

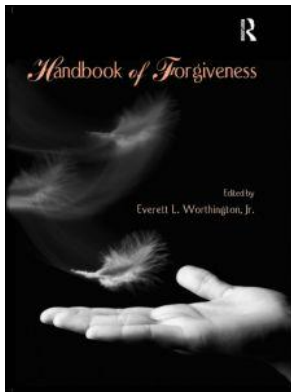
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 10 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Handbook of Forgiveness

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

Families and Forgiveness

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203955673.ch14>

Cynthia L. Battle, Ivan W. Miller

Published online on: 21 Jun 2005

How to cite :- Cynthia L. Battle, Ivan W. Miller. 21 Jun 2005, *Families and Forgiveness from: Handbook of Forgiveness* Routledge

Accessed on: 10 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203955673.ch14>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Chapter Fourteen

Families and Forgiveness

Cynthia L. Battle
Ivan W. Miller

My mom gave us up—we had to go live in a home. Didn't care if we were little, or what. That's what hurt. It took me a long time, but I forgave... I tried to put myself in her position. What would I do?... My father used to beat her up. We could hear it. He used to get us out of bed... "You see this?! You see her?!" My mother there with a black eye... She had to get out of that situation... I didn't see her for 12–13 years. I went to talk to her when I was 35. She explained everything... said she was sorry, crying and everything, apologizing... She knew how much it hurt me. [When she was dying], I'd pray to God that my brother would come and say, "Ma, I love you" before she died. And he wouldn't. I won't ever forgive him for that. (participant in Forgiveness and Families Study)

Despite the great increase in attention to the construct of forgiveness in the psychological and broader social science literature over the past 15–20 years (e.g., Enright & North, 1998; Worthington, 1998a), a number of significant gaps exist in our understanding of the ways in which forgiveness is important for families and family functioning. For example, what types of events or interpersonal transgressions arise in families that most often call for one person to forgive another? Without intervention, how do families typically negotiate the process of forgiveness? How does this process vary for different types of families? Finally, and perhaps most important, how does forgiveness—or lack of forgiveness—following relational injuries relate to the overall functioning and well-being of a family? Although these are critical clinical and research questions to address, the answers remain unclear. In this chapter, we review the emerging theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the process of forgiveness within the family context. In addition, we describe our group's research in this area, which includes interview-based assessments of 102 community families. Finally, we discuss clinical implications based on existing data and present recommendations for future research.

PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

We would like to identify aspects of our background and professional training that have likely shaped our personal assumptions about forgiveness. First, as family researchers, our perspective is influenced by systems theory, an approach that emphasizes the interrelatedness of individuals within a family group, and the importance of understanding how one individual's behavior has an effect on the entire system. More broadly, our assumptions about forgiveness are influenced by our training as clinical psychologists, both valuing empiricism and recognizing the importance of individual differences. Finally, our perspectives are influenced by our backgrounds as European-Americans raised within and influenced by Judeo-Christian culture.

Because the terms *forgiveness* and *family* can mean different things to different people, we would like to be explicit about how we use these terms. As several writers have noted (Butler, Dahlin, & Fife, 2002; McCullough & Worthington, 1995), the concept of forgiveness is often not clearly distinguished from other similar constructs. In our view, forgiveness is an intentional process that is both intrapersonal and interpersonal in nature and, as described by Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991), consists of multiple cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements. The description of forgiveness offered by McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) is consistent with our view: forgiveness is an "intra-individual, pro-social change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated in an interpersonal context" (p.12). We see forgiveness as related to but clearly distinct from reconciliation, exoneration, and acceptance-based conflict resolution strategies.

Just as there are many ways to define forgiveness, there are many ways to define what constitutes a family. We use a relatively simple and broad definition. By *family*, we are referring to people who are related to one another, including an individual's family of origin (parents, siblings, any other relatives in the household), as well as one's current family system (partner, children, other relatives in the household). Thus, our perspective includes traditional couples and marital research/therapy within a more overarching framework of family research/therapy. We use a family systems perspective because it is inclusive of different types of family structures (e.g., wife, husband, and their children; a mother-daughter dyad; a same-sex couple). This perspective allows research and treatment to be generalized to many types of families and couples, an important consideration, given the increasingly diverse demographics of the United States. Finally, family treatment can help address difficulties between family members other than two adult partners (e.g., problems between parents and a teenager; problems with in-laws).

