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Empathy-Motivated Forgiveness

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Abstract

The process of forgiveness may be contingent upon the empathic response towards another individual. A victim cannot begin to forgive a transgressor before he or she is able to empathize with the transgressor's guilt and distress. The empathy-altruism hypothesis further exemplifies the motivation and connection of the empathic response with forgiveness. In interpersonal relationships conflicts are inevitable. The motivation to mend these problems and reconcile with the offender occurs through the experience of empathy and the altruism to act with positive regard. Prior experience of a situation is not a necessity for empathy-motivated forgiveness to occur. Fifty women and 20 men participated in this study (mean age of the respondents was 25.31). Participants answered questions from two vignettes and three scales, the *New Empathy Scale* (Caruso & Mayer, 1998), the *Forgiveness Scale* (Rye et al., 2001), and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* (Rye et al., 2001) to assess the relationship between empathy and forgiveness, as well as the effect of prior experience. Empathy was correlated with forgiveness, according to the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* but not the *Forgiveness Scale*. Empathic individuals significantly forgave a transgressor without previously experiencing a similar situation. Religiosity was also correlated with all three scales. Findings extend prior research by demonstrating that empathy is a possible motivator of conciliatory behavior. Considerations of additional influences of empathy-related forgiveness were considered, and a pattern of gender on both empathy and forgiveness was also proposed.

Empathy-Motivated Forgiveness

Empathy is not a recent concept of interest in psychology, but its effect on forgiveness has sparked new consideration. Empathy is “the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another” (www.dictionary.com). Empathy is also defined as the desire to increase another person’s personal welfare before consideration of one’s own (Batson, Batson, Griffitt, & Barrientos, 1989; Cohen & Strayer, 1996; Levenson & Ruef, 1992). Forgiveness of another can occur because of an empathic response to the other person. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of empathy on the process of forgiveness. Numerous variables contribute to forgiveness, but the focus of this review is on the role of empathy in forgiveness.

When one is hurt or offended, several variables affect one’s reaction: a) whether the offender is a stranger, a friend, or a loved one; b) the strength of the relationship; c) the severity of the offense; and d) the previous experience of a similar transgression (Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981). Thus, forgiveness is affected by contextual and person-specific factors. Both the offending partner and the offended partner can influence the likelihood that forgiveness will be achieved (Cialdini, Schaller, Houlihan, & Fultz, 1987; McCullough et al., 1998). The empathic response of an offended person in relation to a transgression may be pivotal in the overall process of forgiveness. Empathy is also relevant to the ability to continue to forgive after the initial resolution (Walker & Gorsuch, 2004).

Forgiveness

Trait forgiveness is the capacity to forgive interpersonal transgressions across situations over time. It is very often reliant on a pattern of contemplation, as emotion peaks immediately following the transgression, and slowly declines as time passes (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005). *Dispositional forgiveness*, by contrast, is an enduring personality trait; it is not concerned with the situation or transgressor. This type of forgiveness occurs without the need for contemplation. *Offense-specific forgiveness* is the forgiveness of a specific person for a single transgression. *Dyadic forgiveness* is forgiveness in the context of a relationship with a specific person and occurs over the history of transgressions. All these types of forgiveness describe a process, and are not just a goal or end result.

Sometimes forgiveness may occur as a negative process. For instance, motives are negative when an individual forgives another: to a) manipulate that person, b) to make that person feel indebted, or c) to create guilty feelings in order to punish that person. Another negative process involves delay: i.e., an individual has already forgiven the offender, but does not communicate it to the offender; this is known as *silent forgiveness*, which prevents recovery for the offender. Conversely, one may communicate forgiveness to the offender even without experiencing it internally; this is known as *hollow forgiveness* (Worthington, Sharp, Lerner, & Sharp, 2006).

Positive processes in forgiveness include *emotional* and *interpersonal forgiveness* (Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003). Emotional forgiveness is the process of replacing the negative emotions associated with the failure to forgive with positive emotions, such as sympathy, empathy, and love. Similar to this is interpersonal forgiveness, in which an

individual in an intimate relationship forgives the transgressions of a partner because he or she empathizes with the other's distress or guilty feelings.

Forgiveness should also be distinguished from: forgetting, condoning, excusing, or denying that the offense has ever happened (Konstam et al., 2003). These actions are often described as the ineffective way to deal with a transgression.

Both emotional forgiveness and reconciliation are important factors in reducing negative human interaction, and at times they have been used interchangeably.

Worthington (2001) provides a good example of the difference between the two.

Forgiveness is constructed of five steps. Step one is a matter of recalling all the hurt. Step two is experiencing empathy for the individual. Step three is the private altruistic behavior of forgiveness. Step four is publicly committing to forgive. Finally, step five is holding onto the forgiveness. Reconciliation, in contrast, is a four-step process. Step one is deciding when, where, and how to reconcile. Step two is discussing the transgression(s) with the offender. Step three is cleansing the relationship of prior pain and hurt that was done. Finally, step four is both individuals devoting effort to the construction of a mutually valuing relationship.

In some situations, forgiveness is the motivation that leads to the process of reconciliation (Walker & Gorsuch, 2004). In one study (Worthington, 2001) it was suggested that the extended exposure between the two parties involved, both before and after the transgressions, make the possibility of reconciliation more probable and most likely more necessary. To further demonstrate this, in another study by Worthington (2001), slightly over half the subjects expressed their hurt as coming from a parent,

sibling, or other relative. The author suggested that perhaps a hurt in the context of these types of relationships was what caused a greater motivation to reconcile.

There are a number of different explanations for how one forgives another. Some therapists consider forgiveness as the function of responsibility attribution. Others consider the relationship commitment itself a primary factor in the process of forgiveness. The quantifiable view of forgiveness is that it is a series of steps that people must complete, which are essential in the reduction of a wide range of psychological and physiological symptoms that occur when forgiveness has not been reached. Empathy for the transgressor is another emphasis in the research on the process of forgiveness (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997)

Forgiveness of Strangers

Forgiveness includes both a reduction in negative feelings and an increase in compassion towards the offender. In the case of strangers, there is often a lack of initiative or desire to resolve a confrontation with an unknown person (Lawler et al., 2003). In order for forgiveness to occur, some type of connection has to be made between the transgressor and the offended individual. An offensive act or a harmful act by a stranger will not be forgiven unless the offended can identify with the need of the offender. This need imposes a desire for the alleviation of the distress, the distress caused by the harmful act of the offender. Estrangement towards the individual (a stranger) does not cause distress or loneliness; in fact, it is likely to obviate the opportunity for forgiveness. Once the two individuals walk away, they will never see each other again. However, estrangement or avoidance without forgiveness may lead to

ramifications resulting from the transgression, such as guilt or distress, which may remain without the possibility of forgiveness in the future.

Additionally, efforts made to promote forgiveness require substantial time. The individual must think through the transgression and emotionally experience forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2000). With a stranger, this task may be difficult. An act may occur without enough time for the offended to contemplate the action and consider possible forgiveness.

Interpersonal Forgiveness

Interpersonal forgiveness, the forgiving of one partner in a romantic relationship by the other partner, has been the subject of substantial research. After a transgression, many people would be motivated to retaliate or to avoid the transgressor. Some, however, will return relatively quickly to baseline (McCullough et al., 2006).

Interpersonal forgiveness is a motivational change in which one becomes either decreasingly motivated to retaliate against the partner in the relationship or decreasingly motivated to maintain the separation from the offending partner. In addition, the offended partner is increasingly motivated by conciliation and benevolence for the offending partner, even in consideration of the hurtful or offensive actions of the offending partner. Forgiving is the movement away from revenge and avoidance towards conciliatory actions (McCullough et al., 1997; Worthington et al., 2006).

Benefits of Transgressions

It is understood that when any serious transgression occurs, the victim suffers some sort of cost (e.g., loss of trust, emotional or physical well-being). However, choosing not to focus on the loss but instead to focus on any potential benefits of the

transgression may alleviate the physical damage of the transgression. In addition, it may also help to promote forgiveness. Examples of potential benefits include: a) realizing one's inner strength, b) gaining new appreciation of one's life, c) having better future interpersonal relationships, and d) readjusting one's priorities in life (McCullough et al., 2006).

