

# Forgiveness in Human Flourishing



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**Abstract** In this chapter, we examine the association between forgiveness and flourishing. We begin by identifying what forgiveness and flourishing are. We then move to considering conceptual models as well as evidence supporting the connection between forgiveness and flourishing. An early model of the forgiveness and mental health relationship offers a beginning in this regard. Next, we examine the stress-and-coping models of forgiveness of oneself and others. The final model is the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and subjective well-being. These models offer multiple vantage points from which to consider the forgiveness-flourishing connection. Limitations to these models and to the current state of knowledge on forgiveness and flourishing are highlighted, especially the limits to comprehensive assessment of flourishing in the extant literature. Conclusions and future directions for studying and promoting flourishing in people of different religious affiliation, cultures, countries, and life-circumstances are discussed in closing.

**Keywords** Forgiveness · Flourishing · Stress-and-coping model of forgiveness · Mental health · Physical health · Happiness

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The notion of human flourishing is one that encompasses an exceptionally broad range of positive human experiences. Seligman (2011) argued that flourishing pushes the discussion about human well-being beyond a focus on individual positive emotion to a focus on attaining sustained comprehensive well-being for individuals, communities, and entire societies. Nonetheless, Seligman (2011) retained positive emotions as a central component of his model of flourishing, which also includes engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). Accordingly, these are, in his view, the ingredients to lasting fulfillment. Seligman is a psychologist. Others in the field of medicine have comprehensively tackled the question of what constitutes flourishing. For instance, the 100 Million Healthier Lives project ([www.ihl.org/100MLives](http://www.ihl.org/100MLives)) conducted at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement has focused on life satisfaction, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, and social and financial well-being as the building blocks of flourishing. In a recent study of over 23,000 Americans, this model of flourishing served well in characterizing the sample and its levels of flourishing (Stiefel et al., 2019). However, the conceptualizations of flourishing used in these models leave out a critical aspect of flourishing, namely the development of good character—what we might simply call being a good person. Character virtues have been a topic of great philosophical interest for centuries (Gardiner, 2005) and interest in virtues by scientists was stimulated largely with the encyclopedic work of Peterson and Seligman (2004) with the publication of *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. However, it has only been more recently that interest in the inclusion of virtues into the notion of flourishing has developed. VanderWeele (2017) has argued that human flourishing should be thought of as containing many of the same aspects of human experience that others have discussed including happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, and close social relationships, but character and virtue should also be included. It is this last addition to the model of flourishing that is most relevant to the present chapter. That is, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the connections between forgiveness and human flourishing, and as such, the aim here coincides nicely with the work of VanderWeele and his colleagues (VanderWeele, 2017; VanderWeele et al., 2019) highlighting character and virtue as an important aspect of human flourishing. After all, forgiveness can be considered a character virtue (McGary, 1989), and it has received much attention from multiple disciplines. In this chapter we provide definitions, models, and limits of our understanding of the forgiveness and flourishing connection. Table 1 provides an overview of the key takeaways.

## 1 Definitions

If forgiveness is a virtue and can be considered an important contributor to flourishing, then it is critical to understand its meaning. Furthermore, as flourishing is clearly a broad and comprehensive construct that at times is examined in its entirety and at other times the focus might be on specific dimensions of flourishing,

**Table 1** Key takeaways and implications regarding forgiveness and flourishing

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- Forgiveness is thought of as a decrease in negative and increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and motivations toward an offender, oneself or another

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- Multiple forms of forgiveness exist including: forgiving oneself, forgiving others, feeling forgiven by others or a higher power, and seeking forgiveness

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- Flourishing, as thought of in this chapter, is made up of mental and physical health and happiness. Some models of flourishing additionally include things such as social and financial well-being, as well as meaning, purpose, and achievement

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- Forgiveness and unforgiveness are connected to flourishing through both direct and indirect routes. In terms of indirect paths, forgiveness may enhance flourishing because it improves perceptions of control. Forgiveness helps people gain and keep friends, and it helps reduce ruminating on bad things that happen. People might even live healthier lives by doing things like sleeping better because of forgiveness

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- The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness and self-forgiveness can be used to understand how forgiveness is connected to flourishing. The basic premise of these models is that feeling unforgiving toward oneself or others is stressful. The stress arising from this unforgiveness can erode mental and physical health and happiness and ultimately undercut one’s ability to flourish. Forgiveness serves as a healthy coping mechanism that reduces the negative effects of unforgiveness on one’s capacity to flourish

