

# **An Examination of Forgiveness and Revenge in Victims of Crime.**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This body of work examines the concepts of forgiveness and revenge in victims of crime. Victims are historically under-researched and in particular there is a need for further examination of the psychological impact of victimisation. Twelve victims participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews concerning their understanding of forgiveness and revenge. Transcripts of these interviews were subsequently analysed using a rigorous Grounded Theory approach.

This thesis presents the argument that forgiveness is contextually bound; its exact nature being determined by the circumstances and consequences of a particular transgression. The research emphasises the intrapersonal nature of forgiveness, revealing a model that is considerably different from those that have been proposed by other researchers. In particular, the broad assumption that forgiveness is a 'prosocial' construct that involves the development of positive affect for a transgressor is not supported. Forgiveness is understood as a 'gift to the self' stemming from the development of deeper self-awareness concerning the impact of the offence on victims. With deeper self-awareness, victims are able to let go of the negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours which have resulted from the offence. Instead of developing benevolent feelings towards the offender, victims engage in perspective-taking which fosters attributions for an external locus-of-control for the offender's behaviour. The major result of forgiveness is a sense of moving on from the offence which can be understood as the lessening of a cognitive orientation to the past.

Revenge has received very little attention from researchers to date. Where it has been examined previously, it has been assumed to be a unidimensional construct. By posing a rich and intricate model, this thesis provides the most detailed understanding of revenge currently available. Revenge is a distinct form of aggression stemming from substantial negative affect towards the offender and entrenched feelings of powerlessness that result from the offence. These feelings of powerlessness result in a strong motivational drive to restore the balance between the victim and the offender. While generally an affective construct, victims tended to compulsively plan and fantasise about how they would exact revenge.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness and revenge are themes that have existed since pre-antiquity and have a common parlance among human beings in almost every social and cultural context (Govier, 2002). While each has a long and rich philosophical and theological history, neither of these constructs have received sufficient attention from psychological researchers. The goal of this thesis is to address this deficit, albeit in a small way, through an examination of what forgiveness and revenge means to a sample of victims of crime.

This introductory chapter initially aims to draw the reader's attention to the fact that forgiveness has received increasing consideration from empirical researchers over the past three decades. Through this research, a general consensus has been established on a number of points. For example, it is now generally accepted that forgiveness involves the cessation of a negative emotional response to a wrong doer and the development of positive (or at the very least equanimous) feelings in their place. There is also general support for the idea that forgiveness is an interpersonal process that is prosocial in nature as it facilitates the restoration of harmonious social relations.

The existing models of forgiveness, however, are limited in their scope. This introductory chapter undertakes an extensive literature review which demonstrates that the major existing models of forgiveness are constrained in terms of the severity of the transgression they examine. From this constraint, it is argued that a model which is

suitable and which 'works' in the context of a marital disagreement or a workplace dispute is inadequate in the face of a serious criminal offence.

In cases such as these, it is argued that forgiveness may not be prosocial and may not emphasise the restoration of interpersonal relations because such a restoration may not be palatable, possible or advisable for victims of crime. Forgiveness, then, will either be impossible for victims or crime or, less pessimistically, substantially different from the models described in the literature. The inability of current models to adequately describe the experience of victims of crimes is stressed throughout this chapter.

On the basis of this logic, two additional points are argued throughout this chapter. Firstly, while forgiveness researchers are generally anxious to uncover a global definition of the construct, it is argued that forgiveness is strongly contextually bound and that its precise parameters and meaning will depend considerably on the circumstances that precipitated it. Secondly and related to this, in cases where there is no ongoing relationship with an offender (for whatever reason), forgiveness must be strongly intrapersonal rather than interpersonal. In other words, the process of forgiveness will be reached by the victim alone without recourse or reference to the offender.

With regards to revenge, it must be noted from the outset that psychology lacks a comprehensive, well-articulated theory of revenge. There is no substantial body of empirical psychological literature examining this construct and indeed, where it has been given cursory coverage, the literature review will demonstrate that it has remained a largely undefined, unidimensional and poorly measured construct.

While this is a deficit, the literature does provide clues concerning what one might expect a model of revenge to encompass. In particular, revenge is widely understood as a form of aggression. Revenge can be understood through an examination of the dominant models of aggression including the hydraulic model and the frustration-aggression hypothesis.

When determining, however, whether revenge can be considered a form of hostile or instrumental aggression, one must consider the goals of revenge. The literature review in this chapter appraises the strengths and weaknesses of the three generally agreed goals of revenge: equity, or restoring a social status quo; deterrence, or taking steps to minimize future attacks; and ego-defence which refers to an innate need to guard or restore one's positive self-image in the face of an attack.

Following this chapter, the form of data collection and analysis are described. The sample consisted of 12 participants who had been victims of crime and who consented to be interviewed for the study. Analysis was based on a grounded theory approach common in the behavioural sciences. Grounded theory is a method of qualitative analysis which nonetheless retains a high level of empirical rigor and allows for a rich and detailed analysis of data. Data were analysed by theme, with separate chapters for the analysis of responses regarding forgiveness and responses regarding revenge. The resulting models are juxtaposed against the literature that was outlined in the introduction and a number of methodological issues are discussed.

## **1.1 Victims of Crime**

Both forgiveness and revenge occur in response to a perceived transgression (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000; Stuckless, Ford & Vitelli, 1995). As such, understanding the effects of that transgression, in these cases a criminal offences, provides an insight into the context within which these constructs occur. Additionally, this examination provides a strong rationale for the examination of the psychological impact of crime on victims and a rationale for this thesis.

The costs of crime can be divided into two groups: the tangible and the intangible (Dolan, Loomes, Peasgood and Tsuchiya, 2005). For victims of crime, tangible costs include the direct economic costs of an offence through loss or damage to goods or property, costs entailed through the need for medical treatment, and costs incurred by engaging legal representation. It may also refer to indirect costs associated with the offence such as the difficulty that may be associated with trying to sell a property where a violent crime has occurred.

### *1.1.1 Intangible costs of crime*

This thesis is concerned with the intangible costs of crime. These costs are more difficult to measure and quantify with a monetary value. Mayhew (2003) identifies a number of these costs such as fear, pain, emotional anguish and considerable negative impact on a victim's quality of life. Intangible costs may lead to further direct costs for victims, in the form of additional medical or psychological costs, or the loss of income incurred as a result of the psychological repercussions of an offence (Dolan, et al., 2005), but the extent of these additional costs are difficult to assess in terms of a monetary figure. This ought not to imply that the economic burden of the intangible

costs of crime is negligible, indeed the British Home Office estimates that the realized intangible costs of crime account for 68% of the total cost of offences against individuals and households (Brand & Price, 2000). Dolan, et al. (2005) argue that establishing a reasonable monetary figure for the intangible costs of crime requires a degree of subjective judgment and inferences drawn from the cost of injuries from other areas. In addition, an accurate assessment of the intangible costs of crime is further impeded because many victims do not report crimes committed against them (Kilpatrick, Saunders, Veronen, Best, & Von, 1987). The full impact of victimisation, then, can only be estimated conservatively. Even so, the most complete estimates made by the Australian Institute of Criminology (2008) suggest a figure in excess of AUD 35 billion per annum.

Research which examines the consequences of crime for victims has the potential to provide considerable economic benefit for victims themselves as well as the wider community which shares in the cost of crime. By identifying the exact nature of these intangible costs of crime, one may arrive at a more accurate assessment of the burden of crime. In addition such research will also provide clinicians with valuable insights into the effective and efficient treatment of victims. This may help facilitate recovery for victims and allow them to return to active participation in society more quickly than they currently do.

### *1.1.2 Crime as a Traumatic Event*

Depending on the type of crime experienced, a wide variety of psychological and behavioural symptoms may be experienced by victims. From a psychological viewpoint, many serious offences meet the criteria for a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). As such, it is expected that a review of the literature concerning a number of serious offences will reveal that posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD] is a common feature of victims' post-victimisation experience. This thesis uses the terms 'trauma' and 'traumatised' in a general sense. This is not a novel way of conceiving of trauma; it is generally accepted that traumatic events have serious psychological consequences for those who experience them and the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD comprises a common framework for assessing these consequences. For example, Kilpatrick and Acierno (2003) focus on PTSD in their examination of the epidemiology and mental health needs of victims because they believe it is the most consistently documented response. In addition, Wastell (2005) argues that the symptoms associated with PTSD are natural or common experiences in the short term after experiencing a traumatic event and that the disorder refers to delayed onset or chronic symptoms (see also Chase Stovall-McClough & Cloitre, 2006).

### *1.1.3 Causes and Symptoms of PTSD*

The most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM-IV-TR] states that an event to be classed as traumatic it must have "involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others." (APA, 2000). Furthermore, an individual's response to the event must have involved "intense fear, helplessness, or horror." These parameters for the diagnosis of

PTSD are referred to as Criterion A and there is considerable conjecture concerning its utility and appropriate definition (Weathers & Keane, 2007). The current version was introduced in DSM-IV and differed from the previous version of diagnostic manual (Breslau & Kessler, 2001). In DSM-III-R, a traumatic event need only be deemed an event “outside the normal range of human experience,” that could reasonably be expected to cause “significant symptoms of distress in almost anyone.” (APA, 1987). According to Breslau and Kessler, one of the primary reasons for updating the criterion was to emphasise that a person’s subjective appraisal of an event often determines their reaction to it. Thus, Criterion A, as it is defined in DSM-IV-TR, is arguably more subjective. As Weathers and Keane point out, an individual’s distress (rather than simply the possibility of it) became a defining aspect of a traumatic event. This allows for the inclusion of stressors that may have been otherwise disqualified as being of insignificant magnitude to meet the criterion.

The symptoms resulting from such a traumatic event are grouped into three clusters: intrusive, avoidant, and hyper-arousal. According to DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000), intrusive symptoms include phenomena such as flashbacks (intrusive recollections), distressing dreams of the event, and a distressing psychological and physiological reactivity to internal and external cues that remind or symbolize the event to the victim. In certain cases, intrusive symptoms may also include a feeling that the event is recurring. Avoidant symptoms refer to efforts to avoid thoughts and feelings related to the event as well as an avoidance of people and places which remind one of it. Additionally, they may include feeling detached or estranged from others as well as a restricted emotional range. The final symptom cluster, hyper-arousal, includes

symptoms such as insomnia or difficulty sleeping, sudden emotional outbursts (especially anger), and hyper-vigilance.

For a diagnosis of PTSD, symptoms from all three clusters must be present for more than a month. Additionally, symptoms may occur immediately following the offence or they may be classed as delayed onset if they occur six months or more after the event (APA, 2000).

#### *1.1.4 Evidence of PTSD in Victims of Crime*

Crime is associated with higher incidences of PTSD than other traumatic events (Resnick, Kilpatrick, Dansky, Saunders & Best, 1993). Victims of crime are also more likely to experience a recurring traumatic event (i.e. repeated victimisation) which increases the likelihood of developing PTSD (Amstadter, McCart, & Ruggiero, 2007). What follows is a brief review of the literature associated with five serious offences that demonstrate a link between the offences and symptoms of PTSD.

##### *1.1.4.1 Homicide*

In a qualitative analysis of the impact of homicide, Asaro (2001) notes a wide variety of psychological and social repercussions resulting from the murder of a loved one. Apart from distress arising from the circumstances and suddenness of their loved one's demise, Asaro discusses issues such as guilt and self-blame as well as an obsessive need to know all the circumstances relating to the offence. Similarly, Feldman Hertz, Prothrow-Stith, and Chery (2005) point out that while early examinations of homicide survivors (i.e. individuals who experience the homicide of a loved one) relied on a grief framework, later research has tended to incorporate a wider framework which finds that

these victims often exhibit the symptoms of PTSD (see, Thompson, Norris, & Ruback, 1998).

Murphy et al. (1999) found that PTSD was a relatively common experience following the homicide of a child. They conducted a longitudinal prospective analysis and found that parents of children who had been murdered were twice as likely to develop symptoms of PTSD as parents whose children had died as a result of an accident or suicide. In addition, they found that symptoms from the intrusive cluster were reported most commonly and 19% of participants still experienced symptoms two years after the offence took place. Rynearson and McCreery (1993) also found that intrusive symptoms were a prominent feature of PTSD in homicide survivors while the findings of Amick-McMullan, Kilpatrick and Resnick (1991) found that PTSD was experienced by a similar proportion of victims (23.3%) as Murphy, et al.'s sample and noted that only 4.8% experienced onset within 6 months of the offence occurring.

#### *1.1.4.2 Childhood Sexual Abuse*

There is considerable literature examining the psychological and social impact of childhood sexual abuse [CSA]. Tyler (2002) reviewed 41 articles and found a wide variety of outcomes for victims of this offence, including suicide, behavioural problems, substance use and PTSD. Ackerman, Newton, McPherson, Jones and Dykman (1998), examining both physical and sexual abuse of children, found that more than one third of participants met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. The authors found that in cases where participants had experienced sexual abuse only, symptoms of PTSD were less discernable than in cases of physical abuse and both sexual and physical abuse.

Furthermore, in cases of sexual abuse only, there were almost twice as many female participants who met the criteria for diagnoses than male participants, although more male participants met the criteria when both physical and sexual assault were reported. While this study shows a relationship between CSA and PTSD, Tyler urges a cautious interpretation of these results on account of a low response rate. In addition, participants in this study were aged between seven and thirteen years which means that these findings do not describe the long term consequences of CSA.

There are a number of studies that examine the psychological effects of CSA in adult samples. Neumann, Houskamp, Pollock, and Briere (1996) conducted a meta-analytic review of literature which examined the long term effects of CSA. They found a significant positive association between the presence of abuse and a number of symptoms present in adult female survivors. While the authors acknowledge that a number of the studies they included in their meta-analysis did not adequately distinguish between CSA and other forms of child abuse, their findings nonetheless illustrate the chronic problems stemming from CSA that endure into adulthood. For instance, they found significant effect sizes across all five domains they examined: affective (e.g. anger and anxiety), behavioural (e.g. suicidality and substance abuse), identity/relational (e.g. self-concept impairment), psychiatric (e.g. dissociation and traumatic stress responses), and general symptomatology (which included revictimisation). Traumatic stress responses comprised the second largest weighted effect size after revictimisation.

Feerick and Snow (2005) specifically examined PTSD symptomatology as a long term consequence of CSA for women. Results confirmed that women who were sexually

abused during childhood (mean age = 9.85 years) reported significantly more symptoms of PTSD and exhibited a higher level of social anxiety in adulthood than non-abused women. Additionally, the results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses seemed to indicate that certain demographic variables such as age at the time of abuse and parental divorce increased the likelihood of developing PTSD.

There are fewer studies examining the effects of CSA on male victims. Romano and De Luca (2001) argue that while this initially led to the conclusion that boys were sexually abused at a lesser rate than girls, there are a number of variables that may incline male victims of CSA to not report their experiences. These factors include fear of being labelled homosexual; an expectation of male self-reliance; and a fear of losing independence. While there has been research examining CSA in males, those studies available have revealed few differences in the psychological impact of CSA for males compared to females (Finkelhor, 1990). Indeed the reviews by both Finkelhor and Romano and De Luca conclude that the main difference between sexes is the tendency of male victims to externalise their distress, such as through a greater tendency towards angry outbursts.

#### *1.1.4.3 Sexual Assault*

Sexual assault is distinguished here from CSA as an offence that occurs in adulthood as opposed to one that occurs in childhood. Research has indicated that sexual assault leads to high levels of prolonged distress in victims (e.g. Littleton & Radecki Breitkopf, 2006). Additionally, feelings of shame are often experienced (Herman, 1992a) as well as a feeling of mental contamination, or the sense that one is dirty or polluted (Olatunji,

Elwood, Williams & Lohr, 2008). Feelings of shame as well as feelings of mental contamination have been associated with the development of PTSD in sexual assault victims (Amstadter & Vernon, 2008; Olatunji, et al, 2008). Sexual assault can also have a persistent, negative social impact. For example there is a link between sexual assault and increased drug use (Resnick, Acierno, Amstadter, Self-Brown & Kilpatrick, 2007).

The link between sexual assault and the development of PTSD has been long established (see for example, Kilpatrick, et al., 1989). Campbell (2008) proposes that sexual assault is a severe form of trauma that can produce a wide variety of negative psychological outcomes for victims. Additionally, recent research by Shakespeare-Finch and Armstrong (2010) indicates that victims of sexual assault experience stronger symptoms of PTSD than those experiencing other types of trauma. Once again, there is a broad range of psychological outcomes arising from sexual assault but PTSD remains a useful framework for describing many of these experiences. Ullman, Townsend, Filipas, and Starzynski (2007) cite a national (United States) probability sample in which 31% of female respondents reporting sexual assault had experienced symptoms of PTSD at some point.

#### *1.1.4.4 Assault*

Violent, non-sexual assault can also result in debilitating psychological distress for victims in addition to any physical impairment that may result from the offence. Ramchand, Marshall, Schell and Jaycox (2008) found that posttraumatic stress and physical functioning were positively related to each other. They found that higher levels of distress one week after the traumatic experience predicted worse physical functioning

three months after the event. Additionally, participants with lower physical functioning three weeks after the event exhibited more psychological distress after twelve months. It must be remembered that Ramchan et al explored a sample in which all the participants had been injured by weapon (59% suffered a gunshot wound while 41% were either penetrated by a sharp object or assaulted with a blunt object). Although a generalisation and not a hard rule, one may assume that an attack involving a weapon has the potential to cause more damage than one in which there are no weapons. Given that the perceived severity of a traumatic event is positively related to symptoms of PTSD (see, for example, Frommberger, et al., 1998), the relationship between assault and PTSD should be explored at different levels of severity.

Johansen, Wahl, Eilertsen and Weisaeth (2007) recruited a sample that included a wider variety of injuries than those found in Ramchan, et al (2008). Johansen, et al's sample included injuries ranging from a black eye to very serious injuries resulting from non-domestic violence. While injury severity was found to be positively associated with symptoms of PTSD, the researchers found that, 12 months following the traumatic event, 31.4% of participants met the criteria for diagnosis, while 14.3% were considered to be at risk of developing the disorder. Furthermore, it is worth observing that this study was longitudinal and the data show that the number of probable PTSD cases actually increased over a period of 12 months. This data were obtained using the Impact of Event Scale-15. This tool is a self-report inventory which measures event related intrusion and avoidance both of which are key components of PTSD (APA, 2000). It has been shown to have commendable psychometric properties (Wohlfarth, van den Brink, Winkel, & ter Smitten, 2003).

#### *1.1.4.5 Burglary*

While there is little empirical research examining the psychological effects of burglary on victims, some researchers have presented convincing theoretical arguments as to why one may expect to find considerable distress as a result of a burglary. Altman (1975), for example, discusses “primary territories”, or personal areas over which a person has a sense of ownership and in which one’s identity is salient, including one’s home. He argues that these spaces are important environmental extensions of identity and, as such, the violation of, or uninvited intrusion into, these spaces can cause considerable psychological distress because it is perceived as a personal attack.

There is little evidence, however, linking non-violent burglary to PTSD. Boudreaux, Kilpatrick, Resnick, Best and Saunders (1998) examined a community sample of women and found no significant relationship between experiencing burglary and the development of a number of disorders including PTSD. Other research, however, has found that victims of residential burglary experience higher levels of anxiety, hostility, depression, fatigue and psychological distress than controls and these symptoms persist over a period of time (Beaton, Cook, Kavanagh, Herrington, 2000). A number of these symptoms bear a strong similarity to symptoms associated with trauma. For example, hostility is included among Criterion D, or hyper-arousal symptoms, as outbursts of anger or irritability.

Davis, Taylor and Lurigio (1996) found that there were no significant differences in the level of distress experienced by victims of crime who had experienced either a personal, or violent offence and those who had experienced a non-violent economic or property offence. The exception to this finding was that victims of violent crime who had felt that

their life was in danger maintained a significantly higher level of distress than other victims. This finding highlights the influence of a victim's beliefs and reactions to an offence. It is important to note that their measure of distress was conflated from a number of scales including the Impact of Event Scale.

The literature suggests that burglary and other property offences can have a considerable negative impact on victims' psychological well-being. Given that the literature review for this chapter only uncovered one article explicitly examining the association between burglary and symptoms of PTSD, it would seem that some replication is required to confirm these findings (Beaton, et al., 2000). Certainly, there are similarities between the psychological effects of burglary and those more generally experienced in PTSD. This issue, along with the subjective nature of Criterion A (see section 1.1.3), warrant further investigation.

#### *1.1.5 Crime Victims and the Risk of PTSD*

The preceding section detailed the relationship between a variety of offences and PTSD. This section will explore the influence of certain victim-specific variables on victims' responses to an offence and, in particular, to the severity of their distress and their risk of developing PTSD.

##### *1.1.5.1 The Effect of Sex*

The demographic data associated with victimisation in Australia indicates that men feature overwhelmingly as victims of crime. For example, data available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] showed that in 2007, men accounted for almost two thirds of homicide or attempted homicide victims (64% and 65% respectively)

(ABS, 2008). Additionally, 74% of robbery victims were also as male. Indeed, the only personal offence in which females were more commonly victims than males was kidnapping (these data offered no comparison between sexes for cases of sexual assault). The tendency for men to be offended against at a much higher rate than women is not unique to Australia and is replicated in other jurisdictions such as the United States (Hanson, Kilpatrick, Falsetti, & Resnick, 1995).

Despite the fact that men are offended against at a higher rate, they are less likely to engage in help-seeking measures (such as support seeking from family and friends, attending mental health or social services, or reporting the offence to the police) to assist them in their post-victimisation recovery (Kaukinen, 2002). This finding has repercussions for the psychological health of male victims as research indicates that social support has important therapeutic associations. For example, a victim's perceived social support is positively related to the speed of a victim's recovery from the psychological distress resulting from the offence (Norris, Kaniasty, & Scheer, 1990). Green and Pomeroy (2007) argued that positive social support acted as a buffer against stressful life events and their results seem to confirm that social support was an important moderator of the level of distress experienced by victims of crime. Green and Pomeroy also found that social support had an effect on the coping strategies victims adopted. They found, for example, that there was an inverse relationship between social support and avoidant coping. Given that avoidant coping is associated with chronic PTSD (Krause, Kaltman, Goodman and Dutton, 2008), this finding supports the argument that social support has important therapeutic benefits for victims.

#### *1.1.5.2 Revictimisation*

Prior victimisation has been identified as a factor increasing the risk of PTSD developing in individuals and exacerbating symptoms of PTSD (e.g. Breitenbecher, 2001; Schumm, Briggs-Phillips & Hobfoll, 2007; Krause, et al., 2008). The majority of research in this area focuses on cases in which the original trauma occurred during childhood or when the offence is of a sexual nature. For example, Schumm, et al. found that women who had experienced abuse as a child and sexual assault as an adult were 17 times more likely to display symptoms consistent with PTSD. More specifically, Arata (2000) examined the role PTSD plays in the relationship between instances of CSA and subsequent sexual assault as an adult. She found that repeat victims reported significantly more intrusive and avoidant symptoms following the initial CSA than those participants who did not suffer repeat victimisation. In a path analysis, she found that PTSD mediated the relationship between the physical severity of CSA and adult revictimisation along with self-blame for the CSA and consensual sexual behaviour in adulthood.

The nature of the relationship between PTSD and revictimisation appears to be a two way street. Dietrich (2007), for example, found that PTSD predicted sexual revictimisation, but not physical revictimisation in women reporting childhood maltreatment. Furthermore, Messman-Moore, Brown and Koelsch (2005) carried out a longitudinal study examining the role of posttraumatic symptoms and self-dysfunction in predisposing women to future revictimisation. In this study, self-dysfunction was defined as impaired functioning including maladaptive affect regulation; a disrupted sense of self; and disturbances in personal and sexual relationships. Their structural

equation model indicated that both CSA and prior sexual assault as an adult directly predicted future revictimisation. Additionally, both these variables predict revictimisation indirectly, as they were positively related to higher levels of self-dysfunction which was, in turn, associated with repeat victimisation.

The research summarised above suggests a strong relationship between symptoms of PTSD and revictimisation in cases of CSA or sexual assault. Additionally, a number of researchers have reported that experiencing more than one traumatic event significantly increases a person's susceptibility to PTSD (e.g. Amstadter, et al., 2007; Kimerling, Alvarez, Pavao, Kaminski & Baumrind, 2007). In a summary of the findings of the 2004 International Crime Victimization Survey carried out for the Australian Institute of Criminology, Johnson (2005) identified repeat victimisation as an important topic due to the fact that repeat offences contribute substantially to the overall crime rate. For example, 19% of respondents to the survey had experienced three or more personal crimes (assault/threat, robbery or personal theft) in the year before data collection, whilst 8% reported experiencing three or more household crimes.

#### *1.1.5.3 Identification as a victim*

The quality of social support victims receive from those around them is consistently identified as an important mediator of the level of distress they experience as a result of the offence (Kaniasty & Norris, 1992, Kenney, 2002; Green & Diaz, 2007). Of particular interest are findings examining the effect of social support on the development and severity of symptoms of PTSD. Scarpa, Haden and Hurley (2006) examined the effect of social support and coping style on symptoms of PTSD after exposure to

community violence. Hierarchical regression showed that higher levels of both family and friend support significantly predicted lower PTSD symptoms. Interestingly, this finding was sensitive to the severity of the violence experienced by participants. The authors found that higher levels of friend support were associated with more severe PTSD symptoms when levels of violence were higher. One possible explanation for this may be that sympathetic responses to a victim don't always translate into appropriate or helpful behaviours towards them. For example, Clark (1987) found that the label of 'victim' results in feelings of sympathy for the person so labelled and that this has three possible outcomes. The victim may be offered unconditional and fulsome support by those around them. Alternatively, the reaction may be more ambiguous due to uncertainty about how to react to the victim. The final option that Clark proposes is that the sympathy is short lived, quickly leading to stigmatisation and the additional label of 'hopeless victim' being attached to the victim. Additionally, Kenney's (2002) qualitative analysis reveals that victims of crime often feel that well meaning responses from those around them can often be unhelpful or hurtful, even to the point of constituting a form of secondary victimisation.

The above literature demonstrates that identification (by self or other) as a victim can have important repercussions for people subjected to a criminal offence. It is also possible that a victim of crime may not be labelled as a victim. For example, homicide survivors may not consider themselves victims of an offence because it was their loved one and not them who was murdered. Additionally, victims and witnesses to domestic violence often excuse the behaviour as aberrant, or attribute responsibility for the

offence to the victim (Lloyd & Emery, 2000), both of which make the label of ‘victim’ redundant.

### *1.1.7 Summary*

Just like forgiveness and revenge, PTSD is a response to a particular event, thus an understanding of forgiveness and revenge associated with traumatic events must be informed by the literature on PTSD. As such, the models of forgiveness and revenge that emerge from the data collected for this thesis are expected to make a unique contribution to victimological literature, as well as those examining forgiveness and revenge specifically.

## **1.2 Forgiveness**

The previous section of this introduction examined the effects of crime on victims and the factors which may affect the nature of its impact. The purpose of the next two sections is to provide a rationale as to the suitability of exploring forgiveness and revenge within this context.

In particular, when examining forgiveness, the purpose of this section is to outline the difficulties involved in applying existing models of forgiveness to an examination of victims of crime. This section will advance the argument that the main reason for this is that forgiveness is a strongly contextually bound phenomenon, the precise dynamics of which change depending on the situation in which it occurs. Specifically, when considering victims of crime, existing models do not adequately accommodate the possibility that a victim and offender may be unacquainted or that the offence may be so serious as to preclude future interaction between them. This possibility makes it

necessary to question the prevalent assumption that forgiveness is an interpersonal phenomenon (see McCullough, et al., 2000). Furthermore, it leads one to question whether forgiveness in this context requires the development of positive affect for the offender which is a central feature of other models (e.g. Enright, 2001).

In order to clearly articulate these arguments, this section has been structured in the following way. Firstly, there will be an examination of forgiveness in three broad perspectives which one may consider relevant to a study of the construct in victims of crime: morality, mental health, and attributional decision making. This is followed by an examination of some of the major issues currently faced by researchers in forgiveness. These issues include the general lack of agreement concerning the exact definition of forgiveness (e.g. McCullough, et al., 2000); the tendency for researchers to situate forgiveness as a predominantly interpersonal construct (e.g. McCullough & Worthington, 1994); and, finally, the growing tendency to conceive of forgiveness as a trait rather than state (e.g. McCullough & Worthington, 1999). The relevance of each of these three issues to the current examination is also explored. Finally, three major models of forgiveness will be comprehensively outlined, namely that proposed by McCullough and colleagues (e.g. McCullough, 2000); the REACH model proposed by Worthington and colleagues (e.g. Worthington, 1998); and the Process model outlined by Enright and colleagues (e.g. Enright, 2001). Each of these models is summarized in detail and their applicability to victims of crime critiqued.

The goal of this section is to clearly outline the problems inherent in applying assumptions and models about forgiveness in relation to victims of crime. By raising

these problems, this section provides a strong rationale for the empirical examination of the meaning of forgiveness in victims of crime.

### *1.2.1 Relevant Perspectives in Forgiveness Research*

As a first step in examining the forgiveness literature, it will be instructive to outline those fields of research which have touched on forgiveness and that are relevant when considering victims of crime. The majority of empirical research examining the nature of the construct has appeared over the last three decades. While early researchers were conspicuous in their neglect of forgiveness, there were some instances in which forgiveness was considered. This section will briefly outline three streams of this research that may be informative. In a review of the literature examining the history of forgiveness research in the social sciences, McCullough, et al. (2000) identified each of these three areas as historically important. These streams refer to the role forgiveness plays in psychological theories of moral development, stemming from the work of Jean Piaget; the role of forgiveness in attribution theory with reference to the work of Fritz Heider and Bernard Weiner; and finally an examination of the research exploring the link between forgiveness and mental health.

#### *1.2.1.1 The Morality of Forgiveness*

Jean Piaget (1932) was one of the earliest psychologists to mention forgiveness. He related the propensity to forgive to the faculty of moral judgment which he examined in children from a developmental perspective. He argued that cooperation was a ‘common morality’ which informed relations between adults. When examining the role of justice in the maintenance of this common morality, he identified two distinct ethical modes through which justice could be maintained. The first is dominant during the

development of 'heteronomous moral reasoning'. This period is typified by adherence to authority, with rules being seen as literal and inflexible. One assumes that established laws completely reflect that which is just and, thus, the punishment of lawbreakers is morally justified. The subsequent phase sees the development of 'the ethics of mutual respect', which leads to the development of equality and autonomy between individuals and was thus called autonomous moral reasoning. At this level, justice is thought to be based on reciprocity and cooperation in order to maintain this harmonious mutual respect. Piaget is quick to point out that this sense of reciprocity provides a motivation for retribution as it seems to guarantee the right to return harm for harm done. Nonetheless, he argues that with the development of autonomous moral reasoning (which usually occurs in late pre-adolescence), a person begins to comprehend reciprocity as an ideal rather than a mathematical tabulation of rights versus wrongs. One is able to consider responses to transgressions that reflect how he or she would prefer to be treated him or herself. This can be accompanied by a logical realisation that the continual exchange of harm between two parties has the potential to continue without resolution, thus prompting an individual to preference forgiveness over revenge. Piaget's (1932) formulation is by no means perfect. For example, Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1994) observe that very few models of forgiveness propose that an individual is required to forgive a transgressor. Enright's own process model stresses that forgiveness has a magnanimous, gift-like quality to it (see Enright, 2001) which suggests that forgiveness is offered without the expectation of a certain response from the person who originally caused the harm. Furthermore, Piaget's concept of forgiveness focuses on individual human development and argues that forgiveness is

little more than a remedy to guarantee social cohesion. While the role that forgiveness plays in the restoration of harmonious relations has been demonstrated empirically (see Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker & Finkel, 2005), any reduction of forgiveness as a form of social glue overlooks the profound personal benefits of forgiveness for both the transgressor and the transgressed (see Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Rusbult, et al., 2005). In essence, Piaget's (1932) work understands forgiveness only as a tactical response to a transgression which is designed to limit future conflict by responding to a transgressor in a manner which is calculated to enhance harmonious relations.

The assumption Piaget (1932) makes is that forgiveness is a moral virtue. This idea still has currency (White, 2002; Barnes, 2002). It is nonetheless idealistic. For example, it can be argued that victims of crime have a moral liberty to withhold forgiveness. This is because crime offends a social morality that results in a high level of sympathy for victims of crime and empathy for the outrage they may feel as a consequence of the offence (Karstedt, 2002; Johnson, 2009). In this sense, outrage and the withholding of forgiveness may easily be seen as a justified response to the offence. Murphy (1988) reaches an even more damning conclusion. Drawing on Nietzsche's work, he argues that forgiveness is a sign of weakness. Nietzsche (1989) argues that forgiveness is immoral as it is a sign that the transgressed person lacks self-respect. Self-respect, he argues, is what motivates feelings of resentment when one has been transgressed against. As forgiveness involves the remission of that resentment, it must signify weak self-respect. Furthermore, Murphy (2003) argues that a transgression constitutes a symbolic harm to an individual as well as an actual one. It is a communicative act in which the transgressor declares, "I count and you do not, and I may thus use you as a mere thing"

(p.77). In the face of such a declaration, a transgressed person's resentment and grudge holding represents a refusal to endorse this position. Thus, Murphy's (1988; 2003) concerns about forgiveness rest with the integrity of the individual rather than the maintenance of social harmony.

Consistent with this perspective, Baumeister, Exline and Sommer (1998) argue that victim status confers moral superiority and that forgiveness involves relinquishing that high ground. This motivates victims to maintain a grudge and withhold forgiveness.

*1.2.1.1.1 Victims of crime and the morality of forgiveness:* As discussed above, when comparing psychological models of forgiveness with those that are predominantly philosophical in nature, a clear point of difference concerns the tendency of philosophers to conceive of forgiveness as an inherently moral construct. Subsequently, the motivation for forgiveness, along with its goals and outcomes are often framed as a moral consideration. As already mentioned, Murphy (2003) conceives of forgiveness as a symptom of human weakness and thus inherently immoral. Murphy's concerns are echoed by other writers, less unequivocally or provocatively, who feel that forgiveness can only be considered morally permissible to the extent that it doesn't imply complicity in the face of an affront to one's basic dignity as a free being with free will. (Babic, 2000).

A number of scholars conceive of forgiveness with more latitude than Murphy or Babic. Griswold (2007) has conducted a detailed study of the metaphysics and moral implications of forgiveness. He argues that there are a number of reasons to engage in

conditional forgiveness. These include a recognition that resentment must be proportional to the injury caused as well as the idea that a truly remorseful offender who has taken adequate steps to re-join the moral community ought to be afforded the respect of forgiveness. In addition, Griswold argues that the maintenance and repair of the moral community (achieved through the offering of forgiveness) is a goal with inherent moral worth which, in turn, fortifies the moral worth of the forgiver.

Perhaps most importantly with regard to victims of crime, Griswold argues that for forgiveness to have moral worth, it must be freely given. He is at pains to stress that this does not mean it needs to be unconditional but rather that true forgiveness must stand beyond some socially defined convention concerning what is 'morally appropriate'. In other words, the victim must not forgive because it is expected or because forgiveness is 'owed' to the wrong doer. This sentiment informs most of the psychological models of forgiveness. Indeed, even Enright's process model which contains explicitly moral and religious sentiments such as the development of *agape* (unconditional love such as the love of a parent for a child or the love of God) stresses that forgiveness cannot be forced and must be approached freely and with a willingness to actualize it (Enright, 2001).

