

Evidence for a distinct forgiveness prototype:
Convergent and discriminant validity

by

Myron D. Friesen

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Abstract

The following studies adopt prototype theory to investigate the lay conceptualization of forgiveness from a social cognitive perspective. Previous prototype research (e.g., Fehr, 1999; Hassebrauck, 1997; Russell & Fehr, 1994) with social-psychological constructs has focused on convergent evidence of a concept's prototypical structure; rather than provide evidence of how the hypothesized prototype discriminates between similar conceptual categories. The present research documents evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity for a lay forgiveness prototype. In Study 1, participants ($N = 220$) responded to a free response questionnaire and listed a wide variety of forgiveness features. In Study 2, participants ($N = 83$) reliably distinguished between central and peripheral features. Study 3 revealed that participants ($N=36$) favored more central features, compared to peripheral features, when distinguishing forgiveness from other victim responses (avoiding, condoning, denying, dissipating, excusing, and retaliating). Study 4 found that participants ($N=81$) judged hypothetical forgiving responses incorporating central forgiveness features as more forgiving than those hypothetical responses incorporating peripheral features. Finally, Study 5 ($N=300$) showed that regardless of individual differences in the tendency to forgive others, participants reliably used the forgiveness features (primarily central features) to discriminate between forgiveness and other types of victim responses in hypothetical scenarios. These results replicate and extend prior research on forgiveness (Kearns and Fincham, 2004), and support the psychological reality of a forgiveness prototype distinct from other victim responses. Explanations and implications for theories of forgiveness are discussed.

Chapter One: Interpersonal Transgressions and Forgiveness from a Social Cognitive Perspective

In the autobiography, *My Life* (Clinton, 2004) former U.S. President Bill Clinton describes the scandal with Whitehouse intern Monica Lewinsky that almost cost him the presidency and severely damaged his relationships with those closest to him. When the President's relationship with Ms. Lewinsky was first publicly scrutinized, Clinton denied the allegations of inappropriate behavior, both publicly and privately to his family and friends (p. 775). However, when the truth was eventually disclosed, the President was forced to confess his transgressions and deceit. Recalling the pain that his confession caused his wife, President Clinton wrote, "She looked at me as if I had punched her in the gut, almost as angry at me for lying to her in January as for what I had done." (p.800)

Victims of an interpersonal offense or transgression have at their discretion several different response options which can be utilized following a perpetrator's wrongdoing. These responses can either be pro-social and relationship engaging, or anti-social and relationship evading. For example, Clinton describes the mix of reactions he received after he confessed his adultery and deceit (pp. 809-810). Some of his friends and colleagues were angry and hostile, others were upset and withdrawn, while a few acknowledged their hurt but also expressed their support. As this example illustrates, victim responses can include a wide range of initial emotional reactions (e.g., anger, shame, frustration, betrayal, rejection, etc.), personal intrapsychic responses (e.g., denying, minimizing, excusing, accepting), interpersonal active responses (e.g., retaliation, confrontation, accommodation), and interpersonal passive responses (e.g., rumination, avoidance, passive-aggressive acts) (see Worthington & Wade, 1999).

Also emerging from this web of possible victim-responses is the option of forgiveness. McCullough and colleagues define forgiveness as a complex of motivational changes (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). After suffering a significant interpersonal offense, a victim's initial motivations are generally to avoid contact with the offender and/or to seek revenge. However, when a victim forgives, these initial negative reactions subside or are transformed, and other relationship-constructive motivations are restored. In accord with McCullough, other researchers have described forgiveness as a complicated transformational process rather than consisting of a specified set of cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (e.g., Enright, 2001; Fincham, 2000; McCullough et al., 1998; North, 1987). Thus, from a scientific perspective, forgiveness is a process that combines both intrapersonal and interpersonal elements (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998), and an assortment of cognitions, emotions, and behaviors.

Although interest in forgiveness has greatly increased among psychologists over the last several years, we know relatively little about the lay perspective of this construct. For example, we do not know if the lay representation of forgiveness has a consensual organization and structure. In addition, we do not know if forgiveness is associated with unique features that distinguish it from other victim response strategies, such as avoidance, denial, condoning, dissipating, excusing, and retaliating. It is an open question concerning the extent to which scientific and lay conceptions of forgiveness will overlap. However, even if a lay concept of forgiveness is judged as flawed, or even invalid (from a scientific perspective), it will retain its importance for (scientific) social psychological theorizing for the simple reason that such constructs (no matter how foolish) causally influence lay cognition, affect, and behavior (Fletcher, 1995).

The purpose of this research was to discover if there was general consensus amongst lay persons concerning the content and structure of the concept of forgiveness, to investigate if this lay forgiveness representation was distinguishable from other types of victim response strategies, and to determine if lay persons used this knowledge to make meaningful judgments of social interaction. From the broad theoretical perspective of social cognition, this research employed a prototype strategy that identifies the common features across peoples' representations of forgiveness and enables the calculation of relative weights of feature centrality. In order to help place this research within a social cognition perspective, I will first describe two current models of how interpersonal information is cognitively stored and processed, then introduce prototype theory as applied to social psychological constructs, and finally review forgiveness research that has begun to explore lay perspectives of forgiveness.

The Organization and Representation of Relationship Information

Over the years, researchers have conceptualized social and relational knowledge in a variety of ways and adopted several different theoretical perspectives to account for mankind's insatiable appetite for relationship information. Relying on the theoretical writings of Heider (1958) and seminal work of Kelley (1973), many academic writers throughout the 1970s and 1980s applied attribution theory to a range of interpersonal behavior, focusing on relational partners' causal explanations and beliefs to account for lay relationship knowledge (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991). In the 1990s, as attribution theory was assimilated into a broader social cognitive framework, researchers began adopting cognitive terms such as schemas, scripts, prototypes, working models, mental models, and lay relationship theories to further describe lay representations of relationship information. These assorted terms were enhanced by a variety of additional relationship

theories including (but not limited to), interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), prototype theory (Fehr, 1988), and self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1986). While each of these theoretical perspectives account for a variety of relationship phenomena, none of them explicitly describe how relationship information is cognitively structured or organized. However, this question has been addressed by two social cognitive models proposed by Fletcher and Baldwin, respectively, to which I now turn.

Lay relationship theories. Fletcher (2002; Fletcher, Overall, & Friesen, In press; Fletcher & Thomas, 1996) has developed a social cognitive model that has conceptualized lay relationship knowledge in terms of relationship theories. According to this model, folk knowledge of interpersonal and relationship information is organized in a manner that facilitates explanation, prediction and control of social interactions, strikingly similar to how scientific theories function in their relative domains. Everything from brief interpersonal experiences to internal relationship ruminations are eventually organized into generalized representations that summarize regularities in interaction and cognitive and affective processes over time. Whenever a relationship-relevant event occurs, these generalized representations, or lay theories, are automatically activated influencing how the event is mentally processed, interpreted, and responded to (both affectively and behaviorally). Fletcher's model distinguishes between three levels of lay relationship theories; *general social theories*, *general relationship theories*, and *local relationship theories*.

General social theories are broad and abstract representations that are activated during any interpersonal interaction. Fletcher and colleagues (Fletcher, Overall, &

Friesen, In press) conceptualize this dimension of the lay relationship mind as including theory of mind representations (knowledge about the role of people's beliefs, desires, and intentions in motivating behavior), internalized social norms, and social perceptions, categorizations, and stereotypes. At a more defined level are *general relationship theories*. These contain a variety of beliefs, ideals, goals, and expectations specific to close personal relationships. Evolutionary history, as well as shared social and cultural influences, contribute to similarities across individuals concerning the core features of these representations. However, lay theories at this level can be idiosyncratic, to some extent, mutually influenced by an individual's unique history of interpersonal interaction. Finally, *local relationship theories* apply to specific relationships in an individual's life. As proposed by Fletcher (2002), these are generally characterized by four elements, including; (1) a shared interpersonal history, (2) abstract and generalized beliefs about the partner and the relationship, (3) causal connections between the history of the relationship and relational beliefs, and (4) evaluative judgments about the relative warmth, closeness, trust, commitment, passion (in close sexual relationships), and overall satisfaction with the relationship. Over time these local relationship theories become more complex and integrated, and steadily become entwined with representations and evaluations of the self (Aron & Aron, 1986).

Fletcher and colleagues (Fletcher, 2002; Fletcher, Overall, & Friesen, In press; and Fletcher & Thomas, 1996) review a diverse range of research that provides indirect support for this theoretical model. In addition, several recent studies have explicitly tested how relationship knowledge is mentally represented and have demonstrated that people organize this information in a hierarchical structure as the model predicts.

Research on the structure and function of ideals in close relationships has demonstrated

that people hold a variety of beliefs about the qualities that make a good partner and a good relationship (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999), even if they are not currently in a relationship. These beliefs encompass three broad factors, warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and status-resources, when directed toward an ideal partner, and two broad factors, intimacy-loyalty and passion, when directed toward an ideal relationship. Importantly, and as Fletcher's model predicts, additional research has documented that these ideals, held at the *general relationship beliefs* level, influence perceptions and beliefs of specific relationships (*local relationship theories*), which can then reciprocally feed-back and modify ideal standards (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000).

Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000) assessed participant's ideal standards and perceptions of the partner and the relationship in a sample of university students who were in the early stages of romantic relationship development. At one and three month intervals the participants who remained in their original relationship were assessed again on the same measures as time one. Finally, after twelve months from the initial assessment, participants were contacted again, and those who had maintained the same relationship from time one reported their levels of relationship satisfaction. The results revealed that greater *inconsistency* between ideals and current perceptions of the partner and relationship predicted relationship break-up, whereas greater consistency in these perceptions predicted increased relationship satisfaction. Thus, the notion that individuals make cognitive comparisons between their ideals and current perceptions was supported. In addition, over time, partner and relationship perceptions were related to changes in ideal standards but not the reverse, suggesting that participants adjusted their ideals as the relationship progressed, a feed-back loop from *local relationship theories* onto *general*

relationship theories. The association between ideals and current perceptions of the partner and relationship was replicated and extended by Campbell et al. (2001) who studied both members of intimate relationship dyads (Study 2). In addition, this study found that the flexibility of an individual's ideals moderated the association between ideal standards and perceptions. That is, a perception of large discrepancies between ideal standards and partner perceptions led to lower relationship satisfaction. However, if an individual's ideals were flexible the impact on relationship satisfaction was not as strong. Once again, this finding supports the idea that *general relationship theories* influence the perceptions and evaluations of specific relationships.

The hierarchical structure of lay relationship theories was also tested by Overall, Fletcher, and Friesen (2003) by examining the organization of attachment representations across various relationship domains. Several competing models were tested with confirmatory factor analysis, and the model that revealed the best fit across both avoidance and anxious/ambivalence attachment dimensions was a three-tiered hierarchical model. Attachment working models of specific relationships (*local relationship theories*) were nested under relationship domain representations (familial, friendship, and romantic), that were, in turn, nested under a global attachment working model (part of a *general social theory*). This discovery of a hierarchical attachment network has important implications for how attachment is defined and measured in adult relationship research, and helps delineate how early attachment representations are associated with the variety of relationships that form later in life.

Relational schemas. Baldwin's (1992) perspective on how relationship information is structured is based on the seminal ideas of Piaget and Bowlby concerning

the organization of information into cognitive schemes (Piaget, 1952) or knowledge structures (Bowlby, 1969). According to Baldwin (1999), a *schema* is a body of generalized declarative knowledge, largely associated with descriptive information. In an interpersonal context, this descriptive information primarily comes from memory traces for people and social situations. As an individual experiences an increasing number of interpersonal interactions these memories become linked together and organized around shared central features (a prototype), ideals, or clusters of similar exemplars.

According to Baldwin's (1992) model, relationship information is organized into three interactive components; (1) a *self schema*, that represents how the self is experienced in relation to another; (2) a *partner schema*, that represents beliefs about the partner; and (3) *an interpersonal script*, that specifies expected patterns of interaction with the partner, and links the self and partner schemas. Together, these three components comprise a *relationship schema*. Individual differences in relational schemas develop from each person's distinct patterns of interpersonal interaction that are generalized and stored as declarative memory. With repeated use in ongoing relationships, a well-learned script can also become integrated into procedural aspects of memory, facilitating fast efficient processing, and allowing the individual to make predictions about the course of interaction, its potential outcomes, and also enabling regulatory behavior (Baldwin, 1999). In this way, relational schemas function in a similar manner as lay theories by fostering explanation, prediction, and control of interpersonal events.

Support for Baldwin's relational schema model has come from several studies employing a variety of research methods. Using self-report measures of attachment (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996), anger (Fehr, Baldwin, Collins,

Patterson, & Benditt, 1999), and social anxiety (Baldwin & Fergusson, 2001), investigators have demonstrated that people with divergent social expectations adopt different interaction strategies. In other words, people's behavioral strategies are, to some extent, a function of their schemas and scripts. There are also a number of studies that have documented how the activation of a relational schema can affect subsequent information processing. Using both conscious and subconscious priming methods, Baldwin and colleagues have found that the spreading activation of a relational schema can lead to a variety of assimilation effects. Baldwin and Main (2001) found that after priming, ambiguous stimuli are subsequently interpreted in a manner consistent with the activated schema. In research exploring self-esteem (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996) and attachment representations (Baldwin & Meunier, 1999), Baldwin and colleagues have demonstrated that when contingent interpersonal scripts (e.g., *if...then...* interaction expectations) are activated they can serve to either inhibit further information processing that is contrary to the activated schema, or they can facilitate succeeding information processing that corresponds with the activated schema.

Finally, Baldwin and Main (2001) have found that the spreading activation of a primed schema not only affects information processing and social judgments, but also extends to interpersonal behavior. In an early phase of an experiment, participants in two separate conditions were exposed to an obscure stimulus while completing a computer-based activity. Then, in a later interpersonal interaction the stimulus was presented again. For participants who were highly self-conscious the presentation of the conditioned stimulus uniquely affected their levels of social anxiety and interaction evaluations depending on what type of relational schema was originally primed. According to Baldwin and Main, their findings demonstrate the ease with which relational schemas are

activated and the utility of adopting a social cognitive approach in studying social interaction.

Relationship information and a forgiveness representation. Taken together, the models of both Fletcher (2002) and Baldwin (1999) provide a core set of social cognitive principles and hypotheses that can be used as a basis for exploring and understanding the lay representation of forgiveness. First, as discussed above, Fletcher's model proposes that the relationship mind integrates three hierarchical levels of knowledge – *general social theories, relationship general theories, and relationship specific theories.*

Therefore, it was expected that as the features of the lay forgiveness representation were uncovered, many of these items would be associated with each of these three folk-theory domains. For example, the more the victim judges the perpetrator as acting with deliberate malice and intent to hurt, the less likely it is that he or she will forgive. In Fletcher's model, information from both *general social theories* (e.g., theory of mind), and *general relationship theories* (e.g., beliefs about the nature and function of close relationships) are required to make complex attributions about the nature of social partner's behavior. Since a variety of studies have shown that attributions of blame by the victim are an important predictor of forgiveness (e.g., Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Fincham, 2000; Friesen, Fletcher, & Overall, 2005) it was predicted that they would also be incorporated into the lay representation.

According to Baldwin's (1992) *relationship schema* model it was expected that the lay representation of forgiveness would include some features that are specific to both the self and the partner, in addition to dyadic script-like features. For example, the victim's perceived degree of pain and suffering (emotional or physical) as a result of the

transgression, their perceptions of the value or utility of forgiveness to help overcome their pain, and their dispositional tendencies towards rumination, revenge, empathy, and forgiveness were expected to be included in the lay representation. A variety of research findings point to these self variables as important in the forgiveness process (see Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; McCullough et al., 1998; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Aspects of the partner schema that were expected to be present in the lay representation of forgiveness included perceptions of perpetrator remorse (Gold & Weiner, 2000; Schlenker & Darby, 1981) and trustworthiness or likelihood of the transgression being repeated (see Fitness, 2001).

Baldwin's (1992) notion of interpersonal scripts theoretically maps onto Fletcher's (2002) hierarchy of relationship theories at the level of *specific relationship theories*. Therefore, it was expected that a variety of interpersonal script factors, applied specifically to the victim-perpetrator relationship, would be identified as important features of the lay forgiveness representation. The apology and remorse factor could be considered an explicit script feature (e.g., if the perpetrator apologizes, then I will forgive), however there are other implicit script factors such as relationship satisfaction (e.g., Friesen et al., 2005), and commitment (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003) (e.g., If I am happy with or highly invested in this relationship, then I should forgive) that were also expected to be present.

