

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships

<http://spr.sagepub.com>

Does good emotion management aid forgiving? Multiple dimensions of empathy, emotion management and forgiveness of self and others

Lisa K. Hodgson and Eleanor H. Wertheim

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 2007; 24; 931

DOI: 10.1177/0265407507084191

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://spr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/24/6/931>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[International Association for Relationship Research](#)

Additional services and information for *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://spr.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://spr.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://spr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/24/6/931>

Does good emotion management aid forgiving? Multiple dimensions of empathy, emotion management and forgiveness of self and others

Lisa K. Hodgson & Eleanor H. Wertheim

La Trobe University

ABSTRACT

The ability to forgive is considered important in the successful maintenance of relationships. In this study, a multifactorial model predicting two forms of forgiveness was examined in a combined community and university sample ($N = 110$) who reported on their ability to manage emotions, their tendency to empathize (through perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress), and their disposition to forgive others and self. Findings suggested that the ability to manage and repair emotions predicted a greater disposition to forgive, and that perspective taking mediated the relationship between emotion management and forgiveness of others. A multifactorial model for other-forgiveness was completely replicated in significant others' ($N = 104$) reports about participants, although significant others' results only partially replicated participant findings for self-forgiveness.

KEY WORDS: emotional intelligence • emotion management • empathic concern • empathy • forgive • perspective taking • self-forgiveness

All correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Eleanor H. Wertheim, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3086, Australia [e-mail: e.wertheim@latrobe.edu.au]. Larry Erbert was the Action Editor on this article.

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships Copyright © 2007 SAGE Publications
(www.sagepublications.com), Vol. 24(6): 931–949. DOI: 10.1177/0265407507084191

Most relationships eventually encounter conflict of some nature, where one party perceives that the other has behaved in a hurtful or unjust manner. In some instances transgressions can lead to strong grievances that interfere with the relationship. To enable the relationship to continue positively (or resume), one of the key processes that may need to take place is for the offended person to forgive the transgressor for what was done. A perceived transgressor can take a variety of actions to aid this forgiveness process, such as listening to and empathizing with the hurt person's point of view, apologizing, replacing damaged property or compensating the hurt person for any damage (Wertheim, Love, Peck, & Littlefield, 2006). However, the focus of this article will be on the responses of the individual who felt hurt, specifically on how an individual's ability to manage their emotions and empathize relate to forgiving others. A secondary focus will be on forgiveness of the self, to examine whether the same dispositional variables predict self-forgiveness and further whether self-forgiveness promotes forgiveness of others.

Forgiveness can be defined as the tendency to engage in the process of releasing negative emotions, thoughts and behaviors towards a transgressor (arising as a response to an interpersonal hurt), and transforming them to more positive emotions, thoughts and behaviors (Thompson et al., 2005). While forgiveness of others is distinct from reconciliation and may not necessarily lead to resuming a relationship, it can be argued that forgiveness can lay the groundwork for reconciliation. The act or process of forgiving another has been shown to enhance the relationships of intimate couples, families, communities and nations (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Even when reconciliation does not take place, forgiving may lead to a reduction in vengeful actions that could further injure the relationship, as well as to health benefits for the individual who forgives, such as relief from posttraumatic stress, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, grief and depression (Lebel, 2006; Lin, Enright, Krahn, Mack, & Baskin, 2004; Thompson et al., 2005).

While forgiveness has typically been examined in the context of forgiving *others* for interpersonal transgressions within relationships, it is also possible for the object of forgiveness to be oneself after one has transgressed against others (Thompson et al., 2005). Forgiveness of self is defined as a willingness to abandon self-blame and guilt following one's transgressions while cultivating benevolence and compassion towards oneself (Ingersoll-Dayton & Krause, 2005). The disposition to forgive oneself appears to have useful outcomes; for example, it has been correlated with greater life satisfaction, lesser depression and anxiety (Thompson et al., 2005) and less guilt and confusion in the elderly (Ingersoll-Dayton & Krause, 2005). However, it is as yet unclear whether the factors promoting other- and self-forgiveness are the same, or whether self-forgiveness facilitates forgiving others. Therefore the study of both forgiveness of others and of self are of importance to the study of relationships and will be addressed in this article.

Forgiveness and emotions

Various forgiveness theorists have noted the key role that emotions play in the process of forgiving others (Malcolm, Warwar, & Greenberg, 2005; McCullough, 2000; Thompson et al., 2005). One influential theoretical formulation has been Enright and Fitzgibbons's (2000) process model of forgiveness, which describes what needs to occur for forgiveness to take place. This four-phase model includes an *uncovering phase* which involves confronting the emotional pain resulting from an offence; a *decision phase* in which the victim realizes that the decision to forgive may be personally beneficial; a *work phase* where reframing facilitates perspective taking, empathy and compassion; and an *outcome phase* in which the victim gains some emotional relief, and which may promote increased compassion towards others. Thus, a key part of the process of forgiveness is seen as confronting the emotions associated with a hurtful experience, working with them, and eventually letting go of the negative emotions toward the transgressor and replacing them with more positive emotions (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; McCullough, 2000; Malcolm et al., 2005). Consistent with this process, Emmons (2000) has proposed that forgiving individuals have well-developed emotion-management skills that allow them to constructively work through their negative emotional responses to transgressions.

Given the pivotal role that emotions are seen as playing in forgiveness, it appears that a general ability to manage emotions is likely to be important in the process of forgiveness. The ability to manage one's emotions represents a higher-order component of what has sometimes been called *emotional intelligence* (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), which involves the ability to recognize, assimilate, understand, and regulate emotions. Those who are skilled emotion managers first *attend* to their emotional experience, which can lead to *clarity* about which emotions are being experienced. Finally, skilled emotion managers are able to *regulate* and work through their emotions instead of being overwhelmed by them.