Likewise, the idea that forgiveness should be elective and that forgiveness on the basis of social expectation is not really forgiveness are the main concerns regarding forgiveness that are strongly expressed in the victimological literature. These concerns centre around the extent to which moral judgments may exert undue and unwarranted pressure on victims that may compound their suffering (Acorn, 2004). Acorn argues that

moral concerns regarding victims of crime almost always require the victim to forgive the offender. She describes this pressure as a form of “compulsory compassion”. She argues, in a similar vein to Griswold, that the expectations for forgiveness in victims of crime stems from a desire to restore ‘right relations’. A victim who has suffered a substantial loss at the hands of another person has very little chance of restoring ‘right-relations’ (if, indeed, such relations existed prior to the offence) when faced with the compounding emotions of grief and fear stem from a life-altering offence.

In light of these concerns, it would seem inappropriate to directly canvass victims of crime regarding the moral implications of forgiveness or revenge. To ask directly about moral considerations is to invite a morally palatable response which may not be the honest response. Participants must feel free to reject or refute the notion of forgiveness should they feel that is appropriate. Nonetheless, it cannot be ruled out that moral concerns may be important in their decision-making. As such, a study such as this which undertakes to examine the meaning of forgiveness for victims of crime must utilize a methodology which does not try to lead participants to a particular the conclusion but allows them provide sufficient detail to uncover any moral considerations they may have.

#### *1.2.1.2 Attributional Pathways for Forgiveness*

Twenty-six years following Piaget, Heider (1958) examined forgiveness in his explanation of attribution theory. The attributional model is useful when examining forgiveness in victims of crime because it allows for an examination of the decision making process people engage in when assessing the way people behave towards them

and how they will subsequently respond (Weiner, 1995). Within attributional models, forgiveness is most usually described as the decision to forego revenge (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1995); however, it receives little explicit attention. This understanding of forgiveness tends to overlook the affective components as well as the cognitive complexity of the construct. In this sense forgiveness involves *not* doing something (taking revenge). This idea of passive forgiveness is not supported by the literature examining forgiveness (McCullough, et al., 2000).

The attributional pathway outlined by Weiner (1995) still has some utility in a discussion of forgiveness in victims of crime. Weiner's research proposes a more complicated attributional pathway than Heider's (1958). Weiner (1985; 1995) argued that people attribute responsibility for an event based on a decision making process involving three variables: controllability, locus of control, and stability. A person is more likely to judge someone responsible for their actions when they believe they have more control over their behaviour (attribution of control); when their behaviour is thought to be motivated by internal, rather than environmental causes (attribution of locus of control); or when those causes are thought to be relatively stable over time (attribution of stability).

The relevance of attribution to forgiveness lies in the assumption that for forgiveness to be granted, the transgressed person needs to believe that the transgression was intentional (Downie, 1971). This implies that the transgressor was in control of his or her actions and thus considered responsible for the offence. Fincham (2000) explored the relationship between judgements of responsibility and forgiveness in close

relationships. He argues that in such a context, the estrangement experienced as a result of a transgression has three possible resolutions: nullification, habituation/dissipation, or forgiveness. For forgiveness to occur in this situation, Fincham argues that nullification (which involves no longer seeing the event as a transgression) must be impossible and the transgressed partner must see forgiveness as less costly to both themselves and the relationship. Inherent in this is an understanding that the relationship will continue. This is a problematic assumption when examining victims of crime. While statistical data suggest that victims often know their offender prior to the offence (Felson, Messner, & Hoskin, 1999), this is not the case in a considerable minority of cases. For example, a report published by the ABS (2010) indicates that 62% of victims of assault have met the perpetrator before the offence takes place. Additionally, the circumstances and effect of the offence may be so serious as to disincline a victim from continuing a pre-existing relationship with an offender. Fincham's basic premise nonetheless highlights the fact that forgiveness is not the only way of moving on from a transgression. This is important for victims to remember as it removes a sense of obligation from the forgiveness process.

Research has indicated that the three attributional variables described by Weiner (1985; 1995), and controllability in particular, are useful in predicting community members' judgements of responsibility for an offence (Field, Beven & Pedersen, 2008). While most of this research has examined the attributions and judgments of third party observers, an examination of the nature of forgiveness in victims of crime may suggest that these variables are also important when responding first-hand to an offence.

### *1.2.1.3 Forgiveness and mental health*

While studies examining moral development and attributional pathways are implicitly concerned with the nature or definition of forgiveness, later researchers became interested in the potential relationship between forgiveness and mental health and were thus more outcome focused. As has already been demonstrated, victims of crime can suffer chronic psychological distress and exploring the meaning of forgiveness for them further enriches the field's understanding of how to facilitate their recovery.

The first study to examine the link between forgiveness and mental health was conducted by Emerson (1964). Emerson used a Q-sort design to explore the relationship between forgiveness and well being. As McCullough et al. (2000) point out, Emerson's work was largely theoretical. Its argument centred on the assumption that because forgiveness was morally good, it must also be healthy. While this assumption may be considered worthy of investigation, Emerson's empirical work was largely descriptive and lacked appropriate inferential statistics to conclusively support this hypothesis.

More recently the link between forgiveness and mental health has become clearer. Konstam, et al. (2000) found that counsellors believed that forgiveness-related topics were salient during clinical interviews. Forgiveness has been associated with lower levels of depression (Toussaint, Williams, Musick & Everson-Rose, 2008a; 2008b); anxiety (Hebl & Enright, 1993); and stress (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). For example, Witvliet, Phipps, Feldman and Beckham (2004) found that higher levels of forgiveness of oneself predicted lower levels of anxiety and depression, while the forgiveness of a transgressor predicted lower levels of both those variables as well as

less severe symptoms of PTSD. This literature demonstrates the relationship between mental health and forgiveness, but it should be noted that Witvliet's sample consisted of military veterans while Hebl and Enright and Toussaint, et al. looked at individuals diagnosed with mood disorders. Both these populations can experience high levels of PTSD but with considerably different experiences to victims of crime (Magruder, et al., 2004; Brown, Campbell, Lehman, Grisham & Mancill, 2001). The difficulties faced by victims of crime are different from those experienced by other populations prone to PTSD and, thus, conclusions drawn from an examination of other specific populations may not be easily generalisable to them.

### *1.2.2 Current Issues in Forgiveness Research*

#### *1.2.2.1 The Question of Definition*

The question of what constitutes forgiveness is a contentious one and is often cited as a major impediment to consensus in the field (Denton & Martin, 1998; Worthington, 2005; Lawler-Row, Scott, Raines, Edlis-Matityahou, & Moore, 2007). It is nonetheless an important one to consider when examining victims of crime because their circumstances are considerably different from other populations examined in the forgiveness literature.

Enright and Coyle (1998) developed a formula which is often cited by writers who are grappling with this question (see for example McCullough, et al., 2000; Mullet, Girard, & Bakshi, 2004; Thompson, et al., 2005). Forgiveness, they argue, is more easily distinguished from similar concepts than by its own distinctive characteristics. In other words, while there is general agreement as to what forgiveness is *not*, there is less

agreement concerning what forgiveness actually *is*. Enright and Coyle argue that forgiveness is distinct from variables such as pardoning, condoning, excusing, forgetting or denying (p.141). McCullough, et al. (2000) point out that few researchers dispute this assumption however some have added other similar variables from which forgiveness is distinguishable. For example, a majority of researchers argue that forgiveness and reconciliation are distinct (McCullough & Worthington, 1994; de Waal & Pokorny, 2005). These researchers often illustrate the interplay between forgiveness and reconciliation with a 2 X 2 matrix (see Worthington, 1998 p.129). In this matrix, forgiveness and reconciliation may be present with or without the other variable. For example, no forgiveness and no reconciliation would represent the continuation of hostilities or grudge-holding resulting from a transgression. In another case, however, there may be reconciliation without forgiveness such as one would expect to encounter during a truce.

While most researchers generally accept the distinctiveness of forgiveness and reconciliation, it must be noted that this is not universal. For example, Hargrave and colleagues see reconciliation as the final goal of forgiveness (Hargrave, 1994; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Sells & Hargrave, 1998). It ought to be remembered that the model proposed by Hargrave and Sells is solely concerned with relational violations within a family therapy context. As such, an expectation for reconciliation is understandable. This expectation however, is dependent on the context in which forgiveness takes place and ought not to be expected in all circumstances within which forgiveness may occur. Once again, this is a pertinent consideration when examining forgiveness in victims of crime as one cannot be certain that a victim and their offender knew one another prior to

the offence; nor, in the case of serious offences, can one expect that a pre-existing relationship would continue after the offence.

Among the many differing definitions and models of forgiveness, there are a number of commonalities. For example, most models of forgiveness involve the cessation or release of negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours towards the transgressor or the transgression (McCullough, et al., 2000; Enright, 2001). This implies that the transgression provokes a measure of negative sentiment in the transgressed person toward the transgressor. What is less clear from the literature is the extent to which forgiveness involves the cultivation of positive feelings thoughts and behaviours for the transgressor. Three major models of forgiveness conceive of it in terms of this dual process. McCullough (2000) summarises his motivational model of forgiveness as a decreased motivation to avoid the transgressor or to seek revenge, coupled with an increased motivation towards benevolence. In the “work phase” of Enright’s process model, the development of empathy and compassion towards the transgressor is cited as the thirteenth step of the forgiveness process. Enright and Coyle (1998) state that this is only a potential consequence of the previous step. This leaves open the possibility of other responses. Nevertheless, they consider the development of positive regard common enough to constitute a step in the process. Finally, Worthington and Wade (1999) also argue that emotional forgiveness involves countering negative responses to the transgressor with positive ones. These three major streams of research all emphasise the development of benevolent or ‘prosocial’ affect towards the transgressor.

Other researchers argue that the development of positive responses to the offender is not necessarily a facet of forgiveness (see Malcolm, Warwar & Greenberg, 2005). This is often the case when forgiveness is being examined within a therapeutic context. This is possibly due to a greater emphasis being placed on achieving certain beneficial psychological outcomes for the transgressed person rather than focusing on the restoration of harmonious relations as a primary goal.

The question of the definition of forgiveness is important to consider when examining the construct in relation to victims of crime. If forgiveness is a contextually bound construct, it will differ considerably from other definitions and models because the transgression is likely to be considerably more serious than those routinely examined in forgiveness research such as marital disputes (e.g. Gordon & Baucom, 1998) or disputes between co-workers (e.g. Aquino, Tripp & Bies, 2006). The development of positive affect for a transgressor is a key example where one may see a divergence between models. The development of such feelings may be difficult for victims of serious crime because the repercussions of the offence are more severe. Furthermore, such feelings are unlikely to contribute substantively to the forgiveness process when the transgressor is a stranger as strong positive regard exceeds what someone usually feels for strangers, let alone strangers who have offended against them.

#### *1.2.2.2 Is Forgiveness a Trait or a State?*

Originally, forgiveness was examined in terms of transgression specific occurrences and thus the construct was most usually understood as a state-based phenomenon. A number of researchers have examined dispositional correlates of forgiveness and this has led to

discussion of a forgiving personality (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). From this body of work, a number of general trends have emerged. An examination of the literature reveals that forgiveness is often associated with lower levels of neuroticism (Maltby, Macaskill and Day, 2001); and higher levels of agreeableness (Ashton, Paunomen, Helmes & Jackson, 1998). Agreeableness and neuroticism are two factors in the “Big Five” personality framework. An individual with higher levels of agreeableness may have higher levels of trust and sympathy and may display greater altruism, modesty and compliance than those with lower levels of agreeableness (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Alternatively, those individuals with higher levels of neuroticism tend to respond more poorly to environmental stress and may exhibit more anxiety, anger, envy and guilt than those with lower levels of neuroticism (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Additionally, the tendency to think more positively towards a transgressor, already shown to be a common element to a number of forgiveness models, has been associated with higher levels of extraversion (Maltby, Day & Barber, 2004).

Studies such as those cited above provide additional valuable information concerning forgiveness. A number of personality variables have been correlated with different mental and physical health variables and may provide an important link in understanding the pathway between forgiveness and mental health that has been discussed earlier. Hooker, Monahan, Shifren and Hutchinson (1992) found that neuroticism was associated with higher levels of perceived stress and lower levels of perceived health. Additionally, they found that higher levels of neuroticism predicted a higher number of diagnosed chronic health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and arthritis.

Chung, Berger, Jones and Rudd (2006) explored the relationship between the symptoms of PTSD and found that lower levels of agreeableness and higher levels of neuroticism significantly predicted symptoms of hyperarousal. In addition, a cross-cultural study by Furnham and Cheng (1999) found that extraversion was positively correlated to higher levels of happiness (as measured by the Oxford Happiness Inventory which includes a measure of mental health). As with other studies already explored, they also confirmed the negative association between neuroticism and mental illness. These findings were replicated in the three countries the study explores: the United Kingdom, China and Japan.

While the association between personality and forgiveness is instructive, caution is urged when discussing forgiveness itself as a disposition. A number of researchers favour an examination of the tendency to forgive rather than specific instances of forgiveness (see Thompson, et al., 2005). There are three main reasons to be suspect of this. Firstly, the concept of forgiveness makes very little sense without considering a specific transgression. The evidence for this can be seen in studies which show that the more serious a transgression; the harder it is to forgive (e.g. Fincham, Jackson & Beach, 2005). Secondly, the tendency for a person to forgive is already adequately described using the dispositional variables discussed above, such as agreeableness and extraversion. Thirdly, there exists some debate concerning the appropriateness of the trait concept. Pervin (1994) argues that support for the trait model comes from the assumption of longitudinal stability or the belief that certain personality variables (traits) remain relatively consistent over time. Pervin argues that this view overlooks the degree to which personality variables fluctuate according to life events. He also highlights that,

while there is good evidence to suggest that traits are genetically heritable, this is not consistent for all traits, nor does it in any way negate the influence of environment on shaping individual responses. In consideration of these three points, and particularly the importance of transgression severity, forgiveness in this thesis will be understood to refer to a psychological state generated as a response to a specific event rather than as an enduring characteristic of an individual's personality. This is because the main goal of this thesis is to uncover a model of how forgiveness occurs for victims of crime rather than assessing their propensity to engage in the forgiveness process.

#### *1.2.2.3 Situating Forgiveness as an Interpersonal or Intrapersonal Process*

A question remains as to whether forgiveness is a set of changes within an individual (in other words, whether it is an intrapersonal phenomenon) or whether forgiveness ought to be understood within the dyad of ongoing relationships (Pargament, McCullough & Thoresen, 2000). This issue concerns the social dynamic inherent in the process of forgiveness although its importance has been overlooked for the most part. The major models of forgiveness conceive of it as an interpersonal process (see section 1.2.3). As will be discussed when looking at forgiveness within therapeutic contexts, forgiveness tends to be emphasised as intrapersonal only when there is extreme distress as a result of the transgression.

The simplest solution to this inconsistency is that the exact nature of forgiveness is likely to vary depending on the nature of the transgression. With regard to victims of crime, there are two considerations that need to be remembered when considering the nature of forgiveness in this regard. Firstly, victims of crime often endure considerable

psychological distress as a result of the offence to which they were subjected. As such, it is likely that forgiveness in this population will be similar to understandings of forgiveness in therapeutic contexts where there is an emphasis on release of negative emotions. Secondly, one cannot expect that a victim of an offence has had a close or ongoing relationship with their offender or that the relationship is likely to continue, or will require some resolution after the offence. Interpersonal considerations are therefore less relevant in these situations than they may be in other spheres, such as marital or workplace disputes where the transgression occurs within the context of an existing relationship.

### *1.2.3 Major Models of Forgiveness*

A brief outline of the major models of forgiveness will now be provided. Each model has been selected because it is referenced pervasively in the field. Sells and Hargrave (1998) point out the importance of these three models in their review of the theoretical and empirical literature on forgiveness. A number of other authors have also carried out reviews of the literature on forgiveness and these models are consistently prominent in these reviews both because of the extent to which they have been examined empirically and the complexity and completeness of their theoretical structure (see for example Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Festa & Tuck, 2000; Legaree, Turner, & Lollis, 2007; Wade, Johnson, & Meyer, 2008). In the following review, each model will be outlined and critiqued with regard to its relevance for victims of crime. In doing this, the inappropriateness of applying each model to a consideration of victims of crime becomes clear.

### *1.2.3.1 Motivational model*

This stream of research focuses on forgiveness within the context of interpersonal relationships although it does not necessarily posit reconciliation as an outcome of the forgiveness process (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). McCullough and colleagues argue that forgiveness is a relationship constructive variable. This means that individuals work out of consideration for the health of a relationship rather than out of self-interest (McCullough, et al., 1998). McCullough and colleagues argue that forgiveness is the result of three changes in a person's motivation. Following a transgression, a person feels emotionally wounded and may perceive themselves as being under attack. This results in a motivated avoidance of the transgressor. Additionally, the offence may provoke feelings of indignation in the transgressed person which motivates them to seek some form of retribution for the transgression. McCullough et al's (1997; 1998) model describes a process whereby a transgressed person becomes less motivated to retaliate or seek revenge for the transgression or to avoid the transgressor. Along with these decreased motivations they experience an increased motivation for conciliation and goodwill towards their transgressor. Forgiveness, in this model, is not motivation per se, but rather an experience which takes place as a result of these three motivational changes. In other words, forgiveness is thought to have occurred when there is less motivated avoidance (i.e. the perception of being under attack has diminished); less motivation for retaliation (i.e. the sense of indignation has diminished); and the transgressed person is more motivated to behave in a more benevolent fashion towards their transgressor.

Results from empirical investigations have shown that an increase in empathy, on the part of the transgressed person for the transgressor, plays a significant role in instigating these motivational changes. McCullough, et al. (1997) developed a 12-item scale called the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory [TRIM] which measured changes in the three motivations outlined above. They found that increases in empathy were related to reductions in both revenge and avoidance. More specifically, they found that apology-giving was more common between couples with higher levels of emotional closeness and they discussed the possibility that apology-giving enhanced feelings of empathy for a transgressor. As McCullough (2000) points out, this finding was not altogether unexpected. Weiner (1995), for example found that empathy plays an important role in the attributional processes that lead to retaliation; the more empathy one has for a transgressor, the less likely one is to retaliate.

Although the early work on this model focused on forgiveness as it relates to a particular transgression, later research has begun to examine the relationship between forgiveness and certain personality variables. McCullough and Root (2005) argue that such an examination is necessary in order to more accurately gauge the change in a transgressed person's response to the offender. They argue that simply assessing forgiveness using offence specific measures, such as the TRIM, ignores the possibility that people can react differently to the same offence. In other words, one person may be more deeply hurt by a particular offence on account of their personal disposition and, as such, may have more to forgive than another person.

To this end, McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick and Johnson (2001) examined the motivation for revenge in relation to the Big Five taxonomy of personality. Their study confirmed results discussed above concerning the negative relationship between a motivation for retaliation and forgiveness. They subsequently found that this motivation was negatively associated with agreeableness and conscientiousness and positively associated with neuroticism. Further research has confirmed the relationship between forgiveness, and agreeableness and neuroticism in the expected direction and has further established that individual differences accounted for between 22% and 44% of the variance in TRIM responses (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002).

McCullough, et al. (1998) identifies four theoretical classes of determinants of forgiveness: social-cognitive, offence-related, relational, and personality level. The social-cognitive determinants of forgiveness emphasise the influence of empathy towards the offender in the forgiveness process. It also suggests that forgiveness (and empathy) rely on attributional variables such as judgments of responsibility and blame, and intentionality, severity and avoidability of the offence. Situational empathy for an offender has been associated with higher levels of forgiveness for a transgressor in other research (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). With regard to forgiveness of a criminal offence, Ristovski and Wertheim (2005) found that higher levels of trait empathy predicted more forgiveness towards the perpetrator of a property offence however there is no indication that this study used victims of crime (rather than relying on third party evaluations). Consequently, this gives little indication of the effects of the serious psychological distress arising from experiencing a serious offence first hand on either empathy or forgiveness.

A criminal offence constitutes a serious transgression from which strong negative affect is likely to result. In such cases, one must reconsider the role that empathy may play in a model of forgiveness in victims of crime, as research indicates a negative relationship between empathy and negative affect such as anger (e.g. Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001). Additionally, a number of researchers have found an inverse relationship between symptoms of PTSD and empathy (e.g. Joseph, Dalglish, Thrasher & Yule, 1997; Farrow, et al., 2005). Given that victims of crime commonly experience strong negative affect towards their offenders and are susceptible to symptoms of PTSD (Riggs, Dancu, Gershuny, Greenberg, & Foa, 1992) one may conclude that forgiveness is less likely, or at least more difficult for this population. This raises three conceptual possibilities for forgiveness within this context. Firstly, one can assume that forgiveness is impossible for victims of crime; secondly, forgiveness may only be possible for victims of crime who can develop feelings of empathy for their offender or; thirdly there exists some other pathway to forgiveness which is not reliant on empathy.

The remaining three theoretical determinants of forgiveness laid out by McCullough et al. (1998) are less difficult to accommodate when examining victims of crime. The authors argue that the more serious an offence; the more difficult it is to forgive. McCullough et al also raise the possibility that the relationship between transgressor and transgressed may have an impact on the ease with which forgiveness is given. They argue that in close relationships, partners are motivated to preserve the relationship and have a greater sense of shared history, and are more likely to apologise for transgressions. These factors subsequently facilitate forgiveness. Given that most models of forgiveness conceive of forgiveness within the interpersonal context of

existing personal relationships, there has been little research examining the nature or utility of forgiveness between strangers. It is acknowledged, however; that forgiveness of strangers is more difficult than forgiveness of those one knows (Eaton & Struthers, 2006). This raises some interesting questions when considering victims of crime as one cannot expect that a victim always knows their offender (although this can often be the case for violent offences, see Rand & Catalano, 2007).

The final determinant of forgiveness outlined by McCullough et al (1998) is personality. While the importance of dispositional factors in facilitating forgiveness has been established by a number of researchers (e.g. Walker & Gorsuch, 2002; Koutsos, Wetheim, & Kornblum, 2008), the emphasis in this project is on defining state forgiveness for the target population. Thus, an innate propensity to forgive is irrelevant in this context because the goal is to outline how forgiveness occurs rather than whether forgiveness ought to occur.

For the purposes of this thesis, a number of points concerning the work of McCullough and colleagues are relevant. Firstly, their interest is focused on forgiveness within the context of close relationships and, as Thompson and Snyder (2003) point out, this emphasises the interpersonal nature of forgiveness. McCullough (2000) describes forgiveness as a process of 'prosocial' change but one must consider how forgiveness proceeds when empathy towards a transgressor is inhibited. This thesis is specifically examining the role forgiveness plays for victims of crime and in this instance one cannot necessarily expect that a victim and offender will be acquainted or that the continuation of a pre-existing relationship is feasible. McCullough et al. (1997; 1998) have stressed

the importance of empathy and the author does not dispute the role empathy can play in forgiveness. When considering victims of crime, it raises some interesting questions. Given the finding of McCullough, et al. (1997; 1998) concerning the positive relationship between empathy and relational closeness, one is forced to acknowledge that forgiveness may be considerably more difficult for victims of crime for reasons other than the increased perceived severity of the offence. It is also possible that variables other than empathy may precipitate forgiveness or that factors other than relational closeness may be associated with an empathic response to a transgressor.

The motivational model is a popular one and the TRIM has demonstrated utility in a number of fields. For example, it has been used when examining the links between forgiveness and recovery from substance abuse (Brenneis, 2002). In one instance, Strelan, Feather and McKee (2008) used the TRIM to examine participants' perception of forgiveness in restorative justice. Using the TRIM in this context, however, is problematic. Firstly, Strelan et al.'s study was scenario based and the TRIM was modified to allow for answers from a third party perspective. Given that forgiveness is a variable with strong moral connotations, one must question whether participants responded according to what they thought the characters would do or what they thought the characters should do. Secondly, Strelan et al have overlooked the relationship specific nature of the theory driving the TRIM. They employed three scenarios detailing three separate transgressions: a property offence, an extra marital affair and a workplace transgression. Results indicated that participants responding to the extra marital affair scenario endorsed a lower motivation to avoid the transgressor and a higher motivation for benevolence than those responding to the property offence. In light of McCullough

and colleagues' findings, the utility of these results are unremarkable because one would expect a greater propensity for empathy between individuals who know each other than between those who do not. Thus the TRIM is not an adequate measure to employ when exploring the level of forgiveness for different types of transgressions when some transgressions occur during a relationship and others do not.

The possibility that a victim and offender may be unacquainted prior to a transgression precludes the use of the TRIM in measuring forgiveness within these contexts. Specifically, the utility of measuring avoidance between victims and offenders is questionable if they have never met because there is simply no reason for victims to not avoid their offenders. In some other cases, avoidance may be necessary to guarantee the victim's safety and cannot be an adequate measure of forgiveness.

#### *1.2.3.2 The REACH model*

The second major model of forgiveness to be discussed is also interpersonal in nature. Worthington and Scherer (2004) summarise this model as an emotion-focused coping strategy. They identify two distinct forms of forgiveness: decisional and emotional. Decisional forgiveness refers to a conscious intention to relate to a transgressor in the same way one did before the transgression. It is distinct from emotional forgiveness because one may intend to behave towards a transgressor in a particular manner yet still feel a degree of resentment towards him or her. Emotional forgiveness, on the other hand, refers to the cessation of feelings of hurt, resentment and hostility arising from an offence. While the intention to forgive a transgressor is important, the focus in this discussion will centre on emotional forgiveness as this form of forgiveness has received

the most attention from Worthington, Wade and colleagues and resembles other models of forgiveness more closely than decisional forgiveness.

Worthington and Wade (1999) explain that emotional forgiveness requires that a transgressed person impose positive or benevolent emotional responses towards the transgressor to replace the negative ones they hold as a result of the offence. In this manner the negative emotions one feels are neutralised or replaced by the positive emotions one is cultivating. The negative emotional responses one feels as a result of being transgressed against are termed unforgiveness in this model (Worthington & Wade, 1999; Wade & Worthington, 2003). Worthington and Wade (1999) stress that forgiveness is only one possible pathway for dealing with unforgiveness. They concede, for example, that retaliation and justice seeking are both alternative ways of addressing unforgiveness. Given that their explicit intention is to examine forgiveness within the context of ongoing relationships they argue that forgiveness is a more suitable response.

This model bears a number of similarities with that of McCullough and colleagues, indeed it is worth noting that Michael McCullough and Everett Worthington have collaborated on a number of pieces (see for example, McCullough, et al., 1998). At a broad level, they share the common assumption that forgiveness involves both a reduction of negative affect towards a transgressor as well as the development of positive affect. Worthington (1998), however, points out that this model is distinct from that of McCullough and colleagues in that it does not focus so exclusively on the role of empathy and is structured differently.

In terms of structure, Worthington, Wade and colleagues' model offers a more comprehensive theory of forgiveness as a process. They outline a five step pyramid model (referred to in the literature as either the Pyramid or REACH model) through which a person progresses from unforgiveness to forgiveness. Initially, this requires a transgressed person to recall the hurt associated with the transgression. Worthington (1998) argues that the dominant emotion confronted at this stage is fear. This motivates a person to avoid the transgressor or, when this is not possible, to develop anger and a desire to retaliate. Furthermore, Wade, Worthington and Meyer (2005) argue that recalling the hurt is therapeutic in itself as it allows the transgressed person a degree of catharsis and emotional release.

The second step involves the development of empathy on the part of the transgressed person for their transgressor. Wade, et al. (2005) define empathy in this context as an awareness of the situational factors that led to the transgression as well as developing a sense of the transgressor's cognitive and affective state before and during the offence. The third step is described as an 'altruistic gift' to the offender (Worthington, 1998; Wade, et al., 2005). This involves a recognition that the transgressor is in need of forgiveness. Worthington (1998) identifies three parts to this step. Initially there is recognition of one's own guilt. This ought to be understood as a healthy understanding of one's own wrongdoing rather than an unhealthy self-blame. This is followed by an examination of how one would feel should one be forgiven for transgressions they have committed. This highlights that the transgressor is in need of forgiveness and allows for the final step of offering forgiveness as a gift. Worthington (1998) describes the fourth step as a commitment to forgiveness which requires the public acknowledgement of

forgiveness so that one continually applies oneself to forgiveness and does not later retract it. The final step is related to this and involves holding onto forgiveness so that the initial responses associated with unforgiveness are not triggered (Worthington, 1998; Wade, et al., 2005). This is best understood as a personal commitment to forgiveness as opposed to the social one constituted by public acknowledgement.

Unlike the motivational model, the REACH model provides a pathway to forgiveness and is thus proscriptive rather than naturalistic. The REACH model can therefore be understood as a pathway to achieve the original definition of forgiveness provided by Worthington and Wade (1999), that forgiveness involves the neutralisation or replacement of negative emotions through the introduction of positive ones.

The REACH model is difficult to apply to an examination of victims of crime for many of the same reasons as McCullough and colleagues' motivational model. The ease with which empathy can be facilitated remains questionable. Expanding their understanding of empathy to include a consideration of situational factors may be helpful as this requires a cognitive reorientation rather than an affective one. This can be understood as adopting an external locus of control in terms of attributional decision making. A number of researchers have found that an external locus of control is related to higher levels of empathy for an observed actor. For example, Muller, Caldwell and Hunter (1994) found that a tendency to attribute external locus of control predicted higher levels of empathy towards victims of child abuse and rape. Although it must be acknowledged that this research was based on third party evaluations (and not the victims themselves assessing their offender) it nonetheless demonstrates that a consideration of situational

factors can affect one's empathic response to a subject. As mentioned with regard to the previous model, the extent to which the severity of a transgression or the experience of being personally transgressed against may moderate this relationship remains unclear.

Once again, this model requires the development of some benevolent affect towards a transgressor and this is potentially problematic for many victims of crime. It is unlikely, for example, that a homicide survivor would develop feelings for the person who murdered their loved one. In the face of this problem there are two responses. Firstly, one can assume that forgiveness is impossible for some transgressions. Haaken (2002) supports this view by arguing that some transgressions are simply too serious to warrant forgiveness. She goes so far as to suggest that in these cases, forgiveness constitutes a form of psychopathology. Should this be the case, it would be unfortunate given that there is reason to suspect that forgiveness has a number of positive mental and physical health outcomes (Thoresen, Harris & Luskin, 2000). The alternative is that forgiveness can be understood as a contextually bound phenomenon, the exact components of which may differ depending on circumstances. In this sense, then, forgiveness is more correctly understood as 'forgivenesses' which involve an affective change on the part of the transgressed person towards their transgressor without requiring the development of benevolence. This does not preclude the possibility that certain components of forgiveness may be universal but does not rigidly proscribe this.

#### *1.2.3.3 Process model*

The final model of forgiveness to be examined here is the one proposed by Enright and colleagues, commonly referred to as the Process Model. It is also a model in which there

is an emphasis in the interpersonal nature of forgiveness. Similar to the REACH model, the process model is a proscriptive one that may be best understood as a pathway to forgiveness rather than a definition of forgiveness in itself. Nonetheless, Enright and colleagues have described the goal of their model. It is remarkably similar to the definitions put forward in the previous two research streams. As has already been outlined, Enright and colleagues are at pains to distinguish forgiveness from similar phenomena such as condoning or forgetting. Instead, they define forgiveness as a voluntary and unconditional act (Enright & Coyle, 1998) whereby one relinquishes negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviours while fostering feelings of compassion, generosity and love towards an undeserving transgressor (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998). While this two-part understanding of forgiveness is clearly reminiscent of the other models examined here, Thompson and Snyder (2003) point out that the Process model goes beyond this with its insistence on the spontaneous development of loving feelings for the transgressor. Enright (2001) discusses the necessity of compassion, benevolence and love in detail, arguing that when the remission of resentment is not accompanied by the fostering of love, the transgressed person risks replacing resentment with alienation instead of forgiveness.

While the other models in no way preclude the development of such feelings, the Process model emphasises this aspect most strongly. This is probably due to a philosophical interest in scholars who understand forgiveness in terms of the early Christian concept of agape (The Human Development Study Group, 1991). Agape is a Greek term that was used in the New Testament and is most usually translated as love.

Baston (1991), however, clarifies this definition by explaining that it refers to a form of love that is selfless or self-sacrificial and often involves a giving of self to others.

The process model itself is divided into 20 steps that are grouped into three phases (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, 2001). The initial phase is called the uncovering phase and requires the transgressed person to develop some insight into the extent to which the offence has affected them psychologically. This phase has eight steps that require the individual to examine their affective and cognitive responses to the transgression. For example, the second step requires individuals to confront the anger they may feel as a result of the offence whilst the eighth step suggests that individuals examine the effect of the transgression on their perception of a just world.

The second phase is called the decision phase. Enright and Coyle (1998) explain that as one becomes more aware of the effect the offence has had on them and the extent to which their coping patterns are maladaptive they become more willing to accept forgiveness as an option. The final phase is called the deepening phase. In this phase one begins to see the experience of the transgression (and the commitment to forgive) as a meaningful experience. One may develop insight that one is not alone and have a sense of a new purpose in life. This results in a release of negative emotions and sees the development of positive affect for the transgressor (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright 2001).

It is important to note that the three phases of this model are highly intrapersonal even though Enright (2001) stresses the interpersonal nature of forgiveness. The final step in the decision phase requires the individual to commit to forgiveness. Enright & Coyle

(1998) explain that this comes about through developing a sense of perspective and awareness concerning the transgressor's circumstances (i.e. developing more of a stronger attribution for external locus of control). Enright (2001) however explains this phase differently and emphasises the development of compassion, acceptance of the pain one has experienced, and offering forgiveness as a gift to the offender. So while this step is clearly strongly interpersonal, it must be borne in mind that it develops entirely through a consideration of the effect the transgression has had on the transgressed person himself or herself. It does not require them to consider the transgressor's circumstances. Furthermore all, bar the last step of the deepening phase where the results of forgiveness (such as emotional release) start to manifest, describe intrapersonal processes or benefits. The final step posits the possibility that positive affect for the transgressor may develop along with the sense of emotional release.

Enright and colleagues consider the process model an important innovation in the field of forgiveness therapy. Freedman and Enright (1996), for example, examined a prototype of the process model and its effect on survivors of incest. They found that levels of anxiety and depression were significantly lower for participants who had engaged in the process model. They also found that these participants acknowledged feeling more forgiveness for their perpetrator and were more optimistic concerning the future of their parental relationships. More recently, a meta-analysis by Baskin and Enright (2004) examined nine different intervention studies on forgiveness. Five of these were studies from Enright and colleagues' stream of research. The meta-analysis confirmed the link between this model of forgiveness and decreases in anxiety, depression, and anger along with improved self-esteem. Furthermore, Baskin and

Enright's findings suggest that the inclusion of process approaches to forgiveness, such as the one outlined here or the REACH model outlined above, offer greater mental health benefits for individuals in therapy than cognitive based counselling alone. Freedman and Enright's (1996) findings also suggest that forgiveness can have positive psychological outcomes for victims of serious crimes such as incest although this ought to be tempered with Baskin and Enright's (2004) finding that forgiveness is beneficial only when entered into voluntarily and willingly. Given that victims of crime can experience a degree of indignation and resentment (Whiteley, 1998), the choice to forgive may be a complex one for this population.

It is possible to identify a number of difficulties in using Enright and colleagues' definition of forgiveness for victims of crime. Primarily, the concept of agape and its promotion within this model is an unrealistic goal for many victims of crime. Additionally, no attempt has been made by Enright and colleagues to measure this variable (or the related concept of compassion, which is also championed (see Enright, 2001) as an outcome of the process model.

#### *1.2.4 Summary*

The goal of this literature review has been to establish the difficulties in applying existing understandings of forgiveness to victims of crime. As has been demonstrated, none of the major models of forgiveness can adequately capture the variable for these individuals. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, forgiveness is clearly a contextually bound phenomenon as is evidenced by the continuing difficulty the field faces in reaching consensus on a generic definition of the construct.

