

LEARNING FORGIVENESS: THE INFLUENCE OF INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT
ON CHILD FORGIVENESS

by

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DEDICATION

My thesis is dedicated to my family. To my mother, without her love and support, I would never have been able to realize my dream. To my father, who motivated me to “knock on that extra door.” To my brother, who reminded me to laugh and enjoy life. To my grandparents, who laid the foundation for my success. Finally, to my best friend Alex, who was with me from the start. I cannot thank you all enough.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
Abstract	viii
Introduction.....	1
Current Study	11
Method	13
Results.....	20
Discussion.....	26
References.....	39

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table	
Table 1 Descriptives.....	32
Table 2 Correlations.....	33
Table 3 Age, Gender, Mother Reported Frequency/Severity and Resolution of Interparental Conflict as Predictors of Child's Judgment of Forgivability of Self and Others.....	34
Table 4 Maternal Judgment of Self and Other as a Predictor of Child's Judgment of Forgivability of Self and Others.....	35
Table 5 Child Perception of Interparental Conflict and Child Perception of Their Involvement in Interparental Conflict as Predictors of Child's Judgment of Forgivability of Self and Others.....	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
CFI Item.....	37

ABSTRACT

LEARNING FORGIVENESS: THE INFLUENCE OF INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT ON CHILD FORGIVENESS

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The research conducted on forgiveness has mostly focused on an adult population. In the current thesis, I examined the influence of child age, gender, and maternal judgment of forgiveness of self and others on child judgment of forgiveness of self and others. In addition, I investigated the effect of interparental conflict and resolution strategies to assist in discerning how mothers communicate forgiveness practices to their children. Eighty-four children and their mothers were administered a series of questionnaires, to assess both the child's propensity to forgive and the maternal influence on the development of forgiveness. Results indicated that age, maternal judgment of forgiveness, and child perception of interparental conflict were significant predictors of child judgment of forgiveness of self and others. Future research should further investigate the role parents play in child forgiveness. The development of forgiveness in children is important, so they may benefit from forgiveness' positive effects.

INTRODUCTION

The field of forgiveness research is in need of advancement. When individuals possess the ability to forgive, they are healthier both mentally and physically (Worthington, 2006). Due to forgiveness' association with positive mental and physical health, it is important to learn more about its development in children, so that they could reap the benefits and improve the quality of their lives. The question then becomes, how does one learn forgiveness? For the current thesis, I investigated forgiveness in terms of how parents communicate forgiveness practices to their children. According to Bandura (1986), individuals learn most of their behavior through observation. Therefore, a likely source of forgiveness learning for children is their parents. Parents who engage in conflict without resolution are modeling unforgiving behaviors and are failing to provide their children with the tools to affectively deal with difficult social interactions.

What is Forgiveness?

Research has been conducted in an attempt to discern appropriate theories, definitions, and mechanisms of forgiveness in general. There are two main theoretical perspectives that offer support for the present study. The first is that Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering & Boyatzis, (2005) highlight the emotional competence of the person who is forgiving:

Forgiveness is a transformation of one's affect, cognitive judgments, and motivations toward an offender. The victim makes an assessment of the harm done and acknowledges the perpetrator's responsibility but voluntarily chooses to cancel the debt, giving up the need for revenge, punishments, or restitution. Importantly, one removes oneself from the negative emotions directly related to the transgression. Over time, there is a motivational transformation, including a reduction in negative motivations and an increase in constructive motivations toward the perpetrator. The forgiver may be motivated toward positive social behaviors toward the offender. (p. 129)

This definition of forgiveness shows that in order to forgive, one must take the perspective of the offender, which is a key element of emotional competence. The acknowledgement of the other's point of view demonstrates the importance of empathy in forgiveness. In addition, the definition addresses the resulting dissipation of negative affect and promotion of prosocial behavior. The definition of forgiveness provided by Denham and colleagues suggests that children, who are still developing social-emotional skills, are likely also learning how to forgive.

The other theoretical perspective used in the present study is Worthington's (2006) biopsychosocial stress and coping theory of forgiveness. This theory suggests that transgressions are actually stressors and the ability to forgive is evidence of appropriate coping strategies and therefore proper adjustment. Applying Worthington's theory to children, high anger could indicate an inability to cope, which could lead to serious negative emotionality issues later in life. The child, when they cannot cope

(unforgiveness), will lash out with aggression and hostility (Worthington, 2006). These feelings of negativity can linger in what Worthington refers to as “rumination.”

Rumination can have numerous negative health effects, such as depression, anxiety and physical health problems. In addition to these negative health effects, when children continually lash out in anger at perceived hurts, this reaction negatively affects their social interactions and establishment of positive peer interactions (Duman & Margolin, 2007; Worthington, 2006).

The importance of Worthington (2006)’s theory lies in its addressing of the positive and negative side effects of forgiving and not forgiving. This theory is also direct in its message: lack of forgiveness is lack of an essential tool needed to properly adjust to one’s social environment. Using research on forgiveness and how children learn to forgive, future prevention and intervention organizations can initiate programs that better foster forgiveness and decrease childhood anger and aggression and, in turn, some of the negative developmental outcomes that come with childhood aggression. Forgiveness can offer many benefits to children, however to understand the best way to communicate forgiveness to children, researchers must investigate the factors that influence forgiveness and ways in which children learn forgiveness.

