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Two Sides to Every Story:

A Comparison of Role-Based Accounts of Forgiven and Unforgiven Transgressions

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Abstract

Past research has documented systematic discrepancies in the stories victims and transgressors tell about negative interpersonal events (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990). This study tested the generality of interpretations that attribute such divergent viewpoints to self-presentation based motives. In Wave 1, participants (N = 96) wrote 2 autobiographical narratives about forgiven transgressions, one from the role of transgressor and one from the role of victim. Participants in Wave 2 (N = 68) wrote accounts of unforgiven transgressions. We predicted that a victim's decision to forgive (or not) would have important implications for the kind of motives that guide both victims' and transgressor's efforts at account-making because the outcome of the decision process determines the degree to which an individual--depending on his or her role in the episode--is motivated to justify (i.e., defend) the victim's eventual choice. Results generally support the notion that the content of accounts varies by type of transgression. The motivational underpinnings of our results, however, are less clear.

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Previous investigations have documented systematic discrepancies in the stories victims and transgressors tell about negative interpersonal events (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990; Schutz, 1999; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Typically, transgressor narratives downplay the transgression's negative consequences whereas victim narratives exaggerate their severity. Transgressor narratives are also substantially more likely than victim narratives both to deny that the transgressor was responsible for the harm that was caused and to portray the transgressor's actions as reasonable and justified. In addition, transgressor narratives tend to dismiss the incident long before victim narratives do, often describing the victim's unwillingness to "let the matter go" as an indication of unnecessary vindictiveness. Remarkably, as Baumeister et al. (1990) have shown, self-serving discrepancies of this sort emerge even when the same individuals are assigned to both roles, that is, when the "victim" in the victim narrative and the "transgressor" in the transgressor narrative are one and the same person.

To date, investigators have tended to interpret victims' and transgressors' divergent viewpoints in these studies as evidence that concerns about maintaining (or restoring) a positive self-image shape the way people structure accounts of events that threaten their desired identities. The present investigation was designed to test the generality of this interpretation. We contend that previous research has failed to consider the important possibility that a victim's reaction to a transgression (or other negative interpersonal event) may influence how both victims and transgressors come to understand it. Specifically, we argue that a victim's decision to forgive--or, conversely, not to forgive--may have powerful implications for the kind of motive(s) that guide victims' and transgressors' efforts to make sense of the episode and thus for the occurrence of the

kind of role-based discrepancies described above.

Forgiveness and Motivations Underlying Account-Making

The act of forgiving involves an intrapersonal transformation: To forgive is to understand wrong, to release emotions, and to be ready to risk again. It is a constructive response to a destructive act that aids in diminishing negative affect and gives those involved in the transgression the opportunity to carry on with their lives in a positive manner (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). It requires that the injured party suppress the impulse to respond to a partner's breach of good conduct in a destructive fashion (i.e., being rude or humiliating the other) and opt instead to react constructively (i.e., trying to improve conditions).

This process of "accommodation" has been shown to promote relational well-being through empowering relational partners to overcome the transgressions that are an inevitable part of their experience (Rusbult, Verette, Slovik, Whitney & Lipkus, 1991; Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996). Sometimes, however, people fail in their efforts to bring about the difficult transformation of thought and feeling that forgiveness requires. In their hearts or minds they may be unable to come to terms with the pain they have endured, incapable of seeing the transgressor without experiencing a flood of anger and bitterness, unable to stop wishing that the offender be made to suffer as they have. Sometimes they are uninterested in taking the steps necessary to produce such change, believing instead that the offender deserves their continuing wrath or that the anguish they experienced (or more likely continue to experience) or the indignity they sustained is too great to justify any reckoning that would require that they abandon claims for sympathy and desires for retribution. Sometimes the offender continues to act in ways that, for all but the most generous and benevolent of souls, preclude the possibility of giving serious consideration to granting

forgiveness.

As these considerations amply illustrate, for victims the stakes involved in choosing to "let go" feelings of pain and suffering, to move beyond anger and spite, to abandon demands for restitution rather than retaliate can be considerable. Accordingly, the decision to forgive--or not to forgive--is unlikely to be taken lightly. Furthermore, like any important decision, it would be expected to induce a need to construct an account that provides adequate justification for the individual's eventual choice (e.g., Brehm, 1956).

Of course, the fact that social norms concerning forgiveness are ambiguous and often contradictory (Van Biema, 1999) almost certainly augments the pressure victims perceive in this regard. First, the lack of clear norms puts victims in the position of having to construct accounts that suit their purposes rather than being able to rely on a stock of widely-held cultural scripts or schemas about the kinds of offenses that deserve forgiveness, the kinds of situations in which forgiving is advisable versus inadvisable, and so on (cf. Baumeister, Wotman & Stillwell, 1993). Second, because such norms seem at different times both to prescribe and proscribe clemency, victims may very well feel compelled to offer an explanation for their decision irrespective of the direction it may take. For example, among those who choose to forgive, an explanation that legitimizes their decision may be necessary to quell their own nagging doubts concerning whether or not the transgressor truly warrants their charity. Such an account might also usefully serve to persuade others that, contrary to appearances, the offender's actions do not constitute a threat to the individual's "face" (i.e., by downplaying the severity of the transgression or appealing to external or mitigating circumstances as causes for the transgressor's hurtful behavior). At the same time, those who choose not to forgive may find that others expect them to have and to be able to articulate compelling reasons for their refusal to let the matter go; otherwise, victims may

face accusations that their anger is excessive and their treatment of the offender unduly harsh (to say nothing of accusations that their unwillingness to forgive may cause further harm to themselves). Accounts that explain their decision may also help victims themselves to validate their feelings and thus to sustain beliefs that their suffering is legitimate and their continuing anger justified.

The literature on post-decisional dissonance would suggest that the need to account for the victim's decision to forgive would be restricted to victims as the "decision-makers" in this particular context. Research conducted within an equity framework, however, suggests otherwise. In a recent investigation, Kelln and Ellard (1999) demonstrated that, under certain circumstances (i.e., when the gift of forgiveness is unsolicited), forgiveness has the potential to increase rather than decrease a transgressor's feeling of indebtedness to the victim. To the extent that transgressors are motivated to reduce the distress that such feelings of indebtedness are likely to elicit in such instances, they, too, have something to gain from structuring their accounts in ways that legitimize the victim's decision to forgive, specifically, from incorporating into their accounts evidence that they deserved to be forgiven (e.g., claims that they did not intend to harm or that their actions were accidental or could not be avoided).[i] More generally, regardless of any perceived threat to equity that forgiveness may or may not pose them, transgressors may feel obliged to demonstrate that they were entitled to the victim's generosity in forgiving whenever they believe accounts of their actions may be made public, thus exposing them to the risk of censure if they cannot establish that they deserved the victim's good will. In sum, although transgressors may perhaps feel little compulsion to explain why a victim has chosen not to forgive, they may perceive substantial pressure to account for victims' choices in the other direction.

