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Examining Group Forgiveness: Conceptual and Empirical Issues

Robert D. Enright, Yu-Rim Lee,
Matthew J. Hirshberg, Breanne K. Litts,
Eleni B. Schirmer, Anisa J. Irwin, John Klatt,
and Julie Hunt
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jacqueline Yu Song
University of the Philippines-Diliman

What is group forgiveness and can it be measured in an unambiguous way? Recently, scientists have begun to consider the role group forgiveness may play in reducing conflict and enhancing prospects for peace among groups. The forgiveness construct has been, until very recently, primarily operationalized as an individual phenomenon. Increasingly, it is being mapped onto groups. These initial attempts either conflate individual and group capacities or insufficiently describe group forgiveness, rendering the construct ambiguous. While promoting group forgiveness might motivate intergroup peace, empirical support depends on coherent operationalization and sound measurement. We begin by examining the definition of interpersonal forgiveness and the emerging literature on group forgiveness. Based on this review, we present a philosophically coherent operationalization of group forgiveness. Finally, we consider future research directions for researchers interested in studying group forgiveness.

Keywords: group forgiveness, intergroup peace, group dynamics, measurement

Intergroup conflict seems to be ubiquitous in human society. Examples of group conflict are easy to identify across different types of social groupings. A small sample of these include civil conflict in Chile and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, religious and political conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and between Israel and Palestine, intrareligious sectarian and tribal conflict in the Middle East, and sociodemographic conflict along racial lines between White police officers and African American citizens in Ferguson, Missouri. Of course, this is just a small subset of conflicts that receive significant news coverage. There are many other tragic examples of human rights violations and aggression between groups.

The cost of intergroup conflict is significant and multifaceted. There are social and economic costs for the loss of life, the destruction of property, and the mental health of those involved (Masco, 2013; McLernon & Cairns, 2001). The perceived injustices from these losses can result in anger and hate creating cycles of violence and retaliation that go on for generations (McLernon, Cairns, Hewstone, & Smith, 2004). Some have argued that forgiveness between groups might have an important role in peace efforts (Bright & Exline, 2012) and research on group forgiveness has already begun (Van Tongeren, Burnette, O'Boyle, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2014). Although work in this area is of high quality there is an important weakness. Much of the conceptual work on

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ROBERT D. ENRIGHT received his PhD from the University of Minnesota. He is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Board Member of the International Forgiveness Institute, Inc. His research interests include psychology and education of forgiveness.

YU-RIM LEE received her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research interests include forgiveness and health.

MATTHEW J. HIRSHBERG received his MS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research interests include forgiveness, mindfulness, and well-being.

BREANNE K. LITTS received her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is an assistant professor at the Utah State University. Her research interests include learning sciences, new literacies, learning through making, mobile learning, design-based research, out-of-school learning, the maker movement, computer science education.

ELENI B. SCHIRMER received her MS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Her research interests include collective action in education, social movements in education.

ANISA J. IRWIN received her BA from Macalester College. She is a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research interests include forgiveness and moral development.

JOHN KLATT received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is an assistant dean in Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research interests include forgiveness and moral development.

JULIE HUNT received her MA from Ohio State University. She is a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research interests include moral development and college student motivation.

JACQUELINE YU SONG received her MA from the University of the Philippines-Diliman. She is a graduate student in the Department of Psychology, University of the Philippines-Diliman. Her areas of research interest include psychology and education of forgiveness.

CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE should be addressed to John Klatt, Academic Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 116 Agriculture Hall, 1450 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706. E-mail: john.klatt@wisc.edu

interpersonal forgiveness has been applied to group forgiveness (Roe, 2007). Attempts to extend interpersonal forgiveness to groups often conflate individual and group capacities or describe group forgiveness in ambiguous terms. Empirical study of group forgiveness depends on a clear definition of the construct and sound measurement. At this time, there is no philosophically grounded and tested measure of group forgiveness.

We believe it is time to take a step back and philosophically examine what, precisely, it means when a group forgives another group. Several questions are particularly important when considering group forgiveness: Is it logically coherent to say that groups forgive? Do groups have cognitions, behaviors, and emotions? If so, what are the psychological components that comprise the activity of one group forgiving another? Should group forgiveness be democratic? Can a third party forgive a group? Answering these questions will allow researchers to develop conceptually appropriate measures of group forgiveness and improve scientific inquiry into the role of forgiveness in peace.

We explore some of these questions. After we briefly review the definition of interpersonal forgiveness and the research that follows from it, we turn to group forgiveness to see if it has been understood properly from a philosophical perspective and thus operationalized well from a scientific perspective. We then propose a definition of group forgiveness and recommend a measure be developed for research purposes. We end by generating scientific research questions. We will use the term "group forgiveness" to encompass other terms used in the literature including intergroup forgiveness and political forgiveness.

