Back to caring after being hurt: the role of forgiveness

JOHAN C. KARREMANS[1]* AND
PAUL A. M. VAN LANGE[2]
[1]*Utrecht University, The Netherlands*
[2]*Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Abstract

While the topic of forgiveness has only recently started to receive empirical attention, little research has been conducted to examine the notion that forgiveness predicts pro-relationship responses, motivated by a willingness to set aside personal well-being to enhance the well-being of the partner or relationship. The purpose of the present research was to examine whether forgiveness predicts pro-relationship responses, and whether it does so above and beyond commitment to the offender. Consistent with hypotheses, three studies revealed that forgiveness is significantly associated with (a) willingness to accommodate (i.e. to respond constructively rather than destructively when the partner has engaged in a potentially destructive act), (b) willingness to sacrifice, and (c) level of intended cooperation. Moreover, these associations were independent of commitment to the offender, providing initial evidence for the unique role of forgiveness in understanding pro-relationship motivation and behaviour. Finally, the results of Study 3 suggested that forgiveness restores, rather than increases, levels of pro-relationship motivation, compared to baseline levels of pro-relationship motivation. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

John has been involved in a romantic relationship with Cathleen for a long time, he feels strongly committed to her, and in general, everything is going very well between them. However, once, when they were in a bar with friends, Cathleen publicly divulged a secret of John's. All their friends enjoyed the secret and had to laugh, but John thought this was far from amusing and felt that the situation was quite embarrassing for him. He felt deeply hurt by Cathleen and they had a big fight about this incident. Although they talked it over and Cathleen expressed her regrets that same night, nowadays, when he is thinking about the incident, John still experiences some anger and feelings of resentment towards Cathleen: John has not been able to fully forgive Cathleen for this incident.

When they are interacting, people sometimes offend and hurt each other, whether they are intimate partners, family, friends, or acquaintances. What is the impact of such offences on the functioning of the relationship? How do people maintain their interpersonal relationships, despite these sometimes deeply hurtful moments within the relationship? Will it be easy for John to engage in pro-relationship behaviour toward Cathleen? How will John react if Cathleen again acts in some destructive way?

*Correspondence to: Johan C. Karremans, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Utrecht University, PO Box 80140, NL-3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands. E-mail: j.karremans@fss.uu.nl

Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

While previous research on pro-relationship behaviour has typically focused on broad relational constructs, such as commitment, little research has been conducted to examine how offences affect people's pro-relationship motivations and behaviour in subsequent interaction situations.

Recently, interest has grown in the construct of forgiveness while addressing the kind of questions mentioned above (for an overview, see for instance McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). The argument is that forgiveness might be one of the 'keys' towards understanding how people are able to maintain healthy relationships (e.g. Fincham, 2000). Previous research on forgiveness has mainly focused on its determinants, and there is now general consensus in the literature that forgiveness is determined by offence-specific factors (e.g. severity of the offence; Girard & Mullet, 1997), relationship-specific factors (e.g. commitment; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998), and personality factors (e.g. neuroticism and agreeableness; Berry, Worthington, Jr, Parrot, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Also, affective consequences of forgiveness have received considerable attention. For instance, forgiveness appears to be positively related to both physiological indices of well-being (Witvliet, Ludwig, & VanderLaan, 2001), as well as self-report measures of psychological well-being (i.e. Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003).

Although the definitions of forgiveness have been quite diverse, by reviewing the literature, McCullough et al. (2000) observe that all the existing definitions seem to be build on one core feature: 'When people forgive, their responses toward (or, in other words, what they think of, feel about, want to do to, or actually do to) people who have offended or injured them become more positive and less negative' (p. 9). However, remarkably little empirical research has been conducted to examine the relationship between forgiveness and prosocial responses more closely, although there is some evidence relevant to the claim that forgiveness energizes prosocial behaviour (Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough, Worthington, Jr, & Rachal, 1997). For instance, a recent study by Fincham and Beach (2002) demonstrated that forgiveness is negatively related to psychological aggression and positively related to self-report measures of constructive communication in the relationship.

Previous research, however, has investigated this link primarily in light of responses that are specifically related to a particular offence: when participants indicated they had forgiven an offender a past offence, they also reported they had exhibited greater levels of pro-relationship responses toward the offender *in response to* this particular offence, compared to when they had not forgiven the offender (Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough et al., 1997). For instance, McCullough et al. (1997) investigated whether forgiveness was related to conciliatory behaviour on part of the victim. However, such offences obviously do not occur in a vacuum; they may not only be the result of a history of conflicts, but such intense experiences within a relationship may very well affect the way in which people behave toward the offender in future interactions, that are not directly related to the offence (cf. Aron & Aron, 1995; Baldwin, 1992; Holmes, 2000).

The aim of the present research is to illuminate the influence of a past offence on a person's pro-relationship behavioural intentions toward the offender. Specifically, the major purpose is to investigate the link between level of forgiveness of a past offence and a person's current accommodation, willingness to sacrifice, and intended cooperation towards the offender. As will be explained shortly, given that commitment has been claimed, and demonstrated, to exert powerful effects on pro-relationship motivation and behaviour, a complementary purpose is to examine whether forgiveness makes a unique contribution to predicting pro-relationship responses, above and beyond commitment. Finally, we address the question, to be discussed in the introduction to Study 3 in more detail, whether forgiveness restores levels of pro-relationship responses, or whether forgiveness increases levels of pro-relationship responses, as compared to pre-offence levels of pro-relationship behaviour (Pargament, McCullough, & Thoresen, 2000).

FORGIVING AS TRANSFORMATION OF MOTIVATION

Using principles of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; for a review, see Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996), forgiving can be conceptualized in terms of *transformation of motivation*. That is, when a person forgives an offending relationship partner, he or she is likely to forego his or her immediate self-interest, and is motivated to act on broader considerations, such as the pursuit of relational well-being, and concerns to promote both one's own and the partner's well-being (e.g. Karremans et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 1997, 1998). Indeed, consistent with the concept of transformation of motivation, McCullough et al. (1997) define forgiveness as 'a set of motivational changes whereby one becomes decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner, decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender, and increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender's hurtful actions' (p. 321). Importantly, it should be clear that forgiveness does not simply entail the lack of negative motivations (i.e. avoidance and revenge), but forgiveness also includes a restored motivation to be benevolent toward the offender, after the offence occurred (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Thus, forgiveness is conceptualized as an *intra*personal motivational change, and the aim of the present research then is to investigate whether intrapersonal forgiveness, after a conflict has occurred, increases pro-relationship responses as compared to when there is a lack of forgiveness.

COMMITMENT AND FORGIVENESS

Previous research has revealed that commitment promotes forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998; Finkel et al., 2002), such that higher levels of commitment are generally associated with greater tendencies toward forgiveness. However, these findings do not necessarily imply that strong commitment *always* leads to forgiveness. Indeed, sometimes it may be difficult for people to forgive others to whom they are strongly committed. In fact, sometimes it may be even harder to intrapersonally forgive another person to whom we feel strong commitment than another person to whom we feel weak commitment. For example, under some circumstances, an offence, such as breaking a promise (e.g. Cathleen had promised John not to tell anybody about his secret), might evoke less forgiving in highly committed relationships, because it violates some key features and expectations that are more characteristic of highly committed relationships (e.g. trust and dependability; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; cf. Miller, 2001). As to the example discussed earlier, John is just not able to easily forgive Cathleen, but at the same time feels strongly committed to Cathleen.

ACCOMMODATION AND WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE

When interacting, people often encounter situations in which preferences between self and other seem incompatible. In such a situation, referred to as a *mixed-motive situation*, on the one hand a person may have compelling reasons to pursue immediate self-interest, but on the other hand the person may have reasons to promote the interest of one's relationship. Previous research has typically found that broad motivational forces, such as commitment, promotes willingness to forego immediate self-interest and to act in the interest of the relationship (i.e. pro-relationship behaviour). Specific examples of pro-relationship behaviours that result from this transformation of motivation are accommodation and

willingness to sacrifice (e.g. Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Van Lange et al., 1997).