If one focuses on the benefits rather than the losses connected with an event, it may lessen the possibility of vengeful recourse or avoidant behavior. By choosing to reject the cost of the transgression, the victim might come to feel that the transgressor owes a smaller "debt", and the reciprocity-based motivation of revenge is also lessened (King & Miner, 2000). In addition, the expression of a moderate amount of negative affect (e.g., verbal confession of feelings; when conversing about the emotional aspects of the transgression) may help reduce the cost of the transgression. The discussion about the emotional factors of the event as a whole is also important to restore closeness towards the transgressor and, ultimately to grant forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2006).

McCullough et al. (2006) studied the advantages of focusing on the benefits of a transgression known as: benefit finding. In his study the participants were given a questionnaire asking about the most recent occasion in their life when someone hurt or offended them. Next, one group was asked to write an essay: a) describing in what ways the action of the offending person had *negatively* affected their lives, at that moment, and b) how it affected them in the future. The second group was asked to write an essay describing in what ways the action of the offending person had *positively* affected their lives, both at that moment and in the future. A control group was also included in which the essay was not about any transgression or their reaction to another person's actions.

The participants were then given the *Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation Inventory* (McCullough et al., 2006) — 18-item Version (TRIM-18), aimed at assessing participants' ability to forgive their transgressor. The results revealed that the benefit-finding group forgave their transgressors more effectively than either of the other two groups. It also was shown that benefit-finding is relatively common after the trauma of a transgression, and it is positively associated with mental and emotional rebounding from the transgression, and of course, with the likelihood of forgiveness.

Humility and Commitment

Humility is the general concern to help or improve another's welfare or the happiness of a society (www.dictionary.com). Humility is important for forgiveness, as it may provide the means for forgiveness to occur. A person may not agree with or be able to imagine doing what the other person did, but realizes that forgiving is the decent thing to do. Humility, then, acknowledges the inability to comprehend the actions of the transgressor, but still may cause forgiveness because it is a good-natured behavior (Worthington, 1998).

Commitment to resolution, after the apology or act of forgiveness is made, allows for a sense of closure to the situation or relationship. One example is when an individual chooses to forgive a partner who left, instead of acting on feelings of revenge. Rather than holding onto the feelings of resentment, forgiveness can be used to alleviate further harm to one's own emotional structure. Another example is that once one has been forgiven, one embraces that fact, by mentally saying "I have been forgiven," in order to let go of one's own thoughts of the situation go (Worthington, 1998). Commitment in this case acts to prevent hollow forgiveness. Whereas communicating an apology may

start the forgiveness process, it is also important to make sure all thoughts of the offensive or harmful act are also resolved.

Empathy

Empathy is a widely studied construct. It has been considered from the perspective of the emotional connection one feels to psychological objects, as in the connection between a mother and her child. It also has been considered the primary tool utilized by psychotherapists. Empathy originated from the term *Einführung*, which in German means “the projection of the self into the object of beauty” (Weyl, 1993, p. 5). *Einführung* was actually first incorrectly translated as sympathy. The confusion between the terms sympathy and empathy, however, is common.

Sympathy and Embarrassment

Sympathy versus empathy. Sympathy is the cognitive ability to discern others’ internal states. It should be considered the process whereby the sufferer’s pain is brought in front of the observer, leading to an unselfish concern for the other person (Wispé, 1986). It is the process of understanding the emotions of another, from the outsider’s own perspective. Sympathy can be understood from two interpretations. First, it can increase the awareness and sensitivity of another’s emotions. Depending on the context, a person will feel more involved based on his or her sympathy for the individual. The second aspect of sympathy is the motivation to alleviate the suffering of the other, which is experienced as the desire for negative emotions to be resolved. Whereas the actual task of helping may not occur, compassion may still be a natural byproduct. Additionally, it is important to understand that sympathy is not an actual experience but simply the observation of another’s emotions. Because of this, a sympathetic connection with

another is not as strong as the empathic-experience connection that occurs when empathizing with another person (Hatcher et al., 2005).

Empathy, by contrast, is the tendency for observers to project themselves into the objects of their perception, a kind of animism. This refers to the process whereby one person tries to understand accurately, emotionally and without prejudice, the subjectivity of another person. Sympathy is viewing the emotional experience of another from the outside, whereas empathy is viewing the emotional experience of another by taking in those emotions and experiencing them from the inside.

The two concepts have often been used interchangeably. Empathy has been defined as the sympathy for another's suffering when the individual places himself or herself in the other's situation, and is able to conceptualize that he or she is enduring all of the same torments (Batson et al., 1996). Although both empathy and sympathy have as their object the emotions of another person, they are also different physiological processes, and must be understood as such (Wispé, 1986).

Empathic embarrassment. Embarrassment is a construct dealing with maintaining one's social identification. Embarrassment occurs when an awkward or mortifying undesired public event negatively affects one's social identification (Miller, 1987). Empathic embarrassment occurs when an individual sees another person in an embarrassing situation and also feels embarrassed. It goes beyond feeling sorry for the individual, and actually involves an empathic connection of shared embarrassment. An experiment was conducted in which individuals observed people doing an embarrassing act and were assessed as to how embarrassed they felt. The study showed that those observing a person appearing to be embarrassed doing an action elicited more

embarrassment in the observer than watching an embarrassing action in which the person did not appear to be embarrassed (Miller, 1987).

Confluence

Confluence has often been understood as a synonym for empathy as well. Confluence is defined as the absence of the sense of separateness that occurs when no emotional boundary exists between two individuals (O'Leary, 1997). However, confluence may also be associated with non-human elements, such as animals or events and social roles. The merger of emotional boundaries can exist in reference to one's life and one's work. Work confluence is when one's life is one's work, and one's work is one's life. Empathy, however, is a construct limited to emotional connectedness between two people. An empathic response is an experience, not a description of an event. It can also be the resulting way a person conducts his or her life. Simply put, empathy is an emotional interpersonal experience; whereas confluence is mutual connectedness (non-interpersonal).

There are several types of empathy. Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to accurately perceive the plight of others. From this perspective, empathy can be seen as objective, detached, and analytical (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). With cognitive empathy, one can behave in a manner that conveys concern and caring. Affective empathy is the vicarious emotional process in which a person develops an affective connection with another and subsequently has an emotional response to the other's suffering. Dispositional empathy is when a specific empathic response for a person is translated into empathy only in that specific situation or context. That is to say, the empathic experience is linked to specific contextual parameters, and the reoccurrence of this interaction is

limited to a particular empathic template (Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995; Clark, 1980; Regehr, Goldberg, & Hughes, 2002). For example, it would be understandable (and thus, forgivable) if an individual did not hold the door for the next person if that person were carrying a large stack of books in their hands. However, if this were not the situation, many people would find it very rude (and not particularly worthy of forgiveness) if a person failed to hold the door for the next person.

It has been found that an affective empathic state mediates helping behavior, and a cognitive empathic state has been found to modify the attribution of others' behavior (Duan & Hill, 1996). Cognitive empathy is presumed to occur when the perception of the victim's innocence increases the experience of empathy for the observer. For example, the empathic response will be stronger for a rape victim when the act is caused by a stranger rather than a date (Linz, Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1988).

Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis

Much of the research on empathy relates it to the concept of altruism. Whereas empathy is the internal connection with the individual in need, altruism is the prosocial motivation to help that individual (Weyl, 1993; Wispé, 1986). The empathy-altruism hypothesis argues that empathy encourages altruistic behavior. An individual helps another individual, or considers the other person's welfare first, strictly based on altruistic reasons, and does it with no concern for reciprocation (Batson & Ahmad, 2001; Batson et al., 1989).

Altruism has been difficult to explain. Why does one do an unnecessary act if no positive outcome to the actor will occur if it is completed, and no negative outcome will

occur if it is not completed? The empathy-altruism hypothesis suggests that one's empathic reaction to a person in need mediates the altruistic response (Krebs, 1975).

To increase another person's welfare before one's own is thus, a matter of a true desire to help another based on the occurrence of empathy experienced for the individual in need. For example, a truly altruistic experience would be the escorting of an older adult across the street, or holding the door when someone's hands are full. It is best expressed when the action to help is described as "acting without thinking" (Krebs, 1975). To think about helping implies the need for a reason to complete the task and that altruistic motivation is not enough.