Definition of Forgiveness

Interpersonal Forgiveness

Scholars have made interpersonal forgiveness a well-defined and clearly articulated construct (Enright & North, 1998), which has allowed forgiveness research to thrive across several disciplines of the social sciences (Klatt & Enright, 2009). A general consensus exists in the published psychological literature that interpersonal forgiveness involves acknowledging that one has been wronged and relinquishing resentment despite the injustice one has experienced (Worthington, 2005). A common definition of interpersonal forgiveness is, "A willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her" (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998, p. 47). Although nuances exist in the way scholars from various fields and philosophical orientations define forgiveness, good operational definitions have been developed that allow for reliable and valid measurement.

Within the past 25 years hundreds of empirical studies and numerous edited volumes have emerged with an emphasis on the psychology of interpersonal forgiveness. The research on this topic is substantial and multidisciplinary (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998; Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). Research investigating psychological interventions intended to help people heal emotionally by forgiving others who have been unjust to them is important in the discussion of group forgiveness. Intervention research demonstrates that participants experience diminished anger, anxiety, and/or psychological depression and increased self-esteem and general well-being (Wade et al., 2014). These positive outcomes have been found in intervention research conducted with participants living in socially contentious regions such as Belfast, Northern Ireland (Enright, Knutson, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2007). If forgiveness can help individuals cope with unfair treatment, it is possible groups that have experienced injustice can also benefit from forgiveness.

Group Forgiveness

To understand how the term group forgiveness has been defined, used, and interpreted by scholars in this field, we conducted a comprehensive literature search using PsycINFO, SocINDEX, Academic Search Premier, Web of Knowledge, Proquest Research Library, Social Sciences Full-Text, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, ERIC, Family and Social Studies Worldwide, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Women's Studies International, Dissertation Abstracts, and Google Scholar. We used the keywords group forgiveness, intergroup forgiveness, political forgiveness, forgiveness and peace, and forgiveness and reconciliation. Furthermore, we manually reviewed reference lists in relevant articles and books. We considered both empirical and theoretical articles for inclusion. We sought to locate all available literature through August 8, 2013. We initially located 138 journal articles and book chapters, and after examining the full texts, we excluded 113 articles that did not directly and substantively address group forgiveness. With the remaining 25 articles (Table 1), we recorded how the authors defined interpersonal and group forgiveness. For empirical articles, we recorded how they operationalized their measurement of group forgiveness.

Conceptualizing group forgiveness. We identify two major ways scholars conceptualize group forgiveness. First, several authors use a strategy we refer to as "translating definition." Rather than completely reconceptualizing forgiveness on the group level, these scholars define group forgiveness as a simple expansion of interpersonal forgiveness; individual victims become "victim groups," and perpetrators become "perpetrator groups." We distinguish two levels within this category, explicit and implicit. Some authors clearly state that their definitions of group forgiveness are based on the assumptions they hold about interpersonal forgiveness. In other cases, researchers make an implicit assumption that group forgiveness is an extension of interpersonal forgiveness. For instance, Tam et al. (2008) used a definition of interpersonal forgiveness in their discussion of group forgiveness, implying a translation.

The second major way scholars conceptualize group forgiveness is by claiming that it is "qualitatively different" from interpersonal forgiveness. We also distinguish explicit and implicit levels within this category. The scholars we position on the explicit level openly and directly express that a qualitative difference exists between interpersonal and group forgiveness. Generally, these authors appeal to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to suggest that there is an identity shift from the personal to the social when forgiveness occurs on the group level. This shift facilitates the process of group forgiveness (Ferguson et al., 2007; Kira et al., 2009). On the implicit level of the "qualitatively different" category, authors attempt to outline a difference between interpersonal and group forgiveness, yet they do not straightforwardly state such a difference. For example, Neto, da Conceição Pinto, and Mullet

