9-16-2005

Behavioral, Evaluative, and Affective Consequences of Forgiveness

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A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION
WITH DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

April 6, 2005

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THESIS ADVISOR   DEPARTMENT CHAIR

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ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS:
CURRICULUM AND STUDENT ISSUES

Acknowledgements

The assistance of the following people have contributed greatly to the quality of this paper:

Dr. Harry Wallace—for taking me on as his first thesis student and never flagging in his assistance.

Dr. Carol Yoder—for her suggestions on an earlier version of this paper

Dr. Paula Hertel—for being an unofficial mentor since freshman year

Shannon Bowen and Allison Jessee—for ideas about a convincing offense

Diana Cavazos—for being the second experimenter

Matthew Wise—for being a guinea pig at all stages of the methodological process

Table of Contents

Abstract

This experiment manipulated the expression of forgiveness after an offense in order to investigate participants' responses to being forgiven. After informing participants that they "lost" a critical document, the experimenter forgave, did not forgive, or did not communicate an offense to the participants. This manipulation did not directly affect participants' willingness to help the experimenter. It did, however, significantly interact with participants' agreeableness when self-esteem and tendency to forgive were covaried, such that high-agreeable people helped most in the no-offense condition and less when unforgiven. Low-agreeable participants demonstrated the opposite trend, with more helping in the unforgiven condition than no-offense. Unforgiveness resulted in more feelings of anger and resentment toward the experimenter and poorer overall evaluations of the experimenter.

Introduction

Imagine for a moment that Emily's significant other has forgotten their anniversary. With this offense, as with any offense, Emily has three possible behavioral responses. The first possible response entails acting like the offense does not bother her, perhaps by saying to her partner, "Oh, you can make it up to me later." Alternatively, in addition to feeling hurt, she could become angry and stay angry, by holding a grudge and reminding her partner about the transgression repeatedly over time. Finally, she could become upset and communicate that the offense did affect her negatively, but either over time or immediately, respond with forgiveness instead of continued anger. A common fear when forgiving, however, is that once the offense is forgiven, the transgressor will be more likely to transgress again: in short, that forgiving allows transgressors to take advantage of the forgiver. When an offense occurs, such as when a partner forgets an anniversary, the offended has (at least) two goals that they hope their response to the offense will accomplish: to ensure that the offense does not occur again, and, if the relationship is meaningful enough, to restore the relationship. On the one hand, Emily wants her partner to remember their upcoming anniversaries, but on the other hand, she does not want this offense to become so important that it interferes with the relationship itself. The ideal response would balance both of these goals, to restore the relationship as well as prevent later offenses. The present experiment investigates both of these goals: how the three possible responses—of not communicating an offense, forgiveness, or unforgiveness—influence the prevention of repeat offenses and result in a restored relationship by increasing positive emotions about the forgiving party.

Conveying forgiveness, in words or with actions, can be difficult. Except perhaps with grave offenses, rarely does a person say the words "I forgive you" to an offending party. Sometimes forgiveness takes place only internally, and in that case the forgiver might never verbally communicate forgiveness to the offender (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998). When forgiveness is communicated, oftentimes the words "Don't worry about it" or "It's okay" take the place of the formal "I forgive you." Researchers have yet to universally agree on a comprehensive definition of forgiveness, but McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang (2003) write that the shared feature of different researchers' definitions is the "assumption that forgiveness involves prosocial change regarding a transgressor on the part of the transgression recipient." True forgiveness first requires a transgression: there must be some offense to forgive. If the offended party is not affected in some meaningful way by the offense, then there is indeed no reason for forgiveness. The greater the transgression, perhaps the more difficult the decision to forgive, but the more deeply the offending party would appreciate the act. It is also possible for the victim and the offender to view the act of forgiveness quite differently (Baumeister et al., 1998). Forgiveness does not sweep the offense under the rug, although sometimes the offender might interpret it that way. Instead, forgiving acknowledges the occurrence of the offense, but also the value of the person who committed the offense. Forgiving says, in effect, "You have hurt me, but it is ok. My relationship with you and my concern for you is greater than my desire to hold a grudge."