Chapter Two: Prototype Theory and Lay Perspectives of Forgiveness

While Fletcher (2002) and Baldwin's (1992) models of relationship cognition are useful for predicting the content of a lay representation of forgiveness, I now turn to prototype theory, which has been employed in a variety of social psychological studies, to help describe how the content of the lay forgiveness representation might be structured. Prototype theory (for a review see Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Murphy, 2002) assumes that the most common features among a category's exemplars are abstracted to form a mental prototype that guides further categorization (Minda & Smith, 2001; Wisniewski, 2002). Important to this abstraction process is the perception of features according to central tendency. Some features are more informative for a category than others, and accordingly are weighted more heavily in terms of their utility in classification. For example, within the superordinate category of musical instruments there are basic level categories of guitar, piano and violin (e.g., see Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976). Common features for all three of these basic level categories could include strings, a wood frame, and tuning keys. However, some features are more important for category membership than others. If the feature *eighty-eight keys* is introduced there is a high probability that the basic level category is a piano as opposed to a violin or guitar. In this example, eighty-eight keys is a more central feature for a piano than strings or a wooden frame. This continuum from central features to distal features produces a graded structure of feature representation.

Even though the determinants of graded structure are not limited to central tendency alone, graded structure seems to be a key universal property of all categories (Barsalou, 1987). Thus, researchers have concentrated on this aspect in investigating lay

social psychological constructs, including emotions such as anger (Fehr & Baldwin, 1996; Russell & Fehr, 1994), hatred (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993), and jealousy (Sharpsteen, 1991), and relationship constructs such as love (Aron & Westbay, 1996; Fehr, 1988), commitment (Fehr, 1999), respect (Frei & Shaver, 2002), and relationship quality (Hassebrauck, 1997; Hassebrauck & Aron, 2001). One major appeal of this approach is that it provides useful information about the content and structure of a concept's features, delineating typical from atypical elements; and it is this graded structure that has been found to play an important role in cognitive processing – influencing memory, reaction time, learning, and decision making (Barsalou, 1987).

Researchers employing a prototype design implement a fairly standard methodology that progresses through several studies. The normal objective for the first study is to generate a large and diverse group of features (for a concept), or exemplars (for a category), which are coded and organized in an attempt to identify how frequently the various items are nominated. For example, Fehr (1988, Study 1) investigated the concept of commitment and condensed a wide range of participant responses down to 40 features, including abstract elements such as *loyalty* and *faithfulness*, and behavioral elements such as *being there for the other in good and bad times* and *concern about the other's well-being*.

Once the features of a concept have been discovered, the next step is to identify the graded structure. To accomplish this, a new sample rates each feature according to how central or important they are for the construct in question. For example, Fehr (1988, Study 2) found that items such as *trust*, *caring*, and *honesty* were reliably judged as the

most central features of the concept of love, while items such as *dependency* and *butterflies in stomach* were reliably judged as the most peripheral features.

Further studies in a prototype design utilize a variety of methods to test the validity of these initial findings and determine how these central and peripheral items influence cognitive processing. For example, Hassebrauck (1997) discovered 64 features that comprise the concept of relationship quality and then compared the central and peripheral features in recall and recognition memory tests and reaction-time identification tasks. As expected, central features were more salient in memory and were identified faster than peripheral features.

Lay Perspectives of Forgiveness

Research on forgiveness is growing rapidly, including the roles played by situational factors (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Takaku, 2001), intrapersonal factors and individual differences (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Brown, 2003; Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001) and dyadic relational factors (Fincham & Beach, 2002; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Friesen et al., 2005). However, as mentioned earlier, there has been relatively little interest in a possible consensual lay representation of forgiveness, and only a handful of studies have examined forgiveness from a lay perspective.

In developing the Forgiveness Attitudes Questionnaire, Kanz (2000) found general consensus among participants about the variables that influence forgiveness (relationship status, apology, life-change), forgiveness outcomes (restoration of trust, reconciliation, decrease of negative affect), and use of forgiveness (in family of origin,

moral responsibility, multiple offences). These results suggest a moderate level of agreement amongst laypersons regarding the properties of forgiveness, but do not reveal many clues about the cognitive dimensions of the construct.

There are several studies that have examined participants' responses to unstructured, open-ended questionnaires and interviews about forgiveness (e.g., Kelley, 1998; Younger, Piferi, Jobe, & Lawler, 2004; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Each of these studies has focused on slightly different aspects of laypersons' motivations for (or against) forgiveness and explored possible common understandings of what it means to forgive someone. In general, these studies have documented a variety of factors that contribute to similarities in lay perspectives of forgiveness but have not identified any structure associated with these forgiveness dimensions or even if these factors are distinct to forgiveness. One of the first studies of this sort by Kelley (1998), assessed laypersons' motivations and strategies in forgiveness expression by analyzing written narratives of participants' experiences of granting forgiveness, receiving forgiveness, and needing forgiveness. The results indicated that for both forgiveness-seeking and forgiveness-granting narratives, 33% and 43% of the participants respectively reported indirect methods of forgiveness communication, including: use of humor, diminishing the perceived effect of the infraction, nonverbal displays of emotion, acceptance, and understanding. Although reported by participants as forgiveness communication, these types of responses would probably be judged by theorists as more characteristic of nullification (diminishing the perceived effect), habituation/dissipation (acceptance), or excusing (use of humor) (see Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Fincham, 2000; North, 1998). These findings suggest the possibility that the boundaries between subcategories

of transgression responses (i.e., nullification, dissipation, forgiveness) are unclear or fuzzy (i.e., Russell & Fehr, 1994).

In a similar study, Zechmeister and Romero (2002) examined victim and perpetrator narratives of both unforgiven and forgiven transgressions. A majority of victims, both forgiving and unforgiving, portrayed the incident as involving negative consequences, and their initial angry response as justified. However, forgiveness narratives were more likely to portray positive outcomes and affect, benign attributions, and a description of the incident as closed and over in comparison to unforgiven incidents. Victims who forgave their perpetrators were also more likely to express cognitive and emotional empathy for the perpetrator than were unforgiving victims. These findings imply that positive rather than negative emotional features are associated with the lay conceptualization of forgiveness as well as motivations toward closure and empathy.

Closely related to these two earlier studies, Younger and colleagues (2004) asked a university student sample and a community based sample for definitions of forgiveness and reasons for and against forgiveness after an interpersonal offense. The top three definitions in both samples included notions of acceptance, overcoming and moving on, release of negative feelings and grudges, and potential for relationship reconciliation. However, this general level of agreement between the two samples was not replicated with reasons for forgiveness. For the university sample, the top four factors that promoted forgiveness were: the importance of the relationship, personal health and/or happiness, recognition of personal faults and failures, and offender remorse and apologies. In contrast, the community sample identified personal health and/or happiness,

religious or spiritual beliefs, recognition of personal faults and failures, and conflict avoidance factors. This suggests that forgiveness may be promoted by slightly different factors in different populations. In the Younger et al., study the mean age of the university sample was only twenty and the students had participated for course credit, whereas the community sample had a mean age over forty and had specifically volunteered for a study addressing interpersonal betrayal.

Finally, Younger and colleagues noted some discrepancies between the lay conception of forgiveness and recent theoretical models. First, the participants in these studies reported self motivating factors more frequently than empathic or altruistic goodwill towards the perpetrator as emphasized by McCullough (2000) and Enright (2001) respectively. In addition, Younger et al., also noted that lay motivations for forgiveness were closely tied to reconciliation which most researchers have agreed are distinct concepts.

Taken together, these four studies suggest that for the layperson, forgiveness is generally a positive construct, motivated by personal desires for closure, release of negative emotion, relationship reconciliation, and empathy, communicated in a variety of ways, and resulting in various positive internal and interpersonal outcomes. However, these conclusions are not informative about the range of features associated with forgiveness or how these features are related to one another, nor do they provide insight into how lay persons perceive and categorize victim responses.

After completing most of the research described in the current investigation, a closely related series of studies (also exploring forgiveness from a prototype perspective)

was published by Kearns and Fincham (2004). In their first two studies, Kearns and Fincham identified a wide range of both positive and negative forgiveness features (78) and distinguished between those features that were central from those that were peripheral. The authors then established that the lay perspective of forgiveness conforms to a prototype structure by showing that feature centrality influenced participants' judgments and cognition. Responses to central and peripheral features were assessed through recall and recognition memory tests (Studies 3 and 4) and through judgments of hypothetical forgiving scenarios (Study 5). As predicted, central forgiveness features (e.g., *caring, open-minded, an act of love, understanding that everyone makes mistakes*) were more salient in memory for recognition memory tasks (but not recall memory tasks), and were rated as more forgiving when incorporated into a hypothetical description of a transgression response than were peripheral features (e.g., *pretending the incident did not happen, a sign of weakness, giving in, crying, confusion*).

The aims and methodology of three of the studies reported in the present research are uncannily similar to those reported by Kearns and Fincham (2004), perhaps an indication of the research zeitgeist at work. Thus, the current research allows a valuable test of the extent to which investigators in different laboratories will independently produce similar results.

However, the present research goes beyond Kearns and Fincham (2004), and the majority of prototype research, in one crucial respect; namely, the bulk of prototype research with social psychological concepts relies on the convergent validation of a concept's prototype structure, and ignores the need for discriminant validity testing (for an exception, see Fletcher & Fitness, 1993). For example, Kearns and Fincham did not

investigate if the features attributed to forgiveness were also valid or used equally for other victim responses (such as avoidance or condoning). Without discriminant validity testing it remains unclear if the prototype of forgiveness is cognitively distinct from other related concepts within the broader category of victim response strategies.

Overview of the Present Research

The present studies attempted to describe and test the lay prototype structure of forgiveness. Studies 1 and 2 followed the prototype methodology, described previously, by identifying a wide variety of forgiveness features and distinguishing the graded structure of these features. It was expected that the results of the first two studies would largely replicate the findings reported by Kearns and Fincham (2004). Study 4 also generally replicated Kearns and Fincham's Study 5 by testing participants' judgments of hypothetical forgiving responses incorporating either central or peripheral features. For Study 4, I predicted that hypothetical victim responses with central forgiveness features would be judged as more forgiving than victim responses with peripheral forgiveness features. However, I would like to emphasize again that these studies were designed, and the data analyzed, without knowledge of the Kearns and Fincham results (thus, these two research endeavors were completely independent).

The novel aspects of the current research involved the assessment of the discriminant validity of the initial findings, by testing whether participants could reliably and accurately categorize forgiveness features (Study 3) and hypothetical forgiving responses (Study 5) as distinct from six other closely related victim response options (e.g., avoiding, condoning, denying, dissipating, excusing, and retaliating). For these two studies it was predicted that participants would reliably and accurately categorize

forgiveness features and victim responses (composites of forgiveness features), but that central features and victim responses with central features would be categorized more accurately than peripheral features.

Chapter Three: Study One – Free Listing of Forgiveness Features

Previous research investigating lay concepts has relied upon participants' free recall of concept features (Hassebrauck, 1997) or subcategories (Fehr, 1999; Russell & Fehr, 1994). Because of the complex structure of the forgiveness concept, it was decided that participants would produce more detailed and diverse lists of forgiveness features if they were first primed to think carefully about the concept. In addition, participants were informed that the purpose of this study was to understand forgiveness from an experiential perspective. In other words, participants needed to describe what they thought and how they felt and behaved when they had experienced forgiveness, rather than how forgiveness might be explained to someone unfamiliar with the concept, which was the orienting task employed by Kearns and Fincham (2004).

Method

Participants. Two-hundred and twenty participants (85 male, 123 female, 12 undeclared) between the ages of 16 and 54 were recruited for Study 1 from a temporary employment agency associated with the University of Canterbury, New Zealand during the summer holidays. The mean age for men was 23.8 years ($SD = 6.2$ years), and the mean age for women was 22.9 years ($SD = 5.8$). Due to the extensive amount of writing associated with the tasks in this first study, it was decided that familiarity with the English language was a more relevant demographic variable than participants' ethnicity. Therefore, participants were asked to identify their first language and any other languages they could speak and write fluently. Of those who responded (twenty-two did not answer this demographic question), eighty-three percent ($N = 165$) indicated that English was

their first language. All of those who identified a native language other than English also claimed to be fluent in English. The non-English languages included Chinese and/or Mandarin ($N = 18$), a variety of other Asian languages including those from India ($N = 8$), European languages ($N = 5$), and Polynesian languages ($N = 2$).

Procedure. Participants were initially primed about the forgiveness construct by writing about two personal forgiveness experiences; one occasion when they were the victim of an offense or transgression and they granted their perpetrator forgiveness, and a second occasion when they offended or transgressed against another and were forgiven their wrongdoing. Specific instructions in the granting forgiveness condition were: “Recall a time when someone significantly hurt or offended you through either his or her words or actions and you subsequently forgave him or her. Please describe (a) the thoughts you had, (b) emotions you experienced, and (c) how you behaved and communicated your forgiveness.” In the needing forgiveness condition the pronouns were changed to reflect the author as perpetrator.

Following the forgiveness prime, participants were instructed to provide thorough and detailed responses on the final sections. Instructions read, “What does it mean to forgive another person or persons? Please consider what a person thinks, what emotions he or she experiences, and how he or she acts and communicates when forgiving another person and list all the various features that are associated with forgiveness that you can think of.” Immediately following these general instructions, were three separate sections specifically asking, “What does a person think (what thoughts go through their head) when they forgive another for offending or hurting them?” “How does a person feel (what emotions does he or she experience) as they forgive another for offending or hurting

them?” “What actions (behavior and communication) are associated with forgiving another person?” Finally, participants answered a few demographic queries, were debriefed, and given a \$5.00NZ gift voucher to a local store. Time to complete the entire study ranged from twenty to forty-five minutes.

Forgiveness narratives. Participants' forgiveness narratives were intended only as a prime in this study, so this information is not included in the coding and data analysis reported below for the feature nomination exercises. However, many participants recalled in detail their experiences of both granting and receiving forgiveness, and while this type of qualitative information is not the main thrust of this study, it does provide a degree of insight into participants' perspectives as they completed the principal exercise. Seventy-five participants did not specify the relationship in which their forgiveness experiences had taken place, nor did they provide contextual details of the type of transgression that had occurred (the instructions only asked for them to describe their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as a result of forgiving or being forgiven). Of those that specified the type of relationship in which the transgression occurred ($N = 145$) across both victim and perpetrator accounts the vast majority were from four categories, including (in order of frequency); friendships, romantic relationships, family members (immediate and extended) and other peer relationships (classmates, co-workers, etc.). In addition, participants reported a wide variety of transgressions, ranging from minor incidents of miscommunication and misunderstanding to infidelity in romantic relationships and criminal acts of robbery and physical and sexual assault. Thus, the features of forgiveness nominated below arise from a wide variety of relationships and transgressions and this broad base of experiences should help capture the diversity of the lay forgiveness representation.

The most common type of transgression reported from both perpetrator and victim perspectives was verbal insults combined with behavior attributed as offensive. One example of this type of narrative is provided below. A female participant wrote the following “victim” account (abridged):

My friends and I were talking about height one day. One of my friends said that because I was tall, I could be a supermodel. To which my other friend replied, “No she couldn’t – she is a (certain race).” I felt really low about myself when he said that. I felt upset and ugly. I was also hurt by the racist element in the comment but I didn’t say anything because I thought he was probably joking. My friends continued laughing and joking but I became silent and a while later my friend asked if I was OK. I lied and said, “Yes. I am just tired.” I tried to get over my hurt by just thinking, “Who cares? He probably doesn’t know better.” I thought, “I shouldn’t let a remark like that ruin the friendship” and I started to talk and laugh again, communicating my forgiveness I guess.

While this autobiographical account provides a clear description of the participant’s progression of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors from injury through to forgiveness, this pattern of responding is likely to be influenced by the nature of the instructions given to participants and should not be taken as evidence for an actual sequence of the forgiveness process. However, this narrative does illustrate the type of cognitive effort that takes place as motivations are transformed from avoidance to conciliation. In addition, this narrative also illustrates how forgiveness may be indirectly, or implicitly expressed (Kelley, 1998). In this example the participant simply changed

her behavior to a pre-transgression state as a means of communicating forgiveness. The perpetrator may not have known he had been forgiven or even had caused an offense.

Coding. For the feature nomination exercises, participants either spontaneously produced lists of forgiveness traits according to the domain in question (thoughts, emotion, communication and action) or they wrote more narrative descriptions. All responses were independently categorized by two trained judges according to linguistic units following a procedure originally proposed by Rosenberg and Jones (1972), and widely employed by other researchers investigating prototype structures of social psychological concepts such as love and commitment (Fehr, 1988), and relationship quality (Hassebrauck, 1997). For this procedure, responses are organized according to the subject followed by adjective modifiers. For example, the response, “I feel less angry” would be coded as “angry, less”, whereas the response, “I would still feel some residual anger even after forgiving” would be coded as, “anger, residual”. Some narrative descriptions could not be condensed without changing the meaning and were left as written by the participant. For example one participant wrote, “they (*the victim*) thinks what they would do if they were in a similar situation as the one who hurt them” (italics added). On average, the two judges agreed on both the number of features and the nature of the descriptions 90% of the time. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and joint examination of the responses.