A number of studies have found emotion-management styles to be associated with characteristics relevant to forgiveness. For example, higher emotional intelligence (EI) scores have been correlated with greater agreeableness and wellbeing (Schutte et al., 2001), as well as a lower tendency toward bullying, violence (Mayer et al., 2004), and rumination (Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002). Those with greater emotion-management skills have also been shown to be more adaptable to stressors such as transgressions (Mayer et al., 2004), more co-operative with better social skills (Schutte et al., 2001) and more able to resolve interpersonal problems (Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg, & Bechara, 2003; Rahim & Psenicka, 2002) as transgressions can be discussed in a relationship constructive way (Salovey et al., 2002). Conversely, individuals who find it difficult to manage their emotions also find interactions with others difficult (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). Consistent with these findings, several authors have proposed that those who manage their emotions better in general will also be more able to forgive (Flury & Ickes, 2001; Worthington & Wade, 1999).

Forgiveness and empathy

Another component of the process of forgiveness proposed by theorists is that of empathy (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Malcolm et al., 2005; Worthington, 1997, 1998). Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and relate to the cognitive and affective experiences of another (Worthington & Wade, 1999). The process of empathy is the third phase in Enright and Fitzgibbon's (2000) four-phase model (described earlier), in which perspective taking, empathy, and compassion are seen to link the phases of emotional uncovering with the final outcomes associated with forgiveness. Worthington's (1998) pyramid model also places empathy as a core element of a triad including empathy, humility, and commitment; and McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal (1997) have further proposed a multifactorial model in which empathy plays a key mediating role between the offender's actions (such as apology) and forgiveness by the injured party. Empathy can be seen as allowing an injured party to recast the offensive act within a broader perspective of a series of unfolding events, and to place the action in the context of the transgressor's essential (and thus imperfect) humanity (Malcolm et al., 2005). Consistent with these ideas, empathy has been found to predict the tendency to forgive others in several studies (e.g., Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005) and empathy-building interventions have led to increases in forgiveness within relationships (Coop Gordon & Baucom, 1999; McCullough et al., 1997; Malcolm et al., 2005).

While the basic relationship between empathy and forgiveness of others has received considerable support, the relationship between empathy and forgiveness of self is less clear as few such studies have been reported. In one study Macaskill, Maltby, and Day (2002) found in undergraduates that higher scores on a unidimensional measure of empathy were associated with greater forgiveness of others, but not of self. Empathy however, is now considered by many researchers to be a multidimensional construct including both cognitive and affective responses (Davis, Hull, Young, & Warren, 1983; McCullough, 2000). Davis et al. (1983) proposed a conceptual model, and an associated measure, that includes multiple dimensions of empathy: *Perspective taking* is an other-oriented cognitive process involving an ability to consider the view of another person; *empathic concern* is an other-oriented affective dimension likened to compassion (Arrigo & Williams, 2003); and *personal distress* represents a self-oriented affective dimension which involves becoming distressed in situations where others are hurt or in danger.

It is therefore possible that different dimensions of empathy operate in different ways. For example, perspective taking and empathic concern, which focus on understanding the experience of others, might be expected to predict forgiveness of others. Indeed, Konstam et al. (2001) found that these two forms of empathy, but not personal distress, predicted forgiveness in a university student sample. In relation to forgiveness of self and consistent with Macaskill et al. (2002) it might be expected that other-focused forms of empathy, including perspective taking and empathic concern,

would not predict greater tendency to forgive, but that personal distress, a more self-oriented process related to lower self-esteem (Davis et al., 1983), would predict lesser tendency to forgive oneself.

While this proposition has not been tested using dispositional (trait) measures of forgiveness and empathy, Zechmeister and Romero (2002) used Davis et al.'s (1983) multidimensional conceptualization to rate narratives by members of a community sample who described a specific offence they had experienced and one they had perpetrated. The authors found that when participants described their experiences of being an injured party, individuals who reported having forgiven the offender were more likely to take the perspective of the offender, but did not describe more empathic concern toward the offender or personal distress about the transgression. In contrast, in relation to *self*-forgiveness individuals who described forgiving themselves after offending against another reported *less* personal distress and *less* empathic concern for their victims, but no difference in perspective taking was found. While this study did not examine the role of the three forms of dispositional empathy as predictors of forgiveness, the findings support using a multidimensional model of empathy and suggest that empathy may operate in different ways in different forgiveness contexts.

Emotion management and empathy

As well as being a predictor of forgiveness of others, empathy has been found to correlate positively with emotional intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Schutte et al., 2001) and it has been proposed that the associated variance is accounted for by the emotion management component of EI (Mayer et al., 2000). Therefore those skilled at managing emotions could be expected to have greater empathic ability, and to perceive and understand the emotional state of an offender. In particular it would be expected that a greater ability to manage emotions would be associated with greater perspective-taking ability and empathic concern for others, while personal distress is often found to correlate negatively with other forms of empathy (Davis et al., 1983) and would likely reflect reduced ability to manage one's emotions well.

Aims and hypotheses

The primary aim of the present study was to examine a multidimensional model of the roles that the ability to manage emotions and empathic tendencies play in the disposition to forgive others who have acted in hurtful ways and in the disposition to forgive oneself after one has transgressed against another person. It was hypothesized that:

- *H1*: The ability to attend to emotions, be clear about one's emotional experience and repair one's emotions, would correlate with the tendency to forgive others, and the ability to repair (or regulate) one's emotions would be the most direct predictor of forgiveness.

