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Forgiveness and Its Associations With Prosocial Thinking, Feeling, and Doing Beyond the Relationship With the Offender

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Past research has revealed that forgiveness promotes prosocial cognition, feeling, and behavior toward the offender. The present research extends this research by examining whether forgiveness may spill over beyond the relationship with the offender, promoting generalized prosocial orientation. Consistent with hypotheses, three studies revealed that forgiveness compared to unforgiveness is generally associated with higher levels of a generalized prosocial orientation, as indicated by higher levels of a we frame of mind (as indicated by a greater use of first-person plural pronouns, e.g., we, us, in a language task) and greater feelings of relatedness toward others in general. Moreover, forgiveness (vs. unforgiveness) was even associated with greater probability of donating to charity and greater willingness to engage in volunteering. Finally, the authors found that unforgiveness reduces tendencies toward generalized prosocial orientation, whereas forgiveness restores generalized prosocial orientation to baseline levels within the relationship.

Keywords: *forgiveness; prosocial motivation; prosocial behavior; self-construal; helping*

During the past several years, it has been widely recognized that forgiveness seems pertinent to our understanding of how people deal with the almost inevitable hurts that sometimes accompany interpersonal relationships. Research on forgiveness, which is defined as an intrapersonal prosocial motivational change toward an offender (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000), has now provided greater insight into the antecedents of forgiveness (e.g., Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Karremans & Van Lange, in press;

McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997) as well as into its consequences for the forgiver and his or her relationship with the offender. This latter area of research has mainly focused on the affective and behavioral effects of forgiveness, seeking to understand whether forgiveness as compared to the lack of forgiveness is related to psychological and physical well-being and to smoother interactions patterns between forgiver and offender (e.g., Fincham, 2000; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003; McCullough et al., 1998; VanOyen Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001).

Past research has thus exclusively focused on the effects of forgiveness on the specific relationship with the offender, showing that level of forgiveness is positively related to prosocial motivation and behavior toward the offender. Recently, the intriguing question has been raised whether forgiveness may affect a person's prosocial motivation beyond the relationship with the offender (e.g., Pargament, McCullough, &

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Thoresen, 2000). That is, does level of forgiveness influence the offended person's prosocial cognitions, feelings, and behavior that are not directly related to the offender?

In the present article, we argue that the effects of level of forgiveness on cognition, affect, and behavior are likely to be far greater than research thus far has suggested. The purpose of the present research is to examine whether level of forgiveness toward a specific offender affects a person's generalized prosocial orientation. Specifically, as will be explained, we examine whether level of forgiveness is associated with a general we frame of mind, feelings of relatedness toward other people in general, and actual prosocial behavior that is not related to the offender (i.e., donating behavior and willingness to volunteer), thereby seeking to examine complementary indicators of a generalized prosocial orientation.

Forgiveness and Its Consequences Regarding the Relationship With the Offender

What are the correlates of level of forgiveness for the offended person's cognitions, feelings, and behavior toward the offender? Previous research has demonstrated that the person who has forgiven an offender (as compared to a person who has not forgiven an offender) is more likely to act on relational concerns toward the offender, resulting for instance in more cooperation and willingness to sacrifice for the offender and more constructive communication between partners (Fincham, 2000; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Karremans & Van Lange, 2003; McCullough et al., 1998). Moreover, there is good evidence that forgiveness is associated with the degree to which the person who has been harmed feels related to the offender. For instance, McCullough et al. (1998) demonstrated that level of forgiveness is positively associated with postoffense feelings of closeness with the offender. Finally, besides these behavioral and affective associations with forgiveness, a recent study by Karremans and Van Lange (2003) suggested that forgiveness also affects social-cognitive processes that characterize the person who does or does not forgive. In this study, after participants had brought to mind an offense, they were asked to briefly describe their relationship with the offender. Analysis of the descriptions revealed that participants who had forgiven their offender spontaneously used more first-person plural pronouns (i.e., *we, us, our, ours*) to describe the relationship with the offender than participants who had not forgiven the offender, suggesting that level of forgiveness influences cognitive interdependence with the offender (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). To summarize, the person who has forgiven an offender (compared to the person who has not forgiven an offender) thinks

more in terms of we about the relationship with the offender, feels more strongly related to the offender, and behaves in a more prosocial manner toward the offender.

One important question is whether the level of prosocial orientation that accompanies level of forgiveness is restricted to the relationship at hand or whether forgiveness affects a person's generalized prosocial orientation. As noted, we suggest that level of forgiveness toward a specific offender may generalize to cognitions, feelings, and behavior that are related to persons other than the offender. This proposition is based on the rationale that social interactions do not occur in what might be called a social vacuum, and people's motivations in social situations may often be influenced by previous interaction experiences (cf., Holmes, 2000; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000).

Indeed, several theories have speculated about the general idea and have sometimes made the implicit assumption that a certain motivational state often originates in specific interaction experiences. For example, theory and research on self-construal is congruent with the idea that motives that originate from a specific interaction may transform into a generalized motivational state. It has been suggested that people flexibly define themselves more in independent terms, in which a person predominantly views oneself as an autonomous and unique person, or more in interdependent terms, in which the individual focuses more on his or her connectedness with others and importantly, in which one focuses more on values that reflect prosocial goals (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Holland, Roeder, van Baaren, Brandt, & Hannover, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Also, Deaux and Perkins (2001) stressed the importance of the social context and interaction experiences in understanding why such shifts between different levels of self-construal (i.e., which includes a shift between general proself motivations and prosocial motivations) occur. They argued that own interaction experiences initiate a specific level of self-construal that shapes subsequent actions (Deaux & Perkins, 2001). In line with this view, a past offense and the level of forgiveness regarding the offense may shape subsequent cognitions, feelings, and actions not per se related to the offender.

In line with this theorizing, there is some indirect empirical evidence that suggests that interaction experiences within a specific relationship indeed can lead to a more general prosocial motivational orientation not directed to a specific target. For instance, recent research revealed that people who are being mimicked by another person come to like the other person better (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999) and behave in a more prosocial manner toward the person who mimicked

them (Van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, & Van Knippenberg, 2004). But beyond that, mimicked people also reported greater feelings of relatedness toward other people in general (Van Baaren, Holland, Karremans, & Van Knippenberg, 2003) and exhibited more generalized prosocial behavior. That is, participants who were mimicked by another person (compared to participants who were not mimicked) became more helpful toward other persons (Van Baaren et al., 2004). Thus, these findings are congruent with the idea that prosocial motivation that originates from a specific interaction experience may result in a general prosocial orientation, which may influence cognition, feelings, and behavior beyond the specific relationship.

The Present Research

We present three studies that provide evidence relevant to the general hypothesis that an offended person's level of forgiveness toward a specific offender influences his or her generalized prosocial orientation as indicated by spillover effects of level of forgiveness. As noted, previous research demonstrated that level of forgiveness affects prosocial cognition, feelings, and behavior in relationship with the offender. In the present research, we seek to extend these findings by examining whether the presumed level of generalized motivational orientation that accompanies level of forgiveness is manifest in cognition, feelings, and behavior that generalizes beyond the relationship between forgiver and offender. Specifically, to examine cognitive spillover effects, Study 1 examines whether forgiveness as compared to the lack of forgiveness is related to higher levels of a general we frame of mind, operationalized in terms of the use of first-person plural pronouns in an unrelated language task (e.g., Agnew et al., 1998; Fiedler, Semin, & Koppetsch, 1991). Study 2 examines behavioral spillover effects of level of forgiveness. If forgiveness indeed influences an offended person's generalized prosocial orientation, then he or she should be more likely to donate money to a charity organization when reminded of largely forgiven offense than when reminded of a largely unforgiven offense. Moreover, as a second indicator of behavioral spillover effects, we examine whether level of forgiveness is related to the willingness to volunteer for a charity organization. Finally, Study 3 examines affective spillover effects of level of forgiveness. Specifically, it is examined whether level of forgiveness influences the extent to which people feel related toward other people in general. Thus, to summarize, three studies examine whether forgiveness as compared to the lack of forgiveness leads to relatively higher levels of a person's generalized prosocial orientation.

An additional purpose of Study 3 was to examine whether forgiveness results in increasing levels of gener-

alized prosocial orientation, whether an offended person's lack of forgiveness results in decreasing levels of generalized prosocial orientation, or both. It is important to note that recent research findings have demonstrated that the absence of forgiveness is generally associated with a decreased prosocial orientation toward the offender, whereas high levels of forgiveness seem to restore a person's prosocial orientation toward the offender back to baseline levels within the relationship (e.g., Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). For instance, Karremans and Van Lange (2004) demonstrated that participants who were being reminded of an unforgiven offense exhibited lower levels of cooperation toward the offender compared to participants who were being reminded of a forgiven offense and participants who were not being reminded of an offense. The latter two conditions did not differ from each other. These findings are in line with the notion that when a person forgives an offender, there is a cancellation of the interpersonal debt created by the offender's action (e.g., Exline & Baumeister, 2000). In other terms, when a person has forgiven the offender, the situation as before the offense is restored. In line with this notion, we expect that especially unforgiveness is associated with decreased levels of a generalized prosocial orientation, whereas forgiveness restores a person's generalized prosocial orientation back to baseline levels. By using a control condition in which participants are not reminded of an offense, this prediction is examined in Study 3. In sum, in three studies we examine spillover effects of level of forgiveness by using conceptually and methodologically distinct but converging indicators of a generalized prosocial orientation.

Whereas Study 1 uses a correlational design, Studies 2 and 3 use priming techniques to experimentally activate motivations that accompany being reminded of forgiven versus unforgiven offenses (for a similar method, see Karremans et al., 2003; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Based on the assumption that almost anyone can think of largely forgiven as well as largely unforgiven offenses, in Studies 2 and 3 participants are randomly assigned to one of the two conditions in which participants are either asked to think of an offense that they have forgiven the offender (i.e., forgiveness condition) or have largely not forgiven the offender (i.e., no-forgiveness condition).

STUDY 1

Study 1 seeks to provide evidence for a cognitive spillover effect of level of forgiveness by examining whether higher levels of forgiveness compared to lower levels of forgiveness are generally associated with relatively high levels of thinking in terms of we. We asked par-

ticipants to bring to mind an offense and assessed the degree to which they had forgiven the offender. Thereafter, participants were told that the study was completed and proceeded with an ostensibly unrelated second study that consisted of a language task. In this task, participants were asked to intuitively translate personal pronouns of a language with which they were not familiar. Thus, this task was not relevant to the relationship with offender. The number of first-person plural pronouns (*we*, *us*, and *our*) that participants listed was used as an indicator of a general we frame of mind.

Method

Participants. In Study 1, 86 students (61 women, 25 men, 20 years old on average) at the Free University of Amsterdam participated and received 5 Dutch guilders (US\$2) in exchange for their participation.

Procedure. After participants were welcomed in the laboratory, they were seated in individual cubicles where they received the research material. They were told that they were going to participate in two brief unrelated studies.

Participants were asked to bring to mind and to write down the name of their most significant other in life (cf. Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998). We asked them to think of their most significant other because we assumed that almost anybody would at some point in time have felt hurt, offended, or treated unfairly by his or her most significant other. Participants indicated who the other was and then completed an eight-item scale that measured commitment to the other (e.g., "I feel emotionally attached to the other," $\alpha = .83$) (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Of the significant others named, 31% were intimate partners, 27% close friends, 21% one of the parents, 9% siblings, and 10% were unclassified. Level of commitment was, as anticipated, high, $M = 6.26$, $SD = 0.80$ (on a 7-point scale).

Participants were then asked to bring to mind the most severe incident in the past few years in which they felt hurt or offended in some way by the significant other. After they wrote a brief paragraph about the offense, participants completed questionnaires that assessed how long ago the offense occurred and how severe the offense was (three items, e.g., "The offense was very intense," $\alpha = .91$). Level of forgiveness was assessed using a Dutch translation of the TRIM (i.e., transgression-related interpersonal motivations) inventory. This measure, developed by McCullough et al. (1998), was designed to assess forgiveness based on an underlying two-component motivational system (i.e., avoidance and revenge). Of this originally 10-item measure, 8 items were used (with 4 items measuring the avoidance component and 4 items measuring the revenge component of forgiveness; 2 items were deleted because we were not

able to translate these items in a way that connotations of the items perfectly corresponded in English and Dutch). In addition to these items that measure the negative dimension of forgiveness (e.g., "I want the other to get what he/she deserves," "I keep as much distance between us as possible"), we also included a single-item scale previously included in measures that assess the positive dimension of forgiveness ("I have forgiven the other"; cf., Fincham & Beach, 2002; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). We averaged the scores on the TRIM and the single-item scale and used this as an indicator of forgiveness. This measure exhibited good internal consistency, $\alpha = .93$. All aforementioned measures were assessed with scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

Participants were now told that the first study had finished and were asked to proceed with a second study. This study consisted of a language task modeled after Dijksterhuis and Van Knippenberg (2000). It was stated that earlier research has shown that people are fairly good at guessing the translation of an unknown foreign language just by using their intuition. Participants were asked to read a short story in a Polynesian language (which was actually a nonexistent language). In this text, 20 spaces, numbered 1 to 20, were left blank. Participants were told that at these blank spaces personal pronouns were left out of the original text. They were asked to guess and list the correct personal pronoun that was left out at each of the 20 spaces. Of interest to us was the number of first-person plural pronouns (*we*, *us*, *our*, *ours*) participants would list, which served as an indicator of a generalized we frame of mind.

After completion of this task, participants were paid, thanked, and debriefed. During the debriefing, none of the participants indicated any suspicion that the two ostensibly unrelated studies were actually related.

Results and Discussion

We began the analyses by calculating simple correlations between forgiveness, commitment, features of the offense, and number of first-person plural pronouns used. The results are summarized in Table 1.¹ Consistent with our hypothesis, level of forgiveness was positively correlated with the number of first-person plural pronouns. Moreover, level of forgiveness was positively correlated with commitment to the other, negatively correlated with severity of offense, and positively correlated with the time since the offense occurred.

To ensure that the effect of forgiveness on the number of first-person plural pronouns listed was evident after controlling for commitment to the offender and features of the conflict, we regressed the number of first-person plural pronouns simultaneously onto forgiveness, commitment, severity of offense, and how long ago

TABLE 1: Correlations Between Forgiveness, Commitment, Severity of Offense, and Time of Offense and Number of First-Person Plural Pronouns Listed, Study 1

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Forgiveness	5.74	1.74	—				
2. Commitment	6.26	0.80	.19*	—			
3. Severity of offense	4.83	1.75	-.42**	.05	—		
4. Time since the offense	19.2	20.15	.20*	-.06	-.04	—	
5. Number of first-person plural pronouns	4.28	1.91	.25*	-.07	-.05	-.03	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

the offense occurred (i.e., time since the offense). As can be seen in Table 2, there was a positive association between level of forgiveness and the number of first-person plural pronouns participants listed when controlling for these other variables.

Thus, consistent with the general hypothesis, relatively high levels of forgiveness were associated with a relatively greater use of first-person plural pronouns in the language task. This task was completely unrelated to the relationship with the offender, and none of the participants indicated that they believed the two tasks were related. Thus, these findings provide initial evidence for the spillover hypothesis in that level of forgiveness regarding a past offense indeed is associated with a we frame of mind above and beyond the specific relationship with the offender.

STUDY 2

The findings of Study 1 provide good support for the idea that level of forgiveness has spillover effects regarding a we frame of mind, thereby providing initial evidence that level of forgiveness toward a specific offender influences level of prosocial orientation beyond the relationship with the offender. To extend and complement these findings, Study 2 was designed to examine behavioral spillover effects of level of forgiveness regarding a past offense. As indicators of general behavioral spillover effects, we examined whether participants who were reminded of forgiven offenses compared to participants who were reminded of unforgiven offenses were more willing to volunteer for a charity organization and were more likely to donate money to the charity organization.

Moreover, in Study 1 we did not control for possible mood effects. It is conceivable that participants who recalled an offense that was not forgiven experienced higher levels of negative affect than participants who recalled largely forgiven offenses. In Study 2, we included a measure of positive and negative affect to examine whether the effects of level of forgiveness on a generalized prosocial orientation are not due to mood effects.

Finally, because Study 1 used a correlational design, one may argue that participants with higher levels of a generalized prosocial orientation are generally more forgiving than participants with lower levels of a generalized prosocial orientation. Therefore, as noted, we assigned participants randomly to different conditions in which participants were asked to bring to mind an offense that they had largely forgiven or an offense that they had not forgiven.

Method

Participants and design. In Study 2, 58 participants (25 men, 32 women, 1 gender unknown, 20.7 years on average) participated and received 2 Euros in exchange for their participation. They were randomly assigned to the forgiveness condition or the no-forgiveness condition.

Procedure. Upon arrival, participants were welcomed in the lab and escorted to individual cubicles, where they received the research material. Level of forgiveness was manipulated by means of the instructions, in which participants were asked to recall an offense they had largely forgiven (i.e., forgiveness condition) or to recall an offense they had largely not forgiven (i.e., no-forgiveness condition). After these instructions, participants wrote a brief paragraph about the offense.

Subsequently, participants completed the same measures as used in Study 1 that assessed commitment ($\alpha = .94$), severity of the offense ($\alpha = .70$), how long ago the offense occurred, and as a manipulation check, level of forgiveness ($\alpha = .72$). Finally, participants completed an affect scale. Four items assessed positive affect (e.g., happy, cheerful; $\alpha = .90$), and four items assessed negative affect (e.g., anger, sad; $\alpha = .83$). For each item, participants were asked to indicate on 7-point scales the degree to which the item described how they were feeling at this moment.²

After participants had completed the questionnaire, instructions stated that the study was finished and that they could leave the cubicle and report to the experimenter. After the participant was paid, the experimenter explained that he was also conducting a small study for Humanitas, a Dutch charity foundation. The experimenter asked the participant to fill out a brief question-

TABLE 2: Regression Models Predicting Number of First-Person Plural, Study 1

Criteria	Simple r With Criterion	Regression Results		
		Beta	F	R ²
Number of first-person plural pronouns				
Forgiveness	.25*	.33**	2.02	.09
Commitment	-.07	-.14		
Severity	-.05	.10		
Time since offense	-.03	-.10		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

naire in the adjacent room. In this room was also a collecting box for Humanitas in which the participant could donate money if he or she wanted to (for a similar procedure, see Holland, Verplanken, & Van Knippenberg, 2002). The experimenter asked if the participant wanted to fill in the questionnaire in any case. All participants agreed. The questionnaire explained that Humanitas is a foundation that helps people in need and that with the help of volunteers and professionals, Humanitas is among other things active in promoting home care, youth welfare, district visiting, care for the elderly, and care for the homeless. This description was taken from the Humanitas Internet site (<http://www.humanitas.nl/>). After participants read the description, they were asked to indicate their willingness to volunteer for the Humanitas foundation on a 7-point scale (1 = *definitely not*, 7 = *definitely*).

It was stated again that the participant could now donate some money to Humanitas in the collecting box if he or she wanted. Next, the participant was asked to indicate whether he or she had donated money or not and to fill in how much he or she had donated. Finally, to ensure anonymity, the participant was asked to fold the questionnaire and to put it in a closed box that stood next to the donating box. Afterward, we counted the money that participants had donated, and this amount was precisely the sum of the amount of money that participants had filled in on the questionnaire (13 euro and 55 cents).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. To examine whether the instructions to bring to mind a forgiven versus a not forgiven offense caused the intended effects, we conducted an analysis of variance with level of forgiveness as dependent variable and condition (forgiveness vs. no forgiveness) as independent variable. As expected, participants in the forgiveness condition reported higher levels of forgiveness ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.58$) than did participants in the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.18$), $F(1, 56) = 7.74$, $p < .01$.

Links of conditions with features of conflict, commitment, and affect. Separate analyses of variance revealed that severity of offense did not differ between the forgiveness ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.91$) and the no-forgiveness conditions ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.67$), $F(1, 56) = 0.75$, ns ; neither did the time since the offense occurred differ between the forgiveness condition ($M = 11.8$ months ago, $SD = 10.36$) and the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 7.7$ months ago, $SD = 10.23$), $F(1, 53) = 2.84$, ns . Level of commitment did not differ between conditions, $F(1, 56) = .01$, ns . Participants indicated in both conditions that they were, as intended, strongly committed to the offender (in the forgiveness condition, $M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.69$; in the no-forgiveness condition, $M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.64$). Finally, to examine whether the manipulation of forgiveness influenced participants' positive and negative affect, we performed separate analyses of variance with positive affect and negative affect as dependent variables and condition as independent variable. These analyses revealed that positive affect did not differ between the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.46$) and the forgiveness condition ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.46$), $F(1, 56) = 0.52$, ns . However, participants in the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.51$) reported greater levels of negative affect than did participants in the forgiveness condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.49$), $F(1, 56) = 5.08$, $p < .05$.

Prosocial intentions and behavior. To test our hypothesis, we examined whether participants in the forgiveness condition were more willing to volunteer for Humanitas and were more likely to actually donate money to Humanitas than participants in the no-forgiveness condition.

First, we performed an analysis of variance with willingness to volunteer as dependent variable and condition as independent variable. This analysis revealed that participants who were reminded of a forgiven offense ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.74$) exhibited a marginally higher willingness to volunteer than participants who were reminded of a unforgiven offense ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.93$), as evidenced by a marginal effect for condition, $F(1, 55) = 3.86$, $p = .055$. To ensure whether this effect was evident after controlling for positive and negative affect, we included the latter variables in the analysis as covariates. This analysis revealed that there was still a marginal effect of condition on willingness to volunteer, although there was a small decrease of the F value, $F(1, 52) = 3.37$, $p = .072$.

To examine whether participants who were reminded of a forgiven offense (compared to participants who were reminded of a not forgiven offense) were more likely to donate money to Humanitas, we performed a logistic regression analysis with donation (yes or no) as dependent variable and condition as independent variable. In the forgiveness condition, 44.8% of the partici-

pants donated money, whereas in the no-forgiveness condition, only 18.5% donated money, $\chi^2(1, N = 58) = 4.44, p < .05$. To examine whether this effect could be explained by positive and negative affect, we conducted a logistic regression analysis and controlled for positive and negative affect. This analysis revealed that the effect of condition was still evident, $\chi^2(1, N = 58) = 5.14, p < .05$.³

To summarize, participants who were reminded of a largely forgiven offense tended to be more willing to volunteer for a charity organization and were more likely to donate money than participants who were reminded of an offense that they had not forgiven. These effects were observed even after controlling for affect and after controlling for features of the offense and features of the relationship (i.e., commitment) that participants were thinking of. These findings provide strong support for the hypothesis that level of forgiveness may spill over even on prosocial behavior that is not related to the offender.

STUDY 3

Whereas Studies 1 and 2 provided good evidence for a spillover effect on a person's generalized prosocial orientation as a result of different levels of forgiveness, Study 3 was designed to complement these studies in several ways. To begin with, the findings of Studies 1 and 2 are mute as to whether the positive association between level of forgiveness and a generalized prosocial orientation is due to a decrease in a generalized prosocial orientation as a result of low levels of forgiveness or is due to an increase in a generalized prosocial orientation that accompanies high levels of forgiveness. Therefore, in Study 3 we included a control condition in which participants were not reminded of an offense. In line with previous research findings that suggest that forgiveness restores the situation as before the offense took place and the lack of forgiveness reduces a person's prosocial stance (at least toward the offender; see Karremans & Van Lange, 2004), we hypothesized that especially the lack of forgiveness reduces a person's generalized prosocial orientation, whereas a person's generalized prosocial orientation is comparable to baseline levels.

As indicators of a generalized prosocial orientation, in Study 3 we examined the effects of level of forgiveness on a we frame of mind, thereby seeking to replicate the findings of Study 1, and in addition, to extend and complement Studies 1 and 2, we examined the effects of forgiveness on feelings of relatedness toward other people in general.

Method

Participants and design. In Study 3, 91 participants (33 men, 58 women, 20.5 years old on average) at the Free University of Amsterdam participated and received 5

Dutch guilders in exchange for their participation. They were randomly assigned to either the no-forgiveness condition, the forgiveness condition, or the control condition.

Procedure. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were told that they were going to take part in two unrelated studies. They received two questionnaires and completed these in individual cubicles. The three conditions were created by means of the instructions in the first questionnaire. One third of the participants were asked to bring to mind and to briefly write down an offense they had not forgiven (no-forgiveness condition). One third of the participants were asked to bring to mind and to write down an offense they had forgiven (forgiveness condition). And one third of the participants were asked to bring to mind and to briefly write down an everyday interaction they had with someone (control condition). We wanted to control for level of commitment across all three conditions and therefore asked all participants to think about someone to whom they were currently strongly committed. In this way, we could examine, as we predicted, whether the absence of forgiveness reveals decreased levels of a generalized prosocial orientation compared to the control condition and whether forgiveness reveals similar levels of a generalized prosocial orientation compared to the control condition. Participants in the control condition were thus not reminded of an offense, and we reasoned that therefore this condition could serve as a baseline of level of general prosocial orientation when thinking about a relationship of strong commitment.

As in Studies 1 and 2, participants completed measures that assessed commitment to the other person ($\alpha = .90$), severity of the offense ($\alpha = .90$), how long ago the event occurred (which constitutes how long ago the offense occurred in the experimental conditions and how long ago the everyday interaction took place in the control condition), and level of forgiveness ($\alpha = .88$; obviously, in the control condition participants did not complete measures of features of the offense and forgiveness). Subsequently, as in Study 2, positive and negative affect were assessed with four positive feelings ($\alpha = .84$) and four negative feelings ($\alpha = .82$).

After they had completed these measures, participants were told that the first study was completed and were asked to continue with the second study. This second, ostensibly unrelated study consisted of the same language task as used in Study 1 in which participants were asked to guess and list the 20 missing personal pronouns in the Polynesian text. As in Study 1, we counted the number of first-person plural pronouns that participants listed in this task.

Next, participants indicated the extent to which they felt currently related to other people in general. To

assess relatedness to other people, an adapted version of the Inclusion of Others in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) was used. This graphical measure assesses closeness with a specific partner by presenting seven pairs of circles, ranging from the first pair of circles that are completely nonoverlapping circles to the seventh pair of circles that are nearly completely overlapping. Of each pair, one circle represents the self, and the other circle represents the relationship partner. The participant is asked to select the pair of circles that best describes the relationship with the partner. We adjusted the scale by asking the participant to indicate the degree to which they felt related to other people in general. In each pair, one circle represents the self, and the other circle represents other people in general.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. To examine whether the manipulation of forgiveness caused the intended effects, an analysis of variance was conducted with level of forgiveness as dependent measure and the experimental conditions (no-forgiveness vs. forgiveness condition) as independent measure. As expected, participants in the no-forgiveness condition reported lower levels of forgiveness ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.28$) than did participants in the forgiveness condition ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 0.99$), $F(1, 59) = 11.90$, $p < .001$. Thus, the manipulation of forgiveness was successful.

Links of conditions with features of conflict, commitment, and affect. Separate analyses of variance were conducted to examine whether the forgiveness conditions were associated with severity of the offense (in this analysis, the control condition could obviously not be included), how long ago the event took place, and level of commitment.

These analyses revealed that severity of offense did not differ between the no-forgiveness ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.27$) and the forgiveness conditions ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.36$), $F(1, 59) < 1$, *ns*. How long ago the event occurred did not differ among the conditions, $F(2, 90) = 1.15$, *ns*. On average, the event (the offense or the everyday interaction) took place 6.3 months ago. Also, level of commitment to the other did not differ among conditions, $F(2, 90) = 2.04$, *ns*. In all conditions, as intended, level of commitment to the other was relatively strong (in the no-forgiveness condition, $M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.22$; in the forgiveness condition, $M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.31$; in the control condition, $M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.14$). Finally, analyses of variance with positive and negative affect as dependent variables and condition as independent variable revealed a significant effect of condition on positive affect, $F(2, 90) = 4.38$, $p < .05$; and negative affect, $F(2, 90) = 5.72$, $p < .05$. Further analyses revealed that participants in the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.15$) reported sig-

nificantly lower levels of positive affect than participants in the forgiveness and control conditions (respectively, $M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.86$ and $M = 4.97$, $SD = 0.90$), $F(1, 90) = 5.87$, $p < .05$; and there was no significant effect on positive affect between the forgiveness and control conditions, $F(1, 90) = 2.90$, *ns*. Also, participants in the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.31$) reported significantly higher levels of negative affect than participants in the forgiveness and control conditions (respectively, $M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.12$ and $M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.98$), $F(1, 90) = 9.07$, $p < .01$; and there was no significant effect for negative affect between the forgiveness and control conditions, $F(1, 90) = 2.37$, *ns*. These findings are in line with earlier findings by Karremans et al. (2003) in that being reminded of a not forgiven offense compared to being reminded of a forgiven offense is related to more negative affect and less positive affect, particularly in relationships of strong commitment.

*Spillover effects of level of forgiveness.*⁴ To test our hypothesis, we performed separate analyses of variance with the number of first-person plural pronouns and the extent to which participants felt related to other people in general as dependent variables and condition (forgiveness, no forgiveness, and control) as independent variable. First, these analyses revealed an effect of condition on usage of first-person plural pronouns, $F(2, 90) = 3.76$, $p < .05$. Planned comparison analyses revealed that as predicted, there was a significant contrast between the no-forgiveness condition, $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.98$, and the forgiveness and control conditions (respectively, $M = 5.58$, $SD = 2.25$ and $M = 5.13$, $SD = 2.58$), $F(1, 90) = 6.86$, $p < .01$. Use of first-person plural pronouns did not differ between the forgiveness and the control conditions, $F(1, 90) = .66$, *ns*. Thus, consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the no-forgiveness condition listed fewer first-person plural pronouns in the language task compared to participants in the forgiveness and control conditions, suggesting that low levels of forgiveness decrease a we frame of mind.

Second, the analysis with relatedness to other people in general as dependent variable revealed a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 89) = 3.60$, $p < .05$.⁵ Planned comparison analysis revealed that the no-forgiveness condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.35$) differed significantly from the forgiveness and control conditions (respectively, $M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.10$ and $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.90$), $F(1, 89) = 5.93$, $p < .05$. There was no significant difference between the forgiveness condition and the control condition, $F(1, 89) = 1.28$, *ns*. Thus, in line with the hypothesis, participants in the no-forgiveness condition (compared to participants in the forgiveness and control conditions) indicated to feel less related to other people in general.

To examine whether these effects may be explained by mood effects, the same analyses as reported earlier

were conducted for number of first-person plural pronouns and relatedness to others as dependent variables, and in these analyses positive affect and negative affect were included as covariates. The analyses of covariance revealed that the contrasts between the no-forgiveness condition and the forgiveness and control conditions were significant for the number of first-person plural pronouns, $F(1, 88) = 4.33, p < .05$, and for relatedness to other people, $F(1, 87) = 4.57, p < .05$. There were no significant contrasts between the forgiveness and the control conditions for both dependent variables. Thus, the effects of condition on a we frame of mind and on feelings of relatedness with other people could not be explained by mood effects.⁶

In sum, in Study 3 we obtained additional evidence for the hypothesis that level of forgiveness may result in spillover effects by providing evidence that level of forgiveness influences feelings of relatedness toward other people. Importantly, the findings of Study 3 demonstrated that as predicted, the absence of forgiveness decreases a we frame of mind and feelings of relatedness with other people, whereas forgiveness seems to restore level of we thinking back to baseline levels of we thinking and feelings of relatedness with others. Taken together, these findings provide good support for the hypothesized spillover effects of level of forgiveness on a person's generalized prosocial orientation.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The major purpose of the present research was to provide evidence that level of forgiveness regarding a past offense not only influences prosocial motivation toward the offender (as previous research has shown) but even affects a person's generalized prosocial orientation. Specifically, based on the reasoning that motives that originate from a specific interaction experience are not restricted to the specific relationship but may lead to spillover effects above and beyond the relationship (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999; Van Baaren et al., 2004), we predicted that levels of forgiveness might affect prosocial cognition, feeling, and behavior that is not related to (the relationship with) the offender.

The results of Studies 1 and 3 revealed that level of forgiveness affects a generalized we frame of mind. Participants who had forgiven an offender compared to participants who had not forgiven an offender spontaneously used more first-person plural pronouns in a language task. Moreover, Study 2 revealed that level of forgiveness influenced prosocial behavior that is not confined to the relationship with the offender. Participants who were reminded of a forgiven offense were more willing to volunteer for a charity organization and were actually more likely to donate money to a charity organization than participants who were reminded of an unforgiven

offense. Finally, in Study 3 it was demonstrated that level of forgiveness influenced the extent to which participants reported to feel related to other people in general. Importantly, the associations between level of forgiveness and the dependent measures were not mediated by mood, features of the relationship, or features of the offense itself. Thus, in three studies in which a generalized prosocial orientation was operationalized as thinking in terms of we, feelings of relatedness with other people, and participants' willingness to volunteer and donating behavior, we obtained convergent evidence for our general prediction that level of forgiveness affects a person's generalized prosocial orientation beyond the relationship with the offender.

Importantly, Study 3 revealed that compared to a control condition, lower levels of forgiveness were associated with decreases in a we frame of mind and feelings of relatedness, whereas higher levels of forgiveness were not associated with an increase in we frame of mind. These findings suggest that the lack of forgiveness decreases generalized prosocial orientation, whereas forgiveness restores a person's generalized prosocial orientation, at least with regard to thinking in terms of we and general feelings of relatedness. As noted in the introduction, these findings are congruent with earlier findings by McCullough et al. (2003) and Karremans and Van Lange (2004), who found similar effects of level of forgiveness regarding prosociality toward the specific offender.

As briefly noted in the introduction, one important theoretical framework for further understanding the present findings is derived from the literature on self-construal (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Particularly, the finding that level of forgiveness influences the use of *we* and *us* in a language task is consistent with previous research that shows that priming people with *we* and *us* induces relatively high levels of interdependent self-construal (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999). Conceivably, the effects we have observed may reflect varying levels of interdependent self-construal in response to the salience of forgiven versus unforgiven offenses.⁷ That is, high levels of forgiveness compared to low levels of forgiveness may have induced relatively higher levels of interdependent self-construal, manifested in a greater use of plural pronouns (i.e., *we*, *us*), increased feelings of relatedness, and increased prosocial behavior that expresses values (e.g., benevolence) that are linked to interdependent self-construal.

We believe that the finding that level of forgiveness has spillover effects beyond the relationship with the offender has important implications. First, although our findings provide evidence for very general spillover effects of thinking, feeling, and doing (i.e., not directed

toward a specific third party), it is conceivable that level of forgiveness toward an offender may also have consequences for how a person thinks of and behaves toward a specific other (i.e., other than the offender). For instance, level of forgiveness that is rooted in a certain interaction experience with Partner A may in turn influence how the individual behaves in subsequent interactions with Partner B or C (cf., Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Reis et al., 2000).

Second, the demonstrated negative spillover effects of the lack of forgiveness in Study 3 may ultimately contribute to negative psychological outcomes. For instance, reduced feelings of relatedness with other people that result from the lack of forgiveness may obstruct people's essential need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Perhaps a person who is not capable of forgiving others may ultimately experience feelings of loneliness or even depression as a result of the lack of feeling related to others. Also, a person that has not forgiven an offender may not only experience less positive interactions with the offender but may also experience less positive interactions with other people. Thus, the lack of forgiveness may negatively affect both general feelings of relatedness as well as the number of positive interaction experiences, which in turn may have important implications for the person's psychological well-being. This idea is also congruent with the notion that especially in relationships in which partners are strongly committed to each other, low levels of forgiveness, which implies a threat to the relatedness of the self with the partner, are related to lower levels of psychological well-being (Karremans et al., 2003).

Third, a very broad implication of the present research is that it emphasizes the role of specific interaction experiences—or at least, the reminding of a specific interaction—in shaping general interpersonal motivations. The present findings importantly extend previous research and theory, which has predominantly focused on how cognition, feeling, and behavior in a specific interaction situation are influenced by more chronic and general interpersonal motivations rather than by (salience of) specific past interaction experiences (Reis et al., 2000). For instance, research has shown that cognition, feeling, and behavior in a particular interaction is influenced by personality differences in attachment style (e.g., Gaines & Henderson, 2002); prosocial, individualistic, and competitive orientations (Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997); or general type of self-construal (e.g., Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002). However, although several theories have speculated on how specific interactions may influence motivation in subsequent—seemingly unrelated—interactions, there is little empirical evidence in support of this claim.

Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

To our knowledge, the present research is one of the first studies that addresses spillover effects associated with level of forgiveness. Given the rather subtle, covert approach for measuring participants' cognitions, feelings, and behavior that went beyond the specific relationship with the offender, it is remarkable that across three studies we found significant effects consistent with our theoretical reasoning. By doing so, the present research underlines the value of cross-fertilization between research on relationships, prosocial motivation, and social cognition (cf., Holmes, 2000; Reis et al., 2000). However, before closing, we outline some limitations of the present research.

First, in the present research we did not examine the relationship between generalized cognitions, feelings, and behavior, and we did not test mediating models. For instance, one may argue that a decreased we frame of mind or feelings of relatedness that result from the lack of forgiveness in turn would lead to less general prosocial behavior, such as donating behavior and willingness to volunteer. In the present research, we wanted to provide initial evidence for cognitive, affective, and behavioral spillover effects of level of forgiveness; however, whether these cognitive and affective effects mediate the behavioral effects or whether these are independent unmediated spillover effects is an interesting issue for future research.

Second, the present research has some methodological limitations that seem almost inherent to the study of forgiveness (cf., Flanigan, 1998). For instance, forgiveness may be the result of a time-extended attribution process (cf., Fincham, 2000), which cannot easily be manipulated and changed in the laboratory. The paradigm used in the present research, in which participants were randomly assigned to either the forgiveness or the no-forgiveness condition, was based on the assumption that almost all people can bring to mind offenses that they have highly forgiven and offenses that they have not forgiven (for a similar method, see Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Indeed, this instruction should not be regarded as an active manipulation of forgiveness. Normally, one could argue that such a procedure may be sensitive to demand characteristics. However, given the unobtrusive dependent measures that were used in the present research, it seems unlikely that demand characteristics have played a role in the studies. Also, it is important to recognize that memories for forgiven versus unforgiven offenses are likely to be associated with other variables (e.g., felt rejection or reduced trust) that have caused both level of forgiveness as well as level of generalized prosocial orientation, and it would be valuable to control for such factors in future research.

To conclude, by influencing a general we frame of mind, general feelings of relatedness, and general prosocial behavior, the effects of level of forgiveness regarding a particular person seem indeed to be far greater and more multifaceted than documented at present. Clearly, these spillover effects are important because they suggest that experiences regarding a specific interaction have pronounced effects on cognition, affect, and behavior that are relevant to a person's relationship with the interpersonal world more generally.

NOTES

1. Women ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.79$) listed marginally more first-person plural pronouns than did men ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.73$), $F(1, 85) = 3.68$, $p = .059$. Given that higher numbers of first-person plural pronouns listed arguably represent higher levels of interdependent self-construal (which is further discussed in the General Discussion), this finding is consistent with previous research showing that women generally exhibit higher levels of interdependent self-construal than men (e.g., Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002). However, this gender difference was not replicated in Study 3. No further effects of gender were found in the analyses.

2. The mood items were the same mood items that we used in previous research to control for the effects of mood (see Karremans & Van Lange, in press). We chose these items for positive and negative affect because from other previous studies in which we used the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) we learned that these items generally had high factor loadings for, respectively, positive and negative affect.

3. We performed all analyses while controlling for severity of the offense, time of the offense, and commitment to the offender. These analyses revealed nearly identical results, with significant effects of condition for donating behavior and marginal effects for willingness to volunteer.

4. Preliminary analyses revealed that the measure of first-person pronouns used in the language task and the graphical measure of relatedness, although positively associated, did not significantly correlate, $r = .09$, *ns*. Although one might expect a stronger correlation between the conceptually related implicit cognitive we-ness measure and the explicit measure of relatedness, previous research also typically reveals only weakly positive but often nonsignificant correlations between implicit and explicit measures of related constructs (cf. the literature on implicit vs. explicit self-esteem, Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000; the literature on implicit vs. explicit prejudice, Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000).

5. Drop in degrees of freedom is due to the fact that 1 participant overlooked a page in the questionnaire.

6. Also, to explore whether features of the offense and commitment to the offender might account for the results, we conducted analyses with severity of the offense, time of offense, and commitment to the offender (separately and simultaneously) as covariates in the planned comparison analyses for the number of first-person plural pronouns and for the relatedness to others measure. These analyses revealed nearly identical results, with a significant contrast between the no-forgiveness condition and the other two conditions for both dependent measures.

7. One may argue that low levels of forgiveness are associated with greater use of *I* and *me*, assuming that these pronouns represent independent self-construal. However, both in Studies 1 and 3, we found no effects of level on forgiveness on the use of first-person singular pronouns (*I*, *me*, *mine*) or on any of the other pronouns. With respect to this finding, it is important to note that it is generally acknowledged in the literature that independent and interdependent self-construal are not necessarily correlated but are two continuous dimensions (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002; Singelis, 1994). Thus, a shift in level of forgiveness does not necessarily entail a shift from interdependent (accompanied with a greater use of *we* and *us*) to independent self-construal

(accompanied with a greater use of *I* and *me*). The present findings may imply that forgiveness is primarily associated with changes in interdependent self-construal and not with changes in independent self-construal. We suggest that this issue be further explored in future research.

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