research.

Meta-Analyses of Studies 2–4

Our primary hypothesis has been supported strongly and consistently. Study 1 demonstrated that the association of marital forgiveness with trajectories of self-respect depends on the spouse's agreeableness—the spouse's dispositional tendency to convey that the partner will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with him or her. Studies 2–4 demonstrated that the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the perpetrator's amends—the perpetrator's event-specific indication that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with him or her. These interaction effects were statistically reliable for self-respect in three out of four studies and for self-concept clarity in all three studies in which it was tested. In addition, these two subhypotheses have been supported: Forgiving bolsters one's self-respect and self-concept clar-

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[4] Because relationship satisfaction may be associated with forgiveness, amends, self-respect, and/or self-concept clarity, we replicated the Study 4 analyses, controlling for relationship satisfaction. These analyses yielded identical conclusions for the Forgiveness × Amends interaction effect and all simple effects with these two exceptions: (a) the bolstering effect for self-concept clarity changed from significant (p = .01) to nonsignificant (p = .12) and (b) the doormat effect for self-concept clarity changed from nonsignificant (p = .22) to significant (p = .01).
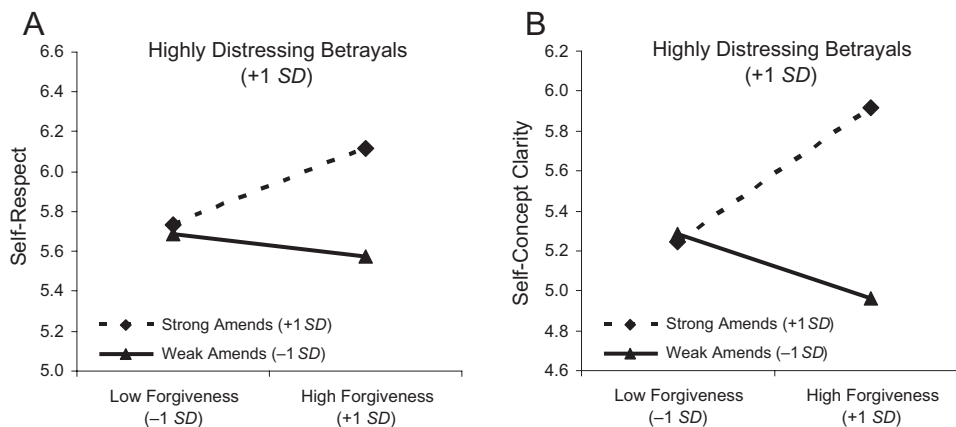
Figure 4. Study 4: Predicting self-respect (Panel A) and self-concept clarity (Panel B) from forgiveness and amends for highly distressing betrayals.

ity if the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued but diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has not. All 14 simple effects were in the predicted direction, but not all of them achieved statistical significance.

Because obtaining statistically significant simple effects in opposite directions is a tall order for any given study, we conducted meta-analyses of the bolstering and doormat effects to formally test whether our subhypotheses garnered reliable support across studies in this research program. (Study 1 was not included in the meta-analyses because change in self-respect over time, rather than absolute levels of self-respect, was the primary unit of analysis.)

Method

For the meta-analyses of the bolstering effect, we examined the simple effects of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity, in turn, when the perpetrator made strong amends (strong amends conditions in Studies 2 and 3; 1 *SD* above the mean of amends for betrayals that were 1 *SD* above the mean of betrayal distress in Study 4). For the meta-analyses of the doormat effect, we examined the simple effects of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity, in turn, when the perpetrator made weak amends (weak amends conditions in Studies 2 and 3; 1 *SD* below the mean of amends for betrayals that were 1 *SD* above the mean of betrayal distress in Study 4). We standardized all predictor and outcome variables in all analyses. To calculate each meta-analytic beta, we weighted the beta for each effect from each study by the inverse of its variance. To calculate each meta-analytic standard error, we took the square root of the reciprocal of the sum of the weights. To conduct hypothesis tests on our meta-analytic effects, we divided the meta-analytic beta by the meta-analytic standard error, which yielded a *z* statistic.