Age Differences In Forgiveness

An important factor shown to affect forgiveness practices and motivations is age. There are numerous theories that attempt to explain the age difference in forgiveness tendencies. First, the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory focuses on the maintenance of social relationships through forgiveness (Allemand, 2008). Specifically, due to younger

individuals' belief that they have more time to develop relationships and start new ones, if necessary, they are less likely to see the need to forgive others. However, older individuals perceive their time to form new relationships as limited and therefore spend more time maintaining the ones they currently possess (Allemand, 2008). Second, The Emotion Regulation Hypothesis proposes that, as children get older, they are more able to control their emotions to engage in forgiveness (Allemand, 2008). Finally, the Social Information Processing Theory suggests that younger children are not able to process all the socially relevant information compared to older individuals and are therefore less likely to be able to forgive (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). In order to provide further evidence of an age difference in child propensity to forgive as well as control for its potential confounding affects on the current analyses, I investigated age as a predictor of child forgiveness.

Previous research has shown that forgiveness motivations and practices differ across the lifespan (Girard & Mullet, 1997). Due to age variation in the current sample, it is important to consider its effect on child judgment of forgivability of self and others. Specifically, previous research has found that older adults are more likely to forgive than younger adults and adolescents (Allemand, 2008; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, & Girard, 1998; Steiner, Allemand, & McCullough, 2011). Age differences have been found among adult age groups as well as child age groups (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Girard & Mullet, 1997). Younger children (less than 8 years of age) tend to focus more on situational factors and less on the behavior of the transgressor after the transgression. Consonant with such principles, preschoolers and kindergarteners were

found to be less likely to consider the apologetic behavior of the transgressor when deciding punishment compared to children in fourth and seventh grade (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). In contrast, young adolescents were more likely to focus on the transgressor's behavior after the transgression (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). In addition, young adolescents were more likely to forgive once the transgressor apologized. These findings lend support to the theory regarding children's lack of information processing capabilities. Due to the current evidence supporting age differences in forgiveness, it is important to explore this effect in young children where the research on this effect is not as prolific.

Gender differences in Forgiveness

In addition to age differences being present in the propensity to forgive, gender differences have also been discovered. One of the main theories behind the effect of gender on willingness to forgive is women's tendency to focus on maintaining the relationship, as compared to men's focus more on obtaining justice (Root & Exline, 2011). Another theory that attempts to explain gender differences in willingness to forgive is socialization of gender roles for young girls and boys. Girls are stressed to be able to empathize with others and see things from others' perspectives, which could influence forgiveness practices in younger children (Root & Exline, 2011). Given that socialization of gender roles begins at birth, this theory suggests that gender differences present in the adult population can be found in younger children as well.

Much of the gender research in forgiveness has been conducted with adolescent or young adult populations; however, the findings could be applicable to potential gender

differences in children's propensity to forgive. Previous research has found that females are more prone towards forgiveness in general. For instance, women were inclined to forgive a transgression without a prompt that to forgive is morally responsible. In contrast, men, when given no prompt for a moral responsibility to forgive, were significantly less likely to forgive (Root & Exline, 2011). The gender difference is less clear in children's willingness to forgive. In order to investigate if the findings regarding gender differences in adult forgiveness are also present in children, I examined gender's effect on child propensity to forgive in the current study.

The Role of Interparental Conflict

Many important behaviors are learned through observation. When observing others, one forms rules and guidelines for future behavior (Bandura, 1986). Observational learning is especially true for when a child is acquiring novel behavior (Bandura, 1986). Families, cultures, religions, and communities provide children with a social reference as to what is acceptable and appropriate (Massey & Abu-Baker, 2009). In addition, because of the number of interactions within a family, most forgiveness episodes occur within the family. Therefore, children will have many opportunities to learn forgiveness practices (Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Hence, because children use their experiences to guide their behavior, families, specifically parents, would be a key reference group that assists in socializing children regarding forgiveness. Parents who teach their children forgiveness are preparing them for the reality of the stressors they will face in their life, therefore giving them the tools to succeed.

Parents are modeling behavior for their children and therefore function as “instructors, inhibitors, disinhibitors, facilitators, stimulus enhancers, and emotional arousers” (Bandura, 1986, p. 50). Parents model nonforgiving behavior when they engage in conflict without also modeling solution strategies, such as forgiveness. The child will then view this behavior as appropriate and expected in other social interactions. In Bandura (1986)’s classic research of a child observing an adult hitting a doll with a mallet, the child observed an adult engaging in novel behavior and adds it to their repertoire. Subsequently, the child is now more likely to use this strategy him/herself, even in other situations, compared to a child who has not seen this violence against the doll. This example is very telling; if children observe aggression they are likely to employ it in other settings as a learned behavior. Furthermore, Duman and Margolin (2007) found that when the parent is the transgressor, the child is more likely to learn the behavior compared to when the transgressor is someone the child does not have a close relationship with. Thus, social learning theory supports the findings that a child could potentially acquire conflict strategies, such as forgiveness, from observing their parents’ disagreements.

Forgiveness is an important aspect of conflict resolution (Battle & Miller, 2005). Children who observe parental reactions to their spouses’ transgressions (i.e., aggression or forgiveness) are more likely to include those behaviors into their forgiveness repertoire (Neal, 2006). Previous research using this dataset has found correlational relations between maternal-report of interparental conflict and maternal-report of forgiveness beliefs (Getman, 2004). The theory that children learn forgiveness from observing their

parents own interactions was further supported by Neal (2006)'s findings of positive correlations between a child's propensity to forgive and their parents' propensity to forgive. These findings support the theory put forward by Neal (2006), that when children observe parental forgiveness, they are more likely acquire it as a learned behavior. Therefore, the previous research on this dataset suggests that it is feasible for children to learn forgiveness through observation. In the current study, I use more extensive analyses to assess the predictive nature of these associations.