Table 1
Conceptualizing Group Forgiveness Using Four Definitional Categories

Author	Definitional category of intergroup forgiveness	Example (stated in text)
Wohl & Branscombe (2005)	Explicitly translates	"At the inter-group level, forgiveness precludes harboring negative feelings toward the perpetrator category as a whole . . . By forgiving the perpetrator category, the negative feelings associated with a category of people (e.g., Germans as a whole) should be lessened" (p. 290).
Roe (2007)	Explicitly translates	"The extension of interpersonal forgiveness to the actions of groups is based on the assumption that groups and communities can also commit moral offenses, and these too result in anger, distrust, and broken relationship" (p. 4).
Tam et al. (2007)	Explicitly translates	"On the intergroup level, forgiveness involves the release of negative feelings toward the perpetrator's group and prosocial behaviors toward that group" (p. 120).
Cehajic et al. (2008)	Explicitly translates	"Consistent with such a conceptualization, intergroup forgiveness involves a reduction of feelings of revenge, anger, and mistrust towards the perpetrator group and intentions to understand, approach, and engage with its members" (p. 352).
Wohl et al. (2012)	Explicitly translates	"Although much of the theoretical and empirical work on empathy and forgiveness has been conducted in the context of interpersonal transgressions, it seems reasonable to argue that empathy might also be of relevance at the intergroup level" (pp. 308–309).
Tam et al. (2008)	Implicitly translates	Definition of interpersonal forgiveness: "Forgiveness is considered an emotional process that involves ceasing to feel angry or resentful over the transgression" (p. 307).
Noor, Schnabel, Haabi, & Nadler (2012)	Implicitly translates	"Forgiveness—defined as decreased motivation to retaliate against or avoid the offender and increased motivation to reconcile with the offender despite harmful acts—has recently become the focus of research that explores ways of ameliorating hostile inter-group relationships" (p. 361).
Hanke et al. (2013)	Implicitly translates	". . . intergroup forgiveness can be described as a dynamic process between the victimized and perpetrating party that involves negotiation and understanding . . . it involves psychological closure for both parties (e.g. a form of 'social healing'), in which a symbolic departure from the past is reached" (p. 2).
McDonough (2005)	Implicit qualitative difference	"An education in peace through forgiveness will require more than simply providing both sides with historical accounts from the perspective of the other. It will also need to give members of all groups the skills necessary to reciprocally transfigure their respective narratives" (pp. 97–98).
Mellor et al. (2007)	Implicit qualitative difference	Mellor writes that it is obscure, and needs to be explored (p. 18).
Neto et al. (2007)	Implicit qualitative difference	"This conception of forgiveness as a strictly interpersonal process does not take into account the fact that . . . many, if not most, major injuries in social life are collective ones . . . [and] the proper cure for them can be undertaken only at a community level" (p. 712).
Noor, Brown, & Prentice (2008)	Implicit qualitative difference	"We define intergroup forgiveness as a process that involves making a decision to learn new aspects about oneself and one's group (one's emotions, thoughts, and capability to inflict harm on others), and to try to explore the world as perceived by the out-group both with the intention of finding adequate closure about the past and developing a vision for the future in which the groups' mutual concerns may be reconciled." ". . . one of the implications from the above understanding of group forgiveness as a conscious process . . ." (p. 101).
Mullet et al., (2010), uses Neto et al.'s (2007) framework	Implicit qualitative difference	"This representation of forgiveness as a strictly interpersonal process, however, does not take into account the fact that, as was suggested in the many, if not most major injuries in social life are collective" (p. 199).
Hewstone et al. (2004, 2008)	Explicit qualitative difference	"People behave differently in intergroup settings than they do in interpersonal settings because of a shift from personal to social identity" (2008, p. 207).
Ferguson et al. (2007)	Explicit qualitative difference	"Intergroup forgiveness is best thought of as a sociopolitical rather than a religious construct, that it is best understood when examined in interpersonal or social contexts" (p. 94).
Manzi & González (2007)	Explicit qualitative difference	"This study indicates that forgiveness and guilt can be translated into intergroup terms through social identification" (p. 73).
Gobodo-Madikizela (2008)	Explicit qualitative difference	"Posits that groups can inspire and provide a context to promote the process of forgiveness that occurs at the group level" (pp. 180–183).
Kira et al. (2009)	Explicit qualitative difference	"Tools to measure forgiveness at an interpersonal level should be adjusted to account for involvement of multiple actors" (p. 390).
Myers, Hewstone, & Cairns (2009)	Explicit qualitative difference	"According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), intergroup settings involve a shift from personal to social identity" (p. 271).
Avruch (2010)	Explicit qualitative difference	"If forgiveness is difficult to achieve at the interpersonal level, imagine how hard it is to achieve between groups. In fact, some authors . . . have questioned whether group forgiveness is even possible" (p. 42).

(*table continues*)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Author	Definitional category of intergroup forgiveness	Example (stated in text)
González et al. (2011)	Explicit qualitative difference	"Although our understanding of intergroup forgiveness may be usefully informed by the interpersonal forgiveness literature, there may be qualitative differences between forgiveness at the two levels. . . . Indeed, when talking about intergroup forgiveness we are not necessarily dealing with direct exchanges between victims and offenders but with people who identify with groups with different roles in the conflict and who experience emotions such as forgiveness as members of their groups . . ." (p. 223).
Greenaway et al. (2011)	Explicit qualitative difference	"According to self-categorization theory, people categorize themselves at three levels of increasing inclusiveness: personal, social, and human. When individuals shift from categorizing at the social level to a more inclusive superordinate categorization, previous outgroup members are accepted as part of the shared ingroup, and thus elicit more positive evaluations" (p. 569).
Zembylas & Michaelidou (2011)	Explicit qualitative difference	"Forgiveness at the personal/private level is the process that takes place within an individual and between two people; sociopolitical forgiveness, on the other hand, operates among and between social groups and takes place in the domain of a conflicting inter-group relationship. Collective forgiveness essentially implies a social and political transformation in which cultures of revenge and resentment gradually give way to increased trust . . . At the level of individual forgiveness, only the victim can exercise forgiveness, while at the level of public forgiveness complex questions such as these are raised: Who can forgive the Other group? Who can engage in sociopolitical forgiveness? On behalf of whom and under what circumstances?" (p. 252).
Swart & Hewstone (2012)	Explicit qualitative difference	"First, interpersonal forgiveness is generally a private affair between individuals. Intergroup forgiveness, on the other hand, is often the subject of intense public scrutiny, and calls for intergroup forgiveness are frequently made with strong political undertone . . ." (p. 446).

