

Enright Forgiveness Process Model

PRELIMINARIES

- Who hurt you?
- How deeply were you hurt?
- On what specific incident will you focus?
- What were the circumstances at the time? Was it morning or afternoon? Cloudy or sunny?
What was said? How did you respond?

PHASE I—UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER

- How have you avoided dealing with anger?
- Have you faced your anger?
- Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?
- Has your anger affected your health?
- Have you been obsessed about the injury or the offender?
- Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?
- Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?
- Has the injury changed your worldview?

PHASE 2—DECIDING TO FORGIVE

- Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.
- Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.
- Decide to forgive.

PHASE 3—WORKING ON FORGIVENESS

- Work toward understanding.
- Work toward compassion.
- Accept the pain.
- Give the offender a gift.

PHASE 4—DISCOVERY AND RELEASE FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON

- Discover the meaning of suffering.
- Discover your need for forgiveness.
- Discover that you are not alone.
- Discover the purpose of your life.
- Discover the freedom of forgiveness.

©R. Enright (2001). Forgiveness Is a Choice. Washington, D.C.: APA Books.

The "Reach" Method for Forgiveness Works

Vijai P. Sharma, Ph.D

Psychologist Everett Worthington Jr., a pioneer researcher in the field of forgiveness, constructed a 5-step model to facilitate the process of forgiveness. It is one of the techniques most favored by counselors specializing in forgiveness and reconciliation.

Worthington is not an armchair scientist. He has endured one of the most horrific traumas that a person ever experiences. In 1996, his aged mother, living in Knoxville, was raped and beaten to death. His heroic struggle in coming to terms with such a brutal event and subsequent forgiveness of the perpetrators should be an inspiration to all.

Worthington's 5-step technique of forgiveness is called REACH. REACH, an acronym, stands for the following:

Recall the hurt

Empathize with the one who hurt you

Altruistic gift of forgiveness, offer

Commitment to forgive, make

Hold on to the forgiveness

Step 1 Recall the Hurt. When we are hurt, it is natural to experience fear or anger. So, when you encounter the wrongdoer in person or in your thoughts, you might tense up, withdraw into your shell or lash out at him or her in your mind. Fear prompts us to run and anger prompts us to attack. It is natural for a victim to try to physically and mentally avoid the aggressor. Mental avoidance consists of trying to forget or distract the mind from focusing on painful thoughts related to the event. Physical avoidance is relatively easy, but escaping thoughts is more difficult and can highly frustrating. . It is difficult to forgive if fear or anger still dominates your psyche. You're just trying to protect yourself or attack the other and forgiveness doesn't have a chance in such a position. The way to overcome the fear or the anger is to recall the event and still try to relax. Take deep, slow and calming breaths as you visualize the event and recall the hurt event fully. Do not hesitate to seek help from a friend or a therapist if it's difficult to do on your own.

Step 2 Empathize with the person who hurt you. Explain the hurtful act, not from your perspective, but from that of the other. Why did wrongdoer do what he or she did? Still better, explain the hurtful event as the wrongdoer's lawyer might do. The purpose of this imaginative exercise is not to arrive at the most accurate explanation of the wrongdoer's actions but to find a plausible explanation with which you can (live.) live and let go. For example, you may say to yourself, "People who attack others are themselves usually in a state of fear, anger or hurt" or, "People are not thinking rationally when they hurt others." An attempt to stop a negative thought has the opposite effect; it increases the negative thought. Try this instead, "I will stop all thoughts of forgiveness today." You'll likely find yourself thinking about forgiveness in spite of yourself.

Step 3 Altruistic gift of forgiveness. Recall a time when you felt guilty for hurting or offending someone and how that person forgave you. Your victim gave you a gift and you perhaps felt grateful. Why did that person give you that gift? Because he or she realized that you needed it! Giving the gift makes us feel better. As the saying goes, "If you want to be happy for a lifetime, help someone." A gift is given to help the other person. Offer the gift of forgiveness for the wrongdoer's own good. You might get a gift in exchange, that is, your own peace of mind.

Step 4 Commit yourself. Make a commitment to yourself to forgive publicly so you don't have a chance to back out later. Such public commitment may include announcing your intention to a group you belong to, write a "certificate of forgiveness" with a specific date on the certificate; write a letter of forgiveness to the wrongdoer and reading it out loud, or tell a trusted friend about your act of forgiveness.

Step 5 Hold onto forgiveness. Memories of the hurtful event will surface even after you have forgiven the wrongdoer. Hopefully, the memories will not be as emotional and disturbing as they were before you exercised your prerogative of forgiveness. Forgiveness should be genuine. Learn to interrupt all thoughts related to revenge and self-pity. There are half a dozen or more well-designed studies measuring the consequences of procedures like REACH and of learning and practicing forgiveness. These studies consistently show that forgiveness reduces chronic anger, fear and stress, increases optimism and brings health benefits.