- *H2*: An ability to repair one's emotions would lead to better perspective taking which in turn would allow individuals to experience empathic concern for others which would then predict the disposition to forgive others.
- *H3*: The ability to repair one's emotions would predict self-forgiveness as would less tendency toward personal distress, while perspective taking and empathic concern, which are other-oriented experiences, would *not* positively predict forgiveness of self.

A further aim of this study was to examine whether a tendency towards self-forgiveness promoted forgiveness of others. In a review of the self-forgiveness literature, Tangney, Boone, and Dearing (2005) suggested that forgiveness of others and forgiveness of self share some fundamental processes, such as both being a response to an objective wrong; both involving a shift from negative affect, cognitions or motivations to more positive ones; and both taking place over time. Furthermore, given these overlapping processes, it is possible that the ability to forgive oneself might play a role in allowing one to forgive others for their transgressions. On the other hand, Tangney and colleagues' review as well as the findings of Zechmeister and Romero (2002) suggest that a disposition to forgive oneself may involve a relative *immunity* to the distress of others, which suggests that the two types of forgiveness may not necessarily be similar processes. Therefore, a fourth hypothesis is proposed:

- *H4*: If self-forgiveness promotes other-forgiveness, it would be expected that in bivariate analysis and within a multifactorial model a tendency towards self-forgiveness would predict a tendency to forgive others.

The final aim of this study was to examine whether findings based on respondents' self-reports would be confirmed by reports of a significant other person. To date the vast majority of forgiveness studies have been based solely on self-report, which may be biased due to social desirability or inaccurate reporting; these biases might be particularly expected to occur if an individual lacks self-awareness of their emotional experience. A method for overcoming the problems of self-report is to include reports of significant others. If a self-reported relationship between characteristics is accurate, then it should also emerge when observers' reports are used (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Accordingly, each participant selected a significant person who also reported on the participant, enabling us to examine whether the models derived from participant self-reports would be replicated with significant-other data.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 110$) were drawn through a social network (snowball) approach (approximately 70% of the sample) and a Psychology Department

Participant Registry in which first-year nonpsychology students had indicated an interest in being contacted about research projects (30% of the sample). There were 110 self-report respondents (34 males, 76 females; mean age = 38.73, $SD = 15.39$), for whom 104 had a significant other who also responded (47 males, 57 female; mean age = 40.70, $SD = 14.08$); 53% of the distributed questionnaires were returned.

Eighty-six per cent of participants and 85% of significant others were born in Australia, while about two-thirds of their fathers (67% and 63% respectively) and mothers (64%, 64%) were born in Australia. Mean religiosity scores for participants (1.89, $SD = 1.01$) and significant others (1.92, $SD = 1.08$) indicated a moderately religious sample, with religion affiliations identified as Christian (22% participant, 26% significant other), Catholic (16%, 16%), Greek Orthodox (6%, 5%), no religion (52%, 51%), or other (5%, 2%). The significant other sample was described by 50% as a spouse or live-in partner relationship, 24% as a relative, 22% as a friend, with 4% as 'other'.

Materials

Self-report measures. Measures were administered in the following order (preceded by demographic questions).

The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) measures the tendency to reflect on and manage moods and emotions. It comprises three subscales: *Attention to feelings*, *clarity of the experience of feelings*, and *repair*, which involve the ability to regulate or manage unpleasant emotions or upsets. Previous internal consistencies range from .71 to .86 for attention, .74 to .88 for clarity, and .64 to .85 for repair (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Salovey et al., 2002). Evidence also exists for construct validity (Palmer, 2003; Salovey et al., 2002). In the current study, Cronbach alphas for self-report data were Attention $\alpha = .81$, Clarity = .83, and Repair = .72.

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis et al., 1983) includes three subscales of *empathy*. *Perspective-taking* measures the tendency to adopt another's psychological point of view; *empathic concern* assesses compassion and concern for others; and *personal distress* measures feelings in response to tense interpersonal situations. Previous alphas range from .68 to .83 with convergent validity demonstrated (Davis et al., 1983; Fox & Spector, 2000). Self-report alphas in this study were .78, .74 and .73 respectively.

The Trait Forgivingness Scale (TFS; Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005) assesses disposition to forgive. A sample item is "There are some things for which I could never forgive even a loved one." Previous alphas range from .71 to .81 and construct validity has been demonstrated with constructs such as avoidance following a hurtful event, rumination, anger, hostility and revenge. The current study self-report $\alpha = .80$.

The Self Subscale of the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (SHFS; Thompson et al., 2005) assessed forgiveness of self following a transgression. For example, "I hold grudges against myself for negative things I've done."

Thompson et al. reported Cronbach's alphas of .72 to .76, test retest reliability ($r = .72$) and construct validity. In the present study self-report $\alpha = .77$.

Significant-other Reports. The significant-other questionnaires were re-phrased so that the questions were about another person, with words such as "I" and "me" being changed to "your friend," which had been explained as a generic term for the participant being rated. Significant-other reporters answered the same demographic questions as participants and indicated the nature of their relationship. They also responded to the same subscales of the TMMS, IRI, TFS, and SHFS. Cronbach alphas for significant other data were Attention $\alpha = .87$, Clarity = .87, Repair = .82, Perspective Taking = .89, Empathic Concern = .80, Personal Distress = .78, Forgiveness of Others = .84, and Forgiveness of Self = .71.

Procedure

Following ethics approval, participants were approached to volunteer for a study on "Exploring responses to negative interpersonal and life events." Separate packets with reply paid envelopes were supplied to participants for themselves and for an adult significant other of their choice. Questionnaires were anonymous and code numbered so participant and significant-other responses could be paired when returned.