Results

A total of 3,465 features were listed by the 220 participants (1,209 thoughts, 1,016 emotions, and 1,240 communication and action items). Over all, women listed significantly more forgiveness features than men (women – thoughts $M = 5.97$, $SD = 2.2$;

emotions $M = 4.77$, $SD = 2.3$; communication and actions $M = 6.02$, $SD = 2.8$; men – thoughts $M = 4.77$, $SD = 2.2$; emotions $M = 4.22$, $SD = 2.4$; communication and actions $M = 5.17$, $SD = 3.0$; $F(1,207) = 9.77$ $p < .01$).

In order to examine the frequencies of individual items, the lists of forgiveness features were categorized according to synonymous subject meaning. For example, items in the forgiveness emotion domain such as “mad”, “hostile” and “anger, residual” were all placed into one category. In a similar manner, items with more complex wording but synonymous meanings were also placed into one category, such as “relieved”, “a weight lifted off my shoulders”, and “a burden taken off my chest”. Those items that were not nominated by at least four percent of the sample (10 participants) were dropped. Upon inspection of the various categories in each domain it was discovered that several categories were represented in multiple domains. For example, forgetting the incident/offense was listed by participants as a thought-process or desire, an emotion, and as an action (refusing to think about it). In addition, some categories only applied to specific types of relationships (e.g., kissing and sex as a forgiving action) and were dropped from the final list of features. This final analysis produced a total of 77 forgiveness features (25 thoughts, 26 emotions, and 26 communication and action items – see table 1). This result is only one less than the number of forgiveness features found by Kearns and Fincham (2004) and slightly more than the number of features found in previous research for concepts such as love (68; Fehr, 1988) and relationship quality (64; Hassebrauck, 1997).

As a reliability check of this categorization procedure, a sample of three representative items from each category and the category titles were given to an

independent judge who re-categorized each list in all three domains. Results showed good reliability for this categorization scheme (Cohen's Kappa = .92 for thoughts, .98 for emotions, .95 for communication and actions).

A feeling of *relief, a weight lifted or removed* was the most frequently cited feature of forgiveness (half of the men and women listed this feature). This feature corresponds with the conceptualization of forgiveness as a transformation of motivation. As the motives for revenge and avoidance are transformed it seems intuitively plausible that the feelings associated with that experience would be relief. Eleven other items were mentioned by at least twenty percent of the sample; these included five thoughts (*evaluating the perpetrator's intent, degree of blame; a desire to move on/forward, get on with life; evaluating the importance of the relationship with the perpetrator; considering how the relationship with the perpetrator might change as a result of forgiving/not forgiving; the personal consequences/risks of forgiving/not forgiving for the victim*), one emotion (*happiness*), and five communication and action items (*communicating about the incident and surrounding events; verbal expressions of forgiveness; general/every-day communication; hug/embrace between victim and perpetrator; and other congenial physical contact such as a handshake or pat on the back/shoulder*).

Discussion

Many of the forgiveness features nominated by this sample are similar to those found by Kearns and Fincham (2004) as were the frequencies of feature nomination (frequency ratings of 48 similar features across both studies were moderately correlated, $r = .45, p < .01$). Between the two studies, there were 27 forgiveness features that were identical in content and an additional 21 features that were very similar in content. For

example, Kearns and Fincham found features such as; *still holding a grudge, buying the other person things, and reconciling*, and these are conceptually similar to features in the present study such as; *resentful, giving the perpetrator a gift as a peace offering, and relationship with perpetrator is repaired/strengthened*.

Most of the differences between those features found by Kearns and Fincham (2004) and the present study appear to be the result of methodological idiosyncrasies. Some of these represent differences in coding and categorization schemes, for example; in the present study a *handshake* and a *hug* were categorized as two features whereas Kearns and Fincham group these types of forgiving actions into one feature labeled *physical acts*. In addition, in the present study all manner of verbal expressions of forgiveness (that's OK, I forgive you, it's all right) were categorized as one feature, but in the Kearns and Fincham research these comprised two features (*saying I forgive you, and telling the person it's okay what they did*).

Other differences between the two sets of features could be the result of different types of instructions given to the participants. In the present study, it was specified that participants were to describe the thoughts, emotions, and communication and actions that represented the experience of forgiveness from the victim's point of view. Thus, some of the features of forgiveness nominated by the present sample concern specific notions that a victim may contemplate (e.g., *personal consequences of forgiving the perpetrator, consider mitigating circumstances, and consider if the perpetrator was justified*) and specific actions, interactions and messages that communicate forgiveness (e.g., *maintain open and receptive body language, make eye contact, laughing/joking, and socializing with the perpetrator*). In the Kearns and Fincham (2004) study, their instructions to the

participants were not as detailed and phenomenological; instead they focused on how an individual might describe forgiveness to someone who was completely unfamiliar with the concept. Thus, some of the features nominated by their sample are more descriptive (e.g., *difficult to do, something you ask for, takes time, and end to fighting*) than those found in the present study.

In addition to replicating a majority of the features found by Kearns and Fincham (2004), many of the items nominated by this sample are consistent with both a variety of other research findings and theoretical perspectives of forgiveness. Several items address the relationship between victim and perpetrator (*evaluation of relationship importance, consider relationship consequences of forgiveness/unforgiveness, love, emotional closeness, repaired/strengthened relationship*) and this echoes several studies which have found that the nature of the relationship between perpetrator and victim is an important predictor of forgiveness (e.g., Finkel et al., 2002; Friesen et al., 2005; Karremans et al., 2003). Several items also concern the victim's perception of the perpetrator's response after the transgression (*remorse, apology, agreement, understanding*) supporting studies that have shown a greater likelihood for forgiveness when perpetrator's demonstrate contrition (e.g., Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991).

A number of items also address the victim's perception of the transgression (*magnitude of offense, other possible explanations, blame attributions, mitigating circumstances, communication about the incident*) and reinforce studies that have found a significant association between these type of victim perceptions and degree of forgiving response (e.g., Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Fincham, 2000; Worthington et al., 2000).

Finally, there were a few items that highlighted the importance of a victim's empathy for the perpetrator (*consider the perpetrator's point of view, feelings of compassion, listen to the perpetrator's side of the story*). Empathy has repeatedly been found to be an important predictor of forgiveness (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; Finkel et al., 2002; Konstam et al., 2001; Konstam et al., 2003; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002; Takaku, 2001) mediating the relation between the perpetrator's apology and the victim's forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997).

Table 1
Prototypical Forgiveness Features: Study 1 Frequencies & Study 2 Centrality Ratings

Feature	Frequency of listing (%)			Mean centrality rating			<i>F</i>
	Total ^a (<i>N</i> = 220)	Male (<i>N</i> = 85)	Female (<i>N</i> = 123)	Total (<i>N</i> = 83)	Male (<i>N</i> = 39)	Female (<i>N</i> = 44)	
Thoughts							
Consider the perpetrator's remorse ^{b, c}	19.10	14.10	22.00	5.82	5.59	6.02	ns
Recognize everyone makes mistakes ^{b, c}	6.80	4.70	8.90	5.34	5.18	5.48	ns
Consider if the perpetrator deserves another chance ^{b, c}	5.50	5.90	5.70	5.34	4.97	5.66	6.23*
Consider other possible explanations for the transgression	17.70	21.20	17.10	5.31	5.31	5.32	ns
Recognize that I offend others, make mistakes ^b	5.90	3.50	8.10	5.27	5.08	5.43	ns
Evaluate the magnitude of the transgression ^c	17.70	17.60	18.70	5.25	5.28	5.23	ns
Evaluate the perpetrator's intent, degree of blame	20.50	17.60	24.40	5.22	5.23	5.20	ns
Empathic thoughts, consider the perpetrator's point of view ^{b, c}	16.80	12.90	20.30	5.05	5.05	5.05	ns
Forgiveness is a choice, decision	6.40	8.20	5.70	5.04	4.85	5.20	ns
Desire to move on/forward, get on with life	20.90	24.70	17.90	5.01	4.64	5.34	4.30*
Consider the likelihood of the perpetrator re-offending	16.80	14.10	18.70	4.94	4.74	5.11	ns
Consider if the perpetrator can be trusted again	6.40	3.50	8.10	4.93	5.08	4.86	ns
Evaluate the relationship with the perpetrator ^{b, c}	30.90	27.10	31.70	4.92	4.72	5.09	ns
Desire to let go, put the incident behind me (victim) ^{b, c}	10.50	11.80	10.60	4.92	4.62	5.18	ns
Consider how the relationship with the perpetrator will change	23.20	25.90	21.90	4.88	4.51	5.05	ns
Consider if I am responsible and the perpetrator justified	15.90	7.10	20.30	4.76	4.62	4.89	ns
Consider if I (victim) have over reacted to the transgression	4.50	2.40	4.90	4.75	4.56	4.91	ns
Consider personal consequences of forgiving/not forgiving	33.20	31.80	34.10	4.70	4.38	4.98	ns
Consider possible mitigating circumstances ^b	7.70	4.70	9.80	4.69	4.44	4.91	ns
Recognize that forgiveness is best, good, right thing to do ^c	12.70	10.60	13.00	4.61	4.28	4.91	ns

Note. Centrality ratings were made on a scale from 1 (non-essential, minor ingredient for forgiveness) to 7 (extremely essential, key ingredient for forgiveness). *F* values refer to tests of gender differences for centrality ratings derived from the MANOVA analyses (see text).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ^a 12 participants did not indicate gender; ^b Features used in Study 4 for hypothetical forgiving responses

^c Features used in Study 5 for hypothetical forgiving responses

Table 1 Continued

Feature	Frequency of listing (%)			Mean centrality rating			<i>F</i>
	Total ^a (<i>N</i> = 220)	Male (<i>N</i> = 85)	Female (<i>N</i> = 123)	Total (<i>N</i> = 83)	Male (<i>N</i> = 39)	Female (<i>N</i> = 44)	
Examine, reconsider how the incident happened ^c	7.30	10.60	4.90	4.61	4.59	4.64	ns
Motivation to avoid conflict ^{b,c}	9.50	11.80	7.30	4.23	4.08	4.36	ns
I (victim) have power/upper hand in relationship ^{b,c}	4.50	2.40	6.50	3.54	3.21	3.84	ns
Rumination	4.50	5.90	2.40	3.51	3.03	3.93	5.88*
Faith/religious values encourage forgiveness ^c	4.50	2.40	5.60	3.24	2.56	3.84	8.04**
Emotions							
Hopeful, anticipation of positive future ^{b,c}	5.50	7.10	3.30	5.59	5.13	6.00	13.21***
Reduction/removal of anger/grudge ^{b,c}	11.40	12.90	11.40	5.55	5.51	5.59	ns
Sense of closure ^{b,c}	4.50	3.50	6.50	5.46	4.97	5.89	9.32**
Sense of release, letting-go ^{b,c}	9.10	10.60	8.10	5.42	4.90	5.89	17.42***
Good/good about self ^{b,c}	11.40	10.60	11.40	5.18	4.77	5.55	6.01*
Relieved, like a weight/burden has lifted ^{b,c}	51.80	49.40	51.20	5.17	4.87	5.43	ns
Peaceful	7.70	5.90	9.80	5.14	4.95	5.32	ns
Love	8.20	5.90	9.80	4.95	5.03	4.89	ns
Feel close to the perpetrator	4.50	2.40	6.50	4.86	4.79	4.91	ns
Mature, grown-up	9.50	5.90	10.60	4.82	4.49	5.11	ns
Compassion ^c	5.50	7.10	3.30	4.77	4.56	4.95	ns
Feel free, liberated	4.50	1.20	5.70	4.76	4.33	5.14	5.94*
Happy/glad	32.30	29.40	35.80	4.75	4.38	5.07	4.71*
Feel like a better person	9.50	12.90	8.10	4.71	4.26	5.11	5.40*
Courageous, strong ^{b,c}	9.10	5.90	9.80	4.51	4.05	4.91	4.98*
Anxious that the transgression will be repeated ^b	8.20	7.10	8.90	4.38	4.38	4.37	ns
Satisfied ^{b,c}	12.30	10.60	14.60	4.10	4.08	4.11	ns
Sympathy for the perpetrator ^c	5.00	5.90	4.90	4.08	4.15	4.02	ns

Note. Centrality ratings were made on a scale from 1 (non-essential, minor ingredient for forgiveness) to 7 (extremely essential, key ingredient for forgiveness). *F* values refer to tests of gender differences for centrality ratings derived from the MANOVA analyses (see text).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ^a 12 participants did not indicate gender; ^b Features used in Study 4 for hypothetical forgiving responses

^c Features used in Study 5 for hypothetical forgiving responses

Table 1 Continued

Feature	Frequency of listing (%)			Mean centrality rating			F
	Total ^a (N = 220)	Male (N = 85)	Female (N = 123)	Total (N = 83)	Male (N = 39)	Female (N = 44)	
Residual anger	14.50	17.60	13.80	3.99	3.87	4.09	ns
Residual disappointment, hurt	15.00	10.60	18.70	3.83	3.67	3.98	ns
Sad, sorrow	14.50	14.10	15.40	3.59	3.36	3.80	ns
Righteous, virtuous ^{b, c}	12.70	11.80	11.40	3.53	3.56	3.50	ns
Feel untrusting of the perpetrator ^b	5.00	4.70	4.90	3.49	3.46	3.52	ns
Resentful ^b	4.50	1.20	7.30	3.07	2.87	3.25	ns
Fearful, apprehensive around perpetrator	11.80	9.40	14.60	2.98	2.79	3.14	ns
Superior ^c	4.50	5.90	1.60	2.93	2.85	3.00	ns
Communication and Actions							
Listen to the perpetrator, hear his other side of the story ^{b, c}	5.90	5.90	5.70	5.89	5.85	5.93	ns
Honest/open communication ^b	5.90	2.40	8.90	5.86	5.69	6.00	ns
Communication about the incident and surrounding events ^{b, c}	21.80	14.10	26.80	5.71	5.49	5.91	ns
Accept the perpetrator's apology	6.40	3.50	8.90	5.63	5.23	5.98	7.41**
I (victim) express my feelings/hurt ^{b, c}	19.10	9.40	26.00	5.55	5.18	5.89	5.65*
We (victim and perpetrator) come to a mutual understanding ^b	5.00	5.90	4.10	5.55	5.64	5.48	ns
Verbal expressions of forgiveness ^c	22.70	25.90	22.00	5.40	5.00	5.75	5.00*
Agreement/compromise between victim and perpetrator ^c	4.50	4.70	3.30	5.30	5.08	5.50	ns
Make eye contact when speaking with perpetrator	5.00	1.20	6.50	5.24	4.92	5.52	ns
Maintain open/receptive body language ^c	10.50	8.20	13.00	5.14	4.97	5.30	ns
Relationship is repaired/strengthened in the long-term	8.20	5.90	10.60	5.08	5.21	4.98	ns
Relationship and behaviour return to normal	18.60	18.80	17.90	5.07	5.18	4.98	ns
Ensuring the transgression will not be repeated ^b	6.80	7.10	6.50	4.91	4.47	5.30	5.38*
Calm, relaxed behavior ^b	10.50	12.80	9.80	4.75	4.49	4.98	ns
Friendly communication ^c	5.90	5.90	5.70	4.49	4.36	4.61	ns

Note. Centrality ratings were made on a scale from 1 (non-essential, minor ingredient for forgiveness) to 7 (extremely essential, key ingredient for forgiveness). *F* values refer to tests of gender differences for centrality ratings derived from the MANOVA analyses (see text).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ^a 12 participants did not indicate gender; ^b Features used in Study 4 for hypothetical forgiving responses

^c Features used in Study 5 for hypothetical forgiving responses

Table 1 Continued

Feature	Frequency of listing (%)			Mean centrality rating			<i>F</i>
	Total ^a (<i>N</i> = 220)	Male (<i>N</i> = 85)	Female (<i>N</i> = 123)	Total (<i>N</i> = 83)	Male (<i>N</i> = 39)	Female (<i>N</i> = 44)	
General/every-day communication ^{b, c}	37.30	37.60	38.20	4.04	4.26	3.84	ns
Smiling at the perpetrator ^{b, c}	18.20	14.10	21.10	3.95	3.69	4.18	ns
Forgetting the incident, refusing to think about it ^{b, c}	18.60	31.80	11.40	3.90	3.49	4.27	ns
Socializing/spending time with the perpetrator ^c	14.10	15.30	12.20	3.86	3.82	3.89	ns
Being kind, nice, friendly to the perpetrator ^b	10.50	12.90	9.80	3.84	3.92	3.77	ns
Hug/embrace between victim and perpetrator	33.60	20.00	43.90	3.66	3.31	3.98	ns
Laughing/joking with perpetrator ^{b, c}	5.00	4.70	5.70	3.59	3.82	3.39	ns
Not mentioning transgression in the perpetrator's presence ^b	8.20	8.20	8.90	3.31	3.15	3.45	ns
Crying	5.50	4.70	4.90	3.20	2.38	3.93	15.91***
Handshake, pat on shoulder, other gentle physical contact	28.20	22.40	34.10	3.04	3.10	2.98	ns
Giving the perpetrator a gift as a peace offering	10.90	11.80	9.80	2.25	2.28	2.23	ns

Note. Centrality ratings were made on a scale from 1 (non-essential, minor ingredient for forgiveness) to 7 (extremely essential, key ingredient for forgiveness). *F* values refer to tests of gender differences for centrality ratings derived from the MANOVA analyses (see text).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; ^a 12 participants did not indicate gender; ^b Features used in Study 4 for hypothetical forgiving responses

^c Features used in Study 5 for hypothetical forgiving responses

Chapter Four: Study Two – Centrality Ratings

Study 1 obtained a large and diverse range of features that participants judged as representative of forgiveness. However, if forgiveness has a common prototypical structure for the majority of lay-persons, then participants should be able to reliably distinguish between those features that are important (central) and those features that are non-important (peripheral). To investigate this internal structure of forgiveness, participants in Study 2 were asked to carefully consider the process of forgiveness and rate the importance or essential nature of each of the 77 forgiveness features identified in Study 1. Because prototype theory proposes that the internal structure of features comprising a concept should be graded as opposed to a strict principle of inclusion/exclusion, it was hypothesized that participants would reliably discriminate between central and peripheral features, but that the distribution of centrality ratings would constitute a continuum as opposed to a dichotomy.