The preceding discussion highlights an important issue. Accounts of negative interpersonal

events may serve multiple needs. As previous research has shown, the desire to present a favorable self-image may be a powerful force among these. However, individuals may experience other pressing concerns that shape the account-making process just as profoundly as do concerns with self-presentation. In particular, the preceding discussion suggests that individuals may often be motivated to fashion stories that explain and/or justify their actions in light of the victim's decision to forgive or not to forgive. Especially in the context of transgressions that occur in important interpersonal relationships, people who have wronged or been wronged may feel a strong need to describe the harmdoer and the harm itself in terms that make rational and understandable the injured party's choice between forgiving and holding on to feelings of hurt and anger.

<div align="center">Complementarity versus Competition Among Motives</div>

We argued above that individuals will be motivated to justify the victim's decision concerning forgiveness regardless of their role in the transgression under consideration. If this assertion is correct, the outcome of this decision-making process (i.e., whether the victim decides for or against forgiving the offending party) becomes a variable of considerable theoretical importance because of its implications for the degree of tension we should expect between motives based on self-presentation versus self-justification[ii] and thus for the occurrence of the kind of role-based discrepancies observed in previous research.

The task of recalling a forgiven transgression places an individual under different pressures than does the task of recalling an unforgiven transgression. In the former case, a victim's efforts to restore a tarnished self-image are likely to be constrained to some extent by the need to present a convincing rationale for having chosen to forgive. This is because the kinds of claims that serve a self-presentation agenda in this context (e.g., "she meant to hurt me," "this was the last straw")

may often compromise a victim's ability to mount a compelling defense of his or her decision to forgive. As a result, when describing a forgiven transgression, a victim's concerns about self-presentation may be tempered by perceived pressures to justify having forgiven the offender. The tension between self-presentation and self-justification may be more circumscribed for transgressors in this instance because desires to present the self in a favorable light and to legitimize the fact they were forgiven may often be complementary in their outcomes. For example, either or both of these motives may lead transgressors to depict the transgression as an isolated incident, atypical of their earlier behavior and devoid of historical precedents in their relational past. Nevertheless, perceived pressures to provide a convincing rationale for having been forgiven will--at the very least--place restrictions on transgressors' ability to portray themselves as unjustly accused. Transgressors who deny that their actions were wrong, who deny that the transgression occurred, or who fail to express feelings of guilt or remorse in their accounts compromise the persuasive power of their other efforts at demonstrating that they deserved to be forgiven.

The situation is quite different in the case of unforgiven transgressions. When a victim opts not to forgive, the accounting strategies he or she uses to justify this decision will likely do double-duty, simultaneously satisfying desires to present a favorable self-image and concerns about legitimizing his or her refusal to grant the offender clemency. For example, accounts that derogate the transgressor's motives (e.g., "there's no excuse for his behavior," "she was thinking only of herself and what she could get out of the situation") serve both to make the decision not to forgive appear rational and to bolster the victim's desired identity as person unworthy of the treatment received. For their part, transgressors are unlikely to perceive pressures to justify why they have not been forgiven. Forgiveness poses no threat to their perceptions of equity in the

relationship and they have nothing to gain, themselves, from arguments that legitimize the victim's continuing wrath. Instead, we believe they will feel compelled to construct an image of themselves in which they have been unjustly held to task for their actions, an account that frames their actions and intentions in ways that suit their needs to be perceived (as much as may be possible) as morally upright and without fault in spite of the victim's unwillingness to forgive.

According to this analysis, the type of transgression recalled--forgiven or unforgiven-- determines whether concerns with self-presentation and self-justification compete with versus complement each other in shaping the stories that people tell about transgressions in which they have been either the wrongdoer or the wronged. If we further assume that the sort of self-enhancing discrepancies Baumeister et al. (1990) identified in their research reflect the influence of self-presentational concerns, then whether or not the content of victim and transgressor accounts in the present study diverge in ways consistent with findings from previous investigations will depend on whether or not self-presentation motives are prepotent, that is, whether they dominate the need to justify the victim's decision concerning forgiveness. We thus offer the following alternative hypotheses:

H1: If self-presentation concerns are uppermost in participants' minds as they construct their transgression accounts, we expect to find widespread evidence of role-based discrepancies in the content of these accounts regardless of the type of transgression about which they write.

H2: If, however, individuals face different account-making pressures as a function of the type of transgression they recall, we expect that type of transgression will moderate the typical pattern of findings. Specifically, we expect that role-based discrepancies of the kind observed in previous research (Baumeister et al., 1990) will be most evident in

accounts of unforgiven as compared to forgiven transgressions and that this pattern of results will be largely attributable to deviations in the content of victim accounts.

We collected the data for this study in two waves. Participants wrote accounts of either forgiven (Wave 1) or unforgiven (Wave 2) transgressions in which they had been personally involved, in each case writing once about an incident in which they were the victim and once about an incident in which they were the transgressor. Using an approach adapted from Baumeister et al.(1990), we coded each narrative for the presence of references to details concerning time, the victim's response to the transgression, the transgressor's intentions as well as his or her later response, the transgression's consequences, and information relevant to forgiveness (e.g., apologies).

Method

Participants

One hundred and twenty-seven undergraduate students (34 from a university in western Canada, 93 from a university in the Northwestern United States) participated in Wave 1 of data collection. Participants for Wave 2 were 99 undergraduates (17 from a university in western Canada, 82 from a university in the Midwestern United States). Data for 62 individuals (31 in each wave) who failed to follow instructions[iii] were removed prior to analysis, resulting in final N's of 96 and 68 for Waves 1 and 2, respectively. Participants in these samples were predominantly White (91% in Wave 1, 76.5% in Wave 2) and female (80% and 66%), ranging in age from 17 to 46 (Wave 1: M = 21.3, SD = 4.2; Wave 2: M = 20.9, SD = 4.1).

Procedure

Data was collected individually or as part of a classroom exercise. Participants were asked to write two autobiographical narratives, one in which they described an incident in which

they had been "the person who was hurt" (i.e., the victim) and a second in which they described

an incident in which they had been "the person who hurt the victim (i.e., the transgressor). In

Wave 1, participants were asked to recall transgressions that had been forgiven. In Wave 2,

participants recalled unforgiven transgressions.

Instructions for the narrative task were adapted from Baumeister et al. (1990).

Except for changes in wording appropriate to the role participants were to assume in each

case (see material inserted in parentheses below), instructions for the victim and

transgressor narratives were identical. For example, participants in Wave 1 were

instructed to

> recall and describe for us a situation in which you were forgiven by someone for
>
> hurting him/her (in which you forgave someone for hurting you), that is, an
>
> incident in which you were excused or pardoned by someone for something
>
> hurtful you did to him/her (that is, an incident in which you excused or pardoned
>
> someone for something hurtful they did to you). Nearly everyone has
>
> experienced such things more than once; please choose an especially important or
>
> memorable event. Please be as thorough in your description as possible,
>
> describing your thoughts and feelings at the time as well as your actions. And be
>
> sure to provide the full story including the background, the episode itself, and any
>
> consequences or after effects.