Research design

Correlations among variables were conducted to ascertain whether there were relationships among the forgiveness, emotion, and empathy subscales, and to aid with interpretation of possible mediation relationships. A series of regression-based path analyses were then conducted predicting forgiveness of others, as well as forgiveness of self. In each case, analyses based on participants' self-report data were conducted and then replicated using the significant other's data. The regressions reported in this article were conducted on the full participant data set ($N = 110$), however, it should be noted that analyses run using only the participants whose significant others provided data ($N = 104$) replicated all significant findings. Where gender of participant or significant other was associated with predictor and dependent variables it was controlled for in the analyses; the one case where this resulted in a difference in significance is noted in the results, otherwise standard correlations and regressions are reported.

Results

Means, standard deviations and interrater reliabilities are shown in Table 1. These results indicated significant, and mostly moderate ($.21, p < .05$ to $.52, p < .01$), interrater r s for all scales. T-tests conducted to assess any gender differences related to forgiveness of self or others were all non-significant ($p > .05$) for both participant and significant-other data.

TABLE 1
Participant and significant-other mean scores, standard deviations, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients and interrater correlations between participant and significant-other data for Forgiveness of Others, Forgiveness of Self, Three Empathy Subscales and Three Emotion-management Subscales

Scale	Participants			Significant others			Interrater
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>r</i>
Forgive Other	34.38	6.83	.80	34.70	7.38	.84	.42**
Forgive Self	29.55	6.13	.77	29.85	5.64	.71	.32**
Empathic Concern	21.31	4.22	.74	19.67	5.13	.80	.43**
Perspective Taking	18.57	4.56	.78	16.15	6.46	.89	.38**
Personal Distress	10.82	4.54	.73	10.33	5.36	.78	.21*
Emotion Repair	22.16	4.16	.72	20.87	5.09	.82	.26**
Emotion Attention	49.78	7.41	.81	47.94	8.77	.87	.52**
Emotion Clarity	40.63	6.65	.83	40.55	7.86	.87	.41**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Participant data, $N = 110$; Significant-other data, $N = 104$.

Intercorrelations among measures

Table 2 displays the intercorrelations among predictor and outcome variables for participant data and for significant-other data. In both participant and significant-other data sets, forgiving others and forgiving self were significantly related to higher scores on all three emotion scales, the only exception being the correlation between forgiveness of self and attention, which was significant for the participant data set ($r = .22, p < .05$) and did not quite reach significance in the significant other data set ($r = .19, p = .052$). However, gender was correlated with both forgiveness of self and attention in the significant other data set (point biserial $r = .22, p < .05$ and $-.23, p < .05$ respectively) and when gender was controlled for, the relationship between the two variables became significant (partial $r = .22, p = .02$). In both participant and significant-other data sets, forgiveness of self was

TABLE 2
Intercorrelations among Forgiveness, Empathy and Emotion Subscales for participant data (bottom left diagonal in bold) and significant-other data (top right diagonal)

	Forgive other	Forgive self	Empathic concern	Perspective taking	Personal distress	Emotion repair	Emotion attention	Emotion clarity
Forgive Other	1	.43**	.21*	.56**	-.26**	.40**	.24*	.32**
Forgive Self	.10	1	.07	.32**	-.33**	.40**	.19	.35**
Empathic Concern	.14	.07	1	.56**	-.23*	.38**	.53**	.41**
Perspective Taking	.44**	.18	.34**	1	-.41**	.52**	.41**	.41**
Personal Distress	-.21*	-.43**	-.03	-.15	1	-.35**	-.08	-.44**
Emotion Repair	.39**	.35**	.18	.36**	-.16	1	.39**	.58**
Emotion Attention	.28**	.22*	.53**	.33**	-.12	.31**	1	.54**
Emotion Clarity	.35**	.48**	.12	.22*	-.48**	.57**	.34**	1

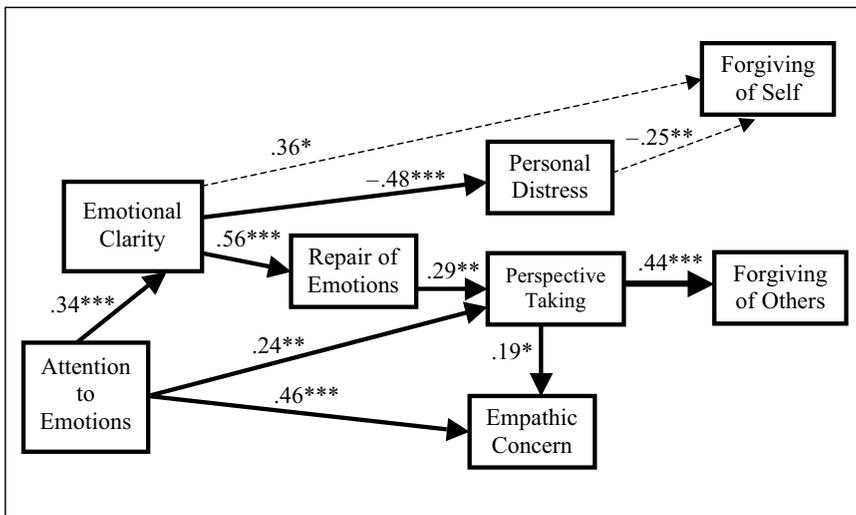
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Participant data, $N = 110$; Significant-other data, $N = 104$.

related to significantly lower scores on personal distress, and there was no relationship with empathic concern. For the significant-other data there was a significant correlation between forgiveness of self and perspective taking ($r = .32, p < .01$), but this did not reach significance in the participant data ($r = .18, p = .06$). There was no correlation between forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others for participants ($r = .10, p > .05$), while the significant-other data showed a moderate correlation of $.43 (p < .01)$.