Secondly, with the exception of a few therapeutic definitions, forgiveness is almost universally defined as an interpersonal phenomenon. This means that the majority of research examining forgiveness has explored it within the context of a personal relationship (whether that relationship survives the transgression or otherwise). While it is acknowledged that a great number of crimes, especially those of a violent nature, occur within such relationships, this is by no means exclusively the case. In order to fully understand the role of forgiveness for victims of crime, a model that emphasises the intrapersonal aspects of the construct is required. In turn, this approach makes a timely contribution to the wider field of forgiveness research by helping to address a deficit in the psychological community's understanding of an increasingly important field.

Finally, an exploration of the major models of forgiveness has revealed a tendency to understand forgiveness as having two distinct aspects: the reduction in negative feelings towards a transgressor and the development of positive ones. While a reduction in negative feelings concerning an offender would be expected from an intrapersonal approach to forgiveness, the development of positive feelings for an offender is unnecessary and in the case of extremely violent or otherwise traumatic offences is unlikely.

Nonetheless, psychological research demonstrates that forgiveness can have positive benefits for individuals who undertake its challenges (McCullough, et al., 2000). Given that victims of crime endure a number of detrimental psychological outcomes, a more

complete understanding of the forgiveness process in this population constitutes the first goal of this thesis.

### **1.3 Revenge**

Revenge, as it is understood in this thesis, refers to the complete range of vindictive thoughts, feelings and behaviours one may experience as a consequence of a perceived transgression. This is not a unique interpretation of the term (e.g. Tripp, Bies & Aquino, 2002). On the other hand, a number of researchers make a distinction between the psychological components of revenge, which they term vengefulness and the behavioural components which they term revenge (e.g. Stuckless, et al., 1995; Schmid, 2005). There are a number of other terms used by various scholars to explain different attributes of the global construct referred to here simply as revenge. Murphy (2003) for example, uses the term vindictiveness to distinguish the feelings and thoughts that motivate the act of revenge, while Stuckless and Goransen (1992) point out that at the time they were writing the topic of revenge (or vengeance as they term it) was subsumed under the search heading of reciprocity in the American Psychological Abstracts (all psychological databases now allow for searches on revenge and vengeance as well as the dispositional construct of vengefulness).

This lack of a common lexicon draws one's attention to the disparate nature of research into revenge. While the literature on forgiveness lacks a common definition, there is at least a common assumption concerning its parameters: it is a phenomenon that can be examined affectively, cognitively and behaviourally (McCullough, et al., 2000). That even a vague consensus is lacking in the examination of revenge is a testament to the

lack of research in the area. As such, this thesis' goals concerning revenge are strongly exploratory in nature. The aim of this section is to find some common ground.

The study of revenge has focused on five disparate areas, each of which will be discussed in this section. Initially, revenge and its relationship to anger and aggression is examined. Following this, the concept of dimensionality is considered. Stuckless and Goranson's (1992) work, which provides the only dedicated measure of revenge, conceives of the construct as one-dimensional while other research suggests that this may not be the case. Subsequently, revenge is examined in terms of its goals, its consequences, and finally the effect of power asymmetries on the consequences of revenge behaviours.

### *1.3.1 Revenge and its Relationship to Anger and Aggression*

Revenge is widely understood as a form of aggression and the two concepts share a number of common components (Stuckless, et al., 1995). For example, rumination is consistently mentioned as a component of revenge. Sukhodolsky, Golub and Cromwell (2001) developed the Anger Rumination Scale [ARS] with reference to literature exploring different aspects of anger. The ARS contains a four item subscale entitled Thoughts of Revenge [ARS-TR] which measures cognitive aspects of revenge and which describe ruminative cognition (e.g. "I have long living fantasies of revenge after the conflict is over", p.694). As part of the validation process for the ARS, each subscale was correlated to other well-established measures of anger and aggression. In particular, they examined the relationship between the ARS-TR and various subscales of the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory [STAXI] and found a significant positive correlation

with subscales measuring the suppression of anger; and a negative relationship with the subscale measuring the ability to control the expression of anger. These findings suggest that revenge is closely associated with aggression and highlight the cognitive and affective components of revenge.

#### *1.3.1.1 Revenge and the Hydraulic Model*

A number of dominant models of aggression can be employed to explain revenge. For example, it is consistent with the hydraulic model of aggression. This model is based on the work of Breuer and Freud (1974) in which they argued that a build up of negative emotions can result in a sudden outburst (hysteria). In this case, an act of revenge would constitute the sudden hysterical outburst resulting from the negative psychological responses stemming from a perceived wrong-doing. It should be noted that the hydraulic model is now considered redundant by most researchers (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Bushman, 2002) but may still have some value in describing the relationship between vengeful feelings and thoughts and acts of revenge.

#### *1.3.1.2 Revenge and the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis*

First proposed by Dollard and colleagues in 1939, the frustration-aggression hypothesis was significantly reformulated twenty years ago (Berkowitz, 1989) and offers a far more convincing explanation of aggression than the hydraulic model. Originally, the hypothesis put forward a simple rule that aggression is always preceded by frustration (an external occurrence which instigates an aggressive response). Berkowitz (1989) clarifies this general rule by pointing out that it only makes sense when examining hostile, as opposed to instrumental aggression. The distinction between these was first made by Feshbach (1964) and refers to a difference in goals between hostile aggression

in which harming another is the goal, and instrumental aggression which has goals that are not necessarily malicious (for example, aggression to obtain money as in a bank robbery). Berkowitz (1989) offered a further modification to the hypothesis by arguing that frustration or an 'aversive event' led to negative affect which could lead to an actual act of aggression.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis is firmly goal orientated. Berkowitz (1989) explains that these aversive events represent the thwarting (deliberate or otherwise) of an individual in their pursuit of particular goals. It is the inability to achieve these goals which causes negative affect and is frustrating to the individual. Conceiving of revenge in terms of this prism thus offers a fuller explanation of the relationship between its affective and cognitive components, and its behavioural components. In this sense, revenge is a response to an individual who is perceived as blocking certain outcomes.

At first glance, the frustration-aggression hypothesis does not appear to easily accommodate the experiences of victims of crime. For this population the anger felt results from an action which negatively impacts the person's status quo. However, if one considers the maintenance of a certain lifestyle and the ability to exercise a measure of self-determination over the circumstances of one's life as fundamental goals that everyone shares then the hypothesis does appear appropriate. Indeed, even if one were to argue that these did not constitute goals as Berkowitz (1989) conceives of the term, it would be naïve to assume that the crimes experienced by any of the participants in this project would not entail the thwarting of any number of goals: whether through loss of property; physical injury; or the loss of a future with a loved one.

### *1.3.1.3 Is Revenge Hostile or Instrumental Aggression?*

If one accepts the frustration-aggression hypothesis as an adequate description of revenge then one must understand the construct as a form of hostile aggression. Feshbach (1964) distinguished between a form of aggression that was motivated by a drive to injure another person, hostile aggression; and aggressive acts that were motivated by nonaggressive goals, instrumental aggression. For example, an individual may harm a person simply because they do not like them (hostile aggression), or they may harm them in order to steal from them (instrumental aggression). At face value, revenge appears to be a form of hostile aggression because the feelings, thoughts and behaviours that characterise it revolve around harming someone. The fact that revenge has a retrospective focus, addressing a transgression that has already been enacted, adds to this argument because the act of revenge cannot be instrumental in undoing that transgression. The situation becomes more complicated, however, when one considers the goals of revenge (see section 1.3.3) as researchers have identified a number of these which are clearly instrumental.

### *1.3.2 Unidimensionality*

Perhaps the main flaw in psychological research examining revenge is that it is defined as a unidimensional construct. For example, the only instrument specifically designed to measure attitudes towards revenge is the Vengeance Scale [VS] designed by Stuckless and Goranson (1992). Although the VS is described by its authors as a measure of attitudes towards revenge, it has nonetheless been used as a direct measure of revenge in a number of studies (e.g. Stuckless, et al., 1995; Cota-McKinley, Woody & Bell, 2001; Brown, 2004). The instrument measures an individual's predisposition for revenge and

can thus be understood as an assessment of cognitive aspects of revenge. On the other hand, it doesn't make any attempt to measure affective aspects of revenge. Anger, for example, has been identified above as a component of revenge and the VS makes no mention of it. Nor, for that matter does it assess negative feelings or thoughts about the transgressor, or the likelihood that one will act on these feelings and thoughts.

Most of the other instruments that include revenge also understand it as a one-dimensional construct. This is usually because revenge is seen to represent a counterpoint to forgiveness. The most pertinent example is the TRIM. As outlined earlier, McCullough et al. (1997) understand forgiveness in terms of motivated behaviour. One of these motivations is for revenge and, as such, the TRIM contains a number of items that measure revenge. Once again, these items make no attempt to measure different aspects of revenge.

Both the VS and the TRIM have acceptable psychometric properties and may provide a good approximate measure of one's vengeful tendencies. It is questionable; however, whether revenge can be adequately *described* in only one dimension. As explained above, revenge can be understood as more than a behavioural response. It contains affective and cognitive aspects as well. Arguably, one would get a more accurate assessment of the nature of an individual's desire for revenge by considering all aspects of the construct when measuring it. One goal of this thesis is to identify the cognitive and affective aspects of revenge in victims of crime so that the variable may be understood in more detail and measured with greater accuracy. This constitutes an

important first step in the development of measures that provide a richer description of how different individuals experience revenge.

### *1.3.3 Goals of Revenge*

Most researchers assume that revenge is an irrational and counterproductive response (e.g. Crombag, Rassin & Horselenberg, 2003). From this point, they attempt to demonstrate some latent evolutionary utility or social value of revenge. Crombag, et al, for example, cite the work of the philosopher Jon Elster who argues that revenge is an irrational act on the grounds that rational acts are measured responses undertaken with a consideration of the outcome they will produce. Revenge, as a response to a transgression, cannot hope to undo the consequences of the transgression and must therefore be irrational. The assumption made by researchers is that despite the apparent lack of logic to revenge it must have some sensible function. Several researchers have posited a number of possible goals of revenge (see Orth, 2004) The three main goals cited to explain revenge are equity, deterrence, and ego-defence.

#### *1.3.3.1 Equity*

The concept of equity assumes that the primary goal of revenge is to restore social harmony by inflicting a wrong for a wrong. In support of this argument, Stillwell, Baumeister and Del Priore (2008) argue that revenge represents an attempt on the part of a transgressed individual to restore equity between themselves and their transgressor. In order to provoke vengeful feelings, thoughts or behaviours, a transgression needs to entail a perceived loss for the transgressed person, either materially or psychologically. This sense of loss motivates the individual to seek recompense. In the results of the two studies they report in their article, Stillwell, et al. demonstrate that their participants

were at least partially motivated by a desire to restore equity. Furthermore, this sense that equity had been violated appeared co-morbidly with a number of distressing psychological variables such as anger and feelings of hurt and upset which seems to suggest that the maintenance of a sense of social equity is an important psychological need.

Stillwell, et al. (2008) highlight an inherent problem in the restoration of equity through revenge. They found that the perceived appropriateness of payback tends to vary depending on whether an individual is an avenger or the one receiving revenge. They called this phenomenon the magnitude gap. What was observed was a tendency for avengers to think that their revenge was an appropriate, proportional response while those receiving the revenge deemed it excessive. As a result, those receiving revenge; the original transgressors, felt victimised themselves and experienced a violated sense of equity. Stillwell, et al. used this phenomenon to explain the tendency for revenge to escalate a conflict rather than restore equity as it was originally intended to do.

#### *1.3.3.2 Deterrence*

A second motive for revenge is deterrence. Some scholars have argued that revenge is essentially a defensive mechanism to guard against future attacks to which one may be vulnerable as a result of the initial transgression. Frijda (1994) identifies deterrence as one of two social aims of revenge along with the restoration of the balance of power (which is similar to restoration of equity). McCullough (2008) has most recently put the case for revenge as deterrence. He argues that revenge is an evolutionary adaptation designed to deter both would be aggressors as well as second time aggressors. To

demonstrate deterrence, he cites the work of Diamond (1977) who found that participants were deterred from administering an electrical shock to a confederate for a perceived transgression if they believed the confederate would have the opportunity to shock them in return. There is a problem, however, with McCullough's (2008) interpretation of Diamond's data. Knowing that the roles would be reversed did not completely deter subjects from administering shocks. It simply meant that they gave shocks of less intensity. Thus revenge still took place although it was muted out of self-interest. McCullough (2008) also argues that revenge deters would-be transgressors on the basis of psychological research which indicates that people will retaliate more forcefully when a provocation is witnessed by a third party. Once again, simply interpreting this as deterrence overlooks a number of other plausible interpretations. For example, it is possible in this situation that retaliation is ego-defensive. It is reasonable to assume that a transgression occurring in front of other people would provoke stronger feelings of embarrassment or humiliation, thus motivating the transgressed person to retaliate more forcefully in order to protect their image. Such a scenario does not necessarily suggest deterrence as a goal of revenge.

Beyond the interpretation offered by McCullough (2008), there is little empirical evidence to support the deterrence view of revenge. Using a student sample Crombag, et al. (2003) found that only 10% of respondents identified deterrence as their goal. The majority of responses suggested that revenge had an ego-defensive role (see below). Schmid (2005) found that when students were asked how important it was for a transgressor to never repeat the transgression, they responded emphatically that it was very important but this is not truly measuring deterrence as a goal of revenge. An event

which prompts revenge would not be something one wished to repeat. It does not necessarily follow that the feelings of revenge are themselves motivated to deter the transgressor.

Govier (2002) counters the deterrence perspective by stressing that deterrence, by definition, is an act designed to make someone refrain from inflicting harm whereas revenge is primarily an attempt to hurt another individual in response to something they have already done. She goes on to argue that revenge, rather than deterring future attacks, may provoke them. This is consistent with the argument made by Stillwell et al. (2008) in relation to the magnitude gap. Govier's argument, however; goes further and demonstrates the inconsistency between the two utilitarian views of revenge as either a method of restoring equity or a method of avoiding future attack (in other words protecting, rather than restoring equity).

#### *1.3.3.3 Ego-defence*

Being transgressed against can leave a person feeling devalued (Scobie & Scobie, 1998) and disempowered (Baumeister, 1999). As such, a number of researchers have raised the possibility that revenge serves the purpose of protecting or repairing an individual's self-esteem or social identity after a transgression (e.g. Uniacke, 2000; McCullough, et al., 2001; Miller, 2001; Eaton, Struthers & Santelli, 2006). A number of researchers have explored the link between revenge and self-esteem. Eaton, et al. (2006), for example, found that lower levels of self-esteem predicted higher levels of revenge using the TRIM. Additionally, while not exploring revenge specifically, Aquino and Douglas (2003) found that threats to an individual's identity (defined as their sense of

competence, dignity and self-worth) predicted more antisocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour was measured using six items, all of which involved inflicting physical or psychological harm on another person. Furthermore, antisocial behaviour was positively related to higher scores (indicating a more permissive attitude towards revenge) on the VS (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992).

As mentioned above, Crombag, et al. (2003) asked participants to state the reason that they sought revenge. Seventy percent of their respondents gave reasons that can be understood as ego-defensive. Sixteen percent of respondents explicitly cited the restoration of self-esteem as their motive for taking revenge. More than half (54%) said that it was because they wanted to demonstrate that nobody was allowed to walk over them. At face value, this response seems to suggest deterrence but the authors distinguished it from this. Instead, they argue that it reflects a desire to equalize power as outlined by Frijda (1994). Frijda argues that a power disparity is created when one individual transgresses against another and revenge serves to cancel this. This response can be considered ego-defensive as the redressing of power inequalities is only likely when a person has been undermined. Thus, by reinforcing their power, they invalidate any personal sense of weakness or vulnerability.

The possible relationship between revenge and self-image or self-esteem has been outlined by Baumeister (1999). He stresses that there are no data suggesting a link between any form of violence and chronic low self-esteem per se. Instead, Baumeister argues that a perceived threat to the individual or their self-image (termed 'ego-threat') can result in violent retaliation. In other words, when another person threatens one's

favourable view of oneself, one is more likely to respond aggressively. In fact, Baumeister summarises empirical literature that suggests that an inflated self-esteem, or insecure or unstable egotism are most likely to result in violent retaliation in the face of ego-threat.

This model has an important contribution to make to an understanding of the psychological processes involved in taking revenge. Baumeister (1999) follows his examination of ego-threat with a theoretical explanation of revenge which relies on the concept of equity and once again outlines the magnitude gap. One can, however, understand a transgression as a form of ego-threat that creates a desire for retaliation. In this sense, a transgression worthy of revenge is one that in some way compromises an individual's positive self-image. An example might be someone who is assaulted and robbed. The assault clearly constitutes an attack on the individual. Furthermore, it could call into question the victim's ability to protect or defend themselves. Assault may also negatively impact an individual's sense of independence, as well as their self-esteem, if the offence results in incapacitating injury (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998). If we accept this as an ego-threat, then revenge would seem to be a natural response. This argument also provides an explanation of why individuals may seek revenge when there seems to be little or no tangible or material benefits in doing so.

Baumeister's (1999) explanation stresses that unstable positive self-image is more likely to result in violent retaliation but it is interesting to consider the effect of a transgression on a more stable or robust self-image. Not everyone who has felt the desire for revenge suffers from unstable egotism. It is worth considering, then, the possibility that stability

of self-esteem may be one factor that influences the likelihood that someone will act on their natural desire for revenge following a transgression.

#### *1.3.4 Revenge and Power*

There is a small body of research that examines the effect of power asymmetries in conflict situations on whether the desire for revenge will be acted on or not. As a general rule, individuals with less power tend to be more reluctant to seek revenge against those with more power (Heider, 1958; Reider, 1984). The usual explanation for this concerns the fact that there are likely to be fewer consequences for downward revenge (by a more powerful individual against a less powerful one) than upward revenge (by a less powerful individual against a more powerful one). It is also worth considering, however, the concept of ego-threat in these circumstances. Baumeister's (1999) position has already been detailed above. If one accepts this stance, it is reasonable to assume that a threat to one's social position could constitute a threat to one's self-identity. The victim of upward revenge is likely to experience a higher degree of ego-threat than a victim of downward revenge and would thus be more likely to seek revenge. In light of the work by Sidanius and Pratto (1999) this seems a plausible contention. These authors propose a dispositional variable called social dominance orientation [SDO] that describes an individual's tendency to adhere to rigid social hierarchies. Individuals with a high SDO actively assist in the maintenance of those hierarchies by behaving oppressively to perceived social inferiors while acquiescing to perceived superiors. These individuals strongly identify with the in-group and their place within it. This theory thus provides an alternative explanation for a tendency to avenge transgressions performed by those with less perceived power.

The ego-threat argument for revenge in cases of power asymmetry does not appear to be supported by the finding of Kim, Smith and Brigham (1998). They examined the effect of the presence of third-parties on the tendency to carry out both upwards and downwards revenge. They found that downward revenge was enhanced in the absence of a third party known to have a concern for justice and fair dealing. It seems reasonable to assume that a transgression by someone with less power or status would constitute more of an ego-threat if it was carried out in the presence of another person because it would add a measure of embarrassment or humiliation. On the other hand, the inhibition of revenge in this case also suggests that the would-be avenger is concerned with the positive regard of others. This is an ego-defensive consideration. On the basis of Kim, et al., then, it is difficult to assess the decision making process involved in taking revenge in a manner which allows one to draw conclusions as to the role of ego-threat.

Nonetheless, an understanding of revenge in power asymmetries is instructive when considering victims of crime. A number of crimes occur within relationships that are characterised by wide discrepancies in power such as in the case of child sexual abuse. Power disparity has also been discussed in cases of intimate partner violence (Felson & Outlaw, 2007). Even in cases where victim and offender do not know each other, there are still immediate disparities of power. For example, in the case of an armed hold-up, an offender has a higher degree of power over the victim because they have a weapon.

### *1.3.5 Consequences of Revenge*

As mentioned above, most scholars are in agreement that revenge entails considerable personal risks to the avenger and is usually counter-productive (Uniacke, 2000; Seton,

2001). Nonetheless there is a widespread social acceptance that cathartic aggression is beneficial in that it discharges pent up emotions and it has been identified as a common lay method of dealing with aggression (Bushman, Baumeister & Phillips, 2001). There is, however, little evidence to support this view.

Bushman (2002) examined the relationship between anger, rumination and venting, which was measured by hitting a punching bag. Results indicated that participants who were instructed to vent their aggression while focusing on a photograph of the person who made them angry (the rumination group) had significantly higher levels of anger than those individuals who had vented while thinking about becoming physically fit and a control group who had done nothing. Additionally, those in the rumination group exhibited significantly more aggressive behaviours (measured by the administration of noise blasts) than those in the distraction group or the control. Thus, Bushman's findings contradict catharsis theory. One can infer from this that acts of revenge, which are cathartic in the sense that they are undertaken to address strong negative feelings, may actually prolong the very states they aim to dissipate.

In a related study dealing explicitly with revenge, Carlsmith, Wilson and Gilbert (2008) found that participants expected to feel better by punishing their transgressor but actually reported significantly more negative mood, irritability and feelings of revenge than those who did not punish. Additionally, Carlsmith, et al found that those who punished spent significantly more time compulsively thinking about the transgressor following the punishment while those who did not punish were more able to focus their

attention elsewhere. These findings seem to suggest that not acting on angry feelings is more beneficial for a transgressed person than acting out.

Orth (2004) examined whether third-party punishment satisfied the feelings of revenge felt by victims of crime. In a cross-sectional design of victims of crime where offences had occurred, on average, 4.1 years previously, current feelings of revenge were related to the severity of punishment; satisfaction with compensation; and acknowledgement of wrong doing by the offender. When examining those variables that predict current feelings of revenge, however, neither the severity of the punishment imposed on offenders by the courts, nor acknowledgement of wrong doing predicted current feelings of revenge. Instead, the only variable that significantly predicted current feelings of revenge was how satisfied the victim was with their compensation. It is also worth noting here that 43% of Orth's participants were offended against by a stranger but the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship was non-significant in all analyses. In a second study, Orth compared participants' feelings of revenge shortly before and shortly after trial. He found that differences in the level of revenge between the two test periods were minimal, however punishment severity was significantly related to a decrease in feelings of revenge. Orth concludes that the findings of both these studies suggest that punishment of the offender does not completely satisfy victims. Moreover, what satisfaction it does give appears to be relatively transitory.

### *1.3.6 Summary*

From the literature review above it is clear that it is very difficult to speak cohesively about revenge. One can understand it, very broadly, as the urge to or act of responding

aggressively to a perceived transgression. Nonetheless, some disagreement exists concerning its motivations and goals. The three main goals covered here have various merits with regard to victims of crime. Equity seems a reasonable motive and the explanation of the magnitude gap (Baumeister, 1999; Stillwell, et al., 2008) provides a competent explanation of some of the practical implications of revenge seeking, such as escalation. The goal of deterrence, on the other hand, seems less likely because revenge is an essentially retrospective response that seeks to redress a past wrong. The strong commonality between revenge and anger and aggression substantiates this point: it seems illogical for an attempt to deter future attack to involve either of these emotions. The notion that revenge is essentially ego-defensive seems the most appropriate explanation for revenge in victims of crime because it explains the presence of the strong negative affect expected from this population. Furthermore, it offers a suitable explanation of why an individual may seek revenge in the absence of material benefits.

#### **1.4 Research Aims**

The primary aim of this thesis is to describe how victims of crime understand forgiveness and revenge. Within this primary aim, there are specific secondary aims for each construct.

Firstly, it is anticipated that the data analysis will support the theory that forgiveness is contextually bound. It is expected that the definition of forgiveness that emerges will be different from existing models and that these differences can be explained by the nature of the population (i.e. victims of crime) and the nature of the transgression (i.e. a criminal offence).

The second though related point concerns whether participants understand forgiveness as primarily an interpersonal or intrapersonal process. In other words, particular attention will be paid to whether they describe a process motivated by a desire to better themselves in some way, or whether forgiveness constitutes a more prosocial response. On the bases that victims and offenders do not necessarily know one another prior to the offence or that the offence may be so serious as to preclude future interaction, it is expected that the model of forgiveness for victims of crime will be predominantly an intrapersonal process.

The final aim is to explore the suitability of a two-part approach to understanding forgiveness in victims of crime. As has been outlined above, the extent to which victims of crime may develop benevolent feelings such as love and compassion, as essential components of the forgiveness process, is questionable.

With regard to revenge, the primary goal is to provide some initial assessment of what revenge means for victims of crime in relation to the largely theoretical and unrelated research outlined above. For example, an area of particular interest concerns establishing what participants believe the motivations and goals of revenge are. Additionally, it is hoped that the data analysis will provide a more detailed understanding of the affect, cognition and behaviours that are associated with it, and in particular, its relationship to aggression.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

Victimisation can result in considerable, though often intangible costs for an individual. Nonetheless, previous research has not examined the meaning of forgiveness or revenge

for this population. This chapter has demonstrated that existing models of forgiveness cannot comfortably account for the experiences of victims. This is because the assumptions that are usually made concerning the relationship between a transgressor and the person they have wronged are not necessarily valid for victims and offenders. Additionally, this chapter has raised a number of questions concerning the exact nature of revenge in terms of its relationship to the related concepts of anger and aggression. The remainder of this thesis is devoted to answering these questions and developing models of forgiveness and revenge that succinctly describe these concepts as they are experienced by victims of crime.

## **CHAPTER II: METHOD AND AN OVERVIEW OF THE GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH.**

The previous chapter developed a rationale to justify the exploration of forgiveness and revenge in victims of crime, while the current chapter sets out the methodological choices that were considered appropriate for this task. Furthermore, it outlines the theoretical model adopted in carrying out the data analysis which is presented in the following two chapters. The chapter initially sets out the selected approach to data collection. This involved a series of semi-structured interviews with participants who identified themselves as victims of crime. The items included in the interview guides were designed with reference to literature outlining strategies that enhance the quality of data.

Following this, the chapter outlines how participants were recruited for the project and provides descriptive statistics of the participants as well as providing data excerpts that confirm the appropriateness of using PTSD as a framework for describing the psychological impact of crime.

As a final point, this chapter attempts to provide the reader with a brief overview of the grounded theory approach that was employed in the data analysis. A brief history of the development of grounded theory is provided, along with an explanation and description of the analytic techniques that were utilised.

## **2.1 Interview Development**

### *2.1.1 Interviewing Technique*

Data collection involved conducting a series of interviews with victims of crime. These interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide (see Appendix 1). Semi-structured interviewing consists of a set of pre-determined items of an open-ended nature, encouraging participants to provide a rich and full account while allowing the interviewer the freedom to probe particular areas of interest that may arise in the course of the interview (Patton, 2002). An important consideration in the choice of this format was that semi-structured interviews encourage the building of rapport with participants (Smith, 1995). This was considered a valuable asset when working with participants who have been victimised. Smith (1995) also argues that semi-structured interviews are an ideal format to adopt with the grounded theory approach that has been employed in the analysis in this study (see section 2.5). Thus, this approach was considered suitable for a task that required the collection of a large amount of data whilst also providing for the flexibility which is essential in the exploration of a relatively new field.

This flexibility was afforded through the use of probing, with each question having one or several probes designed to elicit greater detail should it be required. Additionally, the researcher was free to probe at any point if it was deemed necessary. For example, when asked to describe revenge, a number of participants felt that it contained the concept of hatred. This concept is complex and existing literature often focuses on hatred as an ideologically motivated response to an out-group, as in some instances of racial prejudice (Sternberg, 2005). To gauge what participants truly meant, those mentioning the term were given an impromptu probe as to their understanding of the term. In a

minority of cases where participants had already explicitly answered an item, or were not inclined to answer it, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to omit that particular item. Smith (1995) argues that by doing so the efficiency of data collection is improved and a respectful consideration of participants is afforded by not asking them to repeat information they have already volunteered.

### *2.1.2 Item Development*

Item development was undertaken with two primary requirements in mind. Firstly, items had to allow the researcher to capture as much data as possible to ensure the subject matter was comprehensively explored. Secondly, the items had to ensure that the participants' views and opinions were exhaustively canvassed.

To meet these requirements the development of the interview items followed the funnelling technique often employed in semi-structured interviews to move the participants from general to more specific concerns (Smith, 1995). Smith points out that this technique ensures a high yield of richly detailed data while minimising the possibility of the participants being led by the interviewer. The interview guides for both the forgiveness and revenge sections of the project were structured around four core items. For each construct, participants were initially asked to describe their understanding of each variable in their own words. The subsequent three items asked participants to describe specific feelings, thoughts and behaviours or actions associated with each variable. This threefold delineation allowed each variable to be examined with greater specificity. It also reflects a common cognitive-behavioural approach to conceptualising psychological variables. Specifically, this approach has been employed

in the wider body of forgiveness research and forms a key component in the examination of aggression which has been identified as a variable sharing a degree of commonality with revenge (e.g. Anderson, Anderson, Dill & Deuser, 1998; McCullough, et al., 2000). Indeed, one of the aims of this thesis, which were outlined in the introduction, is to provide a rich model of revenge that examines its affective and cognitive aspects as well as its behavioural components.

Following these questions, participants were asked what they thought the consequences of each variable were. They were then asked on a more personal level about the relevance of each construct to their own experiences since the offence occurred. These items were designed to capture the perceived value and importance of each construct for participants. Next, they were asked what contextual factors influenced their experience of the constructs and they were also asked whether they thought each had a positive or a negative valence. Finally, the forgiveness guide included an item asking whether participants thought there was a process involved in forgiveness. This question was included because a number of forgiveness models, most notably the REACH model and Enright's Process model, conceive of forgiveness in a process or step based model (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). Including this item facilitated a comparison to these models.

## **2.2 Participant Recruitment**

Participants were recruited through local newspapers in suburbs that were identified by the Crime Research Centre (CRC) at the University of Western Australia as having a high crime rate. The CRC publishes a comprehensive report detailing crime and justice

statistics in Western Australia which was the researcher's reference point (Ferrante, Loh, Maller, Valuri, & Fernandez, 2004). In order to select suburbs with high rates of crime, three groupings were made: total number of crimes, offences against a person, and robberies. A suburb was included in a particular grouping if it fell within the highest offending rate for that grouping in the CRC data. Respectively, for each grouping, this was 1800 incidents or more, 110 incidents or more, and 220 incidents or more. From the resulting three lists, a suburb that appeared in at least two lists was included as a target suburb. This resulted in a final list of 23 target suburbs.

After consultation with the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to establish the most appropriate recruitment method, a media release (see Appendix 2) was issued to local newspapers that were delivered to the target suburbs. Media releases were issued in both April and May 2007. Additionally, the researcher's chief supervisor appeared on a local radio programme discussing the broad concepts of forgiveness and revenge and asking suitable, interested persons to make contact. This final recruitment method did not yield any participants.

These restrictions may have had a considerable impact on size of the sample and the resulting data collected. The conditions did not allow for Perth's victimized population to be comprehensively informed about the study. This may have otherwise been possible in collaboration with Victim Support Services, a unit operating under the auspices of the WA Department of Justice. Arguably, these restrictions may have led to a biased sample.

It also ought to be noted that this recruitment method had a strong self-selection bias. A self-selection bias can call into question the generalizability of the resulting models (Karney, et al., 1995). The media releases called specifically for victims of crime and this is problematic because it will only capture individuals who self-identify as victims of crime. It is widely acknowledged in the victimological literature that individuals often don't identify as victims for a variety of reasons many of which may impact the results of this study. For example, women are more likely to identify as victims of crime than men (Walklate, 2011). This may account for the overwhelming proportion of females in the sample.

It is also worth pointing out that victims of crime often don't want to discuss their experiences due to an elevated (and often justified) fear of future victimisation (Grey & Jackson & Farrall 2008). As a result their voices may not be reflected in the victimological literature. While it is tantalizing to speculate on whether this fear is in any way related to their forgiveness for the offender, in the form perhaps of grudge-holding or embitterment (Baumeister, et al., 1998), this study is restricted from being able to comment on these cases.

While arguably heightened in this study as a result of the sampling method, the self-selection bias is a constant risk in much research in the social sciences (Winship & Mare, 1992). Only in very rare and extraordinary circumstances can participation in research be compelled. In this way, the current study is not qualitatively different from the rest of the psychological and victimological literature.

## 2.3 Participant Characteristics

### 2.3.1 Descriptive Statistics

There were 12 participants (11 female, 1 male) with a mean age of 50.45, ranging from 35 to 66 years. Participants were assured that they would not have to go into specific details concerning the offence itself during the interview beyond an initial query as to the whether the offence was a property offence or an offence against a person. Of the 12, 9 described violent offences against a person, 1 described a property offence and 2 described an offence which suited both categories. More specific details of the offences which arose incidentally during the interview are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Participant alias and details of victimisation

Alias	Details of Offence
Anna	Assault, attempted murder
Betty	Assault, car theft, damage to property
Cathy	Murder of child
Dianne	Murder of child
Ellen	Childhood sexual abuse
Frida	Not specified beyond violent offence against herself
Gretel	Murder of ex-husband
Helen	Violent sexual assault
Iris	Assault, robbery
Jane	Burglary, automobile theft
Ken	Childhood sexual abuse
Lily	Childhood sexual abuse, assault

On average, these offences occurred 12.71 years ago with the most recent offence occurring just 4 months prior to the interview and the oldest occurring 45 years ago. In gathering these data, participants who had been repeatedly victimised were asked to calculate the time passed since the offending ceased.

A total of six participants had the offence they experienced dealt with by the courts; four had not; and the offences experienced by two of the participants were either yet to be dealt with by the courts or were in the process of being dealt with. In addition, all offenders were identified as male and as such they will be referred to with gender specific pronouns where appropriate. It ought to be noted that none of the participants had any contact with their offenders after the offence. Even though a number of participants were subjected to sustained abuse over a number of years, once the offending behaviour ceased participants had no further contact with offenders outside of a court environment.

### *2.3.2 Identifying Distress in Participants*

The introduction emphasises that crime is often a traumatic experience for victims. Consistent with this argument, participants exhibited a considerable amount of distress as a result.

For example:

Oh, a lot. Ummm... Physical components because with grief you're ill. Psychological components because of lack of sleep and thinking up ideas on, you know, why has this happened to me and then transferring it on to all the... he should be feeling what I'm feeling. Ummm... emotional; a roller coaster; peaks and troughs. Feeling guilty for laughing when you remember the tragedy that you've suffered. (*Dianne, p.4*)

Ummm... it hurts at such a core level that I guess you have to work at it just one step at a time really. You just... yeah, I guess. Coming to the end of the road could be one component of it. Just where enough is enough; I just cannot deal with this anymore. (*Ken, p.19*)

Do you know, I haven't... ummm... I'm still grieving. Its three years and three months since she died and I have not cried. I'm still full of... ahhh... I just can't put my head around it put it that way... you know... how someone can do that.

*Interviewer:* What do you feel?

What do I feel? Hate. And really, hate, it takes over your body (*Cathy, p.22*)

Previously, traumatic stress referred to a wide variety of negative psychological and physiological responses that occur subsequent to an event which is outside normal human experience and that the individual perceives as violent or threatening (Green, 1990; Harvey, 1996). Green suggests that there are eight general dimensions or traumatic events which can reasonably be assumed to elicit a degree of traumatic stress. Of these eight, five are relevant to the experiences of the participants in this project: threat to one's life or bodily integrity; severe physical harm or injury; receipt of intentional injury/harm; violent/sudden loss of a loved one; and witnessing or learning of violence to a loved one. The experiences of 10 out of 12 were covered by these dimensions.

The definition of a traumatic event has been revised as "an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others." DSM-IV-TR also specifies that "the person's response involved intense fear,

helplessness, or horror.” (APA, 2000). The data are replete with evidence of the strongly negative psychological impact that the offences had on each of the participants.

