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Putting the Pieces Together: A Proposed Model of Unforgiveness

By

Rachel W. Jones Ross

A THESIS

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Abstract

Previous research and theorizing on unforgiveness has largely focused on the emotional – ruminative aspect of the phenomenon and adverse consequences to health and relationships that are associated with it. In contrast to this, my analysis of fourteen semi-structured interviews with victims of interpersonal offenses indicates that unforgiveness is a much more multi-faceted and nuanced experience. Based on participants' responses, I identified a possible model of unforgiveness that includes the emotional – ruminative and cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness, as well as a number of components – inner conflict, barriers to forgiveness, and strategies for resolving inner conflict – that affect where a victim of an interpersonal transgression may be charted along the two dimensions. Implications for conceptualizing unforgiveness and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: unforgiveness, forgiveness, interpersonal transgressions

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Dedication

For my children, Brooke, Lochlan, and Rylan, without whose love and support I would never have been able to finish my thesis. Thank you for understanding when I said I needed more time to write, when dinner was late, and when mommy got a little crazy. For my sister, Aviva, who is ever in my corner. Thank you for being my 'closer' all of these years.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In my undergraduate years, I worked as a crisis and suicide line volunteer at the Calgary Distress Centre. During that time, I found that callers on the distress and suicide lines often reported that their family and friends expected them to “forgive and forget” the violent and violating transgressions they experienced at the hands of their transgressors. Moreover, many of the support systems in the community available to these callers focused on forgiveness as a means of moving beyond transgressions (e.g., the 12-step program offered by Alcoholics Anonymous). However, forgiveness for many of these individuals was inconceivable, given the nature of their experiences. As a result, many callers who felt they were simply unable to forgive reported that they had nowhere to turn for support. The lack of support, in turn, made these callers feel further victimized. Sadly, for some callers, this resulted in self-harm and attempts at suicide.

Unforgiven transgressions, such as those experienced by Distress Centre callers, can result in both psychological and physical pain (Worthington, Mazzeo, & Kliewer, 2002; Harris & Thoresen, 2005). Indeed, unforgiveness is associated with chronic anger, anxiety, and even some personality disorders (Worthington, Mazzeo, & Kliewer, 2002). The potential for such adverse outcomes highlights the importance of conducting research on withholding forgiveness. Yet, aside from a handful of studies (see Green, Burnette & Davis, 2008; Rapske, Boon, Alibhai, & Keong, 2010; Ross, Boon, & Matthews, 2013, for examples), very little attention has been devoted to unforgiveness research. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine how people experience unforgiveness.

Worthington (2001; 2006) defines unforgiveness as a constellation of negative feelings coupled with rumination that one experiences following a transgression. Importantly, Worthington contends that unforgiveness is a very stressful state. He contends that unforgiveness strains relationships, creates similar physiological responses to stress, and challenges people's spiritual well-being (Worthington, 2006).

However, recent research by Ross, Boon, and Matthews (2013) suggests that unforgiveness is a complex phenomenon with at least three underlying dimensions – emotion-rumination, cognitions, and perceptions of the offender. The first two of these dimensions combine together in different ways and produce different experiences of unforgiveness.

The emotional-rumination dimension is consistent with previous conceptualizations of unforgiveness. This dimension is characterized by strong negative emotions coupled with rumination on the event. Victims experience a wide range of negative emotions and ruminate on what they may have done to deserve the treatment they received, the offender's motives, and the future implications of the offense.

The cognitive dimension, in contrast, can be completely divorced from negative affect and rumination. This dimension concerns beliefs regarding the nature and characteristics of offenses and transgressors. Such unforgiving cognitions include beliefs that some transgressions are unforgiveable, that benefits do not accompany all acts of forgiveness, and an unwillingness to forgive. Ross, Boon, and Matthews (2013) found that when victims of interpersonal transgressions experience unforgiving cognitions in the absence of negative emotion and rumination, they do not experience unforgiveness as stressful. In fact, many victims report that they are at peace with the offence despite having not forgiven. In contrast, when victims

experience a high degree of negative emotion and rumination, unforgiveness can be a highly stressful experience with pervasive effects on victims' relationships, health (e.g., their ability to sleep) and perceived wellbeing.

The third dimension – perceptions of the offender – contributes more so to whether the victim is likely to forgive than to how he or she experiences unforgiveness. This dimension represents a change in perception of the offender whereby the victim comes to see the offense as diagnostic evidence of significant and enduring character flaws in the offender. In other words, victims are no longer able to reconcile the offender as they knew him before the offence with the offender as they perceive him post – offence. Importantly, these perceptions contrast sharply with the kinds of thought that is characteristic of accounts of forgiveness. When victims forgive, they frame their offender's actions as mistakes rather than as moral defects in their offender's character.

The current literature presumes that experiences of unforgiveness are necessarily fraught with negative feelings, rumination, and stress, while overlooking those experiences of unforgiveness in which negative affect and rumination are no longer a factor. Perhaps because of this narrow conceptualization of unforgiveness, forgiveness is often privileged in the literature as the ideal means of moving beyond a transgression (Anderson, 2007; Macaskill, 2004). However, for individuals, such as those on the distress and suicide lines, who experience a lot of negative emotion and rumination and feel *unable* to forgive, forgiveness based interventions may be more harmful than beneficial as feeling pressured to forgive when they feel unable to do so may cause them to feel helpless, out of control, or even further victimized. In sum, before definitive statements can be made about the consequences of unforgiveness, or the benefits of forgiveness

over unforgiveness, I believe it is important to have a full and accurate understanding of the ways in which unforgiveness can be experienced. Accordingly, this research aims to further examine the nuances of how unforgiveness is experienced, psychologically.

Goal of the Present Research

The goal of the proposed research program is to better understand what it means psychologically when people say they are “unwilling” or “unable” to forgive. The scholarly literature often refers to an individual’s unwillingness or inability to forgive (see Rapske, Boon, Alibhai, & Keong, 2010). However, the distinction between these states has yet to be examined.

Ross Boon, and Matthew’s (2013) study found that when people described experiences of being unwilling to forgive, they did not experience negative emotions and rumination. In contrast, when people described experiences that they were unable to forgive, they described a wide range of negative emotions and ruminative thoughts. It is important to note, however, that rather than exploring participants’ understanding of the terms unable and unwilling to forgive, Ross, Boon and Matthews (2013) defined the terms at the outset of the interview and then asked participants which of those terms best described their experience of unforgiveness. This aspect of their method precludes alternative explanations or distinctions that individuals may make between being unable or unwilling to forgive. Given this limitation, in the present study I cast a broader net on people’s experiences of unforgiveness by asking participants to define these terms and then describe experiences of being unable and unwilling to forgive that illustrate their definitions. This enabled a fuller understanding of these constructs that was informed by the data (i.e., participant responses), rather than by preconceived theory.

What do We Know About the Experience of Withholding Forgiveness?

Scholarly research on withholding forgiveness is very limited. Indeed, to my knowledge there are only three studies that have focused specifically on the experience of not forgiving (Rapske et al., 2010; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002; Ross & Boon, 2013). Although these studies all used qualitative methodologies, the type of qualitative analysis limited the focus of two of the studies (Rapske et al., 2010; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002) to only certain aspects of unforgiveness. As unforgiveness research is such a new area of study, there is still much to learn, and I contend that grounded theory methodology allows for an exploration of this phenomenon that other qualitative methods do not. The following section details what little we know about the experience of not forgiving, and the methodologies that have been employed in this area thus far.

Using content analysis, Rapske et al., (2010) analyzed and coded the responses of 185 participants to a number of brief open-ended questions as part of an online survey about the nature of unforgiven events, the costs and benefits of withholding forgiveness, and the barriers to forgiveness using content analysis. The authors found that the nature of unforgiven offenses varied greatly as no one type of offense constituted a "typical" offense. Betrayals were the most frequently occurring unforgiven offense, but only accounted for about 30% of the offenses in the sample. They also found that, for many or most of the individuals in their sample, forgiveness is viewed as contingent on the satisfaction of certain conditions (such as an apology or expression of remorse from the offender) and that people feel justified in not forgiving when those conditions are not met. Finally, Rapske et al. (2010) found that people recognize both costs (e.g., that holding a grudge is physically and or psychologically unhealthy) and benefits of withholding forgiveness (e.g., avoiding further contact with their offenders and preventing further

victimization). One of the methodological limitations of their study, however, is the inability to follow up on interesting or novel themes in the analysis. Therefore, the circumstances or conditions under which people view forgiveness as contingent upon the offenders actions or weigh the costs and benefits of withholding forgiveness are difficult to determine.

Zechmeister and Romero (2002) examined 122 autobiographical narratives of victim and offender accounts of interpersonal conflict. Participants were asked to write two narratives in which they were the victim or the offender of an offense, and the offense was either forgiven or not forgiven. The authors found that forgiveness narratives were associated with more positive outcomes and positive affect unforgiveness narratives, independent of whether the narrator was the victim or the offender. In contrast, narrators of unforgiven offenses were more likely than narrators of forgiven offenses to describe negative consequences in the present circumstances and negative affect. In contrast to Rapske et al. (2010), Zechmeister and Romero (2002) found that only about 20% of forgiveness narratives mentioned conditional statements in which forgiveness was contingent on the behavior of the offender. Similarly to Rapske et al. (2010), Zechmeister and Romero (2002) were unable to follow up on novel or interesting themes that arose from the narratives which limited the scope of their findings.

There are also some theoretical articles that discuss unforgiveness. Worthington, (2001; 2006) uses the term "unforgiveness" to describe *one* of the ways in which people can respond to an offense when they do not forgive. He defines unforgiveness as an emotional complex of negative feelings, consisting of resentment, bitterness, hatred, hostility, residual anger, and fear (Worthington, 2001). According to Worthington (2001; 2006) these feelings, alone, do not necessarily result in unforgiveness; it is only when the victim ruminates about the transgression,

the offender's motives, the consequences of the offense and how the offender might respond in the future that produces the potential for unforgiveness.

According to Worthington, people are motivated to reduce the negative feelings associated with unforgiveness and he posits that there are many ways they can do so. One way is to forgive. However, Worthington claims that a person can reduce negative feelings without forgiving, by taking revenge, seeking justice, believing in karma, denial, projection, forgetting, telling a different story about the event, seeking counseling, cognitive reframing, seeking social support, or letting go. These strategies can be broadly categorized as problem focused or emotion focused coping strategies, but all of them are aimed at reducing negative feelings and rumination. Worthington does not explain, however, what unforgiveness looks like or how it is experienced when the negative emotions and rumination are reduced. He seems to imply that negative emotions and rumination can be reduced but will always remain or linger to some degree unless the victim forgives the offender because unforgiveness is, by his definition, negative affect and rumination. Therefore, if a person no longer experienced negative affect and rumination, they would not be unforgiving.

Worthington further argues that unforgiveness is a stressful experience. Some support for his theory has been provided by a study by Van Oyen Witvliet, Ludwig and Vander Lann (2001). The authors examined physiological responses to forgiveness and unforgiveness in a sample of participants who were thinking about an actual offense but imagining different responses to it. Van Oyen et al. instructed participants to rehearse feelings of hurt and imagine that they are harboring a grudge. This "unforgiving response," as Van Oyen et al. defined it, presumes that unforgiveness involves negative emotions and grudge holding. This within subjects design also

had participants (in counterbalanced orders) imagine empathizing with the offender and forgiving the offender. They found that participants experienced higher heart rate, higher corrugator (brow) electromyogram (EMG), skin conductance, and blood pressure changes from baseline when they imagined an unforgiving response than when they imagined a forgiving response (Van Oyen Witvliet, Ludwig and Vander Lann, 2001). Such methodology precludes the examination of any other types of unforgiving responses, such as those involving little or no negative affect, and therefore limits the generalizability of Van Oyen et al.'s findings to experiences of emotional unforgiveness.

Ross, Boon, and Matthew's (2013) research, in contrast, suggests there is a great deal of variability in how people experience unforgiveness. These findings were based on interviews of 13 victims of interpersonal offences in which participants described their thoughts, feelings and reactions to two transgressions. The interviews were then analyzed using grounded theory. Notably, the variability in how unforgiveness was experienced was reported both *between* participants and *within* participants. Indeed, five out of the 13 participants in their study described experiences that were largely cognitive in nature as well as ones that were largely emotional – ruminative. This implies that different experiences of unforgiveness are not due to individual differences. Rather they are dependent on the situation. For the purpose of the present study, this is an important point because it indicates that there are contextual factors that influence how people experience unforgiveness, and that to more fully understand unforgiveness we must understand how those factors contribute to it. To date, Ross, Boon, and Matthew's (2013) study is the only research that investigates what it means, experientially, when people maintain that they have not forgiven.

This study will build upon Ross and Boon's (2013) research using a grounded theory approach to data analysis. Qualitative methodology offers a distinct contribution to the study of unforgiveness by allowing for the richness and complexity of data that results from people's descriptions of their experiences. Previous research has used other qualitative approaches to study unforgiveness (e.g., content analysis), but these types of approaches do not allow the researcher to follow up on new or novel themes in the analysis. Rather, content analysis restricts the researcher to describing a set of data based on numbers of responses. Therefore, what can be learned about unforgiveness using content analysis is constrained to only the questions that are outlined at the outset of the study. Grounded theory analysis, in contrast, is a unique qualitative approach because it is not limited to describing data. Rather, it allows for theory to emerge from the data, which can then prompt further investigation using a variety of research techniques. Grounded theory analysis is ideally suited for investigations when little is known about the subject, as well as when the goal of the research is to generate theory rather than to test or further explicate a known theory. As research on unforgiveness is still in its infancy, grounded theory analysis offers a flexible approach for establishing a theory of unforgiveness that is grounded in people's lived experience.