From: <http://www.mindpub.com/art471.htm>

9 Steps

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else.
3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that hurt you, or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.”
4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes – or ten years – ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.
5. At the moment you feel upset practice a simple stress management technique to soothe your body’s flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the “unenforceable rules” you have for your health or how you or other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace and prosperity and work hard to get them.
7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt seek out new ways to get what you want.
8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty and kindness around you. Forgiveness is about personal power.
9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.

The practice of forgiveness has been shown to reduce anger, hurt depression and stress and leads to greater feelings of hope, peace, compassion and self confidence. Practicing forgiveness leads to healthy relationships as well as physical health. It also influences our attitude which opens the heart to kindness, beauty, and love.

From: <http://learningtoforgive.com/9-steps/>

Forgiveness and forgetting: clinical implications for mental health counselors.

Print

Title Annotation: PRACTICE

Author: Cosgrove, Lisa; Konstam, Varda

Date: Jan 1, 2008

Words: 5965

Publication: Journal of Mental Health Counseling

ISSN: 1040-2861

Although mental health professionals have attempted to specify the meaning of forgiveness, lack of consensus exists. Despite the lack of consensus over the meaning of forgiveness, there is agreement that forgiving is not forgetting or pardoning. However, the relationship between forgiving and forgetting has been undertheorized, and as a result, this relationship has not been empirically investigated. In this paper, we suggest that it would be fruitful to assess the meaning systems individuals associate with the definition of forgiveness. Focusing on the lived experience of individuals may help researchers and counselors avoid unhelpful dichotomizations such as "authentic vs. inauthentic" forgiveness. Implications for both research and mental health counseling are discussed.

In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness ...
it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness:
the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly
fashion, the capacity to feel unhistorically during its
duration. (Nietzsche, 1876/1997, p. 62)

INTRODUCTION

Within the past three decades, social scientists and practitioners have become increasingly interested in forgiveness and its potential for improving personal well-being and interpersonal relationships (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Wade, Bailey, & Shaffer, 2005; Wade & Worthington, 2005). The increase in interest is in part driven by data suggesting that forgiveness can be a helpful counseling tool with a wide range of populations, including substance abusers, cancer patients, and couples addressing moderate to severe relationship and communication issues (Flanigan, 1987; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Gordon, 1999; Phillips & Osborne, 1989; Reed & Enright, 2006). In fact, willingness to forgive and be forgiven was identified as one of the 10 most important characteristics of long-term relationships (Fenell, 1993). Mental health counselors overwhelmingly support the use of forgiveness interventions, because there is consensus that forgiveness is associated with the individual releasing him or herself from anger, resentment, and fear and not wishing to seek revenge (Denton & Martin, 1998; Konstam, et al. 2000). Most individuals writing in this area also believe that forgiveness is

interpersonal and intra-psychic, and that it is a choice (Tangney, Fee, Reinsmith, Boone, & Lee, 1999).

Despite this consensus, ambiguity and disagreement exist with respect to a myriad of definitional issues related to forgiveness. Specifically, there exists a lack of clarity in the literature regarding what forgiveness is and what processes facilitate or impede the ability to forgive. For example, authors disagree on the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation, whether forgiveness is a necessary component of personal growth (Hargrave & Sells, 1997), and whether one has to feel love and compassion toward the offender in order to forgive (Davenport, 1991; Denton & Martin, 1998). Furthermore, Sandage, Hill and Vang (2003) assert that forgiveness may be expressed or defined differently in various cultural contexts and communities. How forgiveness is theorized and defined is critically important when developing psychological interventions to facilitate forgiveness. Both researchers and mental health professionals need to be sensitive to differences in lived experiences and in meaning systems associated with forgiveness.

Definitional Issues Related to Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a multidimensional construct, informed by a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, philosophy, political science, theology, and sociology (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoreson, 2000). Although the perceived gravity of a transgression must be taken into account, forgiveness has traditionally been viewed as a virtue or strength of character (Sandage et al., 2003; Wade & Worthington, 2003). According to Tangney et al. (1999), an individual's ability to forgive is dependent on contextual variables related to the specific incident. Researchers who have studied intra-individual factors related to forgiveness suggest that the ability to forgive is dependent in part, on cognitive and affective characteristics. For example, shame, guilt, and empathy have been identified as emotions that may inform forgiveness (Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001; Tangney, Fee, Reinsmith, Boone, & Lee, 1999; see also, Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). However, it should be noted that in some contexts forgiveness may not be the most salient issue in moving on and may actually perpetuate relations of inequality. Lamb (2002; 2006) for example, raises important issues regarding the relationship between justice and forgiveness, articulating her concerns vis-a-vis trauma victims. Discussing the problems with clinical interventions designed to facilitate forgiveness in victims of abuse, she noted, "[F]orgiveness therapy is a victim therapy that makes no claims to helping stop victimization" (Lamb, 2005, p.75).