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- A key aspect of flourishing is the experience of positive emotion and overall happiness. The scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being asserts that forgiveness contributes to happiness in many ways. In some part, it enhances relationship harmony, maintenance, and mastery. Forgiveness also promotes healthy identity development and perceptions of self-acceptance and self-worth

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- Research on forgiveness and flourishing possesses sample, measurement, and design limitations. More diverse samples need to be studied, better measures of flourishing need to be used, and designs that allow for understanding the causal effects of forgiveness on flourishing need to be used more commonly

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- Forgiveness can be learned. As such, becoming more forgiving could lead to more flourishing. How much of a change in forgiveness is necessary to notice improvements in flourishing probably varies widely across individuals

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it is equally important that the framing of the concept of flourishing also be clear. To that end, we first define forgiveness and second define the particular parameters of flourishing that we will examine.

### **1.1 Forgiveness**

Scholarly papers, books, and dissertations have been devoted to understanding how to properly define forgiveness. Lay-folks struggle to come to agreement on what forgiveness is, and religious doctrine differs about the necessary requirements of forgiveness. As is often the case in scientific work, definitions of forgiveness really are important because they tend to drive what is studied scientifically and what is focused on when trying to help people forgive. Despite the wide variety of common-sense understandings of forgiveness, there has been a surprising consistency in how scholars defined forgiveness early in the development of the psychology of forgiveness field. Scholars generally agree that forgiveness is experienced internally

because of some offense that occurs (usually) in social space. For example, one can feel forgiven by God, can experience self-forgiveness as a response to self-condemnation, can experience human-to-human forgiveness, and can forgive in-group or out-group members. Legitimate representatives of groups (such as a country's President) can express societal forgiveness. In 2005, just a few short years after the founding of the field of positive psychology, Everett Worthington, Jr., one of the founding fathers of the study of forgiveness commissioned the *Handbook of Forgiveness*. In the concluding chapter to that handbook, Worthington noted that, considering human-to-human forgiveness, "There seems to be a near consensus" (Worthington, 2005, p. 557). To be clear, Worthington noted that scholars agree most about what such forgiveness is not. That is, it is not excusing, denying, or condoning bad behavior. It is not reconciling with an offender, merely saying "I forgive you," seeking forgiveness, nor seeking justice because all of those are social experiences within the context of forgiving interactions, but are not internal experiences of forgiveness per se. This agreement is enduring and as recently at 2015 when the book *Forgiveness and Health* was published there was continued support for the notion of forgiveness as a multidimensional construct (Toussaint et al., 2015). With this background in mind, it might be useful to consider a common definition that has been used for human-to-human forgiveness and has also been adapted to self-forgiveness. That is, forgiveness is thought of as a decrease in negative and increase in positive thoughts, feelings, and motivations toward an offender, oneself or another (McCullough et al., 1997). Although this might be one of the most common definitions that scholars rely on when trying to define forgiveness, as noted above, the variety of types of forgiveness are currently gaining interest.

## 1.2 Flourishing

Flourishing is a broad concept. Sometimes it invokes an emphasis on positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011). Other scholars include similar aspects but also emphasize mental and physical health and health-related variables such as social and financial well-being (Stiefel et al., 2019). The present examination will focus on health and happiness aspects of flourishing. This includes mental and physical well-being as well as subjective well-being or happiness. Although other aspects of flourishing are also important, the literature on forgiveness is uneven, and more attention has been paid to health and happiness than to meaning, purpose, achievement, relationship quality, and other elements of flourishing. One other issue that might be worth considering is that while some models of flourishing include character strengths and virtues in the broadest sense, we examine the specific virtue of forgiveness excised from the broader flourishing concept and consider it as a correlate/predictor of other flourishing outcomes. Most studies don't allow for disentangling the nature of the forgiveness-flourishing relationship. Our model for this chapter conceptualizes forgiveness as a possible contributor to flourishing not merely a co-occurring component of the flourishing itself.

## **2 Theory and Evidence of Connections Between Forgiveness and Flourishing**

There are likely numerous ways of thinking about the connection between forgiveness and flourishing. This being the case, we will highlight three helpful models for understanding how forgiveness is related to three core components of flourishing, those being, mental and physical health and happiness.