Using a grounded theory approach to analyzing the interview data, this study contributes to the scholarly understanding of how unforgiveness is experienced in a more full and nuanced manner than previous research has, and provides future researchers a foundation for future research. This research may also be of benefit to health care practitioners in the development of intervention programs for individuals who struggle with the lingering effects of unforgiven transgressions.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Fifteen people who had not forgiven an interpersonal transgression participated in interviews about their experiences. Two interviews were excluded from the following analysis because one participant had forgiven the offender, and a second participant discussed self-forgiveness, which falls beyond the scope of the present study. The interviewer conducted each interview in person. Participants were recruited from the local community and ranged in age from 18 to 50 years (*M* = 31.92, *SD* = 9.07). Twelve participants were Caucasian, one participant was Hispanic, and the remaining two were Asian Canadian. In exchange for their time, participants were entered into a draw for an iPod Touch.

I recruited participants through posters placed on the University of Calgary campus and in the community (e.g., doctors' offices, counseling agencies, coffee shops) advertising a study on people's experiences with not forgiving. The poster directed interested parties to contact the author for more information on the study. After determining that the prospective participant could recall an offense that he or she had not forgiven, I described the interview process to participants in some detail. I then scheduled interviews with those interested in participating.

I conducted the interviews at a place of the participant's choosing; twelve were conducted at coffee shops, and four were conducted at the University campus. All interviews were recorded on audiotape, and later transcribed using MacSpeech software.

The data (i.e., excerpts from the interviews) that are presented in the analysis are not always continuous streams of thought. That is, they may have been taken from different parts of

the interview. To indicate where the excerpts are taken from in the interview, I indicate page and line numbers in parentheses following each excerpt. The number before the decimal place indicates the page number and the number following the decimal place represents the line number. For example, page 5, line 63 would be indicated as "5.63."

Interview Schedule

I constructed the interview schedule in accordance with the dictates of a grounded theory approach to data analysis (Charmaz, 2008) (see appendix D). The interview topics were initially guided by the current literature (e.g., the extent to which participants experience negative emotions and rumination when they do not forgive, as discussed by Worthington & Wade, 1999; Worthington, 2001, 2006; see also, Berry & Worthington, 2001; Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott III, & Wade, 2004; Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Wade & Worthington, 2003) and revised during the interviewing phase in response to themes that emerged in participants accounts of their experiences (see Glaser, 1998). I also collected basic demographic information concerning participants' gender, age, religious affiliation, and ethnicity.

In semi-structured interviews, I asked participants to discuss experiences of *both* a situation in which they were unable to forgive and a situation in which they were unwilling to forgive. Asking participants to talk about more than one experience of unforgiveness enabled comparisons to be made across different contexts, which aided in the development of these constructs. Using grounded theory analysis, data from the interviews were transcribed and coded for themes related to perceived control, how participants experience unforgiveness, and their perceived stress. A within-subject comparison across different experiences of unforgiveness was

chosen because it would provide richer data than using a between-subjects only design that focused on a single experience of unforgiveness.

Grounded Theory Approach to Data Analysis

Grounded theory is a set of systematic guidelines for gathering, synthesizing, and analyzing data to construct theory (Glazer & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; 1998; Charmaz, 2008). There are numerous variants of grounded theory (see Glazer & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2008), but all of them share a set of methodological strategies (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). Specifically, grounded theory analysis examines the initial data to guide the direction of subsequent data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; 1998; Charmaz, 2008). In this way, the analysis facilitates the generation of new questions based on participants' experiences. Therefore, analysis for the present study began immediately after the first interview was conducted. This allowed the researcher to follow up during subsequent interviews on interesting or unexpected themes that arose in earlier interviews. In short, the participants' experiences guided both the data analysis and the data collection.

Generating Data

Initial research questions in grounded theory are guided by the researcher's interests as well as by a set of general concepts (Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2008). The concepts provide open-ended ideas to pursue and questions to ask about the topic at hand. However, these initial questions do not limit the type of data that is collected. Rather, they serve as a point of departure for gathering data that is pertinent to the topic (Glaser, 1998).

Grounded theory analysis is not limited to specific types of data. Rather, it can incorporate many types of data, including qualitative data (e.g., interviews, case histories,

autobiographies; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2008), quantitative data (such as surveys), and even experimental data (Glaser, 1998). This flexibility is especially important when the research is exploratory, as it encourages theory generation that is data driven. For the purpose of the present study, I chose to use in-person semi-structured interviews to generate data.

The interview questions were initially related to three broad areas – experiences of unforgiveness, perceived control and self-reports of stress – as previous research has associated stress (Worthington, 2006) and lack of control (VanOyen Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001) with experiences of unforgiveness. However, during the interview process it became clear to me that these were not the themes of importance to the participants in my study. As a result, I started to ask questions related to themes that arose during the interview process. For example, many participants expressed feeling that the offender challenged some aspect of their selfhood. In response to this theme in early interviews, I started asking participants how the offender's actions made the participants feel about themselves. Therefore, although I started out with questions related to perceived control and stress, the analysis of the data presented here is limited to experiences of unforgiveness as described by the participants in my study.

Analyzing Data Using Grounded Theory

Coding the data. Data analysis begins with coding or describing what is going on in the data. Each line of data is first labeled or described. This line-by-line coding ensures that the researcher is not imposing his or her point of view on the data (Glaser, 1998). Moreover, it allows the researcher to separate data into categories and illuminates processes (Charmaz, 2008). These line-by-line codes are then re-categorized and condensed (a process often referred to as

"raising" to a higher code) to create higher-level categories called "focused codes" (Charmaz, 2008).

Focused coding entails using the most frequently occurring or the most significant line-by-line codes to sort through large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2008). As a result, focused codes are more conceptual and more condensed than the initial line-by-line codes. This type of coding requires the researcher to make decisions concerning which initial codes to include or exclude, based on which data makes the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2008). However, these focused codes are firmly grounded in the data through the initial line-by-line codes.

Finally, focused codes are raised to conceptual categories. These conceptual categories express ideas, events or processes in the data in a narrative form (Charmaz, 2008). Conceptual categories should describe the properties of the data, detail the condition under which the category arises, is maintained and changes, denote the consequences of the category, and indicate how the category relates to other categories.

Constant Comparative Method. A fundamental aspect of grounded theory analysis is using constant comparative coding. Codes (i.e., line-by-line codes, focused codes, and conceptual categories) are compared within the same interviews, as well as between different interviews (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). Therefore, constant comparative coding is involved at every stage of data analysis.

Use of Questioning. Grounded theory is not simply a descriptive method of data analysis. Rather, it is an inductive process aimed at the development of theory through the coding of data. To aid in the development of theory, the researcher asks questions of the data. Indeed, the two questions that separate grounded theory coding from other qualitative methods are: "What category or property of a category does this incident indicate?" (Glaser, 1992, pg. 39)

and “What is this data a study of?” (Glaser, 1978, as cited by Charmaz, 2008). This use of questioning helps the researcher to stay grounded in the data.

Memo-writing. Memo-writing serves as the analytic basis for the development of categories and theory. Memo-writing allows the researcher to break categories down into their components. This process prompts the researcher to elaborate processes, assumptions and actions that are captured by the codes and categories (Charmaz, 2008).

Theoretical Sampling. Memo-writing also leads to theoretical sampling (i.e., collecting additional data to clarify a theoretical category). The goal of theoretical sampling is not to sample for the purpose of representing a population. Rather, the goal is to sample for the purpose elaborating and refining categories to refine the preliminary theory (Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2008). Thus, memo-writing works to illuminate gaps in a category. The researcher can then obtain more cases or go back to earlier participants and ask them about topics that may not have been covered previously (Glaser, 1998; Charmaz, 2008).

Theoretical Saturation. For the purpose of this study, I stopped collecting data when the interviews no longer resulted in new conceptual categories. This is referred to as theoretical saturation, as the goal in qualitative research is not to sample for the purpose of generalizing research findings to a population, but rather to sample for the purpose of developing themes or categories (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

The goal of my research program was to examine what it means psychologically when people maintain that they are unable or unwilling to forgive. In the following analysis, I address this question using a grounded theory approach to data analysis.

Analysis Overview

To understand what it means, psychologically, when people report being unable or unwilling to forgive, I asked participants to describe experiences of being either unable or unwilling to forgive and then analyzed their accounts for recurring themes.

Consistent with my previous research on unforgiveness (Ross, Boon, and Matthews, 2013), I found that being unable to forgive is closely tied to the emotional – ruminative dimension of unforgiveness. In contrast, an unwillingness to forgive is more closely associated with the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness. I also identified a possible model of the unforgiveness experience. The following analysis touches briefly on participants' definitions of being unable and unwilling to forgive, and then explores the proposed unforgiveness model in-depth.

Participants' Definitions of Being Unable and Unwilling to Forgive

Participants' definitions of being unable and unwilling to forgive are so closely related to the dimensions of unforgiveness I identified in my previous studies, I posit that 'unable to forgive' and 'unwilling to forgive' are layperson terms for the dimensions of unforgiveness that I labeled emotional-ruminative unforgiveness and cognitive unforgiveness, respectively. This is evident in participants' definitions of being unable and unwilling to forgive as well as reflected in their descriptions of the offenses that they are unable or unwilling to forgive.

The following excerpts of participants' definitions of being unwilling and unable to forgive illustrate that being 'unable to forgive' is closely tied to the negative feelings aspect of emotional – ruminative unforgiveness. Participants did not talk about the ruminative aspect of emotional – ruminative unforgiveness but they did talk about being unable to 'move on' or being stuck in an emotional state, which is akin to rumination in that rumination perpetuates negative feelings. In contrast, participants associated 'unwilling to forgive' with a lack of desire to forgive, stubbornness, or a lack of interest in forgiving – which reflects a more cognitive conceptualization of being unwilling to forgive.

> David: um I think maybe unwilling is something where you can understand a person's perspective but simply not agree with it and choose to not… (1.17 – 1.19).

> David: So like I can understand the person, I can see where they are coming from. I simply don't agree with it and I don't want to like continue to have a relationship with that person and so that's like when you are unwilling and then unable would be like a scenario where it still creates a fear that if something happened then your emotionally unable to move beyond it (1.22 1-27).

> Bridgette: When you are unwilling it is just stubbornness, like its just being, I won't forgive you and it is just being stubborn. Being unable to me is really serious and I believe in that sometimes you are unable to for some reason work through it (1.18 – 1.20).

> Andy: Well 'unwilling' would be there's something… well it's kind of like holding a

grudge. It happened, well the event happened, and it was just like, no I don't want to… I just want to write you off for the rest of my life. Where 'unable' would be something that it's like they've done something so horrible to you that it, it's… I guess a good situation would be a rape. Like, it's just like something that scars you forever (1.21-1.27).

It is evident from participants' definitions of being 'unwilling' and 'unable' to forgive that laypersons tend to associate being unable to forgive with negative emotions such as hurt and betrayal. In contrast, participants' definitions of being unwilling to forgive reflect more of an unforgiving position or unforgiving stance that is not necessarily tied to negative emotions. However, being unable or unwilling to forgive are not dichotomous categories. Rather, they reflect two dimensions (emotional – ruminative and cognitive) of the same construct (unforgiveness) and though it may be possible not to experience one or the other dimension, it is more likely to experience some or a lot of both dimensions.

The Proposed Unforgiveness Model

When I examined participants' accounts of being unable and unwilling to forgive, I identified a model of a process that victims seem to move through, in the wake of a transgression, which affects where they might be charted along the emotional-ruminative and cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness. There are several components to the process I identified, including an inner conflict or struggle, barriers to forgiveness, and strategies for resolving conflict. See Figure 1. For a summary of participants' unforgiven transgressions see Table 1.

A Brief Overview of the Model

Based on my analysis, I postulate that in the wake of an unforgiven interpersonal transgression, the victim experiences an internal conflict or struggle (this is represented by

pathway 1 in the model). Briefly stated, inner conflict can be defined as conflicted thoughts and feelings about the offender or the offense; a victim may experience more than one type of conflict with regard to a single offense. Inner conflict, in turn can give rise to the emotional-ruminative dimension of unforgiveness (indicated by pathway 2a), or it might give rise to a change in the victim's perception of the offender and/or the offense and contribute to the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness (represented by pathway 2b in the model). There are a number of barriers to forgiveness that can be associated with one or both dimensions of unforgiveness (indicated in the model by pathways 3a and 3b). To resolve these barriers to forgiveness and/or to resolve a particular inner conflict(s) the victim may engage in a number of conflict resolution strategies (represented by pathway 4 in the figure). Conflict resolution strategies can be defined as any attempt to reconcile conflicting thoughts and feelings about the offender or the offense (e.g., cognitive reframing, or seeking justice). Depending on the particular barriers to forgiveness, as well as the type and relative success of the strategy employed, the victim may forgive the offender (pathway 7), or remain cognitively unforgiving (pathway 6). Reducing emotional-ruminative unforgiveness may require several strategies, and it is also possible that the strategies will be ineffective. As a result, a victim may remain at a particular point along this dimension despite efforts to move on (pathway 5).

In the following analysis, I describe each of the components of the process I have identified in detail and provide supporting excerpts for this process from the interview transcripts. Because the dimensions of unforgiveness have been described thoroughly elsewhere, the following analysis focuses on the proposed unforgiveness model, which includes a brief discussion of the emotional-ruminative (unable to forgive) and cognitive (unwilling to forgive) dimensions of unforgiveness.

I have included forgiveness in the model because participants often described wanting to forgive. However, I do not examine forgiveness in this paper, as it is beyond the scope of this study. There is a vast body of literature on forgiveness, and many other ways for a person to reach forgiveness following a transgression (e.g., through emotional replacement of negative emotions with positive, other related emotions, or making a decision to forgive and changing one's behavior accordingly (Worthington, 2006) (see Fehr and Garland, 2010 for a review); I have only included forgiveness in this paper to the extent that it is connected with unforgiveness.

Conflict and Emotional Unforgiveness (Unable to Forgive)

When discussing events that they were unable to forgive, participants described contradictory thoughts and feelings about the offender and the offense, which sometimes gave rise to rumination and negative emotions (represented by pathway 2a in the model). Often these conflicting thoughts and feelings centred on a discrepancy between their own perceptions of themselves and how the offender's actions made the victims them feel about themselves. Participants also described conflicting thoughts about the nature of the offender's character before and after the offense, and how the offender's actions challenged that perception, as well as conflicts between their own perceptions of the offender and others' perceptions of the offender. Their inability to reconcile the various conflicting thoughts and feelings often promoted rumination about such things as why the offender did what he or she did, what the victim may have done to provoke the transgression, and what the consequences of the offense might be in the future. In the following section I will outline the association between being unable to forgive and inner conflict, as well as how that conflict plays into the emotional – ruminative dimension of unforgiveness.

Conflicting thoughts about the offender. In the following passages, George demonstrates some of the contradictory thoughts that victims can have about their offenders. George was not able to forgive his family for pressuring him to travel overseas where he became extremely ill for an extended period of time. Despite being unable to forgive his family for inadvertently causing him to be ill by pressuring him into traveling, George knew that it was not logical to hold his family accountable for his illness. These contradictory thoughts give rise to conflicting feelings of both love for his family and resentment toward them, and his resentment prevented him from forgiving.

> Rachel: Can you describe a time when you have either been unable or unwilling to forgive somebody (1.39)?
>
> George: Last year, my family wanted me to go to a family gathering and I didn't really want to go but I was kind of under the pressure of my family. So, I went and shortly thereafter I got sick. I have never known why I got sick but I think it was a possibility that I got sick because I went there; it was to a foreign country. For a few months I was feeling down, I was feeling unhealthy and throughout that whole time there was always a part of me that blamed them. Even though I know that obviously they didn't want me to get sick, but I felt like if they didn't pressure me to go, then maybe in some alternate universe I would have stayed healthy (1.40 – 1.46).

> Rachel: Would you describe that as a time when you have been unable to forgive or a time when you were unwilling to forgive (2.48)?
>
> George: Unable, because I do actually want to forgive, because I try to judge people based on their intentions not just the consequences. Even though they wanted

what was best for me, and my family, to go to this family gathering, there was always this kind of resentment (2.49 – 2.52).

Rachel: Do you still hold your family responsible for your illness (5.227)?

George: Logically I don't because I know they weren't trying to get me sick and statistically the chances of getting really sick is very low so I don't hold them accountable. Actually, I have tried to hold myself accountable because ultimately even if I felt guilty about going, ultimately, I am still the one who chooses to go (5.228 – 5.230).

Rachel: What do you think is the most difficult aspect of that situation, either what happened or of not forgiving them, what do you think is most difficult (11.504)?

George: I guess for me the most difficult is how conflicted I sometimes feel, like there is a part of me that feels angry and there's a part that I know that I love them and I know that they love me. It's bizarre having two completely opposite feelings towards somebody. That would probably be the most difficult, I don't want to feel that conflicted and I want to move and have a better positive feeling with them (11.505 – 12.510).

Similarly to George, Carlene describes conflicting feelings about her ex-boyfriend after he got emotionally involved with another woman when they were still in a relationship. On the one hand, she had always thought of him as a good person, but his actions challenged her view of him.

Carlene: Um and just like I had had so much trust and faith in who he was cause he is

genuinely a good person. But I got that when we were dating but as soon as we broke up I was like 'where is this person?' This person is gone (14.607 – 14.609).

Rachel: so how would you describe your feelings toward J, today (15.654)?

Carlene: Um, so yeah I think my feelings right now, um, they're twofold. I think part of me would just like to be past – like everything fully gone. Cause when I do think about it and I feel like there's still a few things that are unresolved I feel like there's still a little bit of a tension in my chest. Um, but there's also a still a part of me that has to get over – there's a small pride part of me – that um has been holding on to not letting in go out of stubbornness and like being like no that was so unfair to me – I tried my best to be like mature and everything about it and you lied to me. You made me feel like I was – I had so much baggage when I was right. Um, and uh, but I also recognize that that's not really serving me so. I would say that my feelings are that I would kind of like to let it go but also have to work through letting myself work through moving on and letting it go (15.666 – 15.676).

Both George and Carlene exemplify how conflicting thoughts about the offender can lead to negative emotions and rumination about the offender or the offense. Both George and Carlene wanted to forgive their offenders but felt that their negative emotions prevented them from forgiving.

Conflicting thoughts about the self. In other cases, the offense made the victims look more closely at themselves and made them question their perceptions of self. Perceptions of self included such issues as self-identity and self-worth, as demonstrated in the following examples.

In the following passage, Bridgette describes her experience with work -place bullying. Before she was bullied, she viewed herself as a "professional." She was very proud of her work and of her reputation. After months of being sabotaged at work by a woman who was her junior, she felt that she became somebody else; she no longer saw herself as a professional, but rather a victim with a target on her back. Her conflicting thoughts about her image and ability as a professional caused her considerable emotional distress, and led her to ruminate about the long-term effects of the workplace transgressions on her reputation, as well as her ability to find work in the future

Rachel: Could you elaborate on [the unforgiven event] a little bit (1.22)?

Bridgette: My example is [I am] totally unable to forgive this person that completely turned my life upside down in a workplace (1.23 – 1.24).

Rachel: You weren't able to do anything about her (3.117)?

Bridgette: No, and it is very peculiar as I feel like I became somebody else, and that is why your poster caught my eye because two friends told me that I've got to do something about this or I will never find a job and to get over it. It is affecting the answers [I] give during an interview, it is affecting to this day the conversation [I] have with [my] friends. It was the most dysfunctional environment (3.112).

> I think I am a strong person and hard working and there wouldn't be anything that you can find a weakness in my work but somehow (5.221 – 5.222)… I almost became somewhat of a criminal (6.231).

> I viewed myself as being professional, really serving, and to be dragged down so low was an experience, to this day that still makes me cry (8.332 – 8.334).

In this situation, a coworker caused Bridgette to re-examine her self-identity as a professional. Despite the fact that over a year had passed since she left her job, her inner conflict about her ability and reputation as a professional gave rise to ruminative thoughts and negative emotions.

Other participants, such as Anna, questioned their self-worth as a result of their offenders' actions. That is, they questioned their value as human beings.

Anna's mentally ill mother emotionally abused her throughout her childhood. As a result, Anna began to question her self-worth, even though she knows her mother is mentally ill. Anna explains:

> Anna: It was more emotional abuse than anything like the phone calls where they would call me and she would tell me I was worthless and you know… or if I didn't do what she wanted me to do. Then she would tell me what I failure I was and that I was a waste of space (2.55 – 2.58).

> Rachel: How does it make you feel about yourself with... the way that your mother has

treated you (5.150 – 5.151)?

Anna: I have a lot of problems with... not feeling good enough... in everything that I do (5.152).

Rachel: Mhm... Do you need to take a minute? [Participant crying] I can turn [the recorder] off (5.153 – 5.154).

Anna knows that her mother is mentally ill and therefore she should not take her words to heart yet, her mother's words still continue to cause her a great deal of emotional pain; she broke down in tears when I asked her how she felt when her mother treated her that way.

Similarly, two participants described self-doubt about their abilities in their roles as husbands following their partner's infidelity, and one woman struggled with feelings of lack of self-worth for her entire adult life after her mother tried to kill her. As long as the conflict remained unresolved, participants battled lingering negative feelings and ruminated on the offense.

Conflict between one's own and others' perceptions of the offender. The third type of conflict that I identified in the interview transcripts is between the victim's perception of the offender and others' perceptions of the offender. Only one participant described this type of conflict. It arose when the victim came to see the transgression as diagnostic of fundamental flaws in the offender, but the victim's friends and support systems did not perceive the offender the same way.

In the following excerpt, Pete describes his experience of being involved with what he describes as a cult. When he first got involved with what he thought was a religious organization he saw the leader as a mentor and teacher. Over time, however, he realized that the person he

called his mentor was not who he thought he was. Pete had devoted his life to Buddhism and believed this man would help him to find spiritual awakening. Pete explained:

> Pete: And I had quite devoted myself to this Buddhist teacher for a good five, six years, and during that time I reorganized my life (11.485 – 11.488).
>
> And it just turned out to be more of a cult, and he was using Buddhism to justify his own, if you will, malignant self-love. He was basically the teacher, the guru, and he was up on his pedestal, and whatever he said went (11.503 – 12.506).

It is clear in the interview that Pete came to see his offender as selfish and narcissistic. However, he was alone in his position because many of his long-term friends continued to perceive the offender as an upright and respected member of the community. Although Pete did not articulate this as a conflict per se, the conflict is evident in that he describes it as a trauma that his friends of 15 years did not see the offender the same way he did, despite his best efforts to convince them that the offender was not who he presented himself to be. In other words, his inability to convince others that the offender is a fraud caused Pete a great deal of distress. He stated:

> Pete: It was just a trauma because friends of mine were involved with that, friends that I'd know for fifteen years, and they were supportive of this guy. And I was saying 'there's something wrong here' and nobody is listening, and I don't know what to do, I just know there's something wrong (11.511 – 11.515).

The conflict between his perceptions and others' perceptions of the offender gave rise to a tide of negative emotions, including depression, and ruminative thoughts. Pete stated that because his friends did not see the offender the same way that he did, he had to make a choice to leave the group on his own, and turn his back on everything he held dear. The depression and ruminative thoughts permeated into many areas of his life and affected his general well being in negative ways.

> Pete: And I had to basically get out of there and lose the spiritual connections, the friends, the supports, the relationships, the associations, as well as friends of mine. And this guy is still going on, you know (12.517 – 12. 519).
>
> And now this, it's like, like how… like I don't know, I'm just really, like I'm just seething mad at the guy, even though it's been a few years since I've got out of there (12.522 – 12.524).
>
> I used to enjoy going hiking. I don't enjoy it anymore. I used to enjoy looking at the stars. I don't enjoy it anymore. All the hobbies that I had I don't really enjoy (12.540 – 12.542).

Pete's internal conflict was a discrepancy between how he perceived the offender to be and how his friends and other members of the community perceived the offender to be. He was not only angry with the offender, but he also described feelings depression and lack of enjoyment in his hobbies as a result of losing his social supports.

In summary, I identified three broad types of inner conflict that are strongly associated with the emotional-ruminative dimension of unforgiveness (i.e., being unable to forgive). In some situations, the conflict might challenge the victim's perception of self, their perception of the offender, or it might be a conflict between how victims and third parties to the offence perceive the offender. With the exception of Steve, whom I discuss in the following section, all of the participants that I interviewed described going through some kind of conflict that led to negative emotions and rumination about the offense at some point following the transgression. At the time of the interview, some participants were still experiencing the negative emotion and rumination associated with the inner conflict, whereas other participants had found a way to let go of the emotional-ruminative aspect of unforgiveness, but remained cognitively unforgiving (represented by pathway 6 in the model).

Cognitive Unforgiveness (Unwillingness to Forgive)

Alternatively, conflict may also give rise to the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness (see pathway 2b in the model). However, when participants described being unwilling to forgive, the inner conflict produced a shift in how the victim viewed the offender or the offense (e.g., that the offender is a bad person who is not worth forgiving, or the offense is unforgiveable). As a result, the victim did not struggle with the inner conflict, but rather came to a kind of acceptance about the nature of the offender or the offense. It seems that participants came to this place of acceptance because the offender's actions were irreconcilable with who the victim believed the offender to be before the offense occurred, and the only way to achieve cognitive consonance was to change their perceptions. This acceptance, or lack of conflict, did not seem to be associated with negative affect-laden or ruminative thoughts.

Steve demonstrates an example of conflict leading to cognitive unforgiveness, when he

describes his experience of being stalked by a former girlfriend. At the time that she began stalking him, he had let go of his romantic feelings for her and moved on in a new relationship (3.18-3.19). After she started stalking him, he saw her as a bully. For Steve, there was no inner conflict. Rather, he saw the situation as very cut and dry, so to speak; she did not deserve forgiveness because her stalking behavior was ongoing, and she saw nothing wrong with it. Steve explained:

> Steve: Um… I'm unwilling to forgive an ex-girlfriend of mine, ah, who ended up being a stalker, and actually ended up getting a job at the same place I was working at, on purpose (2.54).
>
> Rachel: Mm hm.
>
> Steve: She'd be waiting for me to walk through the door into science theatres and waited for me to walk out, trying to talk to me. And I'm like, "I'm not interested, I've moved on". And ah, we did have a couple of conversations but I was very careful not to lead her on. But she seemed to see a glimmer of hope in these conversations; I should have just kept on ignoring her I guess. Essentially she just wasn't taking 'no' for an answer (3.125-3.130).
>
> Yah. And ah, I was unwilling to forgive her because she essentially just walked into my life, and she wasn't sorry for what she did (2.60-2.61).
>
> I actually refused to quit the job. I didn't want to be bullied out of my job by some stalker. You know, I had dropped courses already, I had, you know, delayed the progress on my academics to accommodate this woman, and I was like, 'No, forget this, I'm going

to do this – take care of this and, you know, stand my ground.' She ended up quitting before I did so, you know, I don't think I necessarily won anything out of the deal, but I'm just glad I finally stood my ground against her. In some ways I think of her as a bully still (2.89 – 3.98).

As much as I'm not particularly religious, there's actually a, there's actually a little line of the Bible that says, 'Forgiveness is only available for those who want it.' So if they're not… don't actually think they did anything wrong, obviously they don't want to be forgiven (2.65 – 2.68).

Rachel: Mm hm (2.69).

Steve: And if they're not reaching out to you, or anything like that, in a, you know, constructive manner – it's more like a deconstructive or invasive manner, like that – then obviously they don't really have any interest in truly being forgiven, or anything like that. And ah, yah, that was her case (2.70 – 2.73).

Despite his perception of her as a bully, and his feelings that she did not deserve to be forgiven, Steve did not experience much, if any, of the emotional – ruminative aspect of unforgiveness. He explained:

Steve: To be honest, I don't think about her all that much. I guess that I hope that she's doing better, that she's taking some kind of, some meds for her problem, her obsessive problem. That's really the case; I don't wish her any kind of ill will (5.199 – 5.201).

The kind of thoughts and feelings that Steve describes about his offender stand in sharp contrast to those that George, Carlene, Bridgette, and Pete described above. Steve does not think about his offender much, and does not feel any ill will toward her. His unforgiveness toward her is divorced from negative affect and rumination and his conflict seems to be resolved.

Steve was the only participant who described an unforgiven event that was not laden with negative emotion and rumination immediately following the offense (what I describe here as pathway 2b in the model). The other participants who discussed experiences of cognitive unforgiveness described strong negative feelings and rumination following the offense, and arrived at cognitive unforgiveness through a process of resolving inner conflict (i.e., pathway 6 in the model). I will describe this alternate path to cognitive unforgiveness after I describe the other components in the model.

Barriers to Forgiveness

The next component in the model of unforgiveness that I will outline is *Barriers to Forgiveness*. Participants identified a number of barriers to forgiveness that were often associated with both emotional-ruminative unforgiveness and cognitive unforgiveness. The most commonly reported barriers to forgiveness were not feeling heard or acknowledged by the offender, lack of offender remorse or apology, having a desire to forgive but feeling unable to do so because of lingering negative emotions, and the notion that, in some situations, forgiveness may be inappropriate or wrong. These barriers, in addition to any conflict the victim may have been experiencing, influenced whether the victim might forgive the offender, or use other strategies to move on in the aftermath of the offense.

Not feeling heard or acknowledged by the offender. A common barrier to forgiveness for many participants was that they did not feel heard or acknowledged by the offender.

Participants explained that the offenders needed to acknowledge that their acts had negative consequences in order for them to move on.

Pete, for example, has not forgiven his parents for how they treated him throughout his childhood. He felt that he was never heard in his relationship with his parents and his feelings of not being heard were a major obstacle to forgiving them. Pete explained:

> Rachel: So, do you want to describe a time when you've been unable or unwilling to forgive somebody (2.57 – 2.58)?
>
> Pete: Ah, probably the one that's most relevant, at the moment, is growing up through my childhood, mostly my mom, and my dad to some extent as well, and just the nature of the childhood that I had was good on the surface, and there was a lot of things underneath that weren't. And it seems that I was never able to be heard. So when things weren't going right, or something was happening at school, or I had some kind of an issue, it almost became my fault. I had to be responsible for somebody else, whether it's, you know, mom or dad's emotions, or what they went through in life. As a kid I don't know that, but I have to cater to emotions, if you will, and those emotions will come out in whatever way, verbally or physically, and that's what I grew up with. So the scars is what I grew up with, and then I'd like to… I feel sometimes these hold me back, and then I want to, I'd like to find a solution, closure to it, because as time has passed I've found it very difficult, if not impossible, due to the nature of these interactions with my parents (2.59 – 2.72).

No remorse or apology. A nearly ubiquitous barrier to forgiveness was that the offender did not express remorse. This left the victim feeling like he or she had not been heard, and also

allowed for the possibility that the offender would repeat his or her behavior. To rectify these problems, the victim required the offender to express remorse, understanding, and offer the victim an apology.

The relationship between expressions of remorse and feeling heard is clearly evident when Carlene talks about what would be necessary for her to forgive her ex-boyfriend for getting emotionally involved with another woman while they were still in a relationship. Carlene explained that it was not just a matter of needing to hear that the offender is sorry. Rather, she needed to feel heard and understood. Carlene indicated that if she felt heard and understood, she might be able to forgive him for his involvement with another woman while they were in a relationship (represented by pathway 7).

> Carlene: I need to understand what happened from him, on his end. Um to be totally honest I just have to hear a genuine "I'm sorry, I made a mistake." If I hear he's genuinely felt bad for what happened and If he could change it he would and he just made a mistake – like I believe people make mistakes in life – but it's if you OWN that mistake that it makes a big difference (14.625 – 14.629).

> Carlene: it's not only hearing from them that they would um, that they are genuinely sorry but it's also like feeling that I've been heard. I've been heard and that I'm able to express this is what hurt me and this isn't fair. That's really all it is (17.745 – 17.748).

Similarly, Carly had not forgiven a music professor for bad-mouthing her to the music

community in an effort to promote one of his own students to play with an orchestra. Carly explained that a major barrier to forgiveness was that the music professor had no idea the damage he had done to her career as a musician. In this case, expressions of remorse would not only allow the victim to feel that she has been heard, but would also serve to indicate that the offender was aware that what he did was hurtful and damaging.

> Rachel: Okay. What are some of the things that you see as barriers to forgiveness (2.77)?
>
> Carly: Just that he's not even sorry for it like he doesn't know anything that he did and he doesn't care. Like that's the main thing (2.78 – 2.79).

Participants also believed that lack of offender remorse would inevitably lead to the offender re-offending. Anna talks about her unforgiveness toward her abusive parents. She explained that they have never acknowledged that they hurt her, and that without recognizing what they have done they are likely to hurt other people in the future.

> Anna: My parents abused me and I haven't forgiven them to this day so… and I... I don't know if I ever will be able to forgive 'em for… It's more my mother for what went on at home just because there is no remorse there. I mean, we haven't spoken we're estranged... we haven't spoken in years but there... there was never any admission "I made a mistake." "I take responsibility for my actions and I'm sorry. It was my fault." So… it's not… Forgiveness needs to be earned. Forgiveness isn't a right or a privilege it's… you give it to someone because they feel bad for what they did not because they're gonna keep doing it to other people (2.31 – 2.38).

Desire to forgive but feeling unable/prevented. Consistent with Ross, Boon, and Matthews' (2013) research, another common barrier to forgiveness was that victims felt their emotions prevented them from forgiving**.** In the following excerpt, George describes how his resentment toward his family for pressuring him to travel makes him feel resentful, and how his resentment holds him back from forgiving.

> Rachel: Would you describe that as a time when you have been unable to forgive or a time when you were unwilling to forgive (2.48 – 2.49)?
>
> George: Unable, because I do actually want to forgive, because I try to judge people based on their intentions not just the consequences. Even though they wanted what was best for me and my family to go to this family gathering, there was always this kind of resentment (2.49 – 2.52).

Forgiveness as inappropriate or wrong. Also consistent with Ross, Boon, and Mathews (2013) findings, some participants viewed forgiveness as inappropriate or wrong for a given situation. That is not to say that they would not forgive in another given situation, but rather that forgiveness is not appropriate given the particular transgression. When participants in this study indicated that it would be wrong to forgive the offender, it was largely because they felt the offender would re-offend and that forgiveness is not something offenders are entitled to; it must be earned. This suggests that unforgiveness is not just a set of negative emotions. Rather, it can be used as a tool to communicate personal and social boundaries.

With respect to her abusive mother Anna articulated that forgiveness would not be an appropriate response because it would not address the problem. She stated:

> Rachel: Okay. So I think we've kinda touched on it briefly before.. you said.. umm that in certain situations you don't see people as deserving of forgiveness. In this case would you

say that about your mom (3.86 – 3.88)?

Anna: No, she doesn't deserve forgiveness (3.89).

Rachel: Are there any circumstances in which that might change for you? (3.90)

Anna: Nope…(3.91).

Anna: I have a very defined sense of right and wrong... and it's pretty black and white so... I don't think it's right to forgive her for what she did. I think that... trying to think when does forgiveness become something that you're doing just to make yourself feel better I mean like are you lying to yourself? I think that what happened has its place in the past and that's where I need to leave it and forgiveness...I think takes away meaning from that experience. I don't know a better way of putting that... you know (4.104 – 4.109)?

In the following passage, Anna explains why she thinks forgiveness is inappropriate in this situation. She feels strongly that forgiveness must be earned through acknowledgment of one's wrong doings, expressions of remorse, and some indication that the offender will not re-offend; her mother has not met any of her requirements for earning forgiveness.

Anna: There is no remorse there. I mean, we haven't spoken we're estranged... we haven't spoken in years but there... there was never any admission "I made a mistake." "I take responsibility for my actions and I'm sorry. It was my fault." So...it's not…Forgiveness needs to be earned. Forgiveness isn't a right or a privilege its… you give it to someone because they feel bad for what they did not because they're gonna keep doing it to other people (3.33 – 3.38).

In summary, I identified a number of barriers to forgiveness including, not feeling heard or acknowledged by the offender, lack of offender remorse or apology, feeling unable to forgive because of negative emotions, and forgiveness as inappropriate or wrong. These barriers to forgiveness are consistent with findings in previous literature (Rapske et al., 2010). Although participants in my study only discussed a handful of different types of barriers to forgiveness, there are conceivably other barriers to forgiveness that my participants did not discuss.

These barriers were common to both experiences of being unable to forgive and experiences of being unwilling to forgive. Many participants articulated that if the offender were to apologize and take responsibility for the wrongdoing, forgiveness would be a possibility. Other participants, however, indicated that even if the offender were to express remorse, they would remain unforgiving. From the model, then, you can see that barriers to forgiveness are connected to conflict resolution strategies. More specifically, particular barriers to forgiveness might require different strategies for reducing inner conflict, depending on the desired outcome (i.e., forgiveness or moving on emotionally without forgiving). I address conflict resolution strategies in the next section.

Strategies for Reducing Inner Conflict

The next part of the unforgiveness model that I will outline is *Conflict Resolution Strategies*. The victims of interpersonal transgressions that I interviewed engaged in many strategies for resolving their particular conflicts and, possibly, their particular barriers to forgiveness (represented by pathway 4 in the model).

For instance, in the previous section, Carlene articulated that one of her barriers to forgiveness was that her offender had not expressed remorse and that she needed to hear the

offender acknowledge his wrongdoing as well as acknowledge how it affected her. In this situation, the conversation she planned to have is a conflict resolution strategy that she felt would allow her to forgive her former boyfriend. Although this particular conflict resolution strategy is an interpersonal strategy (between victim and offender) it will help Carlene to resolve her inner conflict concerning her perceptions of the offender. That is, it will help her to reconcile her perception of the offender as a good person who made a mistake, rather than viewing his offense as diagnostic evidence of flaws in his character (i.e., her inner conflict).

Other examples of conflict resolution strategies that participants in this study described included seeking justice, going to a counselor, talking to friends, and self-forgiveness for the victim's own part in the conflict. This is most certainly not an exhaustive list of strategies that victims of interpersonal offenses might use, as it is conceivable that other strategies (e.g., cognitive reframing, denial, or forgetting) may also reduce inner conflict.

Some of these strategies, such as seeking justice, and talking to a counselor, may sound familiar to the reader, as Worthington (2001) describes these strategies as means of reducing unforgiveness. I do not disagree that these strategies *may* result in a reduction of negative affect and rumination. However, I propose that, for the participants in my study, the intent of engaging in these particular strategies is to resolve the inner conflict that gave rise to the negative feelings and rumination (i.e., reconcile their perceptions of the offender, or their perceptions of self), rather than for the explicit purpose of reducing negative affect and rumination, as Worthington posits. I argue this as a possibility because when the participants in my study ruminated, they did not focus on their negative feelings. Rather, they ruminated about their particular conflict or conflicts. The strategies they engaged in were aimed at resolving the conflict they were ruminating on. That is, these strategies were goal-oriented to achieve a desired outcome and none

of the participants in this study described reducing negative affect as the primary goal.

Seeking Justice. Seeking justice is one of the means that Worthington (2001; 2006) identified to reduce negative affect and rumination that was also discussed by one of my participants as a means of resolving his inner conflict. Pete's primary goal was to expose the offender. He believed that at some point he would have to forgive the offender to reduce his anger, but his primary goal in seeking justice is to expose the man so that others can see him in the same way that Pete does.

Pete wants to publicly expose his offender as a fraud. He wants others to see the offender as he sees him, and one way he hopes to accomplish this is through the use of the justice system; he plans to obtain a lawyer, and bring the matter to the RCMP.

> Rachel: OK. You talked a little bit about what your responsibility might be to expose him, or to make other people – your friends perhaps – realize (13.571 – 13.572).
>
> Pete: There's something wrong with this guy (13.573).
>
> Rachel: There's something wrong, yeah (13.574).
>
> Pete: Well at the moment I haven't done anything, but there are some people that I'm talking to, and I probably have a list of some items that I need to discuss probably with a lawyer. And I'm thinking that it's either going to go that way, or the CBC, go public, or fifth estate; one of those organizations just to say this is a cult, this is not Buddhism (13.583 – 13.587).
>
> And if you choose to get involved here, do so with your eyes wide open. Here's my story. And to me it's like, to me I just like to have parts of his behaviour brought

> forward to say like an RCMP or something like that. Have him hauled in, and to be able to sit right across from him at a table with, you know, somebody who's maybe a psychologist, police officer, somebody interested in that. And just tear him to pieces; just rip him apart. Like there's no… and where does forgiveness come into there? I know there's a place for it, but I'm just too, I'm too angry to even think of going there at this point. But I know in the end, when that's over, there has to be, for me I need to find some closure. If I just stay angry all the time that's not going to help (13.589 – 14.598).

Notice that forgiveness is not on Pete's agenda at this point. As a result, if seeking justice helps Pete resolve his inner conflict, the outcome will likely still be unforgiveness whether that is emotional – ruminative unforgiveness, or cognitive unforgiveness.

Self-Forgiveness. Another strategy that participants described to help resolve conflict was self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness is a means of reducing conflict that centres on one's own role and perceptions of self in the unforgiven situation. For instance, Shelly has not been able to forgive her sister for the way her sister had been treating her, but she also struggled with her own behavior toward her sister. Shelly believed that it is necessary to be able to forgive herself for her own part in the ongoing relationship transgressions with her sister in order to heal, emotionally.

In the following passages Shelly describes the cause of her unforgiveness toward her sister. She also talks about her own role in the transgression. Her conflict centres around her own behavior; she knows that how she is treating her sister is not only harmful to her relationship with her sister, but also not the right way to behave, yet Shelly feels that sometimes she "can't help herself" because she is responding emotionally instead of rationally. She stated that forgiving herself for her own part in the relationships wrongs with her sister is a necessary step

toward reconciling her relationship. Shelly explained:

Shelly: I feel like it stems from like… a whole… life together… you know (2.62)?

There's like lots of jealousy there for her… um… so she... she... she holds she like can't forgive me for growing up… together and me like being like a bully cause it was not like you know I was the older sister so I was like "ugh. I don't want you around!" My little sister was bugging me and she I think we all… we can't forgive each other (2.65 – 2.69).

In hindsight I'm like why was I doing that? I was acting like a kid… like I still do like really immature stuff around her like just… just to like, give her a taste of her own medicine… but I mean I literally think those things… And then, yeah and I guess I'm not being rational or mature at all… and it just perpetuates… our situation and then I'm all mad at myself but I'm still mad at her and it's like I just can't like I can't stop myself from acting that way (6.249 – 6.254).

And… I felt… felt like if I ever got to the point where I wanted to have that conversation with her, it would be really scary for me … it's… I have to like… let my guard down… and she would… I'm afraid she would [Crying] attack me… you know (6.257 – 6.260)?

So part of the conversation I wanted to have with her is like I want you to say what you wanna say but I also wanted to apologize… really sincerely because I feel like

she [crying] deserves it (8.336 – 8.338).

I really feel… feel like I just want to apologize… you know… that part at least I could… forgive myself maybe (8.342 – 8.343).

In summary, there are a number of possible strategies that victims may engage in to resolve their particular inner conflict. I outlined three possible strategies – talking things out with the offender, seeking justice, and self-forgiveness – but there are conceivably other strategies that victims may utilize to resolve inner conflict.

If successful, engaging in these strategies may result in the victim being able to forgive the offender. Forgiveness may be possible for Carlene and for Shelly if their conflict resolution strategies are successful because forgiveness is a desired goal for both participants. However, forgiveness is not a foregone conclusion. Resolving inner conflict may lead to a shift in the victim's perception of the offender (e.g., that contrary to what the victim believed prior to the offense, the offender is actually a bad person, as demonstrated by the offender's actions, and / or that forgiveness is inappropriate in the given situation) and result in cognitive unforgiveness. I can only speculate on this part of the model, however, as my data does not speak directly to forgiveness. This part of the model, therefore, remains a question for future research.

Another possibility is that the victim engages in any number of strategies for reducing inner conflict but is unsuccessful and therefore remains in a state of emotional – ruminative unforgiveness. That does not preclude forgiveness, or cognitive unforgiveness as a possibility at a future point in time. Rather, at a given point in time, a victim may have tried several strategies for dealing with inner conflict that may not be successful, or fully successful.

Cognitive Unforgiveness Following Resolution of Inner Conflict

Previously I described a direct pathway from conflict to the Cognitive dimension of unforgiveness. In this section I will outline an indirect path from conflict to the Cognitive dimension that begins with Emotional Ruminative unforgiveness (pathway 6 in the model).

As outline above, cognitive unforgiveness can be completely divorced from the emotional ruminative dimension of unforgiveness. It may be that inner conflict causes a shift in how the victim sees the transgressor, as was the case with Steve. However, most people seem to experience some lingering negative affect and rumination in the wake of an offense. For these individuals, 'moving on' or letting go of negative affect and rumination requires that they come to terms with their inner conflict and/or barriers to forgiveness. It makes sense, logically, that if a victim wants to forgive, he or she will have to resolve the barriers to forgiveness in addition to his or her inner conflict. Others, however, may resolve the inner conflict that causes the negative emotions and rumination but remain cognitively unforgiving because they still hold barriers to forgiveness. It is this latter experience that I address in the following section.

In the following passage, Frank talks about his unwillingness to forgive his former girlfriend. A year previous to my interview with him, Frank's girlfriend (at the time) moved in with one of his good friends. This event and the subsequent relationship between his girlfriend and his friend strained his romantic relationship until it ended a month later. He no longer has strong feelings about the event, but on principle cannot forgive his former girlfriend for completely disregarding how her actions made him feel at the time. In this case, he described himself as being unwilling to forgive based on a matter of principle (i.e., cognitive unforgiveness), but does not ruminate or hold negative feelings toward her. Moreover, Frank does not seem to be conflicted in any way. Rather, he seems to have come to a kind of

understanding about the situation that has allowed him to let go of the "visceral" part of the experience, yet he remains unforgiving.

Rachel: How do you feel towards [your ex-girlfriend] today (2.73)?

> Frank: I think by now it's – I've come to understand maybe why everything played out the way that it did. Um, it's hard to answer a question that can be so simple. How do I feel about her? Um. I guess just sort of disappointed but now, not really in a personal way. I'm just disappointed in general. Uh, it's starting to feel like something that I remember from like a book that I read, rather than something that I experienced like viscerally. But, uh, I don't know if that answers your question (2.75 – 2.81).

> Frank: I don't really want to [forgive her] in the sense that I'm – I think I've tied the thought of forgiving [her] with like feeling that what happened was okay. And maybe I'm just being stubborn but I feel like on principle – friends of mine – I don't want to do that. I don't want to see any friends of mine do that and I don't want to see any else (3.135 – 4.138).

From Frank's account, it is apparent that cognitive unforgiveness (i.e., being unwilling to forgive) is not marked with the same kind of inner conflict, negative affect, and rumination that emotional-ruminative unforgiveness is. This is consistent with Ross, Boon, and Mathews' (2013) findings that cognitive unforgiveness is not associated with negative emotions and rumination. However, this was not always the case for Frank. Rather, at the time of the offense, Frank was very conflicted about his own role in the dissolution of their relationship. Frank explained:

> I went through a period of trying to figure out if indeed I was being controlling by not wanting her to hang out with him, like watch movies on the couch together, name their router after each other – some hybrid of both of their names like – they got cats together. Just so I was wondering if – going through the process – is this actually normal – whatever that means – behavior and should I have been okay with that? I think that's the same statement… Anyway. Um. Then I was still open to whether or not what happened was within the realm of normal things and I was controlling or jealous or whatever. So far I've come to the conclusion that I wasn't. Maybe the controlling or jealous behavior that started after the fact was secondary or tertiary issue of the process. Yeah, so wondering if there was something wrong with me that led me to come to that decision (5.185 – 5.195).

In summary, Frank came to an understanding of why the situation played out the way it did. He was able to resolve his inner conflict about his own role in the dissolution of his relationship – he came to the conclusion that he was not being jealous or unreasonable about his expectations. Furthermore, he let go of his negative feelings and ruminative thoughts – what he described as the 'visceral' part of the experience. However, he remained unforgiving on principle that what she did was wrong. In other words, his inner conflict was resolved, but still had a barrier to forgiveness in that he believed forgiveness was inappropriate in the given situation.

Similarly, David did not forgive his wife for rekindling a romance with her high school sweetheart, which led to the dissolution of their marriage. A year after they divorced, he claimed that he not longer felt much of anything toward her, or thought about her much at all (i.e., cognitive unforgiveness). Like Frank, however, he was unwilling to forgive her because he did not want her to think that what she did was okay. This type of experience exemplifies the

cognitive dimension of unforgiveness. But he was not always this emotionally detached from the situation. Rather, at the time of the offense, David was conflicted about what he might have done differently; his unforgiveness was mired in hurt, sadness and frustration. David recounted his experience:

> David: I don't really think I feel like I have negative feelings, I just, like, it was something that happened. I don't agree with it and I feel like I'm like, I just don't want to be her friend. And I don't say that from a place of like, anger, I just don't (4.141 – 4.144).
>
> Rachel: Was it anger at the time (4.145)?
>
> David: It was sadness. There was some anger, just sadness. Yeah. I was um, I don't know. Not anger. I mean sometimes. Mostly No. Just frustration, sadness (4.146 – 4.147).
>
> Rachel: Is this something that um, that you think about (4.148)?
>
> David: Uh uh, not any more… (4.149).

> David: I felt good. I mean, as good as I could. About the decision I had to make, even though I remember calling my dad at the courthouse doorsteps just like bawling, but I don't think about it (4.165 – 4.167).
>
> Rachel: So what do you think has allowed you… um… how is it that you think you've been able to move from that place, where you, the day that you called your dad and you were so upset to where you are today (4.168 – 4.170)?
>
> David: Support. Family and friends. And then just trying to – as cliché as it is – like living in the present and looking for the future and I'm not one to dwell on the past (4.171 – 4.173).

Rachel: Have you considered forgiving her at all (4.179)?

David: Yeah. I have. I just. Just don't want to. I feel like something is pulling me from like wanting to associate with her... I don't want to, I don't want to have a relationship with her and I don't want to give her the satisfaction of like feeling like better about what happened (4.180 – 5.186).

Rachel: What would you say the barriers that you have in forgiving her (5.187)?

David: Part of it I just mentioned. If [forgiveness] exists for her, I don't think that she deserves that. Um, cause I've seen her do it again since then. Like we have mutual friends and I know that she did the same damn thing to the next guy. Um, and ah, that was even worse; he ended up killing himself. So, I just don't, I don't want her to think that what she did is okay. And I don't think she gets that yet (5.188 – 5.193).

Rachel: How did this all make you feel about yourself at the time (5.224)?

David: About myself (5.225)?

Rachel: mm hmm (5.226).

David: I felt… it's interesting because I asked her "what can I do?" And she was like, "you know, that's one of the things I have always appreciated about you, you know if I have ever asked you to change in any way, if you've said you'll do it, you do it right away. I've never had that issue with you. And so, like there are some things that we talked about and you did those. You did everything I asked." I just, I don't know. And so, it was frustrating because I thought like, I was doing everything I could and it wasn't enough. Um, and then I also felt like, what did I miss. How did I let this relationship get to this point and how didn't I see that this was going to happen (5.227 – 5.235).

In summary, through the support of family and friends, David was able to come to terms with his ex-wife's betrayal and his own inner conflict to the extent that he could let go of the negative emotions and rumination associated with the offense. However, he remained (cognitively) unforgiving on the grounds that what she did was wrong, that she never took responsibility for her actions, and that she continued the behavior in other relationships since their divorce. Despite being able to resolve his inner conflict about his own role in the dissolution of their marriage, he contended with a number of barriers to forgiveness that precluded forgiveness as a possibility.

Frank and David exemplify an indirect path between conflict, the emotional – ruminative dimension of unforgiveness, and the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness. If they had been able to resolve their particular barriers to forgiveness, they might have been able to forgive their offenders.

Analysis Summary

I identified a process that victims of transgressions seem to move through when they do not forgive. This process begins with some kind of internal conflict or struggle in the wake of an offense. Inner conflict seems to be a crucial piece of information when trying to understand what it means psychologically when victims say they are unable or unwilling to forgive: It seems that the emotional – ruminative aspect of unforgiveness (i.e., unable to forgive) is caused and/or perpetuated by on-going internal conflict. In contrast, inner – conflict seems to be largely resolved when an individual is cognitively unforgiving (i.e., unwilling to forgive) but has let go of negative emotions and rumination.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

The goal of my study was to examine what it means psychologically when people say that they are unable or unwilling to forgive their transgressors following an offense. At a surface level of analysis, I found that participants' definitions of these terms mapped closely onto the emotional – ruminative and the cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness that I identified in my previous research. At a deeper level of analysis, I also proposed a model of a process that victims may go through in the wake of an interpersonal offense. In this model, there are two dimensions of unforgiveness – the emotional – ruminative dimension and the cognitive dimension – and a number of components that influence the extent to which a victim can be placed along both dimensions – including inner conflict, barriers to forgiveness, and conflict resolution strategies.

Summary of the Proposed Unforgiveness Model

I propose that unforgiven transgressions can often create some kind of inner conflict or struggle for the victim (i.e., pathway 1 in Figure 1). Inner conflict encompasses conflicted thoughts and/or feelings about the offender or the offense, and a victim may experience more than one type of internal struggle following a single offense. Inner conflict, in turn, can give rise to the emotional-ruminative dimension of unforgiveness (i.e., pathway 2a), or it might give rise to a change in the victim's perception of the offender and/or the offense and contribute to the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness (i.e., 2b). There are a number of barriers to forgiveness that can be associated with one or both dimensions of unforgiveness (i.e., pathways 3a and 3b). To resolve these barriers to forgiveness and/or to resolve a particular inner conflict(s) the victim may engage in a number of conflict resolution strategies (i.e., pathway 4). Conflict resolution strategies can be defined as any attempt to reconcile conflicting thoughts and feelings about the

offender or the offense and they may be interpersonal or intrapersonal (e.g., seeking justice or cognitively reframing, respectively). The particular barriers to forgiveness, as well as the type and relative success of the strategy employed, will, in turn, affect how the victim will experience unforgiveness (i.e., pathways 5 and 6) or whether the victim will forgive the offender (i.e., pathway 7). Reducing emotional-ruminative unforgiveness may require several strategies and several attempts at resolving the victim's internal conflict, and he or she may remain at a particular point along the emotional – ruminative dimension despite efforts to forgive or to let go of negative emotions (i.e., pathways 3a, 4, and 5). If, however, the strategies are successful, the victim may forgive, or let go of negative emotions and rumination but remain cognitively unforgiving.

Study Contributions

This study extends and builds upon other research on forgiveness and unforgiveness. Consistent with Rapske et al. (2010), I found that the nature of unforgiven events varies greatly. Also consistent with Rapske et al. (2010), my data indicate that forgiveness is often viewed as contingent on the satisfaction of certain conditions (such as an apology or expression of remorse from the offender) and that people feel justified in not forgiving when those conditions are not met. The present study extended Rapske et al.'s (2010) findings in that it provides a deeper level of understanding of how barriers to forgiveness influence not only whether people forgive or do not forgive, but also how barriers to forgiveness influence *how* people experience unforgiveness (i.e., where people can be charted along the emotional – ruminative and cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness). Understanding how people experience unforgiveness, in turn, is necessary for developing appropriate intervention strategies for individuals who struggle with the lingering

affects of unforgiven events.

This study also provided further support for the emotional – ruminative and cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness, as described by Ross, Boon, and Matthews (2013), as I saw evidence of people at different positions along the two dimensions. Given that Ross, Boon and Matthews' (2013) study is the first to identify a second dimension of unforgiveness (i.e., the cognitive dimension), and that the findings were based on a small sample of participants (N = 13), replication of those findings in an independent sample of respondents is an important building block in the development of this line of research. Although evidence of these two dimensions has now been found in two independent samples, future research should examine the validity of these findings with larger samples and alternative research methods.

Replicating Ross, Boon and Matthew's (2013) findings is not only important because the results were based on a small number of participants. It is also important because these findings challenge established theories about the nature of unforgiveness (Worthington & Wade, 1999; Worthington, 2001; 2006). For example, Worthington argues that unforgiveness is - by definition – comprised of negative affect and rumination (Worthington & Wade, 1999; Worthington, 2001; 2006), and that people are motivated to reduce unforgiveness (i.e., negative emotions and rumination) because it is an unpleasant experience (Worthington, 2001; 2006). In contrast, I argue that negative emotion and rumination is only one facet or dimension of unforgiveness. There is also a cognitive dimension of unforgiveness, which can be experienced in combination with or divorced from negative affect and rumination. Some of the participants in the present study, as well as in my previous research (Ross, Boon, and Matthews, 2013) did not struggle

emotionally, despite not having forgiven their offenders. Rather, they had a kind of acceptance about the situation that allowed them to move on emotionally. The present findings further our understanding of the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness by illustrating how people might move on emotionally (through the use of conflict resolution strategies) while remaining cognitively unforgiving. These findings challenge the very definition of unforgiveness put forth by some scholars (Worthington & Wade, 1999; Worthington 2001; 2006).

I also put forth an argument that challenges Worthington's theorizing about peoples' motivations to reduce unforgiveness: I contend that for participants in my study the intention of engaging in particular conflict resolution strategies was primarily to resolve the inner conflict that gave rise to the negative feelings and rumination they continued to experience, rather than for the explicit purpose of reducing negative affect as Worthington (2001; 2006) posits. I argue this as a possibility because participants ruminated about aspects of their particular inner conflicts and the conflict resolution strategies they generated were goal-oriented to resolve those conflicts. Put another way, inner conflict can be thought of as a kind of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and victims are motivated to achieve cognitive consonance. For example, the offender's transgression may be incompatible with the victim's perception of the offender before the offense occurred. In light of the offense, the victim may see the offender as having made a one-time mistake, which would allow the victim to maintain his or her pre-offense perceptions of the offender. Alternatively, the victim may see the offense as diagnostic evidence that the offender is not the person the victim believed him or her to be before the offense, and the victim's perception of the offender will change to accommodate the new diagnostic evidence of the offender's character.

I am not arguing that people do not want to reduce negative affect – there may be many people for whom reducing negative affect is a primary goal in the aftermath of an offense. Moreover, people may not even be consciously aware that they are motivated by affect to behave the way that they do. Haidt (2000) argues that often people make quick, automatic moral judgments based on intuitions and gut feelings that they are often not even conscious of, and when pressed for explanations of their judgments they will turn to "a priori causal theories" to explain their position on an issue or to justify their behavior (page 12). It is entirely possible, therefore, that people are unaware that they are motivated to reduce unpleasant feelings, and that when pressed for an explanation of their behavior (e.g., why do you want to bring your offender to justice?) they will rely upon culturally supplied explanations for their behavior (e.g., to expose the offender to others so that he cannot harm anybody else) rather than reflect upon their own internal emotional states.

What I am arguing is that unforgiveness is more nuanced than Worthington's theories suggest; reducing negative affect may be the primary goal, or it may be one possible motivator to resolve inner conflict. However, I think it is too simplistic to argue that victims engage in strategies to reduce unforgiveness (Worthington, 2001; 2006) or to resolve inner conflict for the *sole* purpose of reducing negative feelings. In order to understand unforgiveness, and people's goals and motivations in the wake of unforgiveness, we need to take into account both the cognitive dimension and the emotional – ruminative dimension of this construct.

Limitations

The proposed model is the first scholarly attempt to understand peoples' experiences of unforgiveness in all it's depth and complexity, without presuming that it is a particular kind of

experience that hinges on negative affect and rumination. The model ties in findings from other research (Ross, Boon, & Mathews, 2013; Rapske et al., 2010) and sheds light on the system of underlying mechanisms that play into how a person experiences unforgiveness. However, the results presented here are inevitably limited by the questions I asked, and by my own personal interests. For example, in hindsight, I wish I had asked questions about forgiveness experiences so that I could ground that part of the model in the data, instead of theorizing about how it fits in. That said, the interviews I conducted were richly detailed, lengthy, and provided a broad array of valuable insights about how this phenomenon is experienced. Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed participants to share the aspects of their experience that were most important to them, thus ensuring that their experiences and perspectives are represented in the data. In any case, although the questions that I did not ask may be limiting in some respects (i.e., in the sense that, without my prompting, some participants may not have raised points or discussed aspects of their experiences that they might have had I asked them directly about those experiences), they suggest obvious directions for future research.

Another limitation in the present findings is that the proposed model was developed from interviews with a small number of participants. I stopped conducting interviews when I no longer found any new conceptual categories. However, it is difficult to argue that one has truly reached theoretical saturation. Indeed, I recognize that although I was not seeing any evidence of new conceptual categories, I may have been able to fill out or describe more in-depth the conceptual categories that emerged in my analysis if I had conducted more interviews. Put another way, if I had continued to collect data I may have been able to identify a broader range of focused codes that related to each conceptual category. Thus, the conceptual categories that emerged from my

data should be regarded as a starting place to understanding the phenomenon, rather than a complete picture of it.

The small number of participants also limits the generalizability of my findings. My goal was to develop a theory of how unforgiveness is experienced that can be tested using other research methodologies and larger samples of participants. I believe that I accomplished that goal, and that I would not have been able to do so using quantitative methods (e.g., surveys of large numbers of respondents) that do not allow for the richness and complexity of data that grounded theory methodology does. Despite these limitations, the proposed model may be utilized as a foundation for future research on unforgiveness in a number of ways.

Directions for Future Research

Scale Development. An important continuation of this research would be to construct a measure or measures that assess both of the cognitive and the emotional – ruminative dimensions of unforgiveness. My colleagues and I are currently in the process of doing just that. We think this is an important next step because the few researchers who have conducted research on unforgiveness typically use measures of forgiveness, such as the Transgression Related Inventory of Motivations (TRIM) (McCullough et. al., 1998), to measure unforgiveness (see VanOyen Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001; Wade & Worthington, 2003; Carmody & Gordon, 2011 for example). Specifically, the revenge and avoidance subscales of the TRIM are used as a proxy for unforgiveness (e.g., Wade & Worthington, 2003; Green, Burnette, & Davis, 2008; Carmody & Gordon, 2011). I think such an approach is problematic for a number of reasons.

First, revenge and avoidance motivations are a few of the possible *outcomes* of unforgiveness, not necessarily part of the experience. Indeed, many people who withhold

forgiveness may never experience a desire to get even. Second, motivations to seek revenge seem to wane over time even though people remain unforgiving (McCullough et al., 1998). Thus, revenge motivations may not be a strong indicator of unforgiveness for old hurts or grievances. These issues point to the limited predictive utility of the TRIM as a measure of unforgiveness. Third, reverse scoring other forgiveness measures to assess unforgiveness limits the predictive variability of the measure used (e.g., TRIM, or the Willingness to Forgive Scale) to only those aspects of unforgiveness that overlap with forgiveness. This is problematic because these two constructs are not simply opposite ends of the same continuum (Worthington, 2006). Rather, they are separate yet overlapping constructs. If they were simply opposing constructs then only forgiveness would reduce unforgiveness. However, unforgiveness can be reduced in many ways that do not involve forgiveness, such as seeking revenge, restoring justice, or through counselling (Wade & Worthington, 2003; Worthington, 2001; 2006). Furthermore, although forgiveness and unforgiveness share some predictors in common (e.g., offender contrition and empathy), other predictors differ from each other (Wade & Worthington, 2003). For instance, trait forgivingness is a predictor of forgiveness, but not unforgiveness. Similarly, the degree to which an individual attempts to forgive is related to forgiveness, but not to unforgiveness (Wade & Worthington, 2003). By utilizing forgiveness measures to assess unforgiveness, any facets of unforgiveness that are not shared in common with forgiveness (for example, aspects related to the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness) may be overlooked.

Developing a precise instrument for assessing unforgiveness – one that assesses both dimensions – will enable researchers to study unforgiveness in a more valid and in-depth fashion than is currently possible. This is a critical point because existing measures do not address the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness and are therefore unable to assess correlates or outcomes

associated with an entire dimension of the experience of unforgiveness. Korman (1974, pg. 194) states, “The point is not that adequate measurement is ‘nice.’ It is necessary, crucial, etc. Without it we have nothing.” Accurately measuring unforgiveness is an important issue because it can have lasting negative effects on people’s relationships, health, and wellbeing - yet we do not have adequate tools to measure it.

Testing the Model. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study that should be examined by future researchers is the proposed unforgiveness model. The proposed model not only ties together previous research findings, but it also provides future researchers with a foundation to study the experience of unforgiveness in a fuller, more complex and nuanced manner. Previous research has tended to focus on very narrow aspects of unforgiveness – such as the emotional ruminative dimension – but the present research highlights that there is a lot more to this phenomenon than just negative emotions, and that there are a number of components that affect how unforgiveness is experienced.

The proposed model, therefore, is a valuable tool that serves to integrate existing findings with new perspectives, provides a platform for new research, and offers a conceptual framework that can guide theory development. As this model was developed based on a wide range of transgressions it may be generalizable to a wide range of offenses. However, it may apply best to people who have experienced reasonably serious transgressions, as people who have not experienced serious transgressions may not experience any form of unforgiveness.

For the proposed model to be effective at modeling how unforgiveness is experienced, it must first be validated. One way this model can be tested is by asking people to recall an experience they have not forgiven, and then measuring their responses (using survey questions)

to items related to each of the components (i.e., inner conflict, barriers to forgiveness, strategies for resolving inner conflict, as well as the emotional-ruminative and cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness). The proposed pathways between the variables can then be examined using Structural Equation Modeling.