Rusbult and colleagues (Rusbult et al., 1991; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994) have demonstrated that commitment promotes accommodation. Accommodation refers to the willingness, when a partner has engaged in a potentially destructive act, to inhibit impulses to react destructively and instead react constructively. When Cathleen acts rudely towards John, John's immediate impulse will be to act rudely in return (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). However, John's strong commitment to Cathleen, is likely to inhibit John's self-centred impulses and to react in the interest of his relationship with Cathleen.

A related line of research has demonstrated that strong commitment promotes willingness to sacrifice, defined as tendencies to forego desired activities for the good of the partner or the relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). When a person's preferences do not fully correspond with the partner's preferences, high commitment promotes a person's willingness to set aside one's own needs for the needs of the partner. For example, Cathleen really wants John to attend his father-in-law's anniversary party, but John finds such parties terrible. Because of John's strong commitment to Cathleen, he decides to, although he does not like it at all, attend the party for the interest of Cathleen, and their relationship.

But are there constructs that might account for pro-relationship motivation and behaviour in a manner independent of commitment? We suggest that forgiveness is such a construct. Why? Level of commitment to a certain relationship partner results from a history of many interaction experiences (and from a future of expected interactions) with this partner, and is argued to be influenced by investment size, quality of alternatives, and satisfaction level (e.g. Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). In this sense, commitment can be viewed as a broad *macromotive* in relationships, which shapes tendencies to engage in pro-relationship behaviour in a relatively distal way (e.g. Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994). Conversely, the psychological state of forgiveness results directly from a specific experience within the relationship, and, when someone is somehow reminded of this experience, level of forgiveness (i.e. the intrapersonal state of forgiveness) may—at least temporarily—'overrule' motivations to act for the interest of the partner or the relationship that are accompanied by commitment to the partner. That is, whereas level of commitment has been proved to be an important relationship-specific source of prosocial motivation (i.e. predicting pro-relationship behaviour across different situations and different contexts within the relationship), we argue that level of forgiveness can be regarded as a situation or context-specific source of prosocial motivation, within the relationship (i.e. predicting pro-relationship behaviour for instance when the context reminds the victim of the offence, when the offender acts in a way that reminds the victim of the past offence, or when the victim is ruminating on the incident, cf. McCullough et al., 1998). Therefore, from a proximal point of view, we suggest that forgiving should play a unique role in predicting pro-relationship responses, above and beyond commitment.

To summarize, given that forgiveness can be conceptualized as an intrapersonal transformation of motivation, we hypothesize that forgiveness will be positively associated with higher levels of pro-relationship behavioural intentions, that is, accommodation and willingness to sacrifice.[1] Additionally,

---

[1]It should be clear that there is an important conceptual difference between forgiveness and accommodation. Accommodation has been conceptualized as a behavioural response following a partner's destructive behaviour. As such, accommodation takes place at the level of a specific interaction, but does not *directly* predict a person's motivation and behaviour toward the partner in subsequent interactions. In contrast, forgiveness (or the absence of forgiveness) is conceptualized as an intrapersonal prosocial motivational change (or the absence of this change, respectively), which may predict behaviour—including accommodative behaviour—towards the offender in subsequent interaction. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that level of forgiveness may influence behaviour towards an offender even years and years after a specific offence (see for instance Enright & North, 1998).

following the rationale outlined above, we predict that this effect of forgiving on accommodation and willingness to sacrifice will be independent of one's commitment to the offender.

COOPERATION

Stripped to its simplest form, previous research has examined people's responses in mixed-motive situations using the *give-some dilemma paradigm*, in which participants engage in a social dilemma (e.g. Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994; Van Lange & Liebrand, 1991). In this paradigm, the participant is told that he/she and another person are simultaneously offered a choice among five options, varying systematically from least cooperative to most cooperative. The dilemma stems from the fact that each member of the dyad is better off making a non-cooperative choice, no matter what the other member of the dyad does, yet both members of the dyad are worse off when both members make a non-cooperative choice than when both members make a cooperative choice.

Thus, it should be clear that, like accommodation and willingness to sacrifice, cooperation in a give-some dilemma results from transformation of motivation. That is, when faced with a mixed-motive situation (i.e. a conflict between self-interest and the interest of the partner or the relationship), this transformation process leads individuals to forego their immediate self-interest (i.e. making a non-cooperative choice) and to act on the basis of joint interests (i.e. making a cooperative choice). Again, given that forgiveness can be conceptualized as an intrapersonal prosocial transformation, we predict that forgiveness will be positively associated with level of cooperation towards the offender.

Furthermore, we predict that the effect of forgiving on cooperation will be independent of an individual's level of commitment to the offender. That is, we hypothesize that commitment will positively affect level of cooperation, but at the same time forgiveness will facilitate the transformation process and thus will be associated with higher levels of cooperation.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The preceding analysis provides a framework for understanding the relationship between intrapersonal forgiveness and pro-relationship responses in mixed-motive situations. When people encounter such dilemma's with a person who has offended them in the past, forgiveness of this offence will facilitate the transformation process that leads people to act on broader considerations than immediate self-interested preferences.

We present three studies which provide evidence relevant to this framework and the hypotheses derived from it. First, Study 1 examines the link between forgiveness and accommodation, using a measure developed by Rusbult and colleagues, and Study 2 examines the link between forgiveness and both accommodation and willingness to sacrifice simultaneously. In Study 3, the hypothesis is tested that forgiveness is associated with cooperation, independent of one's commitment to the offender. Importantly, Study 3 complements Studies 1 and 2 by addressing the question whether forgiveness leads to increased pro-relationship responses, or the absence of forgiveness leads to a decrease in pro-relationship responses, compared to baseline levels of pro-relationship responses within the relationship.

All three studies use a paradigm in which participants are instructed to bring to mind an incident in which they felt hurt or offended by someone, as used in prior research on intrapersonal forgiveness (e.g. Fincham, 2000; McCullough et al., 1997, 1998; VanOyen Witvliet et al., 2001). If one wants to 'actively' manipulate forgiveness, problems arise that seem almost inherent to the study of forgiveness (Flanigan, 1998). That is, the state of forgiveness may be a result of time-extended attribution

processes (Fincham, 2000), which cannot easily be manipulated or changed in the laboratory. Hence, the paradigm used in the present research was based on the assumption that almost all people can bring to mind offences that they have highly forgiven or have not forgiven the offender. Based on this assumption, in Studies 1 and 3 participants were randomly assigned to either the forgiveness or the no-forgiveness condition (for similar method, see Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). In the forgiveness condition, participants were asked to bring to mind an offence for which they had forgiven the offender, in the no-forgiveness condition they were asked to bring to mind an offence for which they had not forgiven the offender.

Finally, to examine whether our predictions could be generalized across many different types of relationships, we investigated the effects of forgiveness on pro-relationship responses in a wide range of relationships, varying from relationships characterized by relatively weak commitment (e.g. casual acquaintances) to strong commitment (e.g. intimate partners, parents).

STUDY 1

Study 1 was designed to test the hypothesis that forgiving is associated with accommodation, thereby seeking to provide initial empirical evidence for the hypothesis that forgiveness is positively associated with pro-relationship motivation and behaviour. Forgiving was manipulated by asking half of the participants to bring to mind an offence, which they had not forgiven the offender, and half of the participants to bring to mind an offence which they had forgiven the other. Additionally, we manipulated commitment to the offender by asking half of the participants to bring to mind a conflict they had with someone to whom they felt strongly committed, and asking half of the participants to bring to mind a conflict with someone to whom they felt weakly committed.

Method

Participants and Design

Eighty-six participants (19 male, 67 female) at the Free University of Amsterdam participated in the experiment and received a 5 guilder book token for participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions of the 2 (forgiving: conflict forgiven vs. not forgiven) × 2 (commitment: weak vs. strong) factorial design.