Method

Participants. For this study and each additional study, a researcher recruited participants at the entrance to the main library of the University of Canterbury. This was done to gain a more representative sample from the entire university population. Relying on first and second year undergraduate psychology students, as is done in many psychological studies, could produce results that are not representative of a diverse lay population and instead are biased by the interests and knowledge of the students in one field. Eighty-three participants (39 men, 44 women) volunteered for Study 2. Ages ranged from 17 to 52 with a mean age of 22 for men ($SD = 5.6$ years) and 23.3 for women ($SD = 8.9$ years). Eighty-nine percent of the participants were full-time students and 90%

were undergraduate students. The participants represented twenty-five different fields of study with just under half of the sample studying in one of four fields:

Commerce/Business ($N = 14$), Psychology ($N = 12$), Engineering ($N = 9$), and Law ($N = 7$). Ninety-four percent of the sample indicated that English was their first language, and all others indicated that they were fluent in both the verbal and written forms of English.

Procedure: The procedure employed for Study 2 was used for all of the following studies. Before introducing the study and the questionnaires, interested individuals were first screened to ensure that they had not participated in any of the previous forgiveness studies (identified as “research about hurts and transgressions in relationships”) or any other related relationship research. This screening procedure was repeated for each of the following studies and the few individuals identified as previous participants were excluded from further participation. After a brief overview, participants would take the various materials, which were placed in a large envelope, into the library and complete the questionnaires individually. All information was then immediately returned directly to the researcher who briefly debriefed the participant and offered him or her a small reward as compensation for his or her time. Depending on the number of questionnaires and estimated length of time to complete the materials, the incentive varied from a \$5.00 gift voucher to a candy bar or other confectionary. For Study 2, the instructions to participants read as follows:

Each item on the list below has been described as an element, or feature, of forgiveness and represents something that a victim thinks, feels, or does in response to a significant negative and hurtful transgression. Please look at each item and decide if it is an essential, key ingredient in forgiveness or if it is a non-essential and peripheral element in the process of forgiving another person or

persons. Take your time and think carefully about each item, then circle a number from one, which represents something that is non-essential or peripheral when forgiving another, to seven, which represents something very essential for forgiving another.

Results

Mean centrality ratings for men and women are listed in Table 1 where higher means equal greater centrality. Overall, the ratings tended to be concentrated towards the middle of the scale. None of the features received a combined (men and women) mean centrality rating higher than six and only three (giving the perpetrator a gift as a peace offering, and feelings of superiority and fear) received a centrality rating lower than three. Three separate MANOVAs (one for each domain: thoughts, emotions, communication and actions) indicated that women generally rated most traits higher than men (thoughts $F(1,81) = 1.69, p = .051$; emotions $F(1,81) = 2.62, p = .001$; communication and actions $F(1,81) = 1.79, p = .034$). The univariate tests revealed that this gender difference was significant for seventeen of the seventy-seven items (although this finding should be treated with caution given the high number of comparisons) (see Table 1).

Preliminary evidence of the reliability of these judgments is indicated by the high correlation ($r = .90, p < .001$) between men's and women's mean centrality ratings (column 5 and 6 of Table 1). A further reliability analysis, based on a procedure detailed by Hassebrauck (1997), utilized a flipped data matrix where the 77 features were treated as cases and the 83 participants as items. This revealed high internal consistency for both Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .97$) and the intraclass correlation ($ICC = .97, p < .001$) and suggests good agreement across participants about the relative rank of each feature. The

intraclass correlation is equivalent to the mean of all possible split-half correlations across the 83 participants relative to the 77 forgiveness features and has been employed in other prototype research (Fehr & Russell, 1991; Hassebrauck, 1997) to avoid inflated estimates of reliability due to a large number of variables.

In order to compare these findings with those of Kearns and Fincham (2004), the centrality ratings of the 48 features with identical or similar content across the two studies were correlated. This revealed a moderately strong association ($r = .61, p < .001$) suggesting that these two samples generally agreed about the relative importance of those features that were common to both studies. This is an important finding because it provides evidence for a lay forgiveness prototype that transcends local culture (Buffalo, New York and Christchurch, New Zealand) and is probably related to broader (i.e., Western) social and cultural determinants.

Discussion

When centrality ratings were compared in the present study across the three domains (thoughts, emotions, communication and actions) it was found that the communication and action items had six features that received a combined centrality rating above 5.5, while the emotion domain had only two, and the thoughts domain had only one at this level. This is an interesting result, because while most theoretical perspectives acknowledge the importance of the interpersonal aspect of forgiveness (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1998; Enright, 2001; Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Fincham, 2000), it is primarily the intrapsychic dimension that has been the focus of most forgiveness measures (e.g., Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001; Brown, 2003; McCullough et al., 1998; Subkoviak et al., 1995).

As found previously in other prototype studies (e.g., Fehr, 2004; Kearns & Fincham, 2004) the correlation between the frequency ratings in Study 1 and centrality ratings in Study 2 was low ($r = .03, p = .83$). This implies that even though some features of forgiveness are relatively salient in memory (Study 1) they may not be very important for determining category membership (Study 2). This is understandable. For example, a speedometer may be a feature of virtually all automobiles, but if a *Honda Accord* is missing its speedometer it is not excluded from the automobile category. In the same way, a hug, a handshake, or a pat on the shoulder between victim and perpetrator may be commonplace in forgiveness scenarios, but may not be especially diagnostic of forgiveness because these actions can be interpreted in so many ways (e.g., friendliness, greeting behavior, or affection).

The significant gender differences in centrality ratings for 17 of the 77 forgiveness features (see Table 1) could be attributed to many different factors, including chance. However, several of these gender differences were found for features where sex differences have previously been established. Modern stereotypes often portray women as valuing emotion and experiencing emotion states more intensely than men, and research has supported this generalization (see Geary, 1998). Of the gender differences found in the present study nine of the features are associated with this quality. Women identified positive emotions such as *hope, a sense of release, feeling good/good about self, free/liberated, happy/glad, feeling like a better person, courageous/strong* and behaviors such as *expressions of feelings/hurt* and *crying* as more central than men. In addition, women viewed some features associated with transition or transformation as more central than men (e.g., *a desire to move on/forward, get on with life; sense of closure; sense of release/letting-go; feeling free/liberated*). These properties have also

been associated with hope and optimism, although gender differences have not been typically found in research on these traits (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004 and Snyder, Sympson, Michael, & Cheavens, 2001).

As predicted earlier, participants identified a variety of features – many of them judged as central to the forgiveness concept – that reflect the dimensions of relationship information proposed by Fletcher (2002) and Baldwin (1992). Specifically, from the forgiveness thoughts domain, features such as *consider if the perpetrator deserves another chance, evaluate the perpetrator's intent & degree of blame, and consider if I have over reacted to the transgression*, represent thought processes that must incorporate information from levels identified by Fletcher as *general social theories* (theory of mind representations when assessing responsibility and blame) as well as information from *relationship general theories* (social norms for interpersonal relationships). In addition, several of the forgiveness features specifically focused on the victim-perpetrator relationship (e.g., *relationship is repaired/strengthened in the long-term, relationship and behavior return to normal, evaluate the relationship with the perpetrator, consider if the perpetrator can be trusted again*) and reflect the type of information identified by Fletcher as *relationship specific theories*.

In support of Baldwin's relationship schema model, virtually all of the forgiveness features could be classified as either specific to the self (victim), or the partner (perpetrator), or dependent on the interaction between victim and perpetrator (a script-like feature). As can be seen in Table 2 below, the majority of features are specific to the victim, especially those from the emotions domain, although there were a few emotion features that were classified as perpetrator focused. Lambie & Marcel (2002) distinguish

between self-focused and world-focused emotional experiences; proposing that self-focused emotional experiences, such as the experience of happiness, cause the individual's conscious awareness to turn inwardly towards the self. On the other hand, world-focused emotional experiences, such as the experience of anger, cause the individual's conscious awareness to turn towards external sources and action orientations. In addition to anger related features, the emotion features of *love, feeling close to the perpetrator, compassion, sympathy, anxiety, trust/untrust, and superiority* all seem to express an external focus towards the perpetrator.

Table 2 also displays twelve features that could be classified as dyadic and an additional five that could be classified as having either a victim or a dyadic focus depending on how it is interpreted (e.g., *honest/open communication* could either be something that the victim does purely through their expression to the perpetrator, or could include more of an interchange between victim and perpetrator). The dyadic features display either a script-like quality (e.g., *accept the perpetrator's apology*; the perpetrator must first apologize and then the victim accepts this concession) or are dependent on past or future interpersonal processes between victim and perpetrator (e.g., *evaluate the relationship with the perpetrator* and *come to a mutual understanding*). These dyadic or interpersonal features of forgiveness seem to be largely over-looked by the predominant forgiveness theories (e.g., McCullough, 2000 and Enright, 2001) and this issue will be discussed further in the general discussion

These first two studies provide good support for the existence of a forgiveness prototype, and delineate some of the central features. However, as noted previously, a limitation of such work (shared by prior prototype research) is that it fails to provide

evidence of discriminant validity. That is, do the features of the forgiveness prototype (particularly the central features) distinguish this concept from other closely related strategies (e.g., avoiding or excusing) that an individual has at his or her disposal when faced with an interpersonal transgression? The following three studies test both the convergent (or predictive) and the discriminant validity of the forgiveness prototype that has been identified thus far.

Table 2
Prototypical Forgiveness Features Categorized According to Feature Emphasis

Feature	Rating	V/P/D	Feature	Rating	V/P/D
Listen to the perpetrator, hear his or her side of the story	5.89	D	Feel close to the perpetrator	4.86	P
Accept the perpetrator's apology	5.63	D	Compassion	4.77	P
We (victim and perpetrator) come to a mutual understanding	5.55	D	Anxious that the transgression will be repeated	4.38	P
Agreement/compromise between victim and perpetrator	5.30	D	Sympathy for the perpetrator	4.08	P
Relationship is repaired / strengthened in the long-term	5.08	D	Feel untrusting of the perpetrator	3.49	P
Relationship and behaviour return to normal	5.07	D	Resentful	3.07	P
Evaluate the relationship with the perpetrator	4.92	D	Fearful, apprehensive around perpetrator	2.98	P
Ensuring the transgression will not be repeated	4.91	D	Hopeful, anticipation of positive future	5.59	V
Consider how the relationship with the perpetrator will change	4.88	D	Reduction/removal of anger/grudge	5.55	V
Socializing/spending time with the perpetrator	3.86	D	I (victim) express my feelings/hurt	5.55	V
Hug/embrace between victim and perpetrator	3.66	D	Sense of closure	5.46	V
Laughing/joking with perpetrator	3.59	D	Sense of release, letting-go	5.42	V
Consider the perpetrator's remorse	5.82	P	Verbal expressions of forgiveness	5.40	V
Consider if the perpetrator deserves another chance	5.34	P	Recognize that I offend others, make mistakes	5.27	V
Evaluate the perpetrator's intent, degree of blame	5.22	P	Evaluate the magnitude of the transgression	5.25	V
Empathic thoughts, consider the perpetrator's point of view	5.05	P	Make eye contact when speaking with perpetrator	5.24	V
Love	4.95	P	Good/good about self	5.18	V
Consider the likelihood of the perpetrator re-offending	4.94	P	Relieved, like a weight/burden has lifted	5.17	V
Consider if the perpetrator can be trusted again	4.93	P	Peaceful	5.14	V

Note: Rating = Combined (male & female) centrality ratings from Table 1. V/P/D = Categorization according to Victim (V), Perpetrator (P), or Dyadic (D) feature emphasis. The forgiveness features are sorted first by feature categorization (V/P/D) and then centrality rating.

Table 2: Continued

Feature	Rating	V/P/D	Feature	Rating	V/P/D
Maintain open/receptive body language	5.14	V	Sad, sorrow	3.59	V
Forgiveness is a choice, decision	5.04	V	I (victim) have power/upper hand in relationship	3.54	V
Desire to move on/forward, get on with life	5.01	V	Righteous, virtuous	3.53	V
Desire to let go, put the incident behind me (victim)	4.92	V	Rumination	3.51	V
Mature, grown-up	4.82	V	Not mentioning transgression	3.31	V
Consider if I am responsible and the perpetrator justified	4.76	V	Faith/religious values encourage forgiveness	3.24	V
Feel free, liberated	4.76	V	Crying	3.20	V
Consider if I have over reacted to the transgression	4.75	V	Superior	2.93	V
Happy/glad	4.75	V	Giving the perpetrator a gift as a peace offering	2.25	V
Calm, relaxed behavior	4.75	V	Honest/open communication	5.86	V/D
Feel like a better person	4.71	V	Communication about the incident	5.71	V/D
Consider personal consequences of forgiving	4.70	V	Friendly communication	4.49	V/D
Recognize that forgiveness is best, good, right thing to do	4.61	V	General/every-day communication	4.04	V/D
Courageous, strong	4.51	V	Handshake, pat on shoulder	3.04	V/D
Motivation to avoid conflict	4.23	V	Recognize everyone makes mistakes	5.34	--
Satisfied	4.10	V	Consider other possible explanations	5.31	--
Residual anger	3.99	V	Consider possible mitigating circumstances	4.69	--
Smiling at the perpetrator	3.95	V	Examine, reconsider how the incident happened	4.61	--
Forgetting the incident, refusing to think about it	3.90	V			
Being kind, nice, friendly to the perpetrator	3.84	V			
Residual disappointment, hurt	3.83	V			

Note: Rating = Combined (male & female) centrality ratings from Table 1. V/P/D = Categorization according to Victim (V), Perpetrator (P), or Dyadic (D) feature emphasis. The forgiveness features are sorted first by feature categorization (V/P/D) and then centrality rating.

Chapter Five: Study Three – Forgiveness Features and Fuzzy Borders

Study 2 demonstrated that individuals can reliably identify central and peripheral features of forgiveness, providing initial evidence of a rough internal structure for the forgiveness concept. However, the results thus far do not provide evidence that speak to the association between forgiveness, its features, and other victim response strategies. In short, is the forgiveness concept unique and can the features of forgiveness be used to discriminate it from other victim response options such as avoidance, condoning, denying, dissipating, excusing and retaliating?

Study 3 sought to answer this question by again providing participants with the full list of forgiveness features and asking them to categorize each feature into one of seven options (the six victim responses listed above and forgiveness). It was predicted that overall the features would be nominated as a member of the forgiveness category more frequently than all other categories, and central features would be nominated as a member of the forgiveness category more frequently than peripheral features. As found in Study 2, and consistent with prototype theory, it was also predicted that there would be no clear and distinct boundaries between those features categorized as forgiveness and those features categorized as members of other victim response options. In other words, it was expected there would be fuzzy boundaries between the seven victim response categories (Russell & Fehr, 1994).

Method

Participants. Thirty-six participants (11 men and 25 women) were recruited for Study 3 in the same manner as described for Study 2. Once again the sample was

predominantly young adult (age $M = 21.5$, $SD = 5.4$), undergraduate (89%) students. Eighty-six percent of the sample ($N = 31$) indicated that English was their first language. All of the non-native English speaking participants indicated that they were fluent with both the verbal and written forms of the English language. In addition, all of the non-native English speaking participants indicated either Chinese ($N = 3$, including Mandarin) or Taiwanese ($N = 1$) as their mother tongue. Finally, this sample represented a diverse range of students from eighteen different fields of study, with Psychology ($N = 7$) and Law ($N = 5$) the two most common majors listed.

Procedure. Following the procedure described in Study 2, participants first completed the demographic queries and then read the following instructions:

Imagine that you are a witness to the following hypothetical incident:

You attend a large party with Taylor and Chris, two of your best friends. Many of your other friends and acquaintances are also at this party. At one point during the evening, Taylor shares some personal and private information about Chris in front of you and several other people. Before the party is over, Chris discovers what Taylor has said. Chris is now very embarrassed and feels betrayed and publicly humiliated.