A variety of definitions of forgiveness have emerged in the literature with most definitions focusing on forgiveness as a process, whereby an individual moves from a position of resentment to one of diminishment of anger toward the perceived wrongdoer. McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick and Johnson (2001) maintained that forgiveness is a "prosocial" transformation in motivations toward the offender, such that the individual is less vengeful and avoidant and concomitantly more benevolent. For Wade, Worthington, and Meyer (2005) "true" and "appropriate" forgiveness includes the ability to view the transgressor realistically and inclusively acknowledging the good and bad. That is, having positive feelings such as compassion or empathy is believed to be critical to forgiveness. Also, because an interpersonal transgression can be experienced as a narcissistic injury, Wade, Worthington

and Meyer point out that the ability to forgive requires a fairly strong sense of self and ego strength.

Others (e.g., Enright et al., 1991) have defined forgiveness as a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior. These authors suggest that forgiveness also includes fostering undeserved compassion, generosity, and perhaps love toward the perpetrator. It is in this sense that forgiveness is described in the literature as interpersonal and intra-psychic. It takes place over time and involves choice. It is not an event or a one-time decision based on a sudden understanding or compassion for the other (Kurzynski, 1998). Rather, forgiveness is a gradual, non-linear process that allows the individual to feel less estranged from the offender and eventually reestablish a connection through inner-reconciliation.

Insofar as forgiveness is extolled as a psychological strength or virtue, it is perhaps not surprising that it has been incorporated in the positive psychology movement--a movement that focuses on building human strengths and civic virtues (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002; Seligman, 2002, see also Lamb 2005). Most individuals writing in this area emphasize that a willingness to relinquish resentment is an important part of forgiving. However, they are clear that forgiving is not forgetting, condoning, excusing, or justifying the offense (Enright & Zell, 1989). Forgetting is seen as an immature defense and thus one that is not helpful in terms of resolving negative affect associated with an interpersonal transgression. Condoning implies that one chooses to overlook or disregard a serious transgression as unimportant; for it is widely believed that in condoning the individual is not responding honestly to what he or she perceives as a moral transgression. Similarly, to excuse suggests that one is overlooking or letting go of a minor transgression, "... without making mention of it and without demanding punishment or rectification" (Kurzynski, 1998, p. 81). In justifying, the individual attempts to understand the motives behind the transgression and in doing so, may generate reasons for not holding the individual accountable for his/her behavior. Therefore, although forgiveness is not believed to be facilitated by punishment, most researchers and mental health counselors maintain that "true" forgiveness requires that the transgression be acknowledged and that the responsible party be held accountable. In other words, despite the fact that forgiveness may be granted, the action should be condemned. Condemning is seen as integral to the decision to forgive, which in turn allows the individual to forgo feelings of anger, resentment, and hostility.

Worthington and Wade (1999) present a model, grounded in social psychological theory, that distinguishes between the psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness. Unforgiveness is viewed as a "cold" emotion characterized by "resentment, bitterness, and perhaps hatred, along with the motivated avoidance or retaliation against a transgressor" (p. 386). An individual may reduce or avoid unforgiveness by retaliating, seeking revenge, or seeking justice. Forgiveness is a process, believed to be facilitated by empathy that results in a choice to relinquish unforgiveness and to seek reconciliation with the perpetrator. However, it should be emphasized that, at both the individual (e.g., victims of abuse) and societal levels (e.g., cases of genocide), there may be times when advocating forgiveness reinforces injustice. For example Katz, Street, and Arias, (1997) found that participants who were more inclined to forgive their partner for physical abuse, were also more likely to return and/or remain in abusive relationships.

Questions also have been raised as to whether certain expressions of forgiveness represent immature defense mechanisms in contrast to healthy traits (Sandage et al., 2003). Sandage et al. (2003) cite the following examples of expressions of forgiveness that may not be virtuous or expressions of strength: (1) a decision to forgive based on fear of confrontation; (2) desire to forgive based on unwillingness to acknowledge one's anger; or (3) a desire to overlook principled beliefs in the service of convenience. The contributions of Sandage et al. have moved the field forward, particularly with respect to how forgiveness is bound by cultural contexts. Their work as well as the work of others (e.g., Reed & Enright, 2006), has been instrumental in terms of informing treatment interventions.