Procedure

Participants were asked, in randomized order, to bring to mind and to write down four conflicts, that met the criteria of the four conditions in the design. For example, a participant was first asked to bring to mind and write down (a) a conflict he or she had with someone to whom he or she felt strongly committed, and had forgiven the other. These instructions read as follows:

> Every now and then, most or all people have had a conflict with somebody else. The conflict can be relatively mild (e.g., a conflict that you forget about easily), but the conflict can also be severe (i.e., a conflict that you are unlikely to forget). We ask you to think about a severe conflict that you had with someone which you have forgiven the other. Please keep in mind that it concerns a

conflict for which you think the other is to blame. Furthermore, try to think of someone with whom you had a conflict to whom you are currently strongly committed.[2]

Then, the participant was asked to bring to mind and write down three conflicts, one by one, that met the criteria of the remaining three conditions: (b) a conflict he or she had with someone to whom he or she felt weakly committed, and had forgiven the other; (c) a conflict he or she had with someone to whom he or she felt strongly committed, and had not forgiven the other; (d) a conflict he or she had with someone to whom he or she felt weakly committed, and had not forgiven the other. After these each instruction, they were asked to write a brief paragraph about the offence. If they could not bring to mind a certain conflict (for example, an offence they had with a strong commitment other, that was not forgiven), participants indicated that they could not bring to mind this certain conflict.

Only after participants had described all four types of conflicts, by selecting randomly one of the four described conflicts, the computer assigned participants to one of the four conditions of the 2 (forgiving: conflict forgiven vs. not forgiven) $\times 2$ (commitment: weak vs. strong) factorial design. Participants were asked to keep in mind the person with whom they had the selected conflict for this current research. They were told that whenever they were asked about 'the other person', this other referred to this particular person with whom they had the computer selected conflict. Participants then completed measures of features of the conflict, forgiveness, commitment to the other, and a measure of accommodation.

Although the procedure of bringing to mind all four types of conflict has some limitations (which will be addressed in Studies 2 and 3, and in the study that is described in footnote 9), this method was used because an additional purpose of the current study was to explore the availability of forgiven versus not forgiven conflicts in strong commitment versus weak commitment relationships. In line with findings of previous research that commitment is positively associated with forgiveness, results suggest that less people have unforgiven offences available in memory that concern a strong commitment other compared to unforgiven offences that concern a weak commitment other (52% of the participants indicated that they could recall an unforgiven offence with a strong commitment other, while 73% indicated that they could recall an unforgiven offence with a weak commitment other), while more people seem to have forgiven offences available in memory that concern a strong commitment other (77%) than a weak commitment other (67%).

Measures

Participants indicated how long ago the conflict occurred (i.e. *time of conflict*) on a single-item question, and *severity of the conflict* was measured with a three-item scale (e.g. 'The conflict was very serious', *alpha* $= 0.92$).

A single-item scale was used to check whether the manipulation of *forgiving* was successful (i.e. 'To which degree do you feel you have forgiven the other?', cf. Subkoviak et al., 1995).

Participants indicated on an eight-item scale their *commitment* to the other. Three components of commitment, namely feelings of attachment, long-term orientation, and intent to persist, are included in this scale (e.g. 'I feel emotionally attached to the other.', e.g. Rusbult, Martz et al., 1998; Van Lange et al., 1997). This measure served as a manipulation check for commitment, *alpha* $= 0.96$.

Participants completed a measure of *accommodation* as used by Rusbult and colleagues (e.g. Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1991; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Participants read six brief scenarios that described incidents in which the other person (i.e. the person with whom the participant

---

[2]The reason for using the term '. . . conflict, for which the other is to blame' instead of the word offence, is that in Dutch language there is no proper equivalent of the word 'offence'. Dictionary translations of the word 'offence' refer to violations of the law, either as a very strong violation ('vergrijp') or a mild violation ('overtreding').

had the conflict) engages in some kind of destructive behaviour (e.g. 'The other suddenly yells at you for no particular reason'). After each scenario, participants were given four possible behavioural reactions, two of which were constructive reactions (e.g. 'you think 'never mind', probably the other had a bad day'), and two were destructive reactions (e.g. 'you yell back at the other'), and indicated on each of them how likely they thought they would react in this way (1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*). Scores on the 12 constructive responses were averaged (*alpha* = 0.77), and scores on the 12 destructive responses were averaged (*alpha* = 0.82).

Results

Manipulation Checks

To examine whether the manipulations of commitment and forgiving caused the intended effects, we conducted separate 2 (forgiving) by 2 (commitment) analyses of variance for degree of forgiving and for level of commitment to the other. The analysis on degree of forgiving revealed that, as expected, participants in the forgiving condition reported greater levels of forgiving ($M = 6.02$) than participants in the no forgiving condition ($M = 3.49$), $F(1, 82) = 84.40$, $p < 0.001$.[3]

There was also a main effect of commitment, indicating that participants in the strong commitment condition reported more forgiving ($M = 5.33$) than participants in the weak commitment condition ($M = 4.37$), $F(1, 82) = 8.55$, $p < 0.005$. These findings are consistent with earlier research on the determinants of forgiving, which demonstrated that commitment to the offender is an important relational determinant of forgiving (McCullough et al., 1997; cf. Finkel et al., 2002).[4] No further effects were found.

The ANOVA on level of commitment revealed the expected main effect of commitment condition, $F(1, 82) = 183.40$, $p < 0.001$. Commitment to the other was indeed greater in the strong commitment condition ($M = 5.73$) than in the weak commitment condition ($M = 2.45$). The analysis revealed no other effects. Thus, both the manipulation of forgiving and commitment caused the intended effects.

Features of the Conflict

Separate analyses were conducted to examine the links between forgiving and commitment with severity of conflict and time of conflict (i.e. how long ago the conflict occurred). Both the 2 (forgiving) by 2 (commitment) ANOVA on conflict severity and on time of conflict revealed no significant effects of forgiving, commitment, and their interaction. Thus, the conflicts did not differ between conditions for severity and time of conflict. Overall, participants brought to mind relatively severe conflict ($M = 4.87$, which is above the midpoint of the scale). The conflict occurred on average 20 months ago.

Accommodation

To test our hypothesis we performed a 2 (forgiving: conflict forgiven vs. not forgiven) × 2 (commitment: weak vs. strong) multivariate analysis of variance with constructive responses and destructive responses as dependent variables. As expected, there was a multivariate main effect of commitment for

---

[3]There were no gender differences in level of forgiveness, neither were their interactions between forgiveness and gender on level of accommodation. Also in Studies 2 and 3 we found no gender effects.
[4]However, because this is a cross-sectional study, the findings cannot tell us whether higher levels of forgiveness result from higher levels of commitment, or whether lower levels of commitment are a result of the absence of forgiveness, which seems also plausible.

both constructive and destructive responses, $F(2, 81) = 16.62$, $p < 0.01$. At the univariate level, results revealed that participants in the strong commitment condition indicated that they were more likely to respond constructively ($M = 4.44$) than participants in the weak commitment condition ($M = 3.71$), $F(1, 82) = 14.92$, $p < 0.001$. Also, participants in the strong commitment condition responded less destructively ($M = 3.18$) than participants in the weak commitment condition ($M = 3.84$), $F(1, 82) = 7.86$, $p < 0.01$.

More importantly, and consistent with our central hypothesis, the analysis revealed a multivariate main effect of forgiveness condition, $F(2, 81) = 5.18$, $p < 0.01$. At the univariate level, results revealed that participants responded more constructively when they had forgiven the other ($M = 4.32$) than when they had not forgiven the other ($M = 3.82$), $F(1, 82) = 6.45$, $p < 0.02$, and participants responded less destructively when they had forgiven the other ($M = 3.20$) than when they had not forgiven the other ($M = 3.85$), $F(1, 82) = 8.16$, $p < 0.005$.[5] There were no interaction effects of commitment and forgiving.