Path analyses predicting forgiveness of others and self based on participant data

Path analyses based on hierarchical regressions were conducted to examine the predictors of forgiveness of others and of self, in which path coefficients were represented by beta weights (shown in Figure 1). In the first regression, the dependent variable was forgiveness of others and predictors were all entered at once, including forgiveness of self, the three empathy measures and the three emotion measures. In each subsequent analysis all remaining variables were entered except for the current dependent variable (DV) and previously examined DVs. The theoretically determined order of entry as DVs, was Forgiveness of Others, Forgiveness of Self, Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, Personal Distress, Repair, Clarity and Attention. In each regression, significantly predicting variables were reentered into a regression on their own to yield the beta weights displayed in the models.

FIGURE 1
Regression-based path model predicting tendencies to forgive others and to forgive self based on participant data.



Note. Solid arrows indicate paths replicated in significant-other data; dashed arrows indicate paths not replicated in significant-other data.
 $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

The regression predicting Forgiveness of Others was significant $F(7, 102) = 6.64, p < .0005$, and explained 31.3% of the variance, with the only significant predictor being perspective taking. In turn, perspective taking was predicted by greater repair of emotions and attention to emotion, $F(4, 99) = 15.95, R^2 = 39.2, p < .0005$. Thus the prediction of forgiveness of others by emotion management was fully mediated by the perspective-taking form of empathy. Attention to emotions significantly predicted clarity of emotions, which in turn predicted (and fully mediated the relationship with) repair of emotions.

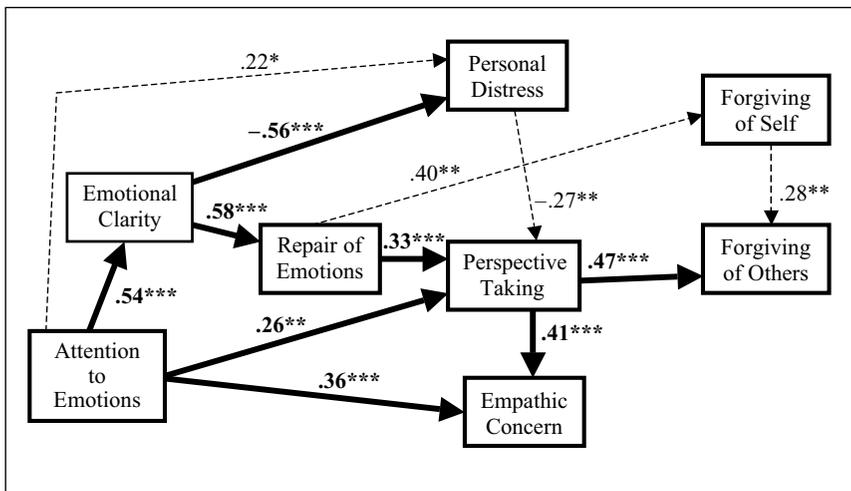
The regression predicting Forgiveness of Self was also significant, $F(6, 103) = 7.41, R^2 = 30.20, p < .0005$, with higher emotional clarity and lower personal distress predicting greater forgiveness of self.

Path analyses predicting forgiveness of others and self based on significant-others data

The same series of hierarchical regressions were repeated with the significant other data. As shown in Figure 2 the primary paths leading to forgiveness of others were replicated in this data set, however, there were some differences between data sets in the paths related to forgiveness of self and those associated with personal distress.

The regression predicting forgiveness of others was once again significant $F(7, 96) = 9.05, p < .0005$, explaining 39.8% of the variance, and as in the participant data set there was a significant path from perspective taking to

FIGURE 2
Regression-based path model predicting tendencies to forgive others and to forgive self based on significant-other data



Note. Solid arrows indicate paths replicated from participant data; dashed arrows indicate paths not replicated in significant-other data.
 $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

forgiveness and no direct paths from emotion variables to forgiveness of others. However, unlike in the participant data set, forgiveness of self significantly predicted greater forgiveness of others. Perspective taking was once again predicted by greater repair of emotions and attention to emotion, but in this case also by lesser personal distress, $F(4, 99) = 15.95$, $R^2 = 39.2$, $p < .0005$. As in the participant data, attention to emotions significantly predicted clarity of emotions, which in turn predicted (and mediated the relationship with) repair of emotions.

The regression predicting forgiveness of self was also significant $F(6, 97) = 5.31$, $R^2 = 24.7$, $p < .0005$, however, instead of higher clarity and lower personal distress predicting greater forgiveness of self, emotion repair was the only significant predictor.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among emotion management and forgiveness of self and others, and to test the mediating effect of multidimensional empathy on those relationships. The results for forgiveness of others will be discussed first, followed by those for self-forgiveness. As predicted, in correlational analyses individuals who scored more highly on measures of attending to emotions, being clear about their emotions, and being better able to repair or regulate their emotions, also scored more highly on the disposition to forgive others. Moreover, these predictive relationships were confirmed when using data based on significant-other reports about the participants, strongly supporting this relationship. In further correlational analyses, participant and significant-other data also both indicated that the disposition to forgive others was associated with two forms of empathy: Greater perspective taking and lesser tendency to become personally distressed about others' difficulties. The role of empathic concern, which is the other-oriented affective component of empathy, was less clear as it did not correlate significantly with forgiveness of others in the participant data set, and only correlated at a low level in the significant-others set.

In addition, when all emotion variables and empathy variables were entered into a regression, perspective taking fully mediated any relationships between emotion management and forgiveness of others in both the participant and significant-other data. Furthermore, attention to emotions and repair of emotions predicted perspective taking in both data sets. These findings provide strong support for a model in which better emotion-management abilities predict greater ability to take other people's perspectives, which in turn leads to a disposition to forgive others for hurtful actions or transgressions.