The Role of Inner Conflict. The proposed pathways can also be examined using experimental designs. Perhaps the most novel pathways for future researchers to examine are the connections between inner conflict and the two dimensions of unforgiveness. From my analysis it appears that a transgression often produces some kind of inner conflict, and that some form of inner conflict is an on-going concern for people who continue to feel negatively and ruminate on their experience, whereas that inner conflict seems to be more or less resolved when they move on emotionally but remain cognitively unforgiving. Are there situations or circumstances in which a victim does not experience inner conflict in conjunction with emotional – ruminative unforgiveness? In other words, can a person just be hurt or angry enough to withhold forgiveness in the absence of any sort of internal conflict?

One possibility, based on Haidt's (2000) theories of moral intuition, is that a transgression (or perceived transgression) could produce a 'knee-jerk' reaction of emotions that might result in unforgiveness. For example, Haidt (2000) argues many people view incest as morally wrong, even if it is consensual, no harm comes to either party, and the couple uses birth control to avoid the dangers of inbreeding. It is possible, therefore, that if somebody learns that a friend or a family member participated in incestuous sexual relations, it may produce a knee-jerk, emotional reaction and subsequent judgment that what the couple did was wrong, and perhaps even unforgiveable. Given the possibility that people could have a knee – jerk emotional reaction to a

transgression or perceived transgression, inner conflict may play a limited role in how people experience unforgiveness.

Future research may be able to examine the relationship between inner conflict, moral intuition, and the two dimensions of unforgiveness using hypothetical scenarios. For instance, participants could be presented with a number of transgression scenarios that describe conflicted thoughts and feelings about the offender or the offense, or scenarios that provoke moral intuition (e.g., incest), and then asked to rate the degree to which they would be unforgiving.

I view inner conflict as an integral piece of the unforgiveness experience that has yet to be examined in the unforgiveness literature. On a theoretical level, I think that understanding the role of inner conflict, and the resolution of that inner conflict, may help explain the extent to which victims might be charted along the emotional – ruminative dimension, the cognitive dimension, or both. At first blush, the role of inner conflict in the experience of unforgiveness may seem irrelevant if an individual can be charted along both dimensions and inner conflict is always somehow tangled up in the emotional – ruminative aspect of this experience. However, my analysis of the interview transcripts suggests that people can be charted along the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness in the absence of negative affect and rumination. As it is negative emotions and rumination that are associated with negative health consequences, finding a way to parse the two dimensions apart and examine the underlying mechanisms that contribute to emotional distress or finding peace with an offense in the absence of forgiveness would be a worthy goal for researchers. I posit that inner conflict may be one such underlying mechanism that contributes to the emotional – ruminative dimension of unforgiveness more so than to the cognitive dimension of unforgiveness, and is therefore theoretically important to our understanding of this construct.

The role of inner conflict in unforgiveness could also have implications for how practitioners approach counseling and crisis intervention. If resolving inner conflict does, in fact, mitigate emotional – ruminative unforgiveness, helping victims of interpersonal transgressions to resolve their inner conflicts may allow them to move on emotionally without any perceived pressure to forgive the transgressor. That does not preclude forgiveness as a possibility for a victim at a future time. Rather it may allow for victims to find a 'healthy' emotional space even if they feel that they cannot forgive the offender at a particular point in time.

Barriers to Forgiveness and strategies for Resolving Inner Conflict. The other pathways in the model are also worthy of future studies. Barriers to forgiveness, for example, were identified in Rapske et al.'s (2010) study. However, the relationships between barriers to forgiveness and the two dimensions of unforgiveness have yet to be explored. In the present study, I proposed that the barriers to forgiveness were common to both emotional and cognitive unforgiveness. However, there may be other barriers to forgiveness that are connected with only one or the other dimension. If this were the case, understanding whether particular barriers to forgiveness differentially affect each dimension would help to parse the two dimensions apart.

Similarly, strategies for resolving inner conflict (identified by Worthington 2001 as ways to reduce unforgiveness) seem to be intimately connected with forgiveness, cognitive unforgiveness, and emotional unforgiveness. However, it is unclear from the present findings if some strategies are more likely going to result in forgiveness or unforgiveness outcomes. Are some strategies tied more closely with cognitive unforgiveness than forgiveness, for example?

One way to look at the relationships between barriers to forgiveness, strategies for resolving inner conflict and the two dimensions of unforgiveness would be to do a prospective longitudinal study. Participants could be asked to sign up for a longitudinal study on forgiveness

and unforgiveness. Then, if they are faced with a transgression at some point during the course of the study, the researcher could follow up with the victim at specific time intervals (e.g., once each week for the first month post-transgression and then once per month for an additional 5 months). The goal would be to get an initial assessment of the variables of interest (e.g., does the victim experience inner conflict? Where can the victim be charted along the emotional-ruminative and cognitive dimensions of unforgiveness? What barriers to forgiveness does the victim identify? How does the victim respond?) at the time of the transgression, and then follow up with the victim at regular intervals to determine what strategies the victim uses to deal with his or her inner conflict and / or barriers to forgiveness and how these variables affect forgiveness or unforgiveness outcomes. This type of study design would allow a researcher to examine the utility of the proposed model through the actual process of unforgiveness as it unfolds.

Conclusions

In closing, the present study embarked on a novel research agenda of understanding *how* people experience unforgiveness. This study represents a departure from mainstream research concerning unforgiveness, as most researchers draw conclusions about this construct from forgiveness research. The present findings also differ from previous findings in that they are not rooted in preconceived notions about unforgiveness. Rather, they are grounded in people's lived experiences. The present findings on not forgiving are thus unique, and I believe that the insights concerning the nature of unforgiveness, the components that contribute to how it is experienced, and the strategies people use to deal with unforgiveness are well positioned to make important contributions to the understanding of this construct.

Unforgiveness has a reputation within the scholarly literature and within popular culture

as a negative experience that his harmful to the victim's health as well as to the victim's relationships. This is not surprising given that unforgiveness has been identified as a complex of negative emotions and rumination (Worthington 2001; 2006; Harris & Thoresen, 2005). However, the present research suggests that unforgiveness is a far more multi-faceted and nuanced phenomenon, and that these kinds of conclusions may be premature. I contend that the conclusions drawn from any research based on such a definition cannot and should not be generalized to all experiences of unforgiveness, but should be limited to experiences of emotional – ruminative unforgiveness. The real world implications of such premature conclusions are that victims may be pushed to forgive their offenders (because unforgiveness is deemed "unhealthy") when it may be inappropriate or unhealthy to do so (e.g., in abusive relationships; McNulty, 2011) (see also Fincham, 2009; Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, & Kumashiro, 2010). For some victims, such as those who call the distress and suicide lines, pressure to forgive can lead to self – harm and attempts at suicide. The results of this study call into question the assumption that unforgiveness is always an affect-laden and stressful experience. At the very least, these results suggest that we need to expand our thinking about how unforgiveness is experienced, and they emphasize the need for further research on this understudied but important topic.

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Table 1. Summary of Unforgiven Events and Contextual Factors

	Unforgiven Event(s) & Relationship to the Offender(s)	**Inner Conflict**	**Barriers to Forgiveness**	**Requirements for Forgiveness**	**Strategies for Resolving Conflict**	**Religious Affiliation**	**Age**
Steve	1. Ex-girlfriend stalked him	No conflict at the time of the interview.	The offender is not sorry, and does not deserve forgiveness.	Offender must ask for forgiveness	Changed his perception of the offender	Agnostic	32
	2. Ex-wife had an affair	Questioned his worth as a husband.	The offender is not sorry, and does not deserve forgiveness.	Offender must ask for forgiveness.	Talked to family, friends, and a counsellor to gain perspective.		
George	1. Family pressured him to travel overseas where he became quite ill	He struggled with conflicted feelings of love and resentment toward his family.	Feelings of resentment.	Finding a way to deal with the emotions and gain a different perspective.	Talking to friends.	None	29
	2. Acquaintance got physically aggressive when George spoke to the man's girlfriend.	No conflict at the time of the interview.	No point in forgiving. The man does not deserve forgiveness.	Offender would have to turn into a different person.	Passage of time.		
Carlene	1. Ex-boyfriend developed a romantic relationship with another woman	Conflicting thoughts and feelings about the offender.	Not having an opportunity to talk things through with the offender	Offender needs to acknowledge what he did and apologize.	Talking to friends, and talking to the offender.	Christian (Lutheran)	29
	2. Former Friend gossiped about her and cut her down to others	No conflicted at the time of the interview.	No desire to forgive.	Offender must acknowledge her offense, and be genuinely remorseful.	Cognitive re-framing.		

Andrea	1. Sister's husband for his demeaning treatment toward Andrea and her sister.	Offender attacked her sense of self.	No desire to forgive. Emotions prevent her from forgiving.	There is nothing he can do to earn forgiveness because he is a bad person.	She avoids the offender.	Spiritual, not religious	29
	2. Former friend for spreading false rumors about her.	Offender is not who she thought she was.	Lack of communication between her and the offender and offender continues to spread rumors.	Offender would have to clear Andrea's name of the rumors she was spreading.	She avoids the offender.		
Rosanna	1. Mother physically assaulted her and threatened her life.	Struggled with the idea that her mother who is supposed to love and care for her could threaten her life.	Feelings of fear and vulnerability.	She explained that if her mother was not her biological parent she might have been able to forgive her, but because she was her biological parent there was too much hurt to forgive.	Turned to others for support and went to counselling but remained very conflicted despite the passage of time (20 years).	Catholic	37
William	1. Former friend hooked up with the girl he liked.	Changed his perception of his former friend. No conflict at the time of the interview.	Who William is as a person.	There is nothing the offender could do to be forgiven.	Avoids the offender	Agnostic	24
	2. Adoptive Mother for not protecting him from racism.	No conflict. He sees his mother as small-minded.	Feelings of anger	Forgiveness is not possible.	Support of friends.		

Bridgette	1. Bullied and professionally sabotaged at work by a woman who was in a junior position.	Offender made her question her identity as a professional.	Negative feelings preclude forgiveness.	Offender must apologize.	Avoids the offender, talks to friends.	Christian	49
	2. Ex-boyfriend lied to her about smoking.	No conflict at the time of the interview. Her perception of the offender changed.	No desire to forgive.	Offender must apologize.	No information available.		
Pete	1. Parents mentally, physically, and verbally abusive actions.	Wants to fix himself somehow to make his relationship with his parents better.	Negative feelings.	Needs parents to acknowledge their respective parts in the ongoing relationship problems.	Tried to talk to parents, went to counselling, takes responsibility for his own part in the current state of their relationship.	Was Buddhist, is no longer religiously affiliated.	50
	2. Buddhist mentor turned out to be a cult leader.	Conflict between his own and other's perceptions of the offender.	Negative feelings. The offender did not acknowledge the harm he caused.	Does not know if forgiveness is possible.	Plans to go to the media and the police to expose the offender as a fraud.		
Shelly	1. Sister for a lifetime of relationship conflict.	Cannot reconcile her own negative behavior toward somebody she loves.	Feelings of vulnerability.	Forgiveness would have to be mutual between her and her sister. Needs to see a changer in her sister's behavior.	Self-forgiveness, and talking to her sister.	Spiritual	29

David	1. Ex-wife for emotional infidelity.	No conflict at the time of the interview.	She continued the same kind of behavior in her other relationships. She does not deserve forgiveness.	No desire to forgive.	Distanced himself from his ex wife, talked to friends, went to counselling.	None	31
Carly	1. A music professor for slandering her reputation.	Offender made her question her worth as a musician.	He was not sorry for what he did and did not care what happened to her. Carly's emotions also prevented her from forgiving. No desire to forgive.	Offender would have to recognize what he did and be truly sorry.	Avoids the offender.	Raised Catholic, not practicing.	18
Anna	1. Mother for abuse.	Questions her self worth.	Forgiveness would be inappropriate in the given situation. The offenders are abusive to others.	Forgiveness is not possible.	Avoids her mother. Hopes she will get her comeuppance.	Spiritual	28
	2. Former friend for a slanderous comment on Facebook.	No conflict at the time of the interview.	Has no desire to forgive her.	Offender would have to be a less selfish human being.	Treats her civilly but does not go out of her way to talk to her.		
Frank	1. Ex-girlfriend for moving in with his best friend, which led to the dissolution of their relationship.	No conflict at the time of the interview.	No desire to forgive. Also did not want the offender to think that what she did was right. Frank did not feel understood.	The offender would have to cut off contact with his former friend, and make a very compelling apology.	Avoids the offender.	None	32