Krebs (1975) found that participants who experienced the strongest empathic reactions towards another individual were most willing to help that individual, regardless of their own welfare or loss of reward. The study paired two individuals, a participant and a confederate. Between the two individuals was a roulette wheel. The instructions were given that when the confederate landed on an even number, he or she would win money. Conversely, when he or she landed on an odd number he or she would receive an electric shock. The participant was led to believe that the position of the performer and the observer was decided randomly. After a few trials, the participants were told they would be given a bonus spin, in which they could win between 0 and \$2, depending on how much they wagered. If the ball landed on an even number, they would win the amount they wagered. However, if the ball landed on an odd number, the performer (the confederate) would receive a shock relative to the amount wagered by the participant. The results of the study revealed the reward was more than irrelevant, and the concern to help the other individual was more important. Additionally, the strongest empathic

reactions in the participants led to the greatest concern, and therefore, altruistic behavior towards the confederate in the form of harm prevention (i.e., shielding him or her from the electric shock).

One study assessed whether individuals would volunteer to help someone, even if they would not receive any feedback on the outcome of their assistance. Feedback, in this case, is any indication of the future well-being of the person being helped. Regardless if the person being assisted was aided by the participants' help or not, no feedback was provided regardless of their assistance. As predicted, when levels of empathy were assessed to be high, the individual would choose to help nearly as often with feedback as without feedback (Batson et al., 1991). In this case, helping was a goal-irrelevant response, and empathy for another person would account for this elicited reaction (Smith et al., 1989). This is not to say that one person never assists another for personal reasons and goal achievement, but one who feels empathic towards another will more likely be inclined to exhibit a truly altruistic response.

In the Batson experiment described above, altruistic helping was the result of an empathic reaction, even when no feedback was provided to the individual who was deciding to help. Another study assessed altruism when no public acknowledgement of the helpful act would be given, not even to the one being helped. Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, and Varney (1986) assessed whether social evaluative circumstances are a necessary condition for the empathy-altruism relationship. Individuals were asked to read a set of letters from a person whom they had never met. The participants were led to believe that the letters were from an earlier participant. In the second letter, the writer stated that she felt very lonely, and was wondering if the

reader would be willing to meet and talk sometime. If the request was denied, no one would know. The participants believed that their response would only be read by the woman, if they decided to respond.

In a second study, Fultz et al. (1986) manipulated the letters to produce an empathic response (low versus high), and manipulated the potential for negative social evaluation (low versus high). In one set of letters the woman appeared desperate, compassionate, and sincere about her need for help (high empathy). In the second set of letters the woman remained straight-forward, dry, and simply laid out the request for help but in a rather emotionless way (low empathy). Additionally, the social evaluation manipulation dealt with whether anyone would know of the choice of the participant. The idea is that a person will act differently if he or she knows that others will be aware and form an opinion about the choice to help. The low social evaluation, then, involved being told that no one, other than the woman, would know of the choice to help; high social evaluation occurred when participants were told that people would know of their choice. Both studies revealed a positive relationship between empathy and the inclination to help. In Study 2, the relationship remained the same regardless of low or high potential for social evaluation. This further suggests that the motivation to help another in need is in fact a result of empathy, and not the result of egoistic motivation in an attempt to avoid negative self-evaluation. It is then the empathic response that evokes the altruistic behavior, in order to reduce a victim's need for assistance (Batson & Toi, 1982; Fultz et al., 1986).

Alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis have been offered. The empathy-specific reward hypothesis is that prosocial motivation related to empathy is directed

towards obtaining social or self-rewards (e.g., praise, honor, or pride). The empathy-specific punishment hypothesis is that prosocial motivation related to empathy is directed towards the goal of avoiding social or self-punishment (e.g., censure, shame, or guilt). When considering helping, recalling prior experience of a situation will elicit either considerations of reinforcement or punishment (Batson, Dyck, Brandt, & Batson, 1988). Feeling empathy will either lead to helping to attain the reinforcement experienced before (empathy-specific reward hypothesis), or helping to avoid the punishment experienced before (empathy-specific punishment hypothesis).

There are a few other possible alternatives before social evaluation can be eliminated as a variable for the empathy-altruism hypothesis. For instance, although empathy may not be a process to avoid punishment from social evaluation, it may be aimed at avoiding personal evaluation, in the form of guilt (Fultz et al., 1986; Tangney, 1991). The empathic response to help another avoid feelings of guilt would not be an altruistic behavior. However, guilt can be assessed here as an outcome of the empathy-specific punishment hypothesis.

Five studies were conducted to test the two alternatives to the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson et al., 1988). Study 1, evaluated the empathy-specific reward hypothesis, and predicted that high-empathy participants would feel better if they were the cause of the victim's relief. However, in accordance with the empathy-altruism hypothesis, the high-empathy participants' self-reported mood revealed that they did not feel any worse if the victim was relieved because of their own actions, or if the victim's need was relieved by other means. Studies 2 through 4 all dealt with the empathy-specific punishment hypothesis. Low-empathy participants were found to be motivated

in some respect by the desire to avoid self or social punishment associated with a failure to do the right thing. However, high-empathy participants were not affected, even when the justification for not helping was high. The high-empathy participants did not appear to act in the avoidance of punishment, but instead by the motivation of the altruism to help. Thus, all three studies supported the empathy-altruism reward specific hypothesis as motivation towards reducing the person's need and not avoiding anticipated punishment in regard to altruism. Study 5 assessed all hypotheses, and once again evidence supported only the empathy-altruism hypothesis.

Prior-Experience Hypothesis

One perspective is that empathy is better experienced when a similar occurrence has been experienced before. The extreme view is that empathy is only possible when a similar occurrence has been experienced before. However, if this were so, a man would not be able to empathize with a pregnant woman. Yet, it can also be argued that he can relate to a painful and uncomfortable situation, and empathizes based on the experience of a somewhat similar context (Batson et al., 1996; Klugman, 2001).

However, it seems that the more a new situation resembles a past experience, the greater the empathy for the person involved will be. At the very least, when a person has experienced a need, and later comes across someone else suffering from that same need, it is much easier to adopt that person's perspective and empathize (Batson et al., 1996).

Barnett, Teteault, and Masbad (1987) assessed whether rape victims would experience more empathy than nonrape victims when observing a videotape of an interview with a rape victim. No differences were found between groups in empathic response to the interviewed rape victim. However, the empathy index in this study was

done by assessing reported distress, including feeling alarmed, grieved, and upset. This is problematic, especially in traumatic experiences, for there is a significant difference between personal distress and empathy (Batson et al., 1996).

The difference between personal distress and empathy is that personal distress increases a memory of one's own anguish, but does not cause any direct concern for the person actually experiencing the situation at that time. For example, hearing a scream at the doctor's office may elicit prior thoughts of being at the doctor's office before, and how the doctor was able take a painful situation and alleviate it. This would then cause an empathic response for the individual screaming, placing oneself in that person's situation and increasing feelings of empathy and understanding of the person's situation. By contrast, the scream may elicit memories of previous pain in the doctor's office. Regardless of whether it was alleviated or not, the memory of pain would increase current distress and anxiety, and the personal distress would actually cause a loss of social contact, driving all focus onto the observing individual and away from the screaming victim. This may explain the difference between participants feeling personal distress for the rape victims being interviewed versus feeling empathy for her (Batson et al., 1996).

Two studies were performed with a focus on empathy based on prior experience, as opposed to personal distress and prior experience (Batson et al., 1996). In Study 1, participants observed a person perform tests in which they were made to believe that incorrect answers elicited a mild shock to the person. Before the test began, one group was told they were going to be taking the test, but at the last minute were told that there was a mistake and that they were actually going to be the observer instead. The other

group simply observed the person take the test. The idea was that having had the potential to be the victim of the shocks would be similar to the experience of being in the same position as the tested individual.

In Study 2, participants read one of two transcripts, either of an experience with the embarrassment of an acne problem or of the rejection by a long-term dating partner. Participants indicated whether they had had a similar prior experience of the situation after reading the transcript.

The prior experience hypothesis is that exposure to either the observed person's need or the hypothetical transcript person's need would prompt recall of one's own prior experience. In both studies, women with prior experience of the situation were more empathic. However, strong empathy was found even in the groups not having had prior experience. Although empathy increased with experience, it was not necessary for an empathic response to occur. From both studies it can be concluded that prior experience is not necessary to feel empathy for another in need (Batson et al., 1996). These studies argue against the prior-experience hypothesis; whereas experience may increase empathic potential, it is not a prerequisite for empathy to occur. Additionally, prior experience may actually reduce empathy, if egoistic motives are first associated with the experience. Regardless, conceptualizing empathy as being sympathy with experience seems to be unproductive. Experience may at times increase empathy, but empathy is not the same as sympathy, and empathy can occur without the aid of prior experience.