Correlates of Forgiveness

Research examining the effects of forgiveness on the offender—the one being forgiven—is quite scarce; most studies examine the benefits of forgiveness for the

forgiver (e.g. Worthington, Kurusu, Collins, Berry, Ripley, & Baier, 2000). These

advantages include health and physiological benefits as well as emotional. For example,

forgiving someone correlates with lower blood pressure and heart rate (Lawler, Younger,

& Piferi, 2003; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). Witvliet, Ludwig, and Bauer

(2002) found that imagining the act of forgiveness increased smiling behavior and

decreased brow-furrowing. Using MRI scanning, Worthington and Scherer (2004) found

that unforgiveness is stressful—in an MRI, unforgiveness looks very similar to anger.

They also found that hormonal patterns of unforgiveness are consistent with stress.

Physically, it seems, forgiveness is easier on the body than unforgiveness.

In addition to these physiological benefits, many authors focus on forgiveness as a

useful tool in therapy (Hope, 1987). In a study of incest survivors, Freedman and Enright

(1996) found that an intervention designed to help victims forgive their abusers led to

more hope and reduced anxiety and depression. On a related note, in a study on

interpersonal crime, Spiers (2004) found that unforgiveness of the crime on the part of

the victim correlates with development of psychiatric disorders. Forgiveness can also

free people from anger and guilt (Fitzgibbons, 1986). Karremans and Van Lange (2004)

found that forgiveness is correlated with pro-relationship motivations and behavior, as

well as willingness to accommodate and sacrifice for the other member of the

relationship, or the relationship itself.

The benefits of forgiveness are not universal, for forgiveness is not correlated

with overall satisfaction of life, found Sastre, Vinsonneau, and Neto, in a questionnaire-

based study (2003). Kelln and Ellard (1999) also found that being forgiven caused less

liking of the forgiver than did being unforgiven. Perhaps being forgiven increased the

offender's guilt, and the sense of increased guiltiness thus decreased liking for the forgiver. It is also possible that the offender felt indebted to the forgiver after being forgiven, which could also lead to less liking (Baumeister et al., 1998). The true effects of forgiveness on an offender have yet to be fully explored in empirical studies.

Prior Approaches to Studying Forgiveness

The imagery methodology of the Karremans and Van Lange (2004) study described above is typical of those in the forgiveness field. This study did not actively manipulate forgiveness; the participants instead concentrated on past events in their lives in which they either forgave or did not forgive someone who hurt them. Participants were randomly assigned to either think about a forgiving or an unforgiving incident, but whether at the time of the incident they forgave or not could not be randomly assigned.

Other common methodologies in this area include using questionnaires in a correlational design (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999) or writing narratives about past experiences with forgiveness (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Wallace, Exline, and Baumeister (in press), for example, instructed participants to imagine a hypothetical situation in which they committed an offense against either a forgiving or an unforgiving victim, and then imagined the likelihood of their committing a repeat offense. In all of these methodologies, the lens of the investigation focuses on the person doing the forgiving, instead of the person who committed the offense; the expression of forgiveness is not randomly assigned; and the operational definition of forgiveness requires participates to think about a past event or hypothetical situation instead of creating a real-world situation in which actual forgiveness or grudge-holding could take place. The

current study departs from these trends in forgiveness research by addressing, rather than avoiding, the limitations described above.

The paucity of research devoted to randomly manipulating forgiveness in order to investigate the effects of forgiveness on the offender can be attributed in part to the difficulty of creating a believable offense in a laboratory setting. Indeed, one wonders whether forgiveness in the laboratory is forgiveness at all—if the two parties have no previous relationship, as in a laboratory setting between an experimenter and a participant, is forgiveness for a transgression even necessary? One purpose of forgiveness is to restore a relationship, and if no relationship exists to restore then the act seems superfluous. In addition to making the offender feel better and perhaps initiating a relationship, forgiveness between strangers can create necessary social smoothing-over. Indeed, people forgive strangers all the time. When an unknown student bumped into you in the hallway, did he not say "excuse me"? Indeed, if he had not expressed this apology, would you not have thought him rude? Unforgiveness goes against social norms (Baumeister et al., 1998), and violating social procedure by not apologizing could result in anger or resentment toward the offender by the offended.