### ***2.1 An Early Model***

In the early days of forgiveness research, Toussaint and Webb (2005) proposed a model for the connection between forgiveness and mental health. Their model begins with the experience of forgiveness or the tendency to experience forgiveness, often referred to as trait forgivingness, and its direct connections to mental health. There is often a sense of immediate relief or feeling of lightness, clarity, or fullness when one forgives an offense (Rowe & Halling, 2004). That may well have direct positive benefits for mental health. Yet, it is likely that forgiveness acts through multiple mechanisms to offer more and more lasting mental health benefits. Toussaint and Webb (2005) offer some specific psychosocial mechanisms for consideration. These include the propositions that forgiveness is related to improved social support, interpersonal functioning, and health behavior. Likewise, forgiveness is thought to reduce perceived lack of control and rumination. In turn, greater support, improved interpersonal functioning, and more positive health behavior and less perceived lack of control and lowered rumination are modeled as being correlates/predictors of improved mental health. These proposed indirect effects of forgiveness on mental health rest on years of research identifying these mechanisms as key correlates/predictors of mental health. Early research suggested that forgiveness was related to these mediating variables. (Over 15 years of subsequent work has supported that.) Toussaint and Webb (2005) also provided for the option that many benefits to mental health come directly from the reduction of unforgiveness and its associated blame, shame, anger, and hatred, all of which have negative effects on mental health.

### ***2.2 Stress-and-Coping Model of Forgiveness***

Since the early years of research on forgiveness and mental health, other models have been offered to explain how forgiveness might impact not only mental health but also physical health. In this regard, no model would have greater prominence than the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness (Strelan, 2020; Strelan & Covic, 2006; Worthington, 2006, 2013). The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness is

based in the transactional theory of stress developed by Lazarus and colleagues (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this transactional theory of stress, there are several cognitively mediated processes that occur when someone experiences stress. First, an objective event or subjective perceived event is experienced as a stressor. Second, it is appraised (i.e., primary appraisal) as being harmful, threatening, or challenging. Third, secondary appraisal involves evaluating one's ability to manage or cope with the stressful event. Fourth, resources for coping with the stressful experience are evaluated. Fifth, an approach to coping is actively engaged, and coping recursively affects earlier processes. Sixth, adaptational outcomes such as improved (or less harmed) mental or physical health are experienced. The entire stress process is considered a transaction between the person and environment and has repercussions for biological, psychological, and sociological outcomes.

The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness applies the transactional theory of stress to situations involving interpersonal offenses and victim's reactions to them in the following way. Let's consider a common situation. Anuradha and Anh are co-workers. Anh believes that Anuradha slighted his contributions to a big work project in a very important and high-level meeting. Anh, in short, is aggrieved. Where does this come from? It is Anh's subjective impression or appraisal of the situation that leads to his grievance. Anuradha might have intended to hurt him, but even if she didn't, Anh believes it to be so. He thus experiences an injustice gap. This is the difference between what Anh wanted to happen and what actually did happen. This injustice gap, if not resolved by the passage of time or by Anh's actions of seeing justice done, turning the matter over to God, tolerating, forbearing, or accepting the offense, or forgiving, will likely create unforgiveness over the event. Unforgiveness is a negative emotional experience motivating vengeance or avoidance of Anuradha. Unforgiveness is experienced as stressful. This represents the primary appraisal of stress in the transactional theory of stress.

Once stress is experienced, the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness suggests that Anh will evaluate his options for coping with the offense that he has suffered. This may include several different options. He might choose to seek outright retribution and wait for the perfect opportunity to overlook Anuradha's contributions on the next big project. Anh might choose to simply deny the intention of Anuradha to being hurtful and attribute this to an accidental oversight on Anuradha's part. Anh might also find a way to condone this poor behavior, excuse it, or explain it away somehow. Anh might seek to put the event behind him by tolerating it (although tolerance can have negative emotional loading), forbearing (which is choosing not to respond negatively for the good of the group, thus finding some benefit in not responding negatively), or accepting the event and moving on (in which accepting decouples the event from one's emotions). Anh might also seek a resolution through a problem-solving conversation. Or, Anh may choose to forgive—either in combination with other means of coping or as the primary means of coping.