Unfortunately, the field of psychology operates within a paradigm that reinforces dualistic thinking (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000). Dualistic frameworks reinforce the idea that it is possible to distinguish in a universal way what constitutes mature and immature defense mechanisms and true (authentic) versus pseudo (inauthentic) forgiveness. For example, in an intervention described by Reed and Enright (2006), the authors allude to true and false forgiveness. Making such a distinction may inadvertently encourage clients to think that there is a right and wrong way to forgive. Certainly, as clients negotiate the difficult process of forgiveness, it is critical to encourage reflection on the process so that clients are better able to identify any ambivalence they may have. However, in some cases the use of such binaries (e.g., true vs. false forgiveness) may impose an artificial structure on a client's experience and, in so doing, compromise the ability to fully capture the richness and complexity of that experience. Instead of imposing a dichotomous structure on a client's experience, it may be more helpful to first address the meaning of that experience with the individual, taking the perspective that it is neither possible nor clinically helpful to a priori discriminate between "true" and "false" forgiveness.

As can be seen in this review, although there exists ambiguity with the forgiveness construct, binary frameworks, such as true versus inauthentic forgiving, are evidenced in the literature on forgiveness (see Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Moreover, both researchers and counselors maintain that forgiveness should not be associated with forgetting. We contend that the assumptions that forgiveness is best conceptualized dichotomously, and the notion that forgetting always impedes the process of forgiveness, may not be warranted. This is not to suggest that forgetting should be conflated with denial. Unlike denial, some forms of forgetting may be experienced as purposeful acts that are helpful to individuals who wish to continue a relationship and achieve a sense of resolution. At the same time however, there may be a place for denial as well. As Matt, Sementilli and Burish (1988) astutely noted in their discussion of coping strategies for cancer patients, denial can sometimes play a positive role. We are advocating a similar position: forgetting, as a coping strategy related to forgiveness, should neither be dismissed out of hand, nor should it be universally endorsed by mental health professionals.

A Critique of Forgiveness and Forgetting

The association between forgiving and forgetting has a long history as is evident by the well-known idiom "forgive and forget." The hierarchy of the association--to first forgive--is embedded in popular culture. For example, a country western song by Willie Nelson states

"forgiving you is easy, but forgetting seems to take the longest time" (Nelson, 1985, track 2). In research settings specific references to forgetting have been included in forgiveness survey instruments. For example, Brown (2003) in discussing the Tendency to Forgive Scale, a 4-item, 7-point Likert Scale designed to measure the degree to which individuals react to interpersonal transgressions with forgiveness, includes the following item: "When people wrong me, my approach is just to forgive and forget" (p. 770). Yet, despite occasional references to forgetting, no consistent discussion of the association between forgiving and forgetting appears in the literature. Moreover, when this connection is made it is described in pejorative ways. The implicit assumption is that forgetting, if it precedes forgiving, is always evidence of underlying pathology or a dysfunctional coping style.

A clear illustration of this assumption can be found in Margalit's (2002) work on how two religious models permeate our present-day understanding of forgiveness. Pointing out that many contemporary views of forgiveness have their roots in Christianity, Margalit described the difference between "forgiveness as blotting out the sin, and forgiveness as covering it up. Blotting out a sin means forgetting it absolutely. Covering it up means disregarding it without forgetting it" (pp. 188-189). Margalit likened forgiveness to the process of writing. An author, when dissatisfied with something he/she has written, can either delete or cross out the written material. While in deletion the transgression is totally erased, in crossing out, the author leaves the error apparent with a visible line that indicates that a crossing-out has occurred. Thus, in deletion, the written account is completely "erased," whereas in crossing out, the written account is "covered up," but visible to the eye.

Although Margalit's description of "covering up" and its relationship to forgiveness may be applicable and helpful for some, perhaps, for a significant minority, "blotting out" may be an effective mechanism for resolving hurt and anger associated with a transgression. Mental health counselors should not assume a priori that "blotting out" or forgetting is always non-adaptive. For some individuals, this way of coping may be effective. Also, parallels related to Margalit's distinction (i.e., "blotting out" versus "covering up") can be drawn from the coping literature. Effective coping, as Fine (1992) noted, is often conflated with aggressive, individualistic "taking control" strategies, strategies that may not be useful or helpful in all situations. When researchers or counselors assess coping mechanisms, they often use dichotomous frameworks such as "active-behavioral" versus "avoidant" coping styles. In so doing, they fail to appreciate the myriad of ways that coping and resilience can be manifest. Behaviors that are assumed to be dysfunctional (e.g., "avoidant" coping styles as measured on standard, likert-based coping instruments) may actually be highly adaptive in some contexts (Cosgrove, 2005; Cosgrove & Flynn, 2005; Fine, 1992). Similarly, "blotting out" rather than "covering up" may be adaptive insofar as it empowers individuals to dismiss the infraction, move forward, and preserve a relationship that is important to them. Again, this is not to suggest that forgetting is a universally adaptive coping strategy, for this strategy might be helpful only under conditions of equality. For example, the use of forgetting in order to preserve the relationship may be helpful only insofar as the individual feels that he or she is making an active choice of his or her own volition. In such instances, forgiveness may be perceived as an act of personal power.