Results

These meta-analyses revealed strong support for both subhypotheses. Across Studies 2–4, the bolstering effect was significant: Tests of simple effects revealed that forgiveness bolstered self-respect and self-concept clarity when the perpetrator made strong amends ($\beta = .14$, $z = 2.22$, $p = .03$, and $\beta = .17$, $z = 2.53$, $p = .01$, respectively; see the dashed lines in Panels A and B of Figure 5, respectively). In addition, across Studies 2–4, the doormat effect was also significant: Tests of simple effects revealed that forgiveness diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity when the perpetrator made only weak amends ($\beta = -.21$, $z = -3.30$, $p < .001$, and $\beta = -.25$, $z = -3.91$, $p < .001$, respectively; see the solid lines in Panels A and B of Figure 5, respectively).

Discussion

In the meta-analyses of Studies 2–4, we examined whether the two subhypotheses—that forgiving bolsters one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued but diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has not—garnered reliable support when the data were averaged across studies in this research program. They did. Both the bolstering effect and the doormat effect were fully supported in that the results of the meta-analyses were statistically significant for both effects and for both self-respect and self-concept clarity.

General Discussion

Given that past research has linked forgiveness with mental health, physical health, and relational benefits, one might have predicted that forgiving consistently increases one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. The present research reveals that this is not the case. Two experiments and two longitudinal studies provided consistent evidence for our primary hypothesis, which was that the effect of forgiveness on self-respect and self-concept clarity depends on the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator, and examples of appropriate actions are acting in a generally agreeable manner and making amends. In other words, the responses of both victims and perpetrators are influential following a betrayal. Victims' self-respect and self-concept clarity are determined not only by their own decision whether to forgive or not but also by their perpetra-
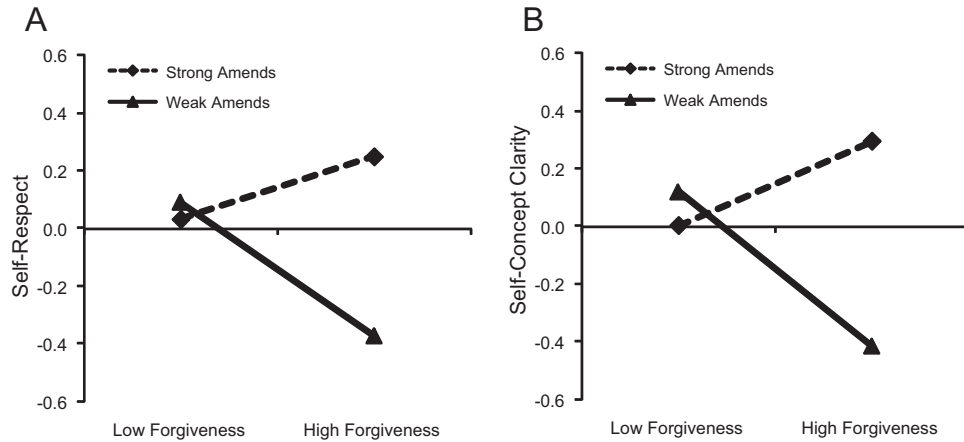
Figure 5. Meta-analytic results predicting self-respect (Panel A) and self-concept clarity (Panel B) from forgiveness and amends across Studies 2–4.

tors' decision whether to act in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued or not.

Simple effects tests supported the bolstering effect and the doormat effect subhypotheses. The bolstering effect subhypothesis was that forgiving a perpetrator who has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued bolsters one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. Participants who forgave when their spouses were highly agreeable (see Study 1) or when their partner made strong amends (see Meta-analyses of Studies 2–4) experienced bolstered self-respect and self-concept clarity. The doormat effect subhypothesis was that forgiving a perpetrator who has not acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. Participants who forgave when their spouses were highly disagreeable (see Study 1) or when their partner made only weak amends (see Meta-analyses of Studies 2–4) experienced diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity.