Although only one choice among many, the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness suggests that coping through forgiveness is one of the more effective ways of reducing stress and adapting positively to being hurt. After all, especially in the

workplace, it is often the case that outright retribution cannot be had without forfeiting one's job and condoning or excusing might lead to long-term relational difficulties. Even if a productive problem-solving conversation takes place, it is unlikely that such a conversation will take the sting and stress out of the experience of being hurt. This is where choosing forgiveness as a means of coping can be productive and healthy. And indeed, much research has documented the benefits to mental and physical health of forgiving (Toussaint et al., 2015). As one example, in a recent review of the literature on forgiveness and mental health, Webb and Toussaint (2020) identified many consistent associations of forgiveness with depression, anxiety, stress, substance use, and suicidality. Similarly, in an outcome-wide, prospective analysis of multiple forms of mental health in samples of 5000–7000 individuals, Chen et al. (2019) found that reduced depression and anxiety were associated with forgiveness of others. Finally, forgiveness of others has been linked to physiological, endocrine, immunological, and self-rated health outcomes (Seawell et al., 2013; Seybold et al., 2001; Witvliet et al., 2001).

### ***2.3 Stress-and-Coping Model of Self-forgiveness***

The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness is without a doubt the most prominent model that has been used to conceptualize the connection between forgiveness and health. Not only has the transactional model of stress developed by Lazarus and colleagues been used to understand connections between forgiving others and health, but it has also been extended to forgiving oneself when experiencing self-condemnation (Toussaint et al., 2017). To understand how self-forgiveness might be understood through a stress-and-coping framework, let's return to our example above of Anuradha and Anh in the workplace. However, this time, let's focus on Anuradha's thoughts and behaviors. First, consider that Anuradha decided Anh needed to be taken down a notch and put in his place. She believes he needs to understand seniority in the company, and she has been working there much longer than him. She decides this is necessary. She intentionally hurt Anh. After the actual event, Anuradha feels terrible about what she has done. She is ashamed of herself, feels guilty about acting hurtfully, and begins to loath herself because of what she has done. Collectively, these experiences combine into a sense of self-condemnation. Self-condemnation is the starting point for the stress-and-coping model of self-forgiveness. That is, self-condemnation is stressful, activating similar physiological processes as unforgiveness toward others. Thus, it negatively impacts health.

According to the stress-and-coping model of self-forgiveness, the experience of self-condemnation may elicit several psychosocial experiences that may hurt one's mental and physical health. That is, feelings of self-condemnation likely engender experiences of hopelessness, pessimism, and loneliness along with desires to self-medicate through substances (Webb, 2021; Webb et al., 2017). Just as in forgiving others, forgiving oneself begins with the choice to use self-forgiveness as a coping

strategy despite the availability of many other options, few of which may be as productive for one's personal experience (e.g., letting oneself off the hook) and might be perceived negatively by people affected by the transgression or by observers (e.g., a self-serving response) and thus have negative social consequences.

Again as in forgiving others, the process of self-forgiving can be a key to feeling better. Self-forgiveness involves many different steps and processes (Worthington, 2013), among them, acknowledging one's wrongdoing, making amends if possible, invoking prayer for those spiritually or religiously inclined, and other means of repentance for more secular-minded folks. Ultimately, self-forgiveness requires a transformation of values and restoration of self-esteem (Griffin et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2012). When self-forgiveness is increased in an individual considerable health benefits can be realized. For instance, Chen et al.'s (2019) outcome-wide, prospective study also showed that self-forgiveness was related to less depression and anxiety. Davis et al. (2015) meta-analyzed 18 studies including about 5700 participants and found a moderate-sized association between self-forgiveness and physical health of 0.32. The same meta-analysis examined 65 studies of nearly 18,000 people and found a slightly stronger association of self-forgiveness with mental health of 0.45.

## ***2.4 Scaffolding Self and Social Systems Model of Forgiveness and Subjective Well-Being***

To this point, we have discussed models of forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness that have as their endpoints mental and physical health outcomes. While those are central to flourishing, it is common to include subjective well-being or happiness in the mix of constructs that comprise flourishing. In fact, some models of flourishing propose that it is primarily a combination of subjective well-being and mental and physical health (Stiefel et al., 2020). For these reasons, it is important to consider separately a model of the connections between forgiveness and subjective well-being.

The scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being explicates the association between forgiveness and well-being and explains important mediating mechanisms of this association (Hill et al., 2015). The model begins with the premise that while several models of forgiveness and its connections to mental and physical health purport to explain why forgiveness promotes well-being, most actually offer reasons why forgiveness reduces *ill*-being and disease as opposed to discussing why forgiveness promotes *well*-being. To explain why forgiveness would be related to greater happiness, the authors look to those traditional drivers of happiness and fulfillment for humankind. First, it is argued that forgiveness of others promotes happiness because it promotes relationship harmony. Knowing the importance of strong relationships for long-term happiness, the model suggests that tools that ensure harmony help to support the happiness resulting from said relationships.