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Very little published literature, either theoretical or empirical in nature, has directly addressed forgiveness in the family context. The literature that does exist primarily

targets forgiveness within marital (as opposed to other family) relationships and often is focused on the development of interventions. Because another chapter in this book is devoted exclusively to the topic of forgiveness within married couples (see chapter 13 by Fincham, Hall, & Beach), we will provide only a brief review of the couples literature here. In the following sections, we will first discuss how the concept of forgiveness is addressed in theoretical writings on normal family processes and in theories of family/marital psychotherapy. Next, we will review the relevant empirical literature on forgiveness in families. Finally, we will describe our current ongoing study of forgiveness in families and present some preliminary findings.

FAMILY THEORY RELEVANT TO FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness as a Construct in Traditional Family Theory

We begin by examining how the concept of forgiveness fits into the “classic” theories of family process and family therapy. Surprisingly, there has been little attention to the construct of forgiveness in major family theories, despite the fact that most approaches consider resolving family conflict and coping with negative family events to be important to the health and longevity of families. In our review of some of the dominant family theories, including Bowen family systems theory (Bowen, 1978), the Beavers family systems model (Beavers et al., 1965), the McMaster model of family functioning (Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978), and the Circumplex model (Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989), few references are made to the concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness is also virtually absent from major theories of family therapy, including Ericksonian family therapy (Lankton, Lankton, & Matthews, 1991), strategic family therapy (Haley, 1963), structural family therapy (Minuchin, 1974), and behavioral marital therapy (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979). However, these theories and therapeutic approaches all promote strategies for healthy family adaptation, conflict management, and relationship repair. For example, family theorists have emphasized that healthy families must be flexible and adaptable to changes over time (Olson & Gorall, 2003); they must be able to tolerate imperfections of family members and foster a climate in which it is comfortable to admit to mistakes (Beavers & Hampson, 2003); they must be able to resolve even emotionally laden problems (Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978); and they must maintain a hopeful outlook for the future, even in the presence of a painful, uncertain reality (Beavers & Hampson, 2003). Thus, although not directly stated, many theories are consistent with the notions that the ability to forgive is integral to the overall functioning of the family and that forgiveness is an important mechanism by which healthy family relationships are maintained.

Several writers have offered reasons for the lack of attention to forgiveness within traditional family systems literature. Coleman (1998) posited that forgiveness may be viewed as somewhat at odds with the family systems approach in that most systemic theories emphasize the transactional nature of relationships and ways in which family members’

behaviors are inextricably linked. Coleman suggests that in some systems therapists deemphasize individuals' behaviors and instead look at relational patterns that have evolved in the family, even in instances when one person's behavior was hurtful to another. Thus, if individuals' behaviors are not viewed as wrong or unjust, the concept of forgiveness becomes less relevant. However, Coleman goes on to suggest that forgiveness should in fact be viewed as consistent with a family systems perspective, because evaluating and changing relational patterns promotes forgiveness, which in turn promotes greater ability to change. It is also possible that forgiveness has not been addressed in family therapy because of the neutral stance that is typically advocated in traditional systems and other therapeutic approaches. Forgiveness is commonly conceptualized as having moral undertones relating to justice, injustice, and fairness—concepts difficult to embrace if one has a neutral stance. Moreover, several writers note that forgiveness may be avoided in the psychological literature because of its association with religion (e.g., Walrond-Skinner, 1998).

Although the majority of traditional family theories make no direct reference to forgiveness, one family therapy approach that does address issues highly related to the construct of forgiveness is contextual family therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991). In the contextual model, there is an emphasis on understanding the balance of fairness, or *equitability*, within the family system, as well as assessing the dynamics of family loyalties, interpersonal trust, and reciprocity. As a cornerstone of contextual family therapy, Boszormenyi-Nagy (1987) introduced the concept of *relational ethics*, or balance of fairness between family members, which he described as a “fundamental force in holding family and societal relationships together through reliability and trustworthiness” (p. 204). During treatment based on the contextual approach, therapists identify relational injuries that have occurred in the family and help family members in the process of exoneration.

Related to contextual family theory is the work of Boss (2001) and Walsh (2003) on family resilience, stress management, and hardiness. These strength (rather than deficit)-based theories of family functioning identify positive qualities and behaviors that promote healthy functioning over time, such as making meaning from adversity, maintaining connectedness, and holding a positive outlook in the face of change and uncertainty. Thus, the skills recognized by these models are consistent with promoting forgiveness in the family system.

