



An exploration of the concept of forgiveness in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

There is limited research on the concept of forgiveness in young adults in romantic relationships, even though, it is undeniable that forgiveness promotes healthier relationships and social bonds. This study aimed to explore how young adults view, experience and understand forgiveness in romantic relationships. Three females and three males participated in semi-structured interviews in order to obtain individual experiences of forgiveness. Interviews were then transcribed using thematic analysis. Three themes were found: 'sense of belonging', 'forgive and forget' and 'emotion'. The themes demonstrates there are various factors affecting forgiveness. It seems to be that the emotion felt for the offender is the one factor mostly expressed to impact forgiveness. Future research should focus on how the concept of forgiveness is viewed differently in different cultures.

KEY WORDS:	FORGIVENSS	ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS	EXPERIENCES	YOUNG ADULTS	INTERPERSONAL
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Introduction

Interpersonal relationships can be formed in two basic ways: voluntary and non-voluntary. Some relationships are non-voluntary relationships such as one's family, whether biological or not, whereas other relationships are voluntary, therefore, they are formed by choice, these are usually based on what each person can offer the other and to the overall relationship itself. Unlike non-voluntary relationships, in voluntary relationships, the relationship is usually based on the value, commitment, satisfaction or intimacy the continued interaction brings to one's life. Romantic relationships are a prime interpersonal example of a voluntary relationship.

As humans, we have the need to establish and preserve romantic relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Nevertheless, preserving a romantic relationship can often be a difficult task. There are a number of external and internal factors that affect how one experiences romantic relationships.

Transgression is one significant aspect which negative affects romantic relationships (Jones W.H et al, 1995). Transgression is an act or event that goes against the standards of compassion, respect, trustworthiness and loyalty (Jones W.H et al, 2001), which are all important skills for romantic relationships. Unfortunately, at some point, almost all people in romantic relationships will either become the victim or offender of a transgression. Transgression can include, but it is not limited to, lying, broken promises and infidelities.

Humans appear to have an innate tendency to reciprocate transgressions with more negative behaviour, this can often be seek revenge against the offender, this is deep- rooted in the psychological, cultural, and biological levels of human nature (Sonkin, 2019). For this reason, it is important to devise a variety of potential solution to corrosive effects of transgression (Fry et al, 1997). One technique that can interject the recurring nature of reciprocation is forgiveness – aimed to quell negative responses to transgressions with positive ones instead.

Introduction to Forgiveness

The initial research into forgiveness began with Piaget (1932). He proposed that the capacity to forgive began in the development of moral judgement. By the 1980s and 1990s research on forgiveness increased substantially, with more serious consideration of the concept of forgiveness. However, only recently has forgiveness become a focal subject for psychologist; thus, only in the last decade has it been possible to write a 'history' of forgiveness in scientific psychology.

Research on forgiveness has never been more relevant, as 50.8% of UK population are involved in romantic relationships (Ons.gov.uk, 2016) and the probability of transgression increasing; it justifies that the concept of forgiveness has become a topic of interest for many psychologists.

However, before tackling the human phenomenon of forgiveness, it is vital to have an appropriate definition. There is no particular consensual definition for forgiveness. Perhaps, it is this lack of definition that makes forgiveness such an enigma to study amongst psychologists.

Enright & Coyle (1998) provided the most common definition of forgiveness. They proposed that forgiveness differentiates from pardoning, disregarding, tolerating, forgetting or negating the transgression. They suggested that forgiveness is a 'willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgement and indifferent behaviour toward one who unreasonably offended us, while adopting qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love towards him or her' (Enright et al, 1998).

This definition was later revised by Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) whom proposed forgiveness includes substituting undesirable cognitions, behaviours and emotions with more positive cognitions, feelings and behaviours. Oppositely, Worthington (2003) emphasises his definition of forgiveness on intentions and motivations and does not contain actual behaviours as mechanisms of forgiveness. Worthington (2003) suggested that there are two types of forgiveness – emotional forgiveness (substituting negative feelings with more positive feelings) and decisional forgiveness (a change in an individual's behavioural intentions).