Experiencing an overload of empathic situations may cause a failure of future responses, or *failed empathy*. Psychic trauma is described as the overload of empathy resulting in a decline in empathic response, which is where *failed empathy* most often

occurs. Psychic trauma can occur in two ways. First, it can occur as the result of particular natural events, such as accidents, illnesses, or natural disasters. The other way is by deliberate actions of other persons, such as those attempting to destroy the individual, with acts of war, torture, or attempted murder. The second type of psychic trauma can be divided into two subparts based on the type of victimizer. In some instances, the victimizer is a lone individual, such as a mugger or rapist. Conversely, in some instances the victimizer is a large group of people, representative of a society, such as those involved in war, genocide, and state supported torture (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989).

When a person is inflicting harm on another, the severity of symptoms of the victim is linked to the interpersonal and moral aspects of the traumatic intrusion. The link between the self and other is predictive of a possible empathic experience between the two. In order to clarify this connection, it helps to consider a psychic trauma with a large victimizer group, for example, the Nazis. The Nazis, in their concentration camps, expressed no concern at all for the Jews who were enslaved there. As a result, the Jews, too, could only be concerned for themselves, if they wished to survive. However, at their weakest points, especially during times of torture, these victims might cry out for help to one of the guards, or maybe even a fellow prisoner. If it did occur that a fellow prisoner would help, that helping prisoner would be tortured or shot and killed (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989). The good deed, acted upon as a result of empathy for the victimized person, was punished, in full view of all the others in the camp. This emotional damage qualifies as psychic trauma.

Failed empathy, then, is defined as a massive failure of the interpersonal environment to mediate needs (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989). All throughout the camp, any

act of kindness or concern for another, if seen by the guards, was punished. Whereas the natural human reaction is to help another in need because of altruism (explained by the empathy-altruism hypothesis), the opposite reaction was conditioned in the concentration camps. The opposite of empathy, i.e., replacing any altruistic behavior with the strong will to survive and avoid helping, was conditioned. As a result, helping was associated with pain and death. A similar situation is experienced by medical doctors in hospitals where empathy must be reduced in order to maintain composure in front of all those in need of help. However, the Jews were given the more severe response, instead of simply habituating and reducing the empathic response, empathy became conditioned as a negative emotion. A severe negative experience can actually destroy the person's sense of empathy, at least for the time in that particular context. Empathy, however, can be redeveloped once the situational demands are removed (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989).

Any normal individual should be inhibited from committing physical aggression by the empathic response that is automatically formed for the victim (Perez-Albeniz & De Paul, 2005). Consider the Nazi example from a different perspective by interpreting empathy from the soldier's viewpoint. When an aggressor views the victim of his or her aggression, especially the victim's distress and pain reactions, normally there is a sharing of the victim's distress. The result is the attempt to reduce this distress by the termination of the aggression. The alternative approach argues that the pain and distress cues evoke an emotional response of empathic concern in the aggressor. As a result, the experience of empathy leads to the motivation to increase the victim's welfare by the termination of the aggression (Perez-Albeniz & De Paul, 2005). The Nazi soldiers, however, could not and did not empathize with their victims, the imprisoned Jews. The explanation is that

the soldiers were part of a large victimizer group, a country (state) who supported torture (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989). The emotional, and therefore empathic, connection was inhibited by the government-enforced mind state inflicted on the soldiers. The lack of empathy in the soldiers, caused by the government, prevented any altruism as the inhibition of aggression towards the Jews did not result. This same principle, the lack of empathy, prevents the inhibition of aggression in cases of childhood physical abuse. Parents involved in childhood physical abuse must not experience empathy for their child, or they would prevent their aggression from continuing (Perez-Albeniz & De Paul, 2005).

It is important to note that empathy is only an underlying characteristic of the tragic events that took place. The lack of empathy was the result of the Nazi-state. It is understood that the events that took place can be explained by a number of different things. Some research explains that there was a dehumanizing of the Jews, as the Nazis viewed the Jews as their scapegoat. The economic decline of Germany during 1929 through 1934 created a devastating setting which resulted in a context ripe for aggression; aggression placed upon the Jews (Laub & Auerhahn, 1989). It is not the intention of this research to downgrade the events that took place, but only to use the extreme situation as a model of *failed empathy*.

Empathy and Forgiveness

Developing empathy is a necessary step in forgiveness. Having greater trait empathy makes it easier to forgive than someone having no trait empathy. Women have greater forgiveness than men, but neither men nor women differ in their levels of forgiveness. Offense-specific and dyadic forgiveness are the primary types more often

associated as important with forgiveness. A different mentality is involved when empathy is developed for a stranger. An individual must create a previously nonexistent connection with a stranger in order to be able to forgive him or her. Interpersonal forgiveness, however, is more complex than the altruistic helping of strangers (Macaskill, Maltzby, & Day, 2002).

Although the empathy-altruism hypothesis has been supported in cases of helping, is it also relevant in forgiveness? Consider the situation in reverse: now this victim (the offender) is trying to alleviate his or her distress by being forgiven. First, some situation has occurred in which the offended has begun to avoid or estrange the offender. The offended then witnesses the distress of the offender. The offended, ideally, empathizes with the offender (considers what it would be like to be the offender and be in distress) and is altruistically motivated to help alleviate the distress. Forgiveness, then, is a way to reduce the victim's need, or alleviate the distress of the offender (McCullough et al., 1997).

It is possible to consider the relationship of empathy, forgiving, and the behaviors that follow as similar to what happens when empathy leads to the motivation to act altruistically towards another. The empathic connection necessary to help another in need is similar to the empathic connection to forgive another who has transgressed. Positive attachment and a shared history often will increase both empathy for the individual as well as the potential for forgiveness.

In general, an existing interpersonal relationship is based on a shared agreement of well-being for one another. However, a destructive occurrence, either one that is harmful or offensive to one of the partners, can upset the balance of well-being. The

result can be an inclination to retaliate against the offending partner, or to avoid any contact with the individual. Often, the resulting affect is congruent with the offense by the offending partner. That is, the level of severity of the offense by the transgressor usually equals the resulting retaliation or estrangement demonstrated by the offended. The resulting affect can take one of two forms: a) *righteous indignation*, including sadness, anger, and contempt; or b) *hurt and perceived attack*, including fear, victimhood, and worry (Gottman, 1994). It is these two reactions that cause the motivation to retaliate, estrange the offending partner, or both. Continued employment of these reactions often leads to sustained deterioration of the relationship.

Although the typical altruistic relationship is conceptualized differently from the relationship in which forgiving occurs, the offended partner may acquire empathy for the offending partner (McCullough et al., 1997). Just as empathy evokes caring for a stranger in need, the experience of empathy by the offended partner can cause an individual to care for the needs of the offending partner. This may occur in three ways. First, the offended partner may observe the offending partner's distress and guilt for his or her actions and, in turn, experience empathy for the other because of the way this is hurting the relationship (Tangney, 1991). Second, the offended partner may develop empathy for the offending partner based on the observed loneliness the offended partner is feeling because of the estrangement behaviors. Finally, the emotional connection itself may cause the offended partner to feel empathy for the offending partner because of the desire to restore the relationship and prevent further deterioration and damage.

In either case, the result of the empathic response is the desire to reduce the motivation for vengeful or avoidant behaviors, so as to reduce the offending partner's

need for revenge. The offended partner then elicits altruistic behavior of caring and motivation to conciliate with the offending partner so as to relieve the distress, guilt, and loneliness. This ultimately is motivated by the desire to restore the relationship (McCullough et al., 1997). Both personality and situational factors are important when considering interpersonal empathy, as well as interpersonal forgiveness. However, once the empathic response of the offended partner overshadows the perpetuation of the offending partner's actions, a set of motivational changes occurs and forgiveness is achieved (McCullough et al., 1997).

Empathy makes a person feel bad about another's guilt in relation to damage done to the relationship. The empathic response may cause the offended partner to care that the offending partner is lonely because of the estranged relationship. Empathy could also lead to the offended partner restoring positive contact.