The Big Five dimension of agreeableness might be particularly related to this idea that forgiveness fulfills a necessary social function. Agreeable people tend to avoid conflicts and value harmonious relationships and encounters. Overall, highly agreeable people experience less conflict and are more likely to forgive (McCullough, 2001). Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) describe people high in this dimension as having a "positive and altruistic approach to others." They replicated Botwin, Buss, and Shackelford's (1997) findings that lower agreeableness leads to more marital

9

dissatisfaction. Participants in this study tended to value marriages relatively unmarked by large or constant conflicts. Having a highly agreeable spouse correlated with fewer conflicts overall, as well as marital satisfaction. In addition, Thoresen, Bradley, and Briese (2004), in their comparison of Big Five dimensions to effectiveness and sales techniques in the workplace, found that high agreeableness in salespeople correlates with more positive "foot in the door" effects in sales. They posit that trust moderates this effect, for other people usually find agreeable people to be trustworthy. Thus, the improved customer relationships moderated by trust and agreeableness lead to more effectiveness in sales.

Predictions

Because of these interpersonal benefits of being agreeable, this experiment hypothesizes that agreeable people in general will have more positive responses, and more helping behavior, to the expressions of forgiveness and unforgiveness than low agreeableness people. In addition, the current experiment proposes that committing an offense and upsetting another person causes a feeling of guilt, especially if the transgression was accidental (McGraw, 1987). The study tests the hypothesis that notifying the offender of the offense creates an awkward social situation, with the offender experiencing mixed emotions, from guilt to confusion to resentment. Forgiving resolves this awkward situation, resulting in decreased negative affect in the offender. Unforgiveness, on the other hand, leaves the tension unresolved, and thus offenders left unforgiven should experience more negative emotions toward the victim: in this case, the experimenter. This experiment investigated the effects of the previously mentioned possible responses to an offense—in this case, a participant causing the experimenter to

lose data—on the behavioral motivation to prevent a repeat offense in the offender, as

well as the emotions toward and evaluations of the person communicating forgiveness or

unforgiveness.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students from introductory psychology classes participated in this experiment for extra course credit. A total of 60 participants (35 female, 25 male) completed this study, with 20 participants randomly assigned to each forgiveness condition. None of the participants were known to the experimenters before completing the study.

Design

This experiment consisted of three conditions—forgiveness, unforgiveness, and no-offense—the language of which was manipulated after the participant believed that he or she had committed an offense against the experimenter of losing a computer document. In the forgiveness condition, the experimenter communicated that she was upset—that an offense had occurred—and then forgave the participant. The unforgiveness condition, like the forgiveness condition, entailed communicating an offense, but the experimenter continued in anger and did not express forgiveness to the participant. In the no-offense condition, the experimenter did not get upset or communicate an offense, but merely continued with the experiment. The specific language of these conditions is outlined in the next section.

Procedure

The cover story informed participants that the experiment investigated how personality traits related to their ability to quickly and accurately make decisions. Participants first took computer-administered personality surveys measuring narcissism (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the Big Five "Ten Item Personality Measure" (Gosling,

Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003), and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). They then completed a task that involved grading another participant's answers in an MS Word document, answering evaluative questions about the quality of the work, and following instructions to correctly save the document. After completing these steps, the experimenter explained that the program utilized for this study used so much of the computer's resources that the computer needed to be restarted in order to complete the second half of the experiment. After the computer was restarted, the experimenter "discovered" that the participant had saved his or her document incorrectly, and so the document was lost. This offense ostensibly affected the experimenter personally, because this experiment was her own honors thesis (a fact that the participant knew from introductions in the beginning of the study).

The forgiveness manipulation took place after the experimenter discovered that the document was missing. To establish that the document was lost, the experimenter said, "Wow, ok, I can't find your data. Are you sure you saved it correctly? Did you read the instructions?" When the participants confirmed their belief that they followed instructions, the experimenter then stated again that she could not find the document.

In the control condition, the experimenter at this point moved on to the next portion of the study without conveying an offense or including any other affect-laden statements. In the forgiveness and unforgiveness conditions, however, the experimenter established the missing document as an offense. To do so, she said, "Man, now I've lost data for my thesis, so I have to run even more participants."

After a pause of a few seconds, to communicate forgiveness the experimenter then said, "Ok, it's all right, don't worry about it. Let's move on to the next section."