Broader Implications

We outline two broad implications of the present research, one theoretical and one practical. First, a survey of the extant forgiveness literature may lead one to conclude that, for virtually all outcomes in all contexts, forgiveness is the optimal response after suffering an interpersonal betrayal. In contrast, but consistent with the idea that forgiveness may have evolved as a conditional adaptation to preserve valuable relationships (e.g., see McCullough, 2008), the research presented in this report indicates that, for some outcomes in some contexts, forgiveness has disadvantages. Forgiving a perpetrator who has not signaled that the victim will be safe and valued erodes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. Although we focused on self-respect and self-concept clarity in this report, forgiving a perpetrator who has not signaled that the victim will be safe and valued may affect other psychological measures in a similar manner. Indeed, our findings may join McNulty's (2008) in representing the tip of the iceberg in terms of the possible negative outcomes of forgiveness. Thus, we suggest that the scholarly literature on forgiveness might benefit from greater nuance in examining the potential consequences of forgiveness; such nuance promises to contribute to a more com-

plete understanding of the effects of forgiveness—both positive and negative—as well as the circumstances under which forgiveness leads to each. Our findings indicate that whether forgiveness leads to positive or negative consequences hinges on the perpetrator's behavior. Interdependence theory holds promise as a useful framework for future investigations of the joint influence of victims' and perpetrators' behavior on the consequences of forgiveness.

Second, the present findings may have implications for conflict resolution strategies and clinical interventions. Consistent with McCullough's (2008, p. 87) assertion that "evolution favors the organisms that can be vengeful when it's necessary, that can forgive when it's necessary, and that have the wisdom to know the difference," it may not be prudent to recommend forgiveness without considering the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator. If the perpetrator has signaled that the victim will be safe and valued, forgiveness may be advisable because it tends to bolster one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. But if the perpetrator has not signaled that the victim will be safe and valued, then forgiveness may not be the best course of action, because it tends to diminish one's self-respect and self-concept clarity. Therefore, the victim's and the perpetrator's responses following a betrayal should not be considered as conflict resolution strategies in isolation; they must be considered in tandem. If perpetrators have not acted and will not act in a manner that signals that their victims will be safe and valued, then victims must weigh the possibility of low self-respect and self-concept clarity against the potential positive outcomes of forgiving.

Limitations and Strengths

We acknowledge three limitations of the present work. First, we assessed self-respect and self-concept clarity with only explicit, self-report measures. Replications of the current work with unobtrusive measures or behavioral indices of self-respect and self-concept clarity would strengthen our conclusions.

Second, our participant populations were limited to individuals living in the United States. It is possible that, for individuals in

other populations and cultures, the effect of forgiveness on one's self-respect and self-concept clarity does not hinge on whether the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued. For example, deeply religious individuals who regard unconditional forgiveness as a virtue (Rye et al., 2000) and those living in collectivistic cultures who tend to place a higher value on social harmony than do those in individualistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989) may experience increased self-respect and self-concept clarity after forgiving, regardless of the extent to which the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued.

Third, our examination of interpersonal betrayals was limited to those occurring in ongoing close relationships. Partners in such relationships have the opportunity to hurt each other repeatedly. To avoid being a "doormat" (i.e., allowing other people to "walk all over them" by their recurring betrayals), individuals may need to withhold forgiveness from close others who have not made amends or otherwise acted in a prosocial manner. Our findings may not be generalizable to betrayals perpetrated by strangers, acquaintances, or even persons to whom the victim was close in the past. In these cases, withholding forgiveness may be less functional, as doing so is unlikely to elicit amends or to deter repeated betrayals.

We also highlight three strengths of the present work. First, we used both experimental and nonexperimental methods to examine the interactive effects of victim forgiveness and perpetrator behavior on victim self-respect and self-concept clarity. In Study 1, we examined the longitudinal associations of marital forgiveness tendencies among newlywed couples with trajectories of self-respect over the ensuing 5 years. In Studies 2 and 3, we experimentally manipulated forgiveness and amends, providing evidence that, in conjunction, these variables cause the observed differences in self-respect and self-concept clarity. In Study 4, we examined patterns of victim self-respect and self-concept clarity following betrayals that naturally occurred between dating partners. Thus, Studies 1 and 4 are high in external validity, whereas Studies 2 and 3 are high in internal validity. Together, they provide convergent evidence that (a) forgiveness causes bolstered self-respect and self-concept clarity when the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued but diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity when the perpetrator has not and (b) this pattern applies to real-life betrayals.