Forgiving is like accommodation, explained as "the inhibition of destructive responses and the enacting of constructive responses following the destructive interpersonal behavior of a relationship partner" (McCullough et al., 1998, p. 1587). Whereas the act, either offensive or hurtful, is done by the offending partner, empathizing with the offender will allow that offended partner to accommodate the damage and reconstruct the bond that was broken by the act. The addition of an apology may initiate the empathetic response, and the forgiving of one's partner is a function of increased empathy for the offender.

In one study, participants recalled a situation in which a partner treated them unfairly and hurt them in the past (McCullough et al., 1997). They then were given a list of questions about that person, followed by empathy and forgiveness measures. The

addition of an apology by the offending partner was used as an empathy-evoking stimulus. As a result, it was shown that when a partner apologized for his or her actions, the apology increased empathy for the offender, most likely revealing the guilt and distress the offending partner was feeling because of his or her actions. The experience of empathy reduces the desire for retaliation and estrangement from the offending partner, and replaces it with feelings of conciliatory motivation.

The process of interpersonal forgiveness does involve variables other than that of empathy. This includes but is not limited to social-cognitive aspects, offense level of the action, relationship level, and personality type. However, all of the above are interconnected with the effects of empathy (McCullough et al., 1998).

The conciliatory motivation, characterized here as forgiveness, is much the same as the empathic motivation to altruistically help or care for others. In addition, an apology by the offending partner facilitates increased empathy for the offending partner, possibly alerting the offended partner to the distress and guilt being experienced (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). This does not imply immediate forgiveness, but instead may be the possible beginning of the process of forgiveness. This process of forgiving is the empathy-motivated set of motivational changes, in which the offended partner is more inclined towards prosocial actions in relation to the offending partner (McCullough et al., 1997). However, forgiving is not motivation in of itself, it simply is the term applied to the transformation of decreasing motivation to retaliate and estrange from the offending partner, and increasing conciliatory behavior as a result of the empathic response.

Rationale for the Study

Forgiveness is the act of excusing a mistake or an offense by another, and it is initiated principally by emotion. However, cognitive processes also are involved in the assessment of the transgression experience. The primary emotional experience necessary for the initiation of forgiveness may be the experience of empathy. Conversely, the cognitive influence may be the reasoning to consider forgiveness, and thus unconsciously experience empathy. An empathic response towards a transgressor greatly increases the likelihood of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997). The lack of an empathic response should be effective in the prevention of forgiveness. Just as empathy is important in initiating forgiveness, the low occurrence of empathy should inhibit forgiveness from occurring.

Empathy is the emotional experience of relating to another person through which another's persons perceptions are cognitively taken as one's own (Wispé, 1986). In order to alleviate the punishment of a person who has wronged one, all aspects must be taken into account. Included in this is the degree of negative emotional affect being experienced by the transgressor. If the offended empathizes with the offender, then the offended will understand and indirectly experience the negative emotional affect. With time, so that the empathic response can be evoked, experienced, and understood, the offended may feel a desire to relieve the need of the offender, by actively reducing the negative affect. Thus, conciliatory behaviors will then be initiated by the offended towards the offender; which is the process of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997).

Either due to the nature of the offense or the ability to empathize, forgiveness may or may not occur. When the offense is too devastating, the offended person will be

unable to empathize because of the lack of an emotional connection. In this case, an affective empathic response will not occur because no emotional connection is evoked and forgiveness is unlikely to be established. If a person does not empathize because he or she lacks the mental ability to empathize with the offender, then again no connection will be made. The result is that the negative affect will not be perceived and forgiveness is unlikely to be established (Regehr et al., 2002).

Forgiveness of a transgressor is most apparent when the situation is familiar to the offended individual. The ability to form the necessary connection with someone, so that empathy will be experienced, occurs more frequently in a situation that is familiar, or has been experienced before. Thus, a person observing another in a situation that the person has experienced before should empathize more with the person in that situation. Experience may not be a prerequisite for empathy, but experience and familiarity can increase an empathic response (Batson et al., 1996).

Consequently, a person of a high empathic nature, observing a situation that is similar to one experienced before, will experience a high empathy response to the person involved. If experience increases the empathic response but is not required for it to happen, that same individual will also experience a *relatively* high empathic response to a person even in a situation that has not directly been experienced before, however, not to same degree as the situation that was familiar to the individual. Therefore, the highly empathic individual will maintain a high level of empathy, and the familiar situation will only increase it. By contrast, a person of low empathic nature will be less inclined to empathize with another. In a situation similar to one previously experienced, the low empathic individual should empathize more than when in a situation not similar to one

previously experienced, but not necessarily to a point adequate for forgiveness to occur. In this case, the level of empathic response remains low, but still should increase in a situation similar to one experienced before.

Method

Participants

Participants were 70 anonymous volunteers (50 women and 20 men), who participated online through the use of the following websites: www.socialpsychology.org/expts.htm, and psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html. Additionally, undergraduate Barry University students were awarded extra credit for psychology classes if they participated online; a flyer is attached as Appendix A. The mean age of the respondents was 25.31 years ($SD = 4.09$) with an age range of 18 to 36 years. Ethnicity was as follows: 44 (62.9%) White participants, 18 (25.7%) Hispanic participants, 4 (5.7%) Asian/Pacific Islander participants, 3 (4.3%) African-American participants, and one participant checked “other”. Ninety-four percent reported at least one year of college experience, with the maximum number of years of college being eight years.

Of the sample, 68.6% reported a Christian religious affiliation, 24.3% reported a “nonreligious” religious affiliation, and the other 7.1% reported either an Islamic, Hindu, or Judaic religious affiliation. Career-field or college-major were distributed primarily through business, education, science, liberal arts, or human/health services (86%).

Materials

Vignettes. Participants read two vignettes (Appendix C), both involving a person who is wronged in some way. Vignette 1 (the infidelity vignette) described a situation

that was likely to be familiar to the participant (relationship termination). This vignette was about an individual who experienced a relationship breakup. After reading the vignette, participants responded to six items measuring empathic response and previous experience with the situation. Sample items include: “I feel sorry for T.J.” and “I have had a friend who had an experience like the ex.” The Likert-type response format ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

Vignette 2 (the journalism vignette) was intended to be a situation that was not very familiar to the participant (betrayal in the workplace). This vignette was about a journalist (John) who was asked by a fellow employee for an idea for a story. John shared his only idea with his fellow employee. Then the fellow employee created a front-page story while John missed his own deadline and was fired from his place of employment. Following vignette 2 were six statements measuring empathic response and previous experience with the situation. Sample items include: “I know from experience what it feels like to be John’s friend” and “If I were John, I would eventually forgive his friend.” The Likert-type response format ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

New Empathy Scale (Caruso & Mayer, 1998). The New Empathy Scale (Appendix D) consists of 29 statements and is designed to measure an individual’s experience of empathy. Respondents were asked how well the statements describe their thoughts and feelings in particular situations. Sample items include “I feel other people’s pain” and “If someone is upset I get upset, too.” The Likert-type response format ranges from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The New Empathy Scale contains six subscales, including Empathic Suffering (8 items), Positive Sharing (4 items),

Responsive Crying (3 items), Emotional Attention (5 items), Feel for Others (4 items), and Emotional Contagion (2 items). The mean of the subscales reflects general empathy.

Cronbach's alpha for subscales of the New Empathy Scale were as follows: Empathic Suffering, .80, Positive Sharing, .71, Responsive Crying, .72, Emotional Attention, .63, Feel for Others, .59, and Emotional Contagion, .44. The Cronbach's alpha for the General Empathy Scale was .86 (Caruso & Mayer, 1998).

Forgiveness Scale (Rye et al., 2001). The Forgiveness Scale (Appendix E) measures forgiveness towards a particular offender. The scale consists of 15 items designed to assess affective and cognitive behavioral responses to transgressions. Respondents were asked to focus on the individual who mistreated or offended them, rather than a broad reaction to offenses in the past. Sample items include "I feel resentful towards the person who wronged me" and "I feel compassion for the person who wronged me." Additionally, the questions assess positive and negative responses to transgressions. The Likert-type response format ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Higher scores on the scale reflect greater forgiveness for the offender (Rye et al., 2001).

The Forgiveness Scale uses a two-factor solution, revealing adequate internal consistency and conceptually meaningful factors. The Absence of Negative factor (AN) subscale contains items describing the absence of negative feelings, judgments and behavioral-tendencies toward the transgressor. The Presence of Positive factor (PP) subscale contains items describing the presence of positive judgments, feelings, and behavioral-tendencies toward the transgressor. The Cronbach's alphas for AN were .86, and for PP .85. The total reliability was .87 (Rye et al., 2001).