Theoretical Models of Forgiveness in Families

We turn our attention now to some contemporary theoretical models that have explicitly addressed forgiveness in family and marital relationships. Not surprisingly, several contemporary family and marital researchers with interests in forgiveness have drawn on the contextual approach to family therapy. For example, Hargrave (1994) and colleagues (Hargrave, Jennings, & Anderson, 1991; Hargrave & Sell, 1997) developed a theoretical model of forgiveness in families particularly well integrated

within Boszormenyi-Nagy's contextual family therapy approach. Hargrave suggests that to recover from interpersonal transgressions, families must go through a process of forgiveness consisting of two overarching dimensions: exoneration and forgiveness. In this model, exoneration includes the two "stations" of *insight* (recognizing patterns that perpetuate unjust reenactments) and *understanding* (recognizing the limits of the offender without removing his or her responsibility). Similarly, forgiveness includes the stations of *giving the opportunity for compensation* (providing a chance for the victimizer to restore the relationship) and the *overt act of forgiveness* (victim and offender openly discuss the hurtful behavior). Based on their model, they have developed and validated scales to measure relational ethics (Hargrave et al., 1991) and the forgiveness process (Interpersonal Relationship Resolution Scale; Hargrave & Sells, 1997).

Other contemporary researchers have also developed models for forgiveness in families. Gordon and Baucom (1998; 1999; 2003) developed an approach to forgiveness of extramarital affairs by integrating contextual therapy with cognitive-behavioral and insight-oriented marital therapies. DiBlasio detailed a model for "decision-based forgiveness" with intergenerational families (1998) and couples coping with infidelity (2000). Finally, Worthington (1998b) and colleagues (Worthington & Wade, 1999) have described a model for forgiving (*empathy-humility-commitment* model) with special attention to forgiveness within close family dyads.

In sum, although traditional family theories describing family processes and family psychotherapies have been essentially silent on the topic of forgiveness, contemporary forgiveness theorists (particularly those developing interventions) have had little difficulty incorporating forgiveness within a family framework, particularly the contextual approach. Forgiveness has been conceptualized in various ways, but generally is described as a complex process with multiple stepwise phases (e.g., Enright, 2001) that can promote healing from interpersonal transgressions on both the individual and relational level. Forgiveness is promoted not only as a process that helps individuals achieve greater emotional well-being but also as a critical process for families that need to restore trust following serious transgressions.

Empirical Research on Families and Forgiveness

The past decade has seen steady growth in the empirical study of forgiveness. The majority of studies pertaining to forgiveness in families have been with married couples (for review, see chapter 13 by Fincham et al. and chapter 25 by Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder). This includes a series of basic research studies by Fincham (2000) and colleagues (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002) on spouses' responsibility attributions, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills, as well as several intervention studies targeting forgiveness in couples (e.g., Gordon & Baucom's 2003). Research addressing family forms other than couples is primarily focused on the development of forgiveness interventions. Group, individual, and family interventions

have been developed for incest survivors (Freedman & Enright, 1996), college students deprived of parental affection (Al-Mabuk, Enright, & Cardis, 1995), parents whose children committed suicide (Al-Mabuk & Downs, 1996), men whose partners had abortions (Coyle & Enright, 1997), intergenerational families with unresolved issues (DiBlasio, 1998), and adults sharing parenting duties (Kiefer, et al., 2004).

Interestingly, most research that pertains to forgiveness within couples and families is based on individual data. That is, rather than draw upon information from more than one member of a family, investigators typically have relied on the report of a single individual. In addition, much research has examined “dispositional” forgiveness rather than reactions to actual interpersonal events or patterns in families (for an exception, see Fincham, 2000). These findings generally suggest that individuals with higher levels of dispositional forgiveness—that is, those who have a greater tendency to forgive those close to them after transgressions—are more likely to experience higher quality relationships, both in their families and in other realms of their lives.