For example:

But for me I had a lot of fear. (*Betty, p. 18*)

I feel that, I’m frightened of the unknown because this guy has left my kids without a father and I don’t want J’s life to be worth five years. (*Gretel, p.32*)

Oh that’s very hard. Probably letting go of the anger, ummm... probably the feelings of helplessness, ummm... maybe, I often think if I went and did a self-defence course, I’d feel better. (*Irene, p.16*)

The acts of the crimes, that’s extremely high in vulnerability and powerlessness and I think that’s the difficulty. It means walking through the same door. (*Helen, p.59*)

A closer examination of Frida’s data reveals that she did not specify a particular offence beyond identifying it as an offence against a person which had been dealt with in Court. This is sufficient to classify the event as traumatic using the definition provided in the DSM-IV-TR while she also reports feeling fear as a consequence of the offence (APA, 2000). Additionally, Jane’s house was broken into and her automobile was stolen and damaged. Five months after the offence, she commented, “I’ve sort of had to let go because it was just getting too much for me,” and, “So it’s just been a big upheaval that’s happened to me.” She describes the offence as a “nightmare” (p. 11) and that it has had, “a really big effect on the family and that” (p. 63). These excerpts suggest that Jane suffered a psychologically negative impact from an offence. As discussed in the

introduction, although a burglary is not necessarily violent in nature, it is still a potential trigger for traumatic stress and as such, it is reasonable to retain her data for analysis.

~~As an important caveat, it should be pointed out that the researcher is not a clinical psychologist.~~ The preceding discussion is designed to demonstrate to the reader that participants exhibited levels of distress that are consistent with PTSD following circumstances that generally meet the criteria for a traumatic event as defined in DSM. At no point should this discussion lead one to presume a diagnosis of PTSD was made, or considered suitable, for any of the participants.

### *2.3.3 The Effects of Research Participation on Traumatized Individuals*

Given the intensity of psychological distress routinely experienced by victims of crime, there are understandable ethical concerns when this population is the subject of research. Nevertheless, research has indicated that the opportunity to participate in research is usually welcomed by victims themselves as long as they are confident that they will be dealt with in a supportive and respectful manner (Ullman, 2007).

Newman and Kaloupek (2004) reviewed literature examining the risks and benefits associated with participating in research subsequent to traumatic events including terrorist attacks, disasters and cases of violent assault. The authors engaged in a cost versus benefits analysis and highlighted the possibility that participation in research may involve a degree of discomfort or psychological distress for participants. Their review revealed that participants who experienced repeated trauma in their past, or who were currently experiencing high levels of distress found participating in research more

distressing. They argue, however, that the intensity of this distress is considerably less than the distress experienced in everyday life. They also point out that reactive distress in research is not limited to traumatised individuals and has been found in other populations. Additionally, Newman, Willard, Sinclair and Kaloupek (2001) found that participants' emotional reactivity was only weakly, though significantly, correlated to the perceived benefits ( $r=0.13$ ) and drawbacks ( $r=-0.13$ ) of participation. Almost all of their participants had experienced some form of traumatic life event (91.8%) and 28.2% of participants met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. The authors concluded that while some level of emotional distress can be elicited in trauma research, this doesn't impact the extent to which participants view the experience of participation as positive.

Other studies have indicated that participation in research requiring the consideration or recollection of traumatic events results in minimal emotional distress. For example, Ruzek and Zatzick (2000), and Cromer, Freyd, Binder, DePrince and Becker-Blease (2006) found that participation in trauma focused research could elicit a small degree of distress from a large minority of participants. Retrospectively, however, participants found that the psychological benefits of participation outweighed the costs of participation. For example, when asked to use five point Likert scale to assess the veracity of the statement "Volunteering made me feel good about myself", 91% of Ruzek and Zatzick's participants, who were hospitalised victims of assault or motor vehicle injury, rated the statement as true or mostly true for them. Cromer, et al. compared the distress elicited from answering questions concerning traumatic events and that elicited from answering other questions of a personal nature such as grades,

preferred body image and sexual orientation. They found no significant differences between groups.

This body of research indicates that the distress resulting from participation in trauma focused research is considerably less than one may expect and tends to be seen by participants as a positive experience in hindsight. Particularly, Ruzek and Zatzick's (2000) findings suggests that participation in this type of research is no more or less distressing than participation in other common forms of psychological research. While the respectful and considerate treatment of traumatised individuals is an imperative for researchers, it is important to balance the needs of such individuals in a manner that does not compromise their opportunities to contribute to the greater understanding of their predicament.

#### **2.4 Procedure**

Details in the media release allowed for participants to directly contact the researcher by telephone. If the researcher was unavailable, an appointment was made for a more convenient time. Before the start of the interview, participants were informed that the project was part of the researcher's PhD studies and that the area of interest was an understanding of what the concepts of forgiveness and revenge meant to victims of crime. They were also informed that the interview would be recorded and all information they provided would be anonymous with participants being assigned an alias for the purposes of data analysis. Participants were advised that if they wished to withdraw from the study they could do so at any time by simply hanging up.

If they agreed to the interview, the researcher then collected the demographic data presented in this chapter and proceeded with the interview guides. The order in which the guides were presented was alternated: participants 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 were asked the forgiveness items first, followed by the revenge items while the remaining participants were asked revenge items followed by forgiveness items. In this way, the researcher avoided the possibility that participants' understanding of one variable would systematically distort their understanding of the other.

At the completion of the interview, participants were debriefed. This involved three aspects. First, participants were thanked and affirmed for their participation. Secondly, they were told that if they had any ethical concerns about the study or the manner in which the interviews were conducted they were welcome to contact the HREC at Murdoch University and were provided with a telephone number and email address to do so. Finally, participants were encouraged to seek professional help should they experience any distress as a result of participating in the interview. In consultation with the HREC it was decided to inform participants of recent Federal Government legislation that provided for a government rebate on psychological services. Further, the researcher offered to compile a list of registered clinical psychologists in the participant's area should they wish to take advantage of this. This allowed participants to seek out highly qualified professionals of their own choosing rather than relying on the researcher's selection. Only one participant took advantage of this offer and all participants expressed the opinion that taking part in the interview had been a worthwhile experience for them.

## **2.5 Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory approach was adopted in the analysis of the data that resulted from the interviews. This approach to data analysis is the dominant qualitative paradigm employed in the social and behavioural sciences (Charmaz, 1995; Charmaz, 2006). It involves a rigorous and systematic inductive approach to the conceptualisation and description of themes, concepts and theories emerging from data under analysis.

Grounded theory is described as either a constructivist or post-positivist approach to inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Annells, 1996) and while its exact metaphysical specifications are contested, its ontological and epistemological bases are widely accepted. For example, it is generally accepted that grounded theory is informed by a symbolic-interactionist ontology (Annells, 1996; Rennie, 1998; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Blumer (1969) argued that the interactions between people and between people and the social and physical environment are determined by the meanings ascribed to those things. A response to a stimulus is not simply reactive but is informed by what a person thinks the stimulus means. Thus there are two realities: the social (perhaps better described as the symbolic) and the natural and the experience of one cannot be separated from the experience of the other (Annells, 1996). Reality then, is intrinsically infused with meaning.

According to Annells (1996), Glaser's grounded theory resonated with the objectivist epistemology that typifies the post-positivist perspective. In this paradigm, objectivity is not assumed (as it sometimes is in the hard sciences which follow the positivist model) but is, rather, actively guarded (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This may be done through replication; referencing findings to pre-existing theory; and examination by the critical

community, through peer review, for example. In Glaser's approach to grounded theory, this is also achieved through the process of theoretical coding. This process was an important step in the data analysis for this thesis (see section 2.5.1). Strauss's approach to grounded theory, on the other hand, is more closely aligned to the constructivist paradigm and adopts a subjectivist or transactional epistemology that sees the researcher as unavoidably and integrally a part of the interpretive method (Annells, 1996). In other words, theory is derived, at least in part, from the meaning ascribed to a phenomenon by the researcher him or herself. Researcher bias is common throughout all forms of empirical inquiry (Grimes & Shultz, 2002) and, as such, Strauss's approach is probably the more realistic in this regard. This does not mean to say that Glaser's approach is idealistic, at least not in a pejorative way. An objectivist epistemology acknowledges that strict dualism between subject and object is not possible (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Instead, it argues, however; that ensuring the researcher remains an observer as much as possible results in a theory that more perfectly describes reality.

Specifically with regards to this study, the use of a grounded theory also provides an approach which is open-ended yet meticulous in keeping with the requirements outlined in Section (1.2.1.1.2) which will allow the researcher to detect, among other things, participants' moral considerations (if they have them) without running the risk of pressuring participants with a moral expectation.

### *2.5.1 Development and Divergence of Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory grew out of sociological research on dying conducted by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Since this time, both researchers have taken grounded theory in different

directions (Charmaz, 2006). This divergence centres on the way in which thematic concepts and categories are drawn together into a coherent theory. Glaser and his adherents favour a more inductive approach that restricts the categorisation of data to that which is emergent from the data (Chamaz, 2006). This approach requires an additional layer of analysis called theoretical coding in which the disparate categories and concepts are woven into a more cohesive whole with reference to the data themselves (Kelle, 2005). Strauss's approach, on the other hand, proposes a method in which a pragmatist model is utilised to generate theory from data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Kelle (2005) explains that in doing so, Strauss's method provides an "axis" or skeleton around which theory can be built rather than relying solely on inductive reasoning as in the case of Glaser.

Proponents of grounded theory insist that the strategies it incorporates ought to be used with flexibility and that there are many different ways of doing grounded theory (Chamaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An approach broadly modelled on Glaser's work (see Glaser, 1992) has been adopted for use in this thesis. There are two reasons for this decision. Firstly, it is generally recognised that Glaser's approach to grounded theory is the more rigorously empirical one because it does not rely on a pre-determined axis to order data as Strauss's approach does (Chamaz, 1995). Secondly, while a theoretical premise is routine in empirical research, Strauss's reliance on a pragmatist paradigm to dictate the manner in which theory is generated was deemed unnecessarily restrictive for the current examination particularly in light of the absence of a coherent, comprehensive psychological theory of revenge.

### *2.5.2 Analysis of Data*

The approach to data analysis adopted for this thesis followed Glaser's recommendations and involved four steps or stages. Initially, the data set was coded line by line. This means that each line of text was read and given an annotation or code describing the basic substance of what the participant was talking about. Following this, the codes were grouped into broader concepts. This was not an exhaustive process; not all codes fitted into a conceptual group and those that did not were disregarded for the present stage although this did not remove them from consideration at later stages of the analysis.

Thirdly, these concepts were grouped into still broader sets of thematically related categories from which theory is generated. Both concepts and categories were selectively coded which means they were re-examined in light of the data in order to be substantiated, qualified or in other ways refined (Kelle, 2005). Selective coding is an important technique to employ because a researcher may unconsciously make decisions concerning the relevance of certain categories or concepts which could influence the data he or she attends to (Sherif, 1998). The researcher found that selective coding successfully combated this tendency by requiring that codes and concepts that had been dismissed be re-evaluated and re-incorporated in light of emerging thematic trends.

The final step required that all substantive categories and concepts be organised into a cohesive whole or theory. This is achieved through theoretical coding which requires a causal model to be substantiated and described with reference to the data set itself. According to Glaser (1992), this requires a degree of "theoretical sensitivity" on the part of the researcher. This term has been criticised as a subjective synthesis of data as

Glaser offers a large list of terms that may be used as clues to the theoretical jigsaw puzzle without explaining how to go about putting it together (Kelle, 2005). This criticism, however, seems to assume that sensitivity is in some way synonymous with intuition. It ignores the firm empirical foundation of Glaser's approach to analysis in that theoretical coding is, as with each step of the process, driven and informed by the data set itself (Chamaz, 1995). As the richness and detail of the following data analysis indicates, the approach outlined above was sufficient to provide for clear and concise theories of both forgiveness and revenge to be generated.

### *2.5.3 Adequate Sample Size and Saturation in Grounded Theory*

The sample size seems at first particularly small and this necessarily impacts the generalizability of findings. Adequate sample size in grounded theory is determined by the point of saturation, a term referring to the point at which new data readily fits into established categories (Charmaz, 2003). Charmaz argues that evidence for this can be seen in the extent to which quotes are not over-interpreted to fit the themes they describe. More (2007) argues that a purposefully targeted sample (i.e. a sample consisting of individuals meeting specific criteria, as opposed to random sampling) reduces the sample size required by reducing 'noise', or irrelevant information, in the data. The point at which saturation occurs is determined by the quality of the data and the participants and varies substantially between studies. Riley (1996) suggests that saturation usually occurs with between eight and twenty-four participants and both Chamberlin (1999) and Charmaz (2003; 2006) concur with this while Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) suggest between eight and sixty participants. In light of this, the level of

saturation as evidenced by the extent to which excerpts accurately describe the themes they constitute must be the measure of the adequacy of the sample size in this study.

## **CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS OF FORGIVENESS DATA**

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the forgiveness data. This chapter explores the concept of forgiveness to victims of crime and offers a model of forgiveness which is strongly intrapersonal or victim-centred rather than offender-centred. The chapter begins by considering the concept of unforgiveness, which can be understood as the starting point of forgiveness. Following this, it examines each of the discrete concepts emerging from the data that are directly related to forgiveness.

The data analysis in this chapter directly addresses the study aims relating to forgiveness that were outlined in the introduction. The differences between the model of forgiveness presented here and those outlined in the introduction can be explained by differences in the nature of the transgression. This supports the notion that forgiveness is a contextually bound process. For victims of crime, forgiveness is a strongly intrapersonal process in which changes in their perspective concerning the offender are better understood in terms of a shift in perceived locus of control within themselves, rather than the development of positive affect toward the offender.

### **3.1 Unforgiveness**

The term unforgiveness has come to describe a construct which is the opposite of forgiveness. This term is necessarily wide-ranging, covering a large assortment of variables that may arise as a consequence of a transgression (Harris & Thoresen, 2005). At the broadest level, all the major models of forgiveness propose that the phenomenon involves a reduction in these negative responses to a transgression (Worthington & Wade, 1999). In order to provide a comprehensive theory of forgiveness which is

comparable to other major models, it is necessary to first define the nature of these negative responses.

### *3.1.1 Defining Unforgiveness*

There are few detailed examinations of the nature and structure of unforgiveness in the literature. Worthington and Wade (1999) understand unforgiveness as a “cold” emotion characterised by “resentment, bitterness and perhaps hatred, along with the motivated avoidance or retaliation against a transgressor” (p.386). The authors stress that unforgiveness and forgiveness are inter-related but not mutually dependent. In other words, forgiveness is not the only way to deal with unforgiveness. Others ways may include retaliation or exacting revenge, or seeking justice through recourse to an accepted judicial body (the relationship between forgiveness and unforgiveness, and revenge is explored in section 5.4). Worthington and Scherer (2004) expand on this definition by arguing that unforgiveness is a delayed response to a transgressor which has both acute and chronic components. Fear or concern for one’s safety may be immediate concerns while in the long term a sense of injustice may develop. This sense of injustice often stems from an incongruity between how the victim would prefer the transgression be redressed (i.e their subjective view of appropriate redress or compensation) and how it actually is resolved. Worthington and Scherer contend that only those prone to angry rumination are likely to experience the more chronic aspects of unforgiveness, possibly because this would excite their growing sense of injustice.

Konstam, Holmes and Levine (2003) adopted Worthington and Wade’s (1999) model in their examination of the correlates of forgiveness and unforgiveness. Their findings

suggest that unforgiveness was positively correlated to a construct they called ‘selfism’. This is defined as “a self-orientation that leads one to view situations from a self-serving in contrast to an other-orientated perspective” (p. 173). Krohne, Pieper, Knoll, & Breimer (2002) suggest that this self-focus is a coping response to negative mood and should not to be considered evidence of unhealthy egocentrism. This research suggests that unforgiveness may involve a diminished ability to see events from the perspective of another person, such as the transgressor.

### *3.1.2 Components of Unforgiveness*

Worthington and Wade (1999) point out that many researchers simply define forgiveness as the antithesis of unforgiveness, so in order to examine the nature of unforgiveness in the literature one must look beyond the scant material that examines unforgiveness explicitly and establish which negative responses are reduced by the act of forgiving. A number of models of forgiveness understand it to involve a reduction in feelings of fear and anger, often coupled with a reduction of other negative responses to the transgressor, such as blaming, feelings of betrayal, or a desire to seek revenge (Worthington & Wade, 1999; McCullough, 2000; Thoresen, et al., 2000; Enright, 2001). These psychological consequences of the transgression can be understood as elements of unforgiveness because they are symptoms or experiences that can be reduced through forgiveness.

The concept of unforgiveness is a crucial component to the argument that the nature of forgiveness depends on the circumstances of the transgression. A range of transgressions

may elicit many diverse responses from different individuals so there is a wide selection of potential 'flavours' of unforgiveness.

### *3.1.2.1 The Role of Traumatic Stress in Unforgiveness*

When attempting to define unforgiveness in relation to victims of crime it is interesting to consider whether all of the psychological responses to the offence can be considered unforgiveness. In particular, one must consider whether traumatic stress is a feature of unforgiveness. PTSD is a diagnosable mental disorder and it would seem that to include it as a component of unforgiveness defines the construct as a pathological response. In the case of victims of crime, this assumption may initially seem pejorative. Nonetheless, the researcher has relied on the tenets of grounded theory in which the imperative is to be guided by what arises in the data (Glaser, 1992). A number of participants explicitly mention trauma as something that needs to be overcome in the forgiveness process. In order to more correctly express the participants' point of view all phenomena mentioned by participants as components of unforgiveness have been considered. In this way, the grounded theory approach is sensitive to the concerns of victims without undermining research that may be beneficial to them. Nonetheless, as stipulated in section 2.3.2, trauma should only be understood in a general sense. While there is evidence to suggest that participants experienced symptoms that were consistent and similar to those described in relation to PTSD, no formal diagnosis could be made in the context of this research.

The idea that forgiveness has a strong therapeutic effect is not uncommon in the literature (Wade, et al., 2005). The use of forgiveness as a therapeutic tool highlights the

possibility that some transgressions can have a psychologically damaging effect on individuals. This implies that it may be worthwhile considering some aspects of unforgiveness as pathological while remaining mindful that forgiveness may not be the only solution to these problems. If this is the case, one would expect a model of forgiveness in victims of crime to have a number of consistencies with research examining the therapeutic aspects of forgiveness.

### *3.1.3 Data Analysis*

In this thesis, examining unforgiveness is hampered because no specific item was included to explore it. This was an oversight on the part of the researcher and the following analysis should be accepted with a degree of caution. While the exact parameters may be difficult to discern, nonetheless the examples that follow very clearly indicate that unforgiveness in victims of crime is an intense psychological experience.

#### *3.1.3.1 Feeling Overwhelmed*

The most obvious aspect of unforgiveness was the strength of the emotions felt and the debilitating effect they had on participants' lives:

It's more that your life becomes a turmoil; your life becomes all over the place... Ummm... it hurts at such a core level that I guess you have to work at it just one step at a time really. (*Ken p. 19*)

I mean I could have remained a hating, violent, miserable, suicidal, depressed human being without friends living on tablets if I hadn't forgiven because by now you wouldn't be talking to me; I would have killed myself because I couldn't live with it any longer (*Lily p. 74*)

Well, again, in my own circumstances, because the crime and the act was so... reprehensible... ummm... horrendous and its personal and

because of that it is personal, again, it brings back this idea of dealing with it personally... (*Ellen p.49*)

In some cases, participants reported feeling so overwhelmed that they could no longer adequately cope with the distress they were experiencing. It was often this experience that prompted them to begin the forgiveness process:

Well I think that umm... without considering taking the forgiveness path is starts to become damaging for yourself and when it starts to become self-destructive you can continue along that destructive path or you can begin to consider that you are a worthwhile person. You don't need to proceed down that path. (*Betty p. 5*)

And spiritually it can really be quite blinding for one and debilitating for oneself if they're not prepared for forgiveness. (*Frida p.7*)

Once you've come to the place of I've got to go forward; I've got to forgive because I can't cope with this crap in my life, you have to be willing to face everything that came to you. Because if you don't take the lot then there's still poison there. (*Lily p. 71*)

You just... yeah, I guess. Coming to the end of the road could be one component of it. Just where enough is enough; I just cannot deal with this anymore. (*Ken p. 19*)

Although two of the major models discussed in the introduction outline pathways for dealing with the hurt resulting from a transgression (e.g. Enright, 2001; Worthington, 1998), the overwhelming intensity of victims' negative responses was the prime motivation in participants' decision to forgive. This underscores the importance of considering context when attempting to define forgiveness and unforgiveness. Feelings of being overwhelmed may be more pronounced for victims of crime because of the traumatic nature of the transgression they have experienced. Research indicates that

intense emotional responses, intrusive rumination and flashbacks such as those described throughout the interviews are typical of the intrusive cluster of symptoms associated with PTSD (Holmes, 2003; Dörfel, Rabe & Karl, 2008). Moreover, Michael, Ehlers, Halligan and Clark (2005) found that high levels of distress were common in some victims of crime and that was an important predictor of chronic PTSD. In light of these findings it makes sense that victims of crime describe higher levels of distress than have been reported in other models if one accepts that unforgiveness is context bound.

### *3.1.3.2 Self-blame*

In addition to the intensity of the distress experienced in the wake of an offence and the difficulty in coping with it, there were a number of other aspects to unforgiveness that participants mentioned. One of the most common was a feeling of self-blame:

I was in total shock and I did nothing to protect myself. Nothing at all. I didn't even put my hand up in front of my face. So that's one thing. (*Iris p. 16*)

I mean I know that sounds Sigmund Freud-y but as you near forgiveness, that hardest thing is taking the whip out of your own hand and beating yourself up thinking oh well, you could have done this. And you've got to understand... part of it is understanding that as a nine year old, you can't fend off an adult so you've got nothing to blame yourself for. So I think a lot of false guilt comes into it (*Ken p. 21*)

If I can understand about the perpetrator then I don't have to blame myself anymore which is the biggest forgiveness of all which is not to blame oneself. (*Frida p. 109*)

In two cases, Lily and Ken, this self-blame was so extreme that both acknowledged that they had experienced feelings of self-hatred during periods of unforgiveness.

Much of the research that examines concepts such as self-blame and its relationship to forgiveness and unforgiveness focuses on the feelings of the transgressor (e.g. Hall & Fincham, 2008). Chagigiorgis and Paivo (2008), however, point out that self-blame and guilt are often experienced by victims of childhood sexual abuse. They examined forgiveness of an abusive other as well as self-forgiveness as outcomes of emotion-focused trauma therapy and found that a decrease in self-blame was present in almost all participants who reached some kind of therapeutic resolution. Importantly, they found that forgiveness decreased self-blame although the opposite did not hold true. In other words, one could resolve feelings of self-blame without necessarily forgiving the perpetrator of the abuse. This reinforces the argument that forgiveness is only one way to resolving the consequences of an offence which may not be suitable for all people and all situations. Only three participants in the current study were victims of childhood sexual abuse however feelings of self-blame were described by victims of other offences as well. This suggests that feelings self-blame are not particular to any particular cohort of victims.

### *3.1.3.3 Negative Affect Towards Offender*

Participants also felt strong negative affect towards the offender which usually involved a desire for him to suffer. This was most clear in the case of Cathy, whose daughter had been murdered and who felt unable to forgive:

Ummm... Well he's got to suffer. He has to suffer for what he done  
[sic] to my daughter. (*Cathy p. 44*)

Anna said that she wished her offender was dead, although it ought to be noted that she acknowledged feeling guilty about those feelings:

Well one day, when he dies, ra ra ra and I realised that the happiest day in my life would be the day he died and for me, I though, what a sad thing. I've got a beautiful life, I'm a beautiful person, I've got so much to give and yet, here I am thinking that the happiest day of my life; my pivotal moment, will be the day *he* dies. (*Anna p. 26*)

While these excerpts would seem to suggest that a desire for revenge is a component of unforgiveness, a closer examination of the relationship between the three variables of unforgiveness, forgiveness and revenge will undertaken later (see section 5.4). Nonetheless this commonality is consistent with the assumptions of other researchers (see Wade and Worthington, 2003).

#### *3.1.3.4 Feeling stuck*

There was a sense among participants of being stuck in the consequences of the offence:

Frozen is really key, you know, so... this only came to me recently; its like, oh my God, how did I... why did I not get that? And it really begins to validate everything else that has happened because frozen is mental shock. (*Helen p. 61*)

The majority of participants spoke about the concept of moving on in relation to forgiveness. This concept is discussed more fully below (see section 3.2.4) but is briefly mentioned here for completeness.

#### *3.1.4.5 Injustice and Indignation*

Some participants also reported feeling a sense of injustice and indignation:

I've gone a long road on this which you probably realise. Ummm.. so yeah, it was being willing to surrender my feelings of it's not fair. (*Lily p. 73*)

Just the fact that... what right has, ummm... other people, what right do they have to just come into your home and just take what is not theirs and to take what I've worked very hard for... (*Jane p.17*)

While this was not as pervasive through the data as some of the other themes, it is consistent with the research of a number of authors (see Montada, 1994).

In addition to these broad concepts, a number of specific emotions or feelings were cited by participants in relation to unforgiveness. For example, all participants reported feeling angry and five participants explicitly mentioned trauma. Additionally, feelings of bitterness and helplessness were common as were feelings of hatred. For Jane, the hatred she felt was directed at all members of the offender's ethnic group:

Oh. Well, I still haven't forgiven because, I don't know... well, I've got a hate towards boongs now. I just... well... even when I see them on the street... I just hate them; hate them, you know? Yeah, it made me very bitter; very bitter towards that sort of race of people. (*Jane p. 110*)

In summation, for victims of crime unforgiveness emerges as a complex of intense emotional and cognitive reactions to the offender and the offence. It often involves a sense of being stuck in the past and is experienced as somehow incapacitating or overwhelming. Furthermore it may involve feelings of self-blame or guilt leading to strong negative self-regard, such as self-hatred. Quite often these feelings are so extreme that the victim feels overwhelmed or unable to adequately cope.

## **3.2 Components of Forgiveness**

### *3.2.1 Self-Awareness*

For victims of crime, the forgiveness process often began with a noticeable increase in their level of self-awareness. This self-awareness usually involved a realisation of the

profound impact the offence had and continued to have on their life generally and their psychological well-being in particular:

I started to become aware of all the things I didn't like associated with what happened to me. All the behaviours people do naturally and I didn't want to live like that so I had to reject many things that were just creeping in naturally through my sub – and other people all around me and all the result of what happened to me. (*Anna p. 36*)

And going away from there, I just got an overall sense that... I saw clearly, once I'd done that act, I saw clearly what I had done to other people in my life. How I'd hurt them; how emotionally I'd closed them off; how I had not given my full self to them, like in marriage and things like that. So there was a whole lot of those feelings. There was a whole lot of awareness; for want of a better phrase, awakening. (*Ken, p.67*)

You have to go... forgiveness is a very deep word. It's something that you have to really really be in touch with yourself to be able to go to even that level.. (*Frida, p.7*)

Sometimes, this self-awareness consisted of an attempt to understand the impact that forgiveness would have on the participant's life:

You look beyond the... if a victim was to forgive a perpetrator they'd have to look ahead and see how they would feel in themselves about forgiveness and what it would do to the crime (*Ellen p. 48*)

You know, if I do this act, what does this do for me? What does this do for me in the short term? In the long term? (*Helen p. 60*)

This aspect of forgiveness suggests a process through which the victim becomes more aware of the extent of their negative responses and their impact on their behaviour. It is not clear which comes first: awareness of psychological distress or awareness of behaviour. The excerpts from Ken and Anna seem to suggest that they initially become

aware of compulsive behaviours that have developed as a result of the offence. Regardless, the specific manner in which self-awareness is begun or carried out is highly individualistic. For example, Anna initially noticed how exhausted she was while Ken noticed how his behaviours and relationships juxtaposed with those of 'normal' people.

It is logical to assume that this cultivation of self-awareness precedes the subsequent letting go phase of forgiveness in the sense that some degree of awareness is necessary to have a sense that there was anything to let go of. Ken also hints at this possibility when he explains that a growing realisation that he was not behaving normally roused a desire to be like other people.

The concept of self-awareness has some parallels in the literature examining the therapeutic uses and effect of forgiveness. Most of the major investigations of forgiveness as a therapeutic tool include some aspect which requires a degree of self-reflection or observation. Enright's process model of forgiveness (Enright, 2001) is the best known and one of the most comprehensive models of forgiveness in this field. Enright proposes a 20-step pathway to forgiveness in which the initial 8 steps are grouped together as the uncovering phase. This phase describes a process in which a victim examines the full extent of their negative reactions to the offence. This may involve, amongst other things, an examination of one's psychological defences as well as the development of awareness regarding the extent of any cognitive rumination and cathexis. Additionally, the transgressed person may develop a sense that the transgression has had a permanent effect on them (Enright & Coyle, 1998). Enright (2001) argues that a true estimation of the extent of one's pain and injury can

subsequently motivate a person to change because they are able to more accurately gauge the extent to which their current coping strategies are inadequate.

The uncovering phase bears many similarities with the concept of self-awareness that was described in the data. As is the case here, it is the first component of the forgiveness process. The excerpts above also clearly illustrate that participants developed a more thorough understanding of the psychological consequences of the offence. Lily, who describes this awareness as being honest with oneself, claims that without this honesty forgiveness is not possible because one could not be entirely certain of what one was forgiving:

Forgiveness takes incredible honesty because you have to be honest about exactly what happened so that you can acknowledge it; acknowledge exactly what happened, ummm... and then say that this is where you make the choice because that happened but it happened in the past, it is not happening now. That I think was the thing that was the breaker. Once I came to the place where I could be honest about it I started to recognise that it happened a long time ago but I was still living in it because I had not forgiven and that was where the honesty came in. I had to reach a point where I was that honest and admit that I was living my life tied up emotionally, mentally, physically by actions of other people in the past. (*Lily p. 74*)

These quotes by Ken and Lily indicate that it was a more complete awareness of the psychological distress the offence had caused and continued to have on their lives that motivated them to forgive.

Research based on Enright's process model has confirmed the importance of self-awareness in forgiveness. Konstam, Marx, Schurer, Lombardo and Harrington (2002) examined the extent to which forgiveness related issues arouse within clinical practice.

They found that 75% of participants, who were members of the American Mental Health Counsellors Association, used awareness related activities drawn from Enright's model with their clients. These activities included awareness of psychological inhibitors of forgiveness, insight that existing coping strategies are not working; and examination of psychological defences.

The major difference between the process emerging from the data and Enright's (2001) process model seems to stem from the fact that the process model is a pathway outlining how an individual can come to forgiveness. As such, the process of self-awareness is a prescribed one whereas most of the participants in this study come to engage in it without being directed to, as a natural part of their recovery. It is worth mentioning at this point that only four participants acknowledged receiving counselling or other forms of psychological care after their victimisation. Of these four, two did not think forgiveness was appropriate for them. This seems to confirm that while forgiveness is undoubtedly a therapeutic agent, it is not appropriate or palatable for everyone. This raises some questions regarding models that are proscriptive as they may pressure individuals to forgive in a manner and along a time line that is not appropriate or necessary for them.

### *3.2.2 Letting Go of Negative Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours*

Participants commonly identified forgiveness with letting go or releasing negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours that were a consequence of the offence.

For example:

Where you learn to accept and it becomes a bit more easier. Well, not easier but you don't hold on to the rubbish for so long. It's a release. It's a release of all that ugly stuff going on inside of you. (*Frida p.8*)

They have to be willing to lay aside their own hurt. I had to be willing to put that aside and say I'm not going to use it as a crutch anymore; I'm not going to be a victim anymore; I'm not going to be a door mat anymore to these feelings. (*Lily p.73*)

It's sort of having... undoing those shackles of fear. There's a sort of real fear that you develop about running into that person again; about meeting that person at a check out queue again; a nervousness about confronting that person. So in going through that process I think it would be about taking off those shackles. (*Betty p. 93*)

What was actually released was often not specified but it is clear from the above excerpts that the term involved a decrease in negative affect. There was also some evidence that letting go led to a decrease in ruminative cognitions:

I don't feel happy about it – I feel relief. I feel relieved that I can stop racetting and going over this stuff in my head – not racetting – ruminating. So for me it was a sense of relief. (*Anna p.27*)

Because with your brain patterns are the way they are; the way they're wired, you've done something for so long, you've got to learn to break those patterns and you've got to reteach yourself to say, no, sorry I am not that person, I will not hold that thought. And I mean you've got to do that self correction sort of stuff. (*Ken p.68*)

Anna believed that these negative emotions and cognitions influenced one's behaviour and that forgiveness wasn't associated with additional behaviours, rather with a need to let go of an existing set of compulsive behaviours that were exhausting:

I seemed to continue that behaviour through until it calms me til I could stop. I was on my toes, I went back to karate and stayed on my toes I couldn't sit; I couldn't rest very often. (*Anna p.29*)

When I came to forgiveness, I started getting very tired of my behaviours and going through those long conversations with people; beating up the issues, I became very very tired and I said to myself one day, "I hate karate. I don't like doing 50 push ups." I'm not even that physical! I can't fight for nuts! I'm not about to – you know – obviously I'm going to run away if something bad happens, here I am with all this energy and yet, what for? I'm really tired. (*Anna p.30*)

There appeared to be no uniform process involved with letting go. In general it seemed to involve an ongoing process that required the individual to confront recurring negative feelings, cognitions and behaviours. This is evident in Ken's excerpt above and Anna also discusses her response to intrusive fantasies about the man who attempted to murder her. These fantasies originally involved turning the gun around and shooting her offender herself. She was uncomfortable, however; with the idea of being violent herself but managed to simply remove the idea of shooting him:

At first I used to get flashbacks. So I used to get back to where the gun was held to my head and I used to see his face. So what I did was learn thought stopping but in the end, I started to turn the gun from my head and finish the ending so I didn't have this horrible nightmare you know, and I'd just go BANG, and shoot him myself... And although it stops me from reliving trauma and stopping the thought, stopping going through the whole thing and waking up feeling horrible. It's not helping me. So whenever I saw his face, I'd just think BANG but no thought of the first. So I would try to reconstruct intrusive thoughts. Big time. (*Anna, p. 39*)

In this excerpt, then, the substance of the intrusive thoughts itself is adapted. 'BANG' goes from meaning fantasising about shooting the offender to simply a method to stop rumination and fantasy.

The concept of letting go is an important aspect of forgiveness in victims of crime. Indeed it was by far the most pervasive category in the data, being mentioned at least once (and often repeatedly) by nine of the twelve participants. From the excerpts above, one may understand it as a process through which victims deal with the intense psychological repercussions of the offence. This occurs through an effort on the part of the victims to develop a way of decreasing the compulsion associated with their negative responses. This may be through conscious decision making, similar to Ken, in which one deliberately decides not to hold particular thoughts; it may be through acceptance as in Frida's case; or it may be through reconstructing intrusive thoughts in a manner that discharges them as Anna describes.

In an attempt to develop a universal definition of forgiveness, a number of researchers have broadly defined it as the cessation of negative affect towards an offender or offence, which seems analogous to letting go, coupled with the development of more 'prosocial' feelings (McCullough, et al., 2000). Indeed, every major theory of forgiveness refers to a termination of negative responses to the transgressor or the transgression. The important point to consider here is that letting go occurs because the experience of the negative affect is distressing to the victims. While some participants did report the development of some benevolent affect towards their offenders (see section 3.2.3), this was by no means universal, nor was it the stated goal of letting go.