Forgiveness Likelihood Scale (Rye et al., 2001). The *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* (Appendix F) measures the likelihood that an individual will forgive an offender in various situations. Respondents read 10 hypothetical scenarios and were asked to provide a meaningful judgment of each situation. The respondents were asked first to consider the scenarios as if they happened to them, and then respond to the likelihood of forgiving the offender in the situation. Sample items include “A stranger breaks into your house and steals a substantial sum of money from you. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the stranger?” and “Your significant other has a ‘one night stand’ and becomes sexually involved with someone else. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?” The Likert-type response format ranged from 1 (*Not at all likely*) to 5 (*Extremely likely*). Higher scores reflect a greater likelihood of forgiveness for the hypothetical offender. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .85 (Rye et al., 2001).

Procedure

Participants completed the vignettes, the *New Empathy Scale*, the *Forgiveness Scale*, and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*. The tests were not timed and all testing was done online.

Hypotheses and Analyses

H1: The *New Empathy Scale* would correlate positively with the *Forgiveness Scale* and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*.

H2: Participants receiving a high score of empathy, according to the *New Empathy Scale*, would forgive the transgressor, even though the situation is unfamiliar (by using selected questions from the infidelity vignette and the journalism vignette).

H3: Although experience is not a prerequisite, experience of a situation was expected to increase the empathic response, according to the *New Empathy Scale*. The participants will be more able to forgive a transgressor and empathize at a higher level, based on the situation being familiar (by using selected questions from the infidelity vignette and the journalism vignette).

H4: Religiosity would increase the participants' ability to empathize as well as forgive a transgressor, based on the *New Empathy Scale*, *Forgiveness Scale*, and *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*.

Analysis of *H1* was a regression analysis computed to determine if a high score on the *New Empathy Scale* would predict a high score of forgiveness based on the *Forgiveness Scale* and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*. Analysis of *H2* was a regression analysis computed to determine if a high score on the *New Empathy Scale* would predict forgiveness of the transgressor in the infidelity vignette (question 3), and the journalism vignette (question 5), as determined by selecting those who found the vignettes unfamiliar. Analysis of *H3* was first a regression analysis computed to determine if a high score on the *New Empathy Scale* would predict forgiveness of the transgressor in the infidelity vignette (question 3), and the journalism vignette (question 5), as determined by selecting those who found the vignettes familiar. Then, the means of the significant results were compared to determine if those participants who found the vignettes familiar (according to the selected questions) empathized at a higher rate (according to the *New Empathy Scale*) than those who found the vignettes unfamiliar. Analysis of *H4* was a regression analysis of the question "How religious do you consider

yourself?” and the three scales: *New Empathy Scale*, *Forgiveness Scale*, and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*.

Results

Empathy and Forgiveness Correlation (H1)

To check the overall relationship between empathy and forgiveness, a correlation among the participants scores on the *New Empathy Scale* ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.45$), the *Forgiveness Scale* ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.56$), and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 0.71$) was conducted. Scores on the *Forgiveness Scale* and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* were significantly correlated, $r = .22$, $p = .033$, one-tailed. Scores on the *New Empathy Scale* and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* were significantly correlated, $r = .20$, $p = .048$, one-tailed. However, scores on the *New Empathy Scale* did not correlate with the *Forgiveness Scale*.

High Empathy Individuals Will Forgive a Transgressor in Unfamiliar Situations (H2)

For the infidelity vignette, 56 participants replied that T.J.’s experience had not happened to them. Data from these participants were used in a correlation analysis between the *New Empathy Scale* score and the response to the following question, “If I were T.J. I would eventually forgive the ex.” This correlation was significant, $r = .40$, $p = .003$, two-tailed. For the journalism vignette, 65 participants replied that John’s experience had not happened to them. Data from these participants were used in a correlation analysis between the *New Empathy Scale* score and the response to the following question, “If I were John I would eventually forgive his friend.” This correlation was significant, $r = .32$, $p = .010$, two-tailed.

From the infidelity vignette, data from the same group of participants (those who found the situations unfamiliar) were further analyzed. Responses to “While reading the scenario I imagined myself as T.J.” were correlated with scores on the *New Empathy Scale*. The correlation was significant, $r(56) = .32, p = .016$, two-tailed. For the journalism vignette the correlation was not significant.

Experience Increases the Likelihood of Empathy (H3)

Those who considered the situations familiar were to be included in this analysis. However, this analysis was not conducted because only 14 and 5 participants could be included for the infidelity vignette and the journalism vignette, respectively.

Religiousness and the Empathic Response (H4)

Responses to “How religious do you consider yourself?” were correlated with the *New Empathy Scale* scores and both forgiveness scale scores. A significant correlation was found with all three scales: the *New Empathy Scale*, $r(69) = .29, p = .009$, one-tailed; the *Forgiveness Scale*, $r(69) = .45, p < .001$, one-tailed; and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*, $r(69) = .34, p = .002$, one-tailed.

Gender

An independent sample *t*-test was conducted with all three scales to assess differences between genders, presented in Figure 1. On average, men experienced significantly greater forgiveness, according to the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* ($M = 2.65, SD = 0.85$), compared to women ($M = 2.23, SD = 0.62$). This difference approached significance, $t(27.62) = 2.04, p = .052$, and represented a medium sized effect $r = .36$. Although women experienced greater empathy ($M = 3.70, SD = 0.44$), than did men ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.49$), this difference was not significant, $t(68) = .80, p = .43$.

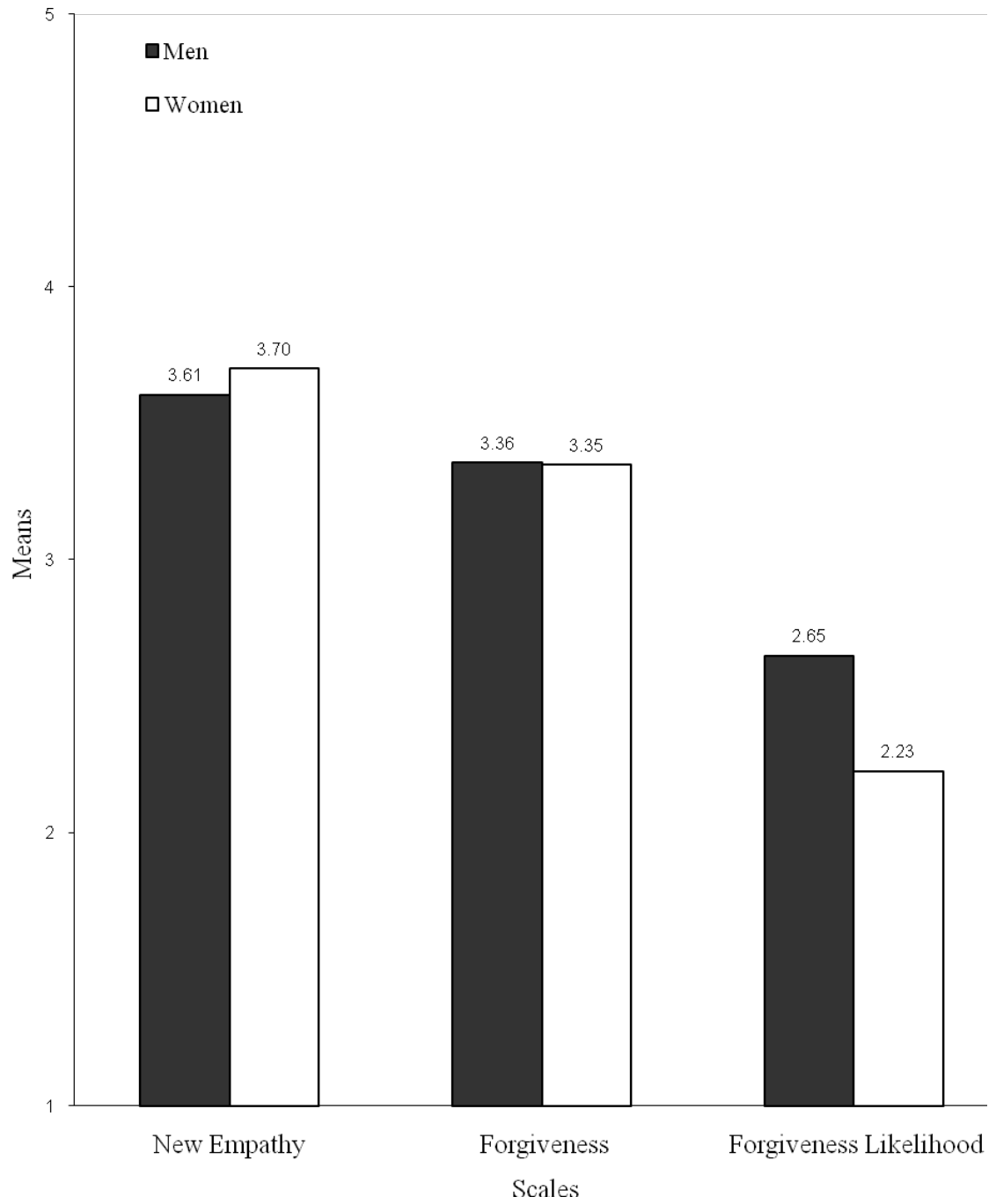


Figure 1. Gender differences in the New Empathy Scale, the Forgiveness Scale, and the Forgiveness Likelihood Scale.

