

Forgiveness as a Relational Enterprise: Giving Back to You in Order to Get Back to Us

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Forgiveness as a process of resolving interpersonal transgressions is associated with greater individual and relational health. This study expands current conceptualizations of forgiveness as a relational enterprise by asking two questions: What are the relational motivations for which people forgive? In what way or ways does the experience of being in relationship change after forgiving? Semi-structured individual and dyadic interviews of five adult romantic couples were conducted. An open-coding analysis of the first research question yielded 11 motivation categories and 9 categories of changes associated with forgiveness. The relative frequencies of the categories in individual and dyadic interviews were explored to understand better the context in which these aspects of forgiveness manifest. A framework for interpreting these results was created to position the motivation categories within private, obligational, or relational orientations toward forgiveness. ***Clinical Implications:*** This study has highlighted ways forgiveness can help couples to reflect on, invest toward, and engage in their relationships. Forgiveness fits into what couples want out of their relationships, as a way of making their own needs and the needs of their relationship congruent and mutually facilitative. Motivations to forgive extended beyond private needs to the point that forgiveness became a hallmark of what the relationship stood for: a priority in their lives and the yearning to find a way to move on together. Forgiveness may not only be helpful to couples following a transgression, but is an activity that can have preventive effects on the relationship down the line.