This is particularly true for close relationships where couples may have to endure difficulties and conflicts and work to resolve discrepancies that may threaten the stability or longevity of the relationship. Research supports this assertion. Couples who are more forgiving toward each other enjoy better conflict resolution and stronger marital stability and quality (Fincham et al., 2007; He et al., 2018). Second, this model suggests that forgiveness of others helps promote relationship maintenance and mastery. That is, forgiving others helps not only reduce potential downsides of relationships, but it also helps a person develop and maintain closer relationships and perceive these relationships as being more stable and within their control. The model suggests that forgiveness is at its core a social construct and it may for that reason pose evolutionary advantages. In short, one might say people who are more forgiving are easier to get and stay close to, and relations with more forgiving people are less chaotic, variable, and unpredictable. Supporting the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being is the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004) which suggests that positive experiences, like the relief that comes from forgiving others or oneself, broaden one's capacity for positive experiences and build positive resources—both of which are extremely important for well-being. Additionally, the undoing of harm is the third and highly relevant leg of the broaden-and-build model. Third, the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness and well-being suggests that forgiving others supports identity development by allowing others to share impressions of one's identity more freely, and this information may be available from a broader and richer network of social contacts for a more forgiving person. Self-forgiveness may promote adaptive identity development also, especially for adolescents and young adults. This is possible because self-forgiveness frees the individual from rumination about past wrongdoings and allows more mental energy for exploring and reflecting on one's identity. Finally, self-forgiveness is thought to enhance perceptions of self-acceptance and self-worth, both of which are associated with improved well-being.

While the scaffolding self and social systems model of forgiveness offers a unique approach to understanding how forgiveness is connected to a central component of flourishing, research aimed at comprehensively testing this model is limited. The model implies that relationships, identity development, and self-acceptance and self-worth are important for well-being, and considerable work supports these contentions (Baumeister et al., 2003; Kamp Dush et al., 2008; Moza et al., 2019). The other legs of the model are less well-established. Yet there is promising research in some areas. For instance, Bono et al. (2008) showed in a longitudinal investigation that prospective increases in forgiveness were associated with prospective increases in well-being and vice-versa. Toussaint and Friedman (2009) showed that forgiveness of others, self, and situations was associated with several happiness measures. Further, positive and negative affect explained a portion of the forgiveness-happiness relationship. Research cited above (Fincham et al., 2007; He et al., 2018) points to the association between forgiveness and relationship harmony and maintenance. Some research suggests that forgiveness is related to development of moral reasoning, which is one aspect of identity development

(Enright, 1991). Finally, limited work also suggests that forgiveness of a specific offense is positively related to self-esteem (Eaton et al., 2006).

### **3 What Limits Our Understanding of Forgiveness and Flourishing?**

After having reviewed three different models of the connection between forgiveness and flourishing and having highlighted some empirical work supporting these models, we consider some limits of our knowledge. While it seems clear that forgiveness is related to three key components of flourishing—mental health, physical health, and happiness—there are gaps in our understanding. We'll consider some limiting circumstances below.

First, almost all of what we know about forgiveness and flourishing is based on analyses of individual components of flourishing. Most studies examine only one or two outcomes at a time. Comprehensive assessment and analysis of how flourishing is connected to forgiveness are lacking. A notable exception, however, is the work of VanderWeele and his colleagues who have recently conducted outcome-wide analyses that incorporate many outcomes relevant to flourishing in a single analysis (Chen et al., 2018; Long et al., 2020). Even in these broad outcome-wide analyses, the outcomes are skewed toward mental and physical health and happiness and fewer assessments include other key aspects of flourishing such as meaning and purpose, character and virtue, social relationships, and financial and material stability. In part, this may be because many of these variables are often considered nuisance variables that are to be controlled while examining more interesting outcomes such as health and happiness. But, the flourishing model calls us to consider not just health and happiness but also many other dimensions of flourishing in our studies. These additional dimensions of flourishing need to be front-and-center in our specific aims for these studies, not relegated to socio-demographic control variables.