.43. Although men experienced greater forgiveness, according to the *Forgiveness Scale* ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.63$), compared to women ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.54$), the difference was not significant, $t(68) = .05$, $p = .96$.

Discussion

The primary hypothesis, that empathy correlates with the process of forgiveness, was partially supported. The significant correlation between the *New Empathy Scale* and the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* suggests that people forgive others to the extent that they experience empathy for them (McCullough et al., 1997). This supports the forgiveness hypothesis of McCullough et al. (1997) in that once the empathic response of the offended partner overshadows the actions of the transgressor, a set of motivational changes begins and forgiveness can occur. The degree of empathy experienced by the participant, then, directly influences the possibility of experiencing forgiveness.

Scores on the *Forgiveness Scale* did not correlate with scores on the *New Empathy Scale*. The *Forgiveness Scale* was designed to assess affective and cognitive behavioral responses to transgressions (Rye et al., 2001). Participants are asked to: “consider a person who has wronged or mistreated you in the past” and to consider this same (one) person for each of the subsequent statements. The *Forgiveness Scale* assesses primarily *trait forgiveness*, the capacity or ability to forgive an interpersonal transgression across situations over time (Berry et al., 2005). The *New Empathy Scale* assesses an individual’s “experience of empathy.” An individual’s *capacity* to forgive may not be parallel with his or her *experience* of empathy. Empathy is a personal experience, and is not necessarily congruent with the general capacity of forgiveness (Duan & Hill, 1996) assessed by the *Forgiveness Scale*. Perhaps an experience of

empathy is not relevant in the process of forgiveness across situations over time, as the empathic experience is specific to the situation.

Participants' scores from both forgiveness scales correlated with each other. The *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* was designed to assess the "likelihood" that a person will forgive another in a given context. This scale asks the participant to: "imagine the scenarios below happened to you...consider the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the person." The *Forgiveness Scale* asked the participant to consider "one person who has wronged you in the past, and consider that person for each statement." Even though the type of forgiveness is not the same for the scales, each scale measures an aspect of forgiveness.

The *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* assesses primarily *offense-specific forgiveness*, the forgiveness of a specific person for a single transgression, and the *Forgiveness Scale* assesses *trait forgiveness*. The distinction could have been the reason both for the relatively low ($r = .22$) correlation between the scales and for the discrepancy related to the empathy correlations. Whereas the general concept of forgiveness is the process of ceasing to feel resentment or anger against another for a perceived offense or difference (Worthington et al., 2006), empathy is personal and affected by individual circumstances. Thus, while both forgiveness scales correlated because each was measuring the similar construct of forgiveness, the *New Empathy Scale* only correlated with the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale* because the scales were assessing individual experiences, rather than a more general consideration of the experience of empathy and forgiveness, respectively.

The second hypothesis was supported: empathic individuals will forgive transgressors in an unfamiliar situation. The significant correlation of the *New Empathy*

Scale (for those selecting the vignette as unfamiliar) with the forgiveness question in each vignette, supported the idea that prior experience is not a necessity for empathy to occur (Barnett et al., 1987; Batson et al., 1996). Those participants who were found to be more empathic, from the *New Empathy Scale*, were more likely to forgive (in both vignettes), even though the situation was unfamiliar. Some research suggests that prior experience may actually reduce the empathic response, if selfish motives are first associated with the experience (Batson et al., 1996). Familiarity with the vignettes could have caused a reduction in the association of empathy to the transgressor, and may have resulted in fewer participants opting to forgive the transgressor.

The third hypothesis, that experience would increase the empathic response, was unable to be tested because participants did not find the vignettes familiar. This may have been caused by two things. First, it is possible that the question in reference to prior experience was too specific (“has T.J.’s [John’s] experience ever happened to you?”). They may have had similar experiences, but it is a limitation of the study that the question was asked so specifically, or that a second, more general, question was not asked. Perhaps the participants perceived the question too specifically, in that each and every aspect of the vignette had to be applicable to his or her prior experience for it to be considered familiar. For example, with the infidelity vignette, the participant first had an experience in which he or she had been broken up with, then discovered the partner had been unfaithful previously, and finally witnesses their ex-partner in distress about all that had transpired.

A second problem with the prior experience question may be that although gender was ambiguous in the infidelity vignette (“T.J” and “the ex”), the male character of the

journalism vignette (John) may have limited the application of familiarity to a prior experience among the participants; specifically the female participants unable to successfully empathize with the male character.

The hypothesis that religiosity is related to empathy and forgiveness was supported, consistent with previous research (Jose & Alfons, 2007; Van Dyke & Elias, 2007). Not all forgiving individuals looking are religious or wish to participate in a religiously-based attempt at forgiveness. However, some religious individuals may appreciate the opportunity to participate in forgiveness interventions that explicitly address their own religious beliefs and practices (Rye, 2005). It could be argued, however, that religious forgiveness is forgiveness based on a principle or set of principles, and it may be different from the forgiveness offered by nonreligious individuals. Nonreligious forgiveness is conceived as following a set of steps or stages (Worthington et al., 2005), whereas religious forgiveness may sometimes be “fast-tracked to a conclusion” based on the principles and guidelines instilled by that person’s religious beliefs (Rye, 2005). It remains a question whether religion encourages the teaching of forgiveness and its practice, or whether more forgiving individuals are drawn to religion. The nature of the transgression and negative feelings associated with the process of forgiveness may also be relevant to whether religion is considered in the process of forgiveness or not (e.g., attempting to forgive the person who murdered one’s child, if the person’s religious beliefs ask one to do so).

Unlike previous studies, men experienced significantly greater forgiveness than women (according to the *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*; Berry et al., 2005). Conversely, neither the *Forgiveness Scale* nor the *New Empathy Scale* yielded a gender effect. One

could argue that gender stereotypes, if they do predict a prominent effect, are more contextual. Additionally, although women generally have greater forgiveness than men, neither men nor women differ in their total capacity of forgiveness (Macaskill et al., 2002). Whereas women may tend to be more forgiving or empathic in some conditions, it may not be the case across the board. For the *New Empathy Scale*, the circumstances were general, presenting a broad range of statements that could allow men and women to empathize equally (e.g., “Too much is made of the suffering of pets and animals” and “I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person”). This was the same with the *Forgiveness Scale* (e.g., “I wish for good things to happen to the person who wrong me” and “I can’t stop thinking about how I was wronged by this person”). The *Forgiveness Likelihood Scale*, however, is contextually based, formulated by a series of scenarios. Perhaps the nature of the scenarios was harder for the women participants to forgive than the men. Of the 10 scenarios, three were about the spreading of rumors, two about relationships, one about going to a dance, and another about the borrowing and loss of a personal item. Research has indicated that women may use indirect aggression more than men (Block, 1973; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979), and this assumption would suggest a higher rate of forgiveness among the male participants in this study based on the majority of the scenarios that were used.

Empathy has been regarded as a relatively high mental function among humans (Duan & Hill, 1996), whereas forgiveness at its core is a much simpler process. However, how is it then that empathy may be a requisite for an adult to process the experience of forgiveness? The present findings open a window to the investigation of this connection, and in what ways an empathic response may encourage forgiveness.