Unforgiveness was conveyed by the words, "For the rest of the study, please be sure to read the directions carefully so that I don't lose even more data," said in a harsh voice and accompanied by an unfriendly demeanor. Two different female experimenters conducted the sessions, and extensive coaching kept the acting necessary for the manipulations as consistent as possible.

The participants then began a new task, which they were told was the main purpose of the experiment. While the experimenter was restarting the computer, the participants read a page-long description of a bogus measure called Cognitive Processing Efficiency, or CPE. The description told participants that the experimenter, for her honors thesis, was proposing a new measure of CPE, which was a measure of how quickly and accurately people can make decisions. In order for this new measure to work correctly, the participants were told that they needed to be sure that they understood the instructions for the types of questions they would be asked—that the efficacy of the measure directly related to how familiar participants were with the types of problems on the measure before the actual test began. Participants entered into the computer how many practice problems, from 1-20, they were willing to do in order to ensure the most accurate score on the new CPE measure. After they reported this number, participants filled out an evaluation of the experimenter, and then were debriefed about the real purpose of the study. Participants never actually completed practice problems or took a CPE test. Finally, they filled out a manipulation check and completed the Attitudes toward Forgiveness and the Tendency to Forgive scales (Brown, 2003).

Results

Manipulation Check

The manipulation check consisted of series of statements, with which the participants rated their agreement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants filled out the manipulation check after the debriefing. The questionnaire items were designed to investigate whether the forgiveness manipulation was effective: in short, whether the forgiven participants felt forgiven and the unforgiven participants felt unforgiven. Two items measured perceived forgiveness: the first was, "The experimenter seemed forgiving in her response to my losing the data." A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences by forgiveness condition on responses to this first statement, $F(2, 57) = 16.11$, $p < .001$. Planned comparisons demonstrated that participants in the unforgiven condition agreed less with this statement ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.40$), and thus experienced less forgiveness, than the forgiven ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.36$) or the no-offense condition ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.49$). The latter two conditions did not significantly differ from each other. Similar effects were found on the second questionnaire item, "The researcher seemed to express forgiveness to me for losing the data before I began the next portion of the experiment," $F(2, 57) = 6.40$, $p < .01$. Again, the unforgiveness condition ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.42$) agreed less with this statement than the forgiven ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.65$) and the no-offense conditions ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.94$), which did not differ from each other.

In addition to measuring the communication of forgiveness, the manipulation check items also investigated the communication of unforgiveness. Here, two questionnaire items were combined to form one composite measure of unforgiveness ($\alpha =$

.80). The questionnaire items were: "The experimenter seemed mad at me for losing data," and, "The experimenter seemed frustrated when she discovered that data had been lost." An ANOVA revealed a significant effect of forgiveness condition on feelings of unforgiveness, $F(2, 57) = 21.10$, $p < .001$. Planned comparisons showed that unforgiven participants ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.12$) experienced more unforgiveness than either the forgiven condition ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.39$) or the no-offense condition ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.37$), which did not significantly differ from each other. Both the forgiven and unforgiven conditions received the communication of an offense—the experimenter saying, "Man, now I've lost data for my thesis, so I have to run even more participants"—so if the participants attributed the anger and frustration of the experimenter to the offense itself, both the forgiveness and unforgiveness conditions would have been significantly different from the no-offense condition. Because, however, only responses of the unforgiven participants were significantly different from the other two conditions, it seems that the participants attributed the experimenter's anger and frustration to unforgiveness, not to the offense itself. Alternatively, the participants in the forgiven condition could have also felt that the experimenter at first seemed frustrated and angry, but that the participants viewed these emotions as "wiped out" or overwritten by the concomitant expression of forgiveness. In either event, manipulating forgiveness and unforgiveness resulted in the unforgiven participants experiencing more anger and frustration from the experimenter than the forgiven or no-offense conditions.

Behavioral Data

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of experimenter, $F(1, 58) = 4.82$, $p < .05$, with the second experimenter eliciting more helping behavior than the first

(*M* = 12.17 vs. 9.30). This effect did not significantly interact with any other variable, *F*s

< 1. There was no significant main effect of participant gender, nor did participant

gender interact with any other variable, *F*s < 1.