In the present study, I utilized mothers' willingness to forgive and report of interparental conflict to examine their contribution to children's forgiveness. Mothers' beliefs and perceptions were used for theoretical reasons and for empirical reasons. Theoretically, mothers have a key position as socializers of social-emotional competence (Dunsmore & Karn, 2001; Garner, Jones, Gaddy, & Rennie, 1997). According to Garner and colleagues (1997) children learn important skills on how to behave in emotionally charge situations and social interactions from their mothers. Empirically, fathers' participation in developmental research is difficult to obtain. In fact, some previous studies have resorted to using maternal report in order to get at father involvement (Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008).

Three components of interparental conflict were investigated: frequency, severity, and resolution strategies. Previous research has shown that children use parent behaviors during conflict as a representation of appropriate strategies for handling conflict with others, specifically their peers (Bascoe, Davies, Sturge- Apple, & Cummings, 2009; Du Rocher Schudlich, Shamir, & Cummings, 2004; Duman & Margolin, 2007). Frequency

of interparental conflict has been associated with many negative outcomes for childhood aggression (Du Rocher Schudlich et al., 2004; Duman & Margolin, 2007; Underwood, Beron, Gentsch, Galperin, & Risser, 2008). In households with high amounts of interparental conflict, children used more negative conflict strategies with peers and enacted more aggressive behavior during simulated conflict situations (Du Rocher Schudlich et al., 2004). This pattern of findings suggests that higher incidences of interparental conflict observed by the child can assist in forming their representation of responses to conflict.

Severity of interparental conflict has also been associated with aggressive behavior in children (Oppawsky, 2000). Severity of interparental conflict is defined in the literature as a conflict that disrupts family functioning (Kerig, 1996). Children's exposure to hostile interparental conflict was associated with external and internal adjustment difficulties (i.e., emotion dysregulation; Buehler, Lange, & Franck, 2007). Furthermore, prolonged exposure to severe/hostile interparental conflict was related to children's and adolescents' lack of confidence in their competencies and ability to regulate their own negative emotions (Buehler et al., 2007).

Conversely, research has shown that children learn aggression and emotion dysregulation through observing poor modeling of conflict resolution (Feldman, Masalha, & Derdikman-Eiron, 2010). Children of parents who effectively negotiate conflict were more likely to be cooperative and prosocial in peer interactions (Feldman et al., 2010). Furthermore, research has shown that parents who are more cooperative with each other have children who are better adjusted (Camara & Resnick, 1989). If parents model more

forgiveness as a conflict resolution strategy, it stands to reason that their children will develop similar forgiveness practices.

The home is a safe environment for the child to observe and participate in family routines and conflicts (Battle & Miller, 2005). In order to maintain the family unit, forgiveness must be utilized to avoid rumination and negative interactions with family members. In the home, the child is able to observe and enact forgiveness with proper reinforcement and then apply what they have learned in other situations, for example, in the school environment with their peers.

In sum, by identifying the components of forgiveness, along with its roots in parenting, we can assist in increasing the potential success of children. Due to the important role the parent plays in a child's acquisition of behavior, it is essential to better understand how parents are communicating forgiveness practices to their children. Observational learning is key to acquiring numerous behaviors (Bandura, 1986) and could also apply to teaching forgiveness to children. By parents modeling forgiveness behaviors, the child could be more likely to utilize them in other situations.

CURRENT STUDY

In the current study, I examined mothers as modelers of forgiveness. More specifically, I investigated the relation between mothers and children's judgments of forgiveness of self and others. To determine whether children adopt parental judgments about forgiveness, I examined mothers and children's perceptions of interparental conflict, interparental resolution strategies, and judgments of forgiveness of self and others, and the association of these reports with the child's judgments of forgiveness of self and others.

To meet these goals, I addressed the following research questions:

1. Is age associated with a child's judgment of forgiveness of self and others? It was hypothesized that age would predict a child's judgment of forgiveness of self and others, such that, as age increased so would the child's judgment of forgiveness of self and others.

2. Is gender associated with a child's judgment of forgiveness of self and others? It was hypothesized that gender would predict the child's judgment of forgiveness of self and others, specifically that girls would be higher in their judgment of forgiveness of self and other than boys.

3. Are frequency, severity and resolution of maternal-reported interparental conflict associated with a child's judgment of forgiveness of self and others? It was

hypothesized that the frequency, severity and resolution of maternal-reported interparental conflict would predict the child's judgment of forgivability of self and others, such that as maternal-report of frequency and severity increased, child judgment of forgivability of self and others would decrease and as maternal-report of resolution increased, child judgment of forgivability of self and others would increase.

4. Is the child's willingness to forgive associated with their mothers' willingness to forgive? It was hypothesized that the mothers' judgment of forgivability of self and others would predict the child's judgment of forgivability of self and others, such that as maternal judgment of forgivability of self and others increased so would child judgment of forgivability of self and others. Previous research on the dataset examined the association between maternal and child forgiveness. However, in the current study, I used more extensive analysis to test the relationship.

5. Is the child's perception of interparental conflict associated with the child's willingness to forgive? It was hypothesized that the child's perception of interparental conflict would predict the child's judgments of forgivability of self and others, such that as the child's perception of interparental conflict increased, child judgment of forgivability of self and others would decrease.