Thus, these findings suggest that both commitment and forgiveness are independently associated with accommodation. Strong commitment, compared to weak commitment, inhibits destructive responses and facilitates constructive responses. At the same time, when reminded of a past conflict, forgiveness inhibits destructive responses and facilitates constructive responses toward the offender, no matter if one is weakly or strongly committed to the offender.

STUDY 2

Study 1 reveals good support for the prediction that forgiving is positively associated with accommodation. When the other behaves in some kind of destructive way (which is actually unrelated to the former conflict), participants reported that they would be more willing to accommodate when they had forgiven the other, compared to when they had not forgiven the other. This effect was evident when the person felt weak commitment to the other, and when the person felt strong commitment to the other.

Study 2 was designed to replicate the findings of Study 1 by testing the hypothesis that forgiving is associated with accommodation. As an extension of Study 1, Study 2 tested the hypothesis that forgiving is associated with willingness to sacrifice.

Moreover, Study 2 extended Study 1 by using a different methodology. Especially because participants in Study 1 were initially asked to think of both forgiven and unforgiven conflicts, this procedure might be sensitive to demand characteristics. Moreover, because of this procedure, it is possible that the results may reflect lay theories of forgiveness and its correlates with accommodation rather than forgiveness per se. To address these potential limitations, in Study 2 participants were not asked to remember forgiven and unforgiven conflicts, but were simply asked to remember a severe offence. Forgiveness was assessed after participants had brought to mind a severe conflict, and only after a filler task, accommodation and willingness to sacrifice were measured. This method has arguably less potential for influence by demand characteristics.

Method

Participants

Ninety participants (34 male, 56 female, 20.3 years of age on average) at the Free University of Amsterdam took part in this study and received 5 Dutch guilders (about US$ 2) for their participation.

[5]When corrected for severity and time, simultaneously as well as separately, results were nearly identical. The effect of forgiving on accommodation remained significant.

Procedure

Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were placed in separate cubicles equipped with a computer. Participants received all instructions by means of the computer.

In the first part of the study, participants were asked to bring to mind and type in the name of 'the most close other in your life. You feel strongly committed to this person and you have known this person for many years (perhaps a parent, sibling, intimate partner or a close friend).' (cf. Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998.) Participants then indicated on the eight-item scale, as used in Study 1, their commitment to the other, *alpha* = 0.84.

In the next part of the procedure, participants were asked to 'bring to mind the most severe conflict you had with the other (the typed name of the other was used in the instructions) in the last several years for which you think the other was largely to blame. You felt hurt, treated unfairly, or otherwise badly treated by the other.' Participants were asked to briefly write down the conflict on a piece of paper and to fold it when finished. After that, participants completed questionnaires which assessed when the conflict occurred, how severe the conflict was, and the degree to which they had forgiven the other. For ten minutes, participants completed a filler task. Then, accommodation and willingness to sacrifice were measured.

Measures

Participants indicated how long ago the conflict occurred (i.e. *time of conflict*) on a single-item question, and *severity of the conflict* was measured with a three-item scale (e.g. 'The conflict was very serious', *alpha* = 0.91).

For the assessment of *forgiving*, participants completed a Dutch translation of the TRIM (i.e. transgression-related interpersonal motivations) inventory. This measure, developed by McCullough et al. (1998), was designed to assess forgiving, based on an underlying two-component motivational system (i.e. avoidance and revenge). Eight items of this originally ten-item measure were used (with four items measuring the avoidance component and four items measuring the revenge component of forgiving; two items were deleted because we were not able to translate these items in a way that connotations of the items corresponded in English and Dutch). Additionally, on a single-item scale participants indicated 'the degree to which you feel you have forgiven the other' (cf. Subkoviak et al., 1995). We averaged the scores on the TRIM and the single-item scale and used this as an indicator of forgiveness. This measure exhibited good internal consistency, *alpha* = 0.84.

For the assessment of *accommodation*, the same measure was used as in Study 1. After each of six scenarios, in which the other (i.e. the other with whom they had the conflict) engaged in some kind of destructive behaviour, participants indicated for two possible constructive responses and two possible destructive responses, how likely they thought they would react in this way. The 12 destructive items exhibited good internal consistency, *alpha* = 0.81. Although the alpha for constructive reactions was lower than ideal, *alpha* = 0.66, we judged them to be adequate and averaged the scores for constructive responses and averaged the scores for destructive responses.

Finally, *willingness to sacrifice* was assessed using a measure developed by Van Lange et al. (1997), in which personal well-being is pitted against relationship well-being. Each participant was asked to list, in order, the four most important activities in their lives, apart from their relationship with the other. For each activity, participants were asked to imagine that it was not possible for them to engage in this activity and maintain the relationship they have with the other person. Then the participant was asked to what extent he/she would consider ending the activity (1 = *definitely would not consider ending the activity*, 7 = *definitely would consider ending the activity*). Internal consistency was good, *alpha* = 0.77.

Table 1. Correlations between commitment, forgiving, destructive and constructive responses, willingness to sacrifice, and time and severity of conflict, Study 3

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Forgiving	6.11	0.92	—					
2. Commitment	6.24	0.65	0.18	—				
3. Destructive responses	2.91	0.92	−0.45**	−0.29**	—			
4. Constructive responses	4.57	0.71	0.36**	0.26**	−0.33**	—		
5. Willingness to sacrifice	4.22	1.39	0.29**	0.05	−0.17	0.25*	—	
6. Severity of conflict	4.45	1.70	−0.37**	0.07	0.19	−0.20	−0.06	—
7. Time of conflict (months)	14.13	17.11	0.13	−0.23*	−0.01	0.11	0.01	0.04

Results and Discussion

Correlational Analysis

First, we calculated simple correlations between forgiving, commitment, willingness to sacrifice, destructive and constructive responses (i.e. accommodation), and the features of the conflict, of which the results are summarized in Table 1. Consistent with our main hypothesis, forgiving was positively correlated with constructive responses and willingness to sacrifice, and negatively correlated with destructive responses. Moreover, commitment was positively correlated with constructive responses and negatively correlated with destructive responses. Finally, forgiving and severity of conflict were significantly negatively correlated. Unexpectedly, commitment was not significantly correlated with willingness to sacrifice.[6]

Accommodation

To determine whether forgiving accounted for unique variance in accommodation, we first regressed destructive responses simultaneously onto forgiving, commitment, and also severity of conflict and time of conflict. The same was done for constructive responses. As can be seen in Table 2, consistent with our hypothesis, after controlling for commitment, severity of conflict, and time of conflict, there was a positive association between forgiving and constructive behaviour and a negative association between forgiving and destructive responses. Consistent with findings in previous research on commitment (by Rusbult and colleagues), level of commitment also accounted for unique variance in accommodation.

Willingness to Sacrifice

To examine whether forgiving accounted for unique variance in willingness to sacrifice, a similar analysis was performed. That is, we regressed willingness to sacrifice simultaneously onto forgiving,

[6]For all relationship types, except for relationships with close friends, the correlation between commitment and willingness to sacrifice was positive, with *r*s ranging from 0.21 in relationships with parents to 0.41 in relationships with siblings. However, the correlation between commitment and willingness to sacrifice within relationships with close friends, appeared to be negative, $r = -0.38$. This effect may explain the overall finding that commitment and willingness to sacrifice are not correlated when relationship type is not taken into account. We regard this finding potentially interesting, but very preliminary; indeed, the meaning and robustness awaits future research.