The importance of using methodology that includes input from more than one family member can be seen by emerging data suggesting that men and women may view forgiveness differently. For example, in Fincham and colleagues’ (Fincham et al., 2002) study with 92 married Italian couples, responsibility attributions were the best predictor of forgiveness for women; however, empathy was a stronger predictor of forgiveness for men. In addition, Fincham et al.’s (2004) two-site study of forgiveness and conflict resolution behaviors suggested that three identified components of forgiveness had different roles for wives and husbands in predicting future conflict resolution. Specifically, wives’ positive forgiveness behaviors (i.e., benevolence) were most important in predicting the couple’s conflict resolution, whereas husbands’ negative forgiveness behaviors (i.e., retaliation, avoidance) mattered most.

The growing body of research on forgiveness provides support for the general premise that forgiveness plays an important role in family relationships. To our knowledge, however, no basic research has examined forgiveness among multiple members of a family system aside from those addressing marital forgiveness.

THE BROWN FORGIVENESS AND FAMILIES STUDY

To begin the process of elucidating how forgiveness works within family systems, our research group is currently examining forgiveness in a diverse sample of families from the community. The Brown Forgiveness and Families Study has three primary aims. First, we hope to identify the events that take place within families that create the greatest need for forgiveness. As Enright and Coyle (1998) have noted, the need for forgiveness arises from some type of event that causes injury. The topology of these events remains unclear, particularly within a family context. Although much of the literature on forgiveness within families has focused on infidelity (e.g., DiBlasio, 2000; Gordon & Baucom, 2003) and to a lesser extent on domestic abuse and incest

(e.g., Freedman & Enright, 1996), no studies have documented a more complete range of situations that necessitate forgiveness.

The second goal of the study is to delineate the processes by which individuals after an interpersonal transgression do (or do not) arrive at a state of forgiveness with their family members. Although several interventions have been developed to help promote forgiveness in families, the effectiveness of these strategies remains largely unknown, as does the extent to which these strategies resemble the process of forgiving in the “real life” development of families. In addition to gathering open-ended responses regarding key elements in the forgiveness process, we are inquiring about the role of several specific elements (e.g., presence or absence of apology, offender’s behaviors following the transgression).

The third goal of the study is to explore the associations among forgiveness, family functioning, and individual coping and adaptation. As noted earlier, prior research has suggested that individuals and families who are able to forgive important transgressions are more likely to experience healthy family relationships and better emotional and physical well-being. This has been less examined in the context of family systems other than marital relationships.

In our ongoing study, we are examining these questions by asking family members to participate in an in-depth, semistructured interview and provide self-report data regarding a number of individual and family characteristics (e.g., empathy, forgiveness, family functioning). The Forgiveness in Families Interview was modeled after the Life Events and Difficulties Schedule (Brown & Harris, 1989). It identifies key interpersonal transgressions in the family and examines factors leading to forgiveness or lack of forgiveness following the transgression.

Our preliminary findings suggest that a wide range of events necessitate forgiveness in families. In addition to infidelity and abuse, many other types of transgressions are reported as important experiences calling for forgiveness. These include (a) unequal treatment of siblings by one or both parents, (b) failure of a parent to protect a child from harm, (c) hurt feelings from divorce and/or remarriage, (d) lack of parental acceptance of a spouse or romantic partner (particularly in interracial or same-sex relationships), (e) irresponsible or dishonest financial decisions made by a family member, (f) problems associated with a family member’s addiction or mental illness, (g) inequitable distribution of household tasks, (h) repeated instances of broken family commitments or prolonged absences, (i) disagreements regarding care of an ill or elderly relative, and (j) disputes regarding funerals and estate settlement.

In addition, our initial examination of the data reveals that there is considerable variation in how the process of forgiveness occurs in different families. For example, some families in our sample achieved forgiveness via overt discussion of the transgression and explicit granting of forgiveness; however, others reported success with much less direct ways of communicating about events. Consistent with findings regarding the role of forgiveness in marital relationships, preliminary analyses suggest that when individuals in families report a history of forgiving recent transgressions in the family (forgiveness

averaged over several events), they tend to report better individual mental health, as well as higher levels of family functioning (Miller, Battle, Rossi, & Sasaki, 2003).

NEW RESEARCH DIRECTIONS NEEDED IN THE AREA

Research on forgiveness in families is still in its infancy. In the broadest sense, we believe that much more basic research is needed to clarify the nature and importance of forgiveness in families. Findings from these studies will play a key role in shaping and evaluating forgiveness-based interventions currently being developed for couples and families.