Listed below are a wide variety of ways that Chris (the victim) could respond to Taylor (the perpetrator) including thoughts, feelings and actions. Your task is to imagine that you witness Chris's response. Then, for each response decide which category it most likely belongs to; (1) avoiding, (2) condoning, (3) denying, (4) dissipating, (5) excusing, (6) forgiving, or (7) retaliating. Please write the number for each item in one (and only one) table for the category that you feel is most appropriate, then cross that item off the list.

Following the instructions a list was presented of the 77 forgiveness features randomly ordered, numbered, and written from the perspective of the hypothetical incident between Chris and Taylor. For example, “*Chris considers Taylor’s apology*”, “*Chris feels a sense of relief, like a weight has lifted*”, and “*Chris listens to Taylor’s side of the story.*” A separate page displayed seven blank tables with the name of each category and its definition at the top of each table. Participants wrote the number of the feature in a space on the table for the category judged as most representative of that feature. For example, “*Chris tries to see the situation from Taylor’s perspective*” was listed as feature number eight. If a participant judged that description as most representative of the *condoning* category (see definition below), he or she would write the number eight on a blank space in the table under that category and definition.

The definitions given to participants for each category were: avoiding – withdrawal, attempting to not confront an offense/hurt or the perpetrator; condoning – viewing an offense/hurt as justified or deserved; denying – refusing to believe an incident was hurtful or offensive; dissipating – allowing time to decrease the pain and hurt from an offense; excusing – identifying external causes for an offense/hurt outside of the perpetrator’s control; forgiving – overcoming negative emotions and negative behaviors directed toward the perpetrator; retaliating – attempting to “get-even” or “pay-back” the perpetrator, revenge. These categories and definitions were selected from theoretical writings on victim responses (Enright et al., 1998; Kolnai, 1974; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002; North, 1987; Worthington, Berry, & Parrott, 2001) in addition to current dictionaries (Harper Collins Publishers, 2000; Dictionary.com, 2003).

Results

In accordance with prototype theory, the boundaries between forgiving features and features of other victim response categories did not seem to be rigidly defined as all 77 items had moderate variances (SD ranged from 1.10 to 2.63). Overall, items were nominated as a feature of forgiveness more than any other category (26%), followed by Dissipation (16%), Avoidance (14%), Denial (13%), Retaliation (11%), Excusing (10.5%) and Condoning (10%) ($\chi^2 = 276.14$, $df = 12$, $p < .01$; Cramer's $\phi = .32$). Correlations between item centrality (from Study 2) and frequency of category nomination revealed that two categories were positively associated with centrality ratings, Forgiving ($r = .31$; $p < .01$) and Excusing ($r = .32$; $p < .01$), and two categories were negatively associated with centrality ratings, Avoiding ($r = -.43$; $p < .01$) and Retaliating ($r = -.31$; $p < .01$).¹

As predicted, within the forgiveness category, central features (mean centrality ≥ 5.00) were nominated more frequently than moderate features (mean centrality between 4.05 and 4.95) and peripheral features (mean centrality < 4.00). Central features were nominated as constituents of the forgiveness category by 50% of the participants, moderate features were nominated by 30% of the participants, and peripheral features were nominated by 20% of the participants, $\chi^2 = 45.74$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$; $\phi = .25$.

Discussion

The results for Study 3 provide preliminary evidence that people can reliably discriminate features of the forgiveness category, particularly central features, from other

¹ Due to the small sample size gender differences were not explored in Study 3. In Study 5, which used a very similar methodology and had a much larger sample, gender differences were tested but none were found.

victim response categories. However, the correlations between item centrality and frequency of category nomination were quite modest, and all 77 features revealed moderate variance, indicating that perceptions of category boundaries for these features were not unanimous. This suggests that forgiveness is a concept without clearly defined features which prescribe category membership (see also Russell and Fehr, 1994). Instead, individuals must rely on other perceptual cues or situational attributions to determine what combinations of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors constitute a forgiving response. Barsalou (1987) has proposed that the lack of consensus about a category's structure reflects information associated with a concept that is context-dependent and thus, to some degree, varies across individuals.

Dissipating - allowing time to decrease the pain and hurt from an offense - was the second most frequently nominated category of the seven victim response options. This result is perhaps not surprising in light of recent research. McCullough, Fincham and Tsang (2003) explicitly modeled forgiveness as a process of temporal change and found that avoidance and revenge motivations decreased significantly over time but benevolence motivations did not significantly increase. This implies that the positive and negative motivational states of a victim are somewhat independent processes, with negative motivation states more susceptible to the gradual effects of dissipation.

Chapter Six: Study Four – Prototypical Judgments of Hypothetical Victim Responses

Studies 1 and 2 provided initial evidence of the internal content and structure of a lay forgiveness concept, and Study 3 revealed that participants favored the central features from Study 2, as compared to peripheral features, when distinguishing between forgiveness and other types of victim responses. However, the evidence acquired thus far of a lay forgiveness prototype has used stripped-down sets of descriptions, rather than being located within broader naturalistic settings that include contextual variables (e.g., incident severity, emotional reactions, etc.) and relationship factors (e.g., romantic partner, family member, friend). Such situational and relational variables have frequently been found to be reliable predictors of forgiveness (for a review see McCullough & Witvliet, 2002), which raises questions concerning the power of central versus peripheral features in guiding perceptions of forgiveness when imbedded in ecologically valid scenarios.

Thus, the goal of Study 4 was to examine participants' perceptions of forgiving responses within typical contexts of interpersonal relationships and associated transgressions. To accomplish this task, Study 4 was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, participants read one of three hypothetical transgressions from the vantage point of one of three relationship types (friends, married, and parent/child) producing a between-subjects 3 X 3 design. Participants then responded to six questions assessing incident severity, blame attributions, and participants' willingness to forgive if they were the victim in the narrative. For the second phase, participants read two hypothetical victim responses to the previous transgression and judged the extent to which each

response was forgiving, positive and reconciling. One victim response was a composite of six central forgiveness features, and the other victim response was a composite of six peripheral forgiveness features.

Based on recent research highlighting the role of commitment for forgiveness (Finkel et al., 2002; Karremans et al., 2003), it was hypothesized that the hypothetical scenarios of transgressions in relationships with greater commitment (i.e. married and parent-child) would involve greater willingness to forgive (phase 1). It was also hypothesized that participants would judge victim responses that included central forgiveness features (from Study 2) as more forgiving than victim responses that included peripheral forgiveness features, regardless of transgression situation or relationship type (phase 2).

Method

Participants. Eighty-one participants (34 men, 47 women) between the ages of 18 and 36 (M age men = 21.3, SD = 3.50; M age women = 21.5, SD = 3.2) were recruited for Study 4 from the University of Canterbury in the same manner described above. As in the previous studies, participants were primarily young undergraduate students (96%). The sample also represented a diverse range of the university student population with participants associated with twenty-six different fields of study. Psychology was the most frequently identified major (N = 21) followed by a number of other departments with five or six representatives each, including; Accounting, Engineering, English, History, and Law. Finally, ninety-one percent of the sample (N = 74) indicated that English was their first language. All non-native English speaking participants indicated that they were fluent with both verbal and written forms of English. All the other native languages were

related to a variety of Asian cultures except for one participant whose native language was Polish.

Procedure and measures. Following the procedure described for Study 2, in the first phase participants received a questionnaire with a description of one hypothetical interpersonal transgression that varied according to the type of relationship (peer, married, parent-child) and the nature of the transgression (house, party, vacation). Of the three possible transgressions that a participant could receive, all were equally applicable across the three relationship types. In general, each transgression described an incident in which the perpetrator failed to keep a promise or in some way broke the trust of the victim resulting in various negative outcomes for the victim. A sample of these transgression scenarios are reprinted below representing each relationship type (peer, married, and parent-child). Please see Appendix A for the full list of transgressions as represented for each relationship type.

Michael and Mary are good friends and flatmates. On Saturday night, they went to a party together. Many of their mutual friends also attended this party. At one point during the evening, Michael shared some personal and private information about Mary in front of several people. Before the party was over, Mary discovered what Michael had said. Mary was very embarrassed and felt that Michael had betrayed her trust and publicly humiliated her.

Jim and Jane have been married for ten years and are trying to save as much money as possible for a vacation together. They agreed that each of them would save a certain amount of money over the next six months. When the six months were up and it was time to buy their tickets, they found out they still did not have

enough money. Jane then revealed that she had failed to save her share and had even spent some of the savings on personal shopping and entertainment.

Robert is sixteen years old. On Saturday his parents visited some friends in a near by city while he stayed at home. Robert told his parents that he had a lot of homework to complete before Monday, and he also promised to finish a few household chores before his parents returned. However, after his parents left Robert called a few friends and invited them to come over. That evening when Robert's parents returned, the house was a terrible mess and they discovered that their new DVD player was damaged.

Within each relationship the role of victim and perpetrator remained constant across all three incidents (i.e., Robert was always the perpetrator and his parents were always the victim regardless of the other incident factors). However, the pairing of relationship type with incident type was completely counter-balanced across participants. After reading one of the above transgression descriptions, participants answered six questions all based on 7 point Likert scales. Two questions inquired about the severity of the transgression (How negative is this incident? How serious is this incident? End points were *not at all* and *extremely*.) Three questions assessed participants' perceptions of the perpetrator's level of blame (How much was [*perpetrator's name*] to blame for this incident? How selfish was [*perpetrator's name*] behavior? How intentional and planned was [*perpetrator's name*] behavior? End points were *not at all* and *completely* or *extremely*). And one question asked participants, if they were the victim in this situation, would they forgive the perpetrator (end points were *not at all* and *completely*). The negativity and seriousness items were significantly correlated ($r = .61, p < .001$) so these two items were averaged to produce one measure of incident severity. In like manner,

internal reliability for the three blame items was acceptable ($\alpha = .64$) so these items were averaged to produce one measure of perpetrator blame.

In the second phase of this study, after a participant's judgments about the transgression were completed, he or she then read two hypothetical victim responses (one with central features and one with peripheral features) each followed by three questions based on 7 point Likert scales (How forgiving is [victim's name] response? How positive is [victim's name] response? How will [perpetrator's name] relationship with [victim's name] recover? End points were *not at all* and *completely* or *extremely*.). All together, six different victim responses were created; three with central features and three with peripheral features, utilizing eighteen of the central and peripheral forgiveness features respectively (see Table 1).

The presentation of these victim responses was systematically counter-balanced across all participants so that each victim response with central features was equally paired with each of the peripheral victim responses. Each of the victim responses contained six forgiveness features: two thoughts, two communication or action items, and two emotion items. The victim responses with central forgiveness features had a mean centrality rating greater than 5.0 from Study 2, and the victim responses with peripheral features had a mean centrality rating less than 4.5 from Study 2. All victim response descriptions were between 61 and 65 words and the order in which the victim responses were presented (i.e., central response first, peripheral response second) was counter-balanced to guard against order effects. Two examples of these victim responses, one representing central features and one representing peripheral features, are presented

below with the specific forgiveness items in italics and their associated mean centrality rating in parentheses:²

Mary is shocked and very hurt because of Michael's behaviour. Mary *imagines that Michael is also feeling very bad for hurting her* ($M = 5.05$). Mary *decides not to let this one issue ruin their relationship* ($M = 4.72$). She *talks with Michael about the incident* ($M = 5.71$) and *tells him how his behaviour has hurt her* ($M = 5.55$). After they talk, Mary *feels good* ($M = 5.18$), *as if a weight has lifted* ($M = 5.17$).

Mary is initially angry and hurt that Michael betrayed her trust. She *thinks that some of Michael's friends might be a negative influence* ($M = 4.44$) on him, and she wants to *be sure that something like this will not happen again* ($M = 4.47$). The next time Mary sees Michael she *does not bring up the incident* ($M = 3.15$), and *makes a joke about an unrelated event* ($M = 3.82$). Mary feels *anxious* ($M = 4.38$), yet *hopeful* ($M = 5.59$).

Results

Transgression perceptions. In the first phase of this study I tested for differences in participants' perceptions of hypothetical transgressions across the three types of relationships (peer, married, and parent-child) and across the three types of incidents (house, party, vacation). Means and standard deviations of participants' perceptions of incident severity, blame, and their willingness to forgive if they were the victim in the transgression are reported in Table 3 (from phase 1). Gender differences were tested for each of the dependent variables and none were found. A 3 (peer versus married versus

² All the various features used in the hypothetical forgiving responses from Study 4 and Study 5 are designated in Table 1, with 'b' indicating a Study 4 feature and a 'c' indicating a Study 5 feature. For the full list of hypothetical forgiving responses, see Appendix A.

parent-child) X 3 (house versus party versus vacation) ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable (incident severity, blame, and forgiveness).

Table 3:
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants Perceptions of Hypothetical Transgressions

<u>Transgression Type & Dependent Variables</u>	<u>Relationship Type</u>		
	<u>Peer</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Parent/Child</u>
House			
Incident Severity	4.55 (1.38)	4.67 (1.41)	4.44 (1.10)
Blame Attributions	4.70 (1.11)	4.67 (1.35)	5.63 (0.92)
Forgive if victim	6.33 (0.71)	5.89 (0.78)	5.33 (1.73)
Party			
Incident Severity	5.33 (0.61)	5.50 (1.00)	5.28 (1.03)
Blame Attributions	4.78 (1.11)	5.11 (0.98)	5.15 (0.73)
Forgive if victim	5.33 (1.32)	6.00 (1.32)	5.11 (1.61)
Vacation			
Incident Severity	4.55 (0.95)	5.22 (0.67)	4.81 (0.96)
Blame Attributions	4.96 (1.18)	4.93 (0.66)	5.11 (1.27)
Forgive if victim	5.22 (1.39)	5.56 (1.01)	5.44 (1.51)

Note: All means and standard deviations are based on 7 point scales. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Total $N = 81$. Each cell $N = 9$.

In the first analysis for incident severity there was no main effect for relationship type, but the main effect for incident type was significant, $F(2,80) = 3.95$, $p < .05$. Post hoc comparisons showed that participants viewed the party incident as significantly more severe than the house incident; Tukey HSD, mean difference = 0.81, $p < .05$. For the second analysis, participants did not show significant differences in blame across relationship type. For the third analysis, contrary to predictions, there were no significant main effects in participants' willingness to forgive when they took the perspective of the victim in the hypothetical scenario. None of the interactions were significant in any of these analyses. In summary, participants were just as likely to forgive a friend, a spouse, or their child in each of the three hypothetical transgression scenarios.

Perceptions of forgiving responses. For the second more important phase of this study I conducted a 3 (peer versus married versus parent-child) X 3 (house, party, vacation) X 2 (central versus peripheral) ANOVA on each of the dependent variables (forgiving, positivity, and relationship recovery). The relevant means are shown in Table 4. As expected, participants judged victim responses with central features to be markedly more forgiving ($F(1,80) = 118.49, p < .001$), positive ($F(1,80) = 152.34, p < .001$), and conducive for relationship recovery ($F(1,80) = 179.30, p < .001$) than those responses with peripheral features. Only one type of interaction was significant in these analyses. The centrality and incident type interaction revealed a small marginally significant effect for both perceived positivity ($F(2,80) = 2.80, p = .068$) and potential for reconciliation ($F(2,80) = 3.83, p < .05$). As can be seen in Figure 1, when the Party incident was paired with the central victim responses it was judged as more positive and conducive to relationship recovery. However, when the Party incident was paired with the peripheral victim responses, it was judged as least positive and conducive to relationship recovery.