Table 2.   Regression models predicting willingness to sacrifice and willingness to accommodate (destructive responses and constructive responses), Study 3

Criteria	Simple r with criterion	Regression results		
		Beta	F	R^2
Constructive responses				
Forgiving	0.36**	0.25*	5.13**	0.19
Commitment	0.26**	0.25*		
Severity	−0.20	−0.13		
Time of conflict	0.11	0.14		
Destructive responses				
Forgiving	−0.45**	−0.39**	7.10**	0.25
Commitment	−0.29**	−0.22*		
Severity	0.19	0.07		
Time of conflict	−0.01	−0.01		
Willingness to sacrifice				
Forgiving	0.29**	0.31**	2.00	0.09
Commitment	0.05[a]	−0.02		
Severity	−0.06	−0.05		
Time of conflict	0.01	−0.03		

[a]See footnote 6.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

commitment, severity of conflict and time of conflict. As shown in Table 2, and consistent with our hypothesis, forgiving was positively associated with willingness to sacrifice after controlling for these variables.[7]

To summarize, the results of Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1, using a different methodology, that forgiveness is associated with accommodation. Furthermore, the findings complement the findings of Study 1, by providing evidence for the link between forgiveness and willingness to sacrifice. Importantly, the results revealed that both these links with forgiveness were independent of commitment to the offender.

STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 reveal good support for the prediction that intrapersonal forgiveness is related to pro-relational responses in mixed-motive situations with the offender, and that this effect of forgiveness is independent of commitment towards the offender. These studies show that when a person has forgiven the offender, he or she exhibits greater levels of pro-relational responses toward the offender, compared to when a person has not forgiven the offender.

In Study 3 we wanted to complement these findings by addressing the question whether it is forgiveness which increases pro-relational responses toward the offender, or whether the absence of forgiveness causes a decrease in pro-relationship acting, compared to 'baseline' levels of pro-relational motivation and behaviour in the specific relationship. When a person harms or offends an interaction partner, by this action, he or she creates a 'debt' towards the partner. When a person forgives an offender, there is a cancellation of this interpersonal debt, created by the offender's action

[7]All analyses were also conducted with the single-item measure of forgiving and the TRIM separately. The TRIM measure was significantly correlated with accommodation and willingness to sacrifice, after controlling for commitment, conflict severity and time of conflict. The single-item measure of forgiving was significantly correlated with accommodation, and marginally correlated with willingness to sacrifice, after controlling for commitment, conflict severity and time of conflict.

(e.g. Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Hebl & Enright, 1993). In other terms, when a person has forgiven the offender, the situation as before the offence is restored. Conversely, when a person has not forgiven the offender, the debt created by the offence still exists. Therefore, we hypothesize that especially the failure to forgive is associated with a decrease in pro-relational responses, whereas when a person has forgiven the offender, and the debt no longer exists, his or her pro-relational responses will be comparable to baseline levels of pro-relational responses within the relationship.

To test this hypothesis, in Study 3 we added a control condition to the two experimental conditions of forgiveness (forgiving vs. no forgiving), in which participants were asked to bring to mind an everyday interaction they had with someone. As a further extension of Studies 1 and 2, in Study 3 we used level of cooperation towards the offender in a give-some dilemma as an indicator of pro-relationship intentions. The give-some dilemma provides a measure of pro-relationship intentions, which allows us to nicely demonstrate the shift from acting on self-interested preferences (i.e. least cooperation) toward acting on joint-interest preferences (i.e. maximum cooperation).

Method

Participants and Design

Ninety-five participants (35 male, 60 female, 21 years old on average) at the Free University of Amsterdam participated in Study 3 and received 5 Dutch guilders in return for their participation. They were randomly assigned to either the forgiving condition, the no-forgiving condition, or the control condition.

Procedure

Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants received a questionnaire and completed this in individual cubicles. The three conditions were created by means of the instructions. One third of the participants were asked to bring to mind and to briefly write down a conflict they had with someone, which they had forgiven the other (forgiving condition). One third of the participants were asked to bring to mind and to write down a conflict they had with someone, which they had not forgiven the other (no forgiving condition). And one third of the participants were asked to bring to mind and to briefly write down an everyday interaction they had with someone (neutral condition). We wanted to control for level of commitment across all three conditions, and therefore we asked all participants to think about someone, to whom they were currently strongly committed. In this way, we could examine, as we predicted, if the absence of forgiveness reveals decreased levels of cooperation compared to the control condition, and if forgiveness reveals similar levels of cooperation, compared to the control condition (which represents baseline levels of cooperation in relationships of strong commitment).

Subsequently, participants completed measures which assessed commitment to the other person, severity of the conflict, time of conflict, forgiveness (obviously, in the neutral condition participants did not complete measures of features of the conflict and forgiveness), and, after a ten minute filler task, level of cooperation towards the other person.

Commitment was measured with the same eight item scale as used in Studies 1 and 2. Internal consistency was good, *alpha* = 0.90. As to features of the conflict, we examined perceived *severity of conflict* with the same three items as in Studies 1 and 2 (*alpha* = 0.87), and *time of conflict*, by asking how long ago the conflict took place. In the control condition, participants were asked how long ago the interaction took place. We will further refer to time of conflict and time of interaction as *time of event*.

Forgiving was measured with the TRIM, along with a single-item measure of forgiveness. As in Study 2, we averaged the scores on the TRIM and the single-item scale, and used this as an indicator of forgiveness (*alpha* = 0.88). This measure served as a manipulation check.

Level of cooperation was measured using a give-some dilemma task, adopted from Van Lange and Kuhlman (1994, see also e.g., Van Lange & Semin-Goossens, 1998). Participants were asked to imagine that (s)he had been given four coins, and that the other person (i.e. the person who had offended him/her, or the person with whom he or she had the interaction, in the control condition) had been given four coins. Each *own* coin had a value of 50 Dutch cents to the participant himself or herself, and a value of 100 Dutch cents to the other person. Similarly, each coin held by the other person had a value of 50 cents to himself or herself, and a value of 100 cents to the participant. The participant was asked to decide how many of his/her four coins (s)he would give to the other, in a task where both the participant and the other person were asked to exchange coins simultaneously. In this task, joint well-being is better served by exchanging more coins and personal well-being is better served by giving fewer coins to the other. Thus, maximal cooperation is to give four coins, and minimal cooperation is to give zero coins to the other person.

After the task was explained, participants were asked to decide how many of his/her four coins (s)he would give to the other person, with whom they had the conflict with (in the forgiving and no forgiving conditions), or with whom they had the interaction with (in the control condition).

Results

Manipulation Check

To examine whether the manipulation of forgiving caused the intended effects, an analysis of variance was conducted, with degree of forgiving as dependent measure and the experimental conditions (forgiving vs. no forgiving condition) as dependent measure. As expected, participant in the forgiving condition reported greater levels of forgiving ($M = 5.72$) than did participants in the no forgiving condition ($M = 4.68$), $F(1, 62) = 12.90$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, the manipulation of forgiving was successful.

Links of Conditions with Features of Conflict and Commitment

Separate analyses of variance were conducted to examine whether the different conditions were associated with severity of the conflict (of this analysis the control condition was obviously excluded), when the event took place, and level of commitment.

These analyses revealed that severity of conflict did not differ between the forgiving ($M = 4.48$) and the no forgiving condition ($M = 4.47$), $F(1, 62) < 1$, *ns*. There was a marginal effect of time of event, $F(2, 92) = 2.86$, $p < 0.10$. The everyday interaction participants brought to mind took place 5.94 months ago on average, the forgiven conflict occurred 14.35 months ago on average, the not forgiven conflict occurred on average 14.06 moths ago. Finally, level of commitment to the other differed marginally among conditions, $F(2, 92) = 2.72$, $p < 0.10$. In all conditions, as intended, levels of commitment to the other were relatively strong (in the forgiving condition, $M = 5.43$, in the no forgiving condition, $M = 5.15$, in the neutral condition, $M = 5.85$).