Second, aspects of research design and methodology limit our understanding of how forgiveness is related to flourishing. For example, many studies are correlational. That, in itself, is not a bad thing. However, it limits our ability to infer causality. Whereas experimentation is an easy way to determine causality where the experimenter has control over manipulated and measured variables, experimentation also introduces concerns about generalizability and ecological validity. Few researchers truly believe that manipulating a participant's thoughts or feelings about forgiveness in the laboratory will make the person's daily life happier, healthier, more purpose-filled, more meaningful, more financially and materially stable. So, the answer to understanding how forgiveness might affect flourishing probably has to come from applied, longitudinal designs that span years. Even then, current design and statistical methods do not permit parsing how the many aspects of flourishing might change other aspects of flourishing. Sampling limits our understanding as

well. Many samples are from western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) societies. We need to understand how forgiveness interacts with flourishing and its individual aspects in samples where the environment and conditions may be more adverse and less supportive of flourishing than in WEIRD samples due to lack of access to healthcare, unfulfilling careers, or lack of or very low income and material wealth. Sometimes measurement tools used for both forgiveness and flourishing can pose problems in the research. Thankfully, numerous measures of forgiveness that are psychometrically sound have existed for some time (Worthington et al., 2014) and useful additions continue to be developed (Griffin et al., 2018). However, measures of flourishing are much less well developed outside of a couple of good options (Stiefel et al., 2020; VanderWeele, 2017).

## 4 Conclusions and Future Directions

Flourishing is comprised of several components including mental and physical health, happiness, meaning and purpose, social engagement, character and virtue, and financial and material stability (Stiefel et al., 2020; VanderWeele, 2017). A good body of both theoretical and empirical work supports the notion that forgiveness is an important trait that is related to three core components of flourishing we have considered most crucial, mental health, physical health, and happiness. The evidence ensuring that forgiveness is a *contributor* to and not merely a *concomitant* of flourishing is more circumstantial than convincing. For these reasons, it is important to consider some avenues of continued pursuit.

Perhaps first and foremost on the to-do list is the examination of forgiveness and flourishing per se. Many current studies lack a comprehensive assessment of flourishing making it difficult to see fully how forgiveness and flourishing might be connected directly and through mediators and moderators. This will require researchers to specifically address this issue. It will require openness to new and alternative conceptualizations of outcomes appropriately considered under the umbrella of flourishing. Yes, mental and physical health and happiness are key to flourishing, but they are not everything.

Second, the study of forgiveness and flourishing across different cultures and religions is necessary. For instance, does the relationship between forgiveness and flourishing differ depending on whether one is a member of a low-, middle-, or high-income country? Likewise, might the salience of forgiveness and its importance for flourishing differ by religion? What about the growing number of spiritual but not religious individuals? How might they compare to religious adherents in the connection between forgiveness and flourishing?

Third, becoming better at forgiving is something that can be learned (Worthington, 2020). Can the same be said for flourishing? Can someone be taught to flourish? If so, in teaching folks to forgive, do they also learn to flourish? These questions will require carefully designed interventions and equally well-designed trials to establish their efficacy.

Fourth, what dose of forgiveness actually leads to substantial flourishing. If one forgives a single, minor transgression, that clearly would not affect one's mental health, physical health, and happiness greatly. But if one became a transformed forgiver and practiced the virtue frequently, we might expect that to affect flourishing. But how much dose of forgiveness is actually needed to make a difference?

A fifth and final question might be, can learning to flourish be of use to individuals who have in the past or are currently living in exceptionally adverse circumstances? Often adversity involves perpetrators (e.g., oneself, neighbors, friends, leaders, governments) and learning to forgive has been related to better post-traumatic stress symptoms in these circumstances (Cerci & Colucci, 2018), but could it also support flourishing?

There is promising evidence to support a connection between forgiveness and flourishing. But it is much too soon to call this a definitive relationship, let alone a causal one. Yes, we do know that forgiveness is related to better health and well-being, and in some cases the designs are sufficient to suggest that forgiveness is a likely contributor to health and well-being. In other places, our designs and measurement strategies have not fully matured and leave us to speculate about the connections. Professionals should know that there is promising evidence in this area, but also be cautioned that there is much more work to be done. With the advent of more sophisticated measures of flourishing, the continued development and improvement of forgiveness measurement and designs, and an ongoing interest in bringing to light ways in which people can live better and more fulfilling lives, the necessary insights on the connections between forgiveness and flourishing are sure to come in future studies as our science continues to mature.

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