Models of forgiveness

Worthington (1998) developed a model that closely adopts to this definition. The empathy-humility-commitment model of forgiveness hypothesises that people's tendencies to forgive are initiated by empathy for the offender, advanced by the humility or sincerity in the offender's apology, and formerly reinforced through a commitment to forgive the offender.

A similar model was developed by McCullough et al (1997) 'empathy-forgiveness model', this two-part model suggests that getting a genuine apology from a offender increases a victim's empathy for the offender which in order lowers the victim's incentive to pursue retaliation on the offender while increasing the incentive to forgive the offence.

Both of these models suggest that people's disposition to forgive someone who has betrayed them include variables of a social-cognitive nature. The transgressor's observed accountability, motives and intention when committing the offence influence the victim's willingness to forgive (Darby et al, 1982) as well as the severity of the offence committed (Kimmies, J. et al, 2016).

This is reinforced by McCullough et al. (1998) study with university students, which reported that the degree to which the offender apologises and seeks forgiveness to a transgression influenced and increased the likelihood of forgiving in university students.

Further studies meta-analysis (Girard & Mullet, 1997 ; Weiner et al., 1991) found that in marriages, victims were more likely to forgive their romantic partner if they felt like their partners were sincere about their apologies and were willing to make the appropriate changes to make the marriage work when a transgression took place.

Forgiveness in romantic relationships

In romantic relationships, forgiveness is an important, or else, how would relationships last?

Forgiveness is an act of equality, and it benefits romantic relationships. When people behave in a forgiving way they are choosing to decrease negative feelings towards

someone who has hurt them and replace these feelings with compassion towards them. Therefore, when people forgive romantic partners this has positive effects on the relationship.

When an individual behaves in a forgiving way, their behaviours may stop negative emotions felt by the victim and instead replace them with positive intention and action (McCullough, 1997). When someone experiences betrayal or transgression, feelings of anger and hostility tend to build up towards the wrongdoer. These feelings can cause the victim to disengage from the romantic relationship if they feel like the relationship has caused them pain (Davenport, 1991). Therefore, it is actually physically and mentally healthier for an individual to forgive.

A study conducted by Braithwaite, R. S., et al (2012) showed that in relations, choosing not to forgive your partner prolongs the conflict. The results showed that showing a lack of forgiveness to a romantic partner actually creates more conflict and enhances negative emotions towards one another. On the other hand, it showed that couples who practiced forgiveness are more likely to engage in positive interpersonal strategies and have higher capability to compromise and solve problems in the relationship.

Further cross sectional studies supported these findings (Thompson et al, 2005; Pieferi et al., 2006) demonstrated that forgiveness is highly associated to life fulfilment; hope and confidence (Maltby et al, 2004; Everson, 2001).

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that forgiveness not only provides intrapersonal benefits, but also has a positive impact on interpersonal relationships.

Longitudinal studies have validated that forgiveness is positively linked with marital durability, relationship gratification and overall relationship commitment (Finkel. Et al, 2002 ; Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2005). Research has highlighted that practicing forgiveness in romantic relationships affects the mending of relationships after a transgression (Hall & Fincham, 2006). It appears that forgiveness seems to have a higher impact on relationships when a transgression has occurred.

Further studies (Toussaint, Owen and Cheadle, 2011) also shown that couples who forgive are more to enjoy longer and more satisfying relationships. Unconditional forgiveness once practiced increases life enjoyment. Those who were previously wronged by their romantic partners tend to experience significant emotional difficulties, such as having difficulty in trusting people and creating new social bonds.

Present Study

The current study will aim to investigate into romantic forgiveness in young adults. With particular focus on how young adults experience romantic relationships and what leads them to forgiving their romantic partners in times of disagreements.

The research questions for this study are:

- • What does forgiveness mean to young adults?
- • In what situations do young adults tend to forgive their romantic partners?
- • What are the benefits or/and consequences of forgiveness?

People appear to become more forgiving as they get older (Darby et al, 1982). This assumption is supported by past research that stated older adults reported significantly higher likelihoods of forgiving in a variety of transgression scenarios than did young adults. As majority of past research is based on couples that are already married or in adulthood, this study will build on the gap of age related research on the concept of forgiveness.