METHOD

Participants

Eighty-four children in second through sixth grades and their parents were recruited from 20 branches of the Fairfax County Public Library, Arlington County elementary school, parochial schools in Prince William and Fairfax Counties, a Northern Virginia Parenting newsletter (a free publication), and Northern Virginia home school networks. Each family was paid \$50 for participating in the study. Demographic information was collected regarding: age, sex, ethnicity, whether or not the child was homeschooled, child's grade, parent's education, whether or not the father was present in the home, grade retention, special learning services the child may of received, child care (in hours), child illness, behavioral or emotional issues, and religious affiliation. The children in this study ranged from 78 months to 158 months of age ($M = 116.22$, $SD = 20.75$). Also, the amount of participants for second and third grade ($n = 33$), fourth grade ($n = 27$) and sixth grade ($n = 24$) varied. The number of boys ($n = 47$) and girls ($n = 37$) differed slightly. Of the families who participated in this study, 82.1 % were Caucasian. In addition, the majority of participants had an income of \$50,000 or above. At the time of the study, 22.6 % of the children were homeschooled. Parent's level of education included obtaining a high school diploma (20.2 %), associates (4.8 %), bachelors (39.3 %), masters (22.6 %) or a doctoral degree (10.7 %).

Materials

The Child Forgiveness Inventory (CFI; Denham & Neal, 2002): Contained eight hypothetical situations that assessed the child's likelihood of forgiving. The CFI's hypothetical situations concentrated on scenarios where the child or a friend of the child mistreated or performed an injustice to the other, such as losing an important item or telling a secret. For an example of a scenario refer to figure 1. After each situation, the child answered 14 questions regarding their own feelings using a three-point scale. The scale ranged from 1 *not bad at all* to 3 *very bad* to assess the severity and feelings towards the transgression. The questions regarding whether or not they child would forgive were scored on a three-point scale including no, maybe, or yes. The questions used in this study addressed whether the transgressor should be forgiven in each of the eight situations. Overall, across questions and scenarios, the internal consistency reliability for this scale on forgivability of the transgressor (self or other) was adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$). A composite variable was created by summing the scores for the "would you forgive" subscale together, such that a higher score was indicative of a higher judgment of forgivability of self and others. The composite variable had a possible range of scores from eight to 24.

In terms of validity, past research using these data has indicated there was no correlation between mother or child forgiveness and social desirability (Neal, 2006). In addition, mothers' belief if an offender should be punished was highly correlated with the child's belief of whether or not the offender should be punished (Neal, 2006). Furthermore, mothers' willingness to forgive the transgressor was highly correlated with the child's willingness to forgive the transgressor (Getman, 2004; Neal, 2006).

Parent Cognitive Understanding of Forgiveness (PCUF; Denham, Neal, Hamada, & Keyser, 2002): Consisted of eight hypothetical situations with 10 questions for each situation. Similar to the CFI, the hypothetical situations concentrated on scenarios where the parent or a friend of the parent mistreated or performed an injustice to the other. The questions inquired about perception of the transgressions, feelings about the situation, what action the parent would take and what they believed would happen if the situation were reversed. The scale ranged from 1 *not bad at all* to 3 *very bad* to assess the severity and feelings towards the transgression. The parent then responded to whether or not they would forgive on a 3-point scale (yes, maybe, or no). Overall, across questions and scenarios, the internal consistency reliability for this scale on forgivability of the transgressor (self or other) was adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$). For validity measures refer to the CFI. Summing the scores for the "would you forgive" subscale created a composite variable, such that a higher score was indicative of a higher judgment of forgivability of self and others. The composite variable had a possible range of scores from eight to 24.

The Couple Conflicts and Problem Solving Strategies (CCPSS; Kerig, 1996): Contained four subscales. The first subscale contained items regarding the frequency/severity of interparental conflict (major or minor), during a two to three month period, on a six-point scale. The second subscale addressed the degree of the disagreement. Parents were asked to rate their level of disagreement on 21 topics (e.g., finances). For each topic the parent was asked to rate from 0 *not an issue* to 100 *a severe issue*. The third subscale presented specific items on efficacy, specifically, parents were

asked to report the percentage of problems solved. The fourth subscale assessed resolution on a four-point scale ranging from 0 *never* to 3 *always*. Reliability analyses showed the Couple Conflicts and Problem Solving Strategies measure was reliable for mothers (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70-.98$; Kerig, 1996).

Composite variables were created for frequency/severity and resolution of interparental conflict. I created the composite variable for the frequency/severity of interparental conflict by summing item 1 (which tested how often minor disagreements occurred) and item 2 (which tested how often major disagreements occurred) together. Before adding the two items together, the response choice for item two was multiplied by two. The minor disagreement item was assessed on a 6-point scale, as was the major disagreement item. The possible scores for the composite variable ranged from three to 18. The resolution of interparental conflict composite variable was created using a more complex weighing system. Items were broken down to good (items one to three), neutral (items four and five) and poor resolution strategies (Items six to 13). First, I summed the good items together and multiplied the total by two. Next, I summed the neutral items together and multiple the total by one. Then, I summed the poor items together and multiplied the total by negative 2. Finally, after each weight was applied all good, neutral, and poor items were summed to create the resolution of interparental conflict composite variable. The possible scores for the composite variable ranged from negative 48 to positive 24.

Regarding validity, the CCPSS measure had strong internal validity with significant intercorrelations among conflict strategies used. Factors assessing non-

cooperative strategies were positively correlated with poorly negotiating conflict. In addition, there were strong negative correlations between constructive resolution and aggressive strategies such as yelling (Kerig, 1996).