Table 4:
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Perceptions of Victim Responses with Central and Peripheral Forgiveness Features

Variables	Victim Response	
	Central Features	Peripheral Features
Perceived forgiveness	6.32 (0.81)	4.32 (1.46)
Perceived positivity	6.42 (0.85)	3.93 (1.72)
Potential for reconciliation	6.28 (0.86)	3.91 (1.56)

Note: All means and standard deviations are based on 7 point scales. Standard deviations are in parentheses. $N = 81$

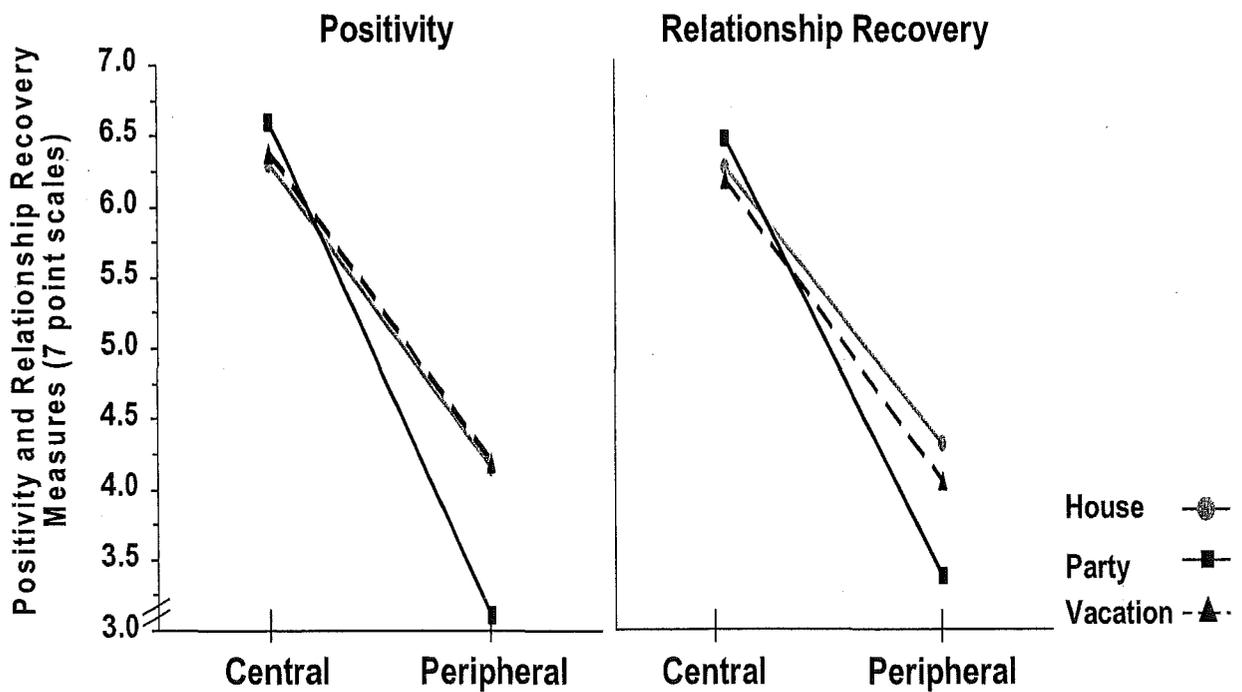


Figure 1.
Participant perceptions of victim responses in Study 4: Interaction between feature centrality (main effect) and incident type.

Testing alternative explanations. The results for the peripheral vs. central features could be a product of third variables. Perhaps participants judged the victim responses with central features as more forgiving based on the greater positive valence of these descriptions or due to the perceived likelihood that these relationships would naturally reconcile. To test these possibilities, the 3X3X2 ANOVAs described above were repeated with positivity and relationship recovery entered as covariates. In these analyses, the main effect for centrality remained significant, although greatly reduced (with positivity as covariate $F(1,80) = 5.25, p < .05$; with relationship recovery as covariate $F(1,80) = 9.51, p < .01$). To further test the role of possible third variables, all three variables from the first phase of the study were also entered into the analyses as covariates (perceived negativity-severity of the transgression, blame attributions, and participants' willingness to forgive). As in the first analyses, the main effect for feature centrality remained, although it was greatly reduced when blame attributions ($F(1,80) = 7.54, p < .01$) and participants' willingness to forgive was the covariate ($F(1,80) = 6.88, p < .05$), and only marginally significant when negativity-severity was the covariate ($F(1,80) = 3.73, p = .057$). Thus, perceptions of forgiving responses were not determined by the victim-perpetrator relationship or the transgressing incident including the variables associated with the transgression (incident severity and blame), and were not simply a reflection of the positive valence of the victim response, the likelihood for reconciliation, or participants' willingness to forgive if they were the victim.

Discussion

To recap, Study 4 examined participants' perceptions of transgressions and forgiving responses across three different types of hypothetical situations, in three different types of relationships (peer, married, and parent-child) and with six different

hypothetical victim responses (3 with central features and 3 with peripheral features). The most important results from this study indicated that participants perceived hypothetical victim responses created with central features as more forgiving than those victim responses created with peripheral features, regardless of the transgression and relationship context. In addition, these results remained significant after controlling for several other third variables. These results replicate and extend Kearns and Fincham's (2004) Study 5 findings, which employed a similar methodology but did not test the effect of third variables, and further supports the notion of a distinct forgiveness prototype by showing that participants relied primarily on the forgiveness features to make meaningful judgments about forgiving responses.

In spite of the attempts to create three hypothetical transgressions that were similar, I found that participants judged a disclosure of private information (Party incident) as more serious than ruined vacation plans (Vacation incident) or a messy house and broken audio-video equipment (House incident) (see Fitness, 2001). In turn, this most serious transgression interacted with perceptions of positivity and relationship recovery from the victim's response. That is, central forgiving responses were judged as even more positive and conducive to relationship recovery, and peripheral responses were judged as least positive and conducive to relationship recovery, specifically for the event judged as the most serious transgression. These results are consistent with prototype theory.

Against predictions, there was no evidence that the type of relationship between perpetrator and victim (peer, married, parent-child) had any effect on participants' willingness to forgive when they imagined they had been the victim in the transgression.

One possible explanation for this null finding is that the commitment factor was not sufficiently manipulated. Thus, with a sample of primarily young university students, the majority of whom are unmarried and are unlikely to have had children, commitment to a good friend and room mate could possibly be just as significant as imagined commitment to one's spouse or child.

Although the main centrality effect for perceptions of forgiving responses was maintained after controlling for positivity and perceptions of relationship recovery, the present results and findings from other studies suggest that these factors (particularly positivity) are closely linked with forgiveness. Kearns and Fincham (2004) had participants in Study 1 list all possible forgiveness features and then rate each feature on positivity. These positivity ratings from Study 1 correlated very highly ($r = .82, p < .001$) with the centrality ratings in Study 2, suggesting that the features of forgiveness that are most crucial for conceptual structure are also those that are more positive. Zechmeister and Romero (2002) found that when participants wrote autobiographical accounts of forgiveness or unforgiveness, the forgiveness narratives were associated with narrators' descriptions of more positive outcomes and affect, regardless of whether the narrator wrote as victim or an offender. Kanz (2000) reported that sixty-nine percent of his participants believed reconciliation to be a necessary part of forgiveness. Finally, Watson and Tellegen (1985) found that the word "forgiving" has a positively loaded valence similar to other relational concepts such as friendly, warmhearted, and affectionate.

The fact that high levels of forgiveness are evaluated very positively does not, however, mean that the two constructs are equivalent. This evaluative dimension is virtually ubiquitous in the way that lay people make and judge attributes of all kinds. But

this does not mean, for example, that judgments of forgiveness, commitment, trust, and attractiveness are equivalent because they are all evaluated very positively (see Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). Therefore, while it is methodologically prudent to try and distinguish between a general positive response and one that is truly forgiving, it also seems important to recognize that a forgiving response has an inherent positive valence (according to lay judgments), as suggested by the various studies discussed above.

Chapter Seven: Study Five – Further Discriminant Validity of the Forgiveness Prototype

Study 3 demonstrated that participants could reliably classify the individual features identified in the first two studies as members of the forgiveness category (particularly the central features) when compared to other victim response categories. In order to duplicate and extend these findings, in Study 5 participants categorized hypothetical victim responses that were composites of central or peripheral features from Study 2. Six of these victim responses (3 central and 3 peripheral) were created, as was done in Study 4. However, in Study 5 a few different features were used from Table 1, and in order to ensure that participants were only influenced by the forgiveness features, and not other contextual factors, the features were not placed within narrative descriptions.

The predictions were the same as those for Study 3. I predicted that overall the victim responses would be nominated as a member of the forgiveness category more than any other category, and victim responses with central features would be nominated as a member of the forgiveness category more than victim responses with peripheral features. As was found in Study 3, I also expected to find fuzzy boundaries between the seven victim response categories (i.e., all victim responses would have moderate degrees of variance in terms of category nomination). The same seven victim response categories were employed from Study 3 (avoiding, condoning, denying, dissipating, excusing, retaliating and forgiving) and participants were provided with the same definitions for each category.

Study 5 also investigated if individual differences in participants' tendencies toward forgiveness were related to their perceptions of category membership. Cognitive researchers have documented differences in how individuals perceive certain concepts depending on their background and experience with that concept (see Barsalou, 1987). For example, a housewife has a different prototype for mammal when compared to a zoo-keeper. There is also evidence for intra-individual differences in conceptual structure. When participants are asked to view one concept from alternative perspectives they are capable of generating two different types of prototypes (Barsalou, 1987). However, prototype studies with social concepts have largely ignored individual difference factors, assuming that the structure and content of the lay prototype is basically the same for the majority of persons.

It is possible that those who have a tendency to readily forgive others have a much more liberal conception of what constitutes a forgiving response, or even differ more radically in terms of their forgiveness prototypes, compared to those who are less inclined toward forgiveness. On the other hand, if the lay prototype of forgiveness operates in a similar fashion across both those high and low in forgiveness tendencies, this would suggest that these conceptual representations, or schemas, tap into more foundational knowledge structures that are relatively invariant across individual differences. To this end, both the Tendency Toward Forgiveness and Attitudes Toward Forgiveness scales (Brown, 2003) were used to assess participants' general inclination toward forgiveness. Both scales have previously shown good reliability, predictive utility, and convergent and discriminant validity.

Method

Participants. 300 participants (117 male, M age = 21.90 years, SD = 6.01; 183 female, M age = 22.53 years, SD = 7.17) were recruited for Study 5 in the same manner described for Study 2. Once again, participants were primarily young undergraduate students (85%) from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. Eighty-nine percent of the sample (N = 268) indicated that English was their first language. All of the non-native English speaking participants indicated that they were fluent with both the verbal and written forms of the English language. There were seventeen different languages represented among the non-native English speaking participants with Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese) the most frequently identified (N = 14). Finally, this sample represented a diverse range of students from forty-four different fields of study, with Psychology (N = 33) and Law (N = 23) the two most common majors listed.

Procedure and measures. Once again following the same procedure described for Study 2, participants received a questionnaire with the following instructions:

All personal relationships can be challenged from time-to-time by incidents of hurt or offense. The questions below concern a person named Taylor, who is the same age and sex as you. Recently, Taylor was severely hurt and offended by someone he/she knew very well. Now imagine that Taylor responds to the one who hurt him/her (the perpetrator) in the following way:

Following these instructions, participants read a hypothetical forgiving response with six forgiveness features (2 thoughts, 2 communication/actions, and 2 emotions) taken from the list in Table 1. Similar to the procedure used in Study 4, these composites of forgiveness features were grouped into six different hypothetical victim responses,

three employing central features, and three employing peripheral features. One example from each condition (central and peripheral) is provided below with the mean centrality rating of that feature in parentheses (the complete set of hypothetical victim responses is presented in Appendix B):

Forgiveness response with central features

Taylor thinks...everyone makes mistakes (5.34); everyone deserves a second chance (5.34).

Taylor's actions are...openly expressing feelings (5.55); having open and receptive body language (5.14)

Taylor feels...like the issue is closed (5.46); positive - good about what I have done (5.18)

Forgiveness response with peripheral features

Taylor thinks...about my faith and personal values (3.24); about the right thing to do (4.61)

Taylor's actions are...acting friendly toward the perpetrator (3.92); smiling at the perpetrator (3.86)

Taylor feels...a sense of inner strength (4.51); virtuous (3.56)

Each participant read only one of the six victim responses ($N = 50$ for each of the six responses) and then responded to one question that read, "Which of the following options best describes Taylor's thoughts, feelings, and actions in response to this transgression? Check only one category." Following this question, the seven victim response categories from Study 3 (avoiding, condoning, dissipating, excusing, forgiving and retaliating) and their definitions were listed in alphabetical order and participants

selected one category out of the seven that seemed the best fit for the victim response in question.

Finally, participants completed the Tendency Toward Forgiveness (TTF) and Attitudes Toward Forgiveness (ATF) scales (Brown, 2003, see Appendix B). In the present study, the TTF and ATF exhibited adequate internal reliability both individually (TTF $\alpha = .70$; ATF $\alpha = .66$) and combined ($\alpha = .70$); thus scores on these two scales were averaged across all ten items creating one individual difference measure of forgiveness propensity.

Results

When nomination frequencies were examined across both central and peripheral victim responses, it was evident that the distribution of nomination frequencies among the various categories changed considerably from Study 3. Forgiveness received 54% of the total nominations (up from 26% in Study 3) followed by Avoidance (12%), Denial and Excusing (11%), Dissipating (7% down from 16% in Study 3), Retaliating (3%), and Condoning (2%). However, in support of the predictions about fuzzy borders between the forgiveness category and the six other victim response categories, forgiveness nominations across the six different hypothetical victim responses ranged from a high of 76% to a low of 8%.

Table 5
Categorization Frequencies of Hypothetical Victim Responses to Transgression

Category	Victim Responses	
	Central Features	Peripheral Features
Avoiding	4%	19%
Condoning	3%	2%
Denying	9%	12%
Dissipating	5%	9%
Excusing	11%	11%
Forgiving	69%	39%
Retaliating	0%	7%

Note: All participants responded to one victim response either with central or peripheral features. Total $N = 300$. Victim responses with central features and peripheral features, $N = 150$ for each.

Table 5 displays the frequencies of category nomination according to victim responses with central or peripheral features ($N = 150$ for each victim response condition). Data was collapsed within the three peripheral and within the three central victim responses, in addition to the six non-forgiving categories.³ This produced a 2 (central vs. peripheral) X 2 (forgiveness vs. non-forgiveness) frequency table of categorized responses. Overall, the forgiveness category was selected more than all other categories combined (forgiveness $n = 162$, all other categories $n = 138$), and victim responses with central features significantly outnumbered those with peripheral features ($\chi^2(1, N = 300) = 25.98, p < .01; \phi = .29$).

³ All three victim responses with central features received a large percentage (66%-74%) of nominations for the forgiveness category. Surprisingly, peripheral response 1 also received a large percentage (76%) of nominations for the forgiveness category, but in support of the predictions, the other two peripheral responses had much lower forgiveness nominations (34% and 8%) in comparison to the victim responses with central features.

The combined ATF/TTF measure of forgiveness propensity yielded a mean and median of 4.6 ($SD = 0.76$) on a seven point scale with no significant gender differences (male $M = 4.65$, $SD = .78$, female $M = 4.55$, $SD = .76$, $t(299) = 1.19$, $p = .28$). In order to test the association between individual differences in forgiveness tendencies and categorization judgments, a nominal variable was created by coding forgiveness categorizations as one and all other categorizations as zero. This nominal variable was then correlated with participants' ATF/TTF scores. The correlations were nonsignificant and close to zero, both when analyzing all the victim responses together ($r = .05$) and when examining peripheral and central victim responses independently (r s ranged from $-.04$ to $.13$). Thus, categorization of hypothetical victim responses based on the forgiveness features from Study 1 and Study 2 was not related to participants' propensity toward forgiveness.

Discussion

Study 5 replicated and extended the findings of Study 3. In accordance with prototype theory the results provide further evidence that participants rely primarily on the central features of the forgiveness concept to distinguish a forgiving response from other victim response options. In addition, in support of prototype theory's postulate of non-distinct boundaries, the boundaries between the various victim response categories were not clearly defined. Hypothetical victim responses with central features, which elicited the greatest convergence of nominations, were still nominated by over a quarter of the sample as one of the six non-forgiving categories.

When compared with the results from Study 3, it is evident that having the forgiveness features grouped together in meaningful composites provided enough

additional information to further consolidate nominations towards the forgiveness category. Besides having more information on central tendency as a basis for judgments, it is also possible that participants may have been influenced by perceptions of feature correlations. Previous research has shown that participants are sensitive to the correlations among the features of a given concept, and highly correlated features increase the likelihood of accurate category classification (see Chin-Parker & Ross, 2002; Malt & Smith, 1983; Wattenmaker, 1993). In this way, central features not only provide important descriptive information about the representative concept, but are also closely associated with one another, contributing to a perception of family resemblance (Rosch & Mervis, 1975; however, also see Wattenmaker, Nakamura, & Medin, (1988) for a different interpretation based on background knowledge).

While individual differences in the tendency toward forgiveness did not have any effect on participants' category nominations, it remains important for future prototype research to test for these types of dispositional factors. The null relationship between individual differences in the tendency to forgive others and the way in which participants endorsed the forgiveness prototypes reinforces the findings from Study 4 suggesting that the lay perspective of forgiveness is primarily defined by the graded structure of its features. This also suggests that an individual's willingness or ability to forgive is relatively independent from the way in which forgiveness is conceptualized.

Chapter Eight: General Discussion – The Lay Representation of Forgiveness

Review of Findings

Taken together, the results of these five studies replicate and extend the work of Kearns and Fincham (2004), and provide further support for the idea that lay people have a unique consensual representation of forgiveness. A wide variety of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors were associated with the lay representation of forgiveness (Study 1), and these various features were reliably perceived as having a graded structure (Study 2) from the most central (important or essential) elements to those that were most peripheral (least important or essential). In addition, a majority of the forgiveness features found in this study (48 out of 77) were similar to those identified by Kearns and Fincham as were the centrality ratings.