Before outlining what we believe are the most important questions facing the field, we would like to highlight some fundamental ways that forgiveness (and lack of forgiveness) in families may be distinguished from forgiveness in other relationships, as well as some ways in which the process of forgiveness research is different with families.

Perhaps most important, family relationships involve longer term and more intimate affiliations than do the majority of other social relationships. Because of the frequent nature of interactions and the high level of emotional involvement and interdependence that typically exists between family members, transgressions are likely to occur more often than in other relationships, and the stakes are higher when such hurts remain unresolved. In addition, because of the everyday nature of family relations and interactions, family members often face the challenge of coping with minor, yet repeated transgressions more so than in other relationships.

Another important aspect of forgiveness in families pertains to the complex nature of family relationships and the affective connections and loyalties that exist among family members: When transgressions occur, *multiple* family members are usually affected, and effects on individual family members may vary depending on the person's developmental status, family role, and affiliation with other family members. Thus, a single event may spur a complex series of reactions and effects across the family, necessitating forgiveness among multiple individuals. Major transgressions in families (e.g. violence, infidelity, abandonment) can result in particularly deep and wide-reaching effects, affecting not only those directly involved but also others in the household, extended family, and in some cases, even future generations.

A third unique aspect of forgiveness in families is that family systems will often adhere to or develop their own philosophies, values, and rules for behavior. A family's value system and behavioral rules may directly stem from a shared religious orientation or from the family's ethnic or cultural background; however, it may also be unrelated to these factors. Some families may therefore explicitly adopt and nurture a "culture" of forgiveness within their family system—teaching, modeling, and encouraging forgiveness among its members—and others may not. This family-level variable and its relation to individual behavior will be interesting to measure as more research is conducted within family systems.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge that research with families can be quite challenging, both conceptually and methodologically, and often more so than research with individuals or couples. For example, defining and measuring the primary variables of interest may not be straightforward, especially when multiple family members' perspectives are taken into consideration. On a practical level, enrolling and maintaining the research involvement of multiple, key family members can be difficult, given family members' work and school schedules and caretaking responsibilities for young children or elderly relatives. However, despite these challenges, we believe the additional effort involved in research with families is well worth it, and indeed essential, depending on the research questions of interest. Although research with individuals can help tap into some family-level processes, most questions regarding families can be adequately addressed only by including multiple family members in the research process.

In terms of specific areas of study, we propose the following progression of research:

1. It will be important to describe the phenomenology of forgiveness in family settings in terms of explicating both the types of events that necessitate forgiveness and the process by which forgiveness happens or is unable to happen. How is forgiveness in families similar to or different from forgiveness in other settings? As noted earlier, because individuals in families are affiliated for long periods of time, it will be particularly important to understand the impact of chronic or repeated transgressions within families, as well as the effectiveness of different strategies for coping with such patterns of hurtful behavior. Are acute, severe transgressions in the family more or less damaging than more minor, yet ongoing transgressions?
2. How important is forgiveness (or lack of forgiveness) between family members to the overall functioning of a family system? What types of positive effects on health and functioning might forgiveness have for the family as a whole and the individuals within it—and what are the negative effects when forgiveness does not take place?
3. What other aspects of family functioning are most closely related to forgiveness in terms of facilitating the forgiveness process? For example, is the best predictor of forgiveness in the family the overall level of cohesion or connectedness in the family system, or is forgiveness more associated with other aspects of functioning, such as communication or problem-solving ability? Are family qualities that predict greater tendency to forgive changeable?
4. What are the specific processes by which forgiveness occurs and by which forgiveness can lead to better family functioning? Initial research indicates that the ability to forgive is associated with better family/marital adjustment; however process mechanisms remain unclear and are important to address. For example, does forgiveness lead to better family functioning by strengthening the degree of trust, cohesion, or closeness among family members? Does forgiveness promote