Child Family Disagreements (CFD; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992): This measure consisted of 49 questions and was completed by the child. The scale ranged from 1 *true*, 2 *sort of true*, and 3 *false*. The CFD had nine subscales, the first four (frequency, intensity, lack of resolution, and content) described dimensions of interparental conflict and the last five (perceived threat, self-blame, triangulation, coping efficacy, and stability) described the child's involvement or interpretation of interparental conflict. Certain items in this measure were reverse coded. On all of the nine subscales a higher score was indicative of a positive outcome (i.e., a higher score on frequency subscale represented a low child observation of the frequency of interparental conflict). I summed the items within each subscale to create a total composite variable for each subscale.

In terms of validity, child perception of interparental conflict was related to mother report of interparental conflict (Getman, 2004). More specifically, child perceived frequency of interparental conflict and resolution was related to mothers reported frequency of interparental conflict and use of resolution strategies. Also, parent involvement of the child in interparental conflict was associated with the child's likelihood of forgiveness (Getman, 2004). Moreover, child perception of interparental conflict was shown in other research to be related to both girls' and boys' adjustment (Grych et al., 1992).

A principal component analysis was conducted on nine total score composite scales with orthogonal rotation (varimax). Two components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 69.82 of the variance (51.33 and 18.49, respectively). All of the component loadings for the nine scales were above .4. The stability, content, and coping efficacy mean composites were excluded because they did not focus on the emotional qualities of the child's perception of interparental conflict. Of the six scales three loaded onto component 1 and three loaded onto component 2. The scales that loaded onto component 1 reflected the child's perception of interparental conflict, and included positive loadings for perceived frequency, intensity and lack of resolution. Therefore, the first component consisted of low child perception of frequency and intensity as well as a high level of resolution of interparental conflict. I created component 1 by summing the frequency, intensity, and resolution subscale totals. The possible scores for component 1 ranged from 19 to 60. Then, component 2 had scales load that reflected the child's involvement in interparental conflict, and included child perceived triangulation, threat, and self-blame. Component 2 represented low child perception of triangulation, self-threat, and self blame. I created component 2 by summing the perceived triangulation, threat, and self-blame subscale totals. The possible scores for component 2 ranged from 15 to 48. This measure had adequate reliability for child perception of interparental conflict (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$) and child perceived involvement in interparental conflict (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$). The two components were used in the current analyses.

Procedure

Measures were administered in the home of each participant. Consent forms describing the study and what was expected of the participants were filled out and collected before the study began. The parents and child completed their respective questionnaires in separate rooms for about 60 minutes. The researcher checked on the participants every 15 minutes to see if they needed assistance. After the participants were finished with questionnaires, they participated in a taped discussion. During the discussion, the parents and child talked about a time where their feelings were hurt, however this aspect of the data was not analyzed in this study. After the taped discussion, the participants were debriefed and asked not to divulge any information to any other participants they may know.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the variables were examined and are shown in Table 1. Children in the study ranged from 6.5 years to 13.17 years of age with a mean of 9.69 years. Age was assessed as a predictor of child judgment of forgivability of self and others and age was also controlled for in each analysis because previous research has shown there to be age differences in forgiveness practices across the lifespan (Allemand, 2008). On average, mothers reported moderate levels of frequency/severity of interparental conflict and using more positive resolution strategies in response to interparental conflict. In addition, mothers reported a moderate level of judgment of forgivability of self and others. On average, children reported observing less frequent, less severe, and more resolved interparental conflict. Also, children tended to report less triangulation, self-blame and perceived threat. Finally, children reported a moderate level of judgment of forgivability of self and others.

Correlations were conducted to assess the relationships between predictors as well as other variables of interest and are shown in Table 2. First, there was a significant negative correlation between maternal-report of frequency/severity of interparental conflict and maternal-report of resolution of interparental conflict. Second, there was a significant positive correlation between child perception of interparental conflict and child perception of their involvement in interparental conflict. Lastly, there were also

significant correlations between maternal report of interparental conflict and child perception of interparental conflict. Specifically, maternal report of frequency/severity of interparental conflict was negatively correlated with child report of frequency, intensity and resolution.

Missing data on the variables ranged from 0% to 52.4 % missing. Detailed percentages of missing data are shown in Table 1. To address missing data, NORM software (Schafer, 1999) was used to conduct multiple imputation. In short, multiple imputation uses existing data to estimate possible values for the missing data points. Multiple imputation was chosen because results using it produce less-biased estimates compared to the listwise deletion method. Five datasets were imputed to estimate the missing data values. Identical regressions were run on each dataset. Then unstandardized as well as standardized regression weights and *t* values from the five datasets were averaged together to determine significance. Results reported herein reflect these aggregated results.

All the assumptions for multiple regression were met for each analysis. Mutlicollinearity was not an issue, with correlations all below .7, VIF scores below 10, and tolerance scores above .2. The Durbin- Watson Statistic was close to 2, indicating that the assumption of independent errors was met. Residual plots were examined and showed no discernible pattern, indicating that the assumption of linearity and homoscedasticity were met.

Age, Gender, Maternal-Reported Frequency/Severity and Resolution of Conflict

To examine whether age and gender would predict child judgment of forgiveness of self and others as well as assessing the hypothesis that maternal reported frequency/severity and resolution of conflict predicted child judgment of forgiveness of self and others, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Age ($M = 116.22$, $SD = 20.75$), gender, maternal-reported frequency/severity ($M = 8.95$, $SD = 3.83$) and resolution ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 14.73$) of interparental conflict were the independent variables and child judgment of forgiveness of self and others ($M = 19.60$, $SD = 3.25$) was the dependent variable. Age and gender were entered into step one. Maternal-reported frequency/severity and resolution of interparental conflict were entered into step two.