(2007) explain that group forgiveness cannot occur on an individual level. This implies a meaningful difference between the two processes, yet they do not state what the difference is.

Operationalizing group forgiveness. Research psychologists have operationalized group forgiveness using self-assessments. One example comes from the work of McLernon et al. (2004) who modified the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI) to develop the Group Enright Forgiveness Inventory which was meant to assess one group's forgiveness of another group. For each self-report item measuring forgiveness, a respondent saw the word "I." For example, "I feel __ towards him/her/them." It appears that McLernon et al. (2004) used "I" to mean "I as a member of my group." To be more consistent with the meaning of group forgiveness, it may have been better to phrase the items with group terms such as "we" or "our group." We see the same pattern of using "I" terms to assess group activities in Kira et al. (2009); Noor, Brown, Taggart, Fernandez, and Coen (2010); Tam et al. (2007); and Wohl and Branscombe (2005). In each case, the questions being asked are innovative and important. Yet, the measures assume that groups can think, act, and feel in the same way as individuals do. In addition, the measures assume that averaging scores from individual group members will represent the group. We question both assumptions and contend that in these articles, group forgiveness is not actually being assessed. The operationalization of forgiveness is essentially an extension of interpersonal forgiveness. We believe clear distinctions between what groups, as opposed to individuals, can and cannot do when they practice forgiveness is important for accurate measurement and study.

We see other psychological research, intended to assess group forgiveness, which actually focuses on the individual. Oliner (2008) states that group forgiveness occurs when all members of a group go through the forgiveness process. As is evident, the actual processes of forgiveness here take place within each individual, not on the group level itself. Ben-Porath (2005) discussed group forgiveness in the context of a group leader's (i.e., an individual's) public acknowledgment of wrong and desire for forgiveness. In this case, it is not the members of the group seeking forgiveness, but the individual leader. As we can see, operationalizing the philosophical construct of group forgiveness is a challenge.

Differentiating Forgiveness From Other Terms

To understand forgiveness at the individual and group levels accurately, we need to differentiate forgiveness from other concepts. Enright et al. (1998) conceptualize forgiveness as a moral virtue. The forgiving party sees the offending party's humanity and responds with kindness although the offender does not have a right to such benevolence. As a moral virtue, forgiveness can be differentiated from reconciliation, justification, pardoning, and forgetting.

As discussed at length in the psychological literature (Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2005), forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness is a moral act that begins within one individual or one group and then moves toward a focus on the offender or offending group. Reconciliation is not itself a virtue but instead is two or more people renewing trust and requires both parties to be ready to resume the relationship. One party may forgive without reconciling; the gift of forgiveness does not depend on the actions of the offending party. However, true reconciliation requires some level of forgiveness (Mellor, Bretherton, & Firth, 2007). Forgiveness and reconciliation are also distinct from coexistence. Kries-

berg (1998) defined coexistence as relationships in which parties are not trying to destroy one another. Coexistence describes degrees of integration and equality in dispassionate terms whereas forgiveness and reconciliation describe active attempts to develop positive feeling and restore relationships.

Forgiveness also differs from justification, pardoning, and forgetting (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Justification involves acknowledging that an offender's action was not wrong and thus, forgiving would be inappropriate. Pardon is legal mercy by the state or unofficial mercy that does not necessarily coexist with forgiveness. Moreover, as Cehajic, Brown, and Castano (2008) noted, some people equate forgiving with forgetting and may be reluctant to forgive because they do not want to forget what has been done to them. When people forgive, they become acutely aware of the injustice(s) they suffered. Forgiveness may not result in forgetting, but may change how the past is remembered.

Some scholars have raised concerns regarding forgiveness as a moral virtue and practicing forgiveness among groups of people. Luchies, Finkel, McNulty, and Kumashiro (2010) argued that the effect of forgiveness on one's self-respect and self-concept depends on whether perpetrators made amends. Dixon, Tropp, Durheim, and Tredoux (2010) stated that, in some cases, having a good relationship with a perpetrator group may hinder social change and subject a disadvantaged group to further injustice. Murphy (2003) noted that a reasonable degree of vindictiveness is neither irrational nor immoral. Murphy argues that vindictive emotions might be appropriate, and preferable to forgiveness, when responding to injustice.