Level of Cooperation

To test our hypothesis, we performed an analysis of variance with level of cooperation as dependent variable and condition (forgiving, no forgiving, and control) as independent variable. This analysis

revealed an effect of condition, $F(2, 92) = 6.74$, $p < 0.005$. Planned comparison analysis revealed that, as predicted, there was a significant contrast between the no forgiving condition ($M = 2.55$) and the forgiving and neutral condition (respectively $M = 3.25$ and $M = 3.52$), $F(1, 92) = 12.11$, $p < 0.001$. Level of cooperation did not differ between the forgiving and neutral condition, $F(1, 92) < 1$, *ns*. Thus, consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the no forgiving condition exhibited lower levels of cooperation compared to participants in the forgiving and control condition.

Correlational analysis revealed that commitment was, as expected, significantly positively correlated with level of cooperation, $r(95) = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$. To determine whether this effect of condition on level of cooperation was independent of commitment to the other, we included commitment in the analysis as a covariate. This revealed that the contrast between the no forgiving condition and the forgiving and neutral condition remained significant, $F(1, 91) = 9.62$, $p < 0.005$, and that level of cooperation between the forgiving and neutral condition did not differ, $F(1, 91) < 1$, *ns*.[8]

Thus, the results of Study 3 revealed that when a person has not forgiven an offender, his or her pro-relational motivation decreases, whereas when a person has forgiven an offender, level of intended cooperation seems to be restored, comparable to baseline levels of pro-relational responses. These findings show that simply reminding a person of a past offence, does not affect his or her pro-relational responses toward the offender: only when the offender is not forgiven, the individual exhibits decreased levels of intended cooperation toward the offender.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present research was to examine whether forgiveness is positively associated with cooperation, accommodation, and willingness to sacrifice. Using principles of interdependence theory, we argued that forgiveness, which we conceptualized as a transformation of motivation, enhances pro-relationship responses in interactions with the offender that are actually unrelated to the past offence. Three studies revealed consistent evidence in support of the hypothesis that forgiveness is positively associated with willingness to accommodate, willingness to sacrifice, and intended cooperation. Also, in line with previous research, the present studies revealed that commitment was positively associated with pro-relationship responses (except for willingness to sacrifice; Study 2). More importantly, consistent with our predictions, the results of these three studies revealed that level of forgiveness predicts cooperation, accommodation, and willingness to sacrifice, independent of level of commitment to the offender, suggesting the 'unique' role of forgiveness in supporting pro-relationship motivation and behaviour.[9] Finally, Study 3 revealed that, in comparison to a control condition (in

---

[8]When controlling for time of conflict or interaction, the analysis yielded almost identical results. Also, when controlling for severity of conflict, an analysis of variance revealed that the effect of forgiving conditions on level of cooperation was significant (when controlling for severity of conflict, obviously, the neutral condition could not be included in the analysis).

[9]An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the effect of forgiveness above and beyond commitment in the present research might be due to a restriction of range of commitment (especially in Studies 2 and 3), and due to the measurement of commitment prior to bringing to mind the offence (in Studies 2 and 3). However, prior to Study 3, we conducted a pilot study, that provides insight into both these issues. Participants were first asked to remember a severe offence (that was either forgiven or not forgiven), and were free to bring to mind any person (i.e. ranging from weak to strong commitment; indeed, on a 7-point scale, level of commitment ranged from 1 to 7, with an overall mean of 4.67). Moreover, only after participants described the offence, participants reported level of commitment to the offender. Then they completed the same measure of intended cooperation as in Study 3. Level of commitment was positively correlated with intended cooperation, $r = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$. Also, consistent with the results of Study 3, level of intended cooperation was higher in the forgiveness than in the no forgiveness condition, $F(1, 88) = 9.66$, $p < 0.01$. Importantly, this effect was still significant after controlling for level of commitment, $F(1, 87) = 9.58$, $p < 0.01$. Thus, even when level of commitment to the offender ranges from weak to strong, and commitment is measured after the offence is recalled, the effect of forgiveness on level of intended cooperation is above and beyond commitment.

which participants were not reminded of an offence), the absence of forgiveness is associated with a decrease in level pro-relationship response, whereas the presence of forgiveness is not associated with an increase in pro-relationship response. Taken together, these findings illuminate the ways in which friends and partners return to becoming caring partners, and provide good initial empirical evidence in support of the largely untested claim that forgiveness promotes pro-relationship responses.

In the following paragraphs, we will consider some of the implications of the current findings. First, we believe our findings have important implications for the literature on commitment and pro-relationship motivation and behaviour. As alluded to in the introduction of this article, commitment can be considered as a macromotive, a very broad relationship motive which is argued to play a 'key role' in promoting central pro-relationship behaviour (Rusbult, Martz et al., 1998). However, also in highly interdependent relationships in which partners are strongly committed to each other, partners do not always act in a pro-relational manner. Indeed, level of 'pro-relationality' fluctuates from time to time: at certain times John is less willing to make sacrifices for Cathleen, to accommodate to Cathleen's destructive behaviour, or to cooperate, than at other times. Although previous research on commitment has contributed a great deal to our understanding of why people in highly interdependent relationships generally act in a pro-relationship or pro-partner manner, the construct of commitment cannot readily account for such temporal fluctuations. Therefore, by examining relational motives that may be especially important at a more micro-level, the present work contributes to our understanding of when and why people, within the same relationship, sometimes act in the interest of the partner or the relationship, and sometimes act on self-interested preferences.

The current research suggests that forgiveness is such a motivational construct, that can account for these—at least—temporal fluctuations in a person's relationship concerns and behaviours. This is not to say, however, that forgiveness is restricted to shape behaviour at a micro-level, or only has short-term effects when a person is reminded of the conflict. Especially when the offence is more severe, forgiveness presumably will not only shape behaviour when one is reminded of the incident, but the incident will also at a more or less unconscious level affect pro-relationship motivations and behaviour toward the offender, depending on forgiveness of the incident. The results of Studies 2 and 3 are congruent with this notion, revealing that, even after a filler task, the psychological state of forgiveness still affects cooperation, accommodation, and willingness to sacrifice. We will return to this point, when discussing the limitations of the present research.

Second, our findings have implications for research concerned with the question how people are able to maintain well-functioning interpersonal relationships, despite the sometimes hurtful moments within relationships. By examining the link between forgiveness and pro-relationship motivation and behaviour, the current findings provide preliminary answers to the question of whether and why forgiveness can be regarded as a relationship maintenance construct (e.g. Fincham, 2000; McCullough, 2000). For instance, previous research has demonstrated that accommodation and willingness to sacrifice are two important constructs that are predictive of relational functioning and persistence (Rusbult et al., 1991; Van Lange et al., 1997). Recently, research by Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) has demonstrated that willingness to sacrifice and accommodation are important activities or responses that may sustain reciprocity of pro-relationship motivation and behaviour in a cyclical manner. John's pro-relational acts (i.e. willingness to sacrifice, accommodation) provide diagnostic information regarding John's pro-relational motives, which enhances Cathleen's trust in John. In turn, trust promotes commitment to John, which promotes pro-relational acts on Cathleen's side. It is easy to imagine how severe offences in a relationship can disturb this cyclical pattern (Wieselquist et al., 1999). In particular, when John has not forgiven Cathleen a certain offence, his pro-relational motivation and behaviour decline, which may result in distrust by Cathleen. In contrast, when John would have forgiven Cathleen, our findings show that this promotes important pro-relational acts, which may prevent the disturbance of mutual reciprocity of pro-relational behaviour, trust, and commitment.

