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Does Malevolent Forgiveness Influence Relationship and Affective Outcomes?



B. Psychological Science (Hons.)

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Abstract

Forgiveness, as well as the affective outcomes associated with it, is conventionally understood as a benevolent intrapsychic phenomenon characterised by goodwill and reconciliation towards one's transgressor. But what happens when forgiveness is expressed unconventionally? This paper introduces the concept of *malevolent forgiveness*: a harm-oriented behaviour designed to serve a beneficial *interpersonal* function for the victim, at the expense of the transgressor. Malevolent forgiveness is characterised by three theorised sub-motives: Revenge, Moral Superiority, and Indebtedness. While the internal state of forgiveness is, by definition, benevolent, the interpersonal behaviour of *communicating* forgiveness can be motivated by malintent and may be used to serve a variety of functional purposes. The affective and relational outcomes of benevolent forgiveness are well documented within forgiveness literature, and are generally positive with a few exceptions. This paper is concerned with the affective and relational outcomes of malevolently motivated forgiveness, and specifically, to what extent do both benevolent *and* malevolent motivations predict relationship quality (relational outcome) as well as justice satisfaction, depression/anxiety/stress levels, and positive and negative affect. The results of this paper found that benevolence positively predicted relationship quality while malevolence had no association. Malevolence negatively predicted justice satisfaction and contentment, while benevolence was not significantly associated. Neither benevolence nor malevolence was associated with depression, anxiety, and stress levels. More research is needed to determine the degree to which malevolent intentions can be attributed to revenge, moral superiority and indebtedness motivations.

Keywords: Forgiveness; Malevolent Forgiveness; Affect; Relationships

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no materials previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide's digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time.

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September, 2023

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 *General Forgiveness Research – A Summary*

Forgiveness is conventionally understood as a benevolent intrapsychic phenomenon characterised by a victim's eagerness to move on from a transgression so that they may experience a number of well-documented positive outcomes (McCullough, Worthington, E. L., & Rachal, K. C., 1997). However, despite the focus of modern forgiveness literature being on its cognitive properties and beneficial outcomes, the critically important but relatively under-discussed *interpersonal* functions of *communicating* forgiveness are worth considering too. Furthermore, what happens when forgiveness is communicated, but not meant in the way that it is conventionally understood? Here I introduce and explore the concept of *malevolent forgiveness*, an intuitively oxymoronic term which challenges the idea that forgiveness is exclusively benevolent. Malevolent forgiveness can be understood through the strict lens of interpersonal communication and specific social behaviours designed to serve particular functions. Communicated forgiveness is used to meet many intended, and sometimes unintended, outcomes. This paper will discuss forgiveness motivations, the positive and negative outcomes of forgiveness, and will specifically test and compare the intrapsychic affective outcomes, as well as the interpersonal relational outcomes, of benevolent vs malevolent forgiveness.

1.2 *Defining Malevolent Forgiveness*

Defining and operationalising forgiveness has been an inconsistent endeavour throughout modern literature, despite theoretical consensus arguably being met via McCullough's popular definition proposed in 1997: "[Forgiveness is] *the set of motivational*

changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner, (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement from the offender, and (c) increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender's hurtful actions” (McCullough, 1997). However, themes like benevolence, avoidance, vengeance, anger, the cancellation of debt, guilt, forgetting, reconciliation, repentance, condonement, resentment and morality have all been associated and operationalised with forgiveness as well (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998; McCullough, 2003; Tracy, 1999). These themes rarely all recur consistently across discussions and, critically, researchers conducting studies on forgiveness seldom make explicit their distinction between *intrapsychic* (the internal state of experiencing forgiveness) and *interpersonal* (the external behaviour of expressing forgiveness) forgiveness when discussing the topic (Gabriels, & Strelan, P., 2018).

Baumeister (1998) coined the term *hollow forgiveness* to describe the phenomenon whereby a victim communicates their forgiveness to their transgressor, but does not mean it. A victim may express hollow forgiveness for many reasons, including: accelerated conflict resolution, fear or apathy for their transgressor, or genuine concern for the wellbeing of their transgressor (Baumeister, 1998). In the context of forgiveness, hollow forgiveness must be viewed through an exclusively functional, interpersonal lens because the “internal state of hollow forgiveness” would be non-forgiveness, or to hold a grudge. In saying this, victims still can, and do, hold grudges while expressing their forgiveness for purely prosocial reasons, especially within the context of social harmony and the maintenance of valued relationships (Takada, & Ohbuchi, K., 2013; Strelan et al., 2013).

To extend from Baumeister's proposed *hollow*, yet still functionally prosocial form of expressed forgiveness, as well as taking inspiration from McCullough's definition of conventional forgiveness: *Malevolent forgiveness is to explicitly communicate reduced motivations to avoid, exact revenge on, or seek reparations from a transgressor while implicitly communicating conflicting intentions and/or expectations.* Malevolent forgiveness exists in contrast to conventional, benevolent forgiveness whereby the objective of the victims behaviour is to utilise the conveyance of forgiveness for personal gain at the expense of their transgressor. Malevolent forgiveness is an interpersonal behaviour driven by a victims internal state of unforgiveness, the nuance of which can be understood within the context of grudge theory. To hold a grudge is to consider the score of a transgression unsettled, the victim harbours resentment towards their offender because they may feel entitled to reparations, to exact revenge or to assume the role of the victim, which, in certain contexts, can result in material or social benefits (Baumeister, 1998).

1.3 Motivations for Forgiveness

Why might a victim elect to forgive their transgressor? The potential intrapsychic benefits of forgiving are now well-documented, with modern literature having associated forgiveness with the reduction of stress, depression, guilt and a general increase in the emotional state of the victim. There have been many justifications for these beneficial associations, including the reduction of stress associated with mitigating ongoing conflict with a relationship partner (Strelan & Covic, 2006; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Additionally, the consequences of a victim withholding forgiveness, and instead electing to hold a grudge, have also been considered (Baumeister, 1998). Sustained anger, resentment and rumination over a transgressor or transgression can lead to chronic feelings of stress, fear and anxiety, the

downstream effects of which can manifest physiologically in a variety of ways including fatigue and cognitive decline.

A victim might elect to forgive for interpersonal (relationship-oriented) benefit, or even for the primary benefit of their offender (Takada, & Ohbuchi, K., 2013; Strelan et al., 2013). Genuine, benevolent forgiveness may yield positive affective outcomes generally, but the pathway by which these benefits are accessed have nuance. Strelan (2013) considered *who* forgiveness was most often motivated for, and it was found that forgiving for the sake of the self (as opposed to the relationship or offender) was both the most common motivation for forgiving, as well as the motivation associated with the best affective outcomes. These findings suggest that while motivations for forgiving can involve external parties, it is generally favourable to keep forgiveness internally motivated. However, individuals do not always forgive for the sake of themselves, and evidence suggests that externally-oriented motivations such as normative, religious, conflict-resolving and social harmony factors often influence a victim's propensity to forgive. (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004; Tracy, 1999).

1.4 Functions of Forgiveness

If forgiveness is best experienced internally for the sake of oneself, what is the functional purpose of interpersonally expressing forgiveness to one's transgressor? Furthermore, does the *expression* of forgiveness necessitate an internal feeling of having forgiven, or any goodwill towards one's transgressor at all? Using the concept of Social Value Orientation (SVO), forgiveness (and punishment) are rooted in either prosocial (i.e. relationship or other-oriented), individualistic (i.e. self-oriented) or competitive (i.e. harm-oriented) motivations (Gollwitzer, & Okimoto, T. G., 2021). Examples of prosocial functions include the diffusion of conflict to seek social harmony, the desire to relieve one's transgressor

of guilt, or to seek some kind of mutual benefit (i.e. a wife forgiving her husband for the sake of their child). Prosocial behaviour would best be described as being motivated by traditionally *benevolent* reasons and, notably, do not necessitate an *internal* state of forgiveness. Individualistic functions include the repairing of a relationship so that the victim may access materials or resources associated with the relationship (i.e. money), the affective relief of not having to manage ongoing conflict with their transgressor, or the relief of social pressures to forgive one's transgressor (i.e. pressures from friends, family, or a church to forgive). While these behaviours may be motivated for many reasons, these are good examples of the purposes that *hollow* forgiveness can serve, and also do not require an internal state of forgiveness.

Malevolent forgiveness is an example of a harm-oriented behaviour, whereby the expression of forgiveness is designed to hurt, manipulate or coerce the forgiveness-recipient for the benefit of the victim, and detriment of the transgressor. Malevolent forgiveness is hence a functional, interpersonal manifestation of holding an intrapsychic grudge, as described by Baumeister (1998). Where prosocial and individualistic approaches intend to convey goodwill to the forgiveness-recipient so that the desired outcomes can be achieved, harm-oriented approaches may convey faux-goodwill *or* malice depending on the objectives of the forgiver. From a SVO perspective, victims harbouring a grudge might proceed with a course of action that meets their needs most effectively, which, depending on the subjective experiences and opinions of the victim, may result in the victim "weaponising" expressed forgiveness. While there could be many reasons as to why malevolent forgiveness might be utilised by a victim, for operational purposes three categories have been identified to describe the most likely motivations based on the best available evidence that appears in literature: Moral Superiority, Indebtedness/Leverage, and Revenge.

1.5 Motives for Malevolent Forgiveness

1.5.1 Moral Superiority

Communicating forgiveness may enhance a victim's claim to moral superiority because the act of forgiveness is itself seen as morally commendable (Baumeister, 1998). Intrapsychically, a victim may receive an affective boost by being made to feel as though they are "better than" their transgressor, regardless of whether or not they had genuinely forgiven at all (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2012).

Interpersonally, following the communication of forgiveness, the transgressor could be made to feel guilty if they perceive that they did not deserve to be forgiven, or if they feel as though they were afforded unjustified leniency (Exline & Baumeister, 2000). Providing forgiveness to assume a position of moral superiority can be a gamble for victims, as the resulting interpersonal dynamic (and affective outcomes) between victim and transgressor is influenced both by the transgressor's perception of the genuineness of the victim's message, *and* the transgressor's perception of how deserving they are of forgiveness. Hence, depending on the context, forgiveness can be used to *relieve* an offender of guilt, or to *induce* feelings of guilt.

In some instances, victims can feel empowered, or superior, by granting forgiveness to their offenders, however, victims have also reported feelings of having relinquished their power as a result of forgiving (Strelan et al., 2013). Clearly, expressing forgiveness can have different results depending on the actual *and* perceived intentions of both the victim and the transgressor, but it can be understood why a victim might try to express forgiveness malevolently to feel morally superior at the expense of their transgressor.

1.5.2 *Indebtedness/Leverage*

It is widely accepted throughout society that following an infringement, justice should be served to compensate the victim. However, given the tendency for a victim to exaggerate the severity of a transgression while transgressors tend to downplay it (Eder, Mitschke, V., & Gollwitzer, M., 2020), the need for third party arbitration is often deemed necessary to settle disputes. In private disputes between a transgressor and their victim, subjective appraisals of an event mean that settling conflicts is rarely a zero-sum game, and typically one party has objectively extracted more value from the other as a result. While there is no inherent *malevolence* in a victim seeking the justice that they genuinely believe they deserve, a victim would be acting malevolently if they see the transgression as an opportunity to extract unjustified compensation at the expense of their transgressor, and knowingly do so.

Given that most empirical, as well as lay, understandings of forgiveness involve the victim absolving their transgressor of debt (Baumeister, 1998), it is perhaps counterintuitive that forgiveness can, in fact, both create *and* compound a debt (Kelln & Ellard, 1999; Strelan et al., 2013). As is a common theme across forgiveness literature, affective and interpersonal outcomes are heavily influenced by subjective perception. Depending on perception, forgiveness can have the effect of compounding an offender's sense of inequity, such that the offender was left feeling like they "owed" their victim both for hurting them, and for being forgiven by them (Kelln & Ellard, 1999).

The previous situation offered an example whereby malevolent forgiveness could be weaponised to compound a transgressor's existing feelings of indebtedness, but offering forgiveness in unexpected situations where a "transgressor" perceives their actions as harmless can also be an effective manipulation tactic. In seemingly benign situations, people could

express malevolent forgiveness to assume the role of a victim in order to extract reparations from unwitting “offenders” (Exline & Baumeister, 2000). Mooney and colleagues also observed the phenomenon whereby transgressors felt increased guilt, shame, regret and indebtedness after receiving forgiveness (Mooney et al., 2016). Hence, it is clear to see how communicating forgiveness could be exploited to induce feelings of indebtedness.

1.5.3 *Revenge*

Revenge is a primal response to a transgression and can take many forms, including physical, psychological, or economic (Gollwitzer et al., 2011). Under certain conditions, we may feel satisfaction, gratification, and relief when revenge is exacted and justice is presumably restored (Feather, 1999). Our need to retaliate, as well as the affective outcomes of our actions are directly tied to our moral intuitions and subjective notions of justice and deservingness (Gollwitzer, 2009; McCullough, 2008).

In keeping with the previously discussed themes of perspective and subjectivity, transgressions often evoke strong emotional responses which can influence the nature of the resulting vengeance taken by a victim. Sometimes revenge can be relatively justified, in fact, many cultures consider revenge to be a necessary component in maintaining peaceful social cohesion, as without the threat of repercussion, aggressors are not disincentivised to infringe on others for personal gain. The subjective nature of the severity of a transgression can make the resulting responses unjustified, and furthermore, malevolent, should the victim choose to inflict the maximum amount of pain that they are capable of inflicting (Eder, Mitschke, V., & Gollwitzer, M., 2020).

When forgiveness is communicated unconventionally the recipient of forgiveness may be subjected to negative outcomes not usually associated with genuine forgiving. As is the case with moral superiority or indebtedness, forgiveness offered too leniently or unsuspectingly can result in feelings of inferiority, guilt, or shame in a transgressor. In intergroup contexts, treating offenders from a low-status outgroup more leniently than ingroup offenders may reflect an ingroup's strategy to showcase their generosity and, thus, to cement the status differential between the ingroup and the outgroup (Braun & Gollwitzer, 2012). "Forgiveness" expressed as a means to devalue a transgressor's self-esteem or social status may look a conciliatory gesture on the surface, but is actually nothing more than a subtle form of revenge (Gollwitzer & Okimoto, 2021).

1.6 Aims of Present Study

This study will test four hypotheses which aim to shed light on the outcomes of communicating forgiveness in a malevolent manner. The first hypothesis is that malevolent motivations will be negatively associated with relationship quality, while benevolent motivations will be positively associated. The second hypothesis is that malevolent forgiveness will be negatively associated with a victim's subjective sense of perceived justice in the aftermath of the event, and conversely benevolence will be positively associated. Noting the links between depression/anxiety/stress symptoms with holding a grudge, and as malevolent forgiveness has been operationalised as the interpersonal manifestation of an intrapsychic grudge, the third hypothesis is that malevolence will be positively associated with depression, anxiety, and stress, while benevolence will be negatively associated. Finally, as negative emotion due to unresolved conflict can be salient many years after an event has occurred, malevolence is predicted to be negatively associated with positive affect at the time of recalling the event, while benevolence will be positively associated.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Participants

An a priori power analysis ($\alpha = .05$, $1-\beta = .80$, $|p| = 0.3$) was conducted to determine the minimum sample size required to test the study hypotheses. 111 participants were recommended, but 151 were recruited to account for potential exclusions. 150 submissions were retained (75 Males, 73 Females, 1 Non-Binary, 1 PNTS). Participant age ranged from 19-75 years ($M = 39.5$, $SD = 14.28$). The participants were recruited from Prolific. Their participation was voluntary. There was no specific age range, selection or exclusion criteria for participation, except for the requirement that each participant must have expressed their forgiveness to a past transgressor.

2.2 Procedures and Measures

Prior to participation all participants read the study information sheet which provided a brief outline of the study and its aims (Appendix 1). After reading the information sheet, the participants were given the questionnaire which contained the consent form before completing the rest of the survey. Participants were first asked three demographic questions – their age, gender and country of residence. Thereafter, they were then instructed to recall a time in their life when somebody had hurt them, but specifically an instance where they had then communicated their forgiveness to their transgressor following the event. With this in mind, participants were then asked to recall:

- Time since transgression.
- What their transgressor did.
- Relationship importance at the time of the event.

- Relationship importance currently.
- Whether they have forgiven their transgressor.
- Transgression severity.
- Whether their transgressor has apologised.
- To what degree do they think their transgressor made amends
- Whether they think their transgressor intended to hurt them.

Participants then responded to the following scales in the following order (Section 2.3).

In total, the questionnaire took about 10 minutes to complete.

2.3 Description of Measures

2.3.1 Forgiveness Motives

Forgiveness motives were measured with 45-item *Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness* scale. The malevolent forgiveness subscale was developed specifically for the purposes of this study to measure which motives were employed when forgiving (Appendix 1). The benevolent forgiveness subscales used were previously developed by Strelan and his colleagues to determine the focus of a victim's forgiveness (Appendix 1).

All items begin with "I told them that I had forgiven them because..." and describes one possible reason for communicating their forgiveness. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* (where *Strongly Agree* indicated higher endorsement). The scale had six subscales, with thirty items dedicated to the three malevolent forgiveness subscales, and fifteen items dedicated to the three benevolent

forgiveness subscales. Final scores were averaged. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted for the items in this measure and can be viewed in the results section.

2.3.2 Relationship Quality

Relationship quality was measured using an adapted version of the relationship quality subscale of Rusbult's *Investment Model* scale (Rusbult et al., 1998). This was originally a 29-item scale developed to measure participants' commitment to their romantic partners. The scale includes some measures of constructs that are specific to romantic relationships (in particular the *quality of alternatives*), as such, 18 items were omitted from use in the present study. The 11 remaining items were identified as being appropriate for use in measuring relationship quality across a wide range of relationships. Examples of items included in the present study are "*I am committed to maintaining this relationship*" and "*Many aspects of my life rely on the success of this relationship*". Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* (where *Strongly Agree* indicated higher endorsement). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was .96. Final scores were averaged.

2.3.3 Justice Satisfaction

Justice satisfaction was measured using the 12-item *Justice-Related Satisfaction* scale (Funk, McGeer, & Gollwitzer, 2014) and was used to measure the victim's levels of satisfaction that justice was served following the transgression. Participants were instructed to reflect on the aftermath of the event, and then to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements listed. Examples of items included in the present study are "*I think I can now close this chapter*" and "*I am content with the way things worked out eventually*". Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to

Strongly Agree (where *Strongly Agree* indicated higher endorsement). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was .87. Final scores were averaged.

2.3.4 Depression, Anxiety and Stress

The *Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21* (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was used to measure current levels of depression, anxiety and stress. For brevity, the shortened 21-item version of the DASS was used instead of the original 42-item version. Participants were asked to read each statement and then to indicate how much the statement had applied to them over the past week. Examples for items in each subscale were “*I felt down-hearted and blue*” (depression), “*I felt I was close to panic*” (anxiety) and “*I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy*” (stress). Participants were scored on a 4-point Likert-style scale with responses ranging from *Never* to *Almost Always* (where *Almost Always* indicated higher endorsement). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was .95. Final scores were averaged.

2.3.5 Positive and Negative Affect

A *Contentment* scale was developed for the purposes of this study and was used as a measure of positive and negative affect. Participants were first asked to recall the transgression and then to think about how recalling the event was making them feel in the present moment. Participants were then asked to read each item and indicate the degree to which they were experiencing each emotion at the present time. There were 5 items included for positive affect and 7 items included for negative affect (Appendix 1). Examples included “*At peace*” (positive affect) and “*Ashamed*” (negative affect). Participants were scored on a 5-point Likert-style scale with responses ranging from *Very slightly or not at all* to *Extremely* (where *Extremely* indicated higher endorsement). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this study was .82. Final scores were averaged.

Chapter 3

Results

3.1 Background Information

One participant was excluded for indicating an unfeasible reason for forgiving. There was an even gender distribution amongst the remaining participants (75M, 73F, 1 Non-Binary, 1 PNTS). Participant age ranged from 19-75 ($M = 39.5$, $SD = 14.28$). The average time since the transgression occurred was 7.9 years, however, reported variance was wide ranging from 1 day before the survey to 40 years ($M = 7.9$, $SD = 9.91$). Nearly half of the respondents reported their romantic partner as their transgressor (42.7%), with the remaining participants reporting a family member (22.7%), a friend (22%), a work colleague (9.3%) or other (3.3%). Incident severity was very high ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .76$). The majority of participants reporting having forgiven their transgressor (74%), though many had not (26%) despite having communicated their forgiveness to their transgressor. Participants reported that their relationship with their transgressor prior to the event was very important to them ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .83$). Current relationship importance ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.65$) was the most polarising item, with most of the responses being either strongly agree (34.7%) or strongly disagree (22.8%). Most respondents reported that their transgressor had apologised to them (72%), though many had not received an apology (28%). Most participants reported that their transgressor had tried to make amends with them (34% strongly agree, 38.7% somewhat agree, $M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.28$). Slightly more than half of participants reported their transgressor being remorseful for the event (33.3% strongly agree, 25.3% somewhat agree, $M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.35$) while a similar proportion of respondents reported that their transgressor was acting intentionally when they were hurt (29.3% strongly agree, 28.7% somewhat agree, $M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.33$).

3.2 Endorsement of Forgiveness Motivations and Main Outcome Variables

Table 3.1 displays the means and standard deviations for each of the forgiveness motivations. On average participants scored the highest on the measure for self-focus ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .85$), while the least endorsed motivation was indebtedness ($M = 1.94$, $SD = .77$).

Table 3.1

<u>Descriptive Data for Independent Variables</u>		
<i>Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale</i>		
Subscales	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Revenge	2.20	1.00
Moral Superiority	2.35	.94
Indebtedness	1.94	.77
Relationship-Focus	3.69	1.15
Self-Focus	3.91	.85
Offender-Focus	3.21	1.02
<hr/>		
Malevolence	2.16	.84
Benevolence	3.60	.78

Table 3.2 displays the means and standard deviations for each of the outcome variables. On average participants reported good current relationship quality with their transgressor, although there was wide variance in responses ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.28$). Participants mostly reported high justice satisfaction ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .64$) and low depression/anxiety/stress ($M = 1.67$, $SD = .58$). Average contentment at the time of recalling the event was high-moderate ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .56$).

Table 3.2

<u>Descriptive Data for Outcome Variables</u>		
<i>Outcome Variables</i>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relationship Quality	3.22	1.28
Justice Satisfaction	4.00	.64
Depression/Anxiety/Stress	1.67	.58
Contentment	3.43	.56

3.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis for the Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale

Since this is the first direct empirical attempt at identifying malevolent motives for forgiveness, a measure of the malevolent motives for forgiveness needed to be developed. The Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale was developed to assess which motives are endorsed when forgiving one's transgressors. Principal axis factoring was conducted to assess the Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale, and the extent to which the items developed represent the proposed subscales. This exploratory factor analysis has served to demonstrate that there are distinct benevolent and malevolent factors present in the measure, however, the subscales are not as discrete as initially theorised.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity are presented in Table 3.3. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is 0.891, which is higher than 0.6 suggested as the minimum for performing factor analyses. Also, Bartlett's test of sphericity is highly significant. This is a good indication that the correlation matrix can be factor analysed (Wilson, 2006).

Table 3.3

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy			.891
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		5342.339**
	df		990

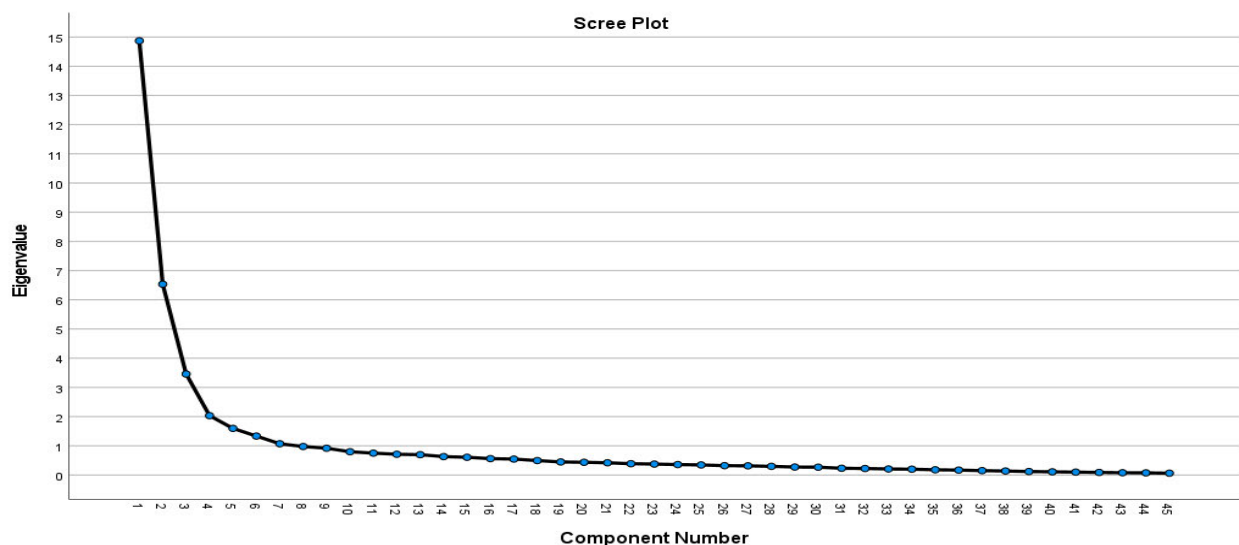
** $p < .001$

3.3.1 Determining the Number of Factors

There are seven factors with Eigen values greater than 1. After extraction they account for 68.3% of the variance. At this stage, it should be noted that 6 factors account for 65.9% of the variance. This is consistent with Henson & Roberts' (2006) findings and their suggestion that accounting for more than 50% of the variance in applied psychological research is a reasonable expectation. The examination of the Scree Plot (Figure 3.1) indicates that there are likely to be 5 to 7 analysable factors. Based on the Eigen values greater than 1 rule, the Scree Plot results and because six factors had been theorised, it was decided to force a 6-factor solution (Table 3.4).

Figure 3.1

Scree Plot for the Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale



The Rotated Matrix (Table 3.4) presents the Principal Components Analysis' results after using the Varimax rotation method. To simplify factor examination, only loadings above .35 are displayed.

Table 3.4

Rotated Matrix and Cronbach's Alpha for the Factors

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factors</i>					
	$\alpha = .88$	$\alpha = .93$	$\alpha = .91$	$\alpha = .91$	$\alpha = .85$	$\alpha = .84$
	Indebtedness	Revenge	Relationship-Focus (Benevolence)	Moral Superiority	Self-Focus (Benevolence)	Offender-Focus (Benevolence)
<i>I told them that I had forgiven them because...</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
/It was my way of getting revenge on them (Revenge)	.817	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted to have control over them in the future (Indebtedness)	.814	-	-	-	-	-
/It gave me the right to ask a favour of them later (Indebtedness)	.778	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel my righteous indignation (Moral Superiority)	.681	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted to inflict some pain on them for what they did (Revenge)	.680	.464	-	-	-	-
/I wanted to get back at them (Revenge)	.639	.383	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to pay me back later (Indebtedness)	.629	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel like they hadn't earned my forgiveness (Indebtedness)	.622	.414	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to know I don't mean it (Revenge)	.620	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel like they were beneath me (Moral Superiority)	.600	.469	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel grateful to me (Indebtedness)	.599	-	-	-	-	-

/I wanted them to feel morally inferior to me (Moral Superiority)	.584	-	-	-	-	-
/It makes them more likely to be nice to me (Indebtedness)	.580	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel indebted to me (Indebtedness)	.575	-	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel like they owed me (Indebtedness)	.497	.411	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel bad about what they did (Revenge)	-	.812	-	-	-	-
/I wanted to make them remorseful (Revenge)	-	.779	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel guilty for what they did (Revenge)	-	.745	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel at fault for what they did (Revenge)	-	.715	-	-	-	-
/I wanted to make them feel ashamed (Revenge)	.449	.706	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to live with their guilt (Revenge)	.505	.615	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel like they needed to be better (Moral Superiority)	-	.586	-	-	-	-
/I wanted them to feel like they needed to make things up to me (Indebtedness)	.477	.541	-	-	-	-
/Preserving the relationship was important to me (Relationship-Focus)	-	-	.904	-	-	-
/I wanted to maintain a good relationship (Relationship-Focus)	-	-	.871	-	-	-
/I did it for the sake of the relationship (Relationship-Focus)	-	-	.863	-	-	-
/Not forgiving would risk the relationship (Relationship-Focus)	-	-	.825	-	-	-
/I genuinely cared about the other person (Offender-Focus)	-	-	.678	-	-	.477
/It was in both of our interests to do so (Relationship-Focus)	-	-	.478	-	.366	.433
/I wanted them to know that I'm more emotionally mature than they are (Moral Superiority)	-	-	-	.785	-	-
/I wanted to show them that I "took the high road" where they didn't (Moral Superiority)	-	-	-	.747	-	-

/It was my way of showing them I wouldn't stoop to behaving as badly as they did (Moral Superiority)	-	-	-	.700	-	-
/I wanted to show them that I was the bigger person (Moral Superiority)	-	.370	-	.692	-	-
/It was my way of showing that I was better than them (Moral Superiority)	-	.361	-	.662	-	-
/I wanted to show that I was morally superior to them (Moral Superiority)	-	-	-	.519	-	-
/I wanted to help myself get over what happened (Self-Focus)	-	-	-	-	.838	-
/It was a way to make myself feel better (Self-Focus)	-	-	-	-	.808	-
/It seemed to be a way to stop myself hurting (Self-Focus)	-	-	-	-	.782	-
/I wanted to move on with my life (Self-Focus)	-	-	-	-	.755	-
/I didn't want anger and resentment to rule my life (Self-Focus)	-	-	-	-	.663	-
/I felt sorry for the other person (Offender-Focus)	-	-	-	-	-	.745
/I really felt for the other person (Offender-Focus)	-	-	-	-	-	.725
/I cared for the wellbeing of the other person (Offender-Focus)	-	-	.465	-	-	.705
Despite what they did, I didn't want the other person to hurt (Offender-Focus)	-	-	-	-	-	.678
/I thought it would make them less likely to hurt me (Indebtedness)	.375	-	-	.379	-	-

Significant cross-loading was observed across multiple factors, particularly between factors 1 (Indebtedness) and 2 (Revenge). A second Principal Components Analysis was conducted after omitting the malevolent items with the poorest independent loadings. After 6 items for each malevolent subscale were retained, a 6-factor solution was forced which yielded cleaner results, though significant cross-loading was still observed. It should be noted that cross-loading was also observed between the benevolent factors despite this measure having been previously validated (Strelan et al., 2013). Considering the results of these first two attempts, the decision was made to force a 2-factor solution observing simply benevolent and malevolent motivations for forgiving (the retained solution can be seen in Table 3.5). Although 6 factors were supported by theory, for the purposes of testing the hypotheses of this study it was not necessary to differentiate between 6 distinct motivations for forgiving, and as such the concession was made to analyse the results of this study using the 2-factor solution. Although this solution affords less ambiguity and increased simplicity, significantly less variance is explained by this solution (46.9% vs 65.9%) and this is taken into consideration in the discussion section. The Cronbach's Alphas for the factors were .96 (Malevolence) and .89 (Benevolence) respectively.

Table 3.5

Rotated Matrix and Cronbach's Alpha for factors (forced 2-factor solution)

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factors</i>	
	$\alpha = .96$	$\alpha = .89$
	Malevolence	Benevolence
<i>I told them that I had forgiven them because...</i>	1	2
/I wanted to make them feel ashamed (Malevolence)	.865	-
/I wanted them to feel like they were beneath me (Malevolence)	.831	-
/I wanted them to live with their guilt (Malevolence)	.802	-
/I wanted them to feel like they needed to make things up to me (Malevolence)	.779	-
/I wanted them to feel at fault for what they did (Malevolence)	.776	-
/I wanted to make them feel remorseful (Malevolence)	.776	-
/I wanted them to feel guilty for what they did (Malevolence)	.764	-
/I wanted them to feel like they hadn't earned my forgiveness (Malevolence)	.748	-
/I wanted them to feel bad about what they did (Malevolence)	.744	-
/It was my way of getting revenge on them (Malevolence)	.732	-
/I wanted them to feel morally inferior to me (Malevolence)	.728	-
/I wanted to inflict some pain on them for what they did to me (Malevolence)	.722	-
/I wanted them to feel like they owed me (Malevolence)	.721	-
/It was my way of showing that I was better than them (Malevolence)	.713	-
/I wanted them to know that I'm more emotionally mature than they are (Malevolence)	.694	-
/I wanted to show that I was morally superior to them (Malevolence)	.680	-
/I wanted them to feel grateful to me (Malevolence)	.675	-
/I wanted them to feel indebted to me (Malevolence)	.672	-
/I wanted to show them that I "took the high road" where they didn't (Malevolence)	.671	-
/I wanted to get back at them (Malevolence)	.667	-
/I wanted them to pay me back later (Malevolence)	.657	-
/I wanted to show them that I was the bigger person (Malevolence)	.655	-

/I wanted them to feel my righteous indignation (Malevolence)	.642	-
/I wanted to have control over them in the future (Malevolence)	.623	-
/It was my way of showing them I wouldn't stoop to behaving as badly as they did (Malevolence)	.603	-
/It gave me the right to ask a favour of them later (Malevolence)	.596	-
/I wanted them to feel like they needed to be better (Malevolence)	.596	-
/I wanted them to know I don't mean it (Malevolence)	.562	-
/It makes them more likely to be nice to me (Malevolence)	.498	-
/I thought it would make them less likely to hurt me (Malevolence)	.437	-
/I wanted to maintain a good relationship (Benevolence)	-	.784
/I genuinely cared about the other person (Benevolence)	-	.779
/Preserving the relationship was important to me (Benevolence)	-	.762
/It was in both of our interests to do so (Benevolence)	-	.749
/I cared for the wellbeing of the other person (Benevolence)	-	.743
/I did it for the sake of the relationship (Benevolence)	-	.708
/Not forgiving would risk the relationship (Benevolence)	-	.685
/Despite what they did, I didn't want the other person to hurt (Benevolence)	-	.650
/I didn't want anger and resentment to rule my life (Benevolence)	-	.525
/I wanted to help myself get over what happened (Benevolence)	-	.497
/I really felt for the other person (Benevolence)	-	.495
/It was a way to make myself feel better (Benevolence)	-	.492
/I felt sorry for the other person (Benevolence)	-	.472
/I wanted to move on with my life (Benevolence)	-	.432
/It seemed to be a way to stop myself hurting (Benevolence)	-	.403

3.4 Relations Between Forgiving Motivations and Outcome Variables

Correlation analysis (Table 3.6) was conducted to examine the extent to which the forgiveness motivations were associated with the main outcome variables, as well as the transgression-specific variables. As expected, both Malevolence ($r = -.22, p < .01$) and Benevolence ($r = .57, p < .01$) were related to relationship quality in the anticipated directions. Malevolence ($r = -.32, p < .01$) and Benevolence ($r = .32, p < .01$) were also associated with justice satisfaction in the expected directions. Malevolence ($r = -.32, p < .01$) had a relatively stronger association with contentment than did Benevolence ($r = .20, p < .05$), although they were both significantly associated in the expected directions. Notably, there was no association at all between either motives and depression/anxiety/stress.

Table 3.6

Correlations between Malevolent and Benevolent Forgiveness Motivations, Outcome Variables, and Background Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Malevolence													
2. Benevolence	-.135												
3. Relationship Quality	-.221**	.574**											
4. Justice Satisfaction	-.316**	.317**	.244**										
5. Depression/Anxiety/Stress	.077	-.038	-0.84	-.355**									
6. Contentment	-.319**	.198*	.137	.551**	-.348**								
7. Victim Forgiveness	-.326**	.397**	.301**	.425**	-.146	.296**							
8. Incident Severity	.109	.012	-.064	-.050	.071	-.059	.008						
9. Age	.091	.161*	.009	-.002	-.321**	.072	.055	-.054					
10. Time since event	.172*	-.066	-.229**	.009	-.187*	.023	.037	.042	.503**				
11. Transgressor Apology	-.003	.169*	.247**	.283**	-.102	.167*	.240**	.004	.055	.049			
12. Has the transgressor made amends?	-.229**	.302**	.406**	.435**	-.118	.229**	.470**	-.057	-.104	-.075	.696**		
13. Transgressor Remorse	-.171*	.309**	.368**	.408**	-.095	.204*	.390**	-.040	-.033	-.029	.742**	.780**	
14. Transgressor Intent	.216**	-.225**	-.172*	-.209*	-.073	-.112	-.137	.118	.015	.166*	-.195*	-.213**	-.353**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which the malevolent and benevolent forgiveness motivations predicted relationship quality, justice satisfaction, depression/anxiety/stress, and contentment following the recollection of the event. Table 3.7 displays the results of the regression analysis run using only malevolence and benevolence as the predictor variables. Malevolence and benevolence were both significant, albeit modest, predictors of justice satisfaction and contentment, while accounting for similar amounts of variance. Malevolence and benevolence were also both significant predictors of relationship quality, however the variance account for by malevolence (3.17%) was negligible compared to benevolence (31.7%). Neither malevolence nor benevolence predicted depression/anxiety/stress.

Table 3.8 displays the results of the regressions conducted whilst controlling for the other background and/or transgression-specific variables present in the survey. As well as malevolence and benevolence, the two other variables with the largest contributions to the variance accounted for by each model are shown. Here we see the forgiveness motives and controls accounted for 39.5% of the variance in relationship quality ($F_{Change} (2, 139) = 21.22, p < .01$), 26.1% of the variance in justice satisfaction ($F_{Change} (2, 139) = 3.77, p < .05$), 10.7% of the variance in depression/anxiety/stress ($F_{Change} (2, 139) = 1.00, p = .371$), and 11.6% of the variance in contentment ($F_{Change} (2, 139) = 5.21, p < .01$). The variables accounting for the most variance for each respective outcome variable were: *Relationship Quality*: Benevolence (23.14%) and Time Since Event (4.92%), *Justice Satisfaction*: Malevolence (3.72%) and Victim Forgiveness (3.17%), *Depression/Anxiety/Stress*: Age (9.00%) and Victim Forgiveness (1.59%), *Contentment*: Malevolence (6.71%) and Victim Forgiveness (1.99%).

Table 3.7
Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Outcome Variables by Forgiveness Motives

<i>Outcome Variable</i>	<i>Model Summary</i>						<i>Coefficients</i>			
	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>	<i>F_{Change}</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Variance</i>	
Relationship Quality	.350	.342	1.04	39.7**	2	147	Malevolence	-.147	-2.19*	3.17%
							Benevolence	.554	8.26**	31.7%
Justice Satisfaction	.176	.165	.58	15.6**	2	147	Malevolence	-.279	-3.69**	7.62%
							Benevolence	.279	3.69**	7.62%
Depression, Anxiety, and Stress	.007	-.007	.58	.50	2	147	Malevolence	.073	.88	.53%
							Benevolence	-.028	-.34	.08%
Contentment	.126	.114	.53	10.6**	2	147	Malevolence	-.297	-3.82**	9.1%
							Benevolence	.158	2.03*	2.7%

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 3.8

Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Outcome Variables by Forgiveness Motives and Background Variables

<i>Outcome Variable</i>	<i>Model Summary</i>						<i>Coefficients</i>			
	<i>R²</i>	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>	<i>F_{Change}</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>		<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Relationship Quality	.436	.395	1.00	21.22**	2	139	Malevolence	-.082	-1.15	.94%
							Benevolence	.481	6.46**	23.14%
							Time since event	-.207	-2.68**	4.92%
							Has the transgressor made amends?	.213	1.85	2.40%
Justice Satisfaction	.311	.261	.55	3.77*	2	139	Malevolence	-.183	-2.32*	3.72%
							Benevolence	.130	1.59	1.77%
							Victim Forgiveness	.186	2.13*	3.17%
							Has the transgressor made amends?	.166	1.31	1.21%

	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	<i>F</i> _{Change}	<i>df</i> ₁	<i>df</i> ₂	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	Variance	
Depression, Anxiety, and Stress	.167	.107	.54	1.00	2	139	Malevolence	.083	.96	.66%
							Benevolence	.090	.99	.71%
							Age	-.349	-.371**	9.00%
							Victim Forgiveness	.143	1.49	1.59%
Contentment	.176	.116	.53	5.21**	2	139	Malevolence	-.272	-3.16**	6.71%
							Benevolence	.074	.826	0.49%
							Victim Forgiveness	.160	1.68	1.99%
							Transgressor Apology	.146	1.16	0.96%

***p* < .01

**p* < .05

Chapter 4

Discussion

4.1 Overview of the Study Aims and Findings

The current study sought to identify malevolent motivations for *communicating* forgiveness, and then aimed to establish a relationship between these motivations and relationship quality, justice satisfaction, depression, anxiety, stress, and positive and negative affect (operationalised as ‘contentment’ for this study) following the transgression.

Since *malevolent* forgiveness is a new concept in forgiveness literature, it should be noted that this study was an exploratory attempt. Using primarily the concepts of *hollow forgiveness* and grudge theory (Baumeister, 1998), as well as foundational understandings of intrapsychic forgiveness (McCullough, 1998), *malevolent forgiveness* was able to be conceptualised after considering the interpersonal motivations behind forgiving behaviour (Strelan et al., 2013; Takada & Ohbuchi, 2013). Three factors were identified as the most common malevolent motivations when communicating forgiveness: Revenge, Indebtedness, and Moral Superiority. However, as these factors were not shown to be suitably distinct (Table 3.4), only the broader factors of Malevolence and Benevolence were analysed. It is worth noting that the two factors used for the analysis are highly distinct, though considering they only account for 46.9% of the explained variance in the data, the following findings and implications should be interpreted with caution. It is also worth noting that continuing the analysis with the 6-factor solution could have been justifiable, which should provide a foundation for further empirical analysis of these six factors in future studies.

The findings indicate that benevolent motivations for communicating forgiveness were the most endorsed, which was to be expected. However, though malevolence scores were consistently lower they were distinct and salient in a significant proportion of participants' communicated forgiveness. Regarding the main outcome variables, benevolence was a significant positive predictor of relationship quality, but malevolence had no association. Malevolence was a significant negative predictor of justice satisfaction, while benevolence was not significantly associated. Incongruent with the third hypothesis, there was no meaningful relationship between either of the motives and depression/anxiety/stress. Finally, malevolence was a significant negative predictor of contentment, while benevolence was not significantly associated.

4.2 Outcome Variable Implications

4.2.1 Relationship Quality

The findings of this study support previous evidence that as a focus on the wellbeing of a relationship increases, so too does benevolence (Strelan et al., 2013). Malevolence not associating with relationship quality is interesting for many reasons. Firstly, relative salience of high malevolence (18% scored above 3.0) and low relationship quality (26.7% scored below 2.0) was present in the data, so if a relationship between these variables existed, it was likely to be found. Additionally, considering that malevolence and benevolence did not significantly associate with each other, it suggests that both malevolent and benevolent intentions can be salient whilst the degree of malevolent intent has no influence on relationship outcomes. This is to say that, theoretically, high levels of malevolent motivations would not influence relationship outcomes via a decrease in benevolent motivations, and that these diametrically opposed motivations can, and often do, exist at the same time. This would suggest that the

participants of this survey were able to keep their malevolent intent hidden through their communications with their transgressor, considering that relationship outcomes are also influenced by an offender's *perceived* intent of their victim (Gollwitzer & Okimoto, 2021). This evidence might suggest that if malevolent forgiveness is predominantly hidden beneath benevolence, then perhaps the component of communicated malevolence perceived by the victim themselves is actually designed to serve as a kind of *intrapsychic* catharsis (Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011), instead of its theorised interpersonal function. This suggestion, however, is not supported by the finding that as malevolence increases, contentment at the time of recalling the event decreases. These findings serve to reinforce the complex nature of forgiveness. If malevolent and benevolent intentions can be distinct and salient at the time of communicating forgiveness without impacting the relationship, it implies that there are many cognitive, and perhaps even subconscious considerations at play. Relationship importance at the time of the event ($M = 4.57$), as well as incident severity ($M = 4.60$), were universally high in this study, suggesting that participants did indeed have to deal with intense emotional hurt, the need to seek justice, reparations and/or vengeance, all whilst considering the health of their valued relationship.

4.2.2 Justice Satisfaction

The largest significant predictor of justice satisfaction was malevolence, which was negatively associated, while benevolence was the third largest predictor, though this association was not significant. The second largest predictor of justice satisfaction was whether or not the victim had (internally) forgiven their transgressor. While the degree to which the transgressor had attempted to make amends was shown to account for a similar amount of variance as benevolence. These results are interesting considering the theorised functions of malevolent forgiveness; being that under certain conditions, we may feel satisfaction,

gratification, and relief when revenge is successful and perceived justice is restored (Feather, 1999). Given its negative association with malevolence, evidence suggests that the participants of this study did not experience an increase in perceived justice despite their increased malevolent intent. This is perfectly understandable given the context, considering that forgiveness is conventionally understood as a benevolent gesture, it would not make for the most effective means of exacting harm-oriented revenge or reparation-seeking behaviour. If the victim truly wanted to seek justice then why would they opt to use forgiveness instead of a more direct approach? It could be because many people are averse to conflict, and may prefer indirect approaches to satisfying internal perceptions of injustice, so as to preserve their relationship (Takada & Ohbuchi, 2013), despite the evident ineffectiveness of adopting a malevolent approach to serve this end. The results of this study suggest that malevolent forgiveness is present, often with and distinct from benevolence, despite poorer outcomes regarding justice satisfaction. It could either be that participants knowingly persist with partially malevolent behaviour in an attempt to address their internal cognitive needs (revenge-seeking), or participants are unaware of their subconscious emotions at the time of expressing forgiveness, which often result in less satisfying outcomes. The results of this study also support prior research that forgiveness is far more likely when steps have been taken by the transgressor to reduce perceived injustice/make amends (Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003).

4.2.3 *Depression, Anxiety and Stress*

It was hypothesised that increased malevolence and/or decreased benevolence would correlate with higher levels of depression/anxiety/stress, however no such relationship was found. Despite these findings, it was justifiable to consider the association given the well-documented depressive and stressful outcomes of holding a grudge and harbouring resentment

(Baumeister, 1998; Takada & Ohbuchi, 2004). The relationship could have also acted in both directions, in that malevolent forgiveness in a close relationship might have been a predictor of depression/anxiety/stress disorders in the future, or that people suffering from depression, anxiety, and/or stress were more likely to endorse malevolent forgiveness. After controlling for all of the variables present in the study, age was the only significant predictor for depression/anxiety/stress, whereby the younger participants were scoring the highest. Though these findings are interesting in their own right, they are not relevant to the present study.

4.2.4 *Contentment*

Malevolence was shown to be the largest predictor (negative) of affect whereas benevolence did not have a relationship. Perhaps this is because benevolence is the more conventional approach to forgiveness, and when forgiving behaviour is experienced by both parties as they would typically expect, it results in a less intense emotional experience. Conversely, as malevolent forgiveness is the interpersonal manifestation of an intrapsychic grudge, intense emotion can often be salient, the feelings of which can persist for a long time if the conflict goes partially or entirely unresolved (Bohanek, Fivush, & Walker, 2005; Baumeister, 1998). These results reinforce the suggestion that malevolence is at least partially endorsed on a consistent basis, yet to yield little affective or intrapsychic benefit. Additionally, the affective consequences of not resolving one's grudge can be experienced for many years after the event has transpired, supporting past research on the topic (Baumeister, 1998). Of the background/transgression-specific variables, whether or not the victim had forgiven their transgressor was the largest predictor of affect. This makes sense given that intrapsychic/internal forgiveness is the opposite of holding a grudge, hence it would stand to reason that living without a grudge would result in affective benefit, or at least result in avoiding negative affective outcomes. This also supports the foundational theoretical basis of

malevolent forgiveness itself; considering that malevolence and victim forgiveness were the two strongest predictors for affect acting in opposite directions, it suggests that malevolent forgiveness as operationalised by this paper is measuring the interpersonal manifestation of holding a grudge as intended.

4.3 Limitations of the Present Study

A major limitation of the present study was the use of an online self-report survey to collect data. Although steps were taken to ensure optimal participant engagement (paying participants a fee, clearly stating the aims of the survey, being explicit about the distinction between forgiveness and *communicated* forgiveness) it is hard to determine how invested participants were with providing valid data. Indeed, there was at least one instance of a participant having clearly miscomprehended the questions and as a result their submission was omitted. Especially given that malevolent forgiveness is a new concept which was not explicitly explained in the survey, it is possible that some participants conflated forgiving and *expressed* forgiving. It should also be noted that much of the wording for the malevolent items (i.e. 'I wanted to inflict some pain on them for what they did') may have prompted prosocial responses from some of the participants, and future studies might benefit from including controls for social desirability.

Since this was an exploratory study that dealt with some previously partially or entirely unexplored constructs, some of the measures used were either modified or newly developed for this study. For instance, many of the items in Rusbult et al.'s (1998) Investment Model Scale (used to measure Relationship Quality) were either omitted or slightly modified because the intended purpose of this scale was exclusively for romantic partners. Additionally, both the Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale and the Contentment Scale were developed for

this study, and although the items of each scale proved to show sound internal consistency, and were backed by theory, the external validity of these scales was not assessed.

4.4 Practical Implications and Further Research Directions

Though the findings of this study are only preliminary in nature, they do provide a foundation for exploring a side of forgiveness that few have previously considered. This research has reinforced what many contributors to forgiveness literature have long understood; forgiveness is an incredibly complex and multidimensional phenomenon, but perhaps now even more so than previously imagined? Back when Baumeister (1998) proposed the concept of *hollow forgiveness* he did so by theorising it as a discrete concept, separate from genuine forgiveness. It seems clear now that forgiveness can be not only hollow in nature, but *malevolent*, and what is perhaps most intriguing is the evidence presented in this paper suggesting that malevolent and benevolent motivations do not exist in isolation of each other, and that both harm-oriented *and* good-faith intentions often coexist at the same time.

In its current form the Benevolent and Malevolent Forgiveness Scale is not optimised, but it does offer a starting point for identifying which motives are primarily endorsed when communicating forgiveness to a transgressor. Though the 6-factor solution for the measure was not used in this study, it may be a viable research tool considering it accounts for an additional 19% of explained variance when compared to the 2-factor solution. Furthermore, there is increased opportunity to explore these factors in depth after advanced refinement of the items. The clinical and therapeutic implications of being able to identify dormant malevolent motivations, perhaps unaware to the victim, may serve to help victims release their grudges in more adaptive ways. Conversely, failure to identify these motivations may contribute to some of the residual affective consequences that were observed in this study.

Considering that incident severity and relationship importance at the time of the event were mostly high in this study, an interesting future direction might be to measure malevolence in situations where the victim does not initially value the transgressor, or in situations where the transgression was not so severe. Perhaps in these situations reported benevolence might be lower, and there would not exist an urgency to preserve the relationship and hide malevolent intentions. It would be interesting to see how often victims endorse malevolent motivation in these scenarios and how favourable their outcomes are. Understanding both benevolent *and* malevolent forgiveness could assist victims to act in ways that are perhaps counterintuitive to their initial emotions or subconscious desires for harm-oriented behaviours, in favour of more adaptive approaches shown to result in better outcomes.

In conclusion, this exploratory study has identified a malevolent component of communicated forgiveness, which exists in concurrence with, but also distinct from, benevolent forgiveness. Benevolence appears to be the main predictor of relationship quality, while malevolence was shown to be the main predictor of justice satisfaction and contentment. The results of this study suggest that neither benevolent nor malevolent motivations are associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. This paper provided foundational theory for the specific motivations that might comprise malevolence, but further research is needed to determine how distinct and endorsed the malevolent motivations of revenge, moral superiority and indebtedness are.

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Appendices

How Do We Deal With Hurt?

Dear Participant,

You have been invited to participate in a study about how people deal with being hurt. You will be asked to recall a time where you were hurt by someone in your life and will be asked questions about how you responded.

The study was approved by the University of Adelaide School of Psychology ethics committee (23/87). The researchers expect that you will read the questions thoughtfully and take the study seriously. Your participation is fully voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

For research transparency purposes, the data will be publicly available, but it will all be anonymised. In particular, note that we will delete your PROLIFIC ID number once data collection is complete. Also, we will ask you to briefly describe an upsetting event, but we will delete this information from the final data set. Finally, we will ask you to provide your partner's first name to personalise the survey, but it will not be recorded in the data set.

If you agree to all of this, please begin by indicating your consent below. If you disagree, no problem; simply navigate away from this site.

I have read the above information and consent to participate in the study

Q1 What is your Prolific ID?

Q2 What is your age (in years)?

Q3 What best describes your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q4 What is your nationality?

Q5 For the following questions, please recall a time in your life when you were significantly hurt by someone, and whom you subsequently communicated your forgiveness to. Please note, regardless of whether or not you had *internally* forgiven this person, you must have *communicated* forgiveness to this person.

How long ago was the transgression?

Q6 What was your relationship with your transgressor at the time of the event?

- Partner
- Friend
- Family Member
- Work Colleague
- Other

Q7 Please answer the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I have forgiven my transgressor for what they did to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was deeply hurt when the event occurred	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My relationship with this person was very important to me at the time of the event	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My relationship with this person is currently very important to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Please describe what this person did to you (approx. 100 words)

Q9 Has your transgressor apologised to you?

- Yes
- No

Q10 Please answer the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
My transgressor has tried to make amends with me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My transgressor was remorseful for what they did to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My transgressor meant to do what they did to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Have you forgiven your transgressor?

- Yes
- No

Q12 You will now be asked about the reasons and motives behind your decision to communicate forgiveness to your transgressor. There are no right or wrong answers. Try to answer as honestly as you can.

"I told them that I had forgiven them because..."

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I wanted them to feel indebted to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to feel guilty for what they did.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It seemed to be a way to stop myself hurting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to show that I was morally superior to them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to feel like they owed me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to help myself get over what happened.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to feel at fault for what they did.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was my way of showing them I wouldn't stoop to behaving as badly as they did.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

It was a way
to make
myself feel
better.

I wanted
them to pay
me back later.

I wanted
them to feel
bad about
what they did.

I wanted to
move on with
my life.

It was my way
of showing
that I was
better than
them.

It gave me the
right to ask a
favour of
them later.

I didn't want
anger and
resentment to
rule my life.

Q13 Here are more items asking about the reasons and motives behind your decision to communicate forgiveness to your transgressor. There are no right or wrong answers. Try to answer as honestly as you can.

"I told them that I had forgiven them because..."

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I did it for the sake of the relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to get back at them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to feel like they were beneath me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preserving the relationship was important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to make them feel ashamed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was in both of our interests to do so.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I thought it would make them less likely to hurt me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I really felt for the other person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to know that I'm more emotionally mature than they are.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to feel like they needed to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

make things up
to me.

I cared for the
wellbeing of
the other
person.

I wanted to
make them
feel
remorseful.

I wanted them
to feel like
they needed to
be better.

Despite what
they did, I
didn't want the
other person
to hurt.

I wanted to
have control
over them in
the future.

Q14 This is the final set of items about the reasons and motives behind your decision to communicate forgiveness to your transgressor. There are no right or wrong answers. Try to answer as honestly as you can.

"I told them that I had forgiven them because..."

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I wanted to inflict some pain on them for what they did.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to show them that I was the bigger person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not forgiving would risk the relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to feel grateful to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted them to live with their guilt.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to maintain a good relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted to show them that I "took the high road" where they didn't.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It makes them more likely to be nice to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was my way of getting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

revenge on them.

I genuinely cared about the other person.

I wanted them to feel morally inferior to me.

I wanted them to feel like they hadn't earned my forgiveness.

I felt sorry for the other person.

I wanted them to know I don't mean it.

I wanted them to feel my righteous indignation.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 Reflecting on your relationship with your transgressor, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I am committed to maintaining this relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want this relationship to last for a very long time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel very attached to this relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would not feel upset if this relationship were to end in the near future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want this relationship to last forever.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel satisfied with this relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This relationship is close to ideal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This relationship makes me very happy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This relationship does a good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

job of fulfilling
my needs.

I have put a
great deal into
this
relationship
that I would
lose.

Many aspects
of my life rely
on the success
of this
relationship.

Q16 Reflecting on the aftermath of the event, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I think that I can now close this chapter.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am content with the way things worked out eventually.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel satisfied now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am now able to turn my mind to something else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that everybody got what they deserved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel relieved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel respected.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel angry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish that things would have turned out differently.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel disappointed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I wonder if I
should have
acted
differently

I think that
someone's still
got to pay.

Q17 Please read each statement and indicate how much the statement applied to you over the past week.

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
I found it hard to wind down.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was aware of dryness of my mouth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I experienced breathing difficulty (eg, excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tended to over-react to situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that I had nothing to look forward to.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I found myself getting agitated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it difficult to relax.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt down-hearted and blue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt I was close to panic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt I wasn't worth much as a person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that I was rather touchy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (eg, sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt scared without any good reason.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt that life was meaningless.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 Thinking back on the event, how does recalling it make you feel right now?

	Very slightly or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
Uneasy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Angry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Happy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fearful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ashamed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hostile	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Irritated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At Peace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unfulfilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Untroubled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thanks for taking part in this study!

This study is part of a project concerned with understanding the motivations behind forgiveness in response to getting hurt. Following a transgression, everyone is unique in the way they process and handle the event, this study seeks to shed light on which responses are associated with favourable outcomes.

Should you need counselling support at any time you are encouraged to contact your local counselling service:

Australia: Beyond Blue <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/> (03) 9810 6100

United States: SAMHSA <https://www.samhsa.gov/> 1-800-662-4357

Canada: Wellness Together Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html> 1-866-585-0445

United Kingdom: Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/> 116 123

New Zealand: 1737 <https://1737.org.nz/> 1737

If you have any serious concerns about the ethical conduct of this study please contact, in the first instance, the leader of this project, Associate Professor [REDACTED]: [REDACTED]@adelaide.edu.au. Alternatively, you can contact the Chair of the Psychology ethics committee, Professor [REDACTED] [REDACTED]@adelaide.edu.au).

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Associate Professor [REDACTED] (University of Adelaide)