Instructions for Wave 2 substituted the phrases "were not forgiven" (or "did not forgive" in the

case of victim narratives) for "were forgiven" ("forgave") and "not excused or pardoned by

someone" (or "did not excuse or pardon someone") for "excused or pardoned by someone"

("excused or pardoned someone"). Efforts to counterbalance the order in which participants

wrote the victim and transgressor narratives were inadvertently foiled by errors in collating.

Prior to coding, a research assistant transcribed the narratives from participants'

handwritten accounts and arranged them in a random order. Individual transcripts were labeled

with participant numbers and, for Wave 2, a code indicating the participant's role in the

transgression (i.e., victim vs. transgressor).[iv]

Coding

Two undergraduate students[v] coded the narratives from each wave, employing a

dichotomous "presence versus absence" criterion that required them to identify whether or not

each narrative contained explicit statements concerning the dimensions in question (e.g., explicit

references stating that a transgressor intended to commit the hurtful act). Baumeister and his

colleagues have used this criterion in previous investigations involving autobiographical

narratives (Baumeister et al., 1990; Baumeister, Wotman & Stillwell, 1993; Leith & Baumeister,

1998; Schutz, 1999).

Of the 45 dimensions that comprised the coding scheme, approximately half ($n = 25$)

were borrowed or adapted from Baumeister et al. (1990). The remainder were developed

specifically for the present study via discussion with a small group of faculty and graduate

students during a lab meeting. These latter dimensions concerned forgiveness-related content

(e.g., offers of and requests for restitution/compensation, discussion of the transgressor's intent

to commit the act, etc.) pertaining to our hypotheses about how the act of forgiving might

influence the information participants included in their accounts. Two of these forgiveness-

related dimensions were irrelevant to the coding of Wave 2 narratives (i.e., "forgiveness was

granted" and "forgiveness was motivated by religious or moral beliefs"); accordingly, coders for Wave 2 used a reduced set of coding dimensions ($\underline{n}$ = 43). A full list of the coding dimensions is available upon request from the first author.

Percentage agreement calculated for individual dimensions ranged from 72.2% to 99% in Wave 1 and 72.1% to 100% in Wave 2, with means of 87.7% and 90.6% respectively. Calculated for codes assigned to individual narratives, percentage agreement ranged from 68.9% to 100% in Wave 1 and 77.8% to 100% in Wave 2. Cohen's' kappas were 62.7 and 70.5 for Waves 1 and 2, respectively. These values compare favorably with percentage agreement and kappa values reported in previous studies using this dichotomous coding scheme (cf. Baumeister et al., 1990; Baumeister et al., 1993; Leith & Baumeister, 1998). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Analysis. To test our hypotheses, we performed a series of logistic regression analyses in which role (victim versus transgressor), type of transgression (forgiven versus unforgiven), and a product term coding for the interaction between role and type of transgression served as predictors and references to a given dimension (coded "1" if the dimension was present in the narrative and "0" if it was not) served as the criterion. Because role perspective is a within-subjects variable in this research, the first step of each analysis involved regressing the dimension in question on a series of (N – 1) dummy variables coding for subject to determine the proportion of variance in responses attributable to within-subjects differences (i.e., to partition the variance into between- and within-subjects effects; see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). In each case, role perspective and type of transgression were entered as main effects in the second block of the analysis. The role by type of transgression interaction was entered in the third and final block of the analysis. To facilitate comparison with findings from previous research, we also performed

planned contrasts examining the effect of role perspective separately for forgiven and unforgiven transgressions.

We conducted a number of important checks prior to performing the analyses described above. First, following Baumeister et al. (1990), we examined the intercorrelations among the coding dimensions in an effort to eliminate dimensions tapping redundant information. In their research, Baumeister et al. considered correlations greater than .80 evidence of duplication, greater than .60 indicative of substantial overlap in content, and greater than .40 as demonstrating a noteworthy degree of similarity. For the Wave 1 data, none of the correlations calculated across pairs of coding dimensions exceeded .80, although two (0.2%) exceeded .60 and 12 (1.2%) exceeded .40. For Wave 2, none of the correlations exceeded .60, although seven (0.7%) exceeded .40 (maximum $\underline{r}$ = .55).

After close examination of the pairs of dimensions upon which these correlations are based, we eliminated two dimensions from the pool of codes to be analyzed in Wave 1 and one dimension from the pool of codes to be analyzed in Wave 2. For Wave 1, one of the two pairs of correlated dimensions asked coders to identify references to opposite kinds of information (e.g., statements that the transgressor intentionally committed the act and statements indicating the converse, that the transgressor committed the act unintentionally);[vi] the other pair of dimensions coded for the presence of virtually identical information (e.g., statements indicating that the consequences of the incident were positive and desirable and statements that there was a happy ending). In each case, we retained the dimension that had the highest base rate of "present" codes (i.e., the dimension mentioned by the greatest number of participants, disregarding role). Removing these two dimensions left 43 dimensions for analysis in Wave 1. For Wave 2, we dropped the dimension coding for references to happy endings because it was involved in two of

the seven correlations greater than .40 and had been dropped from the pool of dimensions in

Wave 1 as well. Removing this dimension left 44 dimensions for analysis in Wave 2.

Next we examined the base rates for the remaining coding dimensions to determine

whether expected frequencies for each were sufficiently large to permit hypothesis testing using

logistic regression (see Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996). In either wave of data collection, dimensions

present in fewer than (or absent in fewer than) 10 narratives produce expected frequencies

smaller than five in two of the four cells. Base rates fell below $\underline{N}$ = 10 for 14 dimensions in

Wave 1 and 22 dimensions in Wave 2. In the Results section that follows, we report frequency

data (including base rates) for each of these dimensions. In addition, in cases where the base rate

was low in just one of the two waves of data collection (say, Wave 2), we report the results of the

planned comparison performed within the wave with the adequate base rate (in this example,

Wave 1).

Finally, because type of transgression is confounded with wave in this study, we also

tested whether Wave 1 respondents differed in demographic background from Wave 2

respondents. Analyses revealed a significantly greater proportion of Whites in Wave 1 as

compared to Wave 2, x^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 159) = 5.51, $\underline{p}$ > .05, as well as a tendency for females to more

clearly outnumber males in Wave 1 than in Wave 2, x^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 159) = 3.46, $\underline{p}$ > .10. The two

samples did not, however, differ with respect to age. Given these results, we examined the

correlations between race and sex and coders' judgments (i.e., present versus absent) within each

wave for each of the 45 coding dimensions (separately for victim and transgressor narratives) to

determine whether we should enter race and sex as covariates in the logistic regression analyses.

As none of the correlations met or exceeded the .30 threshold that Pedhazur (1997) recommends

to justify the inclusion of a covariate, we proceeded with the analyses as planned (i.e., without

covariates).