Method

Design/Data collection

As previously discussed, there is a gap in existing qualitative research regarding young adults experiences of forgiveness in romantic relationship. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, qualitative research design was adopted. This design allows the researcher to gain rich and detailed understanding of the participants' individual experience (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Since qualitative methods are praised for exploring individual

experiences, this was considered the suitable data collection method for this research.

Six semi structured interviews were conducted (N=6), to explore the concept of forgiveness in young adults. Semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to prepare questions ahead of time based on the topic of interest and tailor questions towards individual responses, this meant that participants could freely express their perspectives on romantic forgiveness and embrace the 'gut instinct' collecting data based on human experiences and observation (Braun and Clarke, 2014).

The interview conducted of 14 fixed questions based on experiences of romantic relationships and forgiveness, in order to tackle the concept of forgiveness in young adults. Opened questions were employed to avoid 'yes' and 'no' responses, as well as questions prompts prepared ahead of the interview to enable the interviewee to elaborate on their answers further.

This data collection method was particularly beneficial as a student researcher, as it is time efficient.

Participants

Participants were recruited through opportunity sampling consisting of individuals who met the criterion. Participants were approached in Manchester City Centre and asked if they were or had been in romantic relationships as recent as 2-3 years ago and could be possibly interviewed within 2 weeks of the date approached. Initially, ten people were approached, this was in case any couldn't commit to the interview dates, but were advised that they may or may not be recruited for the research, depending on availability. Participants were provided a 'poster' outlining the details of the study and the contact details for the researcher in case of any future questions. The criterion was design to ensure the research remained relevant to what the researcher aimed to investigate.

The desired criterion was:

- 1) 18+ years old
- 2) Currently involved in a romantic relationship
- 3) OR their last relationship was as recent as 2-3 years ago

In total, six participants were recruited for this study. In order to maintain confidentiality, all participants were provided with pseudonyms instead of their real names, as well as any other people they discuss throughout the interviews.

PARTICIPANT A is a 23-year-old female, currently in a relationship of 2 years, and she will be referred to as Ana.

PARTICIPANT B is a 20-year-old female, not in a relationship; last relationship was 6 months ago. She will be referred to as Becky.

PARTICIPANT C is a 22-year-old male, in a relationship of 10 months and he will be referred to as Carlos.

PARTICIPANT D is a 21-year-old male, not in a relationship; last relationship was 1 year ago. He will be referred to as David.

PARTICIPANT E is a 19-year-old female, currently in a relationship of 4 years, and she will be referred to as Elizabeth.

PARTICIPANT F is a 20 year old male, currently in a relationship of 2 years. He will be referred to as Fabian.

Materials

To capture the individual experiences of each participant the semi-structured interviews were recorded using an electronic device (mobile phone).

An audio recording electronic device (mobile phone) was used to record the interviews for this study. The device is password protected and the App installed to record the interviews also requires its own password – these passwords are only known and accessible to the researcher.

Data analysis

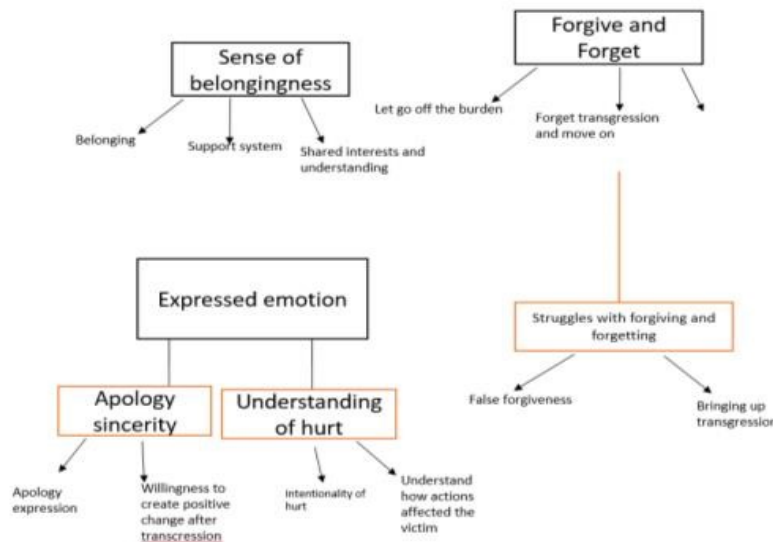
After the interviews took place, full interviews were transcribed (see example, APPENDIX 5) to analyse the data thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis involves pinpointing, examining and recording themes within data (Braun, V and Clarke, V, 2006). This was the chosen data analysis method as it interprets the meaning behind what the participant said and finding themes within data that are purposeful towards the research and recurrent throughout data. Thematic analysis offers accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data.