How Might Forgetting be Beneficial?

Nietzsche wrote long ago about the positive aspects of what he termed 'active forgetting' (1887/1994). He was quite clear that "active" forgetting was just that--a purposeful attempt to relegate the past as past. He wrote, "forgetting is not just *avis inertia* [a form of inertia] as superficial people believe, but rather is an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word" (p. 38). That is, active forgetting should not be conflated with apathy or with a *laissez faire* attitude. Rather, Nietzsche was emphasizing the positive possibilities that are created when we, as individuals or as a collective people, purposely refuse to remain beholden to the past. What is "active" about this kind of forgetting is that it is a reflective attempt to both affirm and be fully engaged in the present. Nietzsche's point is prescient: rumination keeps one stuck, undermines hope, and makes forging a future an almost impossible task. His appreciation for balance is instructive insofar as he cautions us to both actively remember and actively forget. Happiness for Nietzsche is an achievement that requires a willingness to let go, to not let the memory of a transgression rule the individual. By reflectively choosing when--and when not--to invoke the past, one is no longer chained or haunted by it.

Before considering the implications of Nietzsche's position, a note of caution is warranted. As previously mentioned, the perceived gravity of a situation is critical and indeed in some cases (e.g., sexual assault), both the psychological and social cost of forgetting--or forgiving--may be too great. Also, as Nietzsche clearly understood, we must be mindful of the indisputable relationship between power and forgiveness: if an individual or group does not have permission to be angry, forgiveness may be experienced as the only solution, not as one choice among many (see, e.g., Lamb, 2005). In addition to considering relational power dynamics, forgetting may be helpful only when the individual who was wronged genuinely believes that the transgressive act was just that--an isolated incident that is not reflective of who the transgressor "really" is.

These concerns notwithstanding, incorporating Nietzsche's idea into contemporary models of forgiveness means that some individuals may be empowered by letting the memory of the transgression recede. Forgetting, in this context, allows the individual to have a future with the transgressor--one that is not contaminated by unresolved emotions. In forgiving, the individual puts the past behind in a way that permits the continuation of the relationship, even though the relationship dynamics may change. The relationship between forgetting and forgiveness can be described in terms of transcending the negative affect incurred by the hurtful incident, thereby allowing the individual to focus on the future rather than dwell in the past. An "existential recession" (Wertz, 1985) of the emotional pain must take place in order for the person to develop a renewed relationship with the other. It may be that in forgetting the recession of negative emotions associated with the incident helps one move on and restores a sense of agency and hope that had been lost. The past is lived--cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally--as the past. This psychological transformation of meaning may be facilitated by the ability to view the transgression as separate from oneself. That is, the perceived assault is not viewed as a statement about the self; rather, there is acknowledgement of separation of self and other as it relates to the transgression. The individual is able to let go of the hurt, and view the transgression in perspective, a transgression that occurred within a larger context.

Thus, making use of Nietzsche's suggestion may help both researchers and mental health

counselors to re-conceptualize forgetting and its relationship to forgiveness. That is, following Nietzsche, forgetting may, under some conditions, be experienced by an individual as an active decision about when to remember and when to let the memory recede. On the other hand, there may be times when forgetting is not experienced in such a purposeful or reflective manner but is nonetheless a viable coping strategy for the individual.

The relationship between forgiving and forgetting also may be understood in terms of the importance of the ability to refrain from rumination about the transgression (see, e.g., McCullough et al. 2001). Rumination appears to hinder forgiveness although the mechanism(s) by which rumination serves as a barrier to forgiving is unclear. What is known is that the more individuals ruminate about a transgression, the higher are their levels of revenge and avoidance motivation (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998, 2001; see also, Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). McCullough et al. concluded that the degree of rumination about the transgressive act is predictive of the progress individuals make towards forgiving their transgressor. However, given that McCullough based his conclusion on an eight week follow-up time period, it is unclear whether rumination itself is the most salient issue, or whether ideations related to revenge and avoidance are central to understanding the process of forgiveness. What may be relevant is the content associated with rumination, (i.e., need for revenge). Therefore, rather than try to fix the wrong that was done, actively choosing to forget may enable individuals to live the past qua past, thereby relinquishing the need to ruminate. Simply put, forgetting may facilitate the process of letting go. Lamb (2005) wisely reminds us of King Lear's seemingly paradoxical suggestion to Cordelia to "forget and forgive." Perhaps King Lear is actually giving Cordelia good advice: in some cases we just might need to forget first before we can forgive and move on.