Age was a significant predictor of child judgment of forgiveness of self and others, such that as age increased so did child judgment of forgiveness of self and others. Gender was a marginally significant predictor of child judgment of forgiveness of self and others, with girls ($M = 20.15$, $SD = 3.20$) having a slightly higher judgment of forgiveness of self and others compared to boys ($M = 19.17$, $SD = 3.20$). However, maternal-reported frequency/severity and resolution of interparental conflict were not significant predictors of child judgment of forgiveness of self and others. Results are shown in Table 3.

Maternal Judgment of Forgiveness of Self and Others

To investigate the association between mother judgment of forgiveness of self and others and child forgiveness of self and others, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Mother judgment of forgiveness of self and others was the

independent variable and child judgment of forgivability of self and others was the dependent variable. Age and gender were entered in step one to control for confounding effects. In step two, mother judgments of forgivability of self and others was entered. Mother judgment of forgivability of self and others ($M = 19.69$, $SD = 2.85$) was a significant predictor of child judgment of forgivability of self and others, suggesting that, as mother judgment of forgivability of self and other increased, the child judgment of forgivability of self and others also increased. Results are shown in Table 4.

Child Perception of Interparental Conflict

To investigate the effect of child perception of interparental conflict and child perception of their involvement in interparental conflict on child forgiveness, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Child perception of interparental conflict ($M = 46.77$, $SD = 7.22$) and child perceived involvement ($M = 40.62$, $SD = 5.32$) in interparental conflict were the independent variables and child judgment of forgivability of self and others was the dependent variable. Age and gender were entered in step one to control for confounding variables. In step two, child perception of interparental conflict as well as their perceived involvement was entered. Child perception of interparental conflict was a significant predictor of child judgment of forgivability of self and others. As the child's perception of interparental conflict increased, so did their judgment of forgivability of self and others. In other words, children who professed witnessing less frequent, severe, and more resolved conflict were more willingness to forgive. However, child report on their perceived involvement in interparental conflict was not a significant predictor. Results are shown in Table 5.

Additional Analyses

Additional analyses were conducted with the variables of whether or not a child was homeschooled, whether or not the child was in after school child care, and mother education because these variables could potentially influence the analyses. For example, children, who are homeschooled, normally have a parent who can financially afford to stay home and concentrate on educating their child, and therefore may differ from the rest of the sample (Neal, 2006). However, children who are homeschooled were of a small sample size in the present study. Whether or not a child is in after school care could influence their propensity to forgive due to the amount of time the child spends in the presence of their parents. Given my interest in the current study in identifying parents' role in child forgiveness, childcare could potentially be a confounding variable. Finally, mother education was examined; previous research has shown that level of mother education can influence overall child development (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003). Due to the potential these variables have of being confounds additional analyses were conducted.

The additional analyses were not conducted on the imputed dataset. The analyses were run using the listwise deletion method. Two independent sample t tests were conducted to determine if homeschooling or after school childcare was associated with a child's judgment of forgivability of self and others. First, children who were homeschooled ($n=17$) did not differ in their judgments of forgivability of self and others compared to children who were not homeschooled ($n=60$), $t(75) = -.78, p > .10$. Second, children who attended after school care ($n=12$) did not significantly differ in their

judgments of forgivability of self and others compared to children who did not attend afterschool care ($n = 59$), $t(69) = -1.09, p > .10$. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the effect of maternal education on child judgment of forgivability of self and others. The three groups consisted of less than a bachelors (high school and associate degrees; $n = 20$), a bachelors ($n = 30$), or higher than a bachelors (masters and doctorate; $n = 25$). There were no significant main effects for maternal education on child judgment of forgivability of self and others $F(2,72) = .92, p > .10$. This finding shows that there was no difference between children with mothers who had more or less education.

DISCUSSION

When children lack forgiveness skills, they lack important tools necessary to cope with environmental stressors (Worthington, 2006). In the current study I attempted to examine forgiveness in children, specifically how they acquire forgiveness behaviors and the influence of parent behavior on the child's willingness to forgive.

Overall, the current study provided support for three of the five proposed hypotheses. First, further evidence was provided for the age difference in child judgment of forgivability of self and others, such that as age increased so did child judgment of forgivability of self and others. Second, maternal judgment of forgivability of self and others was related to child judgment of forgivability of self and others, such that as maternal judgment of forgivability of self and others increased so did child judgment of forgivability of self and others. Finally, results showed that child perception of interparental conflict was associated with a higher child judgment of forgivability of self and others, such that as a children observed more frequent, intense, and unresolved conflict, the child's judgment of forgivability of self and others decreased. In addition to these significant results, marginally significant results were found for gender differences in child judgment of forgivability of self and others, with girls being slightly higher in their judgment of forgivability of self and others compared to boys.

My first hypothesis, that age would be a significant predictor of child judgment of forgivability of self and others, was supported. This finding was consistent with the literature, such that as individuals get older, their willingness to forgive increases. Specifically, the results provide additional support to the sparse literature on the existence of age differences in judgment of forgivability amongst younger children. The current results could reflect an increase in cognitive ability, the importance of friendships, or emotion regulation capabilities (Allemand, 2008).

My second hypothesis, that gender would be a significant predictor of child judgment of forgivability of self and others, was not supported. However, the results were marginally significant with girls having a slightly higher judgment of forgivability of self and others compared to boys. The marginal finding suggests that gender may still play a role in child forgiveness. Previous literature conducted with an adult population has discovered a gender difference in the willingness to forgive (Allemand, 2008; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Mullet et al., 1998; Steiner, 2011). It is important to continue child forgiveness research to see when this difference emerges.