A one-way ANOVA revealed that a significant effect of forgiveness condition on

the number of practice problems participants were willing to perform did not exist, $F(2,

57) < 1$. When the personality measures were added to the ANOVA model, none of the

personality measures independently affected helping, *F*s < 1.2. When using participants'

Tendency to Forgive (Brown, 2003) and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) scores as

covariates, there was a significant interaction between the Big Five agreeableness scale

(Gosling et al., 2003)—when using a median-split approach—and forgiveness condition

on helping behavior, $F(2, 57) = 3.78, p < .05$ (see Figure 1). Planned comparisons

revealed that the difference between helping behavior between the low-agreeableness

participants and the high-agreeableness participants only reached significance in the

unforgiven condition (*M*s = 13.66 vs. 7.21, respectively, *p* = .009). The difference

between the low-agreeable participants in the no-offense condition (*M* = 9.59, *SD* = 1.46)

and the unforgiven condition (*M* = 13.66, *SD* = 1.44) reached marginal significance (*p* =

.07), as did the difference between high-agreeableness people in the no-offense condition

(*M* = 12.26, *SD* = 1.75) and the unforgiven condition (*M* = 7.21, *SD* = 1.94 *p* = .08).

None of the other differences approached significance. Thus counter-intuitively, high-

agreeableness participants helped less in the unforgiven condition than the low-agreeable

people. The differences in helping between the no-offense condition and the unforgiven

condition by agreeableness category approached significance, so that highly agreeable

17
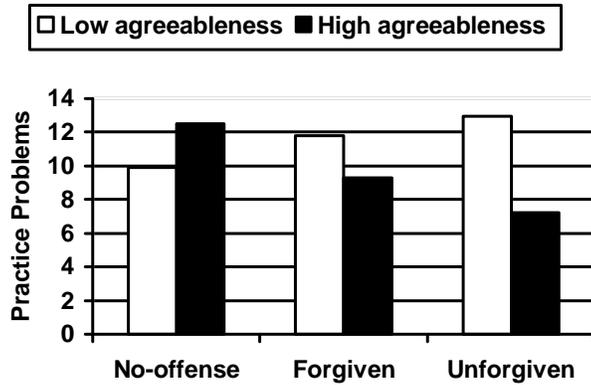
Figure 1. Interaction of the personality dimension of agreeableness with forgiveness condition on the number of practice problems participants were willing to finish in order to help the experimenter.

Note. Means represent estimates with covariates of self-esteem and Tendency to Forgive.

people (almost) helped less when unforgiven than with no offense, and the less-agreeable people (almost) helped more.

Internal Reactions to Forgiveness or Unforgiveness

This study investigated affective and evaluative reactions in addition to behavioral reactions to forgiveness condition. Evaluatively, this experiment measured the participants' opinions about the experimenter after the forgiveness manipulation. Affectively, it measured emotional reactions to being forgiven or unforgiven.

Perceptions of the Experimenter. After the forgiveness manipulation and before the debriefing, participants filled out an evaluation of the experimenter, ostensibly so the professor in charge of the experiment could evaluate the experimenter's performance as a

researcher. This evaluation consisted of a number of statements to which the participants

responded on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). One-way ANOVAs

were conducted on all of these items, with forgiveness condition as the independent

variable (see Table 1 for means). Participants felt the experimenter to be less

professional, less friendly, less polite, less likeable, and overall less competent in the

unforgiven condition than in the other two conditions. Interestingly, responses to the

statement, "The experimenter behaved inappropriately at times" did not differ by

forgiveness condition, $F(2, 57) = 2.06$, $p = .14$. This result demonstrates that participants

felt the experimenter's reaction to the loss of the data, whether it was anger or

forgiveness, was warranted.

    Affective Reactions. Unforgiveness resulted in greater negative feeling than did

forgiveness; specifically, unforgiveness increased resentment and anger toward the

experimenter. A one-way ANOVA found that agreement with the statement "I felt

resentment toward the experimenter because of her reaction to the loss of data," differed

by forgiveness condition, $F(2, 57) = 20.26$, $p < .001$. Planned comparisons revealed that

this difference is entirely explained by the higher resentment felt by the participants in the

unforgiven condition, ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.53$). The forgiven ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.25$) and

no-offense conditions ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.33$) did not differ from each other. Similarly,

unforgiveness also increased anger toward the experimenter, $F(2, 57) = 10.98$, $p < .001$.