Implications for Research

The focus of this paper is on re-theorizing forgiveness in order to develop more varied and useful counseling interventions. However, there are also important implications for research. For example, attempts to clearly distinguish inauthentic forgiveness (in contrast to authentic forgiveness) do not appear to be conceptually meaningful. Unfortunately, these kinds of distinctions are becoming increasingly prevalent in the research literature. As Zechmeister and Romero (2002) noted, "recent theoretical development of the forgiveness construct has attempted to differentiate "true" and "false" or "pseudo forgiveness" (p. 675). We believe that it is neither possible nor desirable to try and identify in advance what constitutes "authentic," "virtuous," or "true forgiveness." In order to improve our knowledge about the process of forgiveness, and be genuinely attuned to both individual as well as cultural differences, it is necessary for researchers to grapple with definitional issues and assess the meaning systems of individuals who are struggling with forgiveness. Utilizing dichotomous frameworks (e.g., authentic/inauthentic forgiveness, ruminating/moving on) with respect to definitional issues is limiting theoretically and compromises our ability to capture a more nuanced and textured understanding of forgiveness.

Thus, rather than simply acknowledge the challenge of operationalizing forgiveness, we suggest that researchers design studies that are robust enough to address the complex (and often contradictory) aspects of forgiving. For example, instead of relying predominantly on survey-based quantitative methods, qualitative research methods may be helpful in

furthering our understanding of how individuals negotiate the process of forgiveness. Gathering narrative data and using a phenomenological methodology to analyze participants' lived experiences would allow for a richer understanding than is possible using only Likert-based scales of forgiveness. Also, longitudinal data that permits observation of how this process unfolds over time, particularly with regard to forgetting, may be fruitful. The use of diaries and other methods that support micro and macroanalysis are also potentially fertile approaches for future research.

Clinical Implications

Forgiveness is shaped by powerful aggressive and defensive responses ... not merely loving and reparative ones. Could it be that in order to forgive, we must first allow a touch of forgetting to weaken the tie to the immediacy of the pain (Smith, 2002)?

Although there will be situations in which forgetting sustains inequity within the relationship and the psychological cost of this strategy is too great, there may be times when forgetting can provide a vehicle for individuals to contain their anxiety and anger and "move forward" in their lives. The point is not to advocate forgetting, but rather that mental health professionals should remain open to the possibility that forgetting may be an adaptive coping strategy. Defining what constitutes "true" forgiveness outside of an examination of individuals' experience undermines an appreciation for non-traditional definitions of forgiveness, definitions that may serve individuals well under certain conditions. Unbearable affect, as Smith (2002) noted, may require the use of forgetting as a defense, "to some forgetting intuitively comes first then forgiveness" (p.328).

In addition, the use of binaries inevitably gloss over the significance of tolerating feelings of ambivalence and ambiguity. The capacity to tolerate these feelings is thought to be critical when considering forgiveness (Malone, 2001; Lamb, 2005, 2006). Challenging these dichotomies loosens the hold they have on our thinking and allows us to develop new theories and create new treatment interventions (Cosgrove, 2005). Rather than try to force an individual's experience to fit into an acontextual construct, we recommend that mental health professionals more fully appreciate and explore the context and meaning of individuals' lived experiences of forgiveness. Doing so will allow mental health counselors to see and respond to the variability of their clients' distress. Indeed, appreciating the uniqueness of an individual's experience fosters a view of counseling as a "psychologically complex kind of re-learning, in which the major objective is to promote critical reflection" (Hoffman, 2002, p. 55). This view of counseling is particularly important for clients struggling with the complex cognitive and affective shifts that need to occur before one can work through an interpersonal transgression and move on. The following hypothetical case example provides clarification.

Mr. Franklin discovered that his good friend and business partner had taken money from their co-owned company. Although the actual amount taken was relatively small and did not put the company in jeopardy, Mr. Franklin was understandably hurt, angry, and felt betrayed. He confronted his friend who admitted his wrong-doing, returned the money, and profusely apologized, stating that he was going through some temporary financial difficulties that he had felt too embarrassed to disclose. After some weeks of counseling with Dr.