Procedure

Once the ethical form was approved (APPENDIX 1) by the research tutor and participants were recruited, participants were provided with a participant information sheet (APPENDIX 2) which detailed the purpose of the study, what would be required of their participation and the ethical considerations. Once the participant agreed this, signature from participant was required in order to confirm their acceptance to participate.

To conduct the interviews, interview rooms were booked in MMU's Brooks (Birley) building, this is so that there would be no external distractions and the participant could feel like they can freely disclose personal information in a comfortable and safe environment. This also decreased the sense of interview formality, which allowed the interview to feel more relaxed, opening up the opportunity for more in-depth information to be gained (Gill et al., 2008). Participants were recorded using an electronic mobile device.

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting approximately 20-25 minutes each. As romantic relationships and transgression can be a sensitive topic to ask someone to disclose, it was ensured that the interview started off with simple questions



such as ‘Are you in a relationship and/or how long have you been with your current partner’ and built up to more intense questions such as ‘What does forgiveness mean to you’ (APPENDIX 3). Following the interview, participants were provided with a debrief sheet (APPENDIX 2). This informed participants they could withdraw from study within two weeks from interview date and provided the participant with support links regarding romantic relationships and forgiving a transgression.

Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical considerations were relevant to this study. These included storage of participant information and data; confidentiality and anonymity; informed consent; right to withdraw from study and debriefing participants after completion of study.

Full BPS (British Psychological Society, 2014) ethical approval was obtained before the research could collect any data (APPENDIX 1). The interviewees gave informed consent (APPENDIX 4) prior to the interview. The informed consent form informed the participants of their right to refuse participation and to withdraw prior to, during or after the interview (two week period). Participants were given pseudonym names, as stated previously, to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Moreover, the participant was also fully debriefed after the interview and also provided websites that offer relationship advice (APPENDIX 1) in order to ensure

participants' psychological and physical well-being (Miller and Bell, 2002). Participants were also provided with a participant information sheet (APPENDIX 2) which informed participants on how their responses would be used for research, how data would be stored on a mobile phone device and keypad lock cabinets and deleted and shredded after analysis according to the Data Protection Act (1988).

Analysis and Discussion

Thematic analysis was the chosen appropriate method to analyse the interview transcripts for this report. Thematic analysis explored the experiences of the participants who are or have been in romantic relationship. It had a particular emphasis on their experiences of romantic forgiveness and how romantic forgiveness is understood and differentiated to participants. Through six semi-structured interview, involving males and females, the themes found were 'Sense of Belongingness', 'Moving on' and 'Offender's expressed emotion/Offender's character'.

The themes found justified the participant's experiences with forgiving, the reasons why people forgive and the benefits of forgiveness.

Sense of belongingness

This theme represents the sense of forgiving someone because the participants' want to feel like they belong, therefore, expressions of finding it simpler to forgive their romantic partners than to break-off the relationship or let the transgression affect the relationship for the sake of feeling like they belong.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that it is a vital human need to belong. It is important for humans to form and maintain lasting, satisfying and significant interpersonal relationships.

The sense of forgiving someone because the participant wants to feel like they belong, therefore they find it simpler to forgive than to lose that sense of belonging.