While these scholars raise important critical points regarding forgiveness, we argue that a person who forgives does not necessarily request amends from or reconciliation with the offender (Enright, 2001). It appears that Dixon et al. (2010) also confused forgiveness with condoning because a forgiving group clearly sees the injustice and does not allow the perpetrators to continue the injustice (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). In response to Murphy's (2003) concerns, we want to emphasize that anger might beget anger and can hurt people across generations, even if it starts as a small degree of retribution (Enright, 2001, 2012). It is important to recall that forgiveness starts from acknowledging resentment (thus admitting that it is neither irrational nor immoral) and working through that to prevent hurting others via continuous desire for retribution (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, 2015).

At both the interpersonal and group levels, justice and forgiveness are often seen as opposing responses to wrongdoing. An individual or group that is wronged can seek justice by punishing the offender for the injury. Hammorabi's code, lex talionis (an eye for an eye), is a classic example of justice; equal circumstances are created for the offending and injured parties. An alternative to seeking justice is offering forgiveness. Forgiveness is a merciful response that attempts to go beyond creating equal circumstances by viewing the offender with compassion (Enright, 2012). In justice-based notions of forgiveness (Allais, 2008), the injured party forgoes some aspect of punishment or retribution. Although justice and forgiveness may represent different ways to respond to wrongdoing, they are not incompatible. For example, victims of apartheid could come to forgive members of the National Party for the purpose of healing, while also seeking restitution for years of oppression. Balancing justice and forgiveness may be necessary for reconciliation and lasting peace (Sarkin, 1999; Villa-Vicencio, 1999). Victims may need some degree of justice to be ready to forgive, but too much retributive justice may lead to cycles of violence rather than peace and stability (McLernon et al., 2004; Villa-Vicencio, 1999).

The Meaning of Forgiveness Across Cultures

Given that conflict is a cross-cultural issue, it is important to ask if people understand forgiveness in a similar way across cultures. As a moral virtue, we reason there is a common core to interpersonal forgiveness that transcends culture. There is evidence to support this assertion. The EFI, a widely used measure of interpersonal forgiveness, has been validated across cultures. Researchers reported the EFI has strong construct validity across seven countries with diverse cultural norms, languages, religions, and geographic locations: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Israel, Korea, Taiwan, and the United States (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, 2015; Orathinkal, Vansteenwegen, Enright, & Stroobants, 2007; Rique et al., 1999). These studies indicate that the items on the EFI represent the same meaning of forgiveness across these cultures.

Although forgiveness may be understood in a similar way across cultures, researchers have found cross-cultural differences in patterns of relationships between forgiveness, personality characteristics, and orientations toward relationships. Fu, Watkins, and Hui (2004) found forgiveness correlated with variables related to group solidarity such as preserving harmony in the People's Republic of China, whereas forgiveness correlates with individualistic personality characteristics and intrapersonal orientations in Western samples. Furthermore, Kadiangandu, Gauché, Vinsonneau, and Mullet (2007) demonstrated that collectivist (Congolese) and individualist (French) cultures emphasize different dimensions of forgiveness. The motivations to begin the forgiveness process and the characteristics that lend themselves to forgive may vary across cultures, however the meaning of forgiveness remains the same.

We have now defined interpersonal forgiveness and reviewed initial attempts to conceptualize and operationalize group forgiveness. We have also explained how forgiveness differs from other terms such as reconciliation. To be clearer about what group forgiveness is and how it can be measured, we now turn to what groups can and cannot do when they forgive.

Group Capacities and Group Forgiveness

To properly analyze group forgiveness, we must start with basic questions about group capacities. Can groups, *as distinct from their individual members*, forgive? Do groups have the capacities to think, act, and feel? If so, what would group forgiveness look like? Resolving these conceptual issues will improve the measurement and scientific study of group forgiveness.

Sociologists have defined a group as a collection of two or more individuals who share a common social and collective identity (Smith, 1967). Smith (1967) emphasized that group members need to interact to conduct shared tasks or achieve common goals. A shared identity alone probably is not a sufficient condition to constitute a group. For example, if 300 young women identify themselves strongly as softball players but never go to a softball

field or form into teams and leagues, then the notion of "softball group" would not actually form. Identity and shared goals are necessary to have a group, but are they sufficient to claim groups can forgive? Groups would still need to possess the moral virtue characteristics that individuals have, such as the motivation to do good and the cognitive abilities to understand and value forgiveness (see Aristotle's (trans. 1926) and Kant's (1781/1999) discussions of moral virtue).

Traditional philosophical approaches to moral responsibility, such as Kant and Aristotle, question the coherence of group forgiveness, and for that matter group blameworthiness. A full description of the philosophy of collective responsibility can be found elsewhere (e.g., Govier, 2002). For our purposes here a summary will suffice. The argument states that groups do not have minds, and therefore cannot have intentions. Without minds and intentions, groups cannot be responsible for unjust behavior, beyond that of the individual members of the group, that hurts individuals outside of the group. From this perspective, groups do not have the same capacities as individuals. For example, a company (a group) that pollutes a local river by dumping waste into it cannot be held morally responsible. Instead only the individuals in the group who intended to dispose of waste in the local river can be morally responsible. By extension, if groups, as distinct from the individual members, cannot act morally, then they cannot forgive.