When feature centrality was manipulated in hypothetical forgiving responses, participants judged responses with central features as more forgiving than those responses with peripheral features (Study 4), even after controlling for several confounding variables (transgression type, negativity-severity, relationship type, participants' willingness to forgive, positive valence of the response, and the likelihood of reconciliation). The present studies also revealed that participants primarily relied on feature centrality when discriminating between a forgiving response and other victim response options (Study 3 & 5), regardless of participants' individual differences in the tendency toward forgiveness. This evidence for discriminant validity supports a primary hypothesis of this work, that the structure and organization of these features (particularly the central features) is unique to forgiveness and not equally applicable across various victim response options.

In the following sections I will discuss the results of this research from a social cognitive perspective. To begin, I will consider how prototype theory and other models of conceptual representation (i.e., classical, exemplar, and knowledge approaches) account for the present findings. Then, I will address the question of what is the lay representation of forgiveness? Is it simply a graded list of forgiveness features, or does it have the properties of a relationship schema as proposed by Baldwin (1992)? Finally, I will consider what implications the present research holds for scientific theories of forgiveness and forgiveness interventions, and will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this work. Avenues for future research will be explored in each section.

Prototype Theory and Alternative Explanations

The main purpose of this research was to examine the lay perspective of forgiveness. In order to accomplish this task, a prototype approach was adopted. However, a prototype approach is not the only theory of concepts and categorization, and while this research was not designed to explicitly test competing concept theories, it is important to consider if the prototype approach adequately explains the present results, and if other theoretical models provide good alternative explanations.

The prototype approach. As described in the introduction, all concepts seem to have features that vary in their descriptive or explanatory capabilities (Barsalou, 1987), and this phenomenon creates a graded structure from those features that are most to least associated with a particular concept. This fact has two important implications for prototype theory. First, this means that there should be relatively few features, if any, which are absolutely necessary or sufficient for a concept. Following from this, because a concept could have any number of features that are only loosely associated with it, the

boundaries between related concepts should not be clearly delineated. The second implication of graded structure is that the cognitive representation of a concept must either be made up of all the various known exemplars comprising that concept, or a generalized summary representation of all the various features and their relative descriptive capabilities. If concepts were constructed only around memories of known exemplars it would suggest that significant demands would be continually placed on memory and cognitive processing, especially for complex concepts, in order to store, organize, and selectively access each exemplar. On the other hand, if concepts are composed of generalized summaries of features, fewer demands would be placed on memory and cognitive processing, and cognitive structures for episodic memory could still hold salient exemplars (Murphy, 2002).

In general, the majority of findings in this research supported the prototype hypotheses from each of the five studies. Beginning with the results of Study 2, it was possible to quantify the relative weightings of each forgiveness feature and determine that the concept of forgiveness was associated with a reliable graded structure across all features. Beyond this first step of feature determination, prototype models typically predict categorization and category induction on the basis of a similarity comparison. Categorization is the process by which an exemplar is assigned to one of a variety of different categories, and was the organizing task in Study 3 and Study 5. Category induction is the process of applying category information to a novel exemplar or the extension of category knowledge to include new information, and was the organizing task in Study 4.

For both processes, the graded structure of a concept's features suggests that each feature has an abstract value or weight according to its importance or centrality for a given concept. In categorization, as an observer experiences an entity, he or she perceives the various features and their relative values and computes how well they compare to one of several different prototypes (the summary representations that include information about the typical features of each category). The greater the sum of the weighted features associated with one category, the more likely it is that the entity will be classified as an exemplar of that particular category (Wisniewski, 2002). In category induction, the new information, or the features of the novel exemplar, are compared to the prototype. If the prototype implicates, or can account for, an association between the existing features and the new information or novel exemplar, then the exemplar is included and the prototype is refined (Murphy, 2002).

Thus, from a prototype perspective, when participants in Study 4 and Study 5 encountered the hypothetical victim response, and were exposed to the features from Table 1, the majority were sensitive to the relative abstract weighting of the included features. Then, when asked to judge how forgiving the victim response was (Study 4), or categorize the victim response (Study 5), participants compared these entities with their generalized summary representations of victim response options. Those entities that contained central forgiveness features (those features with higher weightings) were judged as better exemplars (Study 4) and were classified more frequently as part of the forgiving category (Study 3 and Study 5).

Finally, from Study 2 onwards, the pattern of results for each study supported the prototype postulate of fuzzy, or non-distinct, boundaries. Results from Study 2 revealed

that mean centrality ratings were generally grouped toward the center of the scale (below six and above three on a seven point scale). For Study 4, even though victim responses with central features scored quite highly on forgiveness (all means were greater than six on seven point scales), victim responses with peripheral features were generally rated as more forgiving than unforgiving (two of the three means were above the middle of the scale). For Study 3 and 5, participants reliably and accurately categorized forgiving features and victim responses, yet forgiveness nominations did not exceed 67% for individual features (Study 3) and 76% for composites of features in victim responses (Study 5). Thus, both the internal structure (i.e., the graded structure of the features within the concept) and external structure (i.e., the dimensions between forgiveness and other victim responses) of the forgiveness concept revealed unclear or fuzzy boundaries.⁴

The Classical Approach. In sharp contrast to the prototype approach, a classical view proposes that concepts are structured around definitions which provide specific, necessary, and sufficient features for a concept, and establish relatively distinct boundaries between concepts. This was the dominant view of concepts since the time of Aristotle, and its appeal came from its simple elegance and close conformity to philosophical rules of logic (Murphy, 2002). Obviously, the results from this series of studies, as summarized above, would be difficult to explain from a strict classical view, and instead, the present findings replicate the same pattern of results that have been found with other investigations of lay social psychological concepts (e.g., Fehr, 1988, 1999; Hassebrauck, 1997; Russell & Fehr, 1994). Indeed, support for the classical view of

⁴ Another matter, relevant to Study 3 and 5 is the issue of what constitutes consensus. If, according to the classical view, concepts are comprised of clear and distinct defining features that are necessary and sufficient for category membership (Wisniewski, 2002), then how would researchers determine if a sample of participants reached consensus while allowing for random error? According to Russell and Fehr (1994), as the criterion for consensus becomes less absolute, it becomes more likely that a given exemplar could achieve consensus for more than one category, and this too is contrary to the premises of the classical view.

concepts quickly declined after research by Posner and Keele (1968, 1970) documented better categorization and memory for prototypes, and Rosch and colleagues demonstrated prototype effects in natural categories (Rosch et al., 1976). Further research with other types of concepts has established that the classical approach does not adequately predict or explain the basic phenomena in the field. Murphy (2002) concludes that the classical approach has failed to provide any reliable evidence for definitions of natural categories, that it does not adequately explain the ubiquitous nature of graded structure or unclear boundaries, and ultimately is no longer seriously considered in cognitive research.

The Exemplar Approach. Exemplar models of concepts reject the notion of summary representations, and propose that our knowledge of concepts comes from our memory of experiences with individual examples of a category. From this perspective, categorization and category induction are reliant on the comparison of a novel entity to a range of similar salient exemplars. Medin and Shaffer (1978) were one of the first researchers to propose an elaborate model of category learning via exemplar memory and introduced the idea that exemplar salience was determined by a multiplicative rule (as opposed to a simple additive rule) of similarity comparison. The multiplicative rule implies that very close similarity on key features is more important for category membership than general similarity on a broad range of features (Murphy, 2002). Exemplar models can account for many of the same findings that were originally explained by prototype models and on some cognitive tasks, like category learning of artificial stimuli, exemplar models typically outperform prototype approaches and explain certain phenomena that prototype theory can not account for (e.g., better memory in category learning for unusual entities that do not conform to the prototype).

As applied to the present series of studies, an exemplar approach would make similar predictions as the prototype approach, including; graded structure of features, non-distinct boundaries, and salience of central features versus peripheral features for categorization and induction. However, an exemplar approach would explain these findings by proposing that feature centrality is determined by exemplar experience. Thus from an exemplar perspective, *considering the perpetrator's remorse, listening to his or her side of the story, and honest communication* are central forgiveness features because they must have been repeatedly experienced or witnessed in forgiving interpersonal situations and have become highly associated with that category. Then, in Study 4 and Study 5 the hypothetical exemplars with central features are judged as more forgiving, or categorized as forgiveness more frequently, because they were possibly more similar to the real-life experiences of the participants. Unfortunately this research did not document real-life experiences in Study 4 and Study 5 and therefore these explanations were not testable.

In general then, because of similarity in predictions, both the prototype and the exemplar approaches can equally well explain most of the present findings. However, the exemplar approach has difficulty accounting for the null finding that individual differences in the tendency to forgive were not associated with forgiveness categorization (Study 5). If the understanding of a concept is acquired from experience with various exemplars, then those who are more forgiving seem likely to have more forgiving experiences, and thus, an exemplar approach would predict a positive correlation between forgiveness categorization and forgiveness tendencies. On the other hand, if the understanding of a concept is based upon summary representations of an entire concept, then integrating knowledge outside of personal experience is more easily accomplished.

The Knowledge Approach. Prototype and exemplar models have been useful in understanding the results of category learning and other specific cognitive phenomena, but research exploring these processes has generally been conducted in laboratories with artificial and/or meaningless stimuli. In the real world, perception and understanding of concepts is guided by general or background knowledge related to the concept in question. As an individual experiences a novel concept, be it a natural or man-made object or a social situation, prior background knowledge can guide classification. In turn, when an important novel fact is learned about this new entity, this information may be used to clarify understanding of the concept and expand general knowledge. Murphy (2002) summarizes several important functions of knowledge for category use, including; using knowledge to define relevant versus irrelevant features, contextualizing new information in category learning, influencing categorization after learning has taken place, and creating expectancies, or hypotheses, which influence induction.

Rehder & Hastie (2004) demonstrate that when people hold theoretical beliefs about a category's causality, induction and classification tendencies are stronger than when feature similarity is applied alone. According to Rehder's (2003) causal-model theory, an exemplar's degree of category membership is determined by the probability that it is a product of the category's causal forces. When applied to forgiveness, graded-structure and other prototype effects could result from a belief that certain features are more likely than others to be products of the forces that cause forgiveness.

One candidate that fits the causal-model theory is McCullough's (2000; McCullough et al., 1998) thesis that forgiveness is a product of a motivational transformation from relationship evading tendencies (e.g., avoidance and revenge) toward

relationship engaging tendencies (e.g., approach and conciliation). Although lay persons may not explicitly recognize this causal mechanism (see Mullet, Girard, & Bakhshi, 2004), they may nevertheless possess an implicit understanding that forgiveness requires a certain change of heart or attitude change. On the other hand, it is unlikely that this type of causal mechanism could account for all of the findings in the present work. For example, a close look at the list of forgiveness features reveals several peripheral communication and action features that are just as likely to be produced by a change of heart as more central features (e.g., *hug/embrace between victim and perpetrator*, *socializing/spending time with the perpetrator*, *laughing/joking with the perpetrator*).

In summary, the classical approach to concepts does not adequately explain any of the present results. This is not surprising given the lack of general support for this approach throughout the concept and categorization literature over the last few decades. The prototype and exemplar approaches, which equally rely on a similarity matching hypothesis but diverge in other aspects, can both account for the majority of the present findings, but propose contrasting theoretical explanations. It was outside the scope of the present studies to test the degree to which participants were relying on specific exemplars versus generalized summary representations in making their judgments; however, the prototype approach does a better job accounting for the null finding between individual differences in forgiveness tendencies and forgiveness representation.

Finally, the knowledge approach provides a plausible alternative explanation to the present findings. Indeed, the application of general background knowledge would certainly influence almost all interpersonal and social situations, as articulated by Fletcher's (2002) theory. However, it is unclear from this work what types of background

knowledge or causal hypotheses participants may have relied upon, and apart from McCullough's (2000) theoretical notions, forgiveness research has not yet tested the roles of specific causal mechanisms. It should also be noted that the similarity-matching hypothesis and knowledge theories are not necessarily in competition – both approaches may be true. Murphy (2002) proposes a model of concepts that largely integrates the prototype and knowledge approaches. One fruitful direction for further research and theory would be the investigation of how participants' causal beliefs and theories are related to judgments of feature centrality and perceptions of forgiving responses.

The Forgiveness Knowledge Structure: A Relationship Schema?

I previously discussed (Study 2) how the present arrangement of forgiveness features conforms to both the theories of Fletcher and Baldwin, concerning the representation and organization of social and relationship information. In light of the results from Study 3, 4, and 5, a further question to consider is what exactly is the lay forgiveness representation? Is it simply a prototype of associated features with graded structure, or is it something more, like a relationship schema? In the following paragraphs I discuss this possibility in light of the present findings and Baldwin's theory and research.

To reiterate, Baldwin's model of relationship schemas proposes that relationship information is organized into three interactive components; (1) a *self schema*, that represents how the self is experienced in relation to another; (2) a *partner schema*, that represents beliefs about the partner; and (3) an *interpersonal script*, that specifies expected patterns of interaction with the partner, and links the self and partner schemas. The self and partner schemas are thought to be declarative knowledge structures

consisting of specific facts, descriptors, and memories. Declarative knowledge includes semantic and abstract representations of self and others (often referred to as “knowing what”), whereas procedural knowledge includes cognitive skills and strategies, represented as the rules or procedures for social interactions (often referred to as “knowing how”) (see Anderson, 1993). The bulk of forgiveness research has focused on the procedural aspect of participants’ knowledge, identifying the various intrapersonal and interpersonal variables that promote or inhibit the use of forgiveness as a relationship repair strategy. In contrast, the present studies, along with the work of Kearns and Fincham (2004), have provided a better understanding of the declarative aspect of forgiveness knowledge structures.

By controlling for a number of contextual variables which previous studies have found to be important for granting forgiveness (i.e., relationship between victim and perpetrator, transgression type and incident severity, and general tendencies toward granting forgiveness), the present studies have shown that the primary factor which influenced participants’ perceptions of forgiving responses was the centrality of the included features. There was no evidence of any significant effects for the contextual or individual difference variables on participants’ perceptions of forgiveness. These null findings suggest that the conceptual representation of forgiveness primarily contains declarative knowledge, as opposed to procedural knowledge, in accordance with Baldwin’s model.

However, while the current studies delineate the content, structure, and organization of the forgiveness concept, they may not go far enough to establish it as a relationship schema. According to Baldwin (1999), the third component of the

relationship schema, the interpersonal script, creates expectancies about self and partner interaction and assumptions about the goals, intentions, and beliefs that underlie that behavioral interaction. These interpersonal scripts influence selective attention, perception of ambiguous stimuli, memory and retrieval processes, and the activation of other associated knowledge structures. Baldwin emphasizes that these effects are automatic and generally occur outside of conscious awareness once a relationship schema is activated. Regrettably, it was outside the scope of the present work to investigate how the forgiveness knowledge structure (the prototype) was associated with an interpersonal script and produces these various effects. One direction for future research would be to explore how the declarative and procedural knowledge structures of forgiveness are integrated. Procedural knowledge has frequently been tested in the context of *if-then* contingency strategies (e.g., Baldwin and Sinclair, 1996). Fehr and colleagues (1999) examined anger as an interpersonal script and had participants report on elicitors of anger, reactions when angry, and anticipated partner responses to anger. A similar methodology could be used with forgiveness, incorporating features from the forgiveness prototype and other contextual and relational variables (e.g., transgression severity, blame, and relationship quality).

The convergence of results between Kearns and Fincham's (2004) research, which was conducted in New York, and the present studies, which were conducted in New Zealand, suggests that the lay representation of forgiveness originates from factors that are common to Western cultures. While this list of possible factors could be extensive, it is likely that the influence of Judeo-Christian values, which were an important factor in the founding principles of many Western societies (Burns, 1968), may underlie many of these similarities. Another interesting avenue for future research would be to explore the

lay representation of forgiveness in Eastern cultures, where the religious traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism have broader and less specific doctrines concerning forgiveness (see Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulos, & et al., 1992). In general, cross-cultural research on lay representations for most social concepts has largely been ignored. If a forgiveness prototype was found with non-Western samples that was largely similar to that found in the present work, it would suggest that the origin of the lay representation of forgiveness was related to factors broader than culture, such as adaptive evolutionary processes, as has been proposed for attachment working models (Simpson, 1999) and ideals in intimate relationships (Fletcher, 2002).

Lay Representations and Scientific Forgiveness Theory

I previously noted that the extent to which scientific and lay conceptions of forgiveness overlap was an open empirical question. One benefit of the present research is the ability to compare and contrast the features of the lay forgiveness representation with scientific forgiveness theories. Two of the most frequently cited forgiveness models are McCullough's motivational transformation model (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough, 2000) and Enright's moral process model (Enright, 2001; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). As mentioned above, McCullough's motivational transformation model relies on the proposition that in order to forgive, the victim must experience prosocial changes in affective and behavioral inclinations toward the perpetrator. Unfortunately, this model does not specifically describe what these prosocial inclinations might be and the central features of the forgiveness prototype do not allude to this component. An important component of the transformational model is empathy for the perpetrator, which mediates the association between the perpetrator's apology and the victim's reduction in revenge and avoidance motives (McCullough et al., 1997;

McCullough et al., 1998). Apart from motive transformations, empathy is the primary cognitive component of McCullough's model and was also a central feature of the lay representation, characterized as both a thought process (*empathic thoughts, consider the perpetrator's point of view*) and an action (*listening to the perpetrator's side of the story*).