Lines 45 – 48 *'but in a romantic relationship it's a different type of belonging, it's intimate, so when he apologised to me and expressed how sorry he was and I told*

him how he made me feel, I forgave him, more because I didn't want to lose that' –

Ana

Lines 75 – 79 'I think the reason I was more inclined to forgive him is because we had been together for a very long time at this point, it would be easier to forgive him that to start off with someone else and watch him become someone else's' –

Elizabeth

Line 50 'was more about still wanting to have that type of support system in my life' –

Carlos

This shows that there is a significant link between the need to belong and forgiveness. Not only that, but also it sheds light on the fact that the need to belong is an important factor considered when forgiving a transgression. These views are further supported and expressed by Ana and Elizabeth:

Lines 60 – 65 'Yeah I would say that I am more willing to forgive a romantic partner than I would be to forgive a friend, only because I see a relationship as a mutual understanding and commitment to one another. I believe that the end goal of a relationship is marriage, so it's a long term commitment' – Ana

Lines 90 – 94 'Romantic relationships differentiate to friendships because it's kind of like you belong to that person, you know, you share equal values and intimate experiences, it's not easy to replace that, whereas I find it that it's easier to replace friendships. Therefore, I would find it easier to forgive my boyfriend because I wouldn't want to have to replace that sense of the relationship – that belonging.' –

Elizabeth

However, not all participants express this. Participants that appears to have less desire for the sense of belongingness, appeared to be less likely to forgive their romantic partners and found it easier to break-off the relationship.

Line 30 – 36 'I grew up with two sisters and I was the only guy, my sisters both got the attention of my parents whereas I was kind of expected to do things for myself, I think this gave me a sense of independence from a very young age, I've always felt like I could things for myself and didn't' really need anyone. – David

Lines 12 – 13 *'I have never been cheated on or anything like that, but I can imagine that if my girlfriend was to do that, I probably wouldn't be inclined to forgive her...'* –

Carlos

Lines 37-38 *'It's likely that I would break off the relationship, only because, I'd rather be by myself than with someone who doesn't respect me and my boundaries'* –

Becky

These expressions are current with previous research – previous studies have demonstrated that individuals who tend to have a strong need for belongingness appeared to extend forgiveness to transgressors more easily than those who felt less need for belongingness (Barnes et al., 2010).

Participants expressed feeling that 'belonging' in a relationship increased their overall happiness and they felt more satisfied with their lives.

Lines 25 – 30 *'I think a relationship is actually a need for me. I'm a very dependent person, I've always felt like my purpose in life is to become a mother – and if you think about it, becoming a mother is belonging to that little person for the rest of their lives – having my very own little person, I couldn't think of anything that would make me happier. So, yeah I would say I find it that I am happiest when I am in a relationship, knowing that I have that person there for me, it's important for feeling secured socially and important for life satisfaction over all.'* – Elizabeth

Individuals who have a stronger need to belong are likely to be predominantly inclined to forgive transgressions to maintain social connection and social bonds.

Lines 20 – 21 *'then relationships gets destroyed and must people don't really want that to happen to happen because you are connected with that person'* – Fabian

A study conducted by Carvalho et al. (2010) found that fulfilling the need to belong led participants to demonstrate greater willingness to forgive hypothetical offenses compared to participants in a control group.

The sense of belonging is indeed significant to a meaningful life (Lambert et al., 2013). Meaningful belonging is essential for our romantic life.

The present study found that participants who had a higher intensity for the sense of belonging were more likely to forgive their romantic partners and had fewer thoughts of ending their romantic relationship in addition to having less desire to let a transgression negatively impact the relationship than did participants who were less motivated by the sense of belonging.

Forgive and Forget

Forgiveness means moving on, letting go off the grudge. This means not referring to past transgression, refraining from lording the transgression over the partner in the future.

When it comes to forgiveness, the betrayed person – the victim holds all the power. In this theme it was found that participant's tend to surrender this dominant role and let go off being the 'victim' to allow equality again, the participants' expressed how they had to stop dwelling/replaying the injustice in order to forgive and move on.