- healthy functioning by decreasing the likelihood or severity of family conflict? Regardless of whether overt conflict takes place, does the experience of multiple, unforgiven transgressions over time lead to an erosion of positive feelings or “good will” among family members and increase feelings of hostility and resentment?
5. Because family systems can develop their own values and rules for behavior, it would be important to understand to what extent families explicitly nurture a culture of forgiveness. If present, how might this value influence behavior of individuals following hurtful events, both with family members and with others? Would it lead to a greater tendency to forgive others even when the individual is living in a different environment? For families who explicitly value forgiveness, how is the practice of forgiveness taught to family members, particularly children (i.e., via social modeling or via family “rules” about apologizing and granting forgiveness)?
 6. Depending on their age and level of cognitive/social/emotional development, children who experience hurtful events from parents, siblings, or other family members are likely to have different levels of understanding regarding the context and precipitating factors leading to a hurtful event. They will also differ in their ability to view events from another’s perspective and develop empathy for the offender. Because the skill of perspective taking and the capacity for empathy develop over time, it will be important to examine how the developmental status of family members relates to forgiveness. Participants in our study frequently noted that they were unable to forgive some of their earliest and most significant hurts (e.g., an absent, alcoholic parent; being given up for adoption) because they lacked a full understanding of the situation, explaining that it was only years later that they could forgive, after developing a more nuanced perspective. When children (or adult children) are unable to forgive hurtful events in their families of origin, how does this affect their capacity for healthy intimate relationships as adults?
 7. As noted before, research on forgiveness in families should take into account the complexity of family relationships and far-reaching impact that some transgressions may have. In our research, we have seen evidence of how a single event can affect multiple members of the family system. For example, participants described strong feelings of betrayal regarding transgressions not directly experienced by them but by another family member (e.g., a sibling who stole money from an elderly parent). In such cases, the love and loyalty felt for the offended family member can fuel lingering feelings of resentment that may influence the relationship for years. How does the forgiveness process work when multiple family members have taken offense by a transgression? What if one family member forgives and another does not? Research is needed to examine the impact of transgressions across multiple family members and over time.
 8. It will be important to explore the ways in which empirical findings regarding the above questions vary across different types of individuals and different types of families. The majority of couples research focuses on married, predominantly White, middle-class, heterosexual couples. Greater diversity is needed in terms of family structure (e.g., single-parent families, same-sex families), as well as based

on race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status. Cross-cultural studies examining Western and non-Western families will also be important, particularly because aspects of healthy family functioning that are likely related to forgiveness (e.g., level of cohesion, family loyalty) differ across cultures.

In addition to these specific research questions, improvements are needed in the measurement of forgiveness within families. In their review of approaches to assess forgiveness at various levels (i.e., offense-based, dyadic, and dispositional), McCullough, Hoyt, and Rachal (2000) discuss several ways in which forgiveness measurement warrants improvement. With regard to dyadic and relationship-based measures, for example, no validated interview measures have been described in the literature. Moreover, measures are needed to assess forgiveness not only from an individual perspective but also from multiple informants in the family and perhaps using multiple methods (interview, self-report, observed interaction). McCullough and colleagues (2000) note that there are no validated partner-report forgiveness measures. Finally, although forgiveness is typically conceptualized as a process that unfolds over time, measurement usually approaches forgiveness as a state or dispositional construct with just one individual at one time point assessed. An exception is the measure of recovery from marital betrayal by Gordon and Baucom (2003), but most measures do not take this perspective.

In addition to basic research, another important area is the development and more rigorous evaluation of forgiveness interventions for a wider range of families and family dyads, using randomized controlled trial methodology. As many writers have noted, forgiveness is not unidimensional but a complex construct that has multiple components (e.g., Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991). Thus, in addition to using more rigorous designs, intervention studies would be strengthened by greater attention to mediators of treatment effect and proposed mechanisms of action (e.g., increased empathy for the offender) to help clarify key behavioral, affective, and/or cognitive components of forgiveness among family members.

RELEVANCE FOR CLINICAL AND APPLIED INTERVENTIONS

Forgiveness research is highly relevant for family and marital therapy, especially the growing number of interventions for families and couples that focus specifically on forgiveness. Although basic research is limited, the research that does exist suggests that forgiveness may be associated with better marital and family adjustment, as well as more effective conflict resolution behaviors between relationship partners. Moreover, long-term couples have reported using forgiveness as an important strategy to maintain the health of the relationship (Fennel, 1993). Based on these findings, it follows that clinical interventions (both preventive and treatment-oriented psychotherapies) that focus on building forgiving attitudes and behaviors in families may be useful in promoting healthy family functioning. When unresolved relational transgressions

from the past have a negative impact on an individual's functioning, it may be useful to add an adjunctive family component to individual treatment, focused specifically on forgiveness of a hurtful event (such as the "forgiveness session/s" for families described by DiBlasio & Proctor, 1993). As Worthington and Drinkard (2000) note, however, in many cases, individuals in close relationships will need to be taught how to communicate about hurtful past events and forgiveness in order to make such meetings useful. In general, more basic research is needed to draw conclusions regarding the value of forgiveness for families, the mechanisms by which forgiveness can occur, and how to facilitate this process in psychotherapy.

PERSONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIELD

We are encouraged to see the growing number of studies addressing forgiveness in various contexts, including increased attention to understanding how forgiveness works in family relationships. Because so few basic research studies have been conducted regarding the role of forgiveness in family relationships, we see many exciting opportunities for research in the area. We hope that the coming years will include more refined techniques for measuring forgiveness processes, including methods to capture perspectives of multiple family members. We believe that greater integration between the new and growing body of empirical research on forgiveness and other existing lines of research on close relationships, family processes, and marital/family therapy can lead to key developments in our understanding of what helps families function well, stay connected, and promote optimal functioning of individual members.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though family relationships are arguably one of the most critical contexts for forgiveness, strikingly little research has examined how family members forgive one another. Problems in close relationships often serve as the impetus for seeking psychotherapy (Veroff, Kulka, & Douvan, 1981), and family turmoil, marital dissatisfaction, and divorce are common (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Family dysfunction and marital discord are consistently associated with depression and other forms of psychiatric distress (Keitner & Miller, 1990). The importance of family stability on individual mental health and on social, behavioral, and emotional child outcomes has also been observed (Amato & Keith, 1991). If forgiveness can promote such stability within families, this research may have critical clinical and public health implications. Greater empirical attention to the meaning and impact of forgiveness within families will help inform theory and intervention research, as well as a wider scale of public health programs that may be useful in promoting long-term family resilience and longevity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank Rita Rossi, Ryan G. Sasaki, Linda Bigden, and Jackie Albro for their assistance with data collection and data management. This research was supported by a grant from *A Campaign for Forgiveness Research*.