McCullough (2000), for example, has examined forgiveness in close relationships from a motivational perspective. Of the three motivational responses that comprise this model, two directly imply some decrease in negative affect or cognitions. Firstly, there is a reduction in the feelings of hurt or attack that motivate avoidance of the transgressor and, secondly there is a reduction in the feelings of indignation that correspond to a motivation to harm the transgressor. In the current study, feelings of hurt are clearly evident from the earlier examination of the components of unforgiveness. What has become clearer from the data is the highly individual ways in which individuals may go about this reduction.

Thompson, et al. (2005) proposed a dispositional model of forgiveness in which the victim transforms negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours (termed “negative attachment”) to either a neutral or positive valence. In this sense, transformation stems from a reassessment of the transgression so that it may compliment or enhance one’s positive self-image rather than erode it. This seems to contrast with the data in that there was no sense that a transformation of negativity was occurring in terms of the active, conscious “work” that Thompson, et al. suggest. Although the excerpt from Ken describes an ongoing process of self-correction, the preceding text indicates that this seems to refer to an effort to relinquish a particular feeling or cognition (“I am not that person; I will not hold that thought”) rather than to transform it. In another case, Anna did use a form of transformation but this was a technique to disburse a distressing image and not to develop positive affect for her offender as Thompson et al. employ the term. While there were cases in which the participants perceived their offender in a more benevolent light, the process of letting go refers only to a reduction in the strength of

negative responses and not a change in their valence. Thompson et al. acknowledge that responses to a transgression can be understood in terms of valence (more negative or less negative) or strength (stronger or weaker responses). They argue that a change in the strength of a response is a secondary factor of forgiveness and that transformation of valence (from negative to positive) is the key aspect. The opposite seems to be the case from the data presented here: forgiveness involves a reduction in the strength of negative responses to a transgression or transgressor, while the transformation of those feelings from negative to positive is not an essential component.

As was the case when examining self-awareness, the concept of letting go is most clearly paralleled when forgiveness is examined within a therapeutic context. Greenberg, Warwar and Malcolm (2007) defined letting go as the release of unmet needs and negative feelings towards the transgressor or transgression. In addition, there is a 'reorientation' of one's self-identity so as to reduce negative self-perception in relation to the transgression and transgressor. This definition is similar to the one emerging from the data however the pathway to letting go is not explored. The data in this study very clearly indicate that letting go is an active process and involves some conscious input on the part of the victim. Moreover, while one can reasonably expect that a reduction in self-blame and self-hatred will arise as a result of letting go, negative self-identity was only one facet of unforgiveness and by no means a pervasive one. Many participants did not mention any form of negative self-identity as relevant to their circumstances. Indeed in a number of cases they exhibited high levels of indignation in relation to what had happened to them that suggests their self-image was positive or resilient enough for them to believe that they did not deserve to be offended against.

Greenberg, et al.'s (2007) findings also indicated that letting go was an essential component of forgiveness although the reverse was not true – one could let go without forgiving. This is consistent with participants who had not forgiven but who said that they had let go and moved on.

While the concept of letting go is certainly not novel, previous understandings of it are not entirely suitable when examining traumatised victims of crime. Letting go, as it is understood from the data, is a conscious response to the wide variety of negative responses a victim of crime may experience subsequent to the offence. It is directed towards gaining some relief from those experiences. It does not involve the imposition of positive responses in the face of negative ones nor does it relate specifically to a change in one's self-image although such a change is not precluded.

### *3.2.3 Perspective-Taking of the Offender*

In the examination of unforgiveness in this chapter, research by Konstam, et al. (2003) was cited which linked unforgiveness to a tendency to view situations from a self-orientated perspective rather than an other-orientated one. Another important facet of the forgiveness process involves the participant coming to see the offender and/or the offence within a wider context that they themselves are not directly involved in. This emerged clearly from the data although the interview guides contained no items specifically addressing participants' responses to their offenders. This perspective taking most often involved a consideration of the lifestyle and history of the offender and the role they played in encouraging his offending behaviour:

Ummm... I think that perhaps this man, who incidentally was 29 so he wasn't a young thug, umm... I think that he unfortunately was, I mean unfortunately he may have been brought up wrong or given too much so he just takes what he wants. (*Betty p.4*)

Understanding.

*Interviewer:* Understanding? What else? Hang on, first of all, understanding of who?

Understanding. Well, for me it was understanding of the perpetrator. (*Frida p.7*)

Oh, well, ummm... Oh gosh. Ummm... Well in a logical manner; if you separate head from heart; in a logical manner you can probably trace this guy's history back to probably how he was brought up, ummm... (*Iris p. 15*)

I feel he... I look back on the months and I feel she wasn't a mother that... when L was 14, in the last four years, he could go away for days and she wouldn't know where he was and, "Oh, he's old enough to look after himself" To me, even though my oldest son's now just turning 20, I know where he is. He's got a loving home; a warm fire; a warm bed to come home to. Some nice food; some hot food. Hugs, love. And I feel that boy has never had that and I feel I want to face him and I wonder if he feels the hurt I'm feeling and he's truly sorry, then I feel like I just want to give him a hug and show him my love. (*Gretel, p. 53*)

Well, understanding that they haven't had the right upbringing or chances in life. (*Jane p. 64*)

In some cases this perspective taking led to the development of pity, empathy and even compassion for the offender:

Oh I don't know, at some level you could even pity the other person. (*Iris p. 62*)

There is a space where empathy and other thoughts of trying to figure out why, why they would have done this. (*Helen p.11*)

Ummm... you know, meditating on things like getting to the position to have a degree of empathy. For me, getting to a place of empathy for some of the offenders was really a meditation and, you know, cognition and, you know, and I think forgiveness is putting oneself in the other's shoes... (*Helen p. 61*)

I think that I would have had to rationalise things about that person and obviously have the advantage of considering... I'd just feel compassion because quite clearly they just didn't have the opportunities of ummm... that ummm... that I did for example. They didn't have the opportunities to be able to think of ummm... to rationalise the whole thing like myself. (*Betty p.42*)

So I think there's lots for the... to try and forgive the offender I think you have to look at the bigger picture. You've got to feel a bit of... maybe compassion, if that's the case of why it happened. (*Gretel p. 57*)

In other cases, the result of this perspective taking wasn't so extreme; rather it involved the participant allowing the offender to move on with his life without personal expectations:

For me, forgiveness is this closure and it's to say, I allow you to move forward. And its not – also its wishing a life for that person; wishing them prosperity in their life, not hoping that they suffer negatively for the rest of their life. So wishing that they, too, are able to move forward in a positive fashion throughout life and leave, be aware of their behaviour, to remind themselves with others but not necessarily to carry it as a the emotional baggage, to be free of that. (*Anna p. 1*)

Forgiveness can, like, I would say, to move on from your life and to try and put the past behind you; to let them get on with their lives and to hope that they will, ummm... make good, ummm... of a bad situation in their lives. Ummm... and be good citizens to the community; to the state; to Australia. (*Gretel p. 10*)

It is, ummm... next to that I think is not being resentful against the people so again its coming from a position of, OK, you've done these things but I'll... I'll... let you get on with your life, you know, and in that sense there's also the pardon. (*Helen p.11*)

An important point to note here is that the development of these magnanimous feelings neither motivated participants to either develop an ongoing relationship with their offender where one had not existed previously; nor led them to reconcile with the offender where a relationship between victim and offender had previously existed. Instead, perspective taking led the victim to recognise that human behaviour has complex causes that make binary labels such as 'bad' or 'evil' redundant. The victim appears to be left with a much broader concept of the offender who is a human being rather than a monster and who can be seen as a victim of his own offence as well. Although not explicit in the data, one can surmise that this allows the victim to see the offence as a situation in which there were no winners; potentially reducing the feelings of perceived attack, fear and vulnerability that arise as a result of the offence. This feeling is perhaps best summed up by Gretel, who described the offence as a "sad situation" (p.53) for all parties; expressing feelings of sorrow for the man who murdered her ex-husband.

Perspective-taking of the offender allows the victim to attribute the crime in new ways. This may account for the decrease in self-blame and self-hatred that were cited in some cases as a component of unforgiveness. In this sense, perspective taking of the offender can be seen as a form of reality negotiation where the explanations the transgressed person finds for the behaviour of the transgressor or the transgression itself serve to protect positive self-theories (Higgins, 2002)

Perspective-taking of the offender has a number of parallels in the literature. For example it is a component of Brandsma's (1982) model and is apparent in many process models including Enright's (2001). It is also a component of other therapeutic models. Davenport (1991), for example, cites the identification of the transgressor as a "complex, three dimensional human being, rather than stereotyped or simplified" (p.141) as a component of psychologically healthy forgiveness. Similarly, Malcolm and Greenberg's (2000) review of the literature found that the transgressed person sees the transgressor less negatively and more distinct and separate from themselves when forgiveness was explored within the context of individual therapy. Al-Mabuk, Dedrick and Vanderah (1998) also argue that therapists can help facilitate forgiveness in their clients by encouraging them to think about the transgressor in a larger context.

Attribution theory provides a valuable insight into perspective-taking. Weiner (1985; 1995) argued that a person's attributions for a particular event (or about a particular person) influence their judgements and, thus, their affective reactions to that event (or person). The attributional variable of locus of control is of particular interest when examining perspective-taking of the offender. Locus of control describes the tendency of a person to see the causes of a person's actions as a consequence of the environment the person finds themselves in (outer locus of control) or a result of certain innate qualities the person possesses (inner locus of control). Field, et al. (2008) explored this model further and found that community members who attributed the causes of a crime to more inner locus of control found the offender to be more responsible for his crime. A number of excerpts above provide evidence that perspective taking of the offender results in a movement from attributing inner locus of control to outer locus of control by

considering the contextual factors that contributed to the offender's behaviour. In the light of Field, et al.'s work it may be that participants were inclined to judge their offender less harshly and, in doing so, reduce their negative responses to him.

A number of forgiveness models entail the development of benevolent affect and cognition towards the transgressor on the part of the transgressed person. This benevolent thinking is often specified as a feeling of love or compassion. Enright's (2001) definition of forgiveness requires that the wronged party develop compassion, love and generosity. A number of models that examine forgiveness within the specific context of ongoing personal relationships also include this component as an essential part of forgiveness. Hargrave and Sells (1997), for example, identify the goal of forgiveness as re-establishing love and trust within an existing relationship. It ought to be noted that the data did not suggest that such feelings were an essential or indispensable component of forgiveness in this model although there was certainly instances in which they arose. Rather, perspective taking focuses more strongly on developing a new understanding of the offender and the causes of the offence rather than attempting to directly change any negative affect felt towards him.

This further highlights the importance of context when examining forgiveness. Both Hargrave and Sells (1997), along with other major researchers such as McCullough and colleagues, are primarily concerned with examining forgiveness within close relationships. As a consequence they understand forgiveness as having an interpersonal, prosocial goal (McCullough, 2000). This does not appear to be the case when examining forgiveness of an offender by their victim. Participants in this thesis either did not know

their offender or had no wish to continue the relationship. Thus forgiveness was understood as something other than a mechanism to harmonise social discord. Instead it constitutes an intrapersonal method of recovery from the effects of the offence they experienced. An important point to bear in mind when considering perspective-taking is the fact that it is difficult to verify participants' explanations for their offenders' behaviours. One can assume, then, that perspective-taking need not be a factually accurate understanding of the wider context in which the offence occurred. Rather, as Higgins (2002) and Dunn (2005) argue, its main purpose may be to facilitate the repair of a person's positive self-regard.

#### *3.2.4 Moving on From the Offence*

All participants believed that forgiveness was a process through which one was able to move on from the offence. This idea of moving on often involved recognition that the event was no longer occurring and an awareness that it was in the past. In other cases, it involved a sense of acceptance that the offence had occurred, which seems to suggest that the offence is no longer a dominating aspect of their lives. Moving on can be understood as a lessening of the feeling of being stuck which was described in the section on unforgiveness. It was the major outcome of forgiveness in this intrapersonal model:

I'm going to be aware that I'm thinking of it and I'm going to move away from that and I'm going to start thinking of the here and now. So it's allowing myself to live in the present. (*Anna p.2*)

And you say, well OK, this is the best deal I'm going to get so I'm just going to have to work on accepting it as my best deal. The guy's in the

grave now, blah blah blah, I can't get face to face forgiveness but I need to move on. (*Ken p. 19*)

And it's just... forgiveness and acceptance... when you start to accept and put it in the past where it belongs, then you're treading the road of forgiveness. (*Lily p. 25*)

I think it would be a lot of, ummm... peace, acceptance and getting on with things. Putting it in its right context. (*Iris p. 63*)

Ummm... well virtually just keep going, I suppose. Try and forget about it, sort of thing. Try and put it behind you.

*Interviewer:* So getting on with your life?

Yeah getting on with your life so you don't keep bringing it up again.

(*Jane p.88*)

As was the case with perspective taking, moving on requires a reorientation of the victim in relation to a particular object. In the case of perspective taking, this object was the offender and the reorientation took place through a consideration of the broader contextual factors that led to the offender committing the offence. On the other hand, moving on involved a change in temporal orientation – the offence becomes less important because one has a greater sense that it happened in the past. It can then be appraised as less of a defining moment. Doing this may allow the victim to feel a greater degree of control, rather than feeling that they are merely reacting to the offence. Also, it could potentially alleviate psychological distress. For example, it is feasible that a sense that the offence is over and consigned to the past may help reduce the victim's feelings of fear and thus allow them to pursue other interests more confidently.

Holman and Cohen Silver (1998) found that temporal orientation to the past, or a cognitive focus that focused on past events is a common, long-term response to traumatic events. It is unsurprising then, that this concept was the key outcome of forgiveness for victims of crime. The concept of moving on was also addressed by Gordon and Baucom (1998) in their examination of forgiveness after an extra-marital affair. These authors developed a three-step model of forgiveness in which an examination of the context in which the affair took place was a key component. An understanding that the affair was something that happened in the past was one component of this step. The authors argued that this phase of the forgiveness process allowed the transgressed person to amend attributions made at the time of the transgression. They argue that this decreases negative affect arising from it while increasing the transgressed person's feeling of being in control of the situation and their emotional reactions to it. In the case of victims of crime, this may potentially assist the process of letting go by facilitating a decrease in feelings of self-blame and the intensity of negative affect felt towards the offender.

### **3.3 An Overview of the Forgiveness Model**

On the basis of the above analysis it is now possible to offer a definition of forgiveness for victims of crime and to describe a theoretical model of how forgiveness works. Forgiveness is understood as an intrapersonal process with three components. It is a response to the overwhelming experience of unforgiveness.

Firstly, it involves the development of a self-awareness regarding the individual's negative responses to the offence. This is a highly individual process that may occur

naturally although it could be initiated within a clinical setting if appropriate. Secondly it involves a process of letting go of these feelings. Once again, the manner in which this occurs, or the techniques one develops to do this, are highly individual. Thirdly, it involves the individual considering the offender within a broader context that minimises their current importance and influence in the individual's life. The most important outcome of these three components is that they allow the victim to feel that they have moved on from the offence and its consequences.

What is unclear from this model is the exact cause of this moving on. The data provide three separate variables that may precipitate it. It may also result from a combination of two of these variables, however one can make a logical argument that all three are related to moving on. Self-awareness facilitates moving on by allowing one to become more aware of the inadequacy of existing coping strategies and may motivate a person to seek out more successful ones. Letting go also contributes to a sense of moving on by lessening the intense psychological consequences of the offence. Finally, perspective taking of the offender also contributes to a victim moving on as it lessens feelings of perceived attack. This leads to a decrease in feelings of fear and vulnerability and allow the victim to more fully reengage with other aspects of their life. Further empirical investigation is recommended to confirm the exact pathway to moving on in this model of forgiveness.

The prominence of moving on further highlights the intrapersonal nature of this model of forgiveness. It refers to an aspect of participants' recovery from the internal effects of the offence. Thus, it should not be understood in terms of a particular relationship. This

model differs considerably from other major models of forgiveness that conceive of the construct operating primarily within the context of a close personal relationship. For example, forgiveness as understood by researchers such as Enright (2001) or Hargrave and Sells (1997) requires the development of feelings of love and compassion for the transgressor. While the development of such feelings is certainly a possible outcome in the current model, they are by no means an essential feature of it.

In another instance, the work of McCullough et al. (McCullough, 2000; McCullough et al. 1998) proposes a model in which forgiveness involves a decreased motivation to avoid the transgressor which is also absent from the current model. These factors underscore the fact that the concept of interpersonal forgiveness is of limited use when dealing with victims of crime. Rather, the model outlined above is an intrapersonal process and in this sense it has more in common with therapeutic models of forgiveness in which the healing of the victim is of prime importance. Furthermore, this distinction serves to highlight the importance of context in defining forgiveness. While an interpersonal model may be functional in other circumstances, it is problematic for victims of crime. This does not mean that forgiveness is not possible for them; rather it means that a distinct form of forgiveness is constructed.

Finally, it is worth noting with regard the discussion concerning the moral element of forgiveness and its relevance to victims of crime (see section 1.2.1.1.2) that there was no evidence in the data to suggest that participants perceived of forgiveness as a moral construct, nor that their decision to forgive or to withhold forgiveness was influenced by moral considerations. In light of the considerable detail available in the data, this silence

on the matter of the moral implications of forgiveness is pointed. It highlights that the model described here is concerned with the intrapersonal aspects of forgiveness rather than the “prosocial” aspects of forgiveness emphasised in other models (see section 1.2.3).

### **3.4 Secondary Factors Associated with Forgiveness**

A number of secondary factors concerning forgiveness emerged from the data. They provide additional information about the construct to that contained in the model itself. They will each be explored throughout the next sections.

#### *3.4.1 Forgiveness as a Gift to Self*

An important consideration regarding forgiveness relates to its purpose for victims of crime. After exploring the role that forgiveness plays in the recovery of victims of childhood sexual abuse, Noll (2005) suggests that reconciliation ought not to be a factor when forgiving a violent offender but some models of forgiveness have conceived of it as a gift to the wrongdoer or as a method for restoring relations between the wrongdoer and the wronged party (e.g. Worthington, 1998; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; Sells & Hargrave, 1998). Neither of these principles is relevant to this population. Given the nature of the offences it is not expected that relations between the offender and the victim would be restored and in half of the cases examined the two had no pre-existing relationship to restore. Instead, there was a strong sense in the data that forgiveness was something one undertook for one’s own benefit:

Forgiveness is a present to yourself as well, in that you’re also, you’re acknowledging human nature; you’re acknowledging that we’re not all perfect; and you’re acknowledging situational factors and that its in the past. (*Anna p. 2*)

Well, its about the victim primarily, you know and I think that's a real weighing up of losses and gains. (*Helen p. 60*)

Oh gosh... well its actually better for you. It really doesn't... I mean the other person really doesn't necessarily need the forgiveness. You need it within yourself to... I suppose heal. (*Iris p. 62*)

I knew within me - I knew that I needed to go and forgive the [Name of organisation] and it wasn't about the money; it wasn't about them offering... and it wasn't enough that they needed to ask for it. The fullness of forgiveness is giving it; it's not a two-way street. (*Ken p. 67*)

These excerpts confirm that forgiveness in victims is primarily an intrapersonal process that is engaged in as a response to the intense psychological distress that resulted from the offence. This does not preclude the possibility that there may be interpersonal and prosocial consequences associated with forgiveness but it does point to a process that is primarily undertaken for one's own benefit.

This represents quite a shift in emphasis from the rest of the literature. For example, McCullough and Root (2005) summarise the commonalities between different definitions of forgiveness and find that they are all based on the assumption that forgiveness involves prosocial change towards the transgressor involving a decrease in negative thoughts feelings and behaviours towards that transgressor. The findings of this thesis do not conflict with this appraisal; rather it is a question of emphasis. As the excerpts above identify, the data as a whole were more concerned with the effects of the offence on the victim themselves rather than their feelings towards the offender. This then frames forgiveness for victims as primarily a therapeutic process rather than primarily a social process.

Despite the fact that the literature on forgiveness emphasises an interpersonal understanding and the tendency to examine forgiveness within the context of an ongoing personal relationship, all major models of forgiveness nonetheless note the enormous benefits of forgiveness to the transgressed person (Maltby, et al., 2004). For some researchers, this aspect is an important factor in how they define the entire concept of forgiveness. Walton (2005) examined forgiveness as a therapeutic tool for victims of sexual abuse and provides a definition of forgiveness that is closer to the one developed from the data here. She understands forgiveness as a process of healing psychological wounds and hatred, distancing oneself from the offender that leaves the victim at liberty to engage in positive, healthy pursuits. She points out that such a definition frames forgiveness as a form of self-empowerment. This circumvents a number of the moral and philosophical objections to forgiveness such as those raised by Murphy (1988), who sees forgiveness as a symptom of moral weakness.

#### *3.4.2 Caution in Approaching Forgiveness*

While the strong intrapersonal nature of forgiveness is clear, completely disregarding a violent offender was not a sensible option for most of the participants. There was a strong sentiment in the data that forgiveness ought to be approached with a degree of caution. This was mainly because participants felt there was the potential for the offender to discount the process and that such a dismissive attitude would be humiliating for them:

So that for me was a feeling of sadness too – that – its also a feeling of caution because I sometimes wonder – I don't want to be taken to be thought of as that's it, I forgive you its all over because what happened

to me impacted severely so I don't want that to be underestimated or minimalised in any way. (*Anna p. 27*)

[Being laughed at] by the perpetrator. And I think that ummm... because they would feel they lost more than you. They lost tangible goods you know. And ummm... yeah I think there's a risk, a very great risk of being laughed at. Also being ummm... rejected and then being threatened. I mean, it could be accepted and I would like to meet with you again and then you could sort of spell out the process by which you would do that. But on the other hand, you could very well... it could very well be ummm... the whole thing could be rejected and you could be laughed at and then be threatened. (*Betty p. 93*)

There was also a fear that forgiveness constituted a pardon for the offender or otherwise invalidated their guilt:

Yeah! It puts him at rest, if I forgive. He's got no more guilt. So therefore, he should have guilt. (*Cathy p. 44*)

I think it would be invalidating a crime by forgiving them and saying its OK. (*Ellen p. 48*)

Part of them I've already discussed but part of them is, if you forgive, what if they go and do it to you again? And, yeah, I think for me that would be the only real risk; that you risk being hurt again. Ummm... and when you've been traumatised its really, ummm... its really one you don't want to go back to. There's just a conscious little niggle there but, ummm... yeah, I don't... I just can't think of anything else for that one. (*Ken p. 102*)

*Interviewer:* What sort of things do you think would make the forgiveness process more difficult?

If the perpetrator just sort of thumbed their nose at you. If you were trying to talk to them to give them your forgiveness and if they didn't give a damn.

(*Iris p 123*)

These excerpts confirm that forgiveness was not a process entered into lightly. They also illustrate the participants' concern that forgiveness in some way allows the offender to get away with his crime. To date there appears to be no literature exploring these feelings. Certainly fear is identified as a possible effect of an offence or a factor of unforgiveness (e.g. Wade, Vogel, Liao, & Goldman, 2008) however there appears to be no research that specifically examines the dissonance (the psychological discomfort arising from holding a cognition that conflicts with one's affective experience) that can arise as a consequence of forgiveness process.

The specific fears of having one's feelings invalidated or that one may be seen to be pardoning the offender would seem to indicate that the victim is concerned with the interpersonal repercussions of forgiveness. Two of the above excerpts provide an interesting contrast. Cathy, who declined to answer the majority of the forgiveness questions because she felt no forgiveness towards her daughter's murderer, has an emphatic objection to forgiveness: the offender is guilty therefore forgiveness is unthinkable. In this sense, the question of whether to forgive or not is wholly contingent upon her appraisal of the offender. When one turns one's attention to Ken's excerpt we still see some concern regarding how the offender will respond to the act of forgiveness but the concern centres around how such a reaction will impact upon his own, already vulnerable, psychological state. These two excerpts seem to illustrate that Ken, who has forgiven, is actually more self-focused in this regard than Cathy, who has not forgiven. This interpretation is consistent with the emphasis on self-awareness which underpins this model.

### 3.4.3 Contact between Victim and Offender

Before any discussion of the role of victim-offender contact in forgiveness, an important caveat must be reiterated. The idea of contact should in no way imply reconciliation between parties nor the creation of a new relationship. The participants mentioned neither of these options. Nonetheless, participants often felt that contact with the offender, or the opportunity to directly and personally confront the offender with the consequences of their crime, would be beneficial:

I think so, yeah. Because I think it would speak volumes to the victim who, not so much can trust but can face the perp and say, “Yeah, I forgive you”. More power to them. (*Ellen p. 50*)

I would want to see him; I would want to look him in his face and see if he’s happy and couldn’t care less or is he really truly sorry; I need to know that. I need to know... again, that’s the thoughts, isn’t it? I need to know why he did it; what was going through his mind. (*Gretel p. 58*)

If it is possible to personally contact the person, I would recommend it. If it is not possible then one thing that I found very helpful was to write it down. Write it down and date it. (*Lily p. 75*)

Although the model of forgiveness proposed by McCullough et al. (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough, 2000) proposes a decreased motivation to avoid the transgressor as a prerequisite for forgiveness, the exact role of offender – victim contact as part of the forgiveness process itself is not examined in any detail. Victimological research examining the impact of victim-offender mediation and restorative justice indicates that contact between victims and offenders can facilitate improved well-being for victims (see for example Wemmers & Cyr, 2005). On the basis of the excerpts above from Ellen and Gretel, one can surmise that it helps facilitate a sense of understanding the

situation, perhaps by facilitating the process of perspective-taking through listening to the offender's account of the offence and its antecedents.

#### *3.4.4 Additional Outcomes of Forgiveness*

Jubilant. Triumph. Freedom. (*Frida p. 50*)

All the participants, with the exception of Cathy and Ellen, believed that forgiveness was a positive development in a person's life. Often this was due to the feeling of relief associated with factors such as letting go of negative responses and the feeling of moving on after feeling stuck in unforgiveness. In this sense then, the very act of forgiving can be understood as a positive gain in people's lives. This further emphasises that forgiveness for victims is essentially an intrapersonal process. Additional benefits to forgiveness were highly individual. The following excerpts detail those outcomes around which there was some consensus and should not be considered exhaustive.

Notably, a number of participants felt that forgiveness improved their self-esteem:

Forgiveness is like having a life and a feeling of self-worth and self being. (*Frida p. 7*)

I guess caring about your own self-worth but also taking care of yourself. Like before I never went to see doctors or looked after myself. Because you have this sense of worth now instead of saying I'm a waste of space; I'm pinching air out of people's lungs feelings before. But now you feel no I'm as equal as anyone else and I need to look after myself and I need to... (*Ken p. 101*)

Also I think I am a nicer person. I have got my self-esteem back; I don't hate myself no more. Ummm... In fact I quite like myself. That's a very big change. (*Lily p.105*)

Studies that have examined forgiveness as a dispositional trait have found that higher levels of self-esteem predict forgiveness of other people and situations (Eaton, Struthers & Santelli, 2006). State forgiveness is also positively related to an improvement in self-esteem or self-worth. For example Al-Mabuk, Enright and Cardis (1995) found that self-esteem increased significantly in a sample of adolescents who underwent a forgiveness intervention when compared a control group.

The data also indicated that participants reported better quality social contact:

Oh in my life totally different. Absolutely chalk and cheese. Ummm... I can meet with people; my kids and I have got a fantastic relationship now. (*Ken, p. 101*)

We all need to be encouraged and if we've been living and nursing unforgiveness for years then we need to be encouraged to see that new growth is coming and that is something that I found very important and that's where the fact that I now have friends, and very good friends, has been so fantastic because every new friend is a jewel. I did not have friends before. I was the most incredibly isolated human being you've ever met. (*Lily p. 76*)

So sometimes now, I find I slow down and I take time for people because they come to me and even though it's a little thing, I think, I'll take time this time because I spent a lot of time running past people and now I try to be more – value other people. Before I used to be caught up in my own self, or my thoughts. Not so much myself but my thoughts and protection of my daughter and what the hell am I going to do. Umm so I spent a lot of energy on that and now when I meet people, I like them; I want to hear about them. I'm not so self-centred umm and I find it very interesting... so its more reciprocal, my relationships. (*Anna p. 91*)

In some cases this tendency was reflected in a desire to help other people:

Well look, all I've noticed is that you end up choosing a career in either social work or psychology or around that length where they've got to that healing point. That's when they've got forgiveness and they choose that to help somebody else. (*Frida p. 96*)

In addition to this quote it ought to be noted that, in addition to Frida, three other participants (Anna, Helen and Ken) are actively involved in assisting others who have had similar experiences to what they endured.

There appears to be little empirical data in the literature to suggest that improved social contact is a direct benefit of forgiveness. Again, the specific nature of the population in this study may account for this finding. Research suggests that individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress experience higher levels of social anxiety, social phobia and depression each of which has been associated with higher levels of social avoidance (Hofmann, Litz & Weathers, 2003). It has already acknowledged in this chapter (see section 3.1.2.1) that unforgiveness has much in common with post-traumatic responses. As such, it makes sense that forgiveness for victims of crime may result in a decrease in social avoidance or the experience of greater ease when engaging in social contact.

The results of forgiveness, then, seem to be a greater ease and engagement with life. As Lily put it:

And there's your difference. It turns you from someone who looks... the unforgiving person looks inward because they're nursing the hate and pain. (Lily p. 25)

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the three main facets of forgiveness that were observed in the data: letting go, self-awareness and perspective-taking of the offender and/or offence. It has also provided a brief examination of the nature of unforgiveness although this remains an important area for future research. Finally, this chapter outlined the major secondary factors relating to forgiveness as they arose in the data: the need to proceed with caution, the issue of contact, and the results of forgiveness. While many of these aspects share similarities and parallels with the wider literature on forgiveness, the model arising from the data is unique. As outlined in the introduction, a major argument of this thesis is that the definition of forgiveness is intrinsically context bound. In other words, the precise makeup of forgiveness will be dictated by the individual circumstances of the transgressor, the transgressed and the transgression. In this case, victims of crime have described forgiveness as a primarily intrapersonal process that is undertaken in an attempt to remedy the intense psychological distress arising from their experience. This contrasts with a number of major models of forgiveness that conceive of the variable as primarily interpersonal and prosocial. This discrepancy is explained by the context in which the models were developed. Researchers who tend to view forgiveness as an interpersonal phenomenon have examined it in the context of close personal relationships whereas models developed within a therapeutic context (where the goal is the transgressed person's recovery) bear closer similarities to the one described here.

## **CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF REVENGE DATA**

Previous research examining individuals suffering from traumatic stress has argued that they can experience strong feelings of revenge (Orth, Montada, & Maercker, 2006). This chapter presents the data analysis of the revenge section of the interview guide that was administered to each participant.

This chapter initially outlines the concept of powerlessness from which the drive for revenge stems. This feeling of powerlessness provokes a desire in the victim to redress the balance between themselves and the offender as well as producing strong negative affect towards the offender. The data demonstrate that revenge is an intense drive to restore one's sense of self-determination in the wake of an offence. Despite this intensity, only one participant admitted that they had acted on their feelings of revenge and, as such, this chapter includes an examination of the data for explanations as to why this may be the case. Finally, the chapter examines the outcomes of revenge that participants expected to encounter and finds that the majority of participants believe revenge to be a negative and unhealthy experience.

### **4.1 Powerlessness**

The data indicate that participants felt disempowered, vulnerable or helpless. This was usually as a result of the offence itself, although sometimes it was the result of circumstances stemming from their victimisation:

...whether I would do it or not is another thing but, again, it's necessary to function; it's necessary to reassert one's own power and that can be done in the imaginary world Ummm... so that's one element.(*Helen p.10*)

Oh a feeling of helplessness. (*Dianne p.25*)

Other participants alluded to the concept of powerlessness without explicitly mentioning it. For example, Anna described feeling out of control while Cathy understood it as a feeling that she had lost her independence:

So although I could play the game of life and be seen to not end up in the loony bin and lose my kids, because that was important to me to not be seen to be out of control. I felt out of control, very much out of control and I think that would have to escalate for you to want revenge, to act on it. (*Anna p. 14*)

I've lost my, ummm... what's the word I'm looking for... ummm... my own, ummm... can't think of that word, its gone out of my head.

*Interviewer:* Describe it.

My own, my own, my own, my own... where I was able to stand on my own 2 feet. Where I could do what I wanted to do, put into the house, and yeah... well I can't do that anymore. So ummm... yeah, there is a word I'm looking for but its gone right out of my head.

*Interviewer:* Is it independence?

Yes! That's the one. So I've lost my own independence, I've lost everything. So, yeah... (*Cathy p.82*)

The concepts of being out of control or not having independence are both thematically related to the idea of powerlessness because they share a sense that the individual has lost a sense of their ability to be self-determinant.

In addition, it was not just the offence itself that could make participants feel this way. Betty commented that it was her treatment by the justice system that made her feel powerless:

Well it was because of my powerlessness about not being included in the court process. Not being, in the first instance, even believed, ummm... (*Betty* p. 20)

When discussing powerlessness, participants are not describing a physical incapacity; even in the cases of Anna and Betty where the physical consequences of the offence were considerable. Rather, this seems to be a debilitating psychological response to an attack by one person against another that leads the victim to question their ability to guarantee their own safety. This response may arise as a direct consequence of the offence itself. It may also arise as a result of some later episode in which the participant feels that their experience and the harm caused them is not sufficiently validated. This is clear in the initial excerpts from Helen, who talks about feeling the need to reassert herself, and Betty who felt excluded from the adversarial process. For Anna, Cathy and Jane, it appears to be the offence itself that is experienced as disempowering. A notable aspect of powerlessness is its enduring quality; participants imply that powerlessness can occur frequently, often over a long period of time. It is not limited to the duration of the offence itself.

#### *4.1.1 Powerlessness and Trauma*

Powerlessness has been identified as a traumagenic dynamic in Finkelhor and Browne's (1985) model of the long term traumatic effects of CSA. Their examination of the literature reveals that powerlessness is often experienced as a result of the sexual,

physical, or psychological abuse of children. Finkelhor and Browne understand powerlessness as the infringement of a child's self-efficacy (one's belief in their capability to perform in a given manner and obtain desired goals) with a resulting negative impact on their self-concept and view of the world. This bears a strong similarity to the concept emerging from the data despite the fact that an adult sample was used in this thesis while Finkelhor and Browne's focus was the impact of CSA on victims as children. This suggests that the psychological consequences of CSA are enduring and the role of feelings of powerlessness warrants further examination in adult populations.

As discussed in chapter one (see section 1.1.3), the criteria for making a diagnosis of PTSD has changed. While DSM-III-R (APA, 1987) only specified that the traumatic event must be "outside the range of normal human experience"; DSM-IV and its subsequent revisions specify that an individual must experience intense fear, helplessness, or horror as a consequence of experiencing it regardless of the novelty of the event (e.g. APA, 2000). Little research has been conducted to confirm the utility or suitability of these three requirements; however Roemer, Orsillo, Borkovec, and Litz (1998) found that their participants were significantly more likely to experience all three emotions at the time of an event meeting the requirements of a traumatizing event than participants reporting non-traumatic events. Furthermore, they found that helplessness was significantly, though weakly correlated to the presence of intrusive, avoidant and arousal clusters associated with PTSD. Roemer, et al. also examined the relationship of fear, horror and numbness and these three diagnostic clusters, however, helplessness was the only variable with a significant positive relationship to all three. When one

considers that participants in Roemer, et al's study reported a wide range of traumatic events (with only 9% reporting sexual abuse or assault), these findings suggest that feelings of helplessness and powerlessness may be important factors to consider when examining trauma in general.

#### *4.1.2 The Relationship between Powerlessness and Revenge*

The exact nature of the relationship between powerlessness and revenge is unclear. Nonetheless, two logical assumptions can be made. In light of the relationship between powerlessness and trauma that has been discussed above, one can assume that powerlessness precedes other revenge responses. The literature seems to suggest that feelings of powerlessness, along with horror and fear, commence immediately during the event itself and thus precede other post-trauma symptomology (e.g. Brewin, Andrews & Rose, 2000). Nonetheless, the excerpts imply that the experience of powerlessness is not simply confined to the offence itself but has an enduring quality. This is reminiscent of the concept of being 'stuck' in time that was discussed in the previous chapter (see section 3.1.4.5).