In relation to self-forgiveness, the correlation findings indicated that for both participant and significant other data sets, attention to emotions, and to a greater extent, clarity of emotions and ability to repair emotions were associated with greater self-forgiveness. Therefore the findings offered support for the idea that an ability to attend to one's emotions, to clarify

which emotion one is feeling and to regulate or ameliorate emotions aids in the process of forgiving oneself for hurtful actions. Furthermore, both data sets indicated that individuals who tended to be unclear about their emotions also reported being more likely to respond to others' difficulties by becoming personally distressed, and being less likely to forgive themselves for their own transgressions. Neither data set indicated an association between empathic concern and self-forgiveness. For significant others (but not participants), individuals who were perceived as more able to take others' perspectives were also perceived as more prone to forgive themselves.

While the above correlation patterns related to self-forgiveness overlapped between the two data sets, the path models for the two reporter groups were quite different in the key variables associated with forgiving the self. For participants, the primary characteristics directly and independently predicting forgiveness of self were seeing themselves as clearer about their emotions and less prone to becoming distressed when others had difficulties. For the observers, however, the model indicated that repair of emotions was the one direct predictor of participants' likelihood of forgiving themselves. Thus, the overall multifactorial model in relation to self-forgiveness needs to be interpreted cautiously and replicated in future research before findings can be considered to accurately represent the respective roles of emotion management and empathy in forgiving oneself for transgressions against others.

Perspective taking as the key empathic component in forgiveness of others

The current findings are consistent with models in which empathy plays a major role in the process of forgiving others. Empathy has even been theorized to be a necessary condition before forgiveness can take place (Macaskill et al., 2002; Worthington & Wade, 1999). Previous studies have found that empathy does mediate the relationship between predictor variables such as offender responses (apology, compensation) and forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998; Ristovski & Wertheim, 2005).

Many of these studies, however, have utilized a unidimensional conceptualization of empathy. The current study has extended this research by exploring which of three forms of empathy in Davis et al.'s (1983) multidimensional model were most important in predicting forgiveness. Two forms are most often seen to be the core elements of empathy, and these include a cognitive component, which is the ability to take the perspective of others, and a more affective other-oriented component, which involves a disposition to experience the feelings of the other person. Davis et al.'s final dimension, personal distress, can be seen as a more self-oriented response to another person's distress and involves becoming distressed oneself in the context of an emergency or over an event that is painful for someone else. The findings here, consistent with those of Zechmeister and Romero (2002), suggest that the most important form of empathy for forgiving others is cognitive perspective taking, in which the person who has been hurt is able to take the offender's viewpoint and consider what

might have motivated the offender's actions. This perspective taking appears to enable the victim of the transgression to become more able to forgive the offender.

A tendency to become affectively more involved, either through taking on the feelings of others, or through one's own distress, did not appear to necessarily promote forgiveness of others. The lack of (or lower) relationship with empathic concern may be because, if a hurt individual takes on other people's emotional experiences they may feel for not only the offender, but also *other potential victims* of the offender, or they may affectively respond with further anger or anxiety to *negative emotions* of an offender. This tendency to coexperience the affect of another or become distressed in difficult situations, therefore, will not necessarily mean that the empathic concern becomes directed positively toward the offender. On the other hand, viewing another's perspective in a more detached manner may have some advantages in the forgiveness process and appears to improve relationships in which transgressions have occurred (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Future research could explore further the internal experience of those with high empathic concern in situations in which they have experienced hurt from others, or observed harm to others by an offender.

Forgiveness of self was associated not only with a greater ability to repair and be clear about emotions but also a lesser tendency to become personally distressed at others' misfortunes. Consistent with Zechmeister and Romero's (2002) findings, it may be that those who are able to forgive themselves tend to be more detached from the negative consequences of their actions, whereas those who feel keenly the effects of their actions and are unable to ameliorate their negative emotions, find it more difficult to forgive themselves for hurt caused to others. Tangney et al. (2005) suggest that two key emotions need to be processed after hurting others: Shame and guilt. These emotions are likely to arise when one does perceive and respond emotionally to the distress of others as a result of their actions.

Finally, this study addressed the relationship between disposition to forgive others and disposition to forgive oneself. The possibility that forgiveness of self for one's own transgressions may enable individuals to become more forgiving of others for their transgressions was explored. The pattern of this relationship was not completely clear since in the participant data set the two types of forgiveness were not correlated ($r = .10$) but in the significant other data set they were substantially correlated ($r = .43, p < .01$). One possible explanation for this difference is that the significant others were less aware of the internal experiences of the participant related to self-forgiveness and the correlation was based on a halo effect, where more observable information related to forgiving others was generalized to self-forgiveness. The lack of relationship between self- and other forgiveness based on participant reports combined with findings that self-forgiveness was associated with less personal distress over others' misfortunes is consistent with Tangney et al.'s (2005) suggestion that forgiveness of self may at times be a self-serving act while forgiving others is more altruistic.

Alternatively the significant others and participants may have had different views of self-forgiveness in this context. For example, some researchers

distinguish between *pseudo* self-forgiveness in which the person dismisses or rationalizes the hurt caused to others, and *true* self-forgiveness, which requires a sincere acknowledgement and sense of responsibility for the hurt caused (Hall & Fincham, 2005). One might expect pseudo self-forgiveness to be more likely reported by participants as demonstrated in Zechmeister and Romero's (2002) narrative study, than observers. Future research needs to explore these possibilities and would be enhanced by differentiating between true and pseudo self-forgiveness by including measures of responsibility or self-blame, guilt and shame.