The most recent version of McCullough's Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations inventory (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002) has three subscales measuring revenge, avoidance, and benevolence motivations. Because the first two scales arguably assess unforgiveness rather than forgiveness it is difficult to compare these items. However, five of the seven items from the benevolence scale (*goodwill for perpetrator, desire to move forward, desire for positive relationship, release of hurt and resentment, put the hurt aside to resume relationship, and released anger*) are similar in meaning to several of the central forgiveness features representing each of the three dimensions (thoughts, feelings, and behaviors).

Enright's moral process model of forgiveness (Enright, 2001; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) has much in common with McCullough's model. It is multidimensional and also relies on the victim's transformation of motives. However, instead of a social-cognitive description of forgiveness, Enright's model is based around the application of forgiveness as a therapeutic process and specifies that forgiveness is a moral act of mercy accompanied by positive motives of compassion, benevolence, and love. Enright and his colleagues (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright et al., 1998) propose that the process of forgiveness proceeds in four phases. In the first phase, *uncovering anger*, a victim cognitively explores his or her negative emotions and motivations and the effect the injury has had on his or her life. In phase two, the victim

recognizes that other strategies of coping with the transgression have not worked and a decision is made to forgive. Phase three, the *work phase*, involves reframing the transgression in broader relational contexts, development of empathy for the perpetrator, accepting the hurt and pain the transgression has caused, and steps towards an attitude of compassion for the perpetrator. Finally, in phase four, the victim gains a new perspective on his or her life as a result of the transgression and forgiveness process, and experiences decreased negative affect and increased positive affect.

Of the twenty processes that Enright (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright et al., 1998) associates with the four phases of forgiveness, only seven are related to the features of the forgiveness prototype. The first phase could arguably be a pre-forgiveness stage, thus it is not surprising that the elements involved in *uncovering anger* are not related to any of the forgiveness features. The idea that forgiveness is a choice or decision (Enright's phase two) was viewed as a central feature by the participants in this research, and each of the processes in Enright's *work phase* was identical or similar to several central forgiveness features. Enright's last forgiveness phase has two elements that are similar in meaning to several of the forgiveness features; *the victim's realization that he or she has at times needed to be forgiven*, and *the relief and release of negative affect*.

In summary, both McCullough's motivational transformation model and Enright's moral process model are related to several key features of the lay representation of forgiveness. However, the degree of similarity between the lay representation and these two theoretical models is quite limited. The aspects most overlooked by the theoretical models are those features that reflect participants' perceptions of dyadic elements. As displayed in Table 2, many of the forgiveness features in the thoughts and behaviors

dimensions are described in dyadic or interpersonal terms (e.g., *consider the perpetrator's remorse, accept the perpetrator's apology, consider how the relationship with the perpetrator will change, agreement/compromise, mutual understanding, honest/open communication, etc.*) and reflect the intrinsic interpersonal nature of forgiveness (Fincham, 2000; North, 1998).

Closely related to this latter point, and similar to Kearns and Fincham (2004), this research also found that participants identified several central forgiveness features that are more characteristic of reconciliation than forgiveness (e.g., *relationship with perpetrator is repaired/strengthened in the long-term, relationship and behavior return to normal*). Beginning with Kolnai (1974) and North (1987), forgiveness and reconciliation have consistently been discussed as separate but related processes by most philosophers and researchers. However, and as noted previously, additional research (Kanz, 2000; Younger et al., 2004) has also documented the tendency of lay persons to conjoin these two concepts.

The close association between forgiveness and reconciliation in this and previous research, and the nomination of several dyadic features in the present studies illustrates two points. First, for the lay person, forgiveness is closely tied to the relational and social context in which the transgression was experienced. This suggests that future forgiveness research should make greater efforts to explore forgiveness from a dyadic perspective (see Friesen et al., 2005), so that the bi-directional links between cognition and behavior across both perpetrator and victim can be better understood. Second, for counselors and clinicians who attempt to introduce forgiveness in a therapeutic context, it will be important to clearly define for clients the boundaries of forgiveness so that fears of re-

establishing the relationship with the perpetrator do not hinder the release of negative emotions and harmful psychological ties to the transgression and perpetrator (see Enright and Fitzgibbons, 2000).

Limitations

While this series of studies replicated prior research, and broke new ground in the understanding of lay representations of forgiveness, there are limitations that should be noted. As mentioned previously, this research, along with Kearns and Fincham's (2004), was conducted in a Western culture; thus, these findings should not be automatically generalized to non-Western cultures. In addition, across all studies, the majority of participants were relatively young, undergraduate university students. Accordingly, the present research does not provide any information about the consistency or stability of the lay representation of forgiveness across the life-span. Previous research (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989) has documented unique differences across ages in how participants' reason about granting forgiveness, similar to Kohlberg's (1969) findings on moral reasoning. These findings have been replicated in a non-western sample (Park & Enright, 1997); however, all of this research was again based on participants' procedural knowledge of granting forgiveness and did not specifically examine if participants at different ages had unique conceptualizations or definitions of forgiveness.

Finally, a prototype analysis is useful for identifying the organization and structure of the lay representation of forgiveness; however, prototype theory has limited explanatory breadth. Further investigations of the lay representation of forgiveness could profitably incorporate other cognitive theories to explain how the understanding of

forgiveness develops, its role in relationship maintenance and repair, and its association with health and well-being.

Conclusion

This research, along with the findings of Kearns and Fincham (2004), provides a broad understanding of how forgiveness is conceptualized by lay persons. There is now clear evidence, gathered from two independent laboratories, that a wide variety of features organize this concept's structure and make it distinct from other victim response strategies. In other words, we now possess a good model describing *what* forgiveness looks like from a lay perspective. These findings highlight discrepancies between the lay representation of forgiveness and prominent (scientific) theoretical models, and point to possible links between the content and function of forgiveness and underlying social-cognitive processes.

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Appendix A**Study 4: Hypothetical Transgressions, Victim Responses, and Transgression and
Victim Response Questionnaires**

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Study 4: Hypothetical Transgressions

(*Note:* The nine hypothetical transgressions from Study 4 were systematically varied according to incident and relationship type. The scenarios below are grouped according to incident type.)

The Party: Michael and Mary – friends

Michael and Mary are good friends. On Saturday night, they went to a party together. Many of their mutual friends also attended this party. At one point during the evening, Michael shared some personal and private information about Mary in front of several people. Before the party was over, Mary discovered what Michael had said. Mary was very embarrassed and felt that Michael had betrayed her trust and publicly humiliated her.

The Party: Jim and Jane – married couple

Jim and Jane have been married for ten years. On Saturday night, they went to a party together. Many of their mutual friends also attended this party. At one point during the evening, Jane shared some personal and private information about Jim in front of several people. Before the party was over, Jim discovered what Jane had said. Jim was very embarrassed and felt that Jane had betrayed her trust and publicly humiliated her.

The Party: Robert and his parents

Robert is sixteen years old. On Saturday night, he and his parents went to a party together. Many of their mutual friends also attended this party. At one point during the evening, Robert shared some personal and private information about his parents in front of several people. Before the party was over, Robert's parents discovered what he had said. Robert's parents were very embarrassed and felt that Robert had betrayed their trust and publicly humiliated them.

The Vacation: Michael and Mary – friends

Michael and Mary are good friends and are trying to save as much money as possible for a vacation together. They agreed that each of them would save a certain amount of money over the next six months. When the six months were up and it was time to buy their tickets, they discovered they still did not have enough money. Michael then revealed that he had failed to save his share, and had even spent some of the savings on personal shopping and entertainment.

The Vacation: Jim and Jane – married couple

Jim and Jane have been married for ten years and are trying to save as much money as possible for a vacation together. They agreed that each of them would save a certain amount of money over the next six months. When the six months were up and it was time to buy their tickets, they discovered they still did not have enough money. Jane then revealed that she had failed to save her share and had even spent some of the savings on personal shopping and entertainment.

The Vacation – Robert and his parents

Robert is sixteen years old and he and his parents have been trying to save as much money as possible for a vacation together. They agreed that each of them would save a certain amount of money over the next six months. When the six months were up and it was time to buy their tickets, they found out they still did not have enough money. Robert then revealed that he had failed to save his share and had even spent some of the savings on personal shopping and entertainment.

The House: Michael and Mary – friends

Michael and Mary are good friends and flatmates. On Saturday Mary visited some friends in a near by city while Michael stayed at home. He said that he had a lot of work to complete before Monday, and he also promised to finish a few household projects before Mary returned. However, after Mary left Michael called a few friends and invited them to come over. That evening when Mary returned, the house was a terrible mess and she discovered that her new DVD player was damaged.

The House: Jim and Jane – married couple

Jim and Jane have been married for ten years. On Saturday Jim visited some friends in a near by city while Jane stayed at home. She said that she had a lot of work to complete before Monday, and she also promised to finish a few household projects before Jim returned. However, after Jim left Jane called a few friends and invited them to come over. That evening when Jim returned, the house was a terrible mess and he discovered that his new DVD player was damaged.

The House: Robert and his parents

Robert is sixteen years old. On Saturday his parents visited some friends in a near by city while he stayed at home. Robert told his parents that he had a lot of homework to complete before Monday, and he also promised to finish a few household chores before his parents returned. However, after his parents left Robert called a few friends and invited them to come over. That evening when Robert's parents returned, the house was a terrible mess and they discovered that their new DVD player was damaged.

Study 4: Transgression Assessment

1) How negative is this incident? (*Circle one number*)

NOT at all negative – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Extremely negative

2) How serious is this incident? (*Circle one number*)

NOT at all serious – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Extremely serious

3) If you were [*victim's name*], would you forgive [*perpetrator's name*]? (*Circle one number*)

I would NOT forgive – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – I would completely forgive

4) How much was [*perpetrator's name*] to blame for this incident? (*Circle one number*)

NOT at all – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Completely

5) How selfish was [*perpetrator's name*] behaviour? (*Circle one number*)

NOT at all – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Extremely

6) How intentional and planned was [*perpetrator's name*] behaviour? (*Circle one number*)

NOT at all – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Extremely

Study 4: Hypothetical Victim Responses

(*Note:* For Study 4 there were three hypothetical victim responses with central features from Table 1 and three hypothetical victim responses with peripheral features. Each response was equally applicable to each transgression. The victim responses below are grouped according to feature centrality. Features from Table 1 are in ***bold italics.***)

Victim Responses with Central Forgiveness Features

[*victim's name*] is extremely angry and hurt because of [*perpetrator's name*] behaviour. Even though he/she questions whether he/she can trust [*perpetrator's name*] in the future, he/she thinks ***everyone makes mistakes and deserves a second chance.*** The next time [*victim's name*] sees [*perpetrator's name*] he ***honestly expresses his/her feelings and listens to his/her side of the story.*** After they talk, [*victim's name*] feels like the issue is ***closed*** and everything is ***resolved.***

[*victim's name*] is shocked and very hurt because of [*perpetrator's name*] behaviour. [*victim's name*] ***imagines that [perpetrator's name] is also feeling very bad*** for not keeping his/her word. [*victim's name*] ***decides not to let this one issue ruin their relationship.*** He/She ***talks with [perpetrator's name] about the incident*** and tells him/her how his/her ***behaviour has hurt him/her.*** After they talk, [*victim's name*] ***feels good,*** as if ***a weight has lifted.***

[*victim's name*] is initially angry and hurt that [*perpetrator's name*] betrayed his/her trust. Yet, [*victim's name*] ***recognizes that he/she also makes mistakes*** and should ***consider his/her remorse and explanations.*** The next time [*victim's name*] and [*perpetrator's name*] see each other, they ***calmly talk*** and reach a ***mutual understanding*** and agreement. [*victim's name*] is now ***less angry*** and ***feels a sense of release,*** as if he can let go of the incident.

Victim Responses with Peripheral Forgiveness Features

[victim's name] is extremely angry and hurt because of *[perpetrator's name]* behaviour. Even though he/she questions whether he can trust *[perpetrator's name]* in the future, he wants to ***avoid any further conflict*** and thinks that he/she now ***has the upper hand in their relationship***. The next time *[perpetrator's name]* sees *[victim's name]* he/she ***smiles*** and ***acts friendly*** toward him/her. Afterwards, *[perpetrator's name]* feels a ***sense of inner strength*** yet is still ***suspicious***.

[victim's name] is shocked and very hurt because of *[perpetrator's name]* behaviour. *[victim's name]* thinks that ***over time his/her resentment and negative feelings will change***. *[victim's name]* decides to ***try and forget the incident***. He/She ***refuses to think about the situation*** or dwell on his/her feelings. The next day when *[victim's name]* sees *[perpetrator's name]*, he/she ***acts and communicates like normal***. Afterwards, he/she feels ***satisfied*** and ***virtuous***.

[victim's name] is initially angry and hurt that *[perpetrator's name]* betrayed his/her trust. He/She ***thinks that some of [victim's name]'s friends might be a negative influence on him/her***, and he/she ***wants to be sure that something like this will not happen again***. The next time *[victim's name]* sees *[perpetrator's name]* he/she ***does not bring up the incident***, and ***makes a joke about an unrelated event***. *[victim's name]* feels ***anxious***, yet ***hopeful***.

Study 4: Victim Response Assessment

1) How forgiving is [victim's name] response? (Circle one number)

NOT at all forgiving – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Very forgiving

2) How positive is [victim's name] response? (Circle one number)

NOT at all positive – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – Very positive

3) How will [victim's name] and [perpetrator's name] relationship recover?

(Circle one number)

POOR recovery – 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 – GOOD recovery

Appendix B**Study 5: Hypothetical Victim Responses and Tendency Towards Forgiveness and Attitudes Toward Forgiveness Questionnaire (Brown, 2003)**

Hypothetical Victim Responses	110
Tendency Towards Forgiveness and Attitudes Towards Forgiveness Questionnaire	112

Study 5: Hypothetical Victim Responses

Victim Responses with Central Forgiveness Features

Taylor thinks...

- ... everyone makes mistakes
- ... everyone deserves a second chance.

Taylor's actions are ...

- ... openly expressing feelings
- ... having open and receptive body language

Taylor feels...

- ... like the issue is closed
- ... positive, good about what I have done

Taylor thinks...

- ... the perpetrator might also be feeling very bad for hurting me
- ... this one issue isn't worth ruining our relationship

Taylor's actions are...

- ... talking with the perpetrator about the incident
- ... listening to the perpetrator's side of the story

Taylor feels...

- ... relieved, as if a weight has lifted
- ... hopeful

Taylor thinks...

- ... I should consider the perpetrator's remorse and explanations
- ... about how severe this hurt is to me

Taylor's actions are...

- ... trying to reach a mutual understanding and agreement with the perpetrator
- ... telling the perpetrator, "It's going to be all right" or "The issue is over" or "It's no big deal."

Taylor feels...

- ... less angry
- ... a sense of release, as if I can let go of the incident

Victim Responses with Peripheral Forgiveness Features

Taylor thinks...

- ... about my faith and personal values
- ... about the right thing to do

Taylor's actions are...

- ... acting friendly toward the perpetrator
- ... smiling at the perpetrator

Taylor feels...

- ... a sense of inner strength
- ... virtuous

Taylor thinks...

- ... it is best for me to try and forget the incident
- ... further conflict can be prevented

Taylor's actions are...

- ... refusing to think about the situation or dwelling on my hurt
- ... communicating like normal

Taylor feels...

- ... satisfied
- ... compassion for the perpetrator

Taylor thinks...

- ... about exactly how the incident happened
- ... I now have the upper hand in my relationship with the perpetrator

Taylor's actions are...

- ... making a joke about an unrelated event
- ... socializing like normal

Taylor feels...

- ... sympathy for the perpetrator
- ... superior

**Study 5: Tendency Towards Forgiveness and
Attitudes Toward Forgiveness Questionnaire (Brown, 2003)**

For this final section, carefully read each statement and then CIRCLE ONE NUMBER between 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree) indicating how much you agree or disagree with the preceding statement. Please be sure to circle a number and NOT the endpoint descriptions.

How do you personally respond when you have been offended or wronged in your relationships?

1. I tend to get over it quickly when someone hurts my feelings.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
2. If someone wrongs me, I often think about it a lot afterward.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
3. I have a tendency to harbour grudges.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
4. When people wrong me, my approach is just to forgive and move on.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
5. I believe that forgiveness is a moral virtue
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
6. Justice is more important than mercy.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
7. It is admirable to be a forgiving person.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
8. I have no problem at all with people staying mad at those who hurt them.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
9. Forgiveness is a sign of weakness.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
10. People should work harder than they do to let go of the wrongs they have suffered.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree