Effect of Reminding Past Transgression on Forgiveness

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of reminding different past transgressions (being forgiven or not being forgiven by the victims) on forgiveness by adopting an empathy model of forgiveness which suggests that forgiveness increases with increase in empathy. Seventy-four undergraduate students were randomly assigned into three groups: 1) being reminded of past forgiven transgression, 2) being reminded of past unforgiven transgression and 3) not being reminded of past transgression. Participants’ levels of situational empathy and forgiveness were found to be no difference among the three groups using one-way ANOVA. Results supported the empathy model of forgiveness that situational empathy was strongly correlated to forgiveness. Situational empathy also acted as a mediator accounted for the relation between dispositional empathy and forgiveness.
Effect of Reminding Past Transgression on Forgiveness

As far back as the 1930s in United States and Europe, psychologists and mental health professionals had discussed on the topic of forgiveness (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). However, more serious and systematic researches on the concept of forgiveness were not begun until 1980s (McCullough, et al., 2000). In the past 20 years, research on forgiveness has increased substantially and by the end of 1998, important papers concerning forgiveness were appeared in various field of psychology, such as counseling/clinical psychology, social psychology and developmental psychology (McCullough, et al., 2000). A number of factors related to forgiveness have also been explored. However, one may be curious about the importance of forgiveness as recently researchers have increasingly interest in exploring various factors affecting one’s willingness to grant forgiveness. In fact, various studies had found out some potential benefits of forgiveness on health and well-being. Findings had shown that forgiveness was related to positive mental health and reduced feelings of anger, anxiety, fear and depression (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Mauger, Perry, Freeman, Grove, & McKinney, 1992). Evidence also suggested that forgiveness can be used as a helpful counseling tool for incest survivors, substance abusers and cancer patients (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Flanigan, 1987; Phillips & Osborne, 1989). As a result, exploring the factors related to forgiveness could contribute to the psychological well-being of human. However, Katz, Street & Arias (1997) pointed out that forgiveness may lead to harmful consequence in relationships characterized by physical abuse. People will continue to suffer in the abusive relationship if they are more willing to forgive their partners for physical abuse (Katz et al., 1997). Thus, psychologists have to be careful in using forgiveness as a tool in order to achieve the positive effects of forgiveness.

Definition of forgiveness

Some researchers had defined forgiveness as “a willingness to abandon one’s right to
resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her” (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998, pp. 46-47). However, researchers have not yet reached a consensus on what forgiveness is (McCullough, et al., 2000). In general, researchers had agreed that forgiveness should be differentiated from pardoning, condoning, excusing, forgetting, denying and reconciliation (McCullough et al., 2000). McCullough et al. (2000) pointed out that most of the existing definitions of forgiveness shared one common feature: when people forgive, their responses towards the transgressors become more positive and less negative. Thus, forgiveness can be in general regarded as prosocial behavior with this common feature. Based on the concept of prosocial behavior, present study will adopt McCullough, Worthington & Rachal’s (1997) definition of forgiveness. According to McCullough et al. (1997), forgiveness can be defined as the set of prosocial and motivational changes in which one’s motivations to retaliate and estrange the transgressor have decreased while one’s motivations to conciliate with the transgressor have increased.

Factors related to forgiveness

Research supported that various factors such as apology (McCullough et al., 1997), severity of the offense (Boon & Sulsky, 1997) and relationship closeness (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Jr., Brown, & Hight, 1998) would affect people’s willingness to forgive. With the presence of apology, people were more like to forgive the transgressors because an apology might indicate that the transgressor’s willingness to rehabilitate (Weiner, 1995). However, if the offense is severe, the transgressor will less likely to be forgiven (Boon & Sulsky, 1997). Forgiveness would also be increased when the victims had close, committed and satisfactory relationship with their transgressors (McCullough et al., 1998).

Perspective taking

Apart from that, perspective-taking was found to affect willingness to forgive (Takaku,
In the study of Takaku (2001), effect of a victim’s perspective taking on granting forgiveness in a hypothetical scenario was investigated. In Takaku’s (2001) study, participants (victims) were presented with a hypothetical transgression toward them and their willingness to forgive the transgressor in the scenario was measured. The participants were mainly divided into two categories: one group was guided to take the perspective of the transgressor in the scenario and the other group was guided to take the perspective of their own as victims. In order to induce transgressor’s perspective taking, some participants were reminded of their past transgression as transgressors and some were guided to imagine how the transgressor in the scenario would think, feel and behave. Results had shown that victims (participants) who had taken the transgressor’s perspective were more likely to forgive the transgressor than victims who had taken their own perspectives. Another similar study had further suggested that participants who were manipulated to take the transgressor’s perspective by recalling their personal past transgression as a transgressor were the most forgiving (Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001). In addition, Younger, Piferi, Jobe & Lawler (2004) further supported that realization by the victim that he/she was once an offender was a crucial predictor of forgiveness. Younger et al. (2004) found that victims forgave to a higher degree when they remembered they had betrayed someone in the past. Findings in these three recent studies have demonstrated that willingness to forgive can be increased by asking the victims to recall their own past transgression as transgressors. As the effect of reminding past transgression on forgiveness was a recent finding, further investigation would be needed to well support the effect. Thus, the present study was conducted to explore on the issue of whether reminding past transgression would affect forgiveness.

In addition, in the above studies related to reminding past transgression, the influence of the characteristics of the reminded past transgression was unexplored. As mentioned before, severity of transgression was found to affect forgiveness (Boon & Sulsky, 1997). Thus, it is
possible that there are other unexplored factors concerning the features of past transgressions may also affect the willingness to forgive. For example, when people are reminded of their personal past transgressions as transgressor, their transgressions may vary in the consequences of the event. In some cases, people were forgiven by the victims whereas others were not. This difference in being forgiven or not forgiven by the victims may influence the effect of reminding one’s past transgression on the willingness to forgive in a current transgression. In order to investigate this unexplored area, the present study was designed to find out the effect of reminding one’s past forgiven transgression (one was forgiven by the victim in that particular past transgression) and reminding one’s past unforgiven transgression (one was not forgiven by the victim in that particular past transgression) on the willingness to forgive.

As mentioned in Takaku’s (2001) study, taking the perspective of transgressor can promote forgiveness. Takaku (2001) has proposed a dissonance-attribution model to explain such finding. Takaku (2001) suggested that victims usually had a belief that the transgressors should be the one to be blamed, however when the victims were reminded of their past transgression, they realized that they would easily blame others or the situation as transgressors. Thus victims would feel discomfort because of the two inconsistent attributions of blame when they were in different roles: 1) blaming transgressors when they were victims and 2) blaming others or situation when they were reminded as transgressors. In order to reduce the discomfort feelings, victims who were reminded of their past transgression would form more favorable attributions toward the transgressors, that is, to perceive causes other than the transgressors themselves. These attributional changes will lead to an increase in the willingness of forgiving. As dissonance-attribution model was recently adopted to explain how various factors affecting forgiveness (Takaku, 2001), more research support is needed to confirm this model.

*Empathy*
On the other hand, empathy model of forgiving has been well established in the research of forgiveness and many studies supported that empathy can facilitate willingness to forgive (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1991; McCullough et al., 1997, 1998; Worthington, 1998; McCullough, 2000; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005). According to Batson and Shaw (1991), empathy can be defined as emotion that is congruent with but not necessarily identical to the emotion of another person. Furthermore, empathy can be categorized into two types: one is situational empathy and the other is dispositional empathy (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Situational empathy refers to empathy for specific person and specific situation while dispositional empathy is a kind of global personality factors.

To empirically support the empathy model of forgiving, McCullough et al. (1997) had investigated relationship between empathy (situational empathy) and forgiveness based on Batson’s empathy-altruism model. Under the empathy-altruism model, empathy can lead to motivation to care for others and to help others even for total strangers (Batson, Batson, Todd, Brummett, Shaw, & Aldeguer, 1995). Similarly in the empathy model of forgiving, empathy can lead to motivation to care for the transgressor which then results in a prosocial behavior – forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997). This empathy model of forgiving was supported as McCullough et al. (1997) found that willingness to forgive will be increased when situational empathy increases. In addition, the effect of situational empathy is very powerful that the relationships between various factors, such as apology, relationship and clinical intervention, and forgiveness can be explained as a function of an increase in situational empathy for the transgressors (McCullough, 1997). Therefore, the effect of reminding past transgression on forgiveness may also be well explained by empathy. With the strong research support, the present study would adopt the empathy model of forgiving to investigate the effect of reminding past transgression on forgiveness and predict a strong correlation between empathy
and forgiveness.

Apart from situational empathy, the present study was also interested in the effect of dispositional empathy. One may notice that some people are easier to experience empathy (situational empathy) for others while some people may not. One possible explanation may be the difference in personality in the aspect of empathy (dispositional empathy). For people with a higher dispositional empathy, their experiences of empathy toward others may be easier to trigger and result in a greater level. As a result, dispositional empathy was expected to promote situational empathy, which then in turn facilitated forgiveness (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). In addition, gender difference was found in level of empathy and the relationship between empathy and forgiveness (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Various studies had shown that women had a higher level of empathy than men (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). However, findings of gender difference in relationship between empathy and forgiveness were quite contradictory. Study of Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia (2002) and study of Toussaint & Webb (2005) had shown that empathy was a better predictor of forgiveness in men than in women while in a study of Macaskill et al. (2002), it was found that the effect of empathy on forgiveness was stronger in women than in men. Thus, more evidence will be needed to better understand the gender difference in the relationship between empathy and forgiveness.

Present study

Based on Takaku’s (2001) study, the present study would investigate effect of reminding past transgression on forgiveness. When victims were reminded of their past transgressions, they were enhanced to take the transgressor’s perspective. As empathy involve taking the perspective and understanding the emotion of another person, being reminded of past transgression would increase victims’ empathy toward the transgressor. It was therefore hypothesized that

Hypothesis 1: Victims who were reminded of their past transgression would have a
higher level of situational empathy compared with victims who were not reminded of any past transgression.

Using the empathy model of forgiveness, victims who have a higher level of empathy toward the transgressor would be more willing to forgive as they are motivated to care and behave positively toward the transgressor. Therefore, it is hypothesized that

Hypothesis 2: victims who were reminded of their past transgression would be more willing to forgive compared with victims who were not reminded of any past transgression.

In addition, the present study could investigate how the unexplored factor in Takaku’s (2001) study – characteristic of the reminded past transgression, influences the effect of reminding victims’ past transgression on forgiveness using an empathy model of forgiving. The present study would focus on the consequence of the reminded past transgressions which is either being forgiven or not being forgiven by the victim in the past transgressions. It is therefore hypothesized that

Hypothesis 3: Level of situational empathy of victims being reminded of past forgiven transgression would be the higher than victims being reminded of past unforgiven transgression, who were then higher than victims who were not reminded of any past transgression.

Hypothesis 4: Willingness to forgive of victims being reminded of past forgiven transgression would be the higher than victims being reminded of past unforgiven transgression, who were then higher than victims who were not reminded of any past transgression.

According to empathy model of forgiving, increase in situational empathy can increase forgiveness because victims are motivated to concern the transgressor. In addition, people with a higher dispositional empathy will be easier to generate situational empathy for the
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Transgressor which then increases forgiveness. Therefore it was hypothesized that

Hypothesis 5: Dispositional empathy, situational empathy and forgiveness will be
correlated with each other.

Hypothesis 6: Dispositional empathy can predict situational empathy which then
predicts forgiveness.

Method

Participants

74 university undergraduates aged 18-27 ($M = 20, SD = 1.5$) were recruited through a
participant pool in University of Hong Kong. 51 of the participants were females and 23 were
males. 25 of the participants were in the experiment forgiven group, 26 were in the
experimental unforgiven group and 23 were in the control group. 27% were Christians, 11%
were Catholics, 1% were Buddhists and 61% did not have any religion.

Materials

Scenario. Participants were given a scenario to read before answering the
questionnaires. The scenario described a hypothetical transgression happened on the
participants. In the scenario, participants were described to be offended by a classmate – Chris
and then they received an apology from Chris.

Situational Empathy. Boston’s eight-item empathy scale (Batson, Bolen, Cross, &
Neuringer-Benefiel, 1986) was used to measure participants’ empathy toward the transgressor
for the particular transgression described in the scenario. The scale was consisted of eight
affects that the participants rated to indicate how much they had experienced each affect
toward the transgressor after reading the scenario. The rating was on a 5-point scale that
ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Forgiveness. This was a 10-item scale to measure participants’ willingness to forgive
toward the transgressor in the scenario. Five items in the scale were modified from
Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation Scale – 12-Item Form (TRIM-12; McCullough et al., 1998) and the other five items were generated specifically for the scenario. Participants rated on a 6-point scale that ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree).

Dispositional Empathy. Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1983) was used which was a 28-item scale consisted of four 7-item subscales and each subscale measured one dimension of empathy. The Perspective-Taking subscale measured the tendency to take other people’s perspective in everyday situation. The Fantasy subscale assessed the tendency to identify the feelings and actions of fictitious characters. The Empathic Concern subscale assessed the degree of an individual to experience feelings of concern for other people. The Personal Distress subscale measured one’s own feelings of personal discomfort in reaction to the emotions of others. Participants rated on a 5-point scale that ranged from 1 (does not describe me well at all) to 5 (describes me very well).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned into one of the three groups in this experiment: 1) Forgiven group, 2) Unforgiven group and 3) Control group.

In the Forgiven group, the experiment was divided into two parts. In the first part of the experiment, participants were guided orally and individually to remind their past transgression. Participants were first asked to think of one personal transgression as a transgressor in which the participants were forgiven by the victims in that particular past transgression. Then participants were guided by the experimenter orally to recall that transgression in their mind. In the process of rethinking, participants were suggested to close their eyes and follow the guiding questions asked by the experimenter to recall the whole event and their thoughts and feelings at the time of transgression. Participants were asked to recall the transgression mentally and personally without telling the event to the experimenter.
The process of reminding past transgression would approximately take five minutes. The second part of the experiment is a written task. After the reminding of past transgression, participants had to read the scenario and then answered a questionnaire which composed of the Empathy Scale, Forgiveness Scale, Interpersonal Reactivity Index and some demographic questions.

For the Unforgiven group, participants went through the same procedures as Forgiven group except that they had to think of a personal past transgression as a transgressor in which the victim did not forgive them in that particular transgression.

For the Control group, participants were not asked to recall any past transgression. They only needed to read a scenario and complete a written task - questionnaire which is the same as Forgiven and Unforgiven groups.

Pilot Test

Three pilot tests were conducted for the development of the scenario used in the present study. In the pilot tests, participants were first presented with a scenario and then they had to answer two questions from the Forgiveness scale to measure their willingness to forgive. The results of the pilot tests were used to modify the content of the scenario to ensure the transgression described in the scenario was at medium level. That is in general approximately half of the participants would forgive the transgressor while the other half would not. In the first and second pilot tests, there were 7 and 8 participants respectively and nearly all of them chose to forgive the transgressor in the scenarios (version 1 and 2 respectively). In the third pilot test, there were 18 participants and approximately half of them chose to forgive the transgressor while the other half would not. Thus, scenario used in the third pilot test was finalized as the scenario in the present study.

Results

Internal reliability
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The eight-item situational empathy scale had an internal consistency of .85. The twenty-eight-item dispositional empathy scale had an internal consistency of .74. The ten-item forgiveness scale had an internal consistency of .80. However, the seventh item in the forgiveness scale was found to have nearly no correlation with other items \( r = -.01 \). As a result the seventh item was deleted. Finally, the internal consistency of the nine-item forgiveness scale had become .85.

Forgiven, unforgiven and control groups’ differences

Two one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on forgiveness and situational empathy as a function of reminding different past transgression (reminding past forgiven transgression, reminding past unforgiven transgression, and not reminding of any past transgression). The result showed that there was no difference in willingness to forgive for reminding different past transgression, \( F(2, 71) = .378, p = .72, \eta^2 < .001 \). There was no difference in situational empathy either among the three groups, \( F(2, 71) = .007, p = .99, \eta^2 = .009 \).

Two independent sample \( t \)-tests were conducted on forgiveness and situational empathy as a function of the presence of taking transgressor’s perspective (Forgiven group and Unforgiven group versus Control group). The result showed that there was no difference in forgiveness whether participants were taking the perspective of transgressor or victim, \( t(72) = .29, p = .77, d = .07 \). There was no difference in situational empathy for participants either taking the perspective of transgressor or the victim, \( t(72) = .02, p = .98, d = .23 \).

Situational empathy, dispositional empathy and forgiveness

Using Pearson correlation, situational empathy, dispositional empathy and forgiveness were found to correlate with one another. Dispositional empathy was moderately correlated to situational empathy \( r = .27, p = .05 \). Situational empathy was highly correlated to forgiveness \( r = .59, p = .01 \). Dispositional empathy was moderately correlated to forgiveness
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However, the relation found between dispositional empathy and forgiveness was mainly accounted by a mediator - situational empathy. Result showed that the direct effect of dispositional empathy on forgiveness was not significant ($\beta = .22, p = .32$) after controlling situational empathy. However, the direct path from dispositional empathy to situational empathy was significant ($\beta = .51, p = .02$) as was the direct path from situational empathy to forgiveness ($\beta = .68, p < .001$). The indirect effect of dispositional empathy on forgiveness with situational empathy as mediator was supported to be significant ($\beta = .34, z = 2.64, p = .008$). As a result, the effect of dispositional empathy on forgiveness was mainly mediated by situational empathy. The finding of situational-empathy-as-mediator model was summarized in a Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Situational empathy as a mediator between dispositional empathy and forgiveness*

$\beta = 0.51$ $\beta = 0.68$

Gender differences

Gender differences were found in forgiveness and dispositional empathy. Willingness to forgive was higher in females than in males with $t(72) = -2.27, p = .026$. Level of dispositional empathy was higher in females than in males with $t(72) = -2.74, p = .008$.

As mentioned earlier, situational empathy was found to be highly correlated to forgiveness ($r = .59, p = .01$). Gender was found to be a moderator affecting the strength of
the correlation between situational empathy and forgiveness as $\Delta R = .036$ which is statistically significant with $F(1, 70) = 4.574$, $p = .036$. Thus the moderating effect of gender could explain 3.6% uniquely on the correlation between situational empathy and forgiveness. In addition, regression slope of females was .53 with a y-intercept of 2.74 while regression slope of males was 1.01 with a y-intercept of 1.16 as summarized in Figure 2. As a result, the effect of situational empathy on forgiveness was much stronger in males than in females.

Figure 2

Effect of empathy on forgiveness for males and females

![Graph showing effect of empathy on forgiveness for males and females](image)

Discussion

The present study examined the effect of reminding different past transgressions (forgiven versus unforgiven) on forgiveness using the empathy model of forgiveness. Results of the present study were similar to the results of past studies (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998; Worthington, 1998; McCullough, 2000; Macaskill et al., 2002; Paleari et al., 2005) which supported the empathy model of forgiveness. Both situational empathy and dispositional
Effect of Reminding empathy were found to be related to forgiveness in the present study. Thus evidence may suggest that empathy can facilitate forgiveness. However, the effect of reminding different past transgression on forgiveness was not supported.

_Situational empathy and forgiveness_

The present study clearly supported the relationship between situational empathy and forgiveness as situational empathy was found to be highly related to forgiveness. This strong correlation showed that victims who have higher emotional concern for the transgressors would be more willing to forgive. One possible explanation may be situational empathy can enhance victims’ motivation to care the transgressors which in turn lead to prosocial behavior – forgiveness based on Batson’s empathy-altruism mode (McCullough et al., 1997). Therefore, when victims’ emotional concern toward a particular transgressor in a particular transgression (situational empathy) is enhance, they will be motivated to care for the transgressors and behave more positively toward the transgressors such as forgiving the transgressors. Under this explanation, it is important to explore various effective ways to promote situational empathy in order to facilitate forgiveness. In addition, the present study found that gender was a moderator affecting the relationship between situational empathy and forgiveness. Results showed that the effect of situational empathy on forgiveness was greater in males than in females in which the effect was nearly doubled in males compared with females. An increase in situational empathy can lead to a greater increase in the level of forgiveness for males than females. Thus situational empathy is a potent factor affecting forgiveness in males. Obviously, enhancing situational empathy is a more effective way to promote forgiveness for males than females. This finding was similar to Toussaint & Webb’s (2005) finding however contradicted to result in the study of Macaskill et al. (2002) that relationship between empathy and forgiveness was stronger in women than in men. One reason for the contradictory findings may due to the influence of culture (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Effect of gender on the
relationship between empathy and forgiveness may be different across cultures.

Dispositional empathy, situational empathy and forgiveness

Findings showed that dispositional empathy was moderately related to forgiveness but the relation was mainly accounted by a mediator – situational empathy. This showed that victims with higher level of dispositional empathy were more willing to forgive because they had a higher level of situational empathy. In addition, results suggested that the effect of dispositional empathy on forgiveness was not significant after controlling the mediator - situational empathy. Therefore, generation of empathy for a specific person in a specific situation (situational empathy) is an important factor affecting victim’s willingness to forgive. As a result, it is crucial in facilitating forgiveness that one can transfer his/her dispositional empathy to a specific transgressor in a particular situation or transgression. When victims can take the perspective and show emotional concern of the specific transgressor in the particular transgression, their willingness to forgive that transgressor would be greatly enhanced.

Gender differences

Females were found to be more forgiving than males. In general, females are more concern with relationship than males. Therefore, females may be more willing to forgive in order to restore relationship harmony as relationship is important for females. In addition, females had a higher dispositional empathy than males in the present study. This may due to the effect of socialization. As females are socialized to be more expressive in emotions and concern for others’ feelings, their ability to feel empathic towards others may then be enhance and result in a higher level than males.

Reminding past transgression

Effect of reminding past transgression on forgiveness was not found in the present study. The consequence of the reminded past transgressions, either forgiven or unforgiven by the victims was also found to have no effect on forgiveness. However, the power of the
present study was very low (<.2), it can not be concluded that there is no effect of reminding different past transgression on forgiveness based on these findings. It is possible that the expected effect is really not presence. However, there can be another possibility that the expected effect may be presence but it cannot be observed in the present study with the weak power.

Limitation and future implication

In the present study, the participants were all undergraduate students which would lower the generalization power. Future studies with a more diverse population and even cross culture studies will be suggested to enhance generalization power. Furthermore, with a small sample size, the power of the present study was low which may affect the results of the study. Thus, a larger sample size will be suggested in order to have valid findings and sound arguments. As the effect of reminding past transgression on forgiveness is still under investigated for a more solid conclusion, having a large sample size with diverse population is crucial to provide sound and powerful evidence for investigating such effect. In addition, researcher should be aware of different factors which may contribute in affecting forgiveness when people are reminded of their past transgression. Apart from the consequence of the reminded past transgression (forgiven versus unforgiven), severity of the reminded past transgression and the relationship closeness between the transgressor and victims may also affect people’s willingness to forgive. These factors, such as severity and relationship closeness were not explored and controlled in the present study. Thus, the insignificant results found in the effect of reminding forgiven and unforgiven past transgression on forgiveness may be due to vary in different aspects, for example, severity, in the reminded past transgression. Future research can investigate how various factors, for example severity, in the reminded past transgression affect forgiveness or try to control the effect of other factors while examining one of them.
On the other hand, past research reminded participants’ past transgressions by asking them to write down their transgressions. One problem may arise that is people may vary in length and deepness in writing the past transgressions. Some may think and write about their transgressions very briefly. Unwillingness of self-disclosure may also hinder participants to think in detail about their past transgression as they want to write very briefly about their past transgression in the questionnaire. It becomes difficult to ensure the participants to think of their past transgression vividly. Thus, future research will be suggested to use the reminding method in the present study to ensure participants to think in detail about their past transgression without hesitation of self-disclosure. In the present study, guiding questions used to remind the past transgression were presented orally in an interview so that research can make sure the participants have taken time and effort to think about the past transgression vividly and deeply. In addition, participants were not requested to report the past transgression in the experiment so that participants were motivated to think more thoroughly about the past transgression without the hesitation of self-disclosure.

Although no effect of reminding different past transgression on forgiveness was found, the present study provided support for the empathy model of forgiveness. The present study suggested that people are more willing to forgive when their situational empathy is increased. This findings provide insight to future direction that researcher can explore factors related to situational empathy in order to facilitate forgiveness. Future research is suggested to figure out those factors (such as perspective taking) which are related to situational empathy. When ways to enhance situational empathy are found, forgiveness can be promoted as situational empathy is well supported to be highly related to forgiveness. The evidence of the high correlation between situational empathy and forgiveness is also beneficial for clinical practice. Psychologists can use different methods in the therapy, such as enhancing perspective taking, to increase people’s situational empathy towards their transgressors in order to increase
willingness to forgive. As the relation between situational empathy and forgiveness found in present study was a correlation, it did not indicate the causation. Further studies will be suggested to confirm the causal relationship between situational empathy and forgiveness like the study of McCullough (1997). To conclude, as forgiveness was found to enhance health and psychological well-being of human (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Mauger et al., 1992), it is crucial and beneficial for researcher to further explore in detail in the field of forgiveness for the contribution of human well being.
References


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Paleari, F. G., Regalia, C., & Fincham, F. (2005). Marital quality, forgiveness, empathy, and
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Please read the following scenario:

You and three of your classmates were working on a group project. One of your group members – Chris was often absent for the group project meetings. Although Chris did not come to some of the meetings, you and the other group members had assigned one part of the project for Chris to work on and asked him/her to send the written essay to you in one week time for combining and editing. However, Chris did not send his/her essay to you on time. You kept reminding Chris to send his/her essay to you as soon as possible because the deadline for submitting the project was fast approaching. Another week later, Chris had not sent you anything about the project. You were getting anxious and frustrated as you needed to submit the project in two days time. Just one day before the deadline, you got the essay from Chris. However, the essay written by Chris was not well-organized and did not fit well with the other parts of the project. Thus, you decided to rewrite it by yourself instead of using the essay from Chris. Finally you worked on the project for a whole day and submitted the project on time.

One day after submitting the project, Chris called you and apologized:
“I am sorry that I sent my essay to you so late and seldom attended the group meetings. Actually in these few weeks I had to practice for inter-school swimming competition so that I hardly spared some time to attend the meetings and work on the project. Also, I was exhausted after intensive practice. When I wrote the essay, I felt difficult to concentrate as I was too tired. I am sorry if the essay is bad. I also feel guilty that I did not contribute much to our project. I know I may make all of you anxious and worried. It was entirely my fault. I apologize for causing you any trouble.”
Appendix B
Questionnaire

Part 1

For each adjective listed below, please indicate (1-5) how much you have experienced that emotion(s) toward your classmate Chris.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_____ 1) Sympathetic  
_____ 2) Compassionate  
_____ 3) Softhearted  
_____ 4) Warm  
_____ 5) Tender  
_____ 6) Moved  
_____ 7) Concerned  
_____ 8) Empathic

For the following questions, please indicate your current thoughts and feelings about your classmate Chris. Use the following scale (1-6) to indicate your agreement with each of the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 = Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 = Disagree</th>
<th>3 = Slightly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 = Slightly Agree</td>
<td>5 = Agree</td>
<td>6 = Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_____ 1) I will forgive my classmate Chris.  
_____ 2) Chris should be given a second chance.  
_____ 3) I will not trust Chris.  
_____ 4) I will keep distance with Chris.  
_____ 5) I will do group project with Chris again in the future.  
_____ 6) I wish something bad would happen to Chris.  
_____ 7) I will make Chris compensate for his/her fault.  
_____ 8) I would like to help Chris on his/her study in the future.
9) I will avoid Chris.
10) I will be nice to Chris in the future.

Part 2

Please use the following scale (1-5) to indicate how well each of the statements describes you in most of the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>does not describe me well at all</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>describes me very well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) I often daydream and fantasize, about things that might happen to me.
2) I often have tender, concerned feelings for some people less fortunate than me.
3) I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the “other person’s” point of view.
4) Sometimes I don’t feel very sorry for other people when they have problems.
5) I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel.
6) In emergency situation, I feel anxious and uneasy.
7) I am usually objective when I watch a movie or a play, and I don’t often get completely caught up in it.
8) I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
9) When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel protective towards them.
10) I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation.
11) I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.
12) Becoming extremely involved in a good book or movie is somewhat rare for me.
13) When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm.
14) Other people’s misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal.
15) If I’m sure I’m right about something, I don’t waste much time listening to other people’s arguments.
16) After seeing a play or movie, I have felt as though I were one of the characters.
17) Being in a tense emotional situation scares me.
18) When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don’t feel very much pity.
Effect of Reminding

for them.

19) I am usually effective in dealing with emergencies.
20) I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
21) I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at both.
22) I would describe myself as a softhearted person.
23) When I watch a good movie, I can very easily put myself in the place of a leading character.
24) I tend to lose control during emergencies.
25) When I’m upset at someone, I usually try to “put myself in his shoes” for a while.
26) When I am reading an interesting story or novel, I imagine how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me.
27) When I see someone who needs help in an emergency, I cannot think clearly and lose control of myself.
28) Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

General Information

1) Age: _______

2) Gender: Female   Male

3) Race: Chinese   Other: ____________

4) Education Level: Secondary Post-secondary Undergraduate Postgraduate Other: ____________

5) Occupation: Student Other: ____________

6) Religion: Christian Catholic Buddhist Nil Other: ____________
Appendix C

Guiding questions of reminding past transgressions

Guiding Statements/Questions for “Forgiven” transgression:

1) Please take a moment to think of a past transgression, for example, you broke or forgot a promise, verbally or physically hurt others. In this event, you have been forgiven by the other.

2) Please visualize the event in detail. What did you say and do? What did others say and do?

3) What did you think and how did you feel at that time?

4) What made that person/people forgive you?

5) What were your reactions, thoughts and feelings when that person/people forgave you?

Guiding Statements/Questions for “Unforgiven” transgression:

1) Please take a moment to think of a past transgression, for example, you broke or forgot a promise, verbally or physically hurt others. In this event, you have not been forgiven by the other.

2) Please visualize the event in detail. What did you say and do? What did others say and do?

3) What were you thinking and how did you feel at that time?

4) Did you take any action or say anything to seek for forgiveness from that person/people?

5) What were your reactions, thoughts and feelings when that person/people did not forgive you?