Philosophical Defense of Group Forgiveness

Some authors argue that groups, as distinct from their individual members, can have moral agency and therefore group forgiveness is a coherent construct (Govier, 2002). From this perspective, some groups have decision-making procedures that provide the two required components of moral responsibility. First, some groups have a moral agent, a governing body that is charged with making decisions for the group. The governing body, such as an executive committee, considers options, deliberates, and makes decisions for the group. Second, groups that have mechanisms for acting on group decisions can work to pursue interests or needs in ways individuals alone could not. In these cases, the group decisions lead to rational purposeful action. If groups can be said to act morally, then group wrongdoing and forgiveness are possible.

Govier (2002) put forth three conditions that must be met for groups to be subjects and objects of forgiveness: "1) groups can be agents responsible for wrongdoing, 2) groups can suffer wrongful harm, and 3) groups can have and can amend feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about various matters including harms they have suffered at the hands of others" (p. 87).

To satisfy the first proposition, Govier argued that groups are capable of doing things that individuals are not able to do. For example, she wrote that nations and governments can develop and implement a large, and officially approved, campaign such as a war which could not be done by individuals. She further argued that these group actions are the result of human deliberation, intention, and desire, each of which are needed for responsibility. To defend the second proposition, she argued that individuals can be harmed because of their membership in a particular group. For example, group membership might result in an individual experiencing discrimination. In addition to individuals suffering negative treatment due to group membership, Govier noted groups can be harmed collectively and provided examples of property or cultural resources being damaged or destroyed. In support of the third proposition, Govier noted that beliefs, attitudes, and feelings underlie group deliberation and decision-making processes. She provided an example of a group boycotting products made from a country that was believed to use child labor. The feeling that child labor is bad and children need protection can be attributed to the group and would guide the group's use of its procedures for deliberating and making decisions. She indicated that the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings can be attributed to the group collectively or the group members distributively. She contended that if negative emotions such as hatred can describe groups, then positive emotions, such as compassion and forgiveness, can too.

While Govier's (2002) analysis shows a consistency between interpersonal and group psychology with regard to forgiveness, her description of group forgiveness is also qualitatively different than interpersonal forgiveness. For example, forgiveness between individuals does not require formal decision-making procedures. One individual consciously, or unconsciously, deliberates about how to respond to a transgressor, makes a decision, and acts. Group forgiveness requires a collection of individuals to not only have a process by which they can deliberate and decide, but also have a process or structure for collective action. Another qualitative difference involves the psychology of emotion. In interpersonal forgiveness an individual experiences his or her own emotions. Group forgiveness involves group members feeling emotions when a group identity is made relevant by group level outcomes even when those outcomes do not affect them personally (Leonard, Mackie, & Smith, 2011). Individual group members may not identify with the group to the same degree and may experience differences in the type and intensity of emotions felt. For example, a group member with a loose affiliation and weak group identity might not experience as much anger for a transgression as a group member who has a strong identity affiliation to the group. The psychology of emotions at the individual level does not seem to translate exactly to the group level.

Bright and Exline (2012) articulated four levels of forgiveness (intrapersonal, interpersonal, organization, and group) and posited forgiveness often occurs at several levels. They discussed qualitative differences between forgiveness at each level. One of the important distinctions is that the intraindividual level of forgiveness is an emotional and cognitive process arising within a person dealing with injustices, while the other three levels of forgiveness, including group forgiveness, deal with the behavioral side of forgiveness. Bright and Exline stated that this behavioral side of group forgiveness has the purpose of stopping the offense, of realizing that the perpetrator's offense has ceased, and of withholding retaliatory actions.

Drawing from Govier's (2002) and Bright and Exline's (2012) descriptions, individual cognition, behavior, and affect are not exactly the same as group cognition, behavior, and affect in relation to forgiveness. We agree with Govier and Bright and Exline that groups can forgive. However, we want to emphasize that groups do not possess the same psychological capacities as individuals do as they forgive. Group forgiveness is of a different quality than interpersonal forgiveness and this has implications for scientific measurement and investigation. We believe that researchers studying forgiveness need to be careful of equivocation;

terms used to describe interpersonal forgiveness can be confused when applied to group forgiveness.

Although scholars have braved the difficult task of conceptualizing group forgiveness, we take this opportunity to develop a definition which is based on the commonalities of definitions we found from our literature search and can be operationalized according to group capacities. We define group forgiveness as "acknowledging that a group has been unfairly wronged from another group, the wronged group collectively forgoes retribution and promotes forgiveness in its members by responding to the offending group with positive behaviors." As the literature claims, groups play a powerful role in both inspiring and providing a context to promote forgiveness. In the next section, by analyzing what groups can do, we hope to clarify the role groups have in forgiveness.