Lines 39 – 42 *'Letting go off the anger and resentment you have towards that person... Whatever the situation is, it's just forgetting about it, if you don't forgive you won't forget, and that just leads to you building up grudges, getting angry all of the time'* – Carlos

Lines 25 – 29 *'I think people get confused in the sense of ... People tend to think that to forgive someone you have to go back to talking and hanging out and go back to what the relationship once was, but for me personally, I think you can*

forgive somebody and go your own ways, and I think that's actually very healthy in the sense of you know you don't have any bad vibes and you can move on from it' – Becky

Participants also expressed feeling like 'forgiving and forgetting' helped them move on from the situation, and since the transgression, they have actually managed to build a stronger relationship as they have come to mutual understanding of what 'commitment' means to both of them

Lines 90 – 94 *'I feel like... in order to move on from the situation, I had to forgive and forget, it doesn't necessarily mean that the offence is out of my mind, but its more about not keep on bringing the situation back up, I have to really choose to drop it, and though that was hard initially, it's a fundamental part of forgiveness in my opinion.'* – Fabian

Lines 120 – 126 *'I'd say since I've let the situation go, we've actually got closer... After the cheating happened I expressed to him the changes I needed him to do in order for us to move forward, we came to a mutual understanding of what was right or wrong. I feel like once you truly communicate your issues, what hurt you and how it made you feel, you have opened the door to being able to stop going back to that moment of betrayal, because you've already expressed how you feel and they've acknowledge how they made you feel, if change occurs, you won't feel the need to keep on bringing it up, it's dealt with and you now have the key to build a stronger and more understanding relationship.'* – Elizabeth

These findings are consistent with Finkel et al.(2002) and Paleari et al., (2005) as it demonstrates that forgiveness in relationships increases relationship satisfaction and relationship assurance.

However, some psychologists would argue that actually 'moving on' or 'putting the past behind us' alone is not forgiveness (Enright, North and Tutu, 1998). It can be argued that despite trying to genuinely forgive a transgressor, some fragments of the transgression and the pain it caused may remain. Fabian in particular expressed the memory of the wrongdoing resurface every so often.

Lines 63 – 66 *'I remember trying to convince myself so hard that I had forgiven and forgotten ... It got so silly, like we'd go out to eat somewhere new and I'd be sat there thinking 'Did he take her here and now she's taking me?... (pause)'* – Fabian

When a victim cannot let go off the feeling of resentment, they feel like somebody owes them something. Victims of transgression also frequently experience feelings of anger and hostility concerning the offender (Rye and Pargament, 2002). This was expressed by Fabian who described:

Lines 100 – 104 *'I'd still find myself holding her accountable for her mistakes at every chance I got'*

I was constantly bringing up the fact that she had betrayed me and needed to work harder for my trust and she didn't seem to understand that.' – Fabian

McCullough, et al. (2000) suggested the term 'False forgiveness' – false forgiveness also known as pseudo forgiveness relates to the ploy of maintaining or gaining power over the offender. If a victim says to 'forgive' their romantic partner but continuously reminds them of the betrayal committed to them, then the victim is actually exercising a superiority that is incompatible with forgiveness. Honest acts of forgiveness requires the victim to welcome the wrongdoer's back into the 'good books', worthy or respect and equality. When the victim 'forgives' but expects the wrongdoer to be indebted to us, again, the victim is misunderstanding true forgiveness.

Lines 70 – 76 *'I convinced myself that I had forgave what she had done to me, I mean she apologised and I accepted and then we went back to just being*

together... (pause) but then in that period of 'trying to make things work' I noticed myself getting angry at little things she did, even just the sound of her breathing sometimes bothered me. We kept having stupid arguments over stupid stuff and I kept bringing the situation back up, it was like I was becoming bitter and becoming someone I wasn't prior to the cheating.' – Fabian

Lines 150 – 158 *'I was constantly carrying this heavy burden on my shoulders, this hadn't just affected my relationship, and it affected how I felt as a man. I harboured so much negative energy and so much negative emotion. I think I realised that I couldn't just let go off the situation, I mean yes she was apologetic and she expressed that to me, but that doesn't erase the memories and emotions that I felt that day out of my head.'* – Fabian

These findings are consistent with previous studies (Braithwaite, R.S. et al, 2012) as it suggests that in relationships, when the victim chooses not to forgive the offender for the transgression, more conflict arises from the situation. The findings for the present study show that this conflict can be interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Expressed emotion

The offender needs to understand how the transgression made the forgiver feel and the forgiver needs to feel that the apology is sincere in order to forget.