The experience of powerlessness may also constitute an ego-threat as Baumeister (1999) understands the term. Other research suggests that people, particularly Westerners, are generally motivated to think positively of themselves (Heine, Lehman, Markus & Kitayama, 1999), indeed Baumeister (1993) believes it to be an essential component for mental health. One can understand that powerlessness as an ego threat impinges upon one's positive self-regard because one feels vulnerable, weak or out of control. It seems likely that this creates some dissonance for a victim which inclines them towards

retaliation. In this case, revenge can be seen as a response to this feeling of powerlessness and an attempt to re-validate one's positive self-regard. The exact nature of these responses constitutes the remainder of this chapter.

#### **4.2 Redressing the Balance**

The second major theme that emerged from the data was a desire to redress the balance or even the score in the aftermath of the offence. All participants mentioned or alluded to this aspect of revenge and in light of the earlier discussion on powerlessness, a desire to redress the score seems a consistent response to an attack against one's sense of self-determination:

It's also something people may use in sort of balancing themselves back up again. Maybe they're using it as retribution. I know that with a lot Aboriginal people it's sort of like a balance. This happens and we then payback and its redeemed somehow. (*Anna* p.1)

Its got some sense of... almost as if it's bitter and twisted with hatred as its motivator and its as if it's a... a tit for tat, you know, get even; and eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth notion to it. I prefer the kind of, ummm... the way indigenous cultures look at this in more of the pay back; the reprisal kind of notion that vengeance is inflicting an injury or suffering that is in some way, ummm... in parallel to what was done. (*Helen* p.7)

It's something he did and he has to suffer the consequences and I've heard it's a horrible place to be but it takes a horrible person to do what they've done. And so I just believe that the punishment should fit the crime. (*Gretel* p. 32)

Yeah. That they've got to get even. Pound for a pound I guess.

*Interviewer:* An eye for an eye?

Yeah that's the one I was trying to get. (*Iris* p39)

There is an interesting commonality running through most of these excerpts and that is the tendency for participants to rationalise revenge as a social response. For example, both Anna and Helen prefer to liken revenge to the retributive practices of some Indigenous Australian cultures while Gretel expresses the concept of redressing the balance by using a judicial term: ‘punishment’; perhaps emphasising that revenge is a subsequent response to an initial wrong doing.

Interestingly, a number of the participants preferred to understand the concept of revenge in terms of punishment and retribution. This may be an attempt to reframe revenge in a manner which expresses their feelings of moral indignation by identifying themselves with a legally and socially sanctioned system of punishment. Alternatively, it may have been an attempt to make an intense affective reaction more personally palatable. As Linden (2003) points out, feelings of revenge can be very strong and, as discussed below, contain violent elements which may be unpalatable for victims and violate their positive self-regard.

#### *4.2.1 The Question of Proportionality*

The quotes above suggest a strong sense of proportionality to revenge. Iris, for example, talks about wanting ‘*an eye for an eye*’ while Anna talks about balance and Helen mentions a parallel punishment. There is very little explicit discussion in the literature of the proportionality of revenge although it is certainly implied that this is the case. For example, many researchers include the concept of “getting even” as a major goal of revenge (Aquino, et al., 2006). Certainly a proportional response to a transgression has

been found to be more socially acceptable. Tripp, et al., (2002) employed a quantitative design to assess judgments of consequential symmetry (i.e. the extent to which the consequences of an offence matched the original transgression) and its relationship to the perceived aesthetics, or acceptance, of revenge. Their results indicated that a proportional response was more pleasing to participants than a disproportionately excessive one. However, the participants were third party observers and not individuals who had themselves been wronged.

An examination of the data nonetheless raises questions concerning the relationship between revenge and proportionality. For example, a number of participants employed terms such as “an eye for an eye” or; “a life for a life” which seems to suggest a proportional response. Indeed, when asked about proportionality, Helen explicitly defined it as such:

Yeah, there's a proportional sense to it. (*Helen p.7*)

Ken, on the other hand, defined revenge as decidedly disproportional:

I guess you get to the point where justice isn't enough. You get past a point where you're not even thinking about justice; you just really want to... ummm... for me it was a sense of wanting to rip the person's throat out.

(*Ken p. 43*)

#### *4.2.1.1 Subjective and Objective Assessments of Proportionality*

Ellen's data is instructive when attempting to explain this contradictory data. She claimed that revenge would be a frustrating feeling because she felt it would be impossible to cause her offender enough hurt to match the hurt that had inflicted upon her:

I'm not so sure that it would... that it would recompense all the hurt; all the problems that one still has to live with. So again, it's a two-sided situation. So there would be some benefit but not enough to eradicate all that had happened negatively. (*Ellen p.5*)

You feel like it's... it's impossible to repay the pain that the perp has inflicted on the victim. It would be impossible to match that if it was the other way around. You know, I don't think you could inflict as much pain as the perp has on the victim. (*Ellen p.55*)

These excerpts suggest that Ellen's experience of the offence and its repercussions was so horrific that no measure of retaliation is capable of evening the score. It is therefore conceivable that victims are tempted to inflict disproportionately higher levels of suffering on an offender because their subjective judgment of proportionality deviates from a more objective assessment. This brings into question the nature of proportionality itself and how it is assessed. For example, accepting an objective measure of proportionality may not be suitable because it doesn't sufficiently account for the subjective experience of anguish that the victim experiences. On the other hand, a subjectively proportional response is problematic for the very same reason: it is impossible to have a subjective experience of the harm you cause another person. A victim needs to live with the affective and cognitive consequences of what has happened to them. It may be that a proportional response is difficult for them to appreciate because they cannot experientially gauge the suffering that is being inflicted on their offender nor are they legally entitled to attempt to redress the balance for themselves.

#### *4.2.2 The Role of Exaggeration*

Both Ken and Anna talk about exaggerating the consequences of the offence.

I think you pick up on cues that aren't actually there. Little things that you want to perceive are there. You know you read things in. Self-fulfilling prophecy – you know if I say I'm going to live with this forever then am I saying I'm going to live with this forever, you know, I'm not saying I'm going to get over this and be alright or “until the day he dies I can't rest” or something like that. You're sort of really setting yourself up to live that out... Step back and look at the reality of the situation. (*Anna* p.77)

...you've taken the offence from being one act, and mine wasn't just one act but I'm just taking an example, and you blow it up to where they've done so much wrong that whoever meets this person wants to do them into the police because they're a dog. So you blow it right out of proportion. (*Ken* p.45)

Ken's excerpt seems to suggest a conscious attempt to exaggerate the offence in order to denigrate the offender, while Anna describes a form of reality distortion and self-fulfilling prophecy. The distinction is important because the potential for victims of crime to exaggerate, or over estimate, the seriousness of the offence or its consequences has been mentioned in victimological and criminological literature. This argument is usually made in the form of critique rather than a finding based on the examination of empirical evidence (e.g. Schneider, 1981; Levine, 1976).

It is possible that the consequences of an offence fluctuate over time in terms of their perceived severity. Anna's excerpt is instructive in understanding this argument. She seems to be saying that the severity of her distress is related to the extent to which she focuses on the offence and her offender. By '*stepping back and looking at the reality of the situation*' her situation improves. This suggests that strong rumination may make the quality of one's distress more severe. This idea is consistent with the findings of other researchers. For example, Ehlers, Mayou & Bryant (1998) found that rumination

predicted chronic and delayed onset PTSD. Additionally, a longitudinal study by Michael, Halligan, Clark and Ehlers (2007) found that rumination was significantly and positively related to PTSD symptom severity, initially and at 6 months. They also found that rumination significantly predicted symptom severity in a cross sectional design. Therefore the extent to which a person focuses on what has happened to them can affect the amount of distress they experience.

The data demonstrate that a desire to redress the balance is a key consideration in understanding the nature of revenge in victims of crime but it is important to recognise that victims may have an inflated sense of what is required to redress this balance. Baumeister (1999), and Stillwell, et al. (2008) described this discrepancy as the magnitude gap and argued that the harm a transgressed person may repay to the original transgressor tends to be seen as disproportionately excessive by that transgressor. They found that although victims felt that they were “evening the score” the recipients of revenge also felt they had been victimised. The difficulty here is that Stillwell, et al focuses exclusively on the magnitude gap and included no objective measure of proportionality. As a consequence, it is impossible to discern the extent to which the act of revenge would generally be considered proportional to the original harm done. Future research in this area will prove a key focus in developing a deeper understanding of revenge from a psychological perspective.

### 4.3 Feelings towards the Offender

#### 4.3.1 Feelings of Anger

Victims expressed intense reactions towards their offender. The most common amongst these was anger. Participants described anger in different ways. For example, Ellen understood it as a frustrating emotion:

Anger is... is a frustrating emotion. It's all energy and how to release all that pent up energy after all those years. I don't think somebody could go through a revengeful act and not through all of those at the same time. (*Ellen p.28*)

Iris understood anger as a sense of righteous indignation that motivated a personal desire to respond to the offence:

Hatred, anger, frustration, ummm... a feeling of, what is it, self-indignation, a feeling like they have to do something, they can't leave it to someone else; the situation won't be straightened until they do something. They've got to have some power back. (*Iris p.38*)

These descriptions of anger confirm that feelings of powerlessness represent a strong motivational drive. Helen felt anger was related to vulnerability, despair and sadness that are thematically related to the concept of powerlessness described at the beginning of this chapter:

Well, as I said, the hurt, pain, sadness and anger sit on the same line so if pain and hurt go unacknowledged, then it is not uncommon for it to flip; it's quite... it's what happens with male domestic violence offenders. They have issues that are unresolved that they haven't spoken about and they become the offender. (*Helen p.9*)

Because that can't be reconciled, the victim is left with, you know, a smorgasbord of unresolved thoughts and feelings and a lot of those sit

around anger: vulnerability; despair, ummm... depends what day, you know, and so... it's a feast you're having alone. (*Helen* p.35)

From these excerpts it appears that the anger that is being described is both indignant and frustrated. This sense of frustrated anger is consistent with the feelings of powerlessness that have been described earlier as well as the feeling that equitable retribution is impossible. The presence of anger and frustration are broadly consistent with the frustration-aggression hypothesis that was outlined in chapter one. In this case, the offence constitutes the aversive event described by Berkowitz (1989) because the physical and psychological injuries sustained frustrate the attainment of goals (such as independence or the maintenance of a certain lifestyle, for example). This results in the development of negative affect such as anger, which may be expressed outwardly as an act of aggression which is understood here as the acting out of revenge.

The presence of anger is also consistent with the argument that revenge is an ego-defensive response. Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) argue that when confronted with a threat to their favourable self-appraisal, people make one of two choices. They can accept the negative appraisal that the threat entails, in which case they may develop negative affect such as sadness or anxiety. Alternatively, they may reject the implications of the threat to their self-concept and respond with anger and aggression towards the source of the threat. On the basis of Baumeister et al.'s argument, an aggressive act would seem the natural response to an ego-threat. Thus the argument fails to explain why participants in this thesis consistently resisted the urge to act on their feelings of anger towards the offender. As discussed later (see section 4.3.3) it is possible that the very self-concept they were motivated to protect could not

accommodate the possibility of revenge or that they feared future retaliation if they acted on their feelings.

#### *4.3.2 Feelings of Hatred*

Hatred was the other common affective response to the offender that participants mentioned. As explained in chapter two, hatred is a complex topic and most of the literature focuses on the concept as an impersonal response to entrenched intergroup prejudice such as racist hatred (Sternberg, 2005). Out of all the participants, only Jane expressed hatred towards the ethnic group that her offender belongs to (the excerpts illustrating this are presented in section 3.1.4.5). In all other cases, hatred appeared to be directed at a specific offender. In order to completely understand what hatred means in the present context, a number of participants were asked to outline their understanding of it. For Cathy, hatred for the man who murdered her daughter caused her to feel emotionally empty:

It eats you up inside. You've got no feeling. It sucks you dry. You've got no emotion. You can't feel anything for anyone else. I used to be the most compassionate person out and feel for everybody, now I feel for nobody. My brother's just been diagnosed with cancer and we're a very close family and I can't feel. I just cannot feel. It just strips you, you're just a walking empty shell. (*Cathy* p. 23)

Dianne also explained hatred as an essentially internal emotion experience:

I think its actually an, er, an emotion that comes from within that totally engulfs you. It engulfs your rationale; it engulfs you physically regarding you to do things physically that you would possibly never imagine you could do. Ummm... Hatred. Its, ummm... I don't think you can explain hatred until you can actually, in that moment, it just consumes you. (*Dianne* p.24)

Anna and Iris understood it more explicitly as an affective response to the offender:

Umm just a feeling that this person cannot exist with me existing. This person cannot proceed in life and have a positive life while I have suffered. (*Anna* p.14)

Hmmm... an absolute abhorrence for someone. Ummm... I think, extreme, extreme dislike.

*Interviewer:* What would you think about a person if you hated them?

That they're a waste of space. There's only one person in this world that I don't like. I mean, there's a lot of people but someone I know directly; there's one person. They're amoral; they're totally amoral. (*Iris* p. 38)

Other participants were unable to explain the terms in any detail, which is consistent with Dianne's comments, above, concerning the difficulty in articulating or satisfactorily describing the construct. Gretel for example could only characterise it as "evil" (p.31) while Frida's response was deeply metaphorical:

Hate.

*Interviewer:* Yeah? How would you define hate? What would you say that hate is though? The reason that I'm asking is that...

The colour black. And a foreboding sense.

*Interviewer:* OK

It's a very dark sense (*Frida* p.6)

These excerpts suggest that the participants understand hatred as an intense emotion that seems to have a weak cognitive aspect that can make it difficult to articulate. Apart from embodying an extreme dislike for the offender, it appears that in some cases it also has an internal component that a number of participants emphasised over the interpersonal aspects. This is not to say that Cathy or Dianne did not have strong feelings towards

their offenders; their interviews are replete with examples to the contrary. Rather, the interesting point is that when they were asked to explain hatred specifically, the effect it had on them personally was the most pertinent aspect of the construct for them. There is no literature which conceives of interpersonal hatred in this way; the majority of literature conceives of hatred as an affective response directed at an outgroup (Sternberg, 2005).

Cathy's response is of particular interest as she describes hatred as an emotional deadness. This seems to conflict with the intensity described by other participants and is at odds with other aspects of her interview in which she exhibited a passionate desire for the offender to die. Furthermore it is a counter-intuitive response; the common understanding of hatred is an intense emotional reaction rather than a flattening or deadening of affect. When Cathy's excerpt is read a little more closely, however, it is possible to offer an alternative interpretation. Cathy says "*you can't feel anything for anyone else.*" This phrase is critical because it seems to qualify what Cathy is saying about emotional deadness. It is not that she feels nothing at all. On the contrary, it is clear from her interview that she continues to feel incredibly strong emotions three years after the offence took place. Those feelings are limited to those facets of her life that are directly related to her daughter's murder. Her brother's serious illness is peripheral to these concerns and is thus not attended to emotionally. This qualification explains an otherwise contradictory excerpt by highlighting that hatred can involve a fixation on the offender that is so intense that one loses interest in one's life or the lives of those to whom one has been close.

### 4.3.3 Wanting Harm to Befall the Offender

Both anger and hatred can motivate someone to harm the target of those feelings in some way (Berkowitz, 1989; Sternberg, 2005). Consistent with this, participants expressed a desire to see harm come to the offender. In some cases, this took the form of a desire to personally cause the offender harm:

I think revenge... if you asked [the participant's son], he would probably say he wants to run him down; he wants to put his foot on the accelerator and run him down. (*Gretel* p. 6)

Murder

*Interviewer:* So they would have a feeling that they wanted to kill the person?

Yes. (*Frida* p.29)

I mean you couldn't mention the man without me exploding, ummm... and if I had caught him I literally would have killed him, no two ways about it. I recognise for me, he couldn't have died soon enough but I mean, basically, it would have been in the most cruel, inhuman way I could have figured out. Not quick and easy, he would have suffered. (*Lily* p.46)

In other cases though, it seemed less important to participants whether they personally caused the harm as long as the offender experienced some level of suffering:

So what I would do, indeed I did do, was follow the victims' compensation which would mean they would take some of his property off him. (*Betty* p.21)

Ummm... yeah... you know its nice to think, I have thought about if someone just walked up in there because you hear all these stories that happen in prison, you don't know if they're true or not – and just end it, you know what I mean? Stab him or whatever. (*Cathy* p.24)

Mainly just ringing the family, ummm... and finding out who it is and, I don't know, thinking about letting someone else know so they can go around and... oh I don't know. Yeah just do the same to them, or break their arms or something, you know? You sort of think of all these things  
(Jane p.74)

It is interesting, particularly in light of the ego-threat argument, that participants did not necessarily need to be the instigator of the offender's suffering. Possibly the fear the victims experienced about confronting their offender, or about the possibility of future retaliation, inhibited their desire to exact revenge personally:

At first that didn't cross my mind, ummm, but I started to think that ummm that would be pointless because the other person being stronger, ummm, who beat me up, he would just come back again. So stupid to go down that path, was not something that I considered because of fear.  
(Betty p. 2)

Umm, there's... there's a fear response too with revenge where people run up to commit acts of revenge and they get there and they can't face the person. You know, how would I respond if I did find him? Good Lord! I mean I'd probably want to run. You know? I'm going to get revenge and see him and fall in a heap. (Anna p.14)

I rang them a few times but there was only an answering machine but that's as far as I got. I told my counsellor what I did and she said it might not be a good idea because, being abos, they know where I live so it could get ugly. (Jane p. 74)

On the other hand, some participants also felt that personally harming the offender was either simply not in their nature or that by doing so, they risked becoming just as bad as the offender:

I've thought about it, hoping that someone would do that, but me as a person I could not arrange for someone to do that. You know, that's as being as bad as what he is. (Cathy p.24)

OK. To feel that, I think, you wouldn't feel like a whole person. Because its – I've always wanted to be a positive person. Always run a plate of dinner over to the old lady across the road or whatever. I think that would be inconsistent with how I perceive myself as a person. (*Anna* p.49)

Oh well they're just as bad as the other person and they could go to jail. Ummm... yeah they're no better really than the person who did it to them. (*Iris* p.62)

To begin with but when you came off that emotional high there would be guilt, there would be self hatred that you could do such a thing because you have then become no better than the perpetrator. Ummm... grief... and you would find yourself in a place that is not nice. You would not know who you were anymore. We all have a mental image of who we are but when we step outside that, we shatter that self image and leave ourselves someone we don't know and finding yourself living with a stranger inside you, believe me that is terrifying. (*Lily* p.65)

The interesting point here is not that participants wanted to see harm come to the offender. In light of the intensity of affect associated with hatred, the desire to harm the offender is a consistent response. Despite such intense feelings and despite a desire for the offender to be harmed that was pervasive through the data, only one participant reported actually carrying out any kind of revenge. Previous research that has examined the connection between feelings of revenge and actively harming a perceived transgressor has also found that a large majority of people don't tend to act on feelings of revenge. Indeed, Crombag, et al., (2003) found that 71% of respondents who reported feelings of revenge did not act upon them.

Fear has been identified as an inhibitor of justice seeking. Studies examining bullying in schools have found that the victims of bullying experience fear of retaliation should they alert authority figures such as teachers (Mishna & Alaggia, 2005). This effect has also

been found when examining bullying in the work place (Beale, 2001). Interestingly, while Schmid (2005) found that this was the case, fear was not related to a reduction in negative affect towards an offender. This is logical: simply because a person is fearful for their safety in no way suggests that the person is less desirous of revenge but it may stop them from acting on those desires because to do so would put them in harm's way. While these studies don't examine revenge per se (although one could argue that alerting authorities could be motivated by a desire for revenge), they do illustrate that fear can inhibit retaliation regardless of the negative affect experienced by the transgressed individual.

The final excerpts in this section suggest that stable, positive self-image may constitute another important inhibitor of revenge. Each of the excerpts implies that the person's self-image would preclude them behaving in the same manner that the offender had behaved towards them. This is generally consistent with Baumeister's (1999) argument that aggressive behaviour is more likely when a person's self-concept is unstable or inflated. This raises the interesting question of the effect of violent or traumatic crime on victim's self-concept. Research indicates that traumatic stress negatively impacts self-esteem when it occurs within the context of a violent offence (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998), and this certainly seems to be the case from the data presented in chapter three (see section 3.1.3.2 and section 3.4.4). Crime is not the only type of trauma that can negatively impact aspects of a person's self-concept. Indeed negatively impacted self-esteem appears to be a common facet of traumatic stress generally. For example, guilt, shame and self-reproach are often experienced by ambulance personnel after traumatic, work-related occurrences (Jonsson & Segesten, 2004).

On the other hand, there was no evidence to suggest that participants' self-concept was substantially impacted. While it is impossible to give a conclusive answer as to why this may be the case based on the data in this project, one can speculate that moral outrage or righteous indignation affords victims of crime some protection because it allows them to strongly identify as the wronged party. It follows that the wronged party is deserving of the community's consideration and sympathy. At some stage during their interviews, most participants expressed some kind of outrage or indignation at what had happened to them. This moral high ground, however; could also be used to justify retaliation. An alternative explanation could be that the feeling that revenge is inconsistent with their nature is ego-defensive in much the same way that Baumeister, et al (1996) argue that anger towards the offender is ego-defensive. By believing themselves incapable of revenge, one protects one's self-concept in the face of attack by assuming a position of moral superiority. While generally consistent with Baumeister's work (see Baumeister, 1999), the exact nature of the relationship between self-concept, self-esteem and revenge requires further investigation .

#### **4.4 Compulsive Planning**

The argument that revenge is an affective construct in which strong emotions tend to overshadow cognitive responses has already been substantiated. The excerpts in this chapter also illustrate that there was one clearly discernible cognitive aspect to revenge in the form of obsessive planning. This phenomenon involved the victim fantasising or actively plotting how they would go about getting revenge. In a number of cases this also involved certain behavioural aspects, notably researching or stalking the offender,

and developing social networks with individuals who could potentially be of assistance in the execution of an act of revenge:

You know so you then, you then, I started to affiliating – you know I'd have a drink and I'd be quite open to talking to someone who had been rough neck. Just to get his views on things. You know If you're like more open to people that have an alternate view. You know? So I realised that after I went to Sunday school and Church, I'd go down to the local for a shandy and I'd be sitting there talking to some bikee thinking he's there talking to me all about his church, which is his club and afterwards I'm thinking what the hell am I doing? You know? But it didn't grasp me as that? So you start also gravitating towards people that can supply you with things, I'd imagine. Because why else would you be starting to affiliate with these kinds of people? (*Anna p.17*)

I think very clever behaviour. Clever behaviour in thinking through the best possible outcome for the revenge. And, ummm... I think you become very calculating; you become very networky; you become very calculating about, you know, how you're going to go about this. It becomes true, it becomes an obsession. (*Dianne p.26*)

Well, I think you'd have to be... you'd need to know where the perp is. You'd certainly need to know where he lives. There's sort of almost an element of stalking... without sort of breaching that line. I guess it would of be like researching where they live... you know, find out where they live; you'd have contacts. If there was an offender register, ummm... so you'd do things legally and, ummm... there's planning, there's definitely planning involved. Planning and research, so yeah, I think... I think that would be an avenue of approaching the situation of how to act it out, you know. (*Ellen p.28*)

Well they'd plot what they could do; they'd see who could help them. Ummm... and they would... seethe, it would go through their head and they would play it over and over what they were going to do and it would eat you up. (*Iris p.39*)

These excerpts suggest that planning is compulsive or obsessive. In this case an examination of the literature on rumination may prove helpful. Fantasising about revenge has been identified as a component of disrupted emotional regulation associated with PTSD (Herman, 1992b; Orth, et al., 2006). Orth, et al found that revenge was moderately correlated with posttraumatic intrusions and hyperarousal. Indeed, these authors hypothesise that rumination on victimisation-related themes constitutes a common theme between revenge and posttraumatic stress that could account for their high level of co-morbidity. Further research examining revenge in a sample of participants who are not traumatised would be helpful in determining the exact relationship between this kind of compulsive planning and revenge.

Another noticeable aspect of this compulsive planning is the desire to know personal information about the offender, such as his location. This makes sense as a form of protection but in the context of this construct it is clearly an aspect of the desire for revenge rather than a need to ensure one's safety.

#### **4.5 Defining Revenge**

At this stage of the chapter it is now worthwhile succinctly recapping the model of revenge that has emerged from the data. At a broad level, revenge appears to be a strongly affective response to a transgression. From the data one can infer that the offence has a strong negative impact on a victim's sense of self-efficacy that leads to a pronounced feeling of powerlessness. In turn, this powerlessness prompts a desire within the victim to restore the balance. In terms of powerlessness, this is perhaps best understood as an impulse to reassert themselves. There appears to be a large measure of

resentment towards the offender that often results in strong feelings of anger and hatred. In anticipation of redressing the balance, there is a tendency among victims to compulsively plan how they would go about exacting revenge. This compulsive planning often has certain behavioural aspects to it. Participants reported behaviours such as deliberately socialising with individuals who may be of use in carrying out their plans as well as researching their offender to know as much as possible about them. Importantly, some participants described this kind of behaviour as “secretive” (*Anna*) or “sneaky” (*Iris*).

Only one participant acknowledged actually taking any kind of revenge (beyond pursuing compensation through legal channels) against their offender. While declining to reveal exactly what constituted this revenge, the participant assured the researcher that it was non-violent. While participants acknowledged that fear stopped them from taking revenge a number of participants also felt that violent or otherwise extreme revenge would be inconsistent with their self-image and would have a detrimental impact on them. This would make them just as bad as the offender. As such, there appeared to be few safe, suitable or easy ways of exacting revenge that participants themselves would condone. This is possibly why participants understood revenge more as an internal affective state, rather than a behavioural response to a transgression. An excerpt from *Anna* illustrates this particularly well:

I think it's all about your intention, with revenge. Not your act. (*Anna*  
p.5)

Although there is comparatively little research exploring the nature of revenge in any detail, the construct contains elements that have received attention from psychological

researchers. Of particular note here is the role of anger and the frustration aggression hypothesis in explaining some aspects of participants' reactivity to their offenders. Additionally revenge as it is understood here is also broadly consistent with Baumeister's (1999) description of the link between aggression and ego-threat although further research to determine the impact of self-esteem is needed.

#### **4.6 Consequences of Revenge**

The majority of participants believed that revenge was a negative and unhealthy experience. Four participants, Cathy, Dianne, Helen and Jane felt that it was either a positive experience or that it could be when dealt with in a healthy manner. More specifically, Jane said she felt that revenge helped the victim deal with the offence and she rejected the moral argument that two wrongs don't make a right because she felt that offenders don't understand the consequence their actions have on victims:

It just helps them deal with it a little bit better because its really hard to take it all on board. Ummm... whereas some people say its not healthy because two wrongs don't make a right sort of thing. Ummm... but I sort of feel like, the offender probably doesn't know what its like for something like that to happen to them. (*Jane p. 92*)

Cathy argued that it was healthy because it keeps victims 'going' although this is at odds with other aspects of her interview in which she described an inability to move on with her life (page 68). In this sense, she is describing revenge as a way of coping.

Only one person brought up the possibility that revenge could be functional. Helen implied that revenge was a motivating drive and how one reacted to it need not necessarily be negative. She argued instead that one could find more functional ways in which to reassert one's feeling of power:

I think that if it stays in a functional place, it's about taking whatever action is necessary to maintain a sense of personal power. (*Helen* p. 36)

Well, I think something that really really is key here is that people who are well managed; well supported; and well resourced with mental health, i.e. in the form of art therapy, counselling, ummm... psychology, so not prescriptive intervention but if people have the resources available to them then its much more likely that any of this sort of behaviour, or cognitive or emotional stuff is really going to sit in a much more functional place. So its less likely to derail. (*Helen* p.37)

#### **4.7 Factors Effecting Revenge**

Fear and self-identity have already been examined as factors that mitigate the harming of an offender by their victim. As such, this examination will focus on factors which effect the intensity of those variables identified as part of the revenge construct.

As was the case with forgiveness, the quality of support participants received influenced the strength of the revenge they felt in response to the offence. In some cases this support was in the form of social and familial contact but participants also felt therapeutic intervention was sometimes necessary:

OK, well, ummm... I think revenge is a multifarious thing; I think that it can be the thoughts of, you know, and I emphasise that they are thoughts, but in being thoughts and perhaps being shared with a therapist or a close friend that that gives them a different quality and in that sense if we take, you know, the revenge and the anger as an energy, then the expression is going to subside that build up to some degree. (*Helen* p.10)

You know I don't want my kids getting angry or going off track at all. Yeah so its regard for others close to you; regard for people in your family that see you as a positive role model. That you don't want to show them that this is how you cope with situations. Umm I think if

you've got regard for others then – I think you've got to be very selfish in some regard to act out on revenge. (*Anna* p. 77)

Yeah, lots of counselling coupled with, yeah... no... your GPs need to have some kind of understanding of that... of assault and stuff and the different processes and the court system. All of those coupled together, if they don't work out can lead to high aggravation so its, ummm... yeah just re-living it can be a really traumatic time (*Frida* p.85)

There's no support groups for them but if you've got support there; you know there's places you can go and we as a society get more accepting that these things do happen then recovery is so much more. Ummm... I think that's the major one for me, that I was just totally unsupported and, ummm... totally alone. If you have a sense that somebody else is in the room with you the, yeah... you can achieve a lot more. (*Ken* p.87)

Importantly, participants also identified the way they were treated within the context of the criminal justice system as a major factor that influenced how much revenge they felt:

The thought that's with me is that the justice system; like what you want to know as a victim is why did the person do this? And the justice system just never gets down to answering that sort of question. So that is a key factor as to why people sit in the abyss between revenge and forgiveness and whatever else, which are all pretty nebulous, indistinct concepts. (*Helen* p.8)

But what I found, the injustice was in how the court treated the matter and how I was not even informed about the court process or asked to input into the court process at all. And the fact that the person didn't even get a... only got a suspended sentence and had some community work or something that they had to do. (*Betty* p 19)

That's what I mainly went to court for; I just needed to get a sorry from somebody and I came away without any sorrys whatsoever and all I want is someone to say sorry (*Jane* p.42)

When asked what factors were likely to increase feelings, thoughts and behaviours around revenge, Cathy responded that the courts were a major factor. She elaborated by adding:

That – watching the process – we’ve been through the trial twice. Ummm... He appealed and got another... he got 20 years strict security life and then he appealed and then he got another 20 years, strict security life – it was exactly the same as before. And I cannot work out why they let him appeal. We sat there amongst 3 judges in the appeals court and they all granted him appeal. You know, it was beyond how they could. You know it should never have happened. He done it. He – and that’s it. He admits he done it. So why did they put us through hell again, for another 12 months, until the trial came up and do it all again? And you’re sitting in court and he smiles from ear to ear like there’s no remorse and you’re seeing your daughter’s dead photos all over the wall. So that’s enough to bring hate back all over again – that’s what I’m saying. (*Cathy*, p 80)

Each of these excerpts seems to imply that the victim feels overlooked by the legal system. In this sense, the legal system is contributing to victims’ feelings of powerlessness and further fans the flames of revenge. Anna substantiates this when she comments that she wanted to be recognised as a human being in the court process:

I think also, when I wanted to put in my victim impact statement and I wanted the judge to consider my safety in the community; that I was a human being. Not to say that I want you to punish him worse. (*Anna* p 2)

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter highlights that the motivation for revenge is not simply retributive, but rather to redress a perceived imbalance between victim and offender, arising as a consequence of an attack against the victim’s sense of self-determination. The need to

redress the balance resulting from this sense of attack results in strong negative sentiment towards the offender characterised by anger, hatred, and the desire to see harm come to them. Although the major feature of revenge is its intense affective component, redressing the balance often leads victims to compulsively plan ways in which they could exact revenge. This occasionally embodies a behavioural aspect which resembles stalking the offender.

Despite the intensity of the experience of revenge (and the serious nature of the crimes which precipitated it), only one participant acknowledged taking revenge against their offender and this was non-violent in nature. The data seem to suggest that fear and self-image were the two common factors which inhibited the carrying out of revenge.

While this chapter outlines a very clear model of revenge, there is a need for further empirical examination of the nature and role of revenge for victims of crime due to a general lack of supporting literature in the field. Despite this paucity, revenge appears to be a distinct form of aggression that can be explained, at least partially, by a number of theories in the field.

The model which emerged from the data is ground breaking as it provides the most comprehensive and detailed theory of revenge thus far. It also provides a number of opportunities for future research (such as the nature of interpersonal hatred and the exact effect of self-concept on revenge). In addition, it provides further valuable insight into the psychological impact an offence has on victims. It may thus have some worth to clinicians working in the field of victim recovery.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

The last two chapters provided the data analysis of forgiveness and revenge. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the implication of these findings both generally and in light of the specific hypotheses and study aims set out in the introduction. As with the introduction, this chapter is divided into separate sections that address the data with regards to its implications for victims of crime and the field of victimology; forgiveness; and revenge. In addition to this, the data set was rich enough to allow for some initial thoughts concerning the relationship between forgiveness and revenge to be explored. These are tentative and require further testing. Finally, the usefulness of each model, as well as a number of future directions for research in the area, are discussed in order to highlight the value of the thesis and its contribution to the psychological and victimological literature.

### **5.1 Victims of Crime**

The data demonstrate that the psychological impact of victimisation can be extreme. This is consistent with research by Brand and Price (2000) which suggests that the intangible costs of crime are considerable even though it is difficult to attach an accurate monetary value to them. In particular, the experiences described by the participants show some similarities with symptoms that can be associated with PTSD. This point is noteworthy because it has implications for the developing of an understanding of the psychological experience of victims of crime as well as the ongoing discussion concerning the definition of a traumatic event. DSM-IV-TR outlines the current definition of a traumatic event in the first diagnostic criteria (APA, 2000). As outlined in

the introduction, a traumatic event is defined by its possible outcomes (death, serious injury, whether actual or threatened, or threat to an individual's physical integrity), as well as the victim's psychological response to this event (which must be characterised by intense fear, helplessness or horror).

This definition is not always an easy fit for all criminal offences. Burglary, for example, may not necessarily involve any physical damage or threat to its victim. Nevertheless, as the excerpts presented in chapter two indicate, Jane's interview clearly demonstrates that victims of burglary can experience considerable distress as a result of having been offended against. This is consistent with other qualitative, case based evidence (e.g. Simpson, Morley & Baldwin, 1996); however, quantitative investigations have returned more ambiguous findings. Some studies have found statistically significant differences indicating that burglary can provoke symptoms of PTSD (e.g. Mol, et al., 2005) while other research has found no significant relationship (e.g. Boudreaux, Kilpatrick, Resnick, Best & Saunders, 2005). Conclusive evidence one way or the other is hampered due to the fact that burglary is rarely looked at in isolation; more often examined in an amorphous 'non-violent offence' category (Mol, et al., 2005).

It is not within the scope of this thesis to argue conclusively either for or against burglary as a traumatic event. On the basis of Jane's interview, and in consideration of the subjective nature of Criterion A (see section 1.1.3), there is reason to suspect that this may be the case. This suspicion needs to be confirmed through dedicated empirical research. Such an examination would be an important next step in the ongoing process of understanding the psychological impact of all forms of crime. Additionally, it is an

important examination of the appropriateness of Criterion A. Breslau and Kessler (2001) have pointed out that the wording of this criterion makes it difficult to substantiate empirically. This needs to be redressed to ensure DSM-IV-TR remains an effective diagnostic tool.