Operationalizing Group Forgiveness

As we have noted, philosophical and psychological debates exist regarding group capacities. A foundational question for operationalizing group forgiveness is: What is it that groups can and cannot do to forgive?

Creating group norms and shared values that foster forgiveness. Groups are capable of particular behaviors, one of which is the moral imperative to action (Govier, 2002). This moral imperative can take at least two forms. The first is what we might call the motivational behavior of valuing. A group can be motivated to communicate positive values to its own members and to other groups (e.g., "We value peace; we value cooperation."). The second is what we might call the establishment of group norms for what is and is not acceptable regarding moral issues. For instance, groups might support or oppose euthanasia, child labor practices, or retaliation following a transgression. Groups may play an important role in the forgiveness process by creating norms that support forgiveness. For example, in communities where forgiveness is valued and is a normative response to injustice, one would expect forgiveness to be a likely response to injury. A real-world exemplar of this logic can be seen in the Amish response to the killing of Amish schoolchildren in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. In response to the tragedy, the community used its decision-making processes and structures for collective action to express its forgiveness of the offender, and demonstrate its forgiveness through frequent visits to the offender's family (Kraybill, Nolt, & Weaver-Zercher, 2007).

Proclamations, promises, and gestures of good will. Just as groups can act by expressing values and by establishing norms, they can also make proclamations that support forgiveness. Groups can use language to proclaim forgiveness to other groups (Neto et al., 2007) or to proclaim an apology (Ferguson et al., 2007). Leonard et al. (2011) showed apology can affect group emotions and ultimately group forgiveness. An example of a proclamation of apology is F. W. de Klerk's apology for apartheid in 1996 before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Other kinds of proclamations can include cooperation (e.g., "We as a group do our best to lessen conflict with other groups"), encouragement (e.g., "We must do our best to secure a lasting peace"), and refraining from disparaging other groups. Proclamations in the form of forgiveness are ways to encourage prosocial behavior that might lead to reconciliation among groups (Cehajic et al., 2008; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Groups can also use language to make promises for the future (Oliner, 2008). This can include promises for forgiveness (e.g., "We will work to foster forgiveness within the individuals of our group"). Proclamations and promises can be ascribed to the group rather than to individuals if the group used its decision making processes to decide how to make the expressions and what the content of the expressions should be.

Furthermore, gestures of good will, motivations toward beneficence, can be shown through language and behavior. Hewstone et al. (2004), for example, discussed how church leaders in Northern Ireland facilitated the promotion of forgiveness in their own groups. Cehajic et al. (2008) described the behavior of Bosnians as a group in establishing positive relationships with Serbs. Neto et al. (2007) pointed to the group support of forgiveness by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Other examples include being diplomatically friendly toward the outgroup (Enright, Knutson Enright, & Holter, 2010), and showing collective satisfaction with the other group by being patient and even generous. Reparations are one example of such generosity (Ben-Porath, 2005; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Conversely, deliberate decisions and actions to punish do not show good will (Hewstone et al., 2004; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). By making explicit proclamations and promises of forgiveness, and making gestures of good will group identification and requisites for membership are made clear. The implications for peace between groups would seem to be greater when these qualities are explicitly pointed toward peace and forgiveness with contentious groups.

Establishing structures for group behaviors that promote forgiveness. Behaviors that promote forgiveness can become consistent across time if certain social structures are put into place. Using Rwanda as an example, Sarkin (1999) argued that truth commissions can be particularly important structures for promoting human rights and positive relations between groups. An important caveat is truth and reconciliation commissions need to have clear intergroup conceptualizations of forgiveness or they will default to a focus on relationships between individual victims and perpetrators (Chapman, 2007). Fambul Tok ("Family Talk") is another example of a structure that can establish positive group behavior. Fambul Tok is a program originating in Sierra Leone that provides perpetrators and victims with a way to heal via face-to-face activities. Opportunities for consistent intergroup communication stimulate the development of group norms that can support positive relationships (Hewstone et al., 2004). Groups can take intentional action to create social structures to foster forgiveness and peace.

Groups differ from individuals by the magnitude and duration of their respective actions. Whereas a group acts in a collective manner, an individual is only capable of acting on his or her own. The commonness of the goal and the effect of many individuals acting in concert enhance the magnitude of group action beyond that of the individual, affording groups very large influence. These actions, once institutionalized, can continue long after any one individual's life span, thus having a considerably longer and greater effect.

Group emotions. We acknowledge that group emotions, particularly moral emotions, influence group relations (Giner-Sorolla, 2012). Members of a group can experience emotions that are shared among the group members when identification with the group depersonalizes the individuals and the individuals' self-

concepts become interchangeable with the group (Leonard et al., 2011). We argue that group emotions are important in group relations. However group emotions are assessed based on individual group members' responses. We do not think that aggregating individual emotional responses truly measure group emotions. Therefore, when operationalizing group forgiveness for the purpose of measurement, we conclude that emotions should not be included in the assessment. Instead, behaviors associated with forgiving emotions, such as gestures of good will, should be assessed.