Robertson and talking about the incident at length with his friend, Mr. Franklin believed that he had "gotten past" the transgression and "genuinely forgave" his friend. To his surprise and consternation, Mr. Franklin found that some weeks later his "old" feelings re-surfaced. He tells Dr. Robertson, "I thought I was really over the whole thing, I thought I had forgiven him but I guess I was just fooling myself. When will I know--and how will I know--when those negative feelings are really behind me and I have forgiven him once-and-for-all?"

Many clinicians in this situation have extolled the virtues of forgiving, and perhaps suggested the use of a forgiveness scale to determine Mr. Franklin's current level of forgiveness, then implemented a step-by-step forgiveness intervention, and re-assessed his level of forgiveness post-intervention. But Dr. Robertson took a different approach. He asked his client to describe more fully the meaning and experience of those "negative" feelings. Further, he explained that for many people forgiveness is not a once-and-for-all achievement. In this way, he tried to help Mr. Franklin understand that a return of some "old" feelings may not be evidence of the fact that he did not "genuinely" or authentically forgive. Rather, Dr. Robertson discussed with his client the fact that it is part of the human condition to feel contradictory emotions, to feel ambivalent, especially after a transgression has occurred. He suggested to Mr. Franklin that the distinction between "true" and "false" forgiveness may not be the most useful metric for him and that it may be more helpful in their counseling work to focus on expressing and tolerating seemingly contradictory feelings toward his friend and accepting the fact that such feelings may ebb and flow over time. Dr. Robertson also encouraged his client to talk about what helps him cope when such feelings re-surface, being careful not to impose a rigid sense of what constitutes "functional" (e.g., active) vs. "dysfunctional" (e.g., avoidant) coping.

CONCLUSION

The main premise of this article is that in order to help individuals struggling with moving on after a transgression we need to develop more diverse clinical interventions. Moreover, these interventions should be based on theoretical models that represent a wider range of experiences with respect to forgiveness. For some individuals moving on may be facilitated by joining support groups or by becoming active in advocacy or social justice organizations. For others, a useful counseling intervention may be to help clients embrace, rather than resolve, the ambivalent feelings that arise after a transgression. It also should be emphasized that confronting negative affect and forgetting are not mutually exclusive activities. Our recommendation that counselors remain open to the possibility that forgetting may be clinically useful, is not meant to imply that the mental health counselor collude with a client's avoidance of anger or other emotions that may be difficult for the client to tolerate. Certainly, expressions of anger within the therapeutic context may have great therapeutic value. Such expressions can provide a vehicle not only for intra- and interpersonal change, but also for more activist pursuits (e.g., Lamb 2005). It may be that the ability to "feel unhistorically" of which Nietzsche spoke, or the suggestion given by King Lear to first forget a little, may actually facilitate a client's ability to tolerate the ambivalence and confront the pain and anger associated with the transgression.

REFERENCES

- Brown, R. P. (2003). Measuring individual differences in the tendency to forgive: Construct validity and links with depression. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 759-771.
- Cosgrove, L. (2005). When labels mask oppression: Helping counselors in training to think critically about psychiatric diagnosis. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 27, 283-296.
- Cosgrove, L. & Flynn, C. (2005). Marginalized mothers: Parenting without a home. *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 5, 127-143.
- Cosgrove, L., & McHugh, M.C. (2000). Speaking for ourselves: Feminist methods and community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28, 815-838.
- Davenport, D. S. (1991). The functions of anger and forgiveness: Guidelines for psychotherapy with victims. *Psychotherapy*, 28, 140-144.
- Denton, R. T., & Martin, M. W. (1998). Defining forgiveness: An empirical exploration of process and role. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 26, 281-292.
- Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2000). *Helping clients forgive: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Enright, R. D., & the Human Development Study Group. (1991). The moral development of forgiveness. In W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (vol. 1, pp. 123-152). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Enright, R. D., & Zell, R. L. (1989). Problems encountered when we forgive one another. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 8, 52-60.
- Fennel, D. (1993). Characteristics of long-term first marriages. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 15, 446-460.
- Fine, M. (1992). *Disruptive voices: The possibilities of feminist research*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Flanigan, B. J. (1987). Shame and forgiveness in alcoholism. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 4, 181-195.
- Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996). Forgiveness as an intervention goal with incest survivors. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64, 983-992.
- Gordon C. (1999). A multi-theoretical intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 6, 382-399.
- Hargrave, T. D., & Sells, J. N. (1997). The development of a forgiveness scale. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 23, 41-62.
- Hoffman, I.Z. (2002). Toward a social constructivist view of the psychoanalytic situation. In

S.Fairfield, L. Layton, & C. Stack (Eds.) Bringing the Plague: Toward a postmodern psychoanalysis (pp. 33-67). New York: Other Press.