#### *5.1.1 The Sex of Participants*

ABS data confirm that victims of crime in Australia are overwhelmingly male (ABS, 2008), however only one participant in the sample of twelve was male. There are a number of possible explanations for this sampling bias. For example, Eagly (1987) conducted a meta-analysis of research on human sex differences in social behaviour and outlined two broad dimensions: the agentive and the communal. The agentive dimension is considered more descriptive of men and describes a social role that is dominant, assertive, independent and self-reliant. The communal dimension, on the other hand, is considered more descriptive of women and describes a social role that is more expressive, empathic and concerned with relatedness and communication. Importantly, Eagly describes these sex differences as social roles, or broad social assumptions that exert pressure on an individual's social behaviour. In light of this research, one may argue that there are social pressures that inhibit the reporting or discussion of victimisation by men. This view is substantiated by more recent empirical research. Mendelsohn and Sewell (2004), for example found that men displaying symptoms of trauma following a criminal assault violated stereotypical gender norms and were evaluated less favourably than women displaying the same symptoms. Mendelshohn and Sewell conclude that this social pressure may make men less likely to discuss their

psychological experiences as a result of a trauma and this is precisely what potential participants in this study were invited to do.

An alternative explanation may be that men do not identify themselves as victims of crime in situations where women may do so. Goodey (2005) contends that whether an act constitutes an instance of victimisation rests primarily with the victim, regardless of general social assumptions. She argues that men and women are culturally conditioned to express themselves differently. Specifically, she argues that men are encouraged to down play the effects of crime and their fear of crime. These broad social pressures may negatively impact the willingness of men to participate in a study such as this one.

Although the predominance of female participants in this study constitutes an important limitation on its findings, there nonetheless appears to be a high degree of commonality between the ideas expressed by Ken and those expressed by the other participants. Indeed, Ken proved to be a highly articulate participant whose testimony provided a more detailed explanation of the different attributes of both forgiveness and revenge. This was made particularly clear during the analysis of the forgiveness data in which Ken and Anna are often quoted and seemed to be the most willing to pursue forgiveness.

There is one area in which Ken's interview is widely at odds with the other participants. Ken explicitly stated that revenge was not a proportional response. Even though most of the participants described a response that was not objectively proportional, all except Ken stated that it was. It is unclear whether Ken was able to offer a more objective appraisal of his responses than the other participants or whether he was simply more willing to be honest about it. Furthermore, without other male participants to offer a

comparison, it is difficult to comment on whether this difference reflects a real human sex difference. Further empirical research is required to more fully examine this possibility.

Leaving the relatively minor question of proportionality aside, Ken discussed the same broad concepts as the female participants. This suggests the models of forgiveness and revenge described here have a broad applicability regardless of gender although this requires further clarification.

## **5.2 Forgiveness Findings**

Three study aims were identified for the forgiveness component of the thesis. The first aim was to assess the hypothesis that forgiveness is a contextually-bound process. A model of forgiveness that related specifically to victims of crime would support this argument. The second aim was to examine whether victims of crime experience it as a predominantly intrapersonal or interpersonal phenomenon. Previous research tends to focus on forgiveness within an on-going interpersonal interaction such as a romantic or workplace relationship (McCullough, et al. 2000). As such, this body of literature has limited applicability to victims of crime. One of the premises upon which this thesis is built is that a continuing relationship with an offender after the offence is unlikely. Thus, goals such as relationship restoration, which are central to the understanding of forgiveness in other models, are incompatible in these circumstances. The final aim was to assess the suitability of the broad two-part definition of forgiveness that is generally accepted by researchers, namely that forgiveness involves a reduction of negative

thoughts, feelings and behaviours towards a transgression or transgressor, and an increase in positive ones.

In order to address these aims the model will be briefly recapped, with particular reference to each aim. Additionally, in order to highlight the uniqueness of this model, it will be compared and contrasted to the major models that were outlined in the introduction.

### *5.2.1 A Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Crime*

From the outset, it ought to be remembered that despite the relatively small sample size, the data show that a broad range of responses are possible in the face of victimization. The sample includes victims who had not forgiven (and had no intention of doing so) up to and including victims who felt compassion for their offender. Likewise, some victims acknowledged considerable revenge while others could not conceive of the concept in their circumstance.

The model of forgiveness that emerged from the data makes a unique contribution to the forgiveness literature as well as that examining victim recovery. This section will briefly review the model outlined in chapter three with close reference to the study aims for forgiveness that were outlined in the introduction.

#### *5.2.1.1 Unforgiveness*

While no interview questions explicitly addressing unforgiveness were included in this study, the data provide considerable insight into the nature and composition of the construct. Unforgiveness is the starting point of forgiveness. It is identified by Worthington and Wade (1999) as a necessary state without which forgiveness is not

possible. In this sense it can be understood as a composite of psychological phenomena that are to be overcome during the forgiveness process.

The precise nature of an individual's response to a transgression will differ considerably depending on their own individual differences as well as the type of transgression and the circumstances in which it takes place. It follows that just as the circumstances in which a transgression takes place are unique, so is the individual's reaction to them. Despite this, the data provided evidence that unforgiveness was generally characterised by five different attributes. Each of these attributes provides insight into the psychological experience of victims.

*5.2.1.1.1 Being overwhelmed:* A number of participants described their reactions to the offence as overwhelming. Indeed, this feeling of being no longer able to deal with unforgiveness seems to be a catalyst for forgiveness in certain cases (see excerpts from Betty, Lily, and Ken in section 3.1.3). While unforgiveness has been examined by other researchers (e.g. Worthington & Wade, 1999), this feeling that it is overwhelming clearly distinguishes unforgiveness as it is understood in this model. The most likely explanation for this difference is that the transgressions experienced by participants in this study were more severe than those experienced in other studies. As has been discussed, Worthington and Wade examined transgressions in intimate relationships and the types of transgression they examined were relatively less severe than those encountered by the victims of crime interviewed for this study. Unforgiveness is understood by Worthington and Wade to be sensitive to perceived relational valence. In other words, one's reaction to it will be determined in part by the value one places on

the relationship with the transgressor. For example, forbearance and minimising are suggested as alternative reactions to unforgiveness that are also pro-relational. On the other hand these alternatives may not be as easily available to the participants in this study because of the more serious nature of the offences they experienced. In addition, research indicates that the severity of an offence is related to the level of distress a victim will experience subsequent to it, with violent offences being more psychologically detrimental than property offences (Robinson & Keithley, 2000). As such, one would expect to find a form of unforgiveness characterised by greater psychological distress when examining participants in this study than that described by other researchers. As forgiveness is understood as a reaction to unforgiveness, it follows logically that the form it takes will be different depending on the nature of the transgression which provoked symptoms of unforgiveness.

*5.2.1.1.2 Self-blame:* The second major aspect of unforgiveness that participants highlighted was feelings of self-blame. Where self-blame has been explored in the forgiveness literature it has usually focussed on the feelings of guilt and remorse experienced by the transgressor rather than the transgressed person (e.g. Tangney, Boone & Dearing, 2005; Hall & Fincham, 2008). These feelings were most commonly expressed by those participants who had experienced some form of abuse in childhood which is consistent with previous research examining the consequences of child abuse (see Chagigioris & Paivo, 2008). Participants who had experienced other offences also reported a measure of self-blame (see section 3.1.3.2) though not clearly enough to be conclusive. Further specific examination of the role of self-blame in unforgiveness is warranted in this instance because feelings of shame and guilt have been associated with

PTSD (Wong & Cook, 1992; Leskela, Dieperink & Thuras, 2002) and may help more clearly distinguish unforgiveness in victims of crime from symptoms of PTSD.

*5.2.1.1.3 Negative affect for the offender:* Strong negative affect towards the offender was also a common element of participants' descriptions of unforgiveness. This negative affect was often accompanied by a desire for the offender to suffer. As this is a common aspect between the model of forgiveness and that of revenge, it will be dealt with more fully in the section examining the relationship between these two constructs (see section 5.4).

*5.2.1.1.4 Feeling stuck:* The fourth attribute of unforgiveness was a feeling of being stuck or being unable to move on from the offence. Feeling stuck shares similarities with many symptoms from the intrusive cluster associated with PTSD (APA, 2000). It is also consistent with the findings of Holman and Cohen Silver (1998) who found a positive relationship with fixed temporal orientation (i.e. being stuck in the past) and the level and duration of distress after a traumatic event. This aspect of unforgiveness is unique to this model and is not mentioned by researchers examining forgiveness in other contexts. It supports the argument that the forgiveness is a context bound phenomenon.

*5.2.1.1.5 Evidence of PTSD:* Besides the aspects outlined above, symptoms with some resemblance to those associated with PTSD were evident throughout the interviews. This is only an observed similarity and should not be considered a diagnosis of PTSD for any of the participants in this study. Previous literature has not examined the relationship between unforgiveness and traumatic stress so it is not possible to

discount the possibility that certain traumatic symptoms may be common to all forms of forgiveness. Indeed some aspects of Worthington and Scherer's (2004) model of unforgiveness (specifically fear and concern for one's safety), are consistent with some aspects of PTSD. Nonetheless, it is a point of distinction that these symptoms are much more clearly emphasised in the current model when compared to others. Almost half of the participants used the terms trauma or traumatic to describe their feelings or experiences. Additionally, participants also mentioned specific phenomena closely resembling symptoms of PTSD, such as the distorted temporal orientation described above. This clear emphasis on the traumatic aspects of unforgiveness further highlights the uniqueness of the model of forgiveness for victims of crime.

*5.2.1.1.6 Utility of unforgiveness:* This raises the question of whether maintaining a separate construct called unforgiveness is necessary. From the examination of unforgiveness in this thesis, it appears that there is considerable overlap between this construct and the expected consequences of victimisation. In other words, unforgiveness seems to comprise many of the symptoms one would expect the victim of an offence to exhibit irrespective of whether they were withholding forgiveness from their offender. Further investigation to assess the extent of this overlap is necessary in order to assess the validity of unforgiveness as a specific and separate construct. It may well be the case that unforgiveness is merely a term that one applies to the psychological consequences of an offence that an individual must come to terms with in the course of their recovery. If this is the case, then the use of the term would seem inappropriate as it defines these experiences with reference to only one possible remedy: forgiveness.

### *5.2.1.2 Self-awareness*

Nonetheless, the data clearly indicate that forgiveness does offer a remedy to the experiences termed unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is the point before forgiveness in this model. Self-awareness is its first step. Self-awareness refers to the process through which victims become more fully aware of the negative impact the offence has had on their psychological well being and behaviours. Although there was no conclusive evidence in the data that this was the first step of the forgiveness process, it logically precedes the letting go phase. In order to consciously let go of negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours, one must first be aware of their existence.

The self-awareness aspect of this model is similar to a number of models which examine forgiveness in a therapeutic context. In particular, similar phenomena are found in the process model (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, 2001). While Enright's model is proscriptive and offers a structured pathway to forgiveness, the current one is naturalistic with self-awareness and forgiveness developing over time without artificial stimulation. Self-awareness is also an important facet in the explanation of the role of forgiveness in therapy outlined by Malcolm and Greenberg (2000), and Malcolm, et al. (2005). Additionally, Konstam, et al.'s (2002) research confirms that activities involving awareness were used by clinicians to facilitate forgiveness in therapy. Like the model outlined in this thesis, these models are primarily concerned with the role forgiveness plays in the restoration of personal well-being rather than the restoration of a relationship dynamic. Thus, they focus on achieving intrapersonal outcomes such as a decrease in distress.

Other models of forgiveness tend to downplay or overlook the role of self-awareness in the forgiveness process. This is certainly true of the other major models examined in the introduction. McCullough, et al.'s (1997; 1998) model has a strong interpersonal focus in which forgiveness is motivated out of a consideration of the pre-existing relationship and its future health (or harmonious dissolution). Essentially, this suggests that forgiveness comes from an awareness of the value that a particular relationship or person has had for the transgressed person in spite of the harm caused by the transgression. Once again, this may not be appropriate for victims of serious offences because it is unlikely that the relationship will continue in these cases, nor is it certain that any relationship existed previously. Therefore, in this context the intrapersonal aspects of forgiveness are more salient.

Worthington and Wade's (1999) model implies a degree of self-awareness. In their model, positive emotional responses are imposed over the negative ones resulting from the transgression. In order to do this, one must have some awareness of the negative responses. The difference between Worthington and Wade's model and the one that emerged from the data concerns the extent of the self-awareness required. Like McCullough et al. (1998), Worthington and Wade are concerned with forgiveness within the context of an existing relationship. As such, their model only requires awareness of the negative responses one holds towards the offender. Self-awareness, as understood by participants in this study, describes a deeper familiarity with the way that the offence has impacted on their lives. In other words, it is not restricted to an awareness of their reactions to the offender but also requires them to examine how the offender has made them feel and behave.

### *5.2.1.3 Letting go of Negative Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours*

Letting go of the negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours that they experienced as a result of the offence (McCullough, et al., 2000) was the most commonly described aspect of forgiveness that participants described. This is broadly consistent with the general consensus in the literature. More specifically, in this regard the current model is similar to a number of therapeutic models of forgiveness in that this letting go appears to be an effortful, conscious process. For example, as mentioned above, Worthington and Wade's (1999) model requires the substitution of negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours with positive ones and Enright's model offers a structured path to forgiveness that one must work through step by step (Enright & Coyle, 1998). When discussing letting go in this model, participants described a process in which the negative psychological consequences of the offence were lessened through conscious effort on their part. It was not the case that letting go simply happened as a consequence of time but rather required some input from the participants. The exact nature of this effort differed between individual participants. Ken and Lily, for example, talked about self-correcting negative patterns by reminding themselves that these patterns were not consistent with who they were and by deciding not to hold onto them. Frida, on the other hand, talked about developing a feeling of acceptance regarding what had happened as a means to release negative internal states.

The concept of letting go is common to most models of forgiveness and is not, per se, a distinctive feature of this model. However the goals of letting go are different for victims of crime and these goals highlight the intrapersonal nature of forgiveness for victims. Participants understood letting go, indeed forgiveness in its entirety, as a means

to ease the negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours they experienced as a consequence of the offence. This was most clearly illustrated in the excerpts referred to above, in which participants stated that their decision to forgive was a response to the overwhelming nature of unforgiveness. The idea is also evident in the excerpts provided in chapter three that describe letting go. Frida, for example, states that acceptance is a means of releasing, “all that ugly stuff going on inside you.” Additionally, Betty describes letting go in terms of taking off shackles of fear while Anna was motivated by the exhaustion associated with the compulsive behaviours she recognised as a response to the offence. Importantly, letting go was not understood by any of the participants as a means of restoring relations or reconciling with a transgressor as has been suggested by other authors. McCullough (2000) for example, argues that a decrease of feelings of hurt and perceived attack results in less motivation to avoid the transgressor. Letting go was not motivated by the other prosocial considerations proposed by McCullough and colleagues such as empathy (McCullough, et al., 1998). Most importantly, it was not necessarily accompanied by the development of positive affect for the offender as suggested in a number of models such as Enright’s (Enright, 2001), Worthington and Wade’s (1999), and Hargrave and Sells (1997). The offender was not a reference point for letting go at all. Although Betty discussed letting go in terms of encountering the offender again, she was speaking generally and her comments referred to letting go of the feelings of fear and nervousness associated with this possibility rather than letting go in order to facilitate such an encounter.

#### *5.2.1.4 Perspective-Taking of the Offender*

Perspective-taking is a common feature between this model and a number of therapeutic models of forgiveness. In their literature review and examination of case studies, Al-Mabuk, et al. (1998) conclude that therapists can assist their clients to forgive a transgressor by helping them to see the transgressor and the transgression in a larger context that takes into consideration the transgressor's motives and the pressures on them, as well as their history. More recently, Walton's (2005) review of literature examining the nature and role of therapeutic forgiveness also stressed the importance of perspective taking and cited the process model as the best articulated example of this. Indeed, the central feature of the work phase of the process model involves 'reframing' the transgressor (Enright & Coyle, 1998). Enright and Coyle (1998) suggest that this is best facilitated by encouraging the transgressed person to consider the possibility that the transgressor may have experienced violence themselves when growing up; or to contemplate what was happening in their life at the time of the transgression.

While a strong argument is made in this thesis that forgiveness for victims of crime is a predominantly intrapersonal phenomenon, the forgiveness process nonetheless involves considerable restructuring of the victims' responses to their offender by a situating them within a wider context which did not directly involve the victim. It is important to remember here that perspective taking involved a shift in participants' attribution of locus of control. This led them to consider the external, environmental factors in the offender's life that contributed to his offending behaviour. There was no evidence to suggest that participants felt their offenders should be held less accountable for the offence.

This shift in attribution of locus of control does not require the development of benevolent feelings for the offender although this did occur as a result of perspective taking in some cases. The common feature of the model was the change or widening of perspective and not the development of benevolent affect. That such feelings did develop in some cases; that a participant such as Gretel could say that she felt love for the man who murdered the father of her children, is a testament to the effectiveness of the forgiveness process. Forgiveness was successful even when benevolent affect wasn't present. Participants such as Frida found forgiveness to be an indispensable part of their recovery, and they were familiar with perspective-taking but did not express feelings of compassion or love. This does not mean that forgiveness lost its value for them. Instead, it suggests that forgiveness is predominantly an intrapersonal phenomenon. The development of positive feelings, thoughts and behaviours for an offender is a possible outcome but not a necessary component of the process.

Another important observation concerning perspective-taking is the extent to which the new perspective the victim adopts is accurate. Participants were able to discuss perspective taking regardless of how deeply familiar they were with the circumstances of their offender's life. It is particularly interesting that in a number of cases, participants assumed that offenders must have had an unfortunate childhood simply because they had offended against someone. This is clearly the case for Betty, Iris and Jane as their excerpts indicate (see section 3.2.3). It seems that perspective-taking means a change in perspective and not necessarily a more accurate understanding of the offender. In other words, participants engage in perspective-taking because it makes them feel better about what has happened to them. It allows them relief from the feeling

that they have been attacked because there are now other explanations for the offence that do not reference them. Thus, while perspective-taking may involve some interpersonal components, it nonetheless fits clearly into the intrapersonal model which is being described here.

#### *5.2.1.5 Moving on From the Offence*

Participants felt that the major outcome of forgiveness was that it allowed them to move on from the offence. All participants mentioned this concept at least once. As explained in chapter three, moving on refers to a change in temporal orientation. Traumatic events can often cause people to feel stuck in the past (Holman & Cohen Silver, 1998). Given that experiencing an offence can lead victims to experience symptoms of PTSD (Davis, et al., 1996) a change from an orientation predominantly focused on a past event to a present focus is consistent with the assumptions made in the introduction concerning forgiveness in victims of crime. Most clearly, it stresses the intrapersonal nature of forgiveness. Moving on was the most clearly recognised result of forgiveness and refers to an internal change within the victim. While that change may have prosocial benefits for their loved ones or the offender, these were not the primary concern of the participants.

While the concept of moving on is a component in a number of forgiveness models, it is only in the current model that it is identified as the central outcome. For example, the general consensus concerning the effects of forgiveness is that it lessens negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours while actively fostering positive ones which allow for the restorations of positive relations between the transgressed person and the

transgressor (Wade & Worthington, 2005). As demonstrated above, the development of positive affect in this model is incidental. Furthermore, moving on is distinct from letting go and is less affect laden than it may appear initially. In the excerpts all participants refer to consigning the offence to the past and not to the release of negative feelings (see section 3.2.4). This represents an important distinction between this model and most of the therapeutic models of forgiveness which tend to emphasise the 'letting go' aspect of forgiveness (Wade and Worthington, 2005). One exception to this is provided by Walton (2005) who argues that forgiveness after sexual abuse may allow the link between victim and offender to be severed. This means that the offender no longer occupies a place in the victim's life or mind. This possibility, however; is not explored in any detail. Additionally, a number of models examining forgiveness after an extra-marital affair include a component in which the transgressed person is able to move on from the transgression although this is often in the context of a continuing relationship (Gordon & Baucom, 1998). This was not the case for participants in this study as none of them planned further contact with their offenders.

It is possible that the emphasis on moving on in this model is related to the traumatic nature of the offences because a fixation in temporal orientation is identified as a possible post trauma symptom (Holman & Cohen Silver, 1998). While this possibility seems feasible, further research is required to support it. If it were the case, it would further demonstrate that forgiveness is a contextually bound phenomenon and related to victim recovery and mental health.

#### 5.2.1.6 Secondary Factors Effecting Forgiveness

The major aspects of forgiveness that emerged from the data are those that have been discussed above. A number of secondary factors were also evident in the data and these serve to enhance one's understanding of this model and provide important information concerning a number of the aims of this thesis.

Beyond the excerpts used to elucidate the various components of forgiveness, there was additional evidence that forgiveness was something one entered into for one's own benefit. In this sense, forgiveness was a gift to oneself rather than a gift to the transgressor as other authors have suggested (Worthington, 1998; Hargrave & Sells, 1997). For example, Anna describes it as "a present to yourself," and Iris explains that it is something undertaken because it is necessary for the victim's own healing. Most clearly, this concept offers a further indication that forgiveness for victims of crime is an intrapersonal phenomenon as it highlights that participants' main concern was their own welfare and not more prosocial objectives. Moreover, it is not contingent upon a specific response from the offender. Iris points out that the offender has no need for forgiveness and Ken says, "*the fullness of forgiveness is giving it; it's not a two-way street.*"

While this clearly supports the notion that forgiveness in victims of crime is characterised by an emphasis on intrapersonal rather than interpersonal concerns, it does not indicate that participants are oblivious to the interpersonal consequences of forgiveness. Indeed, participants approached forgiveness with caution because they were concerned that their act of forgiveness may be discounted by the offender, which would humiliate them, or that forgiveness in some way condoned the offender's behaviour. Given that the majority of participants had been subjected to a crime of violence, a

degree of caution or wariness seems sensible and may explain why caution was much more prominent in this model than it seems to be in others.

Participants also reported a number of benefits to forgiveness other than moving on. These included improvement of self-esteem and better, more enjoyable social relations which led to a more fulsome engagement with life.

### *5.2.2 The Role of Reconciliation*

None of the participants mentioned reconciliation as a component or outcome of forgiveness. It is most likely that this is because of the nature of the relationship between a victim and an offender. For example, the majority of the forgiveness literature focuses on a relational dyad in which the transgressor and the transgressed person share a history of close personal contact. This is not necessarily the case for victims of crime; indeed, half of the participants in this study did not have prior contact with their offenders. Forgiveness then, may be less likely to be directed towards reconciliation for victims of crime. This furthers the argument that forgiveness in this case is not an interpersonal phenomenon because the other party, or the relationship with the other party, is not necessarily an important factor and intrapersonal concerns are more salient and pressing. In addition, even in cases where the victim and offender did enjoy a close personal relationship prior to the offence, the offences encountered by participants in this study were often so serious as to preclude future contact.

### *5.2.3 Contact Between Victims and Offenders and its Implications*

While reconciliation is in no way a part of this model, a number of participants felt that some form of contact with their offender would be beneficial for them. The excerpts

included in chapter three to illustrate this point may provide some indication of why this might be helpful (see section 3.4.3). Both Ellen and Gretel seem to imply that contact with the offender would provide them with a greater understanding of the situation. Gretel clearly states that her desire to confront the offender stems from a need to understand the offender's motivation. In this sense, contact may facilitate the perspective-taking process. Additionally, it may also provide victims with an opportunity to assert themselves by explaining the consequences of the offence to the offender.

#### *5.2.3.4 Restorative Justice*

The role of contact in the forgiveness process of victims of crime offers an important insight into the process of restorative justice (RJ) and related processes such as victim-offender mediation. RJ is an innovative approach to justice which attempts to repair the damaged caused by an offence to the main stakeholders in a manner that does not necessarily privilege the law or the state (Beven, Hall, Froyland, Steels & Goulding, 2005). Strang (2002) underscores the essential difference between the view of a victim concerning an offence and that of the state. She argues that victims see the offence as a personal matter requiring the repair of emotional and material damage. The state, on the other hand, conceives of the offence primarily as a breach of criminal law and thus an offence against the entire community that requires resolution through a consistent, legally defined response. Strang describes RJ as a balance between these personal and public aspects of an offence.

Efforts to strike this balance usually mean that victims of an offence participate in its resolution far more actively within restorative settings than they do within the traditional adversarial process (see McCold, 2006). This is done through a variety of processes such as victim-offender mediation and restorative and community conferencing. All of these processes seek to involve each of the main stakeholders (usually conceived as victim, offender, and community) in determining who has been offended against and identifying their needs as well as assigning responsibility and determining appropriate sanctions (Zehr, 2002). This process has been shown to have some important benefits for victims of crime. For example, Beven, et al. (2005) found that victims who participated in a community group conference reported feeling significantly more safe than those who participated in the normal court process and were more satisfied with their level of input. Of particular interest to the current discussion, the authors also found that victim participants in the community conferencing condition reported feeling they understood the offender better than those who participated in the court process and that they reported more positive feelings towards them. While it is impossible to argue conclusively, it is nonetheless worth speculating on the cause of these benefits in light of the model of forgiveness being discussed here. There is evidence to suggest that perspective taking, which can be facilitated through contact between victims and offenders, assists victims of crime to forgive and move on after an offence. In the same manner, by including victims in the justice process, RJ provides them with an opportunity to have greater contact with their offender that may facilitate their sense of improved understanding. Close empirical investigation is required to substantiate this possibility.

An important caveat concerning the usefulness of contact must be mentioned. Even though a number of participants expressed a desire to meet with their offender, believing it would be a helpful experience for them, none of the participants in this study had done so. One cannot rule out the possibility that contact between a victim and their offender may not meet the victim's expectations. For example, a victim may find that their offender is unrepentant or indifferent to their pain and distress which could lead to secondary victimisation (Montada, 1994). Nevertheless, there is a considerable body of literature that demonstrates that practices such as restorative justice provides victims with the sense that justice has been served, which can be very satisfying for victims (Strang & Sherman, 2003). As such, while unsolicited contact is ill-advised, there seems to be a place for mediated, voluntary and discrete contact between victims and their offenders.

#### *5.2.4 Relationship and Relevance of Perspectives*

Three broad perspectives or themes in the forgiveness literature were outlined in the introduction as potentially relevant to a model of forgiveness in victims of crime. Now that the model has been outlined, it is possible to more accurately gauge the pertinence of each perspective for victims as well as the implications of the model for each perspective.

##### *5.2.4.1 The Role of Morality*

As demonstrated in the introduction, Piaget (1932) conceived of forgiveness as a moral principle that facilitated the cooperation that typifies relations between adult persons. The development of autonomous moral reasoning in late pre-adolescence sees the advent of an idealistic concept of reciprocity that governs decision making after a

conflict. This motivates an individual to forgive a transgressor as this reflects the manner in which he or she would want to be treated if he or she were the transgressor.

While this argument is idealistic, it nonetheless reflects a very broad assumption that forgiveness is a morally good act and that the withholding of forgiveness can be blameworthy (White, 2002; Barnes, 2002; Griswold, 2007). On the other hand, researchers such as Murphy (1988; 2003) have raised the possibility that forgiveness is immoral as it is a sign of weakness and indicates a lack of self-respect. The victim's resentment and withholding of forgiveness, on the other hand, constitutes a refusal to accept the transgressor's negative perception of them.

Despite these arguments, it appears from the data that the moral implications of forgiveness are not particularly relevant for victims of crime although there was some concern that forgiveness would be seen as condoning the offence. This is somewhat similar to Murphy's (2003) belief that forgiveness amounted to the acceptance of the transgressor's negative perception concerning their victim. Participants reported very little pressure from those around them to either forgive or to maintain a grudge, although Anna reported some reticence in admitting that she had forgiven her offender out of concern about the reaction of those around her. There were only three instances in which participants mentioned that they felt that people around them expected them to forgive. This was most evident for Lily who was part of a strongly Christian social group and found this expectation helpful and supportive in her efforts to live up to her religious ideals.

Reus-Smit (1999) argues that moral expectations help foster the maintenance of social unity and cohesion. As such, the irrelevance of this aspect of forgiveness to the participants is conspicuous and further distinguishes this model from those which place more emphasis on the interpersonal or ‘prosocial’ nature of forgiveness and its role in ensuring social harmony. Forgiveness is not so much concerned with restoring social harmony after an offence but rather restoring the victim’s psychological equilibrium that the offence has disturbed.

When specifically considering these results in relation to victims of crime and in light of the literature discussed in chapter one concerning the morality of forgiveness in victims of crime (see section 1.2.1.1.2) it would seem the decision to avoid explicitly questioning participants concerning their moral considerations with regards forgiveness was justified. The interviews provided a substantial amount of extremely detailed data. There was no evidence to suggest that victims of crime understand forgiveness as a moral construct, nor that they felt any moral expectation to enter into forgiveness. As such, specifically canvassing their feelings concerning the moral implications of forgiveness which have been raised by some philosophers of forgiveness (e.g. Babic, 2000; Murphy, 2003; Griswold, 2007) may have unnecessarily contaminated the data with the “compulsory compassion” that has been outlined by Acorn (2004).

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to point out in light of the arguments of Murphy (2003) and Babic (2000) in section 1.2.1.1.2 that the model of forgiveness detailed in this thesis bears little resemblance to the picture of forgiveness they have put forward. These authors consider forgiveness, at least in most cases, as a sign of passivity and that the act

of forgiveness in some way compromises the essential dignity an individual is endowed with as a free moral agent. On the contrary, by allowing participants to move on with their lives, the model which has been identified here must be seen to facilitate the extension of victims' agency back towards their original parameters. It is thus a model of empowerment rather than the passivity suggested by these authors.

#### *5.2.4.2 The Relationship between Forgiveness and Mental Health*

This model outlined in this thesis appears consistent with the growing body of research that indicates that engaging in forgiveness can lead to a better level of mental health and a better quality of life generally. Notably, an improvement in self-esteem as well as better quality social contacts were reported among the secondary results of forgiveness by a number of participants. The relationship between self-esteem and a variety of mental health outcomes is well established. Low self-esteem has been associated with higher levels of depression (Kernis, Grannemann & Mathis, 1991), anxiety (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt & Schimel, 2004), and stress (Pruessner, Hellhammer, & Kirschbaum, 1999). Of particular interest, self-esteem also has important implications for those suffering from PTSD. Higher levels, or more stable self-esteem have been proposed as an important psychological buffer that may insulate people who experience a traumatic event against more severe and longer lasting symptoms of PTSD (Kamphuis & Emmelkamp, 1998; Kashdan, Uswatte, Steger & Julian, 2006). As Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) point out however, the majority of research examining self-esteem and other mental health variables is correlational rather than predictive which makes an assessment of causality impossible.

Although the data in this study suggests that forgiveness can lead to better self-esteem for victims of crime, it is difficult to substantiate this belief quantitatively.

Better quality and more rewarding social contact were also reported as a result of forgiveness. There is general agreement in the literature that this plays a positive role in the maintenance (and recovery) of psychological well-being (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001), but the relationship is not always so simple (Kaniasty & Norris, 1992). Ullman (1999), for example, points out that negative reactions towards victims of sexual assault from those they are close to can negatively impact on the victims' psychological well being. This included negative reactions that were well meaning, including taking control and distraction. From an examination of the excerpts concerning social contact presented in chapter three, it is clear that participants are referring to positive, supportive, and welcomed social contact.

#### *5.2.4.3 Evidence of Attributional Pathways*

There was some evidence that attributions may have a substantial role to play in the forgiveness process. This is most clearly demonstrated when one examines the perspective taking aspect of forgiveness in which victims started to consider the broader contextual circumstances that led the offender to commit the offence. In terms of attribution theory, this constitutes a shift from the attribution of internal to external locus of control (Weiner, 1995). In other words, victims begin to find explanations for an offender's behaviour that are not intrinsic to the offender but external to him. According to Weiner's theory of the relationship between attributions and judgments, this is likely to lead victims to see their offender as less responsible for the offence. In terms of the

current model, one can extrapolate on this to suppose that the perception that an offender is less responsible for the offence could lead them a greater likelihood of forgiveness. It is important to understand what is meant by responsibility here. Weiner (1995) defines responsibility as an affectively neutral judgment by which one person ascribes accountability to another. This does not mean that the offence is perceived as less serious or that the offender's behaviour is condoned. There is no evidence in the data to suggest that this was a result of perspective taking of the offender or any other part of the forgiveness process. For that matter, there was no evidence to implicate either of the other attributional variables outlined by Weiner in the forgiveness process: participants did not mention changes in their attributions of controllability or stability of causal factors in relation to the offender.

### *5.2.5 Contribution of the Model to Current Issues in Forgiveness Research*

#### *5.2.5.1 Contribution to the Definition Question*

The question of how to define forgiveness cuts to the heart of this section of the thesis. Each of the study aims outlined for the forgiveness analysis directly affect one's understanding of the construct. It is clear that this model is consistent with Enright and Coyle's (1998) discussion of what forgiveness is not. There was no evidence in the data that forgiveness in this model constitutes a pardon, nor did it mean condoning, excusing, forgetting or denying the offence. Indeed, part of the reason participants felt cautious about forgiveness stemmed from a fear that their forgiveness would be misconstrued as one of these alternatives. Additionally, the data support the general assumption that forgiveness and reconciliation are distinct entities (McCullough & Worthington, 1994; de Waal & Pokorny, 2005). Nonetheless it conflicts with the model proposed by

Hargrave (Hargrave, 1994; Hargrave & Sells, 1997) in which reconciliation is the primary goal of forgiveness. Although this model is a therapeutic model, and there are many commonalities between therapeutic models of forgiveness and the one articulated here, Hargrave (1994) and Hargrave and Sells (1997) develop a model of forgiveness in a family therapy context. Family therapy is a systems theory approach to therapy in which individual and relational difficulties are addressed by changing the quality of interactions within a whole family unit (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). The goals of this process are twofold: the further individuation of group members and improved relationships between them (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). As such, reconciliation forms an important outcome of forgiveness when examined within the context for family therapy. As has been discussed, the context in which forgiveness takes place for participants in this study changes the nature and outcomes of the construct. Hargrave's model is inappropriate to use for victims of crime because reconciliation between victim and offender is often ill-advised for safety reasons or because there is no pre-existing relationship to reconcile.

This model of forgiveness was consistent with the general assumption in the literature that forgiveness involves a reduction in negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours towards the transgressor or the transgression (McCullough, et al., 2000). The letting go and perspective-taking aspects of the model demonstrate that participants experienced a considerable lessening of their feelings of unforgiveness, anger and hatred. The moving on aspect of forgiveness further reinforces this as a change in temporal orientation that made the offence a less dominating feature in participants' lives. Other aspects of the forgiveness data support this but underscore the importance of this reduction in negative

feelings, thoughts and behaviour to the participants themselves. For example, participants understood forgiveness as a gift to themselves by which they meant that the reduction in negative cognitions and affect improved their feeling of well-being.

One of the main areas in which this model diverged from the general consensus concerning forgiveness described by McCullough, et al. (2000) was regarding the inclusion of positive affect and cognitions for a transgressor as an essential component for forgiveness. As discussed above, there was no evidence that this was an essential component in this model. This did not preclude the development of such feelings in some instances, however; the change in the participants' assessment of their offenders concerned a shift towards more external attributions for the offender's behaviour.

With regards to the concepts of letting-go and moving-on, if one accepts, as the participants themselves did, that these concepts can be considered part of forgiveness, then one can conclude that a reorientation of the self (i.e. the victim) with relation to the offender is the prime mechanism for forgiveness and the facilitation of moving on from the offence. This is largely consistent with the work of McCullough (2000), Worthington (1998) and Enright (2001). In particular, Enright's process model can be seen as pathway to self-reorientation. This concept of self-reorientation is an interesting one. One wonders if letting go or perspective taking are possible without forgiveness, as these two aspects bare the closest resemblance to the concept of letting-go of negativity which is generally acknowledged as a basic aspect of forgiveness (see section 1.2.2.1). While this speculation exceeds the scope of the current thesis, these points are important to bear in mind. The sample size for this study was limited and all

of the participants except for Ken were female. Further replication is essential to substantiate this conclusion and to determine the precise ways in which victims reorientate themselves or reconfigure their understanding of the victim – offender dyad.