The findings confirm the importance of the perspective-taking component of empathy in producing forgiveness; to the extent that when individuals had a disposition to understand the viewpoint of others they were more prone to forgiving. In addition, greater ability to repair one's own emotions was a key statistical predictor of perspective-taking ability. These findings have practical implications for postoffence repair of relationships by suggesting that interventions that focus on assisting individuals to manage their own emotional responses of hurt and anger, and to view clearly the perspective of the offender, may allow forgiveness to take place which may set the conditions for relationships to be repaired. Of course, reconciliation is not always advisable, for example, in contexts in which the injured party might be injured again by an unrepentant offender. However, in many contexts reconciliation is possible and preferable. The findings can also be applied to preventive approaches, including providing support for the usefulness of development of emotion management skills and perspective-taking ability in personal development approaches in schools, premarital counselling, and relationship education.

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. First, while the theoretical model was framed in a sequential manner with emotion management affecting empathy which in turn affected forgiveness, the study in fact took place at one time point, so the relationships are correlational in nature. Therefore further research is needed using experimental and prospective methods to enable firmer conclusions to be reached about orders of effect. For example, studies could track the natural course of individuals' responses to interpersonal transgressions, in which baseline levels of emotion management and empathy could be used to predict increases in forgiveness over time. In addition, it would be important to assess whether increases in perspective taking toward an offender are followed by increases in forgiveness or whether the reverse is the case. Similarly, both prospective and intervention studies can ascertain whether the ability to repair one's emotions supports the ability to take another's perspective, as proposed here, or whether it is the reverse, that perspective taking allows one to let go of non-adaptive emotions (or whether a third causal factor is involved).

Second, the sample needs to be extended to a wider diversity of cultural and ethnic groups. For example, in a review of cultural studies into forgiveness, Sandage and Williamson (2005) suggested that in individualistic cultures forgiveness might be considered a personal choice, whereas in collectivist cultures the process might be seen as a cultural duty. The two approaches are likely to have implications for the forms of emotion management and

perspective taking that would be relevant. Sandage and Williamson documented studies in which negative and positive emotions towards an offender played a greater or lesser role in forgiveness depending on culture (e.g., American vs. Japanese participants), and in which relationship (vs. justice) motivations were more salient in collectivist than in individualist cultures. While studies including groups from different cultures are clearly needed, it should nonetheless be noted that the present study, which used a mix of a community sample and a range of university students covering a wide age range, was an advance on previous forgiveness studies which typically include samples of undergraduate psychology students completing questionnaires for course credit.

Finally, a major strength of this study was its use of significant-other observer data to support self-reports of the participants. Interrater scores on the various measures were all significant, ranging from .21 to .52 (all $p < .01$ except personal distress, $p < .05$). While these findings support the construct validity of the various measures, ideally the correlations would be higher. Nonetheless, given that many of the variables involve rating internal experiences of the participant which are difficult for significant others to assess, these interrater findings were considered supportive of participants' reports. Furthermore, these correlation levels are similar to those found in other studies examining self-other ratings on well-known trait and affectivity measures (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). It should however be noted that the significant-other sample in the present study comprised different types of relationships (romantic partners, family members and friends). While this approach allowed a range of types of participants to readily find a significant other to take part in the study, the approach may have confounded the significant other data due to a variety of levels of relationship history and personal knowledge about participants. Future research using significant other data would be enhanced by controlling for relationship type (e.g., including only one sort of relationship as significant other) and relationship longevity.

Furthermore, the model of forgiveness of others produced on the basis of the participant data was replicated in the significant-other data set, suggesting that the findings are relatively robust for that form of forgiveness. In contrast, the path model based on forgiveness of self was not replicated using significant other data. Certain variables associated with forgiveness of self may have been less observable to raters, a possibility supported by lower (though still significant) interrater correlations on forgiveness of self ($r = .32$) than forgiveness of others (.42) and by lower r s on personal distress (.21) than perspective taking (.38) and empathic concern (.43), the latter of which are more likely to be experienced directly by an observer. Therefore the model of forgiveness of self needs replicating before firm conclusions can be reached.

In summary, this was the first study to examine a multifactorial model of two types of forgiveness, examining multidimensional conceptualizations of both emotion management and empathy. The findings related to forgiveness of others were robust, being replicated in two related samples. In

bivariate correlation analyses, results supported the proposition that individuals who are better able to manage their emotions are also more prone to forgive others. Moreover, a clear multifactorial model emerged in which attention to one's emotions and an ability to repair one's emotions predicted the tendency to view situations from other people's perspectives, which in turn predicted a proneness to forgive others. In relation to forgiveness of self, while bivariate correlations supported the proposition that greater clarity of emotions and ability to repair one's emotions, as well as lesser personal distress associated with others' misfortunes, are associated with a disposition to forgive oneself, a single multifactorial model did not emerge. Future research is needed to explore the meaning of forgiveness of self from the perspective of the individual and of observers, to examine the relationship between self and other forgiveness, and to further explore the interrelationships among emotion management, empathy and forgiveness in interpersonal relationships.