My third hypothesis, that maternal-reported frequency/severity and resolution of interparental conflict would predict child judgment of forgivability of self and others, was not supported. This finding is contradictory to the current literature, that parents who model appropriate resolution strategies have children who are more likely to utilize those resolution strategies outside the context of the family (Feldman et al., 2010). One potential reason for this non-significant finding is that only maternal-report was used. By not including paternal-report I could be missing an important underlying mechanism of

interparental conflict. Interestingly, my fourth hypothesis that mother judgment of forgiveness of self and others would predict child judgment of forgiveness of self and others was supported. Furthermore, the finding is consistent with previous correlational analyses conducted on the variables by Getman (2004) and Neal (2006). One possible explanation for these findings is that child perception of interparental conflict may be more meaningful when predicting child judgment of forgiveness of self and others than maternal-report of interparental conflict.

In my fifth hypothesis I investigated the influence of child perception of interparental conflict and child perception of their involvement in interparental conflict on child forgiveness. My prediction that child perception of involvement in interparental conflict would predict child judgment of forgiveness of self and others was not supported. However, the prediction that child perception of interparental conflict would predict child judgment of forgiveness of self and others was supported. The findings showed that children, who perceived frequent, intense, and unresolved conflict had lower judgment of forgiveness of self and others. Conversely, children who observed less frequent, intense, and more resolved conflict were more willing to forgive. The result is consistent with findings in the interparental conflict literature, that children who observe parents effectively negotiating conflict are more likely to utilize those prosocial resolution strategies in other situations (Feldman et al., 2010). The results of the current study demonstrate that parents' reactions to transgressions play an important role in children's acquisition of forgiveness. The supported hypothesis provides evidence for the theory that children use their experiences to guide their forgiveness behavior.

In the current study, I conducted additional analyses to address potential confounds. I examined the influence of whether or not a child was home schooled, whether or not the child attended after school care, and maternal education on child judgment of forgiveness of self and others. First, the results showed that children who were homeschooled did not differ from children who were not homeschooled in their judgments of forgiveness of self and others. Second, children who attended after school care did not differ in their judgments of forgiveness of self and others from children who attended after school care. Lastly, the results showed that among the three groups of maternal education that child judgment of forgiveness of self and others did not differ. These findings pose interesting questions for future research and should be further investigated with an adequate sample size.

Limitations

There are additional predictors of child judgment of forgiveness of self and others that were not investigated in the current study. One in particular is child cognitive capability, specifically, how children think about forgiveness and their reasoning or motivation behind their decision to forgive. Another consideration is the influence of family relationships, beside interparental ones. Previous research has demonstrated that sibling relationships play an important role in later success in social interactions (Ross & Howe, 2009). Given the essential role forgiveness plays in the maintenance of social relationships (Denham et al., 2005), children could be learning forgiveness practices from siblings. In addition to sibling interactions, peer interaction could also be an important predictor of child judgments of forgiveness of self and others. Peer interactions, are a

great opportunity for children to practice forgiveness due to the horizontal nature of peer relationships (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003; Ross & Howe, 2009). Children have equal status in friendships compared to the more vertical relationships they experience with adults (Ross & Howe, 2009). These are all important potential contributors to child judgment of forgivability that should be explored in future research.

A limitation of this study is the small sample size ($n = 84$). The dataset might lack the necessary power to detect the hypothesized associations. Another limitation of this study is the lack of diversity among participants. This dataset consisted mostly of upper middleclass highly educated Caucasians. Due to the homogeneity of the sample, generalizability is limited. Also, interparental conflict is not fully depicted because the fathers' view is absent in the current analyses. In addition, the findings for the current study are correlational and not causal because of the lack of experimental design (Field, 2009).

Future Research

Many possibilities for future research have already been mentioned, such as exploring child cognitive abilities, the importance of sibling and peer relationships. However, the findings from the present study also suggest further research is needed to investigate the role of parent-child forgiveness. Future research should investigate parent-child interactions and how forgiveness in these dyads affects child forgiveness practices. In addition, research should be conducted on what characteristics of the parent influence their ability to properly model forgiveness behavior. Also, future research should examine the motivations and reasoning behind the child's decision to forgive. In this

way, future research can discern the effect of interparental conflict on the thought process involved in the decision to forgive. Finally, future studies should examine situations in which children believe forgiveness is the appropriate response. In this way, the environmental cues that prompt forgiveness can be identified. Finally, the importance of forgiveness in a child's ability to navigate their social world indicates its potential for intervention. Intervention programs could utilize forgiveness as a way to promote quality relationships. Forgiveness is already being used in couples therapy (Worthington, 2006) and could be an effective tool in improve children's relationships with family members and peers.

Conclusion

In the current study, I examined maternal forgiveness, conflict, resolution strategies, and beliefs about forgiveness to assist in discerning how parents communicate forgiveness practices to their children. The results provided evidence that child perceptions of interparental conflict as well as mother belief of forgiveness are key factors in child judgment of forgivability of self and others. Given the importance of forgiveness in having quality relationships, it is essential to determine how children acquire the ability to forgive. Future research should further examine the role parents and additional factors play in child forgiveness in order to insure children have the proper skills in order to negotiate social interactions and relationships.

APPENDIX: TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.