Third, we believe that our findings not only provide an explanation for the link between forgiving and relationship functioning, but may also have implications, albeit indirectly, for the link between forgiving and the forgiver's *own* psychological well-being. Several studies have demonstrated that forgiving can have beneficial psychological outcomes for the forgiver (e.g. Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996). Mostly, intrapsychic processes are provided as an explanation for this link. The lack of forgiveness is directly related to negative emotions such as blame, anger, and hostility, and when forgiving occurs, such negative emotions are reduced and psychological well-being is enhanced (e.g. Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000). However, possible interpersonal explanations have received surprisingly little explicit attention. The current findings suggest that forgiving is related to smoother interactions between relationship partners, which ultimately may result in greater relationship satisfaction. Given the immense evidence for the important role of having and maintaining stable personal relationships for a person's psychological health (for a review, see for example Myers, 2000), the link between forgiving and general psychological well-being might therefore for an important part be mediated by the ability to maintain healthy functioning relationships, resulting from forgiveness.[10]

Finally, the findings of Study 3 are of importance to conceptualizations of forgiveness. Study 3 revealed that when a person has forgiven a relationship partner, his or her level of cooperation was comparable with baseline levels of cooperation within a relationship; in contrast, when a person has not forgiven a relationship partner, his or her level of cooperation was significantly lower than baseline levels of cooperation. This pattern is in line with our expectations, based on the idea that forgiveness involves a cancellation of the debt created by the offender. While there is some debate in the literature as to whether forgiveness primarily involves 'letting go of the negative,' or 'embracing the positive?' (Pargament et al., 2000, p. 300; see also McCullough et al., 2000), the present findings add credence to the claim that the lack of forgiveness instigates negative or destructive patterns of motivations and behaviour, suggesting that forgiveness primarily involves decreasing negative interpersonal behaviour. These findings are also congruent with the notion that a lack of forgiveness, at least in committed relationships, brings about interpersonal tension, which can be resolved by forgiveness (Karremans et al., 2003).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Since the present research is one of the first empirical studies which directly examined the association between forgiving and prosocial motivation and behaviour in relationships, we believe our findings make an important contribution to the relatively young literature on forgiveness. At the same time, we are aware of several limitations of this research.

First, the research was cross-sectional. By instructing the participants to bring to mind a past offence, and analysing the relationship between forgiveness of this offence and pro-relational behaviour, as noted above, we cannot conclude that the effect of forgiveness of a past offence has implications for pro-relationship behaviour in the long-term. For instance, we do not know how frequently people *themselves* bring to mind the offence (rather than elicited by the experimenter). Previous research, however, has demonstrated that people *do* ruminate about unforgiven offences (McCullough et al., 1998). Therefore, the method of bringing to mind an offence as used in the present research, seems to be ecologically valid: when such offences *do* come to mind in daily life, the current

---

[10]It is important to note, however, that there might also be a 'dark-side' of forgiveness (e.g. Exline & Baumeister, 2000; McCullough, 2000). In some cases, on the part of the offender, forgiveness may be taken as a 'permit' to continue his or her hurtful or even violent behaviour (e.g. in abusive relationships). While most psychologists have been interested in the positive consequences of forgiveness, researchers should not neglect the possible negative outcomes of forgiveness.

findings suggests that these thoughts will shape the person's pro-relational motivation and behaviour toward the offender, depending on level of forgiveness.

A second limitation concerns possible alternative explanations for the present findings. For instance, are the present findings caused simply by thinking of negative versus positive relationship memories? And, can the effect of forgiveness on pro-relationship responses be explained by mood effects? However, we think that there are good reasons to believe that memory of forgiven (vs. not forgiven) offences do not simply reflect a difference between positive versus negative relationship memories. For instance, participants who were instructed to bring to mind a forgiven offence did not bring to mind less severe offences, which might have been expected if the instructions would simply yield more positive versus negative memories. As to the second question, admittedly, we have no evidence that the present results are not mediated by mood effects. However, although researchers often seem to assume that mood influences prosocial behaviour, evidence regarding this relationship is mixed (Hertel, Neuhof, Theuer, & Kerr, 2000). Indeed, it appears that mood is often not related, or even negatively related with prosocial behaviour (Forgas, 1994; Hertel et al., 2000; Hertel & Fiedler, 1994). Hence, even if level of forgiveness affected participants mood, such that participants with higher levels of forgiveness experienced more positive moods, it is questionable whether this positive mood in turn affected prosocial intentions toward the offender. However, in future research this issue should be further examined.

Third, we used self-report measures of pro-relationship behaviour. Although this is an important limitation of the present research, it should be noted that prior research has revealed evidence for the validity of these measures. Both the self-report measures of accommodation and willingness to sacrifice are associated with (a) partner reports of accommodation and willingness to sacrifice, and (b) behavioural measures of accommodation and willingness to sacrifice (e.g. coding of videotaped conversations for accommodation: Rusbult, Bissionette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998; stepping up and down a stairs to earn money for the partner for willingness to sacrifice: Van Lange et al., 1997). Moreover, previous research on cooperation using a similar paradigm, suggests that the influences of hypothetical versus 'real' social dilemmas are likely to be weak (e.g. Van Lange & Liebrand, 1991). Although to our knowledge the present research is one of the first that has exclusively focused on the relationship between forgiveness and pro-relationship responses, we acknowledge that future research should address this important limitation, for instance by having both members of an interpersonal relationship interact in the laboratory.

One might argue that important relationship-specific factors other than commitment may have accounted for the present findings. For instance, factors such as satisfaction, closeness, attachment, or liking have been shown to contribute to relationship maintenance behaviour (see Arriaga & Agnew, 2001, for a brief overview). However, there is strong evidence in support of the central nature of commitment, such as that several variables (e.g. satisfaction and liking, alternatives, investments) do not contribute above and beyond commitment in predicting various forms of pro-relationship behaviour, such as willingness to sacrifice and accommodation, as well relationship maintenance (e.g. Rusbult et al., 1991; for a recent review, see Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). At the same time, commitment does contribute above and beyond these variables—in fact, after decades of research, we are not aware of any variable that contributes above and beyond commitment in predicting pro-relationship behaviour. Thus, while we cannot exclude the possibility, it does not seem very likely that the link between forgiveness and pro-relationship behaviour is accounted for by well-established variables related to (and measured by) satisfaction (e.g. liking, attraction). We do suggest, however, that future research on forgiveness would benefit from including commitment as well as each of these relationship-specific variables to provide more direct evidence for the unique predictive power of forgiveness.

The current research focuses on the link between forgiveness and behavioural tendencies toward the offender. In future research, it would be interesting to examine whether forgiveness is also related

to different motivated cognitive processes, that have been identified to benefit relationship well-being (e.g. positive illusions about the partner; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; derogation of alternatives; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990; perceived superiority of the relationship; Buunk & Van der Eijnden, 1997; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000).

The present findings, as noted earlier, complement the extant literature on pro-relationship motivation and behaviour, which has primarily focused on broad relationship constructs, such as commitment and trust. Like studying forgiveness, studying other human 'virtues' (e.g., gratitude: McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001; humility: Tangney, 2000) might also contribute to the literature on pro-relationship behaviour. For instance, in a recent literature review, McCullough, & Kilpatrick et al. (2001) suggest that gratitude might be an important motive that instigates prosocial behaviour, and inhibits destructive interpersonal behaviour. By examining whether such sources of human strength (e.g. gratitude) make a unique contribution to predicting pro-relationship behaviour, above and beyond broad relationship motives, this would extend our knowledge of when and why people in interpersonal relationships sometimes act in the interest of the relationship or the partner, and when and why they do not at other times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Al-Mabuk, R. H., Enright, R. D., & Cardis, P. A. (1995). Forgiveness education with parentally love-deprived late adolescents. *Journal of Moral Education, 24*, 427–444.

Andersen, S. M., Glassman, N. S., & Gold, D. A. (1998). Mental representations of the self, significant others, and nonsignificant others: Structure and processing of private and public aspects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*, 845–861.

Aron, A., & Aron, E. N. (1995). Self and self-expansion in relationships. In G. J. O. Fletcher, & J. Fitness (Eds.), *Knowledge structures in close relationships: A social psychological approach* (pp. 325–344). New Jersey: Hillsdale.

Arriaga, X. B., & Agnew, C. R. (2001). Being committed: Affective, cognitive, and conative components of relationship commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 9*, 1190–1203.