REFERENCES

- Arrigo, B. R., & Williams, C. R. (2003). Victim vices, victim voices, and impact statements: On the place of emotion and the role of restorative justice in capital sentencing. *Crime and Delinquency*, 49(4), 603–626.
- Bar-On, R., Tranel, D., Denburg, N. L., & Bechara, A. (2003). Exploring the neurobiological substrate of emotional and social intelligence. *Brain*, 126, 1790–1800.
- Berry, J. W., Worthington, E. L., O'Connor, L. E., Parrott, L., & Wade, N. G. (2005). Forgiveness, vengeful rumination and affective traits. *Journal of Personality*, 73(1), 183–225.
- Coop Gordon, K., & Baucom, D. H. (1999). A multitheoretical intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 6(4), 382–399.
- Davies, M., Stankov, L., & Roberts, R. D. (1998). Emotional intelligence: In search of an elusive construct. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(4), 989–1015.
- Davis, M. H., Hull, J. G., Young, R. D., & Warren, G. G. (1983). Measuring individual differences in empathy: Evidence for a multidimensional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 113–126.
- Emmons, R. A. (2000). Personality and forgiveness. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness theory, research and practice* (pp. 156–179). New York: Guilford Press.
- Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2000). *Helping clients forgive*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Flury, J., & Ickes, W. (2001). Emotional intelligence and empathic accuracy. In J. Ciarrochi, J. P. Forgas, & J. D. Mayer (Eds.), *Emotional intelligence in everyday life: A scientific inquiry* (pp. 113–132). New York: Psychology Press.
- Fox, S., & Spector, P. E. (2000). Relations of emotional intelligence, practical intelligence, general intelligence, and trait affectivity with interview outcomes: It's not all "G". *Journal of Organisation Behaviour*, 21, 203–220.
- Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. H. (2005). Self-forgiveness: The stepchild of forgiveness research. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 24, 621–637.
- Ingersoll-Dayton, B., & Krause, N. (2005). Self-forgiveness: A component of mental health in later life. *Research on Aging*, 27(3), 267–289.
- Konstam, V., Chernoff, M., & Deveney, S. (2001). Toward forgiveness: The role of shame, guilt, anger and empathy. *Counseling and Values*, 46(1), 26–39.
- Law, K. S., Wong, C., & Song, L. J. (2004). The construct and criterion validity of emotional

- intelligence and its potential utility for management studies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 483–496.
- Lebel, U. (2006). When parents lay their children to rest: Between anger and forgiveness. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 23(4), 507–522.
- Lin, W., Enright, R. D., Krahn, D., Mack, D., & Baskin, T. W. (2004). Effects of forgiveness: Therapy on anger, mood and vulnerability to substance use among substance-dependent clients. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(6), 1114–1121.
- Macaskill, A., Maltby, J., & Day, L. (2002). Forgiveness of self and others and emotional empathy. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 142(5), 663–665.
- McCullough, M. E. (2000). Forgiveness as human strength: Theory, measurement and links to well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19(1), 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(11), 1556–1573.
- McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Brown, S. W., & Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(6), 1586–1603.
- McCullough, M. E., Worthington, E. L., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(2), 321–336.
- Malcolm, W., Warwar, S., & Greenberg, L. (2005). Facilitating forgiveness in individual therapy as an approach to resolving interpersonal injuries. In E. J. Worthington (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 379–391). New York: Routledge.
- Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2000). Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for intelligence. *Intelligence*, 27(4), 267–298.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2004). Emotional intelligence: Theory, findings and implications. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(3), 197–215.
- Paleari, F. G., Regalia, C., & Fincham, F. (2005). Marital quality, forgiveness, empathy, and rumination: A longitudinal analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31(3), 368–378.
- Palmer, B. R. (2003). *An analysis of the relationships between various models and measures of emotional intelligence*. Melbourne: Swinburne University of Technology.
- Rahim, M. A., & Psenicka, C. (2002). A model of emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies: A study in seven countries. *The International Journal of Organisational Analysis*, 10(4), 302–326.
- Ristovski, A., & Wertheim, E. H. (2005). Investigation of compensation source, trait empathy, satisfaction with outcome and forgiveness in the criminal context. *Australian Psychologist*, 40, 63–69.
- Salovey, P., Mayer, J. D., Goldman, S. L., Turvey, C., & Palfai, T. P. (1995). Emotional attention, clarity and repair: Exploring emotional intelligence using the Trait Meta-Mood Scale. In J. W. Pennebaker (Ed.), *Emotion, disclosure and health* (pp. 125–154). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Salovey, P., Stroud, L. R., Woolery, A., & Epel, E. S. (2002). Perceived emotional intelligence, stress reactivity and symptoms reports: Further explorations using the Trait Meta-Mood Scale. *Psychology and Health*, 17(5), 611–627.
- Sandage, S. J., & Williamson, I. (2005). Forgiveness in cultural context. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 41–56). New York: Routledge.
- Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Bobik, C., Coston, T. D., Greeson, C., Jedlicka, C., Rhodes, E., & Wendorf, G. (2001). Emotional intelligence and interpersonal relations. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 141(4), 523–536.
- Tangney, J. P., Boone, A. L., & Dearing, R. (2005). Forgiving the self: Conceptual issues and empirical findings. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 143–158). New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, L. Y., Snyder, C. R., Hoffman, L., Michael, S. T., Rasmussen, H. N., Billings, L. S., Heinze, L., et al. (2005). Dispositional forgiveness of self, others and situations. *Journal of Personality*, 73(2), 313–359.

- Watson, D., Hubbard, B., & Wiese, D. (2000). Self–other agreement in personality and affectivity: The role of acquaintanceship, trait visibility, and assumed similarity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 546–558.
- Wertheim, E. H., Love, A., Peck, C., & Littlefield, L. (2006). *Skills for resolving conflict: A cooperative problem solving approach*. Emerald: Eruditions.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *Dimensions of forgiveness*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1998). An empathy–humility–commitment model of forgiveness applied within family dyads. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 59–71.
- Worthington, E. L., & Wade, N. G. (1999). The psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness and implications for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18(4), 385–418.
- 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, 675–685.