Katz, J., Street, A., & Arias, I (1997). Individual differences in self-appraisals and responses to dating violence scenarios. *Violence and victims*, 12, 256-276.

Konstam, V., Marx, f., Schurer, J., Harrington, A., Lombardo, N., & Deveney, S. (2000). Forgiving: What mental health counselors are telling us. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 22, 253-267.

Konstam, V., Chernoff, M., & Deveney, S. (2001). Toward forgiveness: The role of shame, guilt, anger, and empathy. *Counseling and Values*, 46, 26-39.

Kurzynski, M. J. (1998). The virtue of forgiveness as a human resource management strategy. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17, 77-85.

Lamb, S. (2002). Introduction: Reasons to be cautious about the use of forgiveness in psychotherapy. In S. Lamb & J. G. Murphy (Eds.), *Before forgiving: Cautionary views of forgiveness in psychotherapy* (pp. 3-14). New York: Oxford University Press.

Lamb, S. (2005). Forgiveness therapy: The context and conflict. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 25, 61-80.

Lamb, S. (2006). Forgiveness, women and responsibility to the group. *Journal of Human Rights*, 5, 45-60.

Malone, K. (2001). Beyond constructionism and essentialism: The stakes of gender as a deadlock within subjectivity. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association. San Francisco.

Margalit, A. (2002). *The ethics of memory*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Matt, D.A., Matt, Sementilli, M. E. & Burish, T.G. (1988). Denial as a strategy for coping with cancer. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 10, 136-144.

McCullough, M. E., & Witvliet, C. V. O. (2002). The psychology of forgiveness In C. R. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 446-458). New York: Oxford University Press.

McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. (2003). Forgiveness, forbearance, and time: the temporal unfolding of transgression-related interpersonal motivations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 540-557.

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

McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoreson, C. E. (Eds.). (2000). *Forgiveness*:
McCullough, M. E., Rachal, K. C., Sandage, S. J., Worthington, E. L., Brown, S. W., &

Hight, T. L. (1998). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships: II. Theoretical elaboration and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 1586-1603.

Nelson, W. (1985). *Forgiving you was easy. Me and Paul* [CD]. New York: Columbia Records.

Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Untimely meditations*. (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy). Breazeale, D. (Ed.). Hollingdale, R.J. (Trans.). NY: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published in 1876).

Nietzsche, F. (1994). *On the Genealogy of morality*. (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). Ansell-Pearson, K. (Ed.) Diethe, C. (Trans.). NY: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published in 1887).

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1991). Responses to depression and their effects on the duration of depressive episodes *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 100, 569-582.

Phillips, L. J., & Osborne, J. W. (1989). Cancer patients' experience of forgiveness therapy. *Canadian Journal of Counseling*, 23, 236-251.

Reed, G. L. & Enright, R. D. (2006). The effects of forgiveness therapy on depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress for women after spousal emotional abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74, 920-929.

Sandage, S. J., Hill, P. C., & Vang, H. C. (2003). Toward a multicultural positive psychology: Indigenous forgiveness and among culture. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 31, 564-592.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Positive psychology, positive prevention, and positive therapy. In Cr.R. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.). *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 3-9). New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, H. (2002). A footnote on forgiveness. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 71, 327-329.

Tangney, J. P., Fee, R., Reinsmith, C., Boone, A. L., & Lee, N. (1999). Assessing individual differences in the propensity to forgive. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Boston.

Wade, N. G., Bailey, D. C., & Shaffer, P. (2005). Helping clients heal: Does forgiveness make a difference. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 36, 634-641.

Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2005). In search of a common core: A content analysis of interventions to promote forgiveness. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 42, 160-177.

Wade, N. G., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Meyer, J. E. (2005). But do they work? A meta-analysis of group interventions to promote forgiveness. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of forgiveness* (pp. 423-440). New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2003). Overcoming interpersonal offenses: Is forgiveness the only way to deal with unforgiveness. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 81, 343-353.

Wertz, F. J. (1985). Method and findings in a phenomenological psychological study of a complex life-event: Being criminally victimized. *Phenomenology and psychological research* (pp. 155-216). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Worthington, E. L. Jr. & Wade, N. G. (1999). The psychology of unforgiveness and forgiveness and implications for clinical practice. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 18, 385-418.

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

Lisa Cosgrove and Varda Konstam are affiliated with the Department of Counseling and School Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Correspondence concerning the article should be addressed to Lisa Cosgrove. E-mail: lisa.cosgrove@umb.edu.

COPYRIGHT 2008 American Mental Health Counselors Association
Copyright 2008, Gale Group. All rights reserved.