Additionally, whereas the interaction between empathy and forgiveness has become relatively accepted, the influence of prior experience continues to be uncertain.

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT FLYER

Attention Barry University Students!!



Contribute to a fellow student's research project with just a few minutes of your time

By accessing the website listed below, you could be a part of a short survey on reasons why people choose to forgive each other

Your contribution is voluntary, however some cooperating professors **may offer extra credit for your support**

Your cooperation and consideration of this research survey is greatly appreciated.

The Website is:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=f0UVDO8ecKpO65s7z1TuYA_3d_3d

Clarification for typing in address... ?ms=f(zero)UVD(letter O)8ecKp(letter O)65s7z1TuYA(underscore)3d(underscore)3d “

ALSO: all letters are case sensitive: meaning capital T must be “T” not “t”

**APPENDIX B
COVER LETTER**

**Barry University
Cover Letter**

Dear Research Participant:

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is “Reasons for Forgiveness”. The research is being conducted by Patrick J. Aragon, B.A., a graduate student in the Psychology Department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of social interaction. The aims of the research are to understand how people forgive others and how they connect with others. We anticipate the number of participants to be 70.

To qualify you must be at least 18 years of age.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: read two scenarios and give your opinion about them. Then, you will answer questions addressing how you make decisions about people. It will take approximately 25 minutes.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary, and you may decline to participate or choose to drop out at any time during the study. If you are doing this to receive extra credit in a college class, you will still get credit if you do not complete the study.

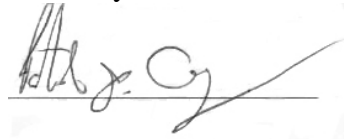
There are no known risks to you by participating in this study. Although there are no direct benefits to you, other than potential extra credit for a designated class, your participation in this study may help our understanding of how people relate to other people.

As a research participant, information you provide will be kept anonymous, that is, no names or other identifiers will be collected on any of the instruments used. By completing this survey you have shown your agreement to participate in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Patrick J. Aragon, through the Psychology Department, at (305) 899-3270, my supervisor, Dr. Szuchman, at (305) 899-3278, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Ms. Nildly Polanco, at (305) 899-3020.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick J. Aragon', written over a horizontal line.

Patrick J. Aragon, B.A.
aragonp@bucmail.barry.edu

**APPENDIX C
VIGNETTES**

Note.

Scenario A is the infidelity vignette.

Scenario B is the journalism vignette.

Reasons for Forgiveness

2. Scenario A

Imagine the following scenarios below as if they happened to you. Read each scenario carefully, as you will be asked a few questions at the conclusion.

A college student, T.J. feels overwhelmed with school. Also, T.J. was just dumped with no explanation after a 3-year relationship. T.J. asked the ex what the reason was for the break up. The ex responded, "Maybe if you had put your book down and picked up the phone I might not have had to go out last week with someone else." Soon, T.J. found out through friends that the ex had been seeing someone else for a couple of weeks already. T.J. felt terrible. But T.J. saw during class and at other social gatherings that the ex felt very bad about hurting T.J.

The following statements inquire about the scenario you just read. Read each item carefully and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. Has T.J.'s experience ever happened to you?

(select one) No Yes

2. I feel sorry for T.J.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. If I were T.J., I would eventually forgive the ex.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. While reading the scenario I imagined myself as T.J.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. I know from experience what it feels like to be the ex.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. I have had a friend who had an experience like the ex.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. (If the answer to question #6 is "Agree" or "Strongly Agree"):

When it happened, I suffered for my friend.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree N/A

APPENDIX D
NEW EMPATHY SCALE

Note:

R indicates a reverse-scored item. Add the following items together for each scale, and divide by the number of items: Positive Sharing (10, 21, 22, 28, 29); Emotional Attention (3R, 5R, 9, 26R); Feel for Others (6, 12, 13R, 19); Emotional Contagion (7, 14); Empathic Concern (1, 8, 15R, 17R, 18, 23, 25R); and Perspective-Taking (2R, 4, 11, 16R, 20, 24, 27) Take the mean of these sub-scales to compute a General Empathy scale.

Reasons for Forgiveness

5.

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you. READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING. Answer as honestly as you can.

Statement describes me:
1 = NOT WELL
5 = VERY WELL

1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

2. I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

3. I don't give others' feelings much thought.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

4. I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

5. Too much is made of the suffering of pets or animals.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

6. If someone is upset I get upset, too.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

7. When I'm with other people who are laughing I join in.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

8. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

9. I rarely take notice when people treat each other warmly.

(select one) 1 2 3 4 5

Reasons for Forgiveness

10. I feel happy when I see people laughing and enjoying themselves.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. It's easy for me to get carried away by other people's emotions.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. My feelings are my own and don't reflect how others feel.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. If a crowd gets excited about something so do I.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. I feel other people's pain.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Reasons for Forgiveness

20. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. Seeing other people smile makes me smile.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. Being around happy people makes me feel happy, too.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. I find it annoying when people cry in public.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. I get a warm feeling for someone if I see them helping another person.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

29. I feel other people's joy.

	1	2	3	4	5
(select one)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**APPENDIX E
THE FORGIVENESS SCALE**

Note.

Reverse code: 1,3,4,5,8,10,12,14

Absence of Negative subscale items: 1,3,4,5,8,9,10,11,12,14

Presence of Positive subscale items: 2,6,7,13,15

Reasons for Forgiveness

6.

Consider a person who has wronged or mistreated you in the past. For each statement below, try to consider how you have responded to that person, using the same person in each situation. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. I can't stop thinking about how I was wronged by this person.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. I wish for good things to happen to the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. I spend time thinking about ways to get back at the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. I feel resentful toward the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. I avoid certain people and/or places because they remind me of the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

6. I pray for the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. If I encountered the person who wronged me I would feel at peace.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. This person's wrongful actions have kept me from enjoying life.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. I have been able to let go of my anger toward the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

10. I become depressed when I think of how I was mistreated by this person.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Reasons for Forgiveness

11. I think that many of the emotional wounds related to this person's wrongful actions have healed.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12. I feel hatred whenever I think about the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13. I have compassion for the person who wronged me.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I think my life is ruined because of this person's wrongful actions.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. I hope the person who wronged me is treated fairly by others in the future.

(select one) Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

APPENDIX F
FORGIVENESS LIKELIHOOD SCALE

Reasons for Forgiveness

7.

Imagine the scenarios below happened to you. Based on the information provided, consider the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the person. Then, circle the response that is most true for you.

1. You share something embarrassing about yourself to a friend who promises to keep the information confidential. However, the friend breaks his/her promise and proceeds to tell several people. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

2. One of your friends starts a nasty rumor about you that is not true. As a result, people begin treating you worse than they have in the past. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

3. Your significant other has just broken up with you, leaving you hurt and confused. You learn that the reason for the break up is that your significant other started dating a good friend of yours. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

4. A family member humiliates you in front of others by sharing a story about you that you did not want anyone to know. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the family member?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

5. Your significant other has a "one night stand" and becomes sexually involved with someone else. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your significant other?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

6. Your friend has been talking about you behind your back. When you confront this person, he/she denies it, even though you know that he/she is lying. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

Reasons for Forgiveness

7. A friend borrows your most valued possession, and then loses it. The friend refuses to replace it. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your friend?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

8. You tell an acquaintance about a job that you hope to be hired for. Without telling you, the acquaintance applies and gets the job for him/herself. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive your acquaintance?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

9. A stranger breaks into your house and steals a substantial sum of money from you. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive the stranger?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

10. You accept someone's offer to attend a formal dance. However, this person breaks their commitment to take you and goes to the event with someone who they find more attractive. What is the likelihood that you would choose to forgive this person?

(select one) Not at all Likely Slightly Likely Somewhat Likely Fairly Likely Extremely Likely

APPENDIX G
DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Reasons for Forgiveness

8.

Demographics Information

1. Please indicate your gender.

(select one) Male Female

2. What is your Race/Ethnicity?

- White
 White, non-Hispanic
 African-American
 Hispanic
 Asian-Pacific Islander
 Native American

Other (please specify)

3. What is your age?

4. Please indicate your religious affiliation.

5. How religious do you consider yourself?

(select one) Not at all Slightly Somewhat Fairly Exceedingly

6. How many years of college have you completed?

7. What is your major (or career field)?