Lines 15 – 17 *'If you can see that they realise how their actions made you feel and they consider your emotions, then I don't see why I shouldn't forgive them'* – Ana

Lines 55 – 58 *'It depends if it was intentional, like if I previously expressed that I don't like that sort of behaviour and then they go and do it again, they were aware that I would feel a type of way and yet they repeated that behaviour on purpose'* – Becky

Participants who felt that their partners' apology was sincere reported greater emotional sympathy towards the offender and greater incentive to forgive their partners than participants who reported not feeling like they got a sincere apology.

Lines 29 – 27 *'I forgive quite quickly, if they are genuinely serious about their apology and I can see that they are being genuine about it, I will forgive it quickly and just let it go'* – Carlos

Lines 63 – 67 *'She started spending more time with me, gave me the passwords to all her social media, even though I chose to never go on it, knowing that she gave me them willingly to help build the trust in our relationship made it easier to forgive her, I felt like she wanted to make it work, she wanted me to forgive her and was willing to take the steps needed to do so.'* – David

Meta-analysis studies (Girard & Mullet, 1997 ; Weiner et al., 1991 ; McCullough et al., 1998) found that the degree to which the offenders apologised and seek forgiveness to a transgression influenced and increased the likelihood of forgiving.

The link between apology sincerity, empathy and forgiveness motivation is consistent with findings from McCullough et al (1997) which suggested that if the victim feels like the apology they got from their romantic partner was sincere, they were more inclined to forgive their romantic partners, than if they felt they didn't get a honest and sincere apology.

Lines 100 – 104 *'Because I am Muslim, you know... I'm not really going to have various romantic relationship experiences in my life, so it's like they've seen every little part of me, especially because I'm not the type of people that can just open up to anybody. So I see it like, because this person knows me, I can't just let them go like that'* – Ana

Lines 19 – 20 *'I consider my feelings about the person, like if it is someone who I share a more intimate relationship, like a romantic partner, I will likely forgive them more easily'* – Carlos

Conclusion and Limitations

In conclusion, it is clear that the psychology of forgiveness is a very wide-ranging field and is closely linked with well-being and health. It is a discipline that provides us strategies to apply to any area of our lives, including daily relationships and work-life. Therefore, forgiving is one of the best virtues and qualities to develop as human beings.

Victim–offender relationship and the offence itself are also good indicators of whether or not a victim will forgive. As the present study shown, we tend to forgive those we are close to more readily than those we do not share any communality with. In addition, as findings suggest, as humans we are likely to forgive small, often unintentional infractions faster than larger and more severe ones.

Post-longitudinal and cross-sectional research (Tsang, 2006 ; Muermann, 2006) suggested that victim-offender relationship as well as relationship closeness influences one's willingness to forgive. This was consistent with the results gathered in the present study.

A possible limitation of the study is that the majority of the participants were Caucasian raised in western culture. Past research (Ho and Fung, 2011) suggests that forgiveness practice may be different from a collective culture. Therefore, the use of different culture and background participants would give a better understanding of the concept of forgiveness in young adults within different cultures. Nevertheless, the present study readily shown just how important forgiveness is in

romantic relationships and how it is intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits to the victim.

Reflexivity

I have always been aware of how forgiveness can positively affect a relationship, and yet, I am the type of person that finds it extremely difficult to practice forgiveness.

Having just gone through a relationship break up due to transgression committed by my ex-partner, I thought to myself, 'Why not investigate the concept of forgiveness in Young adults?' I must admit, this was not my initial topic of interest; however, prior to the beginning of my final year of university, I was already certain that I would want to research perspectives and experiences of young adults in relationships.

It was as though I chose to do this study to improve my own forgiving qualities. I have always struggled with forgiving, I tend to hold on to the offence people have committed, I felt like this dissertation would be a healing form to myself, learning to forgive others even when I have not received any sincere form of apology. Although I struggle with understanding the concept of forgiveness, I felt confident that the questions for the interview and topics chosen to discuss were relative.

Upon reflection, I enjoyed conducting the interviews and using thematic analysis to analyse the responses. I believe that it has influenced me in practicing forgiveness more, having come to a realisation that forgiveness is not always for the other person, as expressed by some participants, sometimes forgiveness is to release ourselves of the negative emotions, the burden and the negative intrapersonal and interpersonal impacts.

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