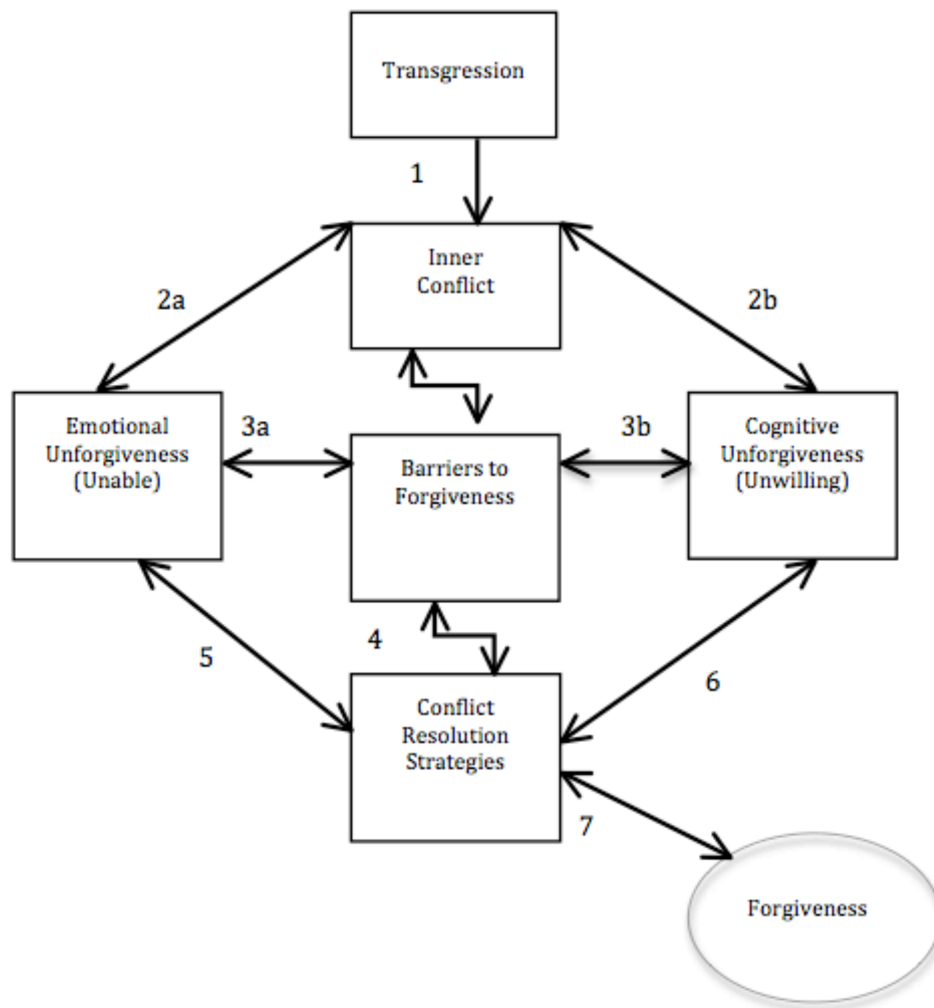

Figure 1. A Proposed Model of Unforgiveness.

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Advertisement

Project: The Experience of Unforgiveness

ARE YOU STRUGGLING TO FORGIVE SOMEONE WHO HURT YOU?

The Social Psychology Department at the University of Calgary is conducting research on people's experiences of not forgiving.

As part of a one-on-one interview, you will be asked to describe two experiences in which you have not forgiven somebody for a serious interpersonal offense against you. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, as the research is interested in what your experiences of not forgiving are like. You must be 18 years of age and fluent in English to participate.

To thank you for your participation, you will be entered to win an iPod Touch.

The interviews take approximately 1-2 hours to complete and will be conducted on campus or at a place of your choosing.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please contact Rachel Ross

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Project: The Experience of Unforgiveness

Title of Project:

The Experience of Unforgiveness

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of unforgiveness—that is, people's experiences in the aftermath of interpersonal transgressions that they have not forgiven.

The data collected in this study will be used to inform a Master's thesis, conference presentations, and journal articles. They may also be used in the future for other research

purposes related to the study of unforgiveness (e.g., they may be used to inform research projects undertaken by our undergraduate or graduate students or in collaboration with other researchers in the future). In all presentations and uses of the data however, your personal identity will not be disclosed. In addition, where results of this study are published or publicly presented, it is possible that research assistants and others who contributed to the project may be indicated as co-authors.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

As part of an interview, you will be asked to describe two experiences in which you have not forgiven somebody for an offense against you. The interview will be conducted in person and will take between one hour and two hours. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, as the researcher is interested in what *your* experiences of not forgiving are like. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, you may also refuse to answer particular questions, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

To thank you for your participation is this study, you will be entered into a draw for the chance to win an iPod touch.

What Type of Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, religious affiliation and ethnicity. The reported results of the study will be completely anonymous. However, we will retain your name and contact information so that we may notify you of the lottery results. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. Parts of the

transcribed interviews may be used as direct quotations for the purpose of publication and presentations. To protect your anonymity you will be asked to choose a pseudonym for yourself and to refer to all others during the interview by their initials.

The pseudonym I choose for myself is:

After the lottery has been announced all contact information will be destroyed.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

Risks: There is a chance that discussing past offenses will cause you to feel upset. If you foresee this as a possibility for you, please feel free to withdraw from the study at this point. Should you become upset or distressed during the interview, you may terminate the interview at that time. If you would like to speak to someone and receive help, the University offers a confidential counseling service to all current students. The Counseling Centre is located at MacEwan student centre – Room 375 and they will accept either walk-in or telephone calls. You can call (403) 220-5893 to make an intake appointment with a counselor. Counselling services are free to all current University of Calgary Students. Non-students can access counseling services through the Calgary Counseling Center. Fees are based on a sliding scale according to income. For questions about counseling, or to set up a file at the Calgary Counseling Center call (403) 691-5991. Additionally, you can call the Calgary Distress Center at (403) 266-1601. The Distress Center is open twenty-four hours a day and there is no charge for their service.

With the exception of material we may quote from your interview, all results will be reported on a group basis for any presentation or publication of results. With respect to your

quotations, excerpts from the interview could potentially be used as quotations in publications and presentations. Although every attempt to maintain anonymity will be made, there is a small risk that someone may be able to identify you as the source of information if they happen to be familiar with you and the events you describe.

Please note the researcher may report disclosures of potential harm to yourself or others when required by the researcher's professional code of ethics.

Benefits: This study will provide you with an opportunity to see how research is conducted and to participate in a research project. Through your participation in this study, you may develop interest in a new topic, or further your appreciation for an area of study. You will also receive an entry to a draw for an iPod Touch.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw, we will retain for possible use any data you have provided up to that point in the interview. Only the researchers listed on this consent form, their approved research assistants, and future students/collaborators working with Dr. Boon will have access to your interview responses. Audiotapes and transcripts of interview responses will be stored in a secure location on campus and retained in an anonymous fashion (i.e., no name or other personal identifying information will be associated with your responses to the interview questions). Audiotapes will be destroyed five years after the data have been published. Transcripts will be retained indefinitely. Please note that we may quote from your transcript under the pseudonym you have provided for us in published articles or presentations. There is a small chance that somebody you know will recognize you from the details that you

provide if they happen to read the article or attend the presentation.

As we indicated above, the interview transcripts will be retained indefinitely (again, in anonymous form). We may, in the future, use your responses to the interview questions to inform further studies. These further studies will undergo whatever ethics review is deemed appropriate at the time of use.

Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print)

____

Participant's Signature ____Date:

____

Researcher's Name: (please print)

____

Researcher's Signature: ____________________ Date: ___________________

Questions/Concerns

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Project: The Experience of Unforgiveness

Part 1: Questions about the event

- What does the term ‘unforgiveness’ mean to you?
- People often describe individuals as being unable to forgive or unwilling to forgive. What does it mean to you to be 'unable' to forgive?
- What does it mean to you to be 'unwilling' to forgive?
- Can you describe a time when you have been unwilling or unable to forgive?
- What were the precipitating factors leading up to this event?

Follow up questions

Affect

- How do you feel toward that person today?
- If no longer negative – what do you think enabled you to find peace with the transgression?
- How were you able to reduce your negative feelings?

Rumination

- Do you think about this event a lot? Daily? Weekly? Often? Seldom? Never?
- Have you considered forgiving this person? (Would you like to forgive this person?)

- What, if any conditions would need to be met for you to forgive this person?
- Have you talked to anybody about this situation (or asked for advice)? (friends, family, counsellor, etc.)

Control Over Granting/Withholding Forgiveness

- In what ways do you feel prevented from forgiving?
- In what ways do you feel that withholding forgiveness is a choice?

Present Control Over the Relationship with the Offender

- Since you have not forgiven this person, how do you deal with him or her? (*Prompt: Do you avoid him or her? Do you cut them out of your life*?)
- Do you still have contact with the offender? (Is having contact or not having contact by choice? To what extent do you have control over the type of relationship you have with the offender, or how much contact you have with him or her)

Present Control over Emotions

- To what extent, if any, do you believe you have control over your emotions with regard to this event?
- What aspect(s) of this situation do you feel you have control over today, if any?
- In what ways, if any, have you been able to make yourself feel better?

Control Over Future Events – with this person, with others

- What do you think the likelihood is of something like this happening again, either with this person or with somebody else? (Why or why not?)
- To what extent, if at all, do you feel that you can avoid or prevent something like this from happening again?

Past Control

- Who or what do you hold responsible for what happened? Can you explain?

Questions Related to Stress

- To what extent, if any, is this experience stressful for you today?
- If so, what does stress look like?
- How do you experience stress?
- How does this stress manifest in their day to day life? (prompt: do you feel anxious, do you feel you cannot work or sleep, do you feel burnt out?)

Part 2: A Second Experience of Unforgiveness

Participants will then be asked to recall a second unforgiven event. However, for the second event, I will be more directive about the nature of the experience that I ask them to discuss. If the participants previously described an event in which they were unable to forgive, I will ask them to recall an event in which they are unwilling to forgive. Conversely, if the first event participants recalled was one they were unwilling to forgive, I will ask them to recall an event in which they are unable to forgive. I will then follow up with the same questions that I asked with regard to the first experience of unforgiveness.

Part 3: Comparing the 2 Experiences of Unforgiveness

- What are the circumstances or conditions that have allowed you to reduce your negative feelings with regard to one experience of unforgiveness but not the other experience?

New Themes/Questions

A new theme that arose after the first few interviews seemed to center around a challenge

to the self. That is, the offender's actions challenged some part of the victim's sense of self. In response to this new theme I started to ask participants the following questions:

> -Have you heard the expression "actions speak louder than words"? What did the offender's actions convey to you?
>
> -How did the offense make you feel about yourself?

The responses to these questions led to themes around conflict and I began to ask questions to get at understanding of what created the kind of conflict participants were describing. For example:

> - What do you think is the most difficult aspect of that situation?

APPENDIX D

Debriefing Letter

Project: The Experience of Unforgiveness

People do not always forgive, and despite the numerous studies that have been conducted on forgiveness, we know very little about what the experience of *unforgiveness* is like. Forgiveness researchers and popular culture tend to presume that unforgiveness is negative and unhealthy. However, these assertions have not actually been tested. Research that I conducted for my honors thesis suggests that unforgiveness may take two forms – *non-emotional* or *emotional* (Ross & Boon, 2010). Consistent with previous research, emotional unforgiveness may be characterized by strong negative emotions coupled with rumination (Worthington 2001; 2006). In contrast, non-emotional unforgiveness may *not* be associated with negative emotions or rumination. Rather, it may be characterized by unforgiving cognitions (such as perceiving an offense as unforgiveable, or a perception of the offender as a bad person).

My previous research suggests that these two types of unforgiveness are *qualitatively* different. Individuals in my study who were emotionally unforgiving reported that they were *unable* to forgive (even if they wanted to) because their negative emotions prevented them from moving on past the offense. In contrast, individuals who were non-emotionally unforgiving reported that they were unwilling to forgive. That is, they believed nothing prevented them from forgiving per se; rather not forgiving was a *choice* they made. Most importantly, non-emotionally unforgiving individuals reported feeling at peace with the offense. These feelings of

peace that some people report, despite not forgiving, are a strong contradiction to the notion that unforgiveness is always a negative or unhealthy experience. These findings also lead to some important questions about the nature of unforgiveness.

First, what are the factors or circumstances that contribute to these different types of unforgiveness? For example, time may play an important role in one's ability to reduce negative feelings. However, in some circumstances, time may not mitigate the often intense negative emotions that an individual experiences.

Another important question is how do different types of unforgiveness relate to an individual's perceived well-being? Unforgiveness might be a negative experience, regardless of whether it is non-emotional or emotional. However, it is also possible that non-emotional unforgiveness is associated with benefits to the victim because the victim is no longer mired in negative feelings or rumination and, can engage in self protective behaviours (such as avoiding the offender). Such a possibility may, in part, account for why non-emotionally unforgiving individuals reported being at peace.

You were asked to discuss two experiences of unforgiveness, one in which was charged with negative emotion, and a second experience in which you no longer experience negative emotions. This will enable us to determine how the type unforgiveness an individual experiences varies as a function of contextual or situational factors. You were also asked to discuss the extent to which you experience stress as a result of not forgiving in each of the situations that you described. This will enable us to understand how different types of unforgiveness relate to people's emotional well-being. The questions you were asked were intended only as a guideline, as your individual experience of forgiveness and unforgiveness are unique and we wanted to allow you the freedom to discuss these things in your own way.

This research is aimed at understanding the differences between non-emotional and emotional unforgiveness with the hope that what is learned can be used in a practical setting to aid in the support of victims who have not forgiven. In addition, this study will contribute to the scholarly understanding of unforgiveness.

We realize that some of the things you discussed here today may have brought back uncomfortable memories of past hurts or offences. If that is the case for you, and you would like to talk to somebody about that, the University Counseling Center has counselors available for you to speak with. If you are not a student, you can contact the Calgary Counseling Center for services. In addition, the Calgary Distress center 24-hour crisis lines are available. If you have any further questions I would be happy to answer them for you at this time. You may also contact Dr. Boon or myself, for further information or follow up on the study.