Follow-up tests demonstrated that unforgiven participants ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.94$) more

than forgiven ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.28$) or no-offense participants ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.08$)

agreed with the statement, "I was angry at the experimenter for the way she responded to

the loss of data." Again, the last two conditions did not differ from each other. The

Table 1

Mean Agreement Scores by Forgiveness Condition

Questionnaire Items	*p*	No-offense	Forgiveness	Unforgiveness
The experimenter has conducted herself professionally.	.003	6.50	6.40	5.25
The experimenter has been friendly.	.005	6.20	6.10	4.75
The experimenter has been polite.	.016	6.45	6.20	5.30
The experimenter is likeable.	.006	6.00	5.95	4.65
Overall, the experimenter has done a good job.	.027	6.00	6.00	5.05
The experimenter has made me feel uncomfortable.	.014	2.00	2.80	3.75
The experimenter behaved inappropriately at times.	.014	1.40	1.95	2.40

Note. Higher scores indicate more agreement.

personality measures and gender of participants did not affect agreement on any of these items, nor did these variables meaningfully interact with forgiveness condition on these questionnaire items.

Unexpectedly, forgiveness condition also affected agreement with the statement, "I thought the experimenter was blaming me for something that wasn't my fault," $F(2,$

57) = 9.09, $p < .001$. This effect is entirely explained by the higher agreement of those in the unforgiven condition than those in the forgiven or no-offense condition (Ms = 4.85, 3.15, and 2.70, respectively). This finding explains the increased anger and resentment toward the experimenter by unforgiven participants outlined above. If unforgiveness results in feeling unwarranted blame, the emotions of anger and resentment naturally follow such a perceived injustice.

Discussion

After one member in a relationship commits a transgression against the other member, the victim has three possible responses: to ignore the offense, to forgive, or to leave the offense unforgiven. The purpose of this experiment was to investigate which of the three responses led to more prosocial behavior, as well as more positive emotions and opinions about the forgiver. This experiment randomly manipulated the expression of forgiveness after an offense in a laboratory setting. After participants believed that they lost a computer document, the experimenter randomly forgave, did not forgive, or ignored the offense of losing the document. Later, participants reported how many practice problems they were willing to do in order to help experimenter by ensuring an accurate measure on a (bogus) CPE test. Although the manipulation check items revealed that the manipulation of forgiveness was effective, it did not affect the primary dependent measure of how many practice problems participants were later willing to solve. The manipulation of forgiveness did interact with the individual difference variable of agreeableness on this helping measure when the scales of Tendency to Forgive (Brown, 2003) and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) were used as covariates, such that highly agreeable people helped most in the control condition and less in the unforgiveness condition.

Although not providing direct evidence of forgiveness on behavior, this study did find that the manipulation of forgiveness had some effect on participants, with unforgiven participants demonstrating greater anger and resentment toward the experimenter than forgiven or control participants. Unforgiven participants also evaluated the experimenter as being less professional, friendly, likeable, and polite, as well as being overall less

competent. Being unforgiven also made those participants feel more uncomfortable than did being forgiven or feeling no offense.

The counterintuitive interaction between forgiveness condition and agreeableness on helping behavior illustrates a situation in which highly agreeable people actually help less than less agreeable people. Most research demonstrates that helping constitutes a key component of the individual difference variable of agreeableness (McCullough, 2001). In this situation, however, highly agreeable participants in the unforgiven condition helped less than the less agreeable people, and also less than they helped in the no-offense condition. It is possible that high agreeable people expect everyone else to be agreeable also, and when the experimenter violated the agreeableness norm, the participants reacted by retaliating and helping the experimenter less. If this is the case, then the low agreeable people held no such expectations about agreeable behavior in the experimenter and thus felt no need to retaliate. It is important to keep in mind that this interaction only reached significance when two other variables were used as covariates, so the size of this interaction is not large.