Arriaga, X. B., & Rusbult, C. E. (1998). Standing in my partner's shoes: Partner perspective taking and reactions to accommodative dilemmas. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 24*, 927–948.

Baldwin, M. W. (1992). Relational schemas and the processing of social information. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*, 461–484.

Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Parrot, L. III, O'Connor, L. E., & Wade, N. G. (2001). Dispositional forgivingness: Development and construct validity of the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness (TNTF). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 1277–1290.

Buunk, B. P., & Van der Eijnden, R. J. J. M. (1997). Perceived prevalence, perceived superiority, and relationship satisfaction: Most relationships are good, but ours is the best. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*, 219–228.

Coyle, C. T., & Enright, R. D. (1997). Forgiveness intervention with post-abortion men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 65*, 1042–1046.

Enright, R. D., & North, J. (1998). Introducing forgiveness. In R. D. Enright, & J. North (Eds.), *Exploring forgiveness* (pp. 3–8). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Exline, J. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). Expressing forgiving and repentance: Benefits and barriers. In M. McCullough, K. Pargament, & C. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiving: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 133–155). New York: Guilford.

Fincham, F. D. (2000). The kiss of the porcupines: From attributing responsibility to forgiving. *Personal Relationships, 7*, 1–23.

Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: Implications for psychological aggression and constructive communication. *Personal Relationships, 9*, 239–251.

Fincham, F. D., Paleari, G., & Regalia, C. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: The role of relationship quality, attributions, and empathy. *Personal Relationships, 9*, 27–37.

Finkel, E. J., Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., & Hannon, P. A. (2002). Dealing with betrayal in close relationships: Does commitment promote forgiveness of betrayal? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 956–974.

Flanigan, B. (1998). Forgivers and the unforgivable. In R. D. Enright, & J. North (Eds.), *Exploring forgiveness* (pp. 95–105). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Forgas, J. P. (1994). Sad and guilty? Affective influences on the explanation of conflict in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66*, 56–68.

Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996). Forgiving as an intervention goal with incest survivors. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*, 983–992.

Girard, M., & Mullet, E. (1997). Propensity to forgive in adolescents, young adults, older adults and elderly people. *Journal of Adult Development, 4*, 209–220.

Hebl, J. H., & Enright, R. D. (1993). Forgiving as a psychotherapeutic goal with elderly females. *Psychotherapy, 30*, 658–667.

Hertel, G., & Fiedler, K. (1994). Affective and cognitive influences in a social dilemma game. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 28*, 49–70.

Hertel, G., Neuhof, J., Theuer, T., & Kerr, N. L. (2000). Mood effects on cooperation in small groups: Does positive mood simply lead to more cooperation? *Cognition and Emotion, 14*, 441–472.

Holmes, J. G. (2000). Social relationships: The nature and functioning of relational schemas. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 30*, 447–495.

Holmes, J. G., & Rempel, J. K. (1989). Trust in close relationships. In C. Hendrick (Ed.), *Review of personality and social psychology: Close relationships* (Vol. 10, pp. 187–219). Sage: Newbury Park.

Johnson, D. J., & Rusbult, C. E. (1989). Resisting temptation: Devaluation of alternative partners as a means of maintaining commitment in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*, 967–980.

Karremans, J. C., Van Lange, P. A. M., Ouwerkerk, J. W., & Kluwer, E. S. (2003). When forgiveness enhances psychological well-being: The influence of interpersonal commitment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 1011–1026.

Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence.* New York: Wiley.

McCullough, M. E. (2000). Forgiveness as human strength: Theory, measurement, and links to well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19*, 43–55.

McCullough, M. E., & Hoyt, W. T. (2002). Transgression related motivational dispositions: Personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the Big Five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 1556–1573.

McCullough, M. E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*, 321–336.

McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade Brown, S., & Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II—Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*, 1586–1603.

McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. E. (2000). The psychology of forgiveness: History, conceptual issues, and overview. In M. McCullough, K. Pargament, & C. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiving: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 1–14). New York: Guilford.

McCullough, M. E., Bellah, C. G., Kilpatrick, S. D., & Johnson, J. L. (2001). Vengefulness: Relationships with forgiveness, rumination, well-being, and the Big Five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 601–610.

McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin, 127*, 249–266.

Miller, D. T. (2001). Disrespect and the experience of injustice. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 527–553.

Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Griffin, D. (1996). The benefits of positive illusions: Idealization and the construction of satisfaction in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 79–98.

Myers, D. G. (2000). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American Psychologist, 55*, 56–67.

Pargament, K. I., McCullough, M. E., & Thoresen, C. E. (2000). The frontier of forgiveness: Seven directions for psychological study and practice. In M. McCullough, K. Pargament, & C. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiving: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 299–320). New York: Guilford.

Rusbult, C. E., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (1996). Interdependence processes. In E. T. Higgins, & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 564–596). New York: Guilford Press.

Rusbult, C. E., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2003). Interdependence, interaction, and relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54*, 351–375.

Rusbult, C. E., Verette, J., Whitney, G. A., Slovik, L. F., & Lipkus, I. (1991). Accommodation processes in close relationships: Theory and preliminary empirical evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60*, 53–78.

Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., & Verette, J. (1994). The investment model: An interdependence analysis of commitment processes and relationship maintenance phenomena. In D. J. Canary, & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (pp. 115–139). San Diego: Academic Press.

Rusbult, C. E., Bissionette, V. L., Arriaga, X. B., & Cox, C. L. (1998). Accommodation processes during the early years of marriage. In T. N. Bradbury (Ed.), *The developmental course of marital dysfunction* (pp. 74–113). New York: Cambridge.

Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The investment model scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships, 5*, 357–391.

Rusbult, C. E., Van Lange, P. A. M., Wildschut, T., Yovetich, N. A., & Verette, J. (2000). Perceived superiority in close relationships: Why it exists and persists. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*, 521–545.

Simpson, J. A., Gangestad, S. W., & Lerma, M. (1990). Perception of physical attractiveness: Mechanisms involved in the maintenance of romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*, 1192–1201.

Subkoviak, M. J., Enright, R. D., Wu, C., Gassin, E. A., Freedman, S., Olson, L. M., & Sarinopoulos, I. (1995). Measuring interpersonal forgiveness in late adolescence and middle adulthood. *Journal of Adolescence, 18*, 641–655.

Tangney, J. P. (2000). Humility: Theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and directions for future research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19*, 70–82.

Thoresen, C. E., Harris, A. H. S., & Luskin, F. (2000). Forgiveness and health: An unanswered question. In M. McCullough, K. Pargament, & C. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiving: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 254–280). New York: Guilford.

Van Lange, P. A. M., & Kuhlman, D. M. (1994). Social value orientations and impressions of partner's honesty and intelligence: A test of the might versus morality effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 126–141.

Van Lange, P. A. M., & Liebrand, W. B. G. (1991). Social value orientation and intelligence: A test of the goal prescribes rationality principle. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 21*, 273–292.

Van Lange, P. A. M., & Semin-Goossens, A. (1998). The bounderies of reciprocol cooperation. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 28*, 847–854.

Van Lange, P. A. M., Rusbult, C. E., Drigotas, S. M., Arriaga, X. B., Witcher, B. S., & Cox, C. L. (1997). Willingness to sacrifice in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 1373–1395.

Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C. E., Foster, G. A., & Agnew, C. R. (1999). Commitment, pro-relationship behavior, and trust in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*, 942–966.

Witvliet, C., Ludwig, T. E., & Vander Laan, K. L. (2001). Granting forgiveness or harboring grudges: Implications for emotion, physiology, and health. *Psychological Science, 121*, 117–123.

Yovetich, N. A., & Rusbult, C. E. (1994). Accommodative behavior in close relationships: Exploring transformation of motivation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 30*, 138–164.

Zechmeister, J. S., & Romero, C. (2002). Victim and offender accounts of interpersonal conflict: Autobiographical narratives of forgiveness and unforgiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 675–686.