REFERENCES

- Al-Mabuk, R. H., Enright, R. D., & Cardis, P. (1995). Forgiveness education with parentally love-deprived college students. *Journal of Moral Education, 24*, 427–444.
- Al-Mabuk, R. H., & Downs, W. R. (1996). Forgiveness therapy with parents of adolescent suicide victims. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 7*, 21–39.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Consequences of parental divorce for the well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 110*, 26–46.
- Beavers, W. R., Blumberg, S., Timken, K. R., & Weiner, M. D. (1965). Communication patterns of mothers of schizophrenics. *Family Process, 4*, 94–104.
- Beavers, W. R., & Hampson, R. B. (2003). Measuring family competence: The Beavers systems model. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (3rd ed.; pp. 549–580). New York: Guilford Press.
- Boss, P. (2001). *Family stress management: A contextual approach*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. (1987). *Foundations of contextual family therapy: Collected papers of Boszormenyi-Nagy, M.D.* Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel.
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., Grunebaum, J., & Ulrich, D. (1991). Contextual therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (Vol. II, pp. 200–238). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Brown, G. W., & Harris, T. O. (1989). Depression. In G. W. Brown & T. O. Harris (Eds.), *Life events and illness* (pp. 49–93). New York: Guilford Press.
- Butler, M. H., Dahlin, S. K., & Fife, S. T. (2002). Linguaging factors affecting clients acceptance of forgiveness intervention in marital therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 28*, 285–298.
- Coleman, P. W. (1998). The process of forgiveness in marriage and the family. In R. D. Enright & J. North (Eds.), *Exploring forgiveness* (pp. 75–94). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Coyle, C. T., & Enright, R. D. (1997). Forgiveness intervention with postabortion men. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 65*, 1042–1046.
- DiBlasio, F. A. (1998). The use of a decision-based forgiveness intervention within intergenerational family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy, 20*, 77–94.
- DiBlasio, F. A. (2000). Decision-based forgiveness treatment in cases of marital infidelity. *Psychotherapy, 37*, 149–158.
- DiBlasio, F. A., & Proctor, J. H. (1993). Therapists and clinical use of forgiveness. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 21*, 175–184.
- Enright, R. D. (2001). *Forgiveness is a choice: A step-by-step process for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Enright, R. D., & Coyle, C. T. (1998). Researching the process model of forgiveness within psychological interventions. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 139–161). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Enright, R. D., & the Human Development Study Group (1991). The moral development of forgiveness. In W. Kurtines & J. Gerwitz (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 123–152). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Enright, R. D., & North, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Exploring forgiveness*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Epstein, N. B., Bishop, D. S., & Levin, S. (1978). The McMaster model of family functioning. *Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling, 4*, 19–31.
- Fennel, D. L. (1993). Characteristics of first-time marriages. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 15*, 446–460.
- Fincham, F. D. (2000). The kiss of the porcupines: From attributing responsibility to forgiving. *Personal Relationships, 7*, 1–23.
- Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2004). Forgiveness and conflict resolution in marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18*, 72–81.
- Fincham, F. D., Paleari, G., & Regalia, C. (2002). Forgiveness in marriage: The role of relationship quality, attributions, and empathy. *Personal Relationships, 9*, 27–37.
- Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996). Forgiveness as an intervention with incest survivors. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*, 938–992.
- Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1998). Understanding betrayals in marriage: A synthesized model of forgiveness. *Family Process, 37*, 425–449.
- Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (1999). A multitheoretical intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 6*, 382–399.
- Gordon, K. C., & Baucom, D. H. (2003). Forgiveness and marriage: Preliminary support for a measure based on a model of recovery from marital betrayal. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 31*, 179–199.
- Haley, J. (1963). *Strategies of psychotherapy*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Hargrave, T. D. (1994). *Families and forgiveness: Healing wounds in the intergenerational family*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Hargrave, T. D., Jennings, G., & Anderson, W. T. (1991). The development of a relational ethics scale. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 17*, 311–320.
- Hargrave, T. D., & Sells, J. N. (1997). The development of a forgiveness scale. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 23*, 41–62.
- Jacobson, N. S., & Margolin, G. (1979). *Marital therapy: Strategies based on social learning and behavior exchange principles*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Keitner, G. I., & Miller, I. W. (1990). Family functioning and major depression: An overview. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 147*, 1128–1137.
- Kiefer, R. P., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Myers, B. J., Kliwer, W. L., Kilgour, J. M., Jr., et al. (2004). *Training parents in forgiving and reconciling*. Unpublished manuscript currently under editorial review, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond.
- Lankton, S. R., Lankton, C. H., & Matthews, W. J. (1991). Ericksonian family therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (Vol. II; pp. 239–283). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Martin, T., & Bumpass, L. (1989). Recent trends in marital disruption. *Demography, 26*, 37–52.

- McCullough, M. E., Hoyt, W. T., & Rachal, K. C. (2000). What we know (and need to know) about assessing forgiveness constructs. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen, (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 65–90). New York: Guilford Press.
- McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. E. (Eds.). (2000). *Forgiveness: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- McCullough, M. E., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1995). Promoting forgiveness: A comparison of two brief psychoeducational group interventions with a waiting list control. *Counseling and Values, 40*, 55–68.
- Miller, I. W., Battle, C. L., Rossi, R., & Sasaki, R. G. (2003, October). *Forgiveness in families*. Paper presented at Scientific Findings About Forgiveness. Atlanta, GA.
- Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Olson, D. H., & Gorall, D. M. (2003). Circumplex model of marital and family systems. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (3rd ed., pp. 514–548). New York: Guilford Press.
- Olson, D. H., Russell, C. S., & Sprenkle, D. H. (1989). *Circumplex model: Systematic assessment and treatment of families*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Veroff, J., Kulka, R. A., & Douvan, E. (1981). *Mental health in America: Patterns of help-seeking from 1957–1976*. New York: Basic Books.
- Walrond-Skinner, S. (1998). The function and role of forgiveness in working with couples and families: Clearing the ground. *Journal of Family Therapy, 20*, 3–19.
- Walsh, F. (2003). Family resilience: Strengths forged through adversity. In F. Walsh (Ed.). *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (3rd ed.; pp. 399–423). New York: Guilford Press.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1998a). The pyramid model of forgiveness: Some interdisciplinary speculations about unforgiveness and the promotion of forgiveness. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 107–137). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1998b). An empathy-humility-commitment model of forgiveness applied within family dyads. *Journal of Family Therapy, 20*, 59–76.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Drinkard, D. T. (2000). Promoting reconciliation through psychoeducational and therapeutic interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 26*, 93–101.
- 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.