#### *5.2.5.2 Forgiveness as a State or a Trait*

The second major issue concerns the growing tendency for forgiveness to be examined as a personality variable rather than a state. There was no evidence in the data to contradict the argument put forward in the introduction. While certain trait variables may predispose a person towards engaging in forgiveness, the concept of ‘forgivingness’ as a specific personality construct pertaining to forgiveness remains problematic (Roberts, 1995; Berry, Worthington, O’Connor, Parrott & Wade, 2005). This is because forgiveness can only occur after an offence and is not therefore an enduring aspect of an individual’s personality. Indeed, there were instances in the data which seemed to support this conclusion. For example, Cathy and Dianne who both experienced the murder of a child, explained that although they generally considered themselves forgiving, the circumstances of the offence were so serious that they were unable to do so in this instance. This clearly demonstrates that even if a personality construct exists for forgiveness, it is nonetheless sensitive to situational variables such as the severity of the transgression.

#### *5.2.5.3 The Intrapersonal Nature of Forgiveness*

The final issue raised in the introduction concerns the focus of forgiveness and whether it is a predominantly interpersonal phenomenon or an intrapersonal one. This question informed one of the major hypotheses for this section, namely that forgiveness in victims of crime would emphasise intrapersonal aspects rather than interpersonal. In

other words, the main motivations and outcomes of forgiveness would be referenced to victims' inner, personal experiences rather than considerations of the social relevance of forgiveness or its relevance for the offender specifically. As demonstrated throughout this section, the data consistently support this hypothesis.

#### *5.2.6 Major Models of Forgiveness*

Detailed reference to the similarities and differences between this model and the other major models of forgiveness that were overviewed in the introduction (see section 1.2.3) has been made throughout this thesis. Nonetheless, a brief summation of the key points of difference may be useful to underscore the uniqueness of this research.

The motivational model is a prosocial model which relies on the development of empathy for the transgressor by the transgressed person (McCullough, et al., 1998). In contrast, the model for victims of crime is predominantly intrapersonal. Any change in affect or cognition towards the offender arises through a change in the perceived locus of control for their actions from more internal attributions to more external attributions. This leads to a change in a victim's perspective of the offender but does not necessitate the development of positive affect.

The REACH model shares a number of similarities with the motivational model including a shared importance concerning the role of empathy (Worthington, 1998). The REACH model provides a more detailed explanation of the process involved in forgiveness than the motivational model (Worthington & Wade, 2005). Worthington and Wade describe a four-step process to forgiveness which begins with recalling the hurt. This step is similar to the development of awareness outlined in this thesis. Recalling the

hurt is supposed to give a person a clear understanding of the hurt they have been caused as a result of the transgression and it allows for a degree of therapeutic catharsis (Wade & Worthington, 2005).

This step is followed by the development of empathy for the transgressor. Wade and Worthington stress that the development of empathy is born out of a deeper consideration of the situational factors that led to the transgression and, in this way, is very similar to the concept of perspective-taking. The difference, once again, lies in the development of positive feelings towards the transgressor as a result of this change in perspective. This is an essential component of the REACH model which requires as its fourth step, the altruistic gift of forgiveness to the transgressor which is impossible without these empathic feelings (Worthington, 1998; Wade & Worthington, 2005).

This constitutes a major distinction between the REACH model and the model presented in this thesis. In keeping with the highly intrapersonal nature of the model, victims of crime conceived of forgiveness as a gift to themselves. Beyond a measure of concern that forgiveness may exonerate or excuse, the effect of forgiveness on the offender was not of great importance to participants. Nor, for that matter, was the need for public acknowledgement of forgiveness. This constitutes the final step in the REACH model and once again contrasts with the model presented in this thesis which describes a forgiveness which is intrapersonal rather than interpersonal.

While the process model is essentially a therapeutic model of forgiveness and would thus be expected to have the strongest resonance with a model of forgiveness in victims of crime, Enright's model emphasises most strongly the role of positive affect in

forgiveness (The Human Development Study Group, 1991; Enright, 2001). Enright (2001) is adamant that feelings of compassion, benevolence and love are essential components of forgiveness and that the giving up of resentment without fostering these feelings is emotionally risky. Once again, there was no evidence that this was the case for victims of crime.

Nonetheless, the process model places a premium on the development of self-awareness (e.g. Enright & Coyle, 1998), particularly in the initial ‘uncovering’ phase. Furthermore, the purpose of this increase in self-awareness is similar to that described by participants in that it allows for the development of a conviction for forgiveness by more fully appreciating the impact that the transgression has had (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Enright, 2001).

#### *5.2.7 Summary*

This model of forgiveness provides conclusive evidence concerning each of the hypotheses and study aims outlined in the forgiveness section of the introduction. While sharing a number of features in common with therapeutic models of forgiveness, the model is nonetheless unique in the field of forgiveness research. One reason for this may well be that forgiveness is a contextually bound process that has not previously been examined in relation to victims of crime. By undertaking this examination, a model of forgiveness has been uncovered which is predominantly intrapersonal in which one embarks on the forgiveness process for one’s own benefit and as a way of addressing the personal consequences arising from having been offended against. To this end, there is no imperative in this model for victims to develop positive affect for their offender

rather, victims engage in an affectively neutral process in which their assessment of the causes of the offence change to include environmental factors which may have exerted pressure on the offender.

While participants stressed that forgiveness was not the only response that could facilitate recovery from the offence, it is important to note that participants who had forgiven reported noticeable improvement in their well-being and general quality of life. Of particular interest, this included a reduction in a number of symptoms similar to those described in relation to PTSD. In this way, this thesis contributes to the growing body of literature which demonstrates that forgiveness can have considerable therapeutic benefit (see Sells & Hargrave, 1998)

### **5.3 Revenge Findings**

The primary aim of this thesis was to outline detailed models of both forgiveness and revenge. In addition, the literature review for each construct allowed additional hypotheses and aims to be formulated. The study aims for the analysis of the revenge data differ considerably from those outlined for the forgiveness data. This is because the richness of the forgiveness literature allowed for the development of logical expectations concerning the form it would take with regards to victims of crime. The dearth of literature concerning revenge and the disconnectedness of what little information there is required an analysis that was more exploratory than confirmatory.

Nonetheless, beyond outlining a detailed model of revenge, three additional aims were identified for the analysis of the revenge data. Firstly, particular attention was paid to the utility or purpose of revenge. In the introduction, three possible goals for revenge were

identified: equity, deterrence, and ego-defence. The data analysis showed some support for equity and no support for deterrence. The model shows strongest support for revenge as a form of ego-defence as the concept is understood by Baumeister (1999). Additionally, the study aimed to more accurately situate revenge in relation to aggression. Of particular interest was the relevance of the frustration-aggression hypothesis in understanding revenge. This model is helpful although revenge nevertheless constitutes a unique form of aggression worthy of discrete attention. The final aim of this study was related to this and involved an examination of revenge to determine whether it constitutes a hostile or instrumental form of aggression.

### *5.3.1 A Model of Revenge for Victims of Crime*

The model of revenge had four aspects. As with the forgiveness section, each aspect will be summarised individually with reference to the study aims outlined for revenge in the introduction. Following this, the other factors examined concerning revenge will also be addressed.

#### *5.3.1.1 Powerlessness*

This model strongly positions revenge as a response to feelings of powerlessness that arise as a result of the offence. From the data, it is unclear whether this feeling of powerlessness arises from the experience of being offended against itself; or the physical and psychological consequences of the offence; or a combination of both. For example, Cathy reported feeling that she had lost her independence even though she wasn't physically harmed during her daughter's murder. Anna and Betty, on the other hand, experienced a degree of physical incapacitation as a result of their offence and also mentioned feelings of powerlessness. One can understand powerlessness as a

diminished sense of a person's self-efficacy and sense of self-determination. This is clear, for example, when Anna talks about feeling out of control and when Cathy talks about being unable to contribute to her household.

It is likely that the experience of powerlessness is the origin of revenge considering it is identified as a traumagenic dynamic (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Additionally, feelings of helplessness are identified in DSM-IV-TR as an initial reaction to a traumatic event (APA, 2000). If revenge can be understood as an attempt to redress this feeling of powerlessness it explains why other researchers have dismissed it as counterproductive on the grounds that it lacks an external goal (Carlsmith, et al., 2008). More specifically, it supports the argument advanced by Bushman and Anderson (2001) that rigid categorization of aggression into hostile or instrumental can fail to fully capture the motives of aggression. In the case of revenge, aggression may arise as part of an effort to restore one's self-efficacy. This is an instrumental aim. Nonetheless, the way in which that is achieved is by harming the person who caused that self-efficacy to be questioned in the first place. This is hostile aggression. To classify revenge as exclusively one or the other is to understand the concept imprecisely.

#### *5.3.1.2 Redressing the Balance*

Powerlessness has a number of consequences. The most pervasive of these was the desire to redress the balance or even the score in the aftermath of the offence. This is consistent with Stillwell, et al.'s (2008) explanation of equity as the goal of revenge. They understand revenge as a motivated response for recompense in the face of a perceived material or psychological loss. In this model, that loss constitutes the

perceived loss of independence or self-determination outlined in relation to powerlessness. One cannot preclude the possibility that the material losses associated with the offence itself contribute to this desire to restore the balance, but this was not articulated in the data. It appears, then, that the data support two of the three possible goals of revenge that were outlined in the introduction: namely ego-defence and equity and that both of these arise as result of the feelings of powerlessness that an offence provokes in victims. The third goal, deterrence, was not mentioned in the data at all despite the assumption made by a number of researchers that revenge serves as a defensive mechanism to guard against future attack (e.g. McCullough, 2008).

The theme of redressing the balance provides valuable information concerning a number of the research aims identified in the introduction. For example, it further demonstrates that revenge is not simply a hostile reaction towards a transgressor but rather has certain psychological and social objectives. This suggests that revenge is an example of instrumental aggression as well as hostile aggression (Feshbach, 1964).

*5.3.1.2.1 Subjectivity and Proportionality:* The idea of redressing the balance also raises questions concerning the idea of proportionality in revenge. A number of participants understood this idea as a proportional response although this was not always the case. From an examination of the data, in particular Ellen's excerpts (see section 4.2.1.1), it appears that an individual's assessment of a proportional response may change depending on whether they experience the consequences of a transgression subjectively or objectively. For example, a victim may be inclined to redress the balance with a stronger response than would seem objectively reasonable because their

subjective experience of distress and pain are taken into account when deciding on proportionality. Likewise, they may be inclined to inflict more suffering on their offender because they cannot subjectively experience the distress their actions cause. This conclusion requires further testing to substantiate it as it is based only on two excerpts from one participant in this study. Nonetheless, it makes logical sense and is consistent with the explanation of the magnitude gap identified by Baumeister (1999). It may also offer a partial explanation of why some victims may exaggerate the seriousness of the offence or its consequences.

#### *5.3.1.3 Feelings towards the Offender*

Participants identified revenge with three main responses towards an offender: anger, hate, and wanting harm. There are several points of interest when examining these three themes.

*5.3.1.3.1 Feelings of Anger:* Considering that revenge was examined in the introduction as a form of aggression, the presence of anger and other strong, negative emotions towards the offender are not unexpected. Specifically, the fact that a number of participants described anger as a frustrated emotion seems consistent with the frustration-aggression hypothesis. These emotions also give revenge the flavour of hostile, rather than instrumental aggression that is consistent with Berkowitz's (1989) reformulation of the frustration-aggression hypothesis, but contradicts the argument made above concerning the instrumental nature of revenge. The relationship between Feshbach's (1964) two forms of aggression, however, need not be seen as strictly dichotomous. A number of authors argue that the maintenance of this distinction

impedes further research on aggression (e.g. Tedeschi & Felson, 1994; Bushman & Anderson 2001). Bushman and Anderson correctly point out that the motive for any particular act of aggression is not always clear-cut. They cite the example of a man whose masculinity is called into question in front of a large group and who retaliates aggressively (p. 276). This may be a hostile response in the face of humiliation or it may be the best way the man can think of to restore his masculine image. Bushman and Anderson also raise the possibility that both may be the case. In this case, the man is definitely motivated to restore his damaged masculinity but this does not preclude the fact that he is angry that it has been damaged. The same kind of argument can be used to explain the model of revenge. A victim may be motivated by a desire to redress the balance but this does not exclude the possibility that they are hostile towards the individual they perceive as being responsible for creating the imbalance. In this model, both of these possibilities are included as a response to powerlessness that, like diminished masculinity in Bushman and Anderson's example, is the result of a perceived attack on some aspect of the victim's self-concept.

5.3.1.3.2 *Feelings of Hatred*: The excerpts examining the concept of hatred describe a strongly affective state with a weak cognitive component that is often perceived as debilitating. This internal aspect was unexpected as hatred is most commonly understood as an affective reaction to another group (Sternberg, 2005) and the implications of this have not been examined before. A close examination of Cathy's description of hatred provided some additional clues concerning this aspect as it revealed she was describing a state of intense fixation on the offender that was so consuming that it inhibited normal affective responses in other areas of her life. The

subject of personal hatred, or the hate of one person by another, has received little attention in the psychological literature but future research in this endeavour may make an important contribution to an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics between victims and offenders.

*5.3.1.3.3 Wanting harm to Befall the Offender:* One final observation in this section is pivotal to an understanding of revenge. Although almost all participants acknowledged a desire to see harm come to their offender, only one participant admitted actually seeking any form of revenge and this was non-violent in nature. This thesis has presented a wide range of evidence to suggest that the feelings associated with revenge are intense, so it is noteworthy that so few people seem to act on them. Indeed, a number of participants merely expressed a desire for the offender to suffer, whether at their own hands or otherwise. The data indicate a number of reasons why this is the case. A number of participants had genuine and pragmatic safety concerns that outweighed whatever benefits they felt they may have derived from exacting revenge. Perhaps of more interest, participants also refrained from the behavioural aspects of revenge because it was inconsistent with their self-image. As pointed out earlier, this is consistent with Baumeister's (1999) explanation of the relationship between self-esteem and aggression; aggressive acts are more likely when a person's self-esteem is inflated or unstable. A person's belief that they were law abiding and not violent seemed to inhibit aggressive acts even when there was a strong affective motivation to engage in them. Although some participants felt that taking revenge was inconsistent with whom they believed themselves to be, this did not stop them from hoping that the offender experienced some harm. In other words, revenge involves a desire to see harm come to

an offender but not necessarily to sacrifice one's image as a law abiding person to achieve this aim.

#### *5.3.1.4 Compulsive Planning*

The data indicated that revenge was a predominantly affective response without a particularly well-developed cognitive process. Nevertheless, there was one notable exception to this rule. Participants often reported engaging in an obsessive process in which they would fantasise or plan how they would go about exacting their revenge. In some cases this would encompass some behavioural aspects such as stalking or seeking out individuals who may be of assistance. Plotting revenge has been associated with other forms of aggression (Denson, Pedersen & Miller, 2006; Anestis, Anestis, Selby & Joiner, 2009) and is also identified as a symptom of PTSD by Orth, et al. (2006). Compulsive planning in this model also encompassed a desire by the victim to know as much as possible about their offender in order to carry out their plans.

Further examination to pinpoint the exact purpose served by compulsive planning is important because, as outlined above, it was undertaken by individuals who were often unwilling to carry out an act of revenge themselves. One possible explanation relates back to the experience of powerlessness that led to feelings and thoughts of revenge in the first place. Horowitz (2007) argues that compulsive planning and fantasies about revenge allow an individual to assuage feelings of helplessness and hopelessness by imagining a scenario in which they are able to redress the balance and, consequently, restore their sense of self-efficacy. Unfortunately, the basis of this conclusion seems to

be drawn from a single case study and the text of the article does not contain enough data to substantiate this claim.

### *5.3.2 Factors Influencing Revenge*

The role that fear and self-identity play in reducing the acting out of revenge has already been covered but the data suggested that there were other noteworthy factors that affected the strength of revenge. Chief among these was the quality of support people received following the offences. This included social and familial support but participants were also quick to point out that sometimes professional, therapeutic care was necessary. What seemed most important regardless of the type of support was that it be characterised by empathy and understanding. A lack of support was reported by Ken to exacerbate a feeling of loneliness. Helen, on the other hand, felt that social or therapeutic support offered an opportunity to discharge negative ideas and feelings that may have been expressed aggressively otherwise.

Interestingly, a number of participants reported that their interactions with the justice system exacerbated their feeling of revenge. This occurred in a number of ways. For example, Cathy felt that the continued appeals by her daughter's murderer increased her feelings of revenge. In particular, the trials were disturbing for her because she again had to confront the photographic evidence of the murder. It also reinforced her belief that the offender lacked remorse for his behaviour. The unfulfilled need for remorse was also a problem for Jane.

In other cases, participants felt that they were overlooked by the justice system or that the sentence imposed was not equitable when compared to the suffering they had

experienced. This highlights an important deficit in the current criminal justice system in Australia and possibly explains why restorative or mediation based approaches are often preferred by victims of crimes (Strang, 2002; Beven, et al., 2005). When understood in light of the model of revenge developed here, greater participation in the justice process affords victims greater recognition and validation than they receive under the current system where a crime is considered an offence against the state and not against an individual victim (Strang, 2002). A more active role in which their input is valued allows victims of crime to feel more in control of their circumstances, which may help to offset feelings of powerlessness that provoke revenge in the first place. On the other hand, the current system which focuses on the offender and which allows only a limited scope for victim participation other than as a witness or spectator is likely to further disempower the victim.

### *5.3.3 Multi-dimensionality and the Measurement of Revenge*

As explained in the introduction (see section 1.3.2), the work of Stuckless and Goranson (1992) offers a measure of revenge which is unidimensional. While this may allow for the accurate detection of revenge, it is not sufficiently detailed to fully explain what the construct actually is. The model of revenge in this thesis makes an important contribution to the field of psychology by providing the first detailed model of this construct. It suggests that revenge is a motivational drive which is composed of a number of affective responses. This model will allow for the development of more sensitive measures of revenge. For example, revenge requires an experience of powerlessness as well as a desire to redress the balance coupled with strong negative affect towards the offender. It is predominantly affective but includes a compulsive

planning component which is consistent with the cognitive aspects measured in the ARS (Sukhodolsky, et al., 2001) (see section 1.3.1).

Restricting the measurement of revenge to one particular aspect risks missing the presence of the construct entirely. For example, a measure that only examines behavioural aspects may miss a strong revenge response because, as the data suggest, individuals do not tend to act on thoughts and feelings of revenge. Similarly, while the ARS and the VS undoubtedly detect aspects of revenge (Sukhodolsky, et al., 2001; Stuckless & Goranson, 1992), they exclusively measure cognitive aspects of a construct which the data suggest is strongly affective.

#### *5.3.4 Summary*

The model of revenge presented here is the most complete and detailed psychological model to date. As such, it makes an original and important contribution, not only to the field of victimology, but also to the wider psychological literature. Revenge, as it is understood here, represents an ego-defensive response to the experience of powerlessness that arises as a result of an offence. The experience of powerlessness appears to be the key to the development of feeling of revenge. Further research is required to clarify this, however; it may be the case that the nature of the offence itself is important only to the extent that it provokes this experience of powerlessness which prompts an ego-defensive response.

#### **5.4 The Relationship between Forgiveness and Revenge**

Although not the explicit focus of this thesis, the data allow some conclusions to be drawn concerning the relationship between forgiveness and revenge. This relationship

has not received a lot of attention from researchers but much of the empirical literature assumes that revenge is antithetical to forgiveness (McCullough, et al. 1998; McCullough, et al., 2001; Barber, Maltby & Macaskill, 2005). Much of this research stems from empirical investigations which have used the TRIM, in which forgiveness is conceived of as a reduced motivation for revenge (McCullough, et al., 1998). Other researchers think differently. For example, Baumeister, et al. (1998) prefer to think of grudge holding as the opposite of forgiveness but nonetheless acknowledge that forgiveness involves giving up revenge. This is a subtle though important distinction. A negative correlation between forgiveness and revenge does not ipso facto imply that the relationship between the two is oppositional.

The findings of this thesis support this line of reasoning. The data suggest that the antithesis of forgiveness is unforgiveness. This construct is considerably broader than the model of revenge. There are certainly commonalities between the two, most notably anger and strong negative affect towards the offender. Unforgiveness also included feelings of self-blame, fixed temporal orientation and symptoms of trauma. None of these were common facets of revenge. Likewise revenge includes facets such as powerlessness and compulsive planning which were not raised with regards to unforgiveness. Given that unforgiveness is a contextually bound phenomenon, the precise components of which are dependent on the nature of the transgression which sparks it, it seems likely that revenge is a possible component of unforgiveness but not an essential one. In this way, one can be unforgiving and vengeful; or unforgiving and not vengeful. Forgiveness, however, involves letting go of feelings of unforgiveness and, thus, when revenge is a component of unforgiveness it must also be relinquished.

There are also structural differences between the two models. These differences centre on the fact that the data describe revenge as a state while forgiveness was understood as a process. In this sense, revenge describes a psychological state that may occur after a transgression. The feeling and thoughts associated with revenge are relatively reflexive and uncontrolled. In contrast to this, forgiveness is an affective and cognitive problem-solving strategy process that requires conscious effort on the part of the victim.

### **5.5 Utility of the Models**

Both of the models make a substantial contribution to the fields of psychology and victimology. In particular, the forgiveness model addresses some of the questions that currently dominate forgiveness research. By demonstrating the differences between this model and other major models in the field, this thesis makes a very strong argument for forgiveness as a contextually bound process. This is clear when one contrasts the nature of unforgiveness in this model, as well as the goals and motivations of the construct against those of other models, in particular the three leading models in the field that have been examined in this thesis. Additionally, participants articulated a model of forgiveness that was predominantly intrapersonal and did not necessarily require the development of benevolent or positive feelings for the offender as evidence that forgiveness had taken place. On the contrary, this model reveals that forgiveness for victims of crime is a process through which an individual may develop a sense of having moved on from an offence, the repercussions of which may have negatively impacted their quality of life.

This forgiveness model provides helpful information for those involved in the rehabilitation of victims of crime. It provides further evidence of the intense psychological repercussions that can arise for those who have been offended against. It also gives a clear indication of the outcomes that are considered valuable by victims themselves. The findings of this thesis suggest that interventions which foster a victim's self-awareness and encourage them to let go of these feelings; to consider external attributions for the offender's behaviour; and to move on with other aspects of their life are likely to be of benefit to victims of crime.

The model of revenge is equally instructive. It draws together a number of disparate threads from psychological literature. Revenge can be understood as an aggressive response to the feelings of powerlessness that may develop following an offence. This finding is broadly consistent with the frustration-aggression hypothesis but is too involved to be fully accounted for by this process. Indeed, this model is among the first attempts in psychology to fully describe the nature of revenge that has previously been understood as a unidimensional construct (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992).

The model of revenge that emerges from the data show a complex response to a transgression. It is an attempt to address the victim's perceived loss of autonomy and self-efficacy. As with the forgiveness model, these findings provide important information for caregivers seeking to assist victims in their recovery. For example, on the basis of this study, therapists and counsellors who encourage victims to re-establish their sense of independence and self-efficacy through safer, healthier, and more

successful alternatives may assist victims in reducing the strong negative affect that can arise as a response to being offended against.

Additionally, the revenge data highlight the difficulties faced by the justice system in dealing with victims in an appropriate manner. A number of participants expressed considerable distress resulting from their interactions with different aspects of the justice system that they felt did not account for their needs. There is a strong imperative for this deficit to be addressed. Both forgiveness and revenge data suggest that alternatives such as restorative justice or victim-offender mediation may suitably address these needs by facilitating an opportunity for victims to engage in safe contact with their offenders as well as providing an environment in which victims concerns can be voiced and incorporated into an appropriate remedy for the offence.

Finally, the data set as a whole indicates that participants commonly experienced symptoms commensurate with those that define PTSD in DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000). This further substantiates the assumption that PTSD is a broad response to unforeseen and potentially dangerous events. This assumption leads to a change in the definition of traumatic event to encompass a subjective emphasis (Bedard-Gilligan & Zoellner, 2008). It suggests that a more complete understanding of PTSD may be possible by considering events that have not previously been considered traumatic. This includes a number of different types of crime which have not received a lot of attention from researchers with regards PTSD, such as burglary and theft.

## 5.6 Limitations and Future Directions

The study suffered from a number of limitations. Each of these is related to sampling and recruitment method outlined in section 2.5.3. As mentioned chapter two, the Human Research Ethics Committee at Murdoch University decided that recruitment for the study should be done passively, through media releases rather than actively soliciting participants out of concerns for the vulnerability of victims of crime. These concerns have already been addressed (see section 2.3.3.) and it is hoped that future victimological research at Murdoch will be able to negotiate a less restrictive method for obtaining participants considering the important insights such research affords.

### 5.6.1 *Gender Bias*

Perhaps the biggest limitation, the participants in the study were overwhelmingly female. Out of twelve participants, only one was male. Given that the majority of victims of crime are men (ABS, 2010) the reason for this is unclear. A possible explanation for this may lie in the work of Sutton & Farrall (2005). They propose that men are more resistant to identifying themselves as victims. This is because dominant images of desirable masculine qualities almost always include physical toughness and a psychological resilience to violence. Both of these may be seen as incompatible with acknowledging victimization, especially of a violent nature. If this is the case then in hindsight it is unsurprising that the make-up of the sample is disproportionately female. The media releases were explicitly directed towards victims of crime which would disincline males to respond. Replication using media releases that avoid the specific

terminology of “victim of crime” may help to rectify this as long as adequate steps are taken to establish that respondents’ experiences meet objective criteria for victimization.

The gender bias in the sample is important. While Ken’s comments are generally consistent with his fellow participants (except with regards the proportionality of revenge as highlighted in section 4.2.1), it is not prudent to discuss the results here with absolute authority. The results presented here contribute detailed models of forgiveness and revenge in victims of crime to the wider literature but it remains unclear whether these are models that describe the constructs for all victims or just for female victims. For this reason, further research is essential using a sample with an even gender ratio.

#### *5.6.2 Small Sample Size*

As discussed in section 2.5.3, the sample size used in this study is relatively small. The detail of the analysis leads one to conclude that saturation of the data was achieved with only twelve participants and thus the sample size was adequate (see section 2.5.3). Further replication with a larger sample size would nevertheless be a valuable step to substantiate this model. Grounded theory is, by its nature, an inductive method which focuses on particular instances for analysis (Charmaz, 2003; 2006). It would be disappointing if the generalizability of these models was not tested and the key to doing this is the employ a larger sample. Ideally this may involve the development of measures to quantify the components of each model to facilitate testing as widely as possible. Quantification and inferential assessment using appropriate statistical methods would facilitate an understanding of how broadly the models are supported by victims

generally. This would allow for refinement, where necessary, the generate models of forgiveness and revenge which are more representative than indicative.

### *5.6.3 Age of the Sample*

While twelve participants proved sufficient for saturation, a concern stemming from the small sample size centres on a possible interaction between forgiveness and age. The mean age for the sample was 50.45 years with individual ages ranging from 35 – 66 years. This indicates a relatively middle-aged sample. The role that age plays in the propensity for forgiveness has not been examined in detail in the literature although some research indicates that older people find forgiveness easier than younger people (Cheng & Yim, 2008). If age is a factor in the likelihood of forgiveness, it does not necessarily follow that it is a factor in how forgiveness occurs, which was the focus of this thesis. Nonetheless, if it was a factor which effected how forgiveness occurred, further research examining this model with a larger sample that had a greater proportion of younger people would show this to be the case. Such research would make a valuable contribution to the forgiveness literature generally.

In a similar fashion, there is no literature examining the link between revenge and age. Research examining this relationship would provide an important contribution to the embryonic field of empirical research on revenge.

### *5.6.4 Additional Opportunities*

A number of additional avenues of research have been identified throughout this thesis. Further research into the nature of unforgiveness, for example, will make an important

contribution to the forgiveness literature. In particular, this research must focus on establishing what constructs, if any, are common responses to different types of transgressions. Research of this nature will ultimately assist researchers attempting to define the common components of forgiveness.

There are substantially more opportunities for further research based on the revenge model than the forgiveness model because until very recently researchers have all but ignored revenge. A deeper understanding of each facet of the model is required. In particular, the key concept of powerlessness needs to be closely inspected. A main concern centres on the duration of feeling of powerlessness. The concept of helplessness used in criterion A of DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) to describe an emotional response to a traumatic event refers to a reaction that lasts for the duration of the event and its immediate aftermath. In contrast, the concept of powerlessness described here is more enduring, as participants' reactions to their involvement in the justice system demonstrate. In addition, the phenomenon of interpersonal hatred deserves considerably more attention than it has received to date. This is an important concept that describes the feelings of a vengeful victim for their offender, yet very few details concerning its nature are known. The findings from this thesis suggest it is an intense and consuming response that leads to a person focusing excessively on the offender to the exclusion of other important aspects of their lives.

Finally, it is worthwhile examining the reasons that participants did not exact revenge despite the intensity of their feelings. Baumeister's (1999) explanation concerning the link between aggressive behaviour and unstable or inflated self-esteem does not entirely

explain the findings here because one would expect an offence to negatively impact or otherwise destabilise a victim's self-esteem. Further research in this area would seem valuable then, in further explaining the findings of this thesis and contributing to a general understanding of ways to minimise aggressive behaviour.

### **5.7 Conclusion**

The concepts of forgiveness and revenge have a common currency and a long history in the fields of theology and philosophy. Even so, neither has received sufficient attention from empirical researchers to fully understand their components and their functioning. This thesis makes a contribution to this goal.

Through an examination of victims of crime, a distinct model of forgiveness has been articulated that runs counter to a number of assumptions which underpin the major existing models. Forgiveness need not be focused on the restoration of social harmony. It is not always a spiritual gift that a person bestows on their transgressor. For victims, forgiveness is a conscious process undertaken to relieve distressing psychological symptoms that have occurred as a result of someone else's actions.

Such distinctions are possible because forgiveness is best defined with reference to the circumstances of the transgression which provoked it. The findings of this thesis provide fuel for the argument that a single, universal definition of forgiveness should not be sought, indeed may not be possible. People can be wronged in an infinite variety of ways and bring their own unique proclivities to the task of forgiveness. Context is the key to understanding forgiveness.

This was no clearer than in the tendency for victims to make affectively neutral changes to their attributions about the offender, rather than develop affectionate or benevolent feelings for them. That a number of participants reported feelings of sympathy or compassion for their offender is a testament to their own fortitude and character and not an essential outcome for forgiveness itself.

The data analysis in this thesis also provides the most detailed model of revenge currently available. While forgiveness is a conscious, effortful process that victims engage in, revenge is a complex of distressing overwhelming emotional reactions to the feelings of powerlessness a person experiences as a result of being victimised. Revenge is a distinct form of aggression which further questions the utility of the distinction between hostile and instrumental aggression.

The feelings of powerlessness that participants described are the key to understanding the goals of revenge. Powerlessness provides a motivational drive to restore the balance between victims and offenders and provokes strong negative affect for the offender. Far from being an illogical attempt to deter an offender from committing an offence that has already been committed, the goal of revenge is the defence of an individual's self-esteem and self-regard. In this sense, an offence impinges on a victim's sense of agency and self-determination. Revenge is the drive to protect one's positive self-regard in the face of this affront. Most curiously, this positive self-regard seems to be the very thing that stops most people from exacting revenge.

The findings of this thesis, in relation to both forgiveness and revenge, are highly exploratory and require further substantiation. Nonetheless, they provide a valuable

insight into the experience of victims of crime who are often overlooked in criminological and psychological research. This work clearly demonstrates that they are a complex population who experience extreme psychological distress as a result of being victimised. By providing this insight, these findings can inform those institutions and groups, clinical and otherwise, that have a care for the welfare of victims. This endeavour, apart from having considerable economic benefit, is a vital moral obligation for any society that truly values the idea of community.

## APPENDIX 1.

### SCHEDULE #A

#### FORGIVENESS Questions:

1. How would you **DESCRIBE** forgiveness?
  - What do you think it is?
  - What is it NOT?
  - What sort of variables do you think forgiveness is comprised of?
  - Does one forgive an ACT or an OFFENDER?
2. If someone was to forgive an act/offender, what sort of **FEELINGS** do you think would be involved in this process?
3. If someone was to forgive an act/offender, what sort of **THOUGHTS** do you think would be involved in this process?
4. If someone was to forgive an act/offender, what sort of **BEHAVIOUR** or **ACTIONS** do you think would be involved in this process?
5. Is there a **PROCESS** involved in forgiveness? What do you think that process is?
  - What are the **STEPS** involved?
  - **HOW** does it come about?
6. What do you think are the **RESULTS** of forgiveness? For the forgiver? For the offender?
  - What are the **BENEFITS**?
  - What are the **RISKS**?
7. Thinking about **YOUR OWN** experiences, how relevant do you think forgiveness is to your own experiences since victimisation?

- What **EFFECT** has forgiveness or the withholding of forgiveness had on you?
8. What things do you think make the forgiveness process **EASIER**? More **DIFFICULT**?
  9. Some people think that forgiveness is a **POSITIVE** and healthy thing, while others believe it is **NEGATIVE** and unhealthy. What is **YOUR OPINION**?

### **SCHEDULE #B**

#### **REVENGE Questions:**

1. How would you **DESCRIBE** revenge?
  - What do you think it is?
  - What is it NOT?
  - What sort of variables do you think revenge is comprised of?
  - Does one want revenge against an offender or for an offence?
2. If someone wanted to get revenge against an offender/ for an offence, what sort of **FEELINGS** do you think that would involve?
3. If someone wanted to get revenge against an offender/ for an offence, what sort of **THOUGHTS** do you think that would involve?
4. If someone wanted to get revenge against an offender/ for an offence, what sort of **BEHAVIOURS** or **ACTIONS** do you think that would involve?

5. What do you think are the **RESULTS** of revenge? For the victim? For the offender?

- a. What are the **BENEFITS**?
- b. What are the **RISKS**?

6. Thinking about **YOUR OWN** experiences, how have feelings, thoughts, and behaviours around revenge **EFFECTED** your own experiences since your victimisation?

7. Some people think that revenge is a **POSITIVE** and healthy thing, while others believe it is **NEGATIVE** and unhealthy. What is **YOUR OPINION**?

8. What factors do you think are likely to **INCREASE** vengeful thoughts, feelings and/or behaviours? What factors do you think would **DECREASE** these thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?

## APPENDIX 2

### A Chance for Victims to Speak Out!

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Researchers at Murdoch University are conducting interviews with victims of crime in an effort to identify factors that affect their mental health.

The experiences of victims are often ignored when people talk about the consequences of crime.

“Victims of crime suffer psychologically and socially as a result of their victimisation and rarely get a chance to have their say about these experiences. In addition, the justice system is often forced to relegate victims to the sidelines, which makes research into their experiences all the more important.” Dr. Jaimie Beven, a co-investigator in the project said.

Between 16 -20 April, members of the public who have been the victim of a recognised criminal offence are invited to participate in an anonymous interview. At this time, the researchers are principally interested in discussing victims’ understandings of forgiveness and revenge.

Interviews will be via phone to make it easier for people to participate and will take less than an hour to complete. All participation is anonymous. If any of your readers have been the victims of legally defined crime and would like to participate, phone lines will be open working hours from 16 April, 2007 to 20 April 2007. They should call 9360 6074.

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