It seems odd that such striking differences in emotional responses to forgiveness condition did not lead to independent significant effects of forgiveness on the behavioral measure of helping. Unforgiveness led to increased anger and resentment as well as strong negative evaluations of the experimenter, yet these feelings did not manifest themselves in an independent behavioral trend based only on forgiveness condition. It is possible that the mannerisms of the two experimenters added too much variability in the manipulation, wiping out a potential effect. Indeed, there was a significant effect of experimenter, with the second experimenter eliciting more helping behavior overall than

the first. In a manipulation so dependent on precise social interaction, it is possible that the slight differences between the two different experimenters may have obscured the effects of the forgiveness manipulation. Another possible explanation for the lack of a behavioral trend could be that the manipulations themselves were so steeped in unquantifiable cues. For example, the experimenters communicated forgiveness with a set phrase and then a friendly demeanor. How does one operationally define demeanor? It is possible that one experimenter was more able to communicate friendliness than the other, and that these small differences resulted in no behavioral trend. Future studies with more easily-replicable manipulations of forgiveness and unforgiveness may indeed find a behavior trend.

Also of note is the fact that the control condition did not differ in any way from the forgiven condition on the manipulation check items. Participants in the control condition were just as likely to think that the experimenter expressed forgiveness as were participants in the forgiveness condition. This finding could imply that in our society, people assume forgiveness barring significant evidence to the contrary. Without a display of anger, participants in this experiment assumed that they were forgiven for their offense.

It is also possible, of course, that the difference in manipulation between the forgiveness and control condition simply was not strong. This study did not explicitly use the term, "I forgive you," in the forgiveness condition, because it was decided that college students would not communicate forgiveness for an offense using those terms. Instead, the experimenter used the phrase, "All right, it's ok, don't worry about it," to communicate forgiveness to the participants. Perhaps clearer forgiveness language

would stop this automatic forgiveness effect, but at the risk of creating an artificial social situation.

When considering the similarity between the control and forgiveness conditions, it is possible to view the current experiment as demonstrating the effects of unforgiveness rather than forgiveness. Explicitly stating forgiveness and not creating an offense both produced the same effects on behavior and opinions of the offender; it was unforgiveness that demonstrated significant differences. Past studies have demonstrated that the act of forgiving offenders provides mental health benefits to the person doing the forgiving (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Fitzgibbons, 1986), and this study demonstrated that forgiveness has interpersonal benefits as well. Although unforgiveness created anger, resentment, and poor evaluations of the experimenter, forgiving avoided all of those negative consequences.

Forgiving can often be easier than maintaining a long-term grudge. In the case of running the experiment, it was much easier for the experimenters to forgive the participants than to leave the offense unforgiven. Experimenters reported that unforgiveness created negative affect in them as well as in the participants—the acting necessary to communicate unforgiveness made the experimenters anxious and uncomfortable. In the absence of behavioral data to prove otherwise, forgiving offenses seems to be the preferred option for avoiding negative affect and unfavorable opinions of yourself in the offender. Forgiveness has the benefit also of letting the offender know that their offense mattered; that it wasn't trivial. Thus, forgiveness allows the communication of an offense on the part of the victim with no behavioral or emotional consequences. The idea that forgiving entails condoning the offending behavior, and thus

allowing offenders to take advantage of the victim, is not supported by the results of this study.

Future Avenues of Research

In order to increase the differences between the manipulations of forgiveness and no-offense conditions, further studies could demonstrate an offense completely impersonally, with no human interaction. This change would perhaps lessen the effect of implied forgiveness. Demonstrating that the offense affected the experimenter personally, and further displays of forgiveness and unforgiveness, would take place through an interaction with the experimenter. With this stronger manipulation, future studies could perhaps demonstrate a difference in internal or external behavior between no-offense and forgiveness conditions.

This study did not directly investigate the mood of the participant after the forgiveness manipulation. To test the hypothesis that unforgiveness causes a more negative mood in the participant as well as toward the experimenter, one could insert a measure of mood immediately after reporting intention of practice problems, as well as right after the forgiveness manipulation. For example, does positive affect increase with forgiveness, or only after the participant has the opportunity to "make things right" by offering to help in some way?

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that forgiveness results in more positive interpersonal consequences than does unforgiveness. In addition, this study showed that forgiving someone does not mean that the offender will take advantage of the forgiver at the next opportunity—a common fear of forgivers. This area of study can only be benefited by

future research to make the affective, evaluative, and behavioral effects of forgiveness on

the person being forgiven more clear.

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