Second, our participant populations were not limited to university students. Because the results of Study 1, in which married couples participated, were similar to the results of Studies 2–4, in which undergraduates participated, the present findings seem to be generalizable to individuals of varying ages and stages of life.

Third, we investigated a diverse array of betrayal incidents and indicators that victims will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with their perpetrators. In Study 1, we measured marital forgiveness tendencies through participants' responses to five betrayal vignettes and assessed the extent to which perpetrators signal that their victims will be safe and valued using a measure of dispositional agreeableness. In contrast, in Studies 2–4, we examined specific betrayal incidents and assessed the extent to which perpetrators signal that their victims will be safe and valued using measures of amends. Participants in Study 2 reported betrayals committed by a variety of close relationship partners, such as friends, parents, siblings, and dating partners.

Participants in Study 3 responded to a hypothetical betrayal in which their partner disclosed an important secret. Participants in Study 4 reported an array of actual betrayals that occurred in romantic relationships during a 6-month period. These included incidents in which participants' partners failed to return a phone call, were generally insensitive, or went on a date with another person, to name but a few. Because this research examined general forgiveness tendencies and many specific betrayal incidents, the present findings seem to be generalizable across an assortment of interpersonal betrayal situations.

Directions for Future Research

Future research might explore three questions left unanswered by this research. First, although we emphasized and examined the interactive effects of victims' forgiveness and perpetrators' behavior on victims' self-respect and self-concept clarity in the present work, other causal paths among these variables may exist. For instance, receiving weak amends for one betrayal may deter a victim from forgiving a subsequent betrayal, and experiencing low self-respect and self-concept clarity may impede one's ability to forgive later. Examining the dynamic and bidirectional effects among these variables is an important avenue for future research.

Second, it may be that the effect of forgiving on one's self-respect and self-concept clarity is orthogonal to other effects of forgiving. For instance, a victim who forgives a perpetrator who has not acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator might experience diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity—but might simultaneously experience a restored relationship with the perpetrator. By examining multiple outcomes of forgiveness in the same study, future researchers could explore whether any potential benefits of forgiveness offered in the absence of indicators that the victim will be safe and valued outweigh the cost of reduced self-respect and self-concept clarity.

Third, our work indicates that forgiving perpetrators who have not acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator leads to diminished self-respect and self-concept clarity. One might extrapolate from this finding that, when perpetrators do not signal that their victims will be safe and valued on their own accord, victims should attempt to extract amends from the perpetrator before forgiving. Furthermore, attempts to extract amends—including confronting the perpetrator, asking for an apology, and requesting amends—are related to actually receiving an apology (Exline, Deshea, & Holeman, 2007). However, it remains unclear whether amends made at the victim's request work together with forgiveness to affect self-respect and self-concept clarity in the same way that unsolicited amends do. When asked to do so, perpetrators may make amends to pacify their victims. But such amends may not reflect perpetrators' genuine desire to maintain relationships that will be safe and valuable to their victims. If victims realize that solicited amends are insincere, forgiving after receiving such amends may lead to decreased self-respect and self-concept clarity, just as forgiving without having received amends does.

Conclusion

The present research establishes that forgiveness is not related solely to positive outcomes. Although forgiving bolsters one's

self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has acted in a manner that signals that the victim will be safe and valued in a continued relationship with the perpetrator (e.g., by behaving agreeably or making amends), it diminishes one's self-respect and self-concept clarity if the perpetrator has not. These findings highlight the importance of both victims' and perpetrators' responses following a betrayal. By withholding forgiveness from perpetrators who have failed to indicate that their victims will be safe and valued, victims might avoid experiencing the eroded self-respect and self-concept clarity that stem from being a human doormat.

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