<div align="center">Results</div>

On the Nature of the Transgressions Recalled

The hurtful behaviors described in participants' transgression accounts were generally

similar across both waves of data collection (e.g., acts of infidelity, disclosure of the victim's

private thoughts and feelings, hurtful messages, damage to personal property, etc.). However,

the type of relationship within which these transgressions occurred varied by wave, x^2 (2, $\underline{N}$ =

313) = 17.61, $\underline{p}$ > .05. Transgressions involving romantic partners were more common (42%) in

Wave 1 (forgiven transgressions) than transgressions involving other types of relational partners,

with approximately equal numbers (roughly 30% each) of participants describing transgressions

involving friends and family members. In contrast, transgressions involving friends were more

common (53%) than transgressions involving romantic partners (31%) among unforgiven

transgressions, with transgressions involving family members (17%) recalled least often.

Comparisons of the Content of Accounts of Forgiven and Unforgiven Transgressions

Tables 1 through 6 summarize findings based on analyses of the content of participants'

transgression accounts. For each dimension, we report the proportion of victim and transgressor

narratives that contain references of the sort indicated, as well as the overall base rate (in

percentage terms) of "present" codes calculated by collapsing across role. For ease of

comparison across type of transgression and to facilitate comparison with previous research

(Baumeister et al., 1990), we also report the results of planned comparisons performed within

each wave (i.e., separately for accounts of forgiven and unforgiven transgressions). Results of

the omnibus analysis (i.e., the full logistic regression model including role perspective, type of

transgression, and the joint effect of these two factors as predictors) are reported in the sections

that follow. A significant main effect of role perspective indicates that victim and transgressor narratives differ in content irrespective of the type of transgression described--as predicted in H1. A significant interaction indicates that the association between role and content (i.e., presence/absence of references to a given dimension) varies across type of transgression--as predicted in H2. A significant main effect of type of transgression, on the other hand, indicates that content differs across wave irrespective of participants' role in the episode under consideration.[vii]

References to time. Two important findings emerged in analysis of the three dimensions coding for references to time. First, consistent with predictions derived from a self-presentation perspective, there were substantial role-based discrepancies in participants' tendencies to embed the transgression they recalled within an extended timeframe. Notably, participants were significantly less likely to discuss circumstances preceding the incident in question and to frame this incident as part of a chain of accumulated transgressions when writing from the transgressor (43.3% and 23.2%, respectively) as opposed to the victim (65.9% and 42.1%, respectively) role. For circumstances preceding the event, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 29.16, $\underline{p}$ > .001; for accumulated transgressions, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 28.88, $\underline{p}$ > .001. References to present circumstances were less common in transgressor than victim narratives as well, although this latter difference was significant only for narratives about unforgiven transgressions (see Table 1).

It is also interesting to note that none of the Role X Type of Transgression interactions obtained significance in analysis of the three dimensions in this category (all χ^2 < 3.75,[viii] $\underline{n.s.}$). References to circumstances preceding the event, $\underline{F}$(1, 164) = 4.99, $\underline{p}$ < .05, present circumstances $\underline{F}$(1, 164) = 6.69, $\underline{p}$ < .05, and multiple or accumulated provocations $\underline{F}$(1, 164) = 3.92, $\underline{p}$ = .05, were, however, significantly more common in narratives that described unforgiven

as compared to forgiven transgressions (see the relevant base rates in Table 1). Accordingly, although there is no evidence to suggest that type of transgression moderated participants' concerns with establishing or restoring a positive self-image through the careful use or omission of references to prior transgressions and so forth, it appears that, relative to forgiven transgressions, unforgiven transgressions elicited heightened concerns with the temporal context in which the transgression occurred.

The victim's response. Only two of the six dimensions coding for references to the victim's response to the transgression were identified in sufficient numbers of narratives in either wave of the study to permit statistical comparisons across role or type of transgression (see Table 2). First consider the findings for statements claiming that the victim's angry response was justified. Consistent with predictions based on a self-presentation motive, victim narratives (91.5%) were more than twice as likely as transgressor narratives (40.2%) to contain statements of this sort, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 95.10, $\underline{p}$ > .001. Moreover, this tendency for greater numbers of victim than transgressor narratives to emphasize the legitimate and appropriate nature of the victim's anger was equally evident in narratives describing forgiven and unforgiven transgressions: The Role X Type of Transgression interaction was nonsignfiicant, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 2.90, $\underline{p}$ > .05. The main effect of type of transgression, on the other hand, was reliable, $\underline{F}$(1, 164) = 4.49, $\underline{p}$ < .05. Disregarding differences associated with role perspective, participants who wrote about unforgiven transgressions were significantly more likely than participants who wrote about forgiven transgressions to include statements describing the victim's response as justified (see the relevant base rates in Table 2).

The pattern of results was quite different for statements indicating that the victim made an overt or obvious response to the offense. For both forgiven and unforgiven transgressions,

transgressor narratives were significantly more likely than victim narratives to contain references stating that the victim made an overt or obvious response to the transgression (see Table 2). A significant Role X Type of Transgression interaction, however, indicates that the disparity between victims and transgressors was more pronounced among participants describing unforgiven as compared to forgiven transgressions, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 5.12, $\underline{p}$ < .05.

The transgressor's intentions. Contrary to predictions derived from either a self-presentation or a self-justification perspective, neither role nor type of transgression--nor their joint effect--accounted for significant variability in the frequency with which participants portrayed the transgressor's actions as intentional. For role and Role X Type of Transgression, χ^2 < 1; for type of transgression, $\underline{F}$ < 1. In fact, the proportion of narratives that contained statements attributing the transgressor with intent was high (roughly 80%) and uniform, varying only slightly as a function of role and wave.

The results were quite different, however, when we examined the frequency with which participants included statements suggesting that the intentions behind the transgressor's actions were justified. The role by type of transgression interaction was significant in analysis of this dimension, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 9.86, $\underline{p}$ < .01. Although the pattern of role-based differences was consistent across waves (see Table 3), the disparity between victim and transgressor narratives-- in which claims that the transgressor's intentions were justified appeared disproportionately more often in transgressor than victim narratives--was substantially more pronounced in analysis of narratives about unforgiven as compared to forgiven transgressions.

A significant interaction also emerged in analysis of the proportion of victim and transgressor accounts that offered external or mitigating circumstances to explain away the transgressor's actions, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 22.95, $\underline{p}$ < .001. As Table 3 shows, among accounts of

forgiven transgressions, victim narratives were no more nor less likely than transgressor narratives to contain references to external causes of, or constraints on, the transgressor's behavior. In contrast, appeals to mitigating circumstances and the like were significantly over-represented in transgressor as opposed to victim narratives about forgiven transgressions.

The proportion of narratives about forgiven transgressions to contain statements describing the transgressor's actions as deliberately hurtful did not differ by role (see Table 3). In fact, fewer than 10% of all accounts of forgiven transgressions included statements of this kind. In contrast, victim accounts of unforgiven transgressions were nearly three times as likely as transgressor accounts to cast the transgressor's actions as purposefully malicious. For Role X Type of Transgression, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 7.99, $\underline{p}$ < .01.