In sum, groups can exhibit such behaviors as establishing norms and long-term social structures to foster forgiveness and peace. Similar to individuals, groups can behaviorally demonstrate motivation by valuing, and they can proclaim, promise, and show gestures of goodwill. We elaborated on what groups can do to forgive in order to identify the dimensions of group forgiveness that can be quantitatively measured. We believe our definition of group forgiveness, which is behaviorally based, is well suited to operationalizing the establishment of norms, the delivery of proclamations, and the creation of social structures.

Discussion and Future Research

Forgiveness between groups has implications for peace. Much of the conceptual and empirical work on interpersonal forgiveness has been extended to group forgiveness. However, individual and group capacities differ and therefore the conceptualization of interpersonal forgiveness may not translate well to the group level. We examined the philosophical groundings of group forgiveness and put forth our own definition of the construct. We also identified concrete observable behaviors that groups can perform to forgive. Our hope is to operationalize group forgiveness in a way that does not conflate individual and group capacities and is specific enough for scientific study. Our definition is a starting point that we hope will build on the important and pioneering work of others. We believe the psychological components comprising group forgiveness include valuing, developing norms, making proclamations and gestures of good will, and establishing social structures that promote forgiveness.

We suggest three areas of inquiry for researchers interested in group forgiveness. First, we think the development of a reliable and valid measure of group forgiveness is essential to studying this construct scientifically. Group forgiveness is not a simple extension of interpersonal forgiveness and should not be measured as such. When testing the reliability of a measure, researchers should consider their samples very carefully. Group identifiers may have multiple meanings that could affect how individuals within that group interpret transgressions and the possibility of group forgiveness. For example, being Muslim might be primarily a cultural identity for some people and primarily a religious identity for others. There may be systematic sources of variation in the way people think about transgressions their groups suffered depending on the way in which they identify with a group. Researchers need to consider this when assessing the psychometric properties of a measure.

Second, assuming a reliable and valid measure of group forgiveness can be created, we think it is important to use the measure to study conflicts that could erupt in order to identify places for intervention. For example, would societies which have experienced repeated conflicts in the past be less likely to perpetrate violence if that society's average group forgiveness score is high and the overall standard deviation of that score is low (indicating consensus across group units)? In other words, the society values forgiveness and puts it into practice. Similarly, would those societies with a record of past conflict that present with low mean group forgiveness scores and, again, a low standard deviation of that score be more likely to erupt in violence in the future? The United Nations' Rosenblum-Kumar (personal communication, April 7, 2008) has observed that almost 50% of countries coming out of violent conflict will revert back into conflict within 10 years. A measure of group forgiveness may be a way to screen groups that are prone to start the cycle of violence again. Those groups with low average group forgiveness scores may be candidates for forgiveness education interventions in schools, homes, places of worship, and work places to prevent cyclical violence (Enright et al., 2007). To our knowledge, this question has never been asked and there are no previous data from which this question can be grounded. However, we deem this to be a very important time to ask this question.

A related question concerns the kind of violence perpetrated. There is a difference between a few individuals acting alone, apart from the group, and a concerted violent effort coming from the group. Might those groups that score low on group forgiveness and have a large standard deviation (indicating no consensus) produce a situation in which an isolated few perpetrate violence? And, might those groups that score low on the scale and have a small standard deviation be more prone to overall group aggression? The nature of the group conflict might help groups understand when forgiveness is a possibility and when it would be unsafe.

It is germane to note that group leaders are influential in groups' violent or forgiving behavior. As an example, Hewstone et al. (2004) argued that contrary to church leaders, few political leaders in Northern Ireland openly express the need to forgive (but rather encourage reconciliation without mentioning forgiveness) between Catholics and Protestants because the politicians do not want to intrude on individuals' religious attitudes or sorrow over violence. Furthermore, Ben-Porath (2005) asserted that politicians and leaders should publicly present group forgiveness, including educating people about forgiveness and peace. We recommend that group leaders take the initiative in receiving forgiveness education and be the role models for their members and promote their groups' forgiving behavior. Equally important is, as Zembylas and Michaelidou (2011) discussed, the possibility of Greek-Cypriot teachers developing curricula regarding forgiveness and peace toward ethnically divided Turkish Cypriots. Teachers can be smaller-scale leaders who educate children about forgiveness and peace.

Third, research can explore if, and how, group forgiveness affects the psychology of individuals in groups and dynamics within and between groups. Does group level forgiveness have an effect on individual group members' psychological well-being in ways that are similar to interpersonal forgiveness? Does group level forgiveness improve intragroup functioning? Does group level forgiveness promote peace between groups? These are all important questions.

Social scientists recognize that group forgiveness has the potential to end cycles of conflict and violence. We have attempted to clarify group forgiveness as a construct so that it can be operationalized and measured without conflating individual and group

capacities. We also identified a few areas of research that would help social scientists across disciplines better understand group conflict and places to intervene.

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