Descriptives

	<i>n</i>	% Missin g	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Mi n	Ma x	Poss Rang e Min	Poss Rang e Max
Child Characteristics								
Age of Child	83	1.2	116.5	20.5	4	9	78	158
Gender	84	0					--	--
Boy	47	0					--	--
Girl	37	0					--	--
Variables								
Maternal Judgment of Forgivability	40	52.4	19.25	2.33	16	24	8	24
Maternal Report of Frequency/Severity	60	28.6	8.85	3.79	3	16	3	18
Maternal Report of Resolution	58	31	2.97	14.3	1	-38	24	-48
Child Judgment of Forgivability	77	8.3	19.51	3.13	9	24	8	24
Child Perception of Interparental Conflict	67	20.2	46.78	7.36	22	57	19	60
Child Perception of Involvement	66	21.4	40.56	5.38	29	48	15	48

Note: High scores on Child Perception of Interparental Conflict indicated less frequent, less severe and more resolved interparental conflict. High scores on Child Perception of Involvement indicated less triangulation, self-blame and perceived threat.

Table 2.

Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Child Age	-											
2 Gender	0.01	-										
3 Maternal Education	0.04	0.09	-									
4 Maternal Judgment of Forgivability	0.06	0.20	-0.32**	-								
5 Maternal Frequency/Severity	0.08	-0.02	-0.08	-0.04	-							
6 Maternal Resolution	-0.02	-0.08	0.10	0.16	-0.60**	-						
7 Child Judgment of Forgivability	0.31**	0.13	-0.16	0.26*	0.12	-0.09	-					
8 Child Perception of Interparental Conflict	0.30**	-0.02	-0.7	0.05	-0.37**	0.44**	-0.01	-				
9 Child Perception of Involvement	0.43**	0.08	0.10	-0.07	-0.05	0.25*	-0.10	0.45**	-			
10 Child Frequency	0.26*	0.06	-0.03	0.05	-0.35**	0.42**	0.07	x	0.35**	-		
11 Child Intensity	0.32**	-0.05	-0.12	0.08	-0.27*	0.30*	-0.07	x	0.46**	0.73**	-	
12 Child Resolution	0.24*	-0.14	0.05	-0.01	-0.27*	0.41**	-0.01	x	0.44**	0.65**	0.64**	-

Note: + $p = .07$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

x = variable in composite

Table 3.

Age, Gender, Mother Reported Frequency/Severity and Resolution of Interparental Conflict as Predictors of Child's Judgment of Forgivability of Self and Others

	β	SE B	b	t	R ²
Step 1					.12
Age	.05	.02	.29	2.76**	
Gender	.99	.68	.24	1.44 ⁺	
Step 2					.13
Frequency/Severity	.03	.11	.04	.29	
Resolution	-.02	.03	-.09	-.73	

Note. DV= Child judgment of forgivability of self and other

+ = p=.08

* p < .05

** p < .01

Table 4.

Maternal Judgment of Self and Other as a Predictor of Child's Judgment of Forgivability of Self and Others

	β	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	R^2
Step 1					.12
Age	.05	.02	.29	2.76**	
Gender	.99	.68	.24	1.44	
Step 2					.15
Mother Judgment of forgivability of self and other	.23	.12	.20	2.76*	

Note. DV= Child's judgment of forgivability of self and other

+ = $p=.08$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 5.

Child Perception of Interparental Conflict and Child Perception of Their Involvement in Interparental Conflict as Predictors of Child's Judgment of Forgivability of Self and Others

	β	<i>SE B</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	R^2
Step 1					.12
Age	.05	.02	.29	2.76**	
Gender	.99	.68	.24	1.44	
Step 2					.20
Child perception of interparental conflict	.05	.05	.24	.2.76**	
Child perception of involvement in interparental conflict	-.07	.07	-.05	-.94	

Note. DV= Child judgment of forgivability of self and other

+ $p = .08$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

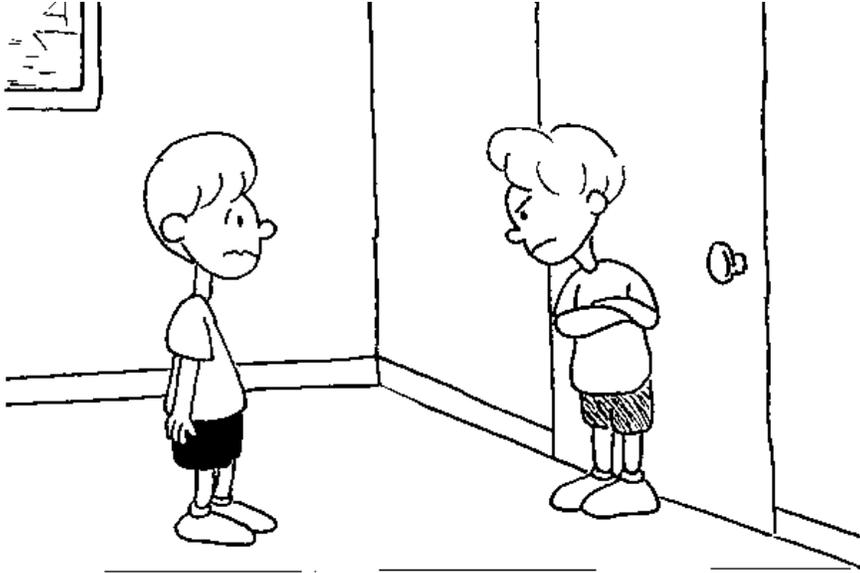


Figure 1. CFI Item: “ Imagine that you tell your best friend a secret and specifically ask your friend not to tell anyone. The very next day, you find out your friend has already told several people.”

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