Type of transgression moderated the pattern of results obtained in analysis of the dimension coding for statements suggesting that the transgressor's intentions were incomprehensible, as well, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 6.89, $\underline{p}$ < .01. In both waves, victim narratives were significantly more likely than transgressor narratives to describe the transgressor's intentions as incomprehensible or incoherent (see Table 3). However, the difference between victim and transgressor narratives was substantially more pronounced in analysis of the content of unforgiven as compared to forgiven transgressions.

Finally, consistent with predictions based on self-presentation motives, transgressor narratives were more likely (12.8%) than victim narratives (1.8%) to refer to the transgressor's actions as impulsive or unpremeditated, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 19.50, $\underline{p}$ < .001. Neither the main effect of type of transgression ($\underline{F}$ < 1) nor the interaction between role and type of transgression (χ^2 < 1) were significant in analysis of this dimension.

The transgressor's response. The pattern of results varies considerably for the four

dimensions in this category that were identified in sufficient numbers of accounts to warrant hypothesis-testing. For example, transgressor accounts (29.9%) significantly outnumbered victim accounts (7.3%) among the set of narratives that contained statements indicating that the transgressor regretted his or her actions in the aftermath of the incident described, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 40.50, $\underline{p}$ < .001. The Role X Type of Transgression interaction was nonsignificant, χ^2 < 1, indicating that this pattern was substantially similar regardless of the nature of the transgression participants recalled. Nevertheless, statements suggesting that the transgressor experienced regret were significantly more common in accounts of forgiven as compared with unforgiven transgressions (see relevant base rates in Table 4), $\underline{F}$(1,162) = 5.53, $\underline{p}$ < .05.

Transgressor narratives also contained significantly more admissions of guilt than did victim narratives. However, in contrast to the findings for regret, the interaction between role and type of transgression was significant for admissions of guilt, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 4.11, $\underline{p}$ < .05, with the disparity in viewpoints between victims and transgressors particularly pronounced when forgiven rather than unforgiven transgressions were the object of consideration.

Different yet again, neither the Role X Type of Transgression interaction (χ^2 = 3.80, $\underline{p}$ > .05) nor the main effect of type of transgression ($\underline{F}$ = 1.40, $\underline{n.s.}$) were reliable in analysis of the dimension coding for statements indicating that the transgressor accepted responsibility for his or her actions. However, significantly fewer victim (8.5%) than transgressor narratives (42.1%) included claims that the transgressor accepted responsibility for his or her actions, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 328) = 48.39, $\underline{p}$ < .001.

The final dimension in this category coded for reports that the transgressor admitted that his or her actions were wrong. Statements of this sort were uncommon in either wave of data collection. In fact, coders identified assertions of this kind in only five percent of narratives

written about unforgiven transgressions. Not surprisingly, they were observed more frequently in narratives written about forgiven transgressions, particularly among narratives written from the transgressor role (see Table 4).

Forgiveness-related content. Among the forgiveness dimensions identified with sufficient frequency to support tests of differences across either role or type of transgression, only two were coded in both waves 1 and 2. Apologies were mentioned in a substantial minority (approximately 43%) of the accounts describing forgiven transgressions. Although much less common in accounts of transgressions that remained unforgiven (10%), expected frequencies were large enough to support hypothesis-testing. Two effects attained significance in analysis of the frequency data for this dimension. First, given the substantial disparity in base rates across waves, the main effect of type of transgression was highly significant, $\underline{F}$(1, 328) = 41.64, $\underline{p}$ < .001. Second, there was a significant main effect for role perspective in analysis of the data for Wave 1 (see Table 5). Participants asked to recall forgiven transgressions were significantly more likely to mention that an apology was offered when they wrote from the transgressor as opposed to the victim role. The pattern of results was similar in analysis of the data concerning unforgiven transgressions but the difference failed to achieve significance. The Role X Type of Transgression interaction was also unreliable, χ^2 < 1, $\underline{n.s.}$

Assertions that the victim no longer harbored feelings of antipathy toward the transgressor were present in 36% of narratives about forgiven transgressions. Consistent with predictions based on a self-justification perspective, assertions of this type were equally common in victim and transgressor accounts of this kind. Attesting to the importance of considering type of transgression, however, claims that the victim's animosity toward the transgressor had ended were completely absent from narratives written about unforgiven transgressions (see the base

rate for this dimension in Table 5).

Two additional dimensions were coded only in the set of Wave 1 accounts. Despite instructions to recall a "forgiven" offense, explicit references to the fact that forgiving had occurred were present in no more than 80% of respondents' accounts. Interestingly, victims were significantly more likely to indicate that they had forgiven their offenders than were transgressors likely to indicate they had been forgiven (see Table 5). Similarly, all nine respondents who attributed the victim's decision to forgive to religious or moral convictions offered this information in narratives written from the victim's perspective.

References to the consequences of the transgression. In strong support of our hypothesis that type of transgression would moderate our findings, the Role X Type of Transgression interaction was significant for four of the six dimensions that were identified in sufficient numbers of accounts to warrant statistical comparison across role and type of transgression. For positive consequences, χ^2 (1, N = 328) = 4.60, p < .05; for relationship damaged, χ^2 (1, N = 328) = 11.37, p < .001; for relationship terminated, χ^2 (1, N = 328) = 29.89, p < .001; for victim's negative feelings continue, χ^2 (1, N = 328) = 5.23, p < .05. Importantly, however, the specific nature of the interactions contradicts our hypothesis. In each case, victim and transgressor narratives differed significantly in the frequency with which they contained explicit references to the dimension in question when participants recalled forgiven transgressions, but not when they recalled transgressions that remained unforgiven at the time of the study. Consistent with predictions based on self-presentation concerns, victim accounts of forgiven transgressions painted the outcome of the transgression in substantially darker terms than did transgressor accounts of this kind. At the same time and in dramatic counterpoint to these same predictions, victim and transgressor accounts of unforgiven transgressions were equally likely to describe the outcome of the incidents under consideration as serious and negative. It is worth noting that this pattern emerges even more clearly if we examine the data from each of the two waves of data collection separately, a strategy that makes some sense given the number of dimensions with low base rates in Wave 2. Table 6 reveals widespread evidence of role-based discrepancies in accounts of forgiven transgressions, but little evidence of discrepancies of this sort in accounts of unforgiven transgressions.

Neither the Role X Type of Transgression interaction (χ^2 < 1, n.s.) nor the main effect of wave (F < 1, n.s.) was significant for the dimension coding for references to positive behavior change in the victim. The main effect of role perspective, however, was significant, χ^2 (1, N = 328) = 22.51, p < .001. Overall, victim narratives (15.2%) were significantly more likely than transgressor narratives (2.4%) to include references suggesting that the transgression had caused some kind of desirable change or growth on the part of the victim.

A similar pattern was observed in analysis of references to changes in the relationship's status. Victim narratives (24.5%) were disproportionately more likely than transgressor narratives (14.2) to include statements indicating that the relationship in which the transgression occurred changed in status as a result of the sequence of events that transpired, χ^2 (1, N = 328) = 8.88, p < .01. No other effects achieved significance in analysis of this dimension. For the role by type of transgression interaction, χ^2 = 2.76, n.s.; for the main effect of type of transgression, F < 1, n.s.

Finally, nearly 95% of unforgiven narratives contained references to negative consequences that accrued from the transgressor's hurtful actions in the incidents described. This finding stands in stark contrast to the results obtained in analysis of forgiven transgressions, where approximately 22% of all transgressor narratives and half of all victim narratives included

claims of this sort (see Table 6). The extremely high base rate for this dimension in the Wave 2 data precluded statistical tests of the effects of role perspective and type of transgression.

Discussion

Our goal in conducting the present investigation was to determine the extent to which the findings obtained in analysis of forgiven transgressions would generalize to a consideration of accounts concerning unforgiven transgressions. As we argued previously, prior investigations in this area (most notably the work of Baumeister et al., 1990) have inadvertently treated transgression/anger accounts as though there were no variation in respondents' regard for the transgressor or the reprehensibility of his or her actions. In other words, investigators have not thought to examine whether the content of the accounts they collect differs as a function of people's current views concerning the nature of the act or event in question.

Although such views might vary along a number of different dimensions, one of the more obvious of these pertains to a victim's decision concerning forgiveness. The present study was motivated by a desire to put this assumption to the test. Whereas others have neglected the important question of whether and how accounts of dilemmatic interpersonal events differ as a function of whether or not the hurtful act under examination has been forgiven, we deliberately set out to determine the effects of directing people's attention to transgressions that varied along this dimension.

It is important to note at the outset of this discussion that the study reported here provides tentative answers at best to our questions concerning generalizability. In particular, comparisons across the two waves of data collection must be considered with caution because the data are based on responses from two different groups of respondents sampled at different points in time and at different geographical locations (i.e., the Midwest versus the Pacific Northwest). Furthermore, the

two sets of accounts concern transgressions that occurred in somewhat different constellations of relationship types. For example, relationships with family members accounted for only 17% of the unforgiven transgressions (i.e., in Wave 2) but nearly one-third of those that were forgiven (in Wave 1). In short, there are a number of potential alternative explanations for differences between waves that bear little relation to the hypothesized differences in motives.

The Verdict: The Importance Forgiveness Makes

We tested two competing hypotheses in this study. Hypothesis 1 was based on the assumption that the pattern of role-based differences obtained in previous research would be invariant with respect to the type of transgression individuals took as their subject. More specifically, it predicted that the content of victim and transgressor accounts would differ in ways that serve individuals' needs to repair their tarnished self-images (i.e., self-presentational concerns) and that these differences would be equally evident in accounts of forgiven and unforgiven transgressions. The second hypothesis, in contrast, argued that participants' account-making agendas would vary as a joint function of their role in the transgression and the type of transgression they recalled. In particular, it predicted that the typical pattern of victim-transgressor discrepancies would be most apparent in accounts of unforgiven transgressions because, especially when they wrote as victims, pressures to justify the victim's decision to forgive would circumscribe participants' efforts at favorable self-presentation in accounting for forgiven transgressions.

In actuality, the pattern of results was considerably more complex than we had anticipated. First, despite the apparent conflict between the two hypotheses we posed, both garnered some support in the present investigation. Indeed, the predicted Role X Type of Transgression interaction emerged as significant in the same number of analyses ($\underline{n}$ = 9) as the predicted main

effect of role perspective. In support of H1, victim accounts were disproportionately more likely than transgressor accounts to include references to circumstances preceding the event and/or to a string of accumulated transgressions; to characterize the victim's angry response as justified and legitimate; to argue that the relationship had changed status; and to attribute positive behaviour change to the victim. In contrast, transgressor accounts outnumbered victim accounts in references to apologies and expressions of regret. Transgressor accounts were also more likely than victim accounts to portray the transgressor's actions as impulsive and to claim that the transgressor accepted responsibility for his or her actions. Importantly, none of these discrepancies was qualified by type of transgression. In support of H2, significant Role X Type of Transgression interactions were observed in analysis of statements asserting that the victim made an overt response; that the transgressor's intentions were incomprehensible and, on the other hand, that they were justified; that the transgressor's actions were deliberately hurtful; that the transgressor experienced feelings of guilt in the wake of these actions; that the incident had positive consequences, damaged the relationship, or led to its termination, and that the victim continues to experience negative feelings. In sum, we found evidence consistent with each of our hypotheses even though we initially believed them to be mutually incompatible.

To further complicate matters, our analyses also revealed a number of effects we had not predicted. Unexpected main effects of type of transgression emerged for several dimensions. For example, compared to narratives describing forgiven transgressions, narratives written about unforgiven transgressions were significantly more likely to locate the transgression within an extended timeframe that referred to circumstances preceding the event, present circumstances, and multiple or accumulated transgressions. They were also more likely to include claims suggesting that the victim's anger was justified. In contrast, narratives about unforgiven transgressions were

significantly less likely than narratives about forgiven transgressions to report that the transgressor expressed regret or apologized for his or her actions.

At first blush, such main effects would appear to challenge our thinking about the importance of type of transgression. After all, we predicted that type of transgression would moderate the typical pattern of role-based discrepancies, not exert its own independent influence on the content of the stories participants told. Upon reflection, however, we are inclined to view the main effects we obtained as additional (albeit unanticipated) support for our contention that the motives underlying account-making processes vary with the type of transgression considered. Put simply, findings that certain dimensions were mentioned significantly more often in narratives concerning unforgiven as compared to forgiven transgressions (or vice versa in the case of references to regret) seem quite consistent with our proposition that the task of recalling a forgiven transgression imposes different demands on account-makers than does the task of recalling a transgression that remains unforgiven. At the very least, such findings suggest that certain kinds of information are of more critical concern when unforgiven as opposed to forgiven transgressions are the object of discussion.

Armed with this interpretation of the main effects of type of transgression, then, and considering the number of significant Role X Type of Transgression interactions we observed, we are prepared to argue that the present investigation raises serious questions concerning the practice of treating transgressions as though the victim's response to the wrongdoing does not matter. True, there is less evidence of moderation in our data than we might have expected, but taken together the main effects and interactions involving type of transgression suggest to us that it will be important for future research to take the nature of the transgression into consideration in examining tendencies for victims' and transgressors' stories to diverge. What is considerably less

clear to us, however, is the extent to which the pattern of results we obtained is attributable to tension between concerns with self-presentation and concerns with self-justification as we hypothesized it would be. We feel reasonably safe in concluding that type of transgression has important implications for the motives that shape the account-making process; we feel as though we are on much shakier ground in making claims that concerns with self-justification are responsible for the disparities between our results and those of previous research.

A Question of Motives

Our lack of confidence in the motivational underpinnings of our results rests on three related concerns. First, a number of the interactions that emerged in analysis of the dimensions we examined do not support our predictions concerning the form we expected them to take. As predicted, the discrepancy between victim and transgressor was substantially more pronounced in accounts of unforgiven as compared to forgiven transgressions for statements indicating that the victim made an overt response to the transgression; that the transgressor's intentions were either incomprehensible or justified; that the transgressor's actions were intended to hurt; and that the transgressor's actions could be explained by external or mitigating circumstances. In contrast, the pattern of results for interactions observed for references to consequences was opposite what we had predicted. In each case, the discrepancy between victim and transgressor was larger and more robust in analysis of narratives describing forgiven as compared to unforgiven transgressions, suggesting that concerns with self-presentation were more, not less, influential in shaping the construction of accounts of forgiven transgressions than in shaping accounts of unforgiven transgressions--at least where discussions of the transgressions' consequences were concerned.

We expected role-based discrepancies to be more prevalent in narratives about unforgiven as opposed to forgiven transgressions. So findings like those above which indicate that victim and

transgressor narratives diverged more widely in Wave 1 than Wave 2 cast doubt on our hypothesis that people who wrote about forgiven transgressions would experience greater tension between self-presentation and self-justification motives than people who wrote about unforgiven transgressions. Indeed, it is difficult to explain victims' and transgressors' divergent viewpoints on the consequences of forgiven transgressions in self-justification terms. To our way of thinking, perceived pressures to defend their decision to forgive should have motivated participants to substantially downplay the severity of a transgression's outcomes when writing as victims, thereby diminishing differences in the content of victim and transgressor accounts.

The pattern of results for unforgiven transgressions can be more easily accommodated within our thinking about self-justification even though they contradict our predictions. Specifically, whether they wrote from the role of transgressor or victim, participants in Wave 2 described the outcome of the transgression in terms that make understandable—even if they do not necessarily justify--the victim's decision to forego forgiving the offender. Victims and transgressors alike agreed that the consequences of the transgression were overwhelmingly negative as opposed to positive, that the bond between the parties involved was damaged--often irreparably so--as a result of the events that had transpired and, in a noteworthy minority of cases, that the victim experienced ongoing feelings of anger toward the transgressor at the time of the study (on average several years after the incident in question had occurred). What we did not anticipate with respect to this pattern of findings is the extent to which participants would be willing paint the transgression's consequences in terms this "black" even when they wrote from the point of view of the transgressor.

Collapsing as they do across differences in role perspective, the main effects of type of transgression are also difficult to explain in self-justification terms. If we are correct that concerns

with self-justification are more salient when an individual's task is to generate an account of a forgiven as compared to an unforgiven transgression, the type of transgression recalled should determine whether (or the extent to which) participants find that accounting strategies aimed at meeting their self-presentational agenda also jeopardize their ability to justify the victim's decision to forgive or not forgive. If we are further correct in assuming that concerns with portraying this decision as legitimate and defensible are more critical when participants write from the victim as opposed to the transgressor role, then we should expect interactions between type of transgression and a participant's role in the event in question, not main effects of type of transgression. In the present investigation we found a bit of both.

It may be important to note here that explanations based on self-presentation motives are equally at a loss to account for the main effects of type of transgression we observed. As described elsewhere (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Mikula, 1994; Schutz, 1999) such explanations presume that victims' and transgressors' goals are distinct and generally incompatible (e.g., victims want to enlist the audience's sympathy and support while legitimizing their right to express feelings of anger and--possibly--desires for reprisal; transgressors want to distance themselves as much as possible from the victim's fate and limit the audience's censure). They make no predictions, however, concerning variation that might arise due to differences in the type of transgression under consideration.

Finally, as alluded to in the above discussion of main effects, we predicted that any differences we observed in the pattern of results across waves of data collection would be largely attributable to differences in the content of victim accounts. A careful consideration of the data presented in Tables 1 through 6, however, reveals little support for this hypothesis. In fact, if anything, the differences between Waves 1 and 2 are more readily apparent in the content of

transgressor narratives. Not surprisingly, this is demonstrated most clearly in the results for the consequences dimensions where the content of transgressor narratives clearly failed to conform to expectations. We assumed that the tension between self-presentation and self-justification would be most intense when participants wrote about forgiven transgressions from the victim role and, moreover, that this tension would be responsible for any disparities we observed between the pattern of results across waves. The present findings question this assumption, contributing further to our doubts concerning whether self-justification motives can account for the areas of discrepancy between our results and those of previous investigations.

What other motivations might account for the pattern of results we obtained given the issues raised above? Our answer to this question must necessarily remain tentative at this time. However, we are inclined to believe that, particularly when they wrote from the perpetrator perspective, participants who wrote about unforgiven transgressions recognized certain constraints on their freedom to construe the incident as they pleased--constraints that by virtue of the difference in the nature of the transgressions they recalled played little or no role in the account-making process for participants in Wave 1. In particular, we suggest that, as the perpetrator of a transgression that they, themselves, acknowledged remained unforgiven at the time of the study (often several years after the actual misdeed was committed), participants in Wave 2 harbored serious doubts about their ability to mount compelling and persuasive arguments that, for example, the victim's anger was unwarranted and excessive or that the consequences of their actions were benign. Simply put, they may have believed it too great a stretch to protest their "innocence" in these ways in light of the demands of the task they were asked to perform (i.e., to write about an unforgiven transgression).

As the examples we used above demonstrate, the strength of this explanation lies in its

ability to explain on the one hand why participants in Wave 2 were more likely than their Wave 1 counterparts to describe the victim's anger as appropriate and justified and, on the other, to render interpretable findings that victim and perpetrator accounts of the transgression's outcome were much more alike than different in content. Accordingly, it is capable of explaining one of the unpredicted main effects of type of transgression, as well as the unexpected pattern of interaction observed for several of the consequence dimensions (including the observation that perpetrator narratives appear to differ more widely across waves than victim narratives). Other explanations are necessary to account for some of the other unexpected findings we obtained (i.e., the greater emphasis on time present and past in Wave 2 as opposed to Wave 1 narratives).

Limitations and Further Research

Some readers may be concerned with the fact that we failed in our efforts to counterbalance the order in which participants completed the victim and transgressor recall tasks. We can point to two lines of evidence which suggest, to the contrary, that potential confounds attributable to order effects are unlikely to account for the results we report in this paper. First, in a recent series of experiments, Mikula et al. (1998) tested whether order influenced people's role-based evaluations of negative interpersonal events. Although findings differed across studies as a function of whether order of recall was fixed or varied,[ix] the effects of order, itself, were statistically unreliable.

Furthermore, the present results demonstrate substantial convergence with findings from an investigation on a similar topic that used the same methodology and coding system but controlled for order of recall (i.e., Baumeister et al., 1990). In fact, more generally, the self-presentation based differences we observed in the present studies are consistent with findings from a burgeoning literature on the effects of role-based perspective (e.g., Baumeister et al. , 1990;

Mikula, 1994; Mikula, Athenstaedt, Heschgl, & Heimgartner, 1998; Mummendey, Linneweber, & Loschper, 1984; Mummendey & Otten, 1989; Otten, Mummendey, & Wenzel, 1995; Schutz, 1999) which demonstrate that victims and transgressors view events from substantially different vantage points. Although it is conceivable that order of recall may be responsible for our results in those domains where our findings diverge from the more typical pattern of self-serving recall/evaluation, it seems unlikely in view of the findings of Mikula et al. reported above.

Future research in this area might take a number of avenues. Mikula et al. (1998) have shown that actor-observer (or transgressor-victim) differences in the way people interpret or evaluate negative interpersonal events are moderated by the quality of relationship between the parties involved. It might be interesting to explore the links between relationship quality and role-based perspective in the context of stories about forgiven and unforgiven transgressions. More specifically, there might be much to learn from investigations that examine the process by which people in relationships consider forgiving or seeking forgiveness from a relationship partner and whether this process (or these processes, should they be different) differs with variation in the degree of trust, commitment, satisfaction and so on between the parties involved. Previous research (e.g., Holmes & Rempel, 1989) suggests that the forgiveness process may occur more smoothly (or perhaps more automatically) in some relationships than others, to the extent that trusting individuals are predisposed toward charitable attributions for a relationship partner's behavior in all but the most extreme circumstances, whereas distrusting individuals tend to be more cautious and doubtful of the other's intentions. Other findings (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1991; Rusbult et al., 1996) suggest that highly committed individuals may be more inclined to accommodate a relational partner's breach of good conduct by choosing to forgive--or in the transgressor's case more inclined to seek ways of making amends for harm they caused and

thereby earn a partner's absolution--than individuals in less committed relationships. We would also expect relational satisfaction to predict willingness to forgive, given a wide body of findings indicating robust differences in the way that distressed and nondistressed couples draw attributions concerning negative behavior (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fincham & Bradbury, 1988; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). Further research is necessary, however, to determine whether and how these and other markers of relationship quality relate specifically to role-based differences in individuals' accounts of the forgiveness process. If our intuitions are correct, the findings may be particularly intriguing in the case of those transgressions which, for whatever reason, the injured party has been unable or unwilling to forgive.

Investigators might also consider examining whether efforts to encourage empathy and perspective-taking alter the content of narratives about transgressions that vary along the forgiven and unforgiven continuum. Recently, Leith and Baumeister (1998) examined how trait measures of guilt proneness and instructions to write about a conflict episode from the other party's perspective (after having first written about this same episode from their own perspective) influenced references to feelings of guilt in accounts of serious interpersonal conflicts. Researchers might use a similar methodology to investigate the extent to which issues concerning forgiveness arise in accounts of forgiven and unforgiven interpersonal transgressions. Investigations along this line would extend previous research which has examined the relation between empathy and forgiveness (e.g., McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997).

Finally, forgiveness research--and particularly forgiveness research using autobiographical narratives--could also benefit from methods in which perspective is manipulated in an experimental fashion. For example, researchers might design experiments that, in addition to investigating the effects of role perspective and whether or not forgiveness has occurred, also vary

whether participants are focused on their own, individual outcomes or the joint welfare of the individuals involved. We might expect that a more relational orientation toward the accounting task would attenuate the typical pattern of self-presentational differences. Individuals' focus on the ways that they and their relational partners are interdependent might promote a more communal perspective in which a single misdeed is interpreted in the broader context of the relationship's history and presumed future (e.g., Borden & Levinger, 1991; Clarke & Mills, 1979; Holmes & Boon, 1990; Kelley, 1979). Such an extended perspective would tend to diminish the wrongdoing's apparent significance. A communal orientation would also tend to promote a concern with relational well-being rather than personal well-being that might attenuate interests in self-presentation strategies that enhance views of the self at the cost of views of the relationship.

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Footnotes

[i] Victims, too, may be motivated to believe that they acted equitably in offering forgiveness. For them, however, the same evidence that provides justifications for the decision to forgive should also address any concerns with inequity that they may have.

[ii] We use the term self-justification to describe both victims' efforts to justify their decision concerning forgiveness and transgressors' efforts to demonstrate their entitlement to forgiveness, whether transgressors' efforts emerge in response to concerns about restoring equity or in the interest of avoiding censure.

[iii] Among the 31 individuals who failed to follow directions in Wave 1, 17 indicated that they had not forgiven/been forgiven, four wrote about the same event for both narratives, one described multiple transgressions, one failed to clearly identify his/her role (i.e., victim or transgressor) in one or more of the narratives he/she wrote, one wrote about a transgression in which God was the purported transgressor (coders were not prepared to judge God's intentions), and seven wrote accounts about events that coders deemed not transgressions. Among the 31 individuals who failed to follow directions in Wave 2, eight indicated that they had forgiven/been forgiven, three wrote about the same event for both narratives, 10 failed to clearly identify their role in one or more of their narratives, and seven wrote about events that the coders did not deem transgressions. Three additional Wave 2 accounts were clearly incomplete or consisted of a single sentence stating that a transgression had occurred.

[iv] During coding of the Wave 1 narratives, coders found that it was sometimes difficult to determine which roles the respective parties in the account held. To reduce confusion in the coding of Wave 2 narratives, coders met prior to coding to decide on these roles.

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[v] The third author served as one of these undergraduate coders, coding both the Wave 1 and Wave 2 narratives. She was assisted by two additional undergraduates, one who coded the Wave 1 narratives and a second undergraduate who coded the Wave 2 narratives.

[vi] Although it might seem redundant to have included both coding dimensions to begin with, it is important to note, for example, that failure on a participant's part to make statements about a transgressor's intent to commit the act cannot be taken as evidence that intent was lacking. Accordingly, we deemed it wise to have coders examine participants' accounts not only for references to intent to commit the act but also to references that the act was unintentional. In some, but not all, cases, pairs of oppositely-worded dimensions such as these were negatively correlated. In others, they revealed no pattern of association at all.

[vii] In the analyses involving type of transgression, subjects are nested within type of transgression. As a result, the logistic regression analyses we performed cannot be used to test the main effect of type of transgression because the error term for this effect includes within-subject variance. Accordingly, in cases where the Role X Type of Transgression interaction was nonsignificant, we tested the main effect of type of transgression using analysis of variance with role as a within-subjects factor and type of transgression as a between-subjects factor. The resulting $\underline{F}$ for the main effect of type of transgression approximates the χ^2 we would obtain could we perform this analysis via logistic regression (T. Fung, personal communication, January 10, 2000). There is no appropriate test-statistic for an effect of this sort within logistic regression.

[viii] With 1 degree of freedom, the critical value for χ^2 at $\underline{p} = .05$ is 3.841.

[ix] In fact, Mikula et al. (1998) found no perspective